



## Ruedi Imbach, Dr.

Professor der Philosophie, Soziologie und der Philosophie des Mittelalters

Université Paris 4 Paris-Sorbonne

Né en 1946 à Sursee (Suisse)

Études de Philosophie et Histoire de la Philosophie, Universités de Fribourg (Suisse), Freiburg (Allemagne), Florence et Bochum

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### ARBEITSVORHABEN

## Monographie zur Philosophie Dantes

Après avoir dirigé la traduction en allemand et le commentaire des oeuvres mineures de Dante (Convivio, De vulgari eloquentia, Questio de situ terre, Epistola XIII), je souhaite écrire un ouvrage de synthèse sur la pensée philosophique du grand poète italien. Ce livre tentera de situer l'apport de sa philosophie à la fois d'un point de vue historique et systématique en tenant compte également de la Divine Comédie. La monographie n'envisagera pas seulement les différentes oeuvres d'un point de vue méthodique et doctrinal mais présentera également les réponses de Dante aux grandes questions théologiques et philosophiques de son temps : amour, Dieu, homme, langage, politique, vertus et vices. Comme dans mes travaux précédents, il s'agira de montrer que Dante est le représentant majeur d'une véritable philosophie laïque au Moyen Âge.

Lecture recommandée :

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# "Dem Menschen allein ist Sprache gegeben"

## Annäherungen an Dantes Philosophie der Sprache

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) opened his 1304 treatise "On Eloquence in the Vernacular" (*De vulgari eloquentia*) with the presumptuous remark that no one before him had ever treated of his present theme, namely the vernacular (*vulgare*). Is this assertion merely the misguided opinion of a cocky man of letters, or can it pass the critical test of an historian of philosophy? In another of his works, the political tract "Monarchia", Dante similarly declares that he wishes to proclaim "truths that have never yet been heard," and in his "Divine Comedy" he even pretends to sail hitherto unseen seas: "The water on which I move has never been sailed" ("L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse," *Paradiso* II, 7).

It is of course widely acknowledged that the author of the "Divine Comedy" is a great poet, but people are not generally aware of his achievement as a philosopher; and it has been largely forgotten that he did in fact compose philosophical works in the truest sense of the term-works whose originality, upon closer examination, is unmistakable. For instance, he is the first theoretical advocate of the separation of church and state, and in his "Convivio" he pleads at length for philosophy to be done in the vernacular. Dante was preoccupied with the subject of language throughout his life, and in my lecture I will be devoting particular attention to this aspect of his philosophy.

After a short presentation of the content and meaning of Dante's "De vulgari eloquentia", I will then, for starters, present the poet's anthropological explanation for the world's vast diversity of languages, with which-using rational arguments-he attempts to interpret and thereby explain the biblical myth of construction of the Tower of Babel. Then I will show the way in which Dante attempts to prove his thesis that man alone has the power of language-alluded to in the title of my lecture. When, in this connection, he asserts that neither God nor the angels nor animals can speak (*loqui*), he is availing himself of certain traditional ideas-but at the same time he modulates these ideas in a highly original way: Language is understood as imparting one's thoughts, but Dante specifies that we are only dealing with language in the truest sense when the vehicle of this communication is a sensory-rational signal; because this signal is not present with animals or angels, they possess no language. Dante also takes a position on the issue of Adam's language, which was taken up again by Leibniz among others and vehemently debated throughout the eighteenth century in connection with the origin of language. Initially Dante believed that this language was identical with the Hebrew language and had a divine provenance; later, in the twenty-sixth canto of *Paradiso*, he arrives at the insight that language is the product of human reason. "Language is invented!" wrote Johann Gottfried Herder. "Natural to and necessarily invented by mankind, as humans are human."

Perhaps we might be permitted to share in the judgment passed by the American scholar Zygmunt Baranski: "In the 'De vulgari eloquentia', Dante undoubtedly made a major new statement in an area trodden bare by centuries of intellectual effort." And perhaps an investigation of Dante's *opera minora* and his sources allows us to better understand what Erich Auerbach meant when he contended that the poetry of "The Divine Comedy" is "eminently philosophical."

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