# JEAN-CLAUDE MILNER, ANN BANFIELD, DANIEL HELLER-ROAZEN

# INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-CLAUDE MILNER Translated by Chris Gemerchak

Ann Banfield (AB): I begin with three themes: study, in the sense you give it in *Le juif du savoir, Wissenschaft*, and Galilean science. And I think that you have drawn a contrast between *Wissenschaft* and Galilean science which is somewhat similar to the one you made between grammar and linguistics in *L'Amour de la langue*. Is it because *Wissenschaft* is based on a totality in comparison to science. Are *Wissenschaft* and Galilean science distinct?

Jean-Claude Milner (JCM): For me, Wissenschaft and Galilean science are distinct notions. But I will come back to that. I will begin with Galilean science. The notion comes from Alexandre Koyré even if, as we will see, I distinguish myself from him on a significant point. According to Koyré, a radical shift occurred when Galileo used mathematics to calculate not only celestial phenomena, but also those of the sublunary world. From this point on-still according to Koyré-modern science was launched. We no longer have a cosmos, but a universe; the paradigm of science is mathematical physics; precision becomes a requirement; mathematics is no longer reserved for the perfection and incorruptibility of celestial bodies. Thus, the law of falling bodies concerns earthly bodies. Galileo summed up this decision in a formula: the book of the universe is written in mathematical letters. But let us take another look at this formula. For Koyré, the important word is mathematics. For me, the important word is letters. In my opinion, what defines Galilean science is this literalization. He believed that for physics and, to a larger extent, for the natural sciences, the most straightforward literalization is mathematical literalization. But I do not think that this is the only choice possible. I think in particular that structuralism represents a non-mathematical literalization of the objects which it scrutinizes, for example, linguistic objects or kinship systems. I think that structuralist phonology is a literalization. To reduce phonology to the notion of opposition alone, as Troubetzkoy and Jakobson did, is in fact to reduce phonology to the fundamental property of a literalization: literalization occurs when one letter is opposed to another. Even if there is not an ounce of mathematics in structuralist linguistics, for me it is a Galilean science. In this, I believe I have rediscovered Galileo's original meaning. In his works of physics, he mathematizes; what concerns

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him, however, is not mathematics and its status, but rather what he calls the book of the universe. In his attempt to decipher it, he considered he was incoporating it within a much larger movement, which had started in the realm of the arts and letters. I base my case on a few clues. First of all, thanks to philology, Galileo took seriously the renaissance of Greek and Latin studies; in fact, he believed that philology should serve as the model for physics much as philology was at that moment the pioneer in the deciphering and correction of written texts...

# AB: That is the passage I tried to find on Erasmus in L'Euvre claire...

JCM: The accurate establishment of manuscripts, the restoration of the authentic rules of Latin grammar, the will to rediscover Ciceronian Latin, and to abandon the Latin of the Scholastics, to build monuments inspired by Vitruvius, this movement we call the Renaissance places the study of letters in the pathbreaking position of what Koyré calls precision. I refer to his title, "Du monde de l'à peu prés à l'univers de la precision." In this new world, the physicists put themselves under the tutelage of philology, but they cannot make use of the same tools and the same methods as the philologists. In order to reach the same ends—accuracy and precision—they have to use other means: mathematicization is the foremost among these means.

# AB: And Koyré says this?

JCM: No, I say this. Koyré believes that the decisive issue was the change in status of mathematics in relation to the position it occupied in the ancient paradigm. I am not saying that this change of status is not important, but I wonder about a preliminary question: why did Galileo resort to mathematics? My answer is that, in his opinion, mathematics was the only way that the physicists could be, with respect to the book of the universe, as exact as the philologists were with respect to printed books.

# AB: Even Milton spoke of the book of nature.

JCM: Curtius has noted that the metaphor of the book is old and widespread. One can find it in the late Latin authors. But the point is that this metaphor, this old analogy, takes on new meaning because the notion of the book is no longer the same from the moment it is a question of printing. It requires that one achieve a precision and exactitude in the creation of the text that corresponds to the precision and exactitude required by printing. The cause of printing and the cause of philology are intertwined: if Erasmus established the Greek text of the New Testament, it was so that it could be printed.

I am not only talking about the technique of printing, but about the fact that the characters used by the printing press are themselves composed of geometrical figures. In the era of Galileo, typographers developed combinations of lines and circles with which they tried to write the forms they would use for printing. Between the time when the book is not printed but written by hand, and the time when the book is something that is printed with characters constructed according to geometric rules, the reference to the book of the universe acquires a different meaning.

So this is a first group of clues. The second group of indications comes from Redondi's works on Galileo. Redondi suggests that Galileo had a Lucretian conception of matter. Matter is letters, Lucretius says so explicitly. Redondi maintains that it is for this that Galileo was condemned, and not because he said that the Earth turns. If Redondi is right, the formula for the book of the universe implies an extremely serious innovation in the eyes of the Church-much more serious than the question of heliocentrism or geocentrism. It is an anti-Aristotelian conception of matter at a time when the teaching of the Church was entirely Aristotelian. Notwithstanding the historical hypothesis, Redondi's interpretation is in line with what I am saying, namely that Galilean science is a literalized science and that it is only mathematicized in order to be literalized. Ultimately, this allows the non-mathematicized linguistics of Saussure, Jakobson and Benveniste to be included among the Galilean sciences. It is true that Chomsky wanted to mathematicize linguistics, at least when he started out. One should remember the title of his thesis: The Logical Structure of Linguistic Theory; the term logical refers to the logic of mathematics. Independent of the fact that Chomsky has profoundly evolved on this question, moving rather towards the life sciences, it is important to note that it is not he who turned linguistics into a Galilean science. It is already Galilean with structuralist linguistics, and in fact, in my opinion, already with comparative grammar, because they are reasoning about letters whose rules of substitution are completely determined.

AB: But there are those who always insist on the observation of nature, the importance of objectivity, and all of that. But does what you are saying imply that it is also a question of translating everything observed?

JCM: I would first of all like to respond to the question about Wissenschaft. I must begin by emphasizing that I understand Wissenschaft in a precise sense; I situate this term via two referents. One is modern knowledge, as Foucault analysed it in Les Mots et les choses; the other is the text by Max Weber, Wissenschaft als Beruf [Science as a Vocation] (no one knows how to translate it in French; Beruf is both vocation and profession, whence the recently suggested translation, "Profession and vocation of the scientist"). In reading Weber, one understands that he considers Wissenschaft as related to the socially recognized existence of the professionals of Wissenschaft, while at the same time he analyses the ideal that guides those who choose science as a profession. In other words, Wissenschaft is the ideal of modern universities; this ideal is affected by the emergence of Galilean science, but is not to be collapsed with it. The Wissenschaft that Weber describes was most thoroughly implemented in the German universities of the 19th century, but it still continues to function today for some as an ideal. I form the hypothesis that one could superimpose Weber's professionalized Wissenschaft on Foucault's modern knowledge. This reveals two points of difference with Galilean science as Koyré conceives it: first of all, there is of course temporal difference, which brings us back to a difference in structure to which I will return. Then there is a difference that concerns the notion of *Beruf*: Galilean science has no essential connection with the existence of professionals of knowledge [savoir]. Even if, in reality, especially today, it is

most often practiced in universities and laboratories, this has not always been the case: think of Descartes, Pascal or Leibniz, who were never professional scientists; I mean that they never earned their living by practicing their science. One could even say that the ideal of Wissenschaft is what allowed institutions which existed well before Galilean science-I am thinking of the universities-to make concessions to Galilean science and to accommodate themselves to it when it emerged on the scene. But this reorganization goes to show precisely that Wissenschaft, because it wants to take Galilean science into consideration, also wants to be distinct from Galilean science. I think, like Foucault, that Kant played an essential role in this reorganization. He was the first great philosopher in post-medieval history to have been an academic; I do not need to recall the importance he accorded Newton and the notion of the "royal road of the sciences," but at the same time I emphasize that, according to Kant, it was still necessary, even after Newton, to write the Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science, without mentioning the three Critiques and all the rest. Every discourse of knowledge has to take Newton into account, but there is something more to knowledge than Newton; one could say that that is the key.

To summarize, I would say that the birth of modern science, with Galileo, depends upon Florentine humanism and Renaissance philology; but once mathematicized physics was established with Newton, all the other knowledges (in the plural), including philology, would be called upon to adjust themselves with respect to this new possibility confirmed by Newton. It is at this moment that modern knowledge, or *Wissenschaft*, appears. I use the German word for three reasons: because of Kant; because of the German universities which, as institutions, came to embody modern knowledge; and finally because the word *science* in French is too restrictive and because the word *knowledge* [*savoir*], which I also use, only becomes clear if accompanied by explanatory commentary.

Daniel Heller-Roazen (DHR): To what extent is your analysis of *Wissenschaft* different from the one undertaken by Foucault?

JCM: It is true that I engage in an implicit debate with *Les mots et les choses*. Foucault proposes two great figures: classical knowledge and modern knowledge, with modern knowledge, according to him, coming to an end right before his eyes in 1960. Now—and this has not been commented upon enough—the notion of classical knowledge is directed against Koyré and against the idea that the birth of Galilean science constitutes an isolated event. Within classical knowledge, Foucault distinguishes two poles: on the one hand, order, and on the other *mathesis* (I simplify). Koyré is not mentioned (nor is Galileo, I believe), but his position is condemned; he is one of those who have understood nothing because they only see a single pole, that of *mathesis*, without perceiving that the mathematicization of physics must be related to the desire to order the set of beings, without necessarily mathematicizing them. Even if I modify Koyré's analysis, I still assign central importance to the notion of Galilean science. But it is true that the notion of literalization combines the two poles that Foucault distinguishes. I could argue that in literalizing, one could approach things just as well from the side of mathematicization as from the side

of ordering. Setting aside these differences, I retain something essential from *Les mots et les choses*. It is the use made there of the term *knowledge*, without adding the slightest complement to it. In traditional grammar, one calls that absolute usage; thus I am led to speak of *absolute knowledge*. To this I oppose what I call knowledges-of: physics is the knowledge of nature; medicine is the knowledge of life and death; philology is the knowledge of texts, etc. In my terminology, *Wissenschaft* and *knowledge* (absolute, without a complement, in the singular) are strictly equivalent. Like Foucault, I tend to think that this figure emerged only after Kant and because of Kant. It is explicitly thematized by the post-Kantians; it is not by chance that Fichte entitled his major work *Wissenschaftslehre*, which is translated into French, poorly, as *Doctrine de la science*. I would prefer the better translation of *Doctrine du savoir*. Max Weber offers an analysis of this figure almost as an afterthought, since his text dates from 1917.

Three passing remarks: firstly, Heidegger's rectoral address is aimed directly against Weber; the notion of Selbstbehauptung (Self-Assertion), which Heidegger used in his title, signifies that the German University obtained its affirmation from itself, and not from this external entity of Wissenschaft. Second remark: if I am right, there is no sense in using the term savoir in the singular and without a complement, except for modern knowledge. In short, there is no classical knowledge; there is a classical organization of knowledges (plural). When speaking about classic knowledge, Foucault is giving in to a retrospective illusion. Third remark: I would not want Foucault's position to be reduced to what I just pointed out. Even if he does not explicitly distinguish the knowledge-of (knowledge linked to an object) and absolute knowledge (released from every object), this opposition did occur to him. Notably, he passed from the singular to the plural. From that point on, he will talk only about knowledges, and this plural indicates that he implicitly places them in relation to objects. In fact, the figure of absolute knowledge disappeared with L'Archéologie du savoir, but after all, this disappearance is in keeping with the conclusion of Les mots et les choses.

AB: But does Wissenschaft include comparative grammar?

JCM: Absolutely. Considered in itself, comparative grammar is apparently a knowledge-of, related to an object. But what it brings about, that which makes it move forward and transform itself is the will to participate in the construction of absolute knowledge, of *Wissenschaft*.

AB: But for you, comparative grammar is not a Galilean science?

JCM: Comparative grammar, as it was born, with Bopp, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is not a Galilean science. It became one with the Neogrammarians from 1875, and with Saussure's *Mémoire sur le système primitive des voyelles (Memoir on the Primitive System of Vowels in the Indo-European Languages)*, which dates from 1877. But ever since its birth, it has been a branch of *Wissenschaft*. Once it starts down the path which leads to Galilean science, it remains a branch of *Wissenschaft*. As I have said, *Wissenschaft* (or absolute knowledge) presupposes the possibility of the

Galilean sciences; it is in relation to this possibility that it organizes the various knowledges, including those which are not Galilean or even those which do not pretend to be sciences.

The case of philology is interesting. It precedes Galileo and provided the latter with a model. But when *Wissenschaft* appears, the relation is inverted; philology continues, but it changes and assumes Galilean science as its horizon. However, it does not become a Galilean science, unlike comparative grammar. I repeat: once *Wissenschaft* is constructed and exists, the various Galilean sciences will become part of it, but they are not the only ones to do so. This is really the issue in what Dilthey will call *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally, the sciences of the mind; in French, one translates it as the *human sciences*): they are not Galilean, yet they belong to *Wissenschaft* may end, while the Galilean sciences continue. They were there before, and they can continue during and after. Outside of *Wissenschaft*, they are the knowledges-of; this seems to be enough for them.

DHR: So all Wissenschaft implies absolute knowledge?

JCM: Thus far, I have explained the expression *absolute knowledge* by relying on a grammatical analogy. The name *knowledge*, without complement, is used absolutely, like the verb *to know* in the phrase, "I know." Now we need to go a little farther. What is specific to the moment of *Wissenschaft*, which coincides with what Foucault called modern knowledge, is the point after which there is nothing greater than knowledge. *Wissenschaft* knows no discourse loftier than it, of which it would be auxiliary or servant. Taking up and reversing Heidegger's expression, it is the moment of the Self-Affirmation of *Wissenschaft*, knowledge's affirmation of itself by itself.

AB: That means that there is nothing that escapes...

JCM: Precisely, there is nothing greater. Everything is included in the space of *Wissenschaft* and there is no object that would be too great (or too small) for *Wissenschaft*. Once again, Kant marks the change. For Kant, there are objects that withdraw from knowledge. Is this because they are too great in size, too noble in dignity? This is not what he says. These objects that escape *Wissenschaft* escape it because of their structure; the antinomies of reason do not properly speaking indicate a deficiency, but a law of the construction of knowledge. The post-Kantians perceived in this an intolerable timidity. One should overcome the obstacle posed by the antinomies, they claimed. In a certain way, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* may be interpreted as a declaration: the absolute rule of *Wissenschaft* can now begin, for while being absolutely faithful to Kant, one can render possible what he posited as impossible.

This movement continues throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the rupture brought about by the Second World War. The terms may be empiricist, idealist, scientistic, anti-scientistic, they all move in the same direction: there

is no object that would be too great, too small or too ephemeral for knowledge. Too great—this is, for example, the physical universe, mathematical infinity, etc. Too small—this is the atom or the cell or the gene. Too ephemeral—this is psychoanalysis. From this point of view, Freud is a product of *Wissenschaft*. He considers himself to be a student of Mach and uses energetic models, but at the same time he grounds himself in philology: in his title, *die Traumdeutung (The Interpretation of Dreams)*, the word *Interpretation [Deutung*] comes from philology. To be able to move in this way from the physical to the textual presupposes the homogeneity of a discursive space. *Wissenschaft* precisely constructs such a space. At the very end of Freud's life, the first lines of *Moses and Monotheism* are again an affirmation of the absoluteness of knowledge.

DHR: I would also like to ask you a question on the topic of Jewish study, which forms the third figure of knowledge Ann mentioned, after Galilean science and *Wissenschaft*.

JCM: I would object to the formulation, "third figure of knowledge." It leads one to believe that one is dealing with three species of a common genus. Galilean science and absolute knowledge are not two species of the same genus. Study, I dare say, even less. So what is the difference I see between study, science and knowledge (*Wissenschaft*)?

I would point out first of all that when I speak of study, I am speaking only of Jewish study; in other words, the study of the Talmud. That being said, in order to make myself understood, it may help to put forward the general characteristics that could apply to other types of study, if there are any. In order to specify the distinction between science and study, I refer to the remarks that Lacan made concerning Galilean science. Galilean science is the foreclosure of the subject, including under its stupidest form, i.e., the special case of the scholar does not come into play at all. This is one of the most remarkable aspects of linguistics; in order to become linguists, speaking subjects must act as if they are not speaking, somehow place themselves outside of language, to treat it as an object from which they are radically separated. The tension is particularly marked when they study their own language, but it is always re-encountered, including when they study a language that is not their own. To put things differently, it is the letters of linguistic theory that act by means of the linguist. Without going into detail, I would say that the foreclosure of the subject is adopted by Wissenschaft; absolute knowledge is indifferent to the object, but in a second move, indifference to the object entails the abolition of the subject. The process is not the same as for Galilean science, but it leads to the same point. It is even what allows absolute knowledge to conclude its transaction with science. For what I am calling study, it is the complete opposite: the dimension of the subject is involved at every moment. It is involved from the start because it is a choice of subjects who give themselves over to study, as I have emphasized on several occasions: not every Jew is a Jew of study. It is implied in the course of the process, because there is always a master who intervenes as subject. It is implied at every moment, because at every moment the one who studies is an agent (and not

an instrument) of his study. Study defines a *bios*, a way of life, in the sense that the Greeks spoke of the *bios philosophikos*. During the course of this *bios*, the subject is not only the agent of his study, but study will bring him back to himself as subject. To put it another way, the Talmud speaks to him of himself, the subject. One could say that the same goes for every kind of *bios*. What happens to the subject in relation to these texts also happens to the painter in relation to painting and to the musician in relation to music. True, but it is precisely a matter of texts; now, we moderns believe that it is in the nature of a text to be sufficient unto itself.

Of course, it is always useful to have masters and commentators, but in our modern conceptions, a text should rightfully be self-sufficient. The good reader should think of himself as the first reader. This is the Protestant position: to read the Bible all alone, as if one were the first, is simultaneously necessary and sufficient. This is also, I believe, Spinoza's position: to interpret Scripture by Scripture itself, which is to say that there are no masters. This is what one asks of students when one urges them to think for themselves. But study adopts exactly the opposite position; for this reason it is not modern. Second element: Jewish study involves the body. I accord the greatest importance to the balancing of the body, to the physical gestures of discussion and finally to corporeal memory, which allows the subject of study to bring to each fragment of text the entire body of other relevant fragments, the entire body of already-formulated commentaries and the complete set of implications. This corporeal dimension is not anecdotal; it points to the constitutive paradox of Jewish study: everything occurs through written books, but these written books are only the support of an oral tradition. It is therefore necessary that the written be vocalized. Books are necessary to the emergence of the spoken word, but the spoken word passes through a body. This spoken word cannot be a soliloquy, otherwise the subject of study remains imprisoned in his own mirror; thus the bodies must be several in number. You need a master and a place of study, where one must be more than one. That is to say, more than one body. As I have said, bodily procedures and reading aloud bear witness to an essential dimension of Jewish study. To take a Christian example, there is nothing more opposed to Jewish study than Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises. Admittedly, the body is implicated, but in solitude and silence.

AB: I was thinking of one thing—I do not know if this is an objection—but I remember that the priest must read his breviary every day, moving his lips as he reads.

JCM: This is not an objection, in my opinion, because it is a matter of solitary and silent reading. In the wake of Frances Yates, Mary Carruthers has studied the procedures that enabled Scholastic theologians to commit a vast number of arguments, counter-arguments and commentaries to memory. They are indeed procedures that imply the body, but all of them are secondary. In Jewish study, the relation of the body to the text is not secondary. It is directly related to the constitutive paradox, which one could summarize as follows: if Judaism has survived, it is by relying on the oral Torah, the support of which is written.

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AB: But that, it is perhaps surprising, for one often insists on the fact that the Jewish tradition depends upon the book, on culture.

JCM: That is precisely what I am saying. The oral Torah is written, but the study of it returns it to the spoken word, in this place that is the *yeshivah*, or the reading that is linked by the grasp of speech, and reciprocally. If I dared, I would paraphrase Mallarmé: the oral Torah transforms the written Torah into itself; study transforms the oral Torah into itself by restoring it to the spoken word.

In the opposition between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, it is the Phariseean position that gains the upper hand. It introduces a paradoxical relationship to literality, since the commentaries are oral commentaries that should be able to survive when the speaking subjects have disappeared. Therefore, they must be written. In order to resolve the paradox, one must engage in a study that is not of the order of knowledge, and in order that it not be of the order of knowledge, at least four conditions are necessary. The first is that the subjects be summoned by the texts as subjects; the second is that the subject never places itself in the position of the "first reader," nor that of the "last reader"; in other words, it is necessary to establish between subjects a chain of relations of master and disciple; the third is that the subjects be summoned as they are supported by their speaking bodies; the fourth is that the study constitutes a way of life (comparable to that which the Greeks called a *bios*). The paradox of study will lead to a return, which is also paradoxical. Insofar as the oral commentaries are preserved in written form, they may lead to knowledge. This is what happens in the Judentumwissenschaft or Wissenschaft des Judentums, which consists precisely in wresting the study of texts from study and turning it into a branch of knowledge, a form of Jewish philology (which still exists). I note somewhere in Le Juif de savoir that the founders of the Wissenschaft des Judentums were the students of Wolf, the founder of Homeric philology. One sees how philology begins by annulling the difference in the nature of texts (even if, subsequently, the difference is restored); this is what I call the indifference of Wissenschaft to its object. At the same time, one puts one's finger on the difference between philology and study; both concern texts, but study begins with a radical difference between the texts: one cannot construct a system in which Homer and the Talmud could be addressed by the same methods at the same time.

AB: But study is not necessarily Jewish.

JCM: I will leave this issue hanging. I have a tendency to think that today, in the modern, Euro-Atlantic space, say a discursive space where the Greco-Latin corpus still determines thought (notably political thought), where Christianity is still the dominant religion, where Galilean science directly or indirectly determines the relationship to the universe, only Jewish study functions as study as I have situated it. Even assuming that in this space, there were studies other than Jewish study, it seems to me that they are extinct.

AB: There is no atheist study.

JCM: No, I think that it is a contradiction in terms, at least in a discursive space where the dominant religions maintain an equally narrow relationship with the book. If I turn towards the ancient world, I admit that one can qualify that. I have evoked the bios philosophikos. We conjecture with the Pythagoreans and the Epicureans a paradoxical relationship between literality and orality. There are more documents on the Neoplatonists; they seem to have developed a study comparable to that which I describe. One will note that this study is not atheistic. An essential objective of Proclus and his successors was to defend the ancient gods and their myths while faced with a Christianity that had become the state religion and whose violence is today underestimated. But this study, if it is one, has not withstood dispersion. I could even argue that classical studies, which continued to play a central role in Europe up until the 1960's, shared several traits with Jewish study; specifically, they brought into play a paradoxical relationship between written and oral, as it is a question of learning languages that no one speaks any more and of not speaking them. In such a way that one orders one's body to pronounce sounds that are simply allusions to Greek or Latin, though nothing of it can be heard. To that are added the memorization exercises, the obligation to imagine ways of life totally removed from ours, all the while searching at all costs for examples to imitate. But one also sees the point at which these studies distance themselves from Jewish study; marginal without exception, they do not involve the subject; they do not commit themselves to anything; they do not establish a bios. All things considered, after having consulted historians and anthropologists, I scarcely see anything other today than Jewish study to focus on the paradoxical relationship between literality and orality, without it leading to the devaluation of one or the other. This is what is critical for me.

DHR: You evoked Epicurus's letter and the idea that may have caused Galileo to affirm that the world was composed of letters. This makes me think of the ambiguities of the Greek "letter", *stoicheion*, which may well have had a literal sense before acquiring a physical one, or which may always have connoted both senses at once. And when you evoked Jewish study, I thought of the *midrashim* in which it said that the world was created out of letters. In short, I am wondering about these two literalisms: the Greek, if you like, and the Jewish. Neither one can be called a literalism in the modern sense. And nevertheless, they may bear a certain relation to the literalism of modern science.

JCM: You oblige me to finish what I have only hinted at by speaking about literalization. It is not just a matter of reconnecting object to letters. It is much more. First remark: when I speak about the letter and literality, I aim at an alphabetical writing. Now, there are many different systems of writing. If I privilege alphabetical writing, it is not because of ethnocentrism. It is because something particular happens there: alphabetical writing assumes the decomposition of a semantic element into non-semantic elements. It is an extremely important operation. Very early on, the Greeks used alphabetical letters to represent entities whose material was of no importance. For example, arithmetical numbers. Or with Aristotle, logi-

cal variables. Or with the geometers, points (vertices of a triangle, the extremes of a straight line). Why? Because there is a connection between alphabetical letters, which are asemantic, and the designation of entities whose empirical singularity is inessential. Second remark: in relation to the literal uses I have cited, something still changes from the moment that the Galilean sciences emerge. Let us consider algebra. The letters are no longer auxiliary to the mathematical procedure; they are the very material of the procedure. In geometry, the reasoning bears on points, not on the letters that label them; in Aristotelian logic, the letters are shorthand for the terms that one dispenses with to determine them, but it is logically equivalent to expressing oneself using the form, "every living being is mortal, a man is a living being, etc.," or using the form, "A is B, or C is A, etc." Whereas in algebraic reasoning, the letters are not auxiliaries; they are the entities themselves which the reasoning is about. For me, Galilean literalization follows this movement: formal entities are the material of reasoning; they are not just the representations, the abbreviations of empirical objects. These formal entities may be mathematical letters, and in that case, the reasoning is strictly mathematical, as occurs in physics; they may be phonetic letters, as occurs in phonology, and in that case, the reasoning could be of the "complementary distribution" or "commutation type," etc.; they may be systemic entities, as occurs in the analysis of kinship systems. Among the literal, non-mathematical kinds of reasoning, I ascribe great importance to what I call synchronic prediction: one notices such a formal disposition at a point in the system and from that one predicts that at another point in the same system, another such disposition appears. It is synchronic, but it is nevertheless of the order of prediction. Such kinds of reasoning are developed in linguistics, anthropology and political economy. They are rightly Galilean. In the ancient examples that I have mentioned to you, one says that physical objects are literal in nature. Stoicheion in Greek, but also *elementum* in Latin, it seems, indeed originally denote letters. But the atomists do not reason about these letters; they reason about the objects through the letters. In particular, they do not make any synchronic predictions drawn solely from the arrangement of the system of letters. In my opinion, there is no reason to construct a general literalism simultaneously encompassing Epicurus or Lucretius, the *midrashim* that you evoke and Galilean science.

DHR: I would like to ask you about your theory of *le nom juif*, "the Jewish name," or "the name *Jew*," or perhaps "the name *Jewish*." I'll choose the second translation. Two aspects of your reflection on the name *Jew* interest me particularly. The first concerns the distinction between the name (or noun) and the predicate; this aspect consists, in turn, of two parts. The second aspect touches on the question of the political value of this name (or noun) and, more precisely its power to divide. The first question: you have written that, unlike many people, you do not believe that the Jews are a people, not even in the cultural sense that they have acquired the characteristics that make them resemble each other, as one says, "The French are like this, the Germans are like that...." For you, the Jews are but a name. I'd begin by asking you why it is important to insist on this principle and, more specifically,

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what you mean by "nom." Perhaps you might also take into account the question of the names for "nom" in English, that is to say, what we call the *name* and the *noun*.

# AB: And how to translate it...

JCM: I would begin from your remarks about English usage, because from a certain point of view, this is the starting point of my reflection. The true starting point is a text by a Hellenist French philosopher, Jacques Brunschwig, who was a specialist in Greek philosophy. In an article on the Stoics, he commented that earlier thinkers did not consider the proper noun and the common noun to be two species of the same genus, as does traditional French grammar. They clearly separated the two entities, just like name and noun are separated in English: Socrates on the one hand, man on the other. It was the Stoics who, for reasons both philosophical and connected to their analysis of language, created a genus: "the name," onoma, divided into two species: the idion onoma as opposed to koinonion onoma, translated in Latin as commune nomen, common name and proprium nomen, proper name. The Latin terminology has been retained in French: for a reason that I am not aware of, English grammar, along with Latin terminology, uses the name/noun pairing. In what way is the common name common? It is insofar as it designates what is common to all those who bear it and to them alone. This common and exclusive ground allows it to be expressed under the predicative form, in sentences and in the third person (without shifter). The proper name addresses that which is proper to each of those who bear that name; the proper name completely leaves aside any possibly common predicates. That is the starting point of my thinking.

It is in this light that I read Kripke's book, *Naming and Necessity*, and interpreted his thesis that a name is not a bundle of predicates. Actually, from a certain point of view, my position would be to say that *Jew* looks more like a name than a noun. In fact, it designates that which is singular in all of those who bear it, in such a way that in the end, it looks like they all have something in common. But that is not the case. There are no common predicates outside of the name Jew itself. In this, there is a certain proximity to the proper name. The difference is in the "all": the name Jew points to what is particular to *all* those who bear the name, while using the proper name *Socrates* does not raise the question of "all those who are named *Socrates*." For good measure, I also remind you that *all* is ambiguous.

# AB: But then neither "American" nor "French" is a name?

JCM: They are nouns. Their nominal use tries to specify that which all those who bear the name American or French have in common, and what is common to them alone. There could be a long discussion on the nature of this common ground; you might even ponder whether there is no reality outside of the administrative rule. This is the best example of the third person: look at your passport; a third person, the State, speaks of you in the third person; X has blue eyes, is 1,70 m. tall, was born in..., etc. Those are the predicates that are shorthand for national names. This is a serious political question, but however one wishes to resolve it, the grammatical structure is clear: the names American or French are nouns, common names (in

the Stoic sense) and have a predicative character, even if they are shorthand for a single predicate: "to be officially registered as American or French." That being said, I know perfectly well that in language, one may use *Jew* as a predicate; it can be used with the definite article, the indefinite article, etc. I must therefore continue my reasoning in order to finish the analysis.

The second stage of my reasoning: from a linguistic point of view, I think that one of the characteristics of nouns in general is that they are used in the third person, (without shifter). Their first person use is derivative and predicative: *homo sum*, "I am a human being"; *I, President of the USA*, etc. In particular, the first person affirmation, "I am a human being," is predicative; one may interpret it in various ways according to one's political conception of nationality. For me, ultimately, it only signifies, "I am administratively recognized as French."

An analogous analysis, subject to some adjustments, will be for their use in the second person: they are derivative.

DHR: Nevertheless, your disagreement with Sartre concerning...

JCM: Yes, but wait a minute! Let's admit that common nouns are, without exception, third person nouns. The majority of proper nouns (names), without exception, are apparently second person names. The initial moment is what is called, in Christian language, baptism: someone addresses the *infant* in the second person, the vocative case; this is how the subject receives and in fact learns his own name. The use of the proper name in the first person and its use in the third person are derivative. But the link is there: when I use the proper name *Socrates* in the third person, I am trying to capture in Socrates that which makes him no one else, and *at the same time* that which enables him to say "I." In the same way, by imposing a proper name on the *infant* in the second person, one constitutes it as a speaking being and therefore as a being capable of speaking in the first person. There is therefore a temporal reversal: the initial moment in time is in the second person, but the foundational moment for the subject is also the moment when he assumes his proper name in the first person.

AB: But it seems to me that, in English, people often say to children, "Does Peter want to go to bed?"...

JCM: Yes, of course. But that is to elicit agreement in the first person.

AB: And in Japanese, one addresses a child in the first person. "Does *I* want to go to bed?"

JCM: Beyond the diverse uses of language, one can claim that the *infant* becomes a speaking being from the moment it is introduced by its interlocutors by its proper name, accomplished in its own voice as first person. In truth, the proper name is achieved entirely as a proper name by this assumption of the second person by the first person. There is no proper name without this moment of interiorization into

the first person. In short, the foundational moment in some way comes after: it is chronologically second and logically first. In contrast, in languages there are names that exist in the second person and which are in fact destined to not be assumed in the first person. This is what I studied in my thesis, the insults "scoundrel," "sleazebag," etc. There again, it is possible to make them nouns, used in the third person, but this usage is derivative. As for the first person, one could say that it is the exact opposite of the proper name: to insult is an attempt to negate the subjectivity of the one insulted. One could say it traps one inside the second person, denies one the first person and challenges one to regain it. The insult is the anti-proper name, but it is correlated with the proper name. Languages are interesting in this respect. In English, the act of insulting is designated as "name-calling," "to call someone names"; in French, insults are readily introduced with the phrase "espèce de" (species of), as if in order to deny subjectivity one begins by denying singularity and plunging it into the species.

Sartre was a remarkable observer of language. Benveniste cites with praise his analysis of the passé simple. Now, in Nausea, he plays with the word bastard (sa*laud*). He first uses it as a name in the second person. The narrator visits a museum, contemplates in detail the portraits of the local bourgeoisie and leaves, saying "goodbye, Bastards," with a capital B. So bastard will become a noun, that is to say, a third-person name: "only the bastards think they have the right to exist," another sentence from Nausea. One sees that the use of the third person is derived from the use of the second person. In fact, the capital letter, used when leaving the museum, carries out the silent passage from the non-predicative insult to the third person name, which is a noun, predicative. But also think about the Autodidact. Incidentally, here we have the figure of a subject that tries to change knowledge into study, or at least into bios. At the end of the novel, he is chased from the library with insults being hurled down upon him because he dared to make a homosexual gesture; the narrator imagines him wandering alone in the city: what is at stake, without it being resolved, is the possibility of the Autodidact regaining the first person, which has been publicly stripped from him.

In my opinion, *les Réflexions sur la question juive (Anti-Semite and Jew)* is based on a similar analysis: Sartre thinks that the name "Jew" only obtained its real foundation in the anti-Semitic insult, the destructive moment that he also, quasiphysically, describes in *l'Enfance d'un chef*. The first-person moment, "I am a Jew," is chronologically second and, even if it is assumed, it remains logically second. The greatness of Sartre is to have understood that the name Jew is not a noun, in the third person, but his error, or the incomplete nature of his analysis, is to not have seen that the foundational moment for the name Jew is the moment when the subject says to himself, "I am Jewish." Even if the second person moment is chronologically first (which it is under the affectionate form of parental speech, "We are Jews, you are Jewish" or under the hostile form of the insult), this moment is not constitutive; it is not logically first. The first person moment is logically first, regardless of its temporal place.

One will object: do not all religious names work in the same way? Are they not founded on a profession of faith in the first person, "I am a Christian"? Not exactly. "I am a Jew" is not a profession of faith. The statement can be pronounced by those who do not know the Torah and observe the rituals and by those who are entirely ignorant of the Torah and the rituals. The key is the pure name and not the equivalent of a *proclamation*. Here again, the moment of the profession of faith may come, but it is not foundational, while for the Christian, the moment of the profession of faith grounds the name.

DHR: You've already anticipated and responded to the second part of this question, which concerns a concept you define in *De la syntaxe à l'interprétation*: namely, "Names of Quality." I haven't been able to take another look at your book, but I did just read the article that Nicolas Ruwet dedicated to your thesis, and I noticed that *le nom juif* does appear in his list of "Names of Quality."

JCM: I no longer know if in my thesis there is...

DHR: That's what I wondered: if Jew counted as a Name of Quality ...

JCM: I don't remember...

DHR: I wonder if one could say that in *De la syntaxe à l'interprétation*, what mattered was the difference between names in the third person and names in the second person, while now, what you are talking about is something else, namely, names in the first person.

JCM: Yes, that is correct, but that does not mean that I have broken with the strictly linguistic analysis that I suggested then. I have rather the feeling of extending and expanding upon it. On many points, I rely on the theory of insults which is put forward in my thesis.

AB: Does that mean that the name Jew always signifies an individual in relation to a people?

JCM: That is the problem. There is a plurality of subjects, each of whom individually says to themselves, "I am Jewish," and when they say that to themselves, they often imagine that they have in mind something which would be common to all those who say, "I am Jewish," whether they are practitioners or not, religious or not. In fact, they envision an *all*; but this *all* is not reached by means of what makes them resemble one another; it is reached by means of the route that makes them not resemble one another. The pseudo-common ground is not a common ground; the affirmation, "I am a Jew," cannot be superimposed from each to each. One could even maintain that the affirmation is not synonymous, that it starts out from a radical homonymy that can eventually change into synonymy. It's up to each subject to answer the question, "What am I saying when I tell myself that I am a Jew?" That's where the work of interpretation begins, where one can detect the crucial points: "when I say that I am a Jew, I am saying nothing about myself"; "when I say that I am a Jew, I insert myself into the succession of generations"; "when I say that I am

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a Jew, I join a people"; "when I say that I am a Jew, I enter into study." Globally, I suggest that various interpretations are polarized around three extremes: the Jew of negation, the Jew of interrogation and the Jew of affirmation.

Still, the dimension of an all is always present. I have already emphasized the importance of this dimension, I have reminded you of its ambiguous nature. I do not want to go into these ambiguities, so I will leave it at this: Lacan makes a distinction between the limited all and the unlimited all; it could be shown that, starting from the all, it would be possible to obtain a theory of the plural term all. In Noms indistincts, to this distinction I add the distinction between an all based upon resemblance and an all based on dissemblance and separation. Ordinary common nouns, when they bring into play an all, move toward the all of resemblance; the name Jew moves toward the all of dissemblance. But whatever its nature, the possibility of a plural *all* is homogeneous to becoming a name in history. The way in which the singular enunciation, "I am Jewish," is constructed initiates a chain, one of the ultimate links of which is the possibility of a plural, the Jews. So the Jews can become a historical name, even if that is thanks to a homonymy with a plural based upon resemblance. Having made that observation, I can now come back to the proper name more precisely. Having brought the name Jew and the proper name more closely together, I can now differentiate them. The dividing line is the plural. Socrates is only a historical name in the singular and in its uniqueness. Socrateses never existed. The Jews exist. As an aside, I note that when Nietzsche, on the brink of madness, said of himself, "I am all the names in history," he meant the singular names: Dionysus and the Crucified. Starting from this point, one would like to reconsider the relationship that Nietzsche maintained with the historical names which are said in the plural (such as the Greeks). At the same time, one could reevaluate his relationship to the name Jew.

DHR: It would be interesting to reconsider Rosenzweig's remarks concerning the historicity of the Jews...

JCM: Yes, of course. The double-sidedness of the name Jew is that it is at once a first person name, structurally singular, and yet it has also become a historical name, structurally plural, without ever ceasing to continually return to the structure of the singular.

DHR: I'd like to move on to the second part of my question, which has to do with the political value of the name Jew. I would like to talk about an axiom that you formulate in your new book, according to which "a name (or noun) holds solely on account of the divisions that it induces." I'm wondering about the extent to which this axiom involves the political name, or the name in politics. I am thinking about a logical distinction that you discuss in *Les Penchants criminals*, that is, the distinction between divisive and non-divisive terms.

My questions are related to one another. I am wondering about the difference between "term" and "name." And I wonder why, in politics, a name that is not divisive does not hold and, moreovoer, whether such a thesis implies something like a po-

lemical criterion in politics. There is the famous Schmittian definition of the political: the political is every association pushed to the point that it necessarily implies dissociation. You maintain that a name is political precisely to the extent that it divides. Should we detect an echo of Schmitt in this thesis? And if all political names are divisive, are all political names then essentially comparable to the name *Jew*? Inversely, is every non-divisive term excluded from politics? What would you say about the name of the citizen, of man or humanity? They would appear to be "transcendental" rather than divisive terms.

JCM: I started from an analysis that was well established in ancient logic. There are divisive terms; for example, the term "man" divides beings into "man" and "notman." There are terms that do not divide. For example, ens, "being": every being is a being. The non-divisive terms are called transcendental terms because they rise above all divisions. I draw on this logical theory, giving it a somewhat political interpretation. I recognize that this is a bit of a leap. There is a play between the logical theory of divisive terms, which is classical and ancient, and my theory of names that divide, which is not classical at all. The difference between term and name refers to this play. But whether or not it is a game, it allows me to understand something essential: a name is only political if it divides. I will admit a certain proximity to Carl Schmitt, but I will not let go of a radical difference. According to Schmitt, everything starts with the opposition, friend/enemy; names come afterwards. For me, everything starts with names; the opposition, friend/enemy, comes afterwards and, moreover, I am not sure that I would take up again this opposition in itself. As for politics, in a general way, there are at least four aspects that I will focus on here. First, the dimension of speaking beings: there can only be politics among speaking beings; from this one concludes that politics is fundamentally political speech and, in my opinion, to talk politics is to use at least one name that divides. Then there is the relation between the one and the multiple: how is the speaker, who in his own eyes counts as one, situated with respect to the multiplicity of speaking beings? This is an old question, which goes back at least to Aristotle; whence the consequence that with Aristotle, the classification of political systems rests on the difference between one, many and all. Thirdly, once the relationship between the one and the multiple is established, we have to ask what supports the one and the multiple. We then have to ask the question concerning the speaking body and bring politics back to this substrate that is so often ignored: the speaking body, as it lives, dies and is perhaps put to death. Fourthly, politics rests on the fact that the passage from the one to the multiple can be in one direction or in the other, the multiple going towards the one or the one towards the multiple, and in this I am in agreement with Freud-however with one small difference. In the relation between the one and the multiple, with all of its complex twists and turns, the decisive operator is, very generally, names. More specifically, it is always an isolatable name. It may be a proper name, a common name, or a name about which one hesitates as to whether it is proper or common. Freud granted great importance to what he called

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"ein einziger Zug," which Lacan translated as "unary trait." For me, ultimately this trait is always a name.

*Ein einziger Name.* A unary name. In the constitution of the Nazi crowd, the name *Jew* was more important than Hitler's moustache, despite what image specialists might say. To take an example that is just the opposite, think about the poem by Eluard, "Liberté, j'écris ton nom," or more subtly, think of the name Elsa, which for Aragon functions in many ways, and also as a political name. Now, it seems to me names can only function as agents of the movement from the one to the multiple insofar as they divide. When they bring together, it is by dividing.

In my opinion, the great shift that we have seen at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that the name *worker* which served as the great divider (that is, the theory of class struggle) has ceased to divide; therefore, it has also ceased to bring together; it has disappeared as a political name. On the other hand, the name *Jew* has become, or become once again, the great divider.

You evoked some names that might not be dividers. *Citizen, man, humanity* are effectively understood as names that bring together without dividing. But this is not a structural issue; it is, in effect, a decision. One could perfectly construct a discourse in which they function as dividers; moreover, one has been constructed. It was not so long ago that the intellectual Left in Europe held these names to be enemies and denounced their lie: they seem to bring together, the Left said, but in reality they do nothing but confirm class division. Marxist literature bears witness to this. Independently of Marxism, I do not think that transcendent terms exist in politics. Any name whatsoever may be divisive, or inversely, may cease to be. It is completely contingent.

Now, I would like to go a little beyond what I have written in my published texts: to divide means to divide within the heart of the multitude; but it is also to divide the singular subject. The subject is not the same before it chooses the name and after it has chosen it as a political operator. In a certain way, I rediscovered Sartre's theory of commitment, except that I think that one commits to a name, not to a situation. The situation is the imaginary paraphrase of a name.

Paris, October 31, 2008