Being and Communication

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A translation of "Ser y comunicación", originally presented at the seminar "Philosophy and Journalism" at the University of Navarra in the academic year 1984-85. It was then published as a chapter in Jorge Yarce (editor), *Filosofía de la comunicación*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1986, pp. 61-75.

ABSTRACT: This text investigates the metaphysical and anthropological foundations of communication. From a metaphysical perspective, the foundation of communication is to be found in the conversion of the metaphysical transcendentals: being, truth and the good. This conversion takes place only in metaphysical realism, which maintains that the principal transcendental is being, and that it is the foundation of the truth and of the good. Thus, all three are transcendentals, but none of them is isolated from the others; furthermore there can also be communication between them. From the anthropological perspective, the person is understood as relation, and communication is seen as being deeply proper and intimate to her. This can be appreciated in the communication between the Persons of the Divine Trinity. A consequence of this understanding of the person and communication is that mass media must not simply be of the masses and for the masses since this depersonalizes the human.

KEYWORDS: being, communication, person, language, transcendentals, truth.

To begin with, let us say that there are several ways to address the topic. The first way is that of the transcendentals. Being has to do with communication insofar as there are not only *absolute transcendentals* –which instead seem incommunicable, because they do not imply relation (communication is incompatible with absolute in-itselfness)–, but also *relative transcendentals*, especially knowing and loving (with respect to *the truth* and *the good*) that guarantee the ontological community as well as the convertibility of the absolute transcendentals.

The so-called conversion of the transcendentals not only signifies the manner by which the transcendentals relate with each other as *notions* or *concepts* (a very complex issue), but also the transcendental *order*. This order is, to use an expression from professor Arellano, *dialogical*. The notion of dialogicity, or dialogical model, is proposed as a way of converting the transcendentals that differs from the endological and analogical models. This approach is very fruitful because it does a good job at highlighting the transcendentals and avoids getting them confused. In sum, the decisive question is the transcendental priority.

Another way of dealing with the problem of communication can be taken from *anthropology*. In fact, anthropology also has a transcendental root, which concentrates above all on the notion of person. In this case the problem of communication and being (if we understand being as personal being) includes the problem of so-called intersubjective communication or communication between persons. Perhaps these two approaches are the ones that best address the title of this essay.

1. TRANSCENDENTALITY AND COMMUNICATION

With respect to the *first way* of facing the question, that is, the point of view of the transcendentals, the very fact of distinguishing the transcendentals into *absolute* and *relative*, and determining the absolute transcendental as *being*, brings up the aforementioned problem of *ordering* according to the criterion of priority.

Throughout history, three answers have been given to the most important problem that, as I have said, the ordering of the transcendentals poses. What is the first transcendental; that is, what is the fundamental transcendental? The conversion of the transcendentals does not imply that all of them are *first*. There have been three ways of understanding this priority. The first, which is the traditional one, states that the first transcendental is *the absolute*, that is, being. This is the realist position, according to which the transcendental *being* grounds the relative transcendental *truth*. According to this ordering, the third is the *good*.

Verum in esse fundatur, says Thomas Aquinas. This means that without the presupposition of the truth, the good fades away, since without it, it does not maintain a relationship with being either. In other words, the transcendental character of the very notion of the good is justified only if it is third. *Being, truth, good.* This is, obviously, the Aristotelian approach, and it seems to me also Thomas Aquinas's (with certain modifications). I will add that the transcendental *one* can be understood as the conversion itself. Plotinus does not frame it that way; this is because conversion is not a very clear topic. But Plotinus becomes confused when separating the one (this is monism).

The second response states that the first transcendental is truth, or that truth is self-grounding. The self-grounding of truth excludes the grounding value of being. Therefore, truth is the first transcendental at the expense of the transcendentality of being, and it also poses a problem for the good. This is the thesis of *idealism*. For example, Spinoza's forceful expression according to which substance is *causa sui*, is strictly speaking not a realist interpretation of substance, but rather an idealist one. *Causa sui* means cause in strictly formal terms. The notion of cause-effect is concretized as an auto-morphism, and precisely because of this *causa sui* is equivalent to *being understood or conceived by itself.*

The third way of understanding the order of the transcendentals is *voluntarism*, which historically predates idealism. I believe that modern idealism is an attempt to reestablish philosophy that is centered on the truth, which falls apart in voluntarism. For voluntarism, the first

transcendental is the good. It can be said that this attitude is already present in medieval nominalism as a reaction to Aristotelian intellectualism, and has a number of representatives in modernity. Nietzsche, for example, is another prominent voluntarist. For him, being and truth are resolved in terms of value. As Heidegger points out, "beyond good and evil" does not mean "beyond value", but rather establishes value as the fundamental criterion.

Voluntarism is surely the attitude in which communication is most difficult. Voluntarism leads, as an inevitable consequence, to transcendental incommunication because the fundamental (or first) character of the good and of the will not only nullifies the transcendental character of being, reducing it to an individual lacking in solidarity, to the pure *singulum*, as Ockham says, or to a sun that cannot be warmed by another sun, as Nietzsche says, but also affects the truth.

Nominalism implies a disqualification of the truth that is due precisely to the good's insufficiency at grounding. Or, what is the same, to that the order of the transcendentals has been upended in a most serious way from the point of view of its priority. An *ordering* in which the relative transcendentals effectively fulfill their communicative function requires the priority of being.

Thus, only the realist thesis concerning the transcendental priority ensures the transcendental value of the truth and the good. On the other hand, the idealist approach limits communication to logical relationships or subjects it to severe difficulties; and the voluntarist approach seems to make it impossible, because it instead establishes incommunication, isolation, solitude, by attributing a fictional or hypothetical character to the relationships between ideas.

It seems to me that present day analytical philosophy has a nominalist point of departure. Upholding the transcendentality of language leads to confusion. This thesis contains within it the attempt to find a new transcendental that prevails over truth; that is, one that replaces idealism. Language is proposed as a transcendental insofar as there is no strict noetic statute. Under such conditions, communication is left in a bad situation.

In idealism, communication is exactly logical communication, that is, the notion of system. The thesis would be this: the transcendental order is insofar as it is a whole, and it is a whole insofar as systematic. Therefore, communication is the same as systematic interrelation, or the same as logical connective. In short, for idealism, communication implies absolute knowledge. If there is no absolute knowledge, there is no truth, and if truth is not absolute, it is not truth at all; with this, of course, its relative transcendental character is lost. Truth rises to absolute precisely if being is not an absolute (that is, the first) transcendental.

But if communication is total communication, then any restriction, that is, any language or form of articulation that is partial, is false. And in the end it will have to be said that it is the result of finitude, or of an immaturity of the human spirit. The idea of the emancipation of reason is the basis of the Enlightened interpretation of reason, and therefore of the Enlightened theory of communication, and also of its pedagogy (as is well known, the Enlightenment has a strong pedagogical tendency). Idealism is the absolute version of the Enlightenment.

If there is no system, that is, if some limitation is found in the discourse, then neither is there a total discourse. As Hegel says, if the speculative phrase is broken, then its separated segments are unintelligible. In idealism, the problem is not knowledge of being. The problem of reference has disappeared. The relationship between truth and being, or the intentional access from truth to being, has been replaced by the pure self-referential sense of the ideal contents with respect to the ideal whole and correlatively also among themselves. Structuralism is a form of idealism, inasmuch as it is total formalism.

Thus, there is communication only if there is absolute knowledge and within its interior: there is communication only insofar as everything has to do with everything (Anaxagoras's old motto). To a large extent, it seems to me that the problems of communication, the suspicion that we are more incommunicated than communicated, comes from the consideration, on the one hand obvious, that idealism does not go beyond being a postulate or, what is the same, that the absolutization of the truth is absolutely impossible. On the other hand, once

the system is established, communication would not be a task, since it would have already been achieved (only as connection of truths. This connection is the only conversion possible in idealism. The dialectic obeys this).

If it is affirmed that reason is systematic, as Hegel does, then reason is transformed into a divine attribute. In the case of the finite man, communication cannot be justified in terms of truth or, what is the same, it cannot be guaranteed that what is communicated is received by the hearer with the same sense.

Spinoza says that an order of partial ideas is a false order and, therefore, that communication between finite subjects cannot have a determining character. If a determining character is given to the relationship between concrete or partial subjects, one falls into error by equivocation.

A particular message, or one transmitted by a particular transmitter, cannot be, properly speaking, received, because its reception depends both on that the particular transmitter subject as well as the particular receptor subject in question are encompassed within a total system; but that system is beyond them. And since they are unaware of it, the particular subjects are mired in error. Therefore, in this case communication would have an arbitrary value (precisely what nominalists say) because, strictly speaking, the only thing that separates idealism from nominalism is the idea of the totality of the discourse.

If the system of truth exists, then, evidently, nominalism has been overcome. But, on the other hand, nominalism lurks in the background and reappears in idealism inasmuch as the discourse is particularized. If some particular discourse were false, then man in fact would not be able to communicate, and would not be able to communicate the truth. For idealism, as we said, transcendental truth is only possible in terms of divine reason, that is, in terms of absolute knowledge.

Therefore, on a merely human level either there is no communication, or that communication is not true. This is what explains, on the

one hand, in my view, Spinoza's curious liberalism in the political order. For Spinoza, the political order is not a system. In that order it is best that each one does what he wants; that is, that he behaves precisely as single individual. Thus, political reason can function exclusively on the basis of a basic disconnection. If what is questioned is the absolutization of the truth, then its fundamental value is nullified: the possibility that a particular discourse is a true discourse is left in suspense; that discourse on a human level is unconditioned (for example, with respect to interest) is denied. Either we identify ourselves with God from the start, or there is no communication. But then true communication is internal to itself.

From the point of view of the modern theory of communication, the idealist version would be static and redundant. This is one of the objections that can be made against the notion of system, which is redundant, because if everything is already known, then to continue talking is nothing more than repeating what is already known.

In sum, intercommunication, that is, communication as a structural property of truth itself, is equivalent to the notion of system. This notion makes the notions of truth and of communication in the practical order problematic. Because only the total truth, before which discourse would have to pause, would be valid; that is why Spinoza says that at the end of reason is intuition, which is a static knowledge.

If everything is known, then we all agree on a culmination whose status is passive, that is, the negation of all increment, of all novelty. Therefore, it is also a negation of otherness as such. Since the system swallows everything, negating otherness as such negates goodness, because goodness has its reason for being in the other. For this reason, I say that the truth understood as the first transcendental does not ground being, but neither does it ground the good; instead it makes it highly problematic.

Spinoza's spiritual automatism is the negation of love. In pure systematic identity, the good is impossible. This says a lot about the doubts concerning communication. Evidently the system is a pseudo-

ideal of communication. The idea of total logic is also an error concerning God, since God is not a system.

The Truth of God does not have a connective character; absolute logic is also a contradiction in terms from the theological point of view. That is why it is easy to recognize that idealism is utopian. Apart from its internal aporias, it does not, in fact, appear. From here a movement of deception that becomes concrete in a suspicion begins: the suspicion that communication implies a problem of translation. Instead of communication one would have to speak of translation, because the interchange between two totalities whose isomorphism is not assured keeps what one says or transmits from being integrated fully or without changes in the comprehensive capacity of the other, precisely because systematicity is lacking.

Thus, when systematicity seems impossible, a deep suspicion lingers in the air. This gives rise to the hermeneutic version of communication; truth is not communicated as such, but rather there is a process of transformation between transmission and reception. This modification is not due to the medium, but rather to the difference between the transmitter and the receiver, insofar as they are totalities whose relationship is not systematic, or which only coincide in a partial manner. There is thus no way to know if explainers correspond with the understanders or vice versa.

The hermeneutic approach, that is, the radical subjugation of the good and truth to interpretation, is the sad residue of systematic philosophy. It is enough to quote Dilthey and Gadamer, hermeneuts as crude as Freud is. But it should also be noted that the transcendental primacy of truth eliminates transcendence: the system closes, the speculative phrase is linguistically transcendental without transcendence.

As we know, the principle of immanence is sometimes distinguished from the principle of transcendence. Now, if the principle of transcendence is understood in the nominalist sense, then it is a mystical principle. Unspeakablity is the *transcendens*, language ends in silence: this is the conclusion of Wittgenstein's *Tratactus*. Strictly speak-

ing, one cannot speak of linguistic totality. Unless we accept an empiricist psychological foundation of language. But the empiricist version of being is not transcendental.

For language, empiricism means reducing it to a mode of conduct. The empiricist temptation that leads to the psychological foundation of logic was denounced by Husserl. But empiricism is a way out that language reveals to be impossible because the definitive finitude of linguistic rules is not admissible. From this point of view, Chomsky's thesis or Saussure's structuralism coincide with each other: they face the study of language from literature, and reduce it to that. The unspeakable is thereby discarded.

Language is not equivalent to literature because literature is a partial and plural discourse. Nominalism is not necessarily an empiricism that leads to the negation of the transcendental. My disagreement with analytical philosophy does not consist in accusing it of nominalism in the empiricist sense, but rather, precisely, of premature mysticism.

I call the dislocation of what transcends us premature mysticism. If there are different rules, if there is a plurality of partial discourses or linguistic games and we do not know the game of games, then the game of games is precisely mystical. Total language is unspeakable and also undeniable. This *appeal* to mysticism discloses the relationships between idealism and nominalism quite clearly.

As I have said, the crisis of idealism leads to hermeneutics or to the reappearance of nominalism. Idealism includes nominalism, since idealism is the attempt to surpass nominalism with the idea of totality. For this reason, conversely, insofar as we establish delimitations within the system or negate the explicit absoluteness of the total system, at this very moment nominalism reappears.

If nominalism is faced with idealism, it has to establish the following thesis: there is no total logic. Now, what does it mean that there is no logical totality? It means that we are participants of logicity in a partial way: in man, logicity appears precisely as fragmented. The rules that we apply are uses of language. We do not know the ultimate rules of language, nor the totality of rules of language (that is, that which

would make language a system). Nevertheless, this totality must exist, even though it is unspeakable by man.

In my judgement, this *mystical derivation*, which is also a drift toward inexpression, is inevitable in nominalism and, ultimately, in the so-called philosophy of language, which is that philosophical attitude which affirms language as the first transcendental. Human language cannot explain itself. At the same time, the thesis that the rules of language are definitely finite is unacceptable.

Wittgenstein's pragmatics is a consequence of this twofold conviction, which in the end is equivalent to fideism, that is, to the substitution of logic by mysticism, the recourse to an irrational transcendentality (that is, *quoad nos*). The key to our discourse is unknown; we cannot explain what we say because what we say we say according to rules that depends on a totality of rules that is beyond us. The philosophy of language ultimately drifts toward the transcendental character of language. As can be seen, this is a way of demonstrating God's existence. From this perspective, God is absolute language. Since absolute language is God, I am a participant of this language; God has given me language, but not all of language. And therefore I cannot do anything more than linguistic games. For this same reason, each one of these linguistic games, inasmuch as I make them, is voluntary; it does not follow an ultimate necessity.

And since no game follows an ultimate necessity, its connection in a total system of rules is impossible. That is, there is no room even for hermeneutics. The problem of translation has to be declared as insoluble when taken from this approach. The plurality of linguistic games implies the incommunicability of linguistic games, since the rules of each game are valid only for itself.

I insist: even axiomatized language would be partial, it would use conventional rules, distinct from those of other literary genres. From the total language, which would be the language of God, my participation in knowledge or in the use of these rules would give rise to an incommunicable plurality. And therefore only those who know the

rules of each game, and within that game, can maintain communication (play it). But there is no communication between the different linguistic games. The linguistic transformation that is done in hermeneutic translation is not even possible. There is a demarcation; that is, if we accept these rules, then we play this game, not others.

Wittgenstein's pragmatic is equivalent to the notion of jargon. Something similar happens with Popperians. A topic can be approached in a scientific manner or with the rules of myth. Whoever communicates scientifically communicates scientifically. But myth and science are incommunicable. It seems to me that this approach is not correct. It makes sense to say that human language is indeed pragmatic, or that it must to be constructed. Language is of the order of *poiesis*. Such that without a will for communication there is no language. Language is a descent of knowledge into practice. And in this sense it is instrumental.

It also seems to me that language, that is, communication, is a complement to the truth that marks, precisely, the conversion of intelligence and will. One speaks because one wants to. Speaking is an active use that always implies a decision. But one does not think because one wants to. Therefore, language is consecutive to thought because it is the way by which thought enters into the order of the will or the order of the good (the good is the third transcendental).

Thomas Aquinas states that the third sense of the truth is not the adequation with the thing, but rather the manifestation, its declaration. The third sense of truth is *tanquam efectum consequentum declarativum et manifestativum esse*: it is declarative and manifestive of being. Strictly speaking, language is terminative in the thing, the same as the will. Language would be something like the complement of the will or the substitution that the will makes for the intelligence.

From this point of view, it turns out that communication is effectively carried out by the will. And that would be within language itself. With this, linguistic mysticism, the problem of the ineffable rules of language, is avoided. It is not that language has ultimate rules. Language is an instrument that is complementary to intellectual intention,

which is immanent. What is thought remains within each one; communicating requires language, which does not mean that the relationship between the truth and its communication is accidental. For this reason, insisting on the conventional nature of the words is not too important. We communicate because we want to. That is, because we want to end in the other. Communication would be the path to the other that the will makes thought undertake and, since it cannot do so in terms strictly of thought, it does so in an instrumental way. Which in no way makes language something of little importance.

Although it is nothing more than an outline, this approach is coherent with the realist point of view. For realism, being is first. If truth is second, then the good has to close the circuit. It is the third transcendental according to order. For this reason, the good marks out a conversion towards being, and thus establishes communication. Communication is not telepathic, but rather voluntary.

In accordance with the will (*tanquam effectum consequentem* with respect to the mental adequation) the manifestation of being is achieved. A consequent effect, but not for this reason less important, but rather necessary for closing up the order.

That which is stated in a rather vague way (rather as a problem) when speaking of the convertibility of the transcendentals is thus resolved. In order for the truth to be convertible with being, language, a voluntary complement, is necessary. At the same time, this voluntary component is neither arbitrary nor the first, but rather the third in the transcendental order.

What I have said is probably close to what professor Arellano calls a dialogical transcendental order. For my part, it follows the perception of an oscillation in the appreciation of the primacy of the transcendentals. The disputes among philosophical schools are due to this oscillation. If communication takes its value from being, then we have to include it within the transcendental order. The third in the order does not open up outside of it (which would be pointing to nothing), but rather it is the return. St. Thomas Aquinas also says that the will is curved. The will would be totally curved and would close in upon itself

if the good was what is first. With this, it would naturally become isolated; but the curvature of the will is precisely the complement to the non-curvature of the intelligence. The intelligence is not curved, the will is. For this reason, the transcendental order would be incomplete without it.

2. PERSON AND COMMUNICATION

As already stated, communication can also be approached from the anthropological point of view. This second mode of access is also realist. When we speak of the person we speak of being from the point of view of its own primary character, since person means subsistence. The person is the subsistence itself, the in-depth consideration upon which it would be advisable to insist without jumping too quickly to the nature or to the accident.

The notion of person is a consolidation of the transcendental being. But, in turn, in the notion of person we contemplate the absolute transcendental that is most open to the relative transcendentals. Going deeper into the person makes us see that being is in turn communicative, or that it opens up to the truth and to the good. The motto: "the transcendentals are convertible among themselves", remains vague as long as the question regarding the mode of the conversion is not answered. Now, the conversion is seen (the answer to the question is achieved) in the notion of person. With this, the meaning of communication is also better seen.

The person is depth itself, the radicality of being considered not insofar as closed, but rather precisely insofar as open. And, therefore, the person is being in which the transcendentals are really given.

Metaphysics and anthropology thus come together. It being understood that the person is discovered in Christian Revelation and is, first of all, an unfathomable theological theme. The notion of person illuminates the transcendental person with intensity and from above: it overcomes the distinction between absolute and relative transcendentals. The person is radicality, subsistence and, at the same time, is open, and thus one sole person is impossible. The relationship is thus

glimpsed in the origin; that is, precisely in the radical identity (in God: it is the Trinitarian mystery).

The *Unitrinity* does not mean that the persons are inferior to the unity (this would be Neo-Platonic): the person is precisely that which makes it possible to go deeper (with the light of faith) into the identity *in divinis*. It does not make sense to say that God is One on the one hand and person on the other. God is One as identical; identity implies origin and what is relative in the intimacy of the origin is the person. The subsistent relation is relation exclusively in the order of origin. With this comes the notion of intimacy. Intimacy does not mean immanence. This is also true in man, a personal reality (although, clearly, the Trinity is exclusive to God).

Communication from the person transcends and, at the same time, assumes the considerations that can be made from a non-personal realism. The person ratifies being in the sense pointed out, and excludes idealism in which truth is seen in an impersonal manner, as well as voluntarism, which looks at the good in an impersonal way. Voluntarism is not a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and idealism does not approach the *Logos* as person either: the absolute *Logos* as system is impersonal.

Trintarian idealism (for example, Hegel's) is heretical because it cannot "personalize" the Trinity, and reduces it to a modalism or a plurality of dimensions of the absolute. If the transcendental order is seen from the person, it is possible to speak of the dialogicity of the transcendental order and to overcome endologicity and analogicity, which imply a kind of reification. This is what it seems to me that Arellano holds.

If being is de-reified, its identity and the other transcendentals are also de-reified. Accordingly, the transcendental being is not the transcendental *res* (*res* means reductive conversion). This ultimately means something very simple, that is, that the dialogical order is the gifting order.

The conversion of the transcendentals has to be *donative, novative*, that is, not *redundant* in any way. Schelling's infinite in which all cows

are black, or Spinoza's static infinite or Hegel's absolute, contemplative, passive, *terminus* of dialectic idealism's adventure, all this makes it impossible to understand the person, if the person is giving. The same happens with the notion of *res*.

The key to being insofar as absolute, but convertible with the transcendentals that are traditionally called relative, is the gifting character. This is what St. Paul says –the only phrase of the Lord taken from outside the Gospels– "it is better to give than to receive". *Communication is in being through gifting*. Understanding it as gift opens both the order of *truth* as well as the order of *love* (in the personal transcendental order, good means love). Love is not subordinated to the good, but rather love is gifting. It is St. Augustine's *ordo amoris*. Communication has to be gifting. If it is gifting of truth, then truth cannot be a pure belonging to or a mere having, because it has to be open in giftingness and intimately linked with love.

These considerations make it possible to connect with the problems that the sociology of communication poses. If communication is not a continuation of personal being, if it does not have the character of gift, then *communication is pure information* or, what is the same, it is redundant, and insufficient as communication. What is strictly not redundant is the person. For this reason, all forms of redundant communication imply a fall into the impersonal.

A serious form of redundancy is triviality. Redundancy is that part of the message that does not add anything meaningful, that can be dispensed with. Therefore, according to this formula, whatever there is that is information is what there is that is new. But it can also be said: whatever there is that is trivial is not new. The trivial is what is disassociated from personality (the Stoic in Kierkegaard's sense) and, therefore, that which is not worth communicating.

That whose communication is not a giving, is an effect of *curiositas* and is superfluous. What I want to say with this is that the problem of information, from the point of view of mass media, is not a problem of the sociology of information, as if society were an entity without personal support. Human society is not a transcendental; however, it

makes reference to the transcendental order if it seeks to "personalize" people, and exclusively so. Therefore, when talking about means of mass communication, it must be said that if the content is dignifying, then it is personalizing and already there is no mass media.

And if it is not dignifying it is an activity of gossips, pure redundancy through superfluity. This can correspond only with vices: for example, the desire to be informed about what is not worth knowing. That which is better not to know is what is insignificant, that which is not endorsed by personal authenticity. That which should not be known must not be communicated either. And when one communicates through mass media, more than being a means of mass communication, it would be better to speak of incitements to becoming a mass.

It is better to speak of personalist sociology, because if society is not a society of persons, it is not society in the human sense. The expression: "Society of the masses" is an internal contradiction. For this reason, communication has an ethical relevance; it is so important that without communication there is no society. Aristotle used to say that without *legein* (discourse, speech, saying) there is no *polis*; but is there *legein* without a person? No.