Language and Method
Historical and Historiographical Reflections on Medieval Thought
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The Language of Reason: From Modern French to Scholastic Latin

In his posthumously published thesis,\(^1\) which deals with medieval and early modern history of the arts of language, the media theorist Marshall McLuhan wrote:

> Classicism, said Taine, is l’esprit abstrait. It is the spirit of Scholasticism misapplied, says Gilson.\(^2\)

McLuhan thus orchestrated an opposition between Hippolyte Taine, a leading figure of French positivism in the 19\(^{th}\) century, and the catholic historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson, who died in 1978. According to McLuhan, Gilson had rediscovered the influence of medieval scholasticism on French classical philosophy, particularly on Descartes, whereas in the 19\(^{th}\) century positivist thinkers had definitively turned their back on the medieval philosophical tradition. This macroscopic scenario may however be refined. Indeed, in Taine’s lifetime, that is, in the mid-19\(^{th}\) century, French philosophical historiography categorically appropriated scholasticism and described it as the precursor of classicism and French philosophical rationality. Even rather »positivist« historians of philosophy, such as the revolutionary and then republican thinker Barthélemy Hauréau, dedicated studies to medieval scholasticism and established a continuity between it and modern French philosophy.

In the mid-19\(^{th}\) century the rehabilitation of medieval scholasticism through the prism of modern philosophy relied on an alleged blood relationship of French language with scholastic Latin. By showing that French prose immediately derived from scholastic Latin, French histori-

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ans of philosophy intended to establish the supremacy of French rationality over German speculation. According to them, the language which had permitted the discovery of scientific method, that is, scholastic Latin, had also given birth to French, defined as the universal language of reason. The reconstruction of this theory thus introduces a nuance into the common view according to which French nationalism, unlike German nationalism, had little to do with genealogical and linguistic ideologies.  
I shall explore some textual examples demonstrating that the German conception of nationalism, above all its linguistic orientation, influenced French history of philosophy in the mid-19th century. To this end, I will first outline the cultural background and historiographical framework of this theory, before focusing on the linguistic issues.

1. French appropriation of scholasticism as a response to German mysticism and idealism

The reception of medieval scholasticism in modern French history of philosophy should be situated in the context of French-German scientific transfers in the 18th and 19th centuries. From the middle of the 18th century onward, the history of philosophy had been established as an academic discipline in Germany. Around 1800, the Middle Ages were gradually rehabilitated in the histories of philosophy which were written

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3 Linguistic ideology is commonly linked to German romanticism and spiritualism. Heikki Mikkeli, for instance, clearly summarizes the main historiographical scenario: "At this point [in French post-1789 nationalism] language was not a major criterion, and nation, people and state became conceptually one. The second nation theory, and one anchored on history and language, sprang from German idealistic philosophy and above all Herder and Hegel. This philosophy stressed the importance of language, culture and a shared religion, which together epitomized the 'spirit of the people'." (Heikki Mikkeli, *Europe as an Idea and an Identity*, Basingstoke 1998, p. 74.)


according to the principles of German »pragmatic« historiography; 6 they were even conceived of as a national heritage. A generation later, from the 1820s onward, French philosophical historiography displayed the same trend, notably in Joseph-Marie Degérando’s and Victor Cousin’s histories of philosophy. 7

Now the Middle Ages formed the background to a major rivalry or opposition between both national historiographies of philosophy. The rediscovery of German mysticism was, as generally assumed, closely related to nationalistic anti-French attitudes which were widespread among German scholars after the Napoleonic wars, mainly in romantic and idealistic circles. At the beginning of the 19th century, German historiography invented German mysticism, which it contrasted with French scholastic philosophy and described as a pure, indigenous philosophy, belonging to the North and flourishing in vernacular from the 14th century onward. 8

The liking for French enlightened culture and French language that had characterized the reign of Frederick II was relegated to the past. While, in 1783, the Prussian Academy of Sciences had published, in French, a call for papers on the topic of universality and superiority of French language, 9 exactly twenty years later Herder completed his *Idee zum ersten

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7 Joseph-Marie Degérando, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, considérés relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, 4 vols, Paris 1822-1823 (vol. 4 deals with the Middle Ages). Cousin’s historiographical work stretches over his whole academic career, from 1828 onward.

8 On the antagonism between scholasticism and mysticism in modern historiography and the invention of German mysticism, see: König-Pralong, *Médiévisme philosophique et raison moderne*, p. 99–130.

9 »Qu’est-ce qui a fait de la langue française la langue universelle de l’Europe? Mérite-t-elle cette prérogative ? Peut-on présumer qu’elle la conserve ?« Antoine de Rivarol won first prize with an essay entitled »De l’universalité de la langue française« (Paris 1785). Another mémoire received much attention, that of Johann Christoph Schwab (*Von den Ursachen der Allgemeinheit der französischen Sprache, und der wahrscheinlichen Dauer ihrer Herrschaft*, Tübingen 1885; French translation: *Dissertation sur les causes de l’universalité de la langue française*, translated by D. Robelot, Paris 1803). In the 19th century French historians sometimes drew upon it when they intended to show that
patriotischen Institut für den Allgemeingeist Deutschlands, a treatise speaking in favor of German language and its necessary domination, at least within the borders of the »nation«.\(^\text{10}\) In terms of linguistic preferences, the scientific landscape totally changed in one generation. In the lectures on the history of philosophy he delivered at the University of Cologne between 1804 and 1806, the romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel clearly formulated the philosophical program which led to the discovery of German mysticism.\(^\text{11}\) It can be summarized under five main theses. Firstly, German medieval philosophy was equated with true religion. Mysticism had preserved the »spirit of Christianism« and thus paved the way for the Reformation. Peder Hjort, a disciple of Schelling, expressed this idea with conviction in a study on mysticism published in 1823:

Doch blieb es immer Sache der Deutschen das wahre Christenthum durch Spe- culationen zu erläutern und darzustellen. Bei den romanischen Völkern hingegen versiegten die Quellen der Speculation mit der allmählichen Erstarrung, die eine Wiedergeburt des Christenthums in der Kirche unmöglich machte […].\(^\text{12}\)


\(^{11}\) See König-Pralong, Médiévisme philosophique et raison moderne, p. 99–113.

\(^{12}\) Peder Hjort, Johannes Scotus Erigena oder von dem Ursprung einer christlichen Philosophie und ihrem heiligen Beruf, Kopenhagen 1823, p. 135.
Secondly, German spiritual life was judged superior to scholastic philosophy, which was situated in a fictional South, of which the capital was Paris. Friedrich Schlegel wrote:

> Was zweitens zu der Ausartung der scholastischen Philosophie sehr viel beitrug, war, dass sie ihren Sitz vorzüglich in Paris hatte [...]. Es scheint schon damals gerade derselbe Partei- und Sektengeist, dieselbe Modesucht geherrscht zu haben, wie sie den Franzosen eigen ist, und wie man es in den neueren Zeiten an den Enzyklopädisten bemerkt hat, vielleicht damals noch in einem höheren Grade.\(^\text{13}\)

Both opposite philosophical tendencies were thirdly described with regard to their contents and developments. Schlegel viewed German philosophy, deriving from medieval mysticism, as speculative and deep, in one word platonic, thus differing from French scholasticism, which he perceived as having degenerated into sensualism and empiricism. Fourthly, modern and medieval German philosophy was praised as pure; by contrast scholastic philosophy was denigrated because of its hybridity, especially because of its Arabic contamination. Finally, philosophies in vernacular languages were regarded as living thought, unlike Latin scholastic philosophy which embodied a dying culture expressed in a dead language. According to Schlegel, Dante Alighieri was the sole non-German philosopher who developed a philosophy in vernacular and in poetic form in the Middle Ages.\(^\text{14}\) This attempt, however, had no successors in the South, while genuine vernacular philosophy has flourished in the North from the 14\(^\text{th}\) century onward.

From 1828 onward Victor Cousin, at that time the leading figure of French philosophical historiography, strove to rehabilitate scholasticism. To this end, he particularly devoted himself to the study of Peter Abelard, nota-


bly editing some of Abelard’s logical works. Nevertheless, Cousin did not struggle against German historians of philosophy or philosophers whom he moreover admired. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, he peacefully and strategically conceived an alternative historiographical plot, the core of which was Peter Abelard, the founder of scholasticism. Although he was well aware of the attitude some foremost German scholars displayed towards French philosophy, he never attacked German philosophical historiography. In 1817, for example, he related an encounter with Schlegel in this way:

[…] or, Schlegel était mystique et détestait la Révolution française, tandis que moi j’adorais la révolution et la philosophie. Mon jeune spiritualisme avait même de la peine à ne pas être injuste envers le mysticisme.

Being true to his consensus politics, Cousin nevertheless ignored the German denigration of French philosophy for its identification with medieval scholasticism. He even planned and directed the translation of Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann’s history of philosophy. A strong reaction against German romantic historiography can be observed in the next generation (1840-1860), when Cousin’s disciples devoted themselves to countering German mysticism in order to rehabilitate scholasticism and scholastic Latin.

It is well known that the discovery of German mysticism went hand in hand with the denigration of scholasticism in protestant Germany – this issue has been thoroughly studied. It is less known that, from the 1840s onward, the German invention of medieval mysticism gave rise to a new image of scholasticism, especially of *scholastic Latin*, in France. I shall now reconstruct this important although less-known episode of entangled history.

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15 König-Pralong, *Médiévisme philosophique*, p. 116–164; see also Mario Meliadò’s contribution in the present volume.


2. Scholastic Latin as national heritage and ancestor of modern French

In 1852 the French historian of philosophy Barthélemy Hauréau praised in the same breath medieval scholastic philosophy, the heart of which had been the University of Paris, and modern French which he regarded as the language of universal reason. In his history of scholastic philosophy published in 1850, Hauréau had thoroughly studied the problem of universals.\(^\text{19}\) Two years later, in the article »Scholastic philosophy« he wrote for Franck’s dictionary of philosophical sciences, he claimed:

>C’est ainsi que se forma, dans les écoles du XIIIe siècle, cette langue nette, fière et pleine d’énergie, qui devait, avec le temps, perdre sa rudesse, mais non sa précision, et devenir, après quelques autres transformations, notre langue nationale.\(^\text{20}\)

He thus imagined a genealogy from scholastic Latin to modern French. Hauréau belonged to a generation of scholars who were under the political and scientific influence of Victor Cousin. Focusing on the topic ›language and philosophy‹, one can describe a network dominated by three intellectual actors: Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, Charles de Rémusat and, to a lesser extent, Francis Wey.\(^\text{21}\) Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire was primarily a politician, having held the offices of senator and foreign minister. From 1838 to 1852 he furthermore held a chair of ancient philosophy at the Collège de France. As an historian of philosophy, he notably translated Aristotle’s oeuvre into French in 35 volumes. In 1892, three years before he died, he published a comprehensive biography of Victor

\(^{19}\) Barthélemy Hauréau, *De la philosophie scolastique*, 2 vols, Paris 1850.


Cousin in two volumes.\textsuperscript{22} Charles de Rémusat was a historian of philosophy who belonged to Cousin’s school. Under his patronage, he wrote a monographic study on Abelard in two volumes. In the wake of Cousinian historiography, he portrayed Abelard as a forerunner of modern European philosophy as well as a spiritual ancestor of René Descartes.\textsuperscript{23} In 1848 the Romance philologist and art historian Francis Wey completed an inquiry dedicated to the »revolutions« of French language.\textsuperscript{24} In this work he addressed en passant the issue at stake in the German-French antagonism. In a chapter dedicated to scholastic philosophy and its influence on French prose, he indeed defended the superiority of French rationality, which he deemed to have originated in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{25} In order to corroborate his own explanations through a philosophical authority he invoked the study on Abelard by Rémusat.\textsuperscript{26} Rémusat and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire dedicated entire treatises to this topic; Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire already in 1840,\textsuperscript{27} Rémusat twenty years later. At the beginning of his study that especially addressed the influence of scholasticism over French language, Rémusat referred to the treatise by Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, saying he wanted to add some explanations to it.\textsuperscript{28} The three works undeniably form a network. These treatises were clearly intended to defend French rationality against the attacks and pretentions of German scholars from within the field of the history of philosophy. Our three authors claimed that French language and philosophy were better than German speculation, since French was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, \textit{M. Victor Cousin, sa vie, sa correspondance}, 2 vols, Paris 1892.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Charles de Rémusat, \textit{Abélard}, 2 vols, Paris [1845] ‘1855.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Francis Wey, \textit{Histoire des révolutions du langage en France}, Paris 1848.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., ch. 5, p. 161f.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 184. It should be noted that Wey’s general statements are very paradoxical. When he addressed literary prose, which is the principal topic of his book, he judged the influence of Latin upon it as negative and praised the purity of the prose written by his favorite authors, particularly by Villehardouin, who, he claimed, excelled precisely because he did not master Latin (p. 172). By contrast, in the chapter dedicated to philosophical prose, he spoke in praise of scholasticism, as if he would take on and reiterate an idea which widely circulated in Paris after 1840. Furthermore, Wey claimed it would be erroneous to search for the rules of reason in philology or history (p. 6), even though he gave in to this penchant himself in the chapter on scholasticism.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, \textit{De l’influence de la scholastique sur la langue française}, Lu à la séance publique du 27 juin 1840, Académie des sciences morales et politiques, Paris 1840.
\end{itemize}
the language of philosophy and reason itself. In the mid-19th century, the anti-French attitudes displayed by some German philosophers or historians of philosophy provoked a peculiar (and historically limited) reaction in France. The cultural rivalry between German and French scholars caused a distortion in the common linguistic view, according to which vernacular languages, particularly Old French, had exerted a notable influence on scholastic Latin in the Middle Ages. Rémusat, Wey and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire did not mention this hypothesis. They rather asserted that medieval scholarly language had become modern French. Rather than Romance languages, they identified scholastic Latin as the origin of French prose. Four main issues comprise the backbone of this theory which highlights a very peculiar episode in the entangled history of German-French cultural relationships.

(1) Firstly, our three authors adopted Cousin’s view, according to which modernity arose in the 12th century beginning with Abelard’s methodological approach. Scholasticism, as initiated by Abelard, was the impetus for modern philosophy as well as the cradle of modern Europe. Since scholasticism is French, even Parisian, Paris has therefore always been at the heart of modernity. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire and Rémusat added a linguistic appendix to this genealogical thesis that drew a straight line from Abelard to Descartes. In their historiographical undertakings language began to play an important role in French genealogy of modernity. In Cousin’s school, French was viewed as the universal language of

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30 This thesis had already been formulated a few years earlier, by Joseph-Marie Degérando, who described French history as the »grand théâtre des études« from the 12th century onward (Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie, Paris 1822-1823, vol. 4, p. 441). Unlike our three scholars, Degérando nevertheless claimed that scholastic Latin was inappropriate for philosophy. He described medieval Latin as a language »si peu propre aux besoins de la philosophie« (Ibid., p. 341).

31 According to Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire (De l’influence de la scholastique sur la langue française, p. 64), scholasticism »a fait l’éducation de l’esprit moderne. Elle a été le berceau du génie européen.« Two intellectual facts gave rise to modernity: scholasticism and its own reversal by Descartes, which was itself prepared and facilitated by the scholastic method arising from Abelard’s philosophy (p. 68–69). Wey adopted the same scenario (Histoire des révolutions du langage en France, p. 183): scholasticism bore the progressive seeds which had led to its own decay, in Descartes.
reason. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, Wey\textsuperscript{32} and Rémusat moreover linked this enlightened claim with a linguistic derivation of French from scholastic Latin. Syntax constitutes the heart of this theory. Rémusat certainly expounded a series of morphological derivations in order to portray scholastic Latin as a medium between classical Latin and French;\textsuperscript{33} he emphasized however that syntax singles out French as the language of philosophy. More precisely, the elimination of inversion, which arose in scholastic Latin, distinguishes French from more archaic languages.

The superiority of languages without inversion, in which the subject precedes the verb and the complement comes after it, was an issue that already had a long history around 1850. It had been discussed and vehemently challenged in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{34} D’Alembert, Chamfort and Diderot, for instance, had dismissed this thesis. Since Diderot, like Hume and Locke, had criticized and abandoned the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident, he could not imagine why the complement should necessarily come after the verb and the adjective after the substantive, as if complements and adjectives were accidents of, respectively, verbs and substantives.\textsuperscript{35} In the Cousinian climate, between 1840 and 1860, such challenges were nevertheless not taken into consideration. On the contrary, after having distinguished the ordinary (ex-

\textsuperscript{32} In Wey, \textit{Histoire des révolutions du langage en France}, see p. 162–165. As to Rémusat and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, this thesis constitutes the main issue of their treatises.

\textsuperscript{33} Rémusat, »Mémoire touchant l’influence de la scolastique sur la langue française«, p. 251–274. The entire second part of Rémusat’s treatise expounds morphological and semantical derivations. Rémusat challenged etymologies he had read in various etymological French dictionaries, claiming that they systematically overlooked the influence of scholastic Latin (p. 241–243). He then sought to complete Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire’s theory by scrutinizing a series of words and their scholastic origins.

\textsuperscript{34} Antoine de Rivarol, the winner of the contest organized in 1783 by the Königlich-Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, also asserted that reason had given up syntactic inversion: »L’inversion a prévalu sur la terre, parce que l’homme est plus impérieusement gouverné par les passions que par la raison.« (\textit{De l’universalité de la langue française}, p. 72)

\textsuperscript{35} See Harald Weinrich, »Die clarté der französischen Sprache und die Klarheit der Franzosen«, in: Harald Weinrich, \textit{Wege der Sprachkultur}, Stuttgart 1985, p. 136–154, here p. 146–147. D’Alembert and Diderot certainly acknowledged the influence of Aristotle (that is, of Aristotelian scholastic) on French syntax, but they regarded it as deplorable. According to D’Alembert, French is moreover the most obscure language in the world (Weinrich, »Die clarté der französischen Sprache«, p. 136), – an opinion which Diderot and Voltaire did not share. On the contrary, they praised the clarity of French language, although they did not think that Aristotelian scholastic had had a positive influence on French philosophical prose.
ternal) languages from the mental language. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire claimed that French was the natural language because it had eliminated inversion. According to him, French was a universal language, the "language of reason itself," that is, the "methodological tool" par excellence which had been already discovered and developed in the Middle Ages. In short, French constituted "the masterpiece of the human spirit" – "le chef-d’œuvre de l’esprit humain". By necessarily adopting the sequence subject-verb-complement, French exactly corresponds to the logic of thought and is thus very close to the mental language. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire consequently blamed syntactic inversion which is "absolutely unjustifiable", since reason itself prohibits it.

A doubt expressed by Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, as well as its rejection, seem to me particularly significant. After having described the transformation of scholastic Latin into modern French prose, Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire addressed the issue of the future developments which could affect French. As a rationalist historian of philosophy he believed in the progress of human reason. He could therefore hardly admit that a human

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37 In 1841 the journalist, historian and politician Hippolyte Fortoul (1811-1856) expressed a similar idea. In that year he earned a PhD with a Latin thesis on Aristotle and was appointed professor of literature at the University of Toulouse. In his introductory lesson, he claimed: "Cependant, la langue française ne prend son véritable caractère, et n’achève de se former que lorsque, contrairement aux langues antiques où l’inversion offre les images dans l’ordre naturel de la sensation, elle s’élève à la construction directe qui présente les objets dans l’ordre logique de la pensée. Cet avantage qui a fait sa clarté, sa grandeur, son universalité, lui a été préparé par tout le travail de la philosophie antique; mais à qui doit-elle de s’en être si heureusement et si particulièrement emparé? A la scolastique, qui fit rentrer les esprits dans le mouvement de la métaphysique grecque." (Hippolyte Fortoul, *Discours prononcé à l’ouverture du cours de littérature française à la Faculté des Lettres de Toulouse*, Paris-Toulouse 1841, p. 19)
39 Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, *De l’influence de la scholastique sur la langue française*, p. 68.
40 Moreover, this thesis seems to have been widespread among the philologists in the mid-19th century. See, for example, the claim of the French philologist, librarian at the Sorbonne and professor of ancient literature at the University of Dijon, Louis Benloew (*De l’accentuation dans les langues indo-européennes*, Paris 1847, p. 295): «La construction de la langue française est l’expression la plus logique de la pensée humaine» (original emphasis).
41 Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, *De l’influence de la scholastique sur la langue française*, p. 62: "absolument injustifiable".
process could be perfect and completed. However, in the case of French language, that is, of philosophy’s language, he made an exception:

Le passé nous atteste que le progrès n’a point un seul jour cessé, et la raison nous affirme qu’il ne cessera pas d’avantage après nous. Mais […]. En ceci [la langue française] il n’y a donc plus lieu à perfectionnement, car la perfection est atteinte […]. L’esprit européen tout entier le sait bien.42

(2) The second issue I would like to stress is the role played by the French-German rivalry in the constitution of these linguistic-philosophical theories. French historians of philosophy indeed built up their coordinate system by dissociating it from German idealistic culture. The linguist and historian of French literature Francis Wey outlined this antagonism in the following way:

[…] l’un [Aristote] faisant appel à la raison et lui fournissant méthode ; l’autre [Platon] inoculant ses rêveries graves, spéculées ou profondes, et souvent vagues, aux esprits épris de mysticisme. […] En 1209 […] le procédé du maître [Aristote] était saisi, et cette première émanation de la philosophie antique avait fécondé le génie moderne. La prose française naquit de cette inoculation. C’est de là qu’elle reçut sa forme limpide et nette, son caractère agressif et délibéré.43

According to Wey, Abelard was sober, clear and logical; and he was as ironic as Voltaire.44 These psychological and philosophical features symmetrically contradict the predicates associated with German thought in French historiography. In his treatise on the Influence of Scholasticism on French language, Bathélemy Saint-Hilaire elaborated a system of oppositions: while French is clear, modern and universal, German language is obscure, archaic and particular.45

In the 19th century, French historians of philosophy thus established a comparison between France and the universal Roman Empire; they elaborated this analogy between French and Roman imperialism as an antidote against the alleged German elective affinity with Ancient Greece which had been claimed by German intellectuals from the 18th century onward, at least since Winckelmann.46 Dealing with linguistic issues,

42 Ibid., p. 71.
44 Ibid., p. 185.
45 Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, De l’influence de la scholastique sur la langue française, p. 64–70.
46 See Eliza M. Butler, The Tyranny of Greece over Germany. A study of the influence exercised by Greek art and poetry over the great German writers of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Cambridge 1935; Anthony Andurand, Le Mythe grec allemand. Histoire
French philosophical historiography certainly displayed imperialistic tendencies. According to Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire modern Europe could be seen as the »Empire of the French«, which had been conquered without the use of weapons. The French conquest of European modernity was said to have succeeded thanks to the attractive force of French language and philosophy. Rémusat and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire established an antithesis between French clarity and the obscurity of German mystical thought. Moreover, Wey stressed an incompatibility between French and Greek language. In these historiographical reconstructions, Greek tends to embody an archaic and past world to which Germany still belonged. Owing to its obscure, obsolete and barbaric language, characterized by archaic idealistic speculation, that is, Platonism, German philosophy is an anachronism. In France, in the mid-19th century German culture was seen as particularistic and therefore derided as antimodernist, that is, anti-universalistic.

Interestingly, Herder, Schlegel and Fichte had used other metaphors for illustrating the pre-eminence of German as philosophical language.

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47 Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, *De l'influence de la scholastique sur la langue française*, p. 57: »l'empire des Français«. On the next page, he mentioned Johann Christoph Schwab, the foremost German participant in the contest of the Preußischer Akademie (in 1783, see above, note 9), in order to show that the German intellectuals had themselves acknowledged French superiority.

48 Wey, *Histoire des révolutions du langage en France*, p. 126–127. He nevertheless claimed that the syntax of French prose »directly derives from Aristotle« (p. 163), that is, in reality, from the scholastic Aristotle who has been translated into Latin. The mediation of the Middle Ages substituted itself for Antiquity in the genealogy of modern language and rationality.

According to the German romantic and idealist philosophers German had been, since the Middle Ages, the true language of living philosophy, while scholastic Latin, a dead language, would not be suitable for speculative thought because of its incapacity to express the life of spirit. A generation later, French philosophers opposed a horizontal distinction between clarity and obscurity to the depth of German spiritual life. Whereas German intellectuals searched for original language (Ursprache), French philosophers sang in praise of clear modernity. As both idealist philosopher and admirer of the French Revolution, Hegel constituted an exception.

(3) Thirdly, the defense and illustration of French language in French philosophical historiography was grounded on a clear distinction between prose and poetry – a demarcation which notably Friedrich and August Schlegel had rejected as fallacious a generation earlier. The brothers Schlegel had indeed portrayed Dante as the only successful undertaking in scholastic philosophy, since Dante, though scholastic, had written philosophy in the vernacular and in verse. Rémusat certainly conceded that German and Greek are more flexible languages than French and thus more appropriate for poetry, he nevertheless claimed that everyone should admit the philosophical pre-eminence of French precisely for this reason. Because French prose is rigid and definite, it offers a guarantee of good method. Interestingly, some German historians of philosophy made similar statements about French language in order to undermine French philosophy. In 1837, for instance, the anti-Hegelian and Kantian philosopher Jakob Friedrich Fries described French as a rigid language which embodies linguistic despotism (Sprachdespostismus) and thus threatens free thought and thinking for oneself (Selbstdenken). He claimed that

\*ursprünglich; und umgekehrt, so jemand nur ein wahrer Deutscher würde, so würde er nicht anders denn also philosophiren können.«


51 Rémusat, »Mémoire touchant l’influence de la scolastique sur la langue française«, p. 236–237. Already Rousseau was convinced that French is the philosophical language par excellence thanks to its clarity and simplicity. He nevertheless regretted its restrictions that hinder poetry (see the »Avertissement« preceding the Lettres sur la musique française published in 1753).
French syntax, which is characterized by inflexibility, would have inhibited the development of original thinking in French philosophy.\(^52\)

On the other hand, Rémusat, like Wey,\(^53\) outlined a double genealogy of French: French poetical language derived from medieval vernacular languages, whereas scholastic Latin was the origin of modern French prose. According to Rémusat, French prose is the universal language of reason because it restrains imagination as well as the free and peculiar flights of fantasy. By curbing fantasy the rigidity of French enables argumentative thinking. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire described it as the ›yoke of reason‹:

\[\ldots \text{il [le français] est la seule [langue] où la poésie ait dû se soumettre à cette règle inflexible, la seule où l'imagination elle-même doive accepter le joug et les allures de la raison.}^{54}\]

Studying the self of scientists and realist (or empiricist) philosophers around 1800, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison reconstructed the staging of a fight between reason and imagination.\(^55\) The defense of French by Cousin’s disciples involved a similar representation of the self. Reason was threatened by imagination. Unlike the absolute self of German idealist thinkers, the French self was split. The struggle against German idealism, considered as obscure and fallaciously deep, indeed constituted the constant background of Hauréau’s,\(^56\) Rémusat’s\(^57\) and Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire’s developments on the topic of philosophy’s language.

(4) This leads us to my fourth and last point, namely the conception of clarity which was at stake in the linguistic philosophical theories of French historians of philosophy in the mid-19\(^{th}\) century. Harald Weinrich\(^58\) in-

\(^{52}\) Jakob Friedrich Fries, \textit{Geschichte der Philosophie}, Halle 1837, p. 16–17: »Eine Sprache, welche, wie z.B. die französische, grossentheils nicht aus freien Wörtern, sondern aus festen Phrasen besteht, hemmt in hohem Grade das fortbildende Selbstdenken.«

\(^{53}\) Interestingly, Wey praised Nicole Oresme, a French medieval prose writer and philosopher, who composed philosophy in French and has alas been overlooked by scholarship (Wey, \textit{Histoire des révolutions du langage en France}, p. 163).


\(^{56}\) In regard to Hauréau, see Barthélemy Hauréau, \textit{De la philosophie scolastique}, 2 vols, Paris 1850, vol. 2, p. 514. Hauréau compared Fichte and Schelling with John Duns Scotus. Like Scotus, German idealism has created chimeras and introduced monstrous beings into the ontology.

\(^{57}\) Rémusat (»Mémoire touchant l’influence de la scolastique sur la langue française«, p. 275) blamed the newly introduction of Kantian and Fichtean concepts into French philosophical prose. He notably mentioned the words »raison pure«, »subjectif«, »objectif«, »phénoménal«, »autonomie«, »antinomie«.

\(^{58}\) Weinrich, »Die clarté der französischen Sprache«.
vestigated the transformation of the French notion of »clarté« from the 16th to the 18th century (from Du Bellay to Voltaire). In the 17th century clarity exclusively referred to a stylistic feature: it signified »shine« and »majesty«. It began to also, and above all, characterize a language only in the 18th century. Diderot and Voltaire conceived of clarity as the main feature of a specific language, namely French, and interpreted it as order. The constellation of philosophers which forms the core of the present study witnessed a later development in which the notion of »clarté« received a new meaning. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire identified the clarity of French with three features: 59 French prose is natural, since it mirrors the universal laws of reason; it is therefore methodical; it is thirdly analytic. French is an »analyzed language« (une langue analysée) that can also serve to reveal the confusion of other languages and thoughts by proving them. Bathélemy Saint-Hilaire and Rémusat mentioned Leibniz who, in the 20th century, has been portrayed as a hero of analytic philosophy and a forerunner in the search for formal languages 60, – and they mentioned him for similar reasons. 61 Though German, Leibniz wrote in Latin and French, that is, in languages which are very close to the universal language of reason. Around 1850 a conception of clarity as linguistic analysis and conceptual purification arose in French philosophical historiography. Rémusat thus suggested a linguistic philosophical experiment reminiscent of later approaches: 62

On peut faire et l’on a fait une expérience assez concluante. C’est de mettre les systèmes exotiques de philosophie à l’épreuve d’une exposition en français. La fausse profondeur, le vague, l’incohérence, l’inexactitude, l’à-peu-près, tous les défauts s’y décèlent mieux que dans le texte original ; c’est un moyen de contrôle

60  From the Vienna circle (particularly in Moritz Schlick) to Johnatan Benneth, Leibniz has often been praised as the best philosopher in the history of philosophy, if not the only one who is still worth studying. On history of the philosophy within the analytical tradition, see Kevin Mulligan, »Sur l’histoire de l’approche analytique de l’histoire de la philosophie: de Bolzano et Brentano à Bennett et Barnes«, in: Jean-Michel Vienne (ed.), *Philosophie analytique et histoire de la philosophie*, Paris 1997, p. 61–103.
61  Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, *De l’influence de la scholastique sur la langue française*, p. 58; Rémusat, »Mémoire touchant l’influence de la scolastique sur la langue française«, p. 236.
62  While, in Rémusat’s view, French was the analytic language par excellence that had derived from scholastic Latin, Alain de Libera interestingly wrote that the 20th century analytic philosophy arose in the Middles Ages, in scholastic theology: »C’est à présent une vérité d’évidence : la philosophie analytique est née au Moyen Age et chez les théologiens« (Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Age*, Paris 1991, p. 152, original emphasis).
Translation as the best way to test the philosophical quality of a text indeed resembles an analytic procedure. The »exotic systems« of course refer to German philosophy, its mysticism, particularism and idealistic features. As an »analyzed« and hence analytical language, French can, in turn, analyze thoughts expressed in foreign languages. In French historiographical imperialism, nationalism does not represent an obstacle to universalism. Analytic and universal thought, French language and philosophy considered as a national property go hand in hand in this theory. Once again, the Kantian philosopher Jakob Freidrich Fries anticipated a similar view a generation earlier, on the other side of the Rhine. He nevertheless pursued opposite goals. In his history of philosophy he claimed that the French philosophers Villers and Degérando, influenced by the nature of French language, had misinterpreted German philosophy. According to him, French translation (or French thought) turns all other philosophies into (French) empiricism.

3. Conclusions. Studying cultural conditioning in history of philosophy

The thesis established and defended in the three treatises which I have addressed in the present study asserted that the universal language of reason had developed from scholastic Latin, or even from the original language of the Brahmans, and reached maturity as modern French prose. The posterity and influences of this theory still require further investigation. In conclusion, however, I shall stress two points regarding its immediate reception.

First, the theory developed by Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, Wey and Rémusat spread beyond the Cousinian school. The catholic thinker Frédéric Ozanam, for instance, took up Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire’s conception

63 Rémusat, »Mémoire touchant l’influence de la scolastique sur la langue française«, p. 236.
64 Fries, Geschichte der Philosophie, p. 17: »Welche im Deutschen deutsche Philosophie kennen, sprechen doch im französischen Empirismus, wenn sie ihre Gedanken ins Französische übertragen.«
65 Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, De l’influence de la scolastique sur la langue française, p. 70.
with some significant adaptations. He described French as the Christian idiom par excellence which had developed since the Middle Ages with a background of Latin; and he also portrayed it as the organizational principle of modernity. In mid-19th century French scholarship, medieval scholasticism had become a national heritage. Far from being the blemish which Schlegel had ascribed to France, it consummately embodied the birth of French spirit, be it catholic or rationalistic.

On the other hand, the constellation I have described presents a very specific moment in the entangled history of French-German cultural relationships. The scholastic Latin genealogy of French prose is not a long-lasting pattern of French philosophical historiography. As far as I know, Victor Cousin himself never formulated it. In 1812 the literary scholar and linguist Gabriel Henry claimed that modern French prose rather derives from Italian. In 1828, the year in which Cousin began to teach history of philosophy as a professor at the Sorbonne, Charles-Nicolas Allou, a Middle Ages lover, wrote that French prose immediately derives from Old French, more precisely from the langue d’oïl. He moreover considered this Nordic origin as a guarantee of nobility. In the 1820s French intellectuals did not necessarily recognize any connection between French culture and medieval scholasticism. Furthermore, after Rémusat’s treatise on the Influence of Scholasticism on French language was published in 1860, Ernest Renan took the opposite path: he praised German erudition and emphasized the superiority of Greek and Indo-


German languages\textsuperscript{70} precisely by defining them as languages that admit syntactic inversion.\textsuperscript{71}

Thus, the derivation of French from scholastic Latin seems to be a short-lived and virulent reaction against German nationalism and idealism from within French philosophical historiography. Interestingly, it betrays how powerful and compelling German linguistic and philosophical ideologies were. Instead of refuting or rejecting any connection between national language and true philosophy, as affirmed in German idealism, mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century French »rationalistic« historians of philosophy adopted this feature and tried to turn it in their favor. They therefore not only claimed that a national language mirrors the universal laws of reason, but they also rooted it in the Middle Ages after having colonized them. Because it is so microscopic, the case study I have expounded provides a clear experimental terrain for reconstructing processes of cultural contamination. It is for instance rather difficult, if not impossible, to say when exactly, in which precise intellectual framework and how culture has been historicized in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. By contrast, there is almost no doubt that the undertakings of Jules Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, Charles de Rémusat and Francis Wey were directly conditioned by German philosophical historiography as it had been developed since Schlegel’s lectures on the history of philosophy. In the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, German historiography was still paradigmatic in European scholarship, even in the counterattacks it had provoked.

\textsuperscript{70} On the discovery or rather invention of Indo-Germanic language (»indogermanisch«), see Jean-Paul Demoule, \textit{Mais où sont passés les Indo-européens? Le mythe d’origine de l’Occident}, Paris 2014.

\textsuperscript{71} See my reconstruction in König-Pralong, \textit{Médiévisme philosophique et raison moderne}, p. 83–94.