

Nietzsche on the Embodiment of Mind and Self

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1. Introduction¹

One of the most celebrated and most frequently quoted passages from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* stems from the speech entitled "On the Despisers of the Body".

"Body am I and soul" — thus talks the child. And why should one not talk like children?

But the awakened one, the one who knows, says: Body am I through and through, and nothing besides; and soul is merely a word for something in the body.

The body is a great reason, a manifold with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman.

A tool of the body is your small reason too, my brother, which you call 'mind' (*Geist*), a small tool and toy of your great reason.

"I" you say, and are proud of this word. But the greater thing — in which you do not want to believe — is your body and its great reason: it does not say I, but does I.

(Za, *On the Despisers of the Body*, translation changed)

Some of the things Zarathustra says here are easier to make sense of than others. For instance, it seems plain that he is suggesting that we are creatures whose mind (*Geist*) is in some sense embodied. Less straightforward is how we are to understand the claim that the body is, or has, a "great reason" of which what we usually call "reason" — or,

¹ I have benefited from discussing earlier drafts of this paper in São Paulo and Lisbon. In particular, I would like to thank João Constâncio, Pietro Gori and Paolo Stellino for pointing out some important weaknesses in the version I presented in Lisbon.

again, “mind” — is but a “tool”. Even less clear is what role the reference to our practice of “proudly” uttering the word “I” is supposed to play in this context. And why should one think that Zarathustra’s words convey a picture of mind and self which is, if not in tune with our naïve intuitions, at least intriguing and perhaps even philosophically attractive?

At the very end of this paper I shall come up with my own answers to these questions. To get there, however, we first need to work out in some detail Nietzsche’s view on the embodiment of mind and self.

2. Two Notions of Embodiment

Different notions of embodiment have been appealed to by philosophers concerned with the nature of the mind and the self. Thus, in order to fruitfully illuminate Nietzsche’s own view on such subject matters, it will be helpful to sort out the ways in which we can talk of the mind and of the self as being embodied. In particular, I shall introduce a distinction put forward by Barry Dainton, which seems to me especially suited to provide us with a congenial way of framing further explorations of Nietzsche’s position.

Dainton’s distinction can be illustrated by considering two different questions we may ask about a certain being’s embodiment. On the one hand, we could ask whether it is “effectively embodied”, i.e., whether, “as a matter of actual fact, it has a body” (Dainton 2008: 205). Similarly, we could ask whether its mind *de facto* depends, in some fundamental sense, on the kind of body it happens to have. Following Dainton, I shall refer to this notion of embodiment as *effective embodiment*. On the other hand, we can ask whether the being in question is presented to itself as being embodied and, again in the same spirit, whether it experiences its own mental life as in some sense shaped by the kind of body it happens to have. Here, the relevant dimension is purely phenomenological. Accordingly, the label suggested by Dainton is *phenomenal embodiment*.

Obviously, the two notions of embodiment just sketched are closely related. There is, however, a remarkable asymmetry in how they interconnect. On the one hand,

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though effective embodiment is not entailed by phenomenal embodiment, the case of a being that is presented to itself in experience as an embodied cognitive self, but that is not in fact embodied, should strike us as a remote possibility.² On the other hand, the case of a being which is effectively, but not phenomenally, embodied seems something we can much more easily make sense of. For instance, if we assume that to experience oneself as being such-and-such requires a minimum of cognitive sophistication, it follows that most animals, though arguably embodied in the effective sense, fail to satisfy a necessary condition for phenomenal embodiment. More strikingly, according to Nietzsche, *we* are beings of the latter kind, or so I shall argue.

3. Nietzsche's Position: an Initial Sketch

That Nietzsche thinks that we are effectively embodied cognitive selves, I take it, should be agreed upon by most scholars. At least, this seems to be one of the only few points one can straightforwardly read out from what Zarathustra tells us in the passage on the “Despisers of the Body” quoted at the very beginning of this paper. Much more controversial, and surely in need of some persuasive illustration, is on the contrary to attribute to him the view that we lack, in some substantial respect, phenomenal embodiment.

Let me start by considering a *Nachlass* passage belonging to the set of preliminary notes Nietzsche wrote down as he was working on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

Behind your thoughts and feelings there is your body and your self within the body (*dein Selbst im Leibe*): the terra incognita. What do you have *these* thoughts and feelings *for*? Thereby your self within the body (*dein Selbst im Leibe*) *wants* something. (*Nachlass* 1882, 5[31], KSA 10: 225)

This passage touches upon aspects which are relevant for both notions of embodiment previously introduced. On the one hand, the claim that we have “thoughts” and “feelings” we happen to have because of our body’s hidden purposes suggests that at

² Were you a brain-in-a-vat, you would be a being of that kind. Let us grant, however, that this is indeed a quite remote possibility.

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least mental states of this sort are — in some sense still to be clarified — “brought about” by the body. Nietzsche seems to be claiming thus that the mind is effectively embodied. Moreover, Nietzsche’s talk of the “self within the body (*Selbst im Leibe*)” clearly indicates that, in his view, there is something like an effectively embodied self.

On the other hand, Nietzsche’s characterization of the body as a “terra incognita” suggests that we lack some kind of relevant epistemic access to it. At first sight, this claim may strike one as hardly plausible, for it seems obvious that we hold a privileged access to (some of) the states of our own body. For instance, I do not need to look at my arm to know that it is stretched out. Facts of this kind regarding my body, we typically know in a direct, non-inferential way. This is precisely what motivates Schopenhauer’s definition of the body as the only “*immediate object*” (Schopenhauer 1819: § 18, 124) we may encounter in experience. Should then Nietzsche’s characterization of the body as a “terra incognita” be read as a denial of the apparently undisputable facts substantiating Schopenhauer’s view of the body as the immediately given?

This would be an overhasty conclusion. Rather, I propose to understand Nietzsche as pointing out that what we lack is epistemic access to a certain range of facts concerning the way in which the body shapes mind and self. More precisely, my thesis is Nietzsche thinks that, in some important sense, we are not presented to ourselves as embodied selves, nor does our mental life look to us as intimately constituted by the kind of body we happen to have. If this is true, it seems thus fair to interpret Nietzsche as suggesting that we are not phenomenally embodied.

Still, in order for Nietzsche’s position to sound somewhat plausible, we need to narrow the scope of his claim that we lack effective embodiment, so as not to entail that we lack any kind of privileged awareness whatsoever of our own body. For Nietzsche’s view of the body as a “terra incognita” would otherwise deny those basic facts Schopenhauer appeals to in describing the body as the unique “*immediate object*” of experience. My proposal is therefore to understand Nietzsche’s claim that we lack phenomenal embodiment as restricted to a certain class of psychological states, namely,

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to that of propositionally³ articulated conscious attitudes (like beliefs, desires, emotions, volitions, etc.). Importantly, the scope of the claim is not intended to include so-called raw feelings, i.e. purely phenomenal states (like pains) or qualities (like sensory qualities). Thus, I propose that we understand Nietzsche as claiming that we lack epistemic access to the constitutive relation obtaining between certain bodily facts and one's attitudes. Similarly, I submit, he claims that we are not presented to ourselves as the embodied bearers of states of this kind.

To my eyes, Nietzsche's endorsement of these restricted claims about our lacking phenomenal embodiment are deeply rooted in his view on introspection. More precisely, he thinks that the way in which we introspectively access conscious attitudes is such that, in experiencing ourselves as the bearer of such attitudes, we take ourselves to be, in a relevant sense, non-embodied beings. This feature of our self-experience is nicely expressed by Sydney Shoemaker, who notes that "when one is introspectively aware of one's thoughts, feelings, beliefs and desires, one is not presented to oneself as a flesh and body person" (1984: 102). Thus, at least as long as we are concerned with conscious attitudes like those listed by Shoemaker, Nietzsche takes what is usually called the *Cartesian* picture of mind and self⁴ to accurately capture the conception we naïvely form of ourselves as thinkers and agents. It is this conception of self-experience which, in turn, substantiates Nietzsche's qualification of the body as a terrain which remains unknowable to the subject. Of course, all this needs some substantial unpacking, and that is the main focus of this paper.

4) Nietzsche on Effective Embodiment

Let us start with Nietzsche's view on effective embodiment. To be effectively embodied requires a being's mental life to essentially depend on its specific bodily constitution.

³ Nietzsche does not believe in the existence of propositions conceived of as abstract entities. Thus, "proposition" refers here to the basic grammatical structure of sentences of a given natural language. In this sense, "propositional" is somewhat equivalent to "linguistic".

⁴ What I call the "Cartesian picture" is not meant to reproduce all the details of Descartes's own view. It is just a handy label.

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According to Nietzsche, this is true of us. In his writings, he points out different ways in which our mind is shaped by our being the kind of organism we are. For the purposes of the present paper, I shall focus on his claim that mind and self are, so to speak, spread throughout the entire organism. I shall refer to this as the *distributed* view (of the mind and self). The task of this section is to spell out Nietzsche's understanding of it.

Let us start by considering the evidently interrelated descriptions of the body and of the soul Nietzsche offers in *Beyond Good and Evil*. First, he suggests that the "soul" should be conceived of as "a society constructed out (*Gesellschaftsbau*) of drives and affects" (BGE 12). Later on in the book, he then states that "our body is, after all, only a society constructed out (*Gesellschaftsbau*) of many souls" (BGE 19). Taken together, these two passages are naturally read as claiming that the body is constituted by souls which are, in turn, constituted by drives (and affects). However, this way of putting things is at best misleading, for Nietzsche actually thinks there is no substantial difference between what he calls "body" and what he calls "soul": as he puts it in the passage from *Zarathustra* I have started with, "soul is only the name of something in the body" (*Za, On the Despisers of the Body*). If we take "soul" to be a broad notion somehow embracing those of "mind" and "self" — as it seems natural to do — it follows that these two terms are to be understood, too, as referring to "something in the body". We can therefore conclude that mind and self are for Nietzsche effectively embodied.

Unfortunately, as soon as we look back at the descriptions Nietzsche offers of the body and of the soul by keeping in mind that he sees no substantial difference between the two, those descriptions start looking quite puzzling. The first problem is how to make sense of his claim that the body is constituted by "many souls", as he writes in BGE 19. A plausible suggestion is that the "many souls" Nietzsche refers to there are in fact just the "drives" he claims the body is constituted by in BGE 12. In the light of this suggestion, we should read him as saying that the body as well as the soul are constituted by the drives—an interpretation which nicely fits with his further claim according to which there is no substantial difference between body and soul. However, this raises a second problem. For why does Nietzsche then use the term "soul" instead of "drive" in BGE 19?

To start answering this question, note that—if we assume the reasoning so far to be correct—what is constituted by the drives can be referred to either as the “body” or as the “soul”. This seems to indicate that the drives can be described in physical or physiological as well as in mental or psychological terms. As Nietzsche takes the soul to be just “something in the body”, it seems natural to conclude that he conceives the drives as something essentially physical. It is less clear, however, in which sense they qualify as mental. To my eyes, a plausible proposal is to consider Nietzsche as holding that the drives are mental *qua* intentional, i.e. *qua* directed towards certain aspects of reality. As he writes in an unpublished note, “each ‘drive’ is the drive to ‘something good’, as seen from a certain standpoint; there’s valuation (*Werthschätzung*) in it” (*Nachlass* 1884, 26[72]). Thus, a rationale for Nietzsche’s referring to the drives as “souls” in BGE 19 could be that there he is primarily concerned with their mental, rather than with their physical features, i.e. with their intentionality.⁵

How does all this relate to the distributed view of mind and self? A quick answer to this question is that, according to Nietzsche, mind and self are realized by the relations the multiple drives have with each other. For instance, in another aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes that “thinking is only a relation between the drives” (BGE 36). Here, I submit, “thinking” should be taken to broadly cover those among our psychological states which are propositionally articulated.⁶ Hence, states of this kind all result from relations obtaining between one’s drives. Of course, in order to better spell out what this claim exactly means, we need to know more about Nietzsche’s conception of the drives.

⁵ Richardson argues that drives should not be conceived as mental. He contends that it would be wrong to think of them not only as “conscious”, but also as “‘previewing’ or ‘preconceiving’ their outcomes unconsciously” (2004: 36). Rather, he suggests that we should understand the drives as selected dispositions. Just some brief considerations, as I cannot address his argument in detail here. My view is that the mere fact that Nietzsche talks of the drives as being unconscious suffices to ascribe to them some sort of mentality, given that the realm of the unconscious is usually taken to be part of the mind. Thus, to this extent the disagreement may be purely terminological. A more substantial point may regard the question of whether drives are in some—perhaps minimal—sense representational. I think that Nietzsche’s evaluative talk (?) suggests that they are. Be it as it may, it is important to note that holding the drives to be representational is compatible with Richardson’s convincingly argued main thesis that they are a product of natural selection.

⁶ See also GS 333, where Nietzsche argues, in a similar vein, that knowledge derives from the certain interplay of certain drives.

Maudemarie Clark and David Dudrick have argued for a homuncularist reading inspired, in particular, by the work of Daniel Dennett. Dennett defends (a certain variety of) homuncularism as the proper approach to most cognitive and, in general, psychological puzzles. The main strategy, he suggests, consists in “breaking the single-minded agent down into miniagents and microagents” (1991: 458), which display much simpler patterns of behaviour, thus becoming empirically tractable. Accordingly, the personal-level behaviour of the agent is to be explained as resulting from the interplay of such sub-personal cognitive systems.⁷

Surely, we find places in Nietzsche’s *corpus*—in particular, in his unpublished notes—which are most naturally interpreted as putting forward a homuncularist model. In an unpublished note from 1884 he writes, for instance: “By following the thread of the body we recognize the human being as a multiplicity of living beings which—partly fighting one another, partly hierarchized and subordinated to one another—by affirming their individual existence involuntarily also affirm the whole” (*Nachlass* 1884, 27[27], KSA 11: 282). The variety of homuncularism emerging from this passage seems far less sober than that of Dennettian brand. Were we to look for a contemporary counterpart of it, a better option would probably be Francisco Varela’s view that a minimal form of selfhood can be sensibly ascribed even to the simplest living systems (Varela 1991; see also Thompson 2007, in particular ch. 3, 5 and 6). Accordingly, each “living being” which is part of our organism would be an instance of such a minimal self.

However, if we zoom in on Nietzsche’s notion of drive, we also find something in the vicinity of Dennett’s idea of a sub-personal cognitive system. In another unpublished note, he describes the drives as “*higher organs (höhere Organe)*” constituted by some kind of coalescence of “actions, sensations and feelings” (*Nachlass* 1883, 7 [198], KSA 10: 304). Though it is hard to make sense of what he might have in mind here, it seems fair to read this note as suggesting that the drives are to be identified in somewhat functional terms, i.e. in terms of the “actions, sensations and feelings” they

⁷ The homuncularist model has been criticized by Katsafanas (forthcoming), who has instead put forward a dispositionalist reading of Nietzsche’s conception of the drives. In my view, both proposals capture important aspect of Nietzsche’s view. Nor do I see them as necessarily incompatible approaches. Thus, my suggestion would be to pursue a conciliatory strategy—something I have to leave to another occasion. Richardson (2004), too, offers a dispositionalist definition of drives. On Nietzsche’s homuncularism see also Lopes (2012).

typically involve, or something along these lines. More obscure is the meaning that the expression “higher organ” might have in this context. In another note from the same notebook, he gives an example which helps us to better grasp what he thereby means: “The hand of the pianist, the wiring (*Leitung*) there and a region of the brain form together an organ [...]. *Separate parts of the body telegraphically connected—i.e. a drive*” (*Nachlass* 1884, 7[211], KSA 10: 308). If we follow the lead offered by this example, Nietzsche seems to conceive of the drives as sub-systems, which are physiologically realized by a kind of network connecting different parts of the body. Accordingly, the term “higher organ” refers to such networks.

If we try to put things together, it looks that Nietzsche’s conception of the drives consists of three main claims. First, the drives are sub-personal systems to be primarily individuated in functional terms. As such, a drive is identified by the pattern of actions it typically produces in association with certain phenomenal states — sensations and feelings, as Nietzsche has it. For instance, hunger is identified by food-searching actions and unpleasant bodily sensations localized in the stomach. The drive toward cruelty is identified by pain-inflicting actions and, say, by the excitement and pleasant feeling of domination associated with them. Second, different parts of the organism contribute to the physiological realization of the sub-personal system a given drive is. They are embodied networks, one could say. Third, to resume a point made earlier, drives are in some — perhaps minimal — sense intentional, as they substantiate an evaluative stance which directs the organism towards certain objects. As such, they impact the way in which the world appears to us. For instance, as Katsafanas (forthcoming) notes, a certain drive makes that determinate features of the environment become salient. Hunger makes me notice the restaurant on the opposite side of the busy square. The drive towards cruelty makes that lizard look as something on which pain can be inflicted.

We are now in a position to appreciate Nietzsche’s distributed view of the mind and the self. On the one hand, he believes that (most of) our psychological states result from the interplay between the drives, which he conceives of as sub-personal cognitive systems. The physiological realization of such systems requires that different parts of the body cooperate. This means that the cognitive processes underlying our mental life are spread over, and depend on, the entire organism. This is the very point Nietzsche makes in assuming “that the entire organism thinks, that all organic formation (*Gebilde*)

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participates in thinking, feeling, willing — consequently, that the brain is only an enormous centralisation apparatus (*Nachlass* 1884, 27[19], KSA 11: 279-80). On the other hand, and similarly, one's self is constituted by the relations in which one's drives stand to each other. This is why we should conceive of the “soul as subject-multiplicity”, as Nietzsche suggests (BGE 12).

5) *Nietzsche on Phenomenal Embodiment*

In the previous section, I have argued that, according to Nietzsche, what we usually refer to when we talk about mind and self is in fact constituted by, or results from, the interplay of the drives, which he conceives of as physiologically realized sub-personal systems. This, however, is not how things look to us in introspection, for we do not take psychological states like beliefs, desires and emotions to result from the workings of a cognitive network distributed over our entire organism. More generally, it is part of the intuitive conception we have of ourselves as thinkers and agents that our being in states of this kind does not essentially depend on our being “a flesh and body person”, as Shoemaker has it. The philosophical outlook of this intuitive conception is the Cartesian picture that Nietzsche critically targets on several occasions. Nonetheless, Nietzsche grants that the Cartesian picture accurately captures important features of the way in which we are presented to ourselves. He just holds it to be wrong. To put it differently, he thinks that, despite our being effectively embodied cognitive selves, there is a relevant sense in which we lack phenomenal embodiment. More precisely, the embodied character of propositionally articulated attitudes, on the one hand, and of the self, which is the bearer of such states, on the other hand, does not figure into the conception we intuitively have of the mind and self. This means that the experience we have of ourselves is, in some way, profoundly misleading. But in which way is it so?

Typically, we experience ourselves as having a *unified* mental life. Moreover, we usually take this unity to reflect the fact that each of us is the bearer of the psychological states constituting her or his own mental life. *I* am the source of the *unity* of my mental life — this is how each of us thinks of herself or himself. In some rough

approximation, we could say that the Cartesian picture is but a sophisticated articulation of precisely this aspect of such a naïve self-conception.

As we have seen, Nietzsche argues — contrary to this — that our mental life has no real unity as it is constituted, or results from, the workings of several sub-personal systems. Thus, the unified character we take it to have is fictitious. In his writings, Nietzsche offers a diagnosis of why we have come to have such a fallacious self-conception. This diagnosis aims at debunking the idea that introspection provides us a secure grip on the nature of our mind and our self — the very idea from which the Cartesian story’s derives its intuitive force.⁸

To start with, and in order to spell out Nietzsche’s diagnosis, we need to briefly consider his account of consciousness. To this purpose, I shall focus on some of the claims put forward in aphorism 354 of *Gay Science*, where he provides the most articulated treatment of consciousness to be found in his published works.⁹ The first thing to note is that Nietzsche’s way of talking suggests that the kind of consciousness he is concerned with is actually something close to *self*-consciousness. Support for this reading comes, *inter alia*, from his claim that consciousness is intimately related to language. As he has it, “the development of language and the development of consciousness [...] go hand in hand” (GS 354). Of course, most of the meanings in which the term “consciousness” might be used are such that this statement would turn out to be deeply puzzling, if not evidently false. If we read consciousness as self-consciousness, however, the problem does not surface. For one, self-consciousness arguably requires the ability to self-refer. Since this capacity is usually understood as depending on one’s mastery of terms like “I” and “mine”, it seems reasonable to conclude that self-consciousness is language-dependent.¹⁰

Nietzsche, however, also holds the converse of this statement to be true: unconscious cognition is non-linguistic in nature. From this, some points flow which are relevant for our discussion. First, note that for Nietzsche the working of the drives is to

⁸ I offer a more detailed account of Nietzsche’s skeptical take on introspection in Riccardi (forthcoming-b).

⁹ Here, I take up a reading more carefully defended in Riccardi (forthcoming-a).

¹⁰ From now on, I shall use the term “conscious” as referring to this kind of self-consciousness.

be situated at the unconscious level. This means that the cognitive processes going on in such systems do not involve linguistically articulated contents. On the contrary, such contents are to be found exclusively at the conscious level. Second, according to Nietzsche this implies that, in turning conscious, the content of psychological states undergoes a significant conversion: whatever kind of structure it may have, this structure is traded in for propositional articulation. Third, from this Nietzsche draws the conclusion that “all becoming conscious involves a vast and thorough corruption, falsification, superficialization, and generalization” (GS 354). This is not the place to try to spell out this claim in detail. In the remainder of this section, I shall focus on just one language-dependent trait which typically characterizes the way in which we are conscious of our own psychological states. This trait, I shall argue, figures prominently in the naïve conception we have of our mind and our self as essentially unified as well as in the Cartesian picture, which further elaborates on such a conception.

The feature I have in mind has already been mentioned at the very end of the previous paragraph: it is, namely, the self-referential employment of the word “I”. To appreciate its role, we first need to focus on some general features of propositionally articulated attitudes such as beliefs, desires, volitions, emotions, etc. (Recall that states of this kind are precisely those with regard to which Nietzsche believes that we lack phenomenal embodiment.) Here, two aspects are crucial. On the one hand, as we have seen, Nietzsche holds that states of this sort are realized by the interplay of various sub-personal systems — the drives — whose cognitive workings occur at the unconscious level and do not operate on linguistically articulated contents. On the other hand, as soon as they become conscious, mental states acquire the linguistic shape under which we introspectively know them. Thus, the way in which we experience ourselves as cognitive selves is shaped by the intrinsically language-mediated access we have to our own psychological states. This is true, in particular, of the experience we have of ourselves as having a unified mental life, which does not essentially depend on our being (effectively) embodied.

The general form of a first-person propositional attitude encompasses three elements: the first-person pronoun, a mental verb, and a sentence embedded in a that-clause. Suitable examples are: “I think that Lisbon is in Portugal”, or “I hope that Benfica will lose the next game”. Nietzsche’s concern is, in particular, with the first two elements of such attitudes. Given its unique philosophical pedigree, he focuses

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specifically on the instance “I think”. However, most of what he says easily generalizes to other examples of “I + mental verb” constructions. In a famous aphorism he writes:

When I dissect the process expressed in the proposition “I think”, I get a whole set of bold claims that are difficult, perhaps impossible, to establish, — for instance, that *I* am the one who is thinking, that there must be something that is thinking in the first place, that thinking is an activity and the effect of a being who is considered the cause, that there is an “I”, and finally, that it has already been determined what is meant by “thinking”[.] (BGE 16)

Here, Nietzsche points out several different beliefs we supposedly endorse as a consequence of our naïve understanding of expressions like “I think”. The main point of the aphorism is to rebut a view which considers such beliefs to be “immediate certainties” (*ibid.*), since — Nietzsche argues — they could at best arrived at only via complicated inferential patterns. However, other passages from his work suggest that he does not think that we are mistaken solely with regard to their epistemic status. Rather, he seems to maintain that the beliefs in question are, as such, false. To see this, let us take a closer look at the three most relevant among the “bold claims” he refers to.

The first claim concerns the way in which the token-referential use of the term “I” shapes the conception we have of ourselves. On the one hand, the usage of the first-person pronoun in expressions like “I think” inclines us to believe that there is something to which the word “I” refers and which is, in some sense, the bearer of the relevant mental state. On the other hand, as the following passage makes explicit, we are also inclined to believe that this “something” does not coincide with the body:

People used to believe in “the soul” as they believed in grammar and the grammatical subject: people said that “I” was a condition and “think” was a predicate and conditioned — thinking is an activity, and a subject *must* be thought of as its cause (BGE 54)

Thus, Nietzsche argues that our conception of ourselves as disembodied selves — as “souls”, or “subjects” — is a kind of folk-metaphysical conclusion we derive from our naïve understanding of expressions like “I think”. Interestingly, a famous passage by Wittgenstein provides a quite similar diagnosis:

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We feel then that in the cases in which ‘I’ is used as subject, we don’t use it because we recognize a particular person by his bodily characteristics; and this creates the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless, which, however, has its seat in our body. In fact, *this* seems to be the real ego, the one of which it was said “Cogito, ergo sum”. (Wittgenstein 1965: 69)

Second point is this: our taking the term “I” to pick out “something bodiless”, as Wittgenstein puts it, is reflected in the way in which we conceive of ourselves as unified selves. However, as soon as we discover that we are effectively embodied beings, such a unified character reveals itself as merely apparent.

To start from the *body* and from physiology: why? — We attain the right view about our kind of subject-unity, namely as that of a regent at the top of a community and not as ‘souls’ or ‘vital forces’, as well as about the dependence of these regents from those they reign on and about the conditions of rank and labor division as enabling both the individuals and the whole. (*Nachlass* 1885, 40[21], KSA 11: 638)

Thus, whereas the experience we have of ourselves as mediated by the self-referential use of “I” prompts the belief that we are souls, or subjects, characterized by some kind of primitive unity, empirical investigation shows that we are in fact constituted by multiple sub-personal systems — the drives — , the interplay of which gives shape to our self.

The third claim concerns our self-conception as the bearers of our mental states. In the passage from BGE 16 quoted above, Nietzsche stresses how expressions like “I think” suggests that the mental verb in question — in the example, “think” — designates a kind of “activity” which the “I” is supposed to be causing. Put in different words, he argues that we most naturally tend to read “I think” as something along these lines: “There is some kind of thoughtful activity and I am the cause thereof”. This, again, is an erroneous belief we come to have as a result of the token-referential usage we make of the term “I” — or, as Nietzsche has it, as a result of our taking grammar at face value.¹¹

¹¹ Some considerations, which are sympathetic to Nietzsche’s own reasoning, have been recently put forward by John Campbell. To start with, Campbell notes that “our pattern of use of the first person is

Let me briefly recapitulate where we have gone so far. Nietzsche argues that, by the process in virtue of which they turn conscious, mental states become propositionally articulated. Given that the domain of introspection only encompasses conscious states, the access we have to our own mind is confined to propositionally articulated states — for all and only conscious states have propositional content. From this, it follows for Nietzsche that the naïve conception we have of ourselves as thinkers and agents is shaped by such a peculiar language-mediated access we have to our own mind. In particular, he argues that the self-referential use of “I” plays thereby a crucial role due to the disembodied mode of presentation associated with it. Here is where the conception of ourselves as “souls” or “subjects” originates, which confers to the Cartesian picture of the mind and of the self its typical intuitive appeal.

6) *Zarathustra’s Speech*

We are now in a position to address the relation between body, mind, and self as it emerges from the Zarathustrian speech “On the Despisers of the Body”, which served as an *incipit* to my paper. Let us start by bringing his very words back to mind.

The quoted passage starts by contrasting the “child”’s way of talking about the body and the soul with that of the “awakened one”. Whereas the child is presented as claiming to be body and soul alike, the “one who knows” conceives of himself, on the contrary, as being body “through and through”. Soul, he adds, is “just a word for something in the body”. As Gerhardt notes, a first point conveyed by Zarathustra’s speech is that “the distinction between body and soul is [...] portrayed as the expression of a naïve kind of consciousness”. Conversely, it also suggests that, “[i]n the awakened

heavily invested in the idea that the self is causally significant” (2012: 373), a point which resembles Nietzsche’s third claim. Key to the notion of causation involved in our usage of the first-person, he goes on, is the commonsensical idea of a “mechanism” sustaining certain “counterfactual structures” (374). Thus, as we conceive of the person as causally efficacious in this sense, we come to believe that “there must be a single concrete thing” which is the relevant mechanism (375). Then, as “[t]here seems to be no physical object that could sustain that role, [...] we are driven to suppose that it must be a non-physical thing, the soul” (*ibid.*). Here, Campbell makes a point similar to that made by Nietzsche—his first claim—and Wittgenstein, though he provides a more substantial story about why the causal self-conception embedded in the pattern of use of “I” leads us to assume that we are disembodied subjects.

light of mature consciousness and the perspective of knowledge, the difference between body and soul is evidently no longer defensible” (2005: 282).

In a recent paper, Christine Daigle has questioned Gerhardt’s reading of this passage. It would be wrong, she argues, to read the “child”’s way of talking to express some kind of naïve dualism, as implied by Gerhardt’s rendering. She proposes instead to understand the “child” as saying that body and soul are just two aspects of the same entity — a “body-soul”, as Daigle puts it. Accordingly, there is no real opposition between the two points of view: “[t]he enlightened man knows that ‘Seele’ is only a word and that it refers to a bodily thing and not to something beyond or separate from the body. So the enlightened man is introduced here to bring a word of caution” (Daigle 2011: 237). This line of argument does not seem compelling, however. First, Gerhardt’s reading is arguably the most natural one. Second, Daigle’s own interpretation faces some exegetical shortcomings, at least to my eye. For instance, it seems to flow from the very dialectic of Nietzsche’s text that the two alternative ways of talking — that of the “child” and that of the “one who knows” — are in tension with one another.¹² This textual aspect, however, though nicely reflected by Gerhardt’s reading, does not harmonize with her interpretation.

Be it as it may, the point that is relevant to our present concern and that is agreed upon by both scholars is that the view Zarathustra ends up endorsing amounts to the claim that there is no substantial difference between what we usually call “body” and what we usually call “soul”. Notably, this goes hand in hand with how the relation between “body” and “soul” is characterized in *Beyond Good and Evil*,¹³ a book which is supposed to provide, in Nietzsche’s own words, an “introduction to the background of Zarathustra”.¹⁴

¹² Zarathustra’s question “And why should one not speak like children?” is only *prima facie* a rhetorical invitation to endorse the “child”’s point of view. For the dialectical context of the passage is such that the question is immediately followed by the introduction of the contrasting point of view held by the “one who knows”.

¹³ See section 4 above.

¹⁴ Letter to E.W. Fritsch, 7th August 1886, KSB 7, 224.

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After contrasting the “child”’s point of view and that of the “one who knows”, Nietzsche introduces his famous description of the body as a “great reason”.¹⁵ The “mind” (*Geist*), on the contrary, is said to constitute but a “small reason” which is actually “a tool of your body”, “a small tool and toy of your great reason”. In light of the proposed reading, the qualification of the body as a “great reason” is best understood as the claim that cognition is distributed over the entire organism. Furthermore, the claim that what we usually call the “mind” — that for which Nietzsche uses the term “*Geist*” — is but a “small reason” and, as such, a “tool” of the body should be interpreted as expressing the fact that one’s psychological states result, in fact, from the interplay between one’s drives. In other words, the conscious states constituting one’s mental life are dependent on certain bodily facts.

In order to address what comes next, it is worth reading Nietzsche’s text afresh.

“I” you say, and are proud of this word. But the greater thing — in which you do not want to believe — is your body and its great reason: it does not say I, but does I. (*Za, On the Despisers of the Body*)

Different points are here condensed in a few lines. First, Zarathustra refers to our common usage of the first person pronoun in a somewhat disqualifying tone. But how are we to make sense of his saying that we are “proud of this word”? To start answering this question, recall that according to him the access we have to our own mind is mediated by the self-referential employment of the word “I”. This fact is responsible — to briefly resume the points made in the previous section — for our intuitive belief that we are the disembodied bearers of our psychological states. Thus, as the experience we have of our mental life is shaped by the disembodied mode of presentation associated with the first-personal pronoun, it seems reasonable to say, as Zarathustra does, that we are “proud” of the word “I”. For, to put it in different terms, the conception we have of ourselves as cognitive selves is governed by the self-referential use we make of it.

¹⁵ The description of the body goes on as follows: “a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, one herd and one shepherd”. I shall not consider these further characterizations, for to my eye, they have to do with the conception Nietzsche has of the drives as building a hierarchical structure—a view which is not immediately relevant to the topic of the present paper.

Completely absent from this picture is, on the contrary, the “great reason” which is our body, Zarathustra goes on. Although our mind and self are constituted by the body’s “great reason” — the cognitive states and processes distributed over the entire organism — we normally fail to become aware of this fact. The main reason for this is that such states and processes, which Nietzsche conceives of as resulting from the working of, and interplay between, our drives, occur at the unconscious level. Thus, we simply lack any kind of direct access to them. Of course, we do become conscious of many of our psychological states. However, such conscious and thus introspectable states are for Nietzsche always propositionally articulated and, consequently, already involve the self-referential pronoun “I”. (Recall that we are here concerned with attitudes of the form “I+mental verb+‘that’-clause”.) Hence, in introspecting one’s conscious psychological states, one is presented to oneself as the kind of disembodied soul, or subject, to which we usually take the word “I” to refer. We are therefore in no position to access the unconscious goings-on of our drives, which are doomed to remain —, as Nietzsche wrote in the *Nachlass* note quoted earlier — a “terra incognita” hidden behind those propositionally articulated states to which we do have introspective awareness.¹⁶ Notably, a revised version of this passage was interpolated by Nietzsche into the published text of Zarathustra’s speech, just a few lines below:

Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a mighty commander, an unknown wise man — his name is Self. In your body he dwells, he is your body.
(Za, *On the Despisers of the Body*)

¹⁶ One might worry that thereby Nietzsche’s view drifts perilously towards some uncommendable version of epiphenomenism about consciousness. In Riccardi (forthcoming-a) I defend that Nietzsche holds, indeed, a version of epiphenomenism. However, I also try to show that, given the notion of consciousness he is concerned with, his epiphenomenism is less radical than it might appear at first sight, though admittedly still unpalatable to many.

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