

Thought and Talk

SOME REFLECTIONS FROM 'PIXIE' - CHAPTER 2

Clive Lindop

Teachers contemplating using Philosophy for Children to facilitate the development of a philosophical community of inquiry in their classrooms usually begin by taking workshops to familiarise themselves with the process of using the readers and teacher-manuals to stimulate pupil interest and discussion. As they persist and the community of inquiry begins to grow, teachers enter another phase in their own development with the recognition of the inadequacy of their own preparation in philosophy. Not being proficient in the craft of philosophical inquiry, nor familiar with the early warning signs of common fallacies being entered upon, or other red-herrings which can stifle fruitful discussion and block the development of a genuine community of inquiry, they look for assistance. Workshop leaders are always asked about 'philosophy' (rather than 'pedagogical') workshops or to recommend philosophy books which teach 'more about philosophy itself.'

There are no philosophy textbooks specifically designed to accompany each Philosophy for Children program which feature a combination of extracts from original sources, exegeses or commentary exploring philosophical topics raised in the children's readers to cater for this growing demand from teachers. A welcome **start** is the recent publication of *Studies in Philosophy for Children: Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* (Sharp & Reed, 1992). But such books take years in preparation and publication. In the meantime it seems to me, journals such as *Analytic Teaching*, *Aprender a Pensar*, *Critical & Creative Thinking* and *Thinking*, could serve as an excellent resource for teachers by featuring more examples of philosophical exegeses of topics embedded in the Philosophy for Children readers. Such exegeses need not be exhaustive but simply samples, rather than exemplars, of philosophical inquiry made more accessible to those without resources to chase down original sources or keep up with recent developments in contemporary philosophical discourse. It is to this end that I offer the following paper 'Thought and Talk' in the hope of stimulating others to send in examples of their own for publication. It takes up a puzzle from *Pixie*, Chapter 2, where Pixie begins to wonder about the relationship between thinking and talking prompted by her wondering about Brian, who never says anything.

THOUGHT AND TALK

Brian puzzles Pixie: how can he possibly make up a story if he never says anything? Isabel tells her that he can make one up but won't talk about it, rather he'll just keep on thinking about it until he writes it down.

Is that what goes on in his mind all the time, she wonders, he tells himself stories he's made up? All this suggests that Pixie views thinking as (silent) talking, as talking silently to oneself. Which may be why she later declares that she can't even imagine what it would be like to be silent all the time: she never stops talking! This echoes the story of thinking outlined by Mrs. Portos (HSD, Ch 6) that thinking results from children first learning to talk with others and then to themselves, when no one is around for them to talk to, and continuing to talk thus to themselves more and more quietly until they make no sound at all - and this, Mrs. Portos tells us, is called thinking.

It begins to look as though there could be no thought without speech. Indeed, Davidson (1984) advances the thesis that thought depends on speech, that a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another (157). However, he does not want to give conceptual or epistemological priority to either speech or thought. Although each requires the other to be understood, neither is sufficient to explicate the

other. The pattern of relations between sentences is much like the pattern of relations between thoughts, for an interpreter of English knows that if the sentence, "It is raining and my feet are wet," is true then the sentence, "My feet are wet," is also true. But this parallel between the structure of thoughts and the structure of sentences, he believes, is an argument in favour of the interdependence of speech and thought, not for the primacy of either. For if thoughts are primary, language would seem to serve no purpose but to express or convey thoughts; while if speech is taken as primary, thought could be seen as speech dispositions and thinking regarded as essentially verbal activity, a position he also cannot identify with.

Indeed we quickly respond to such a position with the example of the artist who thinks in color, line &/or form, not words. Likewise in baseball, the player does not have time to conduct a verbal debate with himself as to where to swing the bat as the ball is hurtling towards him. Furthermore the notion of silent or unspoken speech which is supposed to constitute thinking, is self contradictory. As Goodman (1982) points out, we can think of all sorts of things, of cabbages and kings - and even words. But the difference is that we can think in words but not in cabbages. Also we can speak in words or in English without speaking of words or of English. And we can speak of cabbages but not in cabbages. Speaking of cabbages or of words does not require producing them. Nor is the thinking in words simply the thought of a word for (and as for) a cabbage, for instance, for then a thought of a word involves the thought of a word for a word, and so on ad infinitum. Thinking in then, cannot be reduced to thinking of. All this suggests, Goodman concludes (212), that thinking not only is like but may actually be speaking, that thought is in words we speak silently to ourselves. But since speech consists of producing utterances and utterances must be uttered, silent or unspoken speech is not speech at all. So thought (silent speech) is not speech. The paradox of unspoken speech can be resolved Goodman declares (212), by reminding ourselves that thinking silently in words or having words in mind no more implies having a mind or words in it than having peace as a hope implies that we have anything called peace or hope. 'Having words in the mind' applies to certain of our activities without the presumption of a mind or words in it. Likewise 'having pictures in the mind' applies to certain other activities - submanual drawing and painting or subvisual seeing - without perception of a mind or pictures in it.

In this way Goodman arrives at a way of explicating thought which avoids trouble about unspoken speech and unwritten writing, and dismisses the cinema-in-the-head as myth, yet accommodates thought in pictures, gestures, diagrams or symbols as easily as thought in words, and accommodates thoughts of the fictive as well as the factual. What we call 'thought in words' need strictly involve no perception or production of words in or out of the mind but only activities or states of preparation for such perception or production. Thinking is performance and does not need a mind for words to be in. Although this is reminiscent of Ryle's analysis of 'mind' and 'thinking,' Goodman denies that his position entails reductionism of mental states to physical states for he is not claiming that these activities or states of preparation constitute thinking, only that they are involved in thinking (215). Much more, e.g., consciousness, may be involved but he takes no stand on this possibility.

AND WHAT ABOUT ANIMALS?

As for Brian, we do not know what he is thinking in but we do, with Pixie, discover later that he is thinking of a giraffe. But, as Goodman shows us, his thinking of a giraffe doesn't have to be in words or stories as Pixie presumes. And what about the giraffe he encounters later - can it be thinking of him? Goodman's position does not preclude this possibility, for there seems to be no logical reason why sentient creatures, at least, cannot engage in activities or states of preparation for the perception, production or judgment of signs and symbols. Davidson's position, however, with his thesis that thought depends on speech, is not so clear cut. But since this relationship is not one of conceptual or epistemological priority for speech over thought, it seems to allow the possibility that animals could interpret the speech of others, and so be thinkers. Pet lovers and animal trainers credit their charges with the ability to interpret at least some of their speech be it only commands: whether accompanied by gestures or inflections of voice doesn't matter here as these too would qualify as signs and symbols requiring interpretation. Field naturalists claim to be able to interpret the 'speech' of birds and many other animals, translating some utterances as 'alarm,' 'all clear,' 'challenge,' 'warning,' "welcome," 'affection,' and so on. Such utterances also seem to fulfill Davidson's requirements of consistency and a truth condition of the sort that, for instance, the alarm cry is always and only given when a predator enters the territory/location of the animal(s) in

question. It seems only a form of 'specieism' to treat all animal utterances as genetically programmed reflexes and not intentional communications. If Davidson is correct, attributing thought to animals also attributes a system of beliefs to them. His explanation of the belief system involved when a man raises his arm to attract the attention of another (159) seems equally applicable to a stag raising its head and ears to attract the attention of its does: it wanted to attract their attention and believed that by raising its head and ears in that way it would. And none of this 'thought' need take place in words, spoken or unspoken.

CONCLUSION

If we are going to allow that some animals, at least, can think, why is it that they do not seem to go on to more abstract and involved thinking which leads to them controlling their lives and environment as man has done? Is their thinking necessarily limited in some way? Davidson, while not addressing himself to the question of animals or this question in particular, does provide a clue for dealing with it. If the complex behaviour necessary for the attribution of thought to others is exhibited by some animals in the way outlined above, the theory of interpretation used does not show that this complexity must be connected with language. The speech calls and cries of animals seem to lack what he calls the 'autonomy of meaning' necessary for language. Their utterances seem to be restricted to use for only one purpose whereas in language, when a sentence is understood an utterance if it may be used to serve almost any extra-linguistic purpose. An instrument that could be put to only one use would lack autonomy of meaning: this amounts to saying that it should not be counted as a language (164). When utterances are put to only one purpose it is possible to interpret them along the lines outlined as evidence of thinking, albeit of a restricted kind. Autonomy of meaning is essential to language which involves more sophisticated and varied thought.

My conclusion that animals cannot use their utterances in the autonomous way required for language derives from the observation that they do not do so. With Occam's razor in mind, I prefer this to the conclusion that they do not do so because they choose not to. Brian's giraffe could, and may well, recognise him again should he return to the zoo, but not speculate as to his identity, motives and purpose for his visit. To do so requires language, not merely the ability to make ('speech') utterances.

REFERENCES

- Davidson, D. (1984) *Inquiries into truth and interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
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