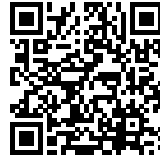




# HUMANISM AND LANGUAGE

*Posted on September 1, 2017 by E.Q. Jeayes*





It's often assumed that the discipline of the Humanities involves anything and everything that cannot properly be classified as a proper science.

It's also commonly assumed that language is simply a method of communication – so that flapping your arms is the same as speaking. Or, you can draw something, since a picture is worth a thousand words. This is a very rudimentary understanding of language.

Before proceeding any further, it's best to define our terms so that we don't get mired in assumptions.

Turning first to language, we need to understand that it is thinking more than it is communication.

The founder of linguistic philosophy (Wilhelm von Humboldt) described language as the expression of thinking, peculiar to a people, even the most primitive of people, those closest to nature, as he puts it.

Thus, communication is only the most basic level of linguistic usage. The most intensive use of language is the generation of ideas.

The philologist Max Mueller extended Humboldt's analysis when he called language as “the outward form and manifestation of thought.”

And Humboldt further defined language as the medium through which humanity encounters reality: “Man lives with his objects chiefly as language presents them to him.”

The philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, then proceeded to specify language as, first, the symbolic rendering of expressions, and second the engendering of discursive thought; or, in other words, reason.

Thus language is the principle which unfolds complexity in order to produce meaning, or what may be called abstract thought.

In brief, for Cassirer, language is the entelechy of knowledge, that is, only through language can knowledge reach its fullest potential. This obviously means that language has more than a denotative function – it's extends far beyond communication.

To quote the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev: “A language is that into which all other languages, and even all other conceivable language structures may be translated. In language, indeed only in such, can the inexpressible be dealt with until such time as it is expressed.”

In other words, language, first and foremost is idea, because it contains all the infinite possibilities of ideas.

Given the intimate association of language with thinking and knowledge – why do we hear teachers referring to it as a “form of communication?” What purpose does this extreme simplification serve?



Can it be that those that teach [do not know what they do](#)?

Having briefly defined language, we may do the same for the humanities. Again, we encounter confusion, because the definition often used is simplistic.

The tendency nowadays is to view the Humanities as anything that is not science; and such muddling continues in the so-called "soft sciences" (like anthropology, psychology and sociology).

So, what are the Humanities? In a very straightforward way the Humanities have always meant the study of Greek and Latin – that is, the discipline of the Humanities has always been tied with the learning of language – because it was once believed (now no longer) that by learning a language, in a disciplined and structured fashion, a person became educated and refined.

This once meant that an educated person was one made fit to carry on the work of civilization, because language alone [builds](#) the mind, by way of very specific disciplines, starting with grammar, and then proceeding on to literature, philosophy, biography, history, and music. Yes, music, because music once meant thinking (rather than head-banging).

And civilization meant moral freedom - those structures of virtue contained in Hellenism and Judeo-Christianity.

The Humanities, as promulgated by the education industry are so frayed and tattered by identity politics that Heaven only knows what they've now become!

The true Humanities must be based upon the understanding that education is only possible through language, since the creation of ideas is uniquely a human activity. This alone can justify the designation of "the Humanities."

In this way, education used to be about understanding the exercise of moral freedom. Now it has become training for [agitprop](#).

Because education has lost its mooring and become meaningless, it blindly promotes falsehoods as sound pedagogy. The worst being the notion of "learning styles," and that absurdity known as, "right-brain" and "left-brain" learners.

[Study after study](#) has amply demonstrated that there is no such thing as "visual learning" or "auditory learning," or kinesthetic learning. Nor does the brain function differently in [left and right compartments](#).

And yet, these false notions are popular in educational institutions – and worst of all, entire pedagogies are built around them. Why?

As researchers [have recently observed](#): "The contrast between the enormous popularity of the



learning-styles approach within education and the lack of credible evidence for its utility is, in our opinion, striking and disturbing."

Disturbing, because students are being taught falsehoods. What does education become when it is founded on pop-psychology?

And yet the popularity of these false views is enormous. They have become rock-solid truths because they are constantly repeated (thank you, Dr. Goebbels!). There is an entire industry that actively promotes this false dogma; careers are built upon it.

Why do teachers follow these falsehoods? Is it that they are useless without them? Or, do they not know any better (far more worrying)?

Studies also tell us that the only way possible for the brain to learn anything is through language.

Thus, the brain is Humanistic. It is built primarily for language, for thought, for ideas. And the world that we live in, the labor that we do, is a function of language, of thought, of ideas. The world that we inhabit is the product of Humanism.

To neglect or confuse Humanism with anything other than language is to deny the importance of thought. Far worse, it is the abandonment of ideas for the tangled jungle of feelings.

But then it's always easier to teach feelings, rather than ideas. Such is the destruction of the mind, which is on full display in society. Is it any wonder that people now believe that it's now far more important to feel than to think?

***The photo shows, "Christ in the House of Mary and Martha," by Henryk Siemiradzki, painted in 1886.***



