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Symposium on Justin Remhof's Nietzsche's Constructivism: A Metaphysics of Material Objects (Routledge, 2018)

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Abstract

Like Kant, the German Idealists, and many neo-Kantian philosophers before him, Nietzsche was persistently concerned with metaphysical questions about the nature of objects. His texts often address questions concerning the existence and non-existence of objects, the relation of objects to human minds, and how different views of objects impact commitments in many areas of philosophy—not just metaphysics, but also language, epistemology, science, logic and mathematics, and even ethics. In this book, Remhof presents a systematic and comprehensive analysis of Nietzsche's material object metaphysics. He argues that Nietzsche embraces the controversial constructivist view that all concrete objects are socially constructed. Reading Nietzsche as a constructivist, Remhof contends, provides fresh insight into Nietzsche's views on truth, science, naturalism, and nihilism. The book also investigates how Nietzsche's view of objects compares with views offered by influential American pragmatists and explores the implications of Nietzsche's constructivism for debates in contemporary material object metaphysics. Nietzsche's Constructivism is a highly original and timely contribution to the steadily growing literature on Nietzsche's thought.

Keywords

History of philosophy, 19th century philosophy, Nietzsche, metaphysics, epistemology, science, truth, nihilism, American Pragmatism

Précis of *Nietzsche's Constructivism: A Metaphysics of Material Objects* (Routledge, 2018)

In this book I set out to provide a comprehensive account of Nietzsche's material object metaphysics and argue that he is a *constructivist*. Constructivism is the neo-Kantian view that our representational practices bring all concrete objects into existence. This reading of Nietzsche is not brand-new in the literature. But it is certainly not mainstream. And constructivism is quite a contentious view of objects in its own right—the position strikes most readers as either flat-out false or too controversial for comfort. Perhaps this is why Nietzsche's constructivism has never been systematically explained or defended. As I see things, however, once Nietzsche's view is properly explicated his position is much stronger than it might initially seem to be, and I think reading Nietzsche as a constructivist can help illuminate many key areas of his philosophical program as a whole.

The book starts by challenging alternative readings of Nietzsche's view of objects. Some believe that he is a commonsense realist (Clark 1990; Leiter 1994, 2002). Others hold that he is an eliminativist (Nola 1999; Meyer 2011). Some argue that he reconceives objects as bundles of forces, or more simply, bundles of empirical properties. One version of this view, unificationism, holds that bundles are unified intrinsically (Hales and Welshon 1999; Doyle 2009). Another version holds that bundles are unified extrinsically, specifically though human representational practices. I defend this last reading.

On my view, Nietzsche holds that objects are conceptually unified bundles of empirical properties. Planets, for instance, are bundles of properties the concept <planet> refers to, namely, objects that orbit the sun, remain round, and are gravitationally dominant. The world is filled with various clusters of properties, Nietzsche thinks, but no cluster is a formal unity—and thus a

bona fide object—apart from our representational practices. This view of objects, I argue, best fits Nietzsche's texts. From early to late, Nietzsche repeatedly claims that objects are ontologically dependent on human actions. Commonsense realism, eliminativism, and unificationism all deny such dependence. Hence none get Nietzsche right.

Constructivism does not imply that we can simply create objects at will, or that the existence of objects depends merely on subjective preferences, or that with respect to what objects exist anything goes. Nietzsche places significant constraints on construction, though no constraint uniquely determines what is or can be constructed. Most importantly, object construction depends on empirical properties that can be encountered in experience. Objects are bundles of properties that we have sensible access to. Other constraints on construction include the experience of resistance, the current body of accepted beliefs, the fact that construction is a social phenomenon, and epistemic values like consistency, utility, and scope. These constraints rein in subjectivism and facile forms of relativism.

The fact that Nietzsche's constructivism is heavily constrained does not mean that the position comes without serious objections. Perhaps the most pressing objection is that constructivism, Nietzsche's or otherwise, is bankrupt because it cannot account for unperceived objects, most notably objects in the past. It is obvious that dinosaurs roamed the earth prior to the existence of human representational practices, for instance, and so it appears false that our practices bring dinosaurs into existence.

I suggest that Nietzsche can respond to this worry by drawing on Kant's view that reality is that which we can in principle encounter in experience. To say that velociraptors existed, for example, is to say that we can track a causal chain from something we perceive in the present—perhaps the perception of some recently uncovered fossils—back to when the application

conditions for the concept <velociraptor> are met. And, crucially, we play a constitutive role in determining these conditions, that is, which group of identifying properties <velociraptor> bundles. These properties include being a bipedal feathered carnivore in the Cretaceous period. The specific group of properties that constitute objects like velociraptors are brought together through our conceptual organization of the world, past or present. This allows Nietzsche to say that objects in the past are constructed.

Another objection concerns bootstrapping. Nietzsche holds that we bring objects into existence. One might argue, however, that we are also objects. It therefore seems that objects bring objects into existence, which appears absurd. I think Nietzsche's response is to explain away the problem. For Nietzsche, *we* gain determinate conditions of identity as we attempt to understand who we are in experience, from evolved organisms, to moral persons, to mothers and fathers. If this is accurate, then there seems to be no problem in claiming that we construct objects and we are constructed in turn.

Understanding that Nietzsche is a constructivist enables us to gain a better understanding of other important aspects of his philosophical project. Consider his views of truth and science, for instance. It is more or less standard to believe that Nietzsche rejects the pragmatist view that truth consists in beliefs that work given our interests. I suggest that Nietzsche endorses what William James and F. C. S. Schiller call a "humanist" view of truth. On this view, truths concerning concrete objects are constructed because the objects of reference of our true and false propositions that populate the empirical world are constructed. Nietzsche embraces a pragmatist understanding of truth in the sense that propositions pertaining to the empirical world gain a truth-evaluable status only in relation to our interests.

Nietzsche's view of science is even more controversial. Commentators disagree over whether Nietzsche thinks science can represent the facts about the world. Some believe that Nietzsche takes science to be successful because it represents the mind-independent world. Others believe that he rejects the possibility of successful science altogether. I argue that Nietzsche's praise of science rests on accepting constructivism. It is a short path from constructivism about objects to constructivism about facts. Nietzsche seems to think a fact is just an object instantiating a property, and if so, then determining which properties constitute objects implies determining the facts about the world. Science can then successfully represent the world, and success turns on facts being mind-dependent.

Why might Nietzsche be motivated to embrace such a controversial view of facts and objects? I think his motivation lies in overcoming what worries him most: the advent of nihilism. For Nietzsche nihilism is the position that life is meaningless because our highest values cannot be realized in this world. One such value is what Nietzsche calls the "true world," that is, some world ontologically independent of the empirical world. From Plato and the Forms to Christianity and the Kingdom of Heaven, Nietzsche thinks humans have most often turned to the true world to find life meaningful. Even those who dedicate their lives to science and philosophy, Nietzsche argues, have been seduced into valuing the true world. Scientists and philosophers commonly believe that our best theories should be those that represent constitutively mind-independent objects.

Constructivism renders this goal unattainable. Coming to recognize the truth of constructivism therefore enables us to see that a longstanding goal of scientific and philosophical inquiry cannot be realized. Constructivism even rejuvenates our cognitive aims with new purpose, which helps us overcome nihilism concerning our theoretical projects. Constructivism

is not merely a metaphysical position, then, but a metaphysical position with vital ethical consequences—consequences that other readings of Nietzsche's view of objects (common sense realism, eliminativism, and unificationism) are not in a position to enjoy. In fact, by denying the constitutive dependence between objects and human practices, the other readings are essentially nihilistic.

The book's penultimate chapter compares and contrasts Nietzsche's constructivism with seemingly similar versions offered by those in the American pragmatist tradition, namely, William James, Nelson Goodman, and Richard Rorty. I argue that Nietzsche is closest to James and furthest from Rorty. The book finishes with an examination of how Nietzsche's constructivism might resolve difficult problems in analytic material object metaphysics, specifically the argument from vagueness, arbitrariness arguments, debunking arguments, and arguments concerning indeterminate identity. Most metaphysicians today reject the commonsense idea that what objects exist are those we typically take to exist, such as dogs and cats, planets and moons, and the like. Instead they believe that there are either indefinitely many objects right before our eyes (permissivism) or no objects (eliminativism). Both of these options should strike us as extremely bizarre. I argue that Nietzsche's constructivism provides a principled, unique way to push back.

For example, consider how a constructivist might respond to a common argument from arbitrariness. Permissivists might claim that *incars* exist because islands exist. Incars are cars that only exist in garages. They go out of existence when leaving a garage, similar to the way in which we might say that islands go out of existence when completely submerged in water. This similarity leads permissivists to claim that there is no ontologically significant difference

between islands and incars. Consequently, it seems objectionably arbitrary to accept the existence of islands but not incars.

The constructivist, however, can say that there is indeed an ontologically significant difference: we take there to be islands and no incars. This sounds simple, but the reasoning is neither obvious nor philosophically shallow. The constructivist argues that there are no unique bundles of properties in the world that require reference by way of extraordinary concepts like <incar>, whereas there are for <island>. The identity conditions of incars can be sufficiently picked out using familiar concepts like <car>, <garage>, and so on. This is just one way constructivism offers a principled way to take back a world that has slipped through the fingers of analytic metaphysicians.

But—and I will finish with this—Nietzsche's constructivism is flexible, and for the better. Nietzsche is certainly not trapped into defending common sense ontologies. Constructivism can adapt with the times. Nietzsche simply denies that any particular conceptual scheme has the ability to represent the way objects are tenselessly and timelessly. Our concepts, which fix the conditions of identity of objects, develop and change in relation to our needs, interests, and purposes. Given our perennial interest in understanding the existence and nature of objects that shape our perception of the world and of ourselves differently over time—from gendered bodies, to invasive species, to artificially intelligent entities—the ability to permit significant change, and sometimes even radical change, might be the most valuable quality of Nietzsche's constructivism.

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Remhof, Response to Adler

I want to thank Professor Adler for his insightful comments. In what follows, I address three issues: the distinction between macroscopic and microscopic objects, how Nietzsche's constructivist project responds to Kant, and the subject of construction.

Adler first asks whether the distinction between macroscopic and microscopic objects is constructed, or if it reflects some mind-independent way the world is. My answer is the former. For Nietzsche, objects that exist fall under our kind terms, including the terms <macroscopic> and <microscopic>. Kind terms are devised in relation to our interests. Nietzsche, along with modern science, has an interest in differentiating macroscopic objects, like tables and trees, from microscopic objects, like forces. And this division is not arbitrary. For instance, different kinds of objects figure into different kinds of explanations, from ordinary to scientific, and such explanatory differences can be ontologically significant.

Are microscopic objects constructed? Adler quotes my "intuitive motivation" for such a position here:

> if existence conditions depend on identity conditions, and identity conditions depend on descriptive representations, then the view that some objects are unconstructed seems to require there to be objects fully apart from the possibility of descriptive representation. Such objects can only be noumenal objects, or things in themselves, which Nietzsche discards. Hence, all objects, including both macroscopic and microscopic objects, are constructed.

Adler asks why we need to think that unconstructed objects are *fully* apart from the possibility of representation. For instance, why not say that there is an *aspect* of the object that cannot be

described? In response, I think we have to say unconstructed objects are fully apart from the possibility of representation because if we can claim that it is not possible to represent some portion of an object, then we have to be able to represent, in some sense, that portion that we cannot access. This seems either impossible or incoherent. We would not be able to answer, for instance, *what* aspects of an object are in principle inaccessible. As a result, objects with portions that cannot in principle be constructed amount to unconstructed objects. On the other hand, objects with portions that, for whatever reason, are not actually constructed, but which are nonetheless in principle accessible, are constructed. For Nietzsche, there is reason to think this holds for all objects.

Next, Adler holds that Nietzsche's theoretical project fails to take Kant seriously. Kant is interested in providing transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience, a project Nietzsche rejects. As I see things, however, Nietzsche trades Kant's project for naturalizing the conditions of experience. By doing so, he denies Kantian objectivity, which is grounded in non-empirical concepts. Nietzsche makes remarks to the effect that Kant's understanding of mathematical concepts, basic ontological concepts like substance and causation, and concepts underlying the natural sciences, lack the objectivity Kant claims. All such concepts are constructed to organize experience in accordance with the needs, interests, and values of creatures like us, which change and develop over time. Thus, I think Nietzsche sees through Kant's failure to grasp the ontological significance of empirical concepts and the dynamic nature of those concepts.

Adler suggests that empirical concepts very well account for the particular identity conditions of objects like suns, moons, and stars, but not identity conditions as such, which Kant's transcendental philosophy appears to provide. Nietzsche's response is to reject the

plausibility of accounting for identity conditions as such. Nietzsche often reiterates that there is no unitary experience for experiencers like us, or no single "subject" of experience, as Adler puts it. This suggests there are no grounds for the deriving constitutive elements of the possibility of experience in general. The untenability of this project undermines the search for concepts that account for the identity conditions of objecthood in general. Concepts like <substance> and <causality>, which Kant uses to define objecthood, can only provide particular kinds of conditions of identity, which reflect how and why they are developed and applied.

I therefore think Nietzsche develops a substantive post-Kantian epistemology and metaphysics. Nietzsche's epistemology turns on the ways in which situated knowers organize complex information in their environment in order to understand it. Knowledge is not the result of representing objects that reflect the basic conceptual structures our mode of cognition, but of creating and applying representations that structure incoming information for us to thrive, both theoretically and practically. Against Kant, Nietzsche offers new conditions of the possibility of what objects exist and how we can know them.

I want to close by briefly commenting on the "we" of construction in the context of Adler's reading that, on Nietzsche's account, social construction always occurs within social relations of dominance and subordination. I think this is indeed Nietzsche's view and that it certainly distinguishes Nietzsche from Kant and Hegel. But there is nothing substantively "social" in Kant's constructivism, as I just suggested, and I do not think Hegel is a constructivist about material objects like Nietzsche.

One might argue that, if anything, Nietzsche's view is closer to Rorty's. Rorty is a self-proclaimed constructivist who seems to have a similar view of social relations. Importantly, though, unlike Rorty, Nietzsche holds that construction is answerable to non-linguistic reality.

Thus, conflicts concerning the existence or non-existence of certain objects between dominant and subordinate social groups need not turn merely on disputes concerning language, or simply what some group has the opportunity to say against another, with the hope that disputes will be resolved by commitment to satisfying shared purposes of the community. Such conflicts can be mediated by the world, in addition to other epistemic constraints. There will of course be interpretive disputes, especially when social groups are at cross-purposes, embrace different epistemic values, or rely on different conceptual frameworks. But at least there is reason to think that disputes can concern some common ground, and this can do some work toward ameliorating pernicious forms of dominance and subordination.

Remhof, Response to Cabrera

I think Professor Cabrera's first reaction to Nietzsche's constructivist view is exactly the reaction most others have: disbelief! After all, how could all objects be socially constructed? Cabrera's thoughtful comments clearly target some of the difficult issues at the heart of this question. I will take these issues one at a time.

Cabrera opens by remarking that the view seems less plausible if the relation between agents and objects is constitutive rather than causal. But I think there are good reasons to think otherwise. It seems clearly false that we causally construct stars, for instance, whereas it certainly seems plausible to think that stars gain determinate conditions of identity as the scientific community develops theories concerning what constitutes a star.

Cabrera then suggests that for Nietzsche objects seem to be created in the same way that fictional characters are created. Cabrera seems to have in mind the artifactualist view that fictional objects, like Storm from the X-Men, are artifacts that come into being once they are conceived by their authors. The primary difference between this view and constructivism is this: fictional objects might exist *merely* due to our representational activities, whereas Nietzsche holds that our representational activities must refer to what which can be verified in sense experience. And Nietzsche offers numerous other constraints, including epistemic virtues, that wouldn't sit well with artifactualists.

Cabrera points out that some of the constraints on construction must come from the objects themselves. I imagine Cabrera has in mind that objects have intrinsic properties. But, as I argue in the book, Nietzsche rejects such properties. For Nietzsche there are no properties constitutively independent of other properties, including the property of standing in some

relation to human beings. Nietzsche's ontology is wholly relational—all properties are ontologically interdependent.

Now turn to unperceived objects. For Nietzsche and Kant, I say that "If there had been no people, there would still have been the things that would be constructed by humans were they to be around." Cabrera asks how this is compatible with the constructivist claim that objects are constitutively dependent on us. After all, how can objects depend on us if they can exist when we're not around? We might say that in worlds where there are no people, there are still some objects—namely, the things that humans would have constructed if they *were* around (so dinosaurs, stars, and so on). But notice that the objects that exist in these worlds are only possible objects. They do not in fact exist since in those worlds humans are not in fact around. Hence the actual existence of objects remains constitutively dependent on us.

Thinkers naturally inimical to Kantian forms of idealism will find the idea that there are no objects in worlds without human beings counterintuitive. But Nietzsche does not have this intuition. Not all metaphysicians do either.[1] Nietzsche would of course argue that intuitions are theoretically-loaded. For him—along with others, such as William James and Nelson Goodman—Kantian views concerning objects are much more intuitive. It is not wildly unreasonable to suppose that positing the existence of objects requires conceptually representing some kinds of objects or other, in which case there is no sense in positing the existence of objects fully outside the possibility of what can be conceptually represented. Take objects in the past, for example. Saying *some*thing existed prior to us does not imply than any particular kinds of objects or other existed. And this kind of general pointing is all that non-Kantian intuitions allow. For

[1] See, e.g., Kenneth Pearce, "Mereological Idealism" in Tyron Goldschmidt and Kenneth Pearce (eds), *Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Nietzsche objects before us certainly exist. They are constructed as we organize properties that we posit to have existed in the past given what we can encounter in the present.

The final issue concerns vagueness. Although I use constructivism to challenge the view that there cannot be sharp cut-offs in a sorites series for composition, Cabrera has the intuition that there could be borderline cases of composition. Can Nietzsche help himself to this intuition? Perhaps he can. The view that there cannot be exact cut-offs is often justified by claiming that such cut-offs would be arbitrary. I argue, on Nietzsche's behalf, that this arbitrariness turns on thinking that there are facts of the matter concerning composition independent of the minds thinking about composition. But facts concerning when a head and handle compose a hammer, for instance, might depend on what we use hammers for, namely, successful hammering. If so, then sharp cut-offs might not be arbitrary. They are meant to differentiate success or failure to perform some function. Importantly, we might be able to embrace cases of borderline composition if we run this kind of argument on each admissible application condition of the concept <hammer>. Each admissible condition of <hammer> would need to satisfy the *function* of being a hammer. We determine the acceptable range of fulfillment. Thus, we render the range of acceptable cases non-arbitrary for satisfying our purposes concerning hammers.

This response fits well with Nietzsche's view that truth is approximate. Nietzsche holds that representation necessarily approximates its target. And, importantly, the evaluation of an approximate representation depends in part on some set of concerns which help render the truth conditions of approximate representations determinate, including over a range or cases. Thus, Nietzsche can say that borderline cases of composition have a determinate truth-value.

If what I have said is accurate, then we do not need to say that Nietzschean constructivism is incompatible with semantic vagueness. Thus, Cabrera need not be worried that

the Nietzschean constructivist must provide exact cut-offs for all cases of composition in order to hold off permissivism and eliminativism.

In conclusion, I am happy to see that Cabrera sees why and how constructivism might be a contender in contemporary analytic material object metaphysics. I do think that we should take seriously any view that can provide principled responses to difficult, longstanding problems in metaphysics, however controversial they might seem at first glance. And maybe—just maybe—the reaction of disbelief one often has when first confronting constructivism will have less effect as we see just what the view can do.

Remhof, Response to Doyle

I want to thank Professor Doyle for her detailed and penetrating commentary. In what follows, I focus on three issues: the nature of objects in Nietzsche's writings, possible challenges from BGE 15 and GS 112, and constructivism's role in overcoming nihilism.

First let me consider the nature of objects. Doyle first pushes back against my reading by remarking, "if our constructive practices are resisted by reality through us being affected by sensory information, as Remhof suggests […] then, it seems that objects are not constituted solely by human beings. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that reality and human social practices co-constitute objects." This is actually an accurate depiction of constructivism—it is no challenge to my reading. Interestingly, the co-constitution relation Doyle tries to levy against constructivism actually appears to undermine her own reading that objects are intrinsically unified bundles of forces.

The texts—and Doyle is perfectly okay with referencing the *Nachlass*—strongly suggest that Nietzsche thinks bundles of forces are constituted by their contextual relations with all other bundles. Nietzsche notes that a bundle of force's "essence lies in [its] relation to all other [bundles]" (KSA 13:14[79]). Importantly, Nietzsche thinks human interpreters are themselves particularly complex bundles of forces which exist in constitutive relations to other bundles of forces, and bundles of forces become objects only in contexts where bundles are conceptually unified (see KSA 13:14[98] and KSA 12:2[77], for example, and note that bundles of forces ground empirical properties). Human interpreters determine that some bundles are genuine objects through conceptual unification. Objects are therefore not intrinsically unified. Objects are unified extrinsically through human practices. This result of co-constitution suggests that the intrinsic unification reading is mistaken.

Are there structures in the world that exhibit some degree of internal unification which resist our constructive efforts? As I say in the book, this certainly seems to be the case. But Nietzsche denies that such structures are genuine objects. To be an object is to be a conceptually organized bundle of empirical properties. Thus, structures outside conceptual organization are not objects. Undifferentiated reality, for example, is not a proper candidate for objecthood. Moreover, we cannot say anything intelligible about structures fully independent of conceptual organization, since such talk inevitably organizes experience through our concepts. So, there are either no objects beyond what we can talk about, or we are not justified in making any claims at all about such objects. As far as I know, there are no passages in Nietzsche which claim that objects exist outside the possibility of human representation.[2] This means that there are no objects prior to human representation, or objects that fully escape the possibility of being represented. And, in any case, Doyle does not point to any such passages, so constructivism seems to be the correct reading.

Now consider BGE 15's attack on idealism, where Nietzsche argues that the external world cannot be the cause of our sense organs, since our sense organs are themselves part of the external world, and nothing can be the cause of itself. Doyle writes that this not only tells against constructivism, but that my preferred response shows that Nietzsche fails to distinguish Kant from the neo-Kantians. I do not think either holds. On my reading, we are in causal contact with non-linguistic reality through our sensory apparatus, and we organize such reality into objects constitutively, not causally, through conceptual organization. Constructivism does not hold that

[2] One might argue that HH I: 9 is the exception. Nietzsche writes "It is true, there could be a metaphysical world; the absolute possibility of it is hardly to be disputed." But I am not convinced. First, this has nothing to do with genuine objects—it concerns entire worlds. Second, Nietzsche goes on to say that belief in metaphysical worlds was derived from "the worst of all methods of acquiring knowledge" and that "When one has disclosed these methods as the foundation of all extant religions and metaphysical systems, one has refuted them!" And third, a few passages later Nietzsche seems to endorse the constructivist view that human beings have "made appearance appear," or that "the world "has acquired color" and "we have been the colorists" (HH I: 16).

we causally bring object into existence. We do not construct planets through causal means. Rather, we organize the properties that constitute planet-hood once we causally encounter empirical properties that might provide the best candidates for planet-hood. And this is a neo-Kantian view, rather than a Kantian view, since such organization is constitutive, contingent, and wholly *a posteriori*.

Nietzsche thinks human interpreters also determine the specific conditions of identity of causal relations. Causal relations are not simply "given," that is, determinately structured apart from our efforts. We construct cause and effect by individuating events for various purposes. Looking at GS 112, Doyle suggests that Nietzsche denies the existence of discrete causes and effects. But this is incorrect: he says that an "intellect" beyond our own, which could see the fundamental connectedness of all events, can justifiably reject discrete causes and effects. The fact that we differentiate cause and effect does not imply that causation does not exist—constructivism is not eliminativism. Of course, as Doyle suggests, one could deny that what we construct is empirically real. But to do so is either to say that causation does not exist *simpliciter*, or to claim that causation is merely in our head. I see no textual evidence for either reading in GS 112. Nietzsche says that "It is enough to view science as an attempt to humanize things as faithfully as possible; we learn to describe ourselves more and more precisely as we describe things and their succession" (GS 112). Constructivism, which holds causal events exist are co-constituted by human practices and the world encountered in experience, makes good sense of this interesting idea.

Finally, let me address the relation between constructivism, values, and nihilism. Doyle holds that the biggest challenge to my reading is that constructivism does not sit well with Nietzsche's pluralism about value. She writes, "If the world in which our values are realizable is

one that is constructed—inter-subjectively—by us then the values that are realizable in it must be ones that the community endorses and that are generally applicable." She then claims that such general applicability is dangerously close to a universalist account of value, which is inconsistent with Nietzsche's value pluralism.

The value at issue in my book concerns what our best theories should do. Should they attempt to describe a mind-independent or a mind-dependent world? The former cannot be realized, I claim, and the latter can. I see no problem in Nietzsche thinking that everyone should embrace this value—after all, the alternative is nihilism. But this does not undermine value pluralism. For instance, my reading only concerns epistemic values. I leave the status of all other values open. Communities committed to constructivism certainly need not agree on the status of any values concerning what norms are best for us, for instance. And within the theoretical context, commitments to epistemic values will inevitably involve compromises and weightings, such as the trade-off between accuracy and simplicity, which assumes pluralism, and different scientific communities might embrace different epistemic values. Nietzsche never defends any single privileged set of epistemic values, unless of course the value in question is required for overcoming nihilism. For these reasons, I do not believe that what Doyle thinks is the biggest worry of my project is all that worrisome.

Remhof, Response to Migotti

First let me express my thanks to Professor Migotti for his provocative commentary. In what follows, I first address truth and then the argument from vagueness.

This is not the place to get into Nietzsche's views about the truth of God's existence. For starters, Nietzsche never openly claims that God does not exist. He instead thinks the belief that God exists is unjustified because it arises by way of unreliable means (see, e.g., D 95; GM II 19-23). But this is beside the point. The point is that my constructivist reading does not imply anything regarding the truth of God's existence. My view that Nietzsche rejects absolute truths exclusively concerns empirical objects like planets, not entities like God. The content of the truth-conditions of propositions that concern the empirical world differ in kind from the content of propositions that concern entities like God. The former can be constructed from empirical properties, for instance, while the latter cannot.

What about Nietzsche and James on truth? James believes that truths are useful, or that usefulness, within constraints, explains truth. Nietzsche believes both truth and falsify are useful. So how do these two agree? They both believe that propositions about the empirical world are not truth-evaluable without the existence of material objects that we construct. It is one thing for propositions to be true or false. It is another to be truth-evaluable. The latter is required for the former. Nietzsche and James agree that constructivism enables us to evaluate propositions about the world as true and false. They disagree on what explains the nature of truth as a first-order evaluation of the world.

Now consider Migotti's worry concerning my Nietzschean constructivist solution to the problem of vagueness. Migotti argues that the attempt to establish sharp cut-offs in a sorites series for composition merely ends up shifting the problem of vagueness to other places rather

than eliminating it altogether. For instance, hammering is not the only thing hammers are used for, and the number of things they are used for is arguably vague. In response, notice that composite objects like hammers, stools, and cottages seem to have proper functions, that is, their parts are arranged for the sake of performing a function. Hammering is the proper function of a hammer. What lies outside this proper function might be vague, then, but this kind of vagueness does not challenge my view.

Migotti then suggests that exactly what is required for a putative hammer to succeed or fail at being a hammer could be vague. Here is my response. Something is a hammer just in case it fulfills the proper function of a hammer, and if something fulfills the function of being a hammer it is a successful hammer. Thus, there is no ontological distinction between a hammer and a successful hammer—no new hammer exists when a hammer performs its proper function. Of course, whether a hammer performs its proper function depends on the specific needs and interests of hammer-users, from those building to those doing demolition. A hammer might fulfill its proper function poorly, that is, it might succeed at hammering, but not well. In this case, we have a defective hammer. And the grounds for establishing the ontological conditions that distinguish a defective hammer from a non-hammer are determined by the needs and interests of hammer-users. Vagueness exists only insofar as such needs and interests remain indeterminate, and I see no good reason to think that such indeterminacy cannot be overcome in specific contexts of use.

Migotti's non-constructivist solution to the problem of vagueness turns on rejecting the view that there can be no borderline cases of composition. For Migotti there can be borderline cases because we can quantify over intervals of time. One payoff he points out is that if we

accept borderline cases of vagueness then it seems that there is no need to find exact cut-offs. Let me present a challenge to this idea and then raise some questions.

Take the sorites series of affixing a head onto a handle to compose a hammer. At the beginning, nothing composes a hammer. At the end, something does. And, Migotti holds, when composition occurs it does so over some interval of time in which there is no determinate answer to the question of how many objects exist. Yet, it seems that on *every possible* interval in the series there is a specific point at which some boundary condition of the interval, but not its immediate successor, marks the proper interval for a borderline case of composition. If so, then there will always be some sharp cut-off between composition proper and indeterminate composition. Perhaps Migotti cannot avoid sharp transitions.

I also what to know what exactly quantification over an interval looks like. Migotti explains that within intervals of composition it is immaterial to ask how many objects there are because traditional logical quantification is not up to the task. Specifically, he suggests that some quantifier in some relevant numerical sentence, such as 'There exist exactly two objects', is indeterminate. But what does this mean? Efforts to answer this question in the literature have faced many problems. Migotti seems to want to say that during intervals the head and handle might not be *everything* there is—that perhaps there is *something else*. Can this be formalized? If so, how? And if not, how do we make sense of the view?

In my response to Cabrera, I suggest how the Nietzschean constructivist might be able to embrace borderline cases of composition. Now consider one more way, which turns on Nietzsche's views of logic and mathematics. Nietzsche might argue that the mere logical syntax of formal logical sentences has nothing to say about which objects actually exist. For Nietzsche, such sentences cannot be used to justify existence claims about objects like hammers, since

justification concerning which objects exist requires reference to conditions of identity set by conceptualization. Variables must be linked to domains of objects, which of course we construct. On these grounds, the warrant for saying there cannot be borderline cases of composition might fall short.

Remhof, Response to Pedersen

Professor Pedersen was the main force behind putting together this symposium, and my deepest appreciation goes to him for all his hard work. In what follows, I attempt to address the main issues he raises.

Let me first address conceptualizability. Pedersen is right to point out that, as I see things, Nietzsche does not believe that the existence of objects depends on any actual, or currently existing, conceptual organization of properties. Objecthood depends on the possibility of being conceptualized. This enables Nietzsche to avoid obvious problems concerning objects that might exist but which are not conceptualized.

Importantly, conceptualization is a social phenomenon for Nietzsche. The unit of construction is a community of shared language users. But which language constructs objects, and how might Nietzsche account for language expansion? For Nietzsche, there is no single shared language, but rather, as I explain in my replies to Sinhababu and Adler, only languages manifest by dominant and subordinate social groups, with dominant groups having greater power to shape the world. Language expansion can be cumulative for Nietzsche in the sense that the bounds of conceptualizability are determined by *L** now and whatever is conceptualizable when new items are added to L^*, such that the bounds of conceptualizability change each time L* is expanded. Nietzsche thinks that certain methodological approaches to expanding languages are better than others. In particular, languages answerable to naturalist approaches to philosophy should dominate over non-naturalist conceptions of philosophy, in part because the objects that naturalists countenance better satisfy the constraints on what constitutes objects. Language expansion should be tied to such better methods.

Pedersen next asks about the nature of the range of cognitive capacities relevant to social constructivism. I think Nietzsche believes that we should we take the relevant cognitive capacities to reflect what can possibly be conceptualized by the cognitive capacities of some actual group of subjects. It is tempting to idealize by making the relevant cognitive capacities an arbitrary, finite extension of the current capacities of some designated group of subjects, thereby closely linking the modal commitment concerning the existence of objects to the modal commitment of the subjects representing objects. But Nietzsche shows no sign of locating the existence of objects in possible cognitive capacities.

This is not to say that he thinks speculation concerning such capacities is not important. For instance, he claims that "higher culture must give to man a double-brain, as it were two brain-ventricles, one for the perceptions of science, the other for those of non-science" such as "illusions" and "passions"—in short *art* (HH I: 251). And he welcomes a future in which "artistic energies and the practical wisdom of life join scientific thought so that a higher organic system will develop" (GS 113). These "higher" systems embody cognitive capacities that can better understand the world, since, after all, objects in the world are the product of artistically-oriented scientific organizations of experience.

Turn next to Pedersen's distinction between (Dep) and (Con). On my view, it is not the case that the former presents a necessary condition for the existence of material objects and the latter a sufficient condition. Instead, (Dep) *specifies* (Con). In the book, I write, "to say objects are socially constructed is to say that the existence conditions are essentially, by which I mean constitutively, dependent on the intentional activities of human agents" (19). Pedersen suggests that this is problematic because it does not seem that mere conceptualizability, that is, some mere intentional representational practice, can suffice for creating objects. And I certainly agree.

Concepts must unify empirical properties for objects to exist. Moreover, I do not think we should construe (Dep) in terms of conceptualizability and (Con) in terms of being conceptualized, such that conceptualizability sets the boundaries of the world while conceptualization makes objects within that world. For Nietzsche, and for Kant before him, conceptualizability determines existence—if something can be conceptualized in the advance of possible experience, it exists. That is the boundary of the world of material objects.

Let me close by briefly addressing Pedersen's paradox of conceptualizability. It should be clear that Nietzsche never addresses this paradox, so what follows can only be conjecture. One promising way of responding to the paradox is to accept a paraconsistent logic. Nietzsche might be amenable to this approach. In a paraconsistent logic some contradictions are permitted on the grounds that the inference from a contradiction to any arbitrary conclusion is not valid. The consequence of a contradiction need not 'explode' a view by rendering it trivial. Paraconsistency is then a property of the consequences of a contradiction.

Nietzsche has nothing to say about this property, but embracing contradictions does provide one good reason for embracing paraconsistency. Nietzsche exclaims that the "*principle of non-contradiction*" is "not *a criterion of truth*, but rather an *imperative* about *what shall count as true*" (KSA 12:9[97]). We are not required to think the principle of non-contradiction as true *a priori*. The principle is regulative. Indeed, Nietzsche thinks logic in general is regulative: "Logic is the attempt *to understand the real world according to a scheme of being that we have posited, or, more correctly, the attempt to make it formulatable, calculable for us*" (KSA 12:9[97]). No logic is true *a priori.* Logics are adopted in relation to their ability to help us navigate the world. Sometimes that might involve corralling contradictions or the consequences of contradictions—for instance, when we face theories which are inconsistent but non-trivial (see, e.g., BGE 22). So,

one way in which Nietzsche has a shot at responding to the paradox is to claim that the correct logic of conceptualizability is paraconsistent. But of course much more work needs to be done to show exactly how this response might look.

Remhof, Response to Sinhababu

I first want to thank Professor Sinhababu for his illuminating commentary, and begin by saying that I like how he links constructivism about value to constructivism about objects. I am perfectly happy accepting that value exists because our passions constitute the objects of passion as valuable, and that material objects exist because our conceptual practices constitute the identity conditions of objects. This unifies some of Nietzsche's important metaphysical commitments.

Sinhababu first asks about the status of the psychological states that construct objects. I think it is safe to assume that Nietzsche thinks psychological states are concepts, insofar as we hold that psychological states are mental representational states with sematic properties, such as content, reference, truth-conditions, etc. Traditionally, mental representations can be understood in two ways: some are composed of concepts and have no phenomenal features, and others have phenomenal features but no conceptual content. For Nietzsche, mental representations are always composed of concepts, since consciousness consists in conceptual representation. And I argue in the book that Nietzsche embraces the *conceptualist* view that at least some phenomenal features, like sensations, actually have conceptually structured content. Thus, Nietzsche endorses an alternative way of understanding mental representation, a way which exemplifies the view that both our sensory and cognitive states contribute to conceptually structuring incoming information. Concepts then organize experience in two ways. On the one hand, conceptually structured sensory information contributes to organizing phenomenal experience, and on the other hand, determining the application conditions of our concepts fixes the conditions of identity for whatever meets them by unifying empirical properties into certain kinds of material objects.

How does Nietzsche understand concepts? I agree with Sinhababu that Nietzsche is sympathetic to the classical theory of concepts rather than the prototype theory. According to the classical theory, a concept *C* is composed of simpler concepts that express the correct application conditions of *C*. On this theory of concepts, then, reference is a matter of whether the constituents that express conditions for falling under the concept are satisfied. For Nietzsche, successful reference turns on sensory experience. Nietzsche holds that we become acquainted with "*reality*" by virtue of "the feeling [or sensation, Gefühl] [. . .] of resistance" (KSA 12:9[91]). Through sensation, we experience resistance, which presents empirical properties that we organize into objects through conceptual unification. Ignoring sensory information when determining the application conditions of concepts, on Nietzsche's version of the classical theory of concepts, leads to failure of reference.

Sinhababu then looks at the constructivist's understanding of the correspondence relation of concepts to objects. He asks whether one material object type corresponds to one simple concept, or if the logical operations we can perform upon concepts lead to material object types of their own. What turns on this distinction? If the latter is true, then we have a much better chance at linking constructivism with the universalist version of permissivism, which holds that any concrete objects conjoin to compose a further object.

Nietzsche links one material object type to one simple concept. However, there is an important caveat. For Nietzsche, logical operations *can* function to organize the world in experience, and experience can also constrain which logical operations we accept. And, for this reason, constructivism can, in principle, support permissivism, or even eliminativism. Other than noumenal objects—objects inaccessible to us, like Kantian things in themselves—there are no types of objects that cannot, in principle, be constructed, assuming we satisfy the constraints on

construction that Nietzsche puts in place. For Nietzsche the concepts we devise and apply might make it the case that there are many more objects than we typically take to exist, as permissivism holds. Accepting this view might depend on how we interpret the nature, meaning, and application of logical operations, or how we take experience to constrain various logical operations. On Nietzsche's account, no concept with intelligible content is immune to revision—all constituents of such concepts can change.

That being said, I suggest in the book that moving away from our commonsense ontology of objects to permissivism or eliminativism is not likely. Many of the concepts that form what William James calls "the stage of common sense" have been around since time immemorial because they remain expedient in the way of helping us navigate experience. It does not look like Nietzsche thinks we should revise our material object ontology in accordance with permissivism or eliminativism because it is not clear that whatever success extraordinary concepts might have in helping us navigate the world can eclipse the success we currently have using commonsense concepts.

The final issue Sinhababu raises concerns whose concepts generate objects. Nietzsche, I think, provides a few clues regarding whose concepts generate objects. They are typically groups of people in positions of dominance (see GM I: 2). But such relations, such as the relation between a Kuhnian researcher to an exemplar of a paradigm, need not be pernicious. As I see things, Nietzsche thinks object ontologies become pernicious when subsumed by interpretive systems that are intrinsically problematic, like the ascetic ideal, which leads people to divorce the application conditions of concepts from the sensory world.

Finally, for whom do particular sets of objects exist? Sinhababu has the concept of an electron, but Glaucon does not. So, do electrons exist for Sinhababu, but not Glaucon? I think we

should say ‘no’. Electrons exist, though Glaucon did not realize it, because the scientific community has shown that <electron> does useful explanatory work in fixing the conditions of identity of elementary reality. For Nietzsche, many of the ways of organizing the world embraced by our ancestors fail to satisfy the constraints on object construction—constraints that emerge as our understanding of how we are affected in experience grows and develops. As our wealth of understanding deepens, we reinterpret the past to have contained, or not to have contained, certain kinds of objects—knowing we could be mistaken, of course, and going forward with that humility.