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Deleuze and Nietzsche: On Frivolous Propositions and Related Matters

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> "I am never trying to raise contradictions. *Help me* rather formulate the problem!" (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*)

What is the point?

"Frivolous propositions," in the sense given to this expression by XVIIth century philosophers such as Locke and Leibniz, does not primarily imply any moral evaluation: it sets a special kind of epistemological standard. A proposal can be frivolous but not extravagant at all; a proposition can be frivolous and yet quite certain.[1] It is just as frivolous to observe that an oyster is an oyster, as it is false to deny it by saying that an oyster is not an oyster. Whether one's statement is merely verbal or contains any clear and real idea, "it shows us nothing but what we must certainly know before," as Locke puts it, and no contribution is thereby made to the enlarging of our knowledge. The statement is

[1] See for example Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, chap.VII, 15, and Book IV, chap.VIII, "Of trifling propositions": "there are universal propositions, which, though they be certainly true, yet they add no light to our understanding; bring no increase to our knowledge". What is at stake is the status of the sophisticated but purely verbal propositions of ontology, to the extent that they can be reduced to identical or analytically true propositions (or *nugatoriae*, to use the language of the scholastics). Leibniz's challenge in the *Nouveaux Essais* consists in showing that metaphysical statements about substances are not always frivolous (*Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain*, Book IV, chap.II, 2 and chap.VIII, "Des propositions frivoles").

certain, but not instructive in any sense. It is as useless as it is irrefutable, and those who make it are merely "trifling."

Regardless of how one measures the use of a proposition, and putting aside the question of the adequacy of Locke's particular (empiricist) epistemological standard (the growth of knowledge) as well as of any epistemological standard in general, one thing at least clearly emerges from this historical insight: frivolity has nothing to do with falsehood (or truth, for that matter), it only concerns the need, the use, the necessity, the relevance or the point of something. But in philosophy the suspicion or accusation of frivolity may involve a more ambitious claim about the evaluation of statements in general, whether "analytic" or not. Deleuze takes that further step in a fairly straightforward manner:

> What we are plagued by these days isn't any blocking of communication, but pointless statements [*propositions qui n'ont aucun intérêt*]. But what we call the meaning of a statement is its point [*l'intérêt qu'elle présente*]. That's the only definition of meaning, and it comes to the same thing as a statement's novelty. You can listen to people for hours, but what's the point?... That's why arguments are such a strain, why there's never any point arguing. You can't just tell someone what they're saying is pointless. So you tell them it's wrong. But what someone says is never wrong, the problem isn't that some things are wrong, but that they're stupid or irrelevant. That they've already been said a thousand times. The notions of relevance, necessity, the point of something, are a thousand times more significant than the notion of truth. Not as substitutes for truth, but as the measure of the truth of what I'm saying. It's the same in mathematics: Poincaré used to say that many mathematical theories are completely irrelevant, pointless. He didn't say they were wrong — that wouldn't have been so bad.[2]

This line of argument is by no means an isolated instance in Deleuze's writings. It comes in different shades and variations, and in more or less philosophically articulate ways, which reminds us of Alain Badiou's point about Deleuzian thought being essentially *monotonous* (in the sense that it relies on a limited set of themes which keep recurring in

[2] 'Mediators', in *Negotiations*, trans. M. Joughin, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, pp. 129-130.

relation to different "cases of the concept"). Thus, in one of the most famous passages of *Difference and Repetition,* a similar reference to mathematics comes in support of the criticism of the "dogmatic image of thought."[3] But *What is Philosophy?* puts things even more bluntly:

> Philosophy does not consist in knowing. It is not inspired by truth: rather, categories such as the Interesting, the Remarkable or the Relevant determine its success or failure. [...] Of many philosophical books one doesn't want to say that they are false, which amounts to saying nothing, but that they are irrelevant and pointless... [...] Only teachers sometimes write the word 'false' in margins, but readers are rather inclined to have doubts about the relevance or the point [*l'intérêt*], in other words the novelty of what they are given to read.[4]

Two things cannot but strike us here.

First, the Nietzschean thread that runs through the whole issue of frivolity and pointlessness. What is at stake is indeed the possibility of considering the meaning and value of statements "beyond true and false," even if this implies giving up the epistemological standard altogether (inasmuch as it essentially relies upon a "dogmatic" determination of truth and falsehood). For frivolous propositions now include every fact that is conceived under an interpretation of knowledge as mere recognition, and of truth as rectitude or exactness. This move, as we shall see, is inseparable from the idea that it is both possible and necessary to reach a genetic account of truth and falsehood in terms of problems (and conversely of problems in terms of truth and falsehood – badly posed or distorted problems).

Second, the mention of Poincaré, and more generally the persistent Deleuzian reference to science in relation to frivolity, raises the question of the status of science from a Deleuzian (and Nietzschean) viewpoint. There is nothing more plain and less exciting than "2+2=4," but everyone knows that this is not what science is about. This ambivalence

[3] "We doubt whether, when mathematicians engage in a polemic, they criticize one another for being mistaken in the results of their calculations. Rather, they criticize one another for having produced an insignificant theorem or a problem devoid of sense." (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* trans. P. Patton, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p.153).

[4] Deleuze and Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?,* Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1991, p. 80 (my own translation).

is an indication that science cannot easily fit in the epistemological framework that is being challenged. It seems it must be condemned, and at the same time be vindicated. At any rate, this difficulty underscores the necessity of a philosophical reappraisal of Nietzsche's own view of science and scientific method.

Frivolous propositions, false problems: variations on a Nietzchean theme

The point of course, as Deleuze acknowledges, is not to substitute "interest" or "relevance" for the classical notion of truth, but only to impose new standards of truth — or at least to emphasize the need of such standards, and the fact that they cannot be simply derived from truth itself. That such a position should drive us beyond a merely psychological or "subjective" appreciation of the "interesting" and the "uninteresting," of the relevant and the frivolous, is obvious from the following aphorism:

> *Age and truth.* – Young people love what is interesting and odd, no matter how true or false it is. More mature minds love what is interesting and odd about truth. Fully mature intellects, finally, love truth, even when it appears plain and simple, boring to the ordinary person; for they have noticed that truth tends to reveal its highest wisdom in the guise of simplicity.[5]

How the "interesting aspect" (or on the contrary the frivolity) of a proposition is supposed to "measure" the truth of what one is asserting, and how this may not necessarily involve getting rid of truth, are questions that remain to be clarified. But they are certainly Nietzschean questions. They address the conceptual foundations of Nietzschean perspectivism, they condition the overcoming of the distinction between reality and appearance, as well as between truth and falsehood. For just as "only degrees and subtleties of gradation" seperate truth from falsehood, there is "no criterion of 'reality,'" but only "grades of appearance measured by the strength of the interest we show in an appearance" (*The Will to Power,* 588).

[5] *Human, All too Human,* 609; see also *HTH* I, 3.

Taken up by Deleuze, this Nietzschean theme is reformulated and hence interpreted anew. Let us consider what such an operation reveals and what it leaves aside.

It has rarely been noted that the chapter on "The image of thought" in *Difference and Repetition* is a direct remix or extension of a section from the earlier *Nietzsche and Philosophy* entitled "A new image of thought." All the major elements of Deleuze's own view are already present in the 1962 study on Nietzsche: meaning and value as more important than truth, the negative of thought found in stupidity rather than falsehood, the childish examples that support the classical doctrines of error ('Good morning Theodorus' when it is in fact Theaetetus who passes by), the notion of a "typology" or "topology" of thought that may account for all determinations in terms of truth and error (an intuition which is later given a precise meaning with reference to the Kantian problematic Idea and Lautman's interpretation of mathematical structures), thought as triggered by a force from outside, the importance of culture and training as opposed to method, etc. Although Nietzsche's name is mentioned only once in the long section of *Difference and Repetition* devoted to the image of thought, his presence can be felt on every page.

Providing "a new image of thought," to quote Deleuze, implies that one understands the following: the proper element of thought is not truth, but meaning and value. Once this is granted, it is plainly absurd to keep on measuring the truth of propositions in terms of their mere contribution to positive knowledge, according to an epistemological presupposition that remains unchallenged. Valuing necessarily implies grading. High and low, instead of true and false, must now play the role of the basic categories in the evaluation of propositons. Nowhere is this intuition more clearly exposed than in the foreword to *Human, All too Human*:

> Granted that it is the problem of hierarchy which we may call our problem, we free spirits; only now, in the noonday of our lives, do we understand what preparations, detours, trials, temptations, disguises, were needed before the problem was permitted to rise up before us.[6]

Such is Nietzsche's problem: the highest problem of all, the problem of hierarchy. But as it appears this general praise of hierarchy cannot be

[6] *HTH*, foreword, 7.

separated from the idea that some problems are more interesting or more valuable than others: "As for me, I am not a sceptic — I still believe in the hierarchy of men and problems... [...]" (*Nachlass Herbst*, 35[43]). Thus the problem of hierarchy unfailingly brings us back to the hierarchy of problems as its precondition. Propositions have as much relevance as their underlying problems allow them to have; but problems themselves are not all equally relevant. This may constitute the basic tenet of a truly anti-positivist epistemology, one that does not seperate the object of knowledge from the "problematic" or "discursive process of instruction" to which it belongs. This characterization is borrowed from Bachelard, but Deleuze might as well have subscribed to it[7].

Nietzsche viewed his own contribution to philosophy in terms of the destitution of old problems and the creation and promotion of new problems. For instance, evaluating moral problems implies that one critically examines "the reduction of problems to questions of pleasure and displeasure," (*Will to Power*, 64) in other words the conditions under which "pleasure and pain become foreground problems" (*WP* 43). It is in this sense, as an optical transformation imposed on traditional problems, that one must understand Nietzche's ambition of "changing the whole perspective of moral problems" (*WP* 41).

But let us come back to Deleuze. *Difference and Repetition*, as has already been said, is entirely dependent on the Nietzschean decision of a radical re-evaluation of truth. As often, Deleuze's intimate reappropriation of an author's thought seems to entitle him to totally dispense with any explicit reference (Deleuze has a name for this habit: "free indirect discourse"). The same remark applies to his use of Bergson, whose name does not appear once in "The Image of Thought" although several passages are obviously heavily inspired by *La Pensée et le Mouvant*.[8] The structuralist import, when one reads this chapter closely, plays a relatively minor role in comparison with the importance of the Bergsonian theme of a criticism of problems, which already

[7] Bachelard, *Le Rationalisme appliqué*, PUF, Paris, 1949, p. 55. This book is in fact quoted by Deleuze in support of his denunciation of the recognition model in philosophy (see *Difference and Repetition*, note 9, p.320).

[8] Compare for instance p. 158 of *Difference and Repetition* (the master's questions to the pupil, the problem conceived after the model of a radio-quiz or newspaper competition) with Bergson's description of false problems: "ready-made solutions" kept "in the city's administrative cabinets," philosophy as a "puzzle," the pieces of which are handed to us by society (*La Pensée et le Mouvant*, in *Oeuvres*, PUF, Paris, 1959, p. 1292).

constituted the bulk of Deleuze's 1966 *Bergsonism*[9]. Much of *Difference and Repetition*'s specific twist actually results from the accommodation of Bergson's conception of false problems within a Nietzschean frame. One gets a sense of this operation by bringing two statements together. The first is extracted from *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* the second from *Bergsonism*: "We always have the kind of truths we deserve according to the meaning of what we conceive and the value of what we believe in"[10] — "a problem always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the way it is stated (i.e., the conditions under which it is determined as problem), and of the means and terms at our disposal for stating it."[11]

The specific "synthesis" or "assemblage" resulting from this parallel reading is in fact displayed in several passages of *Difference and Repetition.* For instance: "A solution always has the truth it deserves according to the problem to which it is a response, and the problem always has the solution it deserves in proportion to *its own* truth or falsity — in other words, in proportion to its sense."[12] For "sense is located in the problem itself."[13] This assumption alone is enough to put an end to the infinite regress which would result from having to first determine the value of the problem itself in order to be able to determine the value of the corresponding proposition or solution: the problem, according to Deleuze, bears its own immanent norm of truth and falsehood, it concentrates in itself all evaluative possibilities. "A speculative problem is solved as soon as it is well posed," Bergson says in the *Creative Mind*; a corollary to this claim is that identifying a problem as a pseudo-problem is not fundamentally different from posing it or trying to pose it. In other words, the point of view that corresponds to problems (the problematic stance) is the point of view of value itself, so that evaluating propositions in terms of problems is the same thing as evaluating problems.

It is as if what Deleuze identified in Nietzsche as the source of all value and meaning now came to be attributed entirely to problems themselves, to the extent that the conditions for a genuine, intrinsic genesis of truth lie at their heart. Similarly, the view — already present

[9] I have dealt with this issue of Bergsonian pseudo-problems in "Fantômes de problèmes" ("Bergson,"*Magazine Littéraire,* n°386, april 2000, pp. 39-42).
[10] *Nietzsche et la philosophie, op.cit.,* p.118 (my own translation).
[11] *Bergsonism,* trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, New York, Zone Books, 1991, p. 16.
[12] *Difference and Repetition, op.cit.,* p. 159.
[13] Ibid., p. 157.

in the book on Nietzsche — that thought is put into motion by some external *encounter,* is transposed into a new register as the formative violence of the encounter comes to be described as a trigger that forces us to pose a problem, and the object of the encounter itself is presented as the bearer of a problem, or indeed a problem itself.[14]

Deleuze remarks in the closing lines of the central chapter of *Difference and Repetition*:

> From the point of view of thought, the problematic distinction between the ordinary and the singular, and the nonsenses which results from a bad distribution among the conditions of the problem, are undoubtedly more important than the hypothetical or categorical duality of truth and falsehoods along with the 'errors' which only arise from their confusion in cases of solution.[15]

He goes on to call for an extension of our creative powers to the level of problems. This stance is of course thoroughly Nietzschean:

> *The fact of determining what is 'true' and what is 'false,' the fact of determining states of affairs in general,* is fundamentally different from the creative act of *posing,* giving form and structure, overcoming, mastering, *willing,* that is implied by the essence of *philosophy.*[16]

Frivolous remarks devoid of any interest or relevance, banalities mistaken for profundities, are our ordinary lot. They are expressions of our inability to distinguish between ordinary points and singular ones, false and real problems, in other words "our inability to constitute, comprehend or determine a problem as such".[17] Thus a new determination is given to the Nietzschean imperative: to consider the point of a proposition, the aspect that makes it interesting or trifling, is not different from evaluating its truth from the point of view of the problem that gives it its meaning and value, but to raise oneself to the level of problems implies that the test of true and false be applied to problems themselves. The idea that in philosophy there is no criticism of

[14] Ibid., p.140.
[15] Ibid., p.163.
[16] *Nachlass Herbst,* 9[48].
[17] *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit., p. 159.

solutions, but only of problems, was of course already present in Deleuze's study on Hume.[18] It was omnipresent though implicit in the book on Nietzsche. But it is only after the encounter with Bergson that Deleuze systematically favoured a formulation of the Nietzschean theme in terms of problems and pseudo-problems. Whether he thereby produced a "monstruous heir" (and was therefore justified in avoiding quoting Nietzsche altogether), or on the contrary merely unfolded Nietzsche's problem, is yet another question. In any case, the continuity of Deleuzian thought is such that every step in the direction of an assessment of the nature of problems brings us back to the Nietzschean problem of the value of truth itself (*Genealogy of Morals,* III, 24).

Deleuze on Nietzsche and science

The second point that deserves to be discussed concerns the strategic use Deleuze makes of scientific references in relation to the issue of frivolity. The unexpected mention of Poincaré in the passage from *Negotiations* quoted earlier is interesting in many respects. It perfectly suits Deleuze's purpose, which is to provide a kind of *a fortiori* argument in favour of his view, because it suggests that even in those fields where truth would seem to be an exclusive concern, the problem of pointlessness plays an essential role. But if Deleuze's intention was indeed to lay that claim, almost any mathematician other than Poincaré would have done quite as well. It is common knowledge that mathematical research (even more clearly in the domain of "pure" mathematics) is concerned with the interesting aspects of certain structures rather than with the mere possibility of adding new truths to a stock of older truths. Truth for its own sake has never been the aim of mathematics (this was indeed one of the points under discussion in the violent polemics triggered by the construction of non-Euclidean geometries, to which Poincaré contributed in a decisive way). At any rate, Poincaré's view on the matter of pointlessness, when taken out of its context, does not strike us as highly original. Although Deleuze, who

[18]"En philosophie, [...] il n'y a pas de critique des solutions, mais seulement une critique des problèmes." (*Empirisme et Subjectivité,* PUF, Paris, 1953, p. 119). And also: "En vérité, une seule espèce d'objections est valable: celle qui consiste à montrer que la question posée par tel philosophe n'est pas une bonne question, qu'elle ne force pas assez la nature des choses, qu'il fallait autrement la poser, qu'on devait la poser mieux ou en poser une autre" (p. 120).

is obviously quoting from memory, does not give us any bibliographical clue, it is quite likely that what he has in mind is a text from a collection of epistemological essays entitled *Science et Méthode,* in which Poincaré develops his views concerning what he takes to be the principles of mathematical invention:

> What is, in fact, mathematical invention? It does not consist in forming new combinations out of previously known mathematical entities. This could be achieved by anyone, but the resulting combinations would be infinitely numerous, and for the most part they would be absolutely pointless [*dépourvu d'intérêt*]. Inventing implies that one does not form useless combinations, but rather useful ones, and these constitute a very small minority. Inventing means to discern, to choose.[19]

It is worthwhile noting that what is at stake here is not theories *per se,* as Deleuze seems to believe, but rather the underlying combinations of mathematical forms that may lead to the construction of mathematical theories. The rest of Poincaré's demonstration consists in providing autobiographical insights into this unconscious sorting mechanism, thus showing how the process of selection is in fact guided by an intuition of an aesthetic kind. It will be interesting to come back to this text in relation to Nietzsche. But what we should be concerned about at this stage is that Poincaré's name is generally attached to another, apparently much more radical statement to the effect that in science one choses certain rules or principles not because they are true, or even interesting, but because they are the most *convenient.* In particular, it follows from such an interpretation of scientific constructs (traditionally labeled as "conventionalist") that "experience does not tell us which geometry is true, it tells us which is the most *convenient.*" This quote from Poincaré's "Space and Geometry" finds many echoes in Nietzsche's conception of the role of "regulative fictions" in common scientific practice.[20] The appeal to utility or convenience only reinforces this

[19]Poincaré, *Science et méthode,* Flammarion, Paris, 1909, p. 48 (my own translation).
[20]See for example *The Gay Science,* V, 344: our beliefs should be held not as ultimate convictions but as "hypotheses, provisional points of view for experiment, or regulative fictions." Nietzsche's standard form of "fictionalism" is in fact much closer to the criticist tradition than he would like to believe. The comparison with Poincaré falls short of identifying Nietzsche as a proponent of instrumentalism or conventionalism (see volume one of René Berthelot's debatable essay *Un*

impression, opening the way to an interpretation of Nietzsche's account of scientific truth along pragmatic lines. But *that* is precisely the direction to which Deleuze's rather awkward use of Poincaré does *not* seem to point.

Quite consistently, Deleuze's treatment of Nietzche, while aiming at what he identifies as the core of his philosophy, deliberately avoids any direct engagement with the intricate problem of Nietzsche's relation to science. In the section of *Nietzsche and Philosophy* entitled "Nietzsche and science," he gives credance to the received view according to which Nietzsche would simply dismiss science as an expression of ascetic ideals. Such a reading is supported by many passages where Nietzsche explicitly draws a link between science and the nihilism of modern thought. But when Deleuze remarks that Nietzsche had "little competence and little taste for science,"[21] he is being partial, and a little philological probity is in order. It is a well-established fact that Nietzsche at one point seriously considered studying science at a university level.[22] The keen interest he took in the natural sciences did not reduce to his desire to find empirical evidence or speculative models in support of his own doctrine of eternal recurrence, nor was it confined to the so-called "positivistic" phase during which he took a rather positive attitude toward "science."[23] Nietzsche was fed scientific literature by his friends Paul Rée and Peter Gast. According to his sister, he had read Riemann. Whether this is true or not, he had for sure read the

Romantisme utilitaire: *Le Pragmatisme chez Nietzsche et Poincaré,* Alcan, Paris, 1911). His gesture in fact consists in folding the categories of the understanding unto the regulative principles of reason. The Kantian reference is explicit in the following fragment: "'The basic laws of logic, the law of identity and the law of contradiction, are forms of pure knowledge, because they precede all experience.' — But these are not forms of knowledge at all! they are regulative articles of belief." (*WP* 530). See also *GS,* V, 357: "we Germans agree with Kant in doubting the absolute value of scientific knowledge...". On this issue, see Ruediger Hermann Grimm, *Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge,* Walter de Gruyter, New York, 1977, pp. 98-110 and 133-137.

[21]*Nietzsche et la philosophie,* PUF, Paris, 1962, p. 51.

[22]See the letter to Peter Gast of June 19th, 1882, where Nietzsche states his intention to start a new student's life at the University of Vienna, in order to learn the basis of physics and atomic theory in particular.

[23]See the passage of *Ecce Homo* where Nietzsche describes the context in which he set out to write *Human, All too Human*: "ever since then, I have attached myself exclusively to the study of physiology, medicine, and the experimental sciences..." This should answer the objection that the scope of the word "Wissenschaft" is much broader than its English equivalent.

writings of the astrophysicist Friederich Zöllner with great attention. *Über die Natur der Kometen* (1872) introduces a cosmology embodying a non-Euclidean conception of space, which certainly appealed a great deal to Nietzche.[24] He was also familiar with the work of Helmholtz, if not from first-hand reading, at least through Lange's account.[25] As for Ernst Mach, it is not unlikely that he may have had access to some of his writings.[26]

Nietzsche and the scientific method

Now the real question of course is: in what sense should this affect our reading of Nietzsche? As we have seen, the priority of what is interesting over what is true cannot be reduced to a mere valorization of states of sensual or even intellectual excitement. The notions of interest or significance point more profoundly to the problematic dimension of all statements. The Nietzschean praise of the interesting side of things nevertheless immediately brings science into focus. For in all likelihood, the products of scientific inquiry, once they have been established on solid grounds and stated in the form of valid results, cannot retain their interest for a very long time. As Nietzsche says, we are still living in the youth of science and are used to follow truth as if it were a pretty girl, but what will happen when science takes on the grim appearance of an old woman (*HTH* I, 257)? The important truths of science are bound to degenerate sooner or later into ordinary and common matters of fact, raising less and less interest as the amount of pleasure taken in them diminishes (*HTH* I, 251). Nietzsche is of course not reproaching science for producing pointless truths: he is merely emphasizing a more general process according to which science inevitably comes to be perceived as a rather tiresome accumulation of "facts" or "results". "What is familiar is what we are used to; and what we are used to is most difficult to 'know'

[24]See Alistair Moles, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Nature and Cosmology,* Peter Lang, New York, 1990, p. 281.

[25]See Paolo D'Iorio's detailed examination of Nietzsche's scientific sources in "Cosmologie de l'Éternel Retour," *Nietzsche Studien,* band 24-1995, Walter de Gruyter, New York, 1995, pp. 61-123.

[26]See Klaus Spiekermann's review of Günter Abel (among others) in "Nietzsches Beweise für die ewige Wiederkehr," *Nietzsche Studien,* band 17-1988, Walter de Gruyter, New York, 1988, pp. 496-538.

–that is, to see as a problem; that is, to see as strange and distant, as 'outside us'" (*The Gay Science,* V, 355).

However, the kind of training involved in culture and scientific method leaves open the possibility of taking an interest in the simplest things, the most modest of truths (*HTH* I, 3). "As his culture increases, everything becomes interesting for man, and he knows how to quickly find the instructive side of things, the aspect through which they may fill a lack in his thought or confirm some idea. Hence boredom progressively disappears, along with the excessive irritability of the heart." (*HTH* I, 254). The general feeling of boredom and tediousness aroused by science is the surest symptom of nihilism. Against this symptom of decadence, the task of the philosopher, *in accordance with scientific methods,* is to introduce disharmonies and problems into things that would otherwise seem unproblematic (*WP* 522): "new questions" arise "new question marks" (*Nachlass Herbst,* 10[102]). Nietzsche ackowledges his "profound aversion to reposing once and for all in any one total view of the world," his "refusal to be deprived of the stimulus of the enigmatic." (*WP* 422; see also 600). Yet, even if the content of science menaces to fossilize into a rigid, all-encompassing view of the world, one of the most obvious benefits of the scientific *method* is precisely to sustain the sense of the enigmatic. The world is "not riddle enough to frighten away human love, not solution enough to put to sleep human wisdom" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* III, 10). As it renders all necessary processes interesting to the highest degree, says Nietzsche, science spares us the task of raising man above necessity in order to find him interesting (*Nachlass Herbst,* 4[121]). This is so because in opposition to the dilettante approach to science that tends to reduce it to a provider of hypotheses and world-views, scientific *methods* draw our attention to the fact that the value of science does not reside in its results but in its actual practice.[27]

> All in all, scientific methods are at least as important as any other result of inquiry; for the scientific spirit is based on the insight into methods, and were those methods to be lost, all the results of science could not prevent a renewed triumph of superstition and nonsense.[28]

[27] On the importance of method, see *HTH* I, 251 and 256, as well as *The Antichrist* 13 and 59.
[28] (*HTH* I, 635).

But what exactly is operative in scientific methods? It teaches us the art of handling hypotheses and explanations.

> Clever people may learn the results of science as much as they like, one still sees from their conversation, especially from their hypotheses in conversation, that they lack the scientific spirit. They do not have that instinctive mistrust of the wrong ways of thinking, a mistrust which, as a consequence of long practice, has put its roots deep into the soul of every scientific man. For them it is enough to find any one hypothesis about a matter; then they get fired up about it and think that puts an end to it. [...] Therefore everyone should have come to know at least one science in its essentials; then he knows what method is, and how necessary is the most extreme circumspection.[29]

One may wonder why, in spite of all the efforts spent on arguments over the status of truth and falsehood (or "falsification"), so little attention has been paid so far to the philosophical use of philological method. For it is there that Nietzsche's praise of scientific method finds its most direct and effective applications. Philology is at bottom nothing but an art (or science) of hypotheses. One of its most essential tools (at least in Nietzsche's time) is the so-called critical or conjectural method, which consists in filling the gaps in a text or a doctrine by devising conjectures. If Nietzsche distanced himself from the mechanical use of what he sometimes refered to as the conjectural loom (*Konjecturenwebestuhl),* he nevertheless laid strong emphasis on the special kind of "philological ingenuity [*Witz*]" required for the "finding of hidden analogies," as well as on the "capacity to raise paradoxical questions"[30] and to operate with "interlocking possibilities."[31] The notion that the conjectural method is intimately tied to the "sense of facts" should only strike as paradoxical those who confuse Nietzschean perspectivism with a sophisticated form of relativism. One may naturally object that "the same text admits of innumerable interpretations: there is no 'correct' interpretation" (*Nachlass Herbst,* 1 [120]), or that there are "no facts, only

[29] *HTH* I, 635
[30] Letter to Rhode of december 9th, 1868, quoted in Charles Murin, *Nietzsche Problème: Généalogie d'une Pensée,* Vrin, Paris, 1979, p. 264.
[31] Ibid., p. 265.

interpretations" (*WP* 481). These statements are by no means incompatible with Nietzsche's vindication of the "incomparable art of reading well," and of the accompanying "sense of facts, the last and most precious of all senses" (*Antichrist,* I, 59). To be sure, philologists are "exclusive" types used to drawing "straight lines." Their methods are responses to "the desire of simply understanding what an author has said" (*HTH* I, 270; see also *Daybreak,* I, 84). "Here I take 'philology' in a very general sense, namely to know how to decipher facts without distorting them according to our interpretations" (*Nachlass Herbst,* 14[60]). The point is that there are some facts (admittedly, certain kinds of interpretations) which one cannot overlook but at the price of embracing a perspective of a lower kind, a more comfortable *conviction* according to which truths are thinned down, veiled, sweetened — not to say blunted or falsified. The philological method outsmarts these interpretative tricks. The facts it aims at are meant to debunk. They unrivet fossilized beliefs and act as incentives for the shaping of new ones. It is in the light of this special kind of "cruelty" that the question "how much truth can one take?" can start making sense.

What one gets from the rigorous apprenticeship of an exact science, namely a feeling of "increased energy" (*HTH* I, 256), a clearer "conscience of one's force," just as when one practices gymnastics (*HTH* I, 252). But this feeling is in exact proportion to one's capacity to constantly look for new interpretations, new forms of life. Free spirits are described as "economical in learning and forgetting, inventive in schemas, occasionally proud of [their] tables of categories, occasionally pedants, occasionally night owls of work even in broad daylight" (*Beyond Good and Evil,* 44). By disciplining and directing our creative powers, the practice of scientific methods may sustain in us the lively awareness that all practice is interpretative and value laden. It embodies the constant possibility of readjusting our perspectives and reframing the schemes, categories or "regulative fictions" we impose upon our world. This is the reason why Nietzsche is more inclined to stress the playful conscience of conventions (examplified in Poincaré's treatment of non-Euclidean geometries),[32] than the pragmatic interpretation generally attached to the account of truth (or falsehood) as a condition of life.

[32]Nietzsche does not seem to ignore the debates over non-Euclidean space: "The categories are 'truths' only in the sense that they are conditions of life for us: as Euclidean space is a conditional "truth." (Between ourselves: since no one would maintain that there is any necessity for men to exist, reason, as well as Euclidean space, is a mere idiosyncracy of a certain species of animal, and one among many...)" (*WP* 515).

At this point one should wonder what is lost and what is gained from leaving the details of these issues aside in order to focus on the shift from truth to value, from propositions to problems. Undoubtedly, Deleuze's reformulation of the Nietzschean concern in terms of problems, true and false, is effective in the sense that it bypasses a certain number of frivolous debates. Once the fictitious character of all intellectual construct is acknowledged, the door lays open to generalized scepticism and nihilism. Every thought amounts to a falsfication, and truth is forever at bay. But the notion of "degrees and subtleties of gradation" between truth and falsehood can only be understood in relation to the problems or interpretations under which specific truths and falsehoods happen to fall. And the sceptical stance itself shares its essential features with the dogmatic image of truth: it holds the impossibility of our access to truth as a problem, when it is in fact the very will to truth that should be questioned. Focusing on problems preserves us from the unwelcome nihilistic consequence of lucidity. The fact that we live by representations, Nietzsche says, is not a problem, it is a *fact*. The real underlying problem is to understand what one represents and how this is done, in other words to reconstruct the particular "optical device" that makes a certain life possible. In the same way, the problem of Nietzsche's pragmatism is not well posed as long as one considers knowledge in terms of its relevance for life in general. If it is true that "perspectivism is nothing but the complex form of specificity" (*WP* 636), then one should ask: *what* life? *what* knowledge? The so-called problem of pragmatism (that truth should be viewed as a useful and vital error) is thus transformed into a specific query: what is the amount of truth that one can take? Nietzsche explicitly rejects the pragmatist criterion according to which success, convenience, efficiency or any kind of vital advantage would speak for the truth of something. Such a creed is in fact the surest symptom of a diminished life. As Deleuze puts it: "Now Nietzsche reproaches knowledge, not for viewing itself as its own end, but for making of thought a mere instrument in the service of life."[33] The measure of vitality is the capacity to embrace new truths, to invent new conditions and possibilities of life, to create and state new problems — not contradictions.

[33] *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 114.

Understanding how truth can be thought to involve a "fundamental falsification" (*WP* 512) and yet retain a kind of "regulative" function in the determination of the relative degrees of power implied by competing perspectives, and thus in the determination of problems themselves, would probably necessitate a close examination of the various philological strategies at play in the Nietzschean critique. But what about the inspiration Nietzsche derives from the consideration of the scientific methods at work in the natural sciences? How do these methods, originally designed to aim at truth, stand in relation to the process of selection and simplification (in short, falsification) in which knowledge essentially consist, at least according to Nietzsche's linguistic (or should we say *criticist*)[34] paradigm? These are the non-frivolous tasks that await any further investigation of the Nietzschean philosophy of problems.

[34] See *Nachlass Herbst*, 9[48]: "If we are not sceptics then, should we say we are critics, or 'criticists'?" The label does not suit Nietzsche any better than that of sceptic (even if he sometimes recommends a kind of "experimental scepticism"). It nevertheless underlines what the Nietzschean philosophy of science owes to the Kantian critique, under the form of a not-so-original theory of "regulative fictions" which is reminiscent of Vaihinger's philosophy of *als ob* [as if].

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Nietzsche's Justification of the Will to Power

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1. Introduction

Much of the literature concerned with Nietzsche's views on epistemology and metaphysics has focused on his perspectivism as a rejection of metaphysical realism and the God's Eye View. It has been generally agreed that Nietzsche's perspectivism rejects the metaphysical correspondence theory of truth in favour of an anti-foundationalist conception of knowledge. It has equally been agreed, at least amongst those commentators who wish to save Nietzsche from the clutches of metaphysical realism and the ontological and epistemological foundationalism that ensues from it, that the ontological doctrine of the will to power is a thorn in Nietzsche's overall philosophical project. Commentators argue that the doctrine of the will to power either needs to be eliminated and discounted as untrue,[1] or, that it is to be understood as an example of Nietzsche's philosophical wavering between a metaphysical and an anti-metaphysical position. Thus the view has been that the ontological doctrine of the will to power is incompatible with Nietzsche's perspectival anti-foundationalist conception of knowledge. This consideration derives from the view that, if true, the ontological doctrine of the will to power represents a foundationalist doctrine and thus an extra-perspectival claim to knowledge. Few commentators, however, have attempted to read the ontological doctrine of the will to power as an important vehicle in Nietzsche's overcoming of metaphysical realism and thus as working in tandem with his

[1] See George Stack, 'Kant, Lange and Nietzsche', in *Nietzsche and Modern German Thought*, ed. K. Ansell Pearson (London: Routledge, 1991), and Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).