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# A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder

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 CAMDEN HOUSE

Rochester, New York

2009

<sup>26</sup> See R. Riex, "Humanitas," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974), 3:1231–32.

<sup>27</sup> See especially book 15 of the *Ideen*, chapters 3 and 4, *SWS* 14:225–43.

<sup>28</sup> *DWb*, vol. 25, 927: "die bedeutung [von "Vernunft"] ist ursprünglich: das richtige auffassen, das aufnehmen."

<sup>29</sup> See G. Bien and K. H. Sladeczek, "Billigkeit," *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 1:939–43.

<sup>30</sup> Aristoteles, *Die Nikomachische Ethik: Griechisch-deutsch*, trans. Olof Gigon, ed. Rainer Nickel (Düsseldorf, Zurich: Artemis und Winkler, 2001), 1137b.

<sup>31</sup> Aristoteles, *Die Nikomachische Ethik*, 1138a.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry Freese (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard UP, 2000), book 1, 1374a.

<sup>33</sup> See Theo Mayer-Maly, "Aequitas," *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, ed. Konrat Ziegler and Walther Sontheimer (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979), 1:97–98.

<sup>34</sup> Regarding *ius strictum* and *aequum* see Dietrich Simon, "Ius," *Der Kleine Pauly: Lexikon der Antike*, ed. Konrat Ziegler and Walther Sontheimer, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979), 3:11–18, here 18.

<sup>35</sup> "I become what I am." *HB* 1:139; Herder to Moses Mendelssohn, April 1769.

<sup>36</sup> In *FA* 4:549–78.

<sup>37</sup> See Herder's periodical *Adrastea* in *FA* 10.

<sup>38</sup> Rainer Wisbert in his commentary to "Von der Integrität und Scham einer Schule. Schulrede Juli 1794," *FA* 9.2:1337.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Dietrich Irscher in his commentary on the *Humanitätsbriefe*, *FA* 7:818.

<sup>40</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* [1951], in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 4:290.

## 5: Herder and Language

Jürgen Trabant

### I. Philosophy of Language

AFTER BACON'S DISCOVERY OF THE non-scientific semantics of natural language as *idola fori*, "idols of the marketplace" and the most serious obstacle to true knowledge, and after Locke's attempt to integrate language into a theory of human understanding in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), and after his proposals for coming to terms with the epistemological problem of language (which is "a mist before our eyes"), language was on the agenda of the philosophy of the eighteenth century — at least of its empiricist current. Rationalist philosophy generally speaking has no problem with language, and, hence, nothing interesting to say about it. The most important answers to Locke's *Essay*, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge, 1746), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain* (New Essays on Human Understanding, 1765), and, in a certain way, also Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (The New Science, 1744), necessarily deal with language. They all know that human "understanding," "connaissances," "entendement," "scienza" have infallibly something to do with language. The question is to what extent and whether this is good or bad.

There is no other philosopher of the eighteenth century — but shall we call him a philosopher anyway? — who is haunted by language in the same passionate way as is Herder. And there is no other philosopher of the eighteenth century for whom language is to the same extent and with the same intensity the heart of a philosophy of knowledge — and hence of philosophy *tout court* — and therefore the main object of philosophy. In that sense, Herder is the creator of the "philosophy of language" as an autonomous philosophical reflection on language, not only as a "linguistic philosophy," that is, a philosophy (of knowledge, of action, of beauty, etc.) that deals with language because language comes along as an obstacle to truth or to true philosophical or scientific discourse.

Recent studies have fervently tried to show (why this strange passion?) that many of Herder's ideas about language are shared by other thinkers, and that he is only one link in the chain of European reflection on language. Of course this is the case, as is generally the case with any philosopher one can think of. But this is beside the point. Nobody claims that Herder is the inventor of every single element of his language philosophy. The claim is only that there is no other thinker or writer — before Wilhelm von Humboldt and, later, Ludwig Wittgenstein — for whom language is in the same depth and intensity the center and the subject of human thought and hence of the human being and of human culture, and that, therefore, Herder initiated an autonomous philosophy of language. Perhaps only Vico knows as much as Herder does about the linguistic foundation of human thought and culture, but Vico's deep insights into "language" constitute rather a *sign* theory, a semiotics or "sematology," than a *language* theory or a language philosophy (in this respect Vico's philosophy is very similar, by the way, to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic philosophy).<sup>1</sup> Condillac's systematic integration of Lockean intuitions into a radically sensualist philosophy of knowledge was the most important contribution to the philosophical language discussion in French-speaking Europe, for what is called "les Lumières" (the Enlightenment) right through to the "Idéologues" after the French Revolution. But this philosophy is a philosophy of "human knowledge," *connaissances humaines*, not a philosophy of *language*. Leibniz's contribution to the discussion, the first direct answer to Locke's *Essay*, also concerns mainly the "entendement humain," human understanding — and it comes too late to have any importance for the French European context. The linguistic insights of Leibniz's *Nouveaux Essais*, published only in 1765, long after Locke's death in 1704, and long after the victory of Condillacian empiricism, were, however, crucial for German developments, especially for Herder and Humboldt.

But none of these thinkers was as passionately involved with language as Herder. His is a threefold passion for language. The first concerns the philosophical problem of to what extent language is involved in "human understanding" and whether this is good or bad. Herder's first message to the intellectual world was a very clear answer to that question, and in his most ambitious and most philosophical book, at the end of his life, he opposed Language to Philosophy itself, that is, to Kant — a kind of philosophical suicide in the name of language and his most important message to the future. Second: as a Christian theologian — we should not forget that the Church was the field of his professional activity — he knew that language is also the divine creative Word, the *Logos* that, according to Saint John, was in the beginning and became flesh in Christ: this Word is God. His was a religion of the Word, hence Herder always understood *Logos* as the Word and not as the pure Spirit. And third, as a young Ger-

man of his generation, that is, as a German-speaking intellectual and writer from the margin of the French-speaking center of Europe, he fought passionately for his own literature and language, which his Lutheran background told him was as good as — or better than — any "catholic" or universal language, be it Latin or — in the second half of the eighteenth century — French with its universal imperial aspirations.

Language, therefore, is not only one specific domain of Herder's philosophy (even if he is the inventor of an autonomous "philosophy of language"), but his passion for language and the central position he attributes to language in his conception of the human being permeates his whole work. Whatever subject Herder is dealing with, language is an important dimension of his thought.

## II. Fragmente

Herder's first battle was for German literature and therefore for the German language: "wer über die Literatur eines Landes schreibt, muß ihre Sprache nicht aus der Acht lassen" (he who writes about the literature of a country must not ignore its language; *FA* 1:177). Two hundred years after Joachim Du Bellay's *Défense et illustration de la langue française* (1549), the model for similar apologies for national languages throughout Europe, Herder wrote his "defense and illustration of the German language," his fragments *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (On the Recent German Literature, 1766–67). The *Fragments* not only made their young author a celebrity in the German-speaking world, but also contain his linguistic theory, which was inspired by Leibniz, and the outline of a vast science of the languages of the world as a necessary consequence of that conception of language (Herder further develops his linguistic ideas in the second edition of the *Fragments*, printed in 1768 but not distributed during his lifetime, which I here take as a part of that first great book). Similarly to the French poet Joachim Du Bellay before him (ca. 1522–1560), Herder fought against the supremacy of a universal language — in Du Bellay's case Latin, in Herder's Latin and French — which is at the same time the successful model. He was convinced that his language was as good as that model, but that that needed to be "illustrated" by original literary works, or, to use a more German conception, that it needed to be "gebildet": "Bildung der Sprache" (formation of the language) is what all this is about (*FA* 1:187). Herder bases his love and defense of his language on that precious individuality that in his time was called the *génie de la langue* or "Genius der Sprache": the genius of the language (*FA* 1:177).

The humanists of the fifteenth century had discovered in Latin and later in Greek a special quality of language, the reason for their defense of those languages, which they called *idioma*, "that which is proper" (Herder

would use other derivatives of the same Greek word, like "Idiotismus," "Idiot," "idiotisch," to refer to the "proper" and peculiar quality of an individual language). Du Bellay attributed a particular quality to this aspect of language (which he mainly finds in the sounds of his beloved French language), its "certain je ne sais quoi which is exclusively its own property,"<sup>2</sup> but the French Academy then called it the "génie de la langue." First, it is not yet very clear what that particular quality of a language is and where one can find it, but it becomes evident that every language has it and that it is the basis of the attachment of people to their languages. Condillac, in his *Essai* of 1746, located the *génie de la langue* in semantic qualities, in "accessory ideas," in a special arrangement of semantic markers as well as in word order; that is, the individuality of a language becomes deeper, "cognitive," it now concerns the content, not only the material form. Leibniz knew already that language is "the best mirror of the human mind" and that languages contain precious knowledge, both of the world and of the operations of the human mind.<sup>3</sup>

It is on this ground that Herder fought his battle for literary expression in his own language: Herder's question is whether there is a connection between the (German) language and the "Denkungsart" or manner of thinking, a question already discussed by Johann David Michaelis in his *De l'influence des opinions sur le langage et du langage sur les opinions* (On the Influence of Opinion on Language and Language on Opinion, 1762) (whom Herder criticizes severely). From the beginning, Herder is convinced that there is a very close connection between thought and language and that, therefore, it makes a difference what language one writes in, and whether one writes in a foreign language or in one's mother tongue or "Muttersprache," the language one knows best (*FA* 1:407).

Words are not just arbitrary signs for universal concepts, and hence only materially different instruments for communication and for the designation of non-linguistic thought. Rather, thought is created together with words; words are the creators of thought: hence, concepts are creations of language. Herder's famous formulation for this conviction is that "Gedanke am Ausdrucke klebt" (thought clings to the expression; *FA* 1:556), and, since languages differ, those thoughts also differ from language to language. Thus every language provides a different perspective on the world:

Jede Nation spricht also, nach dem sie denkt, und denkt, nach dem sie spricht. So verschieden der Gesichtspunkt war, in dem sie die Sache nahm, bezeichnete sie dieselbe. (*FA* 1:558)

[Hence each nation speaks in accordance with its thoughts and thinks in accordance with its speech. However different was the viewpoint from which the nation took cognizance of a matter, the nation named the matter.<sup>4</sup>]

Fighting for the rights of one's native language is, therefore, a fight for one's own mental or cognitive form, for one's own *forma mentis*: "Nicht als Werkzeug der Literatur allein muß man die Sprache ansehen; sondern auch als Behältnis und Inbegriff" (One must view language not only as a tool of literature, but instead also as container and quintessence; *FA* 1:548).

Different languages contain different semantics or — to use Wilhelm von Humboldt's later expression — different "worldviews." As Herder formulated it:

Wenn Wörter nicht bloß Zeichen, sondern gleichsam die Hüllen sind, in welchen wir die Gedanken sehen: so betrachte ich eine ganze Sprache als einen großen Umfang von sichtbar gewordenen Gedanken, als ein unermäßliches Land von Begriffen. (*FA* 1:552)

[If words are not just signs but instead so to speak the shells in which we see thoughts, I look at an entire language as a great range of thoughts become visible, as an immeasurable country of concepts.]

Herder develops a whole range of metaphorical expressions for individual languages as special cognitive forms: the "unermäßliches Land von Begriffen" becomes a "Schatzkammer," "ein unermäßlicher Garten voll Pflanzen und Bäume," "Vorratshaus solcher Gedanken," "Gedankenvorrat eines Volkes," "Feld von Gedanken" (treasure chamber; immeasurable garden full of plants and trees; storehouse of such thoughts; store of thoughts of a people; field of thought): "Jede Nation hat ein eignes Vorratshaus solcher zu Zeichen gewordenen Gedanken, dies ist ihre Nationalsprache" (Every nation has its own storehouse of such thoughts become words: this is its national language; *FA* 1:553).

According to Herder, the study of the thought reservoir of one people requires a linguist, someone who is not an "Idiot" (*FA* 1:554), that is, only knows his own language, but one who knows many other languages as well. And the comparative study of the languages of the world would finally lead to the ideas that are common to the whole human race, to a "Semiotik" (semiotics) that would be a "Entziefierung der menschlichen Seele aus ihrer Sprache" (deciphering of the human mind through its language; *FA* 1:553). Herder never lets his enthusiasm for the cognitive individuality of languages forget that these individual cognitive forms belong to a common heritage, that there is a "eine große Schatzkammer, in welcher die Känntnisse aufbewahrt liegen, die dem ganzen Menschengeschlechte gehören," a "Symbolik, die allen Menschen gemein ist" (a great treasure chamber in which knowledge that belongs to the whole human family lays in store; symbolism that is common to all humans; *FA* 1:553). Herder never falls into the trap of relativism: the fact that each

language possesses a unique "Gesichtspunkt" or special perspective does not mean that languages have no concepts or views in common.

Herder's fight for the cultural legitimacy of his native language is commonly seen as his legacy to the history of linguistic ideas, but such a view is a limited one. In nearly every history of linguistics, Herder's name is linked to the label "linguistic nationalism,"<sup>5</sup> but constant repetition of that prejudice does not make it true. It is true that Herder loved the German language — just as Dante loved Italian and Du Bellay loved his native French — and that he insists on the importance and legitimacy of expressing himself in that language. But what is more important is that he concedes the same value and the same precious qualities to *all* other languages. Herder is a Leibnizian thinker, therefore he sees individual languages as precious entities whose multiplicity and variety is the wealth of the human mind. This is his real message, this is what he fought for, not for the primacy or superiority of one of those forms of the human mind — which indeed would be linguistic nationalism. The aim of his *Fragmente* is certainly a "defense" of German, but heading more to a "Bildung der Sprache" into a literary and erudite form than to a patriotic "illustration" à la Du Bellay (which indeed led to a primacy of the "defended" French language).

An analogous prejudice misrepresents Herder's political and historical convictions: Herder was not a herald of (German) nationalism. In contrast to Voltaire's *philosophie de l'histoire* and other teleological universalist conceptions of the history of mankind as a history of the victory of one — European, that is, French or enlightened rationalist — "progressive" cultural model, Herder shows that *all* cultures, unique in time and space, contribute to the common advancement of mankind. Hence, respect for cultural differences within a belief of a common progress — beyond relativism and nationalism — is the message of his alternative philosophy of history, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte*.

### III. Ursprung

It comes as no surprise that a young author with these linguistic convictions and whose passion is language would take part in the Berlin Academy's essay competition on the hottest language theme of the century. He wrote the *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Treatise on the Origin of Language, 1772) as a response to the academy's assignment: "Find an hypothesis of how human beings, reduced to their natural faculties, can invent language," a proposition with quite outspoken "enlightened," "aufklärerisch" presuppositions, namely that man invents language himself (and that it is not given by God). In the Berlin Academy theological thinkers and partisans of the modern enlightened sensualistic phi-

losophy were opposed in a bitter fight over the question of language. At stake was not only language but a whole system of beliefs (and its political implications): what is created by God — or Nature — cannot be changed, and what is invented by man and therefore subject to "Bildung" can and must be changed. Condillac gave language a precise systematic place in his history of the rise of the human mind from sensation to reason, namely right in the middle, as an outcome of memory, and, in the second book of the *Essay on the Origin of Human Understanding*, he wrote a history of language or rather of human semiosis. He wanted to explain why language is so irrational (as Bacon and Locke had already pointed out) and what we can do in order to make it rational. Therefore, he imagines a "wild" origin from which language (and other human semioses) rises to a pre-enlightened stage which we find in modern languages (and their geniuses) and which we have to enlighten further for scientific use. This view, of course, goes against traditional religious doctrine, especially against what the Bible says about the origin of language. Hence the Prussian Academy posed the question to European thinkers, many of whom responded.<sup>6</sup>

Even if Herder's response depends in many respects on his predecessors and the European tradition, it is a new answer and gives a new direction to European linguistic thought: Herder further develops Leibniz's cognitive conception of language, explains why ideas necessarily "cling to" words, and he shows a way to deal with the diversity of languages within a perspective that postulates the progress or advancement of mankind. In his *Fragmente*, Herder had already written a piece on the "ages of language," and in the unpublished second edition (1768) of the *Fragmente* (FA 1:600–615) there is an outline of some of his ideas on the origin of language, which he now develops in his prize-winning essay, which is perhaps Herder's most beautiful and certainly his most influential work.

"*Schon als Tier, hat der Mensch Sprache*" (Already as an animal, the human being has language; FA 1:697). Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* begins with this famous sentence, which has often been discussed and misunderstood. Notwithstanding its positive statement it has a primarily negative meaning: it implies that what the human being possesses by virtue of being an *animal* is *not human*, but rather something animal: animal language. And as animal language, "language" has two functions: first, the expression of passions and sensations; and second, communication:

Alle heftigen und die heftigsten unter den heftigen, die schmerzhaften Empfindungen seines Körpers, alle starken Leidenschaften seiner Seele äußern sich unmittelbar in Geschrei, in Töne, in wilde, unartikulierte Laute. (FA 1:697)

[All violent sensations of his body, and the most violent, the painful ones, and all strong passions of his soul immediately express themselves in cries, in sounds, in wild, unarticulated noises. (Forster, 65)]

These wild sounds are always "auf andre Geschöpfe gerichtet," directed at other creatures (FA 1:697–98). Therefore, "schon als Tier, hat der Mensch Sprache" means above all that the human being communicates with the other members of his species just like other animals do: by making sounds. Animal life and "animal language" resound and communicate. But these animal sounds are not *human* language. These natural sounds are "freilich [. . .] nicht die Hauptfäden der menschlichen Sprache. Sie sind nicht die eigentlichen Wurzeln, aber die Säfte, die die Wurzeln der Sprache beleben" (FA 1:701; "of course not the main threads of human language. They are not the actual roots, but the juices which enliven the roots of language"; Forster 68).

The "actual roots" of human language are not to be found in the animal domain but in what differentiates the human being from animals. In comparing human beings to animals there is a huge difference: humans' lack of instincts. This deficiency is, however, compensated for by a unique disposition of human nature, *Besonnenheit*. Herder deliberately uses this new expression for what was called, in the philosophical terminology of his time, "Reflexion" (reflection; for instance FA 1:722), a term that Herder still uses from time to time as an alternative to *Besonnenheit*. Expressed in modern terms, Herder used *Besonnenheit* to mean the *cognitive* disposition of human beings, the need of human beings to gain knowledge of the world. It is an innate disposition, inherent only to humans and not derived from other, "lower" mental operations. To the gradual, sensualist ascent of rational man out of the animal body Herder thus opposes a "rationalist" *cogitatio* that only human beings possess. And this cognitive need — which is totally different from the animal need to communicate — creates thought that is simultaneously language. Language originates as specifically human only out of the semantico-cognitive relationship to the world, and hence — and this is what is decisive and radically new in Herder — *thought is the word*. Thus, language is no longer *voice* or the material *sign* for the designation and communication of thought as in the traditional, Aristotelian view of language. Language is primarily *thought*.

This conception of language runs against the grain of nearly the entire European discourse on language: language as an inner cognitive event. Noam Chomsky, writing in 1966, thinks that such a conception of language is already present in Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637),<sup>7</sup> but it is actually in Herder that it first occurs. The extremely dualistic Descartes very traditionally viewed thought as thought (*res cogitans*), not as lan-

guage; language was only its instrument and testimony in the *res extensa*, in the "extended," that is, material reality. Herder takes up the insights of Bacon, Locke, Leibniz, and Condillac into the *linguisticity* of cognition and radicalizes it as a *cognitivity* of language.

Although this appears to be utterly rationalistic — the innate rationality of the human being instead of gradual ascent from earlier animal forms, the cognitivity of the word — it becomes clear in the story of the origin of language that the inner word does not emerge out of the subject itself, but that it requires the world. Therefore, the word is not innate to the human being. Only the *disposition* to create language — *Besonnenheit* — is innate, but the word is created by the human being through his encounter with the world.

Herder develops this conception of language in the famous scene of the origin of language in which a lamb plays the decisive role.<sup>8</sup> The human being, endowed with this disposition for *Besonnenheit*, with the "need to know," that is with Saint Augustine's "cognitive desire" (*appetitus noscendi*), is confronted with the world, which is accessible to him through his senses: his sense of touch, his eyes, and his ears. Now, in this world of sensation, the lamb appears "weiß, sanft, wollicht" (FA 1:723; "white, soft, woolly," Forster 88). As the human cognitive desire is neither the voracity of the wolf or lion nor the sexual drive of the "aroused ram," man leaves the object of his *cognitive* desire in peace, he "does not by instinct [. . .] attack it" (FA 1:723; Forster 88) like the lion or the ram. *Besonnenheit* is also the capability to distance oneself from the object. Among the tactile, visual, and auditory impressions that the human being, endowed with *Besonnenheit*, receives from the world, it is the auditory ones that detach themselves most distinctly from the object and penetrate the human being most deeply. The second time the sheep appears, language-thought appears:

Das Schaf kommt wieder. Weiß sanft, wollicht — sie [die Seele] sieht, tastet, besinnet sich, sucht Merkmal — es blöckt, und nun erkennet sies wieder! "Ha! du bist das Blöckende!" fühlt sie innerlich, sie hat es menschlich erkannt, da sies deutlich, das ist mit einem Merkmal erkennet, und nennet. (FA 1:723)

[The sheep comes again. White, soft, woolly — the soul sees, feels, takes awareness, seeks a characteristic mark — it bleats, and now the soul recognizes it again! "Aha! You are the bleating one!" the soul feels inwardly. The soul has recognized it in a human way, for it recognizes and names it distinctly, that is, with a characteristic mark. (Forster 88)]

This inner mark created by *Besonnenheit*, moved by and penetrated by the acoustic stimulus, is language. Herder builds up to this conclusion —

that the inner mental event alone is language — in a highly dramatic way, as the sequence of the key expressions in the next passage demonstrates: mark, inner mark, name of the sheep, sign, word, human language:

*Mit einem Merkmal* also? und was war das anders, als *ein innerliches Merkwort*? “Der Schall des Blöckens von einer menschlichen Seele, als Kennzeichen des Schafs, wahrgenommen, ward, kraft dieser Bestimmung, *Name* des Schafs, und wenn ihn nie seine Zunge zu stammeln versucht hätte.” Er erkannte das Schaf am Blöcken; es war *gefaßtes Zeichen*, bei welchem sich die Seele an eine Idee deutlich besann — Was ist das anders als Wort? Und was ist die ganze menschliche Sprache, als eine *Sammlung solcher Worte*? (FA 1:724)

[*With a characteristic mark therefore?* And what else was that but an *inward characteristic word*? “The sound of bleating, perceived by a human soul as the distinguishing sign of the sheep, became, thanks to this determination to which it was destined, the *name* of the sheep, even if the human being’s tongue had never tried to stammer it.” The human being recognized the sheep by its bleating; this was a *grasped sign* on the occasion of which the soul distinctly recalled to awareness an *idea*. What else is that but a word? And what is the *whole of human language* but a *collection of such words*? (Forster 89)]

“... even if the human being’s tongue had never tried to stammer it”: one cannot state with greater clarity the purely mental, inner, non-vocal character of language that Herder insists upon with particular emphasis. Therefore, people who are unable to speak from birth also have language: “denn auch der zeitlebens Stumme war er Mensch: besann er sich; so lag Sprache in seiner Seele!” (the person who was dumb all his life, if he was a human being, if he took awareness, had language in his soul!; FA 1:725). The inwardness of language excludes communication as an *essential* characteristic of language. This is clearly stated as the passage progresses and is repeated in the conclusion, when Herder states that also “der Wilde, der Einsame im Walde hätte Sprache für sich selbst erfinden müssen; hätte er sie auch nie geredet” (FA 1:725; the savage, the solitary in the forest, would necessarily have invented language for himself, even if he had never spoken it; Forster 90).

Und was ist die *ganze menschliche Sprache*, als eine *Sammlung solcher Worte*? Käme er also auch nie in den Fall, einem andern Geschöpf diese Idee zu geben, und also dies Merkmal der Besinnung ihm mit den Lippen vorblöcken zu wollen, oder zu können; seine Seele hat gleichsam in ihrem Inwendigen geblöckt, da sie diesen Schall zum Erinnerungszeichen wählte, und wiedergeblöckt, da sie ihn daran erkannte — die Sprache ist erfunden! (FA 1:724)

[And what is the *whole of human language* but a *collection of such words*? So even if the human being never reached the situation of conveying this idea to another creature, and hence of wanting or being able to bleat forth this characteristic mark of taking-awareness to it with his lips, still his soul has, so to speak, bleated internally when it chose this sound as a sign for remembering, and bleated again when it recognized the sheep by it. Language is invented! (Forster 89)]

Herder summarizes what is excluded from this cognitive-semantic inner core of language in the expression “Mund und Gesellschaft” (FA 1:725): the human soul has to invent language just for itself, “even in the absence of a mouth and society.” He is fully aware of the radicalism and novelty of his conclusion and attaches the utmost importance to specifying the exact location of the source of language: *Besonnenheit*, the world of sounds, the inner mark. He calls it the “*einzigsten Punkt*” (sole place, FA 1:724) where the origin of language can be found. Thus, like Vico before him, he affirms the identity of “*Wort und Vernunft, Begriff und Wort, Sprache und Ursache*” (*word and reason, concept and word, language and originating cause*; FA 1:733). Thought is language.

When Herder concludes his chapter on the radical internalization and cognitivization of language in the following way, it sounds just as if Steven Pinker, the present-day prophet of Chomskyan linguistics, was already speaking in 1772:

Es wird so nach die Sprache ein *natürliches Organ des Verstandes*, ein solcher *Sinn der menschlichen Seele*, wie sich die Sehekraft jener sensitiven Seele der Alten das Auge und der Instinkt der Biene seine Zelle baut. (FA 1:733)

[In this way, language becomes a *natural organ of the understanding*, a *sense of the human soul*, just as the force of vision of that sensitive soul of the ancients builds for itself the eye, and the instinct of the bees builds for itself its cell. (Forster 97)]

*The Language Instinct* is the title of Steven Pinker’s 1994 book in which language is conceived of as a *language organ*. The parallels with Herder are striking. Without any doubt, among the classical linguistic theorists, it is Herder — not Descartes — whose conception of the core of language is closest to that of Chomsky: the function of language is cognition; language is essentially internal; it has nothing to do with communication and society nor with the articulation of the voice; it is a “natural organ,” a “sense” of the mind.

However, Herder differs in two instances from this modern rationalist theory and from rationalism in general: Herder’s cognitive, inner language is *not innate*, and it is essentially *dialogical*. The only thing that is

innate is the (in itself completely empty) *disposition* for language-thought: *Besonnenheit*. In contrast, rationalism — the older variant as well as the Chomskyan one — assumes innate ideas and therefore requires absolutely no experience from the outside. The Chomskyan school assumes that the human mind is naturally equipped with a universal grammar and (sometimes) a universal dictionary (Mentalese). In contrast, Herder's *Besonnenheit* invents language through contact with the world; experience of the world triggers the "sense" or the "organ" of language into operation. Without the bleating sheep there would be no language. Herder's inner language is thus completely dependent on the senses.

This empirical moment is connected with an epistemological innovation that is quite revolutionary and at the same time so characteristic of Herder: knowing is no longer seeing, it is hearing, or put another way, cognition is no longer visual but auditory. Herder's fundamental cognitive arrangement is an acroamatic one (from the Greek word *akroōmāi* "to hear, to listen"): the soul listens to the world. Cognitive desire, which is derided by Saint Augustine as a form of *concupiscentia oculorum*, "concupiscence of the eyes," becomes a *concupiscentia aurium*, a "concupiscence of the ears." Herder calls the ear the "Sinn der Sprache," the sense of language (FA 1:748). Since language is the sense of the human soul, the ear is thus the sense of understanding. In contrast to the word "understanding" or the German *Verstand*, which refer to a visual-spatial arrangement, the French word *entendement* (from *entendre* "to hear") refers to this acroamatic way of acquiring knowledge. Hence, Herder's listening to the world, as a fundamental epistemological constellation, takes us miles away from Chomsky, despite their important common features.

Listening to the voices of the world connects language eventually to the speaker's *voice*, which Herder had initially excluded ("even if the human being's tongue had never tried to stammer it") from the core of language, from the "sole space" of its origin — and that is the second fundamental difference with Chomsky. For the inner word (which is reminded voice) is also an inner voice. For Chomsky, this connection between language and the voice is a departure from language into contingency, into communication, into "external language," into *speech*, which has little to do with language. In Chomsky's view, the material communicative manifestations of language are only instances of pure language descending to earthly contingency. Here Herder's view differs profoundly: even if he reduces the origin of language to that "einzigsten Punkt," to which part I, section 2 of his *Abhandlung* is devoted with passionate stringency, language is nonetheless also intimately connected with "Mund und Gesellschaft." Mouth and society are, therefore, not the contingent, inferior and impure realms into which "real" (that is, internal, pure) language descends, as it were,

from its beautiful mental heights; rather, they are the *spheres* in which language is involved.

The structure of the first part of the *Abhandlung* illustrates the interrelationship of these spheres of language. Whereas the first section is devoted to rejecting the communicative and resounding "Tiersprache" as the root of human language, the second section reveals the cognitive-semantic core, and the third section deals again with sounds, with the sounds of the world and with listening to the sounds of the world, ending with the "Mund" that reproduces those sounds. A coda at the end of the second section (the core chapter on the origin of language) not only opens the section on sounds, listening, and the "Mund," but it also — with the establishment of the dialogical nature of the inner word — refers to the second part of the treatise, which primarily deals with "society."

Vortrefflich daß dieser neue, selbst gemachte Sinn des Geistes gleich in seinem Ursprunge wieder ein Mittel der Verbindung ist — Ich kann nicht den ersten menschlichen Gedanken denken, nicht das erste besonnene Urteil reihen, ohne daß ich in meiner Seele dialogiere, oder zu dialogieren strebe; der erste menschliche Gedanke bereitet also[,] seinem Wesen nach, mit andern dialogieren zu können! Das erste *Merkmal*, was ich erfasse, ist *Merkwort* für mich, und *Mitteilungswort* für andre! (FA 1:733)

[It is] excellent that this new, self-made sense belonging to the mind is immediately in its origin a means of connection in its turn. I cannot think the first human thought, cannot set up the first aware judgement in a sequence, without engaging in dialogue, or striving to engage in dialogue, in my soul. Hence the first human thought by its very nature prepares one to be able to engage in dialogue with others! The first *characteristic mark* that I grasp is a *characteristic word* for me and a *communication word* for others!]

The idea that the first thought, as an internal event, is always also dialogical, that is, possesses a communicative quality in itself, is connected to its acroamatic origin. The "inner bleating" *replies* to the resounding world, it "dialogues" with the voice of the world: "Ha, du bist das Blöckende!" The human being hears inside himself his inner word, his "inner bleating," his inner voice, and so dialogues with himself. The inner word contains a dialogical potential that prepares the way for one to dialogue with other people, for stepping outside into the externality of voice and society. Inner language is thus not only involved in and surrounded by the sphere of sound and the other, but it is also communicative and resounding in its internal structure.

Part I, section 3 of the *Abhandlung* develops the idea that hearing is the foundation of knowledge. This makes Herder a real innovator not just



in linguistic theory but also — since language and thought are identical — in epistemology. What Leibniz suggested with his acoustic *petites perceptions* (little perceptions), now becomes the basis of a completely new cognitive device: thinking becomes primarily auditory or acroamatic. Listening to the world is the center of human cognition. In a short phenomenology of hearing, Herder shows why the ear, poised between the senses of touch and sight, has this central position as the “sense of language.” The world that makes sounds, has a voice, and breathes is first and foremost not a thing, an object, but a *you*, an *alter ego*: “*you* are the bleating one!” Such a world is like *me*; it is a world that speaks and dialogues with *me*.

Of course, this acroamatic epistemology was in no way able to replace the traditional Western conception of cognition as seeing and grasping (perhaps also because the human being seems to be a predominantly visual being, as modern brain research shows). The eye that gazes forwards and the hand with its firm grip on things constitute the bodily foundation of our aggressive attitude toward the world. Herder’s softer acroamatic epistemology is an appeal to let the world breathe and resound, and to dialogue with it.

The end of part I, section 2 refers to “Mund und Gesellschaft,” to which the second part of the *Abhandlung* is devoted. Within society, inner language, due to its structural properties, necessarily becomes a “Mittelungswort für andere” (FA 1:733). After the nature and origin of language, Herder deals with its diversity within the sphere of the other.

The intertextuality of Herder’s story of the origin of language with the Biblical story of Adam’s naming of the animals is evident; Herder explicitly establishes this relation himself. In the second part of the treatise, his four “Naturgesetze” (laws of nature) of the linguistic development of humanity correspond to the four Biblical episodes about language: the first natural law deals with the *lingua adamica*; the second concerns talking to each other in society, that is, Adam and Eve; the third elaborates on the Babel story; and the fourth on Pentecost. This sequence is also a progression towards increasingly wider social relationships: from Adam, the solitary inventor of language, via the couple and the family to the tribe and the nation, and finally to humanity.

In the chapter on Adam’s language (“erstes Naturgesetz”), Herder once again explicates the basic idea of his linguistic theory, that language and thought are identical. The following history of language is thus also a history of human thought. The “herds” or “societies” are first portrayed as families. Language, as a “*Vater- oder Muttersprache*” (FA 1:791; father- or mother-tongue; Forster 147) in its development, is identical to itself as long as it is traditionally passed on via upbringing within the family group and promotes the coherence of the “herd.” On the other hand, language is also different in every individual, in both material and semantic aspects:

So wenig als es zween Menschen ganz von einerlei Gestalt und Gesichtszügen: so wenig kann es zwo Sprachen, auch nur *der Aussprache nach*, im Munde zweener Menschen geben, die doch nur eine Sprache wären. [. . .] Das war nur *Aussprache*. Aber *Worte* selbst, *Sinn*, *Seele* der Sprache — welch ein unendliches Feld von Verschiedenheiten. (FA 1:792)

[As little as there can be two human beings who share exactly the same form and facial traits, just as little can there be two languages in the mouths of two human beings which would in fact still be only one language, even merely *in terms of pronunciation*. [. . .] That was only *pronunciation*. But *words* themselves, *sense*, the *soul* of language — what an endless field of differences. (Forster 148)]

The human being is — as Dante says — a *variabilissimum animal*, a “very variable animal.” Therefore, language is “*ein Proteus auf der runden Oberfläche der Erde*” (a Proteus on the round surface of the earth; FA 1:794), a creature that, like the Greek sea god, constantly appears in ever-changing forms. As a family member, or as a social being, the human being not only strives — inwardly — toward “Eintracht” or harmony with his herd, but also — outwardly, in relation with other groups — toward “Zwietracht,” discord, which intensifies the individual differences that already exist:

Dieselbe Familienneigung, die[,] *in sich selbst* gekehret, Stärke der *Eintracht* Eines Stammes gab, macht[,] *außer sich* gekehrt, gegen ein andres Geschlecht, Stärke der *Zwietracht*, *Familienhaß!* dort zogs viele zu Einem desto fester zusammen; hier machts aus zwei Parteien gleich Feinde. (FA 1:796)

[The same liking for family which turned *inward on itself*, gave strength to the *harmony of a single* tribe, turned *outward from itself*, against another race, produces strength of *dissension*, *familial hatred!* In the former case it drew many all the more firmly together into a single whole; in the latter case it makes two parties immediately into enemies. (Forster 152)]

This theory of discordance is Herder’s interpretation of the myth of Babel, which he explicitly quotes with respect to this third “Naturgesetz.” The idea of national hate that manifests itself in linguistic demarcation is, by the way, reminiscent of the shibboleth story in the Old Testament (though Herder does not refer to the story here).

Herder would not be Herder if he did not celebrate this diversity with enthusiasm. Not just the influence of Leibniz’s heritage comes into play, but also his cultural experience of diversity in the corner of Europe he comes from. And we are also reminded here of the *Fragments*, where he

enthusiastically considers the possibility of the study of all human languages. Linguistic research — his *Semiotik* — aims to document what Leibniz called the “wonderful variety of the operations of the human mind” in the human languages (293).

But neither would Herder be Herder — and this last and decisive thought is often omitted by his critics — if he did not also progress from the families, the tribes, the nations to *humanity*, that is, from diversity to universal and common features of mankind. In *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Humankind, 1774) this is quite clearly stated in the title: “for the Education of Humankind.” And in Herder’s treatise on language, humanity is emphatically taken as “ein progressives Ganze” — a progressive whole. The fourth “Naturgesetz” formulates a common human development beyond national differences:

So wie nach aller Wahrscheinlichkeit das menschliche Geschlecht Ein progressives Ganze von Einem Ursprunge in Einer großen Haushaltung ausmacht: so auch alle Sprachen, und mit ihnen die ganze Kette der Bildung. (FA 1:799)

[Just as in all probability the human species constitutes a single progressive whole with a single origin in a single great household-economy, likewise all languages too, and with them the whole chain of civilization. (Forster 154)]

Herder is undeniably a thinker in the spirit of the Pentecost: *one* (Holy) Spirit unites humanity in its different languages. All languages proceed together in history from the same origin in a shared world. Despite all the diversity among languages, humanity has also one and the same language:

Wie Ein Menschenvolk nur auf der Erde wohnt, so auch nur Eine Menschensprache: wie aber diese große Gattung sich in so viele kleine Landarten nationalisiert hat: so ihre Sprachen nicht anders. (FA 1:804)

[Just as there lives only a single human people on earth, likewise only a single human language; but just as this great kind has nationalized itself into so many types specific to a land, likewise their languages no differently.]

Humboldt expresses the same idea with the paradoxical twist that one could just as easily say that every human being has his own language as that humanity possesses one common language.<sup>9</sup> And Chomsky adheres to this idea of the human species possessing one language beyond the different languages with his famous Martian perspective. He repeatedly writes that an inhabitant from Mars who observed the behavior of Earth’s in-

habitants would certainly note that all human beings do the same thing: they talk.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to Chomsky, though, who primarily wants to describe what the Martian would note from his distant perspective, that is, that which is unitary and universal, Herder and Humboldt are instead interested in the diversity that appears when one looks a bit closer.

At the end of the *Abhandlung*, Herder addresses the overcoming of national and linguistic differences; he welcomes the “Überlieferung von Volk zu Volk” (tradition from people to people; FA 1:806) with enthusiasm. Hence, the suspicion that Herder is the inventor of nationalistic relativism must be confronted with his conviction that human beings are not “Nationaltiere” (which, like different animal species, would be unable to communicate with each other); rather, they are one single species with a common human history proceeding from a common origin toward a common human society:

Wären die Menschen Nationaltiere, [. . .] so müßte diese [die Sprache] gewiß eine *Verschiedenartigkeit* zeigen, als vielleicht die Einwohner des Saturns und der Erde gegen einander haben mögen — und doch geht bei uns offenbar *alles auf Einem Grunde* fort. Auf einem Grunde, nicht bloß was die *Form*, sondern was wirklich den *Gang des menschlichen Geistes* betrifft: denn unter allen Völkern der Erde ist *die Grammatik beinahe auf einerlei Art gebaut*. (FA 1:803–4)

[If human beings were national animals [. . .] then this language would certainly have to display “a *difference in type*,” such as the inhabitants of Saturn and of the earth may perhaps have vis-à-vis each other. And yet it is obvious] that with us *everything develops on a single basis*. On a single basis concerning not only the *form* but also the actual *course of the human spirit*, for among all peoples of the earth *grammar is constructed in almost a single manner*. (Forster 158)]

Like Chomsky — and the Port-Royal grammarians in the seventeenth century — Herder thus even assumes that all languages are based on a universal grammar. This quasi-Chomskyan conclusion (which nevertheless rests upon sympathy for the cultural and linguistic diversity of nations) should really suffice to refute the tenacious prejudice that Herder was the inventor of linguistic — or another — nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

#### IV. Ideen

Many years later, in his more elaborate work on universal history, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humankind, 1784–91), Herder resumes the conception of language of his prior works, taking up as well the project of a complete description of the languages of the world, which he calls “*philosophische*

*Vergleichung der Sprachen*" (philosophical comparison of languages; *FA* 6:353). He now seems to moderate that Promethean gesture of the *Abhandlung* that man himself, endowed with *Besonnenheit*, creates language, "invents" language — the presupposition of the "enlightened" Prussian Academy. Echoing perhaps Hamann's more pious conception of language, Herder now calls language a "Wunder einer göttlichen Einsetzung" (miracle of a divine establishment; *FA* 6:346) and "das größte [Wunder] der Erdeschöpfung" (the greatest miracle of earthly creation; *FA* 6:346). But whether he sees language as a "miracle" or only as the action of the first human being,<sup>12</sup> the core of his conception of language remains the same: language is the creation of thought, in a synthesis of voice, hearing, and intelligent disposition: "Sprache ist der Charakter unsrer Vernunft" (Language is the character of our reason; *FA* 6:348). In other words, human rationality is necessarily linguistic. Therefore, Herder wrote, "eine reine Vernunft ohne Sprache ist auf Erden ein utopisches Land" (a pure reason without language is a utopian country on earth; 347). He would later elaborate this issue in his most ambitious philosophical work, the *Metakritik*.

However, in the *Ideen*, which is the sum of Herder's anthropological work, the philosophical critique is not the main intention. Therefore, Herder stresses the contribution of language studies to the anthropological study of mankind. He again takes up his early idea of a *Semiotik*, a study of all human languages as "treasures of thoughts." And he outlines a whole range of linguistic studies that are very similar to Humboldt's comparative study of languages of 1820.<sup>13</sup> Herder conceives four kinds of linguistic investigation: first, the aforementioned philosophical comparison of languages, which should yield an "*allgemeine Physiognomik der Völker aus ihren Sprachen*" (general physiognomy of the peoples according to their languages; *FA* 6:354). Herder knew by this time that the "Genius eines Volkes" (genius of a people) in its language is not only revealed by the lexicon, but also by the sounds and the grammar, or what he calls "der Bau der Sprache," the structure of the language (*FA* 6:353). The other three kinds of linguistic investigation are the "Geschichte der Sprache einiger einzelnen Völker" (history of the language of some individual peoples; *FA* 1:354), a "Gegeneinanderstellung verschiedner kultivierter Sprachen" (comparison of different cultivated languages), and a study of writing as the means of erudition ("*gelehrte Bildung*"; *Ideen*, *FA* 6:355).

## V. Metakritik

Toward the end of his life Herder returned to the heart of his linguistic theory (and hence to the center of his philosophy), which he only touched upon in the *Ideen*: to his conviction of the identity of language and rea-

son, that "eine reine Vernunft ohne Sprache ist auf Erden ein utopisches Land" (*Ideen*, *FA* 6:347). In a kind of suicidal act, Herder, driven by his passion for language revolted against what seemed to many at the time to be the ultimate truth, against the philosophy of Kant, the Giant of Königsberg, and thus seemingly against philosophy itself. Philosophy has never forgiven him this gesture; there has always been a kind of philosophical ostracism of Herder since that heretical lapse. Yet in this courageous act, the depth of his linguistic passion came to the fore. He could not help it: he had to write a "metacritique" of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which he titled *Eine Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1799).

Herder was the only important thinker of his time who dared such open opposition to Kant's chief work. Kant's philosophy had an overwhelming, sweeping effect on the German mind: "Alleszermalmer" — omnidestructor — is the praising epithet with which readers hailed Kant. And here was Herder, Kant's own student in Königsberg, daring to contradict him. Herder had maintained a critical and creative distance to his teacher's philosophy from the beginning, and Kant's utterly negative reviews of Herder's *Ideen* certainly did not bring Herder closer to him.<sup>14</sup> By 1784, Herder's friend Hamann had already outlined a short "Metakritik" (published later, after Hamann's death in 1788). It seems that Hamann's treatise influenced Herder to eventually attack Kant's philosophy directly. In attacking and deconstructing the *Critique*, he attacked Germany's "Second Bible," and hence brought against him the whole intelligentsia, who admired and celebrated Kant. He did this in a way partially reminiscent of Leibniz's method of dealing with Locke's *Essay*, that is, through a commentary that follows closely the structure of the book being criticized, but in a very polemical and antagonistic vein rather than in Leibniz's irenic, dialogical approach.

What made Herder contradict Kant was language. The starting point of his critique of the *Critique* is the non-existence of language in the Kantian system. Herder places language where it belongs: in the very heart of the Kantian theory of knowledge, that is, as synthesis of sensibility and intellect. Already as a young man Herder had written:

Wir haben durch die Sprache denken gelernt: sie ist also ein Schatz von Begriffen, die *sinnlich klar* an den Worten kleben, und vom gemeinen Verstande nie getrennet werden. (*Fragmente* 3, *FA* 1:423)

[We learned to think through language: it is therefore a treasury of concepts that cling close and with sensual clarity to the words and are never separated from common reason.]

Or, more simply: "Wir denken in der Sprache" (We think in language), as Herder wrote in the early *Fragmente* (*FA* 1:558). This conviction would

remain the foundation of his later work. Hence, in the words of Herder's *Metakritik*: "Die menschliche Seele denkt *mit Worten*" (The human soul thinks *with words*; FA 7:320). This message, of course, is not to the liking of philosophers, because it says: there is no such thing as pure reason, reason comes as language, *logos* is language.

From that simple but deep conviction Herder goes on to show that there are no "pure" forms of intuition or of the intellect: space and time are not a priori forms of intuition but depend upon experiences of the body: space comes first, then time is structured analogously. The same is true for the "pure" forms of understanding, the categories, which are according to Herder not a priori but depend upon language. Nearly two centuries later, the French linguist Émile Benveniste would show how deeply the presumably universal Kantian, that is, Aristotelian categories depend upon the Greek language.<sup>15</sup>

Herder opposes both Kant's transcendental aesthetics and his transcendental logic with a sensualistic — explicitly pre-critical — philosophy that finds the roots of human thought in the body and hence ascends from physical sensations to more abstract ideas, thus grounding the most general categories of the human mind in *Erfahrung*, or experience. *Erfahrung* is the basic term of Herder's philosophy, and language is intimately linked to it. The two parts of his *Metakritik* are titled *Verstand und Erfahrung* (Understanding and Experience) and *Vernunft und Sprache* (Reason and Language). Herder brings the second term in each of the binary pairs — experience and language, *Erfahrung* and *Sprache* — into opposition with Kant's main philosophical concepts, *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. As far as language is concerned, Herder uses the critical axioms he had developed in the *Abhandlung*: thought is inner speech, through which marks of the perceived reality articulate themselves; speech then is an exterior realization of inner speech, which is thought:

Was heißt *Denken*? *Innerlich Sprechen*, d.i. die innegewordnen Merkmale sich selbst aussprechen; sprechen heißt laut denken. (*Metakritik*, FA 7:389)

[What is it that we call *thought*? *Inner speech*, i.e. to articulate the internalized mark to oneself; to speak is to think aloud.]

There is no thought beyond experience and there is no thought beyond language. Herder makes his linguistico-empiricist alternative particularly clear in the deconstruction of Kant's chapter on "schematism" (*Metakritik*, FA 8:413–29). In this part of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes how intuition and intellect — the two stems of the human mind — work together to create a concept by creating a "schema":

Diese vermittelnde Vorstellung muß rein (ohne alles Empirische) und doch einerseits *intellektuell*, andererseits *sinnlich* sein. Eine solche ist das *transzendente Schema*. (KrV: A 138)

[This mediating representation must be pure (without anything empirical) and yet *intellectual* on the one hand and *sensible* on the other. Such a representation is the *transcendental schema*.<sup>16</sup>]

Herder harshly criticizes this Kantian schematism as a kind of spectral ghost that wanders around with no particular form. It is precisely here, according to Herder, where language comes in. Instead of Kant's spectral schemata, the human mind creates words, giving thus distinctiveness to his sensuous representations. Linguistic articulation is Herder's alternative to Kant's schematism:

So typisiert der Verstand, und so ward [. . .] aus Verbindung zweier dem Schein nach einander entgegengesetzter, einander aber unentbehrlicher Sinne, unter der Leitung des Verstandes — *Sprache*. [. . .] Und zwar eine Sprache durch *Artikulation*. *Artikulationen der Sprache* wurden dem Menschen, der sich vermittelst Auge und Ohr im Besitz so vieler innern *lebendigen Typen* fand, gleichsam Notgedrungen ein *Abbild* derselben. (*Metakritik*, FA 8:419–20)

[In this way reason typifies, and thus there arose . . . out of the connection of two apparently opposing but mutually indispensable senses, under the direction of reason — *language*. . . And indeed a language of *articulation*. *Articulations of language* became for the human being, who by way of eye and ear found himself in possession of so many inner *living types*, so to speak by necessity a *reflection* of them.]

It has often been observed that in the chapter on schematism, Kant has a certain intuition of what the contribution of language to human knowledge might be. He refrains, however, from attributing the schematic synthesis of intellect and intuition to language. And he is right in doing so, because this would have meant the intrusion of historical and particular thought — the semantics of particular languages — into the heart of his universalist conception of thought. This is precisely the effect of Herder's metacritical operation: to introduce language into the transcendental schematism means to introduce history and culture — and contingency — into that universal operation. Language comes as a particular language — and hence as languages. But, as Herder had already shown — in a typically Leibnizian manner — in the *Fragmente* (FA 1:423–24), this is not necessarily a relativistic destruction of universal concepts. According to Herder, concepts, even if they are created first in the particular semantics of a particular language, can become universal by the process of abstraction and by a universal movement of philosophical and scientific advancement.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Wilhelm von Humboldt would translate the “ghostly” Kantian schematism into the synthetical unit of concept and sound in the word. Without Herder’s polemical negativity, Humboldt would add his linguistic perspective to the Kantian theory of knowledge. This had the same effect as Herder’s attack: it introduced history, culture, and individuality — the particular semantics of particular languages — into the transcendental process, which, therefore, ceased to be transcendental. But, of course, this happened a whole generation later, after Hegel’s historicization of reason. Hegel and Humboldt built on Herder’s anthropological insights, which the immediate contemporaries and followers of Kant could not accept.

Herder did not win the metacritical battle, at least not immediately. His Kantian opponents parried his attack very effectively, mainly by silencing it. But if we consider what Humboldt later did to pure reason (nearly the same as Herder, but calmly, *en passant*, not as a “critique” but as an “addition” to Kant’s philosophy), what Nietzsche teaches us about the linguistic roots of reason, what analytical philosophy would later deal with (namely the semantics of natural language as a cognitive obstacle to scientific truth), if we take into account Wittgenstein’s proliferation of language games and Heidegger’s linguistic house of being,<sup>17</sup> Herder’s *Metakritik* — at least the gist of it — was not on the wrong philosophical road, in the long run: “Die menschliche Seele denkt mit Worten.” The human mind thinks with words.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Jürgen Trabant, *Vico’s New Science of Ancient Signs: A Study of Sematology* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Du Bellay, *La deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* (1549), ed. Henri Chamard (Paris: Fontemoing, 1904), 87–88.

<sup>3</sup> Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain* (1765), ed. Jacques Brunschwig (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), 290, 293.

<sup>4</sup> Translation from Johann Gottfried Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 50. In the following I adopt Forster’s translations for quotations from the *Fragments* and the *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, citing them as Forster plus page number.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. in David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Cordula Neis has studied the responses of all participants to the competition in her *Anthropologie im Sprachdenken des 18. Jahrhunderts: Die Berliner Preisfrage nach dem Ursprung der Sprache (1771)* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought* (New York, London: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> See Trabant, “Inner Bleating. Cognition and Communication in the Language Origin Discussion,” *Herder Jahrbuch* 2000 (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2000), 1–19.

<sup>9</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, ed. Albert Leitzmann et al. (Berlin: Behr, 1903–36), 51.

<sup>10</sup> See Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> See the essays by Zammito, Menges, and Böhm in this volume.

<sup>12</sup> On this problem see Wolfgang Pross, Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke*, vol. 3/2 (Munich: Hanser, 2002), 273, and Ulrich Gaier, *Herders Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1988), 170–72.

<sup>13</sup> See Humboldt, “Über das vergleichende Sprachstudium,” 4:1–34.

<sup>14</sup> See Hans Adler, “Ästhetische und anästhetische Wissenschaft. Kants Herder-Kritik als Dokument moderner Paradigmenkonkurrenz,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 68 (1994): 65–76.

<sup>15</sup> See Émile Benveniste, “Catégories de pensée et catégories de langue,” in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 63–74 (1958; reprint, Paris: Gallimard, 1966).

<sup>16</sup> Quoted after: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 272.

<sup>17</sup> See Jürgen Trabant, *Mithridates im Paradies: Kleine Geschichte des Sprachdenkens* (Munich: Beck, 2003).