CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION

Communication is one of the principal criteria for describing activity that is human. The nature and function of language as Man's chief vehicle of communication occupies a focal position in the human sciences, particularly in philosophy. Human communication is problematic from the beginning, because the term is at once a nominative description for varying states of affair, and yet, the term suggests an explanation for the process nature of speech as an activity. Now the shape of a problem emerges. We are faced with an antinomy. Is the apparent happy relationship between the nature and function of language actually contradictory? Or to reformulate the question, is 'communication' a name for both the nature (description) and function (explanation) of language use in human behavior exchange? This is the basic question that the present study seeks to answer. Thus, the focus of the investigation proceeds to focus explicitly on the speech act theory of language use which in fact presupposes a theory of communication, in the same sense that a conceptual structure presupposes a conceptual infrastructure.¹

The problematic question, then, is the nature and scope of causality in the use of language to communicate between people. The speech act theory as one finds it in the work of Austin, Searle, Grice, and others, is largely an account of language use as a state of affairs (i.e. statements) prescribed and proscribed in rule defined behavior. In the alternate context of communication theory, one finds an account of language use as a process (i.e. speaking) from which a state of affair (a sentence) is abstracted. In short, the speech act theory proceeds within a causality that suggests that meaning or communicative intent is the cause of language use, whereas the communication theory approach utilizes a

view of causation where language use is the cause of meaning or intention. Let us take up these issues in further detail.

Wittgenstein begins *The Blue Book* by asking the question: What is the meaning of a word?² He might as easily have asked, as other philosophers have subsequently done, what is the meaning of a sentence? A proposition? A speech act? A linguistic unit? Or even Alston’s recent query, “What are we saying about a linguistic expression when we specify its meaning?”³ In each instance the question is an analytic probe of language for what it is as a semantic token. I take this general approach to the philosophy of language as having its contemporary reformulation in the explicit question which opens John Searle’s book *Speech Acts*. Searle asks, “How do words relate to the world?”⁴ It is just this restatement of the question that allows a shift in perspective. Rather than a concern with the empirical characteristics of the natural occurrence of a language which properly belongs to the study of linguistics, the philosopher takes up the view of utility and its underlying semantic presuppositions. As Rhinelander suggests, it is a case in which “the disposition is to fit thought to words rather than to fit words to thought.”⁵ This is the sense in which Strawson refers to communicative speech acts which by his definition are expressive of a “communication-intention.”⁶

As might be expected, the location of the speech act within the wider frame of reference, i.e. as part of a communication phenomenon, derives from the early work of Austin where he takes account of the use of speech acts. As he explains, a speech act is dependent upon the listener securing *uptake.*⁷ This is to say, the audience to which a speech act is directed depends upon an understanding of the meaning and force of an utterance in order for the speech act to be manifest as such. This utility aspect of the speech act theory turns on the manner in which the speech act is expressed, as well as on the way in which it is perceived. Both the phases of expression and perception account for the manner in

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