Ever since antiquity, the question as to whether signs, and especially speech words, are natural or conventional has commanded the attention of philosophers and subsequently also of rhetoricians, grammarians, and linguists. This question may be given the form of a paradox: Is natural language natural?

Natural signs are contrasted with conventional ones: (1) in terms of the kinds of objects, events, phenomena or features that the signs themselves are or, more precisely, with respect to what was used in the given case as a sign of something else; (2) in terms of the kind of relation holding between the sign and the entity of which it is a sign or for which it was used; (3) in terms of both of those aspects.

In the first case, signs which are natural entities are termed natural signs, and all others are simply called signs. Thus, although naturalness is understood here as the opposite of artifici- ality, the name "artificial signs" is hardly ever used to describe signs which are not natural.

When we take a closer look at the opposition between natural and artificial signs (or, briefly, signs), however, it turns out that we may have to do with various concepts of naturalness and its opposite.

(1) The adjective "natural" is sometimes used with reference to such an object (e.g., plants, animals, minerals, rain) which simultaneously satisfies two conditions: it is a product of nature and arises without human intervention, that is to say, it is not processed, transformed or in any way used by man. All other objects, events and phenomena are described as artificial. In keeping with this approach we will say that a dog born as a result of cross-breeding arranged by a dog-breeder is something artificial. We will likewise regard as artificial a rose which bloomed thanks to various endeavors of the gardener: fertilizing, cutting, covering with straw mats or polyethylene foil, lighting, heating,
and so on. We will similarly consider to be artificial a piece of uncut amber if it is set in silver, thereby becoming part of a pendant, bracelet or ring. We will also consider rainstorms which are triggered, facilitated or quickened by strong detonations or artificial cooling to be artificial. The water level of a lake, canal or river raised by damming will also be considered artificial.

(2) The adjective "natural", as applied in a more liberal sense, refers to anything arising directly from nature, even if man exercised control over it or transformed or used its product following its appearance. By these criteria, the previously mentioned dammed water, rain, amber, rose and dog will be recognized as natural. Similarly, we will say that honey extracted from the honeycomb by the beekeeper is natural and not artificial honey. We will not question its naturalness even when we learn that the bees were additionally fed with sugar. "Pure Shetland Wool," so described on a sweater label, will remain natural for us although it was intensely processed by man before landing on the store shelf.

When applied to actions and behaviors, the word "natural" occurs in still other meanings which, being related to the preceding two, are readily confused.

(A) We regard as natural innate reflex behaviors or actions, usually the so-called unconditional reflexes such as pupil contraction due to light. What would be the opposite in this case? The conditional reflexes of the organism or, more generally, all that was learned or acquired by the organism, in the broad senses of the words.

(B) The following distinction is related to the one just mentioned: we sometimes regard as natural autonomous states, behaviors and processes, juxtaposing them to the non-autonomous ones, which in this sense are assumed to be non-natural. As we will see in a moment, not only unconditional reflexes are believed to be autonomous in this meaning. As a matter of fact, four different oppositions are usually intended here.

(a) First, by "autonomous," we mean states or processes which arise independently from any activity or behavior of the person or thing influenced by or experiencing these states or processes. An example of natural processes of this kind is aging in the restricted sense of time flow.

(b) Second, we will include in a slightly different meaning of "autonomous," someone's state or process independent of the personal interference of the subject experiencing them. We will