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MENTAL FURNITURE FROM THE PHILOSOPHERS

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THE VOCABULARY OF a language encapsulates a large part of the conceptual apparatus common to its speakers. As Diderot writes in the *Encyclopédie,* "The language of a people gives its vocabulary, and its vocabulary is a sufficiently faithful record of the whole knowledge of the people; simply by comparing the vocabulary of a nation at different times, one can form an idea of its progress." (1) There have been many suggestive, but isolated, remarks made about the relation between the vocabulary of a speech community and its thought. A modern East German study, (2) for example, compared the vocabularies of German as spoken in the Federal Republic and in the Democratic Republic. It found that there was little difference between the two, except in the choice of ideological terms — a difference the authors attributed to the "imperialist attempt to conceal reality and influence the masses." In a similar vein, Theophylact of Ohrid, a Greek theologian at the time of the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches, advocated a lenient attitude towards the errors of the Latin church on the grounds that it was using a language without the requisite theological distinctions. (3) The vocabulary chosen by the Watergate criminals exemplified another way in which words could be related to thought; namely, they could conceal it and preserve the "deniability" of anything that might appear to have been said. (4) Newspaper columnists and comic novelists have long realized that vocabulary is extremely sensitive to social changes, and examples abound in these genres of exposés of the linguistic foibles of sub-classes of societies. (5)

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Two languages may differ in the vocabulary they use in similar circumstances and so reveal differing conceptualizations of the subject matter in question. But it may also happen that two languages differ in the sheer amount of vocabulary of some type. The possibility arises that the community using the poorer language is simply unable to think about the phenomena described by this type of vocabulary in the richer language. Although individuals can perhaps deal in ideas for which there is no word, such ideas can hardly become part of the mental furniture of the community at large. In Diderot's words, if an idea can acquire a name, then, "if this idiom be supposed admitted and fixed, the notions immediately become permanent, the distance of time vanishes." (6) An increase in the vocabulary of a language will then correspond to an enlargement of the pool of concepts at the disposal of its speech community. Modern English, in particular, has a very much larger vocabulary than Old English had. A study of the sources of the new vocabulary can be expected to reveal some deep, and perhaps unexpected, influences on the way we think.

The etymology of English is, of course, in general very well understood. It is well known, for example, that many of the words added to Middle and Modern English are technical terms derived from Latin and Greek. The researches summarized in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary* permit an accurate picture to emerge of the first occurrences in English of words of any given type. This study will consider a class of words which has not been satisfactorily isolated for separate treatment, even though the history of any one of them can be described as familiar. The class is that consisting of the English words which express very general concepts (for example, 'general' and 'concept'). These words are characterized by the variety of the situations to which they apply, and the generality of the features of the world which they express. Other examples are 'absolute,' 'act,' 'infinite,' 'necessary,' 'movement,' 'divide,' 'exist,' 'probable,' and 'common.' Such words are so much a part of our linguistic dealings with the world that the poverty of a language which had no such words is almost unimaginable. Yet Old English did not have them — they are all Latin derivatives.

The importance of these words for our thinking is perhaps too obvious to need laboring. Nevertheless, it need not rest purely on subjective evaluations. The "Brown Corpus" (7) lists the frequency of words in a sample of a million words of modern American written English. Of the 500 most frequently occurring words, 124 are of Romance origin. If those which have obviously Old French modifications to their stems are omitted, there remain, in descending order of

frequency: 'just,' 'state,' 'states,' 'part,' 'general,' 'united,' 'fact,' 'public,' 'president,' 'social,' 'present,' 'national,' 'possible,' 'form,' 'important,' 'case,' 'family,' 'interest,' 'area,' 'different,' 'sense,' 'human,' 'example,' 'action,' 'company,' 'local,' 'history,' 'act,' 'experience,' 'really,' 'information,' 'college,' 'probably,' 'real,' 'question,' 'special,' 'major,' 'federal,' 'moment,' 'study,' 'result,' 'position,' 'individual,' 'society,' 'areas,' 'community,' 'future,' 'department,' 'center,' 'necessary,' 'front,' 'able,' 'provide,' 'education,' 'university,' 'effect,' 'students,' 'military,' 'total,' 'figure,' 'rate,' 'art,' 'century,' 'class,' 'usually,' 'evidence,' 'various,' 'modern,' 'tax,' 'minutes,' 'personal,' 'process,' and 'situation.' Of these, only 'president,' 'company,' 'university,' 'students,' 'military,' and 'tax' could be described as in any way "technical terms,' and the reasons for the prominence of these words in the American context are not hard to find. All the others, except perhaps 'national,' 'family,' and 'century,' fall into the class of general terms described above.

But these words, though Latin derivatives, do not come from classical Latin. The thesis of this article is that these words were technical terms of scholastic philosophy, and mostly entered English directly from that source in the fourteenth century.

Before the evidence for this conclusion is presented in the next section, it should be emphasized how the line of argument being advanced here differs from what has been written on the subject heretofore. Barfield briefly mentions the fashioning of abstract terms in medieval philosophy in his *History in English Words,* but he is apparently unique in doing so. (8) In general, historians of language, faced with the massive borrowings of English (and French) from Latin in the later middle ages, have been content to observe that many technical terms of law, science, and ecclesiastical life were adopted from Latin, and to provide lists of these. (9) But their lists in fact contain a high proportion of general words which have no apparent connection with any of these subjects, and which we would unhesitatingly deny were technical terms at all. That the vulgar tongues adopted technical legal, ecclesiastical, and astrological terms because they had none of their own is not a matter to occasion any surprise. What does call for remark is the fact that the technical Latin vocabulary of philosophy, the most abstract of disciplines, provided the modern languages with a vocabulary which is in no way technical but rather permeates the language used in all areas of discourse.

II

In determining when a word first became current in English, there is an obvious measure to use — the first occurrence of the word in documents as recorded in the standard dictionaries. Some obvious cautions apply to this measure. First, words can be current in a spoken language for an indefinite time before appearing in documents; the words being considered here, however, are ones that would naturally appear first in writing, and in the later fourteenth century at least there is a wealth of documentary evidence of the state of written English. Second, the first occurrence of a word may be an isolated instance which does not represent any genuine currency of the word and may have been unknown to later authors. This was particularly the case before the invention of printing. But it appears that in practice this was rarely so. For almost all of the words to be discussed, the dictionaries record many instances soon after the first.

In the following, "X introduced the word Y into English" should be read as an abbreviation for, "The combined evidence of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary* suggests that the word Y first occurs in extant documents in the works of X." A few quotations will be given where they reveal a specifically philosophical context for the first occurrence of a word.

In the references provided by the dictionaries for the words under discussion, two books appear again and again — Chaucer's translation (of about 1380) of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and John of Trevisa's translation (c. 1398) of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum.*

Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy,* written about 523, was by far the most popular work of medieval philosophy. Most of it was a eulogy of philosophy rather than genuine philosophizing, but its later sections do contain a number of passages which deal with free will, God, and the operations of nature, drawing on many different traditions of ancient philosophy. One of Chaucer's first works was a careful translation of the *Consolation,* (10) using as an aid a French commentary. (11) For many of the more difficult concepts, which strained the resources of English, he retained the original Latin word,or its French derivative. The following words first appear in English in Chaucer's translation: 'absence,' 'absolute,' 'act,' 'action' in other than the legal sense, 'centre,' 'circle' (verb), 'circular,' 'compound,' 'compress,' 'conceit' (meaning "concept"), 'conject-,' 'conjoin,' 'consequence,' 'conservation' ("In conservacion of hyr beynge and enduryngc," III pr. xi), 'continuation,' 'convenient,' 'create,' 'credible' (earlier than 'believable'), 'define,' 'demonstration,' 'differ,' 'disposition,' 'efficient,' 'egal' (an earlier form of

'equal'), 'egality,' 'eternity,' 'exceed,' 'fortuit-,' 'future,' 'imaginable,' 'imply,' 'impress,' 'inestimable,' 'infect,' 'infinite' (possibly), 'infirm,' 'interminable,' 'manifest,' 'moment,' 'movable' (except of feasts) and 'movability,' 'movement,' 'necessary' in the sense of "inevitably determined," 'necessity,' 'object,' 'opportunity,' 'particip-,' 'position,' 'premise,' 'proportion-,' 'reason' in the sense of "a cause independent of humans," 'reduce,' 'resist,' 'subject' (except in the sense of "vassal"; it translates Boethius' "de materiali subjecto"), 'submit,' 'superfice' (earlier than 'surface'), 'universal' ("Reason surmounteth ymaginacioun and comprehendeth by an uniuersal lokynge th commune spece that is in the singuler peces," V pr. iv) and 'variant.' (12) In addition, the frequency of the suffixes of abstraction '-ion,' '-ty' and '-ance' in the translation (13) marks a new ease of expressing abstract concepts in English.

Boethius was by no means the only philosopher who contributed to the development of Chaucer's thought. In later medieval England the language of learning was Latin (rather than French), (14) and the apex of learning was philosophy and theology. Anyone engaged in serious thought in the fourteenth century can be presumed to have examined the ideas of the scholastics, simply on the grounds that there was no other systematic conception of the world available. Detailed studies of Chaucer's opinions on such topics as free will and predestination, Church and State, and generality and individuality, have found that they did indeed stem from the thought of the scholastics. (15) Chaucer's later works introduced into English many more Latin derivatives expressing general ideas. From *Troilus and Criseyde,* which is in part a dramatization of Boethian philosophy: 'alter,' 'casual' (possibly), 'complete,' 'direct,' 'influence,' 'motion,' 'possibility,' 'sentiment,' 'substance' in the sense of "what underlies appearances," and 'transitory.' From the *Canterbury Tales*: 'accidental' (possibly: "cause accidental," *Melibeus* 2585-90, in a passage explicitly about scholastic terminology), 'aspect,' 'consequent,' 'constant,' 'effectual,' 'expel,' 'formal' ("cause material . . . cause formal,' *Melibeus* 2585-90), 'habit' (except in the sense of "clothing"), 'inclination,' 'inequal' (earlier than 'unequal'), 'intellect,' 'introduction,' 'modify,' 'operation,' 'oppose,' 'opposite' and 'opposition,' 'particular' ("particular sciences," *Franklin's Tale* 1122), 'practic,' 'reverse' (noun), 'total' and 'variation.' From other works of Chaucer: 'absent,' 'accident,' 'appearance,' 'authentic,' 'conserve' and 'conservative,' 'effect' (possibly), 'equal,' 'exception,' 'existence,' 'natural,' 'observe' in the sense "look at," 'precedent,' 'retrograde,' 'signal,' and 'site' (originally a technical term of astrology).

Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* was the most

popular encyclopedia of the late middle ages. Written about 1230, it included much of the then newly-rediscovered Aristotelian philosophy and science. It was translated into French, Spanish, Dutch, Provencal, Italian, and English, and there are some forty-five extant printed editions. (16) The English translation was that of John Trevisa, made no later than 1398, and printed in 1495 and again in 1535. (17) In it are the first occurrences in English of 'accidentally' ("Druye essencialliche and moiste accidentallich, as Aristotil seith," XVII.i), (18) 'alteration,' 'apprehend,' 'apprehension' and 'apprehensive,' 'associate,' 'atom' (originally a unit of time), 'communicable' and 'communicative,' 'complement,' 'convenience,' 'cooperate,' 'dimension' ("Eueriche body hath his owne dymensioun and mesure," XI.cxxviii; "As Rabanus seith, tyme is dymensioun of chaungeabil thingis touchinge meovinge and abidinge," IX.ii; cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 221b7 and 223a29-33), 'discontinual' and 'discontinuance,' 'discrete' (possibly), 'effective,' 'essence' (*OED:* "The coinage ['essentia'] is ascribed by Seneca to Cicero, but by Quintilian (who disliked it) to the philosopher Plautus or the rhetorician Verginius Flavus." Trevisa writes, referring to Pseudo-Dionysius, "the essencia of hem [angels] is simple and vnmaterial, pure, distingt, and discrete," II.ii), 'fiction,' 'immaterial,' 'instant,' 'instrumental' ("The cause material and instrumental," III.xx), 'intellectual' ("Damascenus seith that an aungel is substancia intellectual," II.ii) and 'intellectually,' 'magnitude,' 'moderate' (possibly), 'potential,' 'resumptive' (earlier than 'resume'), 'simple' in the sense "not compound" ("As Constantyn seith, an element is symple and lest particle of a bodie that is compowned," X.iii; "the duringe, contrariness, simplenesse, quantite and qualite of the pacient," VII.lxix), 'substantially,' 'symptom,' and 'virtual.' In introducing a Latin word, Trevisa sometimes adds an English word with a similar meaning (thus "associate and coupled," "gretnesse or magnytude," "actiue and passiue, worchinge and suffryng"). This was to some extent merely an intellectual fashion which he shared with other translators of the age, (19) but it was a fashion adopted with good reason. Trevisa seems to have been conscious that the Latin terms would be unfamiliar to his English readers and would require some explanation, and at the same time that there were no English words with meanings precise enough to translate the Latin.

Two other writers played an important part in introducing general words into English, though a smaller one than Chaucer and Trevisa. Richard Rolle of Hampole, a student of philosophy and theology at Oxford early in the fourteenth century, wrote various devotional works in which first appear: 'active' (possibly), 'cause' (verb: "A fantasye caused of trubblyng of the brayne," *Prose Treatises,* (20)

p. 18), 'constrain' ("Fre wil, noght constraynd," *Psalter* xxvi.10), 'continue,' 'illusion,' 'imagine' and 'imagination' (possibly), 'material,' 'moral,' 'necessary,' perhaps 'possible,' 'presence,' 'reform,' 'reserve,' 'singular,' 'transcend,' 'transform,' and 'vary.' Wyclif, himself an author of Latin treatises in the scholastic manner, (21) introduced: 'communication,' 'composition,' 'definition,' 'deform,' 'different,' 'distinct' (adjective), 'essentially,' 'interpretation,' 'negative,' 'occasion,' 'principle,' and 'relative.'

Usk, (22) Gower, Lydgate, and a few other authors could be mentioned, but their contributions were small. A listing of them would be tedious, and would add nothing of substance to the argument.

There are certain Latin derivatives even more fundamental to the language than those so far mentioned — words like 'art,' 'cause,' 'change,' 'common,' 'figure,' 'form,' 'general,' 'image,' 'matter,' 'measure,' 'nature,' 'perfect,' 'person,' 'proper,' 'quality,' 'question,' 'space,' 'special,' 'state,' and 'substance.' These all entered the language in the thirteenth century, at a time when documentary evidence for the history of English is too sparse to draw many definite conclusions. Philosophical influence is sometimes evident in the early uses of the words, but it is not always easily distinguished from the influences of French, legal Latin, and the Vulgate Bible. But the words cited appeared only rarely in classical Latin, or only rarely with a meaning similar to the modern one. Rather, their modern meanings generally reflect those they assumed in medieval philosophy.

The history of abstract words from the time of their introduction into English to the present day is characterized chiefly by its uneventfulness. From the earliest occurrences, they gradually spread to all areas of discourse, to assume the dominant position in contemporary English revealed by the previously-mentioned frequency tables. One incident only is perhaps worthy of some comment. Poets have sometimes felt that these words were too general and colorless for most poetry, but Shakespeare displays no such qualms. As part of his preference for Romance words in intellectual and formal passages (as opposed to Germanic words for strong emotions), (23) he makes remarkably free use of abstract words:

> Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?
>
> *Merchant of Venice* III.i.

> A foolish extravagant spirit, full of forms, figures, shapes, objects, ideas, apprehensions, motions, revolutions.
>
> *Love's Labour's Lost* IV.ii.

Sometimes he gives these words more concrete senses, which have become more familiar in modern English. For example, he is the first

to use 'formal' in the sense of 'excessively regular" (*Lover's Complaint* 29); 'affect' in the sense of "make display of" (*Lear* II.ii); 'the present' in the temporal sense (*Macbeth* III.iv); and 'object' in the sense of "purpose" (*2 Henry IV* IV.v). These meanings have not, however, replaced the original abstract ones. Shakespeare's wholehearted acceptance of abstraction contrasts somewhat with the practice of the authors of the other major contemporary influence on later English, the Authorized Version of the Bible. The simpler words mentioned above as entering English in the thirteenth century are used frequently by the translators — some indeed owed their currency in English to their use in the Vulgate Bible. But the later words of the kind introduced by Chaucer and Trevisa appear rarely in the Authorized Version: 'absolute,' 'active,' 'centre,' 'dimension,' 'exist,' 'formal,' 'idea,' 'movement,' 'opposite,' 'position,' and 'probable' do not occur at all; 'motion' and 'object' only once.

III

Listings of the first occurrences of words in English are effective as a record of the development of that language, but they cannot give any information about the linguistic environment of the words before their importation into English. To partially remedy this defect, it will be useful to examine in detail the histories of two representative words: 'exist' and 'probable.'

The verb 'existere' was used in classical Latin with the meaning "to be manifest," "to emerge," but the sense of the modern English word 'exist' seems to appear in the Church Fathers. Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (c. 180 AD) writes, "The Son of God did not then begin to be, but was always existing (existens) with the Father." (24) Chalcidius (early fourth century) states that Atlantis vanished, leaving no trace of its prior existence. (25) In the same century, the Arian Candidus and the orthodox Marius Victorinus made extensive use of 'existens,' 'existentia,' 'existentialiter,' and 'existentialitas' in their debates on the Trinity. (26) Of more significance for later developments were Boethius' opinions on similar subjects, e.g. "Nor did He form it [the world] after any model, lest it should be thought that anything had already come into being (exstitisse) which helped His Will by the existence (existentia) of an independent thing." (27) The word is used very frequently in this way by the classical medieval philosophers Thomas Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, and others. (28) From about 1300 there are occasional similar usages in Italian and French. (29) The first occurrence of the word in English, however, corresponds to a more specialized sense, in which (real) existence is contrasted with (mere) appearance. The appearance/reality distinction, a philosophical problem long before its life as a literary commonplace, was a source of

sceptical arguments that troubled many ancient and medieval philosophers. The scholastic Siger of Brabant (c. 1250) presents arguments for and against the proposition "that all the things that appear to us are simulacra and as dreams, so that we cannot be certain of the existence (existentia) of any thing." (30) Appearance and existence are similarly contrasted in thirteenth century discussions of sophistical reasoning (31) and in Petrus Aureolus' treatment of optical illusions (c. 1317). (32) It is in this sense that 'appearance' and 'existence' appear in the *Roman de la Rose* of Jean de Meung (another translator of Boethius' *Consolation*):

> Mais ja ne verreiz d'aparence
> Conclure bone consequence
> En nul argument que l'en face
> Se defauz existence efface. (33)

A slightly later French writer, imitating or translating one of the encyclopedic works of Bartholomaeus Anglicus and others, says of the Pole Star:

> Ele est de petite apparence
> Mes elle est de grant existence. (34)

There are examples from Italian authors of the same period, including Boccaccio. (35)

The first occurrence in English is very like these. It is from Chaucer's *Hous of Fame* (c. 1380), I.266:

> Allas what harme do the Apparence
> Whan hit is fals in existence.

The *Romaunt of the Rose* (c. 1400) and Lydgate use the word in an almost identical context. (36) Lydgate is also the first to use 'existence' in its slightly wider and now more usual sense:

> Thyng countirfetyd hath non existence. (37)

Strangely, the verb 'exist' does not appear in English until 1602. (38) It occurs three times in Shakespeare.

In modern written English, 'existence' is among the 1000 most frequently used words. The parts of the verb 'exist,' taken together, have a frequency about twice that of 'existence.' (39) In French, 'existence' ranks a remarkably high 500th in order of frequency. (40)

The history of 'probable' follows very much the same lines. Except for some isolated remarks in Aristotle and Cicero, the concept of a likely or probable event or opinion seems to have been absent from ancient thought. (41) 'Probabilis' is used in classical Latin of opinions, but means "provable" or "approvable."

In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury, in a passage recalling Cicero's *Academica*, writes of propositions that are doubtful to the wise man, "Whether they be true or false, I am satisfied with probability (sola probabilitate)." (42) More typical of later usage is Richard of St. Victor's distinction between necessary and (merely) probable reasons for believing an opinion. (43) A concept of probability developed in legal theory, where theoretical reasoning had to allow for the variabilities, contingencies, and unknown factors of everyday life. Thus a decretal of Innocent III in 1209 ruled on the different grades of suspicion possible about marital infidelities — they may be suspected either with certainty, with a probable and discerning belief (probabili et discreta), or with a light and temerarious belief. (44) Aquinas appreciated that it was not appropriate to demand certainty in such matters (45) and discussed the evidence of witnesses in terms of probability. Two or three witnesses are enough for a conviction, he says, because "a probable certainty is sufficient, which attains the truth in most cases, even though in a few cases it does not. It is probable that what a number says has more truth than what one says." (46) On the other hand, to convict a bishop requires seventy-two witnesses, a cardinal deacon of the city of Rome twenty-eight, and a sub-deacon, exorcist, or door-keeper seven, because "such should be appointed whose sanctity can be believed more than many witnesses." (47) Aquinas also uses 'probabilis' less technically and more in the modern style in speaking of possible historical events where there is some reason, but not a fully convincing one, to believe that the event happened. Thus, "It is probable that parents [living in ancient times] addressed certain prayers to God on behalf of their newly-born children"; "It seems more probable that it [the star that appeared to the Magi] was a newly created star, not in the heavens, but in the air near the earth." (48)

In the fourteenth century, criticism of one another's arguments became a major concern, even an obsession, of philosophers, and almost every opinion and argument was described at one time or another as merely probable. (49) The early occurrences of 'probable' in French and English, however, seem to reflect the usage of Aquinas rather than that of later philosophers. The history of the transfer of scholastic knowledge into French is in most respects parallel to the story traced above for English, but the French language was particularly fortunate in obtaining the services of Nicole Oresme (d. 1367), the last of the great medieval philosophers. Besides writing original works on philosophy, theology, mathematics, and money, Oresme translated large quantities of Aristotle in French. (50) In *Le Livre de Ethiques*, a translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* he writes, ". . . certainnement, si comme en mathematiques, mes es autres non,

mais tant seulement probablement et vraysemblablement" (II.ii).

In English, 'probable' is first used in the same way as in Aquinas. Trevisa's translation (c. 1387) of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (written c. 1350) discusses the question whether there were ever snakes in Ireland. After mention of various authors' conflicting views on the subject, the decision reached is that "it is more probable and more skilful, that this lond was from the byȝynnynge alway with oute suche wormes." (51) 'Probable' here translates 'probabile' (in another manuscript 'probabilius') in Higden's Latin.

Writers of the next century also remain close to Latin usage: "If a treuthe be knowun oonli bi probablines and likelihode, and not sureli" ('likely' in the sense of "probable" is of about the same age in English as 'probable' itself; it translates the Latin 'verisimilis,' a synonym of 'probable'); "As it appereth by probabill persuacions of Philosofers." (52)

In modern written English, 'probably' ranks 361st in order of frequency. (For comparison, this is just ahead of 'free,' 'behind,' and 'cannot'). The word was used in all fifteen genres sampled in the Brown study. (53)

IV

The conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing investigation are by no means clear. At least three reactions seem possible. First, one could maintain that the pervasive, barely-recognized influence of a long-dead school of philosophy on modern thought is inappropriate, and that all traces of medieval superstition should be exposed and uprooted. The difficulty facing this proposal is that, in the absence of any alternative vocabulary, the effect would simply be a regression of thought. The probable result would be the Newspeak of Orwell's *1984*, which "was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought" by reducing its vocabulary to the point where "a heretical thought should be literally unthinkable." (54) Nevertheless, it might reasonably be insisted that the lack of an obvious alternative abstract vocabulary at present is a matter that could be remedied, and that perhaps modern schools of philosophy could contribute to doing so.

Second, one might conclude that since the possibilities of expressing abstraction in English are tied to a particular philosophy, there is no reason to think that our linguistic customs in this matter are in any way privileged or more adequate than others. It would be natural to study languages unrelated to English and investigate whether they embody different metaphysical schemes of the world. Success in finding such a language would enable one to draw the conclusion that many have sought to draw from the diversity of morals among cultures — namely, that since different cultures have different standards, all

standards are false (or at least, no standard is better than any other). A relativist position with regard to languages was in fact adopted by Benjamin Lee Whorf, whose studies of the Hopi Indian language of Arizona aroused considerable interest in the 1940's and 1950's. (55) He claimed, for instance, that the Hopi language did not divide the world into past, present, and future things, as Indo-European languages do, but rather into the "manifested," including everything so far experienced, and the "unmanifest," including future things and also mental phenomena. The Hopi and English ways of describing the world were, he thought, "equally valid."

Thirdly, one might admire the ancient and medieval philosophers for their successful "raids on the inarticulate," the spoils of which are bequeathed to us in our ability to speak and think abstractly. There is a hint of a position of this kind in Barfield's remark that "nobody who understands the amount of pain and energy which go to the creation of new instruments of thought can feel anything but respect for the philosophy of the Middle Ages." (56) The appropriate attitude to their work would then be not so much rejection and suspicion as gratitude of the kind we have for the pioneers of modern science. Indeed, since Galileo, Descartes, Locke, and their contemporaries who laid the foundations of the scientific world view were trained in the philosophy of the schools and expressed their results in scholastic terminology, (57) the philosophers may have supplied one of the prerequisites of science. Scientific thought needs a vocabulary of abstraction; at the time modern science was born, the scholastic vocabulary was the one available.

It is not the concern of this article to adjudicate between these speculations. To do so would obviously require a quite different type of inquiry from that undertaken here. Rather the collection of evidence on the origin of English terms simply reveals the origin of the current abstract vocabulary in medieval philosophy. Generality in language does have a history, and a history that might, with whatever consequences, have been otherwise.

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