

Grundlagen der Kommunikation
Foundations of Communication
Bibliotheksausgabe/Library Edition

Herausgeber / Editors
Roland Posner, Georg Meggle

Hermann J. Cloeren

Language and Thought:

German Approaches
to Analytic Philosophy
in the 18th and 19th Centuries



Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York
1988

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cloeren, Hermann J., 1934—

Language and thought . German approaches to analytic philosophy in the 18th and 19th centuries / Hermann J. Cloeren.

p. cm. — (Grundlagen der Kommunikation = Foundations of communication)

Includes bibliographical references and Index.

ISBN 0-89925-358-X (U.S.)

1. Philosophy, German — 18th century. 2. Philosophy, German — 19th century. 3. Analysis (Philosophy) — History. I. Title.

II. Series: Foundations of communication.

B2628.A52C56 1988

149'.94/0943—dc19

Deutsche Bibliothek Cataloguing in Publication Data

Cloeren, Hermann J.:

Language and thought : German approaches to analyt. philosophy in the 18th and 19th centuries / Hermann J. Cloeren. — Berlin ; New York : de Gruyter, 1988

(Foundations of Communication : Library edition)

ISBN 3-11-011301-5

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Satz und Druck: Arthur Collignon GmbH, Berlin
Buchbinder: Lüderitz & Bauer, Berlin

To my wife, Ingrid,
and our daughters,
Susanne and Nicole

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude faculty fellowships and grants received from *The College of the Holy Cross*, Worcester, Mass. in support of researching and writing this book.

My thanks are due to Dr. Joan Jungbluth for her stylistic suggestions and critical questions.

Chapter 11, "The Linguistic Turn in Kierkegaard's Attack on Hegel," was published in an earlier version under the same title in *International Studies in Philosophy*, vol. XVII/3 (1985). I am grateful to the editors for their permission to use it here.

Massachusetts, February 1988

Hermann J. Cloeren

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Introduction

This book investigates a tradition in philosophy that has been greatly neglected in Germany and has remained virtually unknown in the English speaking world. It draws attention to a mode of philosophizing that considers *Sprachkritik*, critique of language, as its central task. Because this mode of philosophizing accompanied the mainstream of German philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a subterranean stream,¹ it never gained the attention it deserved. Although its proponents loudly proclaimed it to be *the* revolution in philosophy, the accepted opinion is that after Kant's famous Copernican revolution, the next philosophical revolutions were accomplished by Marx and Nietzsche, before logical positivists in the twentieth century again proclaimed *The Revolution in Philosophy*.² This study is a response to a desideratum in the history of ideas that calls for the chronicling of this mode of philosophizing in order to fill an existing gap in the historiography of modern philosophy. In pursuit of this task, virtually unknown and hitherto untranslated material is presented in order to provide necessary textual documentation.

The theories that are the subject matter of this book will be of natural interest to students of eighteenth and nineteenth-century German thought, as well as to those who have a background in continental European philosophy. They should equally interest readers in the British-American tradition of analytic philosophy. In the theories treated in this study, the latter group will find presented a way of philosophizing that shows a remarkable closeness to certain features in twentieth-century analytic philosophy, especially to the work of Wittgenstein.

When language-critical thought in eighteenth and nineteenth-century German philosophy is mentioned here, what is meant is a type of thought that emphasized linguistic analysis, or language critique, as it was then more often called. Language critique was the fundamental task that philosophy had to carry out in order to justify itself and found any theory of

¹ Hermann J. Cloeren, "The Neglected Analytical Heritage," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975): 513–529.

² M. Schlick, "Die Wende der Philosophie," *Erkenntnis*, 1 (1930): 4–11. Engl. tr. D. Rynin, "The Turning Point in Philosophy," *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1959), pp. 53–59. A. J. Ayer et al., *The Revolution in Philosophy* (London: Macmillan & Co.; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1956.) See also A. J. Ayer, *Russell and Moore: The Analytical Heritage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971). (William James Lectures, Harvard 1970).

knowledge. The term “language-critical,” certainly not a household word in English, is used throughout this book because it is the best translation of *sprachkritisch*, a word for which there is no direct English equivalent. At times, the phrase “linguistic analysis” has been used because this translation properly describes the *method* employed by philosophers who considered themselves to be *sprachkritisch*. Even the term “analytic” is justified on some occasions and has thus been used; but the adjective “language-critical” is generally most faithful in expressing the intentions of the authors discussed below.

The origin of this type of philosophizing can be traced to the anti-metaphysical attitude of the British empiricists and to Kant’s transcendental investigation into the conditions of the possibility of cognition, philosophy, and science. However, language-critical philosophers found fault with Kant’s critical philosophy in as much as it did not consider the transcendental role of language for cognition. Their theories emphasize the interdependence of language and thought and are, therefore metacritical, in distinction from Kant’s critical philosophy. The philosophers discussed in this book assigned negative, as well as positive functions to language-critical thought. With their outspoken hostility towards metaphysics and speculative philosophy, they asserted that many philosophical problems were pseudo-problems, which could be dissolved by merely unmasking the linguistic confusion from which such problems arise. The critique of language as linguistic analysis thus had the negative and destructive function of being a tool for the elimination of metaphysics. According to these opponents, metaphysics consisted of meaningless utterances, because its sentences could neither logically nor scientifically be shown to be either true or false. This destructive function of the critique of language also had the liberating and therapeutic effect of bringing peace of mind to the philosopher; he is no longer tormented by what he now recognizes to be pseudo-problems. The closeness of this mode of philosophizing to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,³ to the manifesto of the Vienna Circle, *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis*,⁴ and to the analytic therapists is obvious and will be pointed out throughout this study.

³ L. Wittgenstein, *Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, *Ostwalds Annalen der Naturphilosophie* (1921), usually quoted according to the title of the English translations as *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922 and later editions), tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. New York: The Humanities Press, 1961), 4. 11.

⁴ *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis*, herausgegeben vom Verein Ernst Mach (Wien: Artur Wolf, 1929). V. Kraft, *Der Wiener Kreis: Der Ursprung des Neopositivismus. Ein Kapitel der jüngsten Philosophiegeschichte*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Vienna and New York: Springer, 1968). *The Vienna Circle: The Origin of Neo-positivism. A Chapter in the History of Recent Philosophy*, tr. A. Pap (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, c. 1953). J. Joergensen, *The Development of Logical Empiricism, Foundations of the Unity of Science: Toward an International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, vol. 2 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), fifth impr. 1970.

Common to language-critical thinkers was the rejection of all instrumentalist views of language, according to which, language was a mere expression of thought and thought was considered to be prior to or independent of language. Over and against such views, these philosophers stressed the point that language is a factual *a priori* and also presented interdependence theories of language and thought. Thus language critique was regarded as the true transcendental philosophy. The structure of thought was seen as dependent on the structure of language, so that different world-views are seen as corresponding to and depending on different spoken languages. Such theories of conceptual and linguistic relativity led not only to the rejection of metaphysics and speculative philosophy, but also to the rejection of Aristotelian logic, which was also considered to be dependent on the structure of Greek language. The natural consequence of these views was that language-critical philosophers called for a new logic.

Hand in hand with the theory of linguistic relativity went an anti-definitory attitude, which instead of trusting definitions and expecting much from formalized languages, emphasized the meaning-constituting function of context and speech situation. In addition, this attitude maintained the existence and legitimacy of a variety of languages, all of which were understood to presuppose ordinary language as their indispensable metalanguage. In this respect, eighteenth and nineteenth-century language-critical thought in Germany is closer to the later work of Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, and their interest in ordinary language than to Frege, Russell, Carnap, and others who were more interested in formalized languages.⁵

⁵ On this point, H. Sluga is close to my views (as expressed in 1967, 1971, 1975). Sluga writes: "Wittgenstein's philosophy of language finds its closest kin, not in the work of Frege and Carnap, but in the writings of Gruppe..." H. Sluga, *Gottlob Frege* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 186. One can differ, however, with Sluga's claim that analytic philosophy begins with Frege, "the first analytic philosopher." (p. 2) Sluga's view, in a nutshell, is: "Analytic philosophy arose in reaction to a dominant naturalism. From the very beginning it opposed radical empiricism..." (p. 186) Sluga regards naturalism as the first critical reaction to idealist philosophy in Germany: "The anti-idealist revolt had begun in Germany with David Friedrich Strauss' *Life of Jesus Christ Examined* (1835–36) and was soon enforced by Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* (1841)." (p. 17) Interestingly enough, Sluga associates O. F. Gruppe with the naturalists. However, Sluga, who is one of the few authors to acknowledge O. F. Gruppe's importance for the development of analytic thought, realizes some difficulties in doing so: "Gruppe's philosophy of language originated from the same assumptions as that of the scientific naturalists like Vogt, Moleschott, Büchner, and Czolbe. Nevertheless, his views differ in certain important respects from theirs." (p. 25) The relevant historical and philosophical facts require us to add some corrections and clarifications to Sluga's views. First, there was a long tradition of language-critical thought with features of (non-formal) analytic philosophy prior to Frege's analytic thought, as the present book documents in detail. Thus, analytic philosophy did not simply originate in opposition to

This philosophical movement merits attention today because it provides examples of significant approaches to analytic philosophy in eighteenth and nineteenth-century German thought. What is more, thinkers of this movement cautiously avoided the one-sided conclusions of the logical positivists, according to which linguistic analysis is the only task of philosophy, and all solvable problems are left to logicians and scientists. As I will show, the German philosophers discussed in this study wisely held onto the notion that philosophy has genuine tasks to carry out, in the theory of knowledge, in the history of philosophy, and in an elaboration of the transcendental function of language.

Though they had strong and conscious ties to the British empiricists and were acquainted with French thought, language-critical thinkers did not take a scientific or positivistic position. They tried instead to achieve a position that, to use M. Schlick's later term, could be called consistent empiricism. Most of these philosophers rejected materialism and positivism as being metaphysical views. Both of these alternatives were nonsensical for such analytic philosophers, because they involved epistemological and ontological statements that could neither logically nor empirically be determined to be true or false. These thinkers therefore rejected the view that philosophy was a system of specifically philosophical propositions. Instead, they advocated, as a mode of philosophizing, the piecemeal treatment of particular problems, and they refused to engage in the formulation of sweeping theories. Their task was, like ours is today, to determine "How is Critique of Cognition Possible as Critique of Language?"⁶

In the history of European philosophy, the locus of these approaches to analytic philosophy lies between the rationalist and empiricist discussions of the origin and nature of language in the middle of the eighteenth century, on the one hand, and on the other hand, those studies in language that lost some of their philosophical interest, and in the late nineteenth century, turned towards linguistics and psycholinguistics, before G. E. Moore and B. Russell initiated what A. J. Ayer called *The Analytical*

naturalism, and Sluga's statement about Frege's position needs modification. Second, it was historically not Strauss', Feuerbach's, and Marx' criticism of Hegel that initiated the revolt against German idealism; Gruppe's attack in 1831, and 1834 preceded theirs by several years and was already analytic in its language-critical manner. Third, Gruppe's analytic empiricism was not in agreement with the naturalist, materialist or positivist tendencies of the nineteenth century. In fact, he clearly rejected these positions as metaphysical and thus as meaningless, as will be shown in the chapter on Gruppe. In addition to his philosophical differences with these positions, Gruppe's rather conservative religious views prevent one from associating him with naturalism. Apart from these unavoidable disagreements, I find Sluga's studies very valuable.

⁶ K.-O. Apel, "Wie ist Erkenntniskritik als Sprachkritik möglich?" *Sprache: Brücke und Hindernis*. 23 Beiträge nach einer Sendereihe des "Studio Heidelberg" Süddeutscher Rundfunk (Munich: Piper Paperback, 1972), pp. 9–22.

Heritage. While this outline places early language-critical philosophy in Germany between two poles, as it were, its position can be further specified by distinguishing three major developmental phases in this period:

1. The metacritical reaction to Kant's critical philosophy.
2. The growing opposition to German idealism by language-critical empiricism.
3. The continued attack on metaphysics and speculative philosophy by thinkers whose language-critical ways of philosophizing became increasingly influenced though not dominated by linguistics and by the psychology of language.

The first phase follows upon the programmatic utterances stated by J. H. Lambert, J. G. Sulzer, and the early remarks made by J. G. Hamann in his critical response to J. D. Michaelis. It is essentially the result of a language-critical reaction to Kant's transcendental philosophy found in the writings of J. G. Hamann, J. G. Herder, F. H. Jacobi, and K. L. Reinhold. These men did not regard Kant's philosophy as properly critical, but rather, as the culmination of rationalist thought. They combatted this tradition by employing a critique of language and developing basic features of British empiricism.

The second phase in the development of language-critical thought arose at the end of the first third of the nineteenth century. It was provoked by German idealism and was a critical response especially to Hegel, but on principle, to all speculative philosophers. The outstanding role in this attack of language-critical empiricism on metaphysics and speculative philosophy was played by O. F. Gruppe.⁷ But, quite surprisingly, Karl Marx and Søren Kierkegaard, the Dane, played roles in this context, as well.

The third phase of language-critical philosophy spanned, broadly speaking, the last third of the nineteenth century and reached into the twentieth century. In the works of Gustav Gerber, Friedrich Max Müller, Ludwig Noiré, Georg Runze, and Fritz Mauthner one finds a heightened historical awareness of earlier language-critical thinkers, and a continued hostility to the speculative philosophy of Hegel and German idealism that is combined with a growing interest in linguistics and in psycholinguistics. Yet none of these thinkers was exclusively interested in linguistics or psycholinguistics. Each one of them had a fundamental philosophical

⁷ H. J. Cloeren, *O. F. Gruppe und die sprachanalytische Philosophie* (Phil. Diss. Münster i. W., 1967). (Photoprint) H. J. Cloeren, ed. *Philosophie als Sprachkritik im neunzehnten Jahrhundert. Textauswahl I* (with introduction) (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1971). H. J. Cloeren, "The Neglected Analytical Heritage," see note 1. H. J. Cloeren, "Die Metaphysikkritik der britischen Empiristen, der Positivisten und des logischen Positivismus," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 5 (Basel-Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co., 1980), 1289–1294.

interest in the relation of language and thought, that is, in the transcendental function of language for philosophical and scientific thought and for cognition in general.

The goal of this book is to bring to light and call attention to paradigmatic and representative contributions to language-critical thought found in this period. It is clear, of course, that for the entire discussion, one has to keep in mind the wider horizon of the general history of the philosophy of language. Apel, for example, today writes not of the revolution in philosophy but rather of the *Transformation der Philosophie*,⁸ and traces the history of the philosophy of language back to the days of the humanists, stresses the importance of medieval nominalism in this context,⁹ and acknowledges that many of the fundamental problems of the philosophy of language can go back to the ancient Greeks. Aware of this, the present book does not claim that all the themes discussed in it have been treated for the first time by the authors considered. It does point out, however, how the philosophers here discussed anticipated features that are considered characteristic of analytic thought in the twentieth century. Although there are a few books and articles which treat selected topics, a comprehensive treatment of this period is still lacking.¹⁰ This chapter in the history of philosophy is totally missing in such rightly renowned works as Ueberweg's *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*¹¹ or F. Copleston's *A History of Philosophy*.¹² Given this need, the individual

⁸ K.-O. Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), vol. I. *Sprachanalytik, Semiotik, Hermeneutik*; vol. II *Das Apriori der Kommunikationsgemeinschaft. Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*, tr. G. Adey and D. Frisby (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

⁹ K.-O. Apel, *Die Idee der Sprache in der Tradition des Humanismus, von Dante bis Vico*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Bouvier, 1975).

¹⁰ See note 7 and H. J. Cloeren, "Philosophie als Sprachkritik bei K. L. Reinhold: Interpretative Bemerkungen zu seiner Spätphilosophie," *Kant-Studien* 63 (Berlin and New York, 1972): 225–236. S. J. Schmidt, *Sprache und Denken als sprachphilosophisches Problem von Locke bis Wittgenstein* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968). (Phil. Diss. Münster i. W., 1965). S. J. Schmidt, ed. *Philosophie als Sprachkritik im neunzehnten Jahrhundert. Textauswahl II* (with introduction) (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1971). S. J. Schmidt, "German Philosophy of Language in the Late 19th Century," Herman Parret, ed., *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics* (Berlin. New York: W. de Gruyter, 1976), pp. 658–684. G. Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). H. Wein, *Sprachphilosophie der Gegenwart: Eine Einführung in die europäische und amerikanische Sprachphilosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963).

¹¹ Friedrich Ueberwegs *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, dritter Teil, M. Frischeisen-Köhler and W. Moog, *Die Philosophie der Neuzeit bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, 13th ed. (Tübingen: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft, c. Verlag E. S. Mittler Sohn, 1953). Vierter Teil, T. K. Oesterreich, *Die deutsche Philosophie des 19. Jahrhunderts und der Gegenwart*, 13th ed. (Tübingen: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft, c. Verlag E. S. Mittler Sohn, 1951).

¹² F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 9 vols. (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1946–1975).

chapters of this study discuss material which has never been presented extensively in English and has found but little attention in German. Even a selected treatment of the history of language-critical thought therefore has its merits.

What this book will show is that there is a certain continuity to language-critical thought among German philosophers who showed a generally favorable attitude towards the British empiricists. Seen from a twentieth-century perspective, this closeness indeed allows one to call their philosophical contributions, approaches to analytic philosophy. Work on corresponding developments in Austria, France, and Italy has also begun now.¹³ That many twentieth-century analytic philosophers have only fragmentary knowledge of and generally low interest in the history of philosophy explains, at least in part, their claim of being totally new and revolutionary in their method. This situation may account for statements that flatly declare it to be a

fact that Wittgenstein's philosophy is, so far as I can see, entirely outside any philosophical tradition and without literary sources of influence... The author of the *Philosophical Investigations* has no ancestors in philosophy.¹⁴

This, of course, sounds very strange in the mouth of v. Wright, since he has earlier pointed out Lichtenberg's closeness to logical positivism and Wittgenstein's closeness to Lichtenberg!¹⁵

The need for a presentation of this neglected chapter in the history of philosophy is obvious as long as there is no comprehensive and reliable history of the philosophy of language which covers it. However, this becomes a task of even greater urgency when one encounters in related recent studies utter ignorance of this history. How else could one, in the second half of the twentieth century, account for the following statements?

Language is not only a means of external communication but a constitutive part of reason itself. This thesis is new... This is a typical example of how new ideas are sometimes "in the air!"¹⁶

Tullio de Mauro overlooks a great deal of nineteenth-century linguistic philosophy when he contends that the early language-critical philosophers

¹³ S. Auroux, "La Philosophie Analytique Française: Condillac et les Ideologues." K. R. Fischer, "The Roots of Analytic Philosophy in Austria: A Sketch." Forthcoming in *Proceedings XVIIth World Congress of Philosophy Montreal 1983*. W. Büttemeyer, "Early Approaches to Analytic Philosophy in Italy," *Scientia*, 80 (1986): 65–75.

¹⁴ G. H. v. Wright, *Biographical Sketch*, Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 15.

¹⁵ G. H. v. Wright, "Georg Christoph Lichtenberg als Philosoph," *Theoria* 8 (Lund, 1942): 200–217; see esp p. 214 f.

¹⁶ Konrad Lorenz, *Geleitwort*, G. Höpp, *Evolution der Sprache und Vernunft* (Berlin: Springer, 1970) p. V.

became victims of a total *damnatio memoriae*. At the end of the nineteenth century, it looks as if their thoughts had never occurred.

La scoperta della interna diversità semantica e sintattica delle lingue e, quindi, l'interesse per questa loro intima storicità, le meditazioni di Bacone e di Locke, di Vico, di Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, Hamann, tutto ciò, quando a fine Ottocento si guarda al linguaggio, sembrò non esser mai avvenuto.¹⁷

A. Heinekamp, who quotes de Mauro, reinforces this view by asserting, "Only in our century were these thoughts rediscovered by de Saussure, Croce, and Wittgenstein."¹⁸

In our time, analytic philosophy has been declared to be the heir to transcendental philosophy.¹⁹ But, this ignores the fact that the language-critical thought of Hamann, Herder, Jacobi, and Reinhold already developed Kant's transcendental philosophy along analytic lines. Further, it should be noted that the subsequent attacks on idealist philosophy by analytic empiricism, especially by Gruppe, based its claim to originality and radicalness just on the fact that it proclaimed philosophy as a critique of language and cognition (*Sprachkritik als Erkenntniskritik*) and did so fully aware of earlier language-critical thinkers.

The study of relevant texts from this period has been made easier by the publication of key text selections in some anthologies.²⁰ However, many originals remain *libri rari* and, to make matters worse for most American and British philosophers, reading the sources requires the knowledge of German. My book provides translations that demonstrate the connections and fill gaps in the history of philosophy.

A technical remark is needed regarding the format of this book. Writing in English, one almost feels the need to apologize for, or at least explain, the presence of numerous notes. The celebrated style of some of the greatest philosophers writing in English is characterized by its clarity, its avoidance of technical jargon, and its closeness to the language of the educated, if not necessarily philosophical, reader. By contrast, German philosophical publications often appear in the cumbersome armor of copious footnotes, appendices, indices, and historical references. In the case of the present book, however, the philosophical predicament itself

¹⁷ Tullio de Mauro, *Introduzione alla semantica*, 2nd ed. (Bari, 1966), p. 83.

¹⁸ Albert Heinekamp, "Sprache und Wirklichkeit nach Leibniz," Herman Parret, ed. *History of Linguistic Thought and Contemporary Linguistics* (Berlin · New York: W. de Gruyter, 1976), p. 519.

¹⁹ W. Kamlah and P. Lorenzen, *Logische Propädeutik* (Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut, 1967), p. 15. Kuno Lorenz, *Elemente der Sprachkritik: Eine Alternative zum Dogmatismus und Skeptizismus in der analytischen Philosophie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 30.

²⁰ H. J. Cloeren, 1971. See note 7. S. J. Schmidt, 1971. See note 10.

dictates the frequent inclusion of direct quotations, unless otherwise noted in my translation, in order to fulfill its informational function. The sources themselves have to speak, and for this to occur requires bibliographical data. My endeavor has been to incorporate the necessary textual insertions without jeopardizing the readability of the book. Whether I have succeeded in this is for the reader to judge. The division into chapters and the indices should facilitate the book's use for reference purposes.

The chapters dealing with individual philosophers demonstrate a certain continuity in language-critical thought which was neither ahistorical nor conducted without paying attention to others engaged in the same philosophical enterprise. Numerous cross references are given as documentation. In the cases of Hamann, Lichtenberg, Einsiedel, and Jacobi, the chapters have been kept very brief to provide an outline of the language-critical element in their thought. Other philosophers, some of whom are even less well-known in British and American philosophy, are given more extensive treatment.

It is my hope that these studies will be instrumental in encouraging efforts at bridging the gap which unfortunately still exists between English speaking and German philosophers. In spite of the contemporary ease of communication and the numerous international philosophical conventions, Friedrich Max Müller's words, spoken a century ago, still ring true:

When I watch the philosophical controversies in England and Germany, I feel very strongly how much might be gained on both sides by a more frequent exchange of thought. Philosophy was far more international in the days of Leibniz and Newton, and again in the days of Hume and Kant, than it is now, when each country seems to go its own way.²¹

²¹ F. M. Müller, *The Science of Thought* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887), repr. (New York: AMS Press, 1978), p. 123 f.

1. The place of language critique in the history of modern philosophy

From the eighteenth through the nineteenth century there was a lively philosophical discussion of the relation between language and thought and particularly of the influence of language on philosophy. In the history of philosophy this discussion occupies a place between, on the one hand, the rationalist and empiricist discourses on language in the eighteenth century and, on the other, those works on linguistics (*Sprachwissenschaft*) and the psychology of language from the second part of the nineteenth century. What is hardly known is that this discussion also raised certain themes and questions that are today seen as characteristic of analytic philosophy, which is often depicted as starting with the work of G. E. Moore and B. Russell at the beginning of the the twentieth century.

A central philosophical theme in the middle of the eighteenth century was the question of the origin of language. In 1746 Condillac answered it with his nature theory in the *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*,¹ which he considered to be a complement to Locke's *Essay*.² In 1754 Maupertuis, the French president of the Berlin Academy of sciences, argued against the theory of the divine origin of language and for the view that language was invented by man.³ His view was opposed by Süssmilch in 1756 who, in a paper read before the Berlin Academy, defended the theory of the divine origin of language.⁴ Within the perimeter of these opposite positions, Europeans engaged in a vigorous discussion of the question of language.

¹ E. B. de Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746). J. Starn, *Inquiries into the Origin of Language: The Fate of a Question* (New York: Harper & Row, c. 1976). S. Auroux has shown how Condillac served as a catalyst for the development of early analytic thought in France. S. Auroux, "La Philosophie Analytique Française: Condillac et les Ideologues," forthcoming *Proceedings XVIIth World Congress of Philosophy, Montreal 1983*.

² J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (1690) Later editions as *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

³ P. L. M. de Maupertuis, "Dissertation sur les différents moyens dont les hommes se sont servis pour exprimer leurs idées," (1754) *Histoire de l'Académie royale des sciences et belles-lettres* for the year 1754 (Berlin, 1756).

⁴ J. P. Süssmilch, "Versuch eines Beweises, daß die erste Sprache ihren Ursprung nicht vom Menschen, sondern allein vom Schöpfer erhalten habe." Read before the Berlin Academy, first printed 1766.

These discussions of the origin of language were not historical investigations but rather sought the essence of language. In spite of this, however, they should be regarded as pre-critical since they assumed the independence of thinking from language. The interest of enlightenment thinkers in the philosophy of language had such a strong practical orientation that they ignored the more fundamental questions regarding the relation between thought and language and especially regarding the transcendental function of language.⁵ The theme of the 1757 essay competition sponsored by the Berlin Academy illustrates this practical emphasis. Entrants were to explain: *Quelle est l'influence réciproque des opinions du peuple sur le langage et du langage sur les opinions?*

The question so put ignored the transcendental aspects of language and provoked Hamann's critical reaction in the controversy with Johann David Michaelis. The latter had won the prize of the academy in 1759 with his "*Beantwortung der Frage von dem Einfluss der Meinungen eines Volcks in seine Sprache, und der Sprache in die Meinungen.*"⁶ Hamann regarded Michaelis' essay as insufficient for the same reason he later attacked Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*⁷ in his *Metakritik*.⁸ According to Hamann, a discussion of the transcendental role of language was lacking in both works. Gründer⁹ noted that it was Michaelis whom Hamann, in his *Aesthetica in nuce*,¹⁰ attacked as his chief opponent, and also that Hamann rejected the theme of the essay competition in the formulation chosen by the academy. Hamann, instead, examined the much more fundamental question of the relation between language and history.¹¹

It is worth noting here that Hamann, in a very modern way, conducted his polemic against Michaelis by deliberately employing linguistic analysis. Hamann's concern with clarifying the meaning of terms is displayed in his critical analysis of the concepts in the title of Michaelis' prize winning essay:

⁵ K. Gründer, *Figur und Geschichte. Johann Georg Hamanns »Biblische Betrachtungen« als Ansatz einer Geschichtsphilosophie* (Freiburg/Munich: Alber, 1958), espec. pp. 173–177.

⁶ J. D. Michaelis, *Beantwortung der Frage von dem Einfluß der Meinungen eines Volcks in seine Sprache, und der Sprache in die Meinungen* (1760). *A Dissertation on the Influence of Opinions on Language, and of Language on Opinions...* (London: W. Owen..., 1769).

⁷ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Riga: J. F. Hartknoch 1781, 2nd ed. 1787).

⁸ J. G. Hamann, *Metakritik über den Purismus der Vernunft* (written 1784, published posthumously 1800). Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, histor. crit. ed. Josef Nadler, 5 vols. and Schlüssel Band (Vienna: Herder, 1949–1957), vol. 3, pp. 281–289. The text of the *Metakritik* and other texts are reprinted in: J. G. Hamann *Schriften zur Sprache*. Einleitung und Anmerkungen von Josef Simon (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967).

⁹ K. Gründer, *Figur und Geschichte*, p. 173.

¹⁰ J. G. Hamann, *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762) *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, pp. 195–217.

¹¹ K. Gründer, *Figur und Geschichte*, p. 176.

The concept of the word *opinions* is ambiguous because they are sometimes held to be equal to truths, sometimes held to be opposed to truths, and what is called language (*langage*) has very many aspects (*ist sehr vielseitig*).¹²

Hamann himself described his procedure as “analysis” (*Zergliederung*) and proposed accordingly, “to try to analyze the manifold sense, which the underlying academic problem may have, into some arbitrary propositions that I consider to be easiest to survey and to judge.”¹³ Chapter 2 contains a discussion of Hamann’s importance for the emergence of language-critical philosophy in the eighteenth century. I mention him here as one of the first thinkers of the century who seriously engaged in linguistic analysis.

Another figure worth noting is Johann Heinrich Lambert, both for his position on the question of language and for his discussion of its role for philosophy and the sciences. His *Neues Organon*¹⁴ of 1764 has recently been called “the most comprehensive theoretical elaboration of the idea of a ‘*mathesis universalis*’.”¹⁵ In this work, Lambert faces a multitude of philosophical systems and declares: “on close inspection, a great deal of the diversity of opinions, particularly in the abstract sciences, comes down to mere verbal quarrels.”¹⁶ In order to find truth in the face of this predicament, Lambert (following Aristotle and Bacon) suggests four disciplines: dianoiology, alethiology, semiotics, and phenomenology. These four sciences (*Wissenschaften*), as he calls them occasionally, are to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Whether the human understanding lacks the powers to proceed on the path to truth safely and certainly and without so much stumbling?
2. Whether the truth itself is not sufficiently discernible to the understanding lest it should confuse the truth with error?
3. Whether the language in which the understanding couches the truth may render it less recognizable and more dubious through misunderstanding, vagueness and ambiguity, or whether it places other obstacles in its way?
4. Whether the understanding is deceived by illusion without in each case being able to penetrate to the truth?¹⁷

For Lambert, semiotics is of fundamental importance because “language remains forever the general magazine of our entire knowledge and contains truth and error and illusion without differentiation.”¹⁸

¹² J. G. Hamann, *Versuch über eine akademische Frage* (1760) *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, p. 121.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁴ J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon oder Gedanken über die Erforschung und Bezeichnung des Wahren und dessen Unterscheidung vom Irrthum und Schein*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: J. Wendler, 1764) Repr. J. H. Lambert, *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. H.-W. Arndt, 2 vols. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1965).

¹⁵ H. W. Arndt, *Einleitung* to Lambert, *Neues Organon*, vol. 1, p. X.

¹⁶ J. H. Lambert, *Vorrede* to *Neues Organon*, vol. 1, p(11).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, A₃.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. (11).

To avoid mere verbal quarrels, Lambert seeks to secure the scientific status of propositions. However, this is possible only if a theory of scientific signs can take the place of a theory of objects, i. e., if one can succeed “in reducing each problem in the sciences to a logical one.”¹⁹ For Lambert, this means:

the signs (*Zeichen*) for concepts and things are scientific, in the narrower sense, if they do not simply represent concepts or things, but if they indicate also such relations that the theory of things and the theory of their signs may become interchangeable.²⁰

With this program, Lambert clearly anticipates basic features of Carnap’s later endeavors, especially his attempt to replace the material mode of speech with the formal mode of speech.²¹ Lambert is quite aware of the fundamental influence of language upon cognition and recognizes language as the boundary of knowledge. This insight recurs in Wittgenstein’s famous paragraph that claims “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”²² Lambert goes so far as to regard reflection on language as necessary as the *Grundwissenschaft*, the fundamental science.²³ He emphasizes that “language, as the container of our concepts and truths, deserves the investigation of a philosopher for many reasons.”²⁴

Like most language-critical philosophers, Lambert also realizes that language, more precisely everyday language, can throw obstacles in the way of knowledge. For this reason, he suggests introducing a characteristic symbolic language which would be without the logical weakness of everyday language. He praises Locke’s *Essay*²⁵ as being concerned with the “use and misuse of words.”²⁶ Reaching even further back in history, he refers to Bacon as one who both combatted meaningless words and empty concepts and also suggested that experience and experiments were to be the touchstones for the meaning of words and concepts.²⁷

In spite of these signs of Lambert’s awareness of the dangers that lie in language, his general judgment on language, as expressed in his semiotics, remains positive: language is the instrument to reach scientific knowledge. He firmly states his position as follows:

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰ J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon*, vol. 2, p. 16.

²¹ R. Carnap, *Logische Syntax der Sprache* (Wien: Springer, 1934). Engl. tr., *Logical Syntax of Language* (London: Kegan Paul; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937).

²² L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6.

²³ J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon*, vol. 2, p. 5.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

²⁵ J. Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.

²⁶ J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon*, vol. 1, Vorrede.

²⁷ J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon*, vol. 2, p. 15.

“Since words and their connection are signs of our concepts and their connections... language indisputably has a manifold and noticeable influence on the kind and form of our entire knowledge.”²⁸

While there are problems which occur as consequences of misunderstandings, they can be resolved through an explanation of the meanings of words. This is of particular importance “the more diverse the sects and systems are to which the disputants adhere.”²⁹ According to Lambert, such explanations of meanings are easiest in geometry and in the sciences “because experiences, observations, experiments, illustrations (*Abbildungen*) and models are the means through which names can be connected with things.”³⁰ When such means of communication do not exist, verbal disputes are more likely to arise, and the possibility of overcoming them is much more difficult.

The discussion of language was continued in 1767 with Sulzer’s *Observations sur l’influence réciproque de la raison sur le langage et du langage sur la raison*³¹. Although the title of Sulzer’s essay promises a treatment of a fundamental philosophical problem, the essay fails to be original and is more compilatory in character. Like the Frenchmen mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Sulzer’s point of departure is the problem of the origin of language. For him, the failure to find a solution to this problem stems from the lack of a neutral point of reference.

On the one hand, one believes to perceive that language presupposes reason, cultivated to a certain degree; on the other hand, one does not comprehend how reason could have proceeded without the help of a language. These two abilities seem to be simultaneously cause and effect of one another.³²

Here, it seems that Sulzer recognizes the interdependence of thought and language. However, this is not his view. Language, for Sulzer, as for Locke, consists primarily of words as signs of ideas. Propositions are statements about the relations of ideas, and about the consequences of such relations.³³ Language commences when one makes distinctions, but this already presupposes familiarity with objects as well as with the constancy of the thought process. Thus Sulzer concludes that “the course

²⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 205.

³¹ J. G. Sulzer, “Observations sur l’influence réciproque de la raison sur le langage et du langage sur la raison,” *Histoire de l’academie royale des sciences et belles-lettres (1767)* (Berlin, 1769), Tom XXIII, pp. 413–438. German: “Anmerkungen über den gegenseitigen Einfluß der Vernunft in die Sprache, und der Sprache in die Vernunft,” *J. G. Sulzers Vermischte philosophische Schriften* (Leipzig, 1773), pp. 166–198. Reprint (Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1974).

³² Ibid., p. 166.

³³ Ibid., p. 167.

of understanding is always the same.”³⁴ However, with this statement he abandons or severely weakens his earlier assertion of an interdependence of language and thought. As it turns out, Sulzer holds the rationalist position which defends the priority of thinking over speaking, and allows only for their practical reciprocity. Ideas and concepts are obtained through the action of distinguishing or comparing. This he regards as “an operation which necessarily has to precede the invention of words, since one cannot think of naming that of which one does not have any idea.”³⁵ Sulzer’s declaration that things are known better when we have clear concepts and linguistic expressions for them, is primarily the rationalist’s practical thesis. Yet, at the same time Sulzer advances an interdependence view of language when he develops Lambert’s metaphor of language as “the magazine of our entire knowledge.” As Sulzer argues,

“the number of words in a language can never exceed the number of clear concepts which all individual persons of a nation speaking this language have in common. And since the number of clear concepts is probably not much greater than the number of words, it follows that the number of words of a language and their derived meanings form the sum of all clear concepts of the nation speaking this language.”³⁶

No wonder that Sulzer mentions Lambert’s *Neues Organon*³⁷ with praise! In addition, he applauds Michaelis’ prize essay,³⁸ yet without mentioning its author by name.³⁹ Sulzer even claims, “the etymological history of languages would indisputably be the best history of the progress of the human mind.”⁴⁰

Yet, it must be noted that Sulzer, in spite of some of his promising remarks, does not maintain a consistent position on the interdependence of language and thought. His emphasis is rather on the progress of the human mind by means of language. His clearly is an instrumentalist view of language, far removed from Hamann’s and other philosophers’ insights into the transcendental function of language. The latter view stresses the indispensability of language for the very origin and development of the mind, not just for its progress in terms of useful activity or employment. In the end, Sulzer’s instrumentalist position is confirmed when he lists three advantages of language. First, language has a mnemonic function: it enables one to store ideas and recall them to memory through available

³⁴ Ibid., p. 167; cf. p. 171.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 172.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon*.

³⁸ J. D. Michaelis, *Beantwortung...*

³⁹ J. G. Sulzer, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, p. 178.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 178.

words. Second, language has a logical function: words enable one to abbreviate operations of the understanding. Sulzer describes this function with reference to Lambert's and, indirectly, to Leibniz' and other philosophers' attempts to formalize logical inferences:

thus one can very often reason merely through words or signs without all the time paying attention to their meanings. This abbreviates the conclusions of our reasoning considerably and by so doing makes them all the clearer.⁴¹

Finally, he mentions the heuristic function of language:

A third advantage of language stems from the fact that words lead to the observation of the objects themselves or to thinking about them, and they thus strengthen the spirit of invention.⁴²

Sulzer concludes: "the exact and thorough knowledge of each thing depends therefore largely on the richness of the language in which one thinks."⁴³ In his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*,⁴⁴ he also emphasizes the conventional function of language as a means of reaching conceptually clear knowledge.

In 1769 the discussion of language received a new impulse with another prize question proposed by the Berlin Academy. Harnack pointed out the interest that Europeans took in these prize questions:

In these proposed problems, which were chosen with circumspection and after lengthy deliberations, we find the progressive self representation of the course of the sciences.⁴⁵ The prize problems were, so to speak, the levers by means of which year by year the different sciences should be raised a step.⁴⁶

The prize question proposed by the Berlin Academy in 1769 was: *En supposant les hommes abandonnés à leurs facultés naturelles, et sans-ils en état d'inventer le langage et par quels moyens parviendront-ils d'eux-mêmes à cette invention?* In 1771, the prize was awarded to Herder for his essay *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*.⁴⁷ In his essay on the origin of language, Herder rejected Condillac's, Maupertuis', and Süssmilch's theories, criticized Michaelis, and even incurred the sharp criticism of his friend Hamann. This

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 182.

⁴² Ibid., p. 183.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 184.

⁴⁴ J. G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, 2 Theile (1771, 1774).

⁴⁵ A. Harnack, *Geschichte der königlich-preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, I. Bd., 1. Hälfte (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1900) p. 396.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ J. G. Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache, welche den von der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften für das Jahr 1770 gesetzten Preis erhalten hat* (Berlin: Chr. F. Voss, 1772), *J. G. Herders Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan 33 vols. (Berlin: Weidemann, 1877–1913), repr. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967–68), vol. 5, pp. 1–154.

shows to what extent the debate about language continued to be a heated one.⁴⁸ For the sake of his friendship with Hamann, Herder even took back the theory developed in his prize essay. But later, he returned to these views and defended them.

The discussion concerning language also found lively interest at the university of Göttingen.⁴⁹ There, Christopher Meiners discussed "the influence of languages on the human mind" in his *Kurzer Abriss der Psychologie*.⁵⁰ Lichtenberg's much more interesting role at Göttingen will be discussed in chapter 3 below. In sum, it must be noted that many of the positions in the philosophy of language during the eighteenth century remained largely uncritical, insofar most of them one-sidedly stressed the positive influence of language on thought. The general interest in the philosophy of language found expression in occasional exclamations to the effect that nothing was more important for philosophy than to carry out an investigation of language.⁵¹ But such assertions did not cause even their authors to engage in the necessary fundamental investigations of language. Contrary to Lambert's work, language played no role in many later works with the title *Neues Organon*,⁵² or only an unimportant one as with J. J. Wagner's work.⁵³

By and large, empiricists and rationalists adhered to instrumentalist views of language, according to which, language was *the* most important means of communicating to others what was before thought and known. Language also enabled one to store ideas and to reproduce the thoughts of others. K. L. Reinhold regretfully observed that Hume and Kant, who in his view had left out the problems of language, were more influential than Locke and Leibniz, who both had shown a vivid interest in language.⁵⁴ Those who advocated interdependence theories in those days and emphasized the transcendental function of language, belonged to a minority. It is small wonder, therefore, that those philosophers who were

⁴⁸ E. Büchsel, *Johann Georg Hamann: Über den Ursprung der Sprache* (vol. 4 *Johann Georg Hamanns Hauptschriften erklärt...* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), p. 5 f. and espec. pp. 13–65.

⁴⁹ H. Gockel, *Individualisiertes Sprechen. Lichtenbergs Bemerkungen im Zusammenhang von Erkenntnistheorie und Sprachkritik* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1973), p. 121. (Phil. Diss. Münster i. W., 1971).

⁵⁰ Chr. Meiners, *Kurzer Abriss der Psychologie zum Gebrauche seiner Vorlesungen* (1773), p. 65.

⁵¹ G. E. Schulze, *Grundriß der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, vol. I. (Wittenberg and Zerbst: S. G. Zimmerman, 1788), p. 169.

⁵² W. T. Krug, *Entwurf eines neuen Organons der Philosophie oder Versuch über die Prinzipien der philosophischen Erkenntnis* (Meissen, 1801), repr. (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1969) (Aetas Kantiana, 155).

⁵³ J. J. Wagner, *Organon der menschlichen Erkenntnis* (Erlangen, 1830) repr. (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1968) (Aetas Kantiana, 290).

⁵⁴ K. L. Reinhold, *Das menschliche Erkenntnisvermögen aus dem Gesichtspunkte des durch die Wortsprache vermittelten Zusammenhangs zwischen der Sinnlichkeit und dem Denkvermögen untersucht und beschrieben durch Carl Leonhard Reinhold* (Kiel: Verlag der academischen Buchhandlung, 1816), p. 3.

interested in language but also shared Kant's transcendental interest in the conditions of the possibility of thought and of knowledge, set themselves apart from Kant's "critique" of reason. They offered their theories as a *Metakritik*. A critique of language was regarded as an entirely new and revolutionary project. This is evident with Jacobi, Reinhold and later Gruppe, Müller, and the logical positivists of the twentieth century who still proclaimed the revolution in philosophy, as will be shown in the subsequent chapters of this study.

The immediate impact of these early studies of language, however, remained slight. The general interest in the philosophy of language took a different turn in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Again, the discussion is focused around the Berlin Academy prize question on the origin of language. Schelling, in his *Vorbemerkungen über den Ursprung der Sprache*⁵⁶ of 1850, referred to Herder's and Hamann's earlier contributions, and Jakob Grimm also reacted to them only weeks later in his paper *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*.⁵⁷ Grimm's paper shows how much the emphasis in the discussion of language had shifted from the philosophy of language to linguistics.⁵⁸

Between the earlier philosophical and theological discussions about the nature and origin of language and the later predominantly linguistic and psycholinguistic studies, we find the three phases of language-critical thought that were mentioned above. Language-critical philosophy must at the start be distinguished from the general theories of language developed by Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and others. What is characteristic of the endeavors of language-critical thinkers is their declared intention to conduct philosophy as a critique of language. Their proponents called for a critique of language that would serve the function of a critique of cognition. A language-critical approach was understood as analytic in its method and as critical of metaphysics. Although it developed via a discussion with British empiricism, language-critical philosophy was in fact an original contribution of German philosophers. These men added to the fundamental discussion of the relation among language, thought, reality, scientific knowledge, and philosophy.

⁵⁵ E. Büchsel, *J. G. Hamann*, pp. 101–103.

⁵⁶ F. W. J. Schelling, "Vorbemerkungen zu der Frage über den Ursprung der Sprache" (gelesen in der Klassensitzung der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, 25. Nov. 1850), Schellings *Werke*. Nach der Originalausgabe in neuer Anordnung ed. M. Schröter, vierter Ergänzungsband (Munich: Beck, 1959), pp. 503–510.

⁵⁷ J. Grimm, "Über den Ursprung der Sprache" (gelesen in der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, 9. Januar 1851), J. Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 1 (Berlin: F. Dümmler, 1864), pp. 255–298.

⁵⁸ K. Ulmer, "Die Wandlung des Sprachbildes von Herder zu Jakob Grimm," *Lexis. Studien zur Sprachphilosophie, Sprachgeschichte und Begriffsfindung* 2 (1951): 263–286.