**Nominalism and the History of Constructivism in Western Philosophy**

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I have argued elsewhere that nominalism (whether trope or austere varieties) is sufficient for a view to be constructivist. Due to two interrelated factors, nominalism about properties results in a loss of any qualitative features of reality.[[1]](#footnote-1) First, due to the very nature of nominalism, it seems that whether on trope or austere varieties, any given particular is metaphysically simple. On trope theory, tropes are particular properties or objects. On austere and metalinguistic nominalism, their objects are concrete particulars. In either case, as simples, these objects are *not* an individuator plus a quality. So, a distinction between an individuator and a quality is one of reason, not ontology. Accordingly, we can eliminate either the individuator or the quality without real loss. By eliminating the quality, we are left with a bare individuator. But, that is incoherent.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In terms of qualitative content, both the objects to be known as well as our mental states would be bereft of qualitative content. Yet, nominalists do not write (or live) consistently with such results; instead, they make many knowledge claims about the qualities of reality. Second, this finding has a specific implication, i.e., it seems essences cannot be sustained. If so, there will be no deeper facts that make anything what it is in itself. It seems the result is that everything is interpretation, yet without a way even to get started.[[3]](#footnote-3)

So, in an attempt to be consistent, on nominalism it seems that for there to be any qualitative features in reality, they would have to be constructed - however that might be said to be accomplished. Now, historically speaking, constructivism has been entrenched deeply in western philosophy for well over two centuries, although Ockham’s (1285-1347) nominalist views predate the rise of constructivism by many more centuries. I will focus here on the historical rise to dominance of constructivism, to try to show that its major examples embrace nominalism, and that their being constructivist is not accidental. Indeed, nominalism, along with a related rejection of essences and embrace of empiricism, has driven constructivist thought. That is, in terms of how it has developed in the west, constructivism basically is an unfolding and outworking of nominalism and its implications, first on ontology and then epistemology. For, as Dallas Willard has observed, the breakdown we have experienced in epistemology that has given rise to constructivism (the examples of which he calls “Midas Touch” epistemologies) has occurred due to something more fundamental – namely, a breakdown in ontology.[[4]](#footnote-4) And that latter “breakdown” seems to be from the outworking of nominalism.

**A History of Philosophical Constructivism in the West**

Descartes (1596-1650) and Locke (1632-1704) immediately preceded the rise of a thoroughgoing constructivism, and so it can be helpful to examine their views first. Descartes held that ideas are constructions of the mind that it puts together; thus, the mind “patches out” its objects. Still, he allowed for a way to know reality itself: we can discover unconstructed ideas, such as of God. Such ideas are clear and distinct. Locke was one of the British empiricists, and he too thought ideas are the primary objects before the mind. While we make abstract ideas, Locke thought we cannot create simple ideas, for we work with the ideas received by our senses from external objects.[[5]](#footnote-5) For Locke, simple ideas provide a way to access an unconstructed reality.

But with the advent of a more consistent empiricism, the focus in epistemology shifted from ideas to sense experience. Hume (1711-1776) limited knowledge to what comes by way of the five senses. Since we cannot be acquainted empirically with anything immaterial, universals and essential natures would not be knowable. So, even if they did exist, there is no place for essences to do any work. All that could be before the mind would be spatially and temporally located, and thus particular.

Additionally, the flow of our ideas is internally driven; there is nothing that impinges upon the mind externally. Due to his empiricism, be believed that “since nothing is ever really present to the mind, besides its own perceptions, ‘tis not only impossible, that any habit shou’d ever be acquir’d otherwise than by the regular succession of these perceptions, but also that any habit shou’d ever exceed that degree of regularity.”[[6]](#footnote-6) When we perceive an independent, or distinct, existence, or a relation, like identity, these are psychological projections, products of the imagination due to *custom*. To help explain this, Hume claimed

When we have been accustom’d to observe a constancy in certain impressions, and have found, that the perception of the sun or ocean, for instance, returns upon us after an absence or annihilation with like parts and in a like order, as at its first appearance, we are not apt to regard these interrupted perceptions as different (*which they really are*) but on the contrary consider them as individually the same, upon account of their resemblance.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Following his empiricism, while there may be resemblances, there are no numerical identities. Indeed, it seems that a consistent empiricism entails nominalism about properties, as was the case with him. And, his views have to be constructivist because any “objects” are just projections made by the mind from many sense impressions.

Hume’s constructivism by projection leaves us with serious problems. Since we cannot empirically know the mind, or even custom, they too would seem to be projections – but, of what? We seem to face an infinite regress, without an ability to arrive at anything that is doing the projecting.

Kant (1724-1804) combined empiricist and rationalist elements, and he explored the place for reason when “all our knowledge begins with experience,” and experience provides all the content of knowledge.[[8]](#footnote-8) Within those parameters, Kant still affirmed knowledge of certain *a priori* truths,[[9]](#footnote-9) which are valid “absolutely independent of all experience.”[[10]](#footnote-10) For him, reason plays a key role in that we can know some things about the conditions that make experience possible. First, to make sensation possible, the transcendent mind provides the *a priori* forms of intuition. Second, it provides the *a priori* forms of understanding, which are universal and necessary concepts that structure experience.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Kant postulated two realms: the *phenomenal realm,* which is the realm we know by experience; and the *noumenal realm,* which includes things as they are in themselves.[[12]](#footnote-12) Since all the contents of knowledge come by the senses, we have knowledge of the phenomenal realm. However, we cannot *know* the noumena as they truly are in themselves, but only as they appear to us.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Kant realized that on his empiricism, there are no knowable features of our experiences that are universal and necessary; all empirical knowledge is contingent. Therefore, he too seems to be a nominalist, and without a place for essences, too. If we consider the soul to be the essence of each human being, it belongs to the noumena, something about which we have to act *as if* it is real, in order to make ultimate sense of morality. But, it is not an object of knowledge.

Moreover, we each have our own discrete experiences. How then do we get a common world with apparently universal qualities in which to live? In his attempt to synthesize reason with experience, Kant began with sensation and discards unnecessary elements, leaving him with space and time. Then, he considered universal and necessary conditions for the possibilities of having a sensation. Kant utilized what he called the categories, i.e., the universal and necessary conditions for the *one* understanding.[[14]](#footnote-14) The transcendent mind, or ego, uses our sensory input and constructs in each of us a common, “objective” world that we each can know.[[15]](#footnote-15) But it is not a world with a realist’s kind of objective properties. So Kant’s form of constructivism is a transcendental form of making determinate of what is indeterminate in itself (the noumena).

Like Hume’s construction by projection, Kant’s transcendental constructivism likewise poses serious problems for knowledge. If we cannot know things in themselves, but only as they appear to us, then we seem to face an infinite regress without a way to start to have knowledge. Take some appearance A; I cannot know A as it is in itself, for I only know A as it appears to me (A1). Now the process repeats: I cannot know A1 as it truly is; I can only know it as it appears to me (A2). The same problem recurs with A2, A3, and to infinity, such that it seems we cannot get started to know anything empirically.

In reaction, Nietzsche (1844-1900) sharply criticized Kant and attempted to move constructionism to the conscious realm. Moreover, he denied that reality has any general character. Like Hume and (later) Derrida, Nietzsche denied the reality of any numerical identities.[[16]](#footnote-16) Rather, we construct things by taking them to be identical, but in reality they are only similar. Thus, there cannot be any real universals; everything is particular. Nor are there any enduring substances, such as souls and individuated essences (he was a naturalist). Furthermore, things like “cause, sequence, reciprocity, relativity, constraint, number, law, freedom, motive, and purpose” are all notions we have devised.[[17]](#footnote-17) There are not even any truths of reason, truths due to how the world actually is (i.e., Nietzsche rejected Kant’s synthetic a priori judgments).[[18]](#footnote-18)

As a precursor to the linguistic turn, Nietzsche introduced a role for language. For him, the will, being-in-itself, and so on are words. Even the seemingly self-evident truth that we each are subjects of our own thoughts is not simply a given. For him, that there is a self “contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself. One infers here according to the usual *grammatical* formula.”[[19]](#footnote-19) The ways we have been taught to use words deceive us to think such things are real. What lies behind such philosophical views “is this tyrannical impulse itself; the most spiritual Will to Power, the will to ‘creation of the world,’ the will to the *causa prima* …”[[20]](#footnote-20)

Moreover, for him, knowledge is perspectival. What we think reflects the provisional “nature” of all knowledge. Universal truths are not possible because no universals exist metaphysically. Our notions of souls, being-in-itself, etc., just reflect “our artificial (though convenient) *linguistic-conceptual shorthand* for functionally unitary products, processes, and sets of relations.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Nietzsche’s sympathy for a linguistic focus helps illustrate a growing dissatisfaction with empiricism and sense data to be able to make good on our various knowledge claims. The result was the turn to language, for it seemed language is a datum that is determinate which we can observe, and we do in fact talk about many things, whether morals, religion, politics, philosophy, sports, fashions, or other topics. Moreover, the fact that we do talk, and can talk together, made language an attractive candidate that would not be subject to the metaphysical (and resultant epistemological) issues that seemed to plague appeals to ideas and sense experiences. Now the focal point of our knowledge claims would shift from how our ideas or sense experiences could be about reality, to how our words could do that.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The logical positivists, such as A.J. Ayer (1910-1989), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Rudolf Carnap (1891-1970), and Ernst Mach (1838-1916), made just such a move. While they varied somewhat in their views, they still were united by their commitment to naturalism. For Russell, a logical atomist, constructivism belonged to the conscious realm. He agreed with Hume that all that seems to exist in the empirical world (tables, books, etc.) are just fictions, but he differed by holding that these are logical constructs, logical fictions formed by the operation of a *formal* language composed of logical operators, such as and, or, if – then and so on.

In their focus upon the workings of language, the logical positivists stressed the verifiability criterion of meaning: a sentence is meaningful if and only if it was empirically verifiable.[[23]](#footnote-23) So, the meaning of a sentence was not a matter of the intentions of its speaker and what that person “had in mind,” for that suggests an immaterial mental state that could be shareable. Instead, meanings had to fit within the empirical methodology of the natural sciences, and the most likely candidate seemed to be behaviors, whether verbal or nonverbal, which science could study. Without real universals, language had to be limited to empirically verifiable word tokens, and not word types, for those would be universals. In this “turn,” then, nominalism would be applied every bit as much to words and meanings as it had been to other objects in the world.

Then, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), who had been a logical positivist, developed his later philosophy. He focused on ordinary language in actual use (again, a behavioral matter). On it, meaning is not what someone had in mind (a mental state, which is not shareable, and its intentional contents), but it primarily is a matter of use in a social context (a form of life, with its language games).

Brad Kallenberg claims Wittgenstein aimed to clear up conceptual confusions that arise from our trying to achieve general claims of how things *really* are. To do that, we invent essences and universals. Wittgenstein saw this in relation to language:

Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations.--For someone might object against me: “You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but nowhere have said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language ... .” And this is true.--Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,--but that they are related to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or relationships, that we call them all “language.”[[24]](#footnote-24)

For Kallenberg’s Wittgenstein, metaphysical theorizing bewitches us and leaves us in interminable debates.[[25]](#footnote-25) Consider Wittgenstein’s discussion of scientific claims, such as the following:

. . . There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems. These are, of course, not empirical problems; they are solved, rather, by looking into the workings of our language, and that in such a way as to make us recognize those workings: *in despite of* an urge to misunderstand them. The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known. Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Kallenberg also explains that Wittgenstein rejects “representationalism,” i.e., the view that language can represent, or correspond to, reality. But, in defense of Wittgenstein’s appeal to the tie of languages to their contexts, or forms of life, Kallenberg explains

[t]here is no way to talk about what language gets compared with without *talking* about it; there is no criterion for knowing I’ve got the right “this” (this effect, this referent, this object, this sensation, this word) unless language is already in place. Therefore, the “meaning” of a word can only be determined by its place in the linguistic system.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Thus, any attempt to match up our claims with reality itself is futile. For Wittgenstein himself, a meaning is tied to a language-game (and its form of life), and “it gives the wrong idea if you say that the connection between name and object is a psychological one” (i.e., what is before one’s mind in conscious awareness).[[28]](#footnote-28) Instead, for Wittgenstein, “the connection between ‘language and reality’ is made by definition of words, and these belong to grammar, so that language remains self-contained and autonomous.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

Therefore, as Wittgenstein claims, “it is in language that it is all done.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Like Thomas Kuhn, Wittgenstein explains:

All testing, all confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place already within a system. And this system is not a more or less arbitrary and doubtful point of departure for all our arguments: no, it belongs to the essence of what we call an argument. The system is not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Without universals or essences, even to language, everything is particular. There is a strong nominalism running through the later Wittgenstein’s views and for those who follow his views closely.[[32]](#footnote-32) There also is a continued emphasis upon what is empirically observable. Meanings, for instance, are not the intention (understood as a mental state) of an individual, but instead are matters of behavior in a given social setting.

While many consider Wittgenstein to be a fountainhead of Anglo-American postmodernity, people associate Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) with the Continental variety. Nonetheless, his views also demonstrate a strong commitment to nominalism and a lack of essences. Consider Derrida’s claim that “*there is nothing outside the text*.”[[33]](#footnote-33) According to Merold Westphal, this signifies “textuality as a limit within which we have whatever freedom we have.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Epistemically, Westphal explains this means that “Being must always already be conceptualized,” because we do not have access immediately to reality.[[35]](#footnote-35) Metaphysically, things themselves are not what are signified; rather, they are *signs* and thus “essentially point beyond themselves.”[[36]](#footnote-36) Accordingly, Westphal claims “there is no signified that ‘would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign’ by failing to refer beyond itself.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

For Derrida, there is always an absence “to” things. Yet, what is not present somehow is essential to what is present. Moreover, he denies that thoughts, facts, linguistic utterances, etc., are wholes that are complete in themselves. Instead, from one re-presentation to another, there will be *difference*, for there are no numerical identities, not even for uses of the “same” word. There are only particulars without any real essences to them.

Interestingly, we see a pattern from Nietzsche through Derrida: there are no identities, or essences, so everything is particular. While there is the strong emphasis upon the role of language in all these thinkers, there also is the further turn to interpretation, evidenced in Derrida and apparently Wittgenstein too. But, Nietzsche also seemed to have a place for that, for his constructivism was by *taking* things to be identical, which seems to be roughly synonymous with conceptualizing and interpreting things as such. Unfortunately, on these views, there is no limit to what needs to be taken, for it seems nothing simply is given to us. Once again, we are left with an infinite regress, with *everything* being interpretation. Moreover, if everything is particular, and there are no numerical identities, then we are left with only qualitative identities. But, what makes two things qualitatively identical? Ultimately, that seems to depend upon their sharing something in common. But, if everything truly is particular, then why in principle think that two things would share any traits in common? And why wouldn’t the same problem surface for words? If that is the case, then why should we ever hope to communicate our ideas with each other?

Now, we already have seen two examples of naturalists (Nietzsche and the logical positivists) in this broad, constructivist tradition. But other naturalists’ views seem to end up being kinds of constructivism, too. As an illustration, like most naturalists, Daniel Dennett (1942- ) not only rejects essences, he also embraces nominalism. He describes himself as a functionalist about so-called “mental” properties, like thoughts and intentionality. For him, they are not real. Instead, they are just attributions (or interpretations) we make from observing the behavior of an “intentional system” (like a human being, a sophisticated computer, or an android like Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*), which enable us to predict their behavior. By treating Data as though “he” has intentions and thoughts about how to win a game of chess, we can predict what moves he will make in response to the various moves of his opponent. Does Data really have thoughts that are about the winning the game? No, for naturalism does not allow for irreducible, real mental entities.

Yet, Dennett assumes he and others can make interpretations from our observations of such systems. But what do those interpretations involve? It seems they must really be about the behavior of the objects being observed. Otherwise, plainly, on his own view, Dennett’s observations and interpretations *themselves* must be just interpretations – but, in that case, of what? In that scenario, we “lose” the object being observed as something we can know.

Now, as I have argued elsewhere, if we pay attention to (for example) our thoughts, they seem to have their intentionality *intrinsically*; my thought of my smartphone could not be about something else and still be the thought it is. If it could be changed to being about my lunch, then it would be a different thought. That is, a given thought seems to have a quality to it that defines it as the thought that it is. This, of course, is a classic example of an essence which defines the *whatness* of a thing. So, for even Dennett’s intentional-stance interpretations to be about an object, it seems they would have an essence.

For Dennett, of course, this cannot be the case. He argues that there are no “deeper” facts (e.g., of our mental states’ contents) that would fix the meanings of our thoughts.[[38]](#footnote-38) Dennett draws upon Quine’s thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation to show there will be no deeper facts that fix the meaning of words, or behaviors, because there are *no essences* to do that. Therefore, Dennett admits, “Quine’s thesis of the indeterminacy of radical translation is thus of a piece with his attack on essentialism; if things had real, intrinsic essences, they could have real, intrinsic meanings” (Dennett 1990, 319, note 8).

But, without essences, there are no deeper facts whatsoever. Therefore, it always will be a matter of interpretation what someone meant when doing *x*. And without any deeper facts, there will not be a fact to those interpretations either. Accordingly, there will be a regress of interpretations without a way to start. Further, even Dennett’s so-called “brute” facts of reality (real brains; real, objective patterns; real physical forces) would lack any “deeper facts” that make them what they are. Everything ends up being a construction – at best. [[39]](#footnote-39)

**Tying the Threads Together**

There are some common threads to these major, historical forms of constructivism. First, all are nominalist. That is the case even across a range of otherwise different philosophical positions, including empiricists like Hume and Kant,[[40]](#footnote-40) naturalists like Nietzsche, the logical positivists, and Dennett, and those like Wittgenstein and Derrida, who have helped spearhead the postmodern turn. Second, while some are explicitly empiricist, the others at least have tendencies toward favoring the empirical.[[41]](#footnote-41) Still, third, none of them have any place for essences – either they do not exist, or, charitably, even if they do, they do no work.

These three factors work together in complex ways. Empiricism naturally suggests nominalism, and it has no place for essences. Similarly, a denial of essences suggests nominalism and empiricism. If someone denies essences exist, or has no place for them to do any philosophical work, then it seems universals (at least as Plato’s abstract objects, or even Aristotle’s forms, but not Armstrong’s immanent ones) would be undercut. Moreover, without essences, it seems hard to understand how there could be any numerical identities, again pushing us to nominalism. And, without essences, empiricism naturally fits as a constructivist epistemology.

But, when we look historically at Ockham’s nominalism, it is fairly easy to see how nominalism helped lead to an “anti-essentialist” mindset and empiricism. Nominalism leads us to think that all that exists are non-identical particulars (particular properties, or particular, propertied-objects). So, they would not seem to have room for essences. Also, being particular, they would be located in space and time, and thus we would tend to expect them to be empirically accessible. Indeed, nominalism was reflected in Francis Bacon’s (1561-1626) atomist philosophy.[[42]](#footnote-42) Based on that, his scientific method rejected Aristotle’s final and formal causes, both of which were immaterial and tied to a thing’s essence, and instead stressed efficient and material causes. Influenced by his nominalism, Bacon removed from the practice of science these immaterially-based causes.

While nominalism seems sufficient for a view to be constructivist, and problematically so, because it seems we cannot get started and know any qualitative facts of reality if there are no essences. And, as simples, there are no qualitative facts to be known. However, nominalism does not seem to be necessary for constructivism.[[43]](#footnote-43) I have argued elsewhere that naturalism in general is a constructivist view. Yet, not every naturalist is a nominalist. Consider D.M. Armstrong, who was a materialist and an immanent realist. He thus accepted the reality of universals, though they must be accounted for in a materialist ontology. Arguably, his view is constructivist, but as I argue elsewhere, it is because he embraces materialism and thus denies essences.[[44]](#footnote-44)

So, Willard’s point seems right, that the breakdown in our being able to make good on our knowledge claims (due to the pervasive effects of constructivist epistemologies) is due to a breakdown in ontology. Historically speaking, it seems that that breakdown can be linked and traced to the ascendancy of nominalism in western philosophy.

1. I am bracketing God from such discussions; for theists, they may limit this claim to creation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See my “Thinking About Particulars,” Evangelical Philosophical Society national conference presentation, 2015, in Atlanta, GA. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See my “Craig’s Nominalism and the High Cost of Preserving Divine Aseity,” forthcoming, *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E.g., see his various discussions of a “Midas Touch” epistemology, such as "Predication as Originary Violence: A Phenomenological Critique of Derrida's View of Intentionality," in *Working through Derrida*, Gary B. Madison, ed., (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 120-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1976), 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), 247-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 249 (emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, I, trans. and ed. by Carl J. Friedrich, in *The Philosophy of Kant: Immanuel Kant’s Moral and Political Writings* (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, I, trans. and ed. by Friedrich, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. These included analytic *a priori* truths *(*true by definition) and synthetic *a priori* truths (true due to how the world is). So, for him, there are certain truths that are necessary and universal. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Immanuel Kant, “Prolegomena to Every Future Metaphysics that may be Presented as a Science,” *The Philosophy of Kant*, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), 88. These are the categories, including, for example, causality, substance, unity and modality. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ch. III. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Still, Kant made an exception for morals due to how he conceived of them as categorical imperatives, which, to be absolutes, would have to come from the realm that is unchanging – the noumena. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ch. I, sec. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., ch. II, sec. 2. Clearly, this is not a metaphysically objective world, however, but a common one that we can know. Moreover, the transcendent self seems to be a posit, since we cannot know it empirically. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Friedrich Nietzsche, “Life, Knowledge, and Self-Consciousness,” selection from *The Joyful Wisdom*, in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. On substances, see Ibid., 324. For the quote, see “Prejudices of Philosophers,” selection from *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (New York: The Free Press, 1969), 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Nietzsche, “Prejudices of Philosophers,” 332, 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 338 (my emphasis added to “grammatical”). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See this description in Richard Schacht, “Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 615 (emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Of course, this is not to say that we do not do many other things with words. This has been a good emphasis of many authors, including J.L. Austin and his work on speech-act theory, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina [Sbisà](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_3?ie=UTF8&text=Marina+Sbis%C3%A0&search-alias=books&field-author=Marina+Sbis%C3%A0&sort=relevancerank), 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Of course, once people realized that the verifiability criterion could not meet its own criteria, it self-destructed. But, that did not mean an end to an empirical focus upon what is knowable or meaningful, or of all that the logical positivists emphasized. The urge to find a naturalistic basis for meanings remains strong. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. 3d ed., ed. G.E. M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, trans. by G.E. M. Anscombe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), §65. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §109. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar*, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar,* ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), §56. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., §55. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., §95. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty,* ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), §105. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. For example, another nominalist, Alasdair MacIntyre closely follows the later Wittgenstein in his *After Virtue* and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* See my *In Search of Moral Knowledge* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), chs. 9 and 11 for that discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1976), 158, quoted in Westphal, “Hermeneutics as Epistemology,” 429. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Westphal, “Hermeneutics as Epistemology,” 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 49, as quoted by Westphal, “Hermeneutics as Epistemology,” 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Dennett 1990, 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. It seems that, in principle, the same result should hold for other naturalists as well, for they deny essences. They also (almost always) embrace nominalism. I argue to this end in *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth-claims* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Of course, Kant also was a rationalist. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. I am not sure it is accurate to claim that Wittgenstein’s and Derrida’s views are empiricist. I think to show that would require an argument to that effect. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. This also was the case with Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), who was an atomist, empiricist, and rationalist. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. For example, I have argued elsewhere that externalism in epistemology also results in constructivism. See my *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality: Testing Religious Truth-claims* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 150-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See ch. 1 of *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality.* [↑](#footnote-ref-44)