



Peter Krope

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answer CT2

First Kiss

About the Particular and the General

1 The Question

On Tuesday, 28th of January 2014, the international discussion within the framework of the Grundtvig project was continued via email. Clementina Timus reported in her mail about a female friend who had a look upon the ZKE-questionnaire. Let us call the female friend “Mrs. X.” Mrs. X. found out that the ZKE-questions start with “why” instead of explicitly taking care for a favorable atmosphere, a friendly discussion, a relationship based on feelings. Every partnership is connected with emotions, she stated. Her question: Why doesn’t the ZKE-questionnaire consider individual emotional experiences?

2 The First Kiss

The following example (according to *Krope et al. 2013, 95 - 96*) is meant to point out an experience, which isn’t easily understandable for a partner in a conversation and thus cannot be easily categorized, either. A literary equivalent to the example can be found in the first of *Stefan Zweig’s* novellas in his collection entitled “First Experience” (*Zweig 1976*).

A young man is kissed passionately for the first time in his life. Not caringly by Mum and Dad. But passionately by a young woman. And immediately after this overwhelming erotic kiss the four-year-old brother demands an explanation of what he has just observed. The young man doesn’t know any more what day it is. His head is spinning. The ground is swaying. He feels hot and cold all over. The state he is in leaves him speechless. Lacking words the young man is not able to give his brother an answer now. Then in a later, a second state, when his brother is still waiting for the answer, the young man has to deal with different experiences and needs the proper words for bridging the gap between these. He refers to a speciality of his brother and says a kiss is like delicious ice cream. The younger brother, a specialist in licorice ice cream just like his elder brother, but inexperienced in erotic matters, now thinks that a kiss tastes like licorice. If the conversation stops at this point, the younger brother has formed a category: “A kiss is like licorice.” He has formed it by interpreting what his brother says about this erotic event from his own experience and understanding. By forming a category in this way he interprets what his brother says about this erotic event from his own experience and understanding. But the young man tries to break this process up. Answering the question, what else he finds terrific, the younger brother says, “Riding a roller coaster with you”, and asked for the “Why?” he says, “because both of us enjoy it.” In this fourth state the young man tries to reassure himself that what he says is equally understood by his brother. “Whatever you like is terrific. Licorice ice cream is terrific for both of us. Riding a roller coaster is terrific for both of us. To kiss a girl is terrific for me“.

3 Particular and General

In scientific language the problem of the young man and his little brother can be described as the problem of the general and the particular. What do the two terms “general” and “particular” mean? The ancient philosopher ARISTOTLE explains them as follows: The general is what belongs to various individual items. Consequently the particular is what does not belong to

various individual items (ARISTOTLE Metaphysik 1038 b, 11/12). For example, there are two objects, a car on a parking space and a banana on a breakfast plate. The car and the banana may have the common characteristic that they are yellow. The common characteristic “yellow” is the general by means of which the diversity of the two objects can be reduced to a certain unity. This unity is characterized by the statement: “The car and the banana are yellow.” The general (“yellow”) is the linking factor. Via the general the diversity of objects is reduced to a unity.

The particular as well as the general can be described linguistically. In order to describe a particular (an individual) proper names can be used in the first place. If Mrs. X. calls her daughter Gabriela by name in a group of women, a certain woman is meant who exists only once. In the second place the individual can be described by a definite description (Kennzeichnung). The expression “definite description” stands for a so-called showing gesture (Zeigehandlung). Mrs. X. points at her daughter by adding expressions as “this one here” or “that one there”. The general, however, is described by concepts (Begriffe) or terms (Termini). “Yellow” is such a concept. To describe the general we use concepts that we may also call “common names” to distinguish them from proper names. To sum up it can be said that the particular is linguistically described via proper names or definite descriptions, whereas the general is linguistically described via concepts or terms.

4 The Answer

The short linguistic explanation shows that scientists are in the center of a conflict between the regularity of general relationships and the impossibility to foresee individual acts. As a consequence of this dilemma we can observe empirical scientists phrasing general statements on the one side whereas practitioners are expecting individual statements on the other side. Questionnaires do not aim at the particular. Questionnaires always aim at the general. For the purpose of the ZKE-study the term “violence” is used.

5 References

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