

"Nietzsche's Philosophy of Language: Can Linguistic Idealism be Resisted?"

Nietzsche sees language as a foundational feature of our social epistemology. Language is socially anthropometric and, as such, does not penetrate into the noumenal realm. Since our language does not penetrate into the realm of truth, we cannot say anything about the world independently of language. We cannot even say what it is or is not. It is epistemically closed to us. Language epistemically constrains our thought like a border; beyond that border we cannot think. However, Nietzsche does leave a small space for resisting linguistic idealism at the intersection of the individual and society at large. It is here that we individually express political freedom in a very constrained sense by means of language.

There is a tendency in scholarship to ignore the epistemically social aspects of Nietzsche writing that lead to the danger of linguistic idealism and linguistic determinism. Rather, scholars take Nietzsche as putting forward an individualist epistemology.¹ Seeing Nietzsche's ideal as an independent and self-sufficient master who relies on nothing and no one for his values or constitution. This tradition has formulated Nietzsche's self-creation as a neo-liberal individualist in which one pulls oneself up from one's own bootstraps. This interpretation has relied greatly on

¹ Acampora, Crista Davis. "On Sovereignty and Overhumanity" in *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays*. Edited by Crista Davis Acampora. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 2006). 151; Ridley, Aaron. *Nietzsche's Conscience: Six Character Studies from the "Genealogy"*. (London, Cornell University Press. 1998) 18; Havas, Randall. *Nietzsche's Genealogy: Nihilism and the Will to Knowledge*. (NY: Cornell University Press. 2000) 94-95; May, Simon. Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on 'Morality'. (NY: Oxford University Press. 2000). 117-18; for a list of many examples see: Leiter, Brian. "Who is the "sovereign individual"? Nietzsche on Freedom". In *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: A Critical Guide*. Edited by Simon May. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 2011). 101.

the notion of “the *sovereign individual*” in contrast to the herd in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morality*.²

This individual has unrestricted autonomy and is completely independent of culture and custom. This means that the sovereign individual is “the master of *free will*.” This power of free will is so strong that the individual can maintain his choices in the face of accidents by controlling and having absolute power over fate itself.

Initial skepticism should here arise since even in *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche rejects the notion of autonomy and free will as inversions of master morality. The notion that one can control fate and accidents certainly goes against Nietzsche’s notions of *Amor Fati* and eternal recurrence where the highest form of life affirmation is a love of fate rather than control over it. The position that this is simply a polemic against Kant has been gaining scholarly traction in recent years.³ If Nietzsche is not a neo-liberal individualist, where then might we locate his views on “ontology”? I propose we locate it in his genetic history of the social sphere of language and communication. My first thesis defended below is that language, according to Nietzsche, fundamentally falsifies the world and is the wrong vehicle for considering what the

² “[T]hen we find as the ripest fruit on its [morality’s] tree the *sovereign individual*, like only unto himself, the autonomous, supermoral individual who has liberated himself from the morality of custom (for “autonomous” and “Moral” are mutually exclusive), in brief, a human being of his own independent long will who is *allowed to promise*. [...] The “free” human being, [...] who gives his word as something that can be trusted because he knows himself to be strong enough to keep it even against accidents, even “against fate.” ([GM] *On the Genealogy of Morality in in Beyond Good and Evil / On the Genealogy of Morality. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol 8*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2014). 248 (GM II 2)).

³ Considering the somewhat absurd requirements and the how opposed this is to Nietzsche other writings, it is reasonable to suspect this section is an ironic polemic against Kant rather than Nietzsche’s own position. It is often forgotten that the subtitle to *The Genealogy of Morality* is “A Polemic”. Such a position is gaining support in the scholarly community since the term, Sovereign Individual (*souveraine Individuum*), is found nowhere else in Nietzsche’s published writings and it is difficult to find more general coextensive support of such a view in unpublished writings cf. Hatab, Laurence. “Nietzsche’s ‘On the Genealogy of Morality’: An Introduction. (NY: Cambridge University Press. 2008), 76; Acampora, Christa Davis. “On Sovereignty and Overhumanity: Why it Matters How We Read Nietzsche’s Genealogy II, 2” in *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals: Critical Essays*. Edited by Christa Acampora. (NY: Roman & Littlefield Publishers. Inc. 2006). 147-161.

world might be independent of human experience. However, it does allow for the possibility of “choice” in a limited and social context.

Nietzsche’s thought about philosophy of language starts as early as the 1870’s. In his early unpublished essay entitled “The Philosopher” Nietzsche writes, “The word contains nothing but an image; from this come the concepts [...] we speak the language of symbol and image”.⁴ For Nietzsche, concepts including logic and mathematics can find their origin in the history of language as metaphorical.⁵ The philosophical position that language constrains thinking is something Nietzsche presented consistently throughout his life, even in his early published works. He writes in *Dawn*,

*Words present in us. - We always express our thoughts with the words that lie ready to hand. Or to express my entire suspicion: we have at every moment only that very thought for which we have ready to hand the words that are roughly capable of expressing it.*⁶

We find that Nietzsche thinks that language, which is a condition for the possibility of the genesis of thinking, is social rather than individual. Nietzsche writes in the *Gay Science*,

Consciousness has developed only under the pressure of the need for communication [...] for only this conscious thinking takes the form of words, which is to say signs of communication, and this fact uncovers the origin of consciousness. [...] My idea is, as you see, that consciousness does not really belong to man’s individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature.⁷

If language is determined by our social or herd nature and language determines or constrains what can be thought, then any possible metaphysics and ontology are directly linked to our

⁴ [PT] *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*. Edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale. (New York: Humanity Books, 1979). 20 [PT] (“The Philosopher”, 55).

⁵ “Hasn’t language already disclosed man’s capacity for producing logic. It certainly includes the most admirable logical operations and distinctions. But language did not develop all at one; it is instead the logical conclusion of long spaces of time. Here the origination of the instincts must be considered: they have developed quite gradually. The spiritual activity of millennia is deposited in language” (PT 31 (“The Philosopher” 79)).

⁶ [D] *Dawn. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol 5*. Translated by Brittain Smith with afterword by Keith Ansell-Pearson. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2011). 176 (D 257)

⁷ [GS] Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Trans Walter Kaufmann. (NY: Vintage Books. 1974) 298-300 (GS 354).

history of language. Our very grammar determines and constrains our thoughts and philosophical systems ahead of time. Nietzsche explicates this further in *Beyond Good and Evil*,

The peculiar family resemblance of all Indian, Greek and German philosophizing is explained easily enough. Precisely where linguistic kinship is present it cannot be avoided at all, thanks to the common philosophy of grammar - I mean thanks to the unconscious rule and leadership of the same grammatical functions - everything lies ready from the beginning for a similar development and sequence of philosophical systems: just as the route to certain other possibilities of interpreting the world seem almost barred.⁸

Nietzsche holds that our language itself constructs and limits the kinds of metaphysics or ontologies we can even think. This idea is consistent through his late unpublished writings. He writes, “*we cease thinking when we no longer want to think within the constraints of language, we just manage to reach the suspicion that there might be a boundary here.*”⁹

Early in Nietzsche’s career he traces the genealogy of reason to logically invalid metaphors in human culture and language. Our language is founded metaphorically and this metaphorical foundation makes its way into our epistemology. He writes,

*Logical thinking [...] developed quite slowly. But, false inferences are more correctly understood as metonymies, i.e. they are more correctly understood rhetorically and poetically. All rhetorical figures (i.e. the essence of language) are logically invalid inferences. This is the way that reason begins. [section break] We see how philosophy is first carried on in the same manner that language originated - i.e. illogically.*¹⁰

Here we find a view Nietzsche repeats in several places. He states that the essence of language is rhetorical and metaphorical. He writes, “*But there is no “real” expression and no real knowing apart from metaphor.*”¹¹ This metaphorical nature of language means that it is essentially

⁸ [BGE] *Beyond Good and Evil in Beyond Good and Evil / On the Genealogy of Morality. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol 8*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2014). 22 (BGE 20)

⁹ [LN] *Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Edited by Bittner, Rüdiger and translated by Kate Sturge. (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003). 101. 5[22]

¹⁰ PT 48 (“The Philosopher” 142, 143).

¹¹ PT 50 (“The Philosopher” 149)

rhetorical and cannot “penetrate the realm of truth.”¹² In Nietzsche’s early lecture notes on rhetoric he writes, “There is obviously no unrhetorical “naturalness” of language to which one could appeal; Language itself is the result of purely rhetorical arts. [...] *Language is rhetoric.*”¹³

The idea that language does not capture some eternal and natural truth of the world was later expressed in his published work *Human, All-Too-Human*. He writes,

Language as a supposed science -[...] people believed for long stretches of time in the concepts for and names for things as if they were *aeternae veritates* [...] they really believed that in language they had knowledge of the world. [...] language is in fact the first step of the struggle for science [...] Long afterward - only just now- is it dawning on people that they have propagated a colossal error with their belief in language. Luckily, it is too late for the development of reason, which rests on that belief, to be reversed.¹⁴

This means there is no “pure” language that captures the world outside of social convention.

This has to do with the essence of language. Language always abbreviates and simplifies rather than penetrating into the realm of truth or the Kantian thing-in-itself. Nietzsche writes,

“Language never expresses something completely, but stresses the most outstanding characteristic.”¹⁵ Those outstanding characteristics are, as one would expect, what is of interest to us. Language does not name every object or experience with a particular designation. There is no master index from which we can read the “True name” that describes the essence of a thing. Rather, language picks out what exactly what we might expect; those things that are important and valuable for us as a species.

Language sorts the world and fits it into intelligible kinds and categories that are useful. It does not arrange the world into categories that are useful for hedgehogs or dolphins but for

¹² PT 50 (“The Philosopher” 149)

¹³ [DAR] “Description of Ancient Rhetoric” in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*. Edited and translated by Gilman, Sanders L, Carol Blair and David J Parent. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 21.

¹⁴ [HAH I] *Human, All-Too-Human. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol 3*. Translated by Gary Handwerk (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 1995). 21-22 (HAH I 11).

¹⁵ DAR 53

human beings. Our language, which contains our consciousness, is determined in part by what has been useful in the species. It never gets at the world itself but only at the “sign” or “image” presented in language. Nietzsche writes.

The full essence of things will never be grasped. [...] Instead of the thing, the sensation takes in only a *sign*. [...] Language never expresses something completely but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent to it [language].¹⁶

The failure of language was a topic of interest in the 19th century which is evident in a variety of works during the time.¹⁷ For Nietzsche, like many intellectuals of the time, language does not reach its object in any pure sense. This means that what is “most outstanding” is determined in the biological and social history of a language. This is because language only contains opinion

¹⁶ DAR 23.

¹⁷ The following quote comes from Faulkner’s 1856 book *Madame Bovary* of which Nietzsche was aware. It gives the feeling of the time that language fails to capture what a pure ideal language might. Flaubert writes, “as if the fullness of the soul did not sometimes overflow in the emptiest metaphors, since no one can ever give the exact measure of his needs, nor of his conceptions, nor of his sorrows; and since human speech is like a cracked tin kettle, on which we hammer out tunes to make bears dance when we long to move the stars” (Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary: A Study of Provincial Life*. Edited by Dora Knowlton Ranous. (NY: Brentano’s Publishers. 1919), 196).

Originally published in 1856 this quote gives a good orientation to how intellectuals were thinking about language in the 19th century. This sentiment can be seen in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which can be read as a series of attempts at communicating truth through language that are all bound to fail. Language was not created for the getting at truth of how the world is apart from us but how it is for us. When we try to use language to speak of the world perfectly, in Adrian Del Caro’s expression, “words fail” (“Translator’s Afterword” in *Beyond Good and Evil in Beyond Good and Evil / On the Genealogy of Morality. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche Vol 8*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2014). 451).

Nietzsche owned a copy of Flaubert’s letters ([NPB] *Nietzsche’s persönliche Bibliothek*. Edited by Giuliano Campioni, et al., (Germany: De Gruyter, 2003), 227).

Nietzsche also owned a commentary on Flaubert’s work and others entitled: *L’évolution naturaliste : Gustave Flaubert, Les Goncourt, M. Alphonse Daudet, M. Émile Zola, Les poètes, Le théâtre* by Desprez, Louis Marie which Nietzsche annotated heavily ([NPB] 184).

The copies of both of these works from Nietzsche’s personal library stored in the archive bears heavy annotations. The commentary by Desprez contains much on *Madame Bovary*.

In both Nietzsche’s Published works and his notebooks Nietzsche shows an awareness of *Madame Bovary* ([CW] *The Case of Wagner: A Musician’s Problem in The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*. Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman. (NY: Cambridge University Press. 2012), 250 (CW 9); [KGW] *Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Werke*. 45+ vols. Edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1967ff.) 306) (KGW VIII 3 16 [74]).

[*doxa*] not knowledge [*epistēmē*].¹⁸ The *feeling* of language “purity” is something developed and formed socially through consistent use. Nietzsche writes,

There is neither a pure nor an impure speech in itself. A very important question arises of how the feeling for purity gradually is formed, and how an educated society *makes choices* [*wählt*], to the point at which the whole range has been defined. It evidently acts according to unconscious laws and analogies here: a unity, a uniform expression is achieved; “pure” sanctioned style corresponds to a high society in the same way that a dialect corresponds to a limited group of people.¹⁹

When looking at how Nietzsche uses the word “Choice” [*Wahal*] in the above quote, it is clear it is social and determined by a society not an individual; “how an educated society *makes choices* (*wählt*)”. Nietzsche claims, language use changes based on the dynamic interaction of individuals and the collective that in some sense makes choices. This is, or course, not a radically free choice but choice within the intelligible sphere of meanings already accepted.

This then leads us to ask for concrete examples of how language and meaning change. Surely, one way is through the creation and then adoption of new words. Another way that Nietzsche introduces is the trope as metaphor. He writes, “It [metaphor] does not produce new words but give new meanings to them.”²⁰ Change in metaphor use can then account for the historical change in language. However, these changes in metaphor are dependent on whether or not a society takes them up into a discourse.

For Nietzsche meaning is not contained in the authorial intention of the individual speaker. The “meaning” of a word is not linked to the intention of the author, but what it symbolizes for others. The specific expression does not contain the meaning. Nietzsche writes,

‘Meaning’ means no more than that: no expression determines and delimits its movement of soul with such rigidity that it could be regarded as the *actual* statement of the meaning. Every expression is just a symbol and not the thing; and symbols can be interchanged. A *choice* [*Wahal*] always remains possible.²¹

¹⁸ DAR 23

¹⁹ DAR 27

²⁰ DAR 23

²¹ DAR 67

The notion that “A *choice [Wahl]* always remains possible” seems like a very individualistic form of free will expressing itself on language. This would initially seem to support the case for a individualistic epistemology discussed at the beginning of the paper. However, while new words and new meanings are created by individuals, it is only the larger social group that chooses to take up a new word or metaphor. Nietzsche writes,

Language is created by the individual speech artist, but it is determined by the fact that the taste of the many makes choices [*Auswahl*]. Only a very few individuals utter *Schemata* [figures] whose *virtus* [virtue, worth] becomes a guide for many. [...] A figure which finds no buyer becomes an error.²²

The way words are used and their varied repetition determines the meaning of those words.

Language itself is always on the move as usage changes. Nietzsche quotes Horace as evidence,

Many terms that have fallen out of use shall be born again, and those shall fall that are now in repute, if Usage so will it, in whose hands lies the judgment, the right and rule of speech [sic].²³

Language and meaning are therefore always in a continual process of changing forms. Nietzsche writes, “The wondrous process of choosing [*Auswahl*] new forms of language always continues.”²⁴ Language for Nietzsche is a dynamic process in which terms come in and fall out of use taking on new and different meanings as they are used differently. These changes in language etymologically can give us a hint as to the changes that are taking place in concepts of their time. Additionally, as languages change this also changes the limits of what is thinkable in consciousness.

Nietzsche’s early theory of the relationship between consciousness and language is a particularly fascinating explanation of the wholistic generation of language and consciousness.

²² DAR 25

²³ Nietzsche quotes Horace from *Ars Poetica* (DAR 49)

²⁴ DAR 51

For Nietzsche, language is a dynamic interaction between individual speech users and the larger community. What becomes speakable and thinkable is thus a complex and dynamic process like that of what we sometimes call super organism like beehives and ant colonies. He writes,

Language is neither the conscious work of individuals nor of a plurality. [...] Language is much too complex to be the work of a single individual, much too unified to be the work of a mass; it is a complete organism.²⁵

Language itself neither comes from the individual or the collective. It is the dynamic and interactive process of both coming together. This complicates the origin of language since for Nietzsche conscious thought is not possible without language. It is therefore through a dynamic process between individuals and the collective that there is a mutual arising of language and consciousness.

In Nietzsche's early essay on the origin of language he argues that ever since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* we have had a better grip on the origin of language.²⁶ Nietzsche ends his short essay on the origin of language with a quote from Schelling,

Since without language no philosophical consciousness, indeed no consciousness at all, is conceivable, the foundation of language could not be laid with consciousness; and yet the deeper we penetrate into it, the more definitely we discover that its depths far exceeds that of the most conscious product. Language situation is like that of organic beings [...].²⁷

²⁵ [OL] "On the Origin of Language" in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*. Edited and translated by Gilman, Sanders L, Carol Blair and David J Parent. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). 209.

²⁶ Nietzsche, oddly, suggests that the correct understanding of the origin of language has only become common after Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Nietzsche's arguable misreading of Kant's philosophy of language is likely due to the broad consensus that Nietzsche never read the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself but his understanding came from secondary sources. For example, Nietzsche writes the following, "The deepest philosophical insights are already implicitly contained in language. Kant says: 'A great part, perhaps the greatest part of the work of reason consists in analyzing the concepts which man finds preexisting in himself'." (OL 209) The point in the *Critique of Pure Reason* from which this misquotation comes from has nothing to do with language. This quote comes not from the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself but is a misquotation of Kant in Harmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious* which Nietzsche was reading at the time. Nietzsche simply lifted the misquotation and repeats all the errors exactly.

²⁷ OL 211

For Nietzsche, the necessary condition for the possibility of language in organic beings is the principle of identity. That is, to be able to have a coherent unity in a name or word. As Nietzsche writes in *Human, All-too-Human I*, “the unity of the word guarantees nothing about the unity of the thing.”²⁸ These socially constituted identities often cover over and over simplify the world. For example, his linguistic critique of the “will” and a unified identity in language. It is only due to the unity, the singular identity in language, that we postulate the singularity in ontology.

Philosophers tend to speak of the will as if it were the best known thing in the world; indeed, Schopenhauer gave us to understand it is the will alone that is really know to us [...] But more and more it seems to me that Schopenhauer in this case did what philosophers just tend to do: that he adopted a popular prejudice and exaggerated it. Willing to me seem above all to be something complicated, *something that is a unity in word only* - and it is precisely one word that the popular prejudice that has triumphed over the habitual minimal caution of philosophers. [italics added]²⁹

But is it not enough to simply have the same individual words in common, in addition, “we must ultimately have our experience *in common*”.³⁰

Similar conditions, such as living under shared conditions, generates a people with similar experiences. Language is then a form of repetition and abbreviation that function in the service of the conditions of life. Simply because language has been a condition of conscious life does not mean that it gets at the world in an objective, veridical way. The ability to communicate in a form that serves the evolution of the species does not mean that the language used gets at the world in-itself. Nietzsche writes, “Life is not argument. The conditions of life might include error.”³¹ We saw that for Nietzsche the essence of language and the origin of language is

²⁸ HAH I 14

²⁹ BGE 19

³⁰ BGE 19

³¹ GS 121

illogical.³² However, this does not count as an objection to the value of language. He writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*,

The falseness of a judgment is for us not yet an objection to a judgment; perhaps our new language sounds strangest in this respect. The question is how far it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivation [...] False judgements [...] are the most indispensable to us, that without an acceptance of logical fiction, without a measuring of reality against the purely invented world of the absolute and the self-identical [...] mankind could not live - [...] Acknowledging untruth as a condition of life: this truly means offering resistance[...]³³

Nietzsche gives a very interesting biological or evolutionary history of these false judgments.

These judgements arise and remain based upon their usefulness to the species. Epistemological beliefs are not the result of radical individualist self creation discussed earlier but are the result of a long biological history.

Over immense periods of time the intellect produced nothing but errors. A few of these proved to be useful and helped to preserve the species: those who hit upon or inherited there had better luck in their struggle for themselves and their progeny. Such erroneous articles of faith which were continually inherited, until they became almost part of the basic endowment of the species [...]³⁴

Nietzsche then goes on to list a large number of these evolutionally inherited errors including the foundational presupposition in language and the principle of identity “that there are equal things”.³⁵ Simply because something was useful, such as logic, in the survival of the species does not necessarily mean that a particular belief was true.³⁶ It only means that it helped the species survive and thus the belief gained strength in that community. Nietzsche writes, “Thus the

³² PT 48 (“The Philosopher” 142, 143).

³³ BGE 4

³⁴ GS 110

³⁵ GS 110

³⁶ “How did logic come into existence in man’s head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished; for all that, their ways might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is equal as regards both nourishment and hostile animals - [...] were favored with a lesser probability of survival than those who guessed immediately upon encountering similar instances that they must be equal”(GS 111)

strength of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated on its character as a condition of life”³⁷

For Nietzsche the foundation of language is the principle of identity. That without A=A we cannot coherently speak at all not to mention name things. But this law of thought was itself an evolutionary process which Nietzsche claims originated in lower organisms. Nietzsche writes,

This law [A=A] [...] came to be: it will someday be shown how the propensity gradually emerges in lower organisms, how the weak-sighted mole eyes of these organized entities at first see nothing accept the same thing all the time, then how, when the various stimuli of pleasure and displeasure become more noticeable, various substances are gradually differentiated, but each with one attribute, that is, a single relationship to this organism.³⁸

What shows up as individuals are those entities that are important to the survival of the particular organism. What shows up is not veridically getting at the world as it is in-itself, but the world as it relates the survival of the organism and species. Interestingly this view is evidentially supported by evolutionary cognitive science today.³⁹ The evidence from this study suggests, “We find that veridical perceptions can be driven to extinction by non-veridical strategies that are tuned to utility rather than objective reality. This suggests that natural selection need not favor veridical perceptions.”⁴⁰ This confirms Nietzsche’s hypothesis that simply because something is false does not make it evolutionarily less useful. In fact, false judgments and perceptions are often so much more useful that they completely eradicate the true judgements.

Nietzsche ends up tracking the “genetic history of thinking” all the way back to plants where he claims the principle of identity likely first emerged. Nietzsche writes,

³⁷ GS 110

³⁸ HAH 18

³⁹ Justin T. Mark , Brian B. Marion, Donald D. Hoffman. “Natural selection and veridical perceptions”. *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 266 (2010) 504–515.

⁴⁰ Justin T. Mark , Brian B. Marion, Donald D. Hoffman. “Natural selection and veridical perceptions”. *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 266 (2010) 504

For plants, all things are normally peaceful, eternally, everything identical to itself. The belief that identical things exist has been handed down to human being from the period of lower organisms (experience trained in the highest science is what first contradicts this proposition). From the very beginning, the primal belief of everything organic has perhaps ever been that all the rest of the world is single and immobile. [...] The belief in unconditioned substances and identical things is [...] an original equally old error of everything organic.⁴¹

It was the need to communicate, fostered by evolutionary pressure, which first created consciousness. Consciousness and language emerged to suit the survival of the species.

Language was not created and honed to get at the world as it is apart from us but to get at the world that is important to us and our survival. Language is not a static object that corresponds to eternal truths, but it is always on the move responding to social relations and changes of meaning. Therefore, language is itself exactly the wrong tool to get at the world as it is apart and independent of us. However, language is the perfect tool for reflecting and shaping our world as the world as socially and politically important for us. There is “choice”, and therefore some notion of freedom, within the social and political realm of meaning creation.

It should be clear by now that Nietzsche sees language as a constraining factor on our epistemology. However, we can inquire into whether and how much linguistic idealism can be resisted.

Nietzsche certainly held up models of champions in war that radically changed the world: Napoleon, Julius Caesar, Cesare Borgia. These men were champions who changed history, however, their power was not simply commanded by their whim like the power of a God. One’s inner power on these large scales remains dependent on others following them, on others believing in their power. One simply cannot be a warlord without soldiers to fight in an army and believe in one’s power and authority. Therefore, their power is dependent on the social beliefs of the masses.

⁴¹ HAH 18

Similarly, linguistic geniuses do not affect history and though simply by being brilliant and (poof!) the world is changed. It is through the creation of new metaphors that people must take up. If a new metaphor is not picked up by anyone... it's not really a new metaphor. For Nietzsche a new metaphor only becomes meaningful when it communicates something. A new metaphor must tap into something social to catch on (unlike a nonsense metaphor like "Hubcap dragon neuralgia").

Geniuses can tap into and change the course of events not simply on an individual level but on a social level. Some do it so well that they become ubiquitous. There is a joke about a student who first reads Shakespeare and tell her teacher, "I like his writing but why does he have to use so many clichés?" These "clichés" are, of course, turns of phrase Shakespeare himself created that caught on. While it is true that the "taste of the many" make choices, it is also the case for Nietzsche that "Only a very few individuals utter Schemata whose virtue becomes a guide for many." Even though we think of Shakespeare as high culture today, his writing appealed to the taste of the many. This is evident in the large number of lowbrow flatulence and genital jokes in his writing.

The genius and "the educated few" do not operate alone. Language usage shift with the tides of the mob as well as the great writers. Today the very existence of Urban Dictionary speaks to the creation of new words by the mob that catch on (Bea, Ratchet, Yeet).

Political freedom then exists in a limited way *between* the individual and society. The individual and the larger social dynamics are co-dependent, co-originating or, we might say, an organic unity (a whole organism). We might see here Nietzsche pointing to what process philosophers now call "Emergence".

On a concrete level, what does this mean? It means that perhaps those of us who are not a Shakespeare are still free enough to choose, for example, between the synonyms of “dwarf”, “small person”, and “midget”. Midget is seen as a slur. This is only a small inconsequential choice for one person, but the effect of everyone collectively making a choice to respect the identity of little people has large effects and bearings on the politics of disability. This may have a ripple effect. In the sense that it is the host of small innocuous actions that often trigger others that lead to measurable results. An example of this, at this year’s APA, where name tags come with optional pronoun stickers. The choice to make a small linguistic change, like calling someone by their preferred pronoun, is a form of linguistic freedom. These small linguistic choices, if taken up and reproduced on a mass scale, change our political language and landscape. Robert F. Kennedy expressed something similar in a speech, “Few will have the greatness to bend history; but each of us can work to change a small portion of the events, and in the total of all these acts will be written the history of this generation.”⁴² Thus, even those of us who are not geniuses in Nietzsche’s sense can still make choices in some limited sense and resist linguistic idealism in order to move forward our political sensibilities for better or worse. When we choose our words with care, we express something akin to political freedom.

⁴² Robert F. Kennedy. DAY OF AFFIRMATION ADDRESS, UNIVERSITY OF CAPETOWN, CAPETOWN, SOUTH AFRICA, JUNE 6, 1966.