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PREDICATION AS A PUBLIC ACTION

SOMMARIO: 1. *Introduction.* 2. *Two inadequate explanations for judgment: Kantian and biological nativism.* 3. *Where does judgment come from? Husserl's reply.* 4. *A variation on Husserl's analysis.* 5. *Confirmation: children and the meaning of words.* 6. *The ethics of predication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

IN this essay, I wish to describe predicational judgment as first and foremost a transaction between speakers. When we speak about judgment as simply an act of the mind, we become inclined to think of this act as done primarily “in” the mind, as an interior performance. Such an approach internalizes the judgment in an inappropriate way. It suggests that judgments are, in principle, done internally and are only subsequently and secondarily expressed. It is true, of course, that judgments can be made by people when they are alone, but the primary and paradigmatic way of making judgments is to do so in public, in conversational reciprocity between two speakers or in discourse between a speaker and a group of people. The solitary achievement of predication is derivative upon the public form. It is an internalization of something that is first done in common.

Judgments should also be seen in their relation to the other intellectual activities. The classical scholastic doctrine claims that there are three basic acts of the intellect: simple apprehension, judgment, and reasoning. In the first, we grasp the quiddity of what we think about; in the second, we articulate something in our subject; and in the third we carry out inferences about it, that is, we conjoin several judgments in a logical order and sometimes come to conclusions. Thinking involves all three acts. Judgment must be understood as dependent on a grasp of things that is prejudgmental, and it must also be understood as nested within a larger argument, as concatenated in a series of judgments that come before and after. Every predication has precedents and consequents; it is located within a conversation, and at the extreme it must be located within the entire conversation of mankind. We should also note that simple apprehensions, the first act of the intellect, do not occur by themselves, at least not in human cognition. We do not take in quiddities one by one. They are grasped as elements within judgments.¹

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1. Thus, John Wippel suggests that for Aquinas «the understanding of indivisibles may

Since simple apprehension is a function of judgments, and since reasoning is a conjoining of judgments, it follows that a study of judgment will be central to the understanding of all our intellectual activities. Judgment, therefore, must be contextualized in two ways: as embedded in wider rational activities, and as carried on between speakers.

Judgments are formed by syntax, the structural part of thinking, which is expressed in the grammar of our speech. Judgments involve conceptual contents, but they also require predicational form and its many variations, such as subordinate clauses, modifiers, and various types of conjunction. Edmund Husserl discusses such syntax under the rubric of categoriality, which he says is found in acts of understanding as opposed to acts of simple perception.² Some contemporary linguists have also focused on syntax; I would like to make use of the work of Derek Bickerton, who claims that it is syntax that makes human speech different from animal sounds and cries.³ He also distinguishes syntactically structured speech from what he calls protolanguage, which occurs in baby talk, in some mentally handicapped people, in animals who have been taught the use of signs, and in pidgin, the kind of speech that occurs when people from two linguistic groups try to communicate with each other. One of the properties of syntactic speech, he says, is its hierarchic, “Chinese-box” or “Russian-doll” structure, in which phrases are nested within phrases. This is different from the linear, simply sequential patterns that are found in protolanguage. Another property of language is that it can be used to refer to things that are absent. Protolanguage, in contrast, responds more closely to its immediate environment, and its “speech” can barely be understood apart from the situation in which it is uttered.

Bickerton also claims that predication is the central syntactic activity of the mind: «If nouns and verbs are the most basic elements of syntax, then predication is its most basic act».⁴ The most fundamental act in syntax, that without which nothing else can be done, is predication. Syntax is, of course, immensely rich and varied. There are in the world’s languages untold forms of

be regarded as first in the order of nature from the standpoint of material causality; for it provides the subject for an existential judgment». Wippel is inclined to hold that for Aquinas the first two intellectual operations, the grasp of indivisibles and the judgment of existence, are simultaneous. See J. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 40.

2. Husserl describes the difference between perception and categorial intentionality in E. HUSSERL, *Logical Investigations*, translated by J. N. Findlay (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), Investigation VI, chapter 6.

3. See D. BICKERTON, *Pidgin and Creole Languages*, «Scientific American», 249 (1983), pp. 116–22; IDEM, *Language and Species* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); IDEM, *Language and Human Behavior* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1995); D. BICKERTON, W. H. CALVIN, *Lingua ex Machina. Reconciling Darwin and Chomsky with the Human Brain* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000).

4. D. BICKERTON, *Language and Syntax*, cit., p. 59.

subordination, conjunction, correlation, reciprocity, reflexives and possessives, tenses and cases, adjectives and adverbs, infinitives and gerunds, but underlying all of them is the never-absent form of predication, in which something is said of something else. All the other forms dangle from this or crowd around it. The heart of syntax is predication.

Bickerton adds the further refinement that, in his linguistic theory, the subject and predicate should be considered not as single words but as explicit or implicit phrases.⁵ This is an interesting claim and it would imply that even single words are latent combinations, hence syntactically structured in principle. Bickerton also says that each phrase can give rise to further subdivisions and subphrasing within each of its parts, yielding the cascade of phrases that constitutes language and rational articulation. In all this complexity, however, predication holds a special place: «...the subject-predicate distinction is perhaps the most basic in language».⁶

We will now examine two inadequate explanations of the nature of judgment, the Kantian and the nativist. These two will provide a foil for a treatment of Husserl's phenomenological description of how predication arises from prepredicative thinking. Finally, I will offer a modification of Husserl's analysis, which I believe will give a better account of the origins of judgment and show how predication is primarily a public achievement.

2. TWO INADEQUATE EXPLANATIONS FOR JUDGMENT: KANTIAN AND BIOLOGICAL NATIVISM

Kant claims that the formal structures that introduce logic into our judgments are simply part of human understanding. They are built into our understanding and are established before any experience: they are a priori. Experience triggers their activation. They organize our experience and make it intelligible. The judgments we make about the world are rendered possible by the combination of perception and the pure categories of the understanding, which order the perceptual and imaginative givens into judgments. Kant gives a transcendental deduction of those concepts that must be acknowledged as the understanding's contribution to our experience of things. The categories of the understanding bestow the formal structures of quantity, quality, relation, and modality on our judgments. Each of these headings in turn contains three categories, for a total of twelve «original pure concepts of synthesis that the understanding contains within itself a priori».⁷ Kant deduces these structures or concepts; obviously, we could

5. D. Bickerton develops his theory of "phrase structure" in IDEM, *Language and Syntax*, cit., pp. 59-65.

6. *Ibidem*, p. 97.

7. I. KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by N. Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), A 80, p. 113.

not directly experience them in themselves. Instead, we as philosophers can reason back toward them. We need to postulate them because, according to Kant, the necessary and universal character they bestow on our judgments – especially our synthetic a priori judgments – could not have been caused in any other way. The logical syntax of propositions, therefore, arises from the a priori structure of the understanding. It comes from a mental or spiritual source. We are made up of sensibility and understanding, and logical syntax comes from our understanding. It would follow, then, that the grammar of our languages expresses the logical syntax of our judgments. Kant does not say we are *born* with these a priori categories, because being born is a bodily event, and for Kant reason belongs to another domain. However, for purposes of classification and comparison, perhaps we might be allowed to adopt a contemporary term and speak of Kantian nativism. The term *nativism* has been used in reference to the innate ideas introduced by Descartes and Leibniz, and these ideas also are not corporeal, so it may not be out of place to apply the term to Kant's categories as well.⁸ They are forms we are endowed with insofar as we belong to the kingdom of ends.

At the other extreme from Kant we have a biological form of nativism, which turns to neuroscience and biology and attempts to discover the origins of logic and conceptual thinking in the structures of the brain. These structures in turn are explained by our genetic endowment. Our brains are said to contain an innate language faculty or a language module. Here too we have an appeal to an a priori origin, to forms that are given beforehand to experience and speech, but now the origin is located in the body and not in the understanding as distinct from the body. Such nativism claims that the power to generate formal structures is hard-wired in the brain. Noam Chomsky, for example, is said to have postulated a «dedicated “Language Faculty”, a biologically-specified “mental organ” that “incorporates... the principles of Universal Grammar».⁹ The reason why such nativism must postulate an inborn biological capacity is the “poverty of stimulus argument”: «There are items in our mental stock that cannot be accounted for on the empiricist model... For there is nothing in experience from which they could be derived».¹⁰ The fundamental, elementary grammar of a language, the basic syntax in thinking, cannot be explained by the experiences a child has had of well-formed sentences. Children know that certain verbal combinations are ungrammatical even before they have experienced them and before they have been told that these forms are unacceptable. There must be something innate in the human organism that permits it to recognize certain newly experienced or newly composed combinations as either acceptable or unacceptable.

8. See F. COWIE, *What's Within? Nativism Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), which discusses Descartes and Leibniz at length in its first five chapters.

9. *Ibidem*, p. ix.

10. *Ibidem*, p. 32.

Nativism does not know where else such a capacity could come from. It does not come from experience or instruction, and therefore it must be inborn, and somehow biologically inborn, not part of our understanding, as Kant would have said. Of course, children learn to speak different languages, but these differences result from local variations to the Universal Grammar that each human being is born with. Our native language faculty is described as «the inborn cognitive substrate that, in interaction with our linguistic experience, enables us to learn the grammar of our native tongue».¹¹ Both forms of nativism, the Kantian and the biological, explain syntactic form as innate in us, whether in our understanding or in our bodies as the origin of our minds.

3. WHERE DOES JUDGMENT COME FROM? HUSSERL'S REPLY

I wish to claim that in Husserl's phenomenology we can find a better solution to the origin of syntax and logical form than those offered by both biological nativism and Kantian philosophy. I will present Husserl's alternative in this section, and I will make an important modification to it in the next.

Husserl's explanation for the origin of formal structures is expressed most fully in his posthumously published work, *Experience and Judgment*, but the essentials of his doctrine are present even in his earliest work, *Logical Investigations*.¹² He tries to show how the formal, logical structures of thinking arise from perception; the subtitle of *Experience and Judgment* is, *Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*. The "genealogy" of logic is to be located not in something we are born with but in the way experience becomes transformed. Husserl describes the origin of syntactic form as follows.

When we perceive an object, we run through a manifold of aspects and profiles: we see the thing first from this side and then from that, we concentrate on the color, we pay attention to the hardness or softness, we turn the thing around and see other sides and aspects, and so on. In this manifold of appearances, however, we continuously experience all the aspects and profiles, all the views, as being "of" one and the same object. The multiple appearances are not single separate beads following one another; they are "threaded" by the identity continuing within them all. The identity of the thing is implicitly presented in and through the manifold. We do not focus on this identity; rather, we focus on some aspects or profiles, but all of them are experienced, not as isolated flashes or pressures, but as belonging to a single entity. The identity itself never shows up as one of these aspects or profiles; its way of being present is more implicit, but it does truly present itself. We do

11. *Ibidem*, p. 241.

12. For the treatment in E. HUSSERL, *Logical Investigations*, cit., see above, note 2. See also, IDEM, *Experience and Judgment*, revised and edited by L. Landgrebe, translated by J. S. Churchill and K. Ameriks (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), parts I and II. The latter work gives a genealogical or genetic explanation of judgment, the explanation in the former is more static.

not just have color patches succeeding one another, but the blue and the gray of the object as we perceive it continuously. In fact, if we run into dissonances in the course of our experience – I saw the thing as green, and now the same area is showing up as blue – we recognize them as dissonant precisely because we assume that all the appearances belong to one and the same thing and that it could not show up in such divergent ways if it is to remain identifiable as itself. If it is starting to look blue when it shouldn't, we might look more closely or try to see the thing in a better light.

This sort of perception does not involve any syntax or logic. It is prelogical and precategoryal. Any discrepancy in it – the green ball suddenly starts to look blue – is a felt disharmony and not an explicit contradiction. This sort of prelogical, prepredicative experiencing would, in fact, be very suitable as the experience that is expressed in protolanguage. Both are continuous but not formally structured. One impression follows another, even when we are dealing with one and the same object. Short strings of protolinguistic “words” like “play checkers,” “big drum,” “big horn,” and “horse go”¹³ are an appropriate and commensurate vocalization of continuous, prelogical experience. The various features we indicate are not radically distinguished one from another, nor is any feature explicitly distinguished from and then identified with the subject it belongs to. One impression simply flows into another, and one “word” flows into the next. Both the perception and the speech are precategoryal or presyntactic. This is the sort of experiencing and vocalization we have prior to the explicit discovery of things as substances, as subjects of predication.¹⁴

Such continuous perception can, however, become a platform for the constitution of syntax and logic. What happens, according to Husserl, is that the continuous perception can come to an arrest as one particular feature of the thing attracts our attention and holds it. We focus, say, on the color of the thing. When we do this, the identity of the object, as well as the totality of the other aspects and profiles, still remain in the background. At this point of arrest, we have not yet moved into categoriality and logic, but we are on the verge of doing so; we are balanced between perception and thinking. Then, we make the move into categoriality and syntax when we do the following: we go back to the identity of the thing; we now focus on the identity and on the thing as a whole (we establish a subject, *S*, “the ball”), and we focus again on the feature in question, such as the color, but we now

13. D. BICKERTON, *Language and Human Behavior*, cit., p. 165. Appendix A of this book provides numerous samples of protolanguage, classified under “Pidgin”, “Child language”, and “Ape ‘language’”.

14. I take a phrase in this sentence from the title of Wolfgang-Rainer Mann’s fine book, W.-R. MANN, *The Discovery of Things. Aristotle’s ‘Categories’ and Their Context* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000). The book compares Plato, who resolved things into ideas, and Aristotle, who “discovered” the substantiality of things.

take it explicitly as a part of the whole (we establish a predicate, p , “is green”). When we do this, we do not just have more of the continuous perception of the thing; we do not just prolong the perceptual experience; rather, we now have a new beginning, a discrete, new elevation into something structured, into the proposition or the state of affairs, “The ball is green,” into what could be formalized as S is p . As Husserl puts it in *Logical Investigations*, «It is clear... that the apprehension of a moment and of a part generally *as* a part of the whole in question, and, in particular, the apprehension of a sensuous feature *as* a feature, or of a sensuous form *as* a form, point to acts that are all founded.... This means that the sphere of “sensibility” has been left, and that of “understanding” entered». ¹⁵ We explicitly embed the feature in the thing, the predicate in the subject, and we now enter the game of logical inclusion and exclusion, with all its refinements and syntactic complexities.

The syntactically structured whole is, on the one hand, immersed in perception and hence attached to the thing being perceived, but it also contains, on the other hand, an intellectual, syntactic form that is detachable from that particular experience and that particular object: it is a form, a part-and-whole structure, that could be achieved within any other object. The maneuver we have performed on the green ball, the transition from perception to categorial formation, could also be performed on other things besides the green ball: it could be executed on the blossoming tree, the fevered patient, the threatening burglar, or even something as grand as the inflationary economy or the busy borough of Brooklyn.

We, therefore, in our experience and thoughtful activity, have moved from a perception to an articulated opinion or position; we have reached something that enters into logic and the space of reasons. We achieve a proposition, a meaning, something that can be communicated and shared as the very same with other people (in contrast with a perception, which cannot be conveyed to others). We achieve something that can be either confirmed, disconfirmed, adjusted, brought to greater distinctness, shown to be vague and contradictory, and the like. All the issues that logic deals with now come into play. According to Husserl, therefore, the proposition or the state of affairs, as a categorial object, does not come about when we impose an a priori form on experience; rather, it emerges from and within experience as a formal structure of parts and wholes. It arises in the way things can be presented to us: they can become articulated, their wholes and parts shaken out and their formal structure made explicit. If things did not present parts and wholes to us, predication and syntactic articulation could not occur; predication takes place between us and things, not within our own consciousness, not within a subjective world. The formal structure, the grid that arises in this exchange, can be detached from any particular experience and any particular

15. E. HUSSERL, *Logical Investigations*, cit., p. 792.

state of affairs, but such a detachment yields something abstract, a pure form, something that calls for supplementation by content.

This is how Husserl describes the genealogy of logic and logical form. He shows how logical and syntactic structures arise when things are presented to us. We are relatively passive when we perceive – but even in perception there is an active dimension, since we have to be alert, direct our attention this way and that, and perceive carefully. We are much more active, however, and active in a new way, when we rise to the level of categoriality, where we articulate a subject and predicate and state them publicly in a sentence. We are more engaged. We constitute something more energetically and take a position in the human conversation, a position for which we are responsible. Logical form or syntactic structure does not have to issue from inborn powers in our brains, nor does it have to come from a priori structures of the mind. It arises through an enhancement of perception, a lifting of perception into thought, by a new way of making things present to us. Of course, neurological structures are necessary as a condition for this to happen, but these neural structures do not simply provide a template that we impose on the thing we are experiencing.

We have followed Husserl's description of the manner in which prepredicative experience becomes transformed, by a responsible, rational agent, into a predication. I would like to comment on the relationship between Husserl's description of the genealogy of predication and Bickerton's remarks about the central importance of predication in syntax. Earlier we have quoted as Bickerton saying that predication is the "most basic act" of syntax. The central achievement in articulated speech is to say something of something; all other syntactic structures depend on this fundamental assertion. If predication were not there, none of the other intricate patterns of syntax would be there either. We have just seen how Husserl describes the emergence of predication from perception; the book in which he gives the most extensive analysis of this transition is entitled, *Experience and Judgment*, and the judgment in question is predication. He describes how judgments arise from experience. What I wish to claim at this point is that the structure of predication is itself an outstanding example of the hierarchic, Russian-doll, stacking, embedding architecture that Bickerton says is the major structural feature of syntax. It is not the case that such embedding only starts after predication, that it only happens when one predicative phrase or clause is embedded in another. There is stacking in predication itself. Even if we were to take predication as a very simple structure, as a relationship between a simple subject and a simple predicate, expressed by a simple noun and a verb, we would still have an embedding, we would still have the sharp part-and-whole structure that constitutes syntax, because we would have the subject (the ball) now being taken as the discrete whole within which the predicate (being green) is being stacked. Conversely, if the predicate were to become the focus of our attention, we might want to

say that the subject is being subsumed under the predicate, but in this case also the judgment would be an instance of syntactic hierarchy. Even a simple predication is a manicured formal garden shaped by intelligence, not a spot in the jungle of protolanguage. Things now click into place, syntax is introduced, logic comes into play, consistency and contradiction become issues, things are put on record, communication over distances becomes possible, presence and absence become explicit dimensions of what we experience, and we emerge as speakers who not only can articulate a situation but can also begin to declare ourselves. It is because of what we do when we articulate things that we can say that we have done it, that we have carried out or are carrying out a statement of the way things are.

4. A VARIATION ON HUSSERL'S ANALYSIS

Husserl's description of the constitution of judgment or predication has the advantage of relating the knower directly to the thing known. When we predicate, we do not merely rearrange our mental representations of things; we allow the things themselves, the things we perceive, to appear in a new, more structured and articulated way.

However, I think that Husserl's analysis can be improved in one important respect. I believe that his analysis of how logic emerges from experience is a major advance in philosophical thinking, but I also think that his description does not take intersubjectivity sufficiently into account. He describes categorial articulation as though it were done by a solitary mind, which first perceives an object in a manifold of appearances and then moves upward into categorial form as it articulates and recognizes parts and wholes in things. This description is correct as far as it goes, but it would be more adequate if it took into account the fact that our spoken words, as well as the thoughtful articulation associated with them, occur first and foremost between interlocutors. Instead of describing categorial intuition as something my own mind accomplishes, we should describe it as something a speaker does for a listener. The formal structures of logic arise between two or more persons, not primarily in the mind of a single person by himself. These structures arise in things as they are presented by and between the speaker and listener. That is where the genealogy of logic is located.

Husserl marks an advance over both Kantian and biological nativism because he "publicizes" both the work of the mind and logical form: he describes it as occurring not within a private consciousness but between the person and the thing known. I wish to increase this publicity. Logical form arises not only between the mind and the object, but between two or more people who articulate the object in common. They do so by the use of syntactically structured speech.

Let us say that two people are perceiving one and the same object through the manifolds of appearances that each enjoys from his own perspective.

Then, one of the persons draws the attention of the other (and his own attention as well, of course) to the object as a whole, in its identity. He names the object and establishes a reference, for another as well as for himself. By using a name, he sets up the object as the subject, as the thing that is going to be articulated. He then uses another term, the predicate, to draw the interlocutor's attention to some feature of the object. By conjoining the subject and predicate terms by whatever resources their language provides, by coupling the words, the speaker discloses for his interlocutor the fact that, say, the plate of steel is cold. He brings this fact before them. This articulation might be a new, fresh registration for the speaker as well as for the listener; if it is a thoughtful registration, and not the mere repetition of an opinion the speaker thought through some time ago, then the steel is being displayed as cold for both the speaker and the listener. The speaker does think the fact through. His constitution of the state of affairs is done in the same way that Husserl describes it. However, the speaker is "installing" categoriality into the experience and the object not just for himself but for the other person as well, and perhaps primarily for the other person. He does so by uttering a sentence, such as, "This plate of steel is really cold," and this single statement serves, simultaneously, as a display for the listener and a display for the speaker himself. The one stream of words, spoken by the one and heard by the other, allows two minds to articulate the same categorial object, the steel's being cold.

The formal structure of subject and predicate, of S is p , arises, therefore, because the speaker first focuses the mind of the listener on the whole object in its identity as something to be articulated, then on a part or a feature of the object, in a manner that couples them. The formal structure arises between the speaker and the listener. This articulation is a public action mediated by the language available for the persons involved in the speech situation, with the special slants that the language will afford. Both speaker and listener are thinking in the medium of words, and they are thinking about the thing being articulated, not about words or concepts. Notice how this explanation does away with the need felt by biological nativism to postulate hard-wired formal patterns of syntax in the brain. The syntax of words and concepts does not arise because the speaker and the listener each bring a brain-based formal template to their experience or to their language. Rather, it arises because two people can be so related to a given object that one of them can focus their attention on that object as a whole and then focus their attention on an aspect of that object. These two activities are done out in the open, and the form is something that belongs first and foremost to the thing being targeted by the two activities. All this clicks into place in public; it is as public as a salute or a vote cast in an election or an act of pointing to something. It is categorially formed conduct and it displays a categorially formed target; it is not just categorially formed consciousness. This explanation is obviously different

from that of Kant, who did not appeal to a biological foundation for syntax, but who did appeal to ready-made rational forms that precede experience. The logical forms that arise here are not ready-mades in the mind. This explanation is also different from Husserl's, because my proposal begins with an intersubjective context for the establishment of formal structures, not to the single mind moving upward from perception to logical structure.

My claim is that there can be subjects and predicates, there can be predication as the core of syntax, because, through the use of words, an object can be brought before a speaker and listener as an object of reference, and an aspect of that object can be differentiated and registered in it. There can be predication because we can interact in certain ways, not because our minds or brains function privately or organically in certain ways. The public character of predication is brought out by the Latin etymology of the term. According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the word, *praedicare*, which means "to make known, proclaim, declare," is made up of the adverb or preposition *prae*, "before, in the face of, in view of," and the verb *dicare*, "to show, to indicate". To predicate is to let something show up before an audience, and when this is done, as it normally is, in the medium of words, it is to speak out about something "before" others. The term *praedicare* can also mean to mention something in a special way, and so the modern term *predicate* can also mean an honorable mention, as in the German, when a vintage wine is dubbed "Qualitätswein mit Prädikat." Displays like these do not occur in solitude.

What remains of Husserl's analysis in my own is the fact that categorial objects are indeed based on perceptual, precategorial ones, and also the fact that there are different kinds of part-and-whole structures in perception and in categorial activity. The two kinds are related to one another, and the categorial, which is discrete and distinctly identifiable, is a further heightening or elevation of the perceptual, which is continuous and has blurred boundaries. I would hold on to everything that Husserl says, but I would locate it more clearly in an intersubjective context, and I would claim that the categorial forming, the elevation into logic, is the achievement not of a single mind but of one mind working with another, of one person working with another, and doing so in public. The categorial activity is really very simple: the speaker draws attention to the object as a whole (and for this to happen, the object must have been or must become a topic of concern on the perceptual level, between the two persons), and he then draws attention to the aspect or feature of the object. Of course, the two "draws of attention" are not separate from one another; the first is a preparation for the second and the second is "boxed" into the first. When a speaker utters a name of some sort, the listener waits for what is coming, for what is going to be said about the thing named. The name of the subject involves an expectation; it is not a discrete, isolated, independent utterance. Then, the term for the predicate is also not isolated and solitary and independent; it is joined with the subject even while having

been differentiated from it, and the coupling of the two is an assertion, a judgment. The judgment occurs in this two-step action between speaker and listener, in relation to the object. The acts of judging and hearing someone judge constitute a state of affairs, but they do so primarily between speakers, not separately in each mind.

We can isolate the form that comes about in this transaction; we can isolate S is p from this situation. The form can hold in any number of other situations. It can do so not because our brain has this inborn template that it will activate over and over again, nor because our reason is endowed with a priori forms into which it channels all our experience, but because this speaker – and any other human speaker, any other person – can perform the same maneuver in any other situation: he too can conjointly focus his listener's mind on the object as a whole and on some feature in that object. The syntactic form is the molted skin or carapace shed and left over, abstracted, from any number of such intelligent performances. It is true that the judgmental form, S is p , belongs to the state of affairs that is brought to light or to the proposition that is achieved, but it belongs to it as being disclosed in this double action of first targeting the thing (establishing the S) and then featuring it (establishing the p). The judgmental form is so elementary in our thinking because this action is the simplest kind of manifestation that one speaker can bring about for another, not because our brains or our minds are structured in a certain way. It is the primary move in the conversational game.

But, you might say, does not each person also perform the categorial articulation in his own mind? Does not each person, in the privacy and immanence of his own thinking, also carry out the *Auffassung*, the apperception or the “apprehension” that both Husserl and Kant say takes place when reason “informs” perception and elevates it into the domain of thinking? If this action happens in each of our own minds, does it not have to be accounted for psychologically or even neurologically? Is it not the case that this action happens primarily in each of our own minds, and that it then gets projected outward? The weakness of this objection should be evident. If the transition from perception to thought happened in privacy and immanence, then communication would be impossible. Instead, we start with what is public, and the apparent “psychological” or “privately mental” achievement of thinking is really an internalization of what is first and foremost a public activity. We go, in fact, from the outside to the inside, not the other way around. We do not go from solitude and interiority to publicness. Any private thinking, any personal and solitary insight – and obviously such things do exist – is the derivation from or the rehearsal for a public performance. It is the shadow of what we do in public. The public performance is the dominant and paradigmatic one; it is not the symptom of something that is done wholly within ourselves. We do have to think; we do have to achieve the categorial articulation associated with the words we speak or hear. We do not conduct

ourselves in a merely behavioral manner. But the thinking primarily is public, not private, and of course it could be achieved by more than two speakers involved in a speech situation.

The predicational form comes originally from the interaction between speaker and listener and not from the brain. We are disposed to interact with other people, and in that interaction one person can refer to an entity and then bring something out within it, and it is that interaction, that coupling of focus, that almost legal achievement, that documentation, that installs a syntactic form. Without the public establishment of language no logical achievements would be generated by the brain. Even protolanguage has to be taught. Without interactions and the impress they make on our psychic organism, the human being would be capable of only the most elementary responses to stimuli.

5. CONFIRMATION: CHILDREN AND THE MEANING OF WORDS

I wish to confirm this claim about the intersubjective origin of language and syntax by appealing to a book written by the psychologist Paul Bloom under the title, *How Children Learn the Meaning of Words*.¹⁶ This book is about words and names, and hence about semantics and not primarily about syntax, but what it says applies both to syntactically structured speech and protolanguage.

Bloom argues against a widely held theory of how children learn names. It is often thought, he observes, that names are learned simply by association with the things they signify. According to this view, the child gets used to hearing a particular sound when a particular object appears, and suddenly or gradually the sound becomes the name of the object: «Children learn the meaning of *rabbit*, then, because the word is used when they are observing or thinking about rabbits».¹⁷ But, according to Bloom, words are not learned in that way; rather, the child must experience the sound as being used by someone else to name the object. The child has to realize that another person's referential intent lies behind the word. The child does not just concomitantly experience the word and the thing; he experiences another person using the word to signify the thing. Without this mediation of another person, sounds would not be taken as words.

The original learning of names is, therefore, intersubjective. The dimension of words involves the dimension of other persons and the cognitive initiatives they take. The sound is taken as a name only in this wider context. When a word is uttered, «[...] young children will make the connection only if they have some warrant to believe that it is an act of naming – and for this, the

16. P. BLOOM, *How Children Learn the Meaning of Words* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000).

17. *Ibidem*, p. 56. This section of the book has the heading, "The Associative Infant".

speaker has to be present».¹⁸ The need for referential intent prevails even in highly artificial situations. Bloom describes experiments in which a robot is made to interact in a random way with infants, by beeps and flashes of light; even if the thing has no face, «babies will nonetheless follow its “gaze” (the orientation of the front, reactive part of the robot), treating it as if it were a person. But they will not do so if a faceless robot fails to interact with them in a meaningful way».¹⁹ The mere sound occurring with an object will not be taken as the name of the object. The full context for learning how to use names involves another speaker, who determines the situation by introducing words, and it is the presence of this other speaker and his intent that introduces the dimension of naming. The decisive element is the interaction between the persons.

Furthermore, the child does not merely watch and listen as words are introduced; the child begins to use the words himself. He not only recognizes the other speaker but realizes that he too is a speaker and can enter into the verbal exchanges. The child enters into the human conversation, and in this respect he is different from other animals, who are not members of the community of rational agents. As Bloom says, «Some dogs come to their owner when they are called, but no dogs make the inference that if they were to produce the same sound, their owner will obediently run to them».²⁰ Quoting Michael Tomasello, Bloom says, «Children use symbols, whereas other primates use signals,” that is, “they don’t refer».²¹ Certainly, some animals sense that others are attending to something – as the neuroscientist William Calvin says, «Apes are quite good at picking up what another is looking at»²² – but they do not sense that others are referring to something in order to say something about it. Even pointing is a problem for them; chimpanzees in the wild, Bloom says, “never show, offer, or point to objects for other chimpanzees,” and although they can be trained by humans to point to food, «they never quite get the hang of it; when they see someone else point, they are mystified».²³ Pointing is a more bodily version of referring: when you point to something, you expect something to be said or done about it; pointing, like referring, leads the other person to reply, “What about it?” The other person waits for the predicate. He waits for something to be said about the something that had been targeted. What the child enters into when he begins to point and then to symbolize is the activity of establishing a reference and then embedding a predicate within the referent; he enters into categorial predication, the use of syntax in speech, in reciprocity with other speakers.

18. *Ibidem*, p. 64.

19. *Ibidem*, p. 62.

20. *Ibidem*, p. 74.

21. *Ibidem*, p. 85.

22. W. H. CALVIN, in W. H. CALVIN, D. BICKERTON, *Lingua ex Machina*, cit., p. 119.

23. P. BLOOM, *How Children Learn the Meaning of Words*, cit., p. 85.

What Bloom says about the learning of words can apply to protolanguage as well as language. Children need a reservoir of protonames before syntax can kick in; the speech of under-two-year-olds is a kind of playful identification of things, still waiting for the rule-governed combinatorics of grammar and syntax. And when syntax does start up, what happens is not simply the activation of a more complex neural system, but a conduct between the speaker and the listener: the child suddenly realizes that the speaker can codify a state of affairs – by isolating a referent and highlighting a feature – and that he can do the same himself. He too can package the situation in speech. This step up into syntax also releases the child from being confined to what lies within the environment. Now statements can be made about what is absent. And of course, once the child engages in such verbal give and take, he can distinguish himself as a speaker from his interlocutors and the stage is set for him to mention himself precisely as engaged in the categorial activity he is now part of, that is, the stage is set for his declarative use of the first-person pronoun.

People who use pidgin have already entered into syntactic structures in their own native languages and have established and declared themselves as speakers therein, so their use of “baby talk” is more impatient; they already know that these formal things are possible and know that they are regressing into a more primitive form of communication. But once the pidgin slips into creole, a new species of language is born, and all the essential resources of speech are available: «By the time children are about four, they have mastered just about all of the phonology, syntax, and morphology they are ever going to know, at least for their first language».²⁴

6. THE ETHICS OF PREDICATION

The use of language, the use of words, names, and syntactic structures, is inherently intersubjective, and predication occurs not when we impose categories of understanding on experience, nor when the language faculty becomes activated, nor when our own experience progresses from perception to judgment, but when speakers bring things into focus, establish references for the audience and themselves, and then determine features in what they have isolated. Referential intent is essential for both words and syntax, and it occurs reciprocally between speakers and listeners.

In developing this claim, we have focused on the speaker who is leading the listener into thinking, but the action of the listener is equally intersubjective. The listener has to have a certain elementary trust in the speaker in order to awaken into rationality, to grasp what is being referred to and what is being said about it. This confidence is especially necessary in the early stages of our intellectual life, when an attachment to the expressed mind of another

24. *Ibidem*, p. 12.

shapes the powers of our own mind, and when trauma and fear can introduce a distrust that will deform the way things show up for us for the rest of our lives. If we were to suffer such injuries, we still might recover; later in life, our own cognitive energy, or perhaps the curative generosity of others, might succeed in healing our power of disclosure, but remedies are needed. The ability to return someone's gaze is an essential ingredient in becoming able to look thoughtfully at things and to articulate them. The "brilliant, bestial eyes" of feral children have not been prepared to accept an introduction to linguistic thinking, to letting the truth of things show up for them.²⁵

The truthfulness at the heart of our own thinking, the responsible impulse toward evidence, is cultivated in this elementary interchange with others. When human beings disclose things, they do not act like impersonal drones or machines or like solitary scouts. They themselves are embedded in relations with others, and their syntactic thinking starts up in these relationships, with all the emotive forces, anxieties, and attachments that come along with them. When we enter into the space of reason we do not float up into a kind of distilled detachment that places us beyond human involvement. There is an ethics to disclosure; we have to want to be logical for others and for ourselves, whether in first-order or higher-order logic, and this wanting can be cultivated in either a virtuous or vicious way. We give and receive in the world of thinking as well as in the more practical world, and we might even say that we give others the ability to know, by helping them bring this power into a healthy active state, one in which they will be eager to let things come to light.

Bernard Williams, in his book, *Truth and Truthfulness*, describes two ways in which we exercise moral responsibility as speakers.²⁶ When I say something to you, I imply, first, that I am not lying, and second, that I have taken the appropriate steps to be sufficiently sure of what I am telling you. Any discourse implies what Williams calls the two "virtues" of truthfulness, Sincerity and Accuracy. It is not enough for me to tell the truth and hence to be sincere; I also must have done whatever I needed to do in order to discover the things I am reporting, and different kinds of things demand different kinds of evidence; I must also be accurate. My use of the first-person declarative – "I know ...," "I suspect ..." – is an explicit expression of this implied claim. And it is easier to see this ethical dimension in human thinking if we realize that

25. T. M. LURHMANN, *The Call of the Wild*, «Times Literary Supplement», January 25, 2002, p. 6. This is a review of M. NEWTON, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys. A History of Feral Children*. See also Ch. MACLEAN, *The Wolf Children* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), which tells the story of two children who were said to be feral. One of them learned some rudiments of communication, and the author says of her (p. 183), «There was no sense in what she said, but the way she said it was charged with meaning».

26. B. WILLIAMS, *Truth and Truthfulness. An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002).

originally and essentially predication occurs between persons, not in a solitary mind that imposes logic on experience.

ABSTRACT: Predicational judgment is often taken to be primarily an internal activity achieved in the mind, in which concepts are combined or separated. This article tries to show that judgment is primarily a public action carried on between speakers and listeners. Kant and Chomsky are taken as proposing an intellectual and biological nativism, then Husserl is taken as showing how judgments arise from perceptual experience. But even Husserl takes judgment as the activity of a single mind, and the article tries to show that judgment involves several steps of cognitive activity between speakers and listeners. Some work of Paul Bloom is used to confirm this conclusion, and the essay ends with thoughts on the ethics of predication and the virtues of truthfulness.