

Nietzsche's Money!

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Confronted with the ways in which our societies become progressively decodified and unregulated, in which our codes break down at every point, Nietzsche is the only thinker who makes no attempt at recodification. He says: the process still has not gone far enough.

—Gilles Deleuze

It's somewhat odd that Nietzsche's corpus is looked upon as the cross-disciplinary progenitor of our contemporary "post" world: posthumanism and postmodernism. Despite all the slippery descriptions and heterogeneous definitions of "post," there is perhaps nothing more universally recognized as "post" than the triumph of consumption capitalism—the obliteration of humanist use value and the concomitant domination of consumerist exchange in this, the age of money as the ultimate general equivalent. While there's still a lot of disagreement on the micro-level—for example, over what constitutes posthumanist visual art or what counts as postmodern poetry—everyone seems to agree on the macro-level that a certain style of consumption-based capital both puts the "post" in postmodernism and runs the "human" out of posthumanism. One can, for example, see this consumption anxiety as the central conundrum of recent cultural studies in North America, which seems hopelessly stuck squabbling over what one might call (after Elvis Costello) the "I used to be disgusted, now I try to be amused" quandary: are everyday consumer practices of "post" society to be condemned as the inauthentic canalizing of desire by capitalist masters? Or, are such practices to be celebrated as forms of subversive agency performed by savvy consumers? Following the Frankfurt School, are we to be "disgusted" by postmodern consumerism? Or, picking up on Michel de Certeau's analysis of everyday subversion, are we to be "amused" by the multifaceted, posthumanist subjectivities that are born in and around contemporary economic practices? So, my starting point in reconsidering Nietzsche's relevance for the "post" world is here—or, rather, *beyond* this debate.

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The ubiquity of third- (or fourth-) wave capital is, for better or worse, what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call the “body without organs” of our era of globalization, its most wide-ranging plane of consistency, the field within which the posthuman desiring machines of capital nomadically roam. As Deleuze and Guattari write about our globalized world, “the universal comes at the end—the body without organs and desiring production—under the conditions determined by an apparently victorious capitalism” (*Anti-Oedipus* 139). This capitalism, they remind us, is “the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of decoded flows” (139). Capital, in other words, is simultaneously the “problem” we must learn to respond to, and the field of forces wherein that discontinuous response will be worked out or worked over. “Capital,” Deleuze and Guattari argue, “is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist”; and insofar as we are consuming producers, whether we like it or not, we are all de facto capitalists here at the beginning of what promises to be a very disputatious millennium (10).

Certainly one way to revisit Nietzsche’s relevance at the contemporary post-moment would be to examine what his corpus has to say about these debates over economics and contemporary culture. But this introduces a bucket of problems right away: even his staunchest admirers might have to admit that Nietzsche has very little trenchant to say about consumerism and bourgeois culture—other than that he hates them both. When it comes to a mandarin condemnation of popular culture, Nietzsche can often make Adorno look like Joe Six-Pack. In fact, the bourgeois type is the most obvious figure in Nietzsche for the “base” individual, one who looks only to accumulate wealth, work long hours, and please the herd at work. What he calls this “common type” lives quite happily “in the midst of an age of ‘work,’ that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste” (*Daybreak* 5). Such a base bourgeois type, it seems, cannot understand Nietzsche’s corpus at all, “cannot comprehend how anyone could risk his health and honor for the sake of a passion for knowledge” (*Gay* 78). Indeed, insofar as the claim to Nietzsche as the grandfather of postmodern posthumanism makes any sense at all, he seems best understood as the grandfather of a certain strain of “aesthetic” post-ism, obsessed with questions of self-overcoming, performative subjectivity, living with multiplicity and flow. He is *not*, as far as I can tell, seen as the grandfather of much productive work on “economic” post-ism. One doesn’t often see Nietzsche cited in discussions of post-Fordism or post-Keynesianism, for example.

This essay comprises a modest attempt to change that. It seems to me

that Nietzsche has much constructive to say, even in his ambivalence, about contemporary capitalism. Nietzsche should have much to tell us about the speeds and slownesses inscribed on the body without organs that is our world of global capital, territorialized as it is on global flows of money, flexibly specialized labor markets, symbolic economies, transvaluation, and the dice throw that is the stock and futures markets. More specifically, I’ll try to suggest that Nietzsche has much to teach us about capital’s most slippery symbolic materiality: money. Following Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, we should perhaps ask ourselves today, “Do you understand this new law of ebb and flood” (76)? To add an additional hurdle, I’d like to structure this paper as that most postmodern of consumerist textual forms, the “self-help” manual, much like recent bestsellers *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* or *Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun*. So the real title of this article is “Nietzsche’s Money! The Five Most Will-to-Powerful Laws of Nietzschean Personal and Financial Growth.” All of which I’ll get to in a minute.

But first, another obstacle: Nietzsche’s critiques and comments concerning economics are not only mandarin, they also seem hopelessly romantic—a kind of neo-Wordsworthian pining for a life not territorialized on “getting and spending.” As Nietzsche writes, “The most industrious of all ages—ours—does not know how to make anything of all its industriousness and money, except always still more money and still more industriousness” (*Gay* 94). Or, as he writes about the American “lust” for gold, “The breathless haste with which they work—the distinctive vice of the new world—is already beginning to infect old Europe with its ferocity and is spreading a lack of spirituality like a blanket. Even now one is ashamed of resting, and prolonged reflection almost gives people a bad conscience. One thinks with a watch in one’s hand” (*Gay* 258-59). This particular critique—a kind of whining slacker’s critique of the “Man”—may seem oddly resentful, especially coming from our greatest proponent of *amor fati* and diagnostician of resentment. Some of Nietzsche’s sentiments, in fact, seem ready for easy translation to the jauntily resentful workplace antics of the comic strip *Dilbert*—a character whom nobody ever mistook for the *Übermensch*. “Oddly,” Nietzsche writes, “submission to powerful, frightening, even terrible persons, like tyrants and generals, is not experienced as nearly so painful as is this submission to unknown and uninteresting persons, which is what all the luminaries of industry are” (*Gay* 107). Postmodern translation: Work sucks—and Nietzsche certainly knew a thing or two about remaining on disability for long periods of time.¹

But, as true as it is, “work sucks” is *not* the first Law of Nietzschean Personal and Financial Growth, and I would hesitate quite a bit before suggesting that Nietzsche’s only practical advice for hacking postmodern capital is to complain about your boss’s incompetence or to xerox your ass on the company copier. His critiques of modernity and its discontents (the triumph of clock time, the banalization of work, the leveling of all culture by the general equivalence of money) certainly suggest a refusal of work, but I think his intervention goes further than that: if we learn first and foremost from Nietzsche that one must diagnose a sick system if one is to “treat” it in any effective way, performing such a genealogy of capital will more fruitfully lead us to discovering lines of flight from that system—that is, the Laws of Nietzschean Personal and Financial Growth.

For Nietzsche, money’s levelling effect on modern life is an extension of the triumph of general equivalence that he traces in the *Genealogy* and elsewhere; the capitalist, in other words, is the new ascetic priest. Capital continues and completes that special kind of violence that characterizes the triumph of the weak. As he writes in *Daybreak*,

For if one man employs false weights, another burns down his house after he has insured it for a large sum, a third counterfeits coins, if three-quarters of the upper classes indulge in permitted fraud and have the stock exchange and speculations on their conscience: what drives them? Not actual need, for they are not so badly off, perhaps they even eat and drink without a care—but they are afflicted day and night by a fearful impatience at the slow way with which their money is accumulating and by an equally fearful pleasure in and love of accumulated money. In this impatience and this love, however, there turns up again that fanaticism of the *lust for power* which was in former times inflamed by the belief one was in possession of the truth and which bore such beautiful names that one could thenceforth venture to be inhuman *with a good conscience* (to burn Jews, heretics and good books and exterminate entire higher cultures such as those of Peru and Mexico). . . . [W]hat one formerly did “for the sake of God” one now does for the sake of money, that is to say, for the sake of that which *now* gives the highest feeling of power and good conscience. (123)

Postmodern translation: God is soooooo money! And, as Nietzsche makes clear, this is the case not because God and money both *represent* something similar—far from it. What they represent or what lies behind them is wholly beside the genealogical point, because God and money are not metaphors or signifiers at all; rather, they’re modes of power. In fact,

they are networks of interrelated practices that enact or attract the lowest forms of reactive force (swindling, counterfeiting, insider trading), fueling that “lust for power” that makes a mockery of the “will to power.”

It’s not surprising, perhaps, that this genealogy leads us to discover the First Most Will-to-Powerful Law of Nietzschean Personal and Financial Growth: God is dead, but Internet stocks remain volatile. Both God and money, in other words, have a common face or enact a common truism: it’s all about the practices of *force* and *power*, not about the states of *truth* or *representation*. Like God, an Internet stock doesn’t really represent anything at all—there’s nothing tangible or authentic “behind” it; but both certainly do comprise and enable certain kinds of *command*.

This, in fact, is the most profound homology between Nietzsche and his relentlessly posthumanist heirs, Deleuze and Guattari. Both enact a common swerve around the despotic nature of signification or representation: they insist on “the unimportance of [the question] ‘What does it mean?’” (*Anti-Oedipus* 180). “Interpretation is our modern way of believing and being pious,” Deleuze and Guattari write, because signification is consistently territorialized by tautological questions about meaning and its absence—“the symbolic lack of the dead father, or the Great Signifier” (171). Because every signifier fails to represent its signified adequately (attesting to the *absence* of the signified, not its presence), every interpretation always already lacks—that is, it inevitably fails to do justice to the text at hand. Such an assured interpretative failure (and its symmetrically inverse flipside, the postmodern infinity of interpretation) inexorably defines meanings and subjects not in terms of what they *can* do, but in terms of what they *can’t do*: they can’t be complete. Such an “interpretosis” comprises, for Deleuze and Guattari, the “despotic” legacy of any discourse whose primary pivot is the signifier.

For Deleuze and Guattari, then, there are great differences between “a linguistics of flows and a linguistics of the signifier” (*Anti-Oedipus* 241), insofar as a linguistics of the signifier remains territorialized by tautological questions of representation (by the question, “What does it mean?”), rather than on axiomatic determinations of force or command (the question “What does it do?”). For Deleuze and Guattari, “Language no longer signifies something that must be believed; it indicates rather what is going to be done”: “No problem of meaning, but only of usage” (250, 77-78). As they argue in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “The elementary unit of language—the statement—is the order-word. Rather than common sense, a faculty for the centralization of information, we must define an abominable faculty consisting in emitting, receiving, and transmitting order-

words” (76). Language, in short, is better treated as a form of interpellation than it is as a form of mediation, communication, information, or signification. Language commands and configures—“*I* is an order-word,” and hence it is never treated productively as the trace of an absent or future meaning (84).

In short, Deleuze and Guattari teach us that language is not meant primarily for interpretation but for obedience and resistance: “Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (*Thousand* 4-5). One might say that the performative in Deleuze doesn’t succeed by failing to be a constative; rather, it succeeds the old fashioned way: as a deployment of force, as a provocation—which is why Nietzschean or Deleuzian *amor fati* is about transformation of the present, not about fatalistic acceptance of an inevitable future. The cash value of truth or representation is beholden to a deployment of force, rather than vice versa, and this leads us to consider Nietzsche’s most famous commentary on the interrelations between money and truth:

What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they *are* illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins. (“Truth” 250)

In recent commentary, this passage from “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense” is often folded interpretatively back upon the essay’s larger point about conceptualization and the forgetting of an originary experience: the concept is base coin, the faded representation of a representation, the residue of a metaphor that is itself guilty of forgetting the originary experience. Because truth and money are twice removed from the unthematizable experience of singularity, the history of money thereby becomes a figure for the history of truth, as both dress up a historical regression—increasing abstraction and conventionalization—as “progress.” In *Symbolic Economies*, Jean-Joseph Goux argues along these lines that “the substitution of the concept for the image means a loss. . . . For Nietzsche, the imprinted head, the visible trace, is at the root of the concept, but from image to concept, what disappears, by attrition, is the vivacity of the impression. . . . For Nietzsche the concept

is a paltry reality in comparison with the image: it is an eroded, diminished, faded image—a cliché” (104, 105, 106).²

As compellingly “right” as Goux’s interpretation is, I would argue that the stake or upshot of Nietzsche’s intervention on coins and truth is not finally metaphors or images or significations at all. Rather, perhaps the stake of this passage concerns the “binding” [*verbindlich*] function that confers an obligatory or compulsory signification upon this chaotic “mobile army” of discontinuous relations. Near the origin or far away from it—either way, it’s all about *force*. “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense” is *not* a lament for lost original experience; rather, Nietzsche’s challenge is to affirm the fact that truth and lying are not treated in any serious way if they are treated moralistically or judgmentally—as if truth or lying referred to any preexisting moral standard. Money is akin to truth, then, not because both fail to represent some *Urpsprung* of preexisting value and thereby figure the loss of some kind of originary “vivacity.” Rather, both the worn coin and the clichéd truth illustrate the wisdom of the Second Most Will-to-Powerful Law of Personal and Financial Growth: what does not kill my portfolio, only makes it stronger. In other words, Nietzsche would always show us that markets (of money, of truth) are sites of struggle and risk: the coin, like the concept (already) has a face—the Janus face of power, which is manifest in social *exchange*: measuring, calculating, valuing. Nietzsche’s intervention concerning truth and/as a coin teaches us that the value of truth or money is the product of a *dynamic action*, not the mere referencing of a *static state*. In determining value, it finally doesn’t make any difference what’s printed on the coin or what one calls the truth—a thing’s value is enforced not by the thing itself, but from elsewhere, from a relation of *social force and strife*. As Antonio Negri writes, “Money has the advantage of presenting me immediately the lurid face of the social relation of value; it shows me value right away as exchange, commanded and organized. . . . Money has only one face, that of the boss” (23). Like the general equivalent that is the truth, Negri insists on the Nietzschean point that “money is a *tautology for power*. A power that extends everywhere” (35).

In this vein, recall Nietzsche from the *Genealogy*:

The feeling of guilt, of personal obligation, had its origin, as we saw, in the oldest and most primitive personal relationship, that between buyer and seller, creditor and debtor: it was here that one person first encountered another person, that one person first *measured himself* against another. No grade of civilization, however low, has yet been discovered

in which something of this relationship has not been noticeable. Setting prices, determining values, contriving equivalences, exchanging—these preoccupied the earliest thinking of man to so great an extent that in a certain sense they constitute thinking *as such*: here it was that the oldest kind of astuteness developed; here likewise, we may suppose, did human pride, the feeling of superiority in relation to other animals, have its first beginnings. . . . [M]an designated himself as the creature that measures values, evaluates and measures, as the “valuating animal as such.” (*Genealogy* 70)

This quotation leads us straight away to the Third Nietzschean Law of Personal and Financial Growth: all good things are bathed in blood at their origin (including your TIAA-CREF Social Choice Account).

Nietzsche’s genealogical insistence on “thinking” as a kind of exploitation, a price-setting mechanism, shows us why the rampant consumerism of the postmodern is never about “choice”—(or why more consumption adds up to less choice): the ubiquity of consumption is a problem, everyone agrees, but one doesn’t simply get to accept or reject consumerism. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “Capitalism . . . proceeds by means of an axiomatic and not by means of a code” (251). So-called third-wave capital, for example, works according to the axiom “consume!” and you really can’t choose to ignore or refuse that axiomatic pronouncement—it’s not up to “you,” whomever you might be. As Fredric Jameson explains, capital’s axioms are “operational”—that is, “they do not offer anything for commentary or exegesis, but rather are merely a set of rules to be put into effect” (398). One doesn’t get to “decide” to denounce capitalism or to appreciate it—or even really to comment on it or to understand it. But you do have to *respond* to it, insofar as capitalism is all about axiomatic deployments of force—from its significations right through its border patrols. As *amor fati* teaches us about the body without organs that is capital, judgment or condemnation are weak tools indeed: condemning capitalism, like condemning thinking, will get you nowhere and will only catch you up in a kind of Habermasian “performative contradiction”: from what “outside” can you judge capitalism *whole-sale*? Simply condemning something is the weakest, most resentful form of power’s deployment—the reactive puffing up of “human pride” and self-righteous “good feeling.” In a Nietzschean reading, exchange and valuation are clearly deterritorializing, “affirmative” values; the problem with modern or postmodern consumerism is that this notion of exchange or valuation gets territorialized on the human subject and the concomitant “feeling of superiority” that comes with possession and

ownership. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “Capitalism is inseparable from the movement of deterritorialization, but this movement is exorcised through factitious and artificial reterritorializations”: private property, subjectivity, the desire for control (*Anti-Oedipus* 303). Such reterritorializations configure the *socius* as a negative body without organs—closed, privatized, suffocating. And it is this junky body that haunts the air-conditioned totalitarianism of late, later, or just-in-time capitalism.

So, for Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Guattari, it seems one can broach the question of value only by attempting to leave behind the organic, the authentic, and finally the privilege of human consciousness itself, because the kind of subject we are is the most reactive pustule of resentment. As Nietzsche points out, “Our pleasure in ourselves tries to maintain itself by again and again changing something new *into ourselves*; that is what possession means.” Such a “ridiculous overestimation and misunderstanding of consciousness” being the case, “How,” Nietzsche asks, “should explanations be at all possible when we first turn everything into an *image*, our image?” (*Gay* 88, 85, 172). Humans are reactive pockets of consumerist interiority, and that’s also why we have to *become something else* if we are to be capable of transvaluing values. The problem, in other words, is not capitalism; the problem is, rather, the style of subjectivity that capitalism has produced and rewarded: appropriation, judgment, denunciation—these are the residues of humanism that must be overcome if bourgeois subjectivity is to be transvalued.

However, in the service of this project (on the other side of the coin, as it were), we should keep in mind the fact that capitalism is a great deterritorialization machine. Response to its axioms is the social manifestation of force, flight, and reconfiguration. As Georg Simmel recalls in his Nietzsche-inspired *Philosophy of Money*, “The roundness of coins, which makes them ‘roll,’ symbolizes the rhythm of the movement that money imparts to transactions” (506). If you want to feel consciousness humbled or annihilated, spend the day e-trading Internet stocks. Indeed, referring back to the first law, it’s pretty clear that the NASDAQ stock exchange humbles human subjects in a more effective way than heavenly interventions like Fatima used to: what’s “true” or rational doesn’t really make any difference in determining value.

The electronic flows of multinational capital are perhaps our version of Nietzsche’s faceless coin, traded at a dizzying pace across national, monetary, and linguistic boundaries. It is this movement of capital, this flow, that forces us to confront a different kind of power, and thereby to

search for something other than the weak weapons of humanism: the resentful judgments and condemnations of moralism. Recall Deleuze: “Judgment prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence. . . . It is not a question of judging other existing beings, but of sensing . . . whether they bring forces to us, or whether they return us to the miseries of war, to the poverty of the dream, to the rigors of organization” (*Essays* 135). Following in the footsteps of Nietzsche’s analysis of reactive force turning on itself in the will-to-nothingness (and thereby opening the possibility of an exfoliation of ascetic priesthood into overcoming-man), both Nietzsche and Deleuze urge us to find ways to surf capital out of capital through the deployment of the Fourth Law of Personal and Financial Growth: don’t moralistically denounce or judge capital; instead, experiment with its speeds and slownesses—see what (else) it can do!

“Which,” Deleuze and Guattari ask in *Anti-Oedipus*, “is the revolutionary path? Is there one? To withdraw from the world market . . . in a curious revival of the fascist ‘economic solution’? Or might it be able to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough. . . . Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to ‘accelerate the process,’ as Nietzsche put it” (239-40). As Nietzsche writes in his own ethical idiom, “I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking elsewhere [*Wegsehen*] shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer” (*Gay* 223; translation slightly modified). Perhaps in fleshing out this yes-saying, we could consider Foucault’s Nietzschean affirmation of Marx. Foucault asks,

What did Marx do when in his analysis of capital he encountered the problem of working-class misery? He refused the usual explanation which regarded this misery as the effect of a rare natural cause or of a concerted theft. And he said in effect: given what capitalist production is in its fundamental laws, it can’t help but to produce misery. Capitalism’s *raison d’être* is not to starve the workers but it cannot develop without starving them. Marx substituted the analysis of production for the denunciation of theft. (140)

In Foucault’s Nietzschean reading, Marx consistently steers us away from moralistic explanations (which really aren’t explanations at all) and toward analyses of production—that is, the point is not to denounce capitalism as a misery machine but to map the ways in which misery is

produced by capital, and we undertake this mapping in the hope that the machine can be modified to support a different series of outputs. In the end, if the machine can be so modified (taken to the limit of what it can do), it becomes something else; it’s not the same machine any more. As Foucault insists, in the end it is “not a question of explaining [misery] negatively by repression. The whole problem is to understand which are the positive mechanisms that . . . result in misery” (141). Such an “affirmative” analysis of capital is, it seems to me, one of the most crucial legacies of Nietzsche in the era of globalization.

I can hear the skeptic’s question already: “How can we possibly say ‘yes’ to the brutality and inequality of capital?” But the insistent Nietzschean question, I would submit, is more troubling: “How can we say ‘no’ to capital? It’s who we are.”³ That being the case, it seems that the question for us as postmodern—but humanist, still too humanist—subjects is simply put: how can we become otherwise? Little is clear on this itinerary, but it is clear that the only way *out*, is *through*. And this would be a difficult navigation, but Nietzsche has some helpful advice: “I favor any *skepsis* to which I may reply: ‘Let us try it.’ But I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit any experiment.” He writes, “We have to improvise—all the world improvises its day. Let us proceed today as all the world does!” (*Gay* 115, 95).

In the service of this project, perhaps we need to consider the prescription written out by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they outline “How [to] Make Yourself a Body without Organs” (BwO):

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole “diagram,” as opposed to still signifying and subjective programs. (161)

This, the way *through* that is the only possible pathway *out*, is what *amor fati* teaches us as a concrete strategy for constructing a positive body without organs—as a map or a pack made up of lines of becomings, “populated by multiplicities” (*Thousand* 30). Like any plane of consis-

tency, the body without organs that is capital is “neither totalizing nor structuring”; it is “deterritorializing,” made up of lines of flight (144).

All of this leads finally to the end of the essay and the revelation of the Fifth (and final) Most Will-to-Powerful Law of Nietzschean Personal and Financial Growth: you are a mutual fund, not a subject. So forget about enjoying your symptom; try diversifying your portfolio. And who is the one who can offer a toolbox for such becomings? Nietzsche—that dude is *money!*

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Notes

1. Claiming ill health, Nietzsche resigned his professorship at Basel in 1879 at age thirty-five, and obtained a pension. He never held a steady job again.

2. Goux then goes on to question what he calls “Nietzsche’s *regressive materialism*, which denounces conceptual abstraction in order to revert to the original image” (106).

3. Nietzsche writes in *Gay Science*, “Consciousness does not really belong to man’s individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature” (299).

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