

## *Introduction*

Jere O'Neill Surber

The historical period that witnessed the rise of Kantian philosophy, German Idealist thought, and Romanticism was also the seminal era of modern linguistics and the philosophy of language. Both on the face of it and for numerous more complicated reasons, it would be surprising if those wide-ranging systematic thinkers of this period were not themselves concerned with linguistic issues as a crucial dimension of their overall philosophical projects. As a substantial amount of scholarship over the last thirty years or so has quite firmly established, this was in fact the case.<sup>1</sup> What remains surprising is not that these thinkers of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gave serious and sustained attention to matters linguistic, but that later scholars for so long paid so little attention to this important dimension of the thought of this period. In particular, the much heralded and allegedly novel “linguistic turn” of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (both, one might add, in the “analytic” and “Continental” traditions), either through historical ignorance or willful neglect, missed a significant opportunity to link itself with and situate itself in relation to what might well be regarded as the “original linguistic turn” of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. More recently, however, some of these historical and conceptual lacunae have begun to be filled in, so that today it is no longer possible seriously to claim, for instance, that the German Idealist philosophers were simply “linguistically naïve,” or that the twentieth century’s alleged “linguistic turn” was unprecedented in the history of philosophy.

Both historically and conceptually, this recent “discovery” of linguistic issues as important and fundamental to the philosophical tradition of Kant and the German Idealists commenced with new approaches to the systematic philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel. From the realization not only of the quantity but of the fecundity of Hegel’s reflections on language throughout his philosophical development, scholars have more recently been led to trace, in a sort

of reverse, “crablike” fashion, their “*Entstehungsgeschichte*” through the works of Hegel’s immediate intellectual predecessors, including such figures as F. W. J. Schelling; J. G. Fichte; such Romantics as the Brothers Schlegel and A. F. Bernhardi; the “Metacritics” J. Herder, F. Jacobi, and J. Hamann; Kant and his immediate successors; and, more recently, Friedrich Schleiermacher and W. von Humboldt.<sup>2</sup> Out of this has emerged a much more complete and accurate map of the history and contours of these discussions about language, a cartography that in turn sheds considerable new light on the initial starting point of this research, the linguistic thought of Hegel himself.

The present volume, the first anthology exclusively dedicated to Hegel’s linguistic thought, represents, perhaps, both the end of one cycle of scholarship and the commencement of another. On the one hand, all the authors represented in this collection take as now established the importance and centrality of linguistic issues for Hegel’s own thought; they regard this case as already made and draw freely upon the work of those earlier scholars who accomplished this.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, each chapter, in its own distinctive way, quite deliberately attempts to relate Hegel’s own linguistic reflections to later developments or issues of broader and still current philosophical concern. Thus, in the history of Hegel scholarship, this collection stands as something of a watershed.

In the first part of this chapter, I will begin by offering a broad characterization of the linguistic thought within and on the basis of which Hegel’s own views of language emerged; then I will focus more narrowly on the ways in which linguistic issues emerged and were treated by Hegel’s immediate philosophical predecessors, especially Kant, Fichte, and Schelling; finally, I will review the major points in Hegel’s own philosophical development in which linguistic matters were explicitly highlighted. In the second part, I will consider the four main issues with which the chapters in this volume are concerned and review the contributions of each chapter to these debates.

## PART I: THE HISTORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND OF HEGEL’S LINGUISTIC THOUGHT

### *1. Linguistic Thought in the Later Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*

Even a cursory review of the intellectual history of this period will convince the reader that linguistic issues had come into their own as a major focal point of contemporaneous debates. To bring some order into the virtual explosion of research and reflection about language that occurred during the period just preceding Hegel, we can, in a preliminary way, divide these various attitudes and approaches to linguistic issues into three major groups: the empirical, the metacritical, and the philosophical.

The empirical approach,<sup>4</sup> which largely but not exclusively contributed to the widely recognized founding of “modern linguistics” that occurred during this period, emerged, at least in part, as a result of a greatly expanded mass of “linguistic data” that had become available as a result of the intensive processes of exploration and colonial expansion that had been underway since the advent of modernity. While the study of grammar, especially of ancient Greek and Latin, extended back to classical times, the encounters with a wide variety of unfamiliar languages, many unrelated to what would later be called the “Indo-European” language group, naturally provoked new efforts to formulate grammars for them and explore the roots of their vocabularies. It is hardly surprising that such enterprises were centered in the major colonial nations, especially Great Britain and France. In the German-speaking countries, not yet colonial powers and still feeling the effects of the Reformation, the empirical approach to language initially found a more natural home within the broader projects of “lower” and “higher” biblical criticism. However, with the rise of the early “German phase” of the Romantic movement and the stirrings of nationalist sentiments with which it was often associated, the empirical approach to language soon began to be applied to European languages themselves. Many during this period, like the early German linguists J. Grimm, F. Bopp, and A. Schleicher, regarded important political and cultural issues as turning on the determination of the correct “lineages” of the various Germanic languages. On a parallel front, the German Romantics, to some degree under the influence of the Classicism promoted by J. Wincklemann, F. Schiller, and W. Goethe, engaged in intensive efforts to translate classical authors, especially Plato, and more recent “classics” such as Dante and Shakespeare, into the German language. The former trend of interest in non-European languages, along with a conviction that such research could also shed important light on the structure and functioning of existing European languages, coalesced in the pioneering work of W. von Humboldt, an immediate contemporary of Hegel usually regarded as the “founder of modern comparative linguistics.”

For the most part, this explosion of interest in the empirical study of language served more to highlight language as a crucial, even determining, aspect of the study of history and culture than to provide philosophers with new conceptual insights that might emerge from such studies. That such research—for example the formulation of a grammar for Sanskrit, demonstrating its connection with existing European languages—was an impressive and important intellectual achievement was duly noted by more philosophically inclined thinkers, but, as Kant himself made clear, offered little of importance to the more fundamental conceptual concerns of the philosopher. Nonetheless, the empirical linguistic research of the time did succeed in centrally positioning linguistic issues on the intellectual map; demonstrating that the study of language could indeed be approached scientifically and not

merely as a rhetorical or poetic art; and, as it were, presenting a set of “answers” in search of fundamental “questions” to be posed by those more conceptually or philosophically inclined.

Even before the commencement of the distinctive movement in German philosophy to which Hegel belonged, this broadly empirical thematization of language had already been accompanied by sporadic philosophical reflections upon the significance of linguistic issues for a philosophical understanding of human experience and knowledge. Such earlier thinkers as Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, Montesquieu, Condillac, Hume, and Rousseau had, in various ways, indicated the centrality of language for the philosophical enterprise itself. Many of their insights and concerns found their way into the German intellectual milieu through the famous “*Ursprungsfrage*,” regarding the divine versus the human or “natural” origin of language posed by the Prussian Academy in 1769. J. Herder’s famous “Prize Essay” of 1772, written in response to this challenge, catapulted him into the forefront of linguistic debates in the German-speaking lands and set much of the agenda for subsequent German thought about language that would continue well into the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Herder, responding to the question posed by the Prussian Academy, argued decisively and passionately for its naturalistic origin and development. His principal basis for this, not perhaps entirely original but widely influential, was his insistence that the development and structure of thought and of language are inseparable from one another. On Herder’s view, it was true both that language serves as the privileged vehicle or medium for any possible thought and that thought is entirely limited to and shaped by the language in which it is expressed. Herder subsequently expanded this insight into a lengthy and detailed narrative of the “co-development” of human nature, language, culture, and history in his equally influential *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784–91), a work sometimes cited as influential for Hegel’s later project of a “phenomenology of Spirit.”

Beginning during the 1780s, and to a large extent in reaction against the increasing influence of Kant’s Critical Philosophy, Herder’s linguistic views, in conjunction with those of that “other famous Koenigsbergian,” J. Hamann, came to form the basis for a new and self-conscious approach not just to language but to any human enterprise that employed language as its “vehicle.” Under the name “*Metakritik*,” a neologism first employed by Hamann in the title of a decidedly anti-Kantian essay of 1783, Herder and Hamann, along with some other like-minded thinkers such as F. Jacobi, launched a sustained linguistic critique of philosophy, particularly the transcendental philosophy of Kant and his followers, that would culminate at the turn of the century in Herder’s own detailed elaboration of this viewpoint, his *Verstand und Erfahrung*.<sup>6</sup>

This “metacritical” approach represented, in some important respects, a sophisticated linguistic development of certain strands of earlier empirical,

naturalistic, and skeptical views. While its principal target was the transcendental mode of philosophizing developed by Kant, it could equally well be brought to bear on both pre-Kantian metaphysical views as well as on later “idealistic” developments of Kant’s critical philosophy such as that of Fichte. Always explicitly critical and sometimes highly polemical, *Metakritik* proceeded by a relentless elaboration of the implications, for philosophical discourse and others dependent upon it, of the dual theses of the naturalistic origins and development of language and its complete coextensiveness with thought. With regard to its proximate target, Kantian transcendental philosophy, the *Metakritik* maintained that the “transcendental standpoint,” at best, needlessly restated, in a more obscure “conceptual idiom,” linguistic distinctions already at work in and better accessed by a direct consideration of “natural language,” and, at worse, created a philosophical “phantom language” that then proceeded to introduce distortions and confusions into the language of the “sound human understanding” from which it arose. More broadly, and clearly anticipating the conclusions drawn by Wittgenstein over a century later, the metacritics viewed any philosophical discourse that was not *“Sprachkritik”* (a term first introduced by Herder) as a sort of pathological departure from the “healthy state” of natural language. In its full elaboration, the metacritical position came to argue both that every “philosophy” was merely a linguistic elaboration of the attitudes of its time, themselves creatures of a specific historical level of linguistic development, and that any claim that philosophical thought might occur outside of or transcend its linguistic and historical limitations was intellectual mystification, pure and simple.

This metacritical assault on both the possibility and cogency of any philosophical project that claimed to be more than *“Sprachkritik”* seems to have provoked the heirs of Kant into more explicit reflections upon language, a task Kant himself had, for the most part, neglected. Beginning with Fichte’s monograph-length work on language of 1795 and continuing through Hegel’s “Berlin system” in the 1820s, a fairly continuous strand of philosophical reflection about linguistic issues can be traced through the works of the German Idealists (and others influenced by this movement as well). Although, as we will soon see, they differed considerably in their approaches to and treatments of such matters, their reflections all turned on several convictions that directly opposed those of the metacritics.

Given that all the later Idealists regarded Kant’s Critical Philosophy and its “transcendental turn” as a seminal and determining moment for their own problematics and thought, they could not accept the thesis of the “strong identity” of thought and language proposed by the metacritics. Though Kant himself seemed to have cavalierly dismissed linguistic issues as “merely empirical,” hence falling below the threshold of interest of the transcendental philosopher, it was clear to the German Idealists, beginning with Fichte, that Kant’s “transcendental turn” itself implied that the relation between

thought and language could be neither one of simple identity (as the metacritics held) nor one of simple difference between the conceptual and the empirical (as Kant's own view suggested).<sup>7</sup> Rather, although the later Idealists were convinced that there were, in fact, philosophically important and reciprocally determining relations between language and thought that demanded further elucidation (as opposed to Kant's dismissive view), they realized that the metacritical idea of their complete mutual determination would (as the metacritics clearly intended) render any further philosophical thought conducted "transcendentally" impossible. Specifically, while it was true that ordinary epistemic (and, one might add, moral and aesthetic) judgments, for which transcendental philosophy sought the "grounds for possibility," were normally expressed as linguistic utterances or sentences; and while it was also true that the transcendental discourse designed to ground them also involved a process of linguistic articulation, the *movement* from the first sort of articulation of ordinary judgments to the transcendental articulation of their grounds involved more than merely linking certain more obscure sentences to others, on the "same plane," that were already clear as they stood (as the *Metakritik* seemed to imply). Somehow (and the German Idealists would differ as to the proper account of this), an "act of reflection," not entirely identifiable with any specific linguistic determination, intervened between the two "levels," constituting the former as an "object of discourse" and the latter as a conceptual or philosophical account of this "object-language" at another, "higher" level of discourse.

Put in broader terms more appropriate to the speculative systematic projects of the German Idealists, one might say that, while language constituted both a necessary and indispensable condition and vehicle for their articulation as well as an inescapable thematic for any philosophical view laying claim to comprehensiveness, it could never be claimed that their philosophical accomplishments or import could be understood by reducing them to some set of linguistic statements considered either separately or conjointly. In one way or another, the German Idealists maintained *both* that thought was a process not entirely reducible to the limitations of "linguistic enstructuration" *and*, nonetheless, that such "enstructuration" was an essential "moment" of the process of thought itself.<sup>8</sup>

From such a perspective, it was natural that, in their reflections on language, these philosophers came to emphasize both the ways in which the processes of conceptual thought accommodate themselves to and enrich concrete linguistic structures, and how language possesses a creative dimension of its own that can guide and even inspire further conceptual development. Throughout the texts of the German Idealists, and most of all in Hegel, one finds both passages suggesting how speculative thought at once is limited by its linguistic modes of expression at the same time as enriching them by employing them as its "vehicle"; and how thought, in turn, can be guided by

the meanings and structures already available within language. That the efficacy of thinking arises only with and can be judged in the form of its linguistic articulation, and that the “linguistic being” of thought is itself philosophically fecund are dual theses, already assumed and well developed by the German Idealists, that have not been surpassed in the otherwise “linguistically obsessed” atmosphere of the twentieth century.

## 2. *The Linguistic Thought of the German Idealists*

It is interesting and noteworthy that Kant’s critical philosophy and the *Metakritik*, first outlined by Hamann, originated at almost exactly the same time. Indeed, Hamann’s essay bearing this title was written in the course of his attempts to come to grips with and compose a review of Kant’s first Critique just as the original edition was being published. Roughly put, whereas linguistic issues played no specific role whatever in Kant’s first Critique, Hamann read this work as nothing but a complex, elaborate, and ultimately mystifying “linguistic construction.” Although one can find, scattered throughout Kant’s corpus, the occasional reference to linguistic matters, they seem to be predicated upon Kant’s assumptions of a set of fundamental and interrelated dualities, including the conceptual and the empirical, the logical and the grammatical, judgment and sentence, and so on. In every case, linguistic issues, when they arose at all, were immediately associated with the latter member of these Kantian dyads, which amounted to claiming that they were irrelevant to the concerns of the transcendental philosopher. Of course, this left open the riposte, on the part of the metacritics, who made this point very explicitly, that Kant’s own conceptual distinctions were themselves nothing more than further linguistic gestures and devices, hence opening the critical philosophy to a new line of skeptical attack quite different than the Humean skepticism that he had attempted to refute.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that the force of this linguistic attack on Kantian transcendental philosophy was not lost on Fichte, who, after completing his first “outline” of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), turned immediately to composing a lengthy essay explicitly dealing with language and its central role in philosophical reflection.<sup>10</sup> In this essay, and also frequently in his academic lectures until his departure from Jena in 1799, Fichte contributes three important insights to this debate. First, he cites language as among the necessary conditions for “rationality” itself, and thus for the emergence of any philosophy. On Fichte’s account, reiterated in his political works of the same period, he attributes to language the role of permitting the mutual recognition of one “rational being” by another, which, on his view, constitutes, at the same time, the origins of society itself. On such a view, language becomes seen both as the sign of rationality and the privileged vehicle for its expression. Second, Fichte suggests that there are important parallels and mutual relations between the conceptual

structure of thought and the grammatical structures of natural languages. Indeed, he goes so far as to propose that a “transcendental grammar” be formulated that would correspond, in certain ways, to the “transcendental logic” of Kant. However, if these first two theses seem to concede a good deal to the metacritics, his third point must be taken as explicitly opposing them in favor of a defense of transcendental philosophy. It was Fichte who first insisted upon the view, already mentioned above, that, despite the parallels between thought and language, concept and articulation, logic and grammar, there was nonetheless a crucial asymmetry between them as well. Philosophy, according to Fichte, is an incremental process that proceeds by means of a series of “free acts of reflection.” Indeed, he described the origin of philosophy as a “*Tathandlung*,” a sort of “fact-act,” by which consciousness “posited itself as identical to itself.” While language provides the necessary means for the expression of this act of reflection, it nonetheless fails to capture both the “act character” of reflection, which each individual has to perform for itself, and the “freedom” of the process whereby any linguistically expressed judgment can itself become the “object” of a further act of reflection. On Fichte’s view, then, philosophy itself always involves a “translinguistic” element, namely, the very act of reflection upon its own preceding linguistic accomplishments and articulations.

Schelling, for whom language was a ubiquitous theme throughout the many turns and phases of his long philosophical career, dramatically expanded Fichte’s early reflections upon language. While little justice can be done here to Schelling’s extensive contributions to these discussions, a few observations especially relevant to Hegel’s treatment of language are appropriate.<sup>11</sup> In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1801), Schelling assigned to language two crucial and interrelated roles in the overall context of his systematic thought. First, in response to the question of how the “ideal order of Subjectivity (or consciousness)” could find mediation with the “real order of Objectivity (or nature),” Schelling pointed to language as the primary instance of a genuine “Subject-Object.” On the one hand, language is the principal and original vehicle by which subjective concepts and thoughts are expressed and thus achieve “objective existence.” On the other hand, language, viewed as an objective and concrete existent, is permeated through and through by the historical accomplishments of subjectivity. Language, then, provides the necessary bidirectional mediation whereby “ideal” thought and its concepts can enter the objective order of existence and efficacy, and whereby “real” objects can be appropriated, known, and made possessions of subjectivity or consciousness. Second, since he regarded all art as, to a greater or lesser extent, a complexly mediated “Subject-Object,” he proceeded to claim that language itself represents the “original” and “most perfect work of art.” And, since he regarded philosophy as an ideal or subjective activity that is condemned to proceed by a process of objectification of any content that it considers, hence



always *representing* but never actually *presenting* the “absolute unity” that he held to be the ultimate aim of any philosophical system, it fell to art, and specifically concretely existing language as a whole in the primary instance, to serve as the privileged manner of presenting, and not merely representing, “the Absolute” itself.

These dual ideas of language as the paradigm case of a “Subject-Object” or an “Ideal-Reality” and as the primary mode of access to “the Absolute” continued to reverberate throughout his later career. Not only did he ascribe to language a pivotal role in his attempts to elaborate his *“Identitätsphilosophie,”* but his later formulations of a “Philosophy of Mythology” and a “Philosophy of Revelation” relied heavily upon his view that the “originary narratives” of culture and religion were precisely specific instances of language unburdened by the objectifications of philosophy and hence genuine manifestations of “the Absolute” in concrete historical forms.

As a very general framework for approaching linguistic issues, Schelling’s reflections were, to a great extent, taken over by Hegel. Of course, Hegel, as his own philosophical differences with Schelling emerged, would come to delimit, qualify, and refine Schelling’s views of language in a number of significant ways, but it remained true that language continued to play a decisive role in Hegel’s philosophy both as an explicit and recurrent theme and as a more general and ubiquitous philosophical problem. To characterize, in a general and preliminary way, Hegel’s differences with Schelling on the issue of language, three points are worth noting. First, since Hegel came to reject Schelling’s tendency to think in terms of two “complementary series,” that of “subjectivity” or consciousness and that of “objectivity” or nature, language came to play a rather different role in Hegel’s systematic thought. Rather than emphasizing language as the generalized “mediation” spanning the gap between subjectivity and objectivity, Hegel’s treatment of language adopted a more “vertical” orientation. That is, the most salient feature of language, for Hegel, was the role it played in permitting and sustaining philosophical reflection in its efforts to move to ever “higher levels” of thought, from experienced differences to higher conceptual identities or unifications of (lower-level) differences. Second, Hegel’s often-expressed antipathy toward the Romantics’ (and, on his reading, Schelling’s) idea of “the Absolute” as transdiscursive and accessible only through a mystifying “intellectual intuition” led him to deny that language, in the general sense in which it was discussed by Schelling, offered some privileged path to the “Absolute.” Rather, while Hegel could still agree that language played a crucial role in the systematic philosophical ascent to “the Absolute,” it was not as some unitary entity like a work of art, but through many and manifold interventions along the way. A token of this is the fact that Hegel’s various discussions of language usually have a specificity and occur in determinate systematic contexts, a feature often lacking in Schelling’s more generalized pronouncements. Finally, in his Berlin writings, Hegel

explicitly addresses the underlying assumption that led Schelling to claim that “the Absolute” was inaccessible to philosophy and that, consequently, philosophy would always remain subordinate to art as a human enterprise. In the most extensive discussion of language in his entire corpus, Sections 457–64 of the Berlin *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel explicitly challenges Schelling’s view that philosophical language can only “represent” thought or “the Absolute” but never “present” it. Rather, Hegel attempts to show that it is precisely language that makes possible the transition from the subjectivity of mere representation to the objectivity (and hence “presentation”) of thought itself. Rather than requiring that the philosopher await the “presentation” of “the Absolute” supplied by the work of art, Hegel comes to reverse the roles ascribed by Schelling to art and philosophy, establishing philosophical thought as the true “presentation” of “the Absolute” and relegating art to the realm of “representation” awaiting the conceptual explication and judgment of philosophy as to the “true content” it possesses, though in still “defective form.”<sup>12</sup>

As in so much else, Hegel’s reflections on language represent a synthesis of much that went before. Unlike Kant, Hegel occasionally invokes various empirical observations about the meanings and grammar of natural languages as relevant to or illuminating for the philosopher. While he grants the meta-critics’ insistence on the challenge posed by language for philosophy, he also insists, along with Fichte and Schelling, that their skeptical claims against philosophy can be answered by a more nuanced consideration of the relations between language and thought. And while he rather clearly appropriated some of the more expansive ideas of Schelling regarding language, he qualifies them through specific discussions more reminiscent of Fichte’s detailed treatment.

### 3. *Hegel’s Main Texts on Language*

Although, as I suggested above, there are many briefer reflections, invocations, and asides concerning language scattered throughout Hegel’s corpus, there are three principal texts in which Hegel offers more extended and explicit discussions of linguistic issues. It should be noted that each of these occurs at a crucial “moment” or point of transition within Hegel’s overall philosophical project.

Hegel’s initial explicit and extended discussion of language as a central philosophical issue occurs in the course of his so-called *Jenaer Systementwürfe*, which were, in effect, notes for his lectures on logic, metaphysics, and related topics delivered during the middle years of the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> In several crucial respects, this early discussion of language clearly remains indebted to Schelling’s views of language discussed above. To begin with, Hegel’s initial treatment of language explicitly constitutes the crucial point of transition from the objective realm of Nature to the subjective

domain of Spirit. On the account offered here, reminiscent of Schelling's claim that language is the paradigmatic "Subject-Object," language is presented as the point of mediation between "external Nature" and "internal Spirit" precisely because it itself is Janus-faced, immediately involving elements of both. On the one hand, it is through language that all that is external and foreign to consciousness is appropriated by consciousness and made its own in the form of concepts. On the other, it is also through language that the "inner content" of consciousness or Spirit first becomes objective through the "ex-pression" or "externalization" (*Äusserung*) of physically audible sounds and visible written marks. Language, as (in Hegel's terms) "the first potency of consciousness" and the "immediate mediation" of Nature and Spirit, is thus the unique link or hinge by which the external becomes internalized and subjective, and the internal becomes externalized and objective.

But, Hegel goes on to observe, while language is the "immediate mediation" of Nature and Spirit, it is itself "internally mediated" in various ways, two of which his discussion especially highlights. First, there is the "internal articulation" of language involving the contrast between signs and names. On Hegel's interpretation here, a sign (*Zeichen*) is an "empty placeholder," a merely formal or structural and passive feature of language that requires the determinate content and contexts provided by experience to become activated and communicatively efficacious. By contrast, a name is a specific and determinate content or result of consciousness's appropriation of external things through the process of naming. His suggestion, at this point, seems to be that language as a whole is a weaving together or textuality (in the etymological sense of this word) made up of signs as its formal "woof" and names as its determinate "warp." In terms of his discussion, which often seems to recast some of Kant's basic distinctions in a linguistic mode, we might say that "signs without names are empty, and names without signs are blind." The second "internal mediation" of language that Hegel discusses concerns the manner in which it serves to mediate spatiality as the (following Kant) fundamental condition for "outer sense" and temporality as that for "inner sense." It is by virtue of language that the fundamental spatiality of the external world becomes appropriated by and made part of the temporality of consciousness in the form of signs and names, and that, conversely, the temporal fluidity of experience and thought becomes "fixed," externalized, and takes its place in the order of objectivity in the "higher form" of articulated and intersubjectively accessible conceptual terms. One is here tempted to suggest that it is upon such linguistic grounds that Hegel offers his initial answer to the Kantian conundrum of the relationship between "receptivity" and "spontaneity."

A second interrelated group of texts concerning language occurs in the preface, together with the initial moments, of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Specifically in the preface,<sup>14</sup> Hegel introduces the notion of the "speculative sentence" (*der spekulative Satz*) that will remain, throughout

his subsequent writings, a fundamental reference point for his thought regarding the nature of language and, more specifically, systematic philosophical discourse. While there are many interpretations of this very involved notion (more on this to follow), it is at least clear that Hegel wishes to insist on the fundamental contrast between “judgment” (*Urteil*, as employed in the tradition and most proximately by Kant) and “sentence” or “proposition” (*Satz*). According to Hegel, any view that regards judgment as the basic constituent of thought and discourse has already decided in favor of a purely formal notion of identity and a merely subjective (or even psychologicistic) interpretation of thought and concept. By contrast, a “sentence” (as Hegel explains this notion in the context of his discussion of the “speculative sentence”) is just as much an objective linguistic entity as it is a vehicle for subjective thinking. Further, a view of thought or language based upon the forms of logical judgment misrepresents the actual functioning of thought as Hegel views it, inasmuch as it treats the result of thought (i.e., the judgment) as bringing into a purely formal identity differences that are somehow pre-given or preconstituted. In other words, judgment in its Kantian inflection is language reduced to the simple predicative form, which itself is a creature and, as it were, symptom of the operation of the understanding (*Verstand*). By contrast, the notion of the “speculative sentence” (whatever else Hegel may have meant by this) highlights the fact that, for Hegel, language is associated, most fundamentally, with the self-determining processes of reason (*Vernunft*), but that, when reduced to the merely formal structures of logical judgment, becomes an inert and empty shell incapable of expressing the power of reason to produce and articulate the broader and more complexly mediated unities involved in genuine thinking.

Although Hegel often insists, at various points, that genuine philosophical thinking (and indeed the whole of his version of logic) can only be articulated “speculatively,” that is, not in formal logical judgments but through the deployment of the dynamics involved in “speculative sentences,” he also suggests that ordinary or natural (i.e., nonphilosophical) language also contains clearly discernible “speculative” traces. (His favorite example is “*aufheben*,” a key term in his own philosophical thought as well, that, all at once, means to lift up, to negate, and to preserve.) Further, in the opening moves of the *Phenomenology*, it is the “speculative” nature of language itself that defeats the attempts of consciousness to articulate its own “certainty” about the “truth” of various interpretations of experience. The very restless and dynamic character of language turns out to be more “truthful” than any attempt of consciousness to articulate and fix the meaning of what it takes to be its object in some simple predicative form; rather, consciousness, in its very statement of its “certainty,” always ends up saying something other and more than it actually intends, and it is this intrinsic unruliness and restlessness of language itself that fuels the moves from one attitude of consciousness to another.

Finally, Hegel's most sustained and explicit discussion of language occurs in the *Berlin Enzyklopaedie* (§ 457–64), an outline with commentary, written to accompany lectures delivered in the 1820s and usually regarded as presenting the final and mature form of his systematic thought.<sup>15</sup> This passage certainly merits close study, since here Hegel invokes some already familiar themes, reworks others, and also adds a significant number of new and sometimes surprising insights, proving conclusively that his interest in linguistic issues had continued unabated since their initial appearance in the Jena “system sketches.” However, what is most philosophically significant about this discussion is its systematic location. It occurs under the general heading “Psychology,” which forms the concluding section of “Subjective Spirit,” the first of the three major divisions of the *Philosophy of Spirit*. “Psychology” itself contains two major subdivisions, the “theoretical” and “practical,” and the discussion of language constitutes the “middle moment” of the former under the title “Representation” (*Vorstellung*). As such, the systematic function of this discussion is to effect the absolutely crucial transition from “Intuition” to “Thinking.” Under the sequential headings of “recollection” (*Erinnerung*), “imagination” (*Einbildungskraft*), and “memory” (*Gedächtnis*), Hegel shows how representational images, when taken up by the imagination, find their expression in various types of signs. These, in turn, find their “external expression,” and become communicable, when they assume the various forms constituting spoken and written language. The outcome of this process are names and words, which permit intuitions and meanings to become fixed and thus reidentifiable in “memory” as “the same” upon repeated occurrences of the associated name or word. On Hegel's account, it is precisely this capacity of language to stabilize and permit the reidentification of meanings within the temporal flux of experience that is the necessary precondition for any “higher order” thinking. And it is thinking, when externalized through language, that permits the passage from the realm of subjectivity to that of “Objective Spirit” and its “higher realms” of law and the state and, ultimately, to “Absolute Spirit” itself. There is, then, probably no more important transition in Hegel's entire system than that effected by his discussion of language.<sup>16</sup>

Two points are worth mentioning in conclusion. On the one hand, Hegel did, in fact, remain interested in linguistic matters throughout his career and seemed to maintain a certain common core of convictions about them. On the other, it is also true both that no fully articulated “theory of language” appears in his writings and that the passages that do appear are not always fully consistent, at least in their details. These observations, in themselves, raise a number of broader interpretive and philosophical questions. Is this lack of a fully articulated and consistent theory of language a fatal lacuna for Hegel's broader systematic project? Can, or should, we try to remedy it on the basis of the materials that he provided for us? Or might a rather different approach to language be required in order to supply the basis for what Hegel actually sought

to accomplish in his system? If so, to what “systematic location” would it be assigned; or, would it necessarily stand “outside the system”? I would suggest that these are some of the most fundamental, and philosophically intriguing, issues and controversies underlying the essays collected in this volume.

## PART II: CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS OF HEGEL'S VIEWS ON LANGUAGE

The chapters assembled in this volume provide a fine introduction to a much more extensive body of research concerning Hegel's thought about linguistic issues and its significance for central contemporary philosophical discussions. Although areas of overlap inevitably appear, as befits any work on a philosopher as explicitly systematic as Hegel, they can be grouped according to four principal questions: (1) How can “natural language,” admittedly permeated by vagueness, contingency, and historicity, come to serve as the “speculative vehicle” for articulating the sort of determinate and comprehensive philosophical system that Hegel insists is the only adequate form that philosophy can assume? (2) What view of language emerges from a consideration of Hegel's dual demands that it be capable both of articulating “objective” and “intersubjectively valid truths” as well as expressing the profound “inwardness of subjectivity”? (3) What does Hegel's philosophy and his views on language have to contribute to more recent discussions in linguistics and the philosophy of language? (4) What light has the recent poststructuralist reception of Hegel's thought about language shed upon his broader philosophical viewpoint and how effective has been its sustained attack on Hegel's “totalizing philosophical pretensions”?

### *1. Language and the Possibility of Systematic Philosophy*

This collection opens with three chapters that offer different but complementary characterizations of the problems that language poses for Hegel's systematic project, and each then attempts to show how Hegel succeeds in addressing these fundamental issues.

Kevin Thompson's discussion begins with some of the central issues first raised within the “metacritical” and Romantic traditions. Having described the demands that Hegel himself places upon systematic philosophy, he summarizes the major obstacles to be confronted by any such project under the headings of “fragmentation” and “contamination.” By the former, he wishes to indicate the view, expressed in both Romantic literary theory and practice, that language “ultimately seeks to express that which is inexpressible”; by the latter, he intends the “metacritical” conviction that language “is rooted in custom and tradition and . . . [is] thus ineluctably historical.” According to Thompson, Hegel's response to these two important linguistic obstacles to the

possibility of systematic philosophy, problems of which Hegel himself was certainly well aware, is to be found in Hegel's most extended discussion of language in his entire corpus, the section of the *Philosophy of Spirit* mentioned above. On Thompson's illuminating reading of this key section, Hegel subsumes the problems of "fragmentation" and "contamination" under the broader issue of representation. The key to Hegel's answer to these charges involves (negatively) the thesis that "the representational content of language is insufficient to bind words together into meaningful wholes," and (positively) Hegel's demonstration that the internal movement of language itself necessarily leads beyond the limitations of representation to the "immanence of thought" and its concepts. Especially important in Thompson's reading of Hegel is the manner in which various structural features of language are correlated and interact with the various cognitional moments of "memory" that Hegel presents, progressively overcoming the latent "referentiality" of representation in favor of the unification of "being" and "ideality" that defines thinking in Hegel's sense.

Where Thompson focuses upon the more general linguistic objections presented by the "Metacritics" and the Romantics against the possibility of any systematic philosophy, Chong-Fuk Lau formulates the linguistic issues facing Hegel's project in the somewhat narrower terms of the Kantian dilemma between the "natural aspirations" of human reason to seek the infinite or unconditioned and the necessarily finite forms of judgment available in which to express such insights. Lau locates the key to Hegel's response to Kant in Hegel's discussion of the "speculative proposition" (*der spekulative Satz*), found primarily in the preface to the Jena *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On Lau's reading of this important passage, Hegel argues that the very subject-predicate form of judgment, which Kant took to be "the primordial form of all intelligible discourse," is misconceived by Kant as resting on an "original division" and an "asymmetry" between its elements, thus rendering it capable of expressing only the "finite truths" of the understanding, not the infinite "speculative" movement of reason. Whereas the subject-predicate form of the Kantian judgment is ultimately based upon and correlates with the traditional philosophical idea of a "substance and its accidents," the "speculative proposition" presents an "identity-in-difference" of two conceptual determinations. Because the thinking of the "identity-in-difference" of the two terms in a "speculative proposition" can only be a process, not a static structure as in Kant, Hegel is able to link the "speculative proposition" with the very movement of the "thinking subject" rather than remaining confined to a formal understanding of the "subject" as a mere grammatical placeholder referring to some static substance beyond it. The most important conclusion Lau draws is that, on such a reading, it cannot be correct to regard the "speculative proposition" as some "extraordinary" or "special" form of discourse in addition to the more "ordinary" forms of discourse presented by Kant. Rather, Hegel proposes

a completely different way of understanding discourse itself that does not reject the subject-predicate form but functions as its ubiquitous "meta-theoretical" critique and development. As such, all language is implicitly and potentially "speculative" and it is the task of the philosopher to render this explicit and actual.

Angelica Nuzzo begins not with the question of the suitability of "natural language" or "logical judgment" for the conceptual and speculative demands that Hegel places upon it, but with a question regarding the intelligibility of Hegel's own systematic philosophical discourse. Taking seriously Kierkegaard and William James as two critics (among others) who have called attention to the "perversities" of Hegel's dialectical usages of language, Nuzzo attempts to show that the very features of Hegel's alleged "linguistic excesses" that are most frequently cited are, in fact, "constitutive of the dialectical method that structures speculative philosophy as system." In making the point that Hegel's linguistic practices are inseparable from and, in important ways, constitutive of his "dialectical method," Nuzzo cites two important insights of Hegel: the first, found in the opening sections of the Jena *Phenomenology*, that language itself is "more truthful" than any form of "subjective certainty"; the second, found late in the *Science of Logic*, that only after the logic has been articulated can one finally realize the nature of its "method," namely, that it is the linguistic unfolding of "the absolute idea only as the original *word*." Between the first realization that the philosopher must "trust language" over subjectivity and the concluding insight that "language and method" are identical throughout, Nuzzo cites as specific instances of "the cunning of language" Hegelian strategies involving "ambiguities" of terms and "displacements or shifts of meaning." Broadly put, she argues that such devices are neither products of deliberate "perversity" on Hegel's part (as some critics would have it) nor mere incidental by-products of a more logically rigorous "substructure" (as certain of his more sympathetic readers have tried to argue). Rather, they must be regarded as necessary, productive, and irreducible features of the Hegelian "method" once we have grasped Hegel's fundamental insight that language is not merely the "vehicle" or "medium" of speculative thought but constitutes both the condition and the inner life of thought itself.

## 2. *Language, Subjectivity, and "Objective Truth"*

While the opening chapters address head-on some of the broadest issues concerning the relation between language and the possibility of systematic philosophy in general and argue in favor of the cogency of Hegel's own response to them, the next group brings these issues into a sharper focus. Taken together, they are more concerned with asking, not whether such a systematic project as Hegel's is possible on linguistic grounds, but, granted that it is, what sort of actual "truth" can be claimed on its behalf. Put even



more specifically, the chapters in this section explore Hegel's characterization of the ways in which language functions as the crucial link between our "subjective experiences" and "objective truth-claims" about a shared and transsubjective world.

Jeffrey Reid approaches this issue by focusing upon the question regarding what constitutes the "objectivity" of "*scientific* discourse," where the first term is understood in the special signification that Hegel gives to the German word "*Wissenschaft*." On Reid's view, the "objectivity" of Hegelian "science" is to be sought neither in the adequation of language to being, nor in the fact that language is the articulation of concepts. Both of these readings confine objectivity to the realm of representation and consequently fall short of the "higher objectivity" characteristic of Hegelian "science," whose discourse is "not only objectively true but is also, itself, true objectivity." Rather, he suggests that the proper "objects of (Hegelian) science" are themselves a result of language (in the specific form of names or signs) having already mediated thought and being, thus producing objectively true significations (at the level of representation) that Hegelian "science" must then render conceptual and order within its own systematic perspective. More specifically, whereas the language of representation accomplishes the transition from arbitrary "names" that refer to the "things" of experience, to "words" that have a determinate conceptual content or meaning of their own, Hegelian "science" articulates systematically the *conceptual* objectivity of this content, itself already objective at the level of representation. It is in this sense that Hegel's "scientific discourse" is not only "objectively true" (since its content is the very objectivity of representation) but "true objectivity" (since Hegelian "science" articulates the very structure of objectivity itself). Crucial to Reid's analysis is his reading of Hegel's treatment of the syllogism in the *Science of Logic*, which suggests that the sort of objectivity characteristic of genuine "science" is not to be sought in particular sentences or propositions (however dialectically understood they may be), but in the syllogistic interconnections among their terms, which establish that all concepts are already mediations between thought and being. Reid's discussion of "property" as an example of such an already linguistically mediated objectivity (through the institution of the written contract) that then finds its proper systematic place within "Objective Spirit" in Hegel's system is especially illuminating and suggestive for other extensions of Reid's overall view.

John McCumber's discussion can, in one sense, fairly be read as complementing that of Reid: whereas Reid's begins with Hegel's notion of "scientific objectivity" and attempts to show how it presupposes antecedent linguistic mediations within the sphere of representation, McCumber's moves in the opposite direction, beginning with the emergence of linguistic determinations within the context of experience and representation and culminating in the "higher objectivity" of Hegelian science. However, McCumber is frank in

claiming that, although the “immanence” of systematic discourse upon which Hegel often insists necessarily requires a theory of language adequate to it, Hegel himself never fully provides this, however many clues lay strewn throughout his works. Thus McCumber himself attempts to construct such a theory on the basis of a variety of materials provided by Hegel. He takes as his general starting point a question that he claims Hegel largely neglects: What is the nature of words, the ultimate “units” of language, and where do they come from? Conceding Derrida’s point that Hegel privileges spoken over written language (for good reasons, it will turn out), he then commences his discussion by asking, more specifically, “What is a ‘sound?’” Following Hegel’s suggestion, a sound must be understood as already a type of “identity-which-embraces-difference,” in the sense that a body produces a vibration that becomes external, resonates in other bodies, and thus negates the body from which it was propagated. In this way, even at the level of mere sound, a “unity-in-difference of inner and outer” is produced, which already provides a rudimentary condition for subjectivity. While many bodies (living or not) can produce “sounds,” only a complex organic body can generate “tones” which serve as the expression of the body’s “internal state.” Tones, however, are necessarily unstable temporal manifestations of interiority that gains a more enduring meaning precisely because its “tonal expression” immediately vanishes. While tones can and must be produced individually (and are already, in one sense, meaningful as expressions of the interiority of the producer), they attain another type of meaning as they take their place within a specific set of other tones. (McCumber provocatively suggests that the distinction between *Bedeutung* and *Sinn* might correspond to these two senses of “meaning.”) Specifically verbal signs (*Zeichen*) emerge, in the first instance, when such tones are stripped of their meaning-contextualization among other tones and appear as “meaningless in themselves.” On the one hand, a verbal sign no longer serves as the immediate expression of interiority; on the other, it is freed of its former “*Sinn*” and becomes capable of entering into a greater array of connections with other signs, themselves equally stripped of their “*Sinn*” and hence “free floating.” Thus arises the word, “a sound arbitrarily connected to a representation.” Like the tone from which it derives, a word is “transient, disappearing,” but unlike the tone, it is “only arbitrarily connected to a representation.” These two features of the word, taken together, constitute the word as the sole and privileged means by which thought (in Hegel’s sense of the free self-determination which is Reason) can first emerge and become articulate. Arriving at virtually the same point as Reid’s chapter and employing very similar terms, McCumber concludes: “For words do not, philosophically considered, ‘refer’ to realities. Rather, they *are* those realities in a higher, more conceptualized form.” In an important final addendum, McCumber suggests how such a “Hegelian theory of language” is capable of addressing some of the well-known objections often made against Hegel’s broader views.

Will Dudley adopts yet a third, though again complementary, approach to the question of the “objectivity” of Hegel’s systematic discourse, offering an interpretation of the differing ways in which language functions within the three spheres of “Absolute Spirit”: Art, Religion, and Philosophy. His argument, intriguingly schematized upon the legal oath “to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,” is designed to show that, for Hegel, “only philosophy is capable of accomplishing all three of these goals, and any philosophical endeavor that falls short of doing so is a failure.” To begin with, Dudley argues, it is important to realize that, as spheres of “Absolute Spirit,” art, religion, and philosophy all endeavor (at least in part) to “tell the truth” in linguistic form and that, unlike ordinary consciousness, all already realize that “the truth” involved will be a “particular (or concrete) universality,” not merely the listing of empirical facts or the invocation of abstract concepts. Their differences lie in the ways in which they attempt to “tell the truth” about “particular (or concrete) universality.” Poetry, the most “linguistic” and hence potentially universal of the arts, nonetheless fails to satisfy the dual requirements of “the whole truth and nothing but the truth” because it always tells us “both too little and too much.” It tells us too little because its “universal truth” is always presented or shown in specific forms or individuals (such as characters in a drama), without specifically separating off and specifying the actual “universal” that is being presented. And it tells us too much for the same reason, that is, that it involves many “contingent particulars” (for example, of character, plot, or setting) that are not essential to the “universal” in question. The “symbolic telling” of religion, by contrast, does explicitly distinguish between its “particulars” (e.g., parables or narratives) and the universal meanings represented or symbolized by them. The problem here is that symbols are “nonarbitrary signs,” that is, although certain qualities of the symbol represent the universal to which it points, the chosen symbol also possesses other qualities that are irrelevant or even opposed to its “universal.” Conversely, a certain universal can also be indicated by multiple symbols, each highlighting a different set of qualities. This intrinsic ambiguity of symbols means, again, that “they always say both too little and too much”: too little, because they are restricted to their own “natural qualities,” which never exhaust the “truth” of the universal that they symbolize and require supplementation by other symbols; too much, because they possess additional qualities irrelevant or opposed to the universal that they symbolize. Similar issues occur even when religions introduce the notion of “God,” so long as this is understood in representational terms. From this discussion, Dudley draws two important conclusions. The first is that Hegel’s general avoidance of images, symbols, and examples in his philosophical prose is precisely what allows him to meet the “truth-telling” requirements set forth at the beginning of the chapter; it is precisely this that is required for philosophical discourse to be truly objective. The second is that, nonetheless, Hegel does *not* claim that other forms of linguistic

expression than the philosophical have no role to play within the broader texture of human experience; rather, poetry and religious discourse do address other particular and contingent dimensions of experience such as sensory experience and feeling and hence play an essential role in connecting the “linguistically abstemious” discourse of philosophy with ordinary consciousness and its own native modes of discourse.

These three chapters, taken together, make a strong case against many traditional and contemporary views of Hegel that either characterize his philosophy as an “idealism” barred from making any “objectively valid claims” about “reality,” or as some ramified post-Kantian theory of categories or conceptual structure underlying our ordinary judgments. If we accept the arguments of these three chapters, then we must conclude that either way of reading Hegel will ignore or suppress the crucial role that Hegel assigned to language in mediating subjectivity and objectivity, universal and particular, and ordinary experience and philosophical thought.

### *3. Hegel and Contemporary Philosophy of Language and Linguistics*

While the preceding chapters were primarily concerned with clarifying and developing various of Hegel’s linguistic insights within the context of his own broader philosophical standpoint, the second half of this anthology consists of considerations of Hegel’s linguistic thought in the light of issues arising within later developments in the philosophy of language and linguistics. Roughly, while the next three chapters deal with themes highlighted in the “analytic” tradition, the concluding set focus upon those more characteristic of the “continental” tradition. With regard to the former, the problems of reference, the status of grammatical structure, and linguistic change over time have each served as a focal point for extensive and important discussions throughout much of the period following Hegel. While all three authors acknowledge that these were not issues that Hegel himself directly confronted, at least in their later formulations, they also agree that, even so, Hegel’s linguistic reflections may be deployed in ways capable of shedding considerable light upon them.

Katharina Dulckeit commences her Hegelian intervention in the “analytic philosophy of language” with a review and critique of the major attempts, running from Frege and Russell to the present, to deal with the issue of reference, that is, how language is capable of somehow “connecting with the world” in determinate ways. The problem is philosophically fundamental, she argues, since the failure to produce such a cogent theory will ultimately fall prey to the full force of the skeptic’s attack. According to her overview, the quite extensive number of alternative theories of reference that have been proposed can be regarded as falling under one of three headings: the “Description Theory,” the “Causal Theory,” and “Direct Reference.” Roughly put, the Description