

## KANT'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE?

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As is by now fairly well known, an intellectual revolution of sorts occurred in Germany during the second half of the eighteenth century which gave birth to the philosophy of language as we have known it since.<sup>1</sup> The main protagonists of that revolution were Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried von Herder. The philosophers of the Enlightenment had usually conceived of the relation between thoughts and concepts (or “ideas”), on the one hand, and language, on the other, in a sharply dualistic way: thoughts and concepts were in principle quite separable from whatever expression in language they might happen to receive (so that they could in principle occur without it), developed autonomously of it, and merely employed it as a useful means for memorization and especially for communication with other people. In dramatic opposition to this orthodox Enlightenment picture, Hamann and Herder introduced two starkly contrary doctrines: (1) Thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by (Hamann even goes as far as to say: identical with) language — i.e. a person can only think if he has

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<sup>1</sup> See the classic works on this subject by Isaiah BERLIN, Ian HACKING, and Charles TAYLOR. Also, M.N. FORSTER, *After Herder. Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* and ID., *German Philosophy of Language. From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond*.

a language and can only think what he can express linguistically. (2) Concepts or meanings are — not the sorts of items independent of language that much of the philosophical tradition has understood them to be, for example, referents, Platonic forms, or the subjective mental “ideas” favored by the Cartesian tradition and the British Empiricists, but instead — usages of words. (In what follows, I will refer to these two doctrines as doctrines (1) and (2).)

Kant was a contemporary of Hamann and Herder, and knew them both well: Kant and Hamann both spent most of their lives in Königsberg, and had a fairly close, though tense, relationship that lasted from 1759 until Hamann’s death in 1788. Herder came to study at the University of Königsberg in 1762, where he attended Kant’s lectures and quickly became one of Kant’s favorite students. After leaving Königsberg in 1764, Herder remained in direct contact with Kant for several years, before their relationship dwindled to indirect communication through Hamann, and eventually a famous and bitter intellectual feud. However, despite Kant’s close relationship to Hamann and Herder, a longstanding picture of Kant represents him as continuing the Enlightenment’s thought-language dualism and missing the boat of the new philosophy of language.

This picture was already propagated by Hamann and Herder themselves. In a famous negative response to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that Hamann wrote with the encouragement of Herder and sent to Herder in 1784, titled *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason* (though circulated privately at the time, it was not published until 1800), Hamann leveled the charge that Kant, in continuity with such Enlightenment predecessors as Berkeley and Hume, had divorced reason and concepts from language and attributed to them sovereignty over it, instead of recognizing their virtual identity with it. This was the third of three misguided ascriptions of “purity” to reason of which Hamann accused Kant’s book (the other two concerned reason’s divorce from and sovereignty over tradition/custom, and reason’s divorce from experience):

The first purification of reason consisted in the partly misunderstood, partly failed attempt to make reason independent of all tradition and custom and

belief in them. The second is even more transcendent and comes to nothing less than independence from experience and its everyday induction [...] The third, highest, and, as it were, empirical purism is [...] concerned with language, the only, first, and last organon and criterion of reason, with no credentials but tradition and usage [...] Receptivity of language and spontaneity of concepts! — From this double source of ambiguity pure reason draws all the elements of its doctrinairism, doubt, and connoisseurship.<sup>2</sup>

Herder then went on to publish his own more elaborate *Metacritique on the Critique of Pure Reason* in 1799, which basically repeated the same accusation against Kant concerning the relation of reason and concepts to language (along with a host of others).

This way of interpreting Kant on the relation of thought and concepts to language has been very common *since* the eighteenth century as well (whether with Hamann and Herder's negative assessment of the position ascribed to Kant or not). For example, a recent book on Kant by Wayne Waxman interprets him in roughly the same way, representing him as a thinker who, in continuity with such Enlightenment predecessors as Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, works purely at the level of psychology, and accords no fundamental role to language:

Kant's account of discursive understanding provides an excellent illustration of how limited and tenuous the relation is between a theory of ideas and a theory of linguistic discourse [...] Any residual temptation we may feel to compare thought as Kant portrayed it with linguistic discourse will surely be kept to a minimum when we note that his psychologistic explications resolve the elements of discursive thought into a non-discursive psychological process from which everything linguistic in nature has been excluded in favor of the nature and workings of the individual, isolated psyche: *judgment* is "that action of the understanding, whereby the manifold of given representations (they may be intuitions or concepts) are brought under one apperception in general" (B143; also *Logic*, #17); *thought* is "the action of bringing the synthesis of the manifold given to it elsewhere in intuition to the unity of apperception" (B145); and a *concept* is a "unitary consciousness" in which "the manifold successively intuited and then also represented is united in one representation" (A103).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> J.G. HAMANN, *Writings on Philosophy and Language*. Ed. K. HAYNES, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 207-8.

<sup>3</sup> W. WAXMAN, *Kant and the Empiricists. Understanding Understanding*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2005, p. 103.

Moreover, at least at first sight, this whole line of interpretation seems amply justified. For, as Waxman rightly implies here, Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as in his other two *Critiques* (the *Critique of Practical Reason* [1788] and the *Critique of Judgment* [1790]), scrupulously avoids using such terms as ‘language’, ‘sentence’, and ‘word’ in fundamental explanatory roles, in favor of using such purely psychological terms as ‘thought’, ‘judgment’, ‘concept’, ‘representation’, ‘intuition’, ‘principle’, ‘schema’, ‘idea’, and so on; and moreover, when he defines the latter terms, again avoids using terms which refer to language, instead employing only psychological ones. Nor does Kant at any point in the *Critique of Pure Reason* or the other two *Critiques* accord language anything more than an inessential and subordinate role. Indeed, even the one modest exception which Waxman seems ready to concede, namely Kant’s treatment of the logical functions of judgment in the Metaphysical Deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>4</sup> could safely be dropped: in that work logical functions of judgment are again conceived by Kant in purely psychological rather than linguistic terms.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, in the *Critique of Judgment* he explicitly holds that “aesthetic ideas”, which “give rise to much thinking”, cannot be captured in words or language.<sup>6</sup>

However, matters are not nearly so simple. For as Reinhard Brandt and Michael Wolff have both recently pointed out, there is in fact a series of less salient, more easily overlooked remarks by the critical Kant which seem to tend strongly in the direction of doctrines (1) and (2). Accordingly, Brandt argues that Kant operates “on the foundation of the unquestioned premise that all thinking is speaking”.<sup>7</sup> And Wolff argues, more elaborately:

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> One should not be misled here by the fact that Kant had already from a relatively early period drawn a certain *analogy* between logic and linguistic grammar. For example, already in the *Blomberg Logic* from the early 1770s we read: “Logic is related to the whole use of the understanding just as *grammatica* is to a language” (AA 24:24). [AA = “Akademie-Ausgabe,” i.e. *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. königliche preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften / deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1902–.]

<sup>6</sup> AA 5:314-16.

<sup>7</sup> R. BRANDT, *Die Urteilstafel*, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1991, p. 42.

Kant takes over the locution of “acts of the understanding” but rejects the parallelism between purely mental operations, on the one hand, and acts of speech, on the other. Kant dispenses with a psychology according to which there is such a thing as purely mental acts, speech-free operations of the understanding, and in consequence he dispenses with the assumption that logic is concerned with such operations [...] In particular, Kant rejects the parallelism between purely mental acts of judgment, on the one hand, and propositional expressions (*Sätze*), on the other [...] The concepts that correspond to the termini of a judgment are [...] for Kant just as little purely mental structures as the judgments themselves, but like them require linguistic expression. As for inference, this is already only intelligible as an operation with judgments. But if the latter consist in acts of speech, then inference cannot be regarded as a speech-free operation [...] Concerning the concept of a concept, it would be a mistake to accuse Kant of psychologism. In Kant's view, there can no more be concepts which are not linguistically formed, namely through expressions of concepts (termini) in judgments [...] than there can be judgments which are not expressed in words.<sup>8</sup>

To list Brandt and Wolff's main textual evidence for this interpretation (along with a little more of my own) in roughly chronological order: In the *Vienna Logic* (formerly dated by its first editor Gerhard Lehmann to around 1790, but more recently by Tillmann Pinder to around 1780), Kant states that “our cognition has need of a certain means, and this is language”;<sup>9</sup> and that “when [...] the logicians say ‘A judgment [*Urteil*] is a proposition [*Satz*] clothed in words’ that means nothing, and this definition is good for nothing. For how will they be able to think judgments without words?”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, in *On a Discovery* (1790), Kant writes that “the logicians are wrong in defining a proposition as a judgment expressed in *words*; for we also need to use words in thoughts for judgments that we do not express as propositions”.<sup>11</sup> Again, in the *Dohna-Wundlacken Logic* (1792), Kant says, “One must

<sup>8</sup> M. WOLFF, *Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1995, pp. 23 ff.; p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> AA 24:812.

<sup>10</sup> AA 24:934. It is also noteworthy that in the *Vienna Logic* Kant's longstanding mere *analogy* between logic and linguistic grammar (see note 5 above) seems to turn into something more than an analogy, into the picture of an intimate connection between the two (see AA 24:790 ff.; cf. *Metaphysics L<sub>2</sub>* from around 1790-1, at AA 28:576-7).

<sup>11</sup> AA 8:194

of course always express [a syllogism] with words, loudly or softly”.<sup>12</sup> Finally, and most elaborately of all, in the published *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), Kant writes of “the nature of thought as a speaking to and of oneself”, adding that “thinking is talking with oneself”;<sup>13</sup> states that “words are the means best adapted to signifying concepts. So a man who, because he was deaf from birth, must also remain dumb (without speech) can never achieve more than an analogue of reason”;<sup>14</sup> and holds that “when [a child] starts to speak in terms of ‘I’ a light seems to dawn on him, as it were [...] Before he merely *felt* himself; now he *thinks* himself”.<sup>15</sup> In short, one finds passages in which the critical Kant seems to assert that cognition generally and concepts, judgments, syllogisms, and the transcendental unity of apperception in particular are all fundamentally linguistic.

So what is going on here? Was Kant just another Enlightenment dualist concerning the relation of thought and concepts to language, or was he himself a sort of revolutionary working to establish the philosophy of language? The answer, it seems to me, is complicated and interesting.

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I think that quite a lot depends here on how one dates the *Vienna Logic*. If Lehmann’s original dating of it to around 1790 was right, then we seem to be dealing with two consecutive phases of Kant’s thought: the period of the three *Critiques*, i.e. 1781-90, during which Kant was evidently some sort of Enlightenment dualist; then the period 1790-8, during which he instead moved in the direction of doctrines (1) and (2). On the other hand, if Pinder’s new dating of the *Vienna Logic* to around 1780 is right, then the situation is much less tidy: in

<sup>12</sup> AA 24:781.

<sup>13</sup> AA 7:167, 192.

<sup>14</sup> AA 7:155; cf. 192-3.

<sup>15</sup> AA 7:127. These translations of the *Anthropology* are borrowed from Mary J. GREGOR’s edition of the work. Translations of other passages from Kant in this article are usually borrowed from the relevant volumes of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant* under the general editorship of Paul GUYER and Allen WOOD. Most other translations are my own.

particular, Kant's dualistic-looking position in the three *Critiques* was *contemporaneous* with some of his strongest statements suggestive of doctrines (1) and (2).

Now Pinder offers an imposingly learned and complicated argument in support of his new dating, an argument that largely turns on the interrelations between several known transcripts of the logic lectures.<sup>16</sup> I shall not go into the details of his argument here. However, it seems to me that even without doing so one can say with virtual certainty that it is mistaken. This is because the contents of the *Vienna Logic* themselves show clearly that Lehmann was right to assign it the later date of around 1790. Let me sketch how. First of all, notice a striking agreement in positions between the *Vienna Logic* and *On a Discovery* from 1790 which we have already encountered in passing: the *Vienna Logic* argues that "when [...] the logicians say 'A judgment [*Urteil*] is a proposition [*Satz*] clothed in words' that means nothing, and this definition is good for nothing. For how will they be able to think judgments without words?"; similarly, *On a Discovery* argues that "the logicians are wrong in defining a proposition as a judgment expressed in *words*; for we also need to use words in thoughts for judgments that we do not express as propositions". This is exactly the same point, and it is a point that one finds nowhere else in Kant. This already suggests a close proximity in date, which would place the *Vienna Logic* some time around 1790. Second, and more decisively, the *Vienna Logic*, despite the fact that its official topic is logic, contains page after page of discussion of *aesthetic* judgments,<sup>17</sup> and moreover gives exactly the same account of them as the *Critique of Judgment* from 1790. That this would have happened around 1780 is inconceivable; that it should have happened around 1790 is entirely natural. Third, the *Vienna Logic* contains clear echoes of Kant's bitter quarrel with the attack on the *Critique of Pure Reason* that was launched by Eberhard in a Leibnizian-Wolffian spirit in

<sup>16</sup> T. PINDER, 'Zu Kants Logik-Vorlesung um 1780, anlässlich einer neu aufgefundenen Nachschrift', in: R. BRANDT and W. STARK (Eds.), *Kant-Forschungen*, Vol. 1, Hamburg, Felix Meiner, 1987. Cf. N. HINSKE, *Kant-Index. Band 5. Stellenindex und Konkordanz zur "Wiener Logik"*, Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> AA 24:806-15, 818-19, 832, 835, 843, 849, 936.

the late 1780s, and which Kant then responded to publicly in *On a Discovery* from 1790.<sup>18</sup> Fourth, the *Vienna Logic* also contains a fairly clear allusion to the edict issued by Wöllner, Prussia's Minister of Education and Religion, in 1788 enforcing religious orthodoxy and the censorship of books on religion and morals (an edict of which Kant himself famously ran afoul when he published *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason* in 1792-3).<sup>19</sup> Fifth, the *Vienna Logic* also contains probable allusions to what Kant perceived to be the superiority of his own philosophy of history in *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784) over Herder's in *Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784-91) (whose first two books Kant reviewed critically in 1784-5).<sup>20</sup> In sum, it seems virtually certain that Lehmann's original dating of the *Vienna Logic* to around 1790 was correct, and that Pinder's new dating of it to around 1780 is mistaken. This still leaves the mildly

<sup>18</sup> AA 24:864, 868-70: "All prejudices are *principia* for judging. For them a judgment must arise then. Someone has found a proposition such-and-such maintained by Leibniz. Now he holds [Leibniz] to be thorough, although he does not have any insight into the proof. This is not prejudice but rather inclination based on a prejudice. The prejudices of well-known merits give strong presumption that everything that is said, e.g., by Wolff, Leibniz, etc., will be meritorious [...] He who wishes to expound something new in religion, metaphysics, etc., has to struggle with many difficulties [...] The first judgment on a thing that is new always occurs according to the very prejudices that one wanted to root out from the matter. When one struggles against a prejudice, it defends itself, as it were. For one cannot immediately be dissuaded from the inclination to a certain verdict, and then one has to do, not with reason, but with this inclination. For with reason, things would progress more easily [...] One could well leave them untouched [...] It is advisable, nonetheless, to uncover all errors and prejudices, if one is perfectly convinced of the correctness of his insight. For subsequently people will see that one is right [...] All the prejudices through which we imitate others by grounding our prejudice on the prestige of other men can be called servile prejudices".

<sup>19</sup> AA 24:874-5: "It is wrong [...] for the state to forbid men to write books and to judge, e.g., about matters of religion. For then they are deprived of the only means that nature has given them, namely, testing their judgment on the reason of others. The freedom to think in silence is given by the people who tyrannize so despotically. But that is only because they cannot prevent anyone from doing it [...] I also have a right to expound my thoughts publicly".

<sup>20</sup> AA 24:831, 891: "A system is where everything is subordinate to an idea that is concerned with the whole, and that has to determine the parts. E.g. Someone can know many histories without having a science thereof. For he does not have the form. He did not make himself a sketch of the whole, and did not order everything according to an idea [...] [A] system can be given for historical things, too, namely, by my setting up an idea, in accordance with which the manifold in history is to be ordered. Unfortunately, however, the *historici* are commonly rhapsodists. The idea could be this. Human actions derive from human nature, in order to fulfill completely its determination[;] if I take as my idea how human nature has developed in various ages, and how it has gradually gotten closer to its determination, i.e., to the completion of all the purposes that are prescribed for humanity on earth, then I bring a system to mind, in accordance with which I can order history".

interesting question of where exactly in Pinder's labyrinthine chain of assumptions and inferences the vitiating error or errors may lie. But fortunately, for our purposes here we can set that question aside. For a vitiating error or errors there must be.

In short, the dualism concerning the relation of thought and concepts to language that one finds in the three *Critiques* and the contrasting tendency towards doctrines (1) and (2) that one finds in passages of the sort cited by Brandt and Wolff belong to successive phases of Kant's development (they do not overlap chronologically).<sup>21</sup>

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Why did Kant's position change in this way? As a prelude to answering that question, it will be helpful to broach a further question that none of the commentators mentioned so far has considered, namely: What was Kant's stance concerning the relation of thought and concepts to language *before* the critical period?

The earliest phase of Kant's reflections on the subject that I have been able to identify occurs in the *Prize Essay* of 1763 and *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* of 1766. Several features of this phase are striking. First, in sharp contrast to the period of the *Critiques*, Kant at this earlier period often articulates fundamental issues concerning cognition and concepts in ways that include reference to linguistic usage [*Redegebrauch*], words [*Wörter*], and signs [*Zeichen*].<sup>22</sup> Second, and relatedly, in the following passage from *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* he already articulates a position that sounds surprisingly close in spirit to doctrines (1) and (2) (albeit without quite endorsing it unequivocally):

The reason which has persuaded people to think that they feel the *reflective* soul particularly in the brain is, perhaps, this: all reflection requires the mediation of *signs* for the ideas which are to be awakened, if the ideas, accompanied and supported by the signs, are to attain the required degree of

<sup>21</sup> I shall nonetheless consider briefly in an appendix at the end of this article how one would have to interpret Kant's position concerning language if Pinder *had* been right about the dating of the *Vienna Logic*.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. AA 2:278-9, 284-5, 291-2, 320-1.

clarity. The signs of our representations, however, are primarily those which are received either through hearing or through sight.<sup>23</sup>

Third, despite the preceding two points, Kant's picture of the relation of thought and concepts to language still seems to be fundamentally dualistic. For example, he argues in the *Prize Essay* that whereas geometry can illustrate its universal propositions concretely in a single figure,

If the procedure of philosophy is compared with that of geometry it becomes apparent that they are completely different. The signs employed in philosophical reflection are never anything other than words. And words can neither show in their composition the constituent concepts of which the whole idea, indicated by the word, consists; nor are they capable of indicating in their combinations the relations of the philosophical thoughts to each other. Hence, in reflection in this kind of cognition, one has to focus one's attention on the thing itself: one is constrained to represent the universal *in abstracto* without being able to avail oneself of that important device which facilitates thought and consists in handling individual signs rather than the universal concepts of the things themselves.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, he argues:

In philosophy generally and in metaphysics in particular, words acquire their meaning as a result of linguistic usage, unless, that is, the meaning has been more precisely determined by logical limitation. But it frequently happens that the same words are employed for concepts which, while very similar, nonetheless conceal within themselves considerable differences. For this reason, whenever such a concept is applied, even though one's terminology may seem to be fully sanctioned by linguistic usage, one must still pay careful attention to whether it is really the same concept which is connected here with the same sign.<sup>25</sup>

And lest the fundamentally psychological rather than linguistic nature of the court of last appeal that Kant is invoking here still be in any doubt, he then goes on to prescribe the following approach as appropriate in metaphysics:

<sup>23</sup> AA 2:326.

<sup>24</sup> AA 2:278-9.

<sup>25</sup> AA 2:284-5.

By means of certain inner experience, that is to say, by means of an immediate and self-evident inner consciousness, seek out those characteristic marks which are certainly to be found in the concept of any general property.<sup>26</sup>

So we actually have not just *two* phases in Kant's theoretical reflections on thought and language to take into consideration but *three*. First, there was this pre-critical phase from the early to mid-1760s, when his position seems to have been rather ambiguous between Enlightenment dualism and a certain tendency in the direction of doctrines (1) and (2). Second, there was the phase of the three *Critiques*, 1781-90, when he appears simply to have been an Enlightenment dualist, generally avoiding all mention of language in his discussions of fundamental issues concerning cognition and concepts, and instead using a thoroughly psychological terminology. Finally, there was a third phase, 1790-8, when he seems to have moved strongly in the direction of doctrines (1) and (2), developing a deeply linguistic picture of cognition, concepts, judgments, syllogisms, etc. This third phase reached a sort of climax in the *Anthropology* of 1798, which, in addition to its most important feature of giving an exceptionally emphatic and wide-ranging account of the fundamental role of language in such areas (as already illustrated above), also showed a heightened level of interest in other aspects of language, such as etymology.<sup>27</sup>

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These developmental observations do not really solve the puzzle we started out with, however. On the contrary, in some ways they complicate it. Curiouser and curiouser. So (once again) what is going on?

It seems to me that the likely answer becomes considerably clearer when a little more of the intellectual-historical background behind Kant's writings is filled in. So I shall now attempt to do this. The

<sup>26</sup> AA 2:286.

<sup>27</sup> Concerning these other aspects, see A. BEZZENBERGER, 'Die sprachwissenschaftlichen Äusserungen Kants', in: Königsberg university (Ed.), *Zur Erinnerung an Immanuel Kant. Abhandlungen aus Anlass der hundertsten Wiederkehr des Tages seines Todes*, Halle, Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1904.

background in question mainly concerns doctrine (1).<sup>28</sup> I have already mentioned the Enlightenment's central dualistic picture of the relation of thought and concepts to language. This was the picture first developed by Descartes and his successors in France, and then taken over by Locke, Hume, and others in England. Ian Hacking has aptly dubbed this Enlightenment picture or paradigm "the way of ideas".<sup>29</sup> However, during the Enlightenment there was also an important contrary picture which is much less well known (which has indeed been strangely neglected by the secondary literature). Leibniz already in works such as his *Dialogue on the Connection between Things and Words* (1677) developed a doctrine to the effect that thought is deeply dependent on language. For example, he writes there: "B. This [...] makes me realize that in my thinking I never recognize, discover, or prove any truth without calling up to mind words or some other kind of signs. A. Quite so; yes, if there were no signs, we should never think or conclude anything intelligibly".<sup>30</sup> Under Leibniz's influence Christian Wolff then went on to argue more publicly for a version of the same doctrine in his *Empirical Psychology* (1732)<sup>31</sup> and *Rational Psychology* (1734).<sup>32</sup> Wolff's version of the doctrine usually stopped short of claiming anything as strong as an *essential* dependence of *all* thought on language (let alone an identity between the two), but it did at least claim *some* sort of deep

<sup>28</sup> Doctrine (2) largely has a different, though equally interesting, intellectual-historical background: mid-eighteenth-century German biblical hermeneutics and an ultimate source in Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670). But since doctrine (2) is less centrally present in Kant than doctrine (1), I shall set its background to one side here. For a treatment of the subject, though, see M.N. FORSTER, 'Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation. Three Fundamental Principles', in: ID., *After Herder. Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*; and especially, M.N. FORSTER, 'Herder's Doctrine of Meaning as Use', forthcoming in: M. CAMERON and R. STANTON (Eds.), *Linguistic Meaning. New Essays in the History of the Philosophy of Language*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> I. HACKING, *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1975.

<sup>30</sup> G.W. LEIBNIZ, 'Dialogue on the Connection between Things and Words', in: P.P. WIENER (Ed.), *Leibniz Selections*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, p. 9. Cf. Leibniz's *Unvorgreifliche Gedanken, betreffend die Ausübung und Verbesserung der deutschen Sprache* (1697).

<sup>31</sup> C. WOLFF, *Psychologia Empirica*, in: ID., *Gesammelte Werke*, repr. Hildesheim, Georg Olms, 1968, esp. §284-5, 342, 351, 368-9.

<sup>32</sup> C. WOLFF, *Psychologia Rationalis*, in: ID., *Gesammelte Werke*, esp. §461.

dependence of thought on language in the case of *human beings*.<sup>33</sup> And there are even a few passages in which he does seem to make a form of the stronger claim, and thereby to come still closer to the Hamann-Herder doctrine (1).<sup>34</sup> In addition, Wolff offered various arguments in support of his version of the doctrine, including arguments to the effect that deaf-and-dumb people lack reason insofar as they lack language; that in cases where children have been raised by bears, and hence without language, they have lacked rational thought until they began to acquire language subsequently; and that it would be too difficult for the human mind to abstract and retain from the flux of experience the recurrent features that form the characteristic marks that constitute the general concepts that are required for any rational thought without the help of linguistic signs to label them.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, a whole series of German authors who were influenced by Leibniz and Wolff had gone on to echo their position in publications during the 1750s and 1760s. These authors included Moses Mendelssohn, Thomas Abbt, and Georg Friedrich Meier (especially in their contributions to the famous *Letters concerning the Most Recent Literature* [1759-65], on which Herder's *Fragments on Recent German Literature* [1767-8] subsequently provided a critical commentary). They also included Johann Peter Süßmilch (in his *Attempt at a Proof that the First Language Received its Origin not from Man but solely from the Creator* [first presented as an academic address in 1756, then published in 1766], to which Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* [1772] later replied). In other words, by the time of Kant's first phase, the early to mid-1760s, there was already a rather

<sup>33</sup> For example, at *Psychologia Empirica*, §284 Wolff argues that our abstractions become clearer and more distinct by the use of words, albeit while also expressing skepticism about people who infer from this that we cannot think without the use of words. Similarly, but a bit more strongly, at *Psychologia Rationalis*, §461 he argues, under the significant heading "The dependence of the use of reason on the use of speech": "The use of reason is facilitated and amplified by the use of speech; without the use of speech the use of reason may scarcely be conceded".

<sup>34</sup> For example, at *Psychologia Empirica*, §342 Wolff concludes: "And thus the indispensable necessity of words for designating our perceptions and of an indissoluble connection between intuitive cognition and symbolic cognition becomes clear". Similarly, at *Psychologia Rationalis*, §461 he concludes: "Hence it is sufficiently shown how great is the necessity of words or other equivalent signs for the production of mental operations".

<sup>35</sup> *Psychologia Rationalis*, §461; *Psychologia Empirica*, §284.

widespread counterparadigm concerning the relation of thought and concepts to language which tended significantly in the direction of doctrines (1) and (2). One might call this for short the 'Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm'.<sup>36</sup>

The existence of this counterparadigm helps to explain Kant's stance during the period 1763-6. In particular, it makes readily understandable what might otherwise have looked like an astonishingly precocious anticipation by Kant at that time of the Hamann-Herder position. Kant was himself at this early period just beginning to emerge from years spent under the dominating influence of the Leibniz-Wolff tradition, and he still retained much from that tradition. His general assumption at this period that language is involved in human cognition and conceptualization in a deep way, and in particular his suggestion that human beings require linguistic signs in order for their ideas to be at all clear, are therefore entirely natural continuations of the Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm. As for his retention, nonetheless, of a form of dualism, this is explained both by the fact that Wolff had himself normally left the relation of thought and concepts to language rather loose and by the fact that in the *Prize Essay* and *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* Kant is also heavily influenced by the more stridently dualistic tradition of Locke and Hume (Kant's discussions of language in the *Prize Essay* occur in the context of an appropriation of Locke's distinction between nominal and real definitions; while *Dreams of a Spirit Seer* is heavily indebted to Hume in several areas, including its general empiricism, its position on causation in particular, and its views about ethical value).

In short, Kant's somewhat ambiguous position concerning the relation of thought and concepts to language during the first phase of his development is actually just about what one might have predicted in light of the combination of philosophical influences at work on him at the time.

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<sup>36</sup> For a slightly fuller presentation of this historical account, see M.N. FORSTER, 'Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation. Three Fundamental Principles'.

What about the more important second phase of Kant's development, the period of the three *Critiques* (1781-90)? It seems to me that the position I have just ascribed to the pre-critical Kant, a position that is basically inspired by the Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm but which also accentuates the fundamentally dualistic nature of the relation of thought and concepts to language more in the spirit of the British Empiricists, persists in Kant's philosophy during the period of the three *Critiques*. Two sets of evidence support this claim.

First, the *Collins Ethics* from 1784-5 (an extensive set of student notes from Kant's ethics lectures in 1784-5) contains a very revealing discussion of prayer which shows that Kant is still at this time assuming both that human beings require language as some sort of causal support for their thinking and that the two things are nonetheless fundamentally distinct from each other (so that human beings' need for language is merely a sort of weakness):

All explanation [in prayer] in regard to our wants seems otiose, since God is manifestly aware of our needs, and the nature of our dispositions. The setting forth of our dispositions in words is equally useless, since God sees what is innermost in us [...] We men cannot make our ideas comprehensible other than by clothing them in words. We therefore put our pious wishes and trust into words, so that we may picture them to ourselves more vividly [...] Prayer [...] has only a subjective use. It is a weakness of man, that he has to express his thoughts in words. He speaks, then, when he prays, to himself, and expresses his thoughts and words so that he does not go astray, and on that account, too, it is absurd; but nevertheless it is still a subjectively necessary means of giving strength to his soul, and power to his dispositions towards action [...] A person already accustomed to having ideas and dispositions does not require the medium of words and explanation [...] The spirit of prayer subsists without any letter [...] [I]t is absurd to declare one's wishes to God, since He knows them already, and [...] it is a weakness in man to clothe his dispositions in voice and words.<sup>37</sup>

Second, the metaphysics (and also the anthropology) lectures from the mid-1770s to late-1780s contain numerous passages which show

<sup>37</sup> AA 27:323-4; cf. 728; also, 6:195-6. The principle that human beings' thought depends on language in some way can also be found at around the same period as the above passage in *What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?* (1786), at AA 8:144.

even more clearly the persistence in Kant of a fundamentally dualistic picture of the relation of thought and concepts to language, a picture according to which the former are in principle separable from, and possess sovereignty over, the latter. For example, *Metaphysics L<sub>1</sub>* from the mid-1770s includes the following passage:

We can also say: cognition is symbolic where the object is cognized in the sign, but with discursive cognition the signs are not symbols (*symbola*), because I do not cognize the object in the sign but rather the sign produces only the representation of the object for me. E.g., the word table is no symbol, but rather only a means of producing the representation of the understanding through association.<sup>38</sup>

And the *Mrongovius Metaphysics* of 1782-3 contains the following two revealing passages, one straight after the other:

The faculty of characterization (*facultas characteristic*) is the faculty for laying down certain signs in the understanding, or associating representations so that the one is the means of reproducing the others, and is also the faculty of signifying (*facultas signandi*). It is mechanical, i.e., without any exertion of power, and also involuntary, e.g., if I say Rome, then the representation of this city immediately springs forth. I may want it or not. This comes from habit. I fabricate signs in order to express that which I think.

Whereas by contrast:

The higher [faculty] has spontaneity in its representations. Consequently, we view ourselves as the compelling cause for it. Thus the will also belongs to the higher faculty, thus it is its own master, and the inclination to receptivity of the higher [cognitive faculty] is in general called understanding. The intellectual cognitive faculty is the faculty for thinking or for making concepts for ourselves.<sup>39</sup>

Kant's somewhat ambiguous pre-critical stance concerning the relation of thought and concepts to language therefore implicitly continues to underlie the three *Critiques*. This fact helps considerably towards understanding his dualistic-looking position there.

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<sup>38</sup> AA 28:238.

<sup>39</sup> AA 29:887-8; cf. 881. See also Kant's anthropology lectures from the 1770s and 1780s in AA 25.

On the other hand, it still leaves the following important question about that position unanswered: If, as we have just seen, he continues at the relevant period to acknowledge at least a causal dependence of human thought and concepts on language, while also retaining a more fundamental dualism concerning them, why does the former side of his position receive no recognition at all within the *Critiques* themselves, only the latter side of his position being clearly implied there?

In order to answer this question, it seems to me helpful to fill in yet a little more of the intellectual-historical background to Kant's work: Hamann and Herder continued and radicalized the Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm. That this is what happened historically has not been well understood by the secondary literature.<sup>40</sup> Nor has the secondary literature well understood exactly *how* it happened. In particular, as between Hamann and Herder it was actually Herder who was the leader here, not Hamann (as has usually been supposed, for example by Isaiah Berlin and Ian Hacking).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, their development of doctrines (1) and (2) extends much further back in time than has usually been realized: not merely to the 1780s, but to the mid-1760s, when Herder, under the influence of the Wolff-inspired authors of the *Letters concerning the Most Recent Literature* and to some extent also Süßmilch, began to commit himself to versions of doctrines (1) and (2). For example, Herder already writes in *On Diligence in Several Learned Languages* (1764):

What exactly is the connection between language and mode of thought? Whoever surveys the whole scope of a language surveys a field of thoughts and whoever learns to express himself with exactness precisely thereby gathers for himself a treasure of determinate concepts. The first words that we mumble are

<sup>40</sup> It is perhaps not too surprising that the parts of the secondary literature concerned with Hamann-Herder doctrine (1) that lack any very intimate first-hand acquaintance with the primary sources, such as the writings of Ian Hacking and even Isaiah Berlin, should have overlooked the doctrine's origin in Leibniz and Wolff. It is more surprising, though, that even the learned scholar of Hamann, Rudolf Unger, not only overlooks but actually *denies* that the doctrine has such an origin (R. UNGER, *Hamann's Sprachtheorie im Zusammenhange seines Denkens*, München, C.H. Beck, 1905, p. 214).

<sup>41</sup> For a detailed argument to this effect, see M.N. FORSTER, 'Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation. Three Fundamental Principles'. Also, several of the other essays in M.N. FORSTER, *After Herder. Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*.

the most important foundation stones of the understanding, and our nursemaids are our first teachers of logic.<sup>42</sup>

And he already writes in the *Fragments on Recent German Literature* (1767-8):

[Language] is [...] the form of cognition, not merely in which but in accordance with which thoughts take shape, where in all parts of literature thought sticks [*klebt*] to expression, and forms itself in accordance with this [...] In being brought up we learn thoughts through words, and the nurses who form our tongue are hence our first teachers of logic; with all sensible concepts in the whole language of common life the thought sticks to the expression [...] Language sets limits and contour for all human cognition.<sup>43</sup>

Herder henceforth continued to champion versions of doctrines (1) and (2) in a whole series of influential works, including the *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772) (albeit that the versions there were idiosyncratic), the *Oldest Document of the Human Species* (1774/6), *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul* (1778), and *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1784-91). By the early 1770s Hamann (who prior to that time had been a thought-language dualist in the standard manner of the Enlightenment) began to follow Herder in espousing these doctrines. Indeed, Hamann even had the temerity to publicly criticize Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* — whose versions of the doctrines were admittedly idiosyncratic and inferior in comparison with Herder's earlier and later versions of them — for, in effect, not holding them properly (which contributed to the quite false impression that it was Hamann rather than Herder who was the intellectual leader here).

Now Kant was well aware of this emergence of doctrines (1) and (2) in Herder and Hamann (they were, after all, respectively his most illustrious former student and one of his closest friends in Königsberg). This awareness can be seen from the following facts, for example. First, Kant received and read Herder's *Fragments on Recent German Literature*, where the doctrines are prominent, when it first appeared in

<sup>42</sup> J.G. HERDER, *Johann Gottfried Herder Werke*. Ed. U. GAIER et al., Frankfurt am Main, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–, 1:27.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:556-7.

1767-8 — thanking Herder for sending him a copy in a letter from May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1767,<sup>44</sup> though also (as Kurt Stavenhagen later reported) reacting with some dismay to its contents.<sup>45</sup> Second, Kant also published reviews of the first two books of Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity*, where the doctrines are again prominent, in 1784-5, and evidently went on to read the rest of the work as well, since his own *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786) implicitly replies to book 10 of Herder's work.<sup>46</sup> Third, and perhaps most importantly, in the interim Kant had read Herder's *Oldest Document of the Human Species*, in which the doctrines are again prominent, when it appeared in 1774 and immediately engaged in a lengthy correspondence about it with Hamann. Moreover, in the course of that correspondence — which Hamann (rather indiscreetly) published later in the same year as *Christiani Zacchaei Telonarchae Prolegomena on the Most Recent Interpretation of the Oldest Document of the Human Species* (1774) — Hamann explicitly articulated his own version of doctrine (1) to Kant as follows (this also happens to be Hamann's first *explicit* articulation of it anywhere):

So true is it that speaking [*Sprache*] and writing [*Schrift*] are the most essential instruments [*Organa*] and conditions of all human instruction, more essential and absolute than light for seeing and sound for hearing.<sup>47</sup>

In short, from about 1767 on Kant became well aware, not only of the Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm, which had already tended in the direction of doctrines (1) and (2), but also of the full-blooded versions of doctrines (1) and (2) that Herder and Hamann were now championing.

It seems to me that this historical situation sheds considerable further light on the second phase of Kant's development, the period of the three *Critiques*. One thing that it helps to make clear is that Kant's

<sup>44</sup> AA 10:70.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. J.H. ZAMMITO, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 262.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. A.W. WOOD, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1999, pp. 226 ff.

<sup>47</sup> J.G. HAMANN, *Briefwechsel*. Ed. W. ZIESEMER und A. HENKEL, Wiesbaden, Insel, 1955–, 3:87. For the published version, see J.G. HAMANN, *Johann Georg Hamann Sämtliche Werke*. Ed. J. NADLER, Vienna, Verlag Herder, 1949, 3:130.

avoidance of mentioning language in fundamental roles within the *Critiques*, his articulation of his philosophy there in exclusively psychological terms instead, has to be read as some sort of *statement* (as it were), i.e. as a reflection of a deliberate decision with motives behind it. The combined facts that he *had* mentioned language in more fundamental roles in the pre-critical writings, that he had in particular accepted a version of the Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm's anticipations of doctrines (1) and (2) there, that he still continued to do so even during the period of the *Critiques* themselves (as is shown especially by the *Collins Ethics*), and that he was not only thus long familiar with, and indeed himself committed to, such anticipations of the doctrines, but was also intimately familiar with Herder and Hamann's *full-blooded* versions of them, together make it impossible to see this silence in the *Critiques* about a fundamental role for language as merely a result of intellectual inertia, oversight, or lack of interest.<sup>48</sup>

But *what sort* of statement is this? *Why* does Kant in the *Critiques* choose not to mention the dependence of human beings' thought and concepts on language, instead focusing only on their more fundamental duality? I think that a large part of the explanation here must be systematic: Since Kant himself only acknowledges some sort of causal dependence of human beings' thought and concepts on language, but still believes that thought and concepts are in their essential nature separable from and sovereign over language, he is under no real *obligation* when discussing the very nature of thought and concepts in the *Critiques* to discuss their linguistic underpinnings. Moreover, the official *a priori* character of the *Critiques* would make doing so strictly irrelevant or even inappropriate, since in his view causal relations are always *a posteriori*. There is therefore probably a certain sensibly

<sup>48</sup> A rough analogy: When Plato conspicuously avoids discussing the problem of ethical dilemmas in his writings, even at points where it would seem to call for attention — as it does, for example, when Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro* insists on the propriety of prosecuting his own father for what he (Euthyphro) regards as the unlawful killing of an employee, contrary to a conventional duty of filial loyalty — the fact that ethical dilemmas had constituted one of the central preoccupations of Greek tragedy before Plato makes it impossible to see this as merely a result of intellectual inertia, oversight, or lack of interest on Plato's part; it instead has to be interpreted as some sort of *statement* on his part, some sort of reflection of a deliberate decision with motives behind it.

motivated division of intellectual labor in operation here that takes into account the distinctive tasks and character of the *Critiques* (leaving it open to Kant to discuss language's role as a sort of causal underpinning of cognition in other, more appropriate theoretical contexts perhaps).

However, I strongly suspect that there is also more to the full explanation than just that (after all, the *Critiques* despite their official *a priori* character do contain a fair amount of incidental *a posteriori* information about *other* subjects, and they seem not merely to omit the topic of language's important role in underpinning cognition but actively to suppress it). Specifically, it seems to me likely that another reason behind Kant's silence about the role of language in the *Critiques* lies in the fact that he knew that doctrines (1) and (2) were already intimately associated with Herder and Hamann in the public's perception. This association will have made him reluctant to commit himself to anything like doctrines (1) and (2) in his own publications. Why? The answer is roughly as follows.

First, he probably worried that expressing positions that sounded at all like doctrines (1) and (2) would invite confusion with the strong versions of those doctrines that Herder and Hamann were now championing and which he himself rejected at this period. He may well also have worried that it would suggest certain further arguable consequences of those strong versions which were inconsistent with positions he himself held in the *Critiques*, in particular the sort of historical mutability of reason that Herder had already treated as a consequence of them in *Fragments on Recent German Literature* (1767-8) and which Hamann then in the *Metacritique on the Purism of Reason* (1784) explicitly championed in opposition to Kant's own ahistorical conception of reason.<sup>49</sup>

Second, and relatedly: In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant famously foreswears undertaking "any literary inquiry into the meaning" that a historical predecessor such as Plato has attached to his own terms.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> While it is not clear that Kant ever read, or learned of the contents of, the latter work (Hamann's), he *is* known to have read the former work (Herder's).

<sup>50</sup> I. KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, AA 3 and 4, A313/B370.

And in his reviews of Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* he confesses that "since the reviewer, if he sets foot outside of nature and the path that reason offers to knowledge, feels quite helpless, and since he is altogether inexperienced in scholarly philology and the knowledge or critical examination of ancient documents, he is completely incompetent to make philosophic use of the facts that are related and verified in that branch of knowledge".<sup>51</sup> One perceives in such remarks as these Kant's uncomfortable sense of his own lack of competence in matters concerning language and the interpretation of texts, especially in comparison with Hamann and Herder.<sup>52</sup> To have acknowledged a fundamental role for language in the *Critiques* would potentially have exposed him to contests with Herder and Hamann on this home turf of theirs. So for this reason too, he preferred to exclude the whole subject.

Third, there was probably also a more personal reason: The nature of Kant's initial encounter with Hamann in 1759 had already stamped him in Kant's mind as a religious fanatic in need of conversion to reason, and Kant evidently retained that impression of him ever henceforth (not unfairly, by the way). After Herder's student days, Kant's view of Herder became similarly negative. Kant already took a dim view of Herder's approach to literary and philosophical topics in the *Fragments on Recent German Literature* when it appeared in the 1767-8 (Stavenhagen reports that Kant was actually "horrified").<sup>53</sup> Kant's 1774 correspondence with Hamann concerning Herder's *Oldest Document of the Human Species* shows that Kant was also hostile to what he regarded as Hamann and Herder's shared religious fanaticism and irrationalism in their treatment of the Old Testament. Kant's two 1784-5 reviews of Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* reveal his deep hostility to Herder's positions and methods in the philosophy of history as well. And by 1789 Kant was also writing to Jacobi strongly disparaging the neo-Spinozist theology that Herder had articulated in

<sup>51</sup> AA 8:63. This translation is borrowed from L.W. Beck.

<sup>52</sup> As Bezenberger shows in 'Die sprachwissenschaftlichen Äusserungen Kants', this sense was well grounded.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J.H. ZAMMITO, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology*, p. 262.

*God. Some Conversations* (1787).<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Kant's intellectual hostility towards Herder also became bitterly personal during the period of the *Critiques*: already by the early 1780s he was evidently blaming Herder for the initial failure of the *Critique of Pure Reason* to excite public interest;<sup>55</sup> his two reviews of Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* from 1784-5 were calculatedly condescending; in the 1789 letter to Jacobi recently mentioned he accused Herder of a "lack of integrity [*Mangel an Aufrichtigkeit*]"; and later, in the *Opus Postumum*, he even went as far as to write that "unreason and deliberate deception are Herder's trademark".<sup>56</sup> Presumably, therefore, Kant was loath to lend credibility to Herder and Hamann's work by committing himself publicly to anything like their doctrines (1) and (2). This, then, is probably a further part of the explanation of his suppression of the role of language in the *Critiques*.

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So much for the important second phase of Kant's development on the subject of language, the period of the three *Critiques*, 1781-90. The *third* phase — the period 1790-8 — seems to me to mark a real change in Kant's position, however. Concerning doctrine (1), Kant is no longer content merely to assert *some* sort of dependence of thought on language in the case of *human beings*, as before. Rather, his objection in *On a Discovery* and the *Vienna Logic* to defining a proposition [*Satz*] as a judgment [*Urteil*] expressed in words on the grounds that a judgment must already be verbal seems to imply that this involvement of words is part of the very *definition* or *essence* of a judgment. For if it were instead merely a matter of a *causal* dependence of *human beings'* judgments on words, the objection to the proposed definition would not be a sound one. Moreover, when Kant writes in the *Anthropology* of "the nature of thought as a speaking to and of oneself", and says that

<sup>54</sup> AA 11:74.

<sup>55</sup> For an account of this, see F.C. BEISER, *The Fate of Reason. German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard UP, 1987, pp. 149 ff.

<sup>56</sup> AA 21:225.

“thinking is talking with oneself”, not only do we here see a strong confirmation of the interpretive point just made, since this again seems to imply that language is part of the *definition* or *essence* of thought or judgment, but we even see Kant opting for the strongest possible, “identity” version of doctrine (1), the version (more usually espoused by Hamann than by Herder) which says not merely that thought is essentially dependent on and bounded by language, but that it *is* language. Similarly concerning doctrine (2), while Kant never quite reaches an outright equation of concepts or meanings with word-usages, in the *Anthropology* he does at least come quite close to it, writing (as we have seen) that “words are the means best adapted to signifying concepts. So a man who, because he was deaf from birth, must also remain dumb (without speech) can never achieve more than an analogue of reason”.<sup>57</sup>

Why did Kant shift to this whole new and more radical position? Presumably, the cumulative effect of the Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm with its anticipations of doctrines (1) and (2), which he had already known and accepted in some form since at least the 1760s, and the Herder-Hamann radicalization of that counterparadigm into full-fledged versions of doctrines (1) and (2) between the mid-1760s and the 1780s, of which he was constantly being made aware at that time, eventually convinced him that something like doctrines (1) and (2) must be correct, and so moved him to accept versions of them.<sup>58</sup>

It is less clear to what extent this shift in Kant’s position was grounded in *arguments*. Several of the people just mentioned as having influenced him to make it had striven hard to provide compelling arguments for their versions of doctrines (1) and (2) — as we noted in passing, this was already true of Wolff and his followers; it was also true, indeed in

<sup>57</sup> Cf. the pre-critical Kant’s statement in the *Prize Essay* (as quoted previously): “In philosophy generally and in metaphysics in particular, words acquire their meaning as a result of linguistic usage”.

<sup>58</sup> Concerning Kant’s peculiar combination here of a public rejection of Herder and Hamann with an eventual more private concession to them, one might compare his late response to Fichte. In that case too his public stance was one of rejection, especially in his famous open letter on Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* (1799). But the unpublished *Opus Postumum* (1796-1804) nonetheless contains passages which come very close indeed to accepting Fichte’s central doctrine in the *Wissenschaftslehre* that the self’s self-positing creates the whole world of experience and its objects.

spades, of Herder, who, as I have explained elsewhere, not only developed highly sophisticated and compelling positive arguments in support of the doctrines,<sup>59</sup> but also equally sophisticated and compelling defenses of them against a family of potential *prima facie* objections.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, apart from alluding in the *Anthropology* to Wolff's argument about deaf-and-dumb people lacking reason (as we saw), Kant shows little evidence of a concern to provide arguments in this area.<sup>61</sup>

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Does Kant have a philosophy of language, then? Yes and no. *Yes*: As we have seen, besides espousing a version of the Leibniz-Wolff counter-paradigm, with its anticipations of doctrines (1) and (2), from the early 1760s until around 1790, Kant also during the period 1790-8 developed a position that incorporated more full-blooded versions of doctrines (1) and (2) — the most distinctive doctrines of modern philosophy of language. So in this sense he *does* have a philosophy of language. *No*: However, Kant's versions of these doctrines were essentially just borrowed from other people: in part from the Leibniz-Wolff tradition, in part from its more radical heirs Herder and Hamann. Moreover, as we just noted, there is little evidence that he either appropriated their arguments for the doctrines or developed new ones of his own; instead, he seems to have espoused them in a rather dogmatic way. So to the extent that unoriginality and dogmatism are considered to be contraindications, Kant does *not* really have a philosophy of language.

<sup>59</sup> See M.N. FORSTER, 'Herder's Philosophy of Language, Interpretation, and Translation. Three Fundamental Principles'.

<sup>60</sup> See M.N. FORSTER, 'Gods, Animals, and Artists. Some Problem Cases in Herder's Philosophy of Language', in: M.N. FORSTER, *After Herder. Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*.

<sup>61</sup> Incidentally, the same thing is true of Hamann. It is quite ironic that in this important area of philosophy it is Herder, increasingly regarded by Kant as lamentably short of serious reasons in his philosophizing and as in this respect just like Hamann, who in fact turns out to have had them, whereas Kant himself did not, but instead closely resembled Hamann in adopting the doctrines involved dogmatically.

## APPENDIX

The above interpretation has been fairly heavily dependent on my claim that the *Vienna Logic* dates to around 1790, as Lehmann originally held, rather than to around 1780, as Pinder has more recently argued. I have little doubt that this is correct. Nonetheless, it may be of some interest to consider briefly how a dating of the *Vienna Logic* to around 1780 would affect the interpretation I have given above.

What I have said about the first phase of Kant's development, the phase that began in the early 1760s, would be unaffected. What I have said about the second phase, the phase of the three *Critiques*, 1781-90, would probably be affected only slightly: One would basically have to add the *Vienna Logic* passages concerning the dependence of cognition and judgment on language to the other passages from that phase, and — unless one were prepared to say that Kant was inconsistent during it — interpret the former passages in conformity with the latter, especially in conformity with the *Collins Ethics* passage on prayer. The upshot of doing so would presumably be that the *Vienna Logic* passages are really much less radical than they appear to be: merely expressions of the sort of *causal* dependence of *human beings'* cognition on language that the *Collins Ethics* passage concedes as part of an account that is more fundamentally dualistic.

The main effect would probably concern the third phase, the period 1790-8. Since the *Vienna Logic* passages are largely identical in substance with the remaining evidence for Kant's shift to a new position during the third phase (in particular, with that in *On a Discovery*) and moreover constitute some of the *strongest* evidence for such a shift, the need to re-interpret them as consistent with Kant's position in the second phase would seriously undercut the case for saying that there was a shift to a new position in the third phase at all. Instead, it would presumably now become more exegetically attractive to re-interpret the residual evidence for such a shift, including the passages from the *Anthropology*, as, likewise, really no such thing but instead merely expressions of the sort of *causal* dependence of *human beings'* cognition on language that the pre-critical writings and the *Collins Ethics* passage had already conceded as one side of a position that was more fundamentally dualistic. Helping

this re-interpretation would be the fact that the official orientation of the *Anthropology* to empirical psychology makes the elaboration of such a theme more appropriate there than it would have been in strictly *a priori* works such as the three *Critiques* — which could explain away the seeming discrepancy between the two sets of texts as in fact only the result of a sensibly motivated division of intellectual labor.

In short, the overall picture of Kant's position on language that emerged would probably be one of much greater continuity: the sort of acceptance of the Leibniz-Wolff counterparadigm combined with an accentuation of its dualism under the influence of the British Empiricists that one already finds in the pre-critical Kant of the 1760s not only continues during the period of the three *Critiques* but also forever thereafter.<sup>62</sup>

KEYWORDS: Kant, language, Hamann, Herder, Leibniz, Wolff, thought, concept.

SUMMARY:

The critical Kant has often been read as a sort of dualist concerning the relation of thought and concepts to language — most famously by Hamann in his *Meta-critique* of 1784, but also by many other commentators since. However, recent German scholarship has ascribed to Kant the same sort of anti-dualistic insight into the essential dependence of thought and concepts on language that Hamann and Herder became famous for. Which interpretation is right? This article argues that there is textual evidence supporting both interpretations, but that it belongs to different periods of Kant's development: the dualism belongs to the period of the three *Critiques*, lasting until about 1790, after which Kant switched to anti-dualism. The article also argues that during the period of the three *Critiques* Kant gave an exaggerated impression of the strength of the dualism to which he was committed, before eventually abandoning it in the later period, and that in both cases this was largely due to the influence of Hamann and Herder, which in the first case caused Kant to try to distance himself from their position and in the second case eventually caused him to accept it.

<sup>62</sup> I would like to thank audiences at Notre Dame University, Leuven University, and the University of Western Ontario who listened to this article as a talk and provided helpful feedback which helped me to improve it in various ways. Special thanks go to Karl Ameriks, Karin de Boer, Margaret Cameron, Lidia Gasperoni, Anja Jauernig, Fred Rush, Rob Stainton, and Lu de Vos.