

The argument of the knowledge creator in Nietzsche

Evaldo Sampaio

Graduate Philosophy student at *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais*, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.
evaldosampaio@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This essay proposes to identify the argument of the knowledge creator in Nietzsche's philosophy. Based on this, it is neither intended to reduce the argument to Nietzsche's, nor the latter to the former. Identifying them in this study means to lead them to converge into elements which make them almost undistinguished, claiming that such similarity already predicts their differences. It is planned with such procedure to intensify the creative aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy, as well as to suggest a new scope for our intellectual capacity by taking a connection between knowing and creating as a matter of human condition itself.

Keywords: Knowledge; Maker's Argument; Friedrich Nietzsche

To Ivan Domingues, friend and knowledge creator.

In this article I intend to discuss the argument of the knowledge creator in Nietzsche. First of all, I present the argument, then, I identify it - direct or indirectly - in a selection of passages scattered throughout Nietzsche's work. I am well aware that such passages belong to specific contexts that cannot be reduced to one another; nevertheless, I propose to unify them methodologically, interpreting them from the standpoint of the relation between *language* and *representation*. Such choice is due to the conjecture according to which the relation between language and representation is a privileged way to clarify what Nietzsche has to say about knowledge, as well as to justify why knowledge *is* and *must be* creative.

The argument of the knowledge creator consists in the thesis that the only thing we can effectively know about reality is what we create ourselves. To Vico, who supposedly was the first one to formulate this argument explicitly, this meant the superiority of human sciences over natural sciences. Once nature is not our creation, only an approximate and hypothetical knowledge can be attributed to natural sciences. The same could not be said of human sciences, whose object is a product of conventions and institutional agreements and could be fully known.¹

¹ The formulation of the argument of the knowledge creator here presented follows Ivan Domingues in his *Epistemologia das Ciências Humanas*. Tomo I. São Paulo: Ed. Loyola, 2004, part I, chapter 1.

This evaluation presupposes (a) difference and lack of symmetry between objects themselves and as they present themselves to us, and (b) difference and internal asymmetry among objects as they present themselves to us. We cover reality with our representations and only know it that way, whatever cannot be represented being, therefore, unknowable. Among those that become objects of knowledge, some are projected into reality from our representations, while others are apprehended by them. The objects that are apprehended by representations, because they are distinct from them, do not become used up in the representable; those that share the same nature with representations - that is, those that are also conceptual creations - can be fully known. Hence the fact that the knowledge of natural phenomena, only apprehendable by our representations, is approximate and hypothetical, while the knowledge of social phenomena, which share the same status with our representations, can be complete.

There are variants of the argument that differ essentially from Vico's original formulation because they adopt other meanings for terms such as "knowledge" and "reality", besides diverging as to the criteria used to determine the truth value of propositions, as well as to what types of representations can only be known insofar as we create them.² For some of these variants there is also certain instability concerning the term "creation" as we come across questions such as "who creates?", "how do they create?" and "where do they create from?".

I warn that we should not underestimate the deep changes that the argument, in its countless variations, brings to the theory of knowledge. When we take "knowing" and "creating" as co-extensive, a whole set of issues, considered fundamental so far, become irrelevant or even pseudo-problems.

Note, for example, the so called "Münchhausen Trilemma". According to it, any pretension to founding a theory philosophically, that is, to determining a starting point in the proof chain of a given proposition, fails because it implies either (a) a regression to infinite, (b) an arbitrary choice, or (c) a *petitio principii*.³ The trilemma is an attempt at responding to the project of establishing an inexorable and legitimate foundation to knowledge, or showing the impossibility of doing it. It is as if knowledge were a building that is kept together at its base; once this base is discovered, what supports the whole is discovered likewise, that is, what gives it security and stability. Therefore, this base cannot be unstable - assuming it is so, one falls back on to moderate skepticism and, if one considers that the base does not exist, one seems to adopt radical skepticism.

What increases the difficulties described by the trilemma is the belief that the determination of a starting point in the chain of proof of a given proposition must have an epistemological character distinct from the proposition itself. The epistemic distinction would reflect an ontological difference - the starting point would be the representation of a *datum*, while the other formulations of the chain of proof would be like its effects, therefore, different from its cause. In other words, the starting point would not be a representation projected into reality, but rather a representation apprehended instantly from reality. Such assumption is incompatible with a model that is implicit in the creator's argument, for, if one takes knowledge as "creation", a supposed *datum* would already be a representation, that is, the delimitation of what can be known in something that eludes full apprehension. Since one only knows what is created and one creates all that is known, no instance beyond creation belongs to what we know. Assuming the subject is the demiurge of his own knowledge, one admits as

² One of these variants is presented by Bernardo Oliveira (*Francis Bacon e a Fundamentação da Ciência como Tecnologia*. Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 2002, chap. 9) who, referring to Vico's suggestion as the first explicit presentation of the creator's argument, discusses its relevance, specially in Francis Bacon, focusing on the changes implied by its adoption to the traditional opposition between *episteme* and *techne*.

³ The authorship of the Münchhausen trilemma, as well as a study of some of its main consequences, was attributed to Hans Albert (*Tratado da razão prática*. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1976). However, it is known that the mentioned trilemma restores three arguments from those which form the pentalemma originally developed by Agrippa, quoted explicitly by Diogenes Laertius (*Vida e Obra dos Filósofos Ilustres - Lives and Opinions of eminent philosophers*, IX, 88-89) and by Sextus Empiricus (*Hipotiposes Pirrônicas - Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I, 164-170) as a part of the skeptical strategies to obtain judgment suspension.

well that the referred ontological difference, even if it is the case, is irrelevant to what is known. The problem which leads us to the trilemma, in strict sense, does not even present itself to the knowledge creator. Taking into account that such question is spread out in our culture and has dominated a significant part of modern epistemology,⁴ one can imagine the extent of the philosophical displacement immanent to the creator's argument.⁵

Even metaphysical notions seem to acquire another dimension when they are presented next to the argument. Take, for example, the idea of self cause. *Causa sui* was a current expression among scholastic theologians and philosophers.⁶ One says that something is the cause of itself if it came into existence and keeps itself in existence by itself alone, that is, if it is its only and fundamental cause of existence. Especially from the 19th century on, the term "existence" acquired an ambiguity that has taken it beyond the limits of traditional ontology, indicating, from another perspective, an investigation about human condition itself.⁷ The question about the existence of x could also be interpreted as a question on the meaning of the existence of x. On this other level, saying that something is the cause of itself would consist in stating that one is the only factor directly responsible for one's existential condition, that is, for the meaning of one's life. Transferred to this scope, the knowledge creator's argument would say, then, that man gives himself his own existence, that is, he creates the meaning of his own existence.

This seems to me to be the first shift internal to the creator's argument that Nietzsche's philosophy suggests. In the self-critical preface he had published in the second edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, his first masterpiece, it is stated that "this audacious book dared to tackle for the first time: to look at science in the perspective of an artist, but at art in that of life".⁸ This is the moment when the discovery of what was then designated as "the problem of science itself" is revealed, namely: what is the value of knowledge for Life? This problem, it is reported, cannot be recognized in the field of science itself, hence the reason to submit it to another instance, in this case, art, and this, in its turn, to an even more elementary level. In a temporary and schematic way, one can state that Nietzsche's strategy consists in taking both science and art as symptoms of a way of life. In other words: science and art are forms that manifest the vital relations of a community; science and art, that is, knowing and creating are signs that allow us to interpret – and evaluate – what kind of existence persists in them. But what does it mean to state that science and art are symptoms of a vital condition?

In a section of *Human, All too Human* entitled "Language as a putative science", Nietzsche notes that

⁴ For an interpretation of some projects related to the tradition concerning Münchhausen's trilemma, see Eduardo Luft, "Fundamentação última é viável?". In: Cirne Lima & Custódio Almeida (Orgs.). *Nós e o Absoluto*. São Paulo / Fortaleza: Loyola / UFC, 2001, p. 79-97.

⁵ Ivan Domingues (*op. cit.*, p. 35) remarks that, according to Pérez-Ramos, "[the knowledge creator argument] constitutes one of the most powerful underground currents of Western thought, receiving, before and after Vico, a set of parallel formulations, more or less elliptical, by eminent authors like Bacon, Kant, Hobbes and Boyle".

⁶ Initially used in discussions on the idea of freedom as self-determination (a meaning that goes back to Aristotle, Plotinus and Arab neo-platonism), it seems that it is in modern onto-theological discussions that the idea of *causa sui* assumes, explicitly, the aspect of creation or self-creation that is immanent to it (Nicola Abbagnano, *Dicionário de Filosofia*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1970). To be brief, it would not be wrong to suggest that this capacity of divine self-creation was, by analogy, attributed to man, in a post-Renaissance context. That is why Bacon said that "Man is God to man" and Vico that "God is the artisan of nature, man, the God of artifacts" (*apud* Bernardo Oliveira, *op. cit.*, p. 141).

⁷ For Nietzsche, Schopenhauer would hold most responsibility for the introduction of the value of existence problem in modern philosophy. This problem would consist in the question of whether existence has any sense; this is a question that, one thinks, "[...] would require some centuries till it is simply heard in all its depth" (*The Gay Science* (GS) § 357). All the translations of Nietzsche's works used here – unless otherwise indicated – refer to the ones by Walter Kaufmann (*The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976; *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. New York: Modern Library, 2000; *The Gay Science*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974). Quotations are abbreviated as indicated, followed by the chapter and/or corresponding section.

⁸ *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT), § 2.

The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: *he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world* [my italics]. The sculptor of language was not so modest as to believe that he was only giving things designations, he conceived rather that with words he was expressing supreme knowledge of things; language is, in fact, the first stage of the occupation with science. Very much subsequently - only now - it dawns on men that in their belief in language they have propagated a tremendous error. *Happily* [my italics], it is too late for the evolution of reason, which depends on this belief, to be again put back.⁹

It is said that through language man has established a world of his own beside another world, creating representations of reality that have enabled him to give meaning to things. Because they are human creations, these representations have given us the necessary semantic stability for us to consider ourselves masters of things. Becoming master of things means: to control their meaning. Transferring his concepts and names to things, man believes, by a move of conjuring, that these are also properties of things themselves. The “pride” he takes in his creations, representations that have allowed him to submit things to his purposes and evaluation, has led man to see in language a reflection of the world.

One can say that this series of arbitrary transpositions constitutes the first stage of the effort towards science. The relation between words and things becomes the initial moment of understanding reality. The primacy of this movement is not historical, but “genealogical”. We are dealing with a heuristic fiction that is proposed as a hypothetical starting point for knowledge, whose mediate interest is to corroborate the thesis that we create what we know, the ulterior confusion between what is “created” and what is “given” lying at the origin of scientific thought. But what led us to create science? Apparently, it was an impulse that “could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it”. From the supposed fact that the linguistic-epistemological conjectures that have led us to move towards science are mistaken does not follow that science itself is not a privilege for us. Nietzsche, ironically, tries to show that the “mistake” of the consubstantiation of the world with language was what enabled the development of reason and the importance that it has to life. “Mistake” here means something that has no correspondence with reality.

Undoubtedly, the relevance of a heuristic fiction like that can be questioned. After all, such assumptions seem, at first, to be merely arbitrary. However, if one keeps in mind a peculiarity that, it seems to me, the so called genealogical investigation incorporates from philology – a subject that Nietzsche taught and that, at times, repeated its importance for philosophical activity when accurately understood – one realizes if not the need, at least the plausibility of this procedure. A philological study on the development of a language demands dealing with documents from different times which attest of the changes in level or levels one wishes to apprehend. The *corpus*, at times, reveals itself insufficient for an accurate description, due either to lack of data or to expressive time gaps between records. To face such difficulty, what philology can do, *grosso modo*, based on a hypothesis concerning the changes of a word or structure, is to methodologically rebuild intermediate stages that supposedly would be the case, so as that to assume the existence of a certain linguistic form, if not in fact, at least by right. A similar procedure seems to lie in the matrix of genealogical investigation and supports, secondarily, the heuristic fiction mentioned above. Such expedient is then used in the semantic-pragmatic field, rebuilding and evaluating an assumed structural – as well as moral – logic, at the moment language is established according to the way it proliferated.

⁹ *Human, All too Human* (HH), § 13. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Therefore, this suggests that rational categories are derived from a mirage, and so, against that which reason usually preaches, one must hold such mirages in high esteem: “mistakes” are perhaps the main factors in the development of knowledge. Although science originates from an unfounded hypothesis, it, in fact, enabled man to develop that which was his impulse: to feel as master of things. It is irrelevant whether this domination corresponds to reality or not, for its purposes have been assured: to create a firm, stable, controllable, comprehensive, known “world”. But, how was it possible, without a correspondence with reality, to create a world which we could control?

First of all, one must keep in mind that the demand that we can only understand the world if we have representations that correspond directly to it is, in itself, a consequence of the alleged mistake pointed out by Nietzsche. Thus, it would be a paralogism to consider as a problem the fact that, if a representation is not some faithful reproduction of a state of things in the world, it keeps us from attaining knowledge. Nietzsche goes on to indicate that disciplines like logic are not based on assumptions that have any correspondence to reality. Taking into account notions such as equality between things and the identity of the same object at different points in time, one realizes that these are mere abstractions, copies, semblances of reality – for one thing cannot be equal to another or equal to itself at different points in time. The same reasoning applies to mathematics, which cannot find in nature an exact straight line or any absolute measure of magnitude.¹⁰ The choice of logic and mathematics as examples is not unjustified. As Kant tells us in his first *Critique*, it is accepted that these subjects have long been tracking the safe way of science.¹¹ Therefore, to show that both logic and mathematics take their principles from conceptions that have no correspondence to reality is, undoubtedly, one of the strongest blows one can strike against the idea of science as representation of reality.

From the point of view of a current antagonism in contemporary philosophy of language, namely, that between *realism* and *anti-realism*, one can say that Nietzsche would *suggest* that both are derived from the same view on the relation between language and world: for there to be knowledge, representations (or names) must correspond to reality. Those who judge that there is such correspondence are realists, they consider that there is “true” knowledge; those who do not, are anti-realists, they consider that there is no “true” knowledge.¹²

Nietzsche's position, compatible with the creator's argument, consists in stating that it is not accurate representation that determines the meaning of something or, by extension, the knowledge of it. Thus, he denies the assumption that seems to make the linguistic opposition between realism/anti-realism possible. In an essay from his youth, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, we find the following questioning: “[...] what about these conventions of language? Are they really the products of knowledge, of the sense of truth? Do designations and things coincide? Is language the adequate expression of all realities?”¹³ In this context, “truth”, in opposition to “mistake”, means correspondence to reality. It is said, in the sequence, that “only through forgetfulness can man ever achieve the illusion of possessing a “truth” in the sense just designated”. To justify such statements, Nietzsche offers an analysis of the functioning of language.

What is a word? The image of a nerve stimulus in sounds. But to infer from the nerve stimulus, a cause outside us, that is already the result of a false and unjustified application of the principle of reason. If truth alone had been the deciding factor in the genesis of language, and if the standpoint of certainty had been decisive for

¹⁰ HH, § 13.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant. *Critic of Pure Reason*, B VIII-XII.

¹² A presentation and commentary on the terms “realism” and “anti-realism” in contemporary philosophy of language, critically opposing its original formulation by Michael Dummett, is carried out by Richard Rorty (*Objetivismo, Relativismo e Verdade*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará, p. 13-33).

¹³ *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (TL), § 1.

designations, then how could we still dare to say "the stone is hard," as if "hard" were something otherwise familiar to us, and not merely a totally subjective stimulation! [...] What arbitrary differentiations! What one-sided preferences, first for this, then for that property of a thing! The different languages, set side by side, show that what matters with words is never the truth, never an adequate expression; else there would not be so many languages. The "thing in itself" (for that is what pure truth, without consequences, would be) is quite incomprehensible to the creators of language and not at all worth aiming for. One designates only the relations of things to man, and to express them one calls on the boldest metaphors.¹⁴

The author starts, among other premises, from an alleged distinction between world and representation. Initially, defining "word" as the image in sounds of a nerve stimulus, he questions the legitimacy of attributing to the stimulus that originates a word a cause that is external to the speaker. That is, he does not say that the nerve stimulus does not have a cause that is external to the speaker, but that one cannot make such inference, only from the nerve stimuli. By extension, if one accepts language as the sound image of a nerve stimulus, it does not follow that this is the expression of something external to the stimulus itself, something outside the speaker. If only truth – truth as correspondence – and the certainty of designations were decisive for the genesis of language, then all the judgments we uttered would be meaningless, for a word being derived from nerve stimuli, empirically subjective, how could these account for something that is empirically objective? The nuance of the argument lies in showing that certain conditions that are considered necessary for the establishing of designations – their truth, their certainty – are not so. Thus, truth and certainty are not at stake at the genesis of language and, therefore, of representations.

If in the origin of languages "adequate expression" and "truth" were essential conditions, there could not have been countless languages, but, at most, only one, that which would correspond to the world. Even if hypothetically there were such language that would correspond to reality, the fact that there are other languages suggests that, for nature and for the functioning of a linguistic system, correspondence to reality is, at best, superfluous.

Thus, even not corresponding to reality, a language can be originated and develop, satisfying its speakers' demands, that is, giving them control over the meaning of things or "knowledge". Correspondence, even if it is the case, is rather what is inessential.¹⁵ But isn't it absurd to imagine a language that does not

¹⁴ *TL* § 1.

¹⁵ In my "Wittgenstein e o problema do significado" (In: Kleber Amora & Eduardo Chagas (Orgs.) *Temas da Filosofia Contemporânea*. Fortaleza: Edições UFC, 2004, p. 109-122), I argue that, in distinct ways, Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations*, dealing specifically with the problem of reference (*bedeutung*), arrives at a position that is analogous to the one that is here attributed to Nietzsche. If this is correct, it can be added to the arguments presented by Arthur Danto to justify that "Nietzsche, who is so naturally taken as a predecessor of the irrationalistic tendency in contemporary philosophy, in his own writings, exhibits attitudes toward the main problems of philosophy which are almost wholly in the spirit of Logical Positivism" (Cf. *Nietzsche as Philosopher*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965, p.82-83). To be more polemical, I would add that Nietzsche not only precedes Logical Positivism and Analytical Philosophy, but also, and above all, surpasses them. As to the question of reference, I emphasize that this has been having a similar treatment by new tendencies in contemporary linguistics. As L. Mondada and D. Dubois tell us about reference: "Then, the problem is not any more to ask how information is transmitted or how the states of the world are represented accurately, but to ask how linguistic, cognitive, human activities are structured and give meaning to the world. In other words, we will talk about *referentiation*, treating it, as well as categorization, as derived from symbolic practices rather than from a given ontology. [...] referentiation does not concern 'a relation of representation of things or states of things, but a relation between text and the non-linguistic part of the practice in which it is produced and interpreted". (Cf. "Construção dos objetos do discurso e categorização: uma abordagem dos processos de referenciação". In: M. Cavalcante, B. Rodrigues & A. CIULLA (Orgs.). *Referenciação*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2003, p. 20).

correspond to reality, that does not symbolize what it wishes to symbolize? Wouldn't it be absurd to say "This is a chair" if what we have in front of us is a table?

The author indicates that designations are arbitrary delimitations, unilateral preferences that only establish men's relations with things. A word is not the reproduction of a stimulus, but its *transposition* to another scope. "Transposition" means to interpret, re-dimension. Getting back to the passage of *Human, All too Human* mentioned above, transposition is the symptom of an impulse to become master of things, controlling their meanings. The meaning of an object is not the object itself, but the way in which we can represent it, assimilate it, turn it into knowledge. If transposition consists in the displacement of something from one level to another, what is at stake is the convergence of images, not their isomorphism. One can say that a word "simplifies" reality insofar as it makes representations of states of things stable, more or less constant, states of things which, without this resource, would be neither static nor dynamic. A word *anthropomorphises* the world. This means that a word limits the world arbitrarily, circumscribes it to unilateral preferences driven by pragmatic and functional interests, which, in a more refined sense, denote vital impulses. Hence the reason why

Every concept originates through our equating what is unequal. No leaf ever wholly equals another, and the concept "leaf" is formed through an arbitrary abstraction from these individual differences, through forgetting the distinctions; and now it gives rise to the idea that in nature there might be something besides the leaves which would be "leaf"—some kind of original form after which all leaves have been woven, marked, copied, colored, curled, and painted, but by unskilled hands, so that no copy turned out to be a correct, reliable, and faithful image of the original form.¹⁶

Through the criticism of a model of representation construction through abstraction, Nietzsche wants to show that concepts, as generalizations, arise from the arbitrary abandoning of individual differences. Everything happens as if, from an amorphous bundle of stimuli, differences were limited and stabilized when grouped into words. If we take into account the previously mentioned confusion between what is "created" and what is "given", we can understand why Nietzsche points towards the transference of this characteristic of language to the world, what makes speakers consider that, in reality, there would also be something like an abstract entity behind singular objects – ironically designated as "primordial leaf". Thus, in a first sense, "simplifying" means abstracting. Therefore, to say that a word – or a representation – does not correspond to reality means, in this case, that it is the abstraction of certain aspects of a *continuum* in a process that could be described as metonymic: representation is the limitation of a whole, a part that is, later, unduly mistaken for the whole itself.

Another application of the idea of language as simplification, restriction or delimitation of stimuli is given to us by descriptive linguistics and seems compatible with Nietzsche's remarks. Taking as an example the way different languages represent colors, one can see that there is not a direct correspondence between them, and that one term for color *x* in language *y* may correspond to two or more terms in language *z*, and, at times, such correspondence is only approximate, for the semantic extension of the term for color *x* in *y* covers some aspects of its correlates in *z*, though not all them, some of them being symmetric to other words in different ways.¹⁷ In other words, languages have distinct ways of classifying the color spectrum. Therefore, such examples corroborate the idea of language as a delimitation of reality in terms of relations between speakers and things, showing that correspondence with reality is not a necessary and satisfactory condition for meaning.

It is obviously absurd not to consider it problematic – at different situations – that by pronouncing the

¹⁶ *TL* § 1.

¹⁷ An example of this phenomenon can be found in H. Gleason Jr. *Introdução à linguística descritiva*. 2.ed. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1985, p. 4-5, where, through a diagram, the linguist demonstrates that speakers of different languages classify the color spectrum in very different ways, considering the contrast between English, Shona (a Rhodesian language) and Bassa (from Liberia).

sentence “this is a chair” what one wishes to indicate is a table. However, this is not what is at stake, concerning the debate on the (non) correspondence of something to reality. Stating x , when what I have in front of me is y , is a grammatical problem. To inquire if “ x ” is a representation of x , that is, if “ x ” corresponds in a *true* and *correct* way to x is a “philosophical” issue. What is being investigated is not if we use a sentence correctly or incorrectly, but if this sentence becomes correct or incorrect through its correspondence to a state of things. “Correspondence”, in this specific sense, means “authentic, faithful representation”. However, for a representation to be functional, for it to have an interaction with the environment, it does not need to have or even discard “authenticity”, as we have already seen. The terms adjust themselves in different ways to their referents – referents which, in a finer level of analysis, are also conceptual – according to the human needs they fulfill. When one uses a term to refer to the object chair, what is at stake to assure the success of communication is not accurate representation, but the functionality of the term concerning designation, that is, whether it leads the listener to what the speaker intends to utter – although this leading may be done in different ways. Therefore, while in Portuguese, if I want to point out a chair, I refer to it by “cadeira”, in English I say “chair” and in German, “Tisch”. Grammatically, one makes a mistake if one does not designate a chair, in these languages, by their respective terms. “Philosophically”, however, Nietzsche says that the connection between these sound images and objects is not made through correspondence to reality, but through a transfiguration of reality. Words - and language itself – are qualitative leaps from one sphere to another, semantic transpositions, “metaphors”.

Considering the structural composition of Nietzsche's thought, one can see that his conception of language is a corollary of the investigations he carries out on sublimation (*sublimiere*). As Walter Kaufmann¹⁸ points out, the term goes back to medieval German and was used in its classic sense by Goethe, Novalis and Schopenhauer. Nietzsche uses it few times in this original meaning, but starts using it in its contemporary connotation in the second volume of *Human, All too Human*, anticipating the psychoanalytic use. He then extends this use to several contexts, while referring to the overman (*Übermensch*), in discussions concerning platonic *Eros* and Christian love, and even while referring to the action of art over impulses. Thus, an important *leitmotiv* of his philosophy becomes the comprehension of what happens when impulses are sublimated. Sexual impulse, for example, can be transfigured into a creative spiritual activity and, likewise, barbarian desire for torture and violence can be sublimated by disputes in Olympic games. For Kaufmann, although this is not a doctrine based on “reason”, neither is it some kind of irrationalism, for, in its composition, reason takes up a privileged place. Rationality, however, is not admired because it enables us to elaborate concepts, but because it organizes volitive chaos, integrating impulses into a harmonious whole. Language, therefore, thought of as part of this broad process of impulse sublimation, is one of the ways through which we reach control over things and ourselves.

That is why, in *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche advances the hypothesis that subtlety and strength of consciousness are always related to the *capacity for communication* of a person or animal; and that this capacity for communication refers to the *need for communication*.²⁰ If one refers back to the heuristic fiction mentioned above, one can understand why man, being a threatened and unprotected animal, in need of his equals, found himself obliged to acquire progressively more sophisticated means of mutual interaction and understanding, through which he would express needs and wishes, assuring a cooperation that would strengthen us when facing natural predators. However, in order to make ourselves understood, we had to know, with growing accuracy, what we lacked, what worried or stimulated us. In other words, we had to be able to make distinctions about ourselves and to express them linguistically, with growing accuracy. That is why Nietzsche argues that the need for communication has reigned, so that we developed a greater capacity for communication, whose most refined – and, perhaps, excessive - part may be consciousness. Consciousness thus functions in a double way, both in the linguistic representation of states of things that surround us, and in those that constitute our own “interior”, which, thus, is a consequence of shared linguistic relations. Ironically, Nietzsche says that the “know thyself”

¹⁸ Nietzsche, *Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4. ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, chap. 7-8.

²⁰ *GS*, § 354.

maxim is, actually, a “do not know thyself” maxim,²¹ since it only presents a simulated interior, based on the gregarious mode of symbolic constitution of the world. Therefore, sublimation, rationality, science, language, representation and consciousness are expressions of a process that, is above all, creative, whose raw material is the disorder of impulses, and whose end result is their ordering, aiming mainly at the preservation of self and the control of reality. Hence the fact that Nietzsche recognizes in the origin of our concept of knowing the desire to transform something strange to us into something safe and familiar.²² This “familiarity” consists in the structures and categories that shown themselves – or so we judge them to be – as adequate to our preservation or strengthening.

Let us now focus on a question that remains unanswered: “what does it mean to say that science and art are symptoms of a vital condition?” It means that man, by responding to demands and tendencies such as the need to make the world stable, known and measurable, creates a separate reality to himself, which enables him to become master of the meaning of things. He becomes master of the meaning of things because he is the one who gives the meaning that limits them and conditions his needs. Hence,

If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare "look, a mammal" I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be "true in itself" or really and universally valid apart from man. At bottom, what the investigator of such truths is seeking is only the metamorphosis of the world into man. He strives to understand the world as something analogous to man, and at best he achieves by his struggles the feeling of assimilation.²³

Man is the master of knowledge because he is the creator of knowledge itself. Art keeps and amplifies this creative impulse. However, this man of knowledge “forgets” it.²⁴ He forgets it because science searches equality, identity, calculated restriction of the possibilities of interpretation, truth, incorrigibility. For these purposes, the “primordial leaf” seems to be more important than the singular leaf. In other words, what happens is that the movement of production of scientific knowledge itself dissimulates its own creative aspect. If every day I guide myself in my activities by using a watch, it is not surprising that such convention – safe and automatic measuring of time by the watch – is extended almost naturally to time itself, and, for many, time itself becomes divisible, measurable and controllable. What is not seen is that the watch is only an anthropomorphic mode of time, a way of making it supportive of our demands. In this sense, we create time, that is, we create that which we can know about time. And what do we “forget”? We forget that we are creators.

This condition describes, in a figurative way, a slow and gradual process that, as mentioned before, seems to have been started by underground vital needs. One passage from *The Gay Science* perfectly illustrates this point. It discusses the origin of logical reasoning,²⁵ taking into account not its truth or falseness, but the conditions through which it developed. It is assumed that, originally, there should be beings that did not often know how to distinguish what as considered “equal” concerning their essential demands, such as feeding and safety; it is also assumed that, probably, these “illogical” beings' perception could even more “truthful”. In order for there to be a perception, one necessarily needs the ability of distinction and segmentation: the individual must make a difference between himself and the environment, in order to know that it is he who perceives something,

²¹ *GS*, § 354.

²² *GS* § 355.

²³ *TL* § 1.

²⁴ The category of “forgetfulness” in Nietzsche is complex; a more detailed study on it would go beyond the limits of this work. For a better understanding of the term, see *GM* I, § 2, § 3; II, § 1, § 3.

²⁵ *GS* § 111.

and also that parts of his body are responsible for certain specific perceptions, and also to know which states of things are perceived, etc. Thus, a “pure perception”, that is, one that combines all the information that can be grasped at a given moment, would be something close to the complete absorption of individuality into whole; in other words, in pure perception, everything and, paradoxically, nothing is perceived! By accepting the plausibility of such analysis in conjunction with the previous idea that logical categories do not have correspondence with reality, one concludes that those beings that thought logically are those that acquired sophisticated mechanisms of segmentation and abstraction from reality – “falsification” and “simplification” of states of things, such as, for example, language – whereas “illogical” individuals, because they perceive things as a “flow”, maybe with richer details and thus with an interpretation that better “corresponds” to reality, and because they were incapable of deliberating about their perceptions with greater skill and functionality, became extinct. It is, therefore, suggested, that logic – and, by extension, reason and knowledge – are “false”, and exactly because of that, that they are essential to survival.²⁶ To use a recurrent image in Nietzsche's first writings, I would say that it is as if truth needed to be covered by illusion, in order not to become fatal to those who learned it.²⁷

So, the heuristic fiction that has been presented here shows that knowledge develops, in its different tendencies, in order to respond to demands of conservation and strengthening. Survival is not a difficulty restricted to feeding, safety and other strictly physiological issues, but is fundamentally concerned with meaning, with the value of existence. Science, as well as art, moral and religion, are ways through which we create meaning to our lives. That is why Nietzsche names calls the artist, the moralist and the ascetic “*teachers of the purpose of existence*”.²⁸ All these types have become experts in giving meaning, in creating meaning to our representations of reality.

Conceived in such perspective, the process of creation of knowledge is no more taken as a simple distortion of things, but can be seen as an *intensification* of reality. The new Prometheus, the contemporary demiurge,

[...] spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly toward its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points; and while there is no telling how this circle could ever be surveyed completely, noble and gifted men nevertheless reach, e'er half their time and inevitably, such boundary points on the periphery from which one gazes into what defies illumination. When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail – suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured, needs art as a

²⁶ Passages like this one corroborate Richard Schacht's thesis that Nietzsche develops what could be called a “naturalistic epistemology” (Cf. *Nietzsche*. London / Boston: Routledge, 1983, p. 52-57). Although I agree that, taking the expression in a broad sense, one can designate Nietzsche's treatment of epistemology as “naturalistic” in Schacht's sense, it seems to me that this characterization, if extended to the whole of Nietzsche's considerations in this field, do not account for the different strategies he uses when he thinks about knowledge, as Schacht himself also recognizes in his argument. However, identifying a “naturalistic epistemology” in Nietzsche, even within a restricted scope, is an efficient and interesting way of updating his discourse by projecting it into contemporary epistemic debates.

²⁷ As for the “problem of science”, Roberto Machado evaluates that since “[Nietzsche], denies to science the possibility of elucidating its own problem by itself, denies to an internal criticism of knowledge the possibility of constituting itself as true criticism, the essential part of the *démarche* consists in connecting science with an exterior capable of revealing the real dimensions and purposes of the scientific project; it consists in explaining the moral foundations of science, indicating, at the same time, art as an alternative model for rationality. Hence the privilege of art and moral as instances that make the Nietzschean discourse on science possible, indicating its two main directions”. (Cf. *Nietzsche e a Verdade*. 2ª. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 2002, p. 8).

²⁸ GS § 1.

protection and remedy.²⁹

Knowledge needs art so that it does not surrender to its own absurd. To need art means to recognize and intensify itself as creation, as work. The creative look of art, placed before the face of the man of knowledge,³⁰ shows him his *true* function: to subdue nonsense, meaninglessness, circumscribing it to what is human, transfiguring it into a means of preservation and strengthening of life. It is not truth that lies within the impulse for knowledge, but Life.³¹ In order to rescue such forgotten precept with its creative power, one must submit science to art and art to Life.

Thus, in *Twilight of the Idols*, it is suggested that the traditional division between a “true world” and an “apparent world” is like a “moral-optical illusion”³², for it is constituted not only by an ontological separation between scopes of existence, but above all by its axiological difference – recognizing the former’s worth and despising the latter. Nietzsche adds that such distinction also operates within artistic activity, although in this area it does not establish an opposition between reality and appearance. Appearance is understood by the artist as an aspect of reality and, more appropriately, as a “selection, reinforcement and correction” of it. In the case of the “tragic artist”, appearance becomes a mode of affirmation of Life, even where it seems to be most questionable and terrible, namely, suffering. It is this “tragic insight”, which makes appearance and reality converge, that one must assume, so as not to be paralyzed by what Kant called “the scandal of reason”. The issue, therefore, concerns the acquisition of another *pathos*.

The creator of knowledge type is also, in the structure of Nietzsche’s thought, one of the constituent aspects of the creation of oneself, that is, of the process of “becoming what one is”. The tragic insight consists then in the paradoxical and vital process of giving meaning to the unknowable, finding in the creative and self-referred character of art a “means of protection and remedy” against the limits of meaning. Such way of knowing is said to be “tragic” for being aware of the profound inability to understand that underlies in his refined strategies of comprehension. If such condition can be considered nihilist and weakening for an apostle of Truth, it is a stimulus for someone who creates what he knows.

One can finally understand how several of Nietzsche’s remarks on the relation between language and representation enable us to interpret them as compatible with the argument of the creator of knowledge. The type who creates what he knows can be an answer to the self-referred crisis that undermines the rational foundation of what we know, by taking on, in an analogy with the (tragic) artist, the role of artisan of what can be known. Such willingness is part of the process of becoming master of oneself, understood as the superior stage of the creation of oneself. The creation of oneself means, in this specific sense, to become directly responsible for one’s existential condition, that is, for the meaning of one’s life. Although Nietzsche’s philosophy – even in his investigations on language and representation – cannot be reduced to the argument of the creator of knowledge and vice-versa, the conjunction between them seems to give life to aspects that are equally relevant to both of them.

The so called “problem of science” – the question concerning what impulse sets off the will of knowledge – was the question initially indicated as a way of learning about the relations between knowing and creating; now we can understand how Nietzsche can be our partner in our attempt, as creators, to survive – and overcome – the beautiful and frightening knowledge of ourselves.

²⁹ *BT* § 15.

³⁰ *HH* § 222.

³¹ *GS* § 111.

³² *Twilight of the Idols*, IV.

Translated by Paulo Pimenta Marques
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