
[62] ***Continuous and Discontinuous: Antoine Meillet's Linguistic Ideas between Philosophy and Physics***

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Continu et Discontinu (Continuous and Discontinuous) is the title of an issue of *Cahiers de la nouvelle journée*, a philosophical periodical published in 1929 under the direction of philosopher Jacques Chevalier, a student of Bergson and an eminent figure in Catholic philosophy during the inter-war period. Captivated by the scientific discoveries of his time, Chevalier, like Bergson before him, sought to restore the status of philosophy in a world of knowledge revolutionized by modern physics. Chevalier thus invited specialists of several domains to rethink the concepts of continuous and discontinuous, whose relations play a central role in modern physics. At the volume's center Chevalier placed a beautiful piece by Louis De Broglie on the wave particle duality and matter's wave-like behavior, explaining to the general public the thesis that earned him the Nobel Prize for Physics that same year.

The philosophical exercise designed by Chevalier consisted in demonstrating how the paired concepts continuous/discontinuous functioned in each of the diverse theoretical contexts selected. Among these we can find an important contribution by Antoine Meillet, one of the most prominent contemporary French linguists. How did Meillet think of these contradictory and complementary notions, whose relationship brings to mind other pairs of concepts so central to structural linguistics, such as signifier/signified or synchronic/diachronic? The way Meillet handled Chevalier's exercise testifies to the originality of his thought, especially on the social dimensions of language. At the same time, it also demonstrates the situation of linguistics as a young discipline striving to constitute itself as a science in its own right at a moment when philosophers felt science has turned its gaze away from humanity.

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