

Between Pragmatism and the language animal

Entre o pragmatismo e a animal linguístico

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Abstract: This essay compares and contrasts the pragmatist naturalist approach to the distinctiveness of language, exemplified principally but not exclusively by John Dewey, with Charles Taylor's extensive discussion in his *The Language Animal*. Taylor, inspired by the work of Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt, relies on different conceptual and philosophical resources for delineating what he calls 'the shape' of the human linguistic capacity. But both Dewey and Taylor arrive at overlapping but not identical positions: language is the constitutive defining feature of human beings. Human beings are defined by the rise of 'as' consciousness, a 'break' in our immediate immersion in the world, and, as Peirce and Dewey so perspicuously showed, a reflexive awareness of the use of signs and sign systems of all sorts. These systems potentiate and transform our access to the world and to ourselves. They do not just label a world already existing. They create realms of significance and value that would not have come into being without them. Taylor's pivotal distinction between designative and constitutive models of language is fully supported by pragmatist accounts of language, which Taylor does not advert to. This distinction is shown to be of especial importance for Dewey and Taylor in the creation of existentially vital landscapes of meaning embodied in self-descriptions and in the delicate practices of the arts of self-reflection. Both Dewey and Taylor show that just as the open textures of experience grow by their edges so language itself has its own 'edges' and points us toward 'liminal' domains that bear upon thresholds of sense beyond the fully sayable. These domains, which they show in different but complementary ways, are accessed as realities by non-discursive forms encompassing art works, what Taylor calls 'portrayals,' and enactive and restorative rituals, both personal, civic, and religious that embody meanings. Dewey and Taylor diverge, however, on whether and how these domains need to transcend nature.

Keywords: Charles Taylor. Constitutive nature of language. John Dewey. Liminality. Omnipresence of language. Self-description and self-interpretation.

Resumo: *Este artigo compara e contrapõe a abordagem naturalista pragmatista para a peculiaridade da linguagem, exemplificada, principalmente, mas, não exclusivamente, por John Dewey, com a extensa abordagem de Charles Taylor em seu O animal linguístico. Taylor, inspirado pelas obras de Hamann, Herder, e Humboldt, conta com recursos filosóficos*

e conceituais diferentes para o delineamento do que ele denomina de 'a forma' da capacidade linguística humana. Porém, Dewey e Taylor chegam a posições que se sobrepõem sem se identificar: a linguagem é a característica definidora constitutiva dos seres humanos. Seres humanos são definidos pelo surgimento da 'como' consciência, uma 'ruptura' em nossa imersão imediata no mundo, e, como Peirce e Dewey mostraram de maneira tão lúcida, um reflexivo estar consciente do uso de signos e sistemas de signos de todos os tipos. Esses sistemas potencializam e transformam nosso acesso ao mundo e a nós mesmos. Eles não apenas rotulam um mundo já existente. Eles criam âmbitos de significados e valores que não surgiram sem eles. A distinção crucial de Taylor entre os modelos designativo e constitutivo da linguagem é apoiada plenamente pela consideração pragmatista da linguagem, a qual Taylor não declara. Essa distinção mostrará ser de importância especial para Dewey e Taylor na criação de paisagens existencialmente vitais de significado incorporados nas autodescrições e nas práticas delicadas das artes de auto-reflexão. Tanto Dewey quanto Taylor mostram que assim como as texturas abertas da experiência crescem por suas extremidades, assim a própria linguagem possui sua própria "extremidade" e nos aponta para os domínios "liminares" que sustentam o limiar do sentido para além do totalmente dizível. Esses domínios, que eles mostram de maneiras diferentes, mas complementares, são acessados como realidades por formas não discursivas que abrangem as obras de arte, o que Taylor denomina de 'representações,' e rituais performativos e restaurativos, tanto pessoais, cívicos e religiosos que incorporam os significados. Dewey e Taylor, divergem, entretanto, sobre se e de que maneira estes domínios precisam transcender a natureza.

Palavras-chave: Charles Taylor. Natureza constitutiva da linguagem. John Dewey. Liminaridade. Omnipresença da linguagem. Autodescrição e auto interpretação.

*Let no one say that I have said nothing new ... the arrangement
of the subject is new.*

Blaise Pascal

1 Introduction

At the beginning of Plato's dialogue, *Cratylus*, Hermogenes asks Cratylus to explain to him and Socrates what he means by the "fitness" of names. Cratylus answers:

CRATYLUS: Well, but surely, Hermogenes, you do not suppose that you can learn, or I explain, any subject of importance all in a moment; at any rate, not such a subject as language, which is, perhaps, the very greatest of all.

HERMOGENES: No, indeed; but, as Hesiod says, and I agree with him, 'to add little to little' is worth while. And, therefore, if you think that you can add anything at all, however small, to our knowledge, take a little trouble and oblige Socrates, and me too, who certainly have a claim upon you. (PLATO, *Cratylus*).

Pragmatism can offer us powerful tools for reflection on this “perhaps” very greatest of subjects. And if language itself is not the very greatest, it is nevertheless the indispensable means of determining what is. It supports and stimulates our collaborative “guesses at the riddle” and our search for the “grounds of human significance” in a cosmos marked by emergent novelties on multiple levels.

2 Between Pragmatism and the Language Animal

Charles Peirce offers us a striking metaphorical image of the dynamic conscious matrix in which language arises and functions. Its vivid formulation itself exemplifies the power and functions of language to capture a central aspect of human experience. Peirce writes:

I think of consciousness as a bottomless lake, whose waters seem transparent, yet into which we can clearly see but a little way. But in this water there are countless objects at different depths; and certain influences will give certain kinds of those objects an upward impulse which may be intense enough and continue long enough to bring them into the upper visible layer. After the impulse ceases they commence to sink downwards. (CP 7.547).

What is the nature of those “certain influences” that bring objects into visibility, disclosing them and holding them still for perception? According to Peirce in a well-known passage: “Whenever we think, we have present to consciousness some feeling, image, conception, or other representation, which serves as a sign.” (CP 5.283). Absent these sign configurations as supporting and informing structures, we lose access to their correlative certain kinds of objects. The “different depths,” while evoking a spatial framework, can also be taken as specifying degrees of clarity, of ideational and affective depth and richness. The “we” in “we think” refers to our universal participation in the cultural and intersubjective “play of signs” in which we are caught up and by which we are *informed* and *supported* on every layer of consciousness. Peirce illustrates these informing and supporting structures by means of his striking image of the inkstand without which he would not be able to think (CP 7.366). It is, he contends, along with the attendant pen or quill, just as much a part of his body as the brain within his skull. It is an exosomatic organ and an extension of his expressive powers.

Sign systems of all sorts are differentiated sets of “inkstands” each with their specific “types of ink” and differently cut quills or pen points that perform different functions. Peirce points out another essential consequence of this reliance upon signs: “All thinking is by signs; and the brutes use signs. But they perhaps rarely think of them as signs. To do so is manifestly a second step in the use of language” (CP 5.534). Whatever the status of “brutes” thinking of something as a sign, this is clearly a reflective consequence of our use of signs—and of their use of us. According to Homer and Hesiod the defining feature of humans is that they are “those animals that divide their voice.” It is the distinctive logic of this “voice dividing” that makes language, as John Dewey’s writes in *Experience and Nature*

(hereafter: *EN*), “the tool of tools, [...] the cherishing mother of all significance” (*EN* 146). “It is,” he writes in *Art as Experience* (hereafter: *AE*), “informed with the temperament and the ways of viewing and interpreting life that are characteristic of the culture of a continuing social group” (*AE* 241). These ways are “funded” and make up an essential component of what Charles Taylor calls “footings” in his *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (hereafter: *LA*).

In a key chapter in his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (hereafter: *LTI*), Dewey writes that language is to be “taken in its widest sense, a sense wider than oral and written speech. It includes the latter. But it includes also not only gestures but rites, ceremonies, monuments and the products of industrial and fine arts” (*LTI* 46). Dewey does not claim that language in the traditional sense is identical with its offspring. Nor does Peircean semiotics. Dewey’s point is that these other “languages” have signifying powers and significances of their own as embodiments of thought and other rational and valuational projects and commitments. But only the language animal in the strictest sense has developed them and thereafter developed within them. The “voice” that is divided is the material continuum of the world itself, its materials, surfaces, marking tools, and containers, and also the multiformed articulations and habits of the human body embodied in systems of “toned” gestures and expressions. This segmentation is complemented by processes of relating and joining, the duality exemplified in the reciprocal carving and molding activities of the hand. Out of the complex of these activities sign systems of all sorts emerge and are stabilized. Not all of these sign systems are constructed on a linguistic model in the strict sense. Rather they are “meaning-bearing forms.” But at the same time, they are dependent for their development and interpretation upon a linguistic matrix. They grow as the Peircean “man sign” grows within the web of signs.

As Dewey writes in the chapter on the “Existential Matrix of Inquiry: Cultural:”

Language occupies a peculiarly significant place and exercises a peculiarly significant function in the complex that forms the cultural environment. It is itself a cultural institution, and, from one point of view, is but one among many such institutions. But it is (1) the agency by which other institutions and acquired habits are *transmitted*, and (2) it *permeates* both the forms and the contents of all other cultural activities. Moreover, (3) it has its own distinctive structure which is capable of abstraction as a *form*. (*LTI* 25).

Jamesian pragmatism, however, was ambiguously suspicious of language. James thought that it takes us too far away from the flux and richness of the experiential streams of our lives. James persistently argues in *Some Problems of Philosophy* that “conceptual knowledge is forever inadequate to the fullness of the reality to be known” (JAMES, 1996 [1911], p. 45). Taking, for example, the cases of activity or causation, James thinks that we cannot understand them conceptually because “the conceptual scheme yields nothing like them” (JAMES, 1996 [1911], p. 48). A physicist’s diagram of motion, James contends, is inadequate because it is not able to “reproduce it” (JAMES, 1996 [1911], p. 47). But, from a semiotic point of view, and in light of Peirce’s existential graphs, it is hard to understand why a

diagram should “reproduce,” in any coherent sense, what it stands for or represents (see STJERNFELT, 2007). Representation is not reproduction. It is a *metabasis eis allo genos*. For James, however, committed to a model of experiencing as a continuous flow, the essential weakness of a conceptual scheme, borne paradigmatically by language, is that the scheme, “consisting as it does of discontinuous terms, can only cover the perceptual flux in spots and incompletely. The one is no full measure of the other, essential feature of the flux escaping whenever we put concepts in its place” (JAMES, 1996 [1911], p. 46). Language with its panoply of discursive forms, James claimed in *A Pluralistic Universe*, in agreement with Bergson, lets us “jump over life instead of wading through it” (JAMES, 1996 [1911], p. 272). Paradoxically, James own fine-grained and vivid phenomenology of lived experience was accomplished through the construction of a nuanced and complex descriptive web that in fact leads us to experience and not to sets of abstract labels.

The principal goal of this paper, however, is not to trace in Cratylus’ “all in a moment” some central linkages between the founding figures of the pragmatist tradition with respect to the role and range of language as a distinct semiotic form. It is rather to engage, against and with the help of the background of pragmatism, some central theses of Taylor’s *The Language Animal*. The title of Taylor’s book is an echo of Aristotle’s fateful *zoon logon echon* characterization of human distinctiveness. I want to indicate schematically some substantial overlaps between his arguments and some core elements of a pragmatist approach to language, principally as developed by John Dewey.

Dewey is often for various reasons unjustifiably thought of as playing “second fiddle” to Peirce. Dewey, however, was very aware of the implications of Peirce’s semiotic work, within which reflection on language and other sign systems, especially art, had to proceed. His knowledge was not superficial nor unsystematic. A cursory glance at the indices to his *Logic* and his *Knowing and the Known*, written with Arthur Bentley, puts such an accusation to rest. Moreover, his articles, “Peirce’s Theory of Quality” and “Peirce’s Theory of Linguistic Signs, Thought, and Meaning” engage Peirce in a constructive and supporting manner (see also INNIS, 2011). Indeed, it is Peirce’s theory of quality along with central ideas from James’s theory of experience that informs the theoretical core of his *Art as Experience*, which contains rich observations on language. Dewey is especially helpful in the present case in that his mode of establishing the centrality and range of language in human life clearly foregrounds and anticipates the range of issues engaged by Taylor who relies on quite different analytical resources.

I want to show that the open, non-provincial pragmatist approach to language in the broadest sense, exemplified but not exhausted by Dewey’s approach, can itself be situated within, enriched by, and contribute to the analytical tools and conceptual resources put to use and exploited so profitably by Taylor’s open-ended effort. These resources are derived from different traditions that also affirm the fundamentally constitutive and not merely designative role of language in the broadest sense in determining our complex of modes of being-in-the-world. Dewey’s and Taylor’s common insight, with profound consequences, is that we are first and foremost in language, rather than that language is in us—and by extension in the dynamic play of signs that make up the semiotic matrices of our lives. Or, to

use Hans-Georg Gadamer's expression, "Wer Sprache hat, hat die Welt." But we do not just 'have' language. Language 'has' us and through it so does the world.

3 The break: The rise of 'As' consciousness

Taylor argues forcefully, while perhaps also relying on a set of unexpressed pre-philosophical commitments, for the radical discontinuity between animals and humans with respect to language. For Taylor the mark of humans is the rise of 'as' consciousness, which he asserts is distinctively human. Language, he contends, captures objects and the world as variable *loci of distinguishing features* rather than as an array of felt tones or stimuli to action and reaction. Taylor argues that to respond to a triangle, for example, as indicating food does not entail that an animal can distinguish a triangle from a circle *as* different objects in themselves, apart from their role in leading or training the animal to choose the door behind which food is to be found. Peirce's text on 'the brutes,' however, clearly implies and biosemiotics has established that on the subhuman level there is an operative linking of sign and object, although clearly the rat (or whatever animal) does not reflect upon the link—or *that* there is a link—but merely *acts upon it*. The triangle does not 'signify' food in any other sense than generating a Peircean energetic interpretant, an action or a type of form of behavior. Presented with two doors with a triangle on one and a circle on the other, sign-learning would involve the ability to perceive their difference, to discriminate, but with no reflective awareness of the grounds of the discrimination. The animal is not interested in triangles and circles but in food. (See POLANYI, 1958, chapter on 'articulation' and the three forms of learning, is especially illuminating. Also, see INNIS, 2015, for the links between Polanyi and the pragmatists.)

The triangle and the circle are clearly signs for the animal. But at the same time, they are not alternative names of food, symbols in Peirce's sense. They are *signals* which steer behavior. Taylor's point is that they do not *encode* information about the cheese or whatever, since any other figures could take over their function. They mean or signify 'something-to-be-eaten,' but not any *kind* of food.

But animal semiosis, however interesting, is not our theme (see EMMECHE/KULL, 2011; HOFFMEYER 1992, and 2008; STJERNFELT, 2014). It is the transformation of, or qualitative break in, the relation to the world through what Dewey in *Experience and Nature* (EN 132) called the "vicarious presence" of meanings in a "new medium." This medium is composed of, in Dewey's words, "representatives, surrogates, signs, and implicates" with potential infinity. These make up the "natural bridge" between "dumb creatures" and us, existing on different shores. They change us into "thinking and knowing animals" and create "the realm of meanings" we participate in. Taylor rightly places the matrix of transition in the activity of joint attention in a shared field and in the consequent creation of mediating signs which are taken as initiating a request, expressing a reaction, or representing objects and states of affairs. These are precisely the three fundamental semantic functions charted in Karl Bühler's famous organon-model of language: the appellative, the expressive, and the representational. Only the third function, exemplifying thirdness, is proper to language *qua tale*. It is grounded in what Bühler called 'the principle of abstractive relevance,' the foundation of seeing something as a locus of distinguishing features. Karl Popper (1963, p. 135) added to Bühler's schema a fourth argumentative or

explanatory function. It is one of the consequences of the linguistic self-reflection that is alluded to in Peirce's 'brute' text (see INNIS, 1992).

Dewey and Peirce offer in different ways a naturalistic and emergent conception of language's origin and status, without speculating on its historical origins. Language's emergence as a distinctive form is the result of the dawning of a fundamental, indeed universal, insight: that something can *stand for* something else, make it present even in its absence, a semiotic process that once started or entered into has no greatest upper bound. Dewey argues that recognizing something *as* a sign is cognate to recognizing something *as* a tool, but not in a merely *ad hoc* way. It is to understand a fundamental principle that informed Dewey's pragmatic/pragmatist approach and distinguished it from, but in no way contradicting, Peirce's more abstract and theoretical orientation. Dewey is certainly right to assert that to 'take' something as a tool to achieve a task or to 'take' a sound or a mark as *a way of joining oneself with another in attending to something else* arise together in what he called *problematic situations*: in the case of tools a task to be achieved or in the case of language a situation to be disambiguated. To see the world in its toolness, what Heidegger called its 'equipmentality,' and to take a sound as carrier of sense drawing attention to difference in the experiential or social field, are not just matters of "a practical convenience but [...] of fundamental intellectual importance." As to speech itself, Dewey writes that it is not like a pipe conducting water and does not merely pass on "perceptions, sentiments, and thoughts which are complete prior to language" (*EN* 169).

Regarding the non-pipe image of language, Taylor makes a centerpiece of his examination of the language animal a principled contrast between what he called the designative and the constitutive models of language's relation to the 'world.' The designative model foregrounds 'enframing' or coding of information. The constitutive model 'articulates' lived systems of meaning. These systems bring meaning into existence beyond the designative dimensions of language. Enframing theories, which inform much of analytic philosophy, foreground descriptive coding and communication of information, with the ideal being 'objective' scientific symbolization, and, as Taylor puts it, "exchanging orders and recommendations for action and engaging in common deliberation" (*LA* 35).

Taylor's contrasting of enframing theories with constitutive theories of language is rooted in his complaint that the first type fundamentally loses sight "of the language-constituted background which enables these activities" and that once we take it as given that language simply connects us to a world that exists without language "it is easy to slide into seeing our emotions, footings, normative understandings as well as simply given, as it were, in the nature of things" (*LA* 35-36). The lived background bases of language Taylor calls 'the whole range of *footings* (*my italics*) that come about in human culture, those of intimacy and distance, those of hierarchy and equality, those of kinship and outsider," and so forth through "the whole range of more officially codified footings" (*LA* 36).

There are two points of contact here with a pragmatist approach to language that show that the charges of forgetting the background or being wedded to a purely designative model of the relation of language to the world cannot be directed to it.

First, as to the background, Dewey writes that "the essence and import of communication, signs and meanings" lies in the fact that something "is literally made

common in at least two different centres of behavior. To understand is to anticipate together, it is to make a cross-reference which, when acted upon, brings about a partaking in a common, inclusive, undertaking" (*EN* 178-179). Is this not the ideal of philosophy as joint inquiry? Communication through the system of signs that constitute language is, he writes, "the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnerships. To fail to understand is to fail to come into agreement in action; to misunderstand is to set up action at cross purposes" (*EN* 179), a theme also pursued by Mead and Wittgenstein. And is not philosophy also a reflection on why we are at cross purposes in many dimensions of life? Taylor's reliance on Wittgenstein's notion of forms of life for his concept of footings could well have been extended to Dewey's analysis of the background, especially in light of Dewey's extensive examination of social and political themes, to which Taylor has devoted many works.

Secondly, as to Taylor's emphasis on the fundamental role of the constitutive-expressive function of language, Dewey writes that "the heart of language is not 'expression' of something antecedent, much less expression of antecedent thought" (*EN* 179). It is through language that lived qualities and experienced events "come to possess characters; they are demarcated, and noted. For character is general and distinguished" (*EN* 174). But, as Dewey writes with echoes of Peircean themes, they are also 'open' in the sense already prelinned in perception. Perception, intertwined with language, is concerned with something's

[...] defining, identifying, and distinguishing form. To recognize the thing is to grasp its definition [...] To perceive is to acknowledge unattained possibilities; it is to refer the present to consequences, apparition to issue, and thereby to behave in deference to the connections of events [...] perception is predictive expectancy, wariness [...] potential consequences also mark the thing itself, and form its nature [...] as meaning, future consequences already belong to the thing. (*EN* 182).

4 Landscapes of meaning and self-descriptions

What Taylor calls 'human meanings' or the 'landscapes of meanings' in which we live our lives exemplify the constitutive nature of language even more than the languages by which we attempt to grasp the flux of cosmic processes, which, nevertheless, from a semiotic point of view are also constitutive, but in a different way. Taylor writes: "Being constitutive means that language makes possible its own content, in a sense, or opens us to the domain it encodes" (*LA* 50). This is especially the case with our language of values, norms, and ideals that are created in their very articulation. They are not objects such as "pains, tickles, and other sensations." Here is a key formulation of Taylor's claim about the constitutive-expressive dimension of language that is worthy of deep reflection:

Pride and anger can't just be named, like toothache. Or at least, their naming is charged with expressive resonance [...] But

we can see that they have a special status among meanings which can give them this appearance. There are certain basic dimensions of meaning for which we learn words very early: desire and aversion [...] pleasure and pain, discomfort; gladness, sadness, anger, joy, jealousy, pride, shame, and the like. Without these there is not yet such a thing as the shape that meanings have for us and which we can avow. Further development introduces complexity, richness, nuance; it marks distinctions which alter the shape of meanings, like my sense [...] that remorse is not the same as my feeling bad because I look bad, or my distinguishing indignation from ordinary anger. We develop a rich vocabulary of reasons and occasions for pride, anger, and the rest. And thus, these basic words become part of the broader skein of meaning of adult life. These words are foundational to the shape of meanings for us, rather than reordering this shape. But this makes them even more clearly constitutive. (*LA* 200).

Self-description, for example, does not designate a stable thing, as the history of our attempts to capture our and others' lives in time so clearly show, a theme developed by Taylor under the rubric of *portrayals* and *narratives*. The very vocabulary of what makes such a self-description 'right' depends on a vast background of feelings, memories, and actions, something "we usually lean on without noticing" but which makes up what Dewey called the 'problematic situations' of our lives. The language of the self cannot be, in the last analysis, reified. We are as we describe ourselves to be—in any case to ourselves, as 'others' to ourselves. We describe ourselves out of the background conditions and vocabularies that make up the shifting 'footings' which support us, and which operate behind our backs. Narrative fictions also explore and reveal these footings in their vertiginous breadths and depths, as Taylor shows in some deeply insightful pages (*LA* chapters 6 and 8; see also BRUNER, 1990 and 2002).

Dewey writes in *Art as Experience*, with no nominalistic intent, that "language comes infinitely short of paralleling the variegated surface of nature" (*AE* 219). The "ineffable diversity of natural existence as it operates in human experience is reduced to orders, ranks, and classes that can be managed" by the practical devices of words, whose semiotic content grows by its edges, as does experience. On Dewey's account, we must also admit the ineffable diversity of human existence whose description and acceptance are not just a scientific or intellectual enterprise. Our very lives are at stake. Language takes on a 'poetic' function beyond the words of poetry as a literary art. It becomes a language of self-making, of self-creating. Employing various terms of discourse by which we would make ourselves known to others and to ourselves, in Dewey's words, "we invoke a meaning, namely, the potential consequences of the existence" of ourselves as so described and so demarcate ourselves against and relate ourselves to others. In this way the qualitative immediacies of our lives cease to be "dumbly rapturous, a possession that is obsessive and rapturous [...] They become capable of survey, contemplation, and ideal or logical elaboration" (*EN* 167). In this way, according to Dewey, the "directly enjoyed thing" that is ourselves "adds to itself meaning, and enjoyment is thereby idealized" (*EN* 167).

5 Idealization and the 'Art' of self-reflection

What would this 'idealization' involve? The language of self-reflection is not just a soliloquy. Peircean semiotics has taught us, to use Dewey's words, that "soliloquy is the product and reflex of converse with others; social communication is not an effect of soliloquy. If we had not talked to others and they with us, we should never talk to and with ourselves" (*EN* 135). But, of course, following Peirce's spiral of semioses, that 'other' can be ourselves. We not only dramatically identify ourselves with "potential deeds and acts" (*EN* 135), we project ourselves toward our future by foresight, following the "office of signs in creating" the dynamic, interwoven matrix of reflection and recollection (*EN* 134) by means of which we are constantly assembling and re-assembling ourselves. Self-reflection is an art or skill. What Dewey said in another context applies here: "The expert in thought is one who has skill in making experiments to introduce an old meaning into different situations and who has a sensitive ear for detecting resultant harmonies and discords" (*EN* 152). The work of memory, being confronted with new present situations and new language tools, finds itself in various stages of transitions to new vocabularies and new feeling tones. The self-attribution of having a stable *character* is due to the persistent attempt of words to convey the *nature* of things and events "over and above a brute flux of existence" (*AE* 247). Literature, Dewey writes, "works with loaded dice; its material is charged with meanings they have absorbed through immemorial time" (*AE* 244). Recognition of things and their designation in and through language can rely upon stereotypes, some schemes ready-to-hand, but self-reflection is existentially constitutive, in Taylor's sense of that term and self-understanding hangs in the balance.

The language animal can no more than the artist be capable of divesting himself of the sequence of new perceptions of him or herself, of, as Dewey says (*AE* 95), "meanings funded from his past intercourse with his surroundings, nor can he free himself from the influence they exert upon the substance and manner of his present seeing. If he could and did, there would be nothing left in the way of an object for him to see"—the 'object' being himself. Without such undulatory 'funded footings' we would have no place to stand. It points to the perilousness of self-development due to the ineluctable fact that whenever "anything is undergone in consequence of a doing, the self is modified," leaving "some deposit of meaning of things done and undergone" (*AE* 269).

The connection, even linguistic, with Taylor's picture of the language animal becomes even more explicit. Funded and retained meanings are not just in the head as concepts or ideas. They, in Dewey's words, which could have been written by Taylor,

[...] become part of the self. They constitute the capital with which the self notes, cares for, attends and purposes. In this substantial sense, mind forms the background upon which every new contact with surroundings is projected; yet 'background' is too passive a word, unless we remember that it is active and that, in the projection of the new upon it, there is assimilation and reconstruction of both background and of what is taken in and digested. (*AE* 269).

In the great chapter on ‘The Existential Matrix of Inquiry: Cultural’ in his *Logic*, Dewey remarked on “how thoroughly saturated behavior is with conditions and factors that are of cultural origin and import” (*LTI* 42-43). Prime among these is language’s role in bringing about “the transformation of the biological into the intellectual and potentially logical” (*LTI* 45). This is one of the persistent themes in Taylor’s discussion of the language animal. But, in a passage already cited, Dewey extended language to encompass “not only gestures but rites, ceremonies, monuments and the products of the industrial and fine arts” (*LTI* 46). Such an extension is also found in Taylor, with his extension of the ‘constitution’ of meaning to different media (verbal, enactive, portrayals).

Verbal media generate and sustain both ‘discourse’ and ‘portrayals,’ Taylor’s attempt at a felicitous way of translating the German term ‘*Darstellungen*’ into English. Portrayals are not limited to the medium of language in the strict sense. Portrayals create ‘presentations’ of meaning without explicitly asserting anything, although their interruptive relevance or application to life is unavoidable. The language animal is also the ‘portraying animal,’ as the diverse historical panorama of presentational forms—literature, painting, music, dance, and so forth—show. There is perhaps a more general point to be reflected upon here about both the primacy of language and ‘the failure of words’ that characterize us as language animals in the broadest sense of ‘the articulate animal,’ that is, as I have been foregrounding, the animal that articulates the world by means of shaping and forming the world’s own materials. (On the ‘failure of words,’ see INNIS, 2008; and SCHARFSTEIN, 1993).

Deweyan pragmatist aesthetics foregrounds the fact that “the artist does his thinking in the very qualitative media he works in, and the terms lie so close to the object that he is producing that they merge directly into it” (*AE* 21). A single emotion, Dewey writes, could not be captured in words in a lifetime. The poet and novelist, he claims, surpass the psychologist in delineating the structure and nature of an emotion. What they do is build up through words “a concrete situation and permit *it* to evoke emotional response. Instead of a description of an emotion in intellectual and symbolic terms, the artist ‘does the deed that breeds’ the emotion” (*AE* 73). In this way Dewey can ascribe a kind of ‘symbolic pregnancy’ to art works due to their own forms of ‘funded’ meanings with their sources in the materials of past experience. Art works can have a kind of universal accessibility and communicative power without their meanings being self-evident due to their syntactic and semantic ‘density’ as Nelson Goodman proposed. They can ‘strike’ with a distinctive ‘quality’ or ‘aura’ without our being able to say what that quality is, a point made throughout *Art as Experience*.

6 Liminality and the ‘Open’

With respect to this, Dewey writes:

Since art is the most universal form of language, since it is constituted, even apart from literature, by the common qualities of the public world, it is the most universal and freest form of communication. Every intense experience of friendship and affection completes itself artistically. The sense of communion

generated by a work of art may take on a definitely religious quality. (AE 275).

Taylor calls this quality ‘liminality.’ The sense of communion is not just with one another, but with the cosmos as such, the universe in flux marked by what Dewey called the “moving unbalanced balance of things” (EN 314).

But there is perhaps a more general point to be mentioned here about both the primacy of language and ‘the failure of words’ that characterize us as language animals in the broadest sense of ‘the articulate animal,’ that is, the animal that is driven to articulate the world, as I have already noted, by means of the world’s own materials, including its own body, whose shaping and forming results in open-ended configurations of meaning. Taylor writes:

Possessing a language is having a liminal sense of a great constellation of [...] ordered distinctions [...] The liminal access to these distinctions underpins my capacity to speak, and helps constitute my sense of this capacity; that is, my sense of what I can say, and what is (as yet) beyond my ability to articulate. I can tell you that that picture is of a storm at sea, but I can’t find a way of describing the conflicting emotions it arouses in me. (LA 23n31).

But, if we take ‘articulate’ in the broadest sense, we do not have to find such a way. The picture *is* the articulation and we know what it ‘means’ even if we cannot say it and yet we can traverse its many pathways of significance which are *there*. The language animal knows this, and the philosopher tries to understand how such a knowledge is possible and what it consists in.

Taylor also engages a deeper aspect of liminality, one that borders on the sense of cosmicity that is cognate to Dewey’s notion of a religious quality as found in and elicited by communion with a work of art, this time elicited by the cosmos itself, what Peirce called “the poem of God.” This is not the place, however, to discuss in any detail the relations between Peirce’s and Dewey’s religious approaches, both of which differ radically from Taylor’s clearly Western and even orthodox commitments. (see TAYLOR, 2007). Taylor speaks of enactments such as ritual. He writes that “the actions and words of ritual frequently have an iconic or symbolic relation to what they are trying to effect, or to the order they are meant to repair, but the crucial point about them is that they are performatives, they help to bring about what they (at least in part) represent” (LA 74; see INNIS, 2005, on “The Tacit Logic of Ritual Embodiments”). Ritual, and its accompanying myths, are fundamentally ‘restorative’ on Taylor’s reckoning. They restore us to and enact union with what Dewey called in *A Common Faith* “the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a universe” (CF 53). The universe, according to Dewey’s underlying Jamesian schema, at its most fundamental is *felt* as “the unlimited envelope” (AE 199) of our lives, an “enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience. This whole is then felt as an expansion of ourselves” (AE 199). Myths and diverse religions produce a wealth of discursive forms as well as ritual enactments and portrayals to capture this felt sense. Dewey writes in *Human Nature and Conduct*

that we need objects and symbols that grasp and hold our consciousness, giving us a sense of “encompassing continuities with their infinite reach” and of the “enduring and comprehending whole” (226). But, practicing a kind of pragmatist hermeneutics of suspicion, Dewey warns against attachment to symbols “which no longer serve, especially since men have been idolators worshiping symbols as things,” even if these symbols still have “some trace of vital and enduring reality” (226).

The need for these symbols arises in forces at work in the Peircean bottomless lake of consciousness and in the Deweyan qualitative ‘background’ and Taylorian ‘footings,’ which, as Dewey wrote and Taylor so strikingly showed, is “defined and made definitely conscious in particular objects and specified properties and qualities” (*AE* 197). The incomplete and eminently fallible articulation of this background and these footings in language, in all its forms, bears philosophical witness to a permanent liminality in our experiences and to the ‘open’ range of our joint attention to ‘what matters’ and our attempts to capture it in language.¹

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1 The issue of a permanent liminality in our language and experience and need for adequate modes of symbolization bears upon a radical difference between Dewey’s philosophical naturalist and Taylor’s decidedly non-naturalist approach. Dewey’s *A Common Faith* and Taylor’s *Varieties of Religion Today* construct and utilize very different frameworks. Taylor alludes to Rowan William’s *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) as developing a position that intersects in multiple ways with his argument. Dewey’s hints for our need within a naturalist context for symbols of the “enveloping undefined whole” can be fruitfully expanded and supported by Donald A. Crosby’s deeply sensitive *More than Discourse: Symbolic Expressions of Naturalistic Faith* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014). I have discussed the scope and nature of religious symbolic structures within a naturalistic framework in Innis 2005, 2011b, 2012.

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