

LANGUAGE AS EXISTENT

HARRY A. NIELSEN

No one voices skepticism about the existence of meaningful statements. Since Frege, however, along with the emergence of modern logic as a tool of analysis, the philosophy of language has drifted, I believe, toward a particular view of *how* they exist. This question takes on some importance in connection with Frege's "On Sense and Reference,"¹ Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,² and other difficult analyses of statement-meaning, because an answer to it would clarify the purpose of such analyses, the gap they are meant to fill. That is, a statement exists, according to these philosophers, in such a way as to pose problems concerning its relations to reality, and the *prima facie* purpose of the analyses is, it seems, to x-ray those relations. Yet the role of the analyses is not made fully clear just by saying that on the one hand we have language and on the other what it is about. If we are to avoid the old ptolemaic danger of a preconception which, without our noticing, sends us in pursuit of the wrong kind of complexity, we must also satisfy ourselves that the view of the *relata* which occasions analyses is itself an inevitable view. In suggesting that this remains in our time an unresolved danger to the philosophy of language, I have borrowed and adapted some ideas from Wittgenstein's later work.³

I

Since Frege, philosophers of language have given their blessing to certain uses of the words 'language' and 'statement' as in these examples:

- (a) '... the language or totality of designations . . .'⁴
- (b) '*Die Gesamtheit der Sätze ist die Sprache.*'⁵
- (c) '... our whole body of affirmations . . .'⁶
- (d) 'The system of statements as a whole . . .'⁷
- (e) '... a given language *L* . . .'⁸
- (f) '... given the syntax of a language . . .'⁹

Back of these and similar expressions, it seems to me, lies a particular way of thinking of how our language, or at any rate our statements, may be supposed to exist. To put it into words: *a human language exists as an*

Received June 14, 1961