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Palaeoanthropology revolves the bowels of the earth in search of the origin of the species "homo sapiens", the only one to survive, of all mankind, the brutal struggle for a place in the sun, (or in the shade, since, apparently, the struggle took place in the subtropical forests of the first interglacial period of European and Asian pleistocene). That science endeavors to locate skulls, dentures, parts of skeletons and objects of stone or bone which can be interpreted as being instruments. Thanks to this activity of that discipline we now succeed in extending our genealogic tree right up to "australopithecus transvaalensis", a creature of a cerebral volume that varies between 250 and 1000 cubic centimeters. It produced the "osteodontoceric culture", (i.e. it used bones and teeth for instruments), and it lived in the lower pleistocene, i.e. at least six hundred thousand years ago. Our poetic imagination condenses, from out of the fog of that unimaginable past, an erect being of brutal features, and of terrible muscular strength, which hunted buffaloes and antilopes, strangled them with its hands, cut their skins with sharp bones, devoured them raw, and having feasted on them, hid in holes and caverns, in constant fear of being attacked by those other brutes to which he was food. That brutal, anguished and morose beast is, in accordance with the latest findings of science, the ever elusive and ever looked for "first man". What is the basis of our poetic imagination, responsible for this picture? It is the reconstruction of muscles to cover the reconstructed skeleton, the reconstruction of a skin to cover the reconstructed muscles, the reconstruction of a mentality and of an intellect to animate the reconstructed body. Once this series of highly doubtful reconstructions is accomplished, we must confess that it is impossible so far, and probable will always be impossible, to establish a satisfactory chain not of generations, but even of species between australopithecus and homo sapiens. Science prefers, therefore, to consider australopithecus, like all the other human species so far discovered, not as being our ancestors, but as independent developments of the branch that constitutes mankind. The famous missing link is still missing. The first true man, the first homo sapiens, appears at the end of pleistocene or the beginning of pliocene i.e. about 50 to 100 thousand years ago, equipped with all human characteristics, with his culture, the "aurignacian", with his highly developed pictorial art, with his dance, his music, his magic, with his social and religious orga-

isation, He appears fully developed like Pallas Athene from Zeus' head. In spite of all the endeavors of palaeoanthropology, the origin of man continues a mystery.

We have at our disposal, however, a whole set of phenomena which have not been considered by palaeoanthropology, in spite of their antiquity. I refer to the words which make up our languages. Languages are one enormous current of words and rules that rolls toward us from the bottom of history. They are living witnesses of the origin of man. Each word is a live fossil and hides, within its form and within its meaning, the mystery of the origin of the human mind. It is a much more significant fossil than a skull or even a tool. It witnesses, directly and without need of any intermediaries, to the way human intellect works. Each word was present at that obscure point where human mind emerged, because it was the word that formed the mind and made it emerge from the inarticulate nebulousness of the animal kingdom. Each word was present all along the path of intellectual development, advancing with it and changing with it, because the change, the ramification and the diversification of words is synonymous with intellectual development. Each word harbours, within itself, the secret of man's past destiny, because it formed that destiny and was formed by it. Each word is the product of a joint effort of all those minds engaged in conversation ever since the origin of our species; it is a work ever more perfected, but never perfect. The roots of each word are sunk in the fertile humus from which human intellect sprung, the humus of the unutterable. Could we but follow the word up to its roots, could we but travel the path of words in the opposite direction, we should discover, in theory, the origin of man.

The science that ought to concern itself with such research is etymology (from "etymon=root of words"). In fact, the results of etymological efforts are interesting. We have had, recently, a series of essays in this "suplemento", concerning the "indo-germanics", which was, in effect, an attempt to reconstruct that hypothetical people by etymological methods. However, etymology considers words as external phenomena, as objects of the mind, not as integral parts of mind itself. It therefore observes the perceptible form of words, for instance the "phonemes". History of words is, to etymology, nothing but phonetical changes. Thus words are expelled from out of the intellect and injected into the world of natural phenomena. Natural laws that rule changes in words are being

sought and found. Etymology tends to be a natural science, a more or less "exact" science, and the laws it formulates refer to words taken as natural phenomena. I do not believe that such a method, although fertile in its own rights, will bring us nearer to a vision of the origin of our intellect. And, after all, as they used to say in the 18th century, "man is the aim of human endeavor", or, as Augustine said, (which comes to the same in this context): "God and the soul I desire to know. Nothing more? Nothing". Etymology, such as it is being practiced, is not the method to know "men" or the "soul". We must search for a different method.

views

W. Dilthey teaches that human spirit is the product of history, impelled and inspired by history, and that it impels history toward the future. He proposes the establishment of a Science of the spirit, ("Geisteswissenschaft"), as opposed to natural science. That new science should study spirit as an historical process. Such a science would be, in the words of Dilthey, a Critique of Historical Reason ("Kritik der historischen Vernunft") and an Interpretative Psychology ("Verstehende Psychologie"). Dilthey thus opens a vista on reality that is of great attraction and beauty. We have, on the one hand, the majestic river of history, composed of intellects and forming intellects, and that river is divided into various branches, "types of spirit" as Dilthey says. On the other hand we have matter, extended and inert, the amorphous stuff which spirit moulds in its historical advance toward the future. I fear, however, that this beautiful vision suffers from a grave weakness: it psychologizes, and therefore subjectivizes spirit. Thus spirit is made inaccessible to discursive analysis. Dilthey's Science of the spirit would be a meditative discipline. I believe that this weakness is a consequence of Dilthey's concept of "spirit", which is a romantic and idealistic concept. However, if we identify "spirit" with "intellect", and "intellect" with "organization of words", (and we can do this, if we take seriously what has been said about words so far), Dilthey's concept becomes unromantic, unidealistic and unpsychologized. It is now accessible immediately to a discursive method of research. Dilthey's Science of the spirit, thus redefined as a Science of organizations of words, is the method which should substitute etymology and complement etymology, if we are to know "men" through words.

How should such a method work? Words must be accepted as they are, as the,

appear and as they work within our mind, they must be accepted as mind. All prejudice which we harbour against words, (etymological and other), must be suspended, must be "put in brackets". Mind, as it approaches words, (i.e. itself), must submit patiently and humbly to words, must preserve "epoché" and it must, by "eidetic reduction" try to make evident the "eidos", the essence of words. In short, the method is the phaenomenological one as proposed and practiced by Husserl. It is a powerful and fertile method, but, as I believe, it will produce its most significant results when applied to words in the Diltheyan sense. It will unveil, I am convinced, if applied systematically, something of the origin and the history of words as mental phaenomena, not as phaenomena of nature, and will thus contribute decisively to the illumination of the origin of man's mind. More decisively, I believe, than palaeo-anthropology can ever hope to do.

This method will show words not only in their forms and in their meanings, but also their aesthetic aspect or works of art that they are. It will show, furthermore, the ontological aspect of words, i.e. words as attempts to utter the unutterable. Words will be revealed in their plenitude, and through this revelation the character and the working of human mind will appear.

This humility in the face of words, and this admiration and love for words, is the "conditio sine qua non" of the method of study which I propose. Philosophy in its present stage, influenced both by Dilthey and by Husserl, is approaching this attitude from many angles. I cite, as examples, the formal approach of Russell and Whitehead from logic, of Carnap and Wittgenstein from semantics, the ontological approach of N. Hartmann and Cassirer, and the existential approach of Heidegger, Jaspers and Sartre through the conscious play with words. However, a synthesis of these efforts and the full appreciation of the central role of words in these efforts, is still lacking. In short, what is lacking is the full realization of the fact that the study of words is the most direct and the most promising avenue of approach to the beginning of an understanding of the intellect, of "spirit", ~~of~~ of the "soul" of man.