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Wandering Words

Translation against the Myth of Origin in Fritz Mauthner's Philosophy

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I will address the issue of translation as a critique of autochthony that emerges in the context of Fritz Mauthner's linguistic scepticism. Translation, for Mauthner, becomes a privileged prism through which to consider identity and belonging, as well as a way of understanding uprootedness, since language is a continuous product of borrowing, bastardization, stratification, and contingency. According to Mauthner, languages are not possession, but borrowing; not purity, but contagion; not an abstract crystallization, but transit. Therefore, love of the mother tongue — the only way to conceive patriotism — is not a physical connection with the land, roots, or nation, but a refuge, an always precarious *Heimat* (home).

KEYWORDS: Fritz Mauthner; Translation; Mother Tongue; Linguistic Skepticism; Autochthony

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> Vaterlandsliebe ist nur Liebe zur Muttersprache
>
> Fritz Mauthner

A DIASPORIC PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

At the beginning of the last century, the crisis of a whole series of values that started with Nietzschean philosophy led to the collapse of classical reason, the failure of the teleological understanding of history, and a radical scepticism towards tradition. It was in this context that the so-called *Sprachkrise* (crisis of language) emerged.[1] This was an intense debate in the years leading up to World War I in which poets and intellectuals — such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler,

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1   See Katherine M. Arens, 'Linguistic Scepticism: Towards a Productive Definition', *Monatshefte*, 74.2 (1982), pp. 145–55; Franco Rella, *Il silenzio e le parole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984); Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York: Touchstone, 1973); Libera Pisano, 'Silence, Translation and Grammatical Therapy: Some Features of Linguistic Scepticism in the Thought of Rosenzweig and Wittgenstein', in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2017*, ed. by Giuseppe Veltri and Bill Rebiger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 121–43.

Karl Kraus, and others — discussed language and its limits. In this context, language became a constitutive and insurmountable obstacle to the grasp of reality. The phenomenon of the *Sprachkrise* has not yet received the attention it deserves, and it has been interpreted as a purely literary movement rather than as a philosophical and cultural turning point. In my opinion, the linguistic turn that philosophy took later in the twentieth century would have been inconceivable without the *Sprachkrise*, which preceded it and made it possible. Interest in the limits of language was the common denominator of the thinkers of those years and constitutes a kind of philosophical *koiné*.

It is no coincidence that this phenomenon received special attention among German-Jewish thinkers. First of all, in response to a philosophical urgency, thinkers like Fritz Mauthner, Gustav Landauer, Martin Buber, Walter Benjamin, Margarete Susman, and Franz Rosenzweig resorted to considering Judaism as a heterodox element with respect to the German tradition, an alternative that can offer new paths for interpreting the world through a new philosophical and historical filter. Although these thinkers held different positions, Judaism offered them a hermeneutical horizon and a counter-image during the incubation period of the end of German-Jewish history. They can therefore be described as the last witnesses of a German-Jewish tradition who, in the first decades around 1900, more or less consciously reflected their double philosophical and political identities in a linguistic spectrum. In fact, all of these authors have a dual affiliation with both the Jewish tradition and German philosophy, and their sceptical attitude or critical distance from language is also autobiographical. Linguistically speaking, they were 'bifurcated souls'.[2]

At a time when völkisch ideology and nationalist thought were gaining strength in the German-speaking world and even entering the Zionist movement, this constellation of German-Jewish thinkers reflected on uprooting, exile, community, and language in a very different way, which I would like to call a 'diasporic philosophy of language'. By this, I mean a reflection on language that problematizes the traditional identification between language, nation-state, and territory. By

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2   The expression 'bifurcated souls' is used in Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 1–24.

rejecting the exclusivity of nationalism, this approach takes exile as a pivotal element in thinking about language and belonging. In this context, translation epitomizes a diasporic philosophy of language and assumes a central role with theological, political, and messianic value. It becomes a privileged prism through which to consider language, languages, identity, belonging, and the questioning of autochthony.

Fritz Mauthner, who was the linguistic sceptic *par excellence*, played a central — if somewhat forgotten — role in this constellation of authors, since his work can be considered the *trait d'union* between literature and critical thought which, thanks to the mediation of Gustav Landauer, became widespread among the German-Jewish milieu. In his works, Mauthner develops a critique of the origin, root, and ontological foundation of language that has anarchic echoes. Although his political positions were inclined towards conservatism, Mauthner's linguistic scepticism is one of the most radical examples of a critique of supposed linguistic autochthony.[3] Translation plays a fundamental role as a means of rejecting linguistic purity.

FRITZ MAUTHNER'S LINGUISTIC SCEPTICISM

Mauthner was a philosopher and linguistic sceptic, journalist, novelist, and playwright who lived on the fringes of academia. He was a German-speaking Jew born into an assimilated Bohemian Jewish family in 1849 and grew up in a Czechophone society. He studied law in Prague but did not graduate, as he wanted to devote himself to literature and journalism. In 1876, he moved to Berlin, where he started his career as a theatre critic, journalist, and writer.

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3   Despite his long friendship with the anarchist Gustav Landauer, Mauthner did not share his political stance. However, Landauer's anarchism and Mauthner's conservatism never clashed, except during World War I. While Mauthner advocated active participation in war, Landauer defended the role of philosophy as 'the best means against madness and murder'. See Landauer's letter to Mauthner dated 29 September 1914 in Gustav Landauer and Fritz Mauthner, *Briefwechsel 1890–1919*, ed. by Hanna Delf (Munich: Beck, 1994), pp. 290–92. See also Fritz Mauthner, 'Zum Gedächtnis', *Masken: Halbmonatsschrift des Düsseldorfer Schauspielhauses*, 14.18/19 (1919), pp. 300–04 (p. 300); Carsten Schapkow, 'German Jews and the Great War: Gustav Landauer's and Fritz Mauthner's Friendship during Times of War', *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, 9 (October 2016), pp. 1–17 <https://www.doi.org/10.48248/issn.2037-741X/806>.

In response to the growing anti-Semitism of those years, Mauthner officially resigned from the Jewish religious community in 1891 without professing any other religion, including Christianity. In his *Erinnerungen* (Memoirs) he notes that as a Jew in a bilingual country, he had neither a mother tongue nor, as the son of a completely non-denominational Jewish family, a mother religion.[4]

Mauthner produced an enormous body of work: his three volumes masterpiece *Contributions to a Critique of Language*, a *Dictionary of Philosophy*, *Atheism and Its History in the Occident*, and numerous essays and novels.[5] In 1905, he moved from Berlin to Freiburg, and in 1909, he moved to Meersburg on Lake Constance, where he later died in 1923. As a modern Cratylus, who at the end of his life no longer spoke, Mauthner decided to spend the last years of his life in a glass house (*Gläserhäusle*) on Lake Constance, where he was able to find a kind of mystical rest, and he was therefore called the 'Buddha of the Bodensee'.

Mauthner's critique of language offers one of the most radical forms of linguistic scepticism in the history of philosophy. His work,

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4   Fritz Mauthner, *Erinnerungen I: Prager Jugendjahre*, 3rd edn (Berlin: Holzinger, 2014), pp. 50–51: 'Wie ich keine rechte Muttersprache besaß als Jude in einem zweisprachigen Lande, so hatte ich auch keine Mutterreligion, als Sohn einer völlig konfessionslosen Judenfamilie.' See Carsten Schapkow, '"Ohne Sprache und ohne Religion?" Fritz Mauthners Sprachkritik und die zeitgenössischen Debatten über Deutschtum und Judentum', in *An den Grenzen der Sprachkritik. Fritz Mauthners Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kulturkritik*, ed. by Gerald Hartung (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013), pp. 19–49.

5   Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1913); Mauthner, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Neue Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*, 2 vols (Zürich: Diogenes, 1980); Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: DVA, 1923). For Mauthner's philosophy of language, see Gershon Weiler, *Mauthner's Critique of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Weiler, 'On Fritz Mauthner's Critique of Language', *Mind*, 67 (1958), pp. 80–87; Martin Kurzreiter, *Sprachkritik als Ideologiekritik bei Fritz Mauthner* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1993); Gerald Hartung, *Sprach-Kritik: Sprach- und kulturtheoretische Reflexionen im deutsch-jüdischen Kontext* (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2012); Hartung, ed., *An den Grenzen der Sprachkritik: Fritz Mauthners Beiträge zur Sprache- und Kulturtheorie*; Joachim Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik: Fritz Mauthners Leben und Werk* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975); Elizabeth Bredeck, *Metaphors of Knowledge: Language and Thought in Mauthner's Critique* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992); Bredeck, 'Crumbling Foundations: Fritz Mauthner and Philosophy after Philosophy', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 23 (1990), pp. 41–53; Libera Pisano, 'Misunderstanding Metaphors: Linguistic Scepticism in Mauthner's Philosophy', in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2016*, ed. by Giuseppe Veltri and Bill Rebiger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 95–122.

which aims to show the limits of linguistic superstition, begins by point-
ing out the impossibility of a general definition of language beyond
singular speech acts.[6] In fact, according to Mauthner, language is pure
abstraction, a *Wesenloses Unding*,[7] an unessential no-thing, and a vain
chimaera. This is mainly due to the fact that there is an immeasurable
gulf between reality, which is understood as an unceasing flow,[8] and
the immobility of language, which cannot grasp this flux and can only
provide us with a deformed image of it. This gap is also the gap between
the sensory experiences achieved through the senses — which for
Mauthner are the 'accidental senses' (*Zufallssinne*), as an unintentional
result of the evolution of human beings — and language as a collection
of memory indices that offer only an approximation of experience.[9]

The distortion that language offers is due to its reifying mechan-
ism, which crystallizes the movement of reality and gives reality to
words and turns them into 'things'. Through this reification, words
become fetishes and lead to the naive belief that nouns correspond to
concrete objects and faithfully represent reality.

Language removes the uniqueness of our experience by turning it
into a series of words and empty tautologies. However, although it can
refer to reality only metaphorically, it is the sole means of human know-
ledge. Language's reference to reality is fundamentally metaphorical,
and yet it is the only medium in which human knowledge, which is the
result of a linguistic trap, can unfold. Even if language erases the unique-

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6   Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, p. 4: 'Was aber ist die Sprache, mit der ich es zu tun habe? Was
     ist das Wesen der Sprache? In welcher Beziehung steht die Sprache zu den Sprachen.
     Die einfachste Antwort wäre: die Sprache gibt es nicht; das Wort ist ein so blasses
     Abstraktum, daß ihm kaum mehr etwas Wirkliches entspricht.'

7   Cf. ibid., I, p. 181.

8   The ontological basis of this philosophy is the notion of reality as a constant flux,
     which reflects Ernst Mach's conception of it. Mauthner was greatly influenced by one
     of Mach's lectures delivered in Prague in 1872, because of the sceptical principles he
     presented as the theoretical basis of his physics. See Katherine M. Arens, *Functionalism
     and fin de siècle: Fritz Mauthner's Critique of Language* (New York: Lang, 1984).

9   According to Mauthner, the faculty of memory cannot be distinguished from its effects
     and there is only an illusory divergence between language, memory, ego, and con-
     sciousness. Memory is fundamentally unreliable because it can only approximate past
     sense experiences. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, p. 531: 'Aber das Gedächtnis ist auch we-
     sentlich untreu. Das Gedächtnis wäre unerträglich, wenn wir nicht vergessen könnten.
     Und die Worte oder Begriffe, die erst durch das falsche Gedächtnis entstanden sind,
     wären für den Alltagsgebrauch ungeeignet ohne die Eigenschaft des Gedächtnisses:
     untreu zu sein.'

ness of human experience by turning it into a series of tautologies, and even if it refers to reality metaphorically, it provides us with knowledge. Therefore, a metaphor is not just a rhetorical figure, but instead reveals the functioning of language, or rather, language is a sum of metaphors: it can only refer to the world metaphorically, because words are images of images of images.[10]

All the supposed truths and sciences are a collection of metaphors.[11] For this very reason, Mauthner's scepticism is at the same time a radical attack on Western metaphysics. All metaphysical abstractions are false and the result of a linguistic deception that forces us to believe that every noun corresponds to a pre-existent substance. Since language is a series of abstractions, the entire history of philosophy, with some exceptions such as Hume and Kant, is nothing but a sum of meaningless problems and linguistic illusions. Therefore, Mauthner's *Beiträge* were written in an attempt to expose the tricks and lies of language, to show that it is useless as a means of perceiving reality, and to turn philosophy into a permanent critique of language.

Mauthner's linguistic scepticism can be conceived as a *pharmacon* of philosophy itself that should become a permanent critique of language, useful for revealing its fallacies, but also its inevitability. If the word is not representative of reality, the most important task of philosophy is to subject language to a profound critique — which is arguably 'paradoxical', since such a critique must be articulated in language — that exposes the superstition and tyranny that words exercise over human beings. In this sense, linguistic scepticism has a fundamentally liberating character. In fact, according to Mauthner, philosophy's most important and paradoxical task is liberation from the superstition and tyranny of words.

However, this liberation is in a way an impossible task. In fact, according to Mauthner, there is what we can call an inevitability of misunderstandings. 'We are', wrote Gustave Flaubert, 'all in a desert, no one understands anyone else.'[12] According to Mauthner, this lin-

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10   See Fritz Mauthner, 'Die Sprache', in Mauthner and Gerald Hartung, *Die Sprache* (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 2012), pp. 6–140 (p. 109).

11   On Mauthner's conception of metaphor, see Pisano, 'Misunderstanding Metaphors', pp. 110–14.

12   Mauthner quotes this verse by Flaubert; cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, p. 49.

guistic desert is unavoidable: 'There are no two men who speak the same tongue.'[13] In fact, it is impossible to say that the meaning and reference of a word are the same for everyone, because words precede us and do not correspond to our sensory experience. If reality is in flux and in incessant change, then words give us the illusion of immobility. Moreover, a word is not an adequate expression of inner processes, because it is a public product and an articulation in grammar, syntax, and semantics. As we have seen, the approximation of our random sense impressions and the ambiguity of words inevitably lead to metaphorical representations of reality. Nevertheless, memory — thanks to its preservation of traditions and habits — has a social role that coincides with the common use of language. The collection of words stored in one's memory is nothing but an exchange of linguistic habits that are supposed to be the same for everyone. This commonality proves the non-existence of a private language; in fact, if there is no correspondence between words and reality, then to speak of true communication would be utopian and meaning is determined only by use. By seriously doubting the possibility of true communication, Mauthner does away with the connection between signifier and signified and rejects the reference theory.[14] This revolutionary suspension of the teleology of signs could be interpreted, on the one hand, as an *epoché* of meaning, a stepping back from signification that unsurprisingly leads to silence;[15] on the other, Mauthner's critique of signification does not affect the social aspect of language; namely, the linguistic com-

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13   Ibid., I, p. 56: 'Es gibt nicht zwei Menschen, die die gleiche Sprache reden. [...] Kein Mensch kennt den anderen. Geschwister, Eltern und Kinder kennen einander nicht. Ein Hauptmittel des Nichtverstehens ist die Sprache.'

14   Elisabeth Leinfellner, 'Fritz Mauthner', in *Sprachphilosophie, Philosophy of Language, La Philosophie du langage*, ed. by Marcelo Dascal, Dietfried Gerhardus, Kuno Lorenz, and George Meggle (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992), pp. 495–509 (p. 499): 'Die Referenztheorie der Bedeutung hat Mauthner jedenfalls abgelehnt: wir geben Worte aus wie Banknoten und fragen nicht ob dem Wert der Note im Schatz etwas ein empirisches Referenzobjekt entspricht.'

15   Mauthner defines his silent resignation as a mystical apology, a godless mysticism that transcends the limits of language. He places himself in an apophatic tradition that doubts the reliability of words, starting from Plotinus, Cusanus, and Eckhart. Cf. Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, p. 83. Mauthner never defines his silence as a Jewish silence. However, Judaism could be the religion of silence and silence could be a leitmotif of Judaism, as Franz Rosenzweig, André Neher, Paul Celan, and George Steiner would later testify.

munity.[16] In fact, despite the fact that every individual speaks their own language (*Individualsprache*), language functions only as a 'rule of the game' (*Spielregel*)[17] that acquires validity only when it is accepted by more than one speaker. Under this perspective, Mauthner's analysis concerns the interstitial space between individuals.[18] Language, according to him, 'has arisen and exists only between human beings; languages have arisen between peoples. There are no autochthonous languages.'[19]

AGAINST LINGUISTIC PURISM: MAUTHNER'S PHILOSOPHY OF TRANSLATION

In his introduction to the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Mauthner develops a philosophy of translation in order to criticize linguistic purism. By 'linguistic purism', he means the defence of an original language that supposedly spontaneously arose without having any form of contact with other people. In this respect, he vehemently opposes the various descent theories (*Abstammungsthesen*) that assume that 'all Aryan languages are based on a common original language'.[20] Mauthner says that this supposed *Ursprache* cannot be described, since nobody can say anything about it, whether it was considered unique or whether it was articulated in dialects, whether there was a language even older than this one, and so on.[21] According to him, the original language is a phantom (*Gespenst*), just like the idea of an original people, nation,

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16   According to Mauthner, the communist utopia can only be realized in language where there is no private property, but only common property (*Gemeinbesitz*). See Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, pp. 24–27.

17   Cf. ibid., I, p. 25: 'Die Sprache ist nur ein Schein wert wie eine Spielregel, die auch umso zwingender wird, je mehr Mitspieler sich ihr unterwerfen, die aber die Wirklichkeitswelt weder ändern noch begreifen will.'

18   This also had an impact on Mauthner's conception of *Heimat*. See Thomas Hainscho, 'Fritz Mauthners Heimatbegriff: Zwischen Deutschnationalismus, jüdischem Selbsthass und Sprachkritik', *Colloquium: New Philologies*, 6.1 (2021), pp. 54–69 (p. 57): 'Er bezieht sich nicht rein auf Sprache, sondern umfasst auch eine soziale Gemeinschaft, die diese Sprache spricht.'

19   Fritz Mauthner, 'Einleitung', in Mauthner, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, p. lxi: 'Wie die Sprache nur *zwischen* den Menschen entstanden ist und besteht, so sind die Sprachen *zwischen* den Völkern entstanden. Es gibt keine autochthonen Sprachen.'

20   Ibid., p. xx.

21   Ibid., pp. xx–xxii; Mauthner, *Beiträge*, II, p. 389: 'Das Wort Ursprache bedeutet für die Gelehrten der indoeuropäischen Sprachwissenschaft ein Fabelwesen, die Sprache,

or homeland, which are nothing but abstractions and illusory concepts (*Scheinbegriffe*).[22] The destruction of these conjectures, the exposure of their falsity, is therefore 'not only a theoretical necessity of human knowledge, but also a practical advantage'[23] provided by the liberatory role of Mauthner's critique of language.

In contrast to Aryan chauvinism, which feels 'ashamed to have borrowed things or words from non-Aryan peoples, almost as if a contagion is first felt as a disgrace [*Ansteckung zunächst als Schande*]',[24] Mauthner argues that there is no initial possession, but rather borrowing and theft; no purity, but contagion, due to the wandering of words and the displacement of human beings.[25]

To dismantle this linguistic purism, Mauthner first points out that all cultures and languages are the result of *Entlehnung* and *Lehnübersetzung*,[26] of borrowings and loan translations. These key concepts have played a central role in all areas of culture. Borrowing, for example, is the basis of the entire *Völkerspsychologie*,[27] and through loan translations, ideas from all areas of thought, as well as names of diseases, numbers, plants, and nature — as Mauthner showed in several examples — have migrated from people to people. Even Christianity — and thus Latin as the universal language of the church — was nothing more than a loan translation of Hebrew and Greek.

Mauthner does not speak of translation in the classical sense, but as the paradigm of an encounter caused by the permanent wandering of human beings: imitations and borrowings constitute the history and formation of languages. He writes that 'countless useful terms have only become known through translation, so that each nation is

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    welche das Urvolk der Arier, dessen Existenz nicht bewiesen ist, zu einer Zeit, die wir nicht kennen, gesprochen haben soll.'

22   Mauthner, 'Einleitung', pp. xciii–xcv.

23   Ibid., p. xcv: 'Die Zerstörung von Scheinbegriffen, die Aufdeckung ihrer Falschheit ist also nicht nur ein theoretisches Bedürfnis für die menschliche Erkenntnis, sondern in sehr vielen Fällen auch ein praktischer Vorteil, weshalb der Sprachkritiker es sich gefallen lassen muss und mag, zu den Aufklärern gerechnet zu werden.'

24   Ibid., p. xxiii.

25   Ibid., p. xxvii: 'Die Wanderung von Sachen und von Namen für die Kulturgeschichte von ungleich größerer Bedeutung war als die Völkerwanderung.'

26   See ibid., p. xxvii.

27   Ibid., p. xvii: 'Ohne Nachahmung oder Entlehnung von Werten und Worten keine Völkerpsychologie, kein soziales Interesse in der Geschichte.'

deeply indebted to the other'.[28] Translation is a testimony of the limit of autochthony and a blatant sign of debt to other languages. Therefore, at the beginning, there cannot be an original possession, but rather an original debt to others.

Translations are obvious examples of linguistic exchanges and of word migration. Mauthner writes:

> None of our intellectual property is autochthonous, it is not national, it wanders through the centuries and millennia from people to people. Only a people's language, which is nothing but the *storehouse of wandering hereditary wisdom*, is supposed to be national, is supposed to be autochthonous. Only exceptionally, when it cannot be overlooked that it is a loan or a borrowed translation, is this fact admitted.[29]

In this perspective, Mauthner denounces the linguistic purism that results from a 'national self-deception' (*die nationale Selbsttäuschung*),[30] according to which there is a purity of the mother tongue. This self-deception leads to an absurd patriotism whose intention is to cleanse and free language from foreign words. With his formidable irony, he qualified this obsession with a pure language as an attitude of 'language sweepers' (*Sprachfegermeistern*), who were obsessed with cleansing and disinfecting their own language from foreign impurity.[31] Instead of the supposed cleanliness, Mauthner compares the wandering foreign words, as the lifeblood that makes languages dirty and fertile, to 'mud from the Nile'.[32]

This crusade against foreignness ignores the history of the words themselves. However, it is not always easy to find these foreign traces in one's own language, and sometimes scholars are 'blind and deaf'[33]

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28 Ibid., p. lxiii.

29 Ibid., p. lv: 'Unser gesamtes geistiges Eigentum ist nicht autochthon, ist nicht national, wandert durch die Jahrhunderte und die Jahrtausende von Volk zu Volk. Nur die Sprache eines Volkes, die doch nichts weiter ist als die *Vorratskammer der wandernden Erbweisheit*, soll national, soll autochthon sein'; my emphasis.

30 Ibid., p. lxi.

31 See Fritz Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland* (Leipzig: Dürr & Weber, 1920), p. 13.

32 See ibid., p. 16: 'Stoßweise haben solche Kulturwanderungen ganze Mengen fremder Begriffe dem eigenen Boden zugeführt, schmutzig und ertragreich wie einen gesegneten Nilschlamm.'

33 Mauthner, *Einleitung*, p. lv.

to recognizing the provenance of the words. For example, purists do not recognize loan translations because there are words that wear the garb of 'our' language. Mauthner writes: 'Just as wandering people in foreign lands keep their native garments or put on foreign clothes, so it is with wandering words; they come in great numbers, sometimes as borrowings, sometimes as translations from one people to another.'[34]

There are three forms of borrowings: first, words that have passed into common usage and are difficult to recognize; second, words that retain a certain foreign sound; and third, technical terms that are not part of common usage, such as, for instance, the words of philosophy. One of Mauthner's main questions concerns the nature of the translation of philosophical expressions. He seeks to 'pursue the question of whether philosophical thought really gains as much from the translation of words into the native language as has been believed for several hundred years'.[35] The strategy adopted by Christian Wolff and Christian Thomasius, who began to establish philosophical writing in German, is harshly criticized. According to Mauthner, they offered a concrete example of purism, which he condemns with the help of illustrious examples such as Goethe, Jacob Grimm, and Leibniz.[36]

In the attempt to create a German philosophical terminology, Wolff wanted to write in pure German, excluding all foreign expressions. For Mauthner, this purist approach was not useful for at least two reasons: if the term to be translated does not exist in the destination language, then the new term is formed on the basis of the word to be translated and is explained by its *Modellwort* (model word);[37] if, on the other hand, an existing word in common use has been used for translation, then the philosopher who uses it technically needs to add the new figurative meaning to the old meanings of the word. In both cases, the transformation process that is at stake in the translation is antithetical to the idea of linguistic purism and its static aspect. Accord-

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34   Ibid., p. lvi: 'Wie wandernde Menschen entweder ihr heimatliches Kleid in der Fremde beibehalten oder das fremde Kleid anlegen, so geht es auch den wandernden Worten; sie kommen in großen Scharen bald als Entlehnungen bald als Lehnübersetzungen von einem Volke zum andern.'

35   Ibid., p. lxxxix: 'Um die Frage zu untersuchen: worin besteht das Wesen der Übersetzung, insbesondere der Übersetzung philosophischer Ausdrücke?'

36   See ibid., p. lxii.

37   See ibid., p. xci.

ing to Mauthner, the introduction of foreign terms into a language is possible through the new formation of words or a change of meaning (*Bedeutungswandel*).[38]

Mauthner gives many examples of German philosophical words that bear the hidden traces of other languages. One blatant case is the German word for 'object,' which in the old version was not *Gegenstand* — a poor translation of the philosophical term *Objekt,* in Mauthner's opinion, as it still sounds wrong in German — but *Vorwurf,* which means 'reproach'. By following the etymological path, Mauthner argues that this must be the result of an incorrect translation, because it does not come from the Greek *hypokeimenon*, but from *antikeimenon*, a translation of 'objection' rather than 'object'.[39]

Mauthner not only gives philosophical explanations, but also examples taken from everyday languages. The sentence 'today is Friday 18 January 1907'[40] already includes loan translations, as is the case for everything that has to do with the calendar. He presents a huge list of loan translations of everyday words from Latin and German in order to show the extent of the exchange between the languages. His lists can be considered concrete examples of the dismantling of linguistic autochthony, almost an attempt at deconstruction *ante litteram*. In fact, according to Mauthner, an incalculable part of the vocabulary was and is created by translating the vocabulary of other languages.

Not only is most of 'our' vocabulary the result of translation, but the meaning of words will continue to change with future translations. In fact, a word that is already present in one's own language can be transformed in order to translate the foreign one.[41] Because of this constant change of meaning through translation, Mauthner says that 'words are even more unreliable than substances in an alembic still, words are always in *statu nascendi*'.[42] Every word is not only the result of previous wanderings, but also a promise of future ones. There is no

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38   Concerning the changes of meaning, cf. Mauthner, 'Die Sprache', p. 109: 'Den Satz: dass aller Bedeutungswandel also endlich alle Wortbildung auf Metaphern oder auf Metaphern von Metaphern beruhe.'

39   Ibid., pp. 67–69.

40   Ibid., p. 74.

41   Ibid., p. 56.

42   Ibid., p. 109: 'Worte sind noch viel unzuverlässiger als Stoffe in der Retorte; Worte sind immer in statu nascendi.'

crystallized origin; rather, languages are in transit and are exposed to absolute translatability, which is the opposite of purity and fixedness. If there is no origin at the beginning, there remains only the absolute contamination. Therefore, translation is a necessary bastardization of languages.

The notion of a common root and of the self-contained purity of languages are abstractions, *Scheinbegriffe* (illusory concepts), that necessarily have political consequences. Mauthner writes:

> How can the individual continue to give away his property and his blood for love of the fatherland, which is only love of the mother tongue, when only the body of that language is the property of the people, only the sound; when the immeasurable sum of the ideas of art and science, of custom and law, is gathered from the ownerless property of foreign, barbaric, tyrannical, hated or despised peoples?[43]

However, this criticism of autochthony does not prevent him from thinking of a certain kind of linguistic patriotism.[44] In this critique of purism, the only possible patriotism is not a celebration of blood or a geographical bond with the soil, but what we can call a philological love for the mother tongue: 'Vaterlandsliebe ist nur Liebe zur Muttersprache' (Love of the fatherland is only love of the mother tongue).[45]

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43 Ibid., p. 80: 'Wie kann der Einzelne noch Gut und Blut hingeben aus Vaterlandsliebe, die nur Liebe zur Muttersprache ist, wenn nur der Körper dieser Sprache Eigenbesitz des Volkes ist, wenn nur der Körper dieser Sprache Eigenbesitz des Volkes ist, nur der Laut, wenn die ungeheure Summe der Vorstellungen von Kunst und Wissenschaft, von Sitte und Recht zusammengeholt ist aus dem herrenlos gewordenen Eigenbesitz fremder, barbarischer, tyrannischer, gehaßter oder verachteter Völker?'

44 See Hainscho, 'Fritz Mauthners Heimatbegriff', p. 56: 'Patriotismus besteht also darin, die Heimat zu lieben, was wiederum bedeutet, die Mundart der Heimat zu lieben; das heißt, den Dialekt, der an dem Ort gesprochen wird, den man als Heimat bezeichnet.'

45 Mauthner, 'Die Sprache', p. 80. On this aspect, see Thomas Hainscho, 'A Homeless Patriot: Fritz Mauthner's Search for a Homeland in Language', in *Mother-Tongue and Father-Land: Jewish Perspectives on Language and Identity*, ed. by Libera Pisano, *Azimuth: Philosophical Coordinates in Modern and Contemporary Age*, 9.18 (2021), pp. 31–46 (p. 40): 'Mauthner indeed rejects the love of the father-land as misguided patriotism, but his ideas go well with nationalist positions that see language as an integral part of identity.'

LINGUISTIC *HEIMAT*: AN IMPURE LOVE

Mauthner lived in the antinomy of having a language assigned to him by fate and, at the same time, loving it very much. In *Die Sprache*, he writes:

> The love for one's own homeland, the love for one's own people, is essentially the love for one's own mother tongue, the learning of which is not difficult for us, the shortcomings of which we do not hear, do not feel. We love it much more passionately than we usually know. We love it with longing and jealousy.[46]

As a Jew born in a Slavic province of the Austro-Hungarian empire, he grew up in a multilingualism of three languages: the German of education, poetry, and kinship; the Czech of peasants and servants, but also the historical language of the Bohemian kingdom; and the Hebrew, the holy tongue, of the Old Testament, which also became the *Mauschel* German of Jewish peddlers and elegant businessmen alike.[47] Mauthner did not manage to master any of his three languages, and he therefore describes being deficient in his way of speaking them. He was born with no mother tongue and could not find his *Heimat* in any of these languages as a child. As he writes in his *Erinnerungen*, his Jewishness was, in a sense, a condition — a predestination — for being a sceptic of language.[48]

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46   Mauthner, 'Die Sprache', p. 37: 'Die Liebe zur eigenen Heimat, die Liebe zum eigenen Volke ist aber wesentlich Liebe zur Muttersprache, deren Erlernen uns nicht schwer geworden ist, deren Mängel wir nicht hören, nicht fühlen. Wir lieben sie viel leiden-schaftlicher, als wir gewöhnlich wissen. Wir lieben sie mit Sehnsucht und Eifersucht.'

47   Mauthner, *Erinnerungen*, 17.

48   Cf. ibid., p. 27: 'Ich habe darauf vorhin hingewiesen, dass ich als Jude im zweisprachi-gen Böhmen wie 'prädestiniert' war der Sprache meine Aufmerksamkeit zuzuwenden.' Even if on the one hand — as Thomas Hainscho stated — 'Mauthner's engagement with Judaism is more extensive on a biographical level than on a philosophical one' (see Hainscho, 'A Homeless Patriot', p. 33), the question of whether Judaism had more or less influence on his scepticism is a very important one to ask in theory. Indeed, Mauthner is one of the few authors to explicitly address the relationship between these two elements. With cunning of reason, Mauthner does so in a text published after his death in *The Menorah Journal* in 1924 under the title 'Scepticism and the Jews', which was published in English rather than German, his adopted linguistic language, as if he needed to speak about the connection between Judaism and scepticism in another language. Here, Mauthner addresses perhaps the biggest question of his life; namely, whether or not scepticism can be defined simply as a tendency or characteristic of Jewish thinkers or whether or not there is an affinity and correspondence between

> My linguistic conscience, my critique of language, was sharp-
> ened by the fact that I had to consider not only German but
> also Czech and Hebrew as the languages of my 'ancestors', that
> I had to carry around the cadavers of three languages in my
> own words. Yes, a philosopher of language could grow up under
> such psychological influences.[49]

In his essay 'Muttersprache und Vaterland', Mauthner tells how
the German Jews of Bohemia discovered that Germany was their
homeland when they were referred to as 'German' in 1968.[50] If the
Czech people had a geographical homeland, Bohemian Germans had
an artificial, linguistic one.[51] In particular, Mauthner lamented its
lack of 'the fullness of dialectal forms',[52] since it was separated from
the German soil. Therefore, his spoken German was untied from the
Boden (soil); it was, in a way, a language in exile.

Mauthner's love for the German language, which he deliberately
chose as his mother tongue, came only later. The act of choosing a
mother tongue to love means that language cannot be inscribed in a
natural determinism. It is not a real *Muttersprache*, but the result of

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scepticism and Judaism. If on the one hand, Mauthner rejects an absolute coincidence
between his Jewishness and scepticism precisely because there is no philosophical
school of Jewish scepticism, on the other, he admits that linguistic scepticism has to do
with a critique of religion as a liberation from its delusions. Mauthner himself wonders
how it is possible to consider Jews sceptical when they believe in a God, the creator
of the world. The relationship between scepticism and Judaism is the paradoxical
relationship between religion and scepticism. See Fritz Mauthner, 'Skepticism and the
Jews', *The Menorah Journal*, 1 (1924), pp. 1–14. The German version appeared many
years later; cf. Mauthner, 'Skeptizismus und Judentum', *Studia Spinozana*, 5 (1989),
pp. 275–307.

49   Mauthner, *Erinnerungen*, p. 28: 'Jawohl, mein Sprachgewissen, meine Sprachkritik
wurde geschärft dadurch, dass ich nicht nur Deutsch, sondern auch Tschechisch und
Hebräisch als die Sprachen meiner "Vorfahren" zu betrachten, dass ich also die Leichen
dreier Sprachen in meinen eigenen Worten mit mir herumzutragen hatte. Jawohl, ein
Sprachphilosoph konnte unter solchen psychologischen Einflüssen heranwachsen.'

50   Cf. Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, p. 8.

51   Cf. ibid., p. 7: 'So hatten die Tschechen ein natürliches Vaterland, die Deutschböhmen
nur ein künstliches.'

52   Mauthner, *Erinnerungen*, p. 28: 'Der Deutsche im Innern von Böhmen, umgeben von
einer tschechischen Landbevölkerung, spricht keine deutsche Mundart, spricht ein
papierenes Deutsch […]. Es mangelt an Fülle des erdgewachsenen Ausdrucks, es
mangelt an Fülle der mundartlichen Formen.' On the difference between Mauthner's
conception of *erdgewachsenes* and *papierenes Deutsch*, see Hainscho, 'Fritz Mauthners
Heimatbegriff', pp. 59–60.

a precise choice.[53] One can say that his passion for German springs from his condition of uprootedness, as his multilingualism and Jewish deracination alike robbed him of the ability to feel at home. Mauthner uses this alienation from his roots as a starting point, but it is precisely this non-conformity with language that gives him the opportunity to articulate his scepticism and to recognize the sickness of language.

Even though Mauthner writes in his *Contributions* that 'the Jew becomes fully German (*Volldeutscher*) when the *Mauschel* expressions (*Mauschelausdrücke*) have become foreign to him or when he no longer understands them',[54] as a German speaker, he himself was corrupted by the hidden *Mauscheln* of the Jews he could understand, even if he did not use them. When he advocated for a radical linguistic assimilation, he was perfectly aware that he was contaminated.[55] Notwithstanding, he defended his love of the German language. Far from being an organism or a natural determinism,[56] for Mauthner, language is the fruit of a precise act of love.[57]

Despite his political conservatism, Mauthner elaborates a linguistic philosophy of uprooting. His radical thinking about translation is a paradoxical attempt to conceive a history of languages without a fixed point or origin, since they are in constant transformation and movement. If there was translation at the beginning, there is no loss of the original, but always a spurious process within which history unfolds.

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53 On Mauthner's conception of *Muttersprache*, see Pascale Roure, 'La métaphore de la langue maternelle. Nationalisme linguistique et apories identitaires selon Fritz Mauthner', *Trajectoires*, 3 (2009) <https://doi.org/10.4000/trajectoires.245>.

54 Mauthner, *Beiträge*, I, p. 541.

55 See Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 227–30. Gilman described Mauthner as an excellent example of an assimilated Jew whose idea of Jewish identity was nothing more than speaking with a Jewish accent.

56 On this aspect, cf. Gerald Hartung, 'Die Sprache', in Mauthner and Hartung, *Die Sprache*, pp. 141–224 (p. 183): 'Sprache ist, wie Mauthner betont, kein *Organismus*. Mit der Metapher von Organismus wurde in der Sprachphilosophie viel Missbrauch getrieben, denn sie suggeriert, dass Sprache eine Realität ist, die nicht des menschlichen Zutuns bedarf. Aber Sprache ist nach Mauthners Auffassung keine natürliche Einheit, sie existiert nicht für sich allein, sondern allein zwischen den Menschen.'

57 See Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, p. 52: 'Die Muttersprache und was drum und dran hängt, ist ein Gegenstand der Liebe; man empfindet die Einheit der Sprache, des Geistes und der Sitten wie ein enges verwandtschaftliches Band und liebt seine Sprachgenossen wie man seine Familie liebt […]. Man liebt die Muttersprache sogar stärker als man seine Familie lebt.'

Translation is the precarious capture of a language in transit and the testimony of the wandering of words. Its transformative transit is constant, so that definition and possession are forbidden. The original debt that undermines one's autochthony is perfectly in line with a Jewish motif according to which land, language, and law do not belong to human beings.[58] This debt does not impede us from loving our mother tongue, which is considered not as the fruit of an immaculate womb, but as an illegitimate child; not the origin, but the Derridean prosthesis of the origin.[59]

In contrast to a metaphysics of origin that leads to an illusory autochthony, for Mauthner, translation is a way of radically thinking about uprooting, since language is a continuous product of borrowing, bastardization, stratification, and contingency. While on the one hand, he vehemently criticized the racial implications of ethnology and the Indo-Germanic theory of language, [60] on the other, he argues for a political conception of the mother tongue as a unique form of belonging to a community. At the centre of his diasporic philosophy of language is not possession, but borrowing; not purity, but contagion; not abstract crystallization, but transit. Words often err in a double sense: they make mistakes and they meander. The love of language, which is not a physical connection with the soil and the root, is a refuge that offers an always precarious *Heimat*. Mauthner's *Sprachliebe* is not a love of its purity. It is rather an impure love that requires word-refugees to live, which will infect the 'native' languages with an infinite translation.

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58   Concerning this aspect, cf. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. by Barbara E. Galli (Madison: Wisconsin Press 2005), pp. 317–24.

59   Derrida's maxim 'I only have one language; it is not mine' is already present in Mauthner's thought. See Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. by Patrick Mensah (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 1.

60   See Mauthner, Beiträge, II, pp. 389–464 and pp. 603–71.

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