

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The tenor of eighteenth-century philosophy was anti-Cartesian, and the primary vehicle of this reaction was the philosophy of language. In the rationalist view of the seventeenth century, speech served only as the inert outward means for the communication of the prefabricated mental discourse of ideas. In theory as well as in practice, language constituted an epistemological obstacle because it was an easy victim of the seductive inducements of eloquence and persuasion – hence the denunciations of rhetoric that are common in the writings of Galileo, Descartes, and Locke. There were no disputes in geometry because the visual figure delivered its truth without the intervention of communication. But since communication could not be avoided, the new science and philosophy undertook a cognitive appropriation of language, based on the claim that only an emotion-free information language exhibited the true nature of language. Thus language was split in two. One form was considered natural by virtue of being obediently cognitive and descriptive, the other unnatural and in the strict sense allied with the passion and transgression that had caused the Fall. Descartes believed there had been a long-past Golden Age of perfect communication and harmony, a belief that matched the more familiar notion that the origin and nature of language were revealed in Adam's prelapsarian naming of the animals, an act that characteristically transformed silent epistemic vision into postlapsarian sound.¹

By contrast, the eighteenth century believed in small beginnings and progress toward greater amplitude of communication and knowledge. The pivotal work in these events was Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, first published in 1746.² The *Essai sur l'origine* presented two interlaced arguments. First, the discursivity that is the condition of knowledge is a function of public speech. Secondly, language owes its origin to a combination of instinctually affective communication and reflectively conceived artificial signs. Instinct, sympathy, and reflection are facts of human nature, and they cannot be explained,

except insofar as they may be considered divine gifts toward the self-education of humanity. Condillac's *Essai* is the source of the notion that language is the best means for gaining insight into mind and thought, a principle especially stressed by Adam Smith:

The best method of explaining and illustrating the various powers of the human mind, the most useful parts of metaphysics, arises from an examination of the several ways of communicating our thoughts by speech, and from attention to those literary principles which contribute to persuasion and entertainment.³

The cognitive appropriation of language that perfectly served the epistemological and descriptive priorities of the seventeenth century made no sense once it had become accepted that communication is creative. Though the seventeenth century was the great age of French eloquence,⁴ only the next century could claim to have a doctrine about the source and nature of language, based on the principles of what I shall call rhetorical expressivism.

This development may usefully be seen in two wider perspectives. First, the eighteenth century differed from the seventeenth about the role of social life in human affairs. In the Cartesian view, innateness is compromised by social intercourse. Right reason and knowledge are private achievements, for in this Augustinian view we do not truly learn anything from anybody. God alone is the teacher, and communication is risky. Seen in this light, it took a contract to secure social bonding.

In the eighteenth century, a different view emerged, as shown in David Hume's and Adam Smith's rejection of contract theory because they had other means of accounting for social cohesion, namely, sympathy. This radical cultural shift toward emphasis on natural sociability is illustrated in the frequency with which certain French words occur, based on a survey of 334 texts by 93 authors for the seventeenth century and 488 texts by 156 authors for the eighteenth century. The figures are not directly comparable but still give a striking lesson:⁵

| <i>Word</i> | <i>1600–1700</i> | <i>1701–1800</i> |
|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <i>société</i> | 620 | 7168 |
| <i>social</i> | 8 | 838 |
| <i>sociabilité</i> | 0 | 66 |
| <i>sociable</i> | 16 | 222 |

With such a dramatic shift toward social awareness, all means of communication became of theoretical interest – including music, pantomime, dance, acting, poetry, ballet, and opera – as did the deprivation of communication, such as the conditions of being deaf or blind.

Another perspective is that speech and knowledge come to be seen as aspects of our natural history. In Condillac's conception of the possibility and growth of knowledge, the development of language is a long-term process of repetition, formation of habits, and social interaction. No one before Condillac had so fully and cogently argued that a fundamental human institution is the product of evolving adaptation and functional success over time. It calls to mind Adam Smith's idea of the invisible hand that stirs individuals to action without any forethought or intention about the ultimate effects of their behavior. Speech is not the lone creation of private Cartesian minds. It owes nothing to plotted invention but comes about, as Hume suggests, 'gradually . . . by human conventions without any promise', just like 'two men, who pull the oars of a boat, do it by an agreement and convention, though they have never given promises to each other'.⁶ Adam Smith had read Hume, but Condillac had not; however, he still pulled oars with them 'without any promise'. He did so at a time when thinking about language for decades had been dominated by Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and by the rising prominence of rhetorical expressivism.

II. LOCKE'S ESSAY

The *Essay* stood at the threshold of the eighteenth century like a Janus figure, and it was chiefly its Book III on 'words and language in general' that made it two-faced. Both Berkeley and Condillac found that Locke's argument went awry because he treated language only after ideas (Book II). It is obvious that Locke was at his most Cartesian on the matter of discourse, taking the position that only the word-free discourse of the mind guarantees true knowledge, just as he also held the rationalist view that syllogistic is trivial, for 'A Man knows first, and then he is able to prove syllogistically. So that *Syllogism* comes after Knowledge, and then a Man has little or no need of it' (*Essay*, IV.xvii.6). This is 'the impossible term-by-term empiricism of Locke and Hume', that was taken over from rationalism.⁷

Condillac found that if Locke had treated language before ideas, he would have realized that his faith in word-free mental discourse clashed with his admission that words often take an active role in thought, as when he observed that like children, we learn most words before having the experience to provide the requisite ideas (*Essay*, III.v.15; III.ix.9); that the complex ideas of mixed modes would either not exist or lose stability without the words that name them because 'it is the Name that seems to preserve those *Essences*, and give them their lasting duration' (III.v.10; see also I.iv.27); and that we hardly ever engage in pure mental discourse, but use words instead, 'even when Men think and reason within their own Breasts' (IV.vi.1; see also I.iv.27). But Condillac's critique

was simultaneously a tribute to the forward-looking views by which the *Essay* facilitated the looming intellectual revolution.

Among these views were Locke's insistence that there is no natural connection between the sounds of words and what they signify. The dismissal of this notion released words from any imputation of a nonarbitrary connection grounded in divine origin by virtue of Adam's name-giving, thus clearing the way for the only alternative, human origin. Another important idea was Locke's notion that language is public owing to its social use and its continued modification in speaking. Languages are 'suited only to the convenience of Communication . . . , not to the reality and extent of Things' (*Essay*, II.xxviii.2), and they were 'established long before Sciences', their 'more or less comprehensive terms' having received 'their Birth and Signification, from ignorant and illiterate People who sorted and denominated Things, by those sensible Qualities they found in them' (III.vi.25). Though Locke never treated the origin of language, he made suggestive remarks about the beginners, the beginning, and growth of languages.⁸ A third important view was Locke's belief that this process of usage will cause change over time, thus giving each language a particular quality and historical dimension. He noted that even with our great volume of classical scholarship, we still often cannot with certainty get the right sense of classical texts, and he found that the same was true of the reading and interpretation of Scriptures (III.ix.10 and 23). Locke's *Essay* had the effect of expanding our thinking about language into the larger issue of communication in general.

Though the *Essay* ranged so widely over the nature and workings of language beyond the strict needs of epistemology, Locke still found no place for the uses of language on the stage, at the bar, in the pulpit, or in poetry. He remained confident that if we wish to 'speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick . . . , all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment' (*Essay*, III.x.34). This reassurance was whistling in the dark, for if words pushed their way into mental discourse, then emotion would enter with them and spoil the cognitive appropriation. For Berkeley, one problem with that appropriation was that the language of the Bible and religion is not cognitive. This led to rhetorical expressivism, an altogether new conception of language that took the place of the rationalist appropriation.

III. RHETORICAL EXPRESSIVISM: THE READMISSION OF EMOTION

In a chapter on the progress of gesture in antiquity, Condillac writes that, at the time of Augustus, mimes had brought their art to such perfection that they

could perform entire plays by gestures alone, thus creating unawares ‘a language which had been the first that mankind spoke’ (*Oeuvres*, II.1.34). This was the ultimate progress of expressivism; it was a form of what Condillac called the language of action, the proto-language of speech that sets humans apart from other animals. But the reaction against the mere information language of the cognitive appropriation had claimed much earlier that emotion and gesture cannot be kept apart from communication.

Best known is Berkeley’s identification of the so-called emotive theory of meaning in the ‘Introduction’ to *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). The ‘communicating of ideas marked by words is not the chief and only end of language’. Words also raise passions, induce actions, create beliefs, and may even by their mere sounds, without intervention of ideas, cause such emotions as ‘fear, love, hatred, admiration, disdain, and the like’. These effects have no bearing on cognition. ‘May we not’, Berkeley asked, ‘be affected with the promise of a *good thing*, though we have not an idea of what it is?’ This is a veiled reference to the apostle Paul, who did not mean to raise ‘abstract ideas of the good things nor yet particular ideas of the joys of the blessed’, but to make men ‘more cheerfull and fervent in their duty’. On this page we also read Berkeley’s fullest statement about the ‘good things’: ‘We are told that the good things which God hath prepared for them that love him are such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it enter’d into the heart of man.’ These words are a conflation of two passages, one from the Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity in *The Book of Common Prayer*, ‘O, God who has prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man’s understanding’, and the other from I Corinthians 2:9 (which in turn echoes Isaiah 64:4), ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him’. In the ‘Seventh Dialogue’ of *Alciphron*, Berkeley reiterated these principles, again quoting Paul and arguing vigorously that we must accept ordinary usage in all its fullness of expression and communication. Though they do not refer to determinate ideas, such words as ‘grace’, ‘person’, ‘force’, and ‘number’ are understood perfectly well in common speech.⁹

Berkeley’s rejection of the cognitive appropriation in favor of the emotive theory is often said to have been altogether new, but that is not correct. It had already been proclaimed in two popular works. In a chapter on ‘what words mean in usage’, Arnauld and Nicole in the *Port-Royal Logic* (1662)¹⁰ argued that in addition to the ‘principal idea’, which is its proper signification, a word often ‘raises several other ideas that we can call accessory [*accessoires*] of which we do not take notice though the mind receives the impression of them’. Thus, if someone is told ‘you have lied about it’, the sense is not merely ‘you have said what you know is not true’, which pertains to the ‘truth of things’, but also the

accompanying thoughts of contempt and outrage that pertain to the ‘truth of usage’. The concept of accessory ideas in usage clearly belongs with emotive meaning in Berkeley’s sense.

The same chapter stated that philosophers had not paid sufficient attention to accessory ideas and went beyond Berkeley by emphasizing that these ideas need not all have their source in custom and usage but may also be created by the speaker’s tone of voice, facial expression, gestures (often called ‘movements’ both in French and English), and ‘by other natural signs that attach a multitude of ideas to our words’, including the affective deviation from standard syntax as in the inversion of normal word order. This stylistic device was often called ‘hyperbaton’ after a much-quoted section on it in Longinus’s *On the Sublime*, recently made widely known in Boileau’s French translation (1674).

The chapter in the *Port-Royal Logic* also argued that departure from the ‘simple style’, which states bare truths, is especially suitable for ‘divine truths’, which are not merely to be known but chiefly ‘to be loved, venerated, and adored by the people’. Here again there is a striking closeness to Berkeley, who used the example of the liar in the draft version of the ‘Introduction’ to *Principles*.¹¹ The rhetorical nature of these observations is noteworthy in a work entitled *Logic, or The Art of Thinking*.

The second work to anticipate Berkeley was Bernard Lamy’s *La rhétorique, ou l’art de parler* (Rhetoric, or the Art of Speaking) (1675), which until Lamy’s death in 1715 went through fifteen steadily expanded and revised French printings, expounding with increasing force and detail the emotive and expressive dimensions of speech.¹² Lamy followed the *Port-Royal Logic* on the primacy of usage (66–72), on accessory ideas exemplified by the liar (39), and on the use of vocal gestures for which he cited interjections (or particles, as he called them) that express ‘admiration, joy, disdain, anger, pain’ (38–9). Lamy boldly claimed that the passions are good in themselves (343), that people hardly ever act on reason but on imagination and sense (367), and that his book did something unusual in aiming to uncover the foundations of rhetoric (153). Lamy’s *Rhétorique* remained a respected authority for much of the eighteenth century.

At this point, oratory begins to blend with sympathy, gestures, and sociability. In its classical formulation, the art of oratory had five parts: invention, disposition, expression, memory, and delivery. Traditionally these parts were given roughly equal importance, but toward the end of the seventeenth century, delivery began to get the most attention as the chief agent of persuasion. This change is evident in Fénelon’s *Dialogues sur l’éloquence en général et sur celle de la chaire en particulier* (Dialogues on eloquence in general and on that of the pulpit in particular), published in 1718 but written some forty years earlier.¹³ His thesis is that truth will not prevail without eloquence and persuasion and that sermons

tend to present ineffectual philosophical argument. In our present fallen state, with man being ‘wholly enmeshed in things of sense . . . it is necessary to give physical body to all the instructions one wishes to inject into his soul, and to find images that beguile him’, that is by poetry, which, being ‘the lively portrayal of things, is as it were the soul of eloquence’ (94).

Fénelon found the greatest eloquence in the Old and New Testaments, especially in the prophets and the psalms, which for him surpassed Homer and Plato in grandeur, naiveté, liveliness, and sublimity (131). The example of David showed that ‘the oriental nations regarded the dance as a serious art, similar to music and poetry’, just as the fact that the ancient Greeks went to war to the sounds of ‘trumpets and drums that threw them into a state of enthusiasm and a sort of furor they called divine’ showed that even in pagan Greece, ‘music, dance, eloquence, poetry had no other purpose but to give expression to the passions and to inspire them in the very act of expressing them’ (68). Fénelon paid much attention to the use of gestures in delivery. Citing Cicero, he wrote that the ‘action of the body’ expresses ‘the sentiments and passions of the soul’ (99). The Latin word *actio* was Cicero’s and Quintilian’s term for delivery, and both cited Demosthenes in support of their belief that delivery is the heart of oratory.¹⁴ ‘Action’, said Cicero, ‘influences everybody, for the same emotions are felt by all people and they both recognize them in others and manifest them in themselves by the same marks’ (*De oratore*, III.223). The gestures of action, both with voice and body, constitute a universal language that promotes communication and social cohesion.

Classical rhetoric did not have a term for the mysterious something that provides humanity with the means of universal communication, but Lamy suddenly supplied one in the fourth edition of his *Rhétorique*. ‘Human beings are bound to one another by a wonderful sympathy [*sympathie*] which naturally makes them communicate their passions’. Thus, a ‘person with an expression of sadness on his face causes sadness, just as a sign of joy makes those who notice it share in the joy’, and all this, Lamy declared, ‘is an effect of the wonderful wisdom of God’ (*Rhétorique*, III–12). In support, Lamy cited some lines from a passage in Horace that Hume also cited to make the same point.¹⁵ The term is Greek, and its philosophical home was in Stoic philosophy, where ‘sympathy’ is the name for the cosmic harmony that binds all things together in an organized whole of both the physical and the moral worlds. A loan translation appears in ecclesiastical Latin as *compassio*, which in turn produced other loan translations such as the German *Mitleid*. Among the most efficient disseminators of this concept of sympathy and its significance for the growth of sociability was Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, whose *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719) was well known to David Hume and Adam Smith.¹⁶

The rise of rhetorical expressivism met the need to understand language within the entire spectrum of human communication. The seventeenth century believed that speech had its origin in better times before the Fall; with that faith gone, what would take its place? How could we become self-starters? We could not have begun by inventing language by discursive plotting for, in the aporia made popular by Rousseau, this would require that we already had a discourse to work with. However, spontaneous emotive expression, natural sociability, and sympathy provided a proto-language, a background language ensured by action and response without forethought. Rhetorical expressivism became the source of the proto-language that Condillac called the language of action.

IV. CONDILLAC

Condillac admired Locke as the best of philosophers because he had studied how the mind works without reliance on postulates about its essential nature. The rejection of innate ideas was one aspect of this which, with other debts to Locke, is too obvious to need explication. On this basis, however, it is still often believed that Condillac was a close disciple of Locke, even that his *Essai sur l'origine* is merely a short version of Locke's *Essay*. This is doubly wrong. First, whereas Locke sought to protect his mental discourse from the cheat of words, Condillac did the very opposite by making language the generator of discursivity and knowledge. The second reason can be read right off the table of contents to Part Two of *Essai* in such chapter titles as 'The prosody of the first languages', 'The progress of the art of gestures among the ancients', 'Music', 'The origin of poetry', 'The origin of the fable, the parable, and the enigma', and 'The genius of languages'. These chapters concern artistic expression, a subject irrelevant to the foundations of Locke's epistemology.

The argument of *Essai* is based on two principles: that nature begins everything, and that we owe so much to the passions that without them 'the understanding is virtually at a standstill' (I.2.106). There is nothing at all passive or mechanical in this philosophy.¹⁷ With other animals, we share consciousness, attentiveness, reminiscence, and a limited form of the livelier human imagination. But unlike them we are capable of becoming speaking and discoursing creatures. What accounts for this difference we do not know, though with many of his contemporaries Condillac located it in 'our organization' – that is, our organic makeup. Discursivity cannot occur without recall, recall not without memory, and neither without signs. These signs cannot be private but must be public. Since we are born with neither innate ideas nor signs (I.2.35), how do we get the signs?

The brief Introduction to *Essai* presents two concepts that underlie the argument. The aim of *Essai* is ‘to reduce everything that pertains to the human mind to a single principle’, namely ‘the connection of ideas’. This connection has two sources, the first existing among the objects and phenomena we experience, the second among the signs we make for the experiences that matter to us. As we attend to these aspects, they enter the network of connections that expresses our relation to our natural and social environments. We create our own internal version of the external world. The objects of attention come in contextual bunches, forming chains and subchains that the mind can survey and control once it has the requisite signs. This control over attention is called reflection.

The second basic concept is the language of action, which ‘has produced all the arts that pertain to the expression of our thoughts: the art of gesture, dance, speech, declamation, the art of recording it, the art of pantomime, of music, of poetry, eloquence, writing, and the different characters of languages.’ (Introduction, p. 5 of transl.). The treatment of this proto-language in Part Two will ‘show the circumstances in which signs are imagined’. Part One examines the operations of the mind and argues why signs are necessary for thinking.

Condillac distinguishes two kinds of remembering, memory and imagination. Memory evokes only details of an original perception and is often limited to the mere sign for a thing, its name (I.2.18). This second possibility invests memory with the power of recalling what is stored in the mind. Memory enables reflection. For us the important distinction between recall and storage is generally lost because we use the word memory chiefly in the sense of storage. Imagination does not present mere details; unlike memory, it raises entire perceptions with all the circumstances of the original experience; not just a flower, but the flower brought to life with color shadings, scent, leaves, surroundings, and so forth. Such imagination can be evoked only indirectly as, for instance, by first recalling the requisite name. Thus memory enables imagination, leading to a second expanded meaning that takes ‘the imagination to be an operation that, in the act of reviving ideas, constantly makes new combinations subject to our will’ (I.2.75). This free-ranging imagination is the quality that preeminently belongs to genius (I.2.104). In a later work, Condillac wrote that a person of imagination is a ‘creative mind’ (*un esprit créateur*) by virtue of joining diverse parts into a single whole that exists only in his own mind (*Oeuvres*, I: 413a; see also 385a). Since imagination creates synthesis, it is not compatible with analysis; poetry and philosophy are different modes of thought. The great lesson of *Essai* is that speech is the primal act of human creation and that speaking and communicating remain inherently creative acts at all times.

Condillac distinguishes three kinds of signs (I.2.35). First, ‘accidental signs’ occur when the chance repetition of some perception acts as a sign that triggers an unexpected recall (I.2.15). Condillac calls it reminiscence, and it shows that something stored in memory can suddenly flash vividly to mind with conviction both that it genuinely belongs to memory and that it is not intentionally evoked. Such renewed awareness urges the possibility that with signs we could recall at will, command our attention, and thus become free, creative agents.¹⁸

Secondly, there are ‘natural signs or the cries that nature has established for the sentiments of joy, fear, pain, etc.’ (I.2.35). These sounds express affective states of mind but when first produced spontaneously do not differ from accidental signs; we could not repeat them unless the appropriate situation recurred. They cannot therefore be signs for the utterer, but they become so if a hearer, who by sympathy has recognized a natural cry as the expression of a familiar state of mind, in turn deliberately reproduces the sound of the cry with the intent of communication – that is, as a sign carrying an intended meaning.

With that move, the hearer creates an instance of the third category of signs, ‘instituted signs, or those that we have ourselves chosen and that have only an arbitrary relation to our ideas’. Here Condillac’s language is careless, as he later realized. There are natural cries, but no natural signs, for it takes a mind to know a sign. In the statement on instituted signs, he got ahead of himself, for the very first instituted signs are, though chosen, not arbitrary in relation to our ideas; these signs repeat the sounds of natural cries, which of course are not arbitrary in that sense. However, the very core of his argument was suggested: the first conception of language occurs when the hearer turns the utterer’s natural cries into signs. This suggests that the stock of signs may be enlarged by arbitrary signs that will enter usage in the continuing language game that has now begun within a form of life on the analogy of Hume’s two rowers. Meaning and language arise only in dialogue.

Without natural cries and gestures we could not become self-starting communicators, and Condillac stresses again and again that nascent speech for a long time needs the support of action. All the modes of expression initially coexisted until, ages later, they emerged as the separate arts that Condillac named in his first statement on the language of action. Thus prose eventually evolves from poetry, ready to serve analysis and cognition. Yet language continues to have many uses; Condillac dismissed the rationalist claim that only the fixed subject-predicate order exhibits the true nature of language.

Condillac was well aware of the problem of getting from action to speech and thought, admitting a seeming impasse for if ‘the exercise of reflection can only be acquired by the use of signs’, how do we acquire the instituted signs unless some degree of reflection was already possible at an earlier stage? (I.2.49). The

answer is that for the hearer the inherent sign function of the natural cries suffices to awaken reflection. 'It is reflection', Condillac wrote, 'that makes us discern the capability of the mind' (I.2.51).¹⁹ From then on, signs and reflection engage in a process of reciprocal improvement. In the chapter on language of action (II.1.3), Condillac refers back to his seeming impasse, remarking that he now gives the solution. By repeatedly hearing spontaneous avowals and engaging in communication within their form of life, speakers came to do by reflection what they had earlier done by instinct. Nature begins everything. The proto-language is part of our natural history.

After eight chapters focusing on the forms of action, Condillac explains that he could not interrupt what he 'wished to say about the art of gesture, dance, declamation, music, and poetry' because they are all so 'closely interrelated as a whole and to the language of action which is their principle'. These eight chapters are the heart of *Essai* (II.1.1–79).

To stress the necessity of signs, Condillac devoted a chapter to the cases of two boys, one of whom grew up as if deaf-mute, the other apart from human society (I.4.13–27). Both were reported around 1700 and had already entered the literature on the subject, as we shall see. The first boy lived in Chartres in the midst of social life, he went to church and outwardly participated in worship by crossing himself, kneeling in prayer, and the like. Then suddenly in his early twenties he began to hear; for some months he listened quietly to what he heard spoken and then began to speak, though haltingly. When theologians asked him what thoughts he had had about God, the soul, and moral good and evil in his past state, it became evident that he had no notion of such matters and even lacked any sense that acts of worship were intentional. Condillac concluded that in his deaf-mute state this young man 'hardly had any idea of what life is' (I.4.18), and he agreed with the source he was quoting that the young man had 'led a mere animal life, wholly occupied with [the] sensible and present objects' that determined his attention. Without hearing and speaking, his social life was so severely limited that he could develop neither memory nor the use of signs, for as the source also said, 'the principal fund of the ideas of mankind is their mutual converse'. In spite of having had the benefit of living in society, he was barely human.

The condition of the other boy was worse, for he was found at the age of about ten living among bears in the forests of Lithuania, making bearlike sounds and crawling on all fours. Like animals he had the use only of accidental signs. He would of course make the natural cries of the passions, but without the opportunity to hear others make similar cries, he could not have suspected that they were 'suited to become signs' by being connected 'with the sentiments they are intended to express' (I.4.25). He could not learn that lesson from the roar

of the animals for the important reason that ‘their roar does not have sufficient analogy with the human voice’. Each species conforms to an analogy, which in human beings is grounded in the sympathy that is the condition for the proto-language. For Condillac, this is all part of our natural history.

Analogy plays a crucial role. It is a product of comparison and resemblance, and it shows up in all aspects of language – in grammar, phonology, word formation, and style – thus interacting with and mirroring the mind’s corresponding effort to create order and coherence in the connection of ideas. It follows that ‘the poorer a language is in analogous expressions, the less assistance it gives to memory and imagination’ (II.1.147). Since any particular language embodies a ruling analogy, a language that is a mixture of idioms gives less assistance to the mind (II.1.146, see also 151–2). It is this role of analogy that lies behind the notion of language being an organism. Since there is always a variety of possible relations of resemblance, analogy does not act like a deterministic vise on the mind; quite the contrary, it opens scope for creativity.²⁰

Condillac’s account of signs raised problems both among his contemporaries and also later, often leading to the charge that his account is incoherent. Condillac occasionally exchanged ideas about language with Maupertuis, a distinguished French scientist who was then president of the Prussian Academy in Berlin. In response to an essay on language by Maupertuis, he wrote (25 June 1752) that he wished Maupertuis had shown how the progress of the mind depends on language, continuing that ‘I tried to do that in my *Origin*, but I was mistaken and gave too much to signs’ (*Oeuvres*, 2: 536a). This has been read as an admission that Condillac was wrong about signs and thus, astonishingly, about the entire argument of his *Essai*. The evidence shows otherwise. Condillac wrote much on language during the rest of his life, in the *Cours d’étude pour l’instruction du prince de Parme* (Course of study for the Prince of Parma) (1775), in his *La logique* (Logic) (1780), and in *La langue des calculs* (Language of the calculus) (1798), without retreating from the argument of *Essai*. By his own admission, *L’art de penser* (Art of thinking; part of the *Cours d’étude*) repeated, usually verbatim, the text of *Essai*. He changed the title of the chapter on how we give signs to ideas (*Essai*, I.4. 1–12) to ‘The necessity of signs’, adding a note saying that since *Essai*, ‘I have completed the task of showing the necessity of signs in my *Grammar* [also in *Cours d’étude*] and in my *Logic*’, both with searching chapters on the language of action. Condillac’s remark about having given too much to signs cannot be read as an admission of fatal error on a matter at the center of his philosophy.

He meant that he had given insufficient emphasis to social intercourse, as he implied in criticizing Maupertuis for assuming that a single isolated person would ever hit upon the notion of giving signs to ideas. A few years earlier,

in letters to the Swiss mathematician Gabriel Cramer,²¹ Condillac insisted on the need for social life, with frequent references to his chapter on the two boys, though he admitted that his exposition had not been clear enough. Asked whether natural signs count for nothing, Condillac answered:

[B]efore social life, natural signs are properly speaking not signs, but only cries that accompany sentiments of pain, joy, etc., which people utter by instinct and by the mere form of their organs. They must live together to have occasion to attach ideas to these cries and to employ them as signs. Then these cries blend with the arbitrary signs. That is what I am supposing in several places [he refers to I.4.23–4, II.1.2–3]. But I appeared to suppose the contrary, and thus to make too great a difference between natural and arbitrary signs; and in that I was wrong. (*Lettres inédites à Gabriel Cramer*, 85–6)

This might give the impression that natural cries could be signs before or without social intercourse, but the need for social life is spelled out by what comes next:

That is what my entire system comes down to in this matter. Social intercourse gives occasion 1. to change the natural cries into signs; 2. to invent other signs that we call arbitrary; and these signs (the natural as well as the arbitrary) are the first principles of the development and progress of the operations of the mind. I admit that on all this my work is not clear enough. I hope I'll do better another time (*Lettres*, 86).

The position is thoroughly anti-Cartesian, against solipsism and against the notion that any acceptable explanation of mental life must begin with claims about the mind of the silent, isolated individual. On that view, determinate meaning must precede use; for Condillac, meaning arises only in use and dialogue.

How is it possible to reconcile this argument about communication and knowledge with the widely credited dogma that Condillac's philosophy is most fully represented by the famous statue in his *Traité des sensations* (1754)?²² The claim is that the statue, if endowed with each of the five senses, becomes a full-fledged human being, ready to acquire and command the entire range of our intellectual abilities. Seen in this perspective, Condillac is said to wish 'to eliminate all autonomous activity from the mind' by making reflection 'depend upon the mechanical association of ideas'. This is the familiar misconception that 'the informal metaphysics of the Enlightenment tended toward a mechanical philosophy which saw nothing artificial in likening man to an animated statue, even as the universe is likened to a watch'. However, such a reading grasps neither the pivotal role of signs and communication nor Condillac's persistent affirmation of the creativity and action of the mind. Like the two deprived boys, the statue is radically speechless because its existence is wholly private and unsocial; its mental life is that of an animal.²³ For Condillac, the essence of humanity is the

activity of the mind that is generated when thinking is cycled into action by signs and their use in dialogue. Without language, there is no humanity.

V. INVERSIONS OR THE PROBLEM OF WORD ORDER

Condillac's discussion of inversion brings out the deep implications of his argument that all languages ultimately stem from and still bear some marks of the expressive language of action. In a chapter on 'Music', he observed that compared with Frenchmen, the Greeks had a much livelier imagination because their language was closer to the language of action, which itself is a product of the imagination, while French is so prose-like and analytical that 'it hardly requires more than the exercise of memory' (*Traité*, II.1.51). In a chapter on 'Inversions' (II.1.117–26), he challenged the rationalist term-by-term doctrine, declaring that no one could tell what the natural order was. French must use the order 'Alexander overcame Darius', whereas in Latin '*Alexander vicit Darium*' and '*Darium vicit Alexander*' are equally good. The doctrine that the subject-predicate order was natural might really be a French prejudice since its grammar left no choice in the matter. Latin grammar put little constraint on word order because it left the expression free to create the order that best suited the emotions and the intended emphasis.

In support, Condillac analyzed a passage from Horace and one from Virgil. In plain English, the latter said, 'the nymphs wept for Daphne who lost her life in a cruel death', or, in similar order in Latin, '*Nymphae flebant Daphnim extinctum funere crudeli*'. But Virgil's poetry is '*Extinctum Nymphae crudeli funere Daphnim flebant*'. Here the first four words keep us in suspense until '*Daphnim*' comes like 'the first stroke of the painter's brush', which then quickly completes the picture with '*flebant*'. Thus 'the attributes of a doleful death strike me all of a sudden. Such is the power of inversions over the imagination.' (II.1.120–2). Virgil's poetry emulates the early language of action, which is truer and more spontaneous than the analytical prose that later developed. Much like a painting, Virgil's Latin expression captures the instancy of thought, while the time-bound and linear French can produce only 'a plain narrative'. This implies that the sentence is the unit of meaning; people who are familiar with the language of action know that 'a single gesture is often equivalent to a long sentence' (II.1.51). This is now called semantic holism and contrasts with rationalism, for which individual words are the prime carriers of meaning.

Condillac was pointedly criticized in two long entries in the *Encyclopédie*, on 'Inversions' (8 (1765), 852a–62a), and on language ('Langue', 9 (1765), 249a–66a), by the great universal grammarian Nicolas Beauzée. For him, the original language, being divine and Adamic, exhibited an immutable analytical order reflecting the mind as 'an emanation of the unchanging and sovereign reason

of the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into this world'. Citing the Bible and Descartes, Beauzée concluded that a language of inversions was artificial and thus secondary. Condillac's position was as much against nature as a painting of a tree with its roots in the air and its leaves buried in the ground.²⁴

For Condillac, the poetic quality of the language of action recaptured by inversion gave vivacity and force, or 'energy' as his contemporaries, especially Diderot, called it. The concept of expressive energy became so well known that by 1782 it gained an entry in the *Encyclopédie méthodique: Grammaire et littérature*:

Energy is the quality that in a single word or in a small number of words causes us to perceive or feel a large number of ideas; or which by means of a small number of ideas expressed by words excites in the mind sentiments of admiration, respect, horror, love, hate, etc., which words alone do not signify.²⁵

This is illustrated by a passage from Horace that Condillac used to the same purpose (*Traité*, II.1.121). Written by the splendid Beauzée, the entry began: 'Energy is a Greek word *energeia*, *actio*, *efficacia*; in this sense its roots are in *en* (*in*, *dans*, *en*) and *ergon* (*opus*, *ouvrage*, *oeuvre*).' Beauzée is saying that the true nature of language is action, not ready to hand in finished work, and that this creativity can best be attained in languages that, like Latin, have a grammar that puts few constraints on word order.

In words widely taken to state the heart of his linguistic thought, Wilhelm von Humboldt declared that language 'in itself is no product (*Ergon*) but an activity (*Energeia*). . . . It is the ever-repeated mental labor of making the articulated sound capable of expressing thought.' Humboldt's distinction between what he in German called *Werk* (work) and *Thätigkeit* (activity) corresponds wholly to the one Beauzée made between the two Greek words and their Latin and French equivalents. Humboldt found the true nature of language in Sanskrit and Greek, which by means of their rich use of inflection could create what he called the 'true inner fixity' of expression. Humboldt hardly arrived at his distinction and its formulation without knowing what had been written about inversion and energy.²⁶

Some twenty years after Beauzée's claims for its exclusive legitimacy, the analytical order was celebrated in Antoine Rivarol's less important but better-known *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* (1784). In 1783, it won the prize of the Berlin Academy for the famous argument that 'what is not clear is not French', whereas French has remained 'faithful to the direct order as if it was reason itself'. French 'first names the *subject* of the discourse, then the *verb* that is the action, and last the *object* of this action; there you have the logic that is natural to all humanity'. By contrast, Rivarol wrote, languages with inversions are muddled and hard to learn, though they are very favorable to music, which thrives on 'disorder and abandon'.²⁷

Condillac had already undermined Rivarol's extravagant opinions in his *Grammaire* (1775):

The truth is that in the mind there is neither direct order nor inverted order because the mind perceives all its ideas at the same time; it would speak them at the same time if it could speak them as it perceives them. That is what would be natural to it; and that is how it speaks them when it knows only the language of action. It is therefore only in discourse that ideas have a direct or inverted order, for their succession occurs only in discourse. These two orders are equally natural. (*Oeuvres*, 1: 503a)²⁸

There cannot be discrete prevenient ideas or mental discourse without the public signs that enable thinking, and we cannot claim to know what a thought was before its expression.

VI. CONDILLAC'S EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOURCES

For a work of its kind, *Essai sur l'origines* cites at unusual length from other texts, chiefly from three near-contemporaries of Condillac: the English bishop and man of letters William Warburton, the German philosopher Christian Wolff, and the French critic and historian Jean-Baptiste Du Bos.

Warburton is cited at length in a chapter on 'Writing' (*Essai*, II.I.127–37) and in the crucial chapter on the language of action (II.I.1–12), which draws on a brief section on language in *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1741). Condillac had no English but saw a French translation of Book IV, Section Four of *Divine Legation*, in which he found the term 'language of action' (*langage d'action*) both in the text and in the prominent marginal summaries. Warburton himself never used that phrase nor did he even consistently use the same phrase for that notion. Warburton also argued that in the time of early religion, speech was so rude that the Old Testament prophets often instructed the people by 'actions . . . and conversed with them in signs', to which Warburton added that such 'speaking by action' was also common in pagan antiquity, for instance, by the Delphic oracle.²⁹ Warburton also said that 'the mutual converse [that] was upheld by a mixed discourse of words and actions' might in time be improved by 'use and custom . . . especially amongst the *Eastern* people [as in the Old Testament], whose natural temperature inclined them to a mode of conversation which so well exercised their vivacity by *motion*' (*Divine Legation*, 83; in French, 120). In other words, development might occur even in this sacred territory. Warburton went further, citing ancient accounts of the origin of language, with people at first living in caves like beasts before gradually gaining speech by mutual assistance – an origin so natural, he said, that it had been credited by several church fathers (81–2; in French 119), although the Bible said that God had instructed Adam in religion and language. Still Warburton thought that this

language must ‘needs have been very poor and narrow’, though it did put man in the position of ‘being now of himself able to improve and enlarge it, as his future necessities should require’. Having quoted Warburton’s sanction of development, Condillac commented that this observation ‘seems very judicious to me’, and that when he would now begin his argument with the schematic account of two children alone in the desert after the Fall, it was because he did not think a philosopher could appeal to special dispensation but must limit himself to explaining how things could have come about by natural means (*Essai*, 113–14, note). However, since Warburton’s speaking by actions was divine and deliberate, in fact it had little in common with Condillac’s involuntary expression of sentiments that formed the basis for his language of action. Probably Condillac chose to cite the English divine in order to bolster the legitimacy of an enterprise that might have easily run afoul of doctrine and church authority.³⁰

For his account of the two deprived boys, Condillac referred to Wolff’s *Psychologia rationalis* (1736, 1740), where the relevant passage begins: ‘The use of speech promotes and enlarges the use of reason; without the use of speech the use of reason is quickly lost.’³¹ Like Condillac, Wolff argues that pain and pleasure are grounds of action; that reflection does not occur without words; that reason becomes manifest only by virtue of speech; and that signs and words are necessary for thinking and recall. Wolff is also strong on the enchainment of all things and on the connection of ideas, and he presents the entire architecture of the mind and the process of knowing in terms similar to those of Part One of *Essai*. But there are salient differences. Unlike Condillac, Wolff referred to God as a ground of explanation, and he often likened nature to a clockwork, in contrast with Condillac’s preference for organic terms and metaphors. Wolff has no trace of the evolutionary conception of language or the related conception of the language of action. This may explain why Condillac found that Wolff ‘did not know the absolute necessity of signs, any more than the manner in which they contribute to the operations of the mind’ (I.4.27).³²

In *Essai*, Condillac cites Du Bos’s *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* more than any other text. The seven long citations are in chapters on prosody and declamation in Greek and Latin and on the use of pantomime in the ancient theater, and they are all drawn from Du Bos’s third volume, ‘A dissertation on the theatrical performances of the ancients’. This is a veritable handbook on rhetorical expressivism, and its copious references to Cicero and Quintilian constitute an anthology of passages on expression, gesture, and ‘action’ in the works of those authors. It is true, therefore, that Condillac ‘undoubtedly owes the theory of the language of action and of the language of music to Du Bos’,³³ but his debt goes far beyond the actual citations. *Réflexions* has chapters on music (1.360–75; 3.4–60) and on the advantages of poets composing in Latin

over those in French (1.246–77). This chapter is about inversion and draws the same conclusions as Condillac did in regard to the poetic benefits of the free word order made possible by the inflections of Latin grammar.

In art, Du Bos gave primacy to emotion, with concomitant celebration of genius and activity. We rate a poem or a painting as we do a ragout, not by analysis of the recipe but by a ‘sixth sense’ that is ‘commonly called sentiment’, which is the way the heart works ‘by a movement that precedes all deliberation’ (*Réflexions*, 2.238–9). The tenor of *Réflexions* is that discursivity lacks the energy and immediacy of wordless communication. Du Bos expounded this subject chiefly in four chapters on dance and pantomime in the ancient theater (3.160–225). ‘The gestures of ancient dance must speak, they must signify something, they must, as it were, be a continued discourse’ (3.164), a subject he treated most fully in a chapter ‘on pantomimes or actors who perform without speaking’ (3.202–25). Du Bos relied heavily on Lucian’s dialogue on expression and action in the ancient theater, ‘The dance’.³⁴ This spirited work argued that dance brings both pleasure and harmony in the combined uses of music, song, rhythm, ballet, pantomime, declamation, and other forms of expression. In this sense, dance keeps company with eloquence, for dance ‘is given to depicting character and emotion, of which the orators are also fond’ (‘The dance’, 247). Thus, for Lucian, dance corresponds to what Condillac in the opening pages of *Essai* called the language of action, which ‘has produced all the arts that pertain to the expression of thoughts’.³⁵

The similarity of conceptions and arguments in the works of Condillac and the works of the late Wittgenstein may already have crossed the reader’s mind. This similarity is not surprising. Both take aim at the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, and their arguments follow analogous paths from a non-Cartesian proto-language to the conclusion that language cannot have emerged from the privacy of the individual mind but is a function of social life and communication. For both, the proto-language provides a firm, doubt-free beginning, and for both that beginning was action. The language of action initiates a game that occurs within a form of life, and, like a game, the language of action carries no implication that it is guided by reason. It is unlikely that Wittgenstein had read Condillac (or Du Bos, Fénelon, and Adam Smith) or had come upon the rhetorical expressivism that prevailed over Cartesian dualism. But attention to Wittgenstein evokes a good sense of Condillac’s achievement.³⁶

In his own time and for a good while after, his influence was wide and deep. One aspect appealed particularly to the temper of the times. Condillac argued at length that modern arts have developed from seeds sown in the distant past, that the style of the earliest poetry was a function of the particular quality of the language in which it was composed, and that owing to this interdependence good poetry and language tend to flourish together. Languages differ, and each

language forms a quality or genius very early by the ruling analogy that is, as it were, its soul. Just as each individual, according to his or her passions, has a particular language, so the genius or 'character of nations shows still more openly than the character of individuals', for a 'multitude cannot act in concert to conceal their passions'. As compatriots, we are proud of our shared preferences and 'happy that they point to our native country in favor of which we are always prejudiced. Thus everything confirms that the language of each nation expresses the character of the people who speak it' (*Essai*, II. I. 143). Poets shape the quality of a language, and it becomes a 'painting of the character of each nation's genius' (II. I. 161–2).

This mix of language, poetry, history, and nation is totally at odds with the universalism and contempt for individuality that lie at the core of the so-called Enlightenment project. It is true that Condillac did have a concept of 'a well-made language' that might go beyond prose and approach the quality of algebra without ever achieving its perfection. This may sound as if Condillac had in mind a universal or philosophical language, but in the posthumous *La langue des calculs* (Language of the Calculus) (1798) he expressly rejected the possibility of making a transnational, universal language since it would impair or lack the analogy necessary for the proper understanding and use of any language.³⁷ Condillac did contribute to the universal 'language' of Guyton de Morveau's and Antoine Lavoisier's chemical nomenclature, but the well-made language remained a national language.³⁸ This was the dominant position in the eighteenth century, foreshadowed by Locke's suggestion that no one 'can pretend to attempt the perfect *Reforming* the *Languages* of the world . . . without rendring himself ridiculous' (*Essay*, III.xi.2).

However, Condillac's influence was more powerful at the poetic end of the linguistic spectrum. One of the truly important cultural events of the latter half of the eighteenth century was the sudden rise of interest in the poetry of the unlettered folk, first in Scotland, where Hugh Blair published his *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian Son of Fingal* (1763), and then on the shores of the Baltic, where Herder, after reading Blair, became excited by the singing and poetry of the folk he met in the fields and villages outside Riga. This was not a sudden whim but a wish to learn from the nameless art upon which Condillac had conferred dignity and philosophical importance. The aesthetics of Romanticism has its roots in Condillac's philosophy of speech, art, and culture.

VII. DIDEROT

It cannot be doubted that it is to Diderot that we owe the *Encyclopédie's* copious attention to topics relating to rhetoric, dance, music, pantomime, the stage, poetry, declamation, and other forms of expression – the language of action.

Taken together, these entries constitute the single most notable and innovative feature of that work, and they have shared the usual fate of such reference work entries of flowing anonymously into the minds and discourse of authors who left no evidence of their source. The *Encyclopédie méthodique* was probably an even more important uncredited source. It contained articles that had appeared in the *Encyclopédie* and its Supplement, as well as new entries on topics that had gained prominence in more recent years such as Beauzée's on 'Energie'.³⁹

In the 1740s, Condillac occasionally shared meals with Rousseau and Diderot, who, with his good contacts in the book trade, helped the reclusive author find a publisher. As Condillac's first and most influential spokesman, Diderot, in his *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (Letter on deaf-mutes) (1751), widened the scope of inversion and the language of poetry. Diderot recognized that the problem of inversion raised important issues about the nature of language. How did the unitary gestures of the language of action develop into the analytic order of modern French prose? Could it be known what the basic natural word order had been? And, if so, what was it? How did language solve the problem of converting the simultaneity of a thought into the sequentiality of a sentence? What were the relative merits of poetry and prose? What was the relation between visual and verbal expression? What, if any, was the interdependence of thought and language? How well do speakers and hearers understand one another? And especially, what can we do to improve communication and understanding?

A good rationalist had ready answers to these questions; Condillac's were quite different. About effective communication he would have said that if the aim was affective communication, then the energetic and poetic concentration made possible by Greek and Latin grammar was best, but if the aim was expository clarity suitable for philosophy, then French prose was best. Diderot agreed, and like Condillac he admitted with regret that the perspicuity of French prose had been gained at the cost of 'enthusiasm (*chaleur*), eloquence, and energy'.⁴⁰ This loss became the fulcrum of Diderot's lifelong fascination with forms of art and expression. People of genius were rare, and genius could put an entire nation into a temper of fermentation, perfecting knowledge in a marvellously short time. Genius was marked chiefly by its impact on language because creative minds had 'the passion of imagination and thoughtfulness to enrich language with new expressions'.⁴¹ Diderot disagreed sharply with Helvétius's deterministic beliefs that genius is a matter of luck and that people, being shaped by their environment and education, are mostly alike rather than individually different. The individuality of each person was the heart of Diderot's conception of human nature, genius being a unique and wholly unpredictable manifestation of individuality. But there is a problem: what happens to individuality in the process of communication?

If we imagined, Diderot boldly declared, that ‘God suddenly gave each individual a language which at every point was analogous to his or her feelings, there would be no understanding at all’. We have been spared that possibility by the very poverty and insufficiency of language, for ‘though we all feel differently, we speak alike’. ‘Such is the diversity [of feeling] that if each individual could create for himself a language that was analogous to what he is, there would be as many languages as there are individuals’.⁴² In successful communication, we surrender part of our individuality, with the consequence that ‘we never precisely understand, we are never precisely understood’.⁴³ Naturally, Diderot wished to recover as much as possible for individuality, and this meant paying attention to the spoken dimension of communication. In an early work, Diderot compared creativity in communication to the efforts of strangers to be understood among speakers whose native language they barely know.⁴⁴

It is an accepted axiom, argues Diderot, that different causes do not produce the same effects. Still, says his interlocutor, two people may have the same thought and express it identically; two poets may write the same lines on the same subject. Since two individuals are different causes, does not the sameness of expression show that the axiom does not hold? Not at all, answers Diderot; the sameness is only a superficial result of the poverty of language. If it were rich enough, the two persons and the two poets would not have a word in common, and the public dimension of sense that ensures understanding would be lost. Now Diderot’s friend gets the point, even adding that not having a word in common would be much like the individual differences of what he calls accents in pronunciation. ‘That’s it’, says Diderot,

it is the very variety of accent . . . that makes up for the paucity of words by doing away with the frequent identities of effects that are produced by the same causes. The number of words is limited, while that of accents is infinite. That explains how everyone has his own individual language and speaks as he feels, is cold or warm, vivacious or placid, is himself and only himself, while in regard to idea and expression he seems to be like another person.⁴⁵

Accent belongs to ‘the language of nature’ that is understood by all; it is what ancient authority called ‘the seed-plot of music’ – that is, of vocal music. Accent is a sort of singing added to speech. As noted earlier, the term is a translation of the Greek word behind our word prosody. One authority often cited is Cicero’s statement that ‘there is even in speech a sort of musical play of voice’.⁴⁶ Accent is an aspect of rhetorical expressivism. As a vocal gesture within the repertoire of the language of action, it keeps our information prose alive with the poetic qualities of early speech. Diderot’s chief aim was to show that language has more uses and forms than appear in the silent, visual, ordered display on the written

page. We are wrong to think that our prosy information language exhausts the dimensions of communication.⁴⁷ Diderot's celebration of hearing contrasts with the seventeenth century's fixation on seeing. This opposition of ear and eye, orality and vision defines two radically different conceptions of the nature of language.

In the dialogue cited, while taking a walk in the country, Diderot holds forth about painting, art, life, imitation, and expression, but then suddenly interrupts himself to ask his friend,

'We have been conversing for a long time. I suppose you have heard me and understood me'. – 'Very well'. – 'Do you think you have heard anything besides words?' – 'Certainly' – 'Well, you are mistaken. You have heard only words and nothing but words. . . . Really, while I was talking you were busy enumerating the ideas subsumed under abstract words; your imagination was hard at work depicting the sequence of inter-linked images in my discourse. You aren't thinking of that. I would have finished talking when you would still be at the first word, at the end of my description before you would have sketched the first outline of my presentation.' 'Yes indeed, you may well be right'.

To drive home his point, Diderot cites some soul-stirring lines of poetry about Neptune, Pluto, the gods, hell, death, and Styx, and then begins to ask his friend a question about the recitation – but is interrupted by his friend: '[T]hat is an astonishing mystery; for without recalling the ideas, without depicting the images, I have all the same felt the impression of that terrifying and sublime passage.' To this Diderot quickly answers: '[T]hat is the mystery of everyday conversation.' Playing on the double meaning of the French word *entendre*, which means both 'to hear' and 'to understand', Diderot has disabused his friend of the myth that understanding does not occur until the exterior language in a process of introspection has been translated into an interior language of ideas.⁴⁸

VIII. THE DEBATE ABOUT LANGUAGE IN THE BERLIN ACADEMY: MICHAËLIS AND SÜSSMILCH

Twelve years after the publication of Condillac's *Essai sur l'origines*, the Prussian Academy in Berlin set this prize-essay topic: 'What is the reciprocal influence of the opinions of the people on the language and of their language on the opinions?' The prize went to a famous professor at Göttingen, the Semitic and Arabic scholar Johann David Michaëlis, for a refreshingly unacademic, readable essay called *A Dissertation on the Influence of Opinions on Language and of Language on Opinions*, full of telling examples. It argued that language is the product of usage by generations of speakers, especially 'the fair sex' and children, who, he said, with no preconceived ideas are full of bold associations of ideas. The

learned by contrast play a small role because they tend to have narrow minds and to be ‘blinded by prejudices’. Echoing Locke’s remarks about the ‘ignorant and illiterate people’ who shape language, Michaëlis declared that it is ‘from the opinions of the people and the point of view in which objects appear to them that language has received its form’, which make language ‘a democracy in which use or custom is decided by the majority’.⁴⁹ In the course of time, ‘thousands of people become contributors to that immense heap of truths and errors, of which the languages of nations are the repository’ (*Dissertation*, 3). Michaëlis’s essay is one of the first statements (one could even say manifestos) of the powerful folk doctrine that was emerging from Condillac’s *Essai*.

The papers delivered in the Academy, and usually published in its proceedings, did not favor the divine origin of language, but that doctrine found a strong defender in Johann Peter Süssmilch with two papers in 1756. When these were not published by the Academy, he brought them out in expanded form in 1766 as *Versuch eines Beweises, dass die erste Sprache ihren Ursprung nicht vom Menschen, sondern allein vom Schoepfer erhalten habe*.⁵⁰

Süssmilch’s argument deserves attention both in its own right and as an illuminating contrast to Condillac’s *Essai*: It takes the form that language is either divine or human. If human, it must be either natural or artificial. Since the sounds made by animals are natural and, for each kind, the same all over the world, human language cannot be natural in this sense. Language must be artificial and must have come about either by chance or by design. Chance can be ruled out since it would entail irregularity and lack of order, and, apart from the uselessness of such a language, all languages, even primitive ones, have rules of perfection and order – that is, design. Human language must be the work of reason and wise choice, which means that ‘the first inventors of language’ must already have had the use of reason in order to be able to reflect, abstract, and ratiocinate. These operations, however, cannot be performed without the use of signs, which would presuppose the prior possession of reason. Thus human beings cannot have invented language instantly or even gradually, for the latter would entail that mankind for hundreds of years lived as animals or children, incapable of conceiving the intent, let alone the goal, of any improvement. The origin must lie outside mankind in a higher, more intelligent being. It follows that ‘our Creator was the first teacher of language’, which by a miracle was communicated in the beginning. How this may have happened the essay naturally does not propose to examine; miracles defy explanation and understanding (*Versuch*, 13–17). Although entirely philosophical and without a single biblical citation, Süssmilch’s argument confirms Scripture.

He allows that the arts have undergone gradual growth from simple beginnings toward greater perfection but does not admit anything of the sort for

language (*Versuch*, 54), thus implying agreement with Condillac's belief in the radical priority of language over other human institutions. The very uniformity of grammar among languages and the free choice of signs display a formal agreement that 'forces us to go back to the one and only teacher and originator of language. . . . The form of language is not like the form of a bird's nest or beehive, which owing to innate instincts must always be formed in the same fashion' (83). Süßmilch's argument comes down to this: no reason without language, no language without reason. This is Rousseau's familiar aporia, which Süßmilch in a late addition to his essay cited in support of his position. The contrast between that position and Condillac's is shown in their conceptions of a human origin for language. Süßmilch saw it as 'invention', the term he consistently used, and Condillac as art and creation. It was a contrast between timeless wisdom beyond human reach and the gradual improvement of expression, communication, discursivity, and reason. Süßmilch made it clear that he had not read Condillac. His essay is one of the first extended treatments of the conflict between faith and natural history, anticipating the thicker debate in the nineteenth century, not least in regard to language.

IX. HERDER

Johann Gottfried Herder in 1770, wrote his prize essay on the origin of language for the Berlin Academy, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, which was due for submission by the end of the year. It gained the prize and was published by the Academy in 1772. He had by then already published a good deal on familiar themes in language and literature, especially in the first of three anonymous collections of essays on modern German literature, *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur* (1766–7).⁵¹ Herder's debt to his extensive reading of French is obvious. In a fragment called 'On the life stages of a language', Herder repeated Condillac's and Diderot's observations on the birth, formation, and maturity of a language. In the early stage, language was full of gestures, song, accents, music, and pantomime, all of which assisted the sense of speech that was coming into being. Marked by energy, poetry, and inversions, this stage developed through a middle period into the maturity of prose and well-ordered ideas that is the proper discourse of philosophy while also constituting decline and even decadence owing to loss of immediacy of emotive expression.⁵²

Another fragment is devoted to inversions, again with emphasis on their prominence in the early affective language before those features gave way to prose, which has no inversions because it follows the order of ideas in the mind. In this context, Herder repeats, with similar analysis, a Latin phrase, *serpentem fuge* ('flee the serpent'), which Diderot in *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (155–6)

had used to argue that the speaker's and hearer's principal concern determines whether inversion occurs in that phrase. If the first concern is fright at the sign of the serpent, there is no inversion, but if escape is the first concern, then inversion occurs because the imperative 'flee' stands at the end.⁵³

The fragment on 'Life stages' and the two other early short pieces show knowledge of Condillac's *Essai* and have dates not later than early 1765, possibly even earlier. But in an addendum to *Fragmente* III (1767), Herder wrote that he had recently, through a review published in 1766, come upon a book that cast much light on his 'Life stages'. The book was Condillac's *Essai* which he was now leafing through with delight. The implication is that 'Life stages' was written without knowledge of *Essai*. Unfortunately, Herder was fiddling with the dates, which suggests that his statements cannot always be taken at face value.⁵⁴

In sum, (1) in the 1760s, before *Ursprung*, Herder was familiar with the conception of the language of action and its consequences; (2) he accepted this conception and made it his own to the point of largely repeating Condillac and Diderot; (3) like them he thought of language as speech and communication, not as the prior silent, mental discourse of rationalism; (4) he was committed to expressivism; (5) inversion, poetry, and creativity belonged together; and (6) for these reasons Herder's early principles are not clearly distinguishable from those of Condillac and Diderot. In *Ursprung*, Herder's conception of the nature of language is sharply at odds with his earlier beliefs.

Michaëlis had suggested in his essay that the Prussian Academy in Berlin set a topic on the origin of language, and ten years later it did so: 'Supposing that human beings were left to their own natural faculties, are they in a position to invent language [*d'inventer le langage*]? And by what means will they achieve this invention [*cette invention*]?' The answer was clearly expected to counter arguments, such as Süßmilch's, for divine origin. With no less than thirty-one submissions, this proved vastly more popular than any of the earlier topics.⁵⁵

Ursprung is divided into two parts. In the first, we find Herder's account of the nature and origin of language. It opens with the arresting statement that 'already as an animal does man have language' (Gaier 697, Pross 253). All animals, including humans, naturally express their passions and may thereby elicit sympathetic responses in others, but since the potential for voluntary communication goes unnoticed, human language cannot have its origin here. These merely natural sounds remain 'brutish, the natural law of a sensitive machine' (Gaier 708, Pross 263). The vocal sounds Herder calls 'interjections', which shows that he is committed to Beauzée's rationalist doctrine that interjections are foreign to the true nature of language.⁵⁶ But Herder is astonished that anyone has thought it possible to explain the origin of human language from the cry of passion alone,

unless ‘the intellect supervenes to use the sound with intent’ in the making of a ‘human, arbitrary language’. He declares that Condillac’s is among such empty accounts, giving in support an outrageously false report on the case of the two children in the desert at the beginning of Part Two of *Essai sur l’origines*. This is a rejection of the language of action, and from *Ursprung* one would never appreciate that conception nor its crucial role in Condillac.⁵⁷

Herder could hardly have failed to realize that his version of Condillac was false, for his early writings do not show any such failure. Furthermore, *Essai* argues that animals and humans share the capacity for reminiscence, whereas humans alone command the memory that makes recall possible (I.2.39–40). Though not Cartesian automatons, animals cannot cross the threshold into discursivity. Herder made this point through the familiar organismic principle that there is ‘a unique quality of thinking which, by virtue of its linkage to a certain organization of the body, is called reason in humans but instinct in animals’ (Gaier 717, Pross 272). This nearly repeats Condillac’s statement in the *Traité des animaux* (1755) that it is no wonder that ‘man, who is as superior [to animals] in regard to organic nature [*l’organisation*] as by the nature of the mind that animates him, alone has the gift of speech’ (*Oeuvres*, I: 361b). Herder obviously followed Condillac in connecting the issue of animal language with that of instinct and reason, for he cited *Traité des animaux* in support of his statement that Condillac had made animals into human beings, a claim that is manifestly false but often quoted with approval.

Having closed off one avenue to language, Herder seeks another in what he sometimes calls *Besonnenheit*, a noun formed from the past participle of a verb commonly used reflexively (*sich besinnen*), meaning to consider, reflect, discriminate, or show circumspection. Many efforts have been made to distinguish between Herder’s term and Condillac’s ‘reflection’, but Herder in fact uses both terms interchangeably. It has, for instance, been suggested that *Besonnenheit* is the ability to direct attention at will, but this is precisely Condillac’s explanation of reflection. For Herder, the crucial event takes this form:

Man being placed in the state of reflection [*Besonnenheit*] that is peculiar to him, when this reflection works freely for the first time [*diese Besonnenheit (Reflexion) zum erstenmal frei wirkend*], has invented language [*hat Sprache erfunden*]. For what is reflection [*Reflexion*]? What is language? This reflection [*Besonnenheit*] is uniquely human and essential to the species, as are also language and his own invention of language. (Gaier 722, Pross 276)

Reflection makes it possible to fix attention on some particular ‘among the ocean of perceptions that rush on us through the senses’. For each object singled out for attention, man will seek a tag (*sich Merkmale absondern*) by which the object can be marked and recalled. This process begins with onomatopoeic tags.

For our man seeing and hearing a sheep, its bleat becomes the internal tag word (*innerliches Merkwort*) for sheep, and at that moment ‘language is invented! Thus the invention of language is as natural and necessary to him as he is a human being’ (Gaier 724, Pross 278). This onomatopoeic record of tags derived from the sounds of nature becomes the first human dictionary (Gaier 737, Pross 290). Tags for objects that do not resound are gained by what is known as synaesthesia, which works most powerfully in the early stages of language (Gaier 743–4, Pross 296–9). The second and shorter part of *Ursprung* shows how language subsequently becomes exteriorized as speech.

This account has a baffling feature: subjectively, the invention of language is wholly interior, private, and silent. Herder insists that this reveals the true nature of language.

The savage, the man alone in the forest, would have invented language for himself, even if he had never spoken it. It was the soul’s understanding of itself, and an understanding as inescapable as man was man. . . . [I]t is incomprehensible to me how a human soul could be what it is except by being bound to invent language also without mouth and society. (Gaier 725, Pross 279)⁵⁸

Already in this isolated human being the mental tags were linked to what Herder, with a familiar Cartesian term, calls ‘a discourse of the mind (*eine Diskurs der Seele*)’. He could not imagine that while having such strings of thought – now shifting into the first person – ‘I would not carry on or strive to perform a dialogue in my mind, with the effect that this internal dialogue will prepare for external dialogue and conversation with others’ (Gaier 732–3, Pross 285–7).

There is no explanation why anyone would fix attention on a sheep or on anything else among the ocean of perceptions washed onto the mind by the senses, for emotion, passion, and satisfaction of needs play no role whatever. It is as if the name-giver is moved by an intellectual urge to designate and classify in an epistemological act of cognition. Furthermore, *Ursprung* rules out the possibility of understanding the nature of language in terms of its communicative function.⁵⁹ In *Ursprung*, sociability has no place in Herder’s conception of the origin and nature of language. It has the unmistakable rationalist cast that rules out expressivism.

Why should Herder so quickly have reversed his position? Bearing in mind that the name-giving in Genesis ‘is for Herder, as it were, the schema for his basic philosophy of language’,⁶⁰ we find a suggestion in *Ursprung* itself when Herder invokes Genesis 2:19–20 about God bringing the beasts of the field and the birds before Adam to see what he would call them. Here, spoken in ‘the Oriental style’, Herder finds a beautiful way of saying ‘just what I am trying to prove’, that ‘man invented language for himself from the sounds of living nature

as signs for his commanding intellect' (Gaier 736, Pross 289). In the final pages of *Ursprung*, Herder returns to the name-giving, reiterating that 'the divine origin has nothing in its favor, not even the testimony of Oriental Scriptures [the Old Testament] on which it relies, for these clearly indicate the human origin of language in the naming of the animals' (Gaier 809, Pross 356). This reading is unorthodox for two reasons: Genesis says that naming occurred before the Fall when Adam still commanded semidivine wisdom, and, secondly, the traditional reading held that Adam knew the natures he named by seeing the creatures, not by hearing them. Thus Herder presents a hybrid Adam who straddles the two realms of lapsarian division, a conception he said more about in writings on Genesis that are contemporary with *Ursprung*.

In the period immediately before *Ursprung*, Herder worked on a manuscript entitled 'About the first documents of the human species. Some observations', which is an early version of a much larger work on Genesis published a few years after *Ursprung*.⁶¹ The latter sections of the early version show 'many analogies' with *Ursprung* – for example, that 'physical nature gave the first dictionary of names'.⁶² Furthermore, *Ursprung* proclaims that human language is utterly incommensurable with animal language (Gaier 732, Pross 286); the early work on Genesis complements that it is childish to think that the Bible is God's language, for whatever that language is, it cannot have anything that is 'commensurable' with human understanding. God speaks to humanity in early forms of language, in dialects and national languages, in myth, folksong, and early poetry, all of which are commensurable among themselves by virtue of being human. Obviously, Herder would not have allowed the conceptual absurdity that God might have created several sorts of incommensurable human languages, cultures, and civilizations. In *Ursprung*, animal language stands 'total und inkommensurabel' apart from human language. This was of course also the view of Condillac, as shown by his statement that the Lithuanian boy was cut off from any possible communication with the bears among which he lived owing to lack of mutual 'analogy' between their expressive sounds and sympathetic responses. The early version argues that it is anthropocentric to believe that human language and God's language bear any relation to each other. 'God thinks without words, without symbols, without sentences, without images'.⁶³

In the early version, the designative naming is a matter of Adamic hearing, which thus has the same role as in *Ursprung*, whose silent listener to the sounds of nature is a repetition of the openly theological conception of Adam in the early version. The latter also provides a motive for the naming, namely, that Herder did not wish to exalt Adam's naming as a eulogy of his philosophy, science, and theological wisdom but took it instead as an intimation of Adam's first employment in the formation of his mind and of his title to lordship over

the earth and the creatures as granted in Genesis. In the naming, he was taking stock of his kingdom.

Since the theology of the early version ruled out appeal to a state of nature, it is not surprising that the first language is silent, private, designative, and formed 'without mouth and society' by the emotion-free intellect alone. Herder had no use for the language of action because its passionate expressivism was foreign to the accepted understanding of Adam's nature.

Ursprung is generally taken to be the definitive statement of Herder's philosophy of language. Yet within a dozen years he not once but twice disowned its argument. In what is generally considered Herder's greatest and also most widely read work, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–91) he proclaimed that language was a divine gift.⁶⁴ Also in 1784, in his preface to the German translation of the early volumes of Lord Monboddo's *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, Herder crowned that work as the best treatment of its subject, though it was incompatible with that of *Ursprung*. For Herder himself, *Ursprung* occupied an anomalous position in his *oeuvre*; this, along with the extreme rarity of its publication until after 1870, casts doubt on the confident claims that are being made for its vast influence. What is more, behind these claims lies a perverse but widely trusted tradition that in defiance of the evidence has made Herder into the expressivist who triumphed over the rationalism now attributed to Condillac. Herder is said to exemplify the purported 'German revolt against the soulless mechanical rationalists of the French Enlightenment'.⁶⁵

X. SCOTLAND

In no country was language written about more widely and diversely than in Scotland, by philosophers, lawyers, clergymen, and literary figures. One reason may be that the union with England in 1707 suddenly set a high premium on a good command of correct English. A philosophical reason, often remarked on by Dugald Stewart, was the warm reception Locke had always enjoyed in the Scottish universities, with chief attention to the *Essay's* Book Three on words and language. Still more important was probably the attitude reflected in the famous letter to the early *Edinburgh Review* (1756) in which Adam Smith urged the editor to pay as much attention to Continental as to English contributions to the learned world. He especially praised the *Encyclopédie* and its editors, describing its wide coverage: 'Theology, morals, metaphysics, the art of criticism, the history of *belles lettres*, philosophy, the literary history of sects, opinions and systems of all kinds, the chief doctrines of ancient and modern jurisprudence, nay all the nicest subtleties of grammar, are explained in a detail that is altogether surprising'.⁶⁶ Not least there was the presence of the Gaelic language, with its

rich store of folklore and song, soon to become celebrated in Scottish and pan-European excitement about the poems of *Ossian*, poetry which, as Condillac had suggested, came closer to original truth and imaginative expression than the colorless speech of urban life.

Eager to advance good English and literary taste among his countrymen, Henry Home, Lord Kames, encouraged the young Adam Smith to deliver a series of public lectures on rhetoric and *belles lettres* at Edinburgh in 1748–9. They were subsequently repeated annually at Glasgow University but were never published and are only known from student notes published as *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*.⁶⁷ The *Lectures* presented a new and modern form of rhetoric emphasizing communication in general within the tradition from Locke. Instead of the traditional concentration on the principles of oratory in the manner of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, Smith treated rhetoric as ‘the general theory of all branches of literature’. This was a rhetoric that ‘must define its function as broadly communicative rather than narrowly persuasive and hence must assert jurisdiction over the forms of historical, poetical, and didactic composition no less than over the traditional forms of oratory’.⁶⁸ Smith’s entirely new genre of writing about language and literature became vastly influential when American college education made ‘rhetoric and belles lettres’ the foundation of instruction in the liberal arts. This success had begun immediately with Hugh Blair’s popular lectures at Edinburgh from 1759 onward, later published on his retirement in 1783.⁶⁹

Smith did publish an essay entitled ‘Considerations concerning the first formation of languages, and the different genius of original and compounded languages’ that was a greatly expanded version of his third lecture, ‘Of the origin and progress of language’.⁷⁰ Smith started from Rousseau’s argument that it was virtually incomprehensible how primitive people, as the early language makers must have been, could have ‘invented’ – the consistent usage of both Rousseau and Smith – words for concepts and relations that imply the possession of great ‘metaphysical’ sophistication. Smith’s first principle is that ‘in the beginnings of language . . . every particularly event’ was represented ‘by a particular word, which expressed at once the whole of that event’ (*LRBL*, 218). But given the infinite variety of events, mankind would soon begin ‘to split and divide almost every event into a great number of metaphysical parts, expressed by the different parts of speech, variously combined in the different members of every phrase and sentence’ (217).

Smith uses Latin illustrations of what he often, without any apparent distinction, calls ‘the progress of language’ or ‘the progress of society’. For example, the two Latin names *Julius* and *Julia* express their distinction of gender without the need of an adjective. Or, in *fructus arboris*, ‘the fruit of the tree’, the genitive

relation in *arboris* is expressed 'as it appears in nature, not as something separated and detached, but as thoroughly mixed and blended with the correlative object', thus surprisingly requiring, in Smith's words, no 'effort of abstraction', no 'effort of generalization', and no 'effort of comparison' (*LRBL*, 211). All those complications come into play the moment the Latin case marker is replaced by the preposition 'of'. Indeed, the prepositions that 'in modern languages hold the place of the ancient cases are, of all others, the most general, and abstract, and metaphysical; and of consequence, would probably be among the last invented' (212). Verbs were at first impersonal, merely expressing an event as in *pluit* (it rains) and *tonat* (it thunders), 'each of them expressing a complete affirmation, the whole of an event, with that perfect simplicity and unity with which the mind conceives it in nature' (216). But 'in the progress of language', those verbs would become personal. 'For the first savage inventors of language', *venit* would mean 'the lion comes', thus in one word expressing 'a complete event, without the assistance of any other' word. But with knowledge of other feared animals, *venit* would become a personal verb that could be used about the coming of any terrible object, such as a bear or a wolf.

If early language was a mass of event words that required little or no metaphysical skill, why did it not last? An answer to this question might, as Smith surely intended, answer Rousseau's puzzle. One reason is that there is a limit to the qualities and relations that can be piled into declensions and conjugations that are added to nouns and verbs, and another is, as mentioned, that the infinity of events would soon demand economy of expression. But, toward the end of 'Formation' Smith suddenly adds a third factor, the mixture of nations that has occurred in history. Children gain perfect command of their native language, but adults learning a new language 'by rote, or by what they commonly heard in conversation, would be extremely perplexed by the intricacy of its declensions and conjugations' (*LRBL*, 220). Instead of the proper case endings, they would use prepositions such as 'ad' and 'de' before nouns. A Lombard who wished to say 'I am loved' but had forgotten the word *amor* would instead say *ego sum amatus* (221). All this creates obvious problems. Why, for instance, were prepositions after all available to serve as an easy fix for a learning problem? It all sounds very much like a version of the difficulty boys have always had learning Latin in school.

The result of 'progress' is clear. Some languages, such as Greek and to a lesser degree Latin, are 'original'; they are largely unmixed and have rich inflectionality, as it were, and consequently few constraints on word order. In contrast, modern languages attained low inflectionality both by mixture and by the resolution of event words into their metaphysical elements; consequently the typical modern language became 'more intricate and complex' in structure while at the same

time 'the whole system of the language became more coherent, more connected, more easily retained and comprehended' (*LRBL*, 218). The form of modern languages is prose, which with Smith's constant evocation of progress would seem a desirable result. His entire stance appears rationalistic, almost as confidently as that of Rivarol some twenty years later.

However, in the final pages, Smith, quite surprisingly, leaves no doubt that the original, uncompounded languages are much to be preferred to the modern languages, which (1) are more prolix, requiring, for instance, the expression 'I should have loved' instead of *amavissem*; (2) are less agreeable to the ear, while Greek and Latin have a 'sweetness . . . and variety unknown to any other modern language'; and (3) '[restrain] us from disposing such sounds as we have, in the manner that might be the most agreeable' (*LRBL*, 224). This last point Smith illustrates by comparing some lines translated by Milton with their original in Horace, seeking to show that Milton's English lacked the poetic and creative resources of the Latin. This is the familiar principle powerfully explicated in Condillac's chapter on inversion. It is no surprise, therefore, that Smith, in the final lines of 'Formation', exclaims: 'How much this power of transposing the order of their words must have facilitated the composition of the ancients, both in verse and prose, can hardly be imagined.' By contrast, in modern languages, the 'expression is constantly confined by [their] prolixness, constraint, and monotony'.

'Formation' is a curious performance that seems incoherent in several ways, most obviously in its concluding commitment to the perfection of the classical languages that earlier had supplied examples of the forms whose resolution into their elements illustrated Smith's idea of the progress of language. As he no doubt knew, the distinction between original and compounded languages was already current, though known by other terms. But in the well-known treatments Smith could have known, such as the chapter on inversion in Condillac's *Essai* and Beauzée's entry on that subject in the *Encyclopédie*, the discussion always centered on determining the natural order. In 'Formation', however, this issue is not even raised. 'Formation' has no place for passion or the need for social intercourse because its orientation is entirely 'metaphysical', seeking to account for the 'invention' of the parts of speech on the assumption that such invention would occur all at once in an intentional act.

This rationalist cast is paradoxical. Apart from the sudden reversal at the end, there is the more urgent question of what relation 'Formation' bears to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁷¹ Since Smith eventually published them in the same volume, he must have had some quite close relation in mind that would become apparent to the reader, but I confess that I see only conflict or at best

irrelevance. In 'Formation' there is no trace of the notions of sympathy and the impartial spectator. In contrast, *The Wealth of Nations* (Book I, ch. 2) is evidently linked to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Thus the division of labor 'is not originally the effect of any human wisdom' but 'the necessary, though very slow and gradual consequence of a certain propensity in human nature', namely, 'the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another'. This propensity is likely to be 'the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech'.⁷² These lines contain in brief Smith's pivotal principle of communication and exchange in the formation of social harmony and individual welfare. But in 'Formation' calculating wisdom is very much at work, and things are not 'invented' in a slow and gradual process. Oddly, 'Formation', except possibly the final pages, shows no conceptual similarity to Condillac's *Essai*, which Smith owned in an early anonymous printing.⁷³ Smith considered 'Formation' one of his 'favorite performances', and late in life he regretted that he 'had not written more on *language*', a subject, he said, 'of the richest kind, which had not been at all exhausted'. He even said he thought himself 'better qualified for writing such a work than any man in Britain' because he 'had thought often and long upon the subject', as shown in the specimen he had given in 'Formation'.⁷⁴

Dugald Stewart shared Adam Smith's belief that 'the human faculties are competent to the formation of language' (*Works*, 4: 23). He was probably at least as well read in the literature on the subject as Smith and found little to admire in 'Formation', finding 'obvious and formidable' objections against it, such as Smith's belief that great philosophical effort must have gone into the invention of the prepositions that took the place of Latin noun cases. To this Stewart answered 'that the difficulty of explaining the theory of any of our intellectual operations, affords no proof of any difficulty in applying that operation to its proper practical purpose; nor is the difficulty of tracing the metaphysical history of any of our notions, a proof that in its first origin it implied any extraordinary intellectual capacity' (4: 26). It may be difficult to account for the import of 'of' and 'by', but that does not entail that the 'invention of them implied any metaphysical knowledge' in those who first used them. Even young children know the import of such words and use them correctly. This objection Stewart had brought (1: 360–5) nearly verbatim against the same 'metaphysical' difficulties raised by Rousseau and cited in the opening pages of 'Formation'. In Stewart's view, Smith and Rousseau held the same erroneous opinions.

Stewart also argued against Smith's belief that the invention of new parts of speech would occur instantaneously: '[T]he transition from substantives to adjectives, was probably not (as Mr. Smith supposes) a step taken all at once. It

is by a process much more gradual and imperceptible, that all improvements in language are made' (*Works*, 4: 28–9). In support, Stewart cited Adam Ferguson's fine statement that

without the intervention of uncommon genius, [we must suppose] mankind in a succession of ages, qualified to accomplish in detail this amazing fabric of language, which, when raised to its height, appears so much above what could be ascribed to any simultaneous effort of the most sublime and comprehensive abilities. (*Works*, 4: 27; 1: 365)

Ferguson and Stewart understood very well that the origin of language could not be imagined without allowing nearly endless ages of imperceptible development. As we have seen, such understanding was rare indeed, and its acceptance in Scotland was one of the notable features of the Scottish Enlightenment. Stewart was not uncritical of Condillac, but he was certain that 'concerning the origin and theoretical history of language, Condillac was one of the first who made any considerable advances' (*Works*, 1: 361). In this regard, Stewart may be indebted to his teacher Thomas Reid.

XI. THOMAS REID

It is difficult to form a coherent picture of Adam Smith's view of language, but Thomas Reid's is perfectly clear; language mattered to him as the vessel of the shared common sense of all people:

[T]he first principles of all sciences are the dictates of common sense, and lie open to all men; and every man who has considered the structure of language in a philosophical light, will find infallible proofs that those who have framed it, and those who use it with understanding, have the power of making accurate distinctions, and of forming general conceptions, as well as Philosophers.⁷⁵

Reid took a very wide view of language as being 'all those signs mankind uses to communicate to others their thoughts and intentions, their purposes and desires'.⁷⁶ Signs are natural or artificial. Natural signs formed an initial means of communication because there is 'in the human mind an early anticipation, neither derived from experience, nor from reason, nor from any compact or promise, that our fellow-creatures will use the same signs in language when they have the same sentiments'.⁷⁷ We are reminded of Hume's two oarsmen. Without this 'natural language', mankind 'could never have invented an artificial one by their reason and ingenuity', precisely because the natural proto-language must provide the 'compacts and agreements' in communication that must precede the 'invention' of an artificial language. The natural signs are modulations of voice, gestures, and facial expression. All the fine arts are founded on this

natural language, which in all respects corresponds to Condillac's language of action. As a warrant for natural language, in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Reid cites Cicero on the natural expression of emotions and Du Bos on pantomime and other details (486–7). Like Condillac, Reid thought that the virtual displacement of artificial signs for natural ones that is one of the 'refinements of civilized life' has amounted to a 'corruption' of natural language, which has lost the signs that give 'force and energy' to language by making it 'expressive and persuasive'. 'Artificial signs signify, but they do not express' (*Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, 53).

Reid believed it was important to study the origin of language because 'it tends to lay open some of the first principles of human nature' (*Inquiry*, 51). One of these principles, shared by Condillac and Turgot, is that the primary purpose of language is social, for a 'man, who had no intercourse with any other intelligent being, would never think of language', though once we have language it may be used for 'solitary meditations. . . . But this was not its first intention' (*Intellectual Powers*, 69). In contrast with all the efforts to analyse propositions, none have been made to analyse the 'expression of a question, of a command, or of a promise'. 'Why have speculative men laboured so anxiously to analyse our solitary operations, and given so little attention to the social? I know no other reason but this, that, in the divisions that have been made of the mind's operations, the social have been omitted, and thereby thrown behind the curtain' (*Intellectual Powers*, 70). Reid had the Cartesian tradition in mind, including the theory of ideas that he made it his chief aim to reject.

XII. HORNE TOOKE

The end of the century saw the remarkable publication of two large volumes with the curious title, *The Diversions of Purley*.⁷⁸ The work carries a head title in Greek, *Epea pteroenta*, or 'winged words', which refer to 'the artificial wings of Mercury by means of which the Argus eyes of philosophy have been cheated' (1: 27), namely by abbreviations of words that have obscured what the author considers the philosophical perfection of language. The author was John Horne Tooke, who proclaimed that 'the imperfections of philosophy' were chiefly caused by our failure properly to understand 'the perfections of language' (1: 37). He also proclaimed that 'etymology will give us in all languages what philosophy has attempted in vain' (1: 318). Thus etymology becomes the method of the entire work. When we add a third proclamation, we have the foundation of Tooke's system. 'The business of the mind, as far as it concerns language, appears to me to be very simple. It extends no farther than to receive impressions, that is to have sensations and feelings. What are called its operations, are merely the

operations of language' (1: 51). This last statement sounds both materialist and somewhat mysterious, aspects well illustrated by one of his typical etymologies. The Latin word *res* for 'thing' is the source of the verb '*reor*, that is, *I am thing-ed*'. The English verb 'to think' is no different, 'for remember', says Tooke, 'where we now say, *I think*, the ancient expression was – *me thinketh*, that is, *me thingeth*, *it thingeth me*' (2: 402–6).

The first aim of language is to communicate, and the second is to do so 'with dispatch' in order to make the speed of discourse more nearly approach the speed of thought. Dispatch is created by abbreviation, which is the chief reason that language is not properly understood. Tooke recognized only two kinds of signs or words. Verbs and nouns formed one category. The verb 'must be accounted for from the necessary use of it in communication' (*Diversions*, 1: 27), but Tooke never figures out what to do with it. It is the nouns that matter, for they are the names of the impressions received by the mind. The other category contains all other words, whose nature it is to be 'merely abbreviations employed for dispatch and are the signs of other words' – that is, chiefly of nouns. Abbreviation is Tooke's great discovery, as he often proudly proclaimed. It is especially productive in the explanation of prepositions and conjunctions, as a typical example will show. The preposition 'from' has 'as clear, as precise, and at all times as uniform and unequivocal a meaning, as any word in the language'. Here, as throughout, the proof is etymological. Citing an Old English and Gothic noun 'frum', which, he says, means 'beginning, origin, source, fountain, author', he boldly asserts that '*from* merely means beginning and nothing else'. Thus the phrases 'figs come from Turkey' and 'lamp falls from ceiling' can be converted into 'figs come beginning Turkey' and 'lamp falls beginning ceiling' (1: 341–7). This shows what Tooke means when he says that 'wherever the evident meaning and origin of the particles of any language can be found, there is the certain source of the whole' (1: 147).

Tooke had a method in this seeming madness. He was attacking the philosophy of language that began with Locke. Locke's great mistake was that he judged particles to be 'not truly by themselves the names of any ideas' (Tooke, *Diversions*, 1: 225; Locke, *Essay*, III.vii.2). In fact, Locke's chapter on particles 'should have contained an account of everything but nouns' (1: 41) – that is, of Tooke's category of words that are abbreviations of other words. Tooke's bizarre etymologies provided the basis for his claim that all words, including Locke's particles, are names of impressions of the mind, and furthermore for the astonishing claim that the single true meaning of any word is at all times equivalent to the postulated etymology, as shown in the case of 'from'. These claims have three crucial consequences: (1) that the contexts in which words are used count for nothing in regard to their meaning; (2) that attending to the actual use of words is a confused and even harmful way of seeking their meaning; (3) and that

the etymologized word, not the sentence, is the unit of meaning. How speakers in projecting their meanings could be sure to know or at least respect Tooke's etymological determinism is never discussed. Looking back over the eighteenth century, it is obvious that Tooke's doctrines were retrograde, for they reestablished the term-by-term conception of the nature of discourse that had been respected in the seventeenth century. The tenor of the *Diversions* reveals Tooke's mystical notion that language performs the operations normally assigned to the mind, except for the mind's passive reception of impressions.

Our sense of deep confusion and incoherence was not at all shared by Tooke's contemporaries. They were impressed by the aura of great learning created by his profuse citations in many languages, and especially by the apparently boundless knowledge of forms he cited in his etymological arguments, drawn from scores of languages, including Old English and other early Germanic languages. The work was reviewed in more than a dozen journals, in all but one of them favorably. It was considered superior to Plato's *Cratylus* and called 'the most valuable contribution to the philosophy of language, which our literature has produced'.⁷⁹ Tooke became the celebrated 'philologist', who, in the words of Erasmus Darwin, had 'unfolded in a single flash of light the whole theory of language, which has so long lain buried beneath the learned lumber of the schools'.⁸⁰ Bentham was convinced that Tooke's discovery had laid firm foundations for universal grammar and expected great things from its application to the learning of foreign languages, especially to the benefit of missionaries.⁸¹ Hazlitt thought that Tooke had proceeded 'upon the true principles of science' by treating words 'as the chemists do substances; he separated those which are compounded from those which are not decomposable. He did not explain the obscure by the more obscure, but the difficult by the plain, the complex by the simple'.⁸²

The most important admiring convert was James Mill, who found the *Diversions* 'a profound and satisfactory' investigation, worthy 'to be ranked with the very highest discoveries which illustrate the names of speculative men'.⁸³ In Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, a title designed to evoke the chemical analogy, Tooke's philosophy played a critical role by virtue of its demonstration that the complexities of the mind are an illusion that stems from a misunderstanding of the true nature of language.⁸⁴ By tracing all words via etymology to the names of impressions, Tooke gave Mill the tools to explain the phenomena of the mind by exclusive reference to sensation and the association of ideas. The doctrine of abbreviation made it possible for Mill to make 'the human mind as plain as the road from Charing Cross to St. Paul's'.⁸⁵ It is Tooke's secure place in utilitarian philosophy that makes it impossible to ignore his strange work.

There was one dissenter, Dugald Stewart, in his essay 'On the tendency of some late philological speculations'.⁸⁶ Stewart had respect for Tooke's learning

but was severely critical of his arguments and conclusions. Language is ‘much more imperfect . . . than is commonly supposed, when considered as an organ of mental discourse’. Even in ordinary daily discourse, our words merely ‘suggest *hints* to our hearers, leaving by far the principal part of the process of interpretation to be performed by the mind itself’. This implies, as had been argued in the eighteenth century, that speaking and hearing are reciprocally creative acts. Stewart compared this process to what a sketch of a profile does to the eye. It is not the minute copying ‘after nature’ that produces the best portrait, but the artist’s skill ‘in a happy selection of particulars, which are *expressive* and *significant*’ (*Essays*, 153–4).

Meaning is contextual. The notion that every word in a proposition presents an idea to the understanding and that the mental act called judgment results from ‘the combination and comparison’ of these ideas is falsified by ‘the fact, that our words, when examined separately, are often as completely insignificant as the letters of which they are composed, deriving their meaning solely from the connection, or relation, in which they stand to others’ (*Essays*, 154–5). A ‘problematical term’ is understood ‘by the general import of the sentence’ in which it occurs. Naturally, Stewart also rejected the appeal to etymology in philosophical argument, a procedure he found ‘altogether nugatory’ and serving at best ‘to throw an amusing light on the laws which regulate the operations of human fancy’ (5: 161).

Stewart’s critique of Tooke was cogent, but it did little to stem the reputation Tooke continued to enjoy in England for another two generations. Thanks to James Mill, the philosophy of the *Diversions* was largely taken to be sound, even though it was admitted that the etymologies were hopeless. When comparative historical philology became an academic discipline, Tooke’s work was seen as a pitiful and even laughable example of ‘pre-scientific’ etymology, as if his aim had been to do what the new philologists now flattered themselves to be doing correctly. It was not understood that Tooke’s aim was philosophical – that etymology was his method but not his aim.

This failure of understanding holds true in general for the way in which nineteenth-century language study judged the philosophy of language that flourished during the eighteenth century. Rhetorical expressivism, the aesthetics of language, the language of action, communication, sympathy, sociability, Condillac’s analysis of inversion, and Diderot’s notion of the poverty of language and of the individuality of expression – all these things were disdained or ignored as speculations that need not engage the attention of properly trained academics. This indifference and even hostility created a sort of intellectual void in the nineteenth century, a void that is still being papered over by a goodly amount of bad history.

NOTES

- 1 See Hans Aarsleff, 'The Rise and Decline of Adam and His *Ursprache* in Seventeenth-Century Thought', in *The Language of Adam/Die Sprache Adams*, ed. A. P. Coudert (Wolfenbüttel, 1999), 277–95.
- 2 See Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. G. Le Roy, 3 vols. (Paris, 1947–51), 1: 3–118. References are to part, section, and paragraph. See also Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, ed. C. Porset (Paris, 1973), with an introduction by Jacques Derrida, translated as *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac*, by J. P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln, NB, 1987). The translation of *Essai* used here is *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, trans. and ed. H. Aarsleff (Cambridge, 2001). *Encyclopédie* refers to *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, eds. D. Diderot and J. d'Alembert, 28 vols. (Paris, 1751–72).
- 3 This is from John Millar's description of Smith's lectures on logic as reported in Dugald Stewart, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith LL.D.', in Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, eds. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce, in *Works* (1980), 269–351 at 274.
- 4 Marc Fumaroli, *L'âge d'éloquence; Rhétorique et 'res literaria' de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (Geneva, 1980; Paris, 1994).
- 5 Daniel Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought (1670–1789)* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), 53.
- 6 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739–40], eds. D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton, in *The Clarendon Edition* (2006), 3.2.2.10, SBN 490.
- 7 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch, in *The Clarendon Edition* (1975); Willard Van Orman Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', in his *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 20–46.
- 8 *Essay*, II.xxii.2, II.xxviii.2, III.i.5, III.vi.46, III.vi.51. On the social and public nature of language in Locke, see James Tully, *A Discourse on Property: John Locke and His Adversaries* (Cambridge, 1980), 12–16; E. J. Ashworth, 'Locke on Language', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 14 (1984): 45–73 at 49–51, 72; Lia Formigari, *Language and Experience in Seventeenth-Century British Philosophy* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA, 1988), 135–6.
- 9 George Berkeley, 'Seventh Dialogue' of *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher*, in *Works*, 3: 286–329 at 286, 298, 294–95, 293. The passage on Paul is in 'The First Draft of the 'Introduction' to *Principles*', in *Works*, 2: 137. See also David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford, 1994); Geneviève Brykman, *Berkeley: Philosophie et apologétique*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1984), 1: 462–516, and Brykman, *Berkeley et le voile des mots* (Paris, 1993), 349–401.
- 10 Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La logique ou L'art de penser*, eds. P. Clair and F. Girbal (Paris, 1965), 93–9. This is Chapter 14 in the 5th edition (1683); it was Chapter 12 in the 1st edition (1662). The fifth edition added Chapter 15, 'About Ideas that the Mind Adds to Those that Are Precisely Signified by Words'. This chapter is also about religious language.
- 11 Berkeley, *Works*, 2: 139.
- 12 Bernard Lamy, *La rhétorique, ou L'art de parler*, 4th edn. (Amsterdam, 1699). The first seven issues bore the title *L'art de parler*, but in 1688 the title was changed to *La rhétorique, ou L'art de parler* to take account of the work's new orientation and signalling a movement away from the strict Cartesianism that Lamy professed earlier in his career. Lamy's constant and radical changes constitute an archeological site for the quickly shifting views of language from rational to emotive foundations. See Ulrich Ricken, *Grammaire et philosophie au siècle des lumières* (Lille, 1978), 53–66, and Ricken, *Linguistics, Anthropology and Philosophy in the French Enlightenment: Language Theory and Ideology*, trans. R. E. Norton (London, 1994).

- 13 François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, *Dialogues on Eloquence*, trans. W. S. Howell (Princeton, 1951). This edition identifies Fénelon's many references to Cicero, Quintilian, and Longinus. As Howell says (46), the *Dialogues* are 'the earliest statement . . . of what may be said to have become the dominant modern attitude toward rhetoric'. See also Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ, 1971), 504–19.
- 14 See Cicero, *De oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1942), Bk. III, 213, and *Orator*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA, 1939), 56; Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, trans. H. E. Butler, 4 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1969–79), III.iii.1 and XI.iii.6. In both places, Quintilian says that *actio* and *pronuntiatio* are synonyms for delivery.
- 15 David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp, in *The Clarendon Edition* (2000), 5.2.18, SBN 220.
- 16 Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (Paris, 1719), translated as *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting, and Music*, trans. T. Nugent, 3 vols. (London, 1748), for example, at 1: 32. The term *sympathie* was rarely used in French at the time, but *sensibilité* either alone or suitably qualified as in 'the natural sensibility of the heart' serves just as well. The *Encyclopédie* has an entry 'Sympathie (*Physiolog.*)' (15 (1765), 736a), which opens with a glowing statement that could have come from Hume or Adam Smith.
- 17 Nicolas Rousseau, *Connaissance et langage chez Condillac* (Geneva, 1986), 194 (with full bibliography). See *Condillac et les problèmes du langage*, ed. J. Sgard (Geneva, 1982). For a general introduction to Condillac in English, see Catherine Hobbs Peaden, 'Condillac and the History of Rhetoric', in *Rhetorica*, 11 (1993): 136–56. See also François Dagognet, 'L'animal selon Condillac', in Condillac, *Traité des animaux* (Paris, 1987), 9–131. Dagognet dismisses the notion that Condillac was a materialist. See G. A. Wells, 'Condillac, Rousseau and Herder on the Origin of Language', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 230 (1985): 235–46. On Condillac's aesthetics, see Annie Becq, *Genèse de l'esthétique française 1680–1814* (Paris, 1994), 444–64.
- 18 The entries 'Mémoire (*Metaphysiq.*)' (10 (1765), 326a–28b) and 'Réflexion (*Logique*)' (13 (1765), 885a–86a) in the *Encyclopédie* quote extensively from Condillac's *Essai*. The entry 'Signe (*Metaphysiq.*)' (15 (1765), 188a) quotes, without acknowledgement, *Essai*, I.2.35, which is cast in the first person. Presumably Condillac supplied this entry.
- 19 See Condillac, *Oeuvres*, 1: 733a, in his *Logique*, I.6: 'It is the use of signs that advances reflection, which in turn contributes to the multiplication of signs'.
- 20 See Quintilian's remark (*Orator's Education*, IV.vi.1–27) that analogy is a Greek word that was translated as 'proportion' in Latin.
- 21 *Condillac, lettres inédites à Gabriel Cramer*, ed. G. Le Roy (Paris, 1953), with an illuminating 'Mémoire', 89–109. Le Roy's datings have been revised by Piero Peccato in 'Note sul carteggio Condillac–Cramer', *Belfagor*, 26 (1971): 83–95. Following the Peccato datings, the letter cited is from early 1747. Maupertuis' essay was entitled 'Réflexions critiques sur l'origine des langues et la signification des mots'. In 1750, Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot remarked on the same passage as Condillac: '[A] single person . . . would never be tempted to find marks to designate his perceptions; it is only in company [*vis-à-vis des autres*] that we seek to do that'. See *Oeuvres de Turgot*, ed. G. Schelle, 5 vols. (Paris, 1913–23), 1: 162.
- 22 Condillac, *Traité des sensations* (Treatise on the Sensations), in *Oeuvres*, vol. 1.
- 23 The quoted passages are from Isabel F. Knight, *The Geometric Spirit: The Abbé de Condillac and the French Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT, 1968), 29, 37, 85. It is telling that 'reason' has a long entry in this book's index, but 'imagination' does not occur in it. See also Hans Aarsleff, 'Condillac's Speechless Statue', in *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (Minneapolis MN, 1982), 210–24.

- 24 Large parts of Beauzée's entries are repeated in his *Grammaire générale*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1767). For word order in Lamy, Condillac, Beauzée, and others, see Ricken, *Grammaire et philosophie*; see also Irene Monréal-Wickert, *Die Sprachforschung der Aufklärung im Spiegel der grossen französischen Enzyklopädie* (Tübingen, 1977), listing 333 linguistic entries in the *Encyclopédie*.
- 25 *Encyclopédie méthodique. Grammaire et littérature*, eds. N. Beauzée and J.-F. Marmontel, 3 vols. (Paris, 1782–6), 1: 713a.
- 26 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language. The Diversity of Human Language Structure and Its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind*, trans. P. Heath, introduction by H. Aarsleff (Cambridge, 1988), 49 and liv–lvii. In the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* (Letter on Deaf-Mutes), ed. J. Chouillet, in *Oeuvres complètes*, eds. H. Dieckmann et al. (Paris, 1975–), vol. 4 (1978), Diderot used *énergie* for a concept central also in his aesthetics. See Jacques Chouillet, *La formation des idées esthétiques de Diderot* (Paris, 1973), 151–257, and his *Diderot poète de l'énergie* (Paris, 1984), especially 27–43.
- 27 Antoine Rivarol, *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* (Paris, 1936), 49–50.
- 28 See Ludwig Wittgenstein's anecdote in *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. R. Rhees, trans. A. Kenny (Berkeley, CA, 1978), 107, and see his *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Cambridge, MA, 1997), §336.
- 29 In William Warburton, *The Divine Legation of Moses*, 3 vols. (London, 1738–41), the section (1741) translated into French is 2: 66–205, the section on language 2: 81–87. See Warburton, *Essai sur les hiéroglyphes des égyptiens, ou l'on voit l'origine et les progrès du langage et de l'écriture, l'antiquité des sciences en Egypte, et l'origine du culte des animaux*, trans. M.-A. L. des Malpeines (Paris, 1744, 1977), where the section on language is at 118–27.
- 30 It has been argued that Condillac is much indebted to Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1729), ed. F. B. Kaye, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1924), and that this debt rests chiefly on the language of action. See Rüdiger Schreyer, 'Condillac, Mandeville, and the origin of language', *Historiographia linguistica*, 5 (1978): 15–43. This is untenable; see Aarsleff, Introduction to *Origin*, xxxiii, note.
- 31 Christian Wolff, *Psychologia rationalis methodo scientifica pertractata* (Frankfurt, 1740 edn.), in *Werke*, II.6: §461.
- 32 For Wolff, see Ulrich Ricken in Ricken et al., *Sprachtheorie und Weltanschauung in der europäischen Aufklärung* (Berlin, 1990), 212–36; Aldo Scaglione, 'Direct vs. Inverted Order: Wolff and Condillac on the Necessity of the Signs and the Interrelationship of Language and Thinking', *Romance Philology*, 33 (1980): 496–501; Gianni Paganini, 'Signes, imagination et mémoire. De la psychologie de Wolff à l'Essai de Condillac', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 72 (1988): 287–300.
- 33 Chouillet, *Formation*, 239.
- 34 See *Lucian*, 8 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1913–67), vol. 5, trans. A. M. Harmon (1936), 209–89. The original Greek title is *Peri Orcheseos*, in Latin *De Saltatione*.
- 35 See Basil Munteano, *Constantes dialectiques en littérature et en histoire* (Paris, 1967), 139–71, 219–34, and 297–374.
- 36 For a fuller discussion of Wittgenstein and Condillac, see Aarsleff, Introduction, in *Origin*, pp. xxxiv–xxxviii.
- 37 Condillac, *Oeuvres*, 2: 463a–b, 471a; Hans Aarsleff, 'Origin of Universal Languages', *Language and Society*, 6 (1977): 281–8 at 286; N. Rousseau *Connaissance*, 281; Ricken et al., *Sprachtheorie*, 247; Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. J. Fentress (Oxford, 1995), 289–90. On analogy, see also note 20.
- 38 Antoine Lavoisier, *Méthode de nomenclature chimique* (Paris, 1787). Lavoisier relied chiefly on Condillac's *Logique*. See Marco Beretta, *The Enlightenment of Matter: The Definition of Chemistry from Agricola to Lavoisier* (Canton, MA, 1993).

- 39 See note 24 above.
- 40 Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, 164–5. On Diderot's *Lettre*, see Chouillet, *Formation*, 151–257; Franco Venturi, *Jeunesse de Diderot (1713–53)*, trans. J. Bertrand (Paris, 1939), 237–82. On Diderot's poetics, see Marie-Louise Roy, *Die Poetik Denis Diderots* (Munich, 1966).
- 41 Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, 7: 196, in Diderot's long entry 'Encyclopédie' in the *Encyclopédie*.
- 42 *Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé l'Homme*, in *Oeuvres*, ed. Laurent Versini, 5 vols. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1994–7), vol. 1, *Philosophie*, pp. 777–923, at pp. 816 and 780. Passages on the themes of individuality, genius, and speaking occur throughout Diderot's writings; see, for example, the 'First satire', *Oeuvres complètes*, 12: 3–30.
- 43 Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, 17: 193, toward the end of *Le rêve d'Alembert*.
- 44 Diderot, *Lettre sur les aveugles* (Letter on the Blind) (1749), in *Oeuvres complètes*, 4: 41.
- 45 Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, 16: 219–20; that is, the *Salon de 1767* in the section (174–237) devoted to seven paintings by Joseph Vernet. For the first six paintings, Diderot creates the fiction that he and his friend are observing landscapes during a walk in the country.
- 46 Cicero, *Orator*, 57: 'Est autem etiam in dicendo quidam cantus obscurior.'
- 47 See Wittgenstein's oft-repeated arguments to the same effect; for example, his *Zettel*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford, 1967), §§150, 151, 160, 161, and his *Philosophical Investigations*, I §304.
- 48 Diderot, *Oeuvres complètes*, 16: 217. See Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, §163: '[I]t is wrong to call understanding a process that accompanies hearing'. See also Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §329.
- 49 Johann David Michaëlis, *A Dissertation on the Influence of Opinions on Language and of Language on Opinions* (London, 1769), 12–13, 2–3. In the section on ancient history in his course of study for the Prince of Parma, Condillac included a chapter under the same title (*Oeuvres*, 2: 90–4); here he said that the essay topic was proposed by Maupertuis. 'Opinion' means 'thinking' or 'manner of thinking'. 'Ideas' would have given the question an unwanted intellectual and rationalist bias. Michaëlis's essay was published in German in 1760 and in French in 1762, with a supplement that presented one of the best available arguments against the possibility and desirability of a universal or philosophical language. The English version was translated from the French and reissued in 1771, simultaneously with a Dutch translation. Maupertuis initiated the debate on language in the Academy with two papers that are printed in *Varia linguistica*, ed. C. Porset (Bordeaux, 1970), 22–118. On the debate and its participants, see Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, 146–209.
- 50 Johann Peter Süssmilch, *Versuch eines Beweises, dass die erste Sprache ihren Ursprung nicht vom Menschen, sondern allein vom Schoepfer erhalten habe* (Berlin, 1766). See Bruce Kieffer, 'Herder's Treatment of Süssmilch's Theory of the Origin of Language in the *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache: A Re-Evaluation*', *The Germanic Review*, 53 (1978): 96–105.
- 51 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Über die neuere deutsche Literatur. Fragmente*, commonly known as *Fragmente I, II, and III*, in *Werke*, ed. W. Pross (Munich, 1984–), vol. 1, *Herder und der Sturm und Drang 1764–1774* (1984). Vol. 2, *Herder und die Anthropologie der Aufklärung* (1987) contains *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* at 251–357. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Frühe Schriften 1764–1772*, ed. U. Gaier, in *Werke*, ed. M. Bollacher, 10 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1985–2000), vol. 1 (1985), where *Ursprung* is at 695–810. Both editions are richly annotated. For the dating of the *Fragmente*, see Gaier, 1007. Subsequent references are, wherever possible, to both 'Pross' and 'Gaier'.
- 52 'Von den Lebensaltern einer Sprache', in Gaier, 181–6. Gaier's notes refer to relevant passages in *Essai*: Gaier, p. 1035 to *Essai* II.1. §§158–63; p. 1036 to II.1. §§14–15; p. 1037 to II.1. §§66–79 (the chapter 'On the Origin of Poetry'); p. 1039 to II.1. §76 and II.1. §§155–6. See also Gaier, 947, 960. Diderot on the life stages of language is in *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, 166–7.

- 53 Gaier, 216–22, referring to *Essai*, II.1. §§80–126, II.1. §94, II.1. §84, and II.1. §§1–12. Herder's remark on no inversions in the mind (219) echoes Diderot in *Lettres sur les sourds et muets* (163–4). See Eric A. Blackall, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language 1770–1775* (Cambridge, 1959), 451–6. Herder's enthusiasm for inversion was so great that he considered it a form of 'the German freedom' that German poets enjoyed, with the implication that French poets did not have that freedom (221).
- 54 Gaier, 537. On the fiddling with the dates, see Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure*, 152; Gaier, 871–2, 944; and especially Jörn Stückrath, 'Der junge Herder als Sprach- und Literaturtheoretiker – ein Erbe des französischen Aufklärers Condillac?', in *Sturm und Drang: Ein literaturwissenschaftliches Studienbuch*, ed. W. Hinck (Frankfurt am Main, 1978), 81–96.
- 55 For the Academy's official French wording of the topic, see Gaier, 909–10.
- 56 On Herder's reading of Beauzée's entries in the *Encyclopédie*, including the great entry on 'Langue', see Pross, 907, 934, 949.
- 57 For Herder's misrepresentation of Condillac, see Rudolf Schottlaender, 'Die verkannte Lehre Condillacs vom Sprachursprung', *Beiträge zu romanischen Philologie*, 8 (1969): 158–65.
- 58 The phrase 'without mouth' may be an echo of a passage in Du Marsais's famous entry on 'Construction' in *Encyclopédie*, 4 (1754), 73b: 'Thought in so far as it is only in the mind without regard to speaking, needs neither mouth, nor tongue, nor the sound of syllables'. This in turn is, as Du Marsais points out, taken from the *Confessions*, XI.iii, in which Augustine explains that 'in that inward house of my thoughts', truth comes without language, which is always fallible and open to doubt. Augustine and Du Marsais offer impeccable rationalist credentials. For Herder's reading of 'Construction', see Pross, 906.
- 59 See Hans Dietrich Irmscher, 'Nachwort', in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, ed. H. D. Irmscher (Stuttgart, 1966), 162.
- 60 Irmscher, 'Nachwort', 162.
- 61 The early version was first published as, 'Ueber die ersten Urkunden des menschlichen Geschlechts: Einige Anmerkungen', in Herder, *Werke*, vol. 5, *Schriften zum Alten Testament*, ed. R. Smend (1993), 11–178. The large work is *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, 2 vols. (Riga, 1774–6).
- 62 See Günter Arnold, 'Das schaffhauser Urmanuskript der 'Ältesten Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts' und sein Verhältnis zur Druckfassung', in *Bückerburger Gespräche über Johann Gottfried Herder 1988*, ed. B. Poschman (Rinteln, 1989), here 56 and 60.
- 63 Herder, *Werke*, 5: 28–9.
- 64 See Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, in *Werke*, vol. 6, ed. M. Bollacher (1989), 138 (IV.iii).
- 65 Noel Annan, *Our Age, Portrait of a Generation* (London, 1990), 274. Behind this fundamental misconception lies the work of Isaiah Berlin. See, for example, *Mind and Language*, ed. Samuel Guttenplan (Oxford, 1975), and, following Berlin's lead, Charles Taylor, 'The Importance of Herder', in *Isaiah Berlin, a Celebration*, eds. E. Margalit and A. Margalit (London, 1991), 40–63. Compare Stephen K. Land, *From Signs to Propositions: The Concept of Form in Eighteenth-Century Semantic Theory* (London, 1974), 71, and Hans Aarsleff, 'Herder's Cartesian *Ursprung* vs. Condillac's Expressivist *Essai*', in *Language Philosophies and the Language Sciences: A Historical Perspective in Honour of Lia Formigari* (Münster, 1996), 165–79.
- 66 Adam Smith, 'Letter to the *Edinburgh Review*,' in *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (see note 3), 242–54, 247.
- 67 Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. C. Bryce, in *Works* (1983) (LRBL).
- 68 Wilbur Samuel Howell, 'The New Rhetoric Comes of Age: Adam Smith's Lectures at Edinburgh and Glasgow', in Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (see note 12),

- 536–76; here 547 and 575, also in *Essays on Adam Smith*, eds. A. S. Skinner and T. Wilson (Oxford, 1975), 11–43.
- 69 Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Edinburgh, 1783), ed. H. F. Harding, 2 vols. (Carbondale IL, 1965). By 1861, there had been at least one hundred separate issues plus translations into French, German, Spanish, and Italian. Blair says ‘several ideas have been taken from a manuscript treatise on rhetoric, part of which was shown to me, many years ago, by the learned and ingenious author, Dr. Adam Smith’. (1: 381, note).
- 70 ‘Formation’ is in LRBL, 201–26, first published in 1761 (Introd., 27). For the Rousseau passage, see *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men* in Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, trans. and ed. V. Gourevitch (Cambridge, 1997), 145–9, with the two famous aporias about no society without language and vice versa and about the need of language for thinking about having language. Its arguments were criticized by Condillac in *Oeuvres*, 1: 433, and by Dugald Stewart in *Dissertation Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy since the Revival of Letters in Europe*, in *Works*, ed. W. Hamilton, 11 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1854–60), 1: 361–5.
- 71 Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, in *Works* (1976).
- 72 Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd, 2 vols., in *Works* (1976), I.ii.1–2.
- 73 See Land, *From Signs to Propositions*, 80–7 and 154–81; Hiroshi Mizuta, *Adam Smith’s Library: A Supplement to Bonar’s Catalogue with a Checklist of the Whole Library* (Cambridge, 1967). Adam Smith owned all of Condillac’s works published during the latter’s lifetime, except the *Logique*. See also Gabriel Girard, *Vrais principes de la langue françoise*, to which Smith referred as inspiration for ‘Formation’ (*Essays*, 338). He owned several editions of Lucian, of whom he says that ‘in a word there is no author from whom more real instruction can be found’ (LRBL, 51). Part II of Smith’s essay ‘Of the imitative arts’, especially *Essays*, 187–90, and the fragment ‘Of the affinity between music, dancing, and poetry’ (210–13), show indebtedness to Lucian’s dialogue ‘The dance’, which, as we have seen, became influential through Du Bos’s *Réflexions*. Smith also owned other French works that are closely relevant to his professed interest in language.
- 74 Henry Mackenzie, *Literature and Literati: The Literary Correspondence and Notebooks of Henry Mackenzie*, ed. H. W. Drescher, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1989 and 1999), vol. 2: *Notebooks 1763–1827*, 213.
- 75 Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, eds. D. R. Brookes and K. Haakonssen (Edinburgh, 2002), 466–7.
- 76 Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. D. R. Brookes (Edinburgh, 1997), 51.
- 77 Reid, *Inquiry*, 193. In a note to Reid’s chapter ‘Of Natural Signs’, William Hamilton wrote that ‘this whole doctrine of *natural signs*, on which his philosophy is in great measure established, was borrowed by Reid, in principle and even in expression’ from certain passages in Berkeley, including the fourth dialogue, Sections 7–12, of *Alciphron*. A comparison of the relevant passages does not support that claim. See Reid, *Philosophical Works*, ed. W. Hamilton, 2 vols. in 1 (Edinburgh, 1895), 122b. In a note on p. 146a, Hamilton said, on the authority of Dugald Stewart, that ‘there is no ground for thinking that Reid was at all acquainted with the writings’ of Condillac. Reid’s closeness to Condillac’s conceptions and the overlap of citations make that claim implausible, as does a remarkable letter in which Reid gives a striking overview of his theory of language; see Letter 102, to James Gregory, 26 August 1787, in *The Correspondence of Thomas Reid*, ed. P. B. Wood (Edinburgh, 2002).
- 78 John Horne Tooke, *Epea ptepoenta, or, The Diversions of Purley*, vol. 1 (London, 1786, 2nd edn. 1798), vol. 2 (London, 1805), both ‘printed for the author’. There were four English reissues

- during the nineteenth century. See Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England 1780–1860* (London, 1983), 44–114.
- 79 *Annual Review*, 4 (1805): 675–9.
- 80 Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or, the Laws of Organic Life*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1800), 1: 601 (§xxxix.8.3; in 3rd edn., §xxxix.12.3).
- 81 Jeremy Bentham, *Works*, ed. J. Bowring, 11 vols. (Edinburgh, 1843), 8: 185 and 188 (Appendix to *Chrestomathia*, 1816).
- 82 William Hazlitt, *Complete Works*, ed. P. P. Howe et al., 21 vols. (London, 1930–4), 11: 55–6 ('The Late Mr. Horne Tooke', in *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825).
- 83 *Literary Journal*, (1806), 15.
- 84 James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 2 vols. (London, 1878).
- 85 British Museum MSS. 33, 155, Mill to Place, 8 October 1816, as quoted in Elie Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. M. Morris (London, 1928), 451.
- 86 Dugald Stewart, *Philosophical Essays* (1810), in *Collected Works*, ed. W. Hamilton, vol. 5; here pp. 149–88.