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Externalization and the Transcendental Origin of Language: An Ontological Reinterpretation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

This study reconsiders the origin of language through the concept of the human "desire for externalization," arguing that externalization cannot be explained solely by historical, biological, or technical processes but rests on a transcendental ground. It first evaluates classical approaches from Aristotle to Humboldt, together with the analytic and phenomenological traditions, in the context of the problemof externalization. It then examines Leroi-Gourhan's theory of exteriorization and Stiegler's concepts of organology, epiphylogenesis, and the pharmakon, showing that these approaches describe how externalization occurs yet fail to account for its condition of possibility. The central claim is that externalization is not the transfer of ready-made thoughts to the external world but the manifestation of the transcendental synthesis that makes meaning, judgment, and linguistic structure possible. A transcendental philosophy of language was indeed developed after Kant,notably by Cassirer and Apel. What has not been undertaken is the transcendental grounding of linguistics as a science, that is, the exhibition of the a priori principles under which linguistic meaning is first possible. The present study does not carry out that grounding; it establishes its necessity and sets out the framework for doing so. The argument is then applied to the linguistic performance of large language models, and the study concludes that the fundamental distinction between the human being and artificial intelligence lies not in linguistic performance but in the transcendental capacity to constitute meaning.

Keywords: Origin of language; externalization; transcendental philosophy of language; transcendental synthesis; artificial intelligence; Immanuel Kant.

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1. Introduction

In the history of philosophy, the origin of language has been treated not merelyas a historical question of when and how language emerged, but as a fundamental philosophical problem about the human capacity to constitute meaning. Thinkers fromAristotle to Augustine, from al-Fārābī to Ibn Khaldūn, and from Leibniz to Rousseau, Herder, Fichte, and Humboldt have accordingly sought to explain the origin of languagein terms of sociality, reason, will, affect, or metaphysical principles. Yet however different the ontological and epistemological grounds of these approaches, they share a common assumption: language is an external appearance of the relation the human being establishes with the world. This shared premise, however, has never fully answered what more fundamental condition makes language possible in the first place.

Over the past two centuries, developments in linguistics, cognitive sciences, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence have carried these debates into a new register. In particular, the capacity of large language models to generate outputs closely resembling human speech has revived the question of whether language consists merely of computable symbolic operations or rests instead on a more fundamental meaning-constituting capacity that distinguishes the human being from other cognitive systems. The classical question "How did language arise?" has thus become "What makes language possible?" This second question requires investigating not only the historical origin of language but also its ontological and transcendental ground.

This article reconsiders that problem through the concept of human desire for externalization. Its central claim is twofold. First, historical, biological, and technical accounts of the origin of language describe how language and its externalization occur but leave unexplained the transcendental condition that makes them possible. The second is that although a transcendental philosophy of language was developed after Kant, notably by Cassirer and Apel, the transcendental grounding of linguistics as a science, that is, the exhibition of the a priori principles under which linguistic meaning is first possible, has not been undertaken. The present article does not carry out that grounding; it establishes its necessity and setsout the framework within which it can be carried out. Externalization is therefore understood here not as a historical process denoting merely the emergence of technical objects, writing, or cultural production, but as the manifestation of the transcendental synthesis that makes possible the constitution of meaning, judgment, and linguistic structure. This approach does not reject contemporary interpretations that place technical externalization at the center; it seeks rather to investigate the more fundamental philosophical ground that makes such interpretations possible.

At the outset, it is important to clarify the terminology used here. The ontological question concerns whatlanguage is, that is, its mode of being and its status; the transcendental question concerns how language is possible, that is, the a priori conditions that make it so. Although these two questions are distinguished here, they are pursued together: the reinterpretation of the ontological status of language is carried out through transcendental inquiry, since what language is can be determined only from the conditions that make it possible. The phrase "ontological reinterpretation" in the title thus names the conclusion the study reaches, while "transcendental" names the mode of inquiry through which it is reached.

The first section accordingly re-examines the principal accounts of the origin of language in the history of philosophy along the axis of the problem of externalization. The theories of technical externalization advanced by André Leroi-Gourhan and Bernard Stiegler are then examined, and their explanatory power and limits are assessed. The final section sets out, on the basis of Kant's transcendental philosophy, the framework within which a transcendental grounding of language and of linguistics could be carried out, and argues that the fundamental distinction between human language and artificial intelligence lies not in linguistic performance but in the transcendental synthesis that makes meaning possible.

2. Externalization: A conceptual framework

The concept of externalization, which serves as the central concept of this study, designates in its most general sense the process whereby the human being renders what is inner visible, shareable, and enduring in the external world. The externalization at issue here, however, is not employed in the sense of a merely psychological expression (*expressio*), nor in the sense of transferring cognitive contents onto physical symbols. Externalization is treated rather as an ontological orientation that enables the human being to objectify its own existence, its world of meaning, and its relation to the world through language, writing, technics, and cultural structures. In this sense, externalization is nota historical mode of behavior acquired after the fact; it is an essential characteristic of how the human being relatesto the world.

Within this conceptual framework, externalization must be distinguished from expression, representation, objectification, and socialization, with which it is frequently conflated. Expression (*expressio*) denotes the outward conveyance of a thought or feeling presumed to exist beforehand, whereas representation (*repraesentatio*)

denotes the mental or linguistic reconstitution of contents pertaining to the external world. Objectification, inturn, expresses the transformation of human activities into independent objective structures. Externalization, by contrast, names the more fundamental movement that makes all these processes possible, namely the orientation by which the human being can constitute its own immanent horizon of meaning in the externalworld. Socialization likewise is a historical appearance arising from externalization rather than its principle. The human being does not merely use language within society;rather, sociality itself follows from the human capacityfor self-externalization through language. Externalizationshould therefore be assessed as a principle that explains socialization, not as a consequence of socialization that needs explanation.

A close examination of theories of the origin of language in the history of philosophy reveals a shared assumption, despite their markedly different grounds. Aristotle, in defining the human being as *zoon logon echon*, treated language as a necessary condition of political existence (Aristotle, 1984a, 1984b); Augustine grounded the inner word as prior to outward speech (Augustine, 1991, 2003); al-Fārābī and Ibn Khaldūn explained language as a constitutive principle of social life (al-Fārābī, 2008; Ibn Khaldūn, 1967); Rousseau identified the passions (Rousseau, 1997), Herder the reflective awareness (*Besonnenheit*) distinctive of the human being (Herder, 2002), and Fichte the "linguistic drive" in human nature (Fichte, 2011), as the essential cause of the emergence of language. Humboldt, for his part, interpreted language as a creative activity (*energeia*) in which the human spirit objectifies itself (Humboldt, 2011). However different the metaphysical and epistemological grounds of these explanations may be, they share a common point: they relate language to the process by which the human being realizes itself in the external world. The problem debated throughout the history of philosophy is therefore not only how language arose, but why the human being seeks to render itself visible in the external world.

Contemporary theories of technics, in particular Leroi-Gourhan's concept of exteriorization (*exteriorisation*) and Stiegler's concept of epiphylogenesis (*épiphylogenèse*), offer significant contributions to explaining the technical and historical dimensions of externalization (Abbinnett, 2018, p. 11; Leroi-Gourhan, 1993; Stiegler, 1998). In these accounts, human memory exceeds the natural limits of the body and acquires continuity within technical milieus through writing, tools, and digital technologies. Yet, while such accounts set out with considerable success how technical externalization occurs, they describe its historical development rather than explaining the condition that makes it possible. In other words, they focus on the evolutionary appearance of technical externalization rather than on its condition of possibility.

At this point, the starting position of the present study becomes determinate. Externalization is not a factual occurrence to be explained solely through historical, biological, or technical processes. Rather, it points to a more fundamental transcendental condition that makes all these processes possible. The human being can externalize the world through language only insofar as it can constitute that world as a meaningful whole. Externalization is therefore not a consequence of the human use of language; it is thebecoming-visible of the transcendental structure that makes language possible. For this reason, externalization will be treated here not as a psychological or technical concept but, in the Kantian sense, as the manifestationof the human capacity to constitute meaning. Historical accounts of the origin of language and the theories of technical externalization advanced by contemporary philosophy of technology will thus be reassessed with respect to the transcendental conditions that make human linguistic existence possible.

The understanding of externalization defended hereis accordingly rethought, beyond historical or technical explanation, within the possibilities afforded by Kant's transcendental philosophy. Kant, as is well known, nowhere developed "externalization" as a systematic concept. Nevertheless, the transcendental synthesisset out in the *Critique of Pure Reason* offers a powerful philosophical ground for investigating the conditions that make externalization possible. For Kant, the guiding question is not how the human being represents the world,but what conditions make representation itself possible (Kant, 1998, A92–94/B124–129).

In this respect, externalization is understood here not as the transfer of ready-made contents already possessed by the human being to the external world, but as themanifestation of the transcendental activity that makes the initial constitution of meaning possible. For the human being can have experience of an object only insofar as it can bring the manifold of intuition (*Mannigfaltigkeit der Anschauung*) into unity under the synthetic activity ofthe productive imagination (*produktive Einbildungskraft*) (Kant, 1998, A118–119, B151–152). Without this synthetic unity, concepts cannot acquire objective significance, nor can judgments be formed. Language, accordingly, is not merely the external bearer of already constituted meanings;it is rather the becoming-visible of transcendental synthesis.

This has an important consequence for the present argument. If judgment (*Urteil*) is the product of the synthetic unity between intuition and concept, then language is the becoming-expressible of that same synthetic

unity. Language, in other words, is not an instrument subsequently appended to thought; it is the external appearance of judgment. Externalization musttherefore be assessed not merely as a psychological form of expression or a mode of social communication, but as the manifestation of transcendental synthesis. The problem of externalization thus becomes a problem prior to, and constitutive of, the problem of the origin of language. Indeed, the synthesis effected by the productive imagination does not merely gather the sensible manifold; it also constitutes the precondition for the emergence ofobjectivity and meaning (Kant, 1998, B129–136). Human language is precisely the manifestation of this meaning- constituting activity. Linguistic expressions are not mechanical bearers of antecedently completed thoughts but visible forms of the process by which meaning is constituted. Syntax, semantics, and linguistic meaning should therefore be assessed not as mutually independent domains but as distinct strata in the appearance of transcendental synthesis.

In this connection, the human desire for externalization is, before it is a psychological drive or a biological need, the manifestation of transcendental synthesis. The human being is not a living creature that subsequently learns to use language; on the contrary, because it is the only being capable of constituting the world as a meaningful whole, it necessarily externalizes language. Externalization is therefore not one historical activity of the human being; it is the becoming-visible of the transcendental structure that makes the human being capable of constituting history at all. This is precisely where theories of technical externalization fall short. Technical objects, writing, digital systems, and artificial intelligence can be understood only as historical extensions of a meaning-constituting transcendental activity already rendered possible. Epiphylogenetic memory, in other words, does not replace transcendental synthesis; it represents its historical and technical appearance.

A possible objection warrants attention here. It might be thought that evolutionary and cognitive accounts of the origin of language, such as those deriving language from shared intentionality and cooperative communicative practices (Tomasello, 2008), or those that locate it in the evolution of a narrowly specified computational faculty (Berwick & Chomsky, 2016; Hauser et al., 2002), leave no need for a transcendental ground. Such accounts differ sharply: the first treats language as an adaptation for cooperation, and the second denies that it is primarily a communicative adaptation at all; yet both tacitly presuppose the very capacity they set out to explain. Shared intentionality is possible only insofar as agents can constitute the world as a meaningful whole susceptible of judgment; behaviors such as pointing, intention-reading, and joint attention already require a synthetic capacity that grasps a manifold under unity. Naturalistic accounts, in other words, show the processes within which language emerged while leaving unexplained the possibility of the meaning-constituting capacity that bears those processes, treating it instead as already explained. The distinction at issue is that between the order of genesis and the order of validity, that is, between the question of fact (*quid facti*) and the question of right (*quid juris*): empirical inquiry takes as its object the formation of language, whereas transcendental inquiry takes as its object the conditions under which that formation is possible as a meaningful structure. The search for a transcendental ground is thus not a rejection of empirical explanations but the pursuitof a different question that they neither answer nor can answer.

3. Philosophical approaches to the origin of language

Although debates concerning the origin of language have been conducted on different conceptual foundations throughout the history of philosophy, a significant proportion of these accounts take shape around the ways in which the human being renders itself visible in the external world. Language has at times been interpretedas a manifestation of human social nature, at times of the capacity for thought, and at times of the affects and the will. However different the ontological and epistemological commitments underlying these approaches, they share a common point: treating language as a relation established between the inner world of the human being and theexternal world.

One of the first systematic instances of this approachis found in Aristotle. By defining the human being asboth *zoon politikon* and *zoon logon echon*, Aristotle treats language as inseparable from human social and political existence. For him, *logos* is a capacity encompassing not only speech but also reason, meaning, and deliberation. Language is therefore not merely a technical instrument enabling communication; it is the fundamental condition that makes it possible for human beings to establish a common life and to deliberate together about justice and the good (Aristotle, 1984b). This line of thought continuedin the Middle Ages with Augustine, who, by placing the inner word (*verbum interius*) before the external use of language, argues that linguistic expression rests first on an inner process of constituting meaning (Augustine, 1991, 2003). Thomas Aquinas develops this approach further, interpreting language as a structure mediating between reason and reality, whereby language becomes a vehicle enabling both thought and truth to be expressed in the external world (Aquinas, 1947).

In Islamic thought, al-Fārābī and Ibn Khaldūn likewise treat language as a constitutive element of social life. For al-Fārābī, language is the fundamental instrument enabling the formation of shared meaning (al-Fārābī, 2008); Ibn Khaldūn, for his part, assesses language as a social phenomenon shaped alongside the developmentof civilization (Ibn Khaldūn, 1967). In both thinkers, language is understood less as an individual faculty than as a common ground that makes social togetherness possible.

In the modern period, the center of gravity of the debate begins to shift. Although Leibniz does not explain language directly as a product of desire, he establishes an important relation between the inner development of the human being and language through the concept of *appetition*, the internal principle of motion of the monads. Because it tends to render its perceptions more perfect, the human monad externalizes its thoughts through symbolic structures such as language, art, and science. Language thereby becomes a rational system of representation that opens the individual's inner world of meaning to others (Leibniz, 1989).

Among the most important thinkers to explain the origin of language on the basis of the affects is Rousseau. For Rousseau, the first factor that made humans speak was not physiological need but powerful passions such as love, fear, pain, and anger. Accordingly, the first language bears a poetic, figurative, and affective character rather than a strictly logical one (Rousseau, 1997). Herder's 1772 treatise, written against both Süssmilch's thesis of the divine institution of language and Rousseau's derivation of it from the passions, marks a decisive turn at this point. For Herder, language arises neither from divine gift nor from animal cry but from *Besonnenheit*, the reflective awareness by which the human being can hold one mark of the sensible manifold before itself and take that mark as a sign. Language, on this account, is not something added to reflection after the fact; it is reflection's first exercise (Herder, 2002). Of all the accounts surveyed here, Herder's stands closest to the position defended below, since it too seeks a capacity prior to language rather than a cause of its appearance. It differs, however, in describing that capacity psychologically, as a mode of attention belonging to the human soul, rather than establishing it, as the following sections will attempt to do, through an inquiry into the conditions of possible experience. Fichte, unlike Rousseau, does not reduce language to the affects alone, yet maintains that human nature contains a "linguistic drive" that impels human beings to share their thoughts with others. Language thus emerges not merely from a need for communication but from a fundamental tendency that expresses the human orientation toward opening itself to others (Fichte, 2011, p. 71). This line of thought attains a more comprehensive philosophical framework in Humboldt, who interprets language as a creative activity (*energeia*) in which the human mind continually realizes itself in the external world. Language is not merely an instrument through which thought is expressed but the dynamic process in which thought itself is formed and developed (Humboldt, 2011, p. 111). In a similar vein, Ernest Renan assesses language as one of the fundamental forms of expression that render human social and cultural existence visible (Renan, 2011, p. 56).

Taken together, these approaches show that philosophers have developed markedly different accounts of the origin of language. Some have grounded language in sociality, others in reason and consciousness, and still others in affect, will, or creative activity. The fundamental point on which these theories converge, however, is that language isa structure that makes the inner world of human meaningvisible in the external world. In other words, although each advances different grounds, all accept language as a form ofhuman externalization. Yet while these approaches explain how externalization occurs, they focus on its historical, social, or psychological appearances rather than explainingthe more fundamental condition that makes it possible.

4. The problem of the externalization of language after Kant

Although Kant's transcendental philosophy did not take language directly and systematically as its theme, the approach he developed to the conditions of possibility of meaning, judgment, and experience deeply influenced subsequent debates in the philosophy of language. From the late 19th century onward, however, this Kantian legacy was reinterpreted in two different directions. On one side,the analytic tradition sought to explain language through logical analysis; on the other, phenomenology attempted to reground language along the axis of consciousness,meaning, and lived experience. The problem of language externalization accordingly developed along two distinct philosophical trajectories.

Within the analytic tradition, Frege and Russell approached language primarily in terms of its logical and semantic structure, grounding the origin of language not in psychological processes or affective orientations but in the logical form of propositions. In reconstituting the relation between language and thought at the level of symbolic logic, this approach increasingly tended to reduce meaning to formal structures (Frege, 1948; Russell, 1905). Moving away from Kant's conception of synthetic knowledge, the mathematical and logical foundations of analytic truths thereby came to the fore. This transformation proved decisive in forming the conceptual ground on which modern theories of computation and research in artificial

intelligence would draw. Indeed, Alan Turing's approach, which converted the question "Can machines think?" into behavioral criteria (Turing, 1950), together with John Searle's Chinese Room thought experiment, reopened the distinction between linguistic performance and meaning, showing that the relation between the human being and the machine cannot be explained solely through symbolic operations (Searle, 1980).

Wittgenstein occupies a special position within this tradition. While in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* he explains the relation between language and world through logical picturing (Wittgenstein, 1961), in his later period he assesses language, through the concept of "language games," as an inseparable part of social life (Wittgenstein, 2009). Language thereby ceases to be merely a logical system describing facts and becomes a practical activity in which human beings produce meaning within determinate forms of life. Although Wittgenstein does not explain the origin of language through the concept of externalization, his relating of language to social practices makes an important contribution to the idea that the human being realizes itself through language.

The phenomenological tradition addressed the same problem from a different direction. For Husserl, language is, prior to being a totality of logical forms, the external appearance of the meaning-constituting activity of intentional consciousness. Linguistic expressions objectify the noematic contents of consciousness, while meaning is constituted through intersubjective relations within the life-world (*Lebenswelt*). Language is therefore not merely an instrument that makes communication possible; it is a constitutive element of the relation the human being establishes with the world (Husserl, 1970, pp. 269–299, 2001). Heidegger carries the phenomenological approach onto a more ontological plane, defining language as the "house of Being." For Heidegger, language is not a neutral instrument through which the human being conveys its thoughts to the external world but the historical horizon in which Being discloses itself. Dasein establishes its relation to the world and to its own being through language; language is thus an essential dimension of human existence. In this respect, externalization in Heidegger is not the outward transfer of subjective thoughts but the becoming-visible of Being through the human being (Heidegger, 1971, 1996). It should be noted that Heidegger's conception of language contains an explicit critique of the philosophy of the transcendental subject; the appeal to Heidegger here therefore does not imply the adoption of his ontological framework, but points to the common ground his objection to the instrumental conception of language shares with the question of the conditions that make language possible.

The relation between the transcendental approach and language in post-Kantian philosophy did not, however, develop solely through the analytic and phenomenological traditions. Already among Kant's contemporaries, Hamann directed a "metacritique" at critical philosophy, arguing that reason cannot be criticized independently of language (Hamann, 2007); this line, proceeding through Herder and Humboldt, found systematic expression in the 20th centuryin Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. By extending Kant's categories to the activity of symbolic formation, Cassirer interpreted language, alongside myth and science, as a constitutive form of meaning (Cassirer, 1955).Similarly, Apel transformed transcendental philosophy along the axis of language, developing a "transcendental pragmatics" that locates the conditions of meaning and validity in the a priori structure of the communication community (Apel, 1980).

These approaches occupy the same problem field as the present study insofar as they carry the transcendental question into the philosophy of language, and the argument developed here is indebted to them for thatmove. They differ from it in the question they place first. Cassirer and Apel take symbolic and linguistic formation to be the level at which the conditions of meaning and validity are to be located, and they develop that level with a systematic richness the present study does not attempt to match. The question pursued here is a prior and narrower one: what synthetic capacity must already be in play for a symbolic form to be formed at all, or for a communication community to be entered? Posing that question does not require denying that language operates as a condition of meaning once it is in place; it requires onlythat the conditions of language itself remain a legitimate object of transcendental inquiry. The claim advanced here is therefore not that a transcendental philosophy of language was never developed; it plainly was. It is that the transcendental grounding of linguistics as a science, an inquiry into the a priori principles under which linguistic meaning is first possible, comparable in form to the grounding Kant sought for natural science, has not been undertaken, within these traditions or outside them. It is at that point that the present study locates its contribution.

Although the analytic and phenomenologicaltraditions pursue different orientations, both have offeredimportant openings regarding the externalization of language. Yet whereas the analytic tradition increasingly reduced language to formal structures, phenomenology foregrounded the subjective and ontological dimensionof meaning. Neither approach, however, directly explains the transcendental condition that makes externalization possible. This lacuna would resurface in the second half of the 20th century, above all in theories of technical externalization: André Leroi-Gourhan and Bernard Stiegler placed externalization at the center of human technical and

cultural existence, thereby carrying the problem onto a new plane.

5. Technical externalization: A contemporary approach to the origin oflanguage

The preceding sections examined classical and modern approaches to the origin of language and showed how language has been grounded successively in sociality, reason, consciousness, and the processes of constituting meaning. From the second half of the 20th century onward, however, the question took a different direction. The fundamental issue was no longer merely how language arose, but how the human being externalizes thought, memory, and cultural accumulation through technical instruments. The problem of language thus came to be treated alongside the problems of technics, memory, and culture. One of the most important representatives of this transformation is Bernard Stiegler, who in *Technics and Time* develops, in a manner inspired by Heidegger's concept of Dasein, an account of Dasein as constituted through technics (Stiegler, 1998, pp. 134–184); the other is André Leroi-Gourhan. Both thinkers assess language not merely as a system enabling communication among human beings but as a historical process of exteriorization that makes it possible for the human being to exceed its biological limits. From this perspective, writing, technical instruments, and digital technologies are structures that enable human memory to gain continuity in the external world. Language thereby ceases to be merely an expression of meaning and becomes a constitutive element of human historical existence (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993).

This section first addresses Leroi-Gourhan's conception of exteriorization and then examines the theory of technical externalization that Stiegler develops through the concepts of organology, epiphylogenetic memory, and the pharmakon. The aim is less to rehearse these theories in detail than to determine the extent to which contemporary philosophy of technics explains the problems of the origin of language and of human externalization.

5.1. Exteriorization and technical memory in André Leroi-Gourhan

The systematic treatment of technical externalization becomes salient in the anthropological approach Leroi-Gourhan developed to human evolution. Arguing that biological evolution alone is insufficient to explain human development, Leroi-Gourhan treats technical production as a constitutive element of hominization. For him, the human being is not a creature that passively adapts to nature but a being that continually extends and transforms its own biological limits through technical instruments. Human history is therefore at the same time the history of technical exteriorization (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993). In Leroi-Gourhan's thought, exteriorization (*exteriorisation*) designates the human being's progressive transfer of its bodily and mental functions to instruments outside the body. The line of technical development extending from the first stone tools to the invention of writing made it possible for the human being to preserve in the external world not only its physical strength but also its memory, knowledge, and experience.

Technical objects thereby ceased to be simple extensionsof the body and became bearers securing human historical continuity (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993). Within this approach, language and writing constitute one of the most important stages of technical exteriorization. Whereas oral language makes it possible to transmit individual experience to others, writing exceeds the temporal limits of memory and enables the formation of a collective accumulation of knowledge. Knowledge thus ceases to be transient content bound to the individual mind and becomes a historical inheritance transmissible across generations. For Leroi-Gourhan, human culture develops precisely through this process of exteriorization (Leroi-Gourhan, 1993).

Exteriorization is therefore not merely a concept explaining technical progress. It is also an anthropological principle explaining how human modes of thinking, memory, and social organization have been transformed. Through technics, the human being does not merely alter its environment; it also reorganizes its own cognitive capacity. With the development of instruments, the processes of memory, attention, and learning likewise assume historically different forms. Technics thus becomes an inseparable component of human existence rather than a set of neutral objects standing outside the human being (Leroi-Gourhan, 1965). Stiegler, for his part, links exteriorization directly to human subjectivity, memory, and historical existence, taking it beyond a merely anthropological process through the concepts of technical memory, organology, and epiphylogenetic memory (Abbinnett, 2018, p. 76; Stiegler, 2009a, pp. 22–24).

5.2 General organology and technicalexternalization in Bernard Stiegler

Stiegler does not leave exteriorization at the level of anthropological explanation; he transforms it into a comprehensive philosophical theory of human historical existence. For him, the fundamental characteristic that distinguishes the human being from other living creaturesis not merely its possession of reason but its capacity to continually constitute itself through technics. The human being completes its biological evolution through technical development and compensates for its own default through technical objects. Technics is therefore not a set of instruments the human being subsequently employs but an essential element of the process of hominization (Abbinnett,

2018, p. 11; Stiegler, 1998, pp. 134–184). Stiegler grounds this idea in the concept of "general organology," which explains human existence through three inseparableorgan systems: biological organs, technical organs, and social organizations. These three structures reciprocally transform one another; every change in technical objects reshapes both the cognitive structure of the individual and social institutions (Abbinnett, 2018, p. 5; Stiegler, 2013).

Technics thus ceases to consist of passive objects standing outside the human being and becomes a set of constitutive structures participating directly in the formation of thought, memory, and culture. Within this framework, language too is not merely a symbolic system serving the purposes of communication. Language is a historical structure that develops together with technical organs and makes possible the continuity of collective memory (Abbinnett, 2018, pp. 76–77; Stiegler, 2009a, pp. 22–24). The invention of writing, the emergence of printing, and the development of digital technologies alter the bearing milieus of language while also transforming the human mode of thinking. Technical change and linguistic transformation should therefore be assessed not as mutually independent processes but as different appearances of the same historical movement. This constitutive role of technics yields an important consequence for Stiegler's conception of the human being. The human being is not a completed entity but an open being that continually reconstitutes itself through technics. Technical progress accordingly signifies not merely the development of the means of production but also the reorganization of human memory, attention, modes of learning, and cultural continuity. Technical externalization thus becomes a fundamental dynamic of human historical existence (Abbinnett, 2018, p. 73; Stiegler, 2009a, p. 21, 2014, pp. 47–51).

5.3. Epiphylogenetic memory and the pharmakon

The second concept at the center of Stiegler's philosophy of technics is epiphylogenetic memory. For Stiegler, human memory cannot be explained solely through genetic inheritance or individual experience. Humanity has transferred its knowledge and experience to technical bearers such as writing, images, archives, books, and digital media, thereby producing a third domain of memory beyond biological memory. This memory can persist after an individual's death and forms the ground of cultural continuity (Abbinnett, 2018, p. 35; Stiegler, 1998, 2009b). In this view, writing is not merely an instrument for recording thought; it also restructures the relation the human being establishes with time. Derrida, indeed, questioned the traditional conception that regards writing as a secondary record of speech, drawing attention to writing's constitutive role in the constitution of meaning (Derrida, 1997). Through technical memory, the past can be preserved, the future planned, and the transmission of shared knowledge across generations rendered possible. In this respect, human history is also the history of the development of technical memory. Stiegler conceptualizes this third stratum of memory as "tertiary retention," extending Husserl's distinction between primary and secondary retention: all technical bearers, from writing to digital recording, render a past that consciousness has not lived a constitutive element of experience (Stiegler, 2009b).

Stiegler interprets this process alongside the conceptof the pharmakon in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Abbinnett, 2018, p.34; Derrida, 1981, pp. 61–171; Stiegler, 2011, pp. 124–127).The pharmakon is an ambivalent concept signifying both remedy and poison (Stiegler, 2013, pp. 1–20). Technics can likewise develop human cognitive capacities while also leading to their atrophy. Digital technologies facilitateaccess to information while also producing new forms of dependency in attention, memory, and critical thinking. For Stiegler, technics is therefore never neutral. Technical objects are active structures that transform the human mode of thinking, experience of time, and social relations.In the digital age in particular, the large-scale delegation ofthe production and circulation of knowledge to algorithmic systems renders individual memory increasinglydependent upon technical milieus. Exteriorization thus emerges not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as a process that reshapes human subjectivity.

5.4. Language, technics, and externalization in thedigital age

The development of artificial intelligence technologies and large language models makes it necessary to rethink Stiegler's theory of technical externalization for the present. Digital systems have ceased to be mere instruments for storing information and have become structures that produce language, compose text, and interact with human beings. For the first time, technical exteriorization has thus begun to assume the human linguistic activity itself. This development raises new questions concerning the nature of the relation between the human being and technics. As Hubert L. Dreyfus noted, human processes of constituting meaning cannot be reduced to symbol processing; they are structures interwoven with embodiment, contextuality, and the lived world (Dreyfus, 1972, 1992). Similarly, Mark Coeckelbergh emphasizes that the ethical and ontological assessment of artificial intelligence cannot be conducted solely in terms of technical success, and that the human world of meaning and social relations must also be considered (Coeckelbergh, 2017).

Within this framework, Stiegler's theory of technical externalization offers a powerful resource for explaining the linguistic transformation of the digital age. Nevertheless, this approach focuses essentially on the historical and

technical forms of externalization. The question of why the human being is a being that externalizes, or of the conditions on which the meaning-constituting structure that makes exteriorization possible rests, remains open. In other words, while the theory of technical externalization explains in detail how externalization occurs, it does not explain the transcendental ground that makes externalization possible. At this point the problem ceases to be technical and acquires a philosophical character. If exteriorization can be explained solely through historical and technical processes, then the distinction between the human being and artificial intelligence will likewise be progressively reduced to functional differences. Yet it may be argued that what essentially distinguishes the human being from technical systems is not merely its capacity to produce language but its capacity to constitute the horizon of meaning that makes language possible. The following section therefore moves beyond technical externalization and, in light of Kant's critical philosophy, reassesses the problem of transcendental externalization that makes language possible.

6. The ontological status of language in the age of artificial intelligence

6.1. Artificial intelligence as a constitutor ofmeaning

The success of large language models today has reopened classical assumptions about the nature of human language. Large language models such as ChatGPT can generate natural language with high accuracy; they can write poetry, compose academic texts, and even appear to reason to a certain extent. At first glance, these developments suggest that language is no longer a capacity proper to the human mind alone. This impression is misleading, however, insofar as it overlooks the distinction between linguistic performance and the ontological ground of language. The operating principle of large language models rests not on the direct apprehension of meaning but on the modeling of statistical patterns within very large data sets. These systems predict the subsequent expression by computing the probabilities with which words, or tokens, follow one another. Artificial intelligence, in other words, does not produce meaning; it produces sequences that appear meaningful. The success of artificial intelligence accordingly pertains not to meaning itself but to the forms in which meaning appears. It is therefore insufficient to claim that there is merely a quantitative difference in performance between language produced by artificial intelligence and human speech. The real issue is to explain the ontological ground on which language arises in each case.

As argued in the preceding sections, language is not merely a successive arrangement of signs but a meaning-constituting activity rendered possible under transcendental conditions. The linguistic success of artificial intelligence therefore does not abolish theontological status of human language; on the contrary, it makes it necessary to rethink that status.

6.2. The ontological distinction between statisticaland transcendental language

Artificial intelligence systems produce language, yet this production is not a meaning-constituting activity carried out by a subject. In speaking, the human being does not merely place sounds side by side; it also renders them meaningful wholes through judgments. Imagination, understanding, reason, will, and desire work together to constitute language. Language is therefore not a technical system reducible to syntactic correctness alone; it is the transcendental appearance of the relation the subject establishes with the world. Kant's critical philosophy is decisive here, for on Kant's account meaning is possible by virtue of the unifying activity of the categories and the power of judgment that precede experience. In this respect,language is not merely the external expression of thought;it is the medium in which the synthesis that makes thoughtpossible first becomes articulable. The ontological status of language manifests here: before it is an instrument that represents meaning, language is the becoming-visible of the transcendental structure that makes the constitution of meaning possible. Artificial intelligence lacks this structure.It has no categories, nor is it an intentional consciousness directed toward the world or a reflexive subject that questions its own existence. The expressions produced by artificial intelligence therefore draw not on the ontological source of meaning but on statistical correlations.

This assessment may of course be contested. Some researchers argue that in sufficiently large-scale language models, understanding may "emerge" once purely statistical training reaches a certain scale (Wei et al., 2022),and that the internal representations of such models carry an implicit structure pertaining to the world (Piantadosi &Hill, 2022). Whether systems trained solely on linguistic form can attain understanding remains, by contrast, a matter of ongoing debate in the literature (Bender & Koller,2020; Coeckelbergh & Gunkel, 2025; Mitchell & Krakauer,2023). Work in the cognitive sciences has meanwhile distinguished formal linguistic competence, the mastery of linguistic rules and patterns, from the functional competence required to use language in reasoning about the world, and has found the two dissociable in current models (Mahowald et al., 2024); that distinction isinstructive here, although the argument advanced below concerns neither of the two competences but the conditionunder which either could be exercised by a subject at all. What is decisive for the claim advanced here, however, is not whether such models possess internal

representations. The transcendental argument concerns not the existence of any internal state but the conversion of such states intojudgment under a unity of apperception. The difference between a system's encoding of implicit regularities about the world and a subject's passing judgment about the world is not a difference in representational capacity buta difference in the ability to take up a representation as *myown* representation, that is, in the capacity of the "I think" to accompany all representations (Kant, 1998, B131–132). Even if the emergentist objection is granted, therefore,it does not answer the question of the transcendental condition underlying linguistic performance; it merely deepens the explanation of that performance.

6.3. The digital phase of exteriorization: The anonymization of memory and the transformationof the subject

Having set out the ontological distinction between the transcendental ground of language and the statistical language production of artificial intelligence, it is necessary also to explain the transformation the digital age effects upon the human subject. Artificial intelligence is not merely a new technique of computation; it also marks a historical turning point that alters the structure of the relation the human being establishes with language, memory, and meaning. One of the most important aspects of this transformation is the progressive exteriorization of individual memory through technical systems and the consequent loss of the subject's mastery over its own linguistic production.

Stiegler's concept of epiphylogenesis offers considerable explanatory power at this point. Developing Leroi-Gourhan's approach, which treats technical objects as exteriorized extensions of human memory, Stiegler argues that human history, beyond biological evolution,is the history of collective memory accumulated in technical objects. The human being carries itself into the future not only through genetic transmission but also through writing, language, instruments, and technical systems. Technics thereby becomes not an alien element standing over against the human being but one of the constitutive dimensions of human historical existence. Digital technologies, however, have carried this process of exteriorization into a qualitatively different phase. The exteriorization afforded by writing or the book did not abolish the meaning-constituting activity of the individual subject; on the contrary, it rendered that activity historically enduring. Big data systems and artificial intelligence-supported algorithms, by contrast, do not merely preserve individual experiences but continually process, reclassify, anticipate, and steer them. Memory thus ceases to preserve the past and becomes a dynamic field of data serving the computation of the future.

This transformation also radically alters the positionof the subject. The human being is no longer merely a subject who uses language; it has also become a producer of data that technical systems continually analyze, classify, and reshape through the very language it uses. Linguistic activity has become not only the source of meaning production but also the fundamental source of algorithmic profiling. The subject thereby grows progressively distant from being the agent of its own language, and the language it produces becomes part of a technical mechanism of determination that turns back on it. This process mayalso be related to Stiegler's concept of "proletarianization" (*prolétarisation*) (Şan, 2024; Stiegler, 2010, pp. 30–52; 2015; 2016). Just as labor was severed from the means of production in the industrial age, so in the digital age the individual's memory and capacity for producing meaning are progressively delegated to technical systems. The consequence is not merely the automation of knowledge but also the weakening of the subject's capacity to interpret its own history. The anonymization of memory is not merely a technical transformation but a structural change affecting the ontological status of the subject.

6.4. The ontological singularity of human language before artificial intelligence

The linguistic success of artificial intelligence systems has strengthened claims that the boundaries between the human being and the machine are blurring. In particular, the capacity of large language models to use natural language fluently, write poetry, translate, compose academictexts, and appear to reason to a certain extent has revived reductive approaches that treat human language as merely an advanced mechanism of information processing. Such an approach rests on the assumption that the difference between the human being and artificial intelligence consists solely in quantitative variables such as processing capacity, volume of data, or speed of computation. This assumption, however, is deficient insofar as it disregards the ontological nature of language.

As has been argued throughout, language is not merely the successive arrangement of words according to determinate rules. Language is the form in which the relation the transcendental subject establishes with theworld is articulated. In speaking, the human being does not merely construct sentences; it also judges the world, constitutes meaning, situates itself within temporal continuity, and interprets its own existence, again through language. Language, in other words, is not an external instrument for the human being but the mode in whichits existence is realized. The similarities observed betweenhuman language and the linguistic outputs produced by artificial intelligence therefore do not show that they occupy the same

ontological plane. Large language models proceed not from a subjective consciousness that constitutes meaning but from statistical correlations within very large data sets. The expressions they produce do not rest upon any determinate experience of the world,any lived experience, or any intentionality; they consist rather in the mathematical rearrangement of previously constituted linguistic patterns. Artificial intelligence, accordingly, does not live meaning; it computes structuresthat appear meaningful. The human being, by contrast, does not merely produce language: through language it experiences the world, directs itself toward the world, andrenders its own existence meaningful within language. Thedistinction between the language of artificial intelligence and human language is therefore not a difference of performance but an ontological difference.

At the basis of this ontological distinction lies the transcendental structure possessed by the human being. As Kant showed, experience is not merely the sum of sensory data; it becomes possible through the categories of the understanding, the power of judgment, and the unity of transcendental apperception (*Apperzeption*). Language, at this point, expresses that transcendental unity. In speaking, the human being does not merely rearrange available information; it also discloses possibilities of meaning not yet given. Human language, in other words, bears a creative, poietic character. Since the linguistic production of artificial intelligence consists in recombining available patterns, it is, in this sense, not a constitutive but a derivative activity. What is decisive here is not merely that the human being can speak, but that it has the need to speak. Language is not an external skill in the human being; it is the necessary appearance of the desire to express oneself, to enter into relation with another, to produce meaning, and to objectify one's own existence. The origin of language must therefore be sought not merely in cognitive mechanisms but in the transcendental structure of the human being. Artificial intelligence, by contrast, has no need to say anything; its production arises not from an intentionality issuing from its own existence but from the computation of the inputs it is given. Although the machine may appear to speak, it lacks the ontological conditions of speech.

In this connection, the question requiring a renewed answer in the age of artificial intelligence is not "Can the machine speak like a human being?" The real question is: what ontological conditions make speech possible? Unless this question is answered, the linguistic performance of artificial intelligence and the linguistic existence of the human being will continue to be assessed on the same plane. What matters, however, is that language is not merely a technical system of communication but the essential appearance of human transcendental existence. Within this framework, the development of artificial intelligence does not abolish the ontological position of the human being; on the contrary, it compels us to rethink the human being. Machines can perform many of the tasks performedby human beings and may even surpass the human being in certain domains. Yet what makes the human being humanis not merely its capacity to perform determinate tasks. The fundamental characteristic distinguishing the humanbeing from all other technical systems is its capacity to make its own existence an object of meaning: not merely to use language, but to bear the synthetic capacity of whichlanguage is the manifestation. What must be preservedin the age of artificial intelligence is therefore not human technical superiority but the transcendental linguistic being of the human being.

7. Conclusion

This study has sought to show that language cannot be explained solely as a product of historical, biological, social, or technological processes, but rests rather on a more fundamental transcendental ground that makes all such processes possible. Approaches that seek to explain the origin of language solely through evolutionary development, neurobiological mechanisms, cognitive processes, or the computational capacity of artificial intelligence provide important data concerning how language functions, yet they leave unanswered the questionof why language is possible at all. The central claim of the present study takes shape accordingly: language, and withit the science that takes language as its object, rests upona transcendental ground; this ground has not hithertobeen established as such; and its establishment, that is, the exhibition of the a priori principles under which linguistic meaning is first possible, is a task still to be carried out. The present study does not claim to have done so. It claimsinstead to have established the necessity of that task andto have set out the framework within which it can beundertaken.

In this respect, Kant's critical philosophy, althoughit did not develop a systematic philosophy of language,

offers a powerful conceptual framework for rethinking the transcendental foundations of language. Post-Kantian philosophy did develop a transcendental philosophy of language, as Cassirer and Apel demonstrate. What it did not undertake is the grounding of language, and of the scienceof language, in a synthetic structure prior to language, thatis, in the structure that makes externalization possible. That ground remains to be established, and the present study is directed toward its establishment. The unifying activity of the power of judgment, the synthetic power of the imagination, the categories of the understanding, reason, desire, and will constitute the preconditions not only of thinking but also of the constitution of linguistic meaning.

Language, in this respect, is prior to being a system of communication in which ready-made meanings are transmitted; it is a constitutive activity that enables the subject to render the world meaningful. The ontological status of language must therefore be sought not merely in semantic or syntactic structures but in the transcendental ground that makes them possible.

This is why the concepts of exteriorization and epiphylogenesis developed by Leroi-Gourhan and Stiegler have been invoked here. Both thinkers show that human memory has been historically exteriorizedthrough technical objects and that cultural continuity is possible through this process. At the same time, this study highlights an important limit of these approaches. Explaining the historical forms of exteriorization does not, however, explain the transcendental conditionsthat make exteriorization possible. Technical memory is not an ontological principle that replaces the human being; rather, it is one of the historical manifestationsof the human meaning-constituting structure. In other words, while the epiphylogenetic process explains how exteriorization occurs, the present study seeks to ground why exteriorization is possible.

This distinction becomes still more salient in the age of artificial intelligence. Large language models can reproduce the surface structure of human languagewith remarkable success and can display unprecedented performance in natural language processing. That success, however, does not alter the ontological nature of language. Artificial intelligence does not live meaning; it produces expressions that appear meaningful based on statistical patterns. The human being, by contrast, is not merely a speaking being; it bears the transcendental conditions that make speech possible. Human language expresses intentionality directed toward the world, judgment, the constitution of meaning, and the desire for self-expression. The distinction between the human being and artificial intelligence therefore emerges not at the level of technical competence or computational capacity but at the ontological and transcendental level.

Indeed, the similarities between the human being and artificial intelligence are today most often assessed in terms of linguistic performance. Yet linguistic performance is only the visible outcome of language, not the constitutive principle that makes it possible. The fundamental difference between human language and the linguistic outputs produced by artificial intelligence is that human language represents the possibility of meaning, whereas the outputs of artificial intelligence represent only its appearance. Artificial intelligence reproduces language; the human being constitutes it. Even if artificial intelligence appears to speak, it lacks the ontological conditions of speech. The central conclusion of this study is therefore the following: what essentially distinguishes the human being from artificial intelligence is not its capacity to use language butits role as the bearer of the transcendental conditions that make language possible. The human being is not a biological organism that uses language merely to communicate; it is a transcendental subject that constitutes its own existence through language, renders the world meaningful, and can externalize itself historically. Language is not an external instrument for the human being but the constitutive modeof its existence.

In conclusion, the fundamental question to be posed anew in the age of artificial intelligence is not “Can the machine speak like a human being?” The real question is: “What are the ontological conditions that make speech and meaning possible?” This study proposes a new answer to that question on the grounds of Kantian transcendental philosophy. Future debates in the philosophy of language, artificial intelligence research, and the cognitive sciences will prove fruitful only insofar as they rethink not merely the technical functioning of language but also the transcendental ground that makes it possible. The defining characteristic that distinguishes human beings from all technical systems lies not in the capacity for computation but in their unique capacity to make meaning possible andto constitute their own existence through language.

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