Nietzsche on Mind and Nature
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Consciousness, Language, and Nature

Nietzsche's Philosophy of Mind and Nature

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter focuses on the triangular relation between consciousness, language, and nature in Nietzsche's thinking, by developing the following arguments related to some major views in current philosophy. That physio-physical organisms possess consciousness neither paves the way for dualistic mentalism or monistic materialism. There is a continuous spectrum of what exists, from the inorganic to consciousness. Nature is the dynamic effect of living and intelligent organizations of force qualified as will-to-power-forces. The transition from the classical model of the organism to the one of organization is fundamental for understanding the organic and the conscious. The interpenetration of thought and language sees cognitive operations as necessarily occurring within language. Ego-consciousness resides in the human

body, but must not be mistaken for naturalism. There are limits to consciousness and language. Embodied words and their interpretations are the most fundamental characteristic of the human mind.

Keywords: Nietzsche, consciousness, language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of nature, principle of continuum, process models, mind and body, signs and interpretation

1 The Riddle of Consciousness

Consciousness, language, and nature are fundamental topics in Nietzsche's thought.[1] Careful discussion of them leads into the center of his philosophy. In contemporary philosophy, these areas of research are also of cardinal significance. After the 'linguistic turn' and the dominance of the philosophy of language in recent decades, philosophy, especially analytically oriented philosophy, rediscovered consciousness. Consciousness has arisen as a key topic in contemporary philosophy of mind.

Today, the triangulation of consciousness, language, and nature (more precisely, brain functions) is the subject of intense and controversial discussion within philosophy, the neurosciences, psychology, linguistics, and the cognitive sciences.[2] Throughout the world, people are working in and on research programs in an attempt to solve the riddle of consciousness—that is, the riddle that arises from the striking fact that physio-physical organisms possess consciousness and mind.[3] Physical, physiological, neural, biological, and evolutionary aspects thus play an especially important role today. People speak, for example, of a 'neurobiology of consciousness' (Churchland 1996: 463–90) or even of a 'new physics of consciousness' (Penrose 1994).

(p.38) Scattered throughout Nietzsche's writings are numerous reflections upon the areas of mind, language, and nature as well as on their interconnections. Nietzsche discusses many topics in connection with consciousness—regarding its genesis and scope as well as the various epistemic achievements of the conscious subject, the ego. A brief selection of these topics would include the demarcation

of the realm of the *unconscious*; the processes of *perception, conscious thought, cognition*, and *re-cognition*; the role of *concepts* and *judgments* in consciousness, and the intentionality of consciousness. In addition, there are discussions of phenomenological topics, such as *memory, subjective experiences*, and *understanding other minds, nature, persons, and actions*.

In all of this, Nietzsche appears as someone who also wants to clearly demarcate the limits of consciousness and of language as well as the dangers associated with a hypostatization of the consciousness- and language-model. But Nietzsche is not a reductive eliminativist. He does not advocate the thesis that conscious states and processes are ultimately identical with neurophysical states and processes which we (seduced by our everyday psychology) merely and erroneously interpret as independent mental and conscious phenomena. According to the *eliminativist conception*, mental states do not exist any more than ghosts or demons do.[4] Nietzsche, by contrast, is a realist about consciousness and mind. To deny the existence of consciousness and its role would indicate a failure adequately to take reality into account.

It hardly needs to be emphasized that, together with consciousness and mind, the role of language and the understanding of nature also occupy a place of special importance in Nietzsche's thought.[5] He is above all concerned with actual speech, communication among persons and the function of 'grammar' in man's understanding of the world, others, and himself. And Nietzsche ultimately conceives of natural processes (in external as well as in inner nature) as dynamic processes consisting of a complex interplay of power configurations. The triangulation of consciousness, language, and nature is thus of fundamental significance both for Nietzsche's thought and for a central area of contemporary philosophy.

At the center of contemporary philosophy of mind lies the question of the relationship between *mental*, in particular *conscious* mental states and processes, and *physical* states and processes. With reference to the aforementioned riddle of

consciousness one can, greatly simplifying, formulate two theses that seem to form a dichotomy: (i) mental states and processes *are* states and processes of matter, which is the thesis of a monistic materialism/physicalism of consciousness and mind; (ii) mental states and processes cannot be reduced to physio-physical states and (p.39) processes, which is the thesis of dualistic mentalism. Both theses together with their different variants can, however, be viewed as failures for the following reasons.[6]

Contemporary *mentalism* maintains that the meanings of successfully employed signs are determined by the psychological states of the sign users. This presupposes, however, that speakers can, by way of introspection, gain a secure knowledge of their *psychological states* and, more importantly, of the *semantic features* (meaning, reference, truth or satisfaction conditions) of the signs they employ. Yet introspection very quickly reaches its limits. The meanings of our signs are, following Wittgenstein, not conceivable as the results of inner mental states, and we do not use a language in accordance with internally accessible and predetermined rules.[7]

The strongest version of the *materialism/physicalism* thesis is, to put it roughly and in a sense simplified: mental phenomena *are* physical phenomena, that is, they are the states and processes described by the neurosciences. This thesis also runs into significant difficulties. We should recall three of those that have been raised in discussions of this approach: (i) if two states or processes are identical they also have to have identical qualities. Yet while *a pain can be sharp, a sensation of color soothing, a thought exquisite*, the neural states and processes that correlate to them are not at all to be qualified as sharp, soothing, or exquisite. A neurophysiologist looking into the brain of another person cannot observe thinking and wishing. Only certain observational parameters can be measured in this manner, e.g. the neural action potentials or the metabolism of the brain. The subjective and phenomenal predicate ‘is sharp’ and the neural predicate ‘firing of the C-fibers’ are obviously not synonymous. Thus the desired fundamental assumption of identity is not fulfilled. (ii) The

identity thesis overlooks the fact that in saying, for example, 'water *is* H_2O' and analogously 'the conscious phenomenon X *is* the neuro-physiological phenomenon Y,' the 'is' is not the 'is' of identity but rather that of a *theoretical identification*.[8] There are implicit add-ons such as '*viewed under a chemical aspect*' or '*considered under a neurophysiological aspect*.' Thus one must abandon the claim that we can express what is essential about all qualities of conscious and non-conscious mental states and processes solely from a neuro-physical perspective. (iii) With regard to natural materials and things in the external world, it makes good sense to follow Thomas Nagel and Saul Kripke[9] in distinguishing between what *appears* to us to be such-and-such a thing and what it *is* according to its 'objective way to be.' A *crystal* appears to us to be solid and homogeneous; *physicists*, however, say that it is a grid of atoms that largely consists of empty space. When it comes to conscious mental states and processes, however, one *cannot* make this distinction. In these cases, the qualitative, phenomenal, and subjective state is 'its entire nature' itself.[10] Thus one cannot (p.40) meaningfully say that a desire is, according to its objective way to be, nothing other than a certain state of the brain that a person merely perceives as a desire.

If one wants to progress beyond the difficulties of the dichotomy between mentalism and materialism/physicalism, one must attempt to change the architecture of the conceptual framework itself. Nietzsche's writings contain descriptions and arguments that are instructive with regard to the aspects sketched above. He offers, I think, a very interesting alternative perspective. We will reconstruct and discuss some of these aspects in the following sections.

2 The Principle of the Continuum

What we need is a non-dualistic viewpoint. And Nietzsche provides such a conception. He presents a continuous spectrum of what exists or occurs, from the most extreme limit of the inorganic, through the organic, up to mental states, consciousness, self-consciousness, cognitive and other mental activities, and human action. The organic thus appears as the

developmental and continuous preparatory stage of consciousness. Nietzsche's world is a world of such continuum-relationships. Man is thus '*not* just an individual, but rather the whole organic ensemble of one particular line that continues to live' (NL 1886–7, KGW VIII.1, 7[2]). This thesis can be read either from the standpoint of what has already been achieved developmentally or from the beginning of such development.

Looking back from the stage of development already attained, it means that the character of 'intelligent,' 'spiritual,' 'mental,' and 'living' activities can be found in various degrees of realization in the organic and beyond. Thus, according to Nietzsche, the organic world always already presupposes and consists in 'continuous interpretation processes' (NL 1885–6, KGW VIII.1, 2[148]), and hence always already presupposes and consists in 'intelligent' activities (in the broadest sense of the term) such as identifying, localizing, perceiving, demarcating, classifying, and estimating. This view also preserves the possibility that the 'ego/I' of consciousness and especially the 'Self' of the human body can influence organic processes—that it can, for example, influence the motor apparatus so that a particular intention can be realized through corresponding movements of the body. In such cases, mental causation is obviously present. For Nietzsche, this component plays an important role in connection with the question whether and to what extent certain ideas or thoughts can be incorporated, that is, made organic and responsible for the organization of experience,[11] and which cannot—as, for instance, is the case for Nietzsche's intriguing idea of eternal recurrence.

Read from the perspective of the beginning of development, the thesis claims that man can be seen as a particular embodiment of all 'older valuations,' of all the (p.41) 'intelligent' activities that already reside in the organic and thus participate in the organization of experience. In this sense, Nietzsche thinks that it is necessary to 're-translate man back into nature' (BGE 230), to naturalize man. But since the processes of the organic realm are 'intelligent' and 'spiritual' processes in the broadest sense, this program of

naturalizing man distinguishes itself from both transcendent metaphysics as well as biologistic and merely scientific naturalism. And at the epistemological level, it is not simply the program of 'epistemology naturalized' (Quine 1969). This involves a kind of naturalizing beyond the dichotomy of transcendent metaphysics and reductionist physicalism.

The appearance of consciousness in the narrow sense seems from this perspective to be something that occurs late in developmental history and is preceded by phylogenetic and ontogenetic differentiations in the realm of the organic. Insofar as we do not find consciousness (in the narrow sense linked with self-awareness and self-consciousness), for example, in stones, crystals, and plants, we are concerned here, too, with a *gradual* phenomenon. Thus, one can certainly attribute to *animals* elementary forms of consciousness—for instance, phenomenal discrimination and object awareness. But self-awareness, self-consciousness, and the ability to form explicit intentional plans of action are only to be found in human beings.

One basic form of self-awareness is the following: at the same time that 'something enters consciousness,' an ego or a subject of that consciousness simultaneously appears with it. Now this involves distinguishing the continuous stream of occurrences and context from what we can regard as a conscious and indexical ego, linguistically expressed through the personal pronoun 'I'—something John Perry has labeled the '*essential indexical*.'[12] Now this does not mean that there is an individuated thing or entity which exists independent of the stream of occurrences and which precedes all consciousness of something, and hence even all contents of consciousness and its intentionality.

In connection with the continuum model, Nietzsche praises the 'precocious suspicion' of Leibniz (GS 354). Leibniz had assumed there were *pre*-conscious intelligent activities, perceptions ('petites perceptions') which could significantly affect what occurred in inorganic, organic, and other life events, *without*, however, having to enter 'into explicit consciousness.' An example of such activity would be, for instance, the non-conscious and non-epistemic perception or

registering of visual stimuli which nevertheless significantly help to guarantee our orientation in the world, for example, while crossing a very busy street.

If one allows that the pre-conscious mental realm and the organic realm have a strong and pre-formative impact on explicitly conscious mental states and processes, and if one further reflects that consciousness itself is not in a position to indicate the 'objective cause' for its own emergence—since this would already require (p.42) presupposing consciousness—then one has the background for Nietzsche's provocative formulation: '*To what end* does consciousness exist at all when it is basically superfluous?' Nietzsche's answer to this question consists in the thesis that consciousness is 'really just a net connecting one person with another' and that 'it is only in this capacity that it had to develop' (GS 354).

3 A Particular Process-Model

In order to develop a *non-dualistic* conception of the connection between the *organic* and the *conscious*, the *physical* and the *mental*, it is of the utmost importance that one not conceive the 'building blocks' of nature and of life as 'things' in the sense of 'material bodies' occupying places in space and time, but rather as 'events' or 'processes.'[13] Transitioning from the thing-model to the event- or process-model is incredibly significant when it comes to addressing the problem of consciousness and the relationship between the physical and the mental. Conscious and non-conscious mental states and processes cannot be conceived within the thing-model and its paradigm of material bodies.

Nietzsche's conception of the world or nature is characterized by the figure of highly complex, dynamic, reciprocal effects of numerous 'living' and 'intelligent' organizations of force. According to Nietzsche's *new interpretation of reality*, these 'processual' organizations of force are to be qualified as will-to-power-forces. We do not need to go into the precise meaning of this characterization here.[14] Here we can only point to the difficulty that besets every sort of process philosophy—namely that it is unable to describe or capture the dynamicity of the transition from one state to another. For the

only terms available to describe such a transition either pertain to the mode and elements of the initial state, or the mode and elements of the successive state, but not to the transition itself. This also bears on the question concerning the *performative*- or *event*-character of what happens or the question concerning processual '*becoming*' which is of such fundamental importance for Nietzsche's conception of the world and nature.

The transition from a thing-schema to an event- or process-schema is also reflected in contemporary philosophy of language. Following the pioneering work of Hans Reichenbach, analytically oriented philosophers of language—particularly Donald Davidson—have shown that the logical form of a large portion of the sentences of our natural language cannot be construed without the assumption of 'events' or 'processes' as genuine individuals (Davidson 1980: 105–48). This is true, for example, of sentences that refer to temporal succession, causality, explanation, or action. With his process metaphysics Nietzsche defends a stronger claim than Davidson, which is that 'processes' are more real and fundamental than things, (p.43) and that thing-hood or substance are an illusion. But it is important to see how what Nietzsche has to say about the status of processes and events fits together with analyses of contemporary philosophy of language, taking the concept of an event as indispensable.

The transition to a process-model has important consequences not only with regard to the status and role of the 'thing'-concept, but also with regard to the meaning of any talk of a 'subject.' An important question is whether, for each process, one always has to presuppose a subject to 'enact' it or whether, to use one of Nietzsche's formulations, the processes themselves have being?[15] Since, for Nietzsche, only a limited portion of reality is present to or represented in consciousness, this question gains fundamental significance with respect to the relationship between the organic and the conscious, the physical and the mental.

Consciousness and the ego or the subject of consciousness appear on the scene at the same time. This ego manifests itself in the fact that I could imagine the content of consciousness

differently, sort it differently, and assess it differently without ceasing to be myself. By appealing to the event-/process-model and by taking up the idea of subjectless processes, both of the following assumptions can simultaneously be made comprehensible: (i) that the ego or subject that appears within consciousness is already dependent on a network of subjectless processes, and (ii) that the state and phenomenon of consciousness itself rest upon an antecedent genealogy of non-conscious mental states, processes, or events. From this point of view, one could succeed in explaining how the idea that consciousness has a subject is compatible with the idea of subjectless processes.

First, it is important that the ego does not come on the scene except in the course of manifestations of consciousness. The ego is not to be seen as a pre-conscious, as a particular, fixed, stable, and antecedently existing subject, which just so happens to possess the secondary property of having and directing consciousness. Such a view confuses what is conditioned with what conditions it. One thereby falls prey to the seductive conclusion that one must presuppose an underlying 'Something' as the bearer of consciousness, thinking, and of thoughts.

Nietzsche also critiques the account of the relationship between the 'I' and 'thinking' which Descartes made famous in his *cogito* argument. The critique results in an emphasis on the process-character of the operations involved. Nietzsche analyses the operation that is supposed to be expressed in the phrase 'I think' into the 'bold assumptions' it entails, whose justification he finds 'difficult, perhaps impossible.' Nietzsche's list of such assumptions includes:

> that *I* am the one who is thinking, that there must be a something that is thinking in the first place, that thinking is an activity and the effect of a being who is considered to be the cause (p.44) thinking, that there is an 'I,' and finally, that it has already been determined what is meant by thinking,—that I *know* what thinking is.

According to Nietzsche, it is 'a *counterfeit* of the facts' to say: 'the subject "I" is the condition of the predicate "think"' (BGE

16). To do so is to draw one's conclusions by 'following grammatical habits.'

From here, one can proceed to the question whether one can replace 'I think' with 'it thinks.' This suggestion, as we all know, stems from Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who had a significant influence on Nietzsche's conception of the possibilities and limits of language.[16] For Nietzsche, it was first of all important that one not simply equate this new 'it' with the old 'I.' But he further emphasizes that 'there is already too much packed into the "it thinks"; even the "it" already contains an *interpretation* of the process, and does not belong to the process itself' (BGE 17). Here the *interpretative* character of the operation comes into view alongside its *processual* character. Acknowledging these processual and interpretive characteristics undermines the fundamental role of the conscious and self-conscious subject suggested by the surface grammar of the indexical word 'I.'

Even on the linguistic level it is clear that process-sentences cannot be made dependent on a surface grammatical subject. We can see this in impersonal phrases such as 'x occurred, took place, happened.' It is also manifest in sentences such as 'it rained,' 'it thundered,' or 'it thawed.' These sentences do not have to do with an individuated something that rains, thunders, or thaws. And what and where is the subject, for example, of a cocktail party or of a thaw? To ask 'Who is the subject of the event?' is to miss the aforementioned fact that events or processes themselves have being—as for example in the case of a party.

4 Functional Organization

The transition from the classical model of the organism to that of *organization* is of fundamental significance for Nietzsche's understanding of the organic and of the conscious. Nietzsche conceives of the organism as an organizational structure in which consciousness, awareness, and all further mental states and processes up to and including conscious thought are *emergent* characteristics which result from highly complex interactions of the system's components that guarantee the organization's functionality.[17]

Thus one can say that the initial stages of awareness, explicit consciousness, self-consciousness, and (ultimately) conscious thought arise as the emergent effects of an interplay of multiple organizations of force (the various organization of wills-to-power). Such a view manifests a certain proximity to an opinion widely held today in brain research that consciousness and other mental processes such as perceiving, (p.45) imagining, thinking, learning, and remembering do not occur in a special localizable place or, as Descartes claimed, through a special organ, the infamous pineal gland. In current brain research, conscious as well as non-conscious mental states are rather conceived as results of the highly complex organization and dynamism of entire complexes, more precisely of 'neural assemblies.'[18]

This view can also be connected to the model of 'multiple drafts,' which has been developed within the philosophy of mind by Daniel C. Dennett.[19] Dennett thinks this model provides an alternative to the Cartesian conception of consciousness, which he calls the myth of the 'Cartesian theater.' Descartes advanced a centralistic conception of the location of the seat of consciousness and contended that the locus of conscious experience was the brain. For him, the pineal gland represented the center of the brain—as it were, the inner station through which all sense perceptions must enter in order to be transformed 'into the consciousness' of the individual through a specific transaction. The most important aspect of this conception is that the brain has a center and that this is the causal point of departure for the emergence of the contents of consciousness.

This Cartesian view of a special center in the brain that is causally responsible for consciousness and its contents strongly influenced and even imprisoned reflection on consciousness throughout the modern period. Dennett approvingly cites William James, who wrote in 1890: 'There is no cell or group of cells in the brain of such anatomical or functional preeminence as to appear to be the keystone or *center of gravity* of the whole system' (Dennett 1991: 101; my emphasis). On the 'multiple drafts' model, by contrast, one understands that 'all varieties of perception—indeed, all

varieties of thought or mental activity—are accomplished in the brain by parallel, multitrack processes of interpretation and elaboration of sensory inputs.' Thus, according to Dennett, the information that enters into the nervous system is 'under continuous "editorial revision"' (Dennett 1991: 111). But for our purposes what is of central importance is the rejection of the idea that there is *one and only one* central perspective or *one and only one* inner center of observation and processing with regard to what enters into consciousness as content and what does not.[20]

In addition, the 'multiple drafts' model emphasizes that what is commonly called the 'stream of consciousness' cannot be seen as a unique and unified sequence, but must rather be conceived as a process of 'multiple drafts' in the course of which contents emerge, get revised, strengthen or lose their influence on other contents, (p.46) endure for a longer or shorter time, and manage or fail to leave traces in memory.[21] In these respects, this view, too, evinces a proximity to Nietzsche's conceptions. Above all, it is important to emphasize the immense complexity of the processes of interaction here. Whole systems are interacting not only with one another, but also with other sub-systems. And for Nietzsche, the interactions are further complicated by the fact that each system is to be conceived as an individual and as having its own will-to-power.

With regard to the organic, it is important that the *functional* profile of the whole network of activities is thought of as dependent on the multifarious interactions of the parts. But on Nietzsche's conception (of how the organizations of forces function), this involves the idea that the dominant or 'governing' forces—that is, the predominantly organizing forces—are also simultaneously dependent on the functional partial forces and their constellations. Processual organization is, according to Nietzsche, the fundamental operation of everything that is real and alive. Life, for him, is to be defined as 'a permanent form of *process* of *force determinations* where the various opponents grow unequally' (NL 1885, KGW VII.3, 36[22]). These are the dynamic processes of organization that

continuously take place within the internal structure of all organized beings and in all natural processes.

The central place that Nietzsche accords the idea of *functional organization* suggests that his conception should be characterized as a version of *functionalism*. Nietzsche is interested in functional systems. An important question both with respect to Nietzsche's would-be functionalism as well as with respect to functionalism in contemporary philosophy of mind and biology is whether or not *functional* roles are to be understood *teleologically*. For Nietzsche, this is a fundamental topic.[22] On a teleological interpretation, considerations concerning a state's functional role not only involve the idea that the role *can* be carried out, but also the idea that it *should* be carried out in a normative sense. In contemporary debates in philosophy of mind as well as in philosophy of biology, there are two predominant positions on this point. Many think that, as R. Van Gulick puts it, the teleological-normative element concerns the 'origin of the structure and the role' that this element 'plays in the process of selection or formation.' Others advance the view that what matters in how a sub-system performs within the whole organization has to do with the manner in which it 'contributes to the welfare or the *correct* operation of the system of which it is a part' (Van Gulick 1996: 86f.). Nietzsche's position on this question is clearly aligned with the second position. The problem of goal-directedness or purposiveness arises on the level of self-regulation and the functionality of organizations of force. This concerns operations of optimizing the relationships between forces in the processes of the organization of forces, both on the macro-level of the whole organization as well as on the micro-level of the associated partial systems. The (p.47) multifarious interplay of the organizations of force appears to consciousness as 'purposive' merely *in retrospect*. This does not mean there is actual teleology in the processes, but merely something that *seems* purposive retrospectively and, as it were, epiphenomenally.

It is crucial that there are two different kinds of 'purpose,' according to whether one endorses a strong teleology of *exogenous* causation, or merely the *endogenous* functionality

and regularity that result from the actual relationships of forces. These connections are interpreted as purposive structures only in retrospect. Such an interpretation, however, misses the self-realizing character of the processes themselves. Purpose and purposiveness are, according to Nietzsche, merely aftereffects that are retrospectively and falsely projected—as it were, invented—and posited behind certain occurrences as their motives or driving moments. For Nietzsche, purposiveness is seen as a consequence, not as a cause or motive. On his view, the organization and dynamics of the complex processes of wills-to-power-forces themselves proceed in a *non-teleological* manner. But since what is at issue are organizations and thus functional states and orders, the appearance of purposiveness does not disappear. But how does a purpose that has not yet been realized manage to get 'behind' the occurrence as its motivating force? The fundamental logical difficulty of every teleological explanation resides in this question. On Nietzsche's view, the apparent purposiveness is 'only an *expression* for an order of spheres of power and their interplay' (NL 1887, KGW VIII.2, 9[91]).

5 The Interpenetration of Consciousnessand Language

Consciousness proceeds in and by way of presentations, representations, and meta-representations, and all three of these, in turn, are events that take place *in* and *by virtue of* signs. This is true of the entire spectrum from phenomenal awareness of sense impressions and perceptions, through imagining, remembering, and conscious and reflexive thought, up to self-consciousness and plans of action. Thinking is an event that takes place in signs, more precisely in linguistic signs. We can, as Nietzsche puts it, '*think only* in linguistic form' and we '*cease thinking when we tend not to do it within linguistic constraints*' (NL 1886–7, KGW VIII.1, 5[22]). With this, Nietzsche propounds the dependence of conscious thinking on the grammatical functions of language. Moreover, every cognitive meta-operation also necessarily occurs within the confines of grammar. Since linguistic signs carry out their functions or possess their semantic properties only insofar as there is a practice of interpretation underlying them,[23] it

becomes clear that there are *interpretative grounds* lurking behind the *linguistic-grammatical* grounds. Nietzsche expresses this in an incisive formulation (p.48) when he says that 'rational thinking' is an '*interpretation according to a schema that we cannot discard*' (NL 1886–7, KGW VIII.1, 5[22]).

Now, it is of fundamental significance that the internal connection with language does not only appear at the level of conscious thought. Rather, according to Nietzsche, it even holds true regarding the genesis, the articulation, and the development of consciousness itself. There is an internal connection between consciousness and language, or, more broadly, between consciousness and signs. If one accentuates the *public* character of language and of sign usage—that is, the fact that a functioning language is internally bound to the public practice of using linguistic and non-linguistic signs shared with others—then the *public* and *social* character of consciousness also becomes clear. 'Language is a social art,' is the first sentence of Quine's (1983) famous book *Word and Object*. As we know, Nietzsche also points out this component. In this way, he accentuates the semiotic character of consciousness.

The internal connection between consciousness and language is extremely important in a number of respects. By directing attention to the link between consciousness and language, aspects of consciousness come into view which have a different ontological status from the components already discussed under the rubrics 'continuum,' 'emergent development,' 'process,' and 'functional organization.' The use of language and signs are components that have their seat in the social, historical, and cultural world. They cannot simply be reduced to organic or neurobiological processes. This is particularly true of the higher-order aspects of consciousness such as self-consciousness, the experience of one's own individuality, and the self-interpretations—for example of a free-acting agent. When it comes to such aspects, even present-day brain researchers acknowledge that they 'seem to require explanations that transcend purely neurobiological reductionism' (Singer 1998: 1830). The decisive point is that

consciousness and mind have now become thematized at the intersection between developments in the natural and organic sphere and the social, historical, and cultural realms.

The occurrence and development of consciousness in the sense of awareness, self-consciousness, and explicitly conscious thought arise, according to Nietzsche, principally because of the 'need,' because of the 'necessity' that individual human beings developed in relation to other human beings 'to communicate, to make themselves quickly and precisely understood.' There is a 'need for communication,' which, for its part, presupposes an 'ability to communicate.' The 'subtlety and strength of consciousness' of a person stands in relation to this ability to communicate, to the 'force and art of communication.' In this sense, Nietzsche's thesis is that consciousness '*in general has developed only under the pressure of the need to communicate*' (GS 354).

Consciousness is a 'connecting net linking persons to persons.' Thus, it has to carry itself out in '*communication signs*' (GS 354). In this sense, the development of consciousness and language go 'hand in hand.' Conscious thought takes this so far that we are confronted with a system of concepts and their semantic properties. In (p.49) consciousness, the formation of and our operations with words, symbols, and concepts only take place in the form of the relations between signs and other signs, *not* in the form of a relation between signs and objects. In thought, what is at issue are 'formations of signs about signs' and 'abbreviations' of signs through other signs.[24] Conscious conceptual thought and conscious experience take place as a 'sign script.'[25]

But it is not only the words and sentences of language that perform the function of building a 'bridge' from person to person, non-linguistic signs do so as well. As examples of such non-linguistic signs, Nietzsche refers to glances, gestures, and touch. The human being who 'uses' signs, but above all 'invents' signs, is, in this sense, always the 'one who becomes ever more acutely conscious of himself.' These operations are *ipso facto* connected with sociability. For 'only as a social animal did man learn to become conscious of himself—he is still doing it, and he is doing it more and more' (GS 354). In

this sense, consciousness, in its characteristic relation to other people, obviously plays an important role in the processes of stabilizing social systems. This connection can even be found in a rudimentary form in the activity between brains. Brains, which possess 'monitoring structures' (in the sense of meta-representations of their own inner states), 'would in addition have the possibility to signal to other organisms the result of the internal monitoring.' Through 'mimics, gestures, vocalizations and in humans also languages,' such brains could mutually inform themselves about their perceptions and plans for action. In this way, actions become more predictable. Besides the greater flexibility of reactions to changed conditions and situations that comes with such monitoring consciousness, 'this could be another adaptive function of consciousness that could have favoured its evolution' (Singer 1998: 1829f.).[26] One could add these two considerations to an answer to Nietzsche's provocative aforementioned question: '*To what end* does consciousness exist at all when it is basically superfluous?' (GS 354).

Insofar as the use of signs is internally connected with consciousness, the task of a philosophy of consciousness and the philosophy of mind today consists in elaborating the semiotic-interpretative character of the states, processes, and phenomena of consciousness.

6 The Relation between Consciousness and Body

Ego-consciousness does not succeed in representing, distancing, or even suspending the network of its own conditions. The cause, the ground, and the conditional network of consciousness do not arise within the space of consciousness itself. And nothing in the states or in the objects that enter into consciousness reveals that they are dependent upon a non-conscious network of conditions. But ego-consciousness (p.50) does have the possibility of opening itself up to the network of its own conditions. This opening can be viewed as the transition from the '*lesser* reason' (by which one should principally understand all modern forms of self-consciousness in the Cartesian style, which aims at fundamentalistic self-ascertainment) into the '*greater* reason,'

which Nietzsche saw as residing in the human body or in bodily existence.[27] To be sure, Nietzsche views human consciousness as being in danger of circling around itself auto-teleologically and auto-causally and ultimately degenerating into an empty self-exercise. The human mind tends to 'persuade' itself that it is 'the end of all things,' a final authority, behind which there cannot be anything else which might use it as a 'tool' (Z I 'On the Despisers of the Body'). In such an attitude, consciousness and mind do not open up to the insight that much of what the conscious ego attributes to its *own* operation of synthesis could have already been performed somewhere else, particularly in *pre*-cognitive bodily existence. As soon as consciousness opens itself up to its conditions, it no longer understands itself as the 'ultimate' purposiveness as such, and then, according to Nietzsche, the 'self' of the human bodily existence comes into play. The philosophy of the body or of bodily existence begins where lesser reason reflects upon itself and opens itself up to the network of conditions that cannot be surveyed or entirely brought before one's reflective eye. The point is that bodily experiences enter into perceiving, thinking, and acting as well, since these are bodily embedded.

Nietzsche's philosophy of the body or of bodily existence must not, however, be mistaken for a form of naturalism, biologism, or a body/organism ontology. First of all, the avenue to the body problematic does not lead through a single discipline, for instance biology or neurophysiology, but rather unfolds in the course of reflection upon consciousness. There, bodily existence is conceived as a pre-cognitive dimension of the possibility of knowledge, as well as of biology or neurophysiology. Second, when doing philosophy one cannot simply ask what the relationship is between the neural and the cognitive or the mental. Rather, one must always first ask, how should we *think* about the fact *that* such relations are reciprocal. And third, the body or bodily experience does not, on Nietzsche's conception, consist of building blocks that can be analyzed by a special science. It does not 'consist' of 'something(s)' at all, but rather (as was mentioned before) can be seen as the highly complex and dynamic interplay of

multifarious small intelligent processes, which become manifest as soon as we have bodily experiences.

The transition from the ego-consciousness to the human body is also a transition from achieved subjectivity to individuality in the sense of that bodily organization (p.51) which every one of us *is* individually. As a body I *am* a living individuality. This allows room for the distinction between the *ego* as the rational subject and the *self*, which, as body, is still 'the master of the ego' (Z I 'On the Despisers of the Body') according to Nietzsche. The critique of the concept of a 'rational and pre-fabricated subject' by no means demands the disappearance of the individuality of persons, quite the contrary. Individuality is manifested in a non-reductive sense in the organization of the body or bodily existence, which everyone *is* as the interpreting being she is. Thus, when the subject reflects upon and opens itself up to the network of its conditions, this does not lead back to something *general*, but rather to the *individuality* of the body and bodily experiences.

At the same time, we have to keep in mind that, for Nietzsche, the aesthetic states of bodily existence, which are themselves pre-cognitive, pre-linguistic, and pre-rational can nevertheless be seen as the place of origin of linguistic and non-linguistic signs and their meanings.[28] This corresponds to the fact that bodily states and bodily experiences are importantly involved in the invention as well as in the understanding of signs, e.g. of glances, gestures, words. The organization of the body or bodily existence turns out to be a much 'richer phenomenon' than the self-conscious ego and, moreover, one that allows for much 'clearer' observation, methodologically speaking. So, for instance, a sensation/perception of color is (in its subjective, qualitative, and phenomenal aspects) always much more fine-grained than the even best possible linguistic color-predicate of a given language and even more fine-grained than any indexical or demonstrative expression '*This* color *here* and *now*.'

Perhaps, Nietzsche once hypothetically mused, it is a matter of 'the *body* in the entire development of the mind: it is the *history that becomes* "tangible" that a *higher body or bodily*

existence is forming itself' (NL 1883–4, KGW VII.1, 24[16]). Here we encounter a 'higher formation of the entire *body* or *bodily existence* and not only of the brain!' (NL 1883, KGW VII.1, 16[21]). The spiritual or mental is then 'to be understood as the sign-language of bodily existence!' (NL 1883, KGW VII.1, 7[126]). The organization and dynamics of the body and of consciousness and the mind express, as Nietzsche puts it in another passage, 'something of our whole state in signs.' In this way, the semiotic-interpretative character of mind, language, and nature becomes manifest precisely after ego-consciousness opens itself up to the network of its conditions.

7 The Limits of Consciousness and of Language

In addition to the important role of consciousness and language in the human understanding of the world, oneself, and others, one should not overlook their limits as well. For our purposes, we should mention at least some of these aspects before (p.52) proceeding, in Section 8, to consider a certain prospect: a philosophy of signs and interpretation that forms the basis for an integrative philosophy of mind, language, and nature.

The power of language and signs is great and extensive. Grammar and concepts occupy a particular place therein. Grammar has a pre-formative effect both on the *How* and on the *What* of the conscious thought, and the latter has its limit in the former. What can be *thought* and *said* at all has to already have been prepared in the grammar of a language. Thus, according to Nietzsche, it hardly seems possible to overcome the 'fundamental errors of reason petrified' (G I 13) in language (such as the assumption of a subject, object, substance, unity, identity, duration, cause, thing, purpose, being) *by* reasoning *in* language. In other words, reasoning in language does not seem able to avoid all those prejudices on which metaphysics, which for Nietzsche is essentially 'language-metaphysics' (TI III 5), relies. If one does not understand these prejudices as a 'semiotics' (NL 1888, KGW VIII.3, 14[79]) that is the mere aftereffect of more original processes, if, that is, one does not use concepts like, for

example, ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ in the sense of ‘conventional fictions for the purpose of designation, of communication,’ but rather as explanations, if, in sum, one erroneously mistakes the ‘sign-world’ for the ‘in-itselfness of things,’ then one is engaging in ‘mythology’ (BGE 21). This ‘philosophical mythology’ lies ‘hidden’ in language and always reemerges, ‘however careful one may be’ (HH II, II.11). And even if one appreciates the ‘error’ in such prejudices, that does not mean that one is no longer stuck with the error, that one has escaped grammar. We are ‘*necessitated* to error.’ Error retains language as its ‘constant advocate’ (TI III 5).

The limit of language lies, according to Nietzsche, above all in the *general* character of its words and sentences. Every word has the character of generality. Thus, expressions, for example ‘spot of color,’ are fundamentally incapable of completely grasping or representing the *individual* character of exactly this unique and distinctive spot of color on the wall to my right. Conversely, an expression such as ‘Tower of Pisa’ can apply to many objects beside the slanted tower in the Italian city of Pisa. This character of generality is ineliminable. Nor can it be avoided by adding as many adjectives and adverbial modifications as possible. On account of the general character of all words, every word used for greater precision nevertheless leaves the possibility open that many objects could legitimately be counted as satisfaction-objects of the expression. And even in a descriptive sequence of whatever length, the inimitable individuality of the respective thing would never be articulated.

This general character, which afflicts all the words in a language, is decisively enhanced as soon as the words become *concepts* that act as names for a multitude of similar things. ‘Every word,’ Nietzsche writes in a note,

> immediately becomes a concept in that it does not serve as a reminder of the unique, entirely individual primal experience to which it owes its emergence, but rather of countless, more or (p.53) less similar cases, that is, strictly speaking never identical cases, and thus has to fit

> nothing but unequal cases. Every concept comes into being by making equal what is not equal. (TL 1)

The crux is that, as the well-known formula has it, ‘individuum est ineffabile.’ The point, however, is that one already needs linguistic expression to express *this* point. This is also true of words of sensation (such as ‘splitting headache’), which are supposed to express individual states and experiences, but which could not do so at all if they were entirely free of the character of generality that first enables communication with other people as well as communication with oneself. A pure language of individuality, like a purely private language, would not enable understanding of any sort. It would not be a language at all.

When it comes to consciousness as well, Nietzsche continues to criticize the aspect that everything that enters ‘into consciousness’ is ‘translated’ into it and thus has the character of generality. With respect to human beings, consciousness appears only to constitute a small portion of what humans are, and ultimately turns out to be something superficial—something that rests on the broader and more multifarious world of the organic and which came into being in an emergent and developmentally determinate way. In this sense, ‘the world of which we can become conscious is merely a surface- and sign-world, […] a world turned into generalities and thereby debased’ (GS 354). Thus, Nietzsche thinks we cannot equate consciousness with the human being as such. Writing in connection with the relationship just sketched between consciousness and language, Nietzsche says that consciousness does not, properly speaking, belong to ‘the individual-existence of a person.’

8 Outlook: A Philosophy of Signs and Interpretations As the Basis of an Integrative Philosophy of Mind, Language, and Nature

The critique of consciousness and language that has just been sketched can also be put this way: the fact that signs and interpretations play a constitutive role in language, consciousness, and self-consciousness, must by no means tempt one into thinking that we are therefore dealing with

things in themselves or that we have some guarantee for their definitive comprehension and judgment! To make this assumption would mean committing a kind of semantic fallacy with regard to language and consciousness.

Consciousness and language can be viewed and treated as taking place *in* signs and interpretations and *by virtue of* them. This refers to the genesis and function of consciousness and language. *That* the signs used in consciousness and language possess the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties they do in the course of successful communication 'with other persons' and 'about something,' is a result of the alignment of signs 'toward other persons' and of intentionality in 'being about something.' This double alignment inherently and *ipso facto* has the character of (p.54) constructional interpretation. For semantic and pragmatic properties are not built into the signs in advance, they are not situationlessly and timelessly inherent. Such a view would not only involve, to borrow Hilary Putnam's phrase, a 'magical connection' (1981: 5), but also magical signs across the board. Interpretation is conditional, not merely optional.

The use and understanding of symbolizing signs is the most original and fundamental characteristic of the human mind. For Nietzsche, man is characterized as the being that 'invents signs.' Inventing symbolizing signs makes human beings unique. Mental, spiritual, and cognitive processes occur *as* processes of signs and interpretations.[29] This is *not*, however, a simple endorsement of the idea that characterizes *computational psychology*—namely, that conscious, mental, and cognitive activities consist in nothing other than the operative manipulation of given (inner) symbols (which, computational psychologists pretend, are each supplied with identifiable and exact meanings). *Nor* does it assert a *merely external dependence* of the mind and consciousness on signs and interpretations—for instance, insofar as thinking requires media and instrumental signs in order to be able to represent and communicate itself and its contents. One needs to take one further essential step. For precisely these processes (e.g. of demarcating, fixing, and delimiting meanings and contents; of communicating contents between people standing in

relationships of communication) take place *in* and *as* processes of signs and interpretations. As we have already heard Nietzsche emphasize, one stops *thinking* altogether when one tries to think *outside* of linguistic signs. Here Nietzsche's conception accords with that of pragmatism, above all with the position of Charles Sanders Peirce. 'We have no power of thinking without signs,' Peirce emphasizes,[30] and he goes even a step further: 'When we think, then, we ourselves, as we are at that moment, appear as a sign'—i.e. as someone who intrinsically already depends on an underlying interpretation. In this sense, it is crucial that consciousness, mind, and thought *are* themselves internally and necessarily semiotic and interpretive processes—that signs and interpretations organize and provide the basis for mind, language, and nature. The dependence of consciousness, mind, thought, and nature upon signs and interpretations is not an *instrumental* one—it is not the case that we attain consciousness etc. *by means of* signs and interpretations. Rather, consciousness, mind, thought, and nature *constitutively* depend upon signs and language—semiotic and interpretive processes are that *by virtue of which* we attain consciousness etc. This view can serve as a guide for a semiotically oriented and interpretative-pragmatic philosophy of mind, language, and nature which transcends the dichotomy between materialism/physicalism and mentalism. Elsewhere, I have attempted to develop the outlines and (p.55) features of such a philosophy of signs and interpretation.[31] But I will not bother you with the details here.

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Notes:

([1]) This chapter is a revised version of my essay Abel (2001a). All references to Nietzsche's writings are from *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGW) (Nietzsche 1967–). All English translations in this chapter are my own.

([2]) Cf. Block, Flanagan, and Güzeldere (1997); Rosenthal (1991); Metzinger (1996).

([3]) The 'Ignorabimus' of Nietzsche's contemporary, the physiologist Emil Du Bois-Reymond, has become famous. He considered it fundamentally impossible that consciousness arose from the cooperation of various atoms. Du Bois-Reymond wanted to show 'that based on the current state of our knowledge about consciousness it cannot be explained by its material conditions, which presumably everyone will admit, but rather also that owing to the nature of things it will not be explained by these conditions' (Du Bois-Reymond 1872: 65; cf. 77).

([4]) In contemporary philosophy, all the positions of P. M. Churchland (1995 and 1989) and P. S. Churchland (1986).

([5]) On Nietzsche's program for a new interpretation of reality, see Abel (1998).

([6]) On the following, for a more detailed discussion see Abel (2000: 19–44).

([7]) See Wittgenstein (1980: nos. 65–197).

([8]) On this term, see Putnam (1975: 379ff.).

([9]) See Nagel (1983: 165–80) and Kripke (1971: 135–64).

([10]) Obviously, this thesis should not be confused with the thesis of the incorrigibility of the mental, which is rejected by most contemporary materialists as well as by Nietzsche.

([11]) On the topic of 'incorporation' from this perspective, see, e.g., NL 1887, KGW VIII.2, 9[151]; 1886–7, KGW VIII.1, 6[13]; and 1881, KGW V.2, 11[141].

([12]) On this figure, see Perry (1993: esp. chapter 2).

([13]) For a detailed discussion of this subject, see Abel (1985: 157–85).

([14]) For a detailed discussion, see Abel (1998).

([15]) See NL 1886–7, KGW VIII.1, 2[151].

([16]) On this, see Stingelin (1996).

([17]) On this, see Abel (1998: 110–29).

([18]) See Singer (1994, 1992, and 1998: 1829–40).

([19]) See Dennett (1991: chapter 5).

([20]) One must distinguish from the Cartesian notion of a central point in the brain what is called today in brain research the ‘representational metalevel.’ By that thesis it is understood that ‘brains that have consciousness possess a representational metalevel at which internal states are explicitly represented; they have what one might call an “inner eye” function. They can compare protocols of their own performance with incoming signals and derive from the outcome of these “internal deliberations” decisions for future acts’ (Singer 1998: 1829).

([21]) See Dennett (1991: 134ff.).

([22]) On this topic and for the following, see in detail Abel (1998: esp. 122ff.).

([23]) For more detailed discussion, see Abel (1999). An English translation is in preparation for 2015.

([24]) See NL 1885, KGW VII.3, 38[2].

([25]) See Abel (1999: section 9.3).

([26]) Together with the reference to other people, the interaction with the environment is essential for the development and optimization of the human brain. See Singer (1992: 50–65).

([27]) See Abel (1998), Index: ‘Leib-Organisation’; and Abel (1990) ‘Interpretatorische Vernunft und menschlicher Leib.’ In

the following reference is made to materials from both of these works. The '*lesser* reason' in the sense of reason fixated on itself in a fundamentalistic way is characterized by attributes (like, e.g., validity and unity over time and situations) that would have to be overcome or left behind in the course of opening up to the overwhelmingly rich network of the conditions of 'lesser reason' itself.

([28]) See NL 1888, KGW VIII.3, 14[119].

([29]) This thesis is developed in detail in Abel (1999: chapters 4, 7, and 8; and 2001b).

([30]) Peirce (1960: vol. v, no. 5.265); see also no. 5.251ff. Peirce goes so far as to say (no. 5.283): 'When we think, then, we ourselves, as we are at that moment, appear as a sign.'

([31]) What is offered here only briefly is developed in detail and with a view toward both theoretical and practical questions in Abel (1995, 1999, and 2004).