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## [107] *Ethics and language in (and around) Philipp Wegener*

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Ethics and language in (and around) Philipp Wegener According to R. Musil (1922), ethos is internal to an order of sentiments and ideas which, as such, is “rational”, but not in conflict with the “spirit”. In this sense, the ethical order, reconciles “subjective” and “objective”, because the aim of its order is an overall view of relationships, of the constantly fluid meanings of human activities: it is a representation of life. And what is its fundamental instrument? Language.

In the Preface to his *Sprachtheorie*, K. Bühler declares that language belongs to life's indispensable instruments and constitutes a powerful “structured mediator” (Bühler 1934: XXI). The analysis which he will develop in this regard will be, in its most important topics, in debt to the work of the great linguists, from the Ancient Greeks to Wegener and Gardiner.

It is Wegener, in particular, who stresses the role of ethics as the ‘precondition’ for the acquisition and use of language. Wegener’s considerations are embedded in a theoretical framework which focuses on the concrete acts of speech in situations, and on the active interaction of speaker and hearer for the construction of meaning. Within his dialogical approach (only in dialogue, he claims, do the purpose and intention of speech emerge), the use of language pertains ultimately to the sphere of ethics: “The purposes of speech are arranged like the feelings of value in an infinitely graduated system [...] These values are the aims of the linguistic means” (Wegener 1985: 67). Whatever the purpose is, ‘sympathy’ should be considered as the “most fundamental prerequisite” for understanding speech (Wegener 1885: 67-69). Acknowledging Wegener’s contribution to this topic, Gardiner ascribes self-seeking, altruism and sympathy to “the human attributes from which speech obtains its driving force” (Gardiner 1932: 68).

Our proposal aims to investigate the attention these authors pay to the connection between language and ethics, and to verify whether this concept, in that specific period of time, may have paved the way for a ‘social’ notion of language.

Quoted references

Bühler, K. (1934), *Sprachtheorie*, Jena: Fischer. Gardiner, A. (1932), *The Theory of Speech and Language*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Musil, R. (1922), *Das hilflose Europa oder Reise vom Hundertsten ins Tausendste*, in *Ganymed. Jahrbuch für die Kunst*, reprint in Frisé, A. (ed.) (1978), *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. II, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, pp. 1137-54. Wegener Ph. (1885), *Untersuchungen über die Grundfragen des Sprachlebens*, Halle: Niemeyer.