

## On the Nature of Things: Nietzsche and Democritus

NINA POWER

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Upon the discovery of Friedrich Albert Lange's *History of Materialism* in 1866, Nietzsche declared it "the most significant philosophical work to have appeared in the last decade."<sup>1</sup> Later the same year in a letter to Muschacke he also remarked: "Kant, Schopenhauer, and this book by Lange – I do not need more than that."<sup>2</sup> Lange's influence on Nietzsche, and in particular on his early period, is not to be underestimated. But how precisely can we trace the influence of this post-Kantian thinker on Nietzsche's own work? Which philosophers and scientists did Lange introduce to the receptive and already highly original young scholar? The answers partly lie in the projects carried out most immediately following the conjunction of Lange's ideas with Nietzsche's own: his notebooks of 1867 to 1869 and a (recently translated) lecture course on the Pre-Platonic Philosophers, given by Nietzsche at Basel between 1869 and 1876. Just as we may regard *The Birth of Tragedy* as inspired and imbued with Schopenhauer's thought, we can simultaneously see clear evidence of Lange's impact by examining Nietzsche's much-neglected notes for a project on Democritus as well as the aforementioned lectures, which include a relatively long paper on Democritus, the manuscript of which dates from 1872.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, James I. Porter (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Hermann Muschacke, Nov 1866, quoted in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, (ed. trans. Greg Whitlock, University of Illinois, 2001) p. 243.

<sup>3</sup> There has been relatively little work carried out on these notes and lectures. As Porter writes: "The story of Nietzsche's involvement with Democritus has been a matter of near total neglect." (*Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, p. 25). The same can also be said of Nietzsche's involvement with other pre-Platonics, especially (given their importance for Nietzsche) Empedocles and Heraclitus.

As a broad statement of intent, it is sufficient to declare that it is by taking stock of Nietzsche's disparate interests at this formative stage, before and during his professorship at Basel, that we can determine the interplay of the early Nietzsche's scientific *and* aesthetic interests – the trigger for which is conveniently (if crudely) personified by Lange on the one hand and Schopenhauer on the other – without sidelining either aspect to the detriment of our understanding of Nietzsche's thought as a whole. Nietzsche himself took great care to stress the creative nature of atomist thought and by focussing on Nietzsche's sustained engagement with Democritus during this period, I hope to show how this ancient atomist provided Nietzsche with a set of critical tools with which to explore the relationship between philosophy, science and art in a way that already moves *beyond* Lange and Schopenhauer and prefigures Nietzsche's later, much more complex discussions of force, will and matter.

But exactly to what extent does Lange feature in this early history? George Stack argues in his study *Lange and Nietzsche* that:

It would not be too much to say that many of the essential issues that Nietzsche grapples with throughout his creative life can only be clarified when placed against the background of Lange's remarkable study.<sup>4</sup>

What are then these 'essential issues'? As I will try to suggest, they are many of the problems of materialism as outlined by Lange: the body, senses, materiality, teleology, efficient causality and particularly, theories of mechanism. This is not to claim that Nietzsche (or Lange) was at this point or any other straightforwardly what we would call a materialist; on the contrary, it is the *stumbling blocks* and blind-spots of materialism, ancient and modern, that struck and continued to interest Nietzsche, as evidenced even in the last of his notes from *The Will to Power*. Democritus is for the early Nietzsche the paradigmatic instance of the *problem* of materialism. The academic neglect of this encounter is to say the least, surprising. The set of problems indexed by the name 'Democritus' provide the ground for Nietzsche's first and most lasting exploration of the *ambivalence* in his view of the sciences, the *oscillations* of which ambivalence remain surprisingly consistent throughout his writings, even if the *prima facie* comparison of Nietzsche's explicit statements about science remain 'contradictory'. We

<sup>4</sup> George J. Stack, *Lange and Nietzsche* (De Gruyter, 1983), p. 1.

can see that on the one hand, science is a weapon against many religious and metaphysical 'certainties'. In *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* he writes:

... life itself caves in and grows weak and fearful when the *concept-quake* caused by science robs man of the foundation of all his rest and security, his belief in the enduring and eternal.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, science is often a cover for a re-instantiation of the worst excesses of anthropomorphism and precisely those kinds of metaphysical, religious and moral beliefs that it thought it had overcome. Thus in *The Will to Power*, we find:

But they [the physicists] are in error. The atom they posit is inferred according to the logic of the perspectivism of consciousness – and is therefore a subjective fiction.<sup>6</sup>

Democritean atomism, which reappears again and again in Nietzsche's writings, often accompanied by a proper name, though in the later texts more indirectly, is a prime arena for this oscillatory approach to the sciences. However, Nietzsche's particular interest in Democritus must not be conflated with his comments on, and criticisms of, atomism in general. As I hope to show, it is precisely those aspects of Democritus that do *not* fall into the traps of a dogmatic mechanistic worldview that led Nietzsche to hold him up as one of philosophy's most important thinkers.

Lange provided some of the key tools in Nietzsche's presentation and critique of science, particularly the idea of a constitutive and wholly necessary relationship between materialism and its critically examinable epistemological assumptions. Nietzsche, however, will move far beyond Lange's relatively conservative position regarding the 'thing in itself', according to which it is wholly inaccessible to philosophical speculation, and towards a philosophy that addresses itself explicitly to the question of 'the nature of things', to an explicit description of forces and will. This is not to say that Nietzsche will discard the influence of Lange but rather that he will move beyond Lange's Kantian agnosticism regarding what lies behind the objects of knowledge towards a philosophy of hypotheses,

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations* (Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 120-121.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Vintage, 1987), p. 339.

creativity and experimentation.<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche's later philosophy could be characterised in terms of an attempt to provide – using various scientific theories – a wholly creative interpretation of the world which surpasses Lange, but ultimately could not have got there without him or the many thinkers that he introduced to Nietzsche, perhaps most especially Democritus.

Lange himself occupies an unusual role in the panoply of post-Kantian thinkers, since rather than reinterpreting the transcendental in an idealist way, he refers all questions of experience directly to our physical make-up. It is the 'physical-psychical' organs of our bodies that transcendently frame the way things like 'matter' appear to us. These frameworks are thus material but their precise origin is unknown to us. In this sense, the question of the thing-in-itself stops here for Lange. He argues: 'for the thing-in-itself we must *substitute the phenomenon*.'<sup>8</sup> Crawford writes: 'As a precursor of neo-Kantianism, Lange too retained the idea of representation from Kant, but he reinterpreted it *physiologically*.'<sup>9</sup> In many ways he does remain very Kantian, as Stack argues, but he clearly also upholds a commitment to the broad tenets of materialism, therefore demonstrating the curiosity characteristic of an experimental and essentially scientific approach to the world (albeit a world having undergone a reflexive transcendental critique). From the very first sentence of his history, he therefore presents materialism as a take on the world precisely *co-extensive* with philosophy in the wider sense. He writes: 'Materialism is as old as philosophy, but not older',<sup>10</sup> thus simultaneously establishing the historical importance of materialism as a series of postulates about the nature of things but also denying it the privilege of being outside the status of philosophical speculation, and thereby opening it to all of the criticisms and critique that this entails.

On a historical and cultural level, the conflict between materialism and

<sup>7</sup> There is not enough space to discuss a question of vital importance here but briefly, when we look at Lange's reading of Kant we can ask whether he can still be called 'Kantian' in the sense that he makes the transcendental *material* (by referring to organs and brains and not 'mind' as the formal framework for all experience). Does this physiological emphasis leave Lange open to the same criticisms that Kant has of Locke, for example? See *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. & ed. Guyer & Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Albert Lange, *History of Materialism*, Vol. I (Arno Press (reprint), 1974), p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> Claudia Crawford, *The Beginnings of Nietzsche's Theory of Language* (De Gruyter, 1988), p. 249.

<sup>10</sup> *History of Materialism*, p.3.

idealism appears to Lange to repeat itself again and again throughout the ages; Lange therefore presents his history, *as well as experience in general*, not only from the perspective of materialism but also from the position of the *critique* of materialism. Lange occupies a position between Democritus and Kant, neither of which he sees in opposition to each other but more as part of a wholly necessary and invariant relation *between* philosophy and science: both Kantian critique and modern atomic theory share a direct Democritean lineage according to him. His is the 'idealist' Kant who knows the Roman atomist poet Lucretius by heart and the 'mechanist' Democritus who sceptically states that in reality 'we know nothing.'<sup>11</sup> It is Lange's *complex* presentation of materialism in general and Democritus in particular that Nietzsche takes up and develops with so much enthusiasm in 1867.

Broadly, the historical 'outsider' Democritus is so important to Nietzsche, not only because (even as one of the first atomists) he avoids the traps of naïve or dogmatic materialism (such as positing blind mechanism or insisting on a strict adherence to sense-data), presenting us instead with a sceptical, non-teleological and ultimately, non-sentimental universe, but also because he provides resources for Nietzsche's *own* ideas – still latent at this point but of vital importance nevertheless – concerning the 'nature of things' as *he* conceives it. Democritus' notions of force and matter, such as the eternal motion of atoms in the void and the perceptual invisibility but ontological necessity of these corpuscular units, lead Nietzsche upon a complex and convoluted journey that will take him through the point-particle physics of Boscovich, as well as many other scientific conceptualisations, eventually leading him, not without hesitation or difficulty, to the 'will to power'. This movement is something I want to point towards very briefly at the end of the paper, where I will be picking up on suggestions Whitlock makes in his commentary to the pre-Platonic lectures, when he argues that we can see, even at this very early stage, Nietzsche's own theory of will and force being developed. Perhaps we need not go as far as Whitlock in celebrating Nietzsche's presentation of Democritus by arguing that it 'clearly shows Nietzsche rejecting Schopenhauer's old, worn-out

<sup>11</sup> Kant apparently frequently recited Lucretius' poem *De Rerum Natura* according to Elfriede Walesca Tielsch in 'The Secret Influence of the Ancient Atomistic Ideas and the Reaction of the Modern Scientist Under Ideological Pressure.' (*History of European Ideas*, vol. 2, No. 4, 1981). Erasmus Darwin often did the same thing in the presence of his grandson, leading to speculation about the influence such verses about 'the struggle for existence' might have had.

objections to materialism in enthusiastic favour of materialistic atomism.'<sup>12</sup> But conversely we also need not move as far in the opposite direction as Stack does when he argues that 'to characterise Nietzsche as a "materialist" is to miss entirely the exploratory, experimental nature of his thinking.'<sup>13</sup> Well, certainly, but only if you think to be a 'materialist' is not to be any of those things.<sup>14</sup>

Nietzsche's Democritus does not so much resemble the ancient thinker we know primarily through Epicurus and Lucretius, but rather a strange hybrid of abstract propositions concerning 'the nature of things', consciously filtered through the web of 19th-century questions about matter, idealism and knowledge. As he wrote in a letter to Rhode in December 1868 of Democritus: 'I have constructed him entirely afresh.'<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Nietzsche felt something of an affinity with the much-maligned, historically vilified Democritus of Aristotle and Cicero, amongst others – after all, it is clear from the notes that Nietzsche makes much of Lange's mention of Plato's supposed desire to burn the entirety of Democritus's works in an anti-materialist *auto-da-fé*. Elective affinities aside, Nietzsche's Democritus is above all a *relevant* and contemporary thinker. Nietzsche not only argues in the lecture that we need Kant and Lange to understand him, but also modern physics and chemists such as Boyle.<sup>16</sup>

Democritus is for Nietzsche 'the first rationalist,' who sought to liberate thought from the shackles of mythology; yet whose thought was itself conditioned by a certain idealism. In his lecture and notes on Democritus, Nietzsche oscillates between presenting a Democritus who is the forerunner of all great scientific endeavour and also a thinker for whom the truth lies only 'in the depths'. In support of the first aspect of atomism he writes:

Of all the more ancient systems, the Democritean is of the greatest consequence ... Now for the first time the collective, anthropomorphic, mythic view of the world has been overcome ... Now for the first time do we have a rigorous, scientifically useful

<sup>12</sup> *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p. 242.

<sup>13</sup> *Lange and Nietzsche*, p. 57.

<sup>14</sup> As Nietzsche argues in one of the pre-Platonic lectures (Zeno): 'If we maintain anything whatsoever dogmatically ... we are just as incorrect as when we maintain the dogmatic reality of all things.' (*The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p. 93).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 46, footnote.

<sup>16</sup> At one point in the lecture he simply states: 'We recommend here Lange's *History of Materialism*' (*The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p. 126).

hypothesis.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from seeing already in Democritus an overturning of all of those negative aspects of science that Nietzsche found so prevalent in his own time, the key word in this paragraph is undoubtedly 'hypothesis'. While at this point this no doubt reflects Nietzsche's incorporation of some of the more positive things Lange says about the possibility of scientific knowledge (i.e. that hypothetical postulations about the material world are useful within the bounds of recognising that they are necessarily only 'useful' to us as creatures with a particular kind of physiological make-up), it also points forward to Nietzsche's own schematically 'scientific' hypotheses, such as the Eternal Return, where cosmic concepts of time collide with questions of will and individual affirmation.

Returning to the quote, it is strange to hear Nietzsche being so straightforwardly laudatory on the subjects of 'rigour' and 'utility', when we have come to associate 'utility' in particular with a mere 'stupid belief' of the herd (see for example, §354 of *The Gay Science*). However, elsewhere in Nietzsche's work, it is also clear that perceiving things as useful seems an inescapably *human* way of coping with the chaos of the world (see the essay 'On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense' in particular), and it is perhaps this same attitude that Nietzsche recognizes and praises in Democritus. It is also clear from the lecture, however, that at this early stage there is no question of a *whole-hearted* commitment to scientific principles. Bearing in mind Democritus' idea that we *come* to perceive things as hot, cold, bitter or sweet, according to convention, we see a keen awareness in the lecture of the *pragmatism* of atomism, the aspect of habit; Democritus in these fragments is describing the necessarily *human* dimension of our experience of things, not the true nature of the world revealed directly to us (though of course atomism is *also* a theory about the ultimate composites of all reality). A brief mention of Locke's distinction of primary and secondary qualities in Nietzsche's lecture also serves to sever his Democritus from a proponent of base mechanistic materialism – it is crucial for Nietzsche that Democritus remains a *critic* of the relationship between matter and sensation and perhaps above all, an aesthetic thinker, a *poet*.

It is Nietzsche's stress on Democritus' aesthetic merit and the immediate linking of this creativity with the physical components of atomism that leads a sympathetic commentator like Porter to trace a direct path from Nietzsche's work on Democritus (rather than

<sup>17</sup> *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p.125.

Schopenhauer) to the 'necessary illusions' of the more immediately aesthetic *Birth of Tragedy* in 1872. Perhaps it is a little surprising to us that Nietzsche further declares Democritus' *ethics* to be at the heart of his physics, but if by 'ethics' Nietzsche intends the ethical dimension *within* the physics, then a thoroughgoing scepticism about the world, coupled with a drive to hypothesise about nature, is exactly the kind of intellectual 'honesty' that Nietzsche will see as all too lacking in the scientists and philosophers of his own day.

Democritus' atomism is the scientific inspiration or hypothesis that strips the world of both its simple immediacy *and* any ultimately anthropomorphic centrality of thought. Thought is, for Democritus, a motion that points to the flux and movement of *all* things, a position that links him with Heraclitus and, more particularly, Nietzsche's reading of Heraclitus.<sup>18</sup> Homogeneous atoms unite to form aggregates; it is only our senses that indicate qualitative, determinant differences, whence Nietzsche's emphasis on convention. It is this insertion of human perception into the scheme of things that leads Nietzsche to remind us that we should not be unaware of the 'idealist' in Democritus, and to separate his materialism from an unproblematic realism.

It is precisely the coupling of Democritus' epistemological scepticism with a drive to explain the world scientifically, *without* recourse to a *deus ex machina*, that Nietzsche sees as worthy of note. But Nietzsche cannot help but sound equivocal in the lecture when he attempts to flush the ontological basis of Democritean science – all that exists are atoms and void – with a scepticism regarding questions of epistemology. This is the very contradiction at the heart of Democritus's writings, and Nietzsche moves towards a fairly classical critique of the ontological aspects of atomism when he writes:

Here the genuine embarrassments of materialism always enter, because here it suspects "all is false". All things objective, extended, and efficacious, thus all things material, which qualify as the most solid of foundations to materialism – [all this] is nonetheless only an extremely mediated given, an extremely relative existence that has passed through the machinery of the brain and entered into the forms of time, space, and causality.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> 'There exists a motion, since I think and thought has a reality.' (*The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p. 123)

<sup>19</sup> *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, pp. 129-130.

Note that Nietzsche refers to the physiological ('brain') rather than to transcendental perception ('mind') to present his critique of the circularity of materialism, thus referencing the evolutionary epistemology of Lange rather than the transcendental idealism of Kant and Schopenhauer. At this point in the lecture it is, however, not at all clear that Nietzsche has rejected Schopenhauer's 'old worn-out objections' to atomism, as Whitlock suggests. In fact, the paragraph above is clearly Schopenhauerian in both its origins and objections to the naive postulations of materialistic immediacy, a point which, to be fair, Whitlock does recognise in his notations.<sup>20</sup> However, what leads one to believe that this is not the end of the story, despite this fairly standard idealist objection being introduced so late on in the lecture is Nietzsche's two rather enigmatic sentences at the very end of the piece. He immediately follows the quote above with the following:

On the contrary, materialism is a worthwhile hypothesis of relativity in truth; accordingly "all is false" has been discovered to be an illuminating notion for natural science. We still consider, then, all its results to be true for us, albeit not absolute. It is precisely our world, in whose productions we are constantly engaged.<sup>21</sup>

Note again the emphasis on the 'hypothetical' status of materialism. At first glance, it seems that Nietzsche in this dense passage outlines a form of 'pragmatism' which many commentators take to be his position on science in general. That is, we may not ever know if the truths we discover are absolute, but as long as they are useful, and as long as utility is not itself made the absolute goal of our approach, then we can go along in general (and perhaps we do not have any choice) with the provisional results of scientific research, now conceived as 'necessary fictions'. This is Nietzsche's fairly consistent – at least when he thinks science is being critical – anti-dogmatic, anti-absolutist attitude towards science. With the phrase: "we still consider ... all its results to be true for us, albeit not absolute", we once again witness a commitment to Lange's version of critical materialism, whereby it is our physiological organisation (the ultimate basis of which is unknown) that determines how we interpret the

<sup>20</sup> The Schopenhaurian version of this *reductio ad absurdum* of materialism can be found in *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1 (trans. E.F.J. Payne, Dover, 1969), p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p. 130.

world; but also, crucially, we see here the introduction of 'our world', the suggestion being that this is all there is, or rather, all that concerns us. Nietzsche here sounds *more* pragmatic than both Kant and Lange and prefigures the point where the question of appearance and reality, along with the entire apparatus of his thought shifts to a *perspectivism* of the kind only possible when there is no discussion of an 'outside', of the thing-in-itself, or rather no possibility even of the *question* as to whether there *is* an outside (as arguably still remains for both Kant and Lange). There is only the world *for us*. There can, however, be no simple answer either here or in general as to the question of how Nietzsche's critical and materialist interests relate to his own theory of the nature of things as presented as the will to power. As Stack reminds us:

The entire question concerning what Nietzsche considers as ultimately "real" is the most perplexing question in a philosophy of unusual complexity.<sup>22</sup>

Bearing this in mind, I would like now to briefly outline some of the subsequent moves Nietzsche makes specifically with regard to the atomism he first encountered via Lange and then through his own study of Democritus. For as Porter argues:

It appears ...that Nietzsche is often working out argumentative transitions in a pro and con fashion so as to demonstrate the assumptions and implications of a narrower view of atomism and to replace them with a wider, more accommodating vision.<sup>23</sup>

It is not, therefore, atomism *per se* that Nietzsche objects to, since many of his later formulations will *precisely* rest on quasi-physical theories of motion and 'force-points', but it is rather *particular kinds* of atomism that he criticises, both in his early and his later works. There is no sense in which Nietzsche will *uphold* the extended, corpuscular 'klump-atom' or the type of necessity characteristic of the atomist universe. The atoms themselves will be denigrated as anthropomorphic fictions uncomfortably close to notions of soul, ego, subject, etc. – anything, in fact that retains a sense of externally imposed unity. The 'matter' itself of materialism, atomistic or otherwise, will also become questionable for Nietzsche. He later writes in §522 of *The Will to Power*:

<sup>22</sup> *Lange and Nietzsche*, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, p. 45.

If we did give up the concept “subject” and “object,” then also the concept “substance” – and as a consequence also the various modifications of it, e.g., “matter,” “spirit,” and other hypothetical entities, “the eternity and immutability of matter.” Etc. We have got rid of materiality.

Referring back to the lecture, we note that Nietzsche quotes at length Kant’s *Natural History of the Heavens* in which Kant declares: ‘Give me matter, and I will construct a world out of it!’<sup>24</sup> We must ask ourselves, how much more freedom to ‘construct a world’ will Nietzsche have if he gets rid of matter as this wholly determining starting point? (This problematic is arguably the same for forms of materialism as well as transcendental idealism, even if it ultimately induces very different conclusions). As he moves towards a total suspension of all concepts of substance and matter, we can ask whether Nietzsche ultimately side-steps the anthropomorphisms of mechanistic materialism that he thought were inescapable, or whether he also remains tethered to ‘human’ ways of explanation, albeit in a reflexive way? Perhaps he does transcend his own diagnoses, but not without a considerable amount of theoretical support from scientists themselves. I can only briefly mention the name of Boscovich here, much recent work on whom has been carried out by Whitlock and Keith Ansell Pearson.<sup>25</sup> Whitlock argues in ‘Boscovich, Spinoza and Nietzsche: The Untold Story’ that:

Boscovich helped emancipate physics from naïve atomism’s uncritical assumption that the ultimate units of matter are small, individual, rigid pieces possessing shape, size, weight and other properties.<sup>26</sup>

But what could this ‘property-less’ atomism look like? Simply put, this will be a world of force and force alone. Tracing a similar ‘expansionist’ line as Porter, Whitlock further argues: ‘One should note that the dynamic worldview historically and conceptually grows out of the mechanistic worldview: they are not two rival worldviews.’<sup>27</sup> If, however, ‘atomism is

<sup>24</sup> *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p. 126.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Whitlock’s ‘Roger Boscovich, Benedict de Spinoza and Friedrich Nietzsche: The Untold Story’, *Nietzsche-Studien*, 25, 1996, and Keith Ansell Pearson’s ‘Nietzsche’s Brave New World of Force’, *Pli*, vol. 9, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

a bad interpretation of force’ as Deleuze claims,<sup>28</sup> how can Nietzsche take its basic premises – invisible points combining to form compounds, eternal motion in the void – and create a more appropriate theory of force? Will it still be possible to say that in its final form we can recognise “the quiet incorporation of Democritus into the theory of the will to power”?<sup>29</sup> Boscovich introduces the conceptual and regulative framework for a finite, dynamic world of force, but still lacks a concept of ‘inner will’ that Nietzsche ascribes to the will to power. It is clear that a more detailed analysis of Nietzsche’s relationship to and difference from all the forms of atomism he encountered is needed, and I have only briefly pointed to this particular trajectory of his thought.

In conclusion, it is clear that Nietzsche remained deeply bound up with many of the arguments he found in Democritean atomism, even if the proper name appears less frequently in the later published texts. For the early Nietzsche, atomism indexes a mode of thinking wherein materialism and its critique are pitted against one another under the aegis of the name: ‘Democritus’. Democritus already represented for Nietzsche, as we saw, some of the key limitations of atomistic thinking – the problem of linking an epistemological scepticism with a ‘first order’ theory of nature, the appeal to a world of motion and change and the emergence of a universe without the notion of a creator God (for the atomists ‘nothing comes from nothing’). Nietzsche’s move to a theory of finite force *without* material atoms clearly has its roots in his study of Lange and Democritus, even if he had to wait for Boscovich and others to provide him with the critical apparatus to put such a theory into clearer focus.

The sheer scope of atomist thought leads Nietzsche in the lecture to write:

It is a grand idea, this entire world of order and purposiveness, of countless qualities to be traced back to externalisations of *one force* of the most basic sort.<sup>30</sup>

We will have to wait almost twenty years for Nietzsche’s own ‘grand idea’ of force, but we cannot help but see echoes of Democritus’s ‘world of force’ in Nietzsche’s own, where every specific body strives to become more powerful, to extend itself. Nietzsche’s ‘bodies’ may later be

<sup>28</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (The Athlone Press, 1983), p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future*, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup> *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, p. 126. (Emphasis in the original.)

'matter-less' force-points, but the breadth of his conception of the will to power shares more than simply grandeur with Democritus's own 'grand idea'. Democritus, in going *beyond* materialism even in one of its first inceptions, offered above all, a *method* of philosophising that allowed for both critical, sceptical thinking, *and* the construction of hypotheses about the world. Democritus, arguably much more than either Lange or Schopenhauer, *united* Nietzsche's scientific and aesthetic sensibilities, and it is this *overturning* of the disjunction between art and science, perhaps more than anything else he learns from his work on Democritus, that will remain at the heart of Nietzsche's own philosophy.

## The Individual and Individuality in Nietzsche

NUNO NABAIS

The pessimistic condemnation of life by Schopenhauer is a moral one. Transference of herd standards into the realm of metaphysics. The "individuum" meaningless (...). We are paying for the fact that science has not understood the individuum.

Friedrich Nietzsche

*Posthumous Fragments* (1887), 9 (84); *The Will to Power*, § 379<sup>1</sup>

The Nietzschean project of the *revaluation of all values* is the attempt to invert the perspective on nature and the dynamic of each individual being. For Nietzsche, nihilism is the extreme outcome of a primacy conferred on the *universal*, whether the viewpoint is ontological, as with the One (in the figures of the Platonic *Idea*, the *Divine Substance* of Spinoza, the *Spirit* of Hegel or the *One Will* of Schopenhauer, within which the particular is delimited as a mere copy, mode, moment or phenomenon), or epistemological, as with the Form or Law which endows singular phenomena with truth and intelligibility, or, finally, ethical, as with the Good, the Moral Law or the Common Interest which determines the value of individual actions. Nihilism appears as the result

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA), eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Verlag de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1967, XII, 9 (84); Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. by W. Kaufmann, trans. by W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), § 379. In the quotations from Nietzsche's *oeuvre* that follow, the following will be indicated: a) for the posthumous writings, the volume number in the *Werke* and the number of the fragment [*Ed. note: where the passage has been translated in The Will to Power (henceforth WP), the KSA reference will be followed by the number of the section in The Will to Power in which the passage is found*]; b) for texts published in Nietzsche's lifetime, the title of the work in English, the volume number in the *Werke* and the page number. Where no English translation is noted, the passage has been translated by the editors.