

Ed Elkin

Word Problems

Find yourself a clear, quiet space, and lie down on your back. Make sure that you are sufficiently warm and away from any draughts, and that you are not likely to be disturbed for the next quarter of an hour or so. Close your eyes, and as it were, observe yourself thinking. Don't try to in any way censor your thoughts, but let them drift undisturbed across your mind's eye. If you begin to experience internal images, then you will find yourself thinking about them, too. Notice how your thought is framed in words, phrases or sentences, either complete or fragmented. Perhaps you will find that some of these tend to be repeated, over and again.

Now, see if you can think your thoughts without using words.

If you were in any doubt before, this little experiment will serve to convince you that the process of thought is inextricably bound to words. All thought is framed in language. Whether we think aloud, or to ourselves.

To perceive some 'thing', is to focus the light of our attention into a narrow beam. We invent the thing by the very act of making it bright. By bringing it out into the foreground, we isolate it from the rest of the perceptual field, which recedes into the background. This act of attention that makes our perception of things possible owes nothing to thought. An essential quality of thought is its deliberateness (hence the word 'deliberations' as a synonym for thought) - whereas the process of perception is essentially spontaneous, arising as it does from a continually changing interaction, a dialogue that takes place between the attention of one particular organism and the perceptual field that surrounds it. The phenomenon associated with perception is not thought, but the formation of an image - the unique way in which one individual perceives the things that constitute his world.

There are two separate and distinct ways of being. One is by the process of thought; the other is by the perception of images. There is no need for you to accept this statement just because it happens to be written on this page. At the moment that you are reading it, you *are being* in these two ways. Your own experience of your self, is the only proof that there is of its correctness. Its truth, like that expressed in the American Constitution, is self-evident.

If there is a dilemma that typifies this day and age, it originates from the fact that we have become so dominated by the way of thought, of the intellect, that we have become unable to accept the validity of the perceptions we make. We question the reality, the existence of the images that we form by processes taking place in that large part of our selves that is outside the province of logical thought. For reasons that will be discussed in some detail, we have become obliged to identify ourselves as beings that exist in one way, but not in the other. And more often than not, the two ways are seen as being mutually contradictory.

Speech, as a symbol of thought, originates in a part of ourselves that is

physically quite small in relation to the rest of the body, and which also is comparatively recent in an evolutionary sense. It is located in the cerebral cortex, the 'new' brain - the grey matter that has proliferated in the two great hemispheres that fill the skull above the level of the eyes. The rest of the cortex and the 'old' brain - the white matter of the cerebral medulla - as well as the spinal cord and the sensory and motor nervous system, we share in common with the other primates, and the vertebrates in general. It is this system that forms the nerve-routes by which perception is transformed into co-ordinated action by the body as a whole. The function of attention which is an integral part of perception is in no way diminished in the rest of the animal kingdom by its lack of thoughtful speech - we have only to watch an animal in its natural state when it freezes in response to a stimulus to understand that its attention is total and infinitely more concentrated than man is capable of. That the higher vertebrates are capable of deliberate (in the sense of delayed) action, as well as spontaneous action, is due in all probability to the ability of the cortex to retain memories of similar past experiences in the form of images, to be recalled as an aid to appropriate movement in response to a present situation. This still has nothing to do with the thought process. The intellectual function that enables you to read these words (to agree or to disagree, to accept or reject) sits in state on top of your body and sets you apart, like mine, from the rest of creation. It is precisely this function, that occupies just a part of the part of our physical self that is known as the cerebral cortex, that has come to be identified as the Thinker - the whole of our being. If we acknowledge the rest of our organism at all, it is usually as a kind of conveyance in which we carry our genius around. As R.D. Laing puts it.

My neck is on the guillotine the blade comes down
my head goes this way the rest goes that
which side will I be on?

How is it that we have arrived at a point where we feel obliged to **choose** between the two ways of being, rather than integrating them into a whole? It is because we have created a problem that is artificial - inherent, as we shall see, in the process of thought itself. By and in identifying our selves with the Thinker, we become trapped in the divisive language that is the only way his thought can become symbolised.

This view of humanity as 'nothing but' a Thinker originated from the philosophy of Descartes, which is the underpinning of the structure of modern Western models of being. Descartes cast doubt upon the existence of that which was perceived in the process of imagery. How do we know, he asked, that the images which we call reality are not pure illusion? Going one step further, he cast doubt upon the other way of being - the process of thought - even when that thought was not considering reality, but abstracted toward pure mathematical concepts. Maybe, he said, we even make an error when we add the sides of a cube to make six - what if the error in thinking was built in to all of us? He pointed out the possibility that both thinking and perception did not exist, but were nothing but illusion. Even our physical being, our bodies, had a doubtful existence. Descartes postulated that the only event that was beyond doubt was the *existence of a Thinker who is doing the doubting*. Take away the Thinker, and the doubt would not exist. The very existence of doubt (about thought, reality, or anything

else) serves to confirm that there is a Thinker who thought up its possibility in the first place. This certainly leads us to the basic statement of Cartesian philosophy - 'I think, therefore I am' (cogito ergo sum).

Cartesian thinking, by identifying the mind with the self, separates it not only from the outside world but also from the rest of our physical being. In this way we gain the experience of the mind-self as a cast-iron certainty, but only at the cost of ignoring the possibilities inherent in the uncertain and chaotic dialogue that the perceptive-self conducts in its imagery of the environmental field.

We have seen that thoughts are only capable of being expressed by language - that a thought without words is unthinkable. But, as Descartes pointed out, the nature of thought is essentially polar. The fundamental underlying a thought process is, either/or. We have to divide up a concept before we can begin to think about it. We have to consider both the negative and the positive in the spectrum of possibilities. It is by this means, and by this means only, that we are enabled to choose one or the other of the two opposing possibilities, and to then real-ise it (that is, test it against real-ity) by appropriate action. In modern language, the inability to choose one from a pair of opposites and to convert it to action goes by the word, neurosis. Essentially, neurosis is a proliferation of opposites. Neurotic behaviour relies on thought expressed by language, and does not include either the perceptive mode, or appropriate action. To a more or less extent, all of us are neurotic, in the sense that we remain indecisive on certain issues in our lives that are difficult to resolve. We rarely if ever act without first considering all the possibilities likely to result from the action proposed, and all of us at one time or another wrestle with the paradoxical fear of death. It is a pity that the word neurosis has come to have pejorative overtones in our society, as neurotic states have motivated some of the world's greatest literature. Two examples that immediately spring to mind are Kierkegaard's monumental dissertation, 'Either/Or', and what probably is the most famous neurotic statement in the English language - the soliloquy by the chronically indecisive Danish Prince that begins, 'To be, or not to be. . . .'

All abstracted thought (that is, thinking 'about' things) is a differential, a divisive, process. Thought fragments in order to arrive at a fresh integrity, and language provides the words to symbolise each of the polar particles. Just as in the thought it symbolises, the use of language is to split a given concept into its constituent opposites. But each of these word-pairs cannot stand alone, as it is devoid of meaning without the other. The half-word 'plus', for example, is a nonsense in a vocabulary that does not include 'minus'; without 'dark' we could not know that we are in the 'light', and the quality that is identified by the word 'good' looks toward its boundary, and inescapably sees 'bad' on the other side. Half-words like these represent just one side of the conceptual coin. Put them together, and the result is - zero. Nothing. They are seen to be what they are: intangibles - ethical and moral opinions, points of view. But their original function (which is, as we shall see later, of disclosing new possibilities for the better survival of the language-group) has been obscured *by the very act of naming them*. Perhaps this point needs some clarification.

Language gives names to transitory elements of attention in the field

of perception. It thereby gives them, in and by the very *act* of naming, a kind of spurious substance; a permanence that they do not intrinsically possess.

It turns processes into structures, events into things. It makes facts out of happenings. The magic property of language is that, by its essential function of fragmenting the perceptual field into separate objects (things) by naming them, **it enables the associated imagery to be communicated over space and time.** But this property has been obscured by the death-obsessed Thinker that, busily constructing itself from out of its own thought, thinks that the words it invents are identical with the images they symbolise. The living, moving, constantly dissolving and re-forming process of imagery is killed stone dead in the very act of naming it. Even though a happening can, by definition, only take place in the present, it can be encapsulated by language into a symbol-structure that can be written down, recorded, or re-spoken. For example, it so happens that a certain sequence of thoughts at a certain time in a certain place prompts me to write these words. They represent my attention to a series of (I hope) inter-related mental concepts, expressed by the world-events of me pressing down, in a certain order, symbol-keys on my typewriter.

But, as it happens, after the last word of the last sentence, there has been a change in the focus of my attention. It has become directed to a plant that is growing in a bowl by my desk, about eighteen inches to the right of my typewriter. Even though I-as-Thinker *understand* (by the use of reason and logic) that the plant has not changed its position during the last half-hour; even though it remains within my field of vision when I focus my eyes directly upon the typed page in front of me; still, I-as-perceiver have been unaware of its existence as part of the perceptual field until about a minute ago. So when I type the word 'plant', I refer to a particular element in my personal perceptual field that owes its very existence to the act of my attention to it. I-as-perceiver possess the God-like ability to create a thing; simply by and in the act of attention, to invent it. And just as simply, to destroy that thing - to take away its thing-ness - by shifting of that act to another part of the field. But the Word itself, the logos of 'plant', remains upon this page for as long as the paper upon which it is written retains its physical structure. It is constant and unchanging - a new fact. Whatever time you refer to it, it will always be the same. But the perception that prompted me to write it was transitory; a flash-in-the-pan that momentarily burnt itself out. And even if I attempt to reproduce the original perception (which I do now) by re-directing my attention so to isolate the same element, I find it changed. I must still refer to it as 'plant?' - use the same word. But my perception of it will never be the same. In an attempt to communicate that change to you using the clumsy symbolism of thought I now re-name it, the plant-that-I-have-written-about-in-a-book. For me, it's not as it was before. It has acquired a new significance, and I feel quite differently toward it,. If it has been • a help in bringing you, the reader, toward a realisation of how words can separate us instead of bringing us together - isolate rather than communicate - then I become aware of a quality of gratefulness, even affection, associated with it! Obviously, this is momentarily a unique plant, unlike any other plant that shares its identical word-symbol.

Language is the means by which differentiated thought-processes are perpet-

uated and propagated as if they were entities. So we continue to pretend that things are real. In the grammar, the structure of language, we give all the names we invent for them, the names of persons, places, or things, a group-name, which we symbolise in the word noun. And we proceed to think about these noun-words, to invest them with qualities, with opposing values, with either/or's, good/bad's weak/strong's, even though there was nothing of these values associated with the unique and transitory, one-off events that the words pretend to be.

For an example we might use the word I have just written about - 'plant'. When I isolate the symbol from my recent experience, and begin to think about it purely as a word upon a page, then I find myself thinking of associations, such as 'industrial plant', 'rubber-plant', 'It's a plant!' For some reason, I find my thought more and more centred upon the word 'plantagenet', and simultaneously I become aware of an internal image of a gold crown that flashes with red reflected light. I find the image pleasurable.

Stop reading. Look around you until your attention becomes focussed upon some element in your perceptual field. Now close your eyes, and think about the name associated with this element. Allow your mind to come up with other names, and see what happens. Then open your eyes, and ask yourself these questions:

1. *Was there an internal image accompanied by emotion?*
2. *Was there emotion but no image, or vice versa?*
3. *Are you pleased/disappointed/disgusted with your performance?*
4. *What do you hope to gain/lose by answering?*
5. *How come you're carrying out these instructions?*

As you can find out at any time by, as it were, observing your own processes, you may have become aware of a chain-reaction that led you to experience thoughts, feelings or perceptions that did tally with any expectation of your self as a totally rational and logical being. If words cannot precisely dictate our own totality, we may be sure of greater confusion when we attempt to communicate thoughts about our emotions and perceptions to others by the use of the same symbols. If we are to understand how this happens, then we must take a closer look at the uses (and abuses) of language.

There are two ways by which we as organisms interact with the world about us - by what we say, and by what we do. Any information that we think about has to first arrive by way of our perceptual apparatus. And, galling though it may be for the egotistical Thinker and however it shakes it in its desperate belief in the primacy of its own existence, the hard physical fact remains that a great many of the total and integrated human organism's actions in response to the environmental field completely by-pass the process of thought. For instance, the hand will withdraw from the point of a needle, or from the hot surface of an iron, before thought has time to think about what best to do. Thinking is not a prior requirement of coughing in a smoky room, of sweating in heat or of the raising of an arm to protect the face from a blow. These are but a few of the many ways in which we express our built-in ability to survive - by reacting with movements of parts or all of the body to adverse factors in the field that are isolated by means

of any part of the perceptual apparatus; by the sense of sight, smell, touch, hearing or taste. The intercession of thought is not needed here - in fact, the interference of the Thinker in such circumstances leads inevitably to paradoxical thinking about its own death, which is a polite way of saying that it goes into a blind panic. Humanity, even in a form that we would recognise as being almost identical to modern man, has existed without the faculty of speech for a far longer time than it has, with it. It is a comparatively recent development in terms of human evolution. Before words, *what was done* was the only way of expression. We could only perceive the intent of our fellows by their actions. Body language, although basic, was at least unequivocal.

We can imagine that misty and far-off time when the faculty of speech was developing. Mankind's perceptual field was capable of division broadly into three elements. The first was that which seemed to be immovable - the earth, and the sky. The second, was that which generally shared the property of movement - that is, clouds, water, fire, earthquake, lightning, and living things. The third element consisted of a unique category of moving and living elements, that moved in a pattern consistent with his own movements, and with which he could either mate, or fight. The first two elements gave rise to, at different times, factors in the environment that were either life-destroying, or life-sustaining.

Man had been long since been able to isolate, by focussing his attention upon these factors, images of a reality that was either good or bad in terms of his continuing survival. The perception, the internal events perceived as emotion, and the external event of rapid movement either toward or away from the reality-image, were all interdependent, and completely spontaneous. The imagery was printed indelibly upon the very genes themselves, together with the appropriate sensory/motor circuits. There was no choice to be made, no decision to be arrived at after thought. *All* perception, by the very nature of the beast, led to 'right' action. Life was reduced simply to a series of spontaneous and unequivocal responses that were intrinsically 'right'. Literally, we shared with the rest of creation an innocence, an irresponsibility for our actions, that amounted to an inability to do wrong. How could wrong be done when the concept right/wrong had not yet been thought up by the Thinker (who was, as yet, still speechless)?

But this state of affairs changed with the advent of speech. To mix our myths, the fall of man was in an upward direction, from the Garden of Eden into the Tower of Babel. This would have been concurrent with a tendency to live together in small colonies or communities, tribes similar to those found today in aboriginal groups. When foraging for food, for example, we can imagine that the males went out hunting in a pack, leaving the females and children in a protected place. As long as they kept fairly close together, the perceptual field of each member of the group would be fairly similar, and so there would be little or no need for any communication. But we can envisage a situation where one individual, for one reason or another, becomes separated from the rest, to find himself in surroundings that were beyond their horizon. Let's say that, in this new place, his perception isolates the image, brightly coloured and sharp, of ripe fruit growing on a tree. This ordered image-pattern (representing food) isolates from the rest of the general chaos of the environmental field in the presence of

an organismic need (hunger) and a focussing of organismic attention. The print-out that goes with the image involves, among other actual events, a smile of pleasure, the appearance of saliva, running to the tree, jumping up to pluck the fruit, then the hands holding the fruit to the eagerly biting jaws. As the hunger-need becomes satisfied, so the fruit-image loses focus and definition, until it eventually recedes so completely that the pattern is no longer discernible. The whole sequence of his actions, in common with every other series of movements throughout his life, would have been entirely spontaneous: dictated by the coincidence at the same time and roughly in the same place, of the two factors that together make up an image. These are, the presence of an organismic need that is unsatisfied, and the isolation by attention of need-satisfying elements from the environmental field. In man, and presumably in other species, it is the *image* that is transmitted, by the exact reproduction of the body-movement sequence that led to satisfaction. We can imagine our fruit-eater, once back in his group, re-enacting his find when next he felt the pangs of hunger, in a kind of dance. By joining him -by duplicating his movements, by becoming the chorus to his lead-dance - the other members of the group would, literally, get the picture. They would see the same image. And, by following a pointing finger, they would get the message in its entirety. The same principle would be used to transmit individual perceptions of any factor in the world that could affect the group's chances of continued survival, such as danger, shelter, fire, or whatever. And, from this point on, it is not difficult to envisage the emergence of different dance-ritual sequences; body-language messages which, over the course of many generations, gradually become supplemented with sounds and then with certain sequences of sounds. In this way, sound-symbols, first used to re-inforce the perceptive communication, could in time serve as a sort of shorthand for body-language. But even now, when language has reached its present state, we find ourselves reading the language of the body when we need to perceive the truth of a fellow being. For spontaneous action not only speaks louder than words, but also, unlike language, it cannot lie.

Language gives the name of 'image' to the phenomena perceived in the process of perception. The process of imagery is forever changing, dissolving and re-forming. It is a temporary ordering by a need of a pattern isolated from elements in the field of perception. And, as an image is just a pattern, its reality is not universal and given, but personal and unique.

Look for a while at the blot that appears on this page, and see how many different images your perception isolates from the field that it represents. You will find that, sooner or later, one particular thing-pattern will dominate, to the total exclusion of all the others. Think about the image that you perceive (put it into words) then close your eyes and, without either trying or resisting, just allow a series of word-associations to form. When you come to the end of this train of thought, write down the word, phrase or sentence that you have arrived at.

Ask yourself these questions concerning it: Are you surprised at where your thought has led? Are you aware of any other emotions that it has evoked? Have any other images arisen in your 'mind's eye'?

As this experiment in perception will have shown you, reality is entirely what we choose to make it. It depends upon what 'state' our organism is in, at the moment. Now, the whole validity of language as a *means of communication* depends upon the assumption that the word-symbols it employs enable concepts to be transmitted through time and space *without change*. That is, that the conception formed by one individual can be exactly and accurately reproduced in the awareness of another purely by the use of word-things. But this assumption is as naive as a belief in magic. As we demonstrated previously, my conception of the word 'plant' was a result of factors that are incapable of reproduction. To experience those factors, you would have had to be in my skin at that particular time and place.

As words are the captives of thought - are inextricably bound to it - then to give a process a name is to change it into a thing, to imprison it. The spontaneity of perception is altered by language, into the deliberation of thought. The paradox is, that to 'think about' perception is to ensure that its imagery fades. That which arose from that part of us that, literally, is in touch with our organism's needs in its relationship to the world-field that surrounds it, becomes, if we are to communicate its perceptions, transferred to another part of our total being that does not perceive. The elusive and transient images of personal reality are, like butterflies on a collector's table, killed so that they can be pinned down and immobilised, examined and classified. Instead of enjoying the beauty of the living butterfly, we have come to see ourselves in the role of collectors of information about their lifeless remains. But, as we are in the totality of our two ways of being both collector *and* all of the butterflies, we are obliged, if the totality is to continue, to value the butterfly equally. Obviously, the collector as such would have no function - would cease to exist - without his collection. Once we start to question the purpose of the whole activity, its motivation, then by and in the very act of consideration we re-affirm our identity with the collector.

The fact that I am writing these words, and that you are reading them, joins us both in a conspiracy of thought. And, as its logical thinkers, we can agree to indulge in some differential thinking about the relationship of ourselves-as-collectors to the image-butterflies we so tirelessly collect. The first thought is, that if the relationship is to continue at all, then we must leave enough butterflies alive to give birth to new butterflies (for, as we collectors know, butterflies have a very limited life-span). This means that if the process of butterfly-classification-by-us is to go on, that what's good (or whatever) for us, *has* to be good for the butterflies, and vice versa. If we are going to apply opposing value-concepts to each side of the relationship, then we are being entirely illogical. It's bound to lead to a situation of conflict that ends with the collector killing all the butterflies. To return to the totality that is the sum of our ways of being - it is just as illogical if we were to apply opposing values to the functions of thought and perception. Like the collector and his butterflies, they are indivisible. Just as a butterfly-collector is incapable of existence as such without butterflies to collect, so thought requires the images of perception to think about. No perception, no thought. The answer to the problem of either/or lies in the realisation that the problem inheres only in the nonsense that the collector retains his function in the total absence of any butterflies. The problem is resolved in the acceptance of both functions as interdependent. When we become able to move freely in the continuum of thought and perception, then we can choose to leave the divisive and value-

laden realm of thought and to enter the bright and beautiful, ever-changing regions of the image.

*'Oft have I travelled in the realms of gold
And many goodly sights and seasons seen
Through many been . . . !*

But, deeply attached to the certainty that problems actually exist, we continue to live entirely in our thoughts - off the top of our heads, as it were. The thought process, instead of being merely a useful tool; an accessory for furthering individual being; has become *all* of that which we consider ourselves to be.

Let us first get quite clear just what it is that we attempt to communicate by means of language. Basically, it functions best in the transmission of one individual's experience to others, for the benefit of the group as a whole. It is a truism that we learn from experience, but it would be more accurate to say that we learn from the experiences of others. Those personal experiences that we learn from are those we *survive*, so that we can repeat the action in the event of a similar field-condition occurring in the future. The stories that were passed from mouth to mouth in the centuries when the written word was either non-existent, or the esoteric symbolism of a priest-caste, spoke of great deeds, not of great thoughts. If we knew of actions appropriate to slaying dragons, winning battles or parting the Red Sea, then would we not be able to survive anything that a hostile environment might throw at us? Only proved reality-testers passed on the information, for dead men told no tales. The roots of language lie in its function of propagating information to others concerning the state of the enveloping world. The purpose of word-symbols was to provide this information as part of a great store of folk-lore, that covered every eventuality in the perceptual field. It formed a vast and continually growing data-bank, from which comparisons could be drawn so that the chances of continuing survival would, for each of its members, would be immeasurably increased. The message was instantly understandable. All that was needed was the ability to interpret the symbols correctly - to speak the language. The message was, in essence - 'This is the way we do it'.

Language, then, functions effectively when it serves to communicate images of life-supporting and/or life-destroying elements that may be present in the outside world to the perception of the language-group *as a whole*; toward its better survival as a sociological unit. And, although the *expression* of such messages is by spontaneous and unequivocal action (that is, as specific physical events performed by an individual in the surrounding world) they can only be *transmitted*, by definition, as a result of a prior process of thought. Thought is deliberate, unlike perception, which is spontaneous. Because the thought process is essentially divisive, a choice has to be made of one or other of the alternatives contained in the original concept. The choice is purely that of the transmitting individual - it is *his* responsibility, and his alone, to ensure that the essence of his message is, 'This is how we do it'. As long as this is the case, then the resulting action of the receiver of the message will co-incide with, and re-inforce, the intrinsically 'right-action' print out of his genetic inheritance.

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So here we begin to realise that we have an enormous responsibility that the messages we transmit in our language-contacts with other people reflect the essential purpose of *extending the common good*. Each polarity of a thought-concept in the form of its word-symbol, represents a decision already made. Out of any given pair of dualities, of diametrically opposed possibilities, one only is chosen to be converted into action. Every time we say something, we reject saying the opposite. The very polar words, choose and reject, are differentiations of the total concept choose/reject. It is impossible to say one without not-saying the other. So when we communicate one or other of these words by means of language, what in fact we are doing is passing on a decision that has *already been made* by prior thought. But of course, this need not necessarily be the case. For example, there is no law of the universe that prevents someone from holding a red-hot poker a foot or so in front of your face, and simultaneously making the statement, 'This iron is cold'. The perceptions made by your senses generally would present an image of reality that is flatly contradicted by that symbolised by your sense of hearing. As language puts it, you would find it hard to 'believe your ears'. In this case, based on your experience of red-hot objects and what you have learned during your lifetime of the effects of red heat on human skin, you would rightly assume the reality of your image of the poker as red-hot and back smartly away from both that person and the poker. Your subsequent thought, put into words, would most likely centre round the two concepts, 'This person is/is not deluded' and, 'This person is/is not motivated by ill will' - in which case you would express your opinion by a statement such as 'You are either mad, or else you hate me very much'. To be absolutely accurate, your statement would need to begin '*I think* that you are, etc. .' Either way, you would be right to keep well away from him in the future.

Another way that language can be abused is by asking questions. Most of our questions just throw out the responsibility for an answer on to someone else, like a hook on which we hope to impale their response. By asking these questions we try to hide the fact that our thought has invented a concept, but that we deny our perceptions the responsibility for testing it out against reality by action. In the example above, instead of moving away, we would ask the poker-person such questions as, 'Are you mad?' Or, 'Do you hate me very much?' Denying the responsibility for our own actions, we would instead *ask him* to make the decision for us. We would only do this if we, for reasons that we shall go into later, were not sure as to which of the double messages contained the truth. There is a story (which I hope is not apocryphal) about the writer, Gertrude Stein. While on her death-bed, surrounded by her disciples, one of them - doubtless a long-time receiver of double messages - asked her - 'Miss Stein, before you die, tell me - what is the answer? To which she replied, in her dying breath - 'What was the question?'

Although *all* questions assume that there is an answer, it is not necessary to be either Gertrude Stein or a Zen master to realise that this is by no means always the case. The question-form invokes the law of cause and effect. It asks - what is the *cause* of this given effect? Both the cause and the effect are contained in the original thought-concept, which is the statement from which both the problem and the solution are drawn. Science has made such tremendous strides forward during the last century or so simply because it moved out into the unknown by means of a causeway built by 'right' questions, each of which resulted in a stepping-stone of new fact. Scientific method

is firmly rooted in the empirical approach, which, first, isolates patterns from the perceptual field by the act of attention, and then applies conceptual thought to the resultant image. Questions are asked, problems are raised, *about* the image. But the problems, unlike the perceptual field itself, do not form part of the matrix from which the real world is formed. It is only when a possibility is, as it were, fed back into the field by action in that field, that its validity as answer can be tested. Not only does the problem have no existence in the world - it also is only capable of final resolution by actualising the alternative possibilities to find which one survives the test of reality. The new phenomena that in themselves embody the solution can only be perceived by direct interaction with the world-field.

A Zen master, when asked by a psychiatrist how he dealt with neurotics, answered, 'I trap them into a position where they can ask no more questions!' In Zen Buddhism, those who ask a master for the answer to the question 'How can I achieve Buddha-hood?' are led to an awareness of its paradoxical absurdity by being asked in turn to meditate on an endless series of 'wrong' questions - such as the by now well-known example 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' In modern phenomenological psychotherapy, the responsibility for an answer is similarly put back where it belongs - with the self-same person who asks it. It is for that person alone to make the hard decision, first, to perceive whether or not the problem is real, and if it is, secondly, to take what appears to be (but only to the Thinker!) the odds-on risk involved in resolving it by action.

When you next have a conversation, attempt to make your part in it a series of statements about your thoughts, your feelings and your perceptions - and without asking a single question. Don't suppress your questions; just change them into the statement format. After as little or as long a time as you wish, go back to your normal way of talking. And when you are next by yourself, you may choose to put these questions to yourself

1. Did I **feel** in any way different (embarrassed, vulnerable, angry, resentful, or whatever)?
2. Did I notice any variation from the usual response of the person I was talking to?

The only real function - real, that is to say, in an existential sense - of the question/answer format lies in its application to those world-systems available to perception, where all the contained variables can be actually tested. Our language gives the name of 'mechanism' to systems that enclose a particular usefulness - that encapsulate a certain function, or set of functions, in the world. These closed systems represent certain transactional events that realise a specific purpose; such as those performed by cars, or computers, or clocks -or that particular complex mechanism that is enclosed by our skin. All mechanisms have a particular function, which is of their essence. The essence of the car is transportation at speed; the essential function of a clock is time-keeping; of computers, calculation. Any questions that we may ask about these processes must by definition refer to their function. It is only when we lose sight of the function and ask questions about the *name given to it* that we become absurd, and talk nonsense. For example, the question

'Why has the car stopped?' is capable of being answered. But if we were to ask, 'Why is the car not calculating?', we would be putting a 'wrong' (because unanswerable) question. We are only led into absurdity because we can, by means of language, put a name to a process, - and the name is treated as if it were a separate thing.

So we can see how, by an over-reliance upon the process of thought, we can confuse the symbols of language with the images that we perceive as our personal reality. The confusion is increased when we consider another basic difference between thought and perception. It is that thought, by treating its processes as factual, is able to range freely through limitless possibilities of space *and time*. We can think about events that happened in the immediate past or far back into history, or project our thought forward to form fantasies of the future. All we need is the ability to read and to listen to language, even though the words we hear are taking shape by our own thought. Thought and language are not tied to perception, although the perceptive process was the prior condition for their birth. The Thinker can cut the umbilicus and free them, but in our perceptive mode, we are still fixed in the everlasting present of the image.

To regard our total being as polarised into thought, is to be deluded into the absurdity that we are immortal, that we are free to range through space and time. But to see ourselves as nothing but the mechanism of our perceptive senses, is continually to die and to be resurrected as one image fades to be replaced by another in a rhythm that matches the growth and satisfaction of our organismic needs. If we are to be able to share the images of our personal reality - to truly join our existence with that of others - by means of a common language, then we must keep intact the umbilicus that bridges our two ways of being. We must keep in touch with the imagery that constitutes the reality of any given moment. If words are again to become effective in the transmission of our essential and uniquely personal existence, they must be used, not to ask questions or to make factual statements about problems already solved, but to describe whatever we, as integrated human beings, experience as reality in the present moment of its telling. As we have seen earlier, the dual nature of our being obliges us to accept our totality, or else our very existence becomes paradoxical nonsense.

If we use language to express the totality of what the existential psychiatrist Binswanger called being-in-the-world, then we first must lay bare its inherent tendency to divide the world-field into named Things that become dead artifacts by the very act of name-giving. The fact is worth repeating - that instead of celebrating life by a direct experiencing of that which is, we instead kill it in the naming.

Whatever the state of politics and sociology in the present century, science has certainly had its nose rubbed into the chaotic mess that is the world-field. The increasingly sophisticated tools that have been used to investigate the mechanics of closed functional systems have revealed an infinity of contained sub-systems, each inside the other like Chinese boxes. The layman is still inclined to worship at the shrine of Certain Scientific Fact, largely unaware that its former disciples are beginning to realise the absurdity of coining new words to describe inter-related patterns of short life-span that momentarily form, integrate and then dissolve. What used to be given the name of structure

is now seen as process. Chaos has become accepted as the ground from which a momentary order can obtain. Scientists, who were the first priests of the new religion, have now become the vanguard of a new Reformation. They are among the first to perceive that the facts once worshipped as the idols of institutionalised science had feet of clay - that they were illusions, obtained by the language-naming of transitory images.

NOW IT'S HAPPENING IN THE REGIONS

If you live outside London, and if you would like an occasional meeting, event or get-together in your area, would you please get in touch with the contact person for your area or if there isn't one yet write to the Secretary at 66 Southwark Bridge Road, London S.E.1 and tell her.

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