

Living Bodies, Dead Bodies, and the Cosmos

Edited by
CHIARA FERELLA,
TANJA POMMERENING,
and ULRIKE STEINERT

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Culturally Specific and Universal Concepts

Edited by

Chiara Ferella, Tanja Pommerening,
and Ulrike Steinert

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

In 2019, on 15 to 17 July, the Research Training Group 1876 “Early Concepts of Humans and Nature: Universal, Specific, Interchanged” based at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG, Project No. 215342465) organized an international conference entitled “Concepts of Humans and Nature between Specificity and Universality.” The present double-blind peer-reviewed volume collects the proceedings of that conference and is the result of the thought-provoking discussions that took place during and after among the doctoral students of the Research Training Group, their supervisors, and the conference participants from Europe, Israel, Turkey, Mexico, and the USA.

Within the framework of this conference, the group dealt with the question of possibly universal basic patterns of concepts and their causes as well as with the specific implementations of concepts of humans and nature in early societies. The idea was to foster discussion on whether and how the body or, more generally, our physically grounded experience might be involved in understanding, shaping, and creating concepts within the domains of humans and nature. The presentations therefore explored the universal or contextual nature of those concepts.

The tensions between universality and specificity in concepts of humans and nature and their interrelations continue to raise questions for historical and comparative research: how far-reaching and deep-rooted is cross-cultural variability in the conceptual domains of humans and nature, and on which levels can we identify universals or commonalities? The multitude of factors brought into play to explain cultural variations and commonalities (biochemical, neurophysiological, cultural, ideological, and socio-political) also pose complex challenges for historical research and analysis seeking to interpret and explain cross-cultural data – challenges that show the need for transdisciplinary approaches.

The present volume takes up these questions and challenges, setting out to investigate cross-cultural universals, similarities, and variations in the ways pre-modern societies have conceptualized the human body, the dead body, and the cosmos from a comparative, historical, and diachronic perspective. Influenced by the recent “bodily turn” in the social sciences, it is particularly interested in the role of physically grounded experiences in shaping concepts in the domains of humans and nature, both as a source of conceptual commonalities as well as variations. Thus, it sets out to explore how experiences of bodily existence are reflected in concrete and abstract concepts as well as in models and theories encountered in cosmologies and in scientific thought. Secondly, taking into account recent views of human cognition as embodied, embedded, and extended into the

world, the volume contributes to the exploration of how human engagements with the environment, understandings of phenomena, and creative imagination intertwine in the formation of concepts of humans and nature. Thirdly, the volume pays attention to the interrelations between culturally shaped and variable concepts and practices, engaging with the human body and the natural environment. Lastly, through the selective case studies in parts II to IV, the volume aims to highlight different factors (intra-cultural diversity, change, stability; intercultural exchanges/transmission of knowledge; specific religious or scholarly traditions; socio-political factors) contributing to the cross-cultural variability of the investigated concepts, while also considering how variations can be reconciled with commonalities and universals of human nature and culture.

We would like to thank all conference participants, as well as the organizers and their assistants, who helped make the conference a successful, lively, and enlightening event. The doctoral students of the Research Training Group contributed to the success of the conference in various ways – a heartfelt thank you to all of them. We thank all the speakers who made the effort to go through their papers again and to adapt them to the specific requirements of this volume. Many thanks to the peer-reviewers for their engagement and thoughtful feedback and to Johan Konstantin Mach for his help with style issues. Special thanks go to Jan Schäuble and Marta Chervinka, Marburg University, for compiling the index. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the publisher, Mohr Siebeck, and especially Tobias Stäbler and Linnéa Hoffmann for their excellent support throughout the entire production process, and to the editors of the “Ancient Cultures of Sciences and Knowledge” Series, in which this volume has found its perfect home.

Mainz & Marburg, January 2024

Chiara Ferella,
Tanja Pommerening,
Ulrike Steinert

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List of Abbreviations

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- AHw von Soden, W. 1965–1981. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- BM EA British Museum, Egyptian Antiquities.
- CAD Gelb, I. J. et al. (eds.). 1961–2010. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute.
- CG Catalogue Général, inventory number of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.
- CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
- CT Coffin Texts, Edition: Buck, A. de. 1935–1961. *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*. 7 volumes. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- DK Diels, H. and W. Kranz (eds. and transl.). 1951. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Griechisch und Deutsch*. Zürich: Weidmann.
- DNH Morani, M. (ed.). 1987. *Nemesius. De natura hominis*. Leipzig: Teubner.
- DS Theophrastus, *De Sensibus*. Edition: Diels, H. 1879. *Doxographi Graeci*. Berlin: Reimer.
- J Jouanna, J. (ed. and transl.). 2003. *Hippocrate. La Maladie sacrée*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- K Kühn, K. G. (ed.). 1821–1833. *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia*. Leipzig: C. Knobloch.
- KRI Kitchen, K. A. 1968–1990. *Ramesside Inscriptions*. 8 vols. Oxford: Blackwell.
- L Littré, É. (ed. and transl.). 1839–1861. *Œuvres complètes d’Hippocrate* (10 vols.). Paris: Baillière.
- LCI Kirschbaum, E. (ed.). 1994. *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*. Sonderausgabe (4 vols.). Freiburg: Herder.
- LD Lepsius, C. R. 1849–1859. *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*. 6 vols. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung.
- LGG Leitz, C. (ed.). 2002–2003. *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*. 8 vols. *Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta*, 110–116, 129. Leuven: Peeters.
- LIMC Kahil, L. (ed.). 1981–2009. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*. Zürich: Artemis Verlag.
- L/M Laks, A., and G. Most (eds. and transl.). 2016. *Early Greek Philosophy 5/2*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- LSJ Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- MedWb von Deines, H. and W. Westendorf. 1961. *Wörterbuch der medizinischen Texte*. Grundriß der Medizin der alten Ägypter VII. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- OLD Glare, P. G. W. (ed.). 2012. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Second edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PGL Lampe, G. W. H. A. (ed.). 1997. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. 13th imprint. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- PHP De Lacy, P.H. (ed., transl., and comm.). 1978. *Galen: On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (Corpus medicorum Graecorum vol. 5.4.1.2.). Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- RE Wissowa, G. et al. (ed.). 1890–1980. *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- RITA Kitchen, K.A. 1993–2014. *Ramesside Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations*. 7 vols. Oxford: Blackwell.
- RIA Ebeling, E. et al. (ed.). 1932–2018. *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und der Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. 15 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- TLA Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae. <http://aaw.bbaw.de/tla/>.
- TLL Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (1900–). Leipzig/Stuttgart: Teubner; Berlin: De Gruyter.
- USU Helmreich, G. (ed.). 1907. *Galen de usu partium libri xvii*. Leipzig: Teubner (repr. Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1968).
- VAT Museum siglum of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin
- Wb Erman, A. and H. Grapow. 1926–1963. *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache*. 6 vols. 4th Edition. Reprint 1971. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- WCN Wörterbuch-Corpus-Nummer

Part I

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The Embodied Mind of Premodern Cultures

Chiara Ferella, Tanja Pommerening, and Ulrike Steinert

1. Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

The present volume investigates cross-cultural commonalities, culture-specific variances, and human universals in the ways premodern societies have conceived of the human body, both living and dead, and the natural world or cosmos. The project addresses, firstly, how human embodiment and relations with the environment, understanding of phenomena, and creative imagination are intertwined in the conception of the human living body, the dead body, and the cosmos. Secondly, it considers the extent to which these conceptions may prove to be culture-specific or common to different societies and even universal; that is, emerge independently in different societies under temporally and spatially similar conditions.

From a methodological point of view, this chapter aims to provide a theoretical and methodological background against which to read the subsequent contributions to the present volume and, in doing so, intends to go beyond the scope and intent of the individual contributions by reframing them with a synchronic and diachronic comparative outlook. Our aim here is to elaborate on the conclusions drawn by each individual chapter from a broader perspective and at a more general level; that is, in terms of elaboration and structuring of concepts as well as of the conceptual commonalities and culture-specific traits underlying the concepts of the human body, the dead body, and the cosmos, particularly when considering emic and etic perspectives. In addition, this chapter views the interrelationships between embodiment and cultural variety in the creation and elaboration of concepts, weighing how cultural variations can be reconciled with human universals.

Our starting point is the assumption that the human mind is grounded in, and essentially structured by, the body and is always in contact with the environment. Neuroscience and psychology have demonstrated that cognition is fundamentally embodied and that particular aspects of concepts are rooted in, and structured by, a set of sensorimotor schemas anchored in the body.¹ These serve as the basic

¹ Johnson (1987); Barsalou (1999); Gibbs (2003); Zwaan (2004); Pecher and Zwaan (2005). Anthropological studies of consciousness drawing on P. Bourdieu's work on the *habitus* and on

“yardstick” for the various neural processes that we experience as the mind.² Moreover, the body serves as a resource in concept processing.

There is a growing body of literature from cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics supporting the idea that “crucial elements of relevant perceptual and sensorimotor information are used in conceptual processing,”³ while “significant aspects of both concrete and abstract concepts arise from, and continue to be structured in terms of, pervasive patterns of embodied activity;”⁴ that is, perceptual interactions, bodily actions, and manipulations of objects. These patterns are known as “image schemas,” and as defined by M. Johnson, who first hypothesized their fundamental function in cognition,⁵ schemas are imagistic, analogue, and embodied structures that arise from our kinesthetic interactions with the world and recur in conceptual and epistemological processing.⁶ As R.W. Gibbs put it, “image schemas cover a wide range of experiential structures that are pervasive in experience, have internal structure, underlie literal meanings, and can be metaphorically elaborated to provide for our understanding of more abstract conceptual domains.”⁷ Image schemas are thus grounded in our most basic body experiences and are unavoidable if we are to convey meaning to the world around us.

To clarify how embodied image schemas metaphorically work to convey meanings, let us consider one of Johnson’s examples, the BALANCE schema. BALANCE is “an activity we learn with our body and not by grasping a set of rules or concepts” and thus its meaning “begins to emerge through our acts of balancing and through our experience of systemic processes and states within our bodies.”⁸ Having developed this image schema as a result of our kinesthetic interactions with the physical world, we begin to project it onto more abstract domains of experience. When we pursue, for example, work-life balance, our evaluation of a balanced lifestyle is not based on an intellectual understanding of the similarities between an idea of balance elaborated, say, in physics and a different metaphorical category; rather, we are projecting onto abstract or less tangible domains a deep

M. Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) also underline the importance of the “lived body” immersed in the environment and in social interaction with others as the basis for conscious experience. These processes are mediated through a “body image” or schema and through human capacities for perception, thought, action, self-reflection, affectivity, etc. (see Winkelman [2018] for an overview).

² See Damasio (1994: xvi).

³ The quote is by Gibbs (2006: 86), who at pp. 87–90 provides extensive references to these series of statements and add discussion on case studies, which form the basis of the so-called perceptual systems theory.

⁴ Gibbs (2006: 80). See also Johnson (1987); Lakoff (1987); Lakoff and Johnson (1999); Talmay (2000).

⁵ Johnson (1987).

⁶ Studies in cognitive linguistics suggest there are at least two dozen different image schemas. Some examples provided by Johnson are fundamental structures such as PATH, BALANCE, CONTAINMENT, CENTRE-PERIPHERY, PART-WHOLE, vertical SCALE, CYCLE, and the like.

⁷ Gibbs (2006: 91).

⁸ Johnson (1987: 74–75).

structuring of our bodily experience. The same happens when we perceive balance in a pleasing work of art. All these experiences can be said to be grounded in the body, because they are fundamentally structured by our kinesthetic sense of BALANCE.⁹

Parallel to the notion of image schemas and embodied concepts, neuro- and cognitive science have accumulated a growing body of evidence demonstrating the implausibility of the idea that the mind is a *Geist* unrelated to the body, functioning independently and even in spite of its bodily constraints. Rather, the mind can be regarded as a set of innate, specialized modules designed to process specific types of information.¹⁰ Because of the nature of our brain and the way the neural system functions, our mind imposes structures and limitations on human cognition, while evolution ensures an ongoing alignment between our values and desires and the structure of the world in which we have evolved.¹¹ Thus, the cosmos that surrounds us exists for us only in and through the body, while conception of things in the world arises as a function of our bodily interaction with them.¹²

Indeed, a more convincing perspective on how cognition is acquired is the enactive view, which, as defined by its proponent M. Merleau-Ponty, aims to “negotiate a middle path between the Scylla of cognition as recovery of a pre-given outer world (realisms), and the Charybdis of cognition as the projection of a pre-given world (idealism).”¹³ In contrast, cognition is understood as enaction, in which the agent and the world are not really separate because they mutually determine each other. More precisely, as Gibbs puts it, “a person’s world is determined by the agent’s behavior and the sensorimotor capabilities that allow the individual to cope with local situations. What people perceive depends upon what they are able to do, and what they do, in time, alters what they perceive.”¹⁴ This does not mean that the world and the person are one and the same, nor is our mind identical to the body. Yet, “our bodies are closely defined, and experienced, in terms of the specific actions we engage in as we move about the world;”¹⁵ that is, the manifold neural processes we experience as cognition and concepts, hence as our “mind,” are rooted in systematic patterns of bodily action.

In the present volume, the chapter by B. Tversky focuses precisely on the enacted aspect of cognition, arguing that the way we participate in the world is not only as bodies, but as bodies in space. As such, we must necessarily act (or avoid acting) in space to ensure our survival. Tversky shows the extent to which

⁹ Gibbs (2006: 93–94). See also Slingerland (2011: 164–166).

¹⁰ For a modular idea of mind, see Tooby and Cosmides (2005); Carruthers, Laurence, and Stich (2005; 2006).

¹¹ Slingerland (2011: 8).

¹² Merleau-Ponty (1962: 235).

¹³ Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991: 172).

¹⁴ Gibbs (2006: 17).

¹⁵ Gibbs (2006: 17).

this very ordinary fact is loaded with implications not only for behavior, but also for the production of thought, and therefore cognition.

A further perspective on the mind, which expands on the idea of enaction, is the “extended mind thesis” (EMT), which argues that the mind is not only determined but even extends to the physical world (and thus does not reside exclusively in the brain or body). Specifically, EMT proposes that certain objects in the environment – for instance, a notebook, our mobile phone, personal computer, and the like – can be part of a cognitive process and in this way function as extensions of the mind itself. The reference work for EMT is the study by A. Clark and D. Chalmers (1998),¹⁶ who, arguing that the separation of mind, body, and environment is an unjustified distinction, presented the idea of active externalism, in which objects in the environment play a significant role in facilitating cognitive processes, with the mind and the physical world acting as a “coupled system” that can be seen as a complete cognitive unit in its own right.

An approach to the mind that recognizes its bodily foundation and its constant connection with, hence its enactment/extension in, the surrounding physical space suggests that the way human beings experience themselves and the world in which they live (that is, their embodiment in the world) is inherently common – one might say universal – because it is based on human body-mind systems that have remained unchanged over space and time (at least since the appearance and spread of *homo sapiens*). Consequently, common characteristics of human embodiment in the world can be expected to be translated into cross-culturally shared behaviors, practices, beliefs, values, and bodies of knowledge. Admittedly, human beings are unique among animals in possessing the kind of cognitive fluidity¹⁷ and cultural technology that allow us to substantially alter, over time and space, our behavior, beliefs, values, and desires, thus massively influencing the way single individuals and societies represent themselves and the world they live in. Yet “all of this cognitive and cultural innovation is grounded in – and remains ultimately constrained by – the structure of our body-minds.”¹⁸

The understanding of mind and cognition as embodied has led to a rediscovery of human universals, whose study has been of interest in recent decades in disciplines ranging from social anthropology and linguistics, to evolutionary biology, psychology, and neuro- and cognitive sciences.¹⁹ Research on universals has identified extensive lists of overt or surface universals (in the form of complexes or simple cultural traits), many of which almost certainly have distinctive neural bases. In a seminal article from 2004, D.E. Brown provided a synthesis and some concrete examples of human universals, including universals in the cultural realm (myths, legends, daily routines, rules, body adornment, and the use and production of tools), the realm of language (grammar, phonemes, polysemy,

¹⁶ Clark and Chalmers (1998).

¹⁷ Mithen (1996); Slingerland (2011: 152–156).

¹⁸ Slingerland (2011: 8).

¹⁹ See Antweiler (2016) for an overview of these multidisciplinary research fields on universals.

metonymy, antonyms, etc.), the social realm (division of labor, social groups, age grading, the family, kinship systems, etc.), the behavioral realm (aggression, gestures, gossip, and facial expressions), and in the realm of the mind (emotions, dichotomous thinking, empathy, and psychological defense mechanisms).²⁰ In the same study, Brown distinguishes between “emic” and “etic” universals,²¹ while also listing formally distinct categories of human universals, which include absolute universals, near universals, universal pools, and statistical universals.²² On the one hand, the terms “emic” and “etic,” mirroring the distinction in linguistics between “phonemic” and “phonetic,” discriminate between characteristics that are overtly or consciously represented in certain cultural conceptions and practices and those that are not. For example, from an etic standpoint, everyone has a blood type, but the cultural practice of distinguishing between blood types is far from universal. Emic universals are probably much rarer than etic ones.²³

On the other hand, the formal categories of human universals distinguish absolute universals, which include elements that are found among all people known to history and ethnography (and those listed above are examples of this category); near universals, which are characteristics for which few exceptions are known or reasonably supposed;²⁴ conditional universals, which include features that are always or necessarily realized when particular conditions are satisfied;²⁵ universal pools, which refer to those instances where a limited number of options exhaust the possible variances from one society to another;²⁶ and, finally, statistical universals, which include features that occur independently in unrelated societies at a rate that seems greater than chance. While considering all kinds of human universals, we are particularly interested in emic statistical universals and the spatiotemporal and cultural conditions that may have brought them to the fore, as detected and explored in this volume.

As we have just seen, human universals can be found in different interrelated realms – such as language, culture, behavior – but also in structural elements like concepts and categorizations. Commonalities found in almost every culture or society include concepts and classifications of the cosmos (cosmic bodies, world regions, fauna, flora, inner states, space, weather, etc.) and of the person (body parts, their functions and locations; ideas of the self or of the soul; conceptions of

²⁰ Brown (2004: 47).

²¹ Brown (2004: 47).

²² Brown (2004: 48).

²³ Brown (2004: 47–48).

²⁴ The making of fire and the domestication of dogs can be counted among these, as records suggest very few peoples used fire without also knowing how to make it, or did not own dogs: see Brown (2004: 48).

²⁵ A cultural example of a conditional universal is that if there is a cultural preference for one hand over the other, then it will be the right hand that is preferred; see Brown (2004: 48–49).

²⁶ Though the international phonetic alphabet does not really cover all the possibilities, it serves to express the idea of universal pools, since it consists of a finite possible number of speech sounds or sound contrasts, from which each language selects their own; see Brown (2004: 49).

different states of awareness, dream, sleep, and death, etc.). With its attention to the human being and the natural world, understood as more general perspectives that may elucidate culturally and historically variable phenomena and views, we have chosen to focus on three experiential and conceptual macro-categories that are universal from an etic perspective – that is, the living body, the dead body, and the cosmos – with the aim of examining the different culturally specific variants of emic views.

The first of these, the experiential and conceptual category of the living body, has been the subject of anthropological studies that emphasize specific recurring themes or perspectives for comparative research – for example, the body as a cultural symbol reflecting and expressing social phenomena; the body as a locus of self and identity, and as a medium and instrument of cultural knowledge, techniques, habitual practices, communication, and social interaction; as well as the notion of the “lived body” of experiences, linked to ways of sensing and experiencing the world.²⁷ The second macro-category of the dead body, by exploring the common human (ritual) practice of dealing with (and most often caring for) human corpses, indirectly addresses the universal human need (and value) of confronting and coping with death. Within the third category of the cosmos, recurring comparative themes in premodern cosmology include the conceptualization of heavenly bodies as divine entities, the binary or complementary pairing of heaven and earth, the conceptualization of cosmic phenomena in terms of human relationships and agencies, and the Macrocosm-Microcosm analogy, which is so pervasive in premodern societies that it has been described as a “core component of the premodern *mentalité*.”²⁸

The focus on the foregoing universal macro-categories allows us to emphasize the traits that different premodern cultures share, both at the level of specific conceptual elements and in terms of recurring themes or perspectives. Embodiment and concepts grounded in bodily experiences are especially emphasized by some of the contributions dealing with the living body (e.g., S. Gerhards, R. Nyord, S. Irannejad and A. Milenković, and H. Nijdam). Yet potentially universal concepts and recurring perspectives are reconstructed by several chapters throughout all three macro-categories.

The contributions collected here also offer a clear insight into the wide variety of concepts and meanings to which the abstract or intangible domains of the living body, the dead body, and the cosmos give rise within diverse societies across time and space. In fact, although some cognitive structures are universal because they are forged by the evolved infrastructure of our brains, the human mind is nonetheless capable of shaping emotions and desires in entirely new and idiosyncratic ways, and, based on these structuring decision-making processes, it gives rise to an enormous and astounding conceptual variety.

²⁷ E.g., Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987); Lock (1993); Lock and Farquar (2007); Mascia-Lees (2011).

²⁸ Williams (2010: 120).

In recent years, an increasing amount of research in the fields of cultural neurosciences, cultural psychology, evolutionary biology, and the anthropology of consciousness has found evidence for the far-reaching impact of culture and social factors on human cognition. Cultural beliefs, collective representations/concepts, and practices exert decisive influence on participants' perceptions of themselves, others, and of reality; that is, on the very contents of consciousness or mind.²⁹ These differences point to the intertwining and interaction of biological and cultural factors, in such a way that culture literally becomes "imprinted" or "written" into the structures of the brain. The discoveries of "neuroplasticity" have shown that the brain not only "shapes our conscious experiences," but that it is "in turn shaped by experience,"³⁰ with experience literally "*made* in and by the brain."³¹ For example, the learning and training of skills, such as the acquisition of a second language, or juggling or playing a musical instrument, leads to changes in gray matter at the anatomical level and to reorganizations of the brain's neuronal networks; for example, to an increase or strengthening of synaptic connections between neurons.³² Many cultural variations in cognitive processes are already established during early development in childhood. Through the neural changes resulting from cultural experiences and interactions with the environment, culture becomes embodied as well as "embrained."³³

The plastic nature of the human brain, body, and consciousness as well as the correlating variations in experiences, beliefs, and behaviors, both between individuals as well as cultures, invites us to reconsider the histories of human experiences and human minds, as well as the relationship between "nature" and "nurture/culture": human experiences and minds are biocultural and constantly evolving through cultural innovations, adaptations, technical innovations, and alterations in human practices and interactions, although the same processes of the "conditioning of the brain" through enculturation also support the establishment and perpetuation of institutions and world views over long time

²⁹ E. g., Throop and Laughlin (2007); Turner and Whitehead (2008). Consciousness encompasses complex interactions of such elements as awareness, sensations, perceptions, cognitions, memory, thoughts, feelings, sense of self, and world views (Winkelman 2018). Cognitive and anthropological approaches to the study of human consciousness point out that cultural schemas or models as mediating structures and interpretative frameworks, emerging from the interplay of biological potentials and sociocultural contexts, play a decisive role in conceptual organization, and impact perceptions and experience. The cultural schemas or models are embodied in cultural artifacts, forms of expression, and social activities/interactions. See also Descola (2013) for schemas of practice or "modes of identification and relation" guiding fundamental views about self and other(s) predominant in different cultures.

³⁰ Turner and Whitehead (2008: 45).

³¹ Boddice (2018: 147).

³² See, e. g., Draganski et al. (2004); Driemayer et al. (2008); Turner and Whitehead (2008: 50–52); Rugnetta (2023).

³³ With consequences in many domains, such as cognition, emotion, and motivation; see, e. g., Kitayama, Park, and Cho (2015); Kitayama and Salvador (2017).

periods.³⁴ The cross-cultural similarities as well as variation in human consciousness and experience detected in the neurosciences, psychology, and anthropology also confirms the renewed relevance of questions regarding cross-cultural universals in the different conceptual domains that are investigated in this volume.

Cross-cultural conceptual variance is even more remarkable when it comes to concepts related to experiences and perceptions involving physical states and processes inherent in human nature. For example, although the human body is physiologically and anatomically the same everywhere (apart from sexual differences, disabilities, and age), conceptions of the body, its physical states, and physiological processes differ dramatically across cultures and have changed throughout human history.³⁵ Several contributions in this volume emphasize the way in which body concepts are shaped by culture and are socially mediated. For instance, S. Gerhards' chapter, focusing on the universal activity of sleeping, discusses evidence for cultural-specific sleep practices that were current in ancient Egypt. Moreover, H. Nijdam's study of body patterns in medieval Frisian law suggests an evaluation of body parts that indicates a very culturally specific set of values regarding body organs and their functions. Additionally, the notion of a corpse as a lifeless body, which at first sight might seem to be a universal perception, is challenged by the practice of mummification not only in the ancient Egyptian tradition but also in Christian-medieval culture, as R. Pabst and O. Polozhentseva show. Similarly, F. Neuwahl's contribution argues for the occurrence of particular scenarios and contexts in Greco-Roman antiquity in which the deceased are not simply dead bodies but remain part of social interactions. Finally, A. Kehnel takes up this point in her contribution, noting that weak or dead bodies existing on the margin between life and death serve as "symbolic artifacts" that are frequently the focus of complex collective activities, attention, and social cooperation (centering around the care for sick or deceased members of a community). The practices and beliefs around these liminal bodies (often characterized by the treatment of dead or quasi-dead bodies as if still alive) often challenge or contradict the clear-cut division between a living and a dead human body, throwing into profile a recurring (yet not universal) cultural theme wrestling with the idea of physical (im)mortality.

Thus, on the one hand, embodied cognition of a universally shared nature suggests the existence of numerous categories of universals, which anthropology has in fact recognized and studied. On the other hand, perceptions and conceptions of ourselves and things around us, while embodied, are deeply influenced by cultural factors that result in a considerable variety of ways in which people relate to and conceive of commonly shared experiences. Therefore, as E. Sling-

³⁴ E.g., Smail (2008); Wexler (2010); McGrath (2017).

³⁵ See, e.g., Lock (1993); Tanner (2001); Lock and Farquhar (2007); Ruberg (2020); Althoff and Pommerening (*in press*). For discussion on the plastic nature of the body in light of neural embodiment and epigenetics and its potential in challenging determinist assumptions about the body in Western thought, see Papadopolous (2011).

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