Introduction

Throughout the ages philosophers have questioned our common-sense view of the world, claiming that the world is not as it appears to be.[1] This claim is almost the philosopher's *raison d'être*. Philosophy thrives on the idea that there is a deep structure – matter, atoms, substance, essences, powers, forms, faculties, the absolute spirit, hypostases, Platonic Ideas, or what have you – behind the phenomena we perceive and claim to know; it would amount to naive empiricism to think that what we see is all there is to know, or that it would be enough to justify our claims to knowledge. As a distinguished historian of philosophy has observed: "Over the centuries, it has been practically definitive of the philosopher's job to subject naive empiricism to a withering critique. Indeed, stages in the development of philosophy can be measured in terms of how far they depart, and in which direction, from our natural but naive pre-theoretical orientation toward empiricism."[2]

This departure from a so-called naive empiricism has often gone hand in hand with the development of a language that likewise departs from the way in which people commonly speak about the world. Like scientists, mathematicians, grammarians, lawyers, theologians, and practitioners of various professions, philosophers too developed their own technical language, sometimes staying fairly close to the common parlance of the time but often introducing a more technical, abstract, formal terminology, needed, so it was thought, to refer to and analyze these deeper (or higher) levels of reality, to bring clarity in our philosophical views, or to change our perspective on the world. Whatever it is that philosophers do, it usually comes with a terminology that for the non-initiated may look like mere

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[1] "Common-sense view of the world" is of course a highly contested notion. The essentially contested nature of what is claimed to be "common" and "ordinary" when it comes to language use in philosophy is a central theme of this study; hence no attempt has been made in this general introduction to offer any kind of definition.

[2] Pasnau 2011, 115.

jargon, but for the philosophers in question is necessary to reach the rigor and precision that philosophical analysis requires. Hence, understanding philosophers often begins with learning their language; mastering the terminology of, for example, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger, aided by books with titles such as *Le Vocabulaire de Spinoza*, *Kant Lexikon*, or *Hegel Dictionary*, is like learning a foreign language; and something similar is true of familiarizing oneself with the technical apparatus of analytical philosophy.

Dissonant voices have been heard over the centuries: Does ordinary language, in principle, not contain all the necessary terms, semantic nuances and distinctions, and pragmatic directions that we need for analyzing philosophical concepts? Do we not create rather than solve our philosophical problems by introducing all kinds of technical terminology? If technical terms can ultimately be translated into ordinary language, why not use the latter from the start? And if such a translation proves to be impossible, is that not a sign that we have been playing a game all by ourselves that has no longer any connection with the things we wanted to analyze or explain in the first place? Such questions have left most philosophers unperturbed, and they continued to believe that ordinary language is too imprecise, vague, and unstable for doing rigorous philosophy. Bertrand Russell spoke for many when he said: "Everybody admits that physics and chemistry and medicine each require a language which is not that of every day. I fail to see why philosophy, alone, should be forbidden to make a similar approach towards precision and accuracy."[3]

Such debates about the language of philosophy are well known, in particular, from the twentieth century when philosophical Idealism and the rise of formal logic led in some circles to a defense of the use of ordinary language. But we find appeals to common language or the common understanding of words also much earlier in history. One of the most prominent case studies is the critique by humanists and early-modern philosophers of the Aristotelian-scholastic language developed and practiced in the schools and universities of medieval and early-modern Europe.[4] It is the aim of this book to bring this critique into the narrative of Western philosophical history, showing that it reflected significant trends at that time that would ultimately effect a gradual erosion and demise of a paradigm that had ruled for hundreds of years. In several chapters devoted to a selective range of thinkers from this period, different aspects of this fascinating and highly complicated process will be studied.

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[3] Russell 1959, 178.   [4] Cf. Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, 329–357.

This introduction serves to provide a general framework for the case studies that follow.

Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy was brimming with technical terminology. The reasons for this are too complex and too varied to discuss here, but the basic stages of its development are well known: Aristotle himself had already had to invent some technical vocabulary to express the central concepts of his philosophy and logic. Translators in antiquity from Cicero to Boethius struggled with his language and concepts, but succeeded in providing the Latin West with a corpus of writings that gradually became the curriculum in the schools and universities.[5] Translations of Aristotle from the Greek and Arabic as well as commentaries were added to the corpus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and ever new forms of Latin vocabulary had to be coined to match the complexity of the logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics and all the other parts of this growing edifice: *forma*, *intentio*, *species virtus*, *ens*, *entitas*, *esse*, *essentia*, *actus*, *potentia*, *haeceitas*, *perseitas*, *ubicatio*, *intensio et remissio formarum*, and *suppositio*, with all its all subdivisions and technical terminology such as *restrictio*, *ampliatio*, *distributivus*, *confusus*, *mobilis/immobilis*, *descensus*, *ascensus*, and a myriad of other terms. Building on this Aristotelian corpus, medieval scholars also initiated new developments, for instance, in what we might call the philosophy of language (e.g. the speculative grammar of the Modists), logic (e.g. terminist logic), natural philosophy (e.g. the semantic approaches by the so-called Calculatores), and theology, and many fresh problems in virtually every corner of the Aristotelian building were formulated and discussed throughout the period till the end of the seventeenth century. Also in the twilight of its existence Aristotelian scholasticism was certainly not the retarded, conservative force it is often portrayed to have been, but could challenge the new philosophy in interesting ways.[6]

The longevity, however, had perhaps taken its toll. Basic terminology had already been difficult enough to understand in all its complex uses and transmutations. But new terminology had to be coined to express ever new concepts and distinctions as specialization grew and debates intensified particularly in metaphysics and logic. What is true for almost any kind of theorizing is certainly true for the scholastic way of philosophizing: concepts require new concepts, and to clarify these new concepts still other concepts have to be introduced, and so on, till one might wonder whether

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[5] Pasnau (ed.) 2014 contains state-of-the-art chapters on many aspects of the development of medieval philosophy.

[6] For a general discussion of the vitality and resilience of seventeenth-century scholastic Aristotelianism see Mercer 1993; Pasnau 2011 for a comprehensive treatment with full bibliography.

the gains of this ever-growing complexity are not subject to the law of diminishing returns; whether our philosophical systems, in the words of Francis Bacon, are not "but so many stage-plays, representing worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion."[7] The higher we come in this conceptual building the more, it seems, we lose base with our initial object of study or question. It has become a game on its own, with new concepts or entities requiring new terms. Even a highly sympathetic interpreter of scholastic thought such as Robert Pasnau admits that "one risk this kind of analysis runs is that we will end up not just up to our necks in metaphysical parts, but positively drowning – that once we begin to postulate such entities, we will be forced to postulate infinitely many more."[8] We might think "that nothing of any explanatory value has been achieved by all this philosophizing." It is indeed "the timeless complaint made of all philosophy."

Whatever its truth-value, it was certainly a complaint made passionately by Renaissance humanists and early-modern philosophers alike. From the time of Petrarch onward humanists began to heap scorn on the so-called barbarous Latin of the scholastics, and this critique continued to be voiced by early-modern philosophers in various forms and in different contexts. Though a prominent feature of the humanist program of restoring classical Latin as the vehicle for learned communication and conversation, this critique of scholastic "jargon" has not attracted wide attention from historians of philosophy. While it is an exaggeration to say that the history of the critique of scholastic jargon is "virtually unexplored"[9] – one need only think of the age-old contest between philosophy and reason on the one hand and rhetoric and eloquence on the other – it seems fair to say that the slow and gradual demise of Aristotelian scholasticism has usually been analyzed with reference to metaphysics, natural philosophy, and psychology (the *scientia de anima*). Changes in metaphysical and physical concepts such as substantial form, substance, final cause, space, impetus, matter, and motion, have seemed more promising and more telling evidence for the new directions philosophy was taking in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Less attention has been paid to the critique of language, though it is intrinsically connected to these changes. It is not difficult to understand the reasons for this relative neglect.

[7] Bacon 1857–1874, IV, 55 (*The New Organon*, I, 44).
[8] Pasnau 2011, 211 and 210 (on Scotus's analysis of the inherence of accidents in a substance).
[9] Burke 1995, 22. For some book-length studies on the debate between scholastics and humanists, in which criticisms of scholastic language play a significant role, see Moss 2003; Rummel 2000; Wels 2000; Nauta 2009; Schmidt 2009; Martin 2014; Celenza 2018.

First, the critique of language in this entire period often has the character of a topos, a highly repetitive litany that scholastic language is obscure, incomprehensible, ungrammatical, in short "barbarous." Without further explanation or justification, such a critique easily becomes monotonous, sterile, uninteresting, and philosophically shallow. At first sight, there does not seem to be much variation in these complaints during the period, and while in the beginning of the humanist movement there was at least a dominant paradigm to fight against, by the mid-seventeenth century one might get the impression that the critique had sometimes become something of a straw man, as other new and interesting developments, such as the rise of mathematics and the increasing use of experimental observation, began to occupy a much more prominent role.

Second, the critique seems to be not only monotonous and philosophically superficial, but also unfair. The claim then is that the humanists simply failed to understand the nature of philosophical and scientific analysis, which cannot do without a certain technical terminology. On this view, the humanist complaint that the Latin of the schools is unnatural, artificial, ugly, and ungrammatical only shows that humanists failed to see that a special language is needed to match the rigor of philosophical analysis. In addition to the revival of a classicized Latin, the humanist attempt to revive and emulate ancient rhetorical practice is likely only to deepen the philosopher's suspicion – as if rhetoric can replace the standards of exact, clear, and technical language that philosophy requires.

These sentiments are understandable, and yet historically there are good reasons to pay more attention to critics of scholastic language. First, mere repetition over the centuries might also be a sign that there was more at stake than some aesthetic preference. As already noted, Aristotelianism in all its variety remained a vigorous, resilient tradition, so that it remained, in the eyes of its opponents, a powerful paradigm worth attacking in the seventeenth century no less than in earlier times. Seen from this angle, the critique of language was not a by-product of a paradigm shift that took place elsewhere; it was a vital element in the critique of Aristotelian scholasticism as a whole. This leads to a second reason. We need not subscribe to a form of linguistic determinism to realize that language is deeply embedded in culture, giving expression to it and shaping it. We can therefore expect the language critique of this period to be more than just a critique of some barren expressions or some pieces of badly construed Latin. It could include the following items, starting with the critique of scholastic Latin itself:

- Scholastic Latin vocabulary and grammar (as opposed to "good" Latin following classical norms).
- The study of logic as an end in itself, a mere verbal art (as opposed to an examination of the things themselves, "*res*").[10]
- The Aristotelian ideal of demonstrative science, characterized by notions such as deduction, demonstration, definition, universality, certainty, and truth (as opposed to induction, observation, experience, particularity, and also to less stringent requirements of knowledge such as verisimilitude and probability).
- The study of artificially constructed fallacies and forms of argumentation (as opposed to an examination of arguments in practice or real life).
- Disputations and other scholastic methods, denounced as cavillations, quibbles, and sophistry, that aim at solely promoting one's own position (as opposed to collaborative efforts in the search for the truth).
- The *ipse dixit* attitude ("he has spoken"); that is, an appeal to the authority of Aristotle that was supposed to clinch the argument (as opposed to the *libertas philosophandi*, the freedom to philosophize).
- Scholastic terminology as quasi-precise but in fact "insignificant speech," devoid of any explanatory power.
- Scholastic language as the language of the Church and the university, used as a means to mystify, deceive, impress, or overpower the people (as opposed to the common language as an instrument of communication and bond of society).
- Technical language as a form of uncivilized behavior, and as pedantry (as opposed to civilized forms of conversation at court and in society at large).

We will meet these points in the chapters to come, but the point of listing them is simply to remind ourselves that the critique of language – again, whatever its historical plausibility – was a broad category, not limited to aesthetics or Latin philology. As an expression not only of thought but also of an entire approach and culture, creating identity and securing power, language was of course much more than a neutral verbalization of what went on in the mind. While humanists aimed at a reform of the language arts (the arts of the trivium: grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) and the university curriculum based on the works of Aristotle, philosophers in the seventeenth century had sometimes different motives to criticize the

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[10] The concept of *res* gradually changed from "subject matter" to "things" in the sense of material objects; Vickers 1987, 11. Cf. Eamon 1996, 292–296; Serjeantson 2006, 153–154.

language of the schools, but what many of them shared with their humanist predecessors was the conviction that the language of the schools was the expression of a culture that was hampering progress in the arts and sciences. Being more than just a critique of the barbarous concoction of a so-called unnatural and ungrammatical Latin, it could also target patterns of thinking and behavior that were deemed to be dangerously abstract or politically and religiously corrupt. Thomas Hobbes comes to mind of course, whose critique of the abstract nature of scholastic language went hand in hand with his rejection of a spiritual domain of souls of which the Church claimed to be the guardian and spokesman (see Chapter 7).

We can develop this point a bit more. Through the critique of language important notions, ideas, and attitudes were attacked that opponents had associated, rightly or wrongly, with Aristotelian scholasticism. This might look like a trivial point, for how else can one criticize a philosophical notion than by criticizing the linguistic expression used to speak about that notion? If one disagrees with the opponent's theory of free will, the argument is likely to start with the opponent's definition or use of the words "free" and "will." But while this is a valid point for any kind of (philosophical) debate, the critique of scholastic language often went further than the individual concept, rejecting an entire form of discourse because that discourse was believed to be intrinsically connected with a particular style of philosophizing. Because much of the rejected terminology referred to entities and distinctions of a metaphysical and logical kind, the language critique could easily lead, for instance, to a rejection of these entities and distinctions as well (see for example Chapter 5). Rejecting abstract entities is, of course, not an exclusively early-modern phenomenon; we need only think of a medieval nominalist such as William of Ockham, who was perfectly happy to use a technical, scholastic terminology himself, to realize that a critique of philosophical language exists in every philosophical tradition. It also does not mean that language critique inevitably led to a thoroughgoing nominalism or anti-essentialism. The point, however, is that certain philosophical and intellectual developments that are characteristic for this period were intrinsically linked to a critique of scholastic language: trimming scholastic ontology required trimming scholastic terminology, because the introduction of a new term, for example *haecceitas* (thisness) or *ubicatio* (being in a place) led to the postulation of a new entity, or vice versa. It could thereby easily become a critique that put a question mark over the existence or usefulness of various kinds of metaphysical and logical notions as well as distinctions such as the Aristotelian categories, transcendental terms, essence, act/

potency, matter/form, second intentions, common natures, universals, and so on. It is for this reason that language critique cannot be absent from a history of the gradual downfall of the Aristotelian-scholastic paradigm.

The questioning of abstract entities could also lead to a form of skepticism about the whole idea of reaching certainty and truth about essences, substantial forms, quiddities, haecceities, and the like. Scholars have detected skeptical tendencies in humanism, and the rise of forms of ancient skepticism has been seen as a hallmark of the early-modern period.[11] These are controversial claims, but it is not implausible to suggest that the critique of scholastic terminology referring to these entities went hand in hand with a growing awareness that such ideals of certainty and demonstrative truth, widely perceived at the time as essential ingredients of the Aristotelian system, are out of our reach. Again, we need to be cautious here. On the one hand, among scholastics we already find the idea that essences cannot be known and that we must be satisfied with probable knowledge; the conjectural status of natural philosophical knowledge was widely conceded among scholastic commentators in the sixteenth century, followed by Hobbes, Gassendi, and many others in the seventeenth century.[12] On the other hand, certainty was not given up *tout court* by early-modern thinkers, as testified by Descartes's search for indubitable truth, Hobbes's claim to have set the science of politics on a secure footing, Spinoza's philosophical system *more geometrico*, or Locke's attempt to show that morality is capable of deductive demonstration. But these seventeenth-century developments had been preceded by at least two centuries of a growing dissatisfaction with the demonstrative ideal of Aristotelian science; it was increasingly considered as a bookish and abstract affair that did not deliver the results its defenders had promised. Again, the rejection of (abstract) terms is of course not a sufficient condition for the rise of skepticism about the possibility of knowledge of the referents of those terms. But it seems plausible to suggest that the critique of scholastic language by self-professed outsiders of the Aristotelian paradigm facilitated or helped to create the possibility for skeptical tendencies and renewed attention to the notion of probability in knowledge and reasoning, thereby creating the intellectual space needed to explore new paths in science and scientific methodology.[13]

One development that is clearly linked to the critique of scholastic language – in this case the language and methods of the logicians – is

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[11] For references and discussion see below, Chapter 6 on Sanches.
[12] Dear 1988, 29–30. Perler 2004, 2012, 2014; Adriaenssen 2017; Pasnau 2017.
[13] See Chapter 6 on Sanches.

what has been called the rhetoricization of dialectic.[14] Medieval logic was thought to be too abstract, too technical and far removed from the practice of speaking and arguing. In humanist writings medieval logic was often reduced to its bare essentials, but the more innovative efforts came from Valla and in particular Rudolph Agricola, who aimed at bringing together dialectic and rhetoric into one system of topical invention, showing how to find arguments by using a set of places or topics (*loci*) such as definition, genus, species, place, time, similars, and opposites. In Agricola's hands dialectic became a practical tool of argumentation that aided the student not only in organizing any type of discourse but also in analyzing a text in terms of its underlying questions and argumentative structure.[15] In the sixteenth century Peter Ramus launched an influential program of reorganizing the arts of dialectic and rhetoric, attacking Aristotelian logic and restricting rhetoric to style and delivery. Dialectic must be aimed at teaching what is of use in ordinary reasoning.[16] Whatever the merits of the humanist critique of medieval logic – and many historians of logic are likely to see in the humanist turn to a pragmatic and much less formal art of argumentation an aberration, and a regrettable interruption of the progress logic had made in the hands of medieval and late-scholastic logicians[17] – it is a critique that is an intrinsic part of the general erosion of the Aristotelian paradigm. And here too the critique resonated for a long time, as testified, for instance, by Gassendi's youthful invectives against Aristotelian philosophy or Locke's discussion of the syllogism.

These examples suggest that language critique can be seen as an expression of wider feelings of discontent with the language, methods, and style of argumentation as practiced by the scholastics. Language critique is thus a broad phenomenon, which is not surprising: it was the scholastic idiom that immediately stared the reader of any scholastic book in the face, whether it were a logical handbook, a commentary on Aristotle, a theological *summa*, or a treatise on a specialized metaphysical topic. It was the language that was often regarded as not only an unnecessarily abstract and artificial form of Latin, but also as infecting the thoughts that

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[14] For references see Chapter 4 on Vives.   [15] Mack 1993; Nauta 2009.

[16] Scholars are beginning to correct the view that Ramism was a vastly influential cultural and intellectual movement. See Raylor 2018, 152: "Ramism was a pedagogical technique – or, perhaps more accurately, a gimmick – rather than a philosophical position"; cf. also Hotson 2007 and Feingold 2001 for a corrective. Even the classic study by Ong already stressed the poor philosophical merits of Ramus's critique of Aristotle and medieval logic; Ong also commented on the limitations of Ramist influence (Ong 1958, 303–304). See also Mack 1993, 342 for a critical judgment about the philosophical merits of Ramus's program.

[17] Kneale and Kneale 1962, 298–316; Risse 1964; Broadie 1993, 197; Cf. Jardine 1988, 173–174.

it articulated and the social, religious, and political practices in which it was embedded.

So far we have given some reasons (illustrated by some examples) why, historically speaking, the study of language critique, in spite of its repetitious, sometimes superficial and polemical character, might be an interesting field of study. The focus so far has been on the destructive side of the critique. But the reasons are not exhausted by that, for there is also a constructive side to it, namely the formulation of an alternative to the rejected terminology of the schools. Given the broad character of the critique, which targeted not only particular "barbarous" words but also an approach, style, method, and even a wider culture that critics deemed pernicious for many different reasons, a study of alternatives can easily lead to an unwieldy field of research. Since everything has to do with language – whether one likes it or not, ideas have to be articulated in the first place – the formulation of alternatives to the scholastic language has necessarily a lot to do with changes in natural philosophy, metaphysics, logic, and argumentation, and many other fields that seem to transcend the critique of language as such. But without ignoring these wider dimensions, it is possible to focus on the conviction, widely felt though difficult to put into practice, that the language of the schools had to be replaced by something else, something more transparent, more comprehensible, and more common. The phrase "common" is a key word here, used by humanists and early-modern philosophers alike, and in the following paragraphs we will briefly look at some important points to be developed and discussed in the chapters on individual authors that follow.

The introduction of a so-called common language was only the start of the problem, for what exactly is a "common language"? What are its criteria? How broadly do we understand to take the word "common"? Who defines what "common" is? How can we stabilize and regulate common language? Such questions, which remind us of similar ones raised about the use of "ordinary language" in philosophy in the twentieth century, were often not posed in such explicit terms: it was always much easier to attack something else as unnatural and uncommon than to formulate one's own alternative. Though we can find pleas for the use of common language throughout the period, the answers and strategies obviously differed, if only because the intellectual landscape was constantly changing.

For the humanists, as we will see, the alternative was of course classical Latin, though they realized that Latin had seen its own internal development also in antiquity so that debates necessarily broke out as to whether