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**Philosophizing Without the In-Itself: Philology,  
Genealogy, and the Question of Method in  
Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty**

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*To Elliot, a friend gone too soon.*

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## Introduction

### *A) Preliminary Considerations on the Practice of the History of Philosophy*

Are the respective bodies of research on Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche occurring in parallel sectors that never intersect? The scarcity of works commenting on the two authors simultaneously could lead to believe so. Often, at least in France, the proponents of those authors are not only separated theoretically but even physically, gathering in different cities, universities and institutes (for example in Reims for the Nietzscheans). Why could that be? Are the reasons simply contingent or is there some specific difficulty preventing these studies from meeting? One reason could be the lack of textual references between the two authors. Indeed, on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) came after Nietzsche (1844-1900), which naturally precludes the possibility that Nietzsche could have known him and wrote about him. Nonetheless, the Nietzschean commentators are severely critical of phenomenology, considering it as yet another avatar of idealism and metaphysics, falling under Nietzsche's arguments against idealism in general. On the other hand, while Merleau-Ponty knew about Nietzsche and read some of his books, he only mentioned him explicitly

a handful of times over the whole course of his writings and notes. Among those, one time was to dismiss the hypothesis of the Will to Power and the other times (except once) were to underline a difference of approach to philosophy. Thus, Merleau-Ponty wrote on the hypothesis of the Will to Power: “Their answers, the keys they offer us to this history they so clearly anticipated – whether Marx's praxis or Nietzsche's will to power – seem too simple to us”<sup>1</sup>. This quote is not even from one of Merleau-Ponty's main, published, books but is found in the posthumously published summaries of his courses given in the Collège de France, that were not designed to be published and are in fact not printed anymore. Merleau-Ponty planned to give a whole course on “the possibility of philosophy” and “philosophy and non-philosophy since Hegel”, on which he would have focused on Marx and Nietzsche's critical approach to philosophy. He had the chance to give some classes on Marx and Hegel; however, unfortunately, just when he was about to focus on Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty's death interrupted his work and left no redacted notes (the published *Notes de cours 1959-1961* stops right before). Perhaps, this class focused on Nietzsche would have made Merleau-Ponty's relationship to Nietzsche explicit and clearer, which might have encouraged and motivated many more comparative research on the two authors. Hence, the lack of quotations and obvious or easily accessible textual references, as well as their belonging to different “schools of thought” of the philosophical tradition (for example phenomenology for Merleau-Ponty and philosophy of life or vitalism for Nietzsche), are probably the main reasons that led the historians of philosophy to underestimate the connection between the two authors and therefore to abandon the study of the relations between their philosophies. Nevertheless, is this a valid reason to discard or overlook the potential of comparative studies between these two authors? I would rather argue that approaching the history of philosophy likewise displays a bias in contemporary research, where the texts and explicit mentions

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours (collège de France, 1952-1960)*, p.143.

seem to be more important than the actual content and direction of the authors' thoughts. To denounce the excesses of this approach to history, that he christened under the term "antiquarian history", Nietzsche warned that:

when history serves past life to the extent that it not only undermines further life but especially higher life; when the historical sense no longer conserves but rather mummifies it [...]. Antiquarian history degenerates from the moment when the fresh life of the present no longer animates and inspires it. At this point, piety withers, the scholarly habit persists without it and revolves with self-satisfied egotism around its own axis. Nietzsche, « The Utility and Liability of History », in: *Unfashionable Observations*, p.105<sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, the arbitrariness of this approach is clear when one considers the fact that Merleau-Ponty's date of death, if it was delayed by just a few months, could have changed drastically how researchers relate to the comparison of these two authors, all of a sudden becoming legitimate (for it would be explicit), while all the basis of the relationship (with their similarity) and the core of Merleau-Ponty's criticism was already contained implicitly in all of his works. It is this implicit relation that I aim to make explicit in my thesis, but it requires not to fossilize the thoughts, nor solidifying and venerating the philosophers as immaculate and untouchable statues, nor mistake a philosophical outlook for its published texts.

Another expression of a bias in contemporary research is the tendency to try to place philosophers in definite boxes like structuralism, existentialism or phenomenology for instance. Nevertheless, to which "box" would Merleau-Ponty belong? He shares

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<sup>2</sup> See also, in the same book, p.106: "For antiquarian history understands only how to preserve life, not how to create it; therefore, it always underestimates those things that are in the process of becoming because it has no diving instinct – as, for example, monumental history has. Thus, antiquarian history impedes the powerful resolve for the new".

characteristics of these three but none of them exhaust the richness of his thought; his position defies simplistic categorization. Such a reductive approach will always result in overlooking the nuances within a given philosophical tradition and the complexity of each author. On the contrary, when acknowledging and examining these nuances, it appears that Merleau-Ponty occupies an original place in the phenomenological tradition. His focus on experience – his obsession to be faithful to it – brought him to gradually shift from an idealist, subjectivist (although the subject was already the body in his case), constituting perspective to an ontology of the sensible and an acknowledgement of an originary presence and reality of the world, prior to the subjective constitution of any object. Can one still be considered a phenomenologist if they reject the conception of a transcendental ego? It is a real question. Merleau-Ponty tried to develop an implicit thought of Husserl (son impensé, in his article « Le philosophe et son ombre ») and selected only the aspects of his work that were the most compatible with Merleau-Ponty's view, for example the developments on the *Lebenswelt*, but there remains a tension with Husserl's idealism and his emphasis on the constituting subject. At the very least, this shows that Merleau-Ponty has an unconventional and broader conception of phenomenology than the one that is usually criticized by the Nietzschean scholars, probably forgetting this nuance and extending this opposition to Merleau-Ponty, seen as a phenomenologist among others, and therefore deemed not radical enough, anthropocentric, subjectivist, idealist... This attitude that erases the specificity of Merleau-Ponty within phenomenology is detrimental because it prevents from grasping what is common to Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche as two individuals, beyond the negative prejudices surrounding their philosophical context, which could benefit both schools of thought. Thus and conversely, it is also prejudicial that most tenants of phenomenology consider Nietzsche as an eccentric or as a poet but not as a serious, proper and cohesive thinker, except for some who get interested in Nietzsche but mostly for his most metaphysical texts. Yet, Merleau-

Ponty warned against both a rigid understanding of phenomenology and a strict separation from Nietzsche for, even in his early writing *Phenomenology of Perception*, he was referring to Nietzsche as a pioneer of phenomenology: phenomenology “has been *en route* for a long time, and its disciples find it everywhere, in Hegel and in Kierkegaard of course, but also in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud”<sup>3</sup>. By understanding phenomenology as a faithfulness to experience (which is how he interprets the “return to the things themselves”, phenomenology’s motto), Merleau-Ponty is adopting an approach very close to Nietzsche’s philology, that the latter describes as the “art of reading well – the capacity for absorbing facts without interpreting them falsely, and without losing caution, patience and subtlety in the effort to understand them”<sup>4</sup>. Philology holds the status of a general method in Nietzsche’s thought, that does not apply only to books but, much more broadly, also to reality and experience in general, understood as a metaphorical text that the philosopher must decipher, interpret and describe faithfully, with probity, without adding nor removing anything from the text. Merleau-Ponty did not refer to Nietzsche nor used the term of philology to describe his method, he contingently preferred phenomenology’s terminology; however, Merleau-Ponty’s sole philosophical task and method are undoubtedly philological. Indeed, he aims at describing experience as faithfully as possible; quoting once again Husserl in the preface of *Phenomenology of Perception*, he wrote, to describe his own task: “it is the (...) still-mute experience that must be brought to the pure expression of its own sense”<sup>5</sup>. Merleau-Ponty’s whole philosophical endeavor is summarized by this quote. He gives absolute priority to experience, and if our concepts enter in conflict with it, then we need to discard them and reshape new ones so that they can express experience more faithfully (hence his ontological

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<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Preface, p.xxi.

<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §52. See also *Human too Human* I, §270 and *Dawn*’s Preface, §5: “This art [philology], for its part, is not so easily done with everything, it teaches us to read well, that is, to read slowly, deeply, respectfully and cautiously, with ulterior motives, leaving doors open, with delicate fingers and eyes”.

<sup>5</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Preface, p.xxix. Quote from Husserl, *Méditations cartésiennes*, Paris, Vrin, 1996, trad. G. Peiffer et E. Lévinas.

use of the concept of flesh for instance). Merleau-Ponty's philological approach to philosophy shows that it is possible for different authors to share a community of thought, interest or perspective despite a lack of direct influence. It does not matter if the tradition in which they are situated is different or even opposed to one another, their vocabulary and grammar might seem conflicting, but, if we resituate the authors in their specific context, we might be able to observe similarities in their outlooks that overcome all these apparent differences. Thus, if the two authors do not intend the same meaning by "truth" or by "metaphysics" and "Being", does this mean that their apparent opposition (for these notions are criticized by Nietzsche and praised by Merleau-Ponty) is only situated at the surface level, and that below this appearance of conflict there could be a strong coherence of their thought? This leads to question whether the thought of a philosopher leads to a specific form adapted to it and can only be found once, or if the form it takes is contingent (depending on their time, their readings and relations) and could be found more than once in different contexts. According to Bergson, there is something like an intuition or focal point that determines the direction a thought will follow, and the first elements can be contingent, but then this direction that is characteristic of a type of thought will select the next elements according to it, to preserve the direction and relation of the elements: a specific thought "can choose almost arbitrarily the first elements of a group as long as the others are complementary: the same thought can be translated just as well in diverse sentences composed of completely different words, insofar as these words possess the same relation between themselves"<sup>6</sup>. In this way, thoughts that use very different words and concepts, seemingly incompatible or antithetic, could in fact share a similar direction of thought, which is more important than the choice of words or philosophical school, for this direction is their relation or the structure ordinating the words and granting them meaning. Different words

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<sup>6</sup> Bergson, « L'intuition philosophique » in. *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp.133-134

can convey the same idea and adopt the same approach and method to philosophy. I am convinced and will attempt to prove with this thesis that there is a deep philosophical connection between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty (despite the lack of textual references), to the extent that they can be conceived as philosophical brothers or as having a “stellar friendship”<sup>7</sup>. As such, they do not need to be the same, but they can share a lot, starting with the same method and then bringing it to different places in order to fulfill different tasks. Their connection may even turn out to be stronger (for it is methodological, and a community of method is more decisive and important than a community of concepts) than the one between Nietzsche and authors that commented abundantly on him, such as Heidegger, Foucault or Deleuze (and which have evocated a lot more comments on these relations than on the ones between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty). Indeed, if a philosophical connection does not necessarily rely on using the same concepts, or rather the same terminology, that means that, conversely, authors that have been using a similar terminology to Nietzsche’s one might not be the most faithful to him: the philosophical kinship is not automatic at all. In this way, Deleuze for instance, who even dedicated a whole book to Nietzsche – appearing closer to him than Merleau-Ponty ever could –, used Nietzschean concepts but did not adopt Nietzsche’s framework. Deleuze reintegrated these notions into another framework (his own, which is a metaphysical one, reintroducing some essentialism) that led him to enter in opposition to Nietzsche’s one, which is the criticism Wotling addresses to Deleuze:

By constantly reintroducing dualism in a thought experiment that is based on the ruthless rejection of it (see especially *Beyond Good and Evil* §2), G. Deleuze unknowingly re-moralizes the Nietzschean thought. Has the logic that opposes active and reactive really grown apart from the one that opposes good to evil? Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, note p.103.

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<sup>7</sup> On this notion, see *Gay Science*’s §279, of which I will follow the thread in my conclusion.

In a similar way, Pieniążek showed<sup>8</sup> that the post-structuralists are not very respectful of Nietzsche's genealogical approach, nor of his philological one, for they make absolute statements, situated in an impersonal plane of meaning or being that neglects the historical and cultural variations and incarnations, or, in other words, the becoming in general. Merleau-Ponty might not have developed a genealogy, nor tried to hierarchize the different values; and yet, he is still closer to Nietzsche than the post-structuralists because he acknowledged our cultural and historical situation, as well as the perspectivism of any knowledge, and he invited the philosophers to confront themselves and their prism to other cultural backgrounds (which could be a first step before evaluating the values and hierarchizing them, as I tried to show in my articles on Ignace Meyerson<sup>9</sup>). Thereby, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

If the philosopher does not grant to themselves the power to unconditionally think all over their own thought – if they concede that their “ideas”, their “self-evident facts” are always naive to some extent, and that, embedded in the fabric of the culture to which they belong, it is not enough – for knowing them truthfully – to scrutinize and vary them in thought, they must be confronted with other cultural formations, seen against the background of other prejudices. Merleau-Ponty, « Le philosophe et la sociologie », in: *Eloge de la philosophie*, pp.114-115.

All these authors that borrow concepts from Nietzsche take them out of their context and situate them in their own metaphysics (often drawing on Nietzsche's Eternal Return and Will to Power understood as metaphysical views, which is already a lack of fidelity to the Nietzschean text). As a result, the only relation remaining between them and Nietzsche is that of the sign, but the signified and outlook behind it are totally different. Thus, the words

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<sup>8</sup> In: Pieniążek, *Suwerenność a nowoczesność. Z dziejów poststrukturalistycznej recepcji myśli Nietzschego*, pp.417-440 and pp.473-490.

<sup>9</sup> Heughem, « Ignace Meyerson's Historical Method in Psychology. A Lesson of Philology (in the Nietzschean Sense) for Studying Human Diversity across Time and Culture in its Plurality » and « The Ontological and Epistemological Consequences of the Situationality of Any Knowledge. A Merleau-Pontian Reading of Ignace Meyerson's Historical Psychology ».

(or quotes) alone are clearly not a reliable way to judge the proximity between philosophers. It is the lowest level of similarity possible, a very superficial one. This the reason why, according to Merleau-Ponty, “a philological commentary on texts would offer nothing, for we only find in texts what we have put into them, and if ever a history has called for our interpretation, it is surely the history of philosophy”<sup>10</sup>. We must practice the history of philosophy (as a discipline) in another way (or at least not only in the textual way), beyond the restrictive similarities of terminology or belonging to the different traditions. How to do so? It requires a different attitude, one where the historian of philosophy should “strive to settle in the thought of the philosopher instead of trying to circumscribe it”, said Bergson. He then added: “if we endeavor (faisons l’effort) to imitate this attitude, or even better, to integrate it, we will see again, to a certain extent, what the philosopher has seen”<sup>11</sup>. In other words, Bergson invites historians of philosophy to understand deeply how each philosopher related to the world and to experience, understanding their perspectives from within, by adopting them, and seeing the similarities of approaches from there. When we do not limit ourselves to what a thinker has written but when, instead, we try to reach the perspective from which this thinker was seeing the world and writing, then we can turn this view to new places, confront this perspective to problems or aspects of experience that this philosopher was not interested in, did not consider or simply did not have time to tackle (like with Merleau-Ponty’s class on Nietzsche prevented by his relatively early death). It is by doing so that we might discover unseen similarities, beyond the scope of what quotations allow since they are arbitrarily limited by the circumstances of an author, their time, health, interest, encounters... This approach allows comparisons that texts alone do not allow, and thus it broadens the scope of research. Therefore, on top of its intrinsic value (namely, the comparison between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty), if my thesis is successful, it would

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<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Preface, p.xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Bergson, « L’intuition philosophique », in: *La Pensée et le mouvant*, respectively p.119 and p.120.

prove that there is another way to practice the history of philosophy: not only through the analysis of textual references but also through the outlook or philosophical context of the philosophers, by comparing the light they shine on the world to understand it, according to which they saw and thought. Obtaining such outlooks requires us to live our experience of the world according to the prism of the various philosophers, to fully internalize it and perceive and live accordingly. Only then can philosophies be compared beyond the text, where the texts can serve as symptoms or indicators in order to retrieve a broader perspective (broader in the sense that it is not limited to the issues that have been addressed by the philosopher but could be applied to other aspects of experience too and still be faithful to the philosopher's perspective, uncovering its unthought or untapped thought (*son impensé*) that remains to be exploited and brought to light). With this approach, unnamed and implicit proximity between authors, yet to be noticed, could be discovered. This proximity that might turn out to be more profound and genuine than Nietzsche's so-called influence and proximity with the French authors of the XXth century who have certainly quoted Nietzsche a lot, but who did not respect nor share his methodological prism and his problematization of metaphysics. I hope that the results of my investigation will be able to prove that such an approach has its benefits too, and, without obliterating the traditional way to practice the history of philosophy, could become a good complement to it. As Nietzsche stated, "each of these three [here, two] types of history is valid only in one soil and in one climate; in any other it develops into the most devastating weed"<sup>12</sup>, so the history of philosophy needs these different approaches, simultaneously, without one (any of them, for it would be as disastrous) becoming the exclusive approach. Hence, the goal here is not to deny the texts, one still needs them to access the thought and prism of a philosopher, but the textual references

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<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, « The Utility and Liability of History », in: *Unfashionable Observations*, p.102.

should also not restrict the thought in a reductionist or conservative manner: they are always a partial and situated expression of an author's vision. Such a method (Bergson's one) is sure to contain approximations, to deviate from the orthodoxy of the thought of an author, because it is impossible to think, for instance, exactly in the same way as Nietzsche did. However, if one refuses to even try because they are afraid to deviate from the one righteous interpretation (and even the most respectable Nietzschean specialists have different points of view and can oppose each other, so the existence of a single, perfect interpretation is dubious) and want to remain objective, neutral, as scientific as possible, then they lose the opportunity to see many fruitful relations, and all because of an ideal of scientificity or objectivity that has a history itself and has been abundantly criticized by Nietzsche, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty. Thus, it would not be fair to apply to such an extent a conception of objectivity that these philosophers rejected. Probity must be conserved in the endeavor to retrieve the philosophical prism of an author, but experiments and failures are allowed. In the worst case, these experiments can give rise to interesting discussions on aspects of their philosophies that have been overlooked and understudied.

### ***B) A Methodological Approach***

How to apply Bergson's method and adopt a philosopher's prism, to experience our relation to the world in a similar way as they did? How to settle in a philosopher's thought? This goal might sound vague; nonetheless, I have a compass that will help me in this endeavor: the philosophers' methods. As Nietzsche wrote: "The most valuable views are the

ones you find last: but the most valuable views are the methods”<sup>13</sup>. It is only natural to have a framework or view that is firstly applied to different topics and that can only later become explicitly thematized as the heart or light that was governing all the writings and thought, but which was present all along as the method the philosopher adopted. The method sets both the problem or the interest and the way to tackle it, *i.e.* the criterion on which the philosopher will judge which option is more relevant and which kind of facts they should consider. Hence, going back to the method allows us to uncover the roots of the differences and similarities, which are already traced from the moment the method and its axioms are decided, most often implicitly and coming to light only through the years, through the different writings in which the author progressively takes a hold (possession) over their own thought. Through the application of their method, the authors start to possess a knowledge of their method and of their decisions about the world, although this knowledge rarely becomes fully explicit. Thus, the method can be seen as the seat of the axioms, preferences or prejudices of a philosopher, and this is the reason why an understanding of a philosopher will be the most radical if it takes the method as the angle of study. On the contrary, without a prior methodological work and by just taking the philosophers’ statements in the abstract, as if there was a unique perspective or a universal meaning – implying that the statements do not need to be situated within their context –, one uniformizes the thoughts on a (supposedly) homogeneous and undefined plane of sense, concealing the discrepancies and missing the crucial fact that these statements belong to different grounds. Hence, to compare faithfully and properly, one must acknowledge that the thoughts can be standing on different grounds and should strive to situate them on their initial, respective methodological grounds. Only then will the comparison become more fruitful. I think that this very fact has often been overlooked by the few commentators who dared a comparison between Nietzsche and

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<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §13.

Merleau-Ponty: it often adopted a metaphysical prism instead of a methodological one. Adopting the point of view of the method allows to contextualize each philosophy and constitutes a ground that is much more solid than simply comparing some trends of thought that might rely on different worldviews or even mean totally different things in different contexts. Which is why the existing studies on Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche lack precision; they compare some semblance of similarity, but they do so in abstraction, with a lack of context that prevents the comparison from reaching the full radicality it could have. I am not claiming that the existing comparative studies on Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche are baseless, the commentators have certainly felt that a common direction of thought existed between these two authors, but they might not have retrieved the most fundamental core of their similarity and difference. Two good examples of terms having a vastly different meaning in Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche, on which I will elaborate in this thesis, are the concepts of appearance and metaphysics. One will be misled if they use these terms to compare the two philosophers without taking into account the specific context in which these words occur. The call to acknowledge only the appearances (or phenomena) and reject the “in itself” in these two authors translates very differently and leads to different ontologies and epistemologies. The methodological approach makes this difference very clear and can help situate each author by comparing the use of these terms, whereas the other approaches situate themselves in the pseudo-realm of a universal metaphysics or truth and treat these terms as if they have only one meaning and designate the same reality, thus obfuscating the comparison. The polysemy of words (even within one author, for example in Nietzsche) has to be made explicit and the difference of ontological, epistemological and metaphysical contexts must be acknowledged. Only with such a philological (not in the sense of textual reference but in the Nietzschean sense of methodological probity) approach can the comparison develop its deepest reach. Not overlooking the existing differences will lead to a more radical assessment of their

similarities and complementarity. Indeed, the prism of the method encapsulates very clearly not only the similarities but also the differences. I have emphasized so far only the fact that Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche share a philological approach (approach that situates Merleau-Ponty closer to Nietzsche than to phenomenology, as philosophical brothers), but I also have to state that, unlike most philosophers, Nietzsche did not keep only a single method during his whole philosophical journey and career but added a second one: the genealogical method. This second method, task and interest is what brings Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche apart, and it is what is missed by most commentators when they stay at the metaphysical level of analysis. Therefore, I will adopt the methodological outlook for my study, comparing Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty according to the prism of the methods they use to elaborate their philosophy. I hope to prove that this approach will be far more relevant than the metaphysical one (prevalent in the few existing studies on Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty), which failed to grasp the main specificity and main difference or opposition between these two authors. Thereby, still in the scope of this introduction and with a methodological approach, I will show in two successive moments that Merleau-Ponty shares a philological method with Nietzsche, which brings him closer to him (and allows us to compare their philological approaches), but that Nietzsche also adds a genealogical method to his investigation, which brings them apart.

### ***C) Bergson's and Merleau-Ponty's Philological Method***

Is Nietzsche's philology the only one possible? For my thesis to be grounded and relevant, I must prove that Merleau-Ponty adopted a philological approach too. Only then

will I be able to compare the two. What does philology consist of? As I have already mentioned (and thematized as the “art of reading” or interpreting well), to be philological is to have the utmost intellectual conscience (Nietzsche speaks of a “conscience in intellectual matters” in *Gay Science*, §2) and to interpret the text of reality without adding nor removing anything from it. To summarize the notion, Wotling writes that “in his [Nietzsche’s] “new language”, the reference to philology underlines the meticulousness and care that deciphering the text imposes on the reader, and Nietzsche's praise is aimed above all at the scrupulousness that characterizes the philologist's activity and reflects his respect for the text”<sup>14</sup>. The respect for the text translates as an equal attention to respect all its aspects and to not add any. Wotling emphasizes that the lack of philology is often due to an excess, to something added to the text, and therefore puts the focus on being economical and removing unnecessary principles: “philology has developed a general theory of misinterpretation, defined as the injection of an excess of meaning into the original text: falsity is first and foremost characterized by an excess of meaning”<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, I think the threat of subtracting from reality is as dangerous as faulty excess. In fact, the two are interconnected since the ontological status added to some experiences or concepts (for example the attributes of objectivity, pure positivity, certainty, absoluteness and so on) is made possible only because other aspects of Being have been missed and removed from the interpreted text. Thus, excess always comes with denial or removal too, as adding or overemphasizing an aspect of reality leads to debasing and forgetting others. What is put on an ontological pedestal will always lower the rest, making them appear lower and shallower than if we kept a fair view. Therefore, an important part of proving that Merleau-Ponty adopts a philological method lies in showing that his philological approach strived to account for as many aspects of experience as possible (thus not missing nor removing any), without adding any that do

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<sup>14</sup> Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, pp.44-45.

<sup>15</sup> Wotling, *op. cit.*, p.50.

not belong to the text. This double concern shows, in great part, through the method Merleau-Ponty borrows from Bergson. As Barbaras wrote, “Merleau-Ponty sees in Bergson's method a prefiguration of the intuition that drives his own approach, the path to « an absolute knowledge that is not an overview [pas un survol] but an inherence » (*Bergson se faisant dans Signes*, p.232)<sup>16</sup>”. I agree with Barbaras’ statement and will simply add that this method Merleau-Ponty borrows from Bergson is a philological one. Indeed, I think that philology is the prism that allows to grasp a continuity in each of these two authors’ various works and also between them. In my opinion, Colonna’s view is too restrictive when he emphasized that the similarity with Bergson is especially true of the later period of Merleau-Ponty’s works: “the latter Merleau-Ponty's way of proceeding presents, beyond the easily assignable differences, deep analogies with Bergson's method”<sup>17</sup>. As I will show, the similarity is consistent throughout all of their writings, even the first ones. Their philological outlook is what governs the totality of their work, as a framework and also as an argumentative approach, giving a continuity through the different topics, scientific fields and philosophical matters they explore over the course of their works. Let us consider a quote of Bergson and see how it fulfils (and thematizes explicitly) the double philological requirement to not add nor remove from experience:

But is this representation really adequate to the represented? Does it contain *just what it contains*? At first glance, it might seem so, as we have just said. But the truth is that it contains *more* on one side, *less* on the other, and that if the two appear interchangeable, it is because our mind surreptitiously *subtracts* from the representation what is in *excess*, and no less surreptitiously *introduces what is lacking*. To begin with the second point, it is obvious that becoming itself has been eliminated. [...] But in another sense, it *represents more*. *Subtracting* here, *adding* there, it is doubly inadequate. Bergson, *Durée et Simultanéité*, pp.153-4 (my emphasis).

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<sup>16</sup> Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène. Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, p.122.

<sup>17</sup> Colonna, *Merleau-Ponty et le renouvellement de la métaphysique*, p.101.

Beyond this general consideration on philology (as not removing nor adding anything to the text), let us dive into more specific philological elements of Bergson's and Merleau-Ponty's method. The first remarkable philological point is the interest these two philosophers had in the science of their time: they refused to philosophize in abstraction and became acquainted with the results from empirical sciences in order to gather materials and observations of facts, be it from psychologists, biologists, sociologists, anthropologists or physicists (among others). Merleau-Ponty formulated several times the need for science in philosophy: "it is strictly necessary to teach everyone about the astronomer's sun: it is not a question of discrediting scientific knowledge. Philosophical awareness is only possible beyond that"<sup>18</sup>. In a similar way, Bergson "wanted a philosophy that would submit to the scrutiny of science, and at the same time drive it forward"<sup>19</sup>, so that philosophy could stay grounded and take into account very specific aspects of reality and experience that were completely overlooked by most philosophers, like the cases of psychopathology for instance. This is analogous to Nietzsche's philological interest in various sciences. Indeed, "Nietzsche's thinking goes far beyond the field of investigation defined by the metaphysical tradition, and finds itself at a meeting point between several disciplines, as evidenced by the numerous references in Nietzsche's texts to history, philology, psychology, physiology and, more broadly, medicine"<sup>20</sup>. Even more so for Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, the number of scientific

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<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.79. See also, on the next page: "Philosophy has nothing to fear from a mature science, nor this science from philosophy", or in p.56: "When philosophers want to shelter reason from history, they cannot simply forget everything that psychology, sociology, ethnography, history and mental pathology have taught us about the conditioning of human behavior. It would be a very romantic way of loving reason to establish its reign on the disavowal of our knowledge".

<sup>19</sup> Bergson, Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in. *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.70. See also « L'âme et le corps » in. *L'énergie spirituelle*, p.38: "The metaphysician does not easily descend from the heights where he likes to stand. Plato invited him to turn towards the world of Ideas. That's where he likes to settle, among pure concepts".

<sup>20</sup> Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.29. See also Nietzsche's note at the end of *La Généalogie de la morale's* First Treaty, after §17, pp.113-114, in which he wrote: I would like to raise the following question: it deserves the attention of philologists and historians as much as it does that of academics who specialize in philosophy. [...] On the other hand, it is certainly just as necessary to ensure that physiologists and medical specialists collaborate on these issues [...]. All sciences must now prepare the philosopher's task of the future [la tâche d'avenir du philosophe]".

references in all of their books is nothing short of impressive. However, they were not simply receiving or repeating the scientific results at face value, sacrificing philosophy to science like a trend in analytical philosophy (or in philosophy of mind) sometimes does<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, as formulated by Merleau-Ponty:

Philosophy must take on [assumer] all the acquisitions of science, which are the first word of knowledge, and with them, therefore, historical relativism. But, as philosophy, it is not content to record the variety of anthropological facts [for instance]. [...] Philosophy would be autonomous after positive knowledge, not before. This autonomy would not exempt the philosopher from collecting all that anthropology can give us; [...] it cannot remove anything from the scientists' competence that is accessible to their research procedures. Quite simply, it would be established in a dimension where no scientific knowledge could challenge it. Merleau-Ponty, « Le philosophe et la sociologie », in: *Eloge de la philosophie*, p.114.

This dimension is the one of ontology, epistemology and metaphysics, approached from a philological standpoint. Therefore, the role that falls to a philological philosophy, coming after science and informed by it, is to separate the empirical facts, inaccessible to pure philosophy, from the classical metaphysical framework (implicitly inherited from Descartes and Kant) in which most sciences still operate. Thus, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty aim at freeing the facts and observations gathered by science from any presupposed metaphysical, ontological and epistemological background, in order to let them inform us about, potentially, a new ontology suggested by these facts if we examine them philologically, without a preexisting framework. “Every science secretes an ontology”, and only a “of science, interpreting its own results with an implicit and non-interrogated metaphysical

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<sup>21</sup> Treating philosophy only as a preparatory work, whose sole goal is to found science. According to Wittgenstein, once this goal is reached, philosophy becomes useless (and worthless), like a ladder after reaching the highest point; hence, it can be left behind and forgotten. See the final page of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “He who understands me, finally recognizes [my propositions] as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it) ... then he sees the world rightly” (#6.54).

prism – going sometimes “so far as to distort the observation, interposing itself in certain cases between the observer and the facts”<sup>22</sup> – in his article « L’âme et le corps » as thus:

One cannot do without philosophy; and while waiting for the philosophers to bring him the malleable theory, moldable on the double experience of inside and outside, which science would have needed, it was natural for the scientist to accept, from the hands of the old metaphysics, the ready-made doctrine, constructed from scratch, which best accorded with the rule of method he had found advantageous to follow. Bergson, « L’âme et le corps » in. *L’énergie spirituelle*, pp.38-39.

Merleau-Ponty also thought that science often interprets its own results in a metaphysical framework that does not fit the experience. Thereby, he wrote in *The Primacy of Perception*, a gathering of two texts from when he was twenty-five years old and of one text that followed his thesis, *Phenomenology of Perception*, replying to some questions it gave rise to:

When the theory of form [Merleau-Ponty refers to the *Gestalttheorie*], in spite of its own results, tries to wrap itself in a scientific or positivist ontology, it is at the cost of an internal contradiction that we must not follow. [...] Psychology as a science has nothing to fear from a return to the perceived world, nor from a philosophy that draws the consequences of this return. Far from harming psychology, this attitude, on the contrary, releases the philosophical significance of its discoveries. Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, pp.54-55<sup>23</sup>.

It is through the very notions that science uses that some ontological prejudices are already injected in their understanding of their experiments, for they use already-made, non-interrogated concepts that possess a philosophical history and were created in a specific context, bringing implicitly this whole philosophical context with them whenever they are

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<sup>22</sup> Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in. *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.71.

<sup>23</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Le philosophe et la sociologie » in: *Eloge de la philosophie*, p.97. See also, Merleau-Ponty, « Le métaphysique dans l’homme », in: *Sens et non-sens*, p.103: “It seems hard to deny that the psychology of form disrupts what we might call the implicit ontology of science, and forces us to revise our conception of the conditions and limits of scientific knowledge”.

used. In this way, “the psychology of perception is loaded with philosophical presuppositions, which are introduced with the most seemingly innocent notions – those of sensation, mental image, memory, understood as a permanent being...”<sup>24</sup>. However, sometimes the phenomena that these notions attempt to express would be more faithfully expressed in another ontological framework, thus inviting the philosophers to examine these notions and provide another ontological and epistemological framework that would fit and encompass fully the phenomena at stake in scientific observations. This perspective remained constant throughout all of Merleau-Ponty’s works. Indeed, at the very end of his life, he asserted, in a work note from *Le visible et l’invisible* titled “The scale – the ontological signification of this notion”, that the scientific notion of scale “is the overcoming of the ontology of the In-itself, – and expresses this overcoming in terms of the In-itself”<sup>25</sup> ; while, if one was truly philological, they would express this overcoming in terms of an ontology that does not rely on the In-itself anymore. A philological understanding of the notion of scale requires a radical change of ontology and epistemology, that science has mostly ignored and maintained in an objectivist framework. This objectivist framework is the strength of science, for it allows its operations to reach far broader than what simple perception could, but this advantage is a pragmatic one, it does not guarantee any epistemic superiority of science (for a knowledge that achieves practical results is not necessarily a knowledge that is true), at least not in the field of ontology. The successes of science might be due to useful fictions or to excesses (*i.e.* the overestimation of the objective nature of measurable facts), with their corollary denial or simplification of some parts of experience, by looking at reality only through the prism of its quantitative aspects and overlooking the qualitative ones. It is what Merleau-Ponty means when he writes: “for a long time, and in certain respects, science seemed to want to give the universe an immobile image. It did not

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<sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.16.

<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.275.

seem to recognize any orientation to the process. To this extent, it can be considered incomplete and partial”<sup>26</sup>. He also rightly questions: “Are we really objective about man when we believe we can consider him as an object that can be explained by an interweaving of processes and causalities [...]? Are we really objective when we apply tests to man that concern only abstract aptitudes?”<sup>27</sup>. And he answers further, on the problem of perception: “the scientist's view of perception – a *stimulus* in-itself that gives rise to perception – is, like all forms of naive realism, absolutely inadequate”<sup>28</sup>. In the same way, and more generally, Bergson understands most operations of science as consisting of “substituting the quantitative interpretation given by our understanding for the qualitative impression received by our consciousness”<sup>29</sup>, thus removing from experience. We can find similar criticism in Nietzsche’s philosophy towards science, reason and language (in Bergson too), both criticizing it for being adapted to the needs of action and society or life and not for being a faithful expression of experience: “they may express nothing more than a certain convenience specific to a race or species – their usefulness alone is their « truth »”<sup>30</sup>. In the same fashion, Bergson wrote, about words: “In most cases, they have been elaborated by the social organism with a non-metaphysical purpose in mind. To form them, society has divided reality according to its needs. Why should philosophy accept a division that does not correspond to the articulations of reality?”<sup>31</sup>. These arguments can lead to understand science

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<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.80.

<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.55.

<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.83.

<sup>29</sup> Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, p.38. See also p.136 : “We thus fall back into the illusion we mentioned earlier: we mechanically explain a fact, and then substitute this explanation for the fact itself”.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [105], p.77.

<sup>31</sup> Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in *La Pensée et le mouvant*, p.51. See also Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.203: “What we usually call a fact is not reality as it would appear to immediate intuition, but an adaptation of reality to the interests of practice and the demands of social life”; and p.204 on empiricism: “Its fault lies not in placing too high a value on experience, but on the contrary in substituting true experience, that which is born of the mind's immediate contact with its object, with a disjointed experience, arranged in any case for the greater ease of action and language. Precisely because this fragmentation of reality has been carried out with a view to the demands of practical life, it has not followed the inner lines of the structure of things: this is why empiricism cannot satisfy the mind on any of the great problems”.

as a discipline that is operational rather than faithful to reality, which creates a space for philosophy to interpret its results in a philological ontology and epistemology, based on it but not accepting its theoretical framework for philosophy, as it is not philological enough (for they do not adapt their own categories to the results and keep interpreting them according to the In-itself). This is exactly how Merleau-Ponty conceptualizes the relationship between science and philosophy in a work note of *Le visible et l'invisible* dedicated to this issue: “to justify science as an operation in the given situation of knowledge, – and thereby highlight the need for the “complementary” ontology of this operational science”<sup>32</sup>. Philosophy, to be philological, should not ignore the facts highlighted by science, to do so would make it a purely abstract conjecture, but the ontological and epistemological framework must be reimagined, fueled by these facts and creating concepts that fit closely the sinuosity and nuances of experience. This does not mean, however, that science is “objectively false” either, it is simply less philological than Bergson, Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty because it denies its own situationality and the perspectivism of any knowledge, thus removing from experience. Indeed, by claiming to be objective, science denies its historicity and situationality, for it has only access to a number of points of view and observations at a given time (with certain tools) and new observations (or new tools) could challenge the previous theoretical frameworks and axioms. This is what Kuhn calls a scientific revolution, involving a complete paradigm shift<sup>33</sup>. Truth is situated, always linked to a time, place and culture, there is never a moment when one can know objectively, beyond our means of seeing or situation. The criticism of forgetting our situationality is valid against both the abstract philosopher and the dogmatic scientist:

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<sup>32</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.274.

<sup>33</sup> See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*.

“You believe you think for always and for everyone”, says the sociologist to the philosopher, and in that very fact, you are merely expressing the prejudices or pretensions of your culture. This is true, but it is no less true of the dogmatic sociologist than of the philosopher. Where, they who speak thus, themselves talk from [d’où parle-t-il]? Merleau-Ponty, « Le philosophe et la sociologie » in: *Eloge de la philosophie*, p.115.

The scientists and their means to observe are always involved in their results, “contaminating” them with their historicity too. And the only way to help science become more philological is not by opposing it to an abstract and uprooted, non-situated philosophy, but to bring it back to experience (in all its aspects, not only in its measurable ones), therefore with a philological philosophy. Thus, Merleau-Ponty wrote: “It may be that science buys its accuracy at the price of schematization. But the remedy is to confront it with integral experience, and not to oppose it with philosophical knowledge coming from who knows where”<sup>34</sup>. Hence, there is a possibility for a more philological science, when it does not claim to be objective anymore but understands its results as situated and in another ontological and epistemological framework than the objectivist one, which is precisely what Bergson and Merleau-Ponty try to do. This endeavor does not destroy nor undermine science; it simply prevents it from claiming that it delivers the truth of the world exclusively (closing the possibility for any philosophy) and absolutely. As Merleau-Ponty specified: “I was not thinking of making a clean break with science, as you put it. It is just a question of knowing its scope and meaning”<sup>35</sup>, elucidating its status.

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<sup>34</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Le philosophe et la sociologie » in: *Eloge de la philosophie*, pp.103-104.

<sup>35</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.75. See also Merleau-Ponty, *Causeries 1948*, p.16: “This does not in any way detract from the necessity of scientific research and only combats the dogmatism of a science that considers itself to be absolute and total knowledge. It simply does justice to all elements of human experience and, in particular, to our sensory perception”.

Therefore, another element of philology that has been emphasized during the previous development (as it has shown that the categories of the scientists can lead them to interpret their results in non-philological ways) is the necessity for a probity and humility that imposes to the thinker to set their own prejudices aside and to pay a strict attention to experience, to let themselves be informed by experience instead of imposing their own pre-fabricated notions (or frameworks) onto it and eliminating from it anything that does not fit, like a Procrustean bed. One must modify their own categories and adapt them to experience if experience cannot be fully taken into account by these categories (or without undergoing anti-philological alterations). Experience must prevail over a thinker's habit or convenience. It is this philological requirement that Granier affirms in the following quote:

The passion for knowledge is the manifestation of this uncompromising intellectual probity, which forbids us to interpret Being according to our needs and desires – in other words, in an anthropomorphic way – and which demands absolute respect for the “text”. Our task is no longer to violate reality so that it becomes the accomplice of our ambitions and lusts, but to scrupulously decipher the text before our eyes, even if the message it carries shatters our most cherished hopes.

Granier, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.501–502.

It is in this light that Bergson criticizes the teleological interpretation of science and of causalist paradigms in general, who interpret reality according to their desire or to what validates their pre-existing hypothesis instead of interpreting philologically. Hence, in *Matter and memory* Bergson wrote, as an example of bad philology done by science (in this instance, neuropsychology), writing according to their perspective but, by doing so, showing how they alter experience (underlining at which points they deviate from it and leave its ground), which is a rhetorical (or philological?) device often used by Bergson and Merleau-Ponty:

We are shown a brain analogous, in its essence, to the rest of the material universe, and therefore an image if the universe is an image. Then, as we want the inner movements of this brain to create or determine the representation of the entire material world, an image that infinitely exceeds that of cerebral vibrations, we affect to no longer see in these molecular movements, nor in movement in general, images like any other. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, pp.17-18.

The brain, that is seen and known in perception, cannot be miraculously extracted from it and be deemed afterwards, or rather retrospectively, the cause of all perceptions. If it were the case, then how would we know of the brain in the first place? What is the legitimacy in granting to the brain an extra-sensible ontological status? As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “the ideal of objective thought – the system of experience as a bundle of physico-mathematical correlations – is grounded upon my perception of the world as an individual in harmony with itself”<sup>36</sup>. Hence, if our knowledge is informed by experience, then what right could it claim against its source? How could the interpretation be valid against the text? Priority must be given to experience. One must remain faithful to experience, not amend it, even if it means we have to change our categories, our logic and our grammar to do it. Hence, if a conflict emerges between experience and our notions, ontology, epistemology, language or metaphysics, then we must change all of them in order to fit experience as closely as possible. This is exactly the method that both Bergson and Merleau-Ponty adopted. In the same way as Nietzsche, who elaborated a “new language” to fit experience (on top of using aphorisms to multiply the perspectives), Bergson and Merleau-Ponty revised their categories too. This way to do is more philological than the one consisting in discarding experience, relegating it to the personal and subjective sphere (as an error, mistake or illusion) and opposing to it our notions and predicative logic that we universalize as the objective reality, as the truth of

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<sup>36</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.366.

the things in-themselves, like an absolute. It is exactly on this ground that Bergson criticized the skeptics, idealists and criticists who

assume, like the dogmatism they attack, that all knowledge must necessarily start from concepts with fixed contours, and embrace with them the reality that's unfolding. But the truth is that our minds can follow the opposite path. It can settle into moving reality, adopt its ever-changing direction, and finally grasp it intuitively. To do this, it has to be violent, to reverse the direction of the operation by which it usually thinks, to constantly turn or rather recast its categories. But in this way, it will arrive at fluid concepts capable of following reality in all its sinuosities and adopting the very movement of the inner life of things. Only in this way will a progressive philosophy emerge, free from the disputes that arise between schools, capable of resolving problems naturally, because it will have freed itself from the artificial terms chosen to pose them. To philosophize is to reverse the usual direction of thought. Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in. *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp.213-214.

In the same vein of criticizing the traditional categories of science and philosophy, Merleau-Ponty writes, when trying to explain his task and (philological) approach to philosophy, that

the goal is ontology (in the modern sense), *i.e.* consideration of the whole and of its articulations, beyond the categories of substance, of subject-object, of causality, *i.e.* metaphysics in the classical term. Unveiling of another type of being than these ones. [...] But it does not have an official existence: our “philosophical” thought remains spiritualist, materialist, rationalist or irrationalist, idealist or realist when it is not silent. [...] However, between philosophy, in the classical sense, relying on the aforementioned categories, and concrete research too hastily identified to science – one does not see the place of philosophy as an interrogative ontology, although not settling for either classical philosophy or scientism. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours 1959-1961*, p.37.

Thus, by challenging his own categories, Merleau-Ponty drew a whole ontology and epistemology from the *Gestalt*, that the scientists kept interpreting in an objectivist, causalist framework, still presupposing a world in-itself: “they thereby return to an explanatory

psychology whose ideal Gestalt theory never abandoned because, like psychology, it never broke with naturalism. But in the same stroke, Gestalt theory betrays its own descriptions”<sup>37</sup>.

Merleau-Ponty proceeds to add, a couple of pages further:

Gestalt theory lacks the overhaul of its categories required to sufficiently express these perceptual relations: it acknowledged the principle [of returning to phenomena], and it applied this principle in some specific cases, but it did not notice that an entire reformulation of the understanding is necessary if one wants to accurately express phenomena, or that in order to reach this goal one must question logic and classical philosophy’s “objective thought,” suspend the categories of the world, doubt (in the Cartesian sense) the supposed facts of realism, and proceed to a genuine “phenomenological reduction”. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.50.

Therefore, scientific facts (as testimonies of experience, and if they are interpreted philologically) can also be used in order to contest the dominant philosophical interpretation. If the scientists usually do not do it themselves, it is only because “the psychologists [or scientists] who practice the description of phenomena are normally unaware of the philosophical weight of their method”<sup>38</sup>, but their descriptions are all that is needed to provide a philosophy that is more faithful to experience. The philological philosophers do not add anything to these descriptions. They simply fulfill their epistemological and ontological potential. Thereby, Merleau-Ponty, well aware of the “philosophical weight” of the scientific descriptions of phenomena, will criticize and revise the philosophical tradition based on them, in a way that allows a more faithful account of the scientists’ description (more faithful than if it was biased by classical philosophical categories), as well as a more philological philosophy, that feeds on scientific experiments and descriptions. In this

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<sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.48. See also, Merleau-Ponty, « Le métaphysique dans l’homme », in: *Sens et non-sens*, p.104: “The psychology of form, instead of leading to a revision of the methodology and scientific ideal that had long masked the reality of “form”, only developed insofar as it enabled this failing methodology to be revived”.

<sup>38</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.48.

manner, and as an example, Merleau-Ponty showed in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that the strict dichotomy between the body and the soul is only valid in psychopathological cases, like Goldstein and Gelb's case of the patient Schneider who had a severe occipital lesion, and that we should not understand the normal functioning of the phenomenal body according to this dichotomy: the non-pathological experience pertains to another ontology and epistemology that precedes the substantial dichotomy elaborated by Descartes and that is able to comprehend both, whereas the Cartesian ontology is missing parts of the text. In this philological fashion, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

the normal cannot be deduced from the pathological, and deficiencies cannot be deduced from their substitutions [suppléances], through a mere change of signs. The substitutions must be understood as substitutions, as allusions to a fundamental function that they attempt to replace, but of which they do not give us the direct image. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.110.

Each time Merleau-Ponty criticizes either intellectualists or empiricists, he does so on philological grounds. The examples are numerous, but to remain on the topic of the conclusions on Schneider's case, let us cite an example taken from a development dedicated to it:

The intellectual analysis, here as everywhere, is less false than it is abstract [in the sense that it is lacking philology, unable to take into account some of the aspects of reality revealed by the pathological experience]. The "symbolic function" or "representation function" certainly underlies our movement, but it is not an ultimate term for the analysis, it in turn rests upon a certain ground [missed by the intellectualists]. Intellectualism's error is to make it depend upon itself, to separate it from the materials in which it is realized, and to recognize in us, as originary, a direct presence in the world. For beginning from this transparent consciousness, and from this intentionality that does not admit of degrees, everything that separates us from the true world – error, illness, madness, and, in short, embodiment – is reduced to the status of a mere appearance

[hence denying these aspects of it]. [...] We can thus understand why doctors and psychologists decline intellectualism's invitation, and go back, lacking a better explanation, to attempts at causal explanation that at least have the advantage of bringing into account what is peculiar to the disorder and to each particular disorder, and which thereby offer us at least the illusion of actual knowledge. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.126–127.

Nonetheless, after this statement, Merleau-Ponty does not side with the causal approach either, for they also miss some aspects of experience, the ones the intellectualists acknowledged but overemphasized (thereby losing the aspects of reality rightly emphasized by the empiricists, however excessively and lacking the intellectualists' ones). In this way, Merleau-Ponty repeats the same method that Bergson used in all of his books, pitting the idealists against the empiricists, showing that both focused only on partial aspects of reality and altered their status by seeing the whole of reality only in (and through) them. This philological approach shared by Bergson and Merleau-Ponty takes the shape of the structure: “neither this nor that”, thanks to which they examine the two traditional schools of philosophy on a given problem in a way to show what is lacking and what is excessive in both sides, in order to find a description that restitutes with fidelity the whole experience, and only experience. Each side is often right in what it negates about the other side, but it is wrong in what it proposes itself because it applies dualism to experience and sacrifices one aspect to the other, denying too much and also granting an excessive status to whatever remains. This leads only to a constant movement between excessive positions, always missing experience. Bergson described this movement, with the example of the movement from Descartes' position to Berkeley's:

Undoubtedly, Descartes put matter too far away from us when he confused it with geometric extent. But to bring it closer to us, there was no need to go so far as to make it coincide with our mind itself. For having gone so far, Berkeley found himself unable to account for the success of physics. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.3.

However, this oscillating movement (that can serve as a prism through which to read the history of philosophy) can be prolonged many times, and to some extent is continued even nowadays in the opposition between those who understand the mind like a computer, algorithm or a neuronal network (with a causal approach to representation) and the successors of an idealist phenomenology or spiritualism. This dance could go on forever, as long as the prejudice of dualism is not uncovered and uprooted. This lack of radicality (in the position of these new paradigms) allows the criticisms of Bergson and Merleau-Ponty to remain valid to this day, by opposing these two new schools of thought and finding the total picture of experience that they divide and miss. This advantage of philology, that strives to go to the root of the problems and deal with the given, with as few prejudices as possible, grants it a timeless value. This characteristic of philology has been underlined by Nietzsche (although in a slightly different context): “I have no idea what the significance of classical philology would be in our age, if not to have an unfashionable effect – that is, to work against the time and thereby have an effect upon it, hopefully for the benefit of a future time”<sup>39</sup>. Thus, in the context of Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, a radical philology aims at overcoming dualism altogether, to show that the opposition of idealism and empiricism or realism is only a superficial one and that they in fact share the common prejudice of dualism (that Nietzsche criticized too), of dismembering the experience into two halves: their opposition comes only after they have already implicitly agreed on cutting the experience into halves, arguing afterwards about which one is real. On the contrary, a philological account of experience takes it whole and at once, simultaneously encompassing all of its aspects. After these comments, it should be easy to notice this philological structure (that I will emphasize) in Merleau-Ponty’s following quote:

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<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, « The Utility and Liability of History » in *Unfashionable Observations*, p.87.

We must imagine, *between* the linguistic, perceptual and motor contents and the form that they receive or the symbolic function that animates them, a relationship that would be *neither* the reduction of the form to the content, *nor* the subsumption of the content under an autonomous form. We must understand how Schneider's disorder *simultaneously* overflows the particular contents of his experience (visual, tactile, and motor) *and yet* only attacks the symbolic function through the privileged material of vision. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.128.

Bergson applies the same structure with finalism and determinism in *Creative Evolution*, or in *Matter and Memory* as thus:

The aim of our first chapter is to show that idealism and realism are two equally excessive theses, that it is wrong to reduce matter to the representation we have of it, and also wrong to make of it something that would produce representations in us, but which would be of a different nature to them. For us, matter is a set of "images". Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.1.

Or, still in *Matter and Memory* (which shows that this philological argumentative pattern is recurring throughout the whole book, and all of his other works too):

The obscurity of the problem, in all doctrines, lies in the double antithesis that our understanding establishes between the extended and the unexpanded on the one hand, and quality and quantity on the other. [...] We maintain against materialism that perception infinitely exceeds the cerebral state; but we have tried to establish against idealism that matter overflows on all sides the representation we have of it, a representation that the mind has, as it were, plucked from it by an intelligent choice. Of these two opposing doctrines, one ascribes to the body and the other to the mind a gift of true creation, the first wanting our brain to generate the representation and the second our understanding to draw the plan of nature. And against these two doctrines we invoke the same testimony, that of consciousness, which shows us in our body an image like any other, and in our understanding a certain faculty of dissociating and opposing logically, but not of creating or constructing. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.201.

I would like to apologize for presenting many lengthy quotes, but it is very important to prove that Merleau-Ponty (inspired by Bergson) adopted a philological method so that it can be confronted with Nietzsche's philology and that we can check whether his genealogy made him deviate from the path of philology. For this reading of Merleau-Ponty according to Nietzsche's philological prism has never been done before, and because Merleau-Ponty does not express himself in the same terminology as the Nietzschean one, I thought that it was vital to emphasize enough the philological nature and structure of Merleau-Ponty's arguments. If not, my whole thesis would be pointless or at least frail at its foundations. That is why I wanted its basis to be solidly established through numerous quotes. Moreover, for I do not aim to prove a similarity of position but a similarity of method, I need to display this method at work in Merleau-Ponty (and Bergson, whose work Merleau-Ponty continued by picking up on his philological approach), and this requires showing whole argumentative developments, to observe the whole chain of reasoning and its structure. This argumentative structure is a crucial pattern to these philosophers, as well as a device to find their own position, feeding on the strengths of both sides and rejecting their weaknesses and blind spots (*i.e.* what they overlooked). It is very important for both Bergson and Merleau-Ponty to show that empiricism and idealism share a common prejudice and that a radical philology must overcome this prejudice to remain faithful to experience and provide a more simple interpretation, based on experience, whereas the empiricist and idealist interpretations, for maintaining this prejudice, had to add many *ad hoc* hypotheses to their initial positions. The overcoming of this shared prejudice is visible in many conclusions of Bergson, for example in this one: "a closer look at these two opposing theories would reveal a common premise: they both assume that we start from the perception of individual objects"<sup>40</sup>, or in that one:

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<sup>40</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.175.

Instead of the living unity born of inner continuity, we substitute the factitious unity of an empty framework, as inert as the terms it holds together. Empiricism and dogmatism are basically in agreement, starting from the phenomena thus reconstituted, and differ only in that empiricism is more attached to this form, and empiricism to this matter. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.203.

Merleau-Ponty also criticized empiricism and intellectualism jointly, as sharing a similar approach to perception and experience, which brings them much closer than their apparent opposition:

In fact, empiricism has not been our sole target. It must now be shown that intellectualism, its antithesis, stands on the same ground. Both take the objective world as their object for analysis, which comes first neither in time nor according to its sense; both are incapable of expressing the particular manner in which perceptual consciousness constitutes its object. When it comes to perception, rather than sticking closely to it, they both keep their distance. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.28.<sup>41</sup>

Hence, Merleau-Ponty and Bergson use the philological mistakes of the traditional schools of philosophy in order to overcome their common prejudice and provide a more economical and faithful explanation. And very often, the solution proposed by Bergson and Merleau-Ponty will consist in a middle-ground between realism and intellectualism, a third kind of being that pre-exists the dichotomy: “by « image » we mean a certain existence that is more than what the idealist calls a representation, but less than what the realist calls a thing – an existence situated halfway between « thing » and « representation »<sup>42</sup>”. In the same fashion, Merleau-Ponty will describe the perceived or phenomenal being (l’être perçu ou phénoménal) as a third kind of being, between the subjective representation or the subject

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<sup>41</sup> See also: Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.41: “The kinship of intellectualism and empiricism is in this way much less visible and much more profound than is believed. It does not merely stem from their common use of the anthropological definition of sensation, but rather from the fact that both maintain the natural or dogmatic attitude, and the survival of the notion of sensation in intellectualism is but a sign of this dogmatism”.

<sup>42</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.1.

and the object, existing on a pre-objective modality of being, prior to dualism: “at the same time that the body withdraws from the objective world and comes to form a third genre of being between the pure subject and the object, the subject loses his purity and his transparency”<sup>43</sup>.

#### **D) Reduction and the Principle of Economy**

So far, we have seen that Bergson and Merleau-Ponty adopt a philological approach that strives to not add nor remove any aspects from experience. Thus, in this way, experience can philologically decide between Bergson or Merleau-Ponty’s view and the traditional ones, for theses that might not be decidable in abstraction can be put to the test of experience, one might provide a better account of some practical cases and aspects of reality (so it is not about what the interpretation allows to do but about whether or not it allows to take into account all the aspects presented in experience). Thus, empirical experiences change of nature, status and dimension; as Bergson underlines, “we should immediately point out the metaphysical, and no longer merely psychological, significance of this last problem. [...] We have thus transposed a metaphysical problem to the point of making it coincide with a

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<sup>43</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.366. See also, *ibid.*, p.520: Gelb and Goldstein “have done more than anyone else in overcoming the classical alternative between automatism and consciousness. But they have never named this third term *between* the psychic and the physiological, between the for-itself and the in-itself, to which their analyses always lead them and that we will call « existence ».”; and Merleau-Ponty, « Le métaphysique dans l’homme », in: *Sens et non-sens*, pp.105-106: “If we were to define the philosophical meaning of the psychology of form without prejudice, we would have to say that, by revealing « structure » or « form » as an irreducible ingredient of being, it challenges the classical alternative of « existence as thing » and « existence as consciousness », it establishes a communication and something like a blend of the objective and the subjective, it conceives psychological knowledge in a new way, which no longer consists in breaking down these typical wholes, but rather in embracing and understanding them by reliving them”.

psychological problem, which pure and simple observation can resolve”<sup>44</sup>. Through this means, it becomes apparent that, in philology, experience is the criterion allowing to hierarchize between the interpretations, not anymore according to their objective truth but according to their faithfulness, simplicity and exhaustivity, after having thoroughly examined a variety of sources and documents. Therefore, philology appears as a criterion to select among the different philosophies, according to their “epistemic power”<sup>45</sup>:

Philology makes it possible to devise new criteria for ranking the various interpretations by which thinkers have sought to account for the text of appearances. This means abandoning any notion of adequacy to a supposed but always unknowable reality, and instead questioning the value of interpretations only immanently, in terms of interpretative coherence or power: the interpretation that manages to give an account of the text alone, without adding anything to it or projecting anything into it that is simply invented, but also of the whole text, without neglecting or ignoring any detail that would be overlooked or contradicted by another interpretation, which could then be said to be less rigorous and less powerful than the previous one. Denat, *op. cit.*, pp.144–145.

Nevertheless, the epistemological superiority of Bergson’s and Merleau-Ponty’s interpretations can be granted only if the question of objective truth and the possibility of a reality known in-itself are defused. Indeed, for now we have simply mentioned the philological requirement to not add nor to remove any aspects, however, to not add nor remove any aspect from what exactly? What is the text that we are interpreting? The text of

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<sup>44</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, pp.268-269. See also *ibid.*, p.80: “So the problem of memory is truly a privileged one, in that it must lead to the psychological verification of two theses that seem unverifiable, the second of which, rather metaphysical in nature, would seem to go far beyond psychology”, or p.9: “a crucial metaphysical problem is transferred to the realm of observation, where it can be gradually resolved, instead of endlessly fueling disputes between schools in the closed field of pure dialectics.”.

<sup>45</sup> For this notion, see Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.71, who speaks of a “superior epistemological power”; and Denat, « De la méthode de la philologie à la philologie *comme* méthode. En quel sens parler d’une méthodologie nietzschéenne? », in: (Dir.) Balaudé and Wotling, « *L’art de bien lire* » *Nietzsche et la philologie*, p.145.

reality. Is it experience? Bergson and Merleau-Ponty (as well as Nietzsche) strive to describe experience, but if experience is just an internal, *a posteriori*, constructed, subjective and erroneous interpretation, then what would be the worth of a faithful description of it? Not much... and if there is the possibility to know, through the use of reason (bypassing experience), reality in-itself, at least in some of its characteristics, then this objective knowledge would be superior and the philological descriptions of experience would amount to nothing. In this way, a knowledge that does not take into account all the aspects of experience, that might add or remove from it, could be a better knowledge, for the criterion of truth would be objective reality itself, and maybe this interpretation is unfaithful to experience but it would be faithful to reality, which should be something valued higher. It is precisely in this way that most philosophers have debased experience as something irrelevant to truth, pertaining to the subjective realm and that cannot be applied to judge on the nature of reality. Thus, Plato turns to the supra-sensible world of Ideas, the empiricists turn to the atoms (or any objective, external cause), Kant turns to the thing in-itself as the unknowable limit of rational knowledge, Descartes and Locke dismiss the secondary qualities (like color) to focus only on the substantial ones, pertaining to extension, and so on... to try to be free from relativity and perspectivism. These non-philological interpretations, rejected by Bergson and Merleau-Ponty on the ground of experience, could be truer than their faithful descriptions of appearances and conscious experience. Or, even more broadly, if these other interpretations claim to also take into account the whole experience, the whole experience that matters, denying any legitimacy to the aspects that Bergson and Merleau-Ponty acknowledged and took into account, claiming that they are not ontological but are a mere subjective fiction that interposes between us and reality, then how to decide which interpretation is more philological or superior epistemologically? In other words, and to continue Nietzsche's philological metaphor: how to agree or decide what the text of reality

is? How does one know what reality consists of? Can we really know its nature with certainty? No, it is impossible to objectively know if our experience is adequate to objective reality or if experience heavily biases our interpretation of it and confines us to a purely human and fictitious realm. This shows the intrinsic limit of philology (but in fact of any philosophy), that can never be sure of its results, for this certainty would require one to leave their experience, subjectivity, historicity, language, culture and situationality in general (in short, to be situated nowhere, which is impossible) to be able to know the in-itself and compare it to experience, seeing if it is adequate or different, or if there is even an “in-itself” in the first place. This is probably one of the strong arguments that led Nietzsche to declare: “there are no facts, only interpretations”<sup>46</sup>. It is impossible to decide in absolute objectivity and to clear all doubts, to decide which interpretation is the “right” one once and for all. Thus, all knowledge (or every philosophical interpretation) finds itself in the same situation as the problem of the existence of God, one cannot prove it nor disprove it, leaving each person to their own faith (or lack of). In fact, the idea of the in-itself and of God are so similar, ontologically and epistemologically speaking (for they both constitute another kind of reality that is opposed to experience and debases it), that the in-itself might very well be one form of the “shadow of God” Nietzsche warned us about: “God is dead: but the human species is such that for millennia to come, there may still be caves at the bottom of which his shadow can be seen. – And we – we have to overcome his shadow too!”<sup>47</sup>. Is the In-itself the atheist and epistemological-ontological (therefore philosophical) version of the hypothesis of the existence of God, repeating its characteristics and attitude to life in a non-

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<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XII Automne 1886 – automne 1887*, 7 [60]. See also *Ibid.*, 2 [86]: “What can knowledge only be? – an « interpretation », not an « explanation ».”

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai Savoir*, III, §108, p.161. See also *Ibid.*, §125, pp.177-178, about the madman who sought God and proclaims his death: “At last he threw his lantern to the ground: it shattered and went out. « I have come too soon, he said, it is not my time yet. This tremendous event is still on its way and traveling, – it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they have been done, to be seen and heard »”. During the time between the death of God and its realization, avatars of this belief, value and relation to the world can appear, taking its place in a subtle and modified way.

strictly religious way? It might very well be the case, and this claim is supported by the fact that philology proposes the same answer for both of these questions. Indeed, the answer, according to philology, leaves the ground of absolute certainty and lies in the principle of economy, also known as Occam's razor: the best hypothesis is the simplest one, containing the least number of principles, and the least metaphysically heavy ones. As Wotling puts it: "Nietzsche justifies the privilege of his hypothesis by recalling the central role of the principle of economy in methodological requirements: the power of a hypothesis is measured by the scope of the problems it enables to be solved, but with equal explanatory power, the most economical hypothesis must be preferred"<sup>48</sup>. Thereby, the possibility of the existence of God or of the In-itself cannot be absolutely discarded, but according to philology they should not be the favored interpretations, for they are not economical. They are indeed metaphysically very heavy or costly, especially when you compare these principles or interpretations to sole experience. In the weighing scale of philology, it appears more economical (and less metaphysically heavy) to just have the world of experience (identified to the whole of reality, as a sensible being in which we are situated and that appears to us, although each given perspective does not exhaust the wealth of its aspects) than to suppose an infinite number of subjective worlds plus a God or an objective reality existing in another sphere, unknown to us, resting in-itself. There is one world and plane of reality in the case of experience, while there are two ontological realms in the hypothesis of the in-itself, an objective one and a subjective one, and on top of that there is an infinite number of worlds in the subjective realm, as many as there are living beings. There needs to be some additional principle added to the interpretation accepting the in-itself too in order to explain and guarantee communication between subjective worlds because their separation and internalization in each individual or consciousness turns intersubjectivity into a mystery. It

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<sup>48</sup> Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.71.

is this reason that forces Leibniz to posit a pre-established harmony orchestrated and guaranteed by God, to ensure communication between monads, but such a theoretical device simply to give an account of intersubjectivity is a very expensive one, it is not economical. If you need to summon God or an absolute reality to found your hypothesis, then the principles on which your hypothesis rests are not economical. Therefore, philology, thanks to the principle of economy, avoids Nietzsche falling into absolute relativism: no interpretation is absolutely true, certain or superior according to its objectivity, but this does not mean that all interpretations are equal for they can be hierarchized according to the number and metaphysical weight of their principles or axioms. This hierarchy admits of degrees, and in the case of theology for example a pantheistic conception is more economical than a classical one, for it does not posit a heaven or an after-life and extra-sensible world, but it is not the most economical hypothesis possible because it injects a divine essence in the world. In the same way, science is more economical (and thus superior epistemologically, according to philology) than pseudo-science or conspiracy theories since these usually suppose many and heavy principles (for example if we never flew to the moon, then there should be actors, fake videos and images, as well as a broad-scale bribery and manipulation to not let the information slip and become public, which is far from being economical), where science just supposes the world, considered objectively or in-itself, which is much more economical, but still not the most economical hypothesis possible. Thereby, it is precisely because Bergson, Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty are aware of the metaphysical, ontological and epistemological heaviness and cost of the hypotheses of God and of the In-itself that they undertake the philological attempt (*Versuch*) to produce a philosophy that does not rely on these concepts and ontologies: they strictly restrict themselves to experience alone, as their sole ontological and epistemological ground. It is only the economical nature of their perspectives that can allow us to deem them epistemologically, or, rather, philologically

superior. It is impossible to prove that their philosophies are objectively true; however, if they manage not to lose any aspects of experience while rejecting the in-itself, if we obtain the same world, with the same qualities and phenomena and without having to add the in-itself, then what is the point of keeping this heavy and costly principle? If the in-itself turns out to be inconsequential and optional, it might be an indicator (or at least it opens the possibility) that it is not an objective truth but that it is simply a human fiction and a cultural, historical prejudice, an abstract idea that we oppose to experience, while the latter might be our only contact with Being, with the facticity of the world. As Nietzsche underlines, this idea of the in-itself or of “the « real world » – is an idea that no longer serves any purpose, no longer even has any obligation, – an idea that has become useless, superfluous, therefore a refuted idea [according to philology and the principle of economy]: let us do away with it!”<sup>49</sup>. Nonetheless, it is not so easy to get rid of a cultural prejudice that has shaped philosophy and even our grammar for so many centuries. Its long-lasting influence proves challenging to escape and requires a constant process and struggle. It might always come back in unexpected ways and under new forms (as a shadow of God or as a shadow of objective truth and reality). Merleau-Ponty acknowledged the difficulty:

All that we can know, through practice and science, about the “causes” of perception and the action they exert on us will be deemed unknown. This precept is harder to follow than one might think: the temptation is almost irresistible to construct perception from perception, our contact with the world from what it has taught us about the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.205.

The conclusion he drew from this challenge is to never consider philosophy (or philology) as finished or done once and for all, it must constantly renew its attempt to be faithful to the

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<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *Crépuscule des Idoles*, Comment le « vrai monde » finit par tourner à la fable. Histoire d'une erreur, p.144.

world and exert extreme caution about the notions it is using, checking and re-evaluating many times their relevance and probity. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, this means that:

philosophy itself must not take itself as established in the truths it has managed to utter, that philosophy is an ever-renewed experiment of its own beginning, that it consists entirely in describing this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection is conscious of its own dependence on an unreflected life that is its initial, constant and final situation. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xxviii.

This constantly looming threat of the In-itself (and of its potential return) is the reason why Merleau-Ponty explicitly tried to find a method to neutralize this prejudice and did so through the phenomenological concept of the epochè, which consists in the suspension of the idea and ontology of the in-itself, reducing reality to the experience we have of it. The philosopher that undertakes the reduction “seeks to define a method of approach that gives us the present and living being [l’être présent et vivant]”<sup>50</sup>; “it is the attempt to provide a direct description of our experience such as it is, and without any consideration of its psychological genesis or of the causal explanations that the scientist, historian or sociologist might offer of that experience”<sup>51</sup>. To achieve this goal, the epochè (or suspension) first neutralizes any metaphysical, ontological or epistemological thesis we have about the world and experience, in order to make the phenomena appear as such, without assuming anything about their modality of existence or relation to reality. The first step, in the phenomenological context, is to retrieve the phenomena as such, only in a second time does the reduction of reality to phenomena occur, in an attempt to be as economical as possible, after realizing we still have the whole of experience in phenomena. Thus, it is the philological method and the

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<sup>50</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.57.

<sup>51</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xx.

principle of economy that justify the reduction (while, from a purely phenomenological perspective, the reduction is unmotivated, arbitrary, or can only provide arguments for itself retrospectively, after it has already been undertaken. So, Nietzsche's philological method can help solve an aporia of phenomenology). In the paragraph he dedicates to the notion of reduction in the Preface of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty first thematizes the suspensive aspect or phase of the reduction:

Because we are through and through related to the world, the only way for us to catch sight of ourselves is by suspending this movement, by refusing to be complicit with it [...], or again, to put it out of play. [...] Precisely as the presuppositions of every thought, they are "taken for granted" and they pass by unnoticed, and because we must abstain from them for a moment in order to awaken them and to make them appear. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xxvii.

It is possible to find very similar statements in Bergson's texts, although he never used any explicit phenomenological terms, which once again underlines his sharing of a philological method with Merleau-Ponty, that is more decisive than the difference of philosophical context or terminology. This is not only my interpretation for the comparison has also been made by Camille Riquier, an eminent specialist of Bergson, who dedicated a whole article to the question of whether or not there is a reduction in Bergson's *Matière et mémoire*<sup>52</sup>. He concluded there is a double reduction in Bergson, which leads him closer to Merleau-Ponty than to Husserl, as I will show shortly. Thereby, in a fashion that closely resembles the concept of reduction, Bergson wrote: "We place ourselves from the point of view of a mind that would ignore discussions between philosophers. [...] In a word, we consider matter before the dissociation that idealism and realism have made between its existence and its

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<sup>52</sup> Riquier, « Y a-t-il une réduction phénoménologique dans *Matière et mémoire*? », in Worms, *Annales bergsoniennes II*.

appearance”<sup>53</sup>. However, contrary to what the title of Riquier’s article suggests, Bergson did not adopt such formulas only in *Matter and Memory*, but throughout the whole course of his works. Indeed, here is an example from his first book: “It is up to each of us to examine this point scrupulously, wiping the slate clean of everything our past experience has taught us about the cause of our sensation, and coming face to face with the sensation itself”<sup>54</sup>. Now I will present examples from his book *Duration and Simultaneity*, that he wrote almost two decades after *Creative Evolution*: “In the present work, we take consciousness as experience gives it to us, without making any assumptions about its nature or origins”<sup>55</sup>; “it is possible that the concept is mistaken, and it is certainly true that it is a pure construct of the mind. Let us stick to experience”<sup>56</sup>, and:

Do not take me for a metaphysician, if that is what you call the man of dialectical constructs. I have not constructed anything, I have simply observed. I am giving you what is available to my senses and my consciousness: the immediately given must be considered real until we have convinced it to be a mere appearance; it is up to you, then, if you see this as an illusion, to provide the proof. But you only suspect it is an illusion because you are making a metaphysical construction yourself. Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité*, p.162.

Hence, for Bergson, we should build philosophy on the given, and on the given alone. A similar process of reduction is at stake in Nietzsche’s famous §36 of *Beyond Good and Evil*, the one where he attempts to justify his hypothesis of the Will to Power as the principle to understand the whole of experience:

Assuming that nothing else is “given” as real than our world of desires and passions, that we cannot descend or ascend to any other “reality” than that of our impulses [...]: is it not licit to make the following attempt and ask the following question: isn’t this given also sufficient to

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<sup>53</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, p.35.

<sup>55</sup> Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité*, p.58.

<sup>56</sup> Bergson, *Ibid.*, p.63.

understand, from its similarity, the world we call mechanical (or “material”)? Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §36, p.87.

And a few sentences later, in the same paragraph, he adds:

In the end, it is not only licit to make this attempt: it is ordered by the conscience of method. To not assume several kinds of causality until the attempt to settle for just one has been pushed to its ultimate limit (– to the point of absurdity, if I may say so). Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §36, pp.87–88.

Therefore, it is once again the principle of economy that is at work when these authors undertake a reduction, on top of justifying it.

Nonetheless, let us immediately evacuate a misconception, for the term of reduction can be misleading. Indeed, the term could be understood as removing some parts of reality, and to lead only to subjective perceptions of it. This has been reproached to Merleau-Ponty by Bréhier, who argued against him:

Philosophy was born out of the difficulties of vulgar perception; it was from vulgar perception, and by distancing ourselves from it, that we first philosophized. The first philosopher, Plato, our ancestor, philosophized in this way. Far from wishing to return to immediate, lived perception, he started from the inadequacies of this lived perception to arrive at a coherent, reason-satisfying conception of the intelligible world, which presupposed a faculty of knowledge other than perception itself. You, on the other hand, take this Platonic idealism and follow precisely the opposite path [vous suivez le chemin précisément inverse]: you try to reintegrate it into perception. Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.62.

Thereby, Bréhier considers that Merleau-Ponty operates a reversal or inversion of Plato's idealism and whole approach to philosophy, and he criticizes him for it. This theme of an inverted platonism has often been used to describe Nietzsche's philosophy too<sup>57</sup>, as well as for Bergson's (although he himself would rather target Plotinus and invert his philosophy, but as a tenant of Plato, who radicalized his idealism). And most of the objections against this inversion come from the assumption that perception (or the appearances in Nietzsche's terminology) are flawed, faulty, false and biasing the truth. As a result, they could not be trusted nor used as an ontological and epistemological basis. Hence, Bréhier claims that lived perception or experience is inadequate. But on what basis? Who can decide that experience is inadequate, and according to what criterion? Nietzsche identified as thus the evaluation and judgment at play in those who object to a philological reduction:

They all believe, to the point of despair, in being [l'étant]. But unable to grasp it, they look for reasons why it is hidden from them. "There must be an illusion, a deception in the fact that we do not perceive the being: where is the deceiver?" – "We have it, they cry, in the angels, it is sensibility! These senses, which on top of everything else are so immoral, they deceive us about the real world. Morality: get rid of the deception of the senses, of becoming, of history, of lies – history is nothing but belief in the senses, belief in lies. Morality: say no to everything that puts faith in the senses." Nietzsche, *Le crépuscule des idoles*, La raison en philosophie, §1, pp.137–138.

Isn't the expectation to obtain an apodictic, unambiguous knowledge of an absolute, objective being a demand not coming from faithfulness and probity but from human culture and historical context? A philological approach, on the other hand, will not impose a form or a required nature to knowledge (*i.e.* assuming how knowledge should be) and to the

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<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche himself considered in *Par-delà Bien et Mal*, Préface, p.44 that "to speak of the spirit and the good, as Plato did, was to turn the truth on its head [renverser la vérité] and deny perspective, the fundamental condition of all life". As a result, a consistent and philological philosophy should revert Plato's non-philological inversion in order to retrieve experience, truth and reality.

testimony of experience, but it will take them as they come, to respect them in all fairness. Bréhier's objection assumes that there is an objective, fully external (to consciousness) "world in-itself"; however, this is already an ontological thesis, and not an economical one. By contrast, the assumption of a reductionist approach is precisely to suppose that there is no such thing, or rather it is to not suppose such an objective world that we do not experience and let perception inform us about Being. Only this ontological thesis of an objective world in-itself can debase and discard perception and deem it as inadequate. If this ontological thesis is suspended, then the inadequacy and rejection of perception are rejected too, they become groundless. The philological reduction occurs after science has taught us that our language, concept and ideas all belong to historical, social and cultural backgrounds. In other words, they pertain to a specific perspective on the world too, and they can never be considered universal (which is why a philological reduction can occur only after science and after philosophy has tried to escape from experience). In this way, the world of Ideas Plato wanted to lead us to (or any reconstruction of the world based on the in-itself for the subsequent thinkers) is not epistemologically truer or superior to experience (which was debased precisely for its inherence to a context and history) – and there is therefore no reason anymore to dismiss experience nor to oppose to it another ontological or epistemological sphere – for any knowledge, concept or thought also pertains to a historical and cultural context and thus to a perspective (which is the realm of experience, that now encompasses all knowledge). Thereby, with the philological attempt of reduction, the criterion of objective truth becomes suspended, as it implies the conception of the in-itself which is not economical and denies the situationality of all knowledge. Thus, there remains no standard of knowledge to compare to experience and debase it. Hence, acknowledging perspectivism leads to a reevaluation of experience and perception. Indeed, for the "appearances" do not hide the context and situationality, but, on the contrary, exhibit it and allow us to thematize it,

Merleau-Ponty can state that “there is a truth to appearance as appearance”<sup>58</sup>. In fact, it has more truth than any attempt that denies situationality. The “senses do not lie at all”<sup>59</sup>, they present experience as a knowledge in situation, and the lie starts when we add the interpretation of the in-itself that denies or ignores it. As Nietzsche wrote, “what we do with their testimony is what begins to introduce falsehood [...]. « Reason » is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses. [...] The « apparent » world is the only one: the « real world » is only added by lies...”<sup>60</sup>. Therefore, giving up on the in-itself or on the “true, objective world” does not mean that we are reduced to a purely subjective and illusory sphere<sup>61</sup>: the appearances or phenomena according to which we understand the world are not an inferior kind of knowledge, for this would still presuppose the shadow of the in-itself as the standard (even if considered unreachable) that debases the appearances. As Nietzsche wrote: “we have done away with the real world: what world is left? the apparent one, perhaps?... But no! along with the real world, we also did away with the apparent world!”<sup>62</sup>. After the philological reduction we are not left simply with “appearances” in the sense of a lie or illusory, subjective mistake, but we regain access to the phenomena, as a truth in situation, a knowledge that is adequate to experience for it acknowledges its own situationality. Thereby, a thorough and radical rejection of the in-itself leads to overcoming the dichotomy between objective truth and appearance, the phenomena become the only reality we are dealing with, the only sense that is left to the word reality, and it is not a pejorative or inferior kind of being and knowledge. This is because what the reduction removes is just a prior reduction that has been performed by philosophy and by our culture

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<sup>58</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, p.83.

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, *Le crépuscule des Idoles*, La raison en philosophie, §2, p.138.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.138.

<sup>61</sup> Merleau-Ponty was fully aware of it, understanding his own philosophical undertaking as being in continuity with Bergson's one: “By finding phenomena and measuring our conception of being against them [en mesurant sur eux notre conception de l'être], we are in no way sacrificing objectivity to inner life, as Bergson has been criticized for doing”, *Le primat de la perception*, p.54.

<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche, *Crépuscule des Idoles*, Comment le « vrai monde » finit par tourner à la fable. Histoire d'une erreur, p.144.

in general, removing perception and experience from the picture of the world, trying to give a pure, unambiguous view of it. Indeed, lots of cultural sedimentation has covered the text of experience and has caused it to be forgotten, substituting historical and human interpretations for the text itself, taking them for the text and injecting in it a dogmatic ontological thesis and an arbitrary epistemological demand. The usual, implicit reduction operated by modern culture (starting from Plato and inheriting this attitude from him) dismisses and conceals experience. This anti-philological reduction opposes its own interpretation as the “true text” or “objective reality”, which is why we need a second reduction that neutralizes the first one, suspends this interpretation they opposed to the text of experience in order to free the phenomena and be able to see them once again. Wotling makes judicious use of the metaphor of the palimpsest so as to thematize this situation:

The original text (in this case, natural phenomena) is present from the outset; it is not immediately denied as such, but is quickly suffocated by interpretation, which is granted a privileged status, against all the rules of reading-translation. This violation of philology is thus conceived along the lines of a palimpsest, with a second text superimposed on the original until it becomes illegible and finally disappears, except that the second text is intended here as an explanation to clarify the first. Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.49<sup>63</sup>.

In this way, the philological reduction actually opens the perspective much more than it closes it or removes anything (for that would be non-philological): in fact, it removes only cultural and arbitrary restrictions, the ones of scientism, idealism or realism that reduce reality to individuals, objectified and cut off from their contexts, denying the whole perceptual and broader situation and interrelations (reconstituting them only afterwards, in an artificial, momentary and always fragile way). The goal of a philological reduction is thus

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<sup>63</sup> The idea of the palimpsest, as an interpretation that replaces the text, can also be found in Nietzsche’s texts, for instance in Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes*, XIV, 15 [82], p.214: “Lack of philology: the explanation is always confused with the text – and what an ‘explanation’!”

to counter this first philosophical (but non-philological) reduction that led from experience to a world of ideas and individuals (as essences, objects, atoms, or any such ontological concept that isolates beings from the context of their appearance, from their becoming and from our relation to them). Therefore, the philological reduction that our authors undertake is not a reduction from any aspect of reality, but, on the contrary, a liberation of all the aspects of experience, by undoing the first reduction that buried perception, replaced it and obstructed its vision. What makes philology possible is that the original text of reality as experience can never be destroyed by the non-philological reduction, it can be covered, hidden and forgotten, but an acute attention and philological effort can thematize this forgotten text and make it emerge, below the too human restrictive interpretations, making them crack or implode as reality and the situational nature of any knowledge are reluctant to fixation and objectification, always overflowing them in some way. As Wotling explained, “the elimination of interpretations that screen the reading thus makes it possible to restore, for example, the original text of bad conscience, which is nothing other than the internalization of instincts, [...] the text of the intellect, entirely legible in terms of drives”<sup>64</sup>. This sentence allows us to understand the reduction as an operation of restoration, to retrieve and come back to the given as the only reality, as the originary text we all aim to interpret. To make this forgotten Being visible and seen once again, so as to be able to base a philological philosophy on it, that is the whole task of philology, and it is in this way that we should understand Merleau-Ponty’s definition of philosophy: “true philosophy entails learning to see the world anew [rapprendre à voir le monde]”<sup>65</sup>. This conceptualization of the task of philosophy as a philological one has been constant in Merleau-Ponty. Thus, he thematized in a very similar fashion in the notes for his last courses in the Collège de France the task of philosophy as “the invitation to see again [re-voir] the visible, to speak again [re-

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<sup>64</sup> Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.51.

<sup>65</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xxxv.

parler] the speaking [parole], to re-think the thinking”<sup>66</sup>. This is not Nietzsche’s whole definition or task for philosophy, as we will see, but it is one of them.

We must be mindful, however, not to take the metaphor of the “text” too literally and to know when it is not suitable anymore, so as to not misinterpret the result of the philological reduction. Indeed, the opposition between the text and interpretations is only valid before the philological reduction, against those who grant an absolute status to an interpretation that has been detached from the text and clashes with it. What we obtain with the philological reduction is not simply a more faithful interpretation that would still be opposed or detached from the text, but it is a perspective that occurs “within” the text so to speak, in a context where this strict ontological and epistemological opposition between text and perspective does not hold anymore. As Nietzsche wrote: “the world of appearances and the world invented by lies: this is the antithesis. Until now, the latter has been called the « true world», « truth », « God ». This is the one we must abolish”<sup>67</sup>. Thus, once the objectivist interpretation that replaces the text has been eliminated, we are only dealing with phenomena, the “world of appearances” as the only one that exists. To argue the contrary would lead back to positing a world in-itself once again, which is what philology strives to avoid. Our perspective does not exhaust the whole of the “text”, but it still presents the text in person (in the flesh would say Merleau-Ponty), from within, and the text does not exist or subsist elsewhere than in all the perspectives. The transcendence of the text is immanent to experience, known precisely through the partial and situated nature of perspective, presenting an unrepresentable [imprésentable] (in objective, “clear and certain” or perfectly

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<sup>66</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours 1959-1961*, p.375.

<sup>67</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes XIV*, 14 [134], p.106.

“adequate” terms) through the experience of depth and of the horizon for instance, that inform us from (and about) our situation, affirming that we are in a world that always exceeds our present perspective and cannot ever be wholly grasped in a single view. That is why Merleau-Ponty talks of an intra-ontology, a knowledge and relation of (and to) the world that occurs from within it. Indeed, in this fashion he wrote: “what replaces causal thinking is the idea of transcendence, *i.e.* of a world seen in the inherence to this world, thanks to it, of an Intra ontology, an encompassing Being, a vertical Being, dimensional, dimensionality”<sup>68</sup>. Therefore, in this philological framework, the partial and situated character of perspective is not an argument against it anymore, but, on the contrary, it becomes the only guarantee that we are dealing with a transcendence and a facticity that are not the result of subjective and individual cognitive processes. It is important not to hypostasize and reify our prejudices. We should try to reduce them by crisscrossing the perspectives. Nonetheless, it seems possible (or at least not *a priori* excluded, so the attempt is allowed) to hold an ontology and epistemology of experience that takes perspectivism into account and that sees it as the contact and immanent relation to a transcendence that encompasses us, rather than to understand it as a contingent limit of our finiteness that functions as a fully opaque screen and cuts us off absolutely from reality itself, imprisoning us in a fully subjective jail with no window (*i.e.* solipsism). We will see how in the second part of this thesis. For now, let us observe that once perspective does not relegate experience to a subjective sphere anymore, a philological account of experience is then left with only one sphere of reality. In other words, it leads to ontological monism, which is the most economical ontological option. This is how Riquier understands the consequence of

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<sup>68</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.276. See also *Ibid.*, p.286: “For an ontology of [or from?] within [pour une ontologie du dedans], there is no need to construct transcendence; it is first of all [elle est d’abord], as Being doubled with nothingness [comme Être doublé de néant], and what needs to be explained is its doubling”.

the rigor of maintaining the epochè: sticking to the sole terrain of facts, which is the very plane of images. This is perhaps the real result of Bergson's reduction, not of the image but of what it enables us to constitute: to embrace the world with an equalizing gaze that puts everything on the same plane. The plane of immanence is traversed without anything stopping its course, passing from the nervous system, the organism, the atmosphere, to the earth and the sun without a break, from the amoeba to the universe without a clash that would call for a transition. Riquier, « Y a-t-il une réduction phénoménologique dans Matière et mémoire? », in *Worms, Annales bergsoniennes II*, p.274.

A philological ontology can admit of regions, layers or dimensions, but not of holes nor of radical disjunctions: “nothingness (or rather non-being) is hollow, not hole”<sup>69</sup>. It is exactly the opposite of dualism, that posits only flat, homogeneous ontological planes, without asperities within them, but for which each difference becomes a substantial one, with no possible communication between them, for they do not share a same ontological ground or root, nor are they part of the same whole. In this sense, the reduction is economical because it recognizes only one plane of reality instead of two (or more). In his most philological aphorisms, Nietzsche acknowledges the same thing, trying to understand the whole of reality according to the drives and instincts as we have seen in the quote of his §36 from *Beyond Good and Evil*<sup>70</sup>. Thereby, in Nietzsche, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, the reduction allows them to come back to the given and to interpret the whole of experience according to it, as an economical and unique principle and sphere of existence. The world becomes one, once again, without the dichotomy between in-itself and for-itself.

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<sup>69</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.246. Sometimes Merleau-Ponty also refers to the notion of “fold” to understand a negativity within Being that does not tear it into different substances or separate ontological realms

<sup>70</sup> See also Denat and Wotling, *Dictionnaire Nietzsche*, p.297: “The hypothesis of the will to power thus defends the idea of the total homogeneity of reality, rejecting ontological doctrines that introduce divisions corresponding to differences in the nature of beings, as well as the scientific division of the organic and the inorganic”.

Nevertheless, now that the process of the reduction has been clarified and established in the three authors, a crucial question remains: what is the status and nature of this experience we come back to? How to understand experience? What is the given? Bergson claimed that: “for the moment, we will confine ourselves to drawing a dividing line between what is a hypothesis, a metaphysical construct, and what is the pure and simple fact of experience, because we want to confine ourselves to experience”<sup>71</sup>. The philological approach is clearly visible here; however, how does one draw this line? How do we know when the philological reduction is complete, if it went too far (if such a thing is possible) or not far enough, if it missed the given and reinstated – because of implicit prejudices – another interpretation instead of the text of phenomena (thus performing once again a non-philological reduction that removes from the phenomena and conceals them)? I think that philological reduction can never be too radical for its goal is to come back to a single plane of experience and it only fails to do so when it reinjects a dichotomy that denies parts of the aspects of experience. The reduction must be balanced, it must remain faithful to experience and not remove too much: it is in fact the whole difficulty, to remove only what has been added by human culture, history and prejudice. If a philosopher removes parts of experience from their ontology, they do so because of prejudices (assuming that these parts of experience are not ontological) and for this reason they lack radicality (in fighting their own prejudices). Maintaining a prejudice and absolutizing or reifying only part of experience leads to an incomplete experience (as well as an incomplete reduction) and to a wrong ontology that dismisses some parts, aspects or dimensions of reality, opposing a part to the whole (thus granting too much importance to the part it recognizes). Thereby, the question is to know if we have been radical enough, or if the reduction is not completely achieved

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<sup>71</sup> Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité*, p.62.

and still holds some prejudices that it now posits as the whole of experience and reality, opposing it to some parts of experience that are deemed irrelevant, as subjective or cultural mistakes and illusions. Therefore, it seems, at least to me, that the lack of radicality in philology is shown when an author reinstates a distinction between several spheres of reality or types of beings. Let us examine if my approach allows to elucidate the case of Husserl's reduction, on which our authors can agree, before tackling the cases of Bergson and Nietzsche.

According to the traditional reception of Husserl, reduction leads to the transcendental ego, to a pre-personal consciousness (universal, different from the empirical ego) that creates the world as one of its ideas and that projects it outwards, but the world remains an idea, a *cogitatio* that belongs to the subject and is internal to it. Nonetheless, Nietzsche would eagerly criticize this privilege granted to consciousness, and Bergson's and Merleau-Ponty's philology prevent them from realizing the reduction in such an idealist manner, they perform their reduction beyond the dichotomy between idealism and realism. Thus, according to Riquier, Bergson's reduction does not reduce experience to consciousness, nor does it understand the world only as an ideality produced by the transcendental ego. On the contrary, it leads to understand consciousness in the plane of experience, with a facticity and exteriority that cannot be reduced to the subject or to an ideality, and we discover a subject in and to the world, dealing with a world "already there", that it has not constituted. However, this must not be understood in the realist sense, namely, that only objective bodies exist and that consciousness is an after product. Much rather, there is a single reality of the plane of appearances, overcoming (or pre-existing to) the dichotomy subject-object. It is what Riquier aims when he writes:

If Bergsonian metaphysics is intended to be phenomenological, it is so in the sense that consciousness can access being – “we are it” – but not in the sense that it measures it. It is not a matter of bringing the phenomenon back to the way it appears to consciousness, but rather of bringing consciousness back to the way the phenomenon itself appears, *i.e.*, the durative background from which it comes, the temporal rhythm in which it participates. Riquier, « Y a-t-il une réduction phénoménologique dans Matière et mémoire? », in Worms, *Annales bergsoniennes II*, p.282.

Merleau-Ponty could subscribe to this take, except that for him the background to which consciousness must be brought back would be the whole perceptive one, as the sensible ground, in its thickness, voluminosity and dimensionality. In his view, “human consciousness never possesses itself without rest [sans reste]”<sup>72</sup>, so it cannot be the whole of reality and reduction cannot lead or result in consciousness alone. The philological reduction finds consciousness always already situated in the world and dealing with an “already there” that it did not constitute. The subject itself is not a pure ideality, but it is a body with a sensible reality too, thus belonging to the phenomenal world much rather than it constitutes it. The philological epochè reduces the objective reality of the world, its “in-itself” nature or modality of being, but that does not mean that the subject subsists in the form of another in-itself; it becomes phenomenal too and its ties to the world are not written off nor neutralized by the reduction. In this way, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

Phenomenology is also a philosophy that places essences back within existence and thinks that the only way to understand man and the world is by beginning from their “facticity”. Although it is a transcendental philosophy that suspends the affirmations of the natural attitude in order to understand them [reduction], it is also a philosophy for which the world is always “already there” prior to reflection – like an inalienable presence – and whose entire effort is to rediscover this

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<sup>72</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.87.

naïve contact with the world in order to finally raise it to a philosophical status. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xx.

Nevertheless, because Merleau-Ponty owes a lot to Husserl and was still under the influence of some of his subjectivist prejudices while he wrote the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he always tried to interpret Husserl's writings under the best light possible, in a way to be compatible with his own philological approach. This is the reason why we can find some rather strange or paradoxical quotes from Merleau-Ponty where he plays a radical Husserl against a Kant incarnating the example of a bad reduction, still using the results of an assumption about the world that led him to maintain and apply the causalist scheme of the in-itself:

Reflection does not withdraw from the world toward the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world; rather, it steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical. Husserl's transcendental is not Kant's, and Husserl criticizes Kantian philosophy for being a "worldly" philosophy because it makes use of our relation to the world, which is the engine of the Transcendental Deduction, and makes the world immanent to the subject, rather than standing in wonder before the world and conceiving the subject as a transcendence toward the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xxvii.

The interesting part here is that the criticism of "the unity of consciousness as the foundation of the world" can in fact be applied to Husserl (except in a few of his writings when he thematizes the *Lebenswelt*). Nonetheless, motivated by his philological drive to overcome his own prejudices, Merleau-Ponty came to realize that Beaufret was right when he suggested a potential necessity to overcome the pure phenomenological framework with his question in *The Primacy of Perception*: "the whole problem is precisely to know whether

phenomenology taken to its logical conclusion does not require us to leave subjectivity and the vocabulary of subjective idealism behind, as Heidegger did, starting with Husserl [partant de Husserl]”<sup>73</sup>. Merleau-Ponty overcame Husserl and his subjectivism (*i.e.* assuming the world is constituted) not in Heidegger’s way but with his dimensional ontology of the flesh and his epistemology of the figure against a background. I will not delve any longer into the comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger for it would surpass the scope and intentions of my thesis, as it deserves a whole dedicated study. What matters for my present topic is that Merleau-Ponty became aware of the flaws of Husserl’s reduction and criticized it as thus in his later works (in this case, in a posthumous work note of the *Visible and invisible*, hence the lacunary aspect of the sentences):

Wrongly presented – particularly in the Cartesian Meditations – as suspension of the existence of the world –If it is that, it falls back into the Cartesian default of a hypothesis of the *Nichtigkeit* of the world, which immediately results in the maintenance of the *mens sive anima* (piece of the world) as indubitable. Any negation of the world, but also any neutrality with regard to the existence of the world, has the immediate consequence of missing the transcendental. Epochè only has the right to neutralize the world as effective in itself, as pure exteriority: it must allow the phenomenon of this effective in itself, of this exteriority, to subsist. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.223.

What Merleau-Ponty means in this paragraph is that the facticity of the world is only neutralized by the reduction as a facticity in-itself, completely foreign to us (which is what the concept of the in-itself entails), but that does not mean consciousness become fully transparent to itself. This facticity, exteriority and opacity of the world remains after the reduction, as a phenomenon (which becomes the only plane of reality after the neutralization of the in-itself, in which the consciousness exists with and within this facticity and exteriority

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<sup>73</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le primat de la perception*, p.90.

it did not create and that it does not control nor know perfectly). Which is why Merleau-Ponty affirmed, still in the *Visible and invisible*, that “a sufficient reduction leads beyond the supposed transcendental « immanence »”<sup>74</sup>. Merleau-Ponty was already aware of the requirements of a proper reduction in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Indeed, despite not directing this criticism explicitly towards Husserl, he wrote:

The true Cogito does not define the existence of the subject through the thought that the subject has of existing, does not convert the certainty of the world into a certainty of the thought about the world, and finally, does not replace the world itself with the signification “world”. Rather, it recognizes my thought as an inalienable fact and it eliminates all forms of idealism by revealing me as “being in the world”. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.xxvii.

Therefore, the three authors that I am studying in this thesis have criticized Husserl’s reduction, which is why (besides the fact they do not all belong to the phenomenological tradition) I prefer using the term “philological reduction” to refer to their reduction, so as to highlight the fact they distanced themselves from Husserl’s one and contested the usual understanding of its results.

However, even if these authors can agree that Husserl’s reduction is not radical enough and must be overcome, that does not mean they agree between themselves or that they are beyond all criticism. For instance, Bergson maintained the conception of an immortal soul that can survive the death of the body. Thus, he posited a substantial spirit while keeping an objective conception of the body, as a mere object or matter made of parts of the *res extensa*, which limits our subjectivity and stands as an obstacle to the spirit. In this

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<sup>74</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.224.

fashion, he wrote that “the only reason to believe in the extinction of consciousness after death is that we see the body become disorganized, and this reason no longer has any value if the independence of almost all consciousness from the body is also a fact”<sup>75</sup>, and that, as a result, “the preservation and even intensification of the personality are therefore possible and even probable after the disintegration of the body”<sup>76</sup>. Besides, Bergson even held four conferences on the topic of the immortality of the soul<sup>77</sup>. Both Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche would oppose to Bergson that the soul is not independent from the body and that the subject, if we acknowledge one, is in fact the body-soul, the perceiving body, or “concepts such as « mortal soul », « soul-multiplicity of the subject », and « soul-social structure of drives and affects »”<sup>78</sup> that compose our body in a psychophysiological way. The body and the soul, regardless of how we conceive them, are tightly tied to one another, or are even the one and same thing (not in-itself but understood in a phenomenal way). Moreover, Bergson also distinguished more generally between space and time, making them belong to two different, opposite epistemologies and even, in his later writings, ontologies. Indeed, he conceived of matter (except in a few excerpts where he, very rarely and as a limit-case, admits of a “continuous and indivisible material extension [l’*étendue matérielle*]”<sup>79</sup>) and space only in an objective way, as the schema of divisibility (*i.e.* the *partes extra partes*) and as an obstacle to grasping the spirit and duration, distorting their original experience by spatializing them. Thus, he wrote:

What needs to be said is that we know two realities of a different order, one heterogeneous, that of sensible qualities, the other homogeneous, that of space. [...] We might therefore ask whether time, conceived in the form of a homogeneous medium, is not a bastard concept, due to the

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<sup>75</sup> Bergson, « L’âme et le corps », in *L’énergie spirituelle*, p.59.

<sup>76</sup> Bergson, « La conscience et la vie », in *L’énergie spirituelle*, p.27.

<sup>77</sup> They can be found in Bergson, « Quatre conférences sur “l’immortalité de l’âme” », in *Mélanges*, pp.944-959.

<sup>78</sup> Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §12, p.60.

<sup>79</sup> Worms, « Les Trois dimensions de la question de l’espace chez Bergson », in: *L’espace lui-même*, Epokhè n°4, p.101. See also Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.220.

intrusion of the idea of space into the realm of pure consciousness... Bergson, *Essai sur les données de la conscience immédiate*, p.73.

Bergson often claimed that spatialization (namely, the method of science and of the faculty he calls intelligence, shaping experience in a convenient way for the needs of action and of our daily life) is inadequate for understanding the spirit but adequate for understanding matter. In this way, he maintained a kind of ontological or at least epistemological dualism that does not fit a philological approach (whose goal is to obtain an ontological monism, acknowledging only one type of experience until it is absolutely necessary to admit two ontologies or “substances”). Some might claim that Bergson maintains one experience and that it is the same Being that is understood or travelled across two different directions, but if two radically opposite epistemologies (of the continuous and of the divided) can be each applied rightfully (but not simultaneously, rather in a mutually exclusive way) to different parts of reality, then isn't there a scission in experience? Is this dualist approach and epistemology, even if it was about a single Being, founded, justified and faithful, or is it emerging only due to a prejudice of Bergson? Merleau-Ponty will help us answer this question. In any case, Bergson himself clearly stated his dualism in the foreword he added to *Matter and Memory* several years after the initial publication, to clarify his intention: “this book affirms the reality of mind, the reality of matter, and attempts to determine the relationship of one to the other on a specific example, that of memory. It is therefore clearly dualistic”<sup>80</sup>. Bergson was prompted to add this clarification because his first writings were rather pointing towards a monism, with the objectivity and divisibility of space being a subjective, human schema that we apply on experience, and that coming back to a pure experience, in duration, was possible through an intuition that was conceived as a coincidence with this pre-objective being beyond or prior to the application of the schema

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<sup>80</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.1.

of objectivity. It is in this first period of his writings that Bergson conceived science, focusing on the quantitative, not as a faithful but as a pragmatic knowledge, missing the duration conceived as the only reality. However, when Bergson wrote his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he went back on his monism and claimed that reality was dualist, that matter tends to divide itself and to become a pure homogeneity (which is how Bergson understands entropy, as matter's tendency and its ideal state, that life, as the opposite tendency, tries to fight back by bringing some organization and continuity, but whose effort will always ultimately be undermined by the tendency of matter to break up and disintegrate). In our experience, we are always already confronted to a "mix" or blend, and neither to pure homogeneity and juxtaposition nor to pure indivision. Nevertheless, instead of thematizing this mix (as the sensible being, given in the structure figure-against-a-background), Bergson posits – as the primary and originary reality – two opposite principles that intertwine in life (only in a second time). The spirit must go through matter in order to incarnate (to have life), but Bergson conceived the two as initially (or *de jure*) separated and constituting two different kind of beings and two principles, having two different modalities of being: the matter tending to extend and divide (to a pure juxtaposition) and the life and spirit tending to a pure unity and continuity. Thereby, Worms underlined that, from a theoretical schema guiding our action in the *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* and in *Matter and Memory*, space changes status in the *Creative Evolution* and is "no longer a pure instrumental schema, it is the ideal term of a real movement"<sup>81</sup>. Therefore, as reality contains both continuity (in the spirit) and a real division (in space and matter) according to Bergson, both philosophy and science hold a part of this dualistic reality, with science being the most accurate for dealing with inert matter but becoming less and less accurate as it tries to apply

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<sup>81</sup> Worms, *Op. cit.*, p.112.

its method to organized bodies (life) or to duration and the spirit (psychology)<sup>82</sup>. In this fashion, Bergson wrote, on science, that:

Its primitive domain, which has remained its favorite, is that of inert matter. It is less at ease in the organized world, where it can only make confident progress if it relies on physics and chemistry; it focuses on the physical-chemical aspects of vital phenomena rather than on the vital aspects of living things. But its embarrassment is great when it comes to the mind. Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.34.

The quotes from Bergson are numerous to affirm that science and intelligence (namely, objective thinking, dealing with objects and quantitative, measurable entities) have an ontological reach:

If intelligence is made to use matter, then it is undoubtedly on the structure of matter that the structure of intelligence is modelled. [...] It is impossible to consider the mechanism of our intelligence, and also the progress of our science, without arriving at the conclusion that between intelligence and matter there is indeed symmetry, concordance, correspondence. Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.35.

Or :

When we bring intelligence back to its precise contours, and when we deepen our sensitive impressions enough for matter to begin to give us the interior of its structure, we find that the articulations of intelligence are applied exactly to those of matter. We therefore see no reason why the science of matter should not reach an absolute. Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.36.

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<sup>82</sup> See for instance Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.40: “Metaphysics, which we place alongside science, is very different. Acknowledging that science has the power to delve into matter by the sheer force of intelligence, it reserves the mind for itself [for metaphysics]”.

Thus, Bergson shifted from an epistemological difference (allowing an ontological monism in his framework) between science and philosophy (as well as between duration and matter) to an ontological one; they both reach the absolute, but of a different region of reality, implying a dualism: “the relationship we establish between metaphysics and science is very different. We believe they are, or can become, equally precise and certain. Both deal with reality itself. But each retains only half of it”<sup>83</sup>. It is this dualism that allowed Bergson to argue for an immortality of the soul, that he did not yet assert when he still held an ontological monism.

Nonetheless, regardless of whether the opposition between space and time (or matter and duration) is an epistemological (*i.e.*, of space as a scheme we apply to duration (as the only reality), falsifying it for our own commodity) or ontological one (*i.e.*, that matter is really homogeneous, dividable and made of parts, so that science touches a part of reality itself when it applies its quantitative methods to the realm of inert matter), Merleau-Ponty opposed to Bergson that he did not frame the opposition correctly, and that he removed from experience by arbitrarily excluding space from a pre-objective ontology, granting an unwarranted privilege to time over space, while both can be conceived either objectively or pre-objectively, and that the real opposition is between adopting an objective or pre-objective attitude to experience. It sounds rather strange and arbitrary to conceive motion and movement in general, when considered according to experience, pre-objectively, to pertain only to duration, while any movement also occurs in space. This experience of motion should have led Bergson to overcome his initial prejudice that there is a radical ontological

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<sup>83</sup> Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.43. See also, *ibid.*, pp.42-43: “In short, we want a difference in method, not a difference in value between metaphysics and science. Less modest about science than most scientists have been, we believe that a science based on experience, as understood by modern scientists, can reach the essence of reality. Without doubt, it embraces only a part of reality; but of this part it may one day touch the bottom; in any case, it will approach it indefinitely”.

distinction between space and time. Commenting these problems in Bergson's philosophy, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

In reality, space has no more points or lines than time. Understanding that *Gestalt* is already transcendence: it makes me realize that a line is a vector, a point a center of forces – there are no absolute lines, points or colors in things. Field vision and the notion of field – Bergson says that the snaking [serpentelement] may not reproduce any real lines. But there are none that are “real”. So space is not to be called into question as Bergson does. And correlatively, it is not enough to move on to time as fusion to get the solution – that is a false antithesis – you have to move on from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, *i.e.* as transcendence, *i.e.* as always “behind”, beyond, distant... the present itself is not absolute coincidence without transcendence, even the *Urerlebnis* comprises not a total coincidence, but partial coincidence, because it has horizons and would not be without them – the present, too, is elusive up close, in the pincers of attention, it is an encompasser [un englobant]. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, pp.245-246.

Bergson's solution to all philosophical problems consists in going from a spatialized understanding to a temporal one, but as Merleau-Ponty showed, doing so is not faithful to experience, it denies a pre-objective experience of space. Hence, instead of going from space to duration, Bergson – to be philological – should have “showed that there is a living space; shifting, not from space to time, but from fragmented space to the extension [l'étendue]”<sup>84</sup> (understood as our living experience of space). On the one hand, Bergson had a good philosophical intuition, grasping that most philosophical problems come from a fragmentation and objectivation of experience. But on the other hand, he was wrong to identify this attitude exclusively to space, removing too much from the experience of space and adding an unfounded privilege to the experience of time. Therefore, it is possible to consider that Merleau-Ponty continues Bergson's philology in a more radical way, removing

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<sup>84</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L'Union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson*, p.107.

some prejudices Bergson still had (against space)<sup>85</sup> but keeping a similar approach, coming back to the living experience in general (of the sensible as a whole), and not only to the living experience of time. This is why I will mostly set Bergson aside from the rest of this thesis. He was precious to prove that Merleau-Ponty adopts a philological method, and he will remain in the background, to be used sometimes when his insights are most relevant, but the comparison will be more precise and rigorous if I limit myself to two authors (*i.e.* Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche) rather than if I brought Bergson to the equation too. Since Merleau-Ponty's philology is purer than Bergson's, this makes it a better point of comparison with Nietzsche. Let us now introduce the comparison of the philologies of these two authors.

This comparison will be the whole theme of the first part of my thesis, thereby I will not dwell too much on it in this introduction. Nonetheless, to establish the framework within which the comparison will be made, I can already mention that Nietzsche conceives the reflexive consciousness as a falsifying agent, or at least as something dealing only with creations or fictions that have already been falsified by the body or by drives operating infra-consciously, while for Merleau-Ponty the whole of consciousness is our contact to the world, whose testimony is precious and valid, revealing to us our situation in the world, our being-to-the-world (a lateral or vertical relation to other vertical beings and to an immanent transcendence that encompasses all dimensionally). In Merleau-Ponty's framework, there are not only the thetic, actual, explicit figures in consciousness but there is also the whole

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<sup>85</sup> For a more detailed development on the comparison between Bergson and Merleau-Ponty (with a focus on the notion of space), as well as on the philological superiority of the latter over the former, see the article in the annex of my master thesis: Heusghem, « La question de l'espace chez Bergson et Merleau-Ponty », in. *L'itinéraire de la question de l'espace dans la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty. De l'ontologie de l'objet à l'ontologie verticale.*

background, depth and horizon that are inseparable from them and that connect us to others and to the intersubjective sensible world. Thus, this “background” and depth do not belong to another sphere than the reflexive consciousness, they are given in the experience of perception as an absence, a dimension, a field or as a reversible “other side” and as a thickness, opacity and voluminosity, thereby maintaining only one experience and sphere of experience and reality. There is only one experience (as a figure against a background) and one sphere of reality in Merleau-Ponty. On the contrary, Nietzsche distinguishes two distinct spheres, between the conscious and the infra-conscious (conceived as the axiological sphere of the drives, which is according to him the only ontological reality, and the whole of it, while the conscious sphere – the only one that appears to us, to consciousness – is a creation and a fiction). Nietzsche might attribute a faculty of perception to infra-conscious drives, but whatever they perceive does not reach consciousness without being falsified, it is occurring without us thinking subjects and philosophers, almost in a new form of in-itself (from the point of view of consciousness). Therefore, our perception and sensible experience – the one we are aware of – is detached from reality and from truth. At best, they can be conceived as a “symptom” of the reality of drives and mainly as an illusion and a subjective creation. As a result, pre-objective being is still accessible to consciousness for Merleau-Ponty, maintaining only one field or sphere of experience, whereas for Nietzsche consciousness is stuck with only objectified figures, isolated from their depth or background, constituting a purely subjective and illusory sphere of experience, in opposition to pre-objective being that is displaced to a second, infra-conscious sphere of reality. Thus, with his ontological distinction and layering of reality into the conscious and the infra-conscious as two distinct moments and spheres of experience, Nietzsche appears less economical than Merleau-Ponty. I will tackle this question by examining the legitimacy of this distinction and layering, checking whether it is truly faithful to experience or if it is based on non-philological

prejudices. Sometimes, Nietzsche also conceives the world as chaos, as pure multiplicity and becoming, which means that even the “drives” or wills to power are just an image, a frozen human snapshot that is unfaithful and does not reflect the ever fluid and changing reality<sup>86</sup>. However, isn't Nietzsche removing too much when he reduces reality to our drives and affects? Why does he remove the sensible aspects of perception, or intersubjectivity? Aren't the hypotheses of the Will to Power or of the world as absolute chaos and plurality a repetition of the in-itself? If there is no world in-itself anymore, then there is also no superior truth or reason to debase perception and reject its testimony. In a few aphorisms Nietzsche argues in favor of the senses – affirming that they do not lie and that our knowledge can only be based on them –, but in others he rejects them as a falsification of reality. So which Nietzsche should we follow on this question? The confrontation with Merleau-Ponty, who developed an ontology of perception, will show that even if we interpret Nietzsche favorably – *i.e.* as defending the senses – he did not follow through the radical epistemological and ontological revisions that the senses and perception impose on philosophy if they are taken seriously. The same goes for Nietzsche's rejection of the in-itself. In his most philological aphorisms, he denies the dichotomy between appearances and the in-itself, but it did not lead him to reconsider all his conceptions that involved (and were prompted by) the implicit belief in an in-itself. This raises the question of whether Nietzsche has been faithful to experience and to the principle of economy until the end or not. Didn't he add or remove to the experience? Perhaps ultimately he subordinated his philological approach to another task, to the task of genealogy, and pursued a philological knowledge only insofar as it is a means to

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<sup>86</sup> See for example Müller-Lauter, « La pensée nietzschéenne de la volonté de puissance » in *Nietzsche. Physiologie de la volonté de puissance*, p.91, referring to Nietzsche's *Posthumous Fragments XIII*, 11 [74] (p.235): “As Nietzsche puts it, « the world » is *chaos*: anarchic aggregations and disintegrations of forces. Since *the* world is not an *organized* totality, *the* will to power does not exist as the *ens metaphysicum* that would constitute it. There are only multiple wills to power; *the* will to power does not exist”. Or *Ibid.*, p.90 : “Nietzsche expressly rejects the idea that *the* world can be rooted in *the* will to power, understood as the really existing foundation of being”.

a healthier, more vigorous life. These are serious questions that we will examine in the course of this study, and this interrogation is possible thanks to Merleau-Ponty's philology. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty seems to have taken the philological attempt the furthest, thinking only according to one ontological principle that respects all the aspects of experience. In this specific sense his philology is the purest one out of all these authors and serves as a great standard for interrogating whether and, if so, when Nietzsche deviated from the philological method. For now, let us just observe that Nietzsche's philology led him to acknowledge a plurality of drives and values behind each interpretation, and this, in turn, prompted him to develop the genealogical method.

### **E) Nietzsche's Genealogical Method (in Contrast to Philology)**

While Merleau-Ponty maintained during his whole life his one goal and method for philosophy (namely, philology as the way to re-discover the whole world of experience once again), Nietzsche added a second task to philosophy: “the *problem of hierarchy*, which we are perfectly entitled to call *our* problem, we who are free spirits”<sup>87</sup>. The whole question will be to elucidate whether these two methods stand in a continuity with one another or if there has been a shift, which would mean that the second method has led to the abandonment of the first, or at least to its subordination to the second one, not being pursued autonomously anymore. The second method and task in question is the genealogical one. Genealogy starts

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<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain I*, Préface, §7, p.56. See also Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §345.

from the acknowledgement that knowledge is rooted in experience and that we only have interpretations. At this point, genealogy is still in the direct line of philology, basing itself on its results. However, philology tries to elucidate the ontological and epistemological status of this situation, finding its general structure, coming back to a monism of experience (coming from the particular perspectives to their general ontological and epistemological situation they all share), whereas genealogy, in a vastly different way, dives into the diversity of the perspectives or interpretations and tries to look at their instinctual and axiological origin, in order to evaluate, compare and hierarchize them according to the kind of life they involve (so that we can promote the ones that are the most conducive to life). Indeed, according to Nietzsche, each interpretation is caused by infra-conscious drives (that he will call “values”) that tie them indissolubly and from the start to a certain way to live and outlook on life, and the first step of the genealogical method is to thematize these values, to find the human and kind of life behind the interpretations. As Blondel underlined, “from « what does it say », we move on to the new question: « who said it », or « what made them say it »?”<sup>88</sup>. Thereby, genealogy is not anymore about the content of the interpretations (while philology tried to evaluate their faithfulness, probity and economy) but “it is a question of understanding the instinctual origins of morals [les origines pulsionnelles des morales], what they want and express, as it were”<sup>89</sup>. At first, Nietzsche was only applying the genealogical method to morality (especially to the “morality of the herd” and the Christian one, as well as its secular and modern transformations and reiterations, like science or democracy for instance), but he quickly extended this outlook and this method to the whole of our thinking, sensibility and experience, bringing them back to the infra-conscious drives motivating them. Cultures are a good example, and Nietzsche can criticize the modern ones, capitalism and socialism for instance, as well as religions, but even the individual’s personal thoughts,

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<sup>88</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.270.

<sup>89</sup> Wotling, Introduction in Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, pp.22–23.

emotions and actions can be tied back to values motivating them. In this way, “Nietzsche reduces all our intellectual and psychic activities to our « value judgments », which respond « to our drives and their conditions of existence »”<sup>90</sup>. Following the principle of economy, Nietzsche attempts to understand the whole of reality according to these drives, and thus his genealogical method has become universal (and takes priority over other ontological and epistemological options because “all theoretical activity is also regulated and determined by the struggles and compromises of power between instincts”<sup>91</sup>). In this way, Nietzsche grants more reality to the values that cause interpretations than to the interpretations themselves or to the ontologies they develop. In this sense, genealogy does not read interpretations literally, but it reads them metaphorically, it treats them as a symptom whose content simply expresses the causes or origins that gave rise to this interpretation<sup>92</sup>. Nietzsche indicates explicitly this approach:

Moral judgment should never be taken literally: in that form, it contains nothing but absurdity. But it remains invaluable as *semiotics*: it reveals, at least to those who know, the most precious realities of cultures and interiorities that did not know enough to understand themselves. Morality is pure *figurative discourse*, pure *symptomatology*. Nietzsche, *Le crépuscule des idoles*, « Ceux qui rendent l’humanité meilleure », §1, p.161.

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<sup>90</sup> Müller-Lauter, « La pensée nietzschéenne de la volonté de puissance » in *Nietzsche. Physiologie de la volonté de puissance*, p.39.

<sup>91</sup> Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.97.

<sup>92</sup> For this symptomatic approach, see for instance Nietzsche, « Le problème de Socrate » in *Le crépuscule des idoles*, §2, p.131. “Judgments, value judgments about life, for or against, can never ultimately be true: they only have value as *symptoms*, they only come into play as *symptoms*, – in themselves, these judgments are nonsense”. See also the *Posthumous Fragment XII*, 1 [61], p.35: “Everything that reaches consciousness is the last link in a chain, a conclusion. That one thought is the cause of another is pure appearance. The actual related event is played out in an *infra-conscious zone*; the intervening series and succession of feelings, thoughts, etc., are *symptoms* of the actual event! – Beneath every thought lies an affect”. I found this quote in Wotling’s *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.96, where he states that the psychological lexicon “allows Nietzsche to challenge the primacy traditionally accorded to consciousness, notably in the Cartesian tradition, by reducing it to an epiphenomenon deriving from the interplay of infra-conscious instances studied by the new psychology”.

Thus, one has to see behind, below or through interpretations the drives and values that motivated them and gave them form. This is one of the meanings of the image of the philosopher's hammer, not only to destroy or to build but also, as a doctor of culture, to auscultate values, to see the causes through and beyond the symptoms: "to auscultate the idols [...]. Here, for once, I ask them questions with a hammer [in order to be] in the presence of something which finds itself compelled to speak, but which would very much like to remain silent"<sup>93</sup>. Indeed, if one takes interpretations seriously, their explicit meanings cover and conceal the text of the drives that motivated them, so they are often not seen for themselves; values usually stay hidden, as underlying forces. Hence, genealogy applies a causalist schema to interpretations, it considers them as a subjective content whose ultimate reality lies in its (instinctual) origins. Is this causalist schema still compatible with the philological approach? It divides again the world into two spheres of reality, the subjective one and its axiological causes, so it seems not so economical, but let us dive into this topic later. For now, let us focus on fleshing out the genealogical method. The goal of the philosopher, as the doctor of culture, is not only to find the values that cause the interpretations (which could still be a philological task, if the values are part of experience) but also to evaluate them, to check whether they allow and express a vigorous, healthy and intense life, or if on the contrary they are a symptom of decadence. As Wotling wrote, "this search for the origins of an interpretation is not in itself its own goal; in fact, it is only required in order to make it possible, in a second stage, to assess the value of the interpretation being questioned. Genealogy is inseparable from axiology"<sup>94</sup>. It is precisely in this endeavor that genealogy leaves the sphere of knowledge and of philology to enter the

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<sup>93</sup> Nietzsche, Preface, *Le crépuscule des idoles*, pp.119-120.

<sup>94</sup> Wotling, « Introduction » in Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, pp.29–30.

realm of axiology, by adding a judgment to the experience. In a similar fashion, Granier affirmed that:

Genealogy is not only the search for the origin of values, but also an appreciation of the value of the origin. A phenomenology of the human “type” that invents this or that table of values is not of a purely descriptive nature, for the uncovering of the existential structures underlying an axiological code is from the outset indissolubly linked to a critical judgment on them. Granier, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.164.

This is why Nietzsche called this method “genealogical”, it is not only the search of the origin but also and more importantly the evaluation of the origin, *i.e.* the search of the origin insofar as it allows to examine the value of our interpretations, in the same way as the literal, non-philosophical genealogy looks at the ancestors of a bloodline in order to establish its nobility. This allows to understand the formulation that Nietzsche chose to frame his method, that can sound puzzling at first: “we need a critique of moral values, we need to question once and for all the value of these values themselves – and to do this, we need to be aware of the conditions and circumstances in which they have grown, through which they have developed and shifted”<sup>95</sup>. In this sentence, Nietzsche uses the term “value” in two distinct meanings, and this distinction is his originality and is crucial: the second occurrence refers to the criteria that govern our interpretations and imply a certain way to live, while the first occurrence refers to the worth of these values-criteria according to their benefit or detriment to life. In this way, Nietzsche selects one standard among all values-criteria, namely the standard of life<sup>96</sup>, and he applies it to determine the worth of the other values-criteria, to

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<sup>95</sup> Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, Préface, §6, p.56.

<sup>96</sup> However, the definition of “life” is a tricky aspect of Nietzsche’s genealogical method: indeed, on what exactly should one base the judgment of the detriment or utility for life of the interpretations and values-criteria? In the §6 of his *Antichrist*, Nietzsche states that “For me, life is an instinct for growth, duration, the accumulation of strength and power”. Thus, life is defined by Nietzsche as an expansion of power. Yet, this definition simply pushes the problem one step further: how to know and measure what is an expansion of power? According to what criterion? To the capacity to create? But it holds the same problem. Can similar circumstances or phenomena bear different results (in terms of power, either an increase or a decrease) in

check whether they are good values (for life) or if they are noxious. That is how Nietzsche's crucial genealogical questions become:

Under what conditions did man invent these value judgments of good and evil [as an example among any value-criterion]? And what value do they themselves have? Have they hindered or helped human development to date? Are they a sign of distress, impoverishment and the degeneration of life? Or, on the contrary, is it the abundance, the strength, the will of life, its courage, its assurance, its future that is revealed in them? – Behind my back, I found and risked various answers to this question, distinguishing between eras, peoples and hierarchical levels of individuals. Nietzsche, *La Généalogie de la morale*, Préface, §3, p.50.

Genealogy does not only describe the values-criteria and ways of living attached to them, but it adds an axiological judgement to them: “It is not enough to draw up a descriptive sheet of a certain morality [the philological aspect of Nietzsche's inquiry], we must also interpret this morality by adding a specific coefficient of value to it”<sup>97</sup>. Nietzsche himself identified his task, “the philosopher's task for the future: [as] being understood in the sense that the philosopher must solve the problem of value, that they must determine the hierarchy of values”<sup>98</sup>. It is by adding this axiological judgment or evaluation and hierarchization to the descriptions of cultures and values that Nietzsche steps out of the field of knowledge or philology and enters the proper and specific field of genealogy and axiology. Therefore, as highlighted by Wotling:

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different contexts or to different individuals? These difficulties make the implementation of the genealogical method challenging to carry out, for it is hard to see how one's personal biases would not interfere with the axiological judgement. In all of Nietzsche's numerous writings, it is almost impossible for any reader not to disagree with at least one or some of his judgments, and these disagreements will vary depending on the individuals too. It is impossible to be “objective” in this matter (as in any), and every genealogical hierarchy will be relative and simply an attempt (or *Versuch*). This does not mean that the approach should be abandoned, it is still a very useful attempt and knowledge, but its status must be clear for those who practice it. Nevertheless, let us set these considerations aside and come back to depicting the genealogical method.

<sup>97</sup> Granier, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.164.

<sup>98</sup> Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, First treaty, §17, p.115.

Nietzsche poses the problem of hierarchy: it is not just a question of cataloguing or listing morals, but of evaluating them, which is only possible thanks to the intervention of a new criterion replacing the old criterion of truth – a non-idealistic, non-metaphysical criterion, which Nietzsche calls, depending on the text, health, or power, or the future. Wotling, “Introduction”, in: Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, p.23.

Nietzsche’s genealogy is, for me, his most original breakthrough. It is a great achievement to have allowed us to thematize the values-criteria that shape our lives and to be able to question them and even to choose between them, orienting our life or culture in a new direction (that we hope to be superior and healthier than the previous one) instead of simply passively inheriting and reproducing the values of our ancestors. This method invented by Nietzsche is invaluable. Indeed, it opens up the possibility to evaluate interpretations not simply from the point of view of philology and probity, but according to psychological, genealogical, axiological and health criteria. His philosophy no longer evaluates solely or primarily according to good and evil or falsity and truth (nor according to economy and faithfulness) but according to the way of living promoted by this or that interpretation, and whether it increases the vigor, strength, nobility and health of life, or, on the contrary, makes it sick, weak and decrepit. This is Nietzsche's primary task, what motivates the more deeply his whole philosophy once he became aware of it, and even before: this drive and goal of his was already implicitly present in the *Birth of Tragedy* or in the *Unfashionable Observations*. In fact, in *Ecce Homo* or in the prefaces he added later to his previous works (as we have seen in *Human, All too Human I*), he always emphasized this aspect of his philosophy as being there from the start.

I must warn that I will treat and understand genealogy – in this study – as a broader, more encompassing term than what it means in the Nietzschean studies. I am aware, for instance, that Wotling distinguishes between *Züchtung* (breeding), as the creation and actual promotion of better values, educating and raising a new type of humanity, and genealogy (which he understands simply as the elaboration of the text of the different cultures, uncovering the drives at their origin). Thus, he wrote:

The philosopher's task, then, consists of both sides of this complex logic: genealogical investigation, but also, simultaneously and more essentially, reflection in terms of breeding, of *Züchtung*, to use the image Nietzsche so insistently employs. However spectacular its investigative power and the originality of its results, genealogy is neither the whole of Nietzsche's thought, nor its culmination. And, above all, it is not the compass from which Nietzsche's pathways to their essential goals are oriented. It is certainly present, and indispensable, within the Nietzschean system. But this is because it performs a very specific function, that of a prerequisite, preparing the way for the implementation of a far more radical project – the project of forming new types of human life. Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, pp.6-7.

This distinction is certainly valid and relevant; nevertheless, I also think that philology and genealogy should be as neatly distinguished as genealogy and the *Züchtung*. In the framework of my thesis, the most important shift is the one from the criterion of truth or probity to the one of life, and in this framework both genealogy and the *Züchtung* stand on the side of life, in opposition (or at least difference) to philology. Some Nietzschean thinkers distinguish several meanings of the term truth in Nietzsche's writings (for example Granier), highlighting a polysemy of the term and finding, among them, an existential meaning of truth, designating the values and interpretations without which a given culture or individual cannot live. However, this sense of the term truth (namely, that which is necessary to hold as true in order to live) is purely pragmatic and does not enter the framework of philology; it simply translates the necessity of some judgements (relatively to some needs, that could

change depending on the strength of an individual or culture) and is unrelated to their economy or faithfulness to experience. This understanding of truth is useful in the genealogical context for measuring the strength of individuals or cultures based on their needs, but it is indifferent to the philological attempt at describing the world, experience and reality faithfully, or it even goes against it, as these pragmatic “truths” are often anti-philological fictions (that incite to believe in a purely objective world for instance and deny perspectivism). Granier discussed Nietzsche’s ambivalence toward the concept truth, as in his philosophy it

unfolds on two distinct levels: the level of perspectivist pragmatism and the level of radical ontological problematic. It provides us with the key to what constitutes the paradox of Nietzschean philosophy, *i.e.* the double and contradictory assertion that Truth is measured by the value of life and that, at the same time, Truth demands the rigorous philology that immolates value to justice. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.325.

By contrast, my use of the concept of truth will not be as broad as Nietzsche’s one; I am rejecting the pragmatic use of the term (for less ambiguity and more clarity) and I will understand the notion only from a philological standpoint as the faithfulness to experience regardless of the value for life. It follows from this decision that I will use the term of genealogy (which has the advantage of being a single term and to be a methodological one) to gather, grasp and discuss the whole rest of Nietzsche’s thought (or practice of philosophy). In other words, by the term of genealogy I am aiming at all the side of Nietzsche’s philosophy that does not pursue truth or – strictly speaking – a faithful knowledge but that seeks the promotion of a better way to live for humans (therefore, it encompasses also the Eternal Return as a pragmatic or axiological criterion, the *Züchtung*, the transvaluation of all values, the self-overcoming and more). This will allow me to interrogate the relation of the two tasks more clearly than by using ambiguous terms. In this context, genealogy will remain

Nietzsche's idiosyncrasy, while philology can also be used to describe the task and method of other philosophers, as I have already done in this introduction.

Now that the genealogical method has been described and identified as the shift from evaluating the interpretations according to their truth or probity to evaluating them according to the life they promote, let us flesh out how this new criterion of life can be applied with the example of the genealogical interpretation of God. The fact we have already used this example in the philological context will allow us to highlight better the specificity of the genealogical method, how it operates and how it compares to the philological one. It will not be surprising for anyone that Nietzsche evaluated the value of God in general, and of Christianity in particular, as something noxious for life, as it represents a major figure of decadence in his works. But what is interesting is to examine the genealogical reasons that led to this judgement. There are plenty of them, but we can mention – just to name a few – that the conception of the Original Sin instills guilt in humans, implying that they should spend their life repenting (through confessions, punishments and atonements). According to Nietzsche, guilt is the poison that Christianity spreads in order to thrive, as the priests gain power by presenting a solution to this suffering. By doing so, they weaken humanity, guilt amplifies its suffering and diminishes its strength and vigor. Moreover, the solution proposed consists of the After-Life, a perfect, pure and ideal world where all suffering is gone, where one lives forever and meets their loved ones; however, presenting such an ideal world makes the actual world in which we live pale in comparison. It instills a resentment towards it and, instead of intensifying the only life we have, here and now, the value of God and heaven make people looking forward to their death, diminishing the love for life and for the world instead of increasing it. That is why Nietzsche could assert that:

God degenerated into the antithesis of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal affirmation! In God, declared hostility to life, to nature, to the will to live! God, the formula of every slander of the “below” [de “l’en-deçà”], of every lie of the “hereafter” [de “l’au-delà”]! In God, nothingness divinized, the will to nothingness sanctified!... Nietzsche, *L’Antéchrist*, §18, p.62<sup>99</sup>.

Christianity musters suspicion and hatred towards the senses, body, sex, and thus antagonizes several vital parts of existence. For all these reasons, the hypothesis of God and the Christian values-criteria attached to it are nefarious and harmful to life, and, as a result, they are deemed very low in the hierarchy developed by genealogy. Therefore, in this specific case, philology and genealogy lead to the same result, namely the rejection of the hypothesis of God. Nonetheless, they do not achieve this result through the same means. Indeed, philology selects the most faithful and economical knowledge, rejecting the hypothesis of God for its lack of economy, whereas genealogy selects the interpretations and values leading to the most vigorous life and consequently rejects the hypothesis and value of God for it leads to a meek, decadent life. In this case, philology and genealogy are convergent, for the hypothesis of God involves lies added to the text (*i.e.* another world, perfect, ideal and extra-sensible) to weaken and poison life. However, is that always the case? Are philology and genealogy always in a continuity and consistent with one another? It is precisely this question that I would like to ponder. There can be a tension between the two methods, even within the Nietzschean corpus. Simply assuming that true or faithful knowledge is always good for life is the kind of optimism of knowledge that has been severely criticized by Nietzsche, thus it should not be applied to him. In fact, Nietzsche has put the value of truth into question, and he criticized the philosophers who blindly searched for truth as if it would automatically

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<sup>99</sup> See also *ibid.*, §46, p.104: “every word that comes from the lips of an « early Christian » is a lie, and his every act is instinctively dishonest – all his values, all his aims are noxious”, and *ibid.*, §47, p.104: “We perceive what is revered under the name of God, not as « divine », but as pitiful, absurd, harmful, not only as an error, but as a *crime against life*...”.

bring the Good and be the best thing for life. He wrote in this fashion: “What exactly is it in us that wants “the truth”? [...] We questioned the value of this will. [...] The problem of the value of truth came to meet us”<sup>100</sup>. Nietzsche questions where the will for truth comes from, and instead of understanding it solely as something autonomous, with an intrinsic value, truth can also be understood from the genealogical standpoint, conceiving it as one type of value-criterion among many others. As a result, interpreting truth not anymore in a philological framework, as a faithful knowledge, but in a genealogical one that is interested in its affective origin and its effects on life could lead to the conclusion that truth is a legacy of the ascetic ideals, which means that it could be unfavorable or even noxious in regard to life: “« Knowledge for its own sake » – that is the ultimate trap set by morality: in this way, we find ourselves once again completely entangled in it”<sup>101</sup>. Conversely, from the genealogical standpoint, some anti-philological fictions could be helpful or even necessary for life. In such a fashion, Nietzsche wrote that “the falsest judgements (including synthetic *a priori* judgements) are for us the most indispensable [...] – to renounce false judgements would be to renounce life, to deny life. Recognizing non-truth as a condition of life”<sup>102</sup> or:

In spite of all the value that may accrue to the truthful, the selfless: it may be that appearance, the will to deceive, self-interest and desire must be assigned a higher and more fundamental value for all life. It could even be that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things lies precisely in the fact that they are related, linked, insidiously intertwined with those evil things that are apparently opposed to them. Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §2, p.49.

This dissociation between truth (or faithful knowledge) and life is just a consequence of Nietzsche’s two methods: for they pursue different goals (a faithful knowledge for philology and healthy values for genealogy) through different means, establishing different hierarchies,

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<sup>100</sup> Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §1, p.47.

<sup>101</sup> Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §64, p.117.

<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §4, p.50.

they can lead to divergent results. In this way, a cognitive dissonance that allows one to live better by segmenting incompatible dimensions of one's life and experience would be deemed unfaithful and rejected by philology, but it would be valued rather highly and positively by genealogy which does not care about truth. Indeed, at the same time as life becomes the criterion for establishing a genealogical hierarchy, the quest for truth (or even for probity) becomes relativized. In this framework, truth appears as one value among others and must be given its place in the hierarchy of values, which may not be the highest if truth is not the most favorable value to life. Hence, the genealogical method, taking life as a criterion, becomes more important than the search for truth and faithfulness, at least for those who adopt the genealogical method and strive to live better (thus prioritizing interpretations and values-criteria that benefit life over a faithful knowledge). Consequently, a lie that is good for life is genealogically good, and Nietzsche values positively Manou's code for instance:

It all depends on what *end* you are lying for. That Christianity has no "sacred" ends is *my* objection to its means. Nothing but *bad* ends: poisoning, slander, the denial of life, contempt for the body, the denigration and self-degradation of man through the notion of sin, – *consequently* its means are bad too. – I read *Manou's Code*, an incomparably spiritual and superior work, with a very different feeling. Nietzsche, *L'Antéchrist*, §56, p.120<sup>103</sup>.

Nietzsche also values art positively from the standpoint of genealogy, as it is in his opinion the consolation or justification of existence and the shield that protects us from the lethal dangers involved by philology. I am not exaggerating, as Nietzsche literally wrote: "If we had not given our approval to the arts and invented this sort of worship of untruth: [...] understanding illusion and error as a condition of knowing and perceiving existence would be totally unbearable to us. Probity [and thus philology] would lead to disgust and

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<sup>103</sup> See also Nietzsche, *L'Antéchrist*, §57, p.121: "A code such as Manou's is born like any good code: it summarizes the experience, prudence and experimental morality acquired over the centuries".

suicide”<sup>104</sup>. It follows from this quote that philology and truth are noxious to life in Nietzsche’s opinion, and that probity, which is something valued positively by philology, is negatively by genealogy. Thus, Nietzsche often thematizes the dangers of truth, portraying the philosopher seeking knowledge as someone who might meet a tragic end. See also for instance:

No, this bad taste, this desire for truth, for “truth at all costs”, this adolescent insanity in the love of truth – we abhor it: we have too much experience, we are too serious, too joyful, too burnt-out, too deep for it... [...] We should hold in higher esteem the modesty with which nature has hidden itself behind enigmas and shimmering uncertainties. Nietzsche, *Le Gai Savoir*, Préface, §4, p.32.

Or:

Something could be true while at the same time being harmful and dangerous in the supreme degree; and it could even be that existence has this fundamental property of perishing whoever knew it completely, – so that the strength of a mind would be measured by the precise amount of “truth” it managed to endure, more clearly by the degree to which it needed to dilute it, veil it, soften it, blunt it, falsify it. Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §39, pp.89–90.

Therefore, the methods of philology and genealogy can be at odds with one another, their continuity is not self-evident and involves the dichotomy of knowledge and life. To what extent can the two be reconciled, and with what implications or under what conditions? Before answering, let us first examine how the Nietzschean scholars conceive the articulation and relation between the two methods.

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<sup>104</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §107, p.158.

***F) The Relation Between Philology and Genealogy According to Nietzschean Scholars***

There is not, to my knowledge, a dedicated study of the relations between philology and genealogy as two distinct tasks in the Nietzschean studies. The problematic nature of their articulation is often missed, for they are seen only through the lens of Nietzsche, in which they appear to be in continuity as philology led Nietzsche to genealogy by uncovering values as the only reality. However, if Nietzsche's philology is not the only one possible (thus, if experience is not only made of drives and values), then the transition to genealogy can be put into question. That is why the aim of my thesis is to re-think the connection between philology and genealogy in new ways (thanks to a comparison beyond the sole framework of Nietzsche, hence the relevance of Merleau-Ponty), attempting to consider them as two distinct and autonomous methods – that do not share the same goal nor the same criterion – , to check whether the understanding of philology subordinated to genealogy (or seen only through its prism) is a reduction of its potential scope. Most Nietzscheans agree with Nietzsche's reduction of reality and experience to the drives and will to power, and thereby they assume a strict continuity between philology and genealogy. Nonetheless, even in this case, they do not all agree on the way to conceive the status and relation of the two methods and propose different views. The first type of approach overlooks or underestimates the difficulty of a potential tension between the two methods because they merge them as one and understand genealogy as a subtype of philology. See for instance Solomon:

The most difficult task, therefore, was to “unravel” the manifestations of language, not to discover the “reality” behind the words (for there may be none), but rather to explore the

psychology of those who invented the words and those who now use them. A task that required the skills of a very special kind of philologist, capable of deciphering the language of morality and metaphysics not by relating them to their ancient sources, but by establishing their genealogy and “deep psychology”. Clearly, Nietzsche saw himself as such a philologist. Solomon, « Nietzsche: the philologist as a “psychologist of the depth” », in: Balaudé and Wotling (Dir.), “*L’art de bien lire*”. *Nietzsche et la philologie*, p.67.

In a similar way, Blaise Benoit understands philology as a metaphor of a dual relation to the world, he finds two tendencies within philology that he describes as:

On the one hand, the theme of welcoming or receptivity, guided by the need to grant hospitality to otherness, by means of a sensitivity that is ever more plastic. [...] In this context, the art of reading well refers to the art of understanding well. On the other hand, the register of the imposition of form and meaning, so that philology could curiously find models in Solon or Caesar. The philologist would be very close to the legislator of the future [...]. The art of reading well would then be akin to the art of shaping well, or sculpting well with the hammer of return. Benoit, in: « *Die Redlichkeit: The Philologist’s Virtue?* », in: Balaudé and Wotling (Dir.), “*L’art de bien lire*”. *Nietzsche et la philologie*, pp.105–06.

The first component of philology (according to Benoit) is the most general one, that applies to any philology and is the attempt to be as faithful as possible to experience, broadening our reception of it so as not to miss any aspect. This is true of Merleau-Ponty’s method too. However, the second component that Benoit underlines is the tendency that is particular to Nietzsche’s philology only, already intertwined with genealogy and with the hypothesis of the will to power. While the first definition is the strictest and broadest possible definition of philology, the second one is much more restricted because it supposes implicit epistemological and ontological decisions that are specific to Nietzsche – which I need to clarify later – but that should not (or does not have to) apply to every philosopher nor to all philologies. Indeed, doing so would imply taking for granted that the scope of philology is

limited to genealogy and that its first aspect (*i.e.* the reception of the experience of the world) cannot overflow it, which would reduce the scope and legitimate right of philology. In other words, the second aspect of philology underlined by Benoit comes only in a second time, after having already done a philological reading of the world in the first sense and understanding it as field of forces that struggle to impose their own value, and after adopting a conception of knowledge (or even perception and experience) as a construction (according to the values of the ruling forces in a complex of drives at a given time). Therefore, Benoit's problem is not to have distinguished these two tendencies in Nietzsche's philosophy, as they do co-exist, but it is to have placed them on a single ground, as parts of the same process and as if they were contemporary and necessarily linked or should at least be unified as much as possible. In this way, he advocates that "this dual relationship to the world must be incorporated, thus blending as harmoniously as possible into the body of the philologist of the future"<sup>105</sup>. In my opinion, this statement fails to acknowledge the difference between the general character of the art of reading well – receiving experience without distorting it – and the particular nature of Nietzsche's theory of interpretations and values, leading him to a different method: namely, genealogy. In fact, if the two "tendencies" could be unified to the point of being absolutely equivalent and leading to a single view, becoming one, then why would have Nietzsche needed to coin two different terms and develop two distinct methods? The Nietzschean philosophers might reply that it is simply the use of two distinct registers of metaphors to describe the same reality that escapes – by its multiplicity of aspects and dimensions – the fixation in a single term or perspective, for our language cannot grasp it unambiguously. Nevertheless, there is the possibility (that I will explore throughout this study) that – beyond this supposed failure of language, which is insufficient to account for the two distinct terms – there is a real distinction of task and method between philology and

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.106.

genealogy, and that genealogy relies on a particular conception of philology that does not exhaust all its possibilities. If that is truly the case, then the specificity of genealogy is missed by Benoit, as a shift of ground, task and criterion, not situated in the sphere of knowledge anymore but adding an axiological judgment and constituting another method. Some other Nietzschean scholars acknowledge that genealogy adds a new criterion that allows Nietzsche to evaluate and hierarchize the plurality of interpretations, but usually they do so in a way that deprives philology of its status of independent criterion, forgetting that it was already a criterion of hierarchization of interpretations, and that therefore it could clash with the criterion of genealogy. In such a fashion, Marton writes:

What enables Nietzsche to distinguish between good and bad interpretations? To interpret interpretations, a criterion is needed. In order to evaluate assessments, it becomes essential to have a criterion such that it cannot lend itself to either interpretation or evaluation. And this criterion, Nietzsche believes, is to be found in the notion of life. [...] And so the philologist becomes the philosopher-genealogist. The philologist, who conceived of the world as a text to be deciphered, also devotes himself to interpreting interpretations. The philologist, who devoted himself to re-establishing the text that is the world, also applies himself to evaluating the assessments. Marton, « La philologie: l'astuce du philosophe généalogiste », in: Balaudé and Wotling (Dir.), *“L'art de bien lire”. Nietzsche et la philologie*, p.161.

If genealogy (with life as its value-criterion), and genealogy alone, becomes the criterion to evaluate the interpretations, then philology is reduced to the role of genealogy's servant, simply doing the necessary, preliminary work of establishing the text of culture and of the values, but leaving the whole task of evaluation to genealogy. This subordination of philology to genealogy is very clear in the texts of several Nietzschean scholars, for example in Blondel's: “in setting out the program of his « critique of moral values », Nietzsche refers the assessment of the value of these values to genealogy, while reserving the task of

interpretation and unmasking to philological reading”<sup>106</sup> ; in Wotling’s where he stated “that morality is not a given: it is multifaceted and has specific productive origins, varying with each of its types. There is therefore *preparatory work* to be done [...] in particular by making use of the philological model”<sup>107</sup>; or in Denat’s:

If, as we have seen, philosophy can be defined as the power to hierarchize, to select, as the “instance of choice” and the “faculty of taste”, then philology is precisely what provides the material for philosophical inquiry, which would otherwise remain in vain: philological and historical activity is precisely what enables the philosopher to “gather the materials” that will enable comparisons to be made, and to think in terms of a hierarchy between human types and differentiated cultures. [...] If philology is only complete when it is taken up by philosophy, then philosophy is only authentic when it assimilates philology as the study of texts that can offer us, for example, not ideal or absolute models, but examples and varied human types that the philosopher and genealogist can interpret and evaluate. Denat, « De la méthode *de* la philologie à la philologie *comme* méthode. En quel sense parler d’une méthodologie nietzschéenne ? », in: Balaudé and Wotling (Dir.), “*L’art de bien lire*”. *Nietzsche et la philologie*, pp.143–144.

These statements grasp the specificity of genealogy, but they subordinate philology to it. Philology becomes only one of the means and tools of genealogy and loses its specificity as a competing and alternative criterion. Philology is not only about elaborating the text of experience (that could be evaluated in a second time), but it is also the selection of the most faithful and economical interpretation, so it is an alternative criterion and method that competes with genealogy and creates a gap between the two methods. When the specificity of genealogy is grasped, the fact that philology also constitutes a criterion to select and hierarchize between the interpretations is forgotten, as if only genealogy could hierarchize; however, philology was already a criterion of selection of the interpretations, not based on

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<sup>106</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.156.

<sup>107</sup> Wotling, « Introduction », in: Nietzsche, *La Généalogie de la morale*, p.24.

their relation to life but according to their faithfulness to experience and economy. Distinguishing between the good and bad interpretations has a different meaning if we do it according to the power they grant and the kind of life they promote (genealogy), or if they are faithful to experience and describe it as economically as possible (philology): these two criteria are not identical, they might even be opposed and in any case they do not share the same goal, method, process and direction. Even if they can sometimes end up converging towards a same interpretation (chosen as good in the two senses of the terms), it would be deemed good for two different reasons, and the two criteria might also lead to choosing two (or more) very different (and even conflicting) interpretations. Some Nietzschean scholars discern that there are two different criteria at stake in Nietzsche's philosophy. For instance, Dixsaut wrote that:

The division [between good and bad interpretations] is based both on a principle of economy: an interpretation is better if it accounts for all phenomena on its own, which is the case with the hypothesis of the will to power, and if it contributes to the intensification and not the weakening of power, as physicists' "humanitarian dreams" do. Dixsaut, « On n'a pas été philologues en vain », in: Balaudé and Wotling (Dir.), *"L'art de bien lire". Nietzsche et la philologie*, p.125.

The existence of two criteria is acknowledged here, but how should their relation be understood? Dixsaut does not explicitly discuss the question. Most often, the relation is not considered as something problematic that would require a study and an elucidation. There is one statement in her text that could help us in thinking the relation, but it is ambiguous and could be interpreted in two ways: "the intensification of power includes, as one of its aspects, an intensification of consciousness, which results in an interpretation that understands everything as interpretation, and understands itself as such"<sup>108</sup>. This sentence could mean that philology must be understood in a close relation to genealogy and cannot be independent

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125.

from it, that they constitute a cohesive whole and that Nietzsche's philology is the only one possible because philology requires an increase of power in order to understand the interpretations as such. This is by far the most probable interpretation since Dixsaut also wrote that "for a philologist, history could not be other than genealogical"<sup>109</sup>. Nevertheless, detached from its context and taken literally, this sentence could also mean that any philological approach – even if it differs from Nietzsche's –, as long as it is truly philological, will lead to (or be the sign of) an intensification of power. Thus, the two ways to understand this sentence are either: the only true (or possible) philology is a genealogical one, or – and this second interpretation would be broader – any philological interpretation is good for life and intensifies power. Along a similar line of thought, we can find Granier's interpretation, which has the merit to thematize the question of truth (pertaining to the field of knowledge and philology) too and to consider it as a criterion in Nietzsche's philosophy, different (at least in nature and in a first time) from the axiological one as truth is the philological criterion and seeks a faithful description of Being. Granier's view is complex, perhaps even ambiguous. At first, Granier emphasizes the specificity of the philological truth, opposing it radically to genealogy:

If the only acceptable criterion for a belief is the interest it offers for life, for its preservation and expansion, it is absurd to make this criterion the measure of ontological Truth. When it is no longer a question of taming reality and bending it to the commandment of *Wille zur Macht*, but of consenting to the "predestination of the labyrinth" (*Antichrist*, foreword) by accepting the risk of being destroyed by the discovery of Truth, the application of the criterion of vital utility is not only doomed to failure, it is downright aberrant: for here "we must never ask whether truth is useful". Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.490.

This opposition prompts Granier to conclude that:

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

for Nietzsche, there can be no question of confusing value (useful error) with Truth – even when this value stimulates the demiurgic energies of life. It is not because an idea gives us maximum “power” (power over the world) that it is true. On the contrary, it reveals that it is simply a means of intelligently falsifying reality. Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.495.

Granier goes as far as claiming that Truth is unreachable, in contrast to life: “life is that which, in Being, is directly participable by man, while Truth is that which evades participation, for « one cannot live with truth »”<sup>110</sup>. Thus, as Granier considers ontological truth unreachable or destructive, then it is in its difference in task and method from philology that genealogy shines. Hence, genealogy is an affirmation of life precisely because it does not look for truth anymore and even knows to avert its eyes from it, willingly remaining at the surface of Being, with errors, illusions or appearances:

The sovereign Will to Power, which agrees to limit its impulse to know so as not to break the law dictated by Being itself, attests in this that it has wagered for Being itself, attests in this that it has wagered for Being against nothingness. It is thus an ascendant will, eternally justifying Being [as an unreachable], whereas the veiled will that blasphemes illusion, since it undermines the condition of life, designates itself as decadent Will to Power, as *Wille zum Nichts*. Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.536<sup>111</sup>.

Yet, this success of genealogy (in terms of affirming life) is achieved at the cost of deeming the philological task impossible and vain or lethal: “shouldn't respect for life lead philosophers to moderate their love of Truth?”<sup>112</sup>. Therefore, philology is once more subordinated to the genealogical task and method. Nevertheless, we can ponder whether

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<sup>110</sup> Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.536.

<sup>111</sup> See also Granier, *ibid.*, p.520: “Truthfulness, insofar as it obliges us to confess that « we live by illusions », is careful not to attack error unthinkingly: on the contrary, it invites us to respect appearances and not to dismantle the rampart of fictions behind which we can support the seat of reality. If the « depth » of Being (*Grund*) is an abyss (*Abgrund*), the supreme wisdom lies in remaining firmly on the surface”.

<sup>112</sup> Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.293.

Granier's assumption that the ontological truth of Being is absolutely deadly is philological or not. This assumption of Granier presupposes that life cannot bear the "contradictions of the becoming and the painfulness of existence"<sup>113</sup>, but it is extremely bold of Granier to speak in the name of all life. He simply posits that the world is indeed and necessarily awful and chaotic, but how could this nature be known? He asserts it dogmatically, but it might be possible that becoming and existence appear painful and dreadful only to him and Nietzsche because of their own values and lack of vitality that cannot fully accept perspectivism. Granier's judgment might be an expression of his pessimism. If it is the case and if the truth of Being is impossible to integrate only for some humans and because of cultural or personal values, then the task of philology would not need to be sacrificed and subordinated to genealogy anymore. In a second time, Granier himself affirms that the Will to Power:

is strong enough to convert immediate vital imperialism into a spirit of justice that loyally welcomes all the possibilities inherent in Being and integrates them into the cycle of Return. [...] Through the affirmation of Return, the Will to Power constitutes itself as demiurgic transcendence and as transcendence that offers itself to the shaking of the ordinary Truth.

Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.583.

Consequently, he agrees that truth is at least to some extent reachable, precisely as the duplicity of Being, given through fictions and fossilizations but exceeding them, making them crack and calling for new ones. According to him, reaching this truth is a matter of strength, it requires to be able to accept perspectivism and to be constantly reinventing new fictions (in the game between Apollonian and Dionysian forces). As a result, Granier

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237. See also Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, pp.271-272, quoting Nietzsche's *KGW*, VIII, 2, 11 (415): "There is no antagonism here between a true world and an apparent world: there is only one world, and it is false, cruel, contradictory, misleading-seducive (*verführerisch*), devoid of meaning... a world thus constituted is the true world. We need lies to overcome this reality, this "truth", to live. That lying is necessary for life is yet another aspect of the terrible, problematic nature of existence. (...). "Life must inspire confidence": the task, thus defined, is enormous. To solve it, man must already be a liar by nature, he must be an artist more than anything else".

understands the philological question of truth and the axiological question of genealogy and life as being one and the same. Which is the reason why he could, after having opposed truth and life, claim that “ultimately, beneath the critique of the *value* of values lies the question of the *Truth* of values. The *origin* of values is the *being* of the value, insofar as this being founds the validity or non-validity of the value, and this according to its *coefficient* of ontological Truth”<sup>114</sup>. In the same manner, he also wrote on “the genealogical test of the value. By the hammer, we appreciate the ontological density of an Ideal”, or he affirmed that “the value of value is necessarily borrowed from Being”<sup>115</sup>. The ontological density he mentions is the amount of truth (on Being) a value contains. Hence, Granier puts back genealogy on the same ground as truth and knowledge (which is normally the ground of philology) for he equates the amount of ontological truth one can uncover to the amount of strength and vitality one possesses. Thus, the two criteria become merged once again, and Granier is convinced that the hypothesis of the Will to Power (and of the Eternal Return) is simultaneously the most philological interpretation to describe Being and the one that affirms life the most strongly. Nevertheless, we can question (and we will examine) if Nietzsche’s perspective is the most faithful to experience and also if it is the most conducive to life and expressive of strength. Strictly equating the question of truth with that of life and genealogy might very well be an over-simplification. Certainly, there can be some overlap between the two, and at times they might give similar answers, but it is not *a priori* guaranteed. The question of genealogy is not the same question as the epistemological, ontological and philological one. As we saw earlier, ontological lies can be beneficial to life while being anti-philological; the axiological ground on which genealogy operates is relatively independent of the ontological one and can lead to different hierarchies than in philology. Conversely, faithfulness to experience and the principle of economy operate on a theoretical and

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<sup>114</sup> Granier, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.165-166.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169 for the first quote and p.207 for the second one.

ontological ground that can differ from the axiological results and hierarchy, as Granier and Nietzsche emphasized probity could be dangerous for life for instance. As a matter of fact, Cézanne, who was reaching an ontological truth according to Merleau-Ponty, did not have strong or noble values, he was not so brave nor vigorous in life, but this did not prevent him from developing a philological meditation on the sensible. Thus, it is not automatic that good axiological values lead to a true, faithful knowledge, nor is it necessary that a faithful knowledge involves good values. There is some sort of connection between the two, truth requires a certain attitude that can be seen in the life of a philosopher or an artist, but there is not the strict parallelism that Granier supposes, there is more leeway and ambiguity than he implied. Therefore, good values (and how can we be totally certain that a given value is good?) do not necessarily or always translate into an ontological truth. We cannot judge the truth simply on the basis of the values, nor can we decide on the axiological value of someone's values just based on their ontological truth or faithfulness to experience. Truth requires an ontological investigation, whereas the values and life require a genealogical and axiological one; and the two investigations (as well as the hierarchies that result from them) – in spite of some overlaps – are not perfectly or necessarily symmetrical. It would be a prejudice to assume so.

Another Nietzschean scholar who has thematized philology as a criterion, and this time not equating it nor subordinating it to genealogy, even conceiving philology in opposition to it, is Schacht, who wrote that “an attentive reading of him [Nietzsche] shows that he not only allows but moreover insists that some interpretations may be better than others, where « better » is construed not merely in terms of such cognitively neutral notions

as that of « value for life », but rather in terms of soundness and adequacy”<sup>116</sup>. Thereby, in this article Schacht acknowledges that philology could stand as a separate criterion, but he does not draw the conclusion that this creates a possible tension with genealogy. Moreover, Schacht does not simply highlight that philology is a criterion of its own, but he adds that there must be a way to distinguish between Nietzsche’s perspectivist interpretation and other interpretations that simply have a pragmatic value. In this fashion, he wrote:

Nietzsche thus is concerned to distinguish a kind of “knowledge” from “perspective and affective interpretations” merely as such, and suggests that it is something which can be sought and can in some measure be achieved. [...] For when the “perspectives and affective interpretations” are played off against each other, one ceases to be locked into any one of them; and so it becomes possible to achieve a meta-level perspective, from which vantage point various lower-order interpretations may be superseded in favor of others less narrow and distorting than they.

Schacht, *ibid.*, pp.81-82.

It is not uncommon for Nietzschean scholars to try to differentiate Nietzsche’s interpretation, which is aware of the interpretive nature of our perspectivist knowledge, from most interpretations that assume they are objective, and it does indeed constitute a philological difference. Nevertheless, if Nietzsche maintains the framework text-interpretation, and if his interpretation is of the same nature (in comparison to the text) than the other ones, then how exactly could one justify an epistemological distinction between his interpretation and the rest? His interpretation, according to which every knowledge is an interpretation (understood in the strictly Nietzschean sense), could very well be an interpretation too. Schacht insists that there must be an epistemological difference and a criterion: “It should count for something, especially among those who derive inspiration from him [Nietzsche], that he clearly does not suppose his own interpretive efforts to be on a complete epistemic par with

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<sup>116</sup> Schacht, « Nietzsche on Philosophy, Interpretation and Truth », in: *Noûs*, Vol.18, No.1, 1984, p.76.

the interpretations and pragmatically conditioned modes of conceptualization upon which he brings his critical guns to bear”<sup>117</sup>. But Schacht does not provide any answer, demonstration or proof of this epistemological superiority and difference; he finishes his article with this sentence, and we should take his word for it. Is the will to power a metaphysical and ontological position, epistemologically different from the other interpretations, or is it a metaphor, one interpretation among others? I think that Schacht did not provide proof of an epistemological difference because, within Nietzsche’s framework, it is not possible to establish such a difference. Some authors like Sarah Kofman distinguish between Nietzsche’s interpretation that acknowledges its own perspectivism and the other ones that are oblivious to their own status of interpretation and are dogmatic. Such a distinction could work as an epistemological difference; however, the whole question is to know whether Nietzsche managed to provide an ontological and epistemological framework that allows him to implement this difference and not simply treat his interpretation and position of a universal perspectivism as another dogmatism. This question will be the central theme of the first part of my thesis. But for now, let us already observe that Nietzsche was unable to justify an epistemological difference of his own philosophy (or he at least was in great difficulty to do so, and not decisively nor definitely) because he did not revolutionize radically enough our epistemological categories. Indeed, Nietzsche still speaks of interpretations or appearances, which are heavily connotated terms, and he did argue for valuing them positively morally (or axiologically)<sup>118</sup>, but he still valued them negatively

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>118</sup> See for instance Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain*, I, §29, p.90: “It is not the world as a thing in itself, but rather the world as a representation (as an error) that is so full of meaning, so profound, so wonderful, so full of happiness and unhappiness”. Yet, I must mention one aphorism I came across in Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes*, XIV, 14 [168] in which Nietzsche goes against this tendency and acknowledges that praising the appearance without radically overcoming the dichotomy is still a sign of decadence: “Dividing the world into a “true” world and an “apparent” one is an inspiration of decadence: – valuing appearance more than reality, as the artist does, changes nothing” (p.133). In this light, Nietzsche would therefore disagree with Granier, who asserted in *op. cit.*, p.546: “The aesthetic justification of the world is exactly the opposite of the moral condemnation of the world in Schopenhauer's philosophy”. Nevertheless, this stance is rare in Nietzsche’s texts

epistemologically, as he often labelled them as “errors”, “lies”, “falsifications”, “fictions”, “mistakes” and so on. Therefore, Nietzsche still understands interpretations and appearances in the light of the value-criterion of absolute and objective truth and according to the in-itself (not explicitly but implicitly, for only the shadow of the in-itself leads to debase epistemologically the “appearances”). Nietzsche’s joyful pessimism is about accepting as gladly as possible the fact we only have interpretations, to embrace them, and he thinks he is radical in this way, but he lacked radicality in the fact that he still understood the perspectives as an improper kind of knowledge. According to Merleau-Ponty, Nietzsche – with his conception of interpretation as a creation that distorts the view of Being and interposes, as an insurmountable obstacle, between our conscious selves and reality – takes part in

the critical attitude to the *Erkennen*: the distrust towards a knowledge that *ohne dergleichen Bedenklichkeiten ans Werk selbst geht und wirklich erkennt...* – However, this distrust is presupposed, it is not a true radicalism; it presupposes the *Vorstellungen* of the *Erkennen* as medium and tool *and einen Unterschied unserer selbst von diesem Erkennen*, and the disjunction between the *Erkennen* and the absolute, and therefore the immanence to the *Erkennen* of a truth at the moment when we assert that it is outside of the absolute; all of this is not “fear of the mistake”, but “fear of the truth”..., opposition [résistance] to the truth. – The true radicalism would not be this mistrust, but also a “mistrust of the mistrust”. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours. 1959-1961*, pp.280-281<sup>119</sup>.

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and, most of the time, he praised and adopted the artist’s attitude, emphasizing the creation and the appearance as such.

<sup>119</sup> See also, on the same page (p.281), the definition by Merleau-Ponty of phenomenology as a true radicalism, in opposition to the pseudo-radicalism of Nietzsche: “Phenomenology: this self-presentation of the spirit, appearing that is not the effect of the absolute, but the absolute itself [not in itself, since it appears and Merleau-Ponty denies any reality existing “in itself”, but in person]. – So that philosophy is the experience. Philosophy: not *Erkennen*; but redefining everything from our being, [à partir de notre être], our knowing life open on *die Sache selbst*. The separation knowledge-absolute (the critical attitude) is wrong radicalism, with presuppositions: the knowledge-tool or altering the absolute (and then how can we have any notion of it)”.

Merleau-Ponty asserts that Nietzsche is afraid of the truth, afraid to trust the senses, consciousness and experience, and he hyperbolizes his mistrust in the same way as Descartes, namely, more than what is required by experience. As Dixsaut emphasized, “the philologist's hermeneutic is the constant exercise of this *mistrust*, which for Nietzsche will always remain a virtue, a virtue that philosophers too often lack”<sup>120</sup>. Nietzsche himself wrote: “so much mistrust, so much philosophy”<sup>121</sup>. This absolute mistrust is not (or at least not only) commanded by probity, but it is something that is pleasant to Nietzsche, following from his own psycho-physiological complexion, that seems to be inclined towards nihilism, as he stated: “For a warrior of knowledge, who is always fighting against ugly truths, the conviction that there is no truth is a great refreshing bath, a rest for all limbs. – Nihilism is our own delight [or relaxation, in French the word is *délassement*]...”<sup>122</sup>. Besides, in a posthumous aphorism titled “that we can believe anything at all [que l’on puisse croire quoi que ce soit]”, Nietzsche even provides a moral argument against truth:

Asserting that the truth is out there [que la vérité est là], and that ignorance and error are a thing of the past, is one of the most serious perversions imaginable. If we believe in it at all, the will to examine, to be cautious, to experiment, is paralyzed: it can even seem impious, as doubt as to the truth... “Truth” is therefore more fatal than error and ignorance, because it hinders the forces necessary to work for the enlightenment of knowledge. The passion of laziness is now siding with “truth”. Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes*, XIV, 15 [46], p.202.

Thus, Nietzsche’s aversion for truth is rather strong, and he cultivates mistrust as an absolute virtue; however, mistrust should be measured and be brought only to the claims or

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<sup>120</sup> Dixsaut, « On n’a pas été philologues en vain », in: Balaudé and Wotling (Dir.), “*L’art de bien lire*”. *Nietzsche et la philologie*, p.118.

<sup>121</sup> Nietzsche, *Gai savoir*, §346, pp.290-291. See also, Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §34, p.86: “The philosopher finally has the right to be « ill-tempered », for having always been, until now, the most abused being on earth—he now has a duty to be wary, to glare with the most malicious eye from the depths of suspicion”.

<sup>122</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes* XIV, 16 [30], p.243.

phenomena that contradict experience. As a matter of fact, if mistrust is applied even to experience (as a whole), then there is no possibility of being philological anymore, for we oppose something else to experience and it is not economical. And upon what reason could mistrust of experience be based? Nietzsche denies conscious experience any access to truth because he has the prejudice to understand truth as an absolute of objectivity<sup>123</sup>, while it could be, instead, the absolute of our situation<sup>124</sup>. Indeed, perspective does not prevent the contact with an absolute, it is Nietzsche's prejudice that leads to see the two as antithetical, still opposing an in-itself (as a pure positivity, unambiguous, that should appear fully and all at once) and our experience as a creation and illusion, as subjective lies that objectify and miss the plurality. Nietzsche is afraid (or *too* cautious?) to draw an ontology based on perspective, worried that it would betray reality (in this way he is still pious<sup>125</sup>, which translates not in the fear of being deceived, personally, but on the contrary in the fear of being unfair or unjust to reality), but he thinks so because he still assumes (implicitly) that reality should, if it was accessible, be a pure, unambiguous, positive Being (albeit a plural one). Thereby, the in-itself remains in Nietzsche's philosophy, as something unreachable (or that he even explicitly denies) but that he still expects or posits, in spite of himself, which leads him to be disappointed<sup>126</sup> by the interpretations according to this expectation that they

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<sup>123</sup> It appears that it is case of Wotling too, as he stated in *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.97: "The psychology of the will to power thus rejects the very possibility of « objective » or « disinterested » knowledge" and then he proceeded to discard the search of knowledge completely, while only its objective claim have been undermined.

<sup>124</sup> See for instance Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours. 1959-1961*, p.283: "Therefore, there is the fact of the knowledge that we are and which is contact with the absolute. [...] Implication of the absolute in us as beings within the truth, an absolute that is not something else than our truth, which is not separated from the *Erkennen*. This attitude is not dogmatic, but on the contrary the real critical attitude, radical; for it is the decision to go to the trouble of "giving" the concept of the absolute, of the *Erkennen*, of the objective, the subjective, instead of presupposing them as known by all or implying the concept one has of them."

<sup>125</sup> See Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, §344.

<sup>126</sup> On this disappointment in the field of knowledge (characterizing the pessimist way of thinking), see Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours. 1959-1961*, pp.141-142: "Irrationalism or nihilism are deeply kindred to the prior Metaphysics; it is its counterpart, a *disappointment*; but, for all that, it does not bring back the pre-metaphysical innocence of indistinction. It seems that the description is pessimistic and backward-looking. Since Hegel, a flattening of the world has taken place, which is the cause of the collapse of German idealism, *i.e.* the world without relief, as a mirror that does not reflect anything anymore, unique surface of the "facts",

should (even though they cannot) deliver the knowledge of an in-itself. Thus, in the alternative between “delete either your venerations, or yourselves”<sup>127</sup>, it seems that Nietzsche did not manage to fully rid himself of his inherited venerations. It is the persistent and necessarily disappointed expectation or veneration of the in-itself (and his over-emphasized mistrust) that prevents Nietzsche from granting his own interpretation an adequate status (as a perspectivism introducing to reality in the flesh) and asserting a positive epistemological difference between his philosophy and the other (dogmatic) interpretations that overlook and deny perspectivism. Müller-Lauter also noticed this remanence of the in-itself (as an expectation impossible to fulfil, but whose standard still taints his appreciation of experience) in Nietzsche:

The acuity of perception that must be the prerogative of chemical forces as such lies in its assured and determined character. Only stable perceptions, which Nietzsche in fact attributes to the inorganic, can assume such a character. Insofar as this stability, understood as permanence, was the criterion of the traditional concept of truth, Nietzsche can say of perception in the inorganic world: “There ‘truth’ reigns!” It seems to me that these and other posthumous fragments<sup>128</sup> reveal Nietzsche's undisguised nostalgia for the “truth” whose destruction is a major motif of his philosophy. It is this same nostalgia that is heard when he notes that “the inorganic world” that lies behind organic life is “the highest and most venerable thing.” “Error, limitation of perspective” is absent from it. Müller-Lauter, « La pensée nietzschéenne de la volonté de puissance » in: *Nietzsche. Physiologie de la volonté de puissance*, p.103.

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of the measurable and the indifferent, of the identical. All “*welthafte Geistige*” [something like a world] is destroyed, deemed a lie, man does not act within a *Stiftung*”.

<sup>127</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §346, p.291.

<sup>128</sup> Müller-Lauter mentioned Nietzsche's *Posthumous Fragments* from the time of the redaction of *Gay Science*, II [70]: “Let's not think of this return to the insensible state as a regression! It is where we become totally real, where we are fulfilled. We must reinterpret death! In this way, we reconcile ourselves with reality, *i.e.*, with the dead world”. In this fragment, Nietzsche still admits a truth, inaccessible to consciousness, that can only occur to (or in) the inorganic, and therefore he maintains the old conception of absolute truth, in a way that stands against life (as life is an obstacle to knowing this truth), rejoicing for the moment we die for it is the moment when we join the truth. Such a conception of truth is at the polar opposite of an interpretation that would be valued positively by genealogy.

Certainly, Nietzschean scholars will find aphorisms (among the several thousands he wrote) that will explicitly contradict this interpretation and Nietzsche's implicit reliance on an in-itself. In fact, I did so myself, with the excerpts I used from Nietzsche in the part about the philological reduction where he abolishes both the world in-itself and the apparent one. These are his most philological statements. But they are very rare, and we cannot simply cherry-pick them and ignore the rest, deeming his weaker statements as an irrelevant metaphor or a play of words while they also structure an important part of Nietzsche's thought. It is a good endeavor, when trying to understand an author, to read them with benevolence and take their writings under the best light possible, so as to push their thoughts to the furthest and fullest of what they can teach us. Nevertheless, if some prejudices remain and impede the most philological account of experience, it is also important to accept it, to notice where these prejudices play a structuring role and lead to inherent conflict, tensions or contradictions, serving opposite purposes, so that we can fight these prejudices and propose an even more faithful and economical account of experience. In this fashion, I will provide arguments (mostly in the first part of this thesis) that lead me to think that the characteristics of the Will to Power display a spiritualized (in the Nietzschean sense) subjectivism and objectivism, instead of a radical overcoming of them, which in turn leads to subordinate philology to genealogy instead of maintaining the two methods (this incompatibility, in the Nietzschean framework, will appear already at the end of this introduction). Nietzsche did not specify what epistemology or ontology we obtain once we overcome the distinction between in-itself and appearance, so it is not sure if he was himself fully aware of all the consequences this overcoming implies. If this overcoming was fully understood and developed in all its consequences, the strict ontological and epistemological distinction between the "text" and interpretation should be abolished, and because a lot of Nietzsche's previous philosophical results were established on the ground of this distinction,

it should lead to revisit and revise them. However, this “update” (or, rather self-overcoming) of Nietzsche’s previous results is missing. Indeed, for the most part, Nietzsche maintained this prism of a text (in-itself) against a plurality of interpretations that are always only subjective and created, and thus he did not accomplish fully the radical philological reduction that leads back to the forgotten “text” previously covered by objective interpretations. Nietzsche acknowledged the interpretive status of all knowledge, but he still considered all conscious perspectives to be subjective, not finding an ontological meaning or relevance in them, for he conceived them as creations, and, as such, nothing guarantees that any interpretation reaches more the world (or is more faithful to it) than the other ones. There is a crucial shift occurring when one goes from an ontology of an in-itself to a perspectivist one (and in this respect Schacht was right); however, Nietzsche missed it because he did not have an epistemology nor a conception of language and consciousness that allows an expression (he saw language as a subjective creation, preventing us from reaching the text, and thus maintained a subjectivist framework, in solidarity to an in-itself). Undoubtedly, Nietzsche refused to reify any particular object as a reality in itself; nevertheless, he did not eliminate the structure of the in-itself *per se*, it is maintained as an extra-sensible source of our interpretations (of which the will to power is just an interpretation). Because of the framework of the “interpretation”, Nietzsche must posit a being outside of the interpretation and experience. This scission is the cause of the impossibility of an epistemological criterion and difference. It also causes the debasement of the epistemological status of the interpretation, the position of an in-itself that we cannot know properly and that debases what we know (that becomes just a part of reality, the lesser one, subjective, while the true reality is posited elsewhere). This prevents an autonomous and self-sufficient (as well as monist) philological account of experience and reality. In this

way, Blondel is more consistent with Nietzsche's framework than Schacht when he acknowledges that:

Nietzsche can then hypothesize, on the basis of the way language works, about the laws of the "body", about the interplay of drives. But these intuitions remain conjecture, since to attribute a rhetoric to the body would be to confuse the sign with the signified, to moralize the body, Schopenhauerian intuitive realism. Nietzsche is also wary of this realism: for him, the will to power is "only a word to designate" a process, not the very essence of reality. Finally, the semiotic character of moral language leads Nietzsche to avoid crude physiological realism by using the categories of philological deciphering to describe physio-logy. Nietzsche knows that this is only a metaphor, an operative a priori, which he is careful not to confuse with what it applies to. We might even ask whether the fundamental problem of Nietzsche's philosophy is not that of the heterogeneity of language and the body. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, pp.184-185.

Blondel's rejection of the possibility to consider the will to power as a metaphysical and ontological position<sup>129</sup> is due to the fact that there is no epistemology or theory of language in Nietzsche that allows a faithful ontological expression (that, on the contrary, Merleau-Ponty will develop): every word or signification occurring to (or reaching) the consciousness is a creation and falsification according to him. If our consciousness is only superficial and producing (or being presented) fictions that simplify, stabilize and falsify reality, then how can we know of the deep and underground forces or of the true state of the world? Nietzsche claims that the drives (or will to power) partake to experience, but how? The affects Nietzsche speak of (as infra-conscious entities) are similar to some things we encounter in experience, but if we take his theory of language and knowledge seriously then it can only be a metaphor and we can never truly reach the drives, values or will to power. They seem

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<sup>129</sup> See also Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, note p.165: "With Nietzsche, there is no metaphysical exposition or transcendental deduction of the interpretative *a priori* of the will to power. What takes its place « is only an interpretation »".

to reside in another in-itself, not a supra-sensible one but still one that is not perceived, not experienced by us but by our complex of will to power which is also resting in-itself (from the point of view of our conscious self), in a layer or order of reality that precedes and is below the conscious one. Therefore, Nietzsche attempted to provide an ontology, but without an epistemology that could justify it, he denied our experience (reducing it to a secondary product of the underlying forces), so it is not philological, and on top of that he repeated the schema and structure of the in-itself in the ontology he proposes (in an altered way, but keeping most of the non-philological elements of it, namely the reduction of our perception and conscious experience to a secondary and subjective sphere, thus recreating a division between two worlds or two spheres of reality: the infra-conscious and the illusory, falsified conscious). In such a framework, there is no direct faithful knowledge that can be developed about reality or Being and the philologist has to turn towards genealogy to try to read the drives through and below the interpretations (without explaining clearly how one can reach, through the interpretations as symptoms, the reality of the will to power below them). Therefore, it is Nietzsche's lack of philology (or, rather, his lack of radicality in philology) that prevents him from considering it as an autonomous method, which in turn prevents him from conceptualizing its proper articulation and relation to genealogy. Blondel clarifies well this distorted philology and its relation to genealogy:

Philology, even more than an epistemological model, will provide genealogical analysis with its transcendental, in the proper Kantian sense (forms and categories). The principles of philology are the condition of possibility for the phenomena of culture as a text to be read and deciphered. Nietzsche transforms culture into a set of signs, just as the given of experience is presented by Kant as the phenomenon of an in-itself that cannot be the object of direct intellectual intuition, and to which, for Nietzsche, the reality-in-itself of the body would correspond. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.117.

This leads to conclude that Nietzsche repeats a Kantian framework and posits another in-itself (the only difference being that, in Nietzsche's case, the in-itself is the body<sup>130</sup>), unknowable, from which all interpretations are equally distant for it cannot be known in-itself and the difference between an in-itself and subjective representations are as great as when one would try to translate a sensual experience from a sense to another (an example Nietzsche uses in *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*<sup>131</sup>), for instance attempting to translate a color in music or a caress in smell, with no relation between them (according to Nietzsche). From the in-itself to representations, there is an impossibility of translation, adequation, expression or communication. As a result, if the interpretations are based on falsification and maintain a dualist ontology – a reference to something beyond or prior to experience – they cannot be faithful at all, it is impossible to hierarchize the interpretations according to their faithfulness, for they all miss the infra-conscious reality. Thus, in such a Kantian framework, philology can only work as a negative criterion, reprimanding the interpretations that claim they are objective, reminding them of their intrinsic limit and relative right. Philology only protects the in-itself from any subjective claim, but it cannot decide which interpretation is superior (except based on this negative criterion). Therefore, it is the lack of epistemological renewal and the reliance on a Kantian model that lead to consider philology as simply a servant of genealogy, one of its tools among several others. It is impossible to elaborate a positive philology in the Nietzschean framework, the most

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<sup>130</sup> See Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.117: "The body, a reality of culture but unknowable as such, can only be approached as a set of signs: as a phenomenon of culture, it is text, without being reduced to it, just as the phenomenon cannot be dissociated from the unknowable noumenon that it is for us. In both cases, an *a priori* (the transcendental and the philological reading) goes hand in hand with the impossibility of a direct apprehension of things in themselves. [...] Nietzsche gives reality, as a thing "in itself", to the body, and assigns the status of illusion, false appearance or idol to morality and culture, just as Schopenhauer attributed the reality of the thing-in-itself to the will-to-live and transformed the reality of the Kantian phenomenon into illusion".

<sup>131</sup> Nietzsche, *Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral*, pp.13–14 : "A nervous excitement first transposed into an image! First metaphor. The image in turn remodeled into a sound! Second metaphor. And each time, a perilous leap from one sphere into the middle of a whole new and different one. Let's think of a man who is completely deaf and has never experienced any sensation of sound or music: he is astonished to see Chaldni's acoustic figures in the sand, finds their cause in the quivering of the harp, and swears that he knows with certainty what men call « sound »!"

faithful description of experience (even the will to power) will only ever remain an interpretation among many others and this task of description could go on forever without ever getting closer to a “better” knowledge. It is probably because Nietzsche was aware of this fact that he needed to turn towards genealogy, shifting completely of method, task, goal and ground, as the search for knowledge was doomed to failure, to an endless search running in circles and leading nowhere. In this way, Blondel stated that Nietzsche can, “by denying the possibility of judgment on the object, show that only genealogical judgment on the authors of the judgment is relevant”<sup>132</sup>. Thereby, in the Nietzschean framework, we have either no access to truth, that remains a mysterious X we all interpret, or we attempt to think that the will to power is the most probable and economical interpretation and should be held as a truth (in a pragmatic or probabilistic fashion, but at the bottom it remains an interpretation, except if we enter a metaphysical dogmatism, since no epistemological change granted it another status), but in either case, the problem of knowledge and philology is solved (or deemed unsolvable) and brings to another problem, the one of values, in which the problem of truth and faithfulness dissolves and disappears. Philology, as an independent task, method and criterion is given up, or its sole purpose becomes to uncover the ontology of the will to power and then disappear. At best, it is still being used negatively, as a means to criticize other interpretations (for it cannot positively provide a faithful account of reality), and is subordinated to genealogy. The search for truth or probity becomes only a specific case of genealogy, determined by values, and thus it is not to be taken seriously and literally, independently and for itself, as it is only a sign or expression of a non-interrogated value, tied to a specific history and way to live. As such, philology steps aside for genealogy. Indeed, according to Wotling,

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<sup>132</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.269.

Bringing philosophy into line with its idea [in the Nietzschean framework] implies abandoning the problematic of truth, which is merely secondary, derivative, and therefore ultimately superficial (but unaware of its derivative character), and replacing it with a problematic that is in line with this demand for radicality [namely, the problematic of the values, requiring philosophy to adopt a genealogical approach]. Wotling, « Apparence et phénomène », in: Bertot and Leclerc (Dir.), *Nietzsche et la phénoménologie. Entre textes, réceptions et interprétations*, p.150.

Thus, even if the two tasks of philology and genealogy coexisted at first within Nietzsche, over time his primary task became the genealogical one, consisting in evaluating the value of our values and promoting the ones that are better for life, and this led to “the rejection of the problematic of truth in favor of the problematic of value”<sup>133</sup>. Nietzsche himself goes as far as stating that “the falsity of a judgment is not sufficient in our eyes to constitute an objection against a judgment”<sup>134</sup>, which means that the prism of value and of genealogy became his main one, for, in the framework of philology, a false judgement would either add or remove to experience and therefore be dismissed or hierarchized low, it would be an objection against this judgement, but it is not the case anymore for Nietzsche. Philological probity has become subordinated to Nietzsche’s most urgent and important task: the transvaluation of all our values and the promotion of a better culture for human life.

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<sup>133</sup> Wotling, Introduction, in: Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, p.16. See also, *ibid.*, p.18: “it is the issue of value that needs to take centre stage” and Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, pp.32-33: “What Nietzsche sees as his task: to encourage the emergence of a certain type of culture, and simultaneously, of a certain type of human”.

<sup>134</sup> Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §4, p.50.

### G) *Genealogy as “Non-Philosophy”*

The shift to the task and ground of values allowed Nietzsche to escape the aporia of the in-itself, leaving its limitations and sphere of influence, but he did so at the cost of changing completely his field of investigation, moving to the axiological one and giving up on any positive epistemological difference. Keeping on pursuing a faithful or true knowledge is a lack of radicality according to Wotling, for the value that governs this desire for truth and probity is not interrogated, left in the background, while it is the decisive component without which this knowledge would not even be sought after, and, in fact, constitutes its ultimate truth or being, along with the whole axiological continent that comes with it and that shapes the whole of experience. In this manner, Wotling could write that “in a much broader way, Nietzsche’s thought contests the relevance of any philosophical questioning that is constituted in the perspective of the search for truth by showing that this search is determined by deeper instances”<sup>135</sup>. This is what Wotling opposes to phenomenology, and more generally to any attempt at faithfully describing experience. In an article dedicated to this question, he argued that: “phenomenology, in order to be implemented, still presupposes the validity of the notion of truth; or to put it more precisely, presupposes that we do not see its character as a value, in other words, as a preference constituted by an infra-conscious belief assimilated to the life of the body”<sup>136</sup>. In other words, Wotling debases the phenomenological attempt to describe experience faithfully as he debases the criterion of truth and probity (as being only one criterion among many others, not aware of its own situationality and

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<sup>135</sup> Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.27.

<sup>136</sup> Wotling, « Apparence et phénomène », in: Bertot and Leclerc (Dir.), *Nietzsche et la phénoménologie. Entre textes, réceptions et interprétations*, p.159.

relativity), and more generally the search of knowledge for the sake of knowledge, which applies to any ontological attempt. This dismissal from Wotling stems from the attempt to reduce the whole of reality to our drives and values. Indeed, if the only ontology is that of the drives and of the will to power, then the literal content of the interpretations is senseless and not worth studying. However, cannot the two tasks of philology and genealogy coexist, as equals, independent of one another, adopting a different (but not absolutely exclusive) outlook towards experience and reality? Does the genealogical criterion of value and life fully replace the philological one, obliterating it with no remains or relevance left? It is not the case according to Merleau-Ponty. As a matter of fact, he was well aware of Nietzsche's change of task and method for philosophy, but he still pursued his own philological task of expression of the world and experience. In the following excerpt of *Eye and Mind*, he sides with Cézanne, whose urgent task and priority is to understand the appearing of the world, meditating on our situation in the world, on perception and on the sensible to unveil their silent meaning, regardless of any genealogical considerations:

Although the most insignificant student, after Nietzsche, would flatly reject philosophy if it was said that philosophy does not teach us how to live life to the fullest [qu'elle ne nous apprend pas à être de grands vivants]. It is as if in the painter's calling there were an urgency that passed beyond every other urgency. The painter is there, strong or frail in life, but sovereign incontestably in his rumination on the world, [...] he is there relentless to pull from this world, in which the scandals and achievements of history resound, *canvasses* which will hardly add to the angers or the hopes of humanity; and no one mutters. What, then, is the secret science which he has or which he seeks? Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.353.

Wotling denies the search for a true or faithful knowledge because they are determined by another instance (the infra-conscious drives) and are to be understood solely from a genealogical standpoint, but isn't replacing all the meaning of the expressions by simply the

human behind them and the kind of life their author led a reductionist endeavor? Can we really understand every ontological interpretation as a symptom and expression of a kind of life (of values)? Isn't this reduction too restrictive? Certainly, the search for knowledge is determined, but in what way does this determination cancel or eliminate the whole facticity and being of the world and the relevance of its description? Does the fact that the quest for truth is fundamentally determined axiologically by other instances make its ontological result invalid? How are the two connected? Shouldn't ontology preserve a specific right and realm, beyond the genealogical considerations? Isn't there a being of the world, of reality and of experience to describe for their own sake, without subordinating them to the kind of life the interpreter is leading? Showing the cultural, axiological and social determinations of my existence does not annihilate it for instance, so why should that be the case for truth, philology and experience? In this way, the fact I will get a benefit for my ego and self-worth when taking part in a humanitarian action does not remove the fact that some food or shelter will be given to people in need. Drives might provide the origin of an action, decision or thought, but they do not exhaust the whole reality. The axiological origin is not everything. There is a world too; a sensible world of experience where events occur, with a facticity and meaning of their own that is not exhausted by their axiological dimension. Merleau-Ponty argued the same when some thinkers tried to understand (and reduce) the whole of Cézanne's works according to its psycho-physiological and axiological origins:

His extreme attention to nature and color, the inhumanity of his painting (he used to say that a face should be painted like an object), his devotion to the visible world, would only be an escape from the human world, the alienation of his humanity. – These conjectures do not give the positive meaning of the work, nor can we conclude from them that his painting is a phenomenon of decadence, or, as Nietzsche put it, of "impoverished" life, or that it has nothing to teach the accomplished man. It is probably because Zola and Emile Bernard placed too much emphasis on psychology, on their personal knowledge of Cézanne, that they believed it was a failure. It

remains possible that, in the midst of his nervous weaknesses, Cézanne conceived an art form that was valid for everyone. Left to his own devices, he was able to look at nature as only a human can. The meaning of his work cannot be determined by his life. Merleau-Ponty, « Le doute de Cézanne », in: *Sens et non-sens*, p.15.

Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues that there remains an autonomy of the task of philology. Nietzsche understands the reasons of our thoughts and actions, but he does not exhaust all the meaning of these thoughts and actions themselves, and if some thoughts can be expressive of our concrete experience, then his genealogical approach would not reduce them, it would not even be relevant to them, the two methods would simply take place in two different fields, according to different perspectives and criteria. When asked if there was a scale of values according to Merleau-Ponty between the different disciplines and fields of experiences, he replied that it all depends on the goal we have and on the perspective and criterion we adopt:

Certainly, for me, there is a scale of values. Which is not to say that we consider what is below as something to be eliminated. It seems to me, for example, that if we set knowledge the goal of reaching the concrete, well, in certain respects we will be obliged to put art above science [or genealogy], insofar as it achieves an expression of the concrete man that science does not propose. But the hierarchies you are talking about right now presuppose a point of view: under one point of view, you get a hierarchy, and under another point of view another hierarchy. We are dealing with concentric rather than hierarchical research. Merleau-Ponty, *Le Primat de la perception*, p.78.

There is not one goal or criterion that is absolute and could dismiss all the other ones. The method and criterion we apply are also a perspective among others, and they each hold a part of the truth, emphasizing different aspects or dimensions of experience. Therefore, what Nietzsche's genealogy can rightfully deny is the absoluteness or exclusiveness of the criterion of truth, but it does not obliterate this criterion and task completely, and genealogy

does not become a new absolute or exclusive criterion and dimension: they both coexist as different outlooks applied to the reality of experience that overflows all singular perspective. Thereby, the traditional goal of philosophy, namely to develop a true or faithful knowledge, is not prevented anymore by Nietzsche's genealogy. Which is why, in order to understand the specificity of Nietzsche's position, Merleau-Ponty talks about philology as philosophy (because it still shares the same task as the whole tradition of philosophy, namely to describe reality – now understood as experience –, elaborating a faithful ontology and epistemology), while he characterizes genealogy as “non-philosophy”. Indeed, we can find in the courses' summaries from 1959-1961 statements such as: “after Hegel: anti-philosophy, being is a « vapor » (Nietzsche), the unconditioned is weak, will to will, God is dead”<sup>137</sup>, or:

Something has ended with Hegel. There is, after Hegel, a philosophical emptiness, which does mean not that the thinkers or geniuses were lacking, but it means that Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche start from a denegation of philosophy. Do we have to say that with them we enter in an age of non-philosophy? Is this destruction of philosophy its realization? Or does it retain its essence, and philosophy, as Husserl wrote, rise from the ashes? Merleau-Ponty, *Résumés de cours (collège de France, 1952-1960)*, pp.141-142.

Thus, Merleau-Ponty identifies a crisis of philosophy after Hegel (following on this point Husserl's diagnosis in his *Krisis*) and refers to Nietzsche in this context, who also identified a crisis of philosophy, for its traditional quest to find an objective truth has proven impossible since any knowledge contains biases and is an interpretation, not a transparent or exhaustive understanding. It is therefore the crisis induced by the in-itself, made explicit with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as the realization that our knowledge is subjective and perspectivist and that “true Being” always escapes. In this context, Merleau-Ponty questions: “But what comes after? Are Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche really from after the metaphysics? Or the

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<sup>137</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours. 1959-1961*, p.141.

nihilistic conclusion of its history? Landmark of the future or another expression of the same crisis of our philosophy?"<sup>138</sup>. By changing his field of investigation, from knowledge, ontology and truth to the one of values, axiology and genealogy, Nietzsche did not solve the crisis of philosophy, he simply noticed it and escaped its consequence by developing a whole new method and task. One consequence of the in-itself is that we can never ultimately decide on the superiority (or truth) of an interpretation in the field of knowledge. Nietzsche felt that, and his answer was to change field of interrogation, to move on to the axiological one, instead of fighting radically the in-itself on the ground of knowledge and ontology. The "non-philosophy" that followed this decision is not to be understood as something of lesser value than philosophy (as a search for truth and knowledge) but as situated outside of it, on another ground, not searching for a knowledge anymore but for values, psycho-physiological origins and ways to live, thus highlighting the specificity of Nietzsche's approach and its distance or difference from the traditional goal of philosophy. If genealogy is not interested in knowledge *per se*, if it takes place on the ground of axiology, and if, at the same time, the quest for a faithful knowledge remains possible, then is genealogy really philosophy? Even if it is possible to disagree with Merleau-Ponty, his point of view is certainly food for thought. The Nietzschean scholars would certainly consider that Nietzsche is still within philosophy and tries to change it from the inside; however, they also cannot deny that he has a unique position in the history of philosophy and that he advocates for a change of task or problem of philosophy. Indeed, he wants philosophy to be interested in values more than in (and instead of) truth. Thus, if one proposes to change the goal but also the method of a discipline (which should be genealogical, axiological and civilizational instead of epistemological, ontological and philological in this new conception of philosophy), it is understandable that some can consider that this person is stepping outside of this discipline

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<sup>138</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours. 1959-1961*, p.38.

and is creating a new one. At the very least, the characterization of Nietzsche as being outside (or on the other side) of philosophy emphasizes the specificity of Nietzsche's proposition, when most non-Nietzschean authors miss the most crucial and unique point of his *Versuch* by trying to understand Nietzsche only within the frames of ontology and epistemology, as if he was still situated solely in the traditional framework of philosophy, namely on the ground of truth (including epistemology, ontology and metaphysics). Besides, I think that Merleau-Ponty's term of "non-philosophy", even if it can be contested, has at least the merit to keep the field of knowledge open but, moreover, to question if Nietzsche's ontology of the will to power, as well as his Kantian epistemology are the most philological options, or, if, by closing prematurely the field of knowledge and truth, Nietzsche maintained some anti-philological prejudices (and is thus still situated in the state of crisis of philosophy, without overcoming it). Maybe the will to power was the best ontological option to elaborate and conceive Nietzsche's genealogical method (at least initially), but it might not be the most philological position. Thanks to Merleau-Ponty, the philological question can be asked once again, and the method of genealogy can be freed from the ontology of the will to power, that could remain an operative framework but genealogy does not require the hypothesis of the will to power to be ontologically true to be able to function, it is enough to admit of drives (that can be conceived as a part of experience, they do not need to be the whole of experience). The drives and values-criteria do not need to be objectively true for genealogy to be efficient and possible. It could just be an operational, practical, framework. Therefore, conceiving genealogy as "non-philosophy" allows several interesting things. First, it allows to preserve a right for philosophy, that should not be dissolved fully in genealogy but can keep on attempting to describe faithfully our experience of being, therefore it maintains the possibility of ontology, epistemology and philosophy as a quest for a faithful knowledge. Merleau-Ponty admitted that there is a "decadence of the express, official philosophy";

however, his thesis is that “this decadence of philosophy is inessential; it is the decadence of a certain way to philosophize (according to the substance, subject-object, causality)”<sup>139</sup>. Nietzsche took his distance from these categories, and he criticized them; nevertheless, he did not solve the crisis of philosophy either, which led his endeavor to be incompatible with the traditional task of philosophy and with knowledge, he had to reduce the search for truth to a case of decadent value, or at least a non-interrogated one. By criticizing absolute being (one sense of truth, the traditional one) and removing all search for truth or being on this ground, didn't he throw the baby out with the bathwater? It is not because most philosophers answered wrongly and not faithfully to the question of the meaning of our relation to world (or simply of the meaning of the world) that the question itself should be abandoned: it can be a relevant question, with a relevant answer, and by switching completely question (from what is said to who said that and why did they say it) Nietzsche settles in another register (the axiological one, investigated genealogically, one dimension of the world) but leaves the question of the meaning of life, of experience, of reality and of our relation to the world unexplored and unresolved, he dismissed the non-philological interpretations but did not propose his own on the ground of truth, he asserted that “everything is interpretation” but he did not elaborate on what is perspective exactly, ontologically and epistemologically speaking.

In Nietzschean studies, philology and genealogy have long been considered co-dependent, not even so much as two distinct methods but as a continuation, flowing seamlessly into one another, as if genealogy was the natural, exclusive and necessary

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<sup>139</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours. 1959-1961*, p.39.

conclusion one can draw once they start adopting a philological outlook. Yet, in his attempt to radically solve the crisis of philosophy, Merleau-Ponty has adopted a philological method but without developing a genealogical or axiological approach and results or considerations at all, which means that the fate of philology is not necessarily meant to become a genealogy, unlike most Nietzschean commentators wrote or implied: it does not have to become one and might develop another fate of its own, like an independent task, problem and method. Maybe Nietzsche did not bring philology as far as it was possible, for he became more concerned about values and the cultural dimension of humanity in order to promote a healthier and stronger life-form. Perhaps his interest in the value of our values has supplanted his desire for a philological knowledge and drove him away from this task, which became mostly subordinated to it instead of being an independent task and method. This is not a reproach, and his new perspective and method, taking our values and the way we live as a problem instead of focusing only truth, is invaluable as well as very stimulating and maybe it is what we need the most as living beings. Hence, any consideration and result about philology developed in my thesis will not remove the originality and greatness of Nietzsche in his invention of the genealogical method and his taking culture as a problem. However, if Nietzsche's philology is not the only one possible and if philology does not have to turn into a genealogy, then there is also a possibility for philology to be brought further, considered only for itself (instead of being subordinated to another problem, task and method) and thus developing even more radical conclusions than Nietzsche's philological results, overcoming some prejudices that he might have still kept by not staying long enough in philology or by not pushing it far enough. Indeed, it would make sense for philosophers who devoted their whole life to a single method to manage to find other or deeper results than an author who was adopting simultaneously another one (and who focused more on this second method rather than on philology). It does not have to be the case, the perspicacity of Nietzsche could

have been higher than his successors' in philology, so it is not because they come after him or because they ignored the genealogical method that they are automatically better than him in regards to philology, but I will bring elements that will prove the superior probity of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of experience. Instead of positing *a priori* the complicity and continuity between philology and genealogy (or even their homogeneity, being the two faces of the exact same coin), questioning it and extending each of them in their own direction to their utmost degree might reveal an even deeper and unforeseen connection between the two, that was hidden by a superficial and always already presupposed agreement that did not study enough each of the methods separately. The help of Merleau-Ponty is priceless in this matter, for his purely philological approach can highlight, by contrast, the specificity of the genealogical method, as well as the autonomy of the philological one, and how they can relate once we think about them outside of a strictly Nietzschean context. The rigid and *a priori* continuity between philology and genealogy (that leads to give up on the philological method and to dedicate to the genealogical one once the reality of the drives has been uncovered) can be asserted only if the Will to Power is the most philological interpretation of reality, meaning that genealogy can exhaust the whole of experience or reality and that there is nothing left besides it. Indeed, if Nietzsche's reduction is valid (the reduction of reality to our drives and affects), then the whole philology is subordinated to genealogy, with the unique purpose to describe the different cultures and values so that genealogy can evaluate them and promote the best one; but if Nietzsche's reduction is not philological, non-justified by forgetting some important aspects of reality, then there is a non-negligible (maybe even a very important) part of philology that is independent of genealogy and escapes its realm, dealing with the aspects of reality forgotten by the reduction, allowing maybe an ontology and epistemology freed from the in-itself and from the subjective conception of the interpretations, opposed to an unreachable text. In this way, the association

that most Nietzschean thinkers suppose between philology and genealogy is, if not wrong, at least misleading or underestimating the possibility for philology to escape the reduction to genealogy (Nietzsche's main task). My distinction between philology and genealogy allows it to be autonomous and to introduce us to other realities, whose main interest will not help us to live better but simply to describe the whole text of reality, without missing any aspect nor adding any. Can the whole of reality really be reduced to values? Isn't this reduction anti-philological, by denying any ontological reach to the sensible experience we are aware of (for it is a fiction and creation), opposing to it an unknowable in-itself, or known only as the infra-conscious drives that caused and created our subjective (or conscious) sensible experience? Aren't values themselves inserted into a wider (ontologically speaking) ground? Can there be a more philological description of reality that still takes the values into account? If it is the case, then the philological task would maintain a certain autonomy or independence from genealogy, it could constitute a method in its own right, with its own goal which is to elaborate a faithful description of reality, in a way to provide an ontological and epistemological ground expressing experience itself, denying the world in-itself as an illusion and finding in experience everything there is to know and acknowledge. Conversely, if genealogy is freed from the exclusive outlook of the Will to Power, it could be employed by anyone, even outside of Nietzsche's ontological and epistemological framework. Therefore, if there is a more philological account of drives, which would not imply anymore the complete subordination of knowledge to axiology, then the two methods could be fully compatible again and be held together, with each their own method, task and criterion but with no need to make one of them disappear by choosing exclusively the other one. Nevertheless, this would become possible only if we can find an ontology and epistemology that is more faithful and economical than the Will to Power and that still integrates or takes the drives into account, situating them in a wider philological framework. In order to do this,

I must, in the first part of this thesis, examine the faithfulness of the Will to Power to experience and its economy. This task requires to uncover the epistemology and ontology at stake in Nietzsche's Will to Power, which is not obvious since Nietzsche refused to write in a systematic way and to found or establish explicitly his philosophical framework. Doing so will allow me to underline some anti-philological prejudices in the Will to Power. Only then will I be able, in the second part, to propose another – more philological – ontology and epistemology that manages to integrate drives and values-criteria while still striving, as its sole and unique goal, to stick to experience, to never leave it and describe it as faithfully as possible. This will lead us to Merleau-Ponty's dimensional ontology, that can understand the drives as a case of level or dimension.

## **I- The Philological Flaws of the Hypothesis of the Will to Power**

First, I should define broadly the will to power, to be able to use the concept later without interrupting the development. Nonetheless, this is a challenging task. Indeed, the will to power resists easy attempts at defining it, for it is a complex notion that encroaches upon several different registers of metaphors. This is the reason why I will study several of its core characteristics and key notions or attributes, to try to elucidate this notion progressively. Nevertheless, to provide a first idea and an operative framework, I can temporarily summarize the hypothesis of the will to power as an attempt to understand the whole of reality as the struggle between an irreducible plurality of infra-conscious drives and affects, which are not only psychological but they take on a psycho-physiological nature (prior to the dichotomy between subjects and objects). These drives “seek” to expand, to subjugate others and integrate them so as to seize their power for themselves, and any organization or unity is a structural one and results from such acts of domination and subjugation; however, any such unity lies on a precarious equilibrium that is not fixated but subject to shift by a redistribution of power and commandment at any time. When I write that the drives “seek” (or even the term “will” in the will to power) it is not to be understood as a psychological and conscious deliberate decision, Nietzsche rejected many times the traditional concept of “will” and he asserts that it is the very nature of the drives to strive to expand, dominate and command, which is why he also speaks of *quanta* of forces, their

relations resolve under or prior to the consciousness (so before there is any conscious “will”), but not in a mechanical manner. Indeed, Nietzsche rejected traditional mechanism too<sup>140</sup> (on top of rejecting idealism); there is a whole life and interplay of the drives – whose aftermath determines consciousness – that cannot be reduced to a single principle like “the strong absorbs the weak”: sometimes, the weaker values can impose their domination, like the Christian ones did according to Nietzsche<sup>141</sup>. The drives are also the source of the interpretations that reach the consciousness, they have some direct perception of the world and of the other forces, and the consciousness is just presented with the result of their interpretations, a product already digested, that has been elaborated by the struggle of the drives. Moreover, the drives are not something unchanging or unitary, on the contrary because of their “will” to constantly expand they keep changing and becoming. Hence, even though they form some complexes over time, these complexes never remain eternally stable nor reach a final or definitive form, they also keep changing. Thus, the will to power cannot be unified as a principle of reality or a “ground”, it is always a multiplicity. Therefore, when

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<sup>140</sup> For Nietzsche’s criticism of traditional mechanism, see for instance *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [82], p.60: “Is mechanism merely a symbolic expression for the internal real world of fighting and triumphant quanta of will? All the presuppositions of mechanism – matter, atom and thrust, gravity – are not « facts in themselves », but interpretations using psychic fictions. Life, as the form of being best known to us, is specifically a will to accumulate force [...]: this will remains the most fundamental and intimate element: mechanics is merely a semiotics of consequences”.

<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that, in spite of his explicit criticism of mechanism, Nietzsche sometimes expressed his hypothesis of the Will to Power in a mechanical, physical (the physics of forces and energies) or biological (see Müller-Lauter’s book on the Will to Power, where he underlines Nietzsche’s inspiration of Wilhelm Roux, a biologist who “sees the [organic] struggle as a mechanical process”; Müller-Lauter, « L’organisme comme lutte intérieure. L’influence de Wilhelm Roux sur Friedrich Nietzsche » in: *Nietzsche. La volonté de puissance*, p.169) manner, for instance when he asserted in *Par-delà bien et mal*, §22, p.71: “All power, at every moment, draws its ultimate consequence”, or in *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [144], p.113: “There is no reason to attribute to the mind the particularity of organizing and systematizing. The nervous system has a much wider remit: the world of consciousness is merely an addition to it. It plays no part in the general process of adaptation and systematization. [...] Consciousness, reduced to a secondary role, almost indifferent, superfluous, perhaps destined to disappear and be replaced by *perfect automatism*”. Nietzsche probably wrote in this way in order to expunge any will or consciousness from his interpretation, so he conceived the wills to power as quanta whose conflict would resolve almost automatically, in the manner of an equation. However, conceiving things likewise sometimes prompted him to posit an absolute determinism or even a kind of teleology and necessity of the historical becoming of humanity, which would have been led to its death and extinction if it had followed any other path. In this fashion (which is perhaps not the most economical one), he wrote in *Fragments posthumes XIV*, 14 [182], p.145: “It is absurd to assume that all this victory of values is antibiological: we must try to explain it by life’s interest. The preservation of the human type even by these methods of overdomination of the weak and the badly shared: otherwise, man would no longer exist?”.

I will use the singular form of the formula “Will to Power” it will be only for the convenience of language and to refer to the ontology and epistemology at stake when one thinks of reality as a plurality of wills to power. A key factor to grasp the will to power is to understand that Nietzsche built this concept precisely in opposition to the substance and to the ego, as well as to the object, that is why we can find traits opposite to the ones of these categories in the will to power: plurality (against unity), fluidity and becoming (against fixity), the wills to power are ever-changing, being of a psycho-physiological nature (overcoming the body-soul dichotomy), they are also more *quanta* than beings, a complex of forces whose organization keeps changing in the constant struggle for power and domination (against substance and objectivation). Nietzsche also made them infra-conscious so that they do not need to rely on consciousness, and they are of an interpretive nature instead of being objective so that they do not need to rely on constituted language, and so on... The real question and the topic of this part of my thesis will be to investigate if Nietzsche’s answer to the substance, the in-itself and the dichotomy subject-object is the best one and is philological, or if he identified wrongly (or, rather, not fully) the problems at stake in the traditional concepts of philosophy and therefore provided an incomplete answer, still maintaining some of the anti-philological prejudices of the philosophical tradition. Is an inversion of the predicates of the traditional categories enough? Or should a philological philosophy be a radical overcoming, proposing a totally new language, epistemology and ontology (and does Nietzsche’s attempt at a new language succeed in this overcoming)?

### A) *The World as Chaos and Bergson's Criticism of the Idea of Disorder*

Before dealing more directly with the hypothesis of the will to power, I would like to deal first with the idea that the world is a meaningless and absolute chaos. Nietzsche presented this idea several times, for instance in *Gay Science's* §109 as thus: “the general character of the world is from all eternity *chaos*, not in the sense of the absence of necessity, but on the contrary in the sense of the absence of order, articulation, form, beauty, wisdom and all our aesthetic anthropomorphisms, whatever we call them”<sup>142</sup>; or in a posthumous aphorism that I already quoted previously: “there is no antagonism here between a true world and an apparent world: there is only one world, and it is false, cruel, contradictory, misleading-seducive (*verführerisch*), devoid of meaning... a world thus constituted is the true world”<sup>143</sup>. I will not spend too much time on this idea because it is clearly a dogmatic, non-philological assertion (Nietzsche speaks of this chaotic state of the world as “the true world” but how does he know the state of the world beyond the interpretations? It sounds like he is talking of the world in-itself), but this idea or starting point of the world as chaotic and meaningless will have consequences for his ontology and epistemology, which is why I still need to tackle it<sup>144</sup>. Blondel gathered several other quotes of Nietzsche that posit the world as chaos, and he connects this idea with the will to power:

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<sup>142</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §109, p.162.

<sup>143</sup> Nietzsche, *KGW*, VIII, 2, 11 (415).

<sup>144</sup> In fact, since I will approach Nietzsche's philosophy from the point of view of philology and of conscious experience (since it is the experience we are aware of), the difference between a world as a pure chaos, devoid of organization, and a world made of Wills to Power that gathered in temporary structures or complexes is not relevant, for they are both infra-conscious realities and therefore share, for the most part, the same relation

The world, as raw nature, is chaos: “*Chaos sive natura*”; “The world is not an organism, but chaos”; “The beautiful chaos of existence”. Before the body, there is no order, no relationships, no text: the world is the height of multiplicity. It is text only through (or for) the drives that reduce this “absolute” multiplicity. But this reduction is not, like that of the intellect, the introduction of unity: if the body interprets, it does so as affects, and if affects interpret, they institute a certain simplicity only to pluralize it, for the affects constitute the unstable points of view in a game where they exist only in the plural. Nietzsche's detour through the body is a detour through the plurality of drives. [...] Culture begins as plurality and interpretation, as both simplification and plurality. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.223<sup>145</sup>.

The drives and wills to power are plural because they reflect and express the plurality of the world itself and of reality. Nietzsche himself often conceived the idea of the world as chaos and the hypothesis of the will to power as interconnected, as two faces of the same coin: “a precise name for this reality [the plural world as chaos] would be “the will to power”, so called because of its internal structure and not because of its protean, elusive and fluid nature”<sup>146</sup>. Therefore, because of their ties, the philological criticism of the conception of the world as chaos is important and already deals a blow to the soundness of the hypothesis of the will to power. To conceive the world as chaos, lacking any kind of order, unity or organization, amounts to attributing to an external sphere of reality (external to the conscious experience) characteristics that are not found in experience, for experience displays, on the contrary, sensible structures and organized unities. Where does this affirmation that the world is meaningless or completely foreign to our conscious experience come from? How

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towards consciousness, which will be conceived by Nietzsche as a created or constituted falsification of these infra-conscious realities

<sup>145</sup> The quotes from Nietzsche that Blondel refers too are, in order and respectively: Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes printemps-automne 1881*, 11 [197] and *été 1882*, 21 [3] n°55; *Fragments posthumes novembre 1887 – mars 1888*, 11 [74]; *Le Gai savoir*, §277 and §322.

<sup>146</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes XI*, 40 [53], p.391. See also another passage of Blondel's book that ties the will to power to the world as chaos, *op. cit.*, p.230: “the body being the principal instance where the chaos of the world is first reduced by each drive to be pluralized once again: the body, as unit-plurality, is the site of interpretation that constitutes the chaos of the world in plural units, in signs”.

could it even be known? There is no way to assert that the world is chaotic, it cannot even be experienced, it is an outside sphere (from the point of view of consciousness), belonging to the realm of the in-itself. We only have, as a thinking and writing philosopher, our conscious experience, so – except by supposing our whole conscious experience to be entirely false and then pointing towards an unknowable “beyond” (beyond this experience) – there is no way to conceive of the world as a chaos, it would be a pure negativity and emptiness, a word placed on the denegation of our whole conscious experience. On top of being an empty thought (or a thought whose reality could never be known to the thinking and writing philosopher, constituting an in-itself for us), it also isn’t an economic hypothesis, it supposes another sphere of reality, different in nature from our conscious experience, added as something more and different than experience by pure dogmatism. Therefore, since the hypothesis of a chaotic world is not certain, not knowable in experience and not economical, then what is it exactly? Such a hypothesis might be a cultural prejudice, and it undoubtedly is already a metaphysical choice (and not an economical one at that, for it goes against all of the requirements of a philological philosophy). Thus, if we take it seriously, Nietzsche’s claim of a meaningless and absolutely plural world, devoid of any order or unity, goes against experience and is not philological. It is probable that Nietzsche adopted the conception of the chaotic world because he did not consider perception trustworthy, he found it highly dubious and already containing a lot of added, human metaphysics. It is the only explanation that would make it more economical and faithful (in Nietzsche’s view) to dissolve all perceptual unity into a fluid plurality rather than accepting sensible unities. Nevertheless, how could we be sure that every type of unity is created by the intellect and is absolutely absent from the world? It would require one to know the world in-itself to hold such an affirmation. It is quite a bold statement, and as said before, it is not more economical since it requires to deny perception and posit another sphere of reality, while having on top

a causalist or representationalist approach to perception (that creates what we experience in a falsifying way). What is more philological: is it to postulate a plurality existing in-itself of which we have no idea or experience and positing that our knowledge of totalities is always already an artifact, creation, simplification and falsification, or is it to suspend the belief in the world in-itself (as a chaos in this case) and receive the perception of these totalities as a relation with sensible beings in the flesh? Why would a world of pluralities be more philological than a world of sensible wholes? And then how to explain intersubjectivity and communication if we all create our own subjective entities? To be economical (and thus philological) is to deal only with what we have in experience, not adding nor removing any aspect. But isn't this view of plurality coming only in a second time, by decomposing the perception of wholes that we first experience? Then, suspending all our prejudices, it would be more economical to stay at the level of these totalities (*Gestalt*) and, from there, elaborate an ontology and epistemology that interrogates and elucidates how we know them and relate to them, and what kind of being they are, rather than having them in experience and then discarding this experience to posit a chaotic world and then a world of drives. To have a reduction that makes sense philologically requires to have reasons to be suspicious of the fact that is reduced, but what exactly is suspicious about the unity of structure that we perceive? Why, even though they first appear as a unity, would it make more sense to dismember the perceived beings into a plurality? How is the existence of a plurality more justified than the one of unities<sup>147</sup>? This ontological privilege granted to plurality does not seem philological to me, and this arbitrary decision to deem the world pure chaos is probably

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<sup>147</sup> Nietzsche would probably invoke historicity and the idea that unities are just constituted and built over time, but why must historicity be conceived as a path towards falsification, why not a path towards a better knowledge, a progressive (through time) acquaintance with the world, the others and the things, as a co-nnaissance that allows the things to reveal themselves in their flesh? Experience presents a transcendence of Being, but, simultaneously, it does not present Being as absolutely foreign. In this way, philosophy (and philology) could be conceived as a creation that is at the same time a self-expression of the experience of Being, brought to its explicitness as a non-exhaustive contact with the flesh of the world that encompasses us. I will talk more about it in the next section on language. For now, let's just notice that Nietzsche's rejection of the unities is not the most economical interpretation possible.

due to Nietzsche's pessimistic assumption that the truth of Being is something dangerous, unknowable and meaningless. Some may argue that Nietzsche's pessimism is advantageous from an axiological standpoint, preparing an existential heroism, a type of human ready to face the chaos of the world and accept the lack of a more-than-human meaning, in order to then emphasize the creation of new human values. Nevertheless, even this existential heroism is based on the non-philological assumption that our sensible, conscious existences are absurd and based on nothing real. Certainly, Nietzsche is faithful to the transcendence of Being that exceeds the mere figures or objects of representation, but he did not render this wealth and transcendence in the most philological or economical way: his new language still intends a world in-itself, whose attribute is to be chaotic (and thus to deny our conscious and sensible experience). He posited this transcendence separately, outside of our interpretations, instead of understanding it as the dimensionality or depth of (and within) perception itself (therefore as an immanent kind of transcendence, a transcendence that is immanent to the experience we are aware of, to consciousness and perception).

Besides, not only is the idea of the world as chaos a dogmatic, non-philological assumption, but on top of that the idea of an absolute lack of order is, *per se*, non-sensical. The question to know whether there is an order or a lack of order in the world and in the things "only makes sense if we assume that disorder, understood as an absence of order, is possible, or imaginable, or conceivable. But order is the only real thing"<sup>148</sup>. This is what Bergson argued in several of his books. He did not tackle explicitly the idea of chaos, but he criticized harshly the idea of disorder, which is almost a synonym for the word chaos, for

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<sup>148</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.274.

what would chaos be if not a lack of any recognizable order? The chaos is even explicitly understood by Nietzsche as a “lack of order and articulation” in *Gay Science*’s previously quoted §209. Therefore, Bergson’s criticism of the idea of disorder (parallel to his criticism of the idea of nothingness) applies to Nietzsche. His argument consists in showing that, at least in experience (and philology only acknowledges experience), there is never an absence of order, but simply a different order than the one we were expecting. Thus, Bergson affirmed that

Disorder is simply the order we do not seek. You cannot remove one order, even by thinking about it, without giving rise to another. [...] All disorder thus comprises two things: outside us, an order; inside us, the representation of a different order which is the only one that interests us. Suppression therefore still means substitution. And the idea of a suppression of all order, *i.e.*, of absolute disorder [or, in other words, of the whole, true world as chaos], envelops a real contradiction, since it consists in leaving only one face to the operation which, by hypothesis, included two. [...] In other words, the idea of an order being added to an “absence of order” implies an absurdity. Bergson, « Le possible et le réel », in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp.108-109.

According to Bergson, the idea of disorder can have a meaning and usefulness, but only within certain limitations, for the commodity of daily-life language and referring to a particular experience: it cannot be generalized to the whole world or be used for speculative purposes (which is what Nietzsche does). To take an example, if I enter the room of a child and can only see a mess, I could tell that this room is in a state of total disorder, but I can tell this only because I expected the room to be tidy; in the eyes of the child there is an order to where the scattered toys have been left, maybe the ones closest to where the child usually plays are the ones that they use the most and want to be able to grab first and quickly for the next time. An analogous example could be when I am searching for my keys or a certain tool; I expect them to be in the flat and I cannot find them, so I say that they are “nowhere”,

but in reality they have to be somewhere, just not in the place I expect them to be. Hence, what Bergson means when he tells the idea of disorder is pragmatic or practical<sup>149</sup> is that it applies to such limited and personal situations (speaking from the perspective of an expectation, which is disappointed and leads to talk of a lack of order while another one is present, emphasizing the disappointment and leaving aside the remaining order), but it loses all relevance when one tries to use it in speculative matters, about the whole state of the world, as an in-itself (for the remaining order is absolutely denied instead of being implicitly maintained, which destroys the idea of order as a substitution<sup>150</sup>). An order always replaces another order, and if we do not find a specific one it means that there is another one that we ignore because it does not interest us at the moment, but it does not mean there is a lack of order; experience is never empty or chaotic, there is never a pure absence but always a kind of presence and order<sup>151</sup>. This led Bergson to conclude:

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<sup>149</sup> See for instance Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.274: "The idea of disorder is therefore entirely practical". This could be understood as "psychological" in the traditional sense of the term, although for Bergson (and Merleau-Ponty) the psychological can be ontological if it is grasped philologically. Indeed, in a philological paradigm, Being is expressed "in us" (although this distinction between "internal" and "external" becomes relativized and overcome), we perceive the world and in the world, my vision of the chair is not "in" me but at the chair. In this way, Barbaras wrote in « Le tournant de l'expérience. Merleau-Ponty et Bergson », in: *Le Tournant de l'expérience. Recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty*, pp.58-59: "When we get used to thinking about Being directly, says Bergson, « then the Absolute reveals itself very close to us and, to a certain extent, within us. It is psychological in essence, not mathematical or logical. It lives with us » [quote from *Creative Evolution*]. [...] Bergson discovers within the psyche a dimension of being that exceeds it". And Barbaras writes one page further: "Duration is that which resides indistinctly within us and outside us, that which we contain only as that which contains us: « in a sense everything is within us, in a sense we are in the Absolute » [quote from Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature*, p.74]. Duration is not psychological rather than ontological in nature; it is the articulation of the psychological on the ontological, or rather what makes possible the passage from one to the other". In a certain sense, Nietzsche also extends psychology to the whole of reality, as he conceives the Wills to Power as drives and affects (thus becoming a psycho-physiology); see Wotling's book on this topic: *La pensée du sous-sol*. Nonetheless, in Nietzsche's case this psychology might not be the one we find in consciousness or experience, as we will examine.

<sup>150</sup> On this idea of an ontological disorder as a dismembered substitution, see: "Since the absence of one thing is always the presence of another – which we prefer to ignore because it is not the one we are interested in, or the one we expected – a suppression is never more than a substitution, a two-sided operation that we agree to look at from only one side: the idea of an abolition of everything is therefore self-destructive, inconceivable; it is a pseudo-idea, a mirage of representation". Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, pp.266-267.

<sup>151</sup> See Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique II », in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp.67-68: "You cannot remove an arrangement without another arrangement replacing it, you cannot remove matter without another matter replacing it. « Disorder » and « nothingness » therefore really designate a presence".

Consequently, to speak of the absence of all order and of all things, *i.e.*, of absolute disorder and absolute nothingness, is to utter empty words, *flatus vocis*, since suppression is simply a substitution envisaged by only one of its two faces, and the abolition of all order or of all things would be a single-face substitution – an idea that has just as much existence as that of a round square. So when the philosopher speaks of chaos and nothingness, he is merely transporting into the realm of speculation – elevated to the absolute and thereby emptied of all meaning, of all actual content – two ideas made for practical use, and which then related to a specific kind of matter or order, but not to all order, not to all matter. Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique II », in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp.68.

Thus, speaking of an absolute lack of order or of the world as chaos is meaningless. The concept of chaos can be applied empirically within experience, but it cannot be applied ontologically to the whole of experience, referring it to a zero of meaning or to a totally different nature “in-itself”. The real content of such propositions, as Bergson underlined, is a disappointment: the idea of chaos “corresponds to a certain disappointment of a certain expectation, and does not designate the absence of any order, but only the presence of an order that offers no current interest”<sup>152</sup>. Therefore, beyond simply discarding the idea of disorder as non-sensical in the absolute, the fact that it is born from disappointment can lead us to ask what was Nietzsche’s disappointment that prompted him to deem the whole world chaos. What did Nietzsche expect to find and in what way did experience disappoint him? This can only be an hypothesis, but I would say it is possible that Nietzsche sought a world devoid of human biases, a world in-itself, pure of its meaning, that he can only obtain by removing any order – since he associates order to a human creation (*i.e.* to an anthropomorphism) – and he is therefore left with a chaos, a pure absence of order. Two

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<sup>152</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.274. See also, on this disappointment, the continuation of the previous quote: “« Disorder » and « nothingness » therefore really designate a presence – the presence of a thing or an order that does not interest us, that disappoints our effort or our attention; it is our disappointment that is expressed when we call this presence « absence »”. Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique II », in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp.67-68.

quotes of Granier point towards this interpretation: “By defining Being as chaos, Nietzsche frees nature from all-too-human idealizations, dehumanizing nature at the same time as he naturalizes man”; and “when Nietzsche speaks of « chaos », he means that Being is not reducible to any human ideal. It is mobility itself, the flow of interpretations that make up the « world »”<sup>153</sup>. The following aphorism of *Gay Science* also highlights the fact that Nietzsche denies “reality” simply for the reason that any knowledge or perception is given through human perspectives and with human biases:

You never cease to carry with you the assessments of things that originated in the passions and effusions of past centuries! A secret, impossible-to-extirpate intoxication is constantly at one with your austerity! Your love of “reality”, for example – oh, what an ancient “love”, as old as time! In every sensation, in every sensory impression, lies a piece of this ancient love: and likewise, some extravagance, some prejudice, some folly, some ignorance, some fear and who knows what else! have collaborated and woven the fabric. That mountain over there! That cloud over there! What is “real” about them? Take away all the ingredients added by man, you austere men! Yes, if only you could! If only you could forget your origins, your past, your first education – all your humanity and animality! For us, there is no such thing as “reality” – and neither for you, austere men! Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §57, pp.111-112.

Thus, Nietzsche found only human relations to the world, but he was not interested in them from an ontological point of view. This rejection of human perspective in the framework of ontology reveals that Nietzsche’s expectation was initially or implicitly to know the world beyond (or prior to) the human interpretations, devoid of biases and perspective and always exceeding or escaping them, the world without us, resting in-itself. It is this expectation that the world as chaos fulfils. According to Nietzsche, at least in a non-negligible number of aphorisms and in the perspective of the world understood as a chaos, only a pre-human world could be worthy of the status of “reality”. Nietzsche wanted to find

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<sup>153</sup> Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.324 for the two quotes.

a pure meaning of the world, devoid of any human presence, contact or influence; this is his disappointed expectation that is at the root of positing the world as chaos. Nietzsche finds humanity already everywhere in our knowledge, and he does not think that the world could be given at the same time as human relations, given together with them or through them; therefore, he posits the world as chaos, as a pure multiplicity, ever fluid and moving, that our understanding cannot reach. However, the assumption that human relations cannot give the world (*i.e.* the source of his disappointment) is a Nietzschean prejudice, it is not established or proven but simply assumed. Indeed, a philological inquiry might prove (or at least attempt to think according to) the contrary: namely, according to the hypothesis that the meaning of the world could be given (non-exhaustively but still given in the flesh) through a human relation. This is the attempt Merleau-Ponty will undertake, and if he succeeds, he will reach a more economical philosophy than Nietzsche, for he will not need to posit a world devoid of order outside of our consciousness, nor to debase perception and language. To acknowledge (ontologically speaking) only plurality in the world forces Nietzsche to conceive of language (which portrays unities and uses singular terms, nouns for instance) as an abstract and artificial creation, as lies and errors. In a framework based on an absolute plurality of the world and on a lack of any human meaning (relying on some unities and order), language and human cognitions can only appear as a fabricated positivity, as artificial and mistaken constructions that try to build a human sense on an ever-fluid and shifting sand. This is one of the consequences that Bergson warned about when he wrote that “the problem of knowledge is complicated, and perhaps rendered insoluble, by the idea that order fills a void, and that its effective presence is superimposed on its virtual absence. We go from absence to presence, from void to full, by virtue of the fundamental illusion of our understanding”<sup>154</sup>. It is in this way that Nietzsche’s position of a total absence of meaning in

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<sup>154</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, pp.274-275.

the world (an absence of any meaning or structure that our consciousness can know) has to be compensated by exaggerating the positivity of the meaning we obtain, as something purely created and therefore abstract and disconnected from the world, for the order they display is a fiction, established only for our convenience with no ontological correlate or inspiration (so without any expression of the world). A nothingness of meaning (*i.e.* the world as chaos) prompts Nietzsche to conceive the meaning we have (in consciousness) as a pure positivity and as a creation. Or perhaps it might be the other way around, Nietzsche refused to admit that language and human perspective could reach the world or any ontological reality, therefore he had to posit the world as an absolute plurality and chaos. In any case, there is a strong connection between Nietzsche's conception of the world as chaos and his conception of language, that we will now examine.

***B) Nietzsche's Conception of Language as a Creation and Falsification, and the Problem of Expressing his Thought***

Nietzsche has always been skeptical of language, the criticism of language has been constant throughout his works, denying it any ontological reach or expressive power (as an expression of the world and not just of ourselves, of our body). The only exception might be his first published book, *The Birth of Tragedy* – where Nietzsche still had a Schopenhauerian

metaphysical perspective –, in which he grants an ontological reach (expressing the Dionysian affects and reality) to the images and words of the lyrical poet, who has

the right to say “I”: except that this egoism is not the same as that of the awakened man, who possesses empirical reality, but the only egoism that truly is and stands eternally at the bottom of things, and thanks to whose aftershocks the lyrical genius plunges the gaze right to the bottom of things. Nietzsche, *La Naissance de la tragédie*, §5, p.112.

However, already in this first book, Nietzsche criticized language as such, and understood the ontological power of the lyrical poet as coming from its musicality, borrowing the expressive power of music, while words on their own are just superficial metaphors:

Lyric poetry can express nothing that is not already contained, with the most formidable universality and absolute validity, in the music that has forced it to speak in images. [...] In relation to it [music], all phenomena are merely metaphors. Hence the fact that *language*, as the organ and symbol of phenomena, can never render outwardly what is most profoundly intimate in music, and that it is always limited, on the contrary, to a superficial contact with music when it undertakes to imitate it, whereas all lyrical eloquence leads us as close as possible to its deepest meaning. Nietzsche, *La Naissance de la tragédie*, §6, pp.121-122<sup>155</sup>.

This tendency to understand language as a superficial creation that fails to express the heart of things will only strengthen in Nietzsche’s following texts. In this way, in another early writing, *On Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche conceives language as a falsification of truth and even of experience. From then on, Nietzsche understands language

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<sup>155</sup> See also, *ibid.*, §16, pp.198-200: “If we consider it as the expression of the world, then music is a universal language in the highest degree, and relates to the universality of concepts in much the same way as concepts relate to singular things. But its universality is by no means the empty universality of abstraction; it is of an entirely different kind, and is attached to a continuous, self-evident determinacy. [...] Concepts contain the forms initially derived from intuition, as it were the outer bark of things, and are thus *abstracta* in the strict sense, whereas music gives the innermost core preceding all form, or the heart of things. We could well express this relationship in the language of the scholastics, by saying: concepts are *universalia post rem*, while music gives *universalia ante rem*, and reality *universalia in re*”. In this way, music is superior to linguistic concepts in Nietzsche’s first book.

as conceived by the intellect, and he affirmed about the intellect that, “as a means of preserving the individual, it deploys its main forces in distortion”<sup>156</sup>, distorting our experience to produce words that ignore the individuality and uniqueness of each experience, forging general words that apply to more than one experience<sup>157</sup>. Hence, according to Nietzsche, linguistic signs are created for gathering dissimilar experiences or a fluid reality and putting a name (thus treating it as a thing, as one object) on a whole complex process, process from which we forget and deny a lot of aspects by forming a word. And then comes the phase of projection: we treat these signs as things, as real entities, while they are just an artifact elaborated for our convenience, in a pragmatic way. Thus, we take as real and existing some falsified tools and mummies. This criticism could already be discussed as such, for its limited understanding of what a sign is for instance. However, the most striking anti-philological component of Nietzsche’s criticism of language in the framework of this short book is that Nietzsche still adopted a causalist approach, he conceived experience as a relation subject-object in which the subject receives stimuli from the object: “What is a word? The sound transposition of a nervous excitation”<sup>158</sup>. This conception of experience still involves a thing in-itself, as the object that causes the stimuli that our body or intellect interprets, translates and falsifies is completely unknown and unknowable to consciousness:

We believe we have some access to the things themselves when we speak of trees, colors, snow and flowers, and yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things, which in no way correspond to the original entities. Like sound as a figure of sand, the enigmatic X of the thing-in-itself successively takes on the aspect of a nervous excitation, then an image, finally an articulated sound. In any case, the birth of language does not occur logically, and all the material in and with

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<sup>156</sup> Nietzsche, *Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral*, pp.8-9.

<sup>157</sup> See for instance: *ibid.*, pp.14-15 : “Every word immediately becomes a concept, precisely because it does not have to serve as a memory for the original, unique and completely singular experience to which it owes its birth, but must also adapt to innumerable cases that are more or less similar – in other words, strictly speaking, never identical, and therefore to a multitude of different cases. Every concept is born of the identification of the non-identical”.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

which the man of truth, the researcher, the philosopher, later works and builds [...] certainly does not come from the essence of things. Nietzsche, *Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral*, p.14.

This first quote could be interpreted as an ironic criticism by Nietzsche of the expectation of reaching an in-itself through language as well as through any other means, and therefore it could be a philological perspective. Nevertheless, the rest of the text refers non-ironically to a nature in-itself that debases all the concepts available to us in language and consciousness. Indeed, Nietzsche claimed that “the omission of the individual and real element provides us with the concept, just as it also gives us the form, while on the contrary there are no forms nor concepts, and therefore neither genre, *in nature*, but only an X that remains inaccessible and indefinable for us”<sup>159</sup>. On top of understanding nature as an in-itself opposed to experience, Nietzsche assumed here that the goal of a faithful language – if it was achievable – should be to provide the positive meaning of this ever fluid reality. However, this is a prejudice, for the goal or at least some uses of language could also be to describe relations, describing things of experience, for which language would be accurate and not deceitful anymore, as it is a relation. As a result, through his belief in a reality in-itself outside of experience and his discarding the relations, Nietzsche was not philological in his first criticism of language. The whole question will be to know whether his later criticisms of language are still contaminated (albeit maybe implicitly) by the belief that reality rests outside of experience and is inaccessible to conscious perception and language. Up until his last writings, Nietzsche did not change his conclusion that language should not be trusted to philosophize and to know reality or even to describe experience. Nonetheless, does this identical conclusion still contain anti-philological prejudices as Nietzsche’s philosophy

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

matured? Let us examine the issue, by observing how Nietzsche formulates his criticism of language in his later works.

In *Human, All Too Human II*, Nietzsche already stopped referring explicitly to an in-itself in his criticism of language:

Our usual imprecise observation takes a group of *phenomena* as a unit and calls it a fact: between it and another fact it adds an empty space by thought, isolating each fact. But *in reality*, our actions and our knowledge as a whole are not a succession of facts and intermediate empty spaces, but a continuous flow. [...] Words and concepts still induce us to constantly represent things as simpler than they are, separated from one another, indivisible, each existing in and for itself. There is, hidden in language, a philosophical mythology that resurfaces at any moment, no matter how cautious we may be. Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain II*, Le voyageur et son ombre, §11, pp.238-239.

Although the term “in reality” is ambiguous, the fact that Nietzsche mentioned “a group of phenomena” instead of, for instance, stimuli, is a philological progress compared to the previous text. A passage from *Dawn* also uses terms that point towards the interpretation that language does not invent completely (fabulating based on nothing), but simply that it does not allow for enough nuances, that it can only grasp the prominent aspects of experience and overlooks the plurality, fluidity and wealth of experience: “Language and the prejudices on which it is based are often obstacles to probing our inner processes and drives, not least because there are really only words for the superlative degrees of these processes and drives”<sup>160</sup>. Thus, instead of opposing language to a reality in-itself, Nietzsche now opposes

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<sup>160</sup> Nietzsche, *Aurore*, §115, p.114. In the same book, Nietzsche also titled the §47: “Words get in our way” (*ibid.*, p.67).

language, as focusing only on a few aspects and establishing objective, isolated entities, to experience as a broader, richer, fluid and plural reality, which is a more philological alternative. Merleau-Ponty also criticized the objectivist approach to language that considers that the words and the things constitute a positive and isolated existence. However, the crucial question is to know if this is the only fate and possibility of language, or if there could be a language that does not treat its words and the things as objects, as separate and independent entities (so without adding this “empty space” between the terms, keeping a link between them and with a depth or field). It seems that Nietzsche opted for a general condemnation of language, for he wrote in *Human too Human* that “every word is a prejudice”<sup>161</sup>. This line of thought, of language conceived as an irresistible seduction that puts a veil on experience, hiding its fluid and plural reality by interposing fictitious unities, can be found in several texts of Nietzsche, for instance in the *Twilight of the Idols* as thus: “« Reason » in language: oh, what an old deceiver! I am afraid that we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar”<sup>162</sup>; or in *On The Genealogy of Morality*: “this can only appear to be the case thanks to the deceptive seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified in it), which understands, and misunderstands, any production of effects as conditioned by a thing that exerts effects, by a « subject »”<sup>163</sup>. However, if language is such a deceiver, always betraying reality and experience, and if, as Nietzsche suggested in *Dawn*, “we always express our thoughts with the words we have at hand. Or, to fully express my suspicion: at any given moment, we only have the thought for which we have the words that are more or less likely to express it”<sup>164</sup>, then how could Nietzsche get any idea of reality or experience and of the world as a plurality, multiplicity

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<sup>161</sup> Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain II*, Le voyageur et son ombre, §55, p.272.

<sup>162</sup> Nietzsche, *Crépuscule des idoles*, La « raison » en philosophie, §5, p.141. See also *Beyond Good and Evil*'s preface that mentions a “seduction through grammar”.

<sup>163</sup> Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, I, §13, p.97.

<sup>164</sup> Nietzsche, *Aurore*, §257, p.207.

and becoming? If language is unable to express becoming, can only stabilize (through falsification) an ever fluid and moving reality, and if our thought is tied to language, then how could we even have an idea about it and talk for instance of the will to power? Nietzsche's conception of language leads him to a philosophical aporia. He rejects the testimony of words and language, but then how can he think and express the will to power and the world as a chaos?

***C) First Solution: Dissociating Language and Thought (versus Merleau-Ponty's Spoken Speech)***

One possible solution would be to dissociate thought and language, to grant a certain kind of autonomy to the former, that becomes distorted only in a second time by the latter, and the contrast of the two would allow Nietzsche to be aware of this distortion and betrayal (although the question of the expression of the will to power would still remain a problem). This line of thought seems sometimes suggested by convergent aphorisms that can be found in several of his works, for example in *Twilight of the Idols*: "What we have words for is also what we have already outgrown. [...] Language, it seems, was invented only for the mediocre, the average, the communicable. With language, the one who speaks already

vulgarizes themselves”<sup>165</sup>, in *Gay Science*: “One cannot convey [rendre] their thoughts in words [paroles]”<sup>166</sup> and:

I seized the idea on the fly and threw myself at the first misshapen words to stabilize it, so that it would not escape me again. And now these dry words have killed it for me, and it hangs and dangles in them – and I can hardly understand, looking at it, how I could have been so happy when I caught that bird. Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §298, pp.243-244.

or in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

Alas, what strange things you are, my written and painted thoughts! Not so long ago, you were so multicolored, young and clever, full of thorns [piquants] and secret spices. [...] What kind of things do we write and depict, we mandarins with Chinese brushes, we eternalizers of things that can be written, what are the only things we are capable of depicting? Alas, never anything other than that which is about to fade and begin to lose its perfume! [...] Alas, never anything but flight-weary birds that have strayed, and which the hand – our hand – can now catch in flight! We eternalize that which no longer has long to live and fly, nothing but tired and overripe things! Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §296, pp.280-281.

These aphorisms convey the idea that while Nietzsche has thoughts – when they are solely thoughts and are yet to be materialized by words – they are still alive and colorful, perhaps able to introduce the thinker to the moving and fluid reality. Only when they are put into words do they become fixated, fossilized, even killed by the process of verbalizing and writing (which is why Nietzsche sometimes talks of conceptual mummies): the thoughts become materialized, objectified, enclosed in themselves and cut off from the rich and fluid experience. In contrast to the fleeting but living and expressive thoughts, language appears as a gravedigger in this framework, completely detached from experience and reality,

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<sup>165</sup> Nietzsche, *Crépuscule des idoles*, Incursions d’un inactuel, §26, p.192.

<sup>166</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §244, p.217.

producing its own “great colombarium of concepts, in the sepulcher of sensitive intuitions”<sup>167</sup>, an artificial edifice built only on human imagination. Hence, Nietzsche – by separating language and thought – could possess a pre-linguistic intuition of the will to power thanks to his thoughts. Such an intuition could not be expressed in words, it would be incommunicable, but it could still convey and certify to the philosopher himself a truth outside of language and perception (and of the unities they present), thereby leading (and justifying) Nietzsche to posit the world as chaos or as wills to power. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty denied this possible solution for Nietzsche, as he has radically rejected such a strict distinction between language and thoughts. Admittedly, a certain use of language does not measure up to our most living and original thoughts, only gathering already made significations (sedimented and ready-to-use), functioning as a set of signs that refer to fixated thoughts that would betray experience if they were taken as the whole of reality. However, in the same way as objective thought is not the whole of thought, objective or sedimented language is not the whole of language either, it is but a part of it. There is a use and function of language that is adequate to experience. Therefore, the relevant opposition is not between language and thought but between objective and pre-objective or concrete modalities of the two. Thus, inspired by Saussure – although overcoming his distinction between signified and signifier –, Merleau-Ponty differentiates between two modalities of language: “la *langue* – language considered as a system of terminological, syntactic, and semantic rules, and la *parole* – the concrete act of speech itself”<sup>168</sup>. To explain this distinction in a more Bergsonian manner, but directly from Merleau-Ponty’s writings:

It might be said that languages [langages], that is, constituted systems of vocabulary and syntax, or the various empirically existing “means of expression,” are the depository and the sedimentation of acts of speech [parole], in which the unformulated sense not only finds the

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<sup>167</sup> Nietzsche, *Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral*, p.27.

<sup>168</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.82.

means of expressing itself on the outside, but moreover acquires existence for itself, and is truly created as sense. Or again, the distinction could be made between a *speaking speech* and a *spoken speech*. In the former, the meaningful intention is in a nascent state. [...] But the act of expression constitutes a linguistic and cultural world, it makes that which stretched beyond fall back into being. This results in spoken speech, which enjoys the use of available significations like that of an acquired fortune. From these acquisitions, other authentic acts of expression – those of the writer, the artist, and the philosopher – become possible. This ever-recreated opening in the fullness of being [...] is the function revealed through language, which reiterates itself, depends upon itself, or that like a wave gathers itself together and steadies itself in order to once again throw itself beyond itself. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.202-203.

In opposition to Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty puts forward the fact there is not only a spoken speech (the only kind or modality of language Nietzsche acknowledges), the language whose expressive operation is already finished, fixated, becoming a sign in the traditional sense of the term, ready-made and easily accessible to anyone who speaks that language, a mere memory of an expressive act that is not relational anymore, but there is also the parole (or speaking speech), the speaking in the act [*se faisant*] at the nascent state, when it speaks for the first time, taking place in our whole sensible life, changing the whole existential and cultural context or even establishing one, modifying the structure and distribution of experience, opening a new dimension for us in a creative act (not in the sense of construction but in the sense of novelty). As Merleau-Ponty wrote,

the operation of expression, when successful, does not simply leave to the reader or the writer himself a reminder; it makes the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, it installs this signification in the writer or the reader like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.188.

In the same way as a melody cannot be simply reduced to the notes composing it, but is, at the same time, also present in them and existing through them, the signification cannot be reduced to its words<sup>169</sup> but still stays connected to them: “the signification absorbs [dévore] the signs”<sup>170</sup> and brings them to our existential and sensible life when it is expressive. Their sonorous texture, the bodily movements they require in order to be pronounced, the intonation they require, all of this makes the words participate to experience and to our sensible life, the words are born from it and stay connected to it, instead of constituting a second sphere, its own edifice reconstructing experience only in an imaginative and disconnected way. As David Abram asserted, it is “only by isolating this secondary layer of conventional meanings from the felt significance carried by the tone, rhythm, and resonance of spoken expressions can we conceive of language as a code – as a determinate and mappable structure composed of arbitrary signs linked by purely formal rules”<sup>171</sup>. Yet, this is exactly what Nietzsche does in his criticism of language, but doing so removes from experience the sensible, expressive qualities of the words (so it is not philological). Nietzsche’s criticism might apply, to some extent, to the spoken speech (and only if all we ever had was access to this spoken speech), but it completely overlooks the expressive speaking speech and the fact that all spoken speech is born from a speaking speech. Certainly, the speaking speech becomes stabilized and ready-made, and Nietzsche thematizes this aspect of language (in fact, focusing solely on it), but below or prior to this stabilization there has been an expressive act, and expressive acts can happen once again to change these stabilized words, giving them life once again and bringing them in a new

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<sup>169</sup> For this idea, see Merleau-Ponty, « An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A Prospectus of His Work » in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, pp.287-288: “The sense of language, like that of gestures, thus does not lie in the elements from which it is made. The sense is their common intention, and the spoken phrase is understood only if the hearer, following the “verbal chain,” goes beyond each of its links in the direction that they all designate together. It follows that our thought, even when it is solitary, does not stop using the language which supports it, which rescues it from the transitory, and which throws it back again”.

<sup>170</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.188.

<sup>171</sup> Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.79.

direction, opening a new dimension of thought, meaning and language. Nietzsche conceives the language as already given to him, once and for all, always already after the operation of stabilization. Nonetheless, by doing so, the thinker of becoming overlooks and undermines the nascent state of speech in which it is alive and expressive. He does not see or acknowledge the whole process that led to the stabilization of the signification, he just attributes it to the intellect or later to the infra-conscious drives, but according to Merleau-Ponty it is the phenomenal body and my relation to the world in experience that undertakes this process, therefore it is part of experience instead of being separated from (or prior to) it and falsifying it. By denying to language the possibility of expression, leaving the possibility open only for thought, Nietzsche implies and displays “the naivety of a silent cogito that believes itself to be adequate to silent consciousness, whereas its very description of silence relies entirely on the virtues of language”<sup>172</sup>. Merleau-Ponty affirmed that thought cannot occur silently nor without language. On the contrary, thought rests on the sedimented significations and previous expressive acts, and precisely one may believe they think without words because they use implicitly this sedimentation that does not require an act of expression anymore, ready to be used for elaborating a new expression (which is the only thing that will be thematized and explicit in the new thought), but it still relies on language:

Thought is nothing “inner”; nor does it exist outside the world and outside of words. What tricks us here, what makes us believe in a thought that could exist for itself prior to expression, are the already constituted and already expressed thoughts that we can silently recall to ourselves and by which we give ourselves the illusion of an inner life. But in fact, this supposed silence is buzzing with words – this inner life is an inner language. [...] The new meaningful intention knows itself by donning already available significations, which are the result of previous acts of expression. The available significations suddenly intertwine according to an unknown law, and once and for all a new cultural being has begun to exist. Thought and expression are thus

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<sup>172</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.230.

constituted simultaneously when our cultural assets are mobilized in the service of this unknown law, just as our body suddenly lends itself to a new gesture in the acquisition of habit. Speech is a genuine gesture and, just like all gestures, speech too contains its own sense. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.188-189.

There is a play of the already-made significations that can, through their relations and articulations, grant a new perspective, idea and relation to the world, which is exactly what thought does and how it does it. Indeed, thought does not create from nothing nor has a silent intuition, but it uses already existing perspectives or significations – from the language and culture to which the thinker belong – in a new arrangement or configuration to give rise to new entities (at the same time in thought, language and perception). This interplay of speech and thought lead Merleau-Ponty to conclude that:

We can no more admit, as is ordinarily done, that speech is a simple means of solidifying thought, or again, that it is the envelope or the clothing of thought. [...] In one way or another, the word and speech must cease to be a manner of designating the object or thought in order to become the presence of this thought in the sensible world, and not its clothing, but rather its emblem or its body. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.187.

If we start from a distinction between thought and language, granting a primacy to thought, then language can be only a clothing that will never fit the thought adequately because it would be constructed in a second time and be of a different nature than the thought it tries to dress (hence Nietzsche's disappointment in the rendering of his thoughts into words). However, Merleau-Ponty rejects this position as he asserts that thought cannot be given outside of language: "speech and thought would only admit of this external relation if they were both thematically given; in fact, they are enveloped in each other; sense is caught in speech, and speech is the external existence of sense"<sup>173</sup>. To think of thought and language

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<sup>173</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.187.

as separated is not philological because it removes from the experience of speech, it restricts too much what language is and misses its nature and power. In this way, Merleau-Ponty wrote that:

To make a language a means or a code for thought is to break it. When we do so we prohibit ourselves from understanding the depth to which words sound within us – from understanding that we have a need, a passion, for speaking and must (as soon as we think) speak to ourselves; the words have power to arouse thoughts and implant henceforth inalienable dimensions of thought; and that they put responses on our lips we did not know we were capable of, teaching us, Sartre says, our own thought. If language duplicated externally a thought which in its solitude legislates for every other possible thought, it would not be, in Freud's terms, a total "reinvestment" of our life. It would not be our element as water is the element of fish. A parallel thought and expression would each have to be complete in its own order; the irruption of one into the other, or the interception of one by the other, would be inconceivable. Merleau-Ponty, « Preface to *Signs* » in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, pp.332-333.

Therefore, in a philological framework that aims to be faithful to experience, conceiving language and thought as separated would remove from the experience of language (as well as from the one of thought), and language and thought should be conceived as always already intertwined. In a work note from the *Visible and Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty goes even further and grants to language a proper ontological reach, the same that he will grant to perception and thought – or, rather, he conceives them all as one same endeavor –, as he wrote:

The philosopher knows better than anyone that experience [le vécu] is experience-speech [du vécu-parlé], that, born at this depth, language is not a mask over Being, but, if we know how to grasp it with all its roots and all its foliage, the most valid witness to Being, that it does not interrupt a perfect immediacy, that vision itself, even thought, is « structured like language » (Lacan), is articulation avant la lettre, the appearance of something where there was nothing or something else. [...] This logos is an absolutely universal theme, the theme of philosophy. Philosophy itself is language, based on language; but this does not disqualify it from speaking

about language, or about pre-language and the mute world that doubles them: on the contrary, it is operative language, that language which can only be known from within, through practice, is open to things, called by the voices of silence, and continues an attempt at articulation that is the Being of all being. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, pp.165-166.

Merleau-Ponty can relativize the difference between language, perception and thought because he conceived, in his later works, any meaning as a difference or deviation (*écart*), as a figure against a background. This modality of signification is the same as Saussure's conception of language as a diacritic and oppositive system. As underlined by Abram:

By describing any particular language as a system of differences, Saussure indicated that meaning is found not in the words themselves but in the intervals, the contrasts, the participations between the terms. As Merleau-Ponty states: "What we have learned from Saussure is that, taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs". This does not mean that it is necessary to know, explicitly, the whole of a language in order to speak it. Rather, the weblike nature of language ensures that the whole of the system is implicitly present in every sentence, in every phrase. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.83.

Thus, Merleau-Ponty refers once again to Saussure, but this time he did so to generalize his conception of meaning to the whole of experience. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty affirmed that "the Saussurean analysis of relations between signifiers, of relations from signifier to signified and of significations as differences of significations, confirms and recovers the idea of perception as a deviation from a level, *i.e.* the idea of primordial Being, of the Convention of conventions, of speech before speech"<sup>174</sup>. I will elaborate on the notion of the level or dimension and on the epistemology of the figure against a background in the context of

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<sup>174</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.252. See also Abram, p.84: "Merleau-Ponty comes in his final writings to affirm that it is first the sensuous, perceptual world that is relational and weblike in character, and hence that the organic, interconnected structure of any language is an extension or echo of the deeply interconnected matrix of sensorial reality itself".

perception in the second part of this thesis, but I can already provide a linguistic example of what is a signification as difference, so as to make Merleau-Ponty's point clearer. My coffees every morning are "coffees" not so much because they are exactly the same and could be defined in a positive and exhaustive way, but rather because they are differentiated from the other drinks I could choose (fruit juice, tea, milk, water...), and as a drink they are differentiated from food (that I can eat), and these two categories are differentiated from what I would not ingest and so on... This differentiation process goes on until the whole world is taken into these oppositions, articulating all of them (the meanings-differences) together. Hence, in a Saussurean way, Merleau-Ponty conceives sense in a diacritic and oppositive manner, always in reference to the whole system (of a language and of a culture), where any given meaning is not isolated, standing on its own, positively and apart from the rest, but on the contrary it rests on its difference from all the other significations and signs. Sense is not true individually, it is in fact never given individually, but it is true as a whole. The meaning of the coffee is not something I possess separately nor in a fully clear, explicit, distinct and determined way, but it appears as some hollow or thickness in the totality, surrounded by other significations-differences. It stands out in a field of contrasts and its total meaning remains implicit. Another example to better grasp how sense is based on difference is the example of the distinction between the animal and their meat. In English, there is a distinction between the living pig and the term pork that refers exclusively to a pig in the context of food. I do not know if there is a language in which this distinction does not exist, but if we suppose or admit that it is (or could be) the case, then it becomes clear that, compared to a single term that gathers all these significations indistinctively, the existence of a separate, dedicated term for the sense of food shapes and specifies, by contrast, our understanding of the term "pig"; these two terms gain their meaning from their opposition to each other and their difference. If the term pork did not exist, the signification of the word

pig would not be the same anymore, but the meaning at stake becomes specified and distinct only when another term emerges to which it is opposed. Without the word “pork”, the term pig would also signify the food in a plate, but it would not be a clear meaning, this specific usage or dimension of the meaning would remain implicit. It is in this way that, much more broadly, beyond (or prior) to the distinction between sign and signification, every sense is determined by the existence of all the other signs-significations within the system they constitute; the whole meaning of the world is expressed in it, but always according to the particular outlook that is a given culture, distributing this meaning into many different oppositions. Therefore, meaning has to be grasped in the context of the whole of a language and culture in order to be expressive. In this way, if we think in terms of “in-itself”, object, or pure essence that should have a positive and determined meaning, it would be a contradiction that some people consider the tomato to be a fruit and some others a vegetable: those two terms are mutually exclusive and the tomato in-itself could be only one of them, therefore our determinations and language are ambiguous and are pure human arbitrary conventions that tell nothing about the being of the tomato. However, this is the case only if we understand significations as absolute and standing on their own, detached from any context. Merleau-Ponty is well aware that there are always limit cases on which people will disagree, or that different languages and cultures sort the world and things differently, according to conflicting distributions. But precisely, the conception of signification as *écart* allows to understand this difference, because a “same” word or signification is in fact not the same if it belongs and participates to – or is thought against the background of – another sense-system. Thus, if we adopt Merleau-Ponty’s approach and understand significations and words with the whole cultural system of signification they belong to, we can notice that, in a sense-system where the biological approach is chosen to classify food, then the category of fruit is built in opposition to the one of vegetable, with the difference being that they

develop from the flower of a plant and contain seeds, and the tomato falls into this category; but in another sense-system in which the culinary approach is favored, then the opposition consists in a difference of taste, between sweet and savory, and in this system the tomato is considered a vegetable. Is one of the two senses and systems truer than the other one, or are they even both equally false? No, they are simply situated, adopting a certain perspective that distributes the sense of the world in a certain way, a different one, but they both express reality and the world. For instance, the characteristics of the tomato such as its taste or texture and the fact it is a ripened flower ovary are not mere inventions, but simply it depends on us and our culture or linguistic community to consider these traits relevant and to segregate being according to them or not. Thereby, the different segregations of the world provide different outlooks on experience, but they are still about the same world (which is the same Being that is segregated), they exhibit articulations of the sensible world but always with a perspective tied to a culture, time, place and a community of thinking-speaking-perceiving subjects. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty could speak of meaning as “the « ray of the world » [which] is not synthesis and not “reception”, but *segregation*, *i.e.* it supposes that we are already in the world or in being. We cut into a being that remains in its place, of which we do not make a synopsis – and which is not in itself”<sup>175</sup>. Besides, even one given language is not a fixed system but the history of a culture can revise and modify its segregation and distribution of the world (we can think for instance of societal changes and considerations that lead some of the members of a linguistic community to attempt to propose a more inclusive grammar). There is a life or becoming of language, new relations to experience can be expressed thanks to changing the distribution of the whole, which does not mean that all the previous structurations were completely false or devoid of meaning, but they were a temporary sketch or outline that described the experience of a time and culture and still

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<sup>175</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.290.

contributes, through the history of language, to the new articulations emphasized by its evolution and current state. All of these structurations are always leaned against the whole of Being, that lies between the figures or words, as their gap and background. Thus, the important point here is that sense is never positive nor exhaustive, that it must be understood within a whole context and system, but that does not mean that the characteristics emphasized in the different systems are false nor that our words are meaningless. With such a conception of language, we can now understand why Merleau-Ponty could understand it as the same as thought or perception: they are all attempts at articulating the world. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty conceives perceptual signification exactly in the same way as the linguistic one:

What, then, do we have at the outset? We do not have a given multiplicity along with a synthetic apperception that surveys it and thoroughly penetrates it, but rather a certain perceptual field against the background of the world. Nothing here is thematized. Neither the object nor the subject is posited. In the originary field, we do not have a mosaic of qualities, but rather a total configuration that distributes functional values according to the demands of the whole, and as we have seen, for example, a “white” sheet of paper in the shadows is not white in the sense of an objective quality, but it has the value “white”. What we call “sensation” is merely the most basic of all perceptions and, as a modality of existence, sensation can no more than any other perception be separated from a background that is, ultimately, the world. Correlatively, every perceptual act appears as taken from an overall adhesion to the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.251.

Merleau-Ponty argued that we never have a pure *quale*, isolated figures or determinations but always figures against a background: “we only perceive figures on levels – and we only perceive them in relation to the level, which is therefore unperceived. – Perception of the

level: always between objects, it is that around which..."<sup>176</sup>. Thus, to continue Merleau-Ponty's example of a white sheet of paper, there is never an objective view of the paper, but it is always seen in a context. The sheet of paper is none of its particular colors that appear according to different lightings (*éclairages*), but it is also not outside of them, it is rather in between them, as an *écart* or difference. A musical note is never heard for itself but most often against the background of a "key" in which the song or bar is settled. Even atonal music is not independent, but it is opposed to (and resting against) silence, appearing as a difference that emerges against the background of silence. Every value or meaning is attributed according to a specific dimension, and all the dimensions are drawn from the world as the dimensionality that encompasses, exceeds and supports or underlies all the meanings and is expressed in each of the distributions or segregations we operate on it. Therefore, as highlighted by Colonna: "the same is true of speech as of visibility: it is always already there, scattered and at the same time only the partially illusory crystallization of the invisible that is its *raison d'être*"<sup>177</sup>. Thanks to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of sense or meaning as a difference, it becomes possible to conceive perception like a language (as a diacritic and oppositive system, segregating the whole of the world) and to conceive language as a world, or at least as an expression of the world. The perceptions or thoughts are not given more directly than language, they are also differences, and in this fashion Merleau-Ponty could write: "In the end, only the totality in which the sensible beings [*les sensibles*] [and the words] are cut up can be seen in the full sense. Thought is only a little further away from the *visibilia*"<sup>178</sup>. There is maybe a difference of degree or distance (from the world) between thought, language and perception but not a difference in their modality of relation to Being,

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<sup>176</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.240. See also *ibid.*, p.242: "Presence to oneself is presence to a differentiated world – The perceptual difference [*écart*] as making "sight" [...]. To be aware [*avoir conscience*] = to have a figure against a background – you cannot go back any further".

<sup>177</sup> Colonna, *Merleau-Ponty et le renouvellement de la métaphysique*, p.335.

<sup>178</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.264.

that they always segregate into an oppositive and diacritic system. Which is why Merleau-Ponty could write, about the thoughts and the spirit, that we should “redescribe the whole of interhuman and even spiritual life in these terms, the *Weltlichkeit* of the spirit, its non-insularity, its links with other spirits and with truth, to be understood also as differentiations of a spatio-temporal architectonics”<sup>179</sup>. Thereby, the solidarity between sign and signification due to the conception of meaning as *écart* also results in a solidarity between language, perception and thought. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty asserted: “If the sign is only a certain deviation [*écart*] between signs, and the meaning a similar deviation between meanings, thought and speech overlap one another like two reliefs. As pure differences, they are indiscernible”<sup>180</sup>. Similarly, Barbaras argued that:

The signifying operation lies below the opposition between signification and the sign, prior to their distinction, which is also their union: it therefore takes place at a level where the separation between signs on the one hand, and between significations on the other, has not yet been achieved. This is what linguistics recognizes when it emphasizes the diacritic character of the sign, to which Merleau-Ponty will return again and again: in language, there are only differences, which are not based on positive terms, and it is from these that signs and meanings are born in parallel. Meaning is originally given in the form of oppositional principles, modes of discrimination. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène. Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, p.72.

As a result, thought is contemporary or coextensive to language, functioning in the same diacritic and oppositive way. Therefore, we cannot grant a primacy or independence to the former over the latter anymore. However, since Nietzsche did not admit that language could be expressive, could be anything else than a falsification that misses experience and reality,

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<sup>179</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.281. See also *ibid.*, p.301: “The sense of being to be revealed: the point is to show that the ontic, the « *Erlebnisse* », the « sensations », the « judgments », – (the objects, the « represented », in short all the idealizations of the Psyche and of Nature), all the bric-a-brac of these supposedly positive psychic « realities », (and lacunar, « insular », without *Weltlichkeit* of its own) is in reality an abstract cut-out in the ontological fabric, in the « body of the mind »”.

<sup>180</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Preface to Signs » in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, pp.333-334.

substituting fixated and arbitrary fictions to it, we are brought back to the problem of how he could even obtain an idea of the fluid reality – of the will to power – to begin with, and how he could communicate it in his books.

#### **D) *Second Solution: The Interplay of Perspectives (and the World as a Field)***

In fact, in his later writings Nietzsche did not acknowledge a separation between thought and language. In this way, he wrote in the latest period of his life (in 1888, just two years before his death) some aphorisms that comprise statements such as: “« Internal experience » only becomes conscious once it has found a language that is intelligible to the individual. The fact that our relationship to reality is mediated by language means that our relationship to reality is distorted”<sup>181</sup>, or: “we cannot escape the habit imposed on us by our senses and our language. Disjoining subject and object, acting subject and act, act and what it produces: let's not forget that this is a simple semiotic that designates nothing real”<sup>182</sup>. Nevertheless, as these quotes clearly underline, even when Nietzsche acknowledged the coextensivity between thought and language, he did not admit of a pre-objective modality for any of them and instead rejected both as creations and falsifications that are inadequate to experience (or, rather, to reality, for our thought and language are the only experience we

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<sup>181</sup> Nietzsche, *KGW*, VIII, 3, 15 [90], found in Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.161.

<sup>182</sup> Nietzsche, *KGW*, VIII, 3, 14 [79], found in Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.171.

can be aware of, along with perception). Thus, and already in *Gay Science*, Nietzsche argued that “illusion and error are the condition of the knowing and perceiving existence”<sup>183</sup>. Therefore, thought, language and perception are all equally untrue according to Nietzsche, equally unfaithful to experience and reality. Now that language and thought are connected in Nietzsche’s framework too, and because they are understood mainly as a process of objectivation and a falsification, there is only one option that could allow Nietzsche to be philological without reducing experience to objectified and fixed entities: Nietzsche must create a new language, or rather a new use of language that tolerates a kind of pre-objective expression, so as to be able to think and express the will to power and the interpreting as a process. As Blondel meticulously summarized:

We have seen that reality can only be deciphered through language. And this language, supposedly more adequate, has yet to be invented. What is more, it turns out that all language is inadequate to reality, in other words, moral, metaphysical. Nietzsche is thus led to a critique of language as such: language, misleading (*verführend*), generates fictions that erase the reality of becoming, of power relations and the will to power. Nietzsche must therefore either forge a new, extra-moral language – a challenge – or refer to reality outside of language, which is an admission of philosophical failure and, moreover, would contradict his philological apriorism.

Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.165.

In order to be philological, there is no alternative. Refusing, at least explicitly or knowingly and in principle, to refer to an in-itself outside of experience, Nietzsche must therefore invent “a language of my own for these things of mine”<sup>184</sup>, that could reveal or thematize the interpreting (instead of solely the interpretations, that present objectivations if they are not

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<sup>183</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §107, p.158.

<sup>184</sup> Nietzsche, *La généalogie de la morale*, Préface, §4, p.52. See also: Nietzsche, « Essai d’autocritique », in: *La naissance de la tragédie*, §6, pp.70-71: “How I regret, today, that I did not have the courage (or the immodesty?) to give myself a personal language for such personal intuitions and risky undertakings, – to have laboriously sought to express, through Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas, foreign and new assessments that radically went against the spirit of Kant and Schopenhauer, as much as their taste”.

understood as an interpreting, as a process) as well as the plural, changing reality, the will to power, and not just mummified ideations. In what could this new language consist of in the Nietzschean framework? What solutions does Nietzsche propose? And are they satisfying? First of all, Nietzsche abundantly used quotation marks and irony, so as to subvert the usual definition of some terms, understanding them in a new way, bringing them in a new direction, or even simply to warn that the ontology and epistemology implied by the texts or notions he is commenting or borrowing should be relativized and contested. In this way, both irony and quotations marks are used to subtly imply that the concepts Nietzsche is discussing are never an object, a substance or a fixed entity but a perspective, a process, or something else entirely. Secondly, the very shape of Nietzsche's writing, or rather his style, is remarkable and serves the purpose of defeating the objectivation: Nietzsche writes in aphorisms to refer to the perspective multiplicity that experience elicits. As Wotling and Denat have underlined in their dictionary on Nietzsche:

Favoring a fragmented presentation, which elucidates the same notion from multiple perspectives to better convey its irreducible complexity, the aphorisms illuminate each other, within the same work but even more so from one work to the next. Nietzschean writing thus demands a networked reading, attentive to cross-references, repetitions, echoes and variations.

Wotling and Denat, *Dictionnaire Nietzsche*, p.17.

Along with the plurality of aphorisms, Nietzsche also uses several lexical and thematic fields to describe a same phenomenon, in order to vary the registers of metaphor and describe several aspects of a given experience. Thus, some Nietzscheans say that the new, more philological language consists in the use of multiple registers of perspectives, multiple interpretations at once or rather successively, through different aphorisms that come back to the same topic with a different perspective, to give more than one meaning (emphasizing more than one aspect of the phenomenon or reality). It is the plurality and interplay of

interpretations that makes it possible for the interpretations to neutralize each other's drawbacks or blind spots (although some will always remain because there is never a pure or absolute view of a phenomenon) and, more importantly, each other's claim of objectivity and absoluteness. In other words, by opposing each other and changing constantly, the perspectives or interpretations can become aware of their own status, the interpreting can be revealed to itself or to us, as a process, without leaving the field of the interpretations, being given simply through their struggle and interplay. It is the sense of Müller-Lauter's following paragraph:

Man, as a synthesis and multiplicity of interpretation, can become aware of his perspectivist interpretation insofar as "the center of gravity is unstable" and perspective changes with each new center. It is aware of this instability because, like everything organic, it gathers experience and has a memory. The possibility of interpreting the interpreting comes from this variation in interpretations. There is no need to possess a special faculty for this, and it does not exclude the perspectivist character of the interpreting. Müller-Lauter, « La pensée nietzschéenne de la volonté de puissance » in: *Nietzsche. Physiologie de la volonté de puissance*, p.138.

Adopting a similar line of thought, Granier wrote:

The demand for justice conditions the establishment of a certain methodology. It imposes on the philosopher who aspires to be an authentic *Versucher* the obligation to constantly multiply perspectives. For it is only if we know how to extricate ourselves from the limitation of idiosyncratic perspectives deployed by immediate vital pragmatism that we can hope to grasp reality in the plurality of its contradictory aspects. [...] If the philosopher's task is to "see things as they are", then this task requires that the philosopher learn to "see them through a hundred eyes, through a variety of people". Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.513-514.

However, if we take seriously Nietzsche's criticism of language (and of perception and knowledge), as being entirely fictitious, missing completely the becoming and distorting it,

constituting the falsified prison of conscious experience, then we cannot understand how blending or using simultaneously several registers of speech and interpretations could help us, as they are all mistaken metaphors that are unrelated to reality. Nietzsche did not just say that our perspectives are partial, he claimed that they are abstract creations completely devoid of reality. He refused even a partial, non-exhaustive expression of reality through language, therefore using a plethora of aphorisms will not help at all in describing reality. The only idea that the merging of interpretations can provide in the Nietzschean context is that of their inadequacy and that they are all the result of an interpreting that occurs prior to consciousness. In Nietzsche's thought, the process of interpreting is always already over for the philosopher, who only knows the results or final products of this process (namely, particular interpretations) and is deeming them all inadequate when he compares them. This idea allows to realize that the interpretations are indeed interpretations and are lacunary, non-exhaustive, partial, biased and cannot be objective, but it gives us no knowledge about the world or even about the instance that interprets reality nor about the process of interpreting either. Thus, the only knowledge revealed or gained by merging or comparing the interpretations is their inadequacy and their interpretive status, but it does not reveal anything positive, definite or determined about the process itself. We never reach under or prior to the interpretations (which is why Nietzsche can only posit the world as chaos). Any statement or proposition that would attempt to go beyond or behind the interpretations and try to describe the interpreting reality is leaving the field of experience. Therefore, even the will to power appears, in this framework, as an illusion of language, a fixation and objectivation of an ever-moving reality that always escapes our attempts to express it. That is the reason why I think the most consequent Nietzscheans, on this topic, are those who deny an ontological and metaphysical status to the hypothesis of the will to power, it remains an interpretation that also falls victim to the fallacies of language and illusions of grammar. The logical

conclusion following from Nietzsche's conception of language and perspective or interpretation is not a "new language" and an interplay of perspectives but simply the opposition between countless dogmatic interpretations, that each person has the responsibility to choose (or be determined to adopt according to their infra-conscious affects) but that cannot escape its status of objectified fiction and arbitrary, dogmatic bias; in other words, a partial, all-too-human creation. To think of an interplay of perspectives implies to suppose a kind of cohesion (in this case, a preobjective one), both in the world and in the "subject", but the Nietzscheans refuse either of them, therefore they cannot guarantee that the perspectives are about a same world. To consider a flow of experiences to be perspectives, and not simply each time new exhaustive views of a changing world, there must be a kind of unity that is given. Nevertheless, according to Nietzsche, there is not a unique world that an interplay of perspectives could express, but there is just a plurality of perspectives that are multiple precisely because they try to catch and transcribe ever-emerging new sensations (*i.e.* the world as chaos), in a flow in which the world would be photographed by interpretations at each instant, like a flat painting that would change of pigment in all of its parts at every instant but without ever maintaining a coherence or continuity that would allow to understand the successive pictures as views of a same being, of the same world. Acknowledging an interplay and a progressive understanding of a same phenomenon through a succession of perspectives would be possible only if we understand the things or phenomena as a field or horizon (and the world as the field of all fields, encompassing them) in which our perspectives take place, expressing different aspects progressively and correcting one another, but Nietzsche refuses such a type of being. In his view, there is only a pluralist world, a plurality of unrelated sensations, and a plurality of falsified perspectives or rather of fixated views; there is not a common field or horizon in which they take part and place. As a result, there can be no merging or interplay of the

perspectives and no progressive, temporal knowledge, which is the reason why Nietzsche finds only fixated and objectifying perspectives following one another with no link between them. He does not acknowledge any unity of the world that would allow him to overcome the objective modality of thinking in consciousness, which in turn prompts him to reject its testimony. Therefore, Nietzsche's position of the world as chaos and his denial of any kind of unity leads him to only accept experience as fragmented dogmatisms that oppose one another, fighting for domination and being elected but never integrating the other views. It is in fact shown by Nietzsche's attitude when, after opposing his hypothesis of the Will to Power to the mechanical and moral interpretation of the world, he did not affirm an epistemological and ontological superiority or difference of his view against the scientific one, in a way that the two views could communicate, but he simply accepted the interpretive status of his own view too: "Assuming that this too is just interpretation – and you are dying to make that objection? – well, so much the better"<sup>185</sup>. Nietzsche's hypothesis of the Will to Power is presented in a dogmatic way, and as such it can only be received as an interpretation among others. Thus, Nietzsche could argue in favor of his interpretation thanks to the principles of philology; however, doing so would just promote his dogmatic interpretation as the most economical one, but it does not change the status of his own interpretation, presented as an objectified and dogmatic view, and it does not allow for an interplay of the perspectives. Indeed, in this case, the perspectives are isolated and compared one by one according to the philological method, but they never communicate, intermingle or criss-cross. Nietzsche conceived the interpretations as creations that are closed on themselves, and he understands their relations solely as a struggle, as a conflict where only one perspective (and instinct) can rule at a given time, imposing its own view on the others<sup>186</sup>, instead of a

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<sup>185</sup> Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §22, p.71.

<sup>186</sup> See for instance: Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.361: "It is essential to realize that the affirmation of pluralism imposes not only the idea that Being splinters into an infinite number of centers of interpretation, but also the idea that these centers are "*herrschaftlichen Zentren*", centers of

cohesion that unites them in the same world. On the contrary, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges communication and solidarity between the perspectives. As Dufourcq rightly highlighted, there is a multiplicity of perspectives too in Merleau-Ponty – thereby undermining objective thought –, however:

Merleau-Ponty's multiple Being is not Nietzsche's Will to Power. If there is indeed an eternal return of sentient phenomena, and if perspectives as conceived by Merleau-Ponty can indeed clash violently, they are nevertheless all, without exception, fundamentally linked to one another by a universal kinship and relations of reflections and echoes. Gentle understanding, not devoid of tension, prevails over merciless war. Dufourcq, « Nietzsche et Merleau-Ponty : profondeur et des images et pensées de l'éternel retour », in: *Chiasmi International*, n°13, pp.517-554.

The cohesion that Merleau-Ponty acknowledges is that of the world, which stands as the depth or the common ground and membrane of the perspectives, their common field or dimension that allows them to communicate and can be given only through their interplay in which they continue to co-exist (instead of crowning a single winner, a unique perspective that obliterates and submits the other ones). With such a conception of the world, what is presented in consciousness, perception or language are not simply objects for myself, belonging solely to me and opposing other interpretations, but they are presented to a community of subjects; they are not personal because they are in the world and accessible to anyone. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

Neither the world, nor the objects behind my back, nor the hidden faces of things are only for me, they are *Wahrnehmungsbereit* [ready to be perceived], they are not posited as objects. They are objects only if I add to myself the others to whom they show their hidden sides, or could show them, *i.e.* through the intermediary of the horizon structure that the philosophy of

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domination, striving to conquer maximum power. There is not a multitude of beings living side by side, respecting each other's limits, but a perpetual struggle in which some claim supremacy and command functions. The struggle is inscribed in the very essence of Being”.

understanding precisely wants to reduce [as a psychological invention]. So there is intersubjectivity, not just a plurality of incompatible views bound together by their rivalry and mutual destruction. Intersubjectivity: not only do I exist for myself, while others are for themselves and thereby negate me as for myself, and this negation teaches me that they are there and that I am what they think, but we exist *füreinander* [for each other] as subjects because my objects are worked on by others, objects for them and for me, thanks to their thickness: they cannot be reduced to their “objectified” skin. Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution. La passivité. Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)*, pp.102-103.

Moreover, even in my own personal view, leaving the question of intersubjectivity aside (even though the world and our perceptions are always already intersubjective according to Merleau-Ponty), we can still find this preobjective unity of the world as the field that unites my perceptions temporally, ensuring their continuity and the fact that they are about a same world. In this way, Merleau-Ponty affirmed that even if I make a mistake and that a new perspective will correct the other, the first perspective will not simply disappear and be replaced by the newer, more correct one, but the historicity of my situation that first went through this perspective will carry over, and in each case and at any time the world was affirmed with them and the succession or interplay of perspectives will never erase that fact. On the contrary, the interplay of perspectives and the fact a correction is possible at all confirms that they are all about the one and same world, instead of an external succession. Thus, the world is not solely or even mainly the content of the ruling interpretation at any given time, but it is the preobjective field that is always already affirmed and continued to be affirmed through their successions and interplay. The world transcends the interpretation; it is given only through them and their interplay, but it can never be reduced to the punctal content of an interpretation or be of the same nature as the interpretations. Merleau-Ponty described the specific modality of being of the world (and its unity) as such:

The world itself remains the same world throughout my entire life because it is precisely the permanent being within which I make all corrections to knowledge, a permanent being that is not affected in its unity by these corrections, and whose evidentness polarizes my movements toward the truth through appearance and error. The world is on the margins of the infant's first perception, like a still unknown though irrecusable presence, which knowledge subsequently determines and fills out. If I make a mistake, I must rework my certainties and I must expel my illusions from being, but I do not for a moment doubt that things in themselves [to be understood as "in their flesh" here, but Merleau-Ponty did not possess his own "new language" yet] have been compatible and compossible, because from the very beginning I am in communication with a single being, an immense individual from which my experiences are drawn, and who remains on the horizon of my life, just as the constant hum of a large city serves as the background for everything we do there. Sounds and colors are said to belong to a sensory field, because sounds, once perceived, can only be followed by other sounds or by silence, which is not an auditory nothingness, and which thus preserves our communication with sonorous being. If I am reflecting, and if during that time I cease listening, the moment I regain contact with sounds they appear to me as already there; I pick up a thread that I had dropped, but that was not broken. The field is a structure that I have for a certain type of experiences, and that, once established, cannot be canceled. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.342-343.

It is precisely acknowledging such a preobjective unity of the world that allows to undermine and overcome the objective modality of thinking and ontology, not simply the multiplicity of the perspective. As a result, since Nietzsche refused such a common field of experience for the interpretations, he finds them already objectified and in a human, individual (or psychological) realm, instead of retrieving the intersubjective milieu in which they develop, finding them in their nascent state, with not just their figures but also their background, depth, thickness, horizon and with the invisible and the whole perceptual context that comes with each figure and that allows the different views to communicate. According to Nietzsche, there is no thickness, continuity nor depth that subsists between the perspectives and links them, but only a succession of fixated views that depict objects (as flat representations, never

merging them together to retrieve their context, their flesh and the world), which is why he denies them any ontological reach. Thus, in Nietzsche's paradigm, all the philosophers can discuss "are the « figures » of thought, and no mention is made of the « background » or « horizon »"<sup>187</sup>. Nevertheless, by missing the whole context coming with the figures, Nietzsche cannot retrieve the world with the interpretations and has to posit it as absolutely exceeding and preceding them. Nietzsche was right in what he was denying, namely the ideality of an objective unity of the world; however, the solution he proposed, *i.e.* to pluralize the world and reject any kind of unity, is inadequate. Nietzsche's conception of the world as a chaos probably meant that it cannot be reduced to our objectivations, which is true; nevertheless, by refusing any kind of unity to the world he missed the opportunity to recognize and acknowledge the preobjective modality of being of the world as a field or horizon, which is not an ideal unity but a sensible and preobjective one. As Merleau-Ponty wrote:

The natural world is the horizon of all horizons, and the style of all styles, which ensures my experiences have a given, not a *willed*, unity beneath all of the ruptures of my personal and historical life; the counterpart of the natural world is the given, general, and pre-personal existence in me of my sensory functions, which is where we discovered the definition of the body. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.345.

Without any kind of unity at his disposal, Nietzsche cannot even admit any interplay of the perspectives. How could the perspectives, always singular for Nietzsche, be united, or even confronted with one another, if they are from the start unique and not about a same world or thing that could unite them, and if humans are not a unity themselves? According to Müller-Lauter, humans are doing this "synthesis" thanks to memory; however, how can the perspectives (given by memory) be considered as being about a same phenomenon in the Nietzschean framework? How is the identification or connection of the perspectives done if

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<sup>187</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.321.

all that is given are singular, unique perspectives without any unitary things nor world and no similarity nor resemblance and no unique field of experience? How could the memories of different perspectives be connected as being about a same thing or being, precisely as “perspectives of *something*”, if there is no unity of the things and of the world? How can the perspectives be recognized as a change, a new aspect or a difference (about the same thing) and not as totally new experiences each time? Since the perspectives are not united by the world (for it is itself absolutely plural), they are isolated, external to one another and seem to recreate each time a complete (but lacunary, relative to a view point, dimension and situation, non-exhaustive) picture of the world, replacing the previous one, each time claiming a full hegemony that leaves no remains or residue of the other perspectives. The Nietzschean struggle of the perspectives does not allow them to communicate and interweave, their relation is simply that of a conflict, whose temporary winner can claim its own content and figures as true so long as it rules, and the history or memory of the “subject” is not interlocking the perspectives (for it is itself plural according to Nietzsche) but simply juxtaposes temporally for us the successive winners of the struggle of the perspectives (the subject is in fact this plurality in succession). However, according to Merleau-Ponty, memory is not simply juxtaposing the different views while keeping them external to each other, like a timelapse of snapshots would, but the succession of perspectives entails a modality of being that transcends each individual one and ensures their continuity in a flow that never ceases, understanding them all as an expression of the world that overflows each of them and attests of their cohesion, as a common field, horizon or style. Nietzsche’s denial of the unity of the world throws him into an eternal present, a succession of views of the world that do not retain the past nor anticipate the future, there is no temporal viscosity that exceeds the present interpretation and ties it to the other ones, it remains closed on itself. Nevertheless, according to Merleau-Ponty,

I cannot conceive of the world as a sum of things, nor time as a sum of punctual “nows,” since each thing can only be presented with its full determinations if the other things recede into the vagueness of the distance, since each present can only be presented in its reality by excluding the simultaneous presence of previous and later presents, and since, in this way, a sum of things or a sum of presents is non-sensical. [...] A present without a future, or an eternal present, is precisely the definition of death, the living present is torn between a past that it takes up and a future that it projects. Thus, it is essential for the thing and for the world to be presented as “open,” to send us beyond their determinate manifestations, and to promise us always “something more to see”. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.348.

Nietzsche’s conception of consciousness as something trapped within false creations does not allow to conceive the perspectives or interpretations as “open”; they must be closed to be able to fully trap the consciousness inside, with no way out for reaching an ontological truth. Certainly, Nietzsche argued for the becoming of the interpretations, and he would not claim that they are only present; however, his denial of the unity of the world and of the communication or interplay between the interpretations prevents him from finding this historicity within experience, he has to posit it from outside, as a philosopher who is not stuck within the perspectives, thus adopting an “overview thought” [une pensée de survol], Sirius’s view point or the stance of the *kosmotheoros*<sup>188</sup>. Indeed, Nietzsche writes as if the consciousness was stuck only in fabricated illusions and was unable to leave them, so we cannot understand how they could know of their historicity, but, somehow, the philosopher

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<sup>188</sup> On these notions, implying a tacit subject, expressing the attitude of a philosopher that is not taking part in their description of the world, as if they could think it wholly at once and from the outside, from an absolute standpoint that could juxtapose the whole of the world without belonging to it, like a spectator would observe a painting on a wall – in other words, from a distance and not being immersed in it, thus leaving the field of experience –, see Renouard, « Le point de vue de Sirius et la cartographie du visible », in: Benoist and Merlini (Dir.), *Historicité et spatialité. Recherches sur le problème de l'espace dans la pensée contemporaine*. For a comparison, thanks to an analogy with visual arts, between the philosophical attitude that considers the world as an objective painting, from a disinterested point of view that does not take part in it (in the third person), and Merleau-Ponty’s stance that understands us within the world and conceives the world as what encompasses us and has us more than we have it (described at the first person), see my article: Heusghem, « Senses in Visual Arts as a Prism for Philosophy and Through the Prism of Philosophy », in: Kazimierska-Jezyk and Gralinska-Toborek (Ed.), *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis. Folia Philosophica. Ethica-Aesthetica-Practica*, n°41.

of the Will to Power, still without presenting an epistemology that could allow him to do so, has an external view of these interpretations (for he is not stuck in this artificial creation) and can qualify them as historical, plural and erroneous, in an implicit comparison with the world of forces, devoid of ambiguities (with each force occupying its piece of matter or space), without also specifying how he got to know this infra-conscious world. Through this take, Nietzsche adopted the stance of a *kosmotheoros*:

If I am *kosmotheoros*, my sovereign gaze finds things each in its own time and place, as absolute individuals in a single local and temporal location. Since they participate from their place in the same meanings, we are led to conceive, transversal to this flat multiplicity, another dimension, the system of meanings without locality or temporality [that Nietzsche conceived as a fictitious creation, but that nonetheless remains separated from the flat multiplicity of the Wills to Power].  
Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, pp.150-151.

Merleau-Ponty abundantly criticized such a philosophical stance, for it is not a philological attitude:

the system of experience is not spread out before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator of it, I am a part of it, and it is my inherence in a point of view that at once makes possible the finitude of my perception and its opening to the total world as the horizon of all perception. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.317.

The philological philosopher cannot leave experience and perspectives; he should provide an account of reality from within the perspectives, but Nietzsche cannot do that because he conceived consciousness, language and perception as lies and fabricated fictions. This conception of consciousness, language and perception is not philological according to Merleau-Ponty (as I will show in the next section). As Merleau-Ponty highlighted:

Since perception is the “flaw” in this “great diamond,” there can be no question of describing it as one of the facts that happens in the world, for the picture of the world will always include this lacuna that we are and by which the world itself comes to exist for someone. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.215.

By positing a world as pure chaos or even a sphere of the wills to power, Nietzsche considers this “flaw” of perception as if it was accidental and was preventing us from reaching the truth of reality as a pure becoming, attempting to fixate it, instead of conceiving perspectivism as the only access to a preobjective unity of the world, the only way to have a relation and knowledge of it. Nietzsche’s acknowledgement of a pure perception of the forces at the inorganic level implies this idea that perspectivism is optional and only belongs to life as a defect. Against this conception of perception as separated from the world and as a succession of perspectival views that amount to fictions, Merleau-Ponty argued that what experience shows is that

the profiles do not succeed each other and are not juxtaposed in front of me. My experience in these different moments is united with itself in such a way that I do not have different perspectival views linked together through the conception of an invariant. The perceiving body does not occupy different points of view in turn beneath the gaze of a consciousness who has no place and who thinks these perspectives. It is reflection that objectifies points of view or perspectives; when I perceive, I am directed toward the entire world through my point of view, and I do not even know the limits of my visual field. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.344.

Thus, experience does not present a succession of individual and closed perspectives, but it always already reveals the world as a field that both exceeds and unites them. It is only a subsequent reflection that can dissociate a plurality in the world, the perspectives or in the perceiving body, thus leaving the unitary field of experience to oppose against it this pluralistic reconstruction. Nietzsche can only realize the pluralization and isolation of the

perspectives as an ontological moment and sphere of reality by leaving the field of experience. In contrast to Nietzsche's paradigm, Merleau-Ponty's one allows the historicity and multiplicity of the perspectives to be grasped in experience, and not as an absolute separation. He can do so because the temporal change of perspective does not destroy the previous one but maintains a thread between them, interweaving them together so that they do not simply express their own content (fixated in a single present) but the world each time, understanding the figures each perspective presents as appearing against the background of the world and against the background of the other perspectives as other dimensions. In this way, coming back to a previous perspective does not mean that it is created anew and wins the struggle that it previously lost, merely replacing the other perspective by destroying it and claiming its own figures as the new temporary "official" or mandatory picture of the world (for the complex of drives it now dominates), but it should rather be understood as

picking up a thread that I had dropped, but that was not broken. The field is a structure that I have for a certain type of experiences, and that, once established, cannot be canceled. Our possession of the world is of the same genre, except that one can conceive of a subject without an auditory field, but not of a subject without a world. Just as the absence of sound for the hearing subject does not break the communication with the sonorous world, so too the absence of the visual or auditory world for the subject who is blind or deaf from birth does not break the communication with the world in general; there is always something opposite this subject, something of being to be deciphered, an *omnitudo realitatis*, and this possibility is forever established by the first sensory experience, as narrow or imperfect as it might be. We have no other way of knowing what the world is than by taking up this affirmation that is made in us at each moment, and every definition of the world would merely be an abstract description that would mean nothing to us if we did not already have access to the definite, if we did not know it through the simple fact that we exist. All of our logical operations of signification must be established upon the experience of the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.343.

If the perspectives are susceptible to enter in an interplay with one another (instead of a succession of isolated views), it means that they intend a same world and the same phenomena. It also means that the continuity of the field of experience must be maintained, so that I can understand the perspectives precisely as perspectives on a same phenomenon and not as presenting each time a new universe closed on itself. An interplay of perspectives can only occur in a continuous and open field of experience, and not in an absolutely pluralistic world in which there is no cohesion, unity or order. And yet, it is the experience of the world as a preobjective unity that Nietzsche denies and rejects. However, is this unity of the world really rejected by Nietzsche, or does he reject it only explicitly while implicitly continuing to rely on it? If the Nietzscheans really maintained an absence of unity of the world, then they could not even become aware of their perspectivism, for the views would keep changing with no link between them and they would present new worlds at each change of perspective, but there would remain no basis to deny the claim that this world, in this view and at this instant, is as presented by the view or not. Granier even admits this fact, as he formulates the following rhetorical question: “is it not obvious that Nietzsche could not even suspect the inadequacy of the metaphysical concept of the « true » [and therefore understand our knowledge as perspectivist] if he did not already think the being of Truth from an origin that makes visible both the structure of metaphysical reflection and its radical inadequacy”<sup>189</sup>? However, this ontological “intuition” cannot be one of the pluralist world because if the world was absolutely plural, then it could change in all its parts at once and the new perspectives could be faithful each time. As a result, we would never notice the relativity of our views. To oppose the absolute claim of each perspective, it is necessary to compare them and consider that they are describing the same world. If it was not the case, the views could not even be compared and could just present a new world at each instant. To

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<sup>189</sup> Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.298.

find the relativity of perception and perspectives, one must maintain the focus on a thing and change the perspective (through a movement for instance): it is only this temporal unfolding, maintaining the view on something, that can reveal its thickness, transcendence and voluminosity while at the same time revealing our perspective as a partial, non-exhaustive contact with the world, the things and others (but still presenting them in their flesh as transcendences immanent to the world, and not mere objects or representations). Thus, if we take his writings literally, Nietzsche cannot even grasp the inadequacy of perspective in his own framework, for he cannot or does not want to acknowledge that the different perspectives are about the same world (accepting a unity of the world as the field of all experiences). Therefore, when they assert that the perspectives are interpretations, the Nietzscheans are in fact relying on the preobjective unity of the world and of our temporal experience; they implicitly compare them as presenting differently a same world. Hence, their claim of absolute plurality and absence of unity of the world and of the subject cannot be taken seriously, or it would disintegrate their understanding of perspective and interpretation as such. Consequently, the subject is not a mere succession and plurality, and the world is not pure plurality either:

My first perception, along with the horizons that surrounded it, is an ever-present event, an unforgettable tradition; even as a thinking subject I am still this first perception, I am the continuation of the same life that it inaugurated. In a sense, there are no more distinct acts of consciousness or of *Erlebnisse* [experiences] in a life than there are isolated things in the world. Likewise, as we have seen, when I move around an object, I do not obtain a series of perspectival views that I subsequently coordinate through the idea of a unique geometrical plan (all I find is a bit of “indeterminacy” [bougé] in the thing that crosses through time all by itself), so too am I not a series of psychical acts, nor for that matter a central I who gathers them together in a synthetic unity, but rather a single experience that is inseparable from itself, a single “cohesion of life,” a single temporality that unfolds itself [s’explicite] from its birth and confirms this birth in each present. It is this advent or rather this transcendental event that the Cogito recovers. The

fundamental truth is certainly that “I think,” but only on condition of understanding by this that “I belong to myself” in being in the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.429-430.

I will come back to Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the subject more in depth in the next section, but what matters for the purpose of this section is to acknowledge that the perceiving subject in perception is not a collection of plural mental states, and conversely that the perspectives do not simply present isolated objects or figures. Indeed, the figures presented in perception do not appear as fully objective, they cannot be simply juxtaposed and added up: they are impossible in one single gaze or view because they are about the same voluminous world, they comprise lacunas that introduce us to preobjective being. Such a preobjective type of being must be presented as a relation to maintain its transcendence, with a depth, a dimension and a background that cannot be thematized and made explicit without changing perspective and involving new ones that are not seen but allow to see. For instance, the mug in front of me has another side, my visual field is limited, I cannot see behind my back or the other side of the mug until I move my body and explore the field of experience temporally and spatially, but this is not a flaw of perception, it is required by the nature of the world as a field. There must always be a side of the mug that remains invisible to me (the perceiving being in situation), that remains its “other side”. If not, it ceases to be a thing and becomes an isolated figure, a pure object. In this way, the ideal view that would hope to sum up all the figures of the mug, from all angles, ceases to deal with a real being and leaves the field of experience, it instead intends a mere idea of representation, and as such it loses contact with the beings in their flesh and with the world. In the same way, the world cannot simply be the sum of all things and all perspectives or interpretations, it would alter its being and miss its transcendence, considering it only as the big Object, as a sum whose parts could be juxtaposed and that is missed only because of the limitations of our subjectivity, situation

and finite being. This conception of the world as a big Object is implicitly contained in Granier's statement when he wrote that "the ego must be the microcosm in which all the possibilities of Being are reflected"<sup>190</sup>; as if the possibilities of Being could ever be exhausted and that Being simply consisted in a sum of particular views. If Being was just a sum of positive interpretations (detached from their context, which could allow to juxtapose them), then its nature would be no different from these explicit figures, and our knowledge would be considered faulty because it is limited in time and range, but there would be no ontological transcendence left, simply one of quantity and not of quality or nature. In opposition to such a paradigm, Merleau-Ponty affirmed that the things and the world cannot ever be fully elucidated and must remain partly mysterious, writing that:

They are indeed mysterious, as soon as we do not limit ourselves to their objective appearance, and as soon as we place them back into the milieu of subjectivity. They are even an absolute mystery, which admits of no elucidation, not through a temporary flaw in our knowledge – for then it would fall back to the status of a mere problem – but rather because it is not of the order of objective thought where there are solutions. There is nothing to see beyond our horizons except still other landscapes and other horizons; there is nothing within the thing except other, smaller things. The ideal of objective thought is simultaneously grounded upon and left in ruins by temporality. The world, in the full sense of the word, is not an object, it is wrapped in objective determinations, but also has fissures and lacunae through which subjectivities become lodged in it or, rather, which are subjectivities themselves. We understand now why things, which owe their sense to the world, are not significations presented to the intelligence, but are rather opaque structures, and why their final sense remains foggy. The thing and the world only exist as lived by me, or as lived by subjects like me, since they are the interlocking of our perspectives; but they also transcend all perspectives because this interlocking is temporal and incomplete.

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.349.

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<sup>190</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.600.

Therefore, the goal of an interplay of the perspectives is not to merge all the perspectives (unlike what Granier proposes<sup>191</sup> or even Nietzsche<sup>192</sup>), for the world is not something that could be embraced in a single gaze like a flat painting, it is not a sum of pigments, figures or étants. To conceive the world as a big Object misses the original modality of being and knowledge uncovered by perspectivism. To gather perspectives like Granier proposed would extend our knowledge, yes, certainly, but what matters here is not to escape perspective, because we cannot, nor to exhaust all points of view, because we cannot either, there is an infinity of them, and we could never exhaust the meaning of Being nor reach an ultimate and complete knowledge. We cannot produce an exhaustive figuration of Being because Being does not consist solely of figures or étants. According to Husserl, even God would perceive in perspective because it is the only way for the world to appear as a field, a structure and a horizon. Thus, it is not enough to simply change perspective; it is required, yes, but it is insufficient by itself, we would just switch figurations, but we would not manage to describe epistemologically and ontologically the experience of Being. Instead of this vain and never-ending attempt, what truly matters is to change perspective, not in order to accumulate them, but to become able to notice the dimension or field as an ontological category, therefore obtaining a philological epistemology and ontology, recontextualizing all of our figures as being seen against the background or in the light of a dimension and in the field of the world. By shifting perspectives, we do not simply want to obtain a more complete picture of the

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<sup>191</sup> Which he thinks is possible, for instance when he wrote in *Op. cit.*, p.582: “the Will to Power proves itself capable of overcoming this pragmatism and sacrificing the point of view of value to the rigorous unveiling of Being. For acceptance of the Return envelops consent to the totality of aspects of Being, and thus renunciation of the partiality of vital perspectivism”, or at pp.599-600: “The selection process that must engender the Superman [...] aims to produce the far-reaching individuality that will actualize the integral Truth of perspectivism”.

<sup>192</sup> See for instance Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes* XII, 1 [105], p.45: “The loss in any specialization: synthetic nature is superior. Yet all organic life is already a specialization; the inorganic world, in the background, constitutes the greatest synthesis of forces and therefore what is highest and most venerable. – Error and perspectival limitation are absent from it”. In this text Nietzsche sees the highest truth in the inorganic world in which the synthesis of all views and perspectives is perfectly realized, or rather that precedes the perspective and can therefore ignore it. By conceiving the inorganic world in such a way, in opposition to the organic one, Nietzsche admits that he does not consider perspectivism to be necessary, that perspective is simply a defect added to reality and experience as a limitation due to the emergence of organic life.

world, but we notice the change of dimension, how the perspectives criss-cross to mutually limit their biases and to retrieve the thick reality at their crossroads, that all perspectives intend but that none exhaust. Thereby, what matters is not the plurality of perspectives *per se* but what connects them, what is in between them and always escapes a full thematization because it is a deep, thick and voluminous Being in which we are situated. The acknowledgement of this preobjective unity of the world is the decisive step in terms of philology, not the number of perspectives we manage to adopt successively or simultaneously. And this crucial step is missed by Nietzsche, or at least it is not thematized nor justified. The Nietzscheans, when they advocate for an interplay of the perspectives, use implicitly this evidence, structure and knowledge of the world as the field of experience, but they deny any unity of the world in their texts. Yet, it is only by noticing the dimensions and the structure of the figure-against-a-background according to which we know anything that we can obtain an interpretation of the interpreting (as a process) and of experience. The interplay of perspectives is meant to introduce us to the world as a field, rejecting the idea of the world and of the things (in perception, thought and language) as objects. What is at stake here are the

universality and the world [that] are at the core of individuality and of the subject. We will never understand this as long as we turn the world into an ob-ject; but we will understand it immediately if the world is the field of our experience, and if we are nothing but a perspective upon the world, for then the most secret vibration of our psycho-physical being already anticipates the world, quality is the sketch of a thing, and the thing is the initial sketch of the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.428.

Thus, the very concepts of an interplay of perspectives and of the world as a field should, if taken seriously, lead to abandon the idea that interpretations, perception, consciousness and language are only presenting objectified, isolated fictions and that the world is simply a

collection of plural, unique and individual events. Nietzsche dismembers and alters experience when he affirms that interpretations only present objects or that only one Will to Power imposes its perspective to the other ones constituting its complex, he misses the preobjective modality of being of the world as the field of experience, of the things as Gestalt and of the perspective as a knowledge of the type figure-against-a-background. The perspectives do not present objects but relations, and by presenting the relations they are not false, they are in fact true. Indeed, it would make no sense to affirm that a tree is tall “in-itself”. Nonetheless, when I state that the tree is taller than me or shorter than a mountain, I am not attributing qualities or determinations to an object, but I am expressing real relations, that are real precisely as relations and because they encompass and take into account my situation in the world and my perceiving being. Perspectives and interpretations become false only if we treat them as presenting objects, isolating the figures from the whole perceptual context, but it is not necessary to do so and it is not what perspectivism is about. In order to understand perspectivism, it is important to acknowledge with Merleau-Ponty that

each perception, although always potentially “crossed out” and pushed over to the realm of illusions, only disappears in order to leave a place for another perception that corrects it. Of course, each thing can, après coup, appear uncertain, but at least it is certain for us that there are things, that is, that there is a world. To wonder if the world is real is to fail to understand what one is saying, since the world is not a sum of things that one could always cast into doubt, but precisely the inexhaustible reservoir from which things are drawn. The perceived, taken in its entirety, along with the worldly horizon that simultaneously announces its possible disjunction and its eventual replacement by another perception, does not fully trick us. There could be no error where there is still no truth, but rather reality, and where there is still no necessity, but rather facticity. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.359-360.

Perspectivism is not a flaw of knowledge, but it is that which is required in order to express the facticity, transcendence, depth and voluminosity of the world. Perspectives that differ while maintaining a continuous link are the only way to express and become aware of the world as a field. Therefore, our knowledge is not faulty, it manages to present the facticity and transcendence of the world in immanence to perception and experience precisely thanks to the perspective when it is taken with its whole context. Hence, conceiving the perspectives or interpretations as closed, objectifying and isolated misses the whole point of perspectivism according to Merleau-Ponty, for it is not what separates us from the world but, on the contrary, what guarantees our access to it and reveals it as the field of experience that encompasses us and through which the perspectives communicate. The perspectives are not a created fiction that entraps us, on the contrary, they are an opening, our contact to the world and our way to know it in its transcendence and not as a mere idea or representation. Thus, as Merleau-Ponty highlighted, “my point of view is for me much less a limitation on my experience than a way of inserting myself into the world in its entirety”<sup>193</sup>. Perspective is the only philological way to introduce us to preobjective being, as a relation to immanent transcendences within a field and a situated relation, as well as a merging or criss-crossing of perspectives that are possible only because I am part of a thick, voluminous world that encompasses me (and not a mere flat and objectifying-isolating representation).

Some Nietzscheans might argue against my depiction of Nietzsche’s view that it is too caricatural, and that – between the world as an absolute chaos and the falsified sphere of consciousness – there is a middle ground that consists in, through the historicity of

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<sup>193</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.345.

becoming, the constitution of stabilized (to some extent) complexes of Wills to Power, that can, thanks to this stability and below the conscious perception, perceive through time and memory a “same phenomenon” and can therefore still possess or intend things and a world as a field of experience. We can read the following text of Nietzsche in this fashion:

My conception is that every specific body tends to make itself master of all space and to extend its force (– its will to power) and to repel everything that opposes this extension. But it constantly comes up against similar efforts from other bodies, and ends up “arranging” (“uniting”) with those closest to it: – so they conspire together to take power. And the process continues...  
Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [186], p.148.

However, this third ontological layer added between chaos and falsified consciousness, mediating the two, is highly problematic and does not help Nietzsche’s case. Indeed, if the Wills to Power form, through their dynamic struggles, temporary and relatively stable wholes by dominating the other forces, then either these wholes are ontologically true, occurring in reality as the field of becoming in which these forces interact, or they are a falsified construction (and are thus of the same kind as the conscious knowledge and language, simply adding another fabricated interpretation between reality and falsified consciousness). In other words, either the Wills to Power constituting wholes are, at different moments in time, exactly the same, and are therefore true as wholes, or there are some minuscule, infinitesimal changes in their configuration at each instant (and even the simple passing of time between two experiences is such a difference), which makes the identification and memory of “same” wholes erroneous. The second option seems more in line with Nietzsche’s belief that experience never repeats exactly in the same way twice, except when all the spatial configurations have been exhausted and repeat through the cycle of the Eternal Return. Nonetheless, even then, the “same” structure would repeat only for an

infinite time, and not in the span of a lifetime. Nietzsche affirms it several times in his texts, for instance in *Gay Science* as such:

There are not and cannot be identical actions – every action that has been performed has been performed in a completely unique way and will never be repeated, and the same will be true of every action in the future – all prescriptions for action concern only the crude external aspect [...] – thanks to them, one can achieve an appearance of identity, but precisely nothing more than an appearance. Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §335, pp.271-272<sup>194</sup>.

What is true of actions here is true of wholes as well, they can never repeat identically. As a result, following this interpretation, this intermediate and infra-conscious ontological sphere of wholes of Wills to Power, perceiving other wholes, is not perceiving the truth of becoming nor all the – supremely – individual Wills to Power, but it operates a false identification, treating as the “same” two structures that are not made of the same parts. Thus, the structured Wills to Power do not have a superior or different knowledge than consciousness, but they are also dealing only with falsified creations and identifications, fixated fictions. However, if that is the case, then what is the point in adding this third ontological layer of reality? By perceiving stable wholes (even if for a mere instant), these structured Wills to Power do not mediate the absolutely plural and fluid reality anymore but are already falsifying the experience. Either the structured Wills to Power can still perceive the minute and minuscule changes of every part (or force) as reality is unfolding (which would in fact prevent acknowledging any whole or structure), or they are distanced from reality in the same way as conscious perception, hence becoming redundant. A solution would be, as Merleau-Ponty did, to acknowledge thanks to the *Gestalt* a perception of the structure that precedes and overflows the parts; in other words, a holistic perception of the whole that cannot be reduced

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<sup>194</sup> See also Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain*, I, §19, p.79: “The laws of numbers were invented based on the original error that already prevailed, namely that there are several identical things (but in reality there is nothing identical)”.

to the sum of its parts and is not disintegrated by infinitesimal changes of parts so long as the general structure is maintained. Nevertheless, if we admit the perception of *Gestalten*, this knowledge can be obtained in perception and consciousness, therefore there is no need to refer this holistic knowledge to an infra-conscious sphere of beings, it needlessly adds to experience and is not economical. As a result, this intermediate layer of reality defended by some Nietzscheans is either a fiction that does not help us in knowing reality, or it is allowing to perceive wholes but then it is a non-economical position that is redundant with Merleau-Ponty's account of perception. Thereby, in either case, this hypothesis is useless to a philological philosophy. Besides, this assessment can lead us to wonder why, in the Nietzschean framework, would an interplay of meanings or experiences be accepted only for language (constituting Nietzsche's "new language") and not for perception (by refusing the totalities that perception presents, as well as the unity of the world, positing instead a world of forces). Indeed, if the Nietzscheans are ready to admit of an interplay of perspectives, sentences and thoughts that can, somehow and to some extent, point towards the will to power, then why do they refuse this interplay and preobjective means of signification to conscious perception? Acknowledging an interplay of perspectives and a knowledge of wholes would lead to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the speaking speech, but it would also apply to perception and there would be no reasons anymore to conceive reality as something purely plural and devoid of order or totalities. Thus, the interplays of perspectives that the Nietzscheans accept for language would also apply to perception and could present *gestalten*, totalities, organisms, sensible structures, instead of reducing them to false subjective constructions devoid of any reality. Moreover, the acknowledgement of an interplay of perspective would also lead to understand the world as the unitary field of experience instead of an absolute plurality and chaos. And yet, against these (philo-)logical consequences, Nietzsche and the Nietzscheans still affirm that the world is absolutely plural.

On what does this objection rest, though? If the Nietzscheans refuse to grant to perception the same epistemological power they grant to this “new language”, it is purely out of prejudice, because of their ontological assumption that reality must be absolutely plural and chaotic. Nevertheless, from where do they even have the idea or certainty that the world is absolutely pluralistic and is an absolute chaos? How did they manage to know this reality (or the one of the will to power)? Through what epistemology? There is no answer to these questions in the Nietzschean corpus. If we have a preobjective use of language and perception (through their interplay), then we can find wholes (that most Nietzscheans deny), criss-crossing several perspectives that are expressing differently the same phenomenon and occurring in the same world (if not, we are only dealing with unique, isolated perspectives that are never about the same phenomenon but always disconnected and totally new, thus not allowing for a preobjective interplay or even for perspectivism), and these wholes do not require multiple ontological layers but can be found directly in perception. However, if we refuse such a preobjective knowledge, this refusal can only be based on a mystical intuition (for it cannot be explained in Nietzsche’s framework) of the world as a pure plurality. Thereby, in either case of this dilemma, the Nietzscheans are going against experience because they refuse the perception of wholes, or, at best, refer it to an infra-conscious sphere of reality which is not an economical option since we can reach the same result with only conscious perception. Therefore, we can start to ask whether Nietzsche’s difficulties are due to the nature of language, consciousness and perception, or if they are in fact due to his prejudices in ontological and epistemological matters. Indeed, Nietzsche is blaming our situationality, language, perception and consciousness for the lack of faithfulness to experience, but maybe Nietzsche’s perspective and ontological and epistemological positions are also (and perhaps mainly) playing a role in this lack of faithfulness. The solution for a “new language” consisting in the “style” of Nietzsche and a succession of

perspectives is not a sufficient answer because he needs another conception of language and perception, another epistemology and another ontology for this interplay of perspectives to be possible at all and to thwart the objective modality of knowledge, expression and being. Instead of maintaining an opposition between an absolutely plural and chaotic world and the perspectives, adding *ad hoc* their interplay as a solution (for the expression) but without revising his ontology and epistemology to understand this interplay, Nietzsche could have delved into the interplay of perspectives, developed an ontology and epistemology based on it, directly in the sensible experience, which would have led him to revise his conception of the world as a chaos and of the Wills to Power as something existing prior to the perspectives, outside of them, like a text containing its own meaning that they simply interpret in a second time. If he did so, the world could become simultaneous or coexisting with the perspectives as their common field, revealed through their interplay while conversely making it possible. This paradigm would have modified Nietzsche's conception of language, perception and consciousness too, as ways to introduce us to this interplay that reveals the world in its flesh (as an intersubjective transcendence immanent to our experience), instead of conceiving them as constructions and falsifications. But this realization is prevented because Nietzsche still implicitly conceives the world as an in-itself that pre-exists to the interpretations, situated outside of them, and because he refuses to grant any ontological reach to the human relations and perspectives, even in their interplay: they are only conceived as positing objectified and isolated fictions. Therefore, Nietzsche's attempt to "dance" between the perspectives is rendered useless by the fact he refuses to embrace the relations, perspectives and perception; his results can always be brought back to a dogmatism, an illusion, falsification, construction and biases or prejudices for he maintained an external relationship between consciousness or experience (where the language, perception, thought and the writing of the philosopher – and their possible interplay – occur) and reality. Because

Nietzsche refused the existence of wholes and the nature of perception, thought and language as ontological systems that encompass us, he had to condemn all language and perception that display totalities, but this double anti-philological prejudice (of the world as chaos and of language and perception as deceitful) lead to a third one: if wholes do not exist but if we perceive totalities and speak of them, this means that these totalities have been created by something<sup>195</sup>, and this brings Nietzsche to adopt a Kantian framework with a transcendental (whose nature does not need to be an ego or a consciousness, and in fact Nietzsche will conceive this transcendental as the body and the infra-conscious drives) constituting our conscious experience and language, instead of overcoming this non-philological framework of a constitution and construction, which involves segregating between the experience we are aware of and the sphere of the transcendental, inducing a dichotomy once again instead of a monism of experience. Let us explore Nietzsche's transcendentalism.

**E) *Third Solution: Nietzsche's Kantianism. A Figurative Language to Unveil the Transcendental Sphere of the Will to Power (Versus the Consciousness as Offenheit)***

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<sup>195</sup> See for instance Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XI*, 35 [50], p.265: "The laws of thought as results of organic development – we must admit the existence of a fiction-producing *force* capable of laying down these laws".

## 1) Nietzsche's Transcendental Perspective

Sometimes, the Nietzschean thinkers thematize the difficulty of Nietzsche's relation to language more frontally. For instance, Granier admitted that Nietzsche "neglected to give his own discourse a solid foundation"<sup>196</sup>. Moreover, about the elaboration of a new language that aims at describing the ever-moving reality of becoming, Granier observed that

if we accept Nietzsche's condemnations, it is hard to see how language could lend itself to such a project. Nietzsche himself declares: "the means of expression of language are useless for expressing 'becoming': it belongs to our indissoluble need for conservation to constantly posit a coarser world of enduring beings, 'things', etc." (*La Volonté de puissance*, t.I, 1. II, §58, pp.218-219). Under these conditions, the essential pragmatism of language prevents us from overcoming the limits of our vital demands, and we will only ever enunciate "errors" about becoming, in other words, useful but inadequate propositions. Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.355-356.

Thus, according to Granier, Nietzsche, because of his pragmatist conception of language, did not provide the means for an expression of becoming. In the same way, Blondel acknowledged that

Nietzsche denied himself any recourse to language to express the truth it covers: the body, reality. At most, he admits to a "phenomenism": "I hold to the phenomenism of the inner world itself: nothing comes to our consciousness that has not first been completely modified, simplified,

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<sup>196</sup> Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.355. Granier specifies in a note on the next page that: "the fact remains that language functions as a sign, and it would be necessary to explain what the nature of the sign is, and why language can serve as a medium for transcendence (a transcendence that it spontaneously tends to block, insofar as it refuses to be the pure medium of the ineffable)", which Nietzsche does not do, while Merleau-Ponty provides a reflection on the sign and language that makes them compatible with the philological task of describing and expressing experience.

schematized, interpreted - the true process of inner “perception”, the causal link between thoughts, feelings, desires, between subject and object, is absolutely hidden from us - and is perhaps pure imagination”<sup>197</sup>. E. Fink has remarkably indicated where the problem lies for Nietzsche: “What (Nietzsche) lacks in an even more decisive way (for his work of destroying metaphysics) is the appropriate language. What he really wants, he cannot yet formulate. For language itself is metaphysical. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.217.

Nevertheless, Blondel, although he acknowledged Nietzsche’s rejection of language, still proposed a solution to justify and validate Nietzsche’s philosophical undertaking, understanding his “new language” in a specific way, as a metaphorical discourse:

The only solution might seem to be silence. And perhaps this is the one Nietzsche “chose” as a last resort. [...] Or did Nietzsche want to write a new language to express reality and life? He embarked on a *Versuch*: metaphorical plurality, where language, he thought, instead of simplifying, could attempt to recover the perspectival multiplicity of life. Philological misology will be succeeded by metaphor. It is the body that needs to be said. Nietzsche will thus relativize language – and thus philology – but instead of shifting the emphasis to physiology, as one would expect, he will seek to represent the world of drives by “creating a new language”, metaphorical, and, according to the logic of this concept, he will end up with a metaphor that is to metaphors as their principle: the metaphorical text. In order to think philosophically about culture, genealogy relates ideals to the body as their hidden origin. Nietzsche must therefore define what is meant by the body, and clarify the notion of origin. Since discursive language fails, Nietzsche attempts a metaphorical discourse. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.220.

Blondel says in this paragraph that Nietzsche’s criticism of language prompts him to “relativize language and philology”, they cannot be the main and only philosophical method anymore, for it is impossible, in the Nietzschean framework, to provide a faithful description of experience and reality directly. Instead, language must be conceived as a metaphor (which

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<sup>197</sup> Blondel quotes here an excerpt from Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes Novembre 1887 - Mars 1888*, 11 [113] and *Fragments posthumes Spring 1888*, 14 [152].

is the principle of the genealogical method too), it should not be treated literally but only as a symptom that can help uncover the origin of our experience (the body, culture, drives). This is the result of the fact that, in Nietzsche's framework, any knowledge found directly in consciousness cannot be trusted or deemed ontological, for conscious knowledge has already been constituted, artificially created according to pragmatic and vital needs by the deeper instance of the body. The only things that us – thinking and conscious subjects – can do “is not to « know », but to schematize, to impose to the chaos enough regularity and forms to satisfy our practical needs”<sup>198</sup>. And this schematizing does not even occur to consciousness, “the main activity is unconscious”<sup>199</sup> and the consciousness is always already presented with a modified, artificial and falsified product. Therefore, the consciousness is dealing with an experience already constituted and created, that departed from reality and cannot be faithful to it. This leads Granier to conclude that

the habitable world for man is thus an entirely fictitious world, and the worst misunderstanding would be to believe that reason can derive the predicates of Being from this fictitious world; in this way, we only succeed in redoubling the illusion, making the lie unconscious of itself as a lie, and handing history over to the fatality of Nihilism. For we then hypostasize a negation with utilitarian significance – that is, one that is biologically profitable. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.511.

As a result, conscious knowledge cannot be trusted according to the Nietzscheans. If we were to trust our conscious experience and try to find Being thanks to its testimony we would

misunderstand the essence of life, its will to power; in so doing, we overlook the primordial precedence possessed by spontaneous, aggressive, expansive forces, interpreting in new ways, ordering in new ways and giving form, “adaptation” deriving solely from their effect; in so doing, we deny the dominant role, within the organism itself, of the supreme functionaries in whom the

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<sup>198</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [152], p.116.

<sup>199</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.334.

will to life [volonté de vie] appears active and form-giving. Nietzsche, *La Généalogie de la morale*, Second Treaty, §12, pp.155-156.

The whole work or organizing activity done by the organism below the consciousness prevents us from trusting it. There is no gateway that could lead the consciousness to escape its falsified prison, for even the slightest sensation is already a product of the body's activity and shaping. Indeed, as underlined by Nietzsche, unconscious drives are determining any experience we can become aware of:

Affects such as fear, love and hatred, including the passive affects of laziness, reign even in the "simplest" of sentient processes. [...] Even in the midst of our most singular lived experiences, we continue to act in the same way: we invent most of our lived experience through affabulation, and we can scarcely be forced not to look at any action as "inventors". What it all boils down to is this: from time immemorial, we have been – accustomed to lying. [...] We are much more artists than we realize. Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §192, p.149.

The theme of the artist is recurring and underlying all of Nietzsche's philosophy, often highlighting the created nature of our conscious experience. Thereby, the term "art" in Nietzsche's language does not refer simply to artistic forms and practices as understood in daily language (*Kunst*), but it expresses more generally any productivity, even (or especially) the ontological and epistemological one. Thus, Granier rightly affirms that:

In fact, art, meditated in its immediate meaning, is a principle of works, it is essentially productivity. That is why Nietzsche does not hesitate to call any creation of forms in general "art". There is "art", according to Nietzsche, wherever we witness the organization of "matter", *i.e.* wherever we see a force assimilating reality through the construction of an ordered system of figures. According to such a criterion, every organism, however humble, is an artist's work. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.523.

In his later works, Nietzsche will understand this creation as the work of unconscious, bodily artists. The Wills to Power are the entities that fulfil this role of infra-conscious artists that give shape, paint and create our conscious experience. In this way, Granier could write that

every instinct represents an aesthetic power: “The unconscious plastic force is revealed in generation; there is indeed an artistic instinct at work here”. This brings us to the crucial point that, for Nietzsche, art is rigorously identified with the activity of the *Wille zur Macht*, an activity which, characterized in terms of knowledge, corresponds to vital pragmatism. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.523-4.

This whole artistic activity of constituting the conscious world by the Wills to Power is, at least from the perspective of consciousness (and therefore from a philological, economical standpoint too), a transcendental and ante-predictive activity that precedes it and debases language, perception and consciousness. Indeed, in such a framework, they can only be conceived as purely passive and imagining, receiving a false product in which they are trapped, fantasizing and interacting with fictitious entities. It is this falsity of the produced result, subordinated to pragmatic needs and not to the philological description of experience, that

explains why art is necessarily illusion and appearance. This is because the information of becoming, insofar as it signifies the concatenation of becoming in the system of forms in which the *Wille zur Macht* objectifies itself according to the axiological *a priori* of each living species, gives rise to a world, which accords with the demands of each individualized Will to Power, but which does not accord with the Truth of becoming as such. This world is false because it is a construction, the result of the architectonic activity of the *Wille zur Macht*. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.524.

Thus, the artistic perspective, synonym to a constitution of the conscious world, allows Granier to assert that “this ante-predictive constitution of the world is, according to

Nietzsche, the work of the imagination, so that perception is conceived by him as a veritable poetics”<sup>200</sup>. In the same way, Blondel attributes to imagination the shaping of the world and thinks consciousness’s modality of relation to the world as that of the fantasy:

So man's relationship to the world as chaos is more of the order of the interpreting imagination than of the concept, because man is thrown into the midst of the labyrinthine efflorescence of a universe of signs. [...] “What, then, are our lived experiences? Much more what we introduce into them (*hineinlegen*) than what they contain (*darin liegt*)! Or should we even go so far as to say that: in itself, there is nothing there? To live is to fabulate?” Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.232.

This conception of perception and conscious experience as a creation that traps the constituted self in a subjective and imaginary representation, devoid of any ontological reach<sup>201</sup>, even leads Granier to admit that there are some remains of idealism in Nietzsche’s philosophy. Indeed, he stated that “it is only with reference to this conception of perceptual activity as a game of fantasy that we can speak of a Nietzschean « idealism »”<sup>202</sup>. This idealism consists in considering perception, language and consciousness as illusory and constituted, as artificial and falsifying creations. Nevertheless, this does not sum up the whole of Nietzsche’s philosophy. This idealism applies only to our conscious experience, the one subordinated to our needs, but it does not apply to the whole of reality. Consequently, Nietzsche posits the ontological sphere of the wills to power (conceived as having a real contact with the plural reality and creating our conscious experience). Thus, Nietzsche acknowledges another sphere (of reality) than the conscious one, and he considers, according to Granier, that the

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<sup>200</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.474.

<sup>201</sup> For this question, see for instance Granier, *op. cit.*, pp.331-332: “Appearance, we explain, is not, in the cogito, equal to Being, because everything that appears to consciousness is merely a system of signs whose intelligibility cannot be founded by consciousness”.

<sup>202</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.475.

conscious syntheses are inconceivable unless we admit that a power of interpretation emanating from the body has already structured the spatio-temporal field and prepared the framework within which the mind will be able to deploy its categories [...]. We must therefore admit that, behind the ego of the cogito, a subjectivity is at work, offering the reflection of consciousness a set of data. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.340-341.

It is this originary subjectivity or activity that Nietzsche tries to describe or uncover thanks to the notion of the Will to Power, as the real source of our conscious experience. Nonetheless, this solution is very reminiscent of Kant. Indeed, Kant also conceived consciousness as a representation that is constituted by a preceding subjectivity, although the two authors do not agree on the nature of this transcendental sphere. Nietzsche's transcendental is not the ego nor a universal consciousness, it is the body and the drives, but that does not change the fact they fulfil the function of a transcendental in Nietzsche's perspective, namely they constitute and build or shape the experience we become aware of (the experience that reaches consciousness). Granier acknowledged that Nietzsche's philosophical undertaking can be understood as a transcendental one:

Transmutation means that man claims as his own the establishment of the framework of valuations in which phenomena are embedded and, therefore, that value is not an independent essence anchored in a suprasensible beyond, but the product of a tacit activity that precedes any objective rationalization, the horizon sketched out by a certain project which, insofar as it constitutes the field of possible experience for a given type of life, well deserves the name of "transcendental" project. The death of God thus entails the resorption of the metaphysical transcendent in man's transcendental project. Man acquires the dignity of a universal legislator. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.290.

Blondel also admitted that Nietzsche's solution is a Kantian one, as he wrote:

Between a mysticism of life and an excessive confidence in the power of language to reveal the reality of life, or between the Schopenhauerian, "nihilistic" problematic of phenomenal illusion

and the idolatry of the word that characterizes the moral ideal, Nietzsche can only choose a “Kantian”-type outcome. But this implies a) that he must produce a new kind of language, always threatened by silence or sonorous inanity; b) that he basically denies any ontological significance to language. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, pp.165-166.

This comparison might sound peculiar at first, for Nietzsche has criticized Kant harshly and many times, especially his conception of the moral imperative, but he also criticized his ontology and epistemology. For instance, against Kant’s conception of the transcendental as an ego and a universal consciousness, Nietzsche opposed that it is the “body [that] thinks, judges, chooses, wants, creates values, feels and imagines”<sup>203</sup>, and thereby that “the body is the Self, of which ego-consciousness is only a mediate and partial expression”<sup>204</sup>. He criticized the so-called universality or unity of Kant’s transcendental ego and of the world or “thing-in-itself”, to posit instead a real plurality of the Wills to Power (a plurality of the transcendental centers of interpretation). In this way, Blondel affirms that:

in Nietzsche, the “in-itself” of life shifts with the perspectives and play of metaphor: it is not, as in Kant, the hidden face of a relative universality. With metaphor, Nietzsche insists on the irreducibility of the singular and, allowing synthesis only through partial and inadequate metaphorical transference, underlines at the same time that the world can only be traversed by interrogative pluralization. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, pp.165-166.

As a result of the rejection of a universal Ego, “the “transcendental” constitution of the interpreted world rests on the body as the power of imagination and the site of metaphor production – instead of on the originally synthetic unity of apperception. Conversely, the concept appears as the fixed perspective”<sup>205</sup>. Therefore, Nietzsche severely criticized Kant’s conception of the Transcendental Ego and characterized the transcendental differently.

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<sup>203</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.338.

<sup>204</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.341.

<sup>205</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.257.

Nevertheless, he maintained a transcendental framework and simply radicalized it, making it more philological by not denying the body nor the plurality of reality. In other words, by criticizing consciousness and doubting the unity of the Ego to posit a plurality instead, “Nietzsche is simply pushing Kantian's idea that knowledge is essentially a constituent synthetic activity to its ultimate consequences”<sup>206</sup>, radicalizing this direction of thought (the transcendental one) and still maintaining it. The modifications brought by Nietzsche to the transcendental framework are important, but they are a continuation of it rather than an absolute condemnation of the whole undertaking and framework. Nietzsche’s radicalization of Kant’s perspective presents several advantages over his predecessor. Firstly, Nietzsche’s perspective allows to extend the scope and field of the constituted. Indeed, in opposition to Kant, who recognized the categories and forms of perception as an *a priori* framework that must be adopted by any subject, held as necessary for the transcendental, Nietzsche considers that

Categories are « truths » only in the sense that they condition our lives: just as Euclidean space is such a relative « truth ». (In and of itself – for no one will argue that there must be men – reason, like Euclidean space, is a mere idiosyncrasy of certain animal species, and only one of many...). Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes XIV*, 14 [152], p.117.

Thus, the categories and forms are not necessary to any possible subject but become simply necessary to a certain species or type of life. They become just one option among others, selected by certain kinds of Wills to Power. In this sense, “the space of perception, too, is constituted; it is no longer, as in Kant, the *a priori* framework of representation”<sup>207</sup>. In other words, Nietzsche sees the necessity that Kant grants to the categories as the sign of unreflected prejudices as well as an anthropocentrism, as if any subject had to perceive in

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<sup>206</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.467.

<sup>207</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.476.

the same way as the modern human. Moreover, because the transcendental Ego is universal in Kant's perspective, he must accept the categories as necessary and cannot explain them nor even try to understand where they come from, he simply finds them always already there. On the contrary, thanks to the fact Nietzsche refers the categories to the Wills to Power, he "can account for the existence of these categories, whereas Kant merely found categories in human understanding and drew up a table of them. If the meaning of a category is its usefulness for life, then this usefulness itself must be interpreted"<sup>208</sup>. It is precisely because he wants to interpret the usefulness of the categories and refers them to their origin, as the result of a process, that "Nietzsche suggests replacing transcendental deduction with genealogical deduction, which would demonstrate that the use of categories is justified insofar as categories are the tools of the Will to Power. Transcendental deduction gives way to a reflection on the « usefulness for life » of the cardinal concepts of understanding"<sup>209</sup>. Besides the change of status of the categories involved by Nietzsche's transcendental framework, there is also a change of status of the transcendental subjectivity entailed by his perspective. As noted by Granier, in Nietzsche's transcendental framework

the Self refers to the subjectivity of the body. But this very concept of subjectivity then calls for profound reworking. We now need to distinguish between the subjectivity of the organism (the organism represents the totality of the living being, not just what is offered in perception<sup>210</sup>) and the subjectivity of the subject-self, which is identified with the sphere of Reason and its intellectual categories. Life in its essence is subjectivity, insofar as it envelops the power to think, *i.e.* the power to interpret the world by creating value judgments and projecting its specific

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<sup>208</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.509.

<sup>209</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.471.

<sup>210</sup> We could already notice a departure from the philological framework here, because how could this other sense of the body be given outside of perception or experience? It implies another sphere of reality than the perceived and lived one, which might not be an economical position. Thus, Nietzsche redefines what is the subject, but he maintains a constituting subject and therefore an idealist approach to some extent, which has been redefined but that maintains a structure of division between the interpreting text and the constituted interpretations. Hence, pluralizing the "subject" does not change the epistemological and ontological way it structures the world and experience, which is not a philological nor economical structure.

teleology onto things. [...] Primary subjectivity is non-reflexive, non-representational (it is independent of the subject-object framework), it is not linked to a fixed pole, the ego, and it designates a multiplicity of interpretation centers... Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.343-344.

Nietzsche thus distinguishes between the reflexive subjective of the consciousness, subordinated to the frames of Reason, and a pre-reflexive subjectivity of the body that is free from these frames (as it constitutes and applies them) and precedes the dichotomy between the subject and the object. It is interesting to remark that, in this specific endeavor or perspective, Nietzsche is very close philosophically to the first Merleau-Ponty.

## **2) Merleau-Ponty's Transcendental Perspective**

Indeed, at the time of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty also adopted a Kantian framework and acknowledged a pre-reflexive subjectivity of the body, below the distinction between the subject and the object, that was constituting our subjective experience (the one subordinated to the frames of reason and coming only in a second time, after the phase of constitution). Thus, at this time, Merleau-Ponty still understood our conscious, reflexive experience as the result of a synthesis, of operations unfolding unconsciously that shape our habitable reality, as he claimed that “there are no connected objects without an act of connecting and without a subject, there is no unity without a

unifying”<sup>211</sup>. Nevertheless, just like Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty also criticized Kant while still maintaining a framework of the constitution; for instance, he argued against Kant’s transcendental ego that

if a universal constituting consciousness were possible, the opacity of the fact would disappear. If we want reflection to preserve the descriptive characteristics of the object upon which it bears and to actually understand this object, then we must not consider reflection a simple return to a universal reason, setting it up in advance in the unreflected; rather, we must consider reflection to be a creative operation that itself participates in the facticity of the unreflected. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.62.

This notion of a “creative operation” that takes place in the unreflected and in the facticity of the world is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s artistic perspective and his understanding of the Wills to Power as artistic “beings” that are part of the unreflected reality. Hence, we can notice the convergence of the two authors when Granier wrote: “precisely because it is radical, this assimilative activity remains hidden from reflexive consciousness. [...] No wonder, then, that the ego appears to itself as affected in perception, since it is unaware that what it grasps as given is the result of a constitutive operation carried out by the organic Self”<sup>212</sup>. In this way, Merleau-Ponty was in total accordance with Nietzsche when he stated that the “philosophers who have practiced reflective analysis have always sensed that they had to look beneath absolute consciousness”<sup>213</sup>. It is what Merleau-Ponty tried to do too when he argued against Kant that

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<sup>211</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.250.

<sup>212</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.474.

<sup>213</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.507. Merleau-Ponty justifies this statement at the p.64: “The error of reflective philosophies is believing that the meditating subject could absorb the object into his meditation or grasp the object upon which he is meditating without remainder, or that our being reduces down to our knowledge. [...] If we were consciousness, we would have the world, our history, and perceived objects before us in their singularity as transparent systems of relations”.

the Kantian subject posits a world, but, in order to be able to affirm a truth, the actual subject must first have a world or be in the world, that is, he must hold a system of signification around himself whose correspondences, relations, and participations do not need to be made explicit in order to be utilized. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.131.

And the solution of Merleau-Ponty was the same as Nietzsche's too, namely, to deem the body as the transcendental, pre-reflexive subject. Stated by Merleau-Ponty himself, in the clearest manner: "all along our goal was to shed light upon the primordial function by which we make space, the object, or the instrument exist for us and through which we take them up, as well as to describe the body as the place of this appropriation"<sup>214</sup>. Thus, Merleau-Ponty understands the body as carrying or constituting a whole set or field of implicit significations that constitute our milieu and that we do not need to explicitly think about, acting as a transcendental for us, which leads him to understand the body as a tacit cogito beneath the consciousness, that prepares and makes possible anythetic, reflexive knowledge or even any action. However, just like for Nietzsche, this body who is a transcendental subject is not the objective body. Indeed, in the same way as for Nietzsche the constituting body is made of pre-reflexive drives that are as psychological as they are physiological, according to Merleau-Ponty the body-subject is the pre-objective, phenomenal body:

We withdraw the synthesis from the objective body in order to give it to the phenomenal body, that is, the body insofar as it projects a certain "milieu" around itself, insofar as its "parts" know each other dynamically and its receptors are arranged in such a way as to make the perception of the object possible through their synergy. By saying that this intentionality is not a thought, we mean that it is not accomplished in the transparency of a consciousness, and that it takes up as acquired all of the latent knowledge that my body has of itself. Resting upon the pre-logical unity

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<sup>214</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.156.

of the body schema, the perceptual synthesis no more possesses the secret of its object than it does the secret of one's own body. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.241-242.

The quotes confirming that this perspective was the dominant one (against the perspective of consciousness) during the period of the *Phenomenology of Perception* are numerous, such as: “every perceptual habit is still a motor habit, and here again the grasping of a signification is accomplished by the body”<sup>215</sup>; or “here we discover the general function of tacit transposition that we have already recognized in the body when studying the body schema”<sup>216</sup>. Speaking of the body schema, Merleau-Ponty affirmed that

learning to see colors is the acquisition of a certain style of vision, a new use of one's own body; it is to enrich and to reorganize the body schema. As a system of motor powers or perceptual powers, our body is not an object for an “I think”: it is a totality of lived significations that moves toward its equilibrium. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.154-155.

Thereby, the body schema is conceived by Merleau-Ponty as a tacit and holistic knowledge that the body possesses – of its own parts and of the world – but that is not a consciousness, an idea nor an abstract thought. It is a knowledge in the world whose subject can only be the body (conceived in a pre-objective way), and this knowledge occurs beneath the sphere of the consciousness, who simply finds its results always already there and ready-to-use. Consciousness relies on this tacit knowledge at its disposal, but Merleau-Ponty insists that consciousness cannot access this knowledge thematically, it can only use it. Therefore, this knowledge is not a conscious one, it is established by the body. Merleau-Ponty specified, as he wrote on the topic of the sexual perception of the body:

Here we can detect a mode of perception that is distinct from objective perception, a genre of signification distinct from intellectual signification, and an intentionality that is not the pure

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<sup>215</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.154.

<sup>216</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.172.

“consciousness of something.” Erotic perception is not a *cogitatio* that intends a *cogitatum*; through one body it aims at another body, and it is accomplished in the world, not within consciousness. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.159.

Merleau-Ponty praised Kant’s original perspective, for it was one step closer – compared to the philosophical tradition – to retrieve the tacit cogito that constitutes a world for us; however, Merleau-Ponty argued for pushing the radicality even further by understanding the body as the transcendental agent, which is the only way to overcome the aporia involved by Kant’s idealism:

Intellectualism certainly represents a step forward in the coming to awareness. In intellectualism, that place outside of the world – which the empiricist philosopher merely implied, and where he tacitly placed himself in order to describe the event of perception – now receives a name, it now figures explicitly within the description. This place is the transcendental Ego. [...] Now, if one’s own body and the empirical self are merely elements in the system of experience, merely objects among other objects beneath the gaze of the genuine I, then how can we ever merge with our body? [...] How is it that the world is not perfectly explicit in front of us, and why does it only deploy itself little by little and never “in its entirety”? Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.215.

Kant’s main problem is that he overlooked or underestimated the role of the body for our experience: “Kant concluded that I am a consciousness who encompasses and constitutes the world, and, in this reflective movement, he passed over the phenomenon of the body”<sup>217</sup>. When the body becomes the subject, the union between the body and the “subject” is not problematic anymore, for this distinction does not apply to a body-subject, and perspective is not mysterious anymore either for it is simply the translation of the body’s situation in the world (whereas a pure consciousness had no place in it and the perspectival limit could not

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<sup>217</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.317.

be understood if it constituted our experience). Thereby, it is only by making the body the transcendental subject that these problems can be overcome (while maintaining a Kantian perspective), and it is what both Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche discerned. Therefore, both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty have criticized Kant's transcendental ego, precisely as an ego and consciousness, and they instead posited the body as the source responsible for the constitution of the experience we are aware of, making it a tacit cogito, preceding reflexive consciousness and operating below it, infra-consciously. Their only difference is that Nietzsche conceived the body as plural, while Merleau-Ponty conceived it as a unity (as the "cohesion of a life"), but both authors are very close philosophically in their decision to posit the body as a pre-reflexive constituting agent below the consciousness. They explore a similar direction of thought, radicalizing Kant's one.

### **3) Merleau-Ponty Self-Criticism and Overcoming of the Transcendental Framework**

Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty ended up moving away from this Kantian perspective, as he realized that it was not the most radical solution. Let's see if his self-criticism also reaches Nietzsche's conception. In spite of improving the Kantian perspective, Merleau-Ponty argued that maintaining a constituting sphere of reality is not philosophical enough. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty came back on his conclusions in his later works (like the *Visible and*

*Invisible* or in his courses at the Collège de France) and deemed them unsatisfactory. Thus, Merleau-Ponty asserted in the *Visible and Invisible* that

the tacit cogito does not, of course, solve these problems. By revealing it as I did in *Phenomenology of Perception*, I have not arrived at a solution (my chapter on the cogito is not attached to the chapter on speech): on the contrary, I have posed a problem. The tacit cogito must make us understand how language is not impossible, but it cannot make us understand how it is possible – there remains the problem of the passage from perceptual meaning to linguistic meaning, from behavior to thematization. [...] It is a question of grasping *what*, through the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects, wants, speaks and finally thinks. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.227.

The question of the expression emerges once again, and Merleau-Ponty realized that, just like for Nietzsche, a perspective of the constitution does not explain how or why a linguistic expression of the constituting sphere could be possible if it is distinguished and separated from our conscious experience, for language seems limited to the latter (when such an extreme dichotomy is implied). If we posit a strict distinction between the constituting and the constituted and if we grant to consciousness an access exclusively limited to the constituted (seeing it as trapped in a fictitious painting that resulted from the artistic creation of the Wills to Power), then it is not possible to understand how we (as conscious thinking philosophers) could know anything about the constituting or even talk about it and express it. Therefore, it is the whole framework of the constitution that is at stake in Merleau-Ponty's self-criticism, not only the version of Kant but the whole of it, including its radicalizations. Merleau-Ponty realized that this very framework always implies (even if tacitly) a dichotomy between the subject and the object. In this way, Merleau-Ponty wrote that:

the problems posed in *Phenomenology of Perception* are unsolvable because I start from the distinction "consciousness" - "object" – It will never be understood, on the basis of this distinction, that such-and-such an event of the "objective" order (such-and-such a brain lesion)

can lead to such-and-such a disturbance of one's relationship with the world, – a massive disturbance, which seems to demonstrate that the entire “consciousness” is a function of the objective body – It is these very problems that must be downgraded by asking: what is so-called objective conditioning? Answer: it is a way of expressing and noting an event of the order of raw or wild being which, ontologically, is first. This event consists in the fact that an appropriately arranged visible (a body) is hollowed out by an invisible meaning – the common fabric from which all structures are made is the visible, which itself is by no means the objective, the in-itself, but the transcendent, – which is not opposed to the for-itself, which has cohesion only for a Self – the Self to be understood, not as nothingness, not as something, but as a unity of transgression or correlative encroachment of “thing” and “world” (time-thing, time-being). Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.250.

By still opposing an unconscious transcendental reality to a for-itself that is captive of false constituted illusions, the dichotomy between subject and object is revived, even if the transcendental subject is considered as the body. Certainly, Blondel argued that making the body an unconscious subject involves a change of order that overcomes dualism:

What is the point of referring to the body if it is almost spiritualized? In what sense can the body remain the foundation, the origin? The question then becomes: what is the body as a fundamental interpretation? The body is the instincts (*Instinkte*) or drives (*Triebe*) which, interpreting reality, constitute it. Two corollaries: a) constitution (*e.g.* categorical) is replaced by bodily-affective [pulsionnelle] interpretation; b) the conscious mind-intellect becomes the instrument of an unconscious interpreting body. So there is not a simple reversal of the earlier dualism. There is an interposition (*détour*) and a change of order. Blondel *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, pp.222-223.

However, this nuance underlined by Blondel does not suffice. Ultimately, even in this case, the dichotomy is simply repeated and displaced instead of being radically overcome. In this “change of order”, instead of an ego as a subject that constitutes objects we now have a natural or objective (ontologically speaking, in the sense that it is not constituted but pre-

exists the constitution (as its operator) and exists like an in-itself, unconscious and in the true world) subject that constitutes or creates a subjective world (made of objects, in the sense of isolated and fixated figures that are detached from their context and from reality) in which the consciousness is trapped. This represents indeed a “change of order”, the conception of the body and of the consciousness take on a new dimension or nature and are partitioned differently, ontologically speaking. Nevertheless, this new understanding of reality still maintains an ontological dichotomy between our conscious experience and the unconscious interpreting body. In this manner, Nietzsche repeats a dichotomy between subject and object (not as definite “things”, for Nietzsche changes their traditional definition, but as a specific way of structuring experience into two different poles: a constituting one and a constituted one) because he considers that reality (in-itself, of the unconscious body) is opposed to the for-itself of the consciousness. The fundamental, interpreting body completely escapes the consciousness because the for-itself is a pure illusion and fictitious creation while the real ontologically existing “Being is freed from all all-too-human restrictions, it is beyond value, beyond utility, beyond logic, beyond the rigid antinomies in which human understanding is locked”<sup>218</sup>. Even if the Wills to Power are considered as subjects, they are still absent from our conscious perception of the world, and therefore they end up on the side of nature. As Barbaras argued against the first Merleau-Ponty,

the psychology of behavior does allow for the reduction of idealism, but it does so only to the benefit of what we have identified as a form of naturalism: the analysis of the body is still traversed by the duality of subject and object, and, essentially recaptured as a living being-in-the-world, the body is ultimately rejected on the side of nature. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène. Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, p.88.

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<sup>218</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.537.

A tacit cogito becomes inevitably a natural cogito, and, as such, falls on the side of the object or nature rather than really overcoming the dichotomy. The same applies to Nietzsche, his drives or Wills to Power are more on the side of nature because they know the world infra-consciously, below the experience, therefore they are like a mute nature for us, they do not speak to us and are not expressive. To convince ourselves of that fact, we can observe how Nietzsche praises inert matter:

This is precisely what Nietzsche implies by comparing the organic and inorganic modes of being. The material world is the seat of impersonal perception, for the various centers do not yet pose as individualities in the strong sense of the term, there is still continuity between them [...] this is why, too, the material world is the one in which the exact assessment of power relationships reigns, the one in which error – linked to perspectivism – has no place yet: “Admit that there are perceptions in the inorganic world, and perceptions of absolute exactitude: that is where ‘truth’ reigns! – With the organic world comes imprecision and appearance”. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.363.

This means that perspectivism is not something that delivers the transcendence of the world to us, but it is simply a flaw of our subjectivity or situation that makes our view erroneous and traps us in an artificial creation. The world in-itself, and it is such a world that is at stake in Nietzsche’s thought, can be known by the Wills to Power when they are still completely plural and disorganized, then they know reality as it really is, but for our perspectivist experience and consciousness such a world is inaccessible and we are stuck in artificial and fictitious creations. There is a pure perception of the world that is admitted by Nietzsche, as a field of plural forces, but this world is so foreign from our conscious experience that it constitutes an in-itself for us. The pure “experience” or “perception” of the world is not lived by us but by natural subjects (if an experience or perception devoid of perspectivism were even conceivable at all). Granier confirms this interpretation by quoting Nietzsche once again:

So, “moving from the inorganic to the organic world means moving from solid perceptions of force values and power relationships [assuming this is the reality to know] to uncertain and ill-defined perceptions (because a multitude of beings in struggle with each other... have set themselves against the external world)”. Each type of living being then brings its own idiosyncratic *a priori* and shapes its *Umwelt* according to its own requirements: perspectivism is now linked to the structure of an apparatus of knowledge, in man, for example, to the intellect and its logical categories, so that man finds himself a prisoner of his perspective and can no longer even imagine other ways of apprehending reality. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, pp.364-365.

The lack of philology is blatant here, for there is once again a division between two worlds that is operated: the world in-itself, made of forces, where “truth reigns”, and the subjective worlds that amount to artistic and false creations. This pure world of forces can only be understood as a new type of metaphysical ground or foundation that is once again opposed to experience. Undoubtedly, the Nietzscheans deny this interpretation because they know perfectly well that it goes against all the philological aphorisms of Nietzsche in which he refuses such metaphysical distinctions between two worlds; however, their arguments against this case do not seem convincing to me, and I will attempt to show why (although it will appear even more strikingly when these arguments will be compared to Merleau-Ponty’s solution). For instance, even if Blondel spoke of the body “as a foundation or origin” in the previous quote, he made sure to emphasize strongly and several times that the body should not be understood as a new metaphysical or ontological ground or foundation, in statements such as: “Nietzsche even explicitly condemns the idea that affects can be a foundation (*Grund*): « Affects are a construction of the intellect, an invention of causes that do not exist. All bodily feelings that we do not understand are interpreted intellectually » (*KGW*, VII, 1, 24 (20)). The foundation itself is an interpretation”<sup>219</sup>, or:

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<sup>219</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.226.

There is nothing original about Nietzsche's metaphors for the primacy of the body. The very metaphor of the foundation might lead one to think that Nietzsche is taking up, and inverting, the metaphorical charge of the concept of foundation [...]. For him, the body is “a subterranean world (*Unterwelt*) of organs at our service (*dienstbar*)” [*On the Genealogy of Morals*, II, §1]. Nietzsche always speaks of an *Unterwelt* of the soul, which refers to the body at its most secret. [...] Now, the *Unterwelt*, the subterranean world of unconscious drives, is less a cause or a nature than an invisible. Blondel *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.225.

And:

The subterranean body does not replace the sun as the cause and true reality of appearances (shadows), as if, for Nietzsche, the shadow were, contrary to Plato, the ultimate reason for the deceptive light (of consciousness). In this case, Nietzsche would simply be repeating Schopenhauer's thought of the in-itself, inverted by a conception of the will-to-live as the profound reality of illusory appearances, although many texts can be invoked in this metaphysical sense. [...] More often than not, Nietzsche defines this obscurity of the body as a philological enigma of the plural rather than as a hidden foundation. Blondel *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.226.

Nevertheless, all these statements are just affirmations. They do not prove anything nor make us understand how an unconscious interpreting body could be something else than a ground.

What are Blondel's arguments for denying the status of ground or foundation to the body?

Blondel summarizes his arguments in three points:

This definition is evidenced by a) the constant use of terms indicating multiplicity associated with obscurity [...]; b) by images indicating, not the constitution of a ground, but on the contrary the destruction, crumbling or undermining, the pluralization of the foundation; c) by the ultimate recourse to the metaphor of legibility as the reason for visibility: Nietzsche's genealogical concern is not aimed at the exhumation of a hidden in-itself that founds ideals, but at the determination of a thought of interpretation. Blondel *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.226.

The third point is irrelevant, for it refers to Nietzsche's intention, but the intention of the philosopher does not matter, if his method, results and perspective involve a partition of experience into a conscious sphere and an unconscious, constituting, ontological one, then it means that he either betrayed his intention or that his goal tacitly required such an anti-philological partition of experience. Thus, we have to turn to the two first point to examine the validity of his argument. These two points constitute in fact a single one, for they are both about plurality. However, it relies on a prejudice of Blondel, namely that a ground could not be plural and that it must be something united and unchanging like a substance. In this way, in Blondel's perspective, pluralizing the foundation would amount to destroy the foundation. It is in this sense that we can read Blondel's following statements: "Schopenhauer's aim was to demonstrate that it is the will itself that serves as the substratum and unconscious cause of our thoughts. It is this in-itself as cause that Nietzsche rejects, insisting on arbitrariness and plurality"<sup>220</sup>, and:

As a subterranean thinker, Nietzsche does not claim to touch the foundation (*Grund*), but to undermine it from below (*untergründlich*). [...] Nietzsche presents his task as one of destruction, not of digging for solid foundations. He not only undermines morality, but even its foundation, which he crumbles and desubstantializes. [...] The metaphor of depth does not lead to the solidity of the foundation, but rather transposes the infinite plurality of perspectives, indecipherable and obscure in a... figurative sense! We should therefore not speak of the mind as foundation, but of the body as plurality, and of "the soul as plurality of subjects" and "the soul as social edifice of drives and affects". Blondel *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.229.

Blondel has a prejudice concerning what a ground should be, understanding it as something unitary, unchanging and substantial, which leads him to think that it is sufficient for denying any ground to make the reality plural and changing. Nevertheless, this restrictive

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<sup>220</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.228.

understanding of what a metaphysical ground can be is missing the fact that a ground can be of different nature. Why should a ground necessarily be unitary? What matters is that it is situated in another ontological sphere, differentiated from the conscious one. It being plural or a unity, unchanging or becoming does not matter, what makes a ground a metaphysical structure is the fact that its reality or ontology (regardless of how its nature is conceived) is opposed to conscious experience, language and perception. Some entities – deemed unconscious or outside of perception, consciousness and experience – are reified and stand as a true reality that is opposed to conscious experience. And the Nietzscheans often talk of the Wills to Power as reified entities that exist beneath or prior to the consciousness and as parts of the real world (that they conceive as a chaos). For instance, Blondel himself, quoting Nietzsche, spoke of the drives as beings: “the body's impulses are therefore « *beings* that grow, struggle, increase or decline, so that their number is perpetually changing and our life, like all life, is a perpetual death »”<sup>221</sup>, or, in a similar way, Müller-Lauter affirmed that “the world is indeed the sum of *beings* who imagine worlds, the sum of forces that are given *de facto*”<sup>222</sup> and Granier talked of the drives as realities: “instincts, passions – these are the terms that Nietzsche uses over and over again in his attempt to think of the *profound realities* that unfold the range of value judgments that human morality represents in the forms of language and conceptualization”<sup>223</sup>. Granting to becoming or plurality and the Wills to Power an ontological status as the true reality does not shatter the ground, it simply changes its nature. Thus, instead of overcoming the traditional philosophical structure of an ontologically true ground that is opposed to conscious experience and debases it as something false and created, Nietzsche simply repeats it and inverts the terms, thinking this inversion equates a destruction of the structure while it affirms it once again. In the

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<sup>221</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.247, quoting Nietzsche *Volonté de puissance*, I, §226, p.266.

<sup>222</sup> Müller-Lauter, « La pensée nietzschéenne de la volonté de puissance », in: *Nietzsche. Physiologie de la volonté de puissance*, p.88.

<sup>223</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.159.

philosophical tradition, the true ground was considered to be Ideal, unique and unchanging, opposed to perception as relative, plural and changing. What Nietzsche did was simply to invert the attributes<sup>224</sup>: he posits the world (or true ground) as something absolutely plural and ever-changing, opposing conscious perception as an artistic (and false) creation of fixated, unchanging unities. As such, the dual ontological structure between the truth of the world and the falsity of perception and conscious experience is maintained. Granier's following quote is strikingly displaying this inversion, thinking it is a destruction:

Under the guise of an apology for scientific rigor, Nietzsche makes an abrupt break with Schopenhauer's Metaphysics and initiates the implacable critique of Idealism that will continue in all his mature works. This critique shatters the scheme of substantial, permanent "being" and inverts the hierarchical relationship between "being" and becoming. Becoming is no longer the non-being of mere "appearance" (*Schein*), but true reality, and it is "being", as defined by Metaphysics, that proves to be a pure fiction, a vain appearance forged by negations and the vengeful instinct of the weak. Similarly, the multiple ceases to be the lie that hides the one-original from us, pluralism is the essential attribute of Being, and it is the category of unity that appears as a pragmatic category used by the understanding to synthesize the diversity of experience. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.550<sup>225</sup>.

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<sup>224</sup> See for instance, among many quotes that confirm this interpretation, Blondel, *op. cit.*, p.247, quoting Nietzsche's *Volonté de Puissance*, I, §177, p.255: "In fact, we are a multiplicity that has constructed an imaginary unity".

<sup>225</sup> See also Granier, *ibid.*, p.155, where he compares Nietzsche to Marx and argue that both invert the relation between life and consciousness, in a way that it is not anymore consciousness that determines life but life (and the body) that determine consciousness: "In both cases [of Marx and Nietzsche], in fact, the regression to the supra-sensible "founder" – which defines the method of Metaphysics – is eliminated in favor of a search for the origin at the heart of immanence. [...] For, as Marx put it – and Nietzsche could also be countersigned – « It is not consciousness that determines life, it is life that determines consciousness »". However, once again, the relationship is simply inverted instead of being radically overcome and redefined, escaping a dualism and thinking of the two as simultaneous or contemporary, coexisting rather than in a relation of causation and determination (that implies that there is a primordial order of reality opposed to a second, derivative and determined one). This structure of causation is a metaphysical structure that Nietzsche did not overcome. This interpretation is confirmed implicitly by Blondel, who wrote in *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.246: "What is new here is the nature of the relationship between the conscious intellect and the rest of the body, or more precisely between the groups of drives themselves: it is causal neither in a spiritualist sense (the mind is a toy), nor in a physiologist-mechanist sense. The body is not a machine, but a political organization based on unstable relationships of forces that are not univocally regulated by conscious causal logic". Once again, this nuance brought by Blondel does not attain the core of the problem, he changes the nature of the causal relation, but he

The “break from Schopenhauer’s Metaphysics” is not as abrupt as Granier thinks. An inversion of stigma and values instead of a complete reshaping of our epistemology and ontology is not radical enough, it still contains too many ancient prejudices implied by the structure it is repeating and inverting. Therefore, Nietzsche’s perspective lacks radicality and philology, for philology, to be the most economical, supposes not a dual structure of experience but a single experience and ontology. Barbaras brilliantly exposed the lack of radicality of the thinkers who argued for this inversion and granted to becoming the status of Being. Although this paragraph is aimed at Bergson, it fully applies to Nietzsche too:

Strictly speaking, and contrary to Bergson's assertion, the neutralization of nothingness does not lead to becoming, as opposed to unchanging essence, but to a sense of being that includes the negative, as opposed to full positivity. This is the line of demarcation, both narrow and deep, that separates Merleau-Ponty's thinking from that of Bergson. Bergson tends to emphasize the positivity of becoming, against classical perspectives that relegate it to non-being. Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, generalizes Bergson's analysis of nothingness, sees in the immutable a modality of the positive, which is like the essence of essence, and thus draws the consequence that Being, which does not have to resist nothingness, can accept negativity within itself. This is why Merleau-Ponty also sees in Bergson's duration the presentiment of an original sense of being, integrating negativity as if unknowingly. Nevertheless, there is a Bergsonian positivism in that Bergson tends to shift positivity from essence to becoming, and thus to substantialize the latter, instead of conferring on becoming the negativity that essence lacks. Merleau-Ponty's analysis here echoes that of G. Lebrun: “Bergson undoubtedly recognizes that true mobility – duration – is the difference with oneself, but it is to make it attain the substantial dignity that Hegel congratulates Zeno on having delivered movement from. Bergsonism is therefore less a critique of metaphysics than a displacement of its topic: Being has merely changed its content”. Bergson attributes to becoming the privilege granted to essence by metaphysics, thus entering into a kind of contradiction. Barbaras, « Le tournant de l'expérience. Merleau-Ponty et

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does not reject or overcome the causalist framework as a whole (and the metaphysical dichotomist structure it involves).

Bergson », in: *Le Tournant de l'expérience. Recherches sur la philosophie de Merleau-Ponty*, pp.51-52.

In the same way as Bergson, Nietzsche also shifted positivity from essence to Becoming, and, as such, he failed his enterprise of destroying metaphysics<sup>226</sup>, he remained dependent on it. Indeed, by understanding “Being” restrictively as an Ideal substance and unity, and by denying it completely, opposing that reality is an absolute becoming, Nietzsche remains closer to metaphysics than Merleau-Ponty or Heidegger who are still searching for Being, not anymore as a big Object or substance, but as what exceeds the objectivations while still encompassing them, ensuring a preobjective unity of our experiences as the field in which they occur and that they attempt to thematize. Our objectivations never manage to exhaust the world nor to grasp it “adequately”, but at the same time they are never completely detached or separated from it, and they are the only way for Being to be presented to us, precisely as what always exceeds our interpretations but that also ties them together. Thus, Merleau-Ponty affirmed:

To say that Being [l'Être] is hidden [in opposition to the position claiming Being is nothing, non-existing, a grammatical illusion], is the idea that what comes *zum Vorschein* is in principle from the order of the Being [l'Étant], and inadequate for the *Sein*. [...] The philosophy of the non-positive is further away from theology than the philosophy of nothingness or than the nihilism, which is the inevitable counterpart of theology. The philosophy of the dead God is still theology. Reclaiming the experience of being [de l'être] which is at the origin of Metaphysics, Heidegger is further away from metaphysics than those who consider Being [l'Être] as fumes [une

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<sup>226</sup> On the destruction of Metaphysics as a goal for Nietzsche, see Granier *op. cit.*, p.151, where he contrasts Nietzsche's philosophical enterprise to Kant's: “Kant is not questioning the legitimacy of metaphysical idealism; he is merely abandoning positions that had become untenable for him. [...] In contrast, Nietzsche's critical method appears radically subversive. The aim here is to overthrow Metaphysics itself, which is why criticism must be aimed at the Ideal as Ideal, and not simply at challenging the claims of pure reason to construct a science of « being » as Ideal”.

“vapeur”] (Nietzsche). [...] In this sense, Heidegger is further from theological positivism than the nihilists. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de Cours 1959-1961*, p.119.

Nietzsche ontologizes the Wills to Power or the plurality of the world in opposition to the consciousness (and to a unitary Being), and, as such, he conceives his Wills to Power as morsels or fragments of pure being. Both Bergson and Nietzsche simply inverted the predicates granted to Being and continued to conceive Being in the same ontological structure or texture of a pure positivity that does not tolerate perspectivism within itself, relegating perspective to a flaw our situation in the world projects on the becoming, thus missing it. A becoming that is just a succession of positivities, with all the negativity of relativism, experience and perspectivism being attributed to the falsified and created consciousness – conceived as preventing us from accessing reality instead of allowing it – means that Being is not conceived in a preobjective way, as a relation (*i.e.* a description at the first person), field or *Gestalt*, but as a reality that could escape all presentation and exist in-itself. Thus, far from overcoming and abolishing metaphysics, Nietzsche is its counterpart, his artificialism (conceiving perception and experience as constituted by a deeper instance) still shares the same prejudice as metaphysics and still posits a different ontological instance below perception<sup>227</sup>. Hence, positing a fluid plurality and making it the reality that causes or creates our experience as a false illusion is as dogmatic as positing a universal and unchanging substance. In both cases, a true and positive reality described at the third person, outside of consciousness, is opposed to experience and debases it, considering all negativity or “flaws” in our knowledge to be due to our faulty perspective,

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<sup>227</sup> Many quotes of Nietzsche validate this interpretation, among others, I will present *Fragments Posthumes XI*, 35 [35], pp.255-256, in which Nietzsche opposes the « metaphysician's » conception of the subject, but, by focusing mostly on that aspect, he missed the opportunity to ponder the meaning or modality of Being and maintained an opposition between reality and conscious fiction: “What separates me most radically from the metaphysicians is that I do not concede to them that the “I” is what thinks: rather, I regard the “I” itself as a *construct of thought*, of the same order as “matter”, “thing”, “substance”, “individual”, “end”, “number”; consequently, as *merely a regulatory fiction*, thanks to which a kind of permanence, hence “cognoscibility”, is implanted, *Hineingedichtet in a world of becoming*” (my emphasis).

because the two viewpoints share the same prejudice that reality must be fully positive, devoid of consciousness, perspective and language. Only after accepting this shared, common prejudice do the two viewpoints disagree on the nature of this positivity. Therefore, regardless of whether reality is conceived as a unity or as a plurality, as a fixed substance or as a becoming, it is always presented according to the ontology of the object, as a plenitude of existence to which consciousness only adds itself erroneously and in a second time, contingently, by chance or by accident<sup>228</sup>. Thus, Bergson and Nietzsche missed the crucial step of rejecting and overcoming the ontology of the object and its implication that consciousness only has an external relation to reality. According to Merleau-Ponty, the only way to escape this ontological positivism is to reassess consciousness and stop considering it as an artificial, falsified creation, occurring outside of Being, in a purely subjective sphere, and to consider it instead as an opening that expresses Being (and conversely, to understand Being as including a kind of negativity and perspectivism). In this way, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

We do not get out of the rationalism-irrationalism dilemma as long as we think “consciousness” and “acts” – The decisive step is to recognize that a consciousness is in reality intentionality without acts, *fungierende*, that the “objects” of consciousness themselves are not some positive before us, but nuclei of meaning around which transcendental life pivots, specified voids, – and that consciousness itself is an *Urprasentierbar* for Oneself [pour Soi] that is presented as *Nichturprasentierbar* for others, that feeling is an *Urpräsentation* of that which in principle is *Nichturpräsentierbar*, the transcendent, the thing, the “quale” turned “level” or dimension, – that the chiasmus, the intentional “encroachment” are irreducible, leading to the rejection of the notion of subject, or to the define the subject as a field, as a hierarchical system of structures opened up by an inaugural “there is” [il y a]. This reform of “consciousness” means that non-

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<sup>228</sup> See Blondel, *op. cit.*, p.224, quoting Nietzsche’s *Gay Science*, §357, in which Nietzsche “asserts that the whole body thinks, and that consciousness is only an accident: « consciousness (*Bewusstheit*) is only an accident (*accidens*) of representation, and not a necessary and essential attribute, consequently what we call consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) is only a state of our intellectual and psychic world (a state that may be morbid), far from being confused with it »”.

objectifying intentionalities no longer have the alternative of being subordinate or dominant, and that the structures of affectivity are constitutive in the same way as the others, for the simple reason that they are already those of knowledge, being those of language. There is no longer any need to ask why we have affections in addition to “representative sensations”, since representative sensation too (taken “vertically” to its insertion into our life) is affection, being presence to the world through the body and to the body through the world, being flesh, and language too. Reason is also in this horizon – promiscuous with Being and the world. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.289.

What is important to retain from this paragraph for the current section and problem at stake is that consciousness should not be referred to “acts” or “creations” anymore – such terminology ensnares it in a subjective sphere – but it should be understood as a contact with the world, with an ontological reach that bypasses or renders useless and artificial any constituting transcendental sphere. Barbaras summarizes the situation and concludes as follows: “the notion of constituting subject must therefore be replaced by that of instituting subject [...]. Understood in this way as instituting, the subject is destined to be re-imagined from an ontological perspective, *i.e.* as instituted by its very institution”<sup>229</sup>. The notion of institution is understood by Merleau-Ponty not only in the political sense but in a broader ontological sense, referring to our situation in the world. He dedicated a course at the Collège de France to this notion and worked, during the same year, on the notion of passivity. Both of these notions refer to the concepts of dimension, field or horizon (concepts on which I will elaborate in the second part of this thesis) as the institution is the establishment of existential pivots according to which we perceive and grant value. These two notions also refer the fact we are born within an experience that has not been constituted, nor created, but

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<sup>229</sup> Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène. Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, p.84.

that overflows us and encompasses us, always already intersubjective. In this way, Merleau-Ponty affirmed in his course on *The Institution* that:

neither the world, nor the objects behind my back, nor the hidden sides of things are only for me [pour moi], they are *Wahrnehmungsbereit* [ready to be perceived], they are not posited as objects. [...] The notion of “field”, of institution, of truth, demands that subjectivity is not being for itself [pour soi] first, but the holder [titulaire] = X of an experience [...]. Being is not that which is in-itself or for someone, but that which being for someone is ready to be developed according to another becoming of knowledge, like a constellation whose figure would be continually reworked. Merleau-Ponty, *L’Institution. La Passivité. Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)*, pp.102-103.

In other words, Merleau-Ponty’s perspective of the institution, field or dimension is an ontological solution that implies giving up on the Kantian framework and the distinction between a constituting and a constituted sphere. If we maintain such a distinction (like Nietzsche did), the dichotomy between in-itself and representation will repeat itself in some way or another (often as in-itself versus for-itself). The problem with the Kantian framework is that there is still an origin that is sought: this concept of “origin” refers our perception and consciousness (although they are an integral part of experience) to another type of reality; maybe not as a supra-sensible one like the idealist version of it, however even the body or Wills to Power are still non strictly sensible and step away from the full scope of experience. Thus, Nietzsche’s perspective does not go as far away and against the sensible as Christianity or idealism, but his perspective is still not fully immanent to experience and prevents consciousness from having an ontological reach and expressing the world. Moreover, the Kantian perspective overemphasizes both the creativity or activity of the constituting sphere and the passivity of the personal consciousness. Indeed, Nietzsche grants pure passivity to the consciousness (that receives its representations as already finished,

ready and constituted, as well as falsified<sup>230</sup>) and an absolute activity to the infra-conscious sphere<sup>231</sup>, but this misses the fact that the experience of Being is not presented as divided in two ontological and epistemological halves and instead overcomes or precedes the dichotomy between passivity and activity. Therefore, the Kantian perspective divides into two “real” separate moments and ontological levels or spheres a single experience of the world that blends passivity and activity. Against such a division, Merleau-Ponty argued that

Being is that which is not nothing. [...] It is the excess of our experience on/over “subject”, “object”, “humans” – all what is beyond these terms that are obtained through a *scission*, beyond what is not nothing. To speak about it, to open this field, one must speak the language of human passivity. Nonetheless, this language is inadequate: humans are not more passive than creating [créateurs] in the intramundane sense, no more effect than cause. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de Cours 1959-1961*, p.115<sup>232</sup>.

Nietzsche escapes pure artificialism since he also acknowledges the being or sphere of existence of the Wills to power, prior to its human creations. Nevertheless, our conscious perceptions remain mere artifacts according to him. Therefore, he is still criticized by Merleau-Ponty as thus,

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<sup>230</sup> See for instance Granier who wrote in *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.346, on reflexive consciousness, that it “works from files prepared by the relevant organic commissions”.

<sup>231</sup> See for instance Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.466: “Anchored to the body, knowledge is essentially action, an organizing and assimilating activity. It is the Dionysian impulse to shape matter, so that it “creates” truth through the very act of informing reality by mastering it. To interpret the world is therefore, *ipso facto*, to shape and change it”.

<sup>232</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *ibid.*, p.114, for a very similar quote that rejects the “human acts” to understand experience, as they imply an over-emphasis on activity and creation. In this way, Merleau-Ponty highlighted “the impossibility to do a philosophy with the “human” “acts” and their “objects”; the “human actions and passions”; Being is all that is non-artifact. Necessity for it to be understood to speak the language of human passivity, which is an inadequate language: man is not more passive than creative [créateur] in the intramundane sense of these words”. For another perspective on the dichotomy passive-active, see also Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.66: “It is a matter of reconsidering the interdependent notions of the active and the passive, in such a way that they no longer place us before the antinomy of a philosophy that takes account of being and truth, but does not take account of the world, and of a philosophy that takes account of the world, but uproots us from being and truth”. In Nietzsche’s case, he tries to describe the world as it is, but doing so he closes consciousness in a false, constructed sphere and thereby uproots us (conscious “subjects”) from truth and being.

the passage from the *Dasein* to the *Sein* expresses what is narrow and meager in the philosophy of the subject and the object, – or in the philosophy of the “creating” “man” – as if they made poetry, science, art and philosophy from scratch. It is no one other than themselves who made them, but through them there are relations at play, institutions that are a world or being – “Site” and not “situation”: *Stätte* that the *Sein* needs to reveal itself, to *Eröffnung*. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de Cours 1959-1961*, p.114.

This emphasis on the distinction between passivity and activity has led Nietzsche to overlook the possibility of their interplay in experience to reveal or express a Nature or a world that does not exist “in-itself” but that is given precisely as a transcendence in immanence to a perception or consciousness that does not fully encompass it and did not fully create its meaning either. Thus, Merleau-Ponty could write:

Energies that step outside the framework of the constituted world reveal contingency. But this awareness of a *Boden*, a sedimentation, could be a rediscovery of Nature (provided we do not conceive of this Nature as described by objectivist science and as a universal cause in-itself), a rediscovery of a Nature-for-us as the soil of all our culture, and where our creative activity in particular takes root, which is therefore not unconditioned, and which has to keep culture in contact with raw being, to confront it with it. It is the logic of the world of technology that reduces being to the alternative and antinomy of the pure object-in-itself and the artifact. Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de Cours 1959-1961*, p.44.

Nietzsche’s problem is that he did not maintain a contact or relation between the creation and raw being. In his view, the Wills to Power are sovereign in their creating and shaping of conscious experience, they give an artistic form to a matter that is inert or mute and devoid of meaning without them, *i.e.* the world as a pure disorganized chaos. Nonetheless, this conception of a pure creation is rejected by Merleau-Ponty, as he wrote:

Philosophy as a creation (*gebilde*) resting on itself – this cannot be the ultimate truth. For it would be a creation that sets itself the goal of expressing in *Gebilde* what is *von selbst* (the *Lebenswelt*),

and thus denies itself as pure creation. The point of view of the creation of human *Gebilde*, – and the “natural” point of view (of *Lebenswelt* as nature) are both abstract and insufficient. We cannot settle on either of these two levels. It is a question of a creation that is called and engendered by the *Lebenswelt* as an operative, latent historicity, which extends it and bears witness to it. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.225.

Thus, to be philological, a creation cannot be based solely on itself, being purely arbitrary and fictitious or illusory, constituting a purely subjective sphere, but it must be ontological and be called by the world, in such a way that we do not simply create from nothing but become receptive and opened to the circuit of the world that reaches its own self-expression through our creation (which is thus as much an expression as a creation, it would not exist without us, so it is a creation, but a creation that expresses a meaning already there and that we did not create *ex nihilo*). Once again, this point is very clearly and strongly highlighted by Barbaras:

All in all, Merleau-Ponty's constantly reaffirmed project of bringing experience to the pure expression of its own meaning only finds its scope and fulfillment in the ontological enterprise: this expression is only conceivable if it is an expression of the world itself, in the sense that it proceeds from it, where the world is its own expression, and if we are therefore not the subjects but the points of passage of this teleology. Barbaras, *De l'être du phénomène. Sur l'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty*, p.85.

As a consequence, philosophy itself cannot be conceived like a pure creation, not situated anywhere, but becomes an expression of Being from within Being (instead of adding an interpretation to the text from outside of it). In this way, language and being are not frontally opposed to one another anymore, with one being objective (devoid of relations and expression) while the other one would be exclusively subjective, language is not an artificial invention that is added in a second time as a human creation. If we start from this distinction,

we can never grasp how language could ever reach Being. On the contrary, and in a philological endeavor, Merleau-Ponty invites us to acknowledge “that it is not us who have language, but language that has us. That it is being that speaks in us, not we who speak of being”<sup>233</sup>. As a result, the thinking-writing philosopher or the perceiving subject and the reflexive consciousness are not excluded from the expression of Being, relegated to false creations, but they take part in it and should be thematized for the expression to be understood precisely as an expression in its full circle that connects us to the world, and not as a creation for an implicit subject. Hence, our speech and written philosophy must become a self-expression of the world, an interrogation from within. The pre-existence of the world does not mean that our experience and expression of it are merely abstract and artificial. Indeed, as Merleau-Ponty asserted: philosophy “has value, it is something else and more than just a partial product of the *Lebenswelt*, enclosed in a language that guides us. Between the *Lebenswelt* as universal Being and philosophy as the extreme product of the world, there is no rivalry or antinomy: it is philosophy that reveals it”<sup>234</sup>. Therefore, while in the *Phenomenology of Perception* the world was constituted, in Merleau-Ponty’s later works the world is always already there, it has us rather than we have it or constitute it, which is the reason why Merleau-Ponty now intends an ontology, speaking of Being, instead of a transcendental constitution. The world and the things are not an in-itself anymore, a mystery or a pure chaos, nor are they standing beneath or prior to consciousness, but they become “others”, sensible structures and vertical beings that we perceive in the world and in the

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<sup>233</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.244. See also *ibid.*, p.322: “The Logos is also realized in man, but by no means as his property” and Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p.179: “The coherence of human language is inseparable from the coherence of the surrounding ecology, from the expressive vitality of the more-than-human terrain. It is the animate earth that speaks; human speech is but a part of that vaster discourse”.

<sup>234</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.222. See also *ibid.*, pp.247-248: “Philosophy precisely as « Being speaking within us », an expression of silent experience, is creation. Creation that is at the same time reintegration of Being: for it is not creation in the sense of any of the particular *Gebilde* that history fabricates: it knows itself to be *Gebilde* and wants to transcend itself as pure *Gebilde*, to rediscover its origin. It is therefore creation in a radical sense: creation that is at the same time adequacy, the only way to achieve adequacy. [...] Being is what demands creation from us so that we may experience it”.

flesh, instead of constituting artificial and illusory “representations” of them in a falsifying consciousness. All these implications are held together and at once by Merleau-Ponty’s term of Intra-ontology, that stands in opposition to both the causalist and Kantian or constituting-creating perspectives. Thus, he wrote:

Each field is a dimensionality, and Being is dimensionality itself. It is therefore accessible through my perception as well. It is even perception that offers me as a spectacle the reference of lateral transcendence from “appearances” to essence as the nucleus of *Wesen* (verbal) – Knowledge on a macro or micro scale (macrophenomena-micro-physics) is a dotted determination (by mathematical instrument, *i.e.* inventory of structures) of nuclei of being whose actuality only perception gives me, and which can only be conceived by borrowing from its membrane. Causal thinking, which is always: a view of the world from the outside, from the point of view of a *Kosmotheoros*, with, as antithesis, the antagonistic and inseparable movement of reflexive recapturing – I must no longer think of myself in the world in the sense of objective spatiality, which amounts to autopositioning and installing myself in the uninterested Ego – What replaces causal thinking is the idea of transcendence, that is, of a world seen in its inherence to this world, thanks to it, of an Intra ontology, of an encompassing Being, of a vertical Being, dimensional, dimensionality – And what replaces the antagonistic and interdependent reflexive movement (the immanence of the “idealists”) is the fold or hollow of Being having, in principle, an outside, the architectonics of configurations. There is no longer: consciousness, projections, in-itself or object. There are intersecting fields, in a field of fields where “subjectivities” are integrated, as Husserl points out in his *Unpublished* work on teleology and the phenomenological absolute, since they carry in their infrastructure a *leistende Subjectivität* that is wholly supported by them. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.276.

This paragraph exemplifies perfectly Merleau-Ponty’s attempt to devise a new language that was unfortunately interrupted by his death but that already contained the promise to be even more radical than Nietzsche’s one because it challenged all our key philosophical notions in a way to modify the ontological and epistemological structure of our understanding of

experience, to align conscious or sensible experience and the world in a single sphere of reality, while Nietzsche still conceived (at least implicitly and because of his Kantian framework) two of them. From all this paragraph, what is important to underline for the current section is that Merleau-Ponty considered that the world is reachable (as dimensionality) through perception, language and consciousness. To do so, one must not consider the world as an in-itself outside or beneath experience anymore, and correlatively the consciousness must not be conceived as a for-itself that is condemned to only know subjective fictions. Consciousness cannot be closed on itself anymore (if not, there cannot be a knowledge of the world nor any communication with others). Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, it is impossible to be philological if we reject or debase the testimony of consciousness: “How can we rely on consciousness? How can we reject consciousness? to overcome [this dilemma, as a pseudo-problem] by the idea of consciousness as *Offenheit* [Openness]”<sup>235</sup>. For Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is not to be understood as something positive (conception that Nietzsche criticized too), as a substance, not as a thing nor as another sphere of reality, but the solution is not to pluralize the ego into a multitude of smaller ones (as instincts or wills to power) either, for the Nietzschean solution does not change the positivity of their modality of being and it just moves the subject outside of the sphere of experience, prior to consciousness. The more radical (or at least economical) solution that Merleau-Ponty proposes is to still refer to the consciousness – so as to remain within the sphere of experience, not adding a second layer of reality (as a transcendental sphere in which the real subject would be located) – but conceiving it as an opening, fold or field within being that allows its expression. Already in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty wrote: “What remains beneath my particular thoughts for constituting the tacit Cogito and the original project of the world? And what am I in the end such that I can

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<sup>235</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.249.

catch sight of myself outside of every particular act? I am a field, I am an experience”<sup>236</sup>. In the *Visible and Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty conceived the consciousness as an invisible and as the other side of the body (like the other side of a glove): “the soul is the hollow of the body, the body is the swelling of the soul”<sup>237</sup>; and:

Defining the spirit as the other side of the body – We have no idea of a spirit that would not be doubled by a body, that would not settle on this ground – “The other side” means that the body, insofar as it has this other side, is not describable in *objective* terms, in terms of the self, – that this other side is really the other side of the body, overflows into it (*Ueberschreiten*), encroaches on it, is hidden in it, – at the same time needs it, ends in it, *anchors* itself in it. There is a body of the spirit, and a spirit of the body, and a chiasm between them. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.307.

Thereby, Merleau-Ponty develops in his last work a philosophy of the chiasm<sup>238</sup>, of the intermingling of different fields or regions and dimensions that unite in a single experience. In this sense, consciousness is still tied to the body, but it is not simply a product of the body, it does not come in a second time and as a construction operated by the infra-conscious body; instead, for Merleau-Ponty, consciousness is contemporary to the body, it is the sensing side of the experience of the body as a sensing-sensible being (that we are). Merleau-Ponty used the experience of the touching hands to explain this relation<sup>239</sup>. If my two hands hold one another, I can observe that one appears as a tactile being while the other one is the touching

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<sup>236</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.429.

<sup>237</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.282.

<sup>238</sup> On this notion, see Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, pp.313-314: “the idea of the chiasm, *i.e.*: every relationship to being is simultaneously to take and to be taken, the taking is taken, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being that it takes. From here, we can develop an idea of philosophy: it cannot be a total and active grasp, an intellectual possession, since what there is to grasp is a dispossession – it is not above life, overhanging it. It is below. It is the simultaneous test [l’épreuve] of the taking and the taken in all orders. What it says, its meanings, are not absolute invisibility: it makes us see through words. Like all literature. It does not settle on the other side of the visible: it is on both sides. No *absolute* difference, then, between philosophy or the transcendental and the empirical (better to say: the ontological and the ontic)”.

<sup>239</sup> See for instance Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.309: “The flesh of my fingers = each of them is phenomenal finger and objective finger, the finger’s outside and inside in reciprocity, in chiasm, coupled activity and passivity. [...] The finger’s local *Self*: its space is sensing-sensed”.

one. This relation is reversible, it depends on the focal point of my attention (or presence to the world), but in any case, the two hands cannot be the touching one simultaneously. My body is always two-fold, sensible and sensing (or visible and invisible), and what Merleau-Ponty means by consciousness is the sensing fold of the body, which is invisible in its act of sensing but that does not exist outside of the visible, it exists only as its other side and as partaking to the same reality (so, in a sense, “it is on both sides”). As such, consciousness is invisible, not as something infra-conscious and made of falsifying subjective acts (such as judgments or concepts), but in the manner of the means to see that are still present in vision and in the visible. In this way, Merleau-Ponty wrote in a work note:

The invisible is a hollow in the visible, a fold in passivity, not pure production. [...] To take the *Erwirken* of thought literally: it is really emptiness, the invisible – All the positivist bric-a-brac of concepts, judgments, relations is eliminated, and the spirit rises like water in the fissure of Being – There is no need to look for spiritual things, there are only structures of emptiness – I simply want to plant this emptiness in visible Being, to show that it is its other side, – in particular the other side of language. Just as the visible world must be made *vertical*, so there is a *vertical* view of the mind, according to which it is not made up of a multitude of memories, images and judgments, but is a single movement that can be monetized in judgments and memories, but which holds them together in a single bundle, just as a spontaneous word contains a whole becoming, just as a single grip of the hand contains a whole piece of space. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.284.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that consciousness cannot see or know everything, it is not exhaustive nor ubiquitous. However, against the arguments of a causalist or transcendentalist framework that argue that the reason of this “blindness” is because conscious experience has been constituted by a prior ontological instance, Merleau-Ponty opposes that:

What [consciousness] does not see, it does not see for reasons of principle; it does not see because it is conscious. What it does not see is what in it prepares the vision of the rest (just as the retina is blind at the point from which the fibers that will enable vision spread within it). What it does not see is what makes it see: its attachment to Being, its corporeality, the existentials through which the world becomes visible, the flesh in which the object is born. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.296.

Therefore, there is still an invisible not only of consciousness but in what we perceive too according to Merleau-Ponty, something that escapes the figures we thematize. Yet, this invisible is not below, behind or prior to consciousness and perception, it is the very depth of perception and the whole context of our relation to the world. As highlighted by Merleau-Ponty: “it must not be imagined that I am adding a non-visible to the visible, perfectly defined as in Itself (which would only be an objective absence, *i.e.* an objective presence *elsewhere*, in an *elsewhere* in Itself) – It must be understood that it is visibility itself that comprises a non-visibility”<sup>240</sup>; and:

This unconscious is not to be found deep inside us, behind the back of our “consciousness”, but in front of us, as the articulations of our field. It is “unconscious” in that it is not an object, but it is that by which objects are possible, it is the constellation where our future is read – it is between them like the interval of trees between trees, or like their common level. It is the *Urgemeinschaftung* [primordial community] of our intentional life, the *Ineinander* [entanglement or encroachment] of others in us and of us in them. These existentials are what make the (substitutable) sense of what we say and hear. They are the armature of this “invisible world” which, with speech, begins to impregnate all the things we see. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.231.

Similar invisibles can be the background (when we focus our vision on a given thing at a certain distance), the lighting of a room to perceive a color... In short, all the dimensions in

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<sup>240</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.295.

which we settle to perceive figures (according to *Gestalt*, i.e. the structure figure-against-a-background). Thus, perspective is not a mere construction or “interpretation”, a limitation imposed by our intellect or language (as in Nietzsche’s philosophy of inorganic perception), but it is required by Being as its armature and also as its means of expression and as a relation: I do not see all the aspects of the chair in front of me but I nonetheless – or rather, thanks to this non-exhaustive presentation – “see” its thickness, its voluminosity, it has an horizon and a contour or relief that invites me to explore more and refers to my whole situation in the world, to my current position (and to my historicity and becoming too) and to the fact that if I move and change point of view I could reach its “other side”. However, because of my own situation in the world and because of the fact I only have relations and perspectives, I can never grasp the whole of the chair at once, some aspects of it always escape my thematization (hence, Merleau-Ponty does not have a naive or realist conception of consciousness, language and perception, he still admits a transcendence of Being that cannot be fully thematized at once and in isolated, fixated, objective and fully positive entities). Nevertheless, and all the nuance is here, this perspectivism is not a flaw of perception, language or consciousness, it is on the contrary the guarantee that I am not dealing with a flat constructed representation or picture but with a voluminous, transcendent being in the flesh that can only be expressed through perspectivism, according to the structure figure-against-a-background. Therefore, from an ontology of the objects and from an epistemology of representation and of a transcendental instance that constitutes it, Merleau-Ponty shifts to a dimensional, perspectivist ontology and to a relational epistemology. In this way, conscious perception can be conceived as an introduction to the relational modality of being that we find everywhere in experience, as a diacritic and oppositive system (which is the case for language and thought too, for they also are relations). This relation can be thematized from within experience, perception, language,

consciousness and within reality. As a result, there is no need to posit a transcendental, a world as chaos, an in-itself or anything that would be situated in another sphere of reality than the one of experience. That is the reason why Merleau-Ponty's solution is the most economical and philological one, it never leaves the ground of experience (in the sense of an experience that is presented to us, with which we are in contact and are aware of, and not a so-called "experience" of an infra-conscious entity or instance). His conception of consciousness allows us to understand it not as a created falsified jail, captive within its own artificial walls (thereby debasing it), but as a relation to Being. This direct relation to the world circumvents the need for positing an ontological transcendental sphere beneath the consciousness, the depth of the world and its voluminosity does not lie anywhere else than in the consciousness, it is presented through it, as what encompasses its vision field (as Merleau-Ponty's dimensional ontology and epistemology will show). Thus, Merleau-Ponty allows to maintain the conscious experience, to trust its testimony, not as presenting objects or the world in-itself but presenting differences and relations to the sensible world, lived from within. Nevertheless, Nietzsche could not accept such a conception and therefore he still required a transcendental framework, maintaining a non-philological opposition between constituting and constituted because he constantly – throughout all of his works – refused to admit that consciousness could know anything else than objectified, illusory and falsified creations. Nietzsche's clearest quote on this topic is probably the following one from *Gay Science*, dedicated to the question of consciousness:

What is the point of consciousness in general, if it is essentially superfluous? [...] Consciousness is nothing more than a network of human-to-human relationships – and it is only as such that it has had to develop [...]. Man, like all living creatures, thinks continuously, but doesn't know it; the thought that becomes conscious is only the tiniest part of it, let's say the most superficial, the worst part: – for only this conscious thought comes in the form of words, *i.e.* signs of communication, which reveals the origin of consciousness itself. [...] All our actions are at heart

incomparably personal, singular, of unlimited individuality, of that there can be no doubt; but as soon as we translate them into consciousness, they seem no longer to be so... This is true phenomenalism and perspectivism, as I understand it: the nature of animal consciousness implies that the world of which we can be aware is nothing but a world of surfaces and signs, a generalized, vulgarized world, – that everything that becomes conscious thereby becomes flat, inconsistent, stupid by dint of relativization, generic, a sign, a landmark for the herd, that to all awareness is linked a great and radical corruption, falsification, superficialization and generalization. [...] We have precisely no organ for knowing, for the “truth”: we “know” (or believe, or imagine) exactly as much as may be useful in the interests of the human herd. Nietzsche, *Gai savoir*, §354, pp.302-305.

Thus, for Nietzsche consciousness is only superficial and is trapped within artificial creations that amount to simplifications and falsifications that stand in the way of knowing reality, making a true or faithful knowledge impossible. This line of thought is emphasized in other texts of Nietzsche, for instance in *Dawn* in an aphorism entitled “In Prison”, in which he wrote:

The habits of our senses have bound us in the lies and deceptions of sensation, which in turn are the foundations of all our judgments and “knowledge”; there is no way out, no escape, no backdoor leading to the real world! We spiders are in our webs, and whatever we catch will never be anything other than what we catch in our webs. Nietzsche, *Aurore*, §117, pp.117-118<sup>241</sup>.

However, by conceiving consciousness as such an inescapable and illusory prison for humans, Nietzsche falls under Bergson’s criticism of Kant. Indeed, the image of consciousness as a prison has been targeted by Bergson, cutting conscious experience off any contact with reality:

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<sup>241</sup> See also Nietzsche, *Aurore*, §483 “Enough of Man”, p.278: “Always seeking knowledge as a man! [...] Always unable to see things through eyes other than these? [...] What, then, will mankind have known, once it has reached the end of its knowledge? Its own organs!”.

The whole point of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to explain how a definite order is added to supposedly incoherent materials. And we know the price we have to pay for this explanation: the human mind imposes its form on a “sensible diversity” [or sense-data] that comes from who knows where; the order we find in things is the one we put there ourselves. [...] The human mind is thus relegated to a corner, like a schoolboy undergoing penance: we are forbidden to turn our heads to see reality as it is. Bergson, « Introduction à la métaphysique », II, in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, p.69.

This excerpt from Bergson shows how Nietzsche’s consideration of consciousness leads him to the same conclusion as Kant. In this way, Nietzsche remains too Kantian. However, it is not the case only because of his transcendental framework of constitution but also because he deemed the objectifying categories of reason (or intelligence in Bergson’s terminology) absolutely necessary and inescapable for man or at least for consciousness, constituting a biological *a priori* for it (*i.e.* the *a priori* of a given species). Thus, beyond simply this image of the prison, what Bergson criticizes is the prejudice that consciousness would be necessarily bathed in an atmosphere of intelligence. On this topic, Bergson wrote that:

Intelligence, as Kant represents it to us, is bathed in an atmosphere of spatiality to which it is as inseparably united as the living body to the air it breathes. Our perceptions reach us only after having passed through this atmosphere. Our perceptions reach us only after having passed through this atmosphere. They have been impregnated in advance by our geometry, so that our faculty of thinking only finds again in matter the mathematical properties which our faculty of perceiving has already deposited there. We are assured, therefore, of seeing matter yield itself with docility to our reasonings; but this matter, in all that it has that is intelligible, is our own work; of reality “in itself” we know nothing and never shall know anything, since we only get its refraction through the forms of our faculty of perceiving. Bergson, « Bergson and Kant », in: Ansell Pearson and O Maoilearca (Ed.), *Henri Bergson. Key Writings*, p.351.

Nietzsche's framework, although wider than Kant's thanks to his acknowledgement of the Wills to Power, still understands consciousness as always already trapped in such an intellectual atmosphere. Indeed, since, according to Nietzsche, the categories of traditional logic are due to the needs of our psycho-physiological infra-conscious reality, there is nothing we can do about them, they are necessary for our conscious experience, not because they are true but because they are constituted *a priori* (of conscious experience) by the Wills to Power that shape our experience, shaping the chaos of the world according to these categories for our life to be possible at all (so they fulfil a pragmatic role). In the light of Bergson's text, this perspective of Nietzsche amounts to imprisoning the conscious experience of humanity in the atmosphere of Intelligence. The philosophies of the two authors could seem very close at first, because Bergson, just like Nietzsche, acknowledged that intelligence is subordinated to the needs of practical life and action and therefore departs from a faithful description of reality:

What we call a fact is not reality as it would appear to an immediate intuition, but an adaptation of reality to the interests of practice and the demands of social life. Pure intuition, whether external or internal, is that of undivided continuity. We break it down into juxtaposed elements, responding here to distinct words, there to independent objects<sup>242</sup>. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.203.

Yet, their difference shows in the fact that, unlike Nietzsche, Bergson denied that intelligence (and, as it is understood as dealing with fictions, imagination) is the exclusive and necessary faculty available to conscious experience. It is only because Nietzsche assumed that consciousness was stuck in Intelligence, always already bathed in it, that Blondel could claim

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<sup>242</sup> We can observe that for Bergson the pragmatism of intelligence consists in disorganizing a continuous unity of reality, whereas for Nietzsche it organizes the real plurality, however this disagreement is not relevant to the point I am making, which is concerned with the relation of consciousness to this pragmatism, pondering whether it is necessary or not, regardless of the nature or result of this pragmatism.

that, in order to escape the dichotomy between a mystical intuition of reality (as becoming) that no language or consciousness can express (because they can only lie), and a naive view of language and consciousness that treat their words or thoughts as an adequation to objective realities, Nietzsche did not have any other option than adopting a Kantian framework<sup>243</sup>, treating language and conscious experience as a metaphor or symptom and as a creation. Nevertheless, there was another (and more philological) possible solution, disregarded or overlooked by Nietzsche and Blondel. Indeed, instead of closing consciousness in these illusory and pragmatic creations and adopting a Kantian framework, Bergson argues that:

There would be one final [and more philological *Versuch* or] enterprise to attempt. It would be to seek out experience at its source, or rather above that decisive turning point where, bending in the direction of our utility, it becomes human experience itself. The impotence of speculative reason, as demonstrated by Kant, is perhaps, at bottom, nothing more than the impotence of an intelligence enslaved to certain necessities of bodily life and exercising itself on matter that has had to be disorganized to satisfy our needs. Our knowledge of things would then no longer be relative to the fundamental structure of our mind, but only to its superficial and acquired habits, to the contingent form it takes from our bodily functions and inferior needs. The relativity of knowledge would therefore not be definitive. By undoing what these needs have done, we would restore intuition to its original purity and get back in touch with reality. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.205.

What Bergson aims and considers accessible, to some extent, to the consciousness, is the turning point of experience, retrieving it before it becomes fully and only human, cut off any expression of being. The consideration of such a solution is absent from Nietzsche's works, or maybe he thought it was impossible. If Nietzsche deemed it impossible, then he certainly

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<sup>243</sup> See the following quote of Blondel, already mentioned previously: "Between a mysticism of life and an excessive confidence in the power of language to reveal the reality of life, or between the Schopenhauerian, "nihilistic" problematic of phenomenal illusion and the idolatry of the word that characterizes the moral ideal, Nietzsche can only choose a "Kantian"-type outcome". Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, pp.165-166.

did not “overestimate the conscious”, but, in fact, he underestimated it, and, conversely, he overestimated the necessity by which the pragmatic frames of intelligence apply to our experience. And this interpretation is the most probable one because Nietzsche posited the elaboration or determination of these pragmatic needs not from within experience or consciousness but in a transcendental sphere that ontologically and epistemologically precedes conscious experience, which then had no way to escape it. By coming back to the sole ontological plane of a consciousness in the world, both Bergson and Merleau-Ponty make it possible for these practical needs to be suspended. Thus, what both Bergson and Merleau-Ponty attempt is a conversion from the pragmatic frames of intelligence to the experience of raw or wild being, coming back to the relation with the world instead of simply being confronted with created objects. Such a conversion is not a metaphysical intuition that leaves experience or a pure coincidence with reality “in-itself”, but, on the contrary, it consists in immersing ourselves fully in experience as our relation to the world, instead of opposing to it other spheres (be it language as an artificial, purely human edifice, a reality in-itself or a transcendental sphere below the consciousness). It is the transcendental perspective that separates consciousness and experience from Being and conceives it as exclusively dealing with fabricated objects. Which is the reason why Bergson asserts that, to attempt to reach a conscious ontological experience, “we must give up the method of *construction*, which was that of Kant’s successors [in this framework, Nietzsche can be considered as one of them, adopting his transcendental approach and a conception of conscious experience as created]. We must appeal to experience – an experience purified, or, in other words, released, where necessary, from the moulds that our intellect has formed in the degree and proportion of the progress of our action on things”<sup>244</sup>. It is in this context that Bergson referred to the artists too, just like Nietzsche; however, he summons art for a reason

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<sup>244</sup> Bergson, « Bergson and Kant », in: Ansell Pearson and O Maoilearca (Ed.), *Henri Bergson. Key Writings*, p.358.

and conclusion that are opposite to Nietzsche's ones. Indeed, Nietzsche mentioned art to refer to the creative activity that builds our conscious experience almost from scratch, imposing the frames of reason and the categories to consciousness, while for Bergson the artists, in a supreme effort, attempt to break free from the frames of reason by suspending the needs of action and life, with the only goal to see and describe the world in its preobjective meaning or modality of existence. Therefore, art is the operator of the subordination of our conscious experience to the needs of life and action for Nietzsche, while for Bergson art suspends these needs and allows a vision of another nature, not dependent on the sole frames of intelligence anymore. This undertaking is not a superhuman task according to Bergson, the frames of intelligence are not consubstantial with the whole of humanity but only with a part of our experience. Thus, he readily admits that:

Of course, it would be a chimerical undertaking to try to free ourselves from the fundamental conditions of external perception. But the question is whether certain conditions, which we usually regard as fundamental, do not concern the use to be made of things, the practical benefit to be derived from them, much more than the pure knowledge we can have of them. Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p.208.

In the same way, Merleau-Ponty's *epochè* and return to lived experience and perception aim at suspending these needs of action that distort experience in order to retrieve the contact, still in experience, with the more-than-human (which is what Merleau-Ponty means by the adjectives raw or wild) Being that exceeds but encompasses and has us and which is still always present beneath the solid objectifications our practical needs add on it (or rather segregate, isolate and objectify from Being as the encompassing dimensionality). By contrast, Nietzsche, probably because of his genealogical perspective, focused a lot on the needs and values, took them as an object of study and even as the source of reality and did not consider or admit that they could be bypassed or suspended in order to better describe

our experience of the world. It is this decision of Nietzsche to consider the needs and values as always already determining all of our conscious experience that prompts him to posit that consciousness cannot escape the frames of intelligence and is therefore trapped in a falsified, artificial creation, creation that is precisely governed and determined by the drives, values and needs of life.

Nevertheless, by rejecting conscious knowledge, but still positing a thinking activity below it, Nietzsche is condemned either to a supra-conscious (or infra-conscious) intuition of it – but he denies it as a metaphysical temptation – or to silence. Granier wrote, in very similar terms: “It is one of two things: either we have a tacit knowledge of Being, and a discourse on Being is justified by it (at least in terms of its possibility), or Being is irremediably alien to human subjectivity, and silence is the only tolerable philosophy”<sup>245</sup>. However, choosing neither of these options, (and, thereby, being doomed to fail?) Nietzsche attempts a symptomatology. In this way, he wrote in the foreword to the second edition of *Gay Science*:

We have every right to regard all the reckless follies of metaphysics, particularly its answers to the question of the value of life, first and foremost and always *as symptoms* of determined bodies; and if, on the whole, these kinds of acquiescence to the world and negation of the world contain, from the scientific point of view, not a grain of meaning, they nevertheless provide the historian and psychologist with indications all the more valuable, *as symptoms*, as we have said, of the body, of its success and failure, of its fullness, its power, its sovereignty in history, or of its stoppages, its fatigue, its impoverishment, its foreboding of the end, its will to end it all. [...]

Until now, all philosophical activity has been absolutely not about “truth”, but about something

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<sup>245</sup> Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.305.

else, let us say health, the future, growth, power, life... Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, Préface, 2, pp.28-29<sup>246</sup>.

According to Nietzsche, the only given reality is that of the body, of the drives and of the forces, but because our consciousness is trapped in falsified creations (elaborated by these drives), the only thing the philosopher can do is, by a process of induction, trying to find hints of the infra-conscious sphere of reality of the Wills to Power through the effects they produce (*i.e.* our life, our actions and all our knowledge and conscious experience), trying to read the reality of the cause through and thanks to the effects or creations it produced. However, doing so denies the contents of experience and prevents any description in a philological framework. Indeed, in the symptomatological approach, the content of experience is never read directly anymore, literally, but only metaphorically, in a second sense (to retrieve the psychology and drives or values of the authors). As Blondel stated himself: “Nietzsche's principle is not to take language literally [in French, *à la lettre*], « to the word »”<sup>247</sup>, and he also quoted the §47 of *Antichrist* in which Nietzsche states that “as a philologist, we look *behind* the Holy Books, as a physician, *behind* the physiological degradation of the typical Christian”<sup>248</sup>. Such a genealogical approach can add some knowledge of reality that is not immediately visible in experience, but, taken in a reductionist way, this approach leads to lose many important parts of the real too and of experience, essentially the sensible world, of which Nietzsche almost never talks about or only in very

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<sup>246</sup> See also Nietzsche, *Par-delà bien et mal*, §3, p.49: “After reading philosophers between the lines and scrutinizing them for quite some time, I have come to the conclusion that most conscious thought must still be classified as instinctive activity, even in the case of philosophical thought”, or *ibid.*, §187, pp.141–142: “Quite apart from the value of such assertions as « there exists in us a categorical imperative » one can still ask: what does such an assertion say of the man who asserts it? [...] In short, moralities too are only a *sign-language of the affects* [langage figuré des affects]”.

<sup>247</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.219. See also, Blondel, *ibid.*, p.250: “Nietzsche turns so-called facts into signs. « The apparent series and successions of sensations, thoughts, etc., are the symptoms of true sequences (...). The next thought is a sign (Zeichen) of how the whole situation of forces has changed in the meantime »”.

<sup>248</sup> Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, §47, found in Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.158.

vague terms (as the faithfulness to the Earth) or to discard sensations as false creations. And it is in a reductionist way that Nietzsche attempts to think the Will to Power: he acknowledges the drives “and nothing else”<sup>249</sup>. This means that any experience that is not directly a drive, through which Nietzsche looks for a drive but indirectly, is discarded once the drive at its origin has been found. This amounts to using these experiences as a ladder to reach the drives and then leaving these experiences behind, once the only reality (the drive) has been found. Thus, most of experience becomes discarded by Nietzsche. This conclusion should already convince anyone that Nietzsche’s approach is not philological. It seems paradoxical for a philosopher that claims to adopt a philological method not to try describing our experience as a whole and referring it instead to cultural-physiological causes (values); as if he considered this attempt at description to be pointless because it would not be about the world but about human creations. Nietzsche praised the appearances so much, but he does not try to describe them, except as symptoms of another reality. This leads to ask why did he grant an ontological status of reality, within experience, only to the affects, forces, drives and to the body? We become acquainted with the body, values and the drives in experience, in the experience we are aware of, so on what basis exactly could they be granted a primacy or priority that makes them transcendental while the rest of experience is relegated to a constructed, subjective sphere? The meaning of the rest of experience besides the drives is not absolutely irrelevant or devoid of ontological reach, as Merleau-Ponty demonstrated. Therefore, the primacy that Nietzsche granted to the body does not rest on any indication contained in experience and much rather seems to be the result of a prejudice. There is no argument that allows to grant more reality to the drives or to the body than to the rest of experience because the body and drives are found in experience too. Or, if they are not, then they are considered as a reality in-itself, which is not a philological alternative either. Thus,

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<sup>249</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, §36.

either the drives and the body are found in experience, but they cannot be given a superior ontological status that serves to debase the rest of experience, or they are considered as things-in-themselves, but then Nietzsche's approach does not belong to philology anymore. This second interpretation is the one favored by Blondel, and it allows him to explain why Nietzsche had to rely on such an indirect approach as symptomatology, going through symptoms instead of a direct experience because:

By virtue of Nietzsche's philological "transcendental", the body is only accessible as a linguistic phenomenon, in a semiotic, never as a body in itself, *i.e.*, as a non-linguistic thing-in-itself. In fact, the fact that Nietzsche gives it to himself as a text signifies recognition of its depth, inaccessible to direct vision and therefore susceptible only to interpretation. The body and the world, as texts, are but signs of themselves for a philosophical gaze that is not in-tuitive, but is a reading of an enigmatic meaning that is not given but interpreted. Nietzsche wants to restore enigmatic wandering to reality, as opposed to those who confuse objectivity with the in-itself of things. In this respect, Nietzsche's thought remains closer to a Kantian – Schopenhauerian – model than to what is commonly called "structuralist": he maintains a referential reality of the body outside the letter where it enigmatically gives itself to be deciphered. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.143.

In medicine, both the symptoms and the cause are part of the same reality, that of the body. However, if we consider the whole of conscious experience, language and perception as symptoms of the body, then the "cause" of these symptoms must be posited outside of them. But this means that, by maintaining a Kantian framework and by relegating the whole experience to falsity or construction, Nietzsche must posit the body as a new kind of "in-itself". Therefore, the Kantian framework turns symptomatology into a causalist perspective, in which the body is considered as a cause of experience that rests in-itself and is inaccessible to consciousness. Thus, by positing the transcendental outside of consciousness, Nietzsche implicitly grants it the status of a ground, of another layer or type of ontology that is more

real than our consciousness (which is, then, only an artistic creation and falsification). In fact, Blondel readily acknowledges that the body stands as an in-itself in Nietzsche's philosophy, which is ineluctable since he rejected the knowledge of experience:

The body, a reality of culture but unknowable as such, can only be approached as a set of signs: as a phenomenon of culture, it is text, without being reduced to it, just as the phenomenon cannot be dissociated from the unknowable *noumenon* that it is for us. In both cases, an *a priori* (the transcendental and the philological reading) goes hand in hand with the impossibility of a direct apprehension of things in themselves. [...] Nietzsche gives reality, as a thing "in itself", to the body, and assigns the status of illusion, false appearance or idol to morality and culture, just as Schopenhauer attributed the reality of the thing-in-itself to the will-to-live and transformed the reality of the Kantian phenomenon into illusion. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.117.

In this way, symptomatology and the Kantian framework go hand in hand, the latter requires the former because it posits reality below the consciousness, and, therefore, needs a method or way to access it and talk about it. Thus, instead of leaving the framework of a constitution of our experience, Nietzsche maintained it and tried to reach reality through a metaphorical discourse (as Blondel underlined), seeing in experience, as a constituted fiction, clues, hints or symptoms of this reality in-itself of the body. Nevertheless, the ground on which symptomatology rests is fragile, to say the least, and non-philological. Indeed, Nietzsche attempts to throw a bridge between our conscious experience and the infra-conscious (or in-itself) sphere of activity and creation of the Wills to Power and of the body, but, being stuck in conscious experience (and understanding it as a falsified fabrication since Nietzsche refused Bergson's solution), there is nothing that guarantees the effectiveness of this bridge and that it can ever leave the sphere of our conscious, falsified experience. Such a jump from conscious to infra-conscious reality, conceived as two different ontological spheres and of which one produces the other, might never be possible or achieved. If the phenomenal world is created by something, and if our consciousness is stuck in it, then how could we be sure

that anything in our experience is adequate to this creative reality? Since consciousness is not simultaneous with the infra-conscious reality of the body that creates it, always lagging behind it and stuck in its own secondary, subjective, artificial sphere of reality, it can only deal with signs. Therefore, even the “type of life” and values or drives the conscious philosopher will find thanks to symptomatology will also always and only be signs, they will be an interpretation and a mere falsified image of the “body-in-itself” of which we cannot check the adequacy. This is exactly what is implied by Blondel’s statement: “Nietzsche's metaphors on physiology [in other words, the drives] are not, therefore, sensible images”<sup>250</sup>, and even more clearly by Granier’s:

Nietzsche calls “instincts” the multiple organic instances which behave like so many primary subjectivities and which, through their struggle for hegemony (*i.e.*, for the investment of the ego) generate a structural unity and impose a certain individual style of existence. Let's be clear from the outset: these drives are never known in their final reality; what we call “instincts” represents no more than the image we form of them at the level of the rational cogito. Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.347.

How would one experience the Wills to Power, since they are supposed to escape all language and perception? There is no ontology or epistemology that could justify any knowledge of a transcendental below the experience if we admit Nietzsche’s conception of thought and language that always remain superficial, dealing with abstractions (or simplifications of reality) and fictions. As Nietzsche asserted himself in his last written notes: “What can be thought must surely be fiction. Thought has no hold [n’a aucune prise] on reality”<sup>251</sup>. Therefore, even if we admit that the drives are a transcendental reality, there is no epistemology in Nietzsche that explains exactly (or at all) how we could obtain – from

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<sup>250</sup> Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.221.

<sup>251</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [148], p.115.

language, thought and the conscious sphere – any knowledge on the infra-conscious drives. Moreover, most Nietzscheans would certainly say that the drives and this transcendental creating reality are still part of experience, because it is the body, so it is not a “beyond” or “outside of the world”, it is not “extra-worldly”, and on top that it is not simply a physical or mechanical body but it is also a subject or a spiritual body, it has a knowledge of the other bodies, drives and forces. However, if this spiritual or knowing “body” is below the consciousness, inaccessible to it, always already infra-conscious, then can we really say that it is part of experience, that it partakes to experience? Nietzsche claims this body has an experience, is experiencing the world, but what would be an experience we are not aware of? It becomes a pure nature, it falls back to the in-itself. An in-itself that is made of a plurality of bodies-subjects, but an in-itself nonetheless, forever foreign and mythical to us, speaking subjects. The philological attempt reduces all that is not experienced, that is not lived and present nor sensible, everything that radically escapes consciousness (for our experience of talking and thinking philosopher starts in consciousness, therefore it is the most economical option to stick with it), not as a substance but on the contrary as the medium of our relation to the world. Hence, from a philological standpoint (*i.e.* from our point of view as speaking, perceiving, talking beings), the experience of the drives is nothing, or, rather, it is an in-itself unfolding without us, it is another sphere of reality, a non-sensible one that cannot be expressed in language nor known in conscious thoughts. As Merleau-Ponty rightly pointed out: “the philosopher is always implicated in the problems they pose, and there can be no truth if, in assessing any statement, the presence of the philosopher who states it is not taken into account”<sup>252</sup>. This means that a philological description should be made at the first person, involving the philosopher in the experience of the world. Nonetheless, in Nietzsche’s perspective, the philosopher who thinks and writes about the

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<sup>252</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.122.

Wills to Power is not thematized, not included in the worldview he is depicting at the third person, so it is not a philological account of the whole experience. Thus, being accessible neither to thought nor to experience, the ontology of the Wills to Power should be rejected by philology.

Therefore, none of the three solutions considered for Nietzsche's "new language" (*i.e.* the dissociation between thought and language, the interplay of perspectives and the transcendental framework) are able to provide a satisfying account of how the Wills to Power could be known consciously and expressed linguistically. However, if Nietzsche cannot provide a basis or justification for a philological use of language that can reach, know and express the Wills to Power, then how are we supposed to believe that this notion has any real "correlate" or tells us anything about the world and about experience? How can we place more trust in the Wills to Power than in our conscious experience (and rely on this trust to reject radically our experience)? Should we just accept an unexplainable mystical or transcendental intuition (or induction)? But then, why not accepting directly the testimony of consciousness, language and perception? It would be more economical, while achieving a similar result. Indeed, either our conscious experience cannot be expressive of reality, and in this case the hypothesis of the Wills to Power is only a dogmatism, or our experience can be expressive of reality, but then the whole of experience should become ontological and we can no longer understand Nietzsche's privileging of the body and the drives as anything other than a prejudice. Consequently, no matter how we look at the situation, Nietzsche's position appears as a dogmatic one. Thus, Nietzsche's symptomatological approach and his affirmation of the Wills to Power do not contain any justification for a possible discourse on reality and even appear as non-economical dogmatisms, for he refused the testimony of

experience and, from there, could only leave the ground of philology. To understand Being as an experience, or, better, as a sensible reality, we should give up on the causalist and transcendental (*i.e.* constituting) epistemology and ontology. It is the only way to know of a reality that is not fully prisoner of the frames of intelligence, by accepting that consciousness and experience can be a contact with the world. If we posit a transcendental below experience and if we forbid language to be expressive or have any ontological reach, then there is no way to be sure we can ever leave the sphere of language and consciousness, but because this conscious or verbal sphere has been debased and devalued as simply a construction and a metaphor or falsification of the primordial experience (or of the transcendental), it is considered irrelevant and is discarded. The way to reach the truth is not to posit it elsewhere, or impossible to reach, or *Abgrund* (abyss), but it is to acknowledge once again the relation between humans and the world in experience, and not simply positing our perception as a result, product or creation of an infra-conscious activity. Acknowledging an ontological relation in experience allows to overcome both the world “in-itself” and the transcendent-causal framework, as well as the subjectivist conception that goes with it (no matter if it is the consciousness or biological, numerous, fluid forces), shaping the matter and creating perception. Undoubtedly, Nietzsche was right to search for reality beneath the too-human and pragmatic or intelligent abstractions of consciousness; nevertheless, he was wrong to posit this reality elsewhere, outside of consciousness, as another kind of reality (be it transcendental or “in-itself”) that he deemed absolutely plural and unreachable through consciousness and language. Nietzsche tries to save himself from subjectivism by telling it is reality itself (pluralized in wills to power) that interprets, and to save himself from objectivism he admits that this infra-conscious reality is a collection of subjects that sense, create and give shape; thus, he blends subjectivity and objectivity in the psycho-physiological sphere of the Wills to Power. And yet, this attempt does not manage to

overcome the dichotomy, it only displaces it because Nietzsche still opposes the infra-conscious to the conscious, he ontologizes the plurality of perception and perspectivism as a second (but ontologically first) layer of reality, beneath the consciousness, instead of rethinking it philologically and from our lived situation and conscious experience, as a presentation of Being within one single ontological plane to which consciousness participates. Thus, by contrast, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty are more philological by attempting the possibility of a conscious experience of Being, trusting its testimony, understanding experience directly and not metaphorically anymore, granting it an ontological reach that maintains a contact with the facticity of the world. They might fail in this endeavor, but a pure philology, if it is possible at all, would be reached according to this method, and not by being subordinated to the evaluation of our reified drives and values and by an infra-conscious (*i.e.* non-sensible) constitution of the conscious experience. Indeed, I think that an interpretation that is able to provide an epistemology that fits the ontology it is proposing and can understand both in a single perspective, in a single plane of existence or experience (instead of Nietzsche's division of the sphere of reality preceding the secondary and human-made sphere of language and consciousness) is philologically superior in virtue of the principle of economy. Therefore, according to Nietzsche's own methodological principles, because of all the prejudices I have underlined so far, we should abandon the hypothesis of the Will to Power (as an ontological perspective on reality), for it is less economical and less philological than Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the sensible and epistemology of perception that fit into one cohesive whole with our language and experience, thus avoiding to repeat the dichotomist schema of a reality in-itself and representation. Now that the philological flaws of Nietzsche's perspective have been exposed, let us explore Merleau-Ponty's relational and dimensional ontology to verify

whether he can account for the drives and values (which would justify the genealogical method) while remaining more philological than Nietzsche.

## II- Merleau-Ponty's Dimensional Ontology and Values as Levels

In the first part of this thesis, we have seen how none of the options proposed for interpreting Nietzsche's "new language" seem to satisfyingly reply to the aporia of how Nietzsche could get any concept or intuition of the world as a pure plurality (or as wills to power), nor do they manage to explain how he could express these fluid realities in his writings. Thus, Nietzsche lacked a conception of language that could allow him to know and express a pre-objective reality, seeing language – along with consciousness and perception – as fabricated fictions. What should be noted is that Merleau-Ponty understood Nietzsche's approach to language, he even affirms that it is necessary to be, at first, skeptical of language and to suspend our faith, complicity and "empathy" with it to be able to interrogate it. However, Merleau-Ponty also asserted that this first suspension and relativization of language should lead to another, deeper "empathy" with it thanks to a renewed conception of language and experience, and this is what is lacking in Nietzsche's philology: this second step of renewal and radicalization of the expression. In this manner, Merleau-Ponty wrote about science's disbelief in language (but in this context it is valid for Nietzsche's too) that:

there is something good and necessary about the scientific attitude: the firm stance [or decision, or bias; in French Merleau-Ponty uses the term "parti pris" which is ambiguous] of ignoring everything about language, of not presupposing our inherited rationalization of language. To do as if language was not ours. [...] We are going to question them [consciousness, language and the

phenomena in general] without *Einfühlung* – Negatively, as an unveiling of the “unknown” language, this attitude is profoundly philosophical, it is constitutive of the attitude of reflection at its best. This reflection is not, and cannot be, limited to the phenomenology of the *Erlebnisse*. The mistrust towards living experience is philosophical – we postulate that consciousness deceives us about ourselves and about language, and we are right: it is the only way to see them. Philosophy has nothing to do with the privilege of the *Erlebnisse*, the psychology of living experience and so on. [...] But this abstention from any *Einfühlung* with language, animals, *etc.* leads back to a superior *Einfühlung*, its purpose is to make a superior *Einfühlung* possible. The search for a “wild” view of the world [sauvage, not only human or intelligent in the Bergsonian sense] is by no means limited to a return to pre-comprehension or pre-science. “Primitivism” is merely the counterpart of scientism, and is still scientism. [...] The retrieval of the *Lebenswelt* is the retrieval of a dimension, in which the objectivations of science themselves retain meaning and are to be understood as true (Heidegger himself says: every *Seinsgeschick* is true, is part of the *Seinsgeschichte*) – the prescientific is merely an invitation to understand the meta-scientific, and the latter is not non-science. It is even revealed by the constitutive approaches of science, on condition that we activate them once again, that we see what they *verdecken* left to themselves. For example, the structuralist attitude = the verbal chain, language as being recreated in its entirety before our eyes in each act of speech, a commitment to identifying the act of speaking where it takes place, it is a commitment to returning to the originary, to the *Ursprung* – provided we do not confine ourselves to the factual [or actual, already done, fixated, objectified and isolated] synchronic determination – it is a commitment to grasping the cohesion of the synchronic-diachronic whole in speech, therefore in monumental speech, or mythical speech if you will. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.233.

Thereby, Nietzsche was right to reject the hypothesis according to which language is giving us the essence of things, as positive and isolated individuals, existing in themselves. Nevertheless, he did not go further and reevaluate positively the role and status of language once the in-itself has been rejected... Ultimately and at bottom, Nietzsche still understood language as a deceiver only capable of thematizing (falsely) such positive and isolated objects. Thereby, although he acknowledged that language and experience are all about

relations, Nietzsche still refused to elaborate a description of the relations as we experience them, denying their ontological worth or relevance. This is shown by Blondel quoted Nietzsche's posthumous fragments:

According to Nietzsche, it is in fact all language that should be placed in quotation marks: "Language is built on the most naive prejudices". [...] "We are not free to change our means of expression: it is only possible to understand the extent to which they are mere signs [a mere semiotic]. The demand for an adequate mode of expression is senseless [absurd]: it is inherent to the essence of language, of any means of expression, to express only a mere relation. The notion of « truth » is meaningless. The entire domain of « true-false » applies only to relations, not to the « in-itself ». There is no essence [or being] in-itself (only relations constitute an essence [or beings]), just as there can be no « knowledge in-itself »". Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.167<sup>253</sup>.

We can see in this quote a tendency within Nietzsche's text that consists in discarding relations as a proper means of expression. Why though? On what basis? The only reason that could lead to rejecting living relations is to posit that a proper knowledge should be in-itself. However, in this text and in others, Nietzsche formally rejects ontology of the in-itself:

The "thing in-itself" is absurd. If I disregard all relations, all "qualities", all "activities" of a thing, the thing does not exist: because we invented thingness beforehand out of logical necessity, in order to designate it, to make ourselves understood, *not...* (for the connection between these relationships, qualities, activities). Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIII*, 10 [202], p.209.

Nietzsche rules out the epistemology of the in-itself too<sup>254</sup>: "« To understand everything » – that would mean eliminating all relations according to perspective; that would mean not

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<sup>253</sup> Blondel quotes Nietzsche's *KGW*, VII, 1, 5 (22) for the first quote, and *KGW*, VIII, 3, 14 [122] for the second one, that I compared to the French translation in Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [122], p.92; hence the alternative translations or terms in the brackets.

<sup>254</sup> See also Granier, *Le Problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.317, in which he quotes some aphorisms of Nietzsche in which he acknowledges that there are only relations in experience and that the "in-itself" is an impossible hypothesis and a mere invention or abstraction: "To know is always to « enter into

understanding, misunderstanding the essence of the one who knows”<sup>255</sup>. Such firm rejection of the in-itself should lead him to accept relations as the only reality. Indeed, if we only have relations in experience (in language, thought and perception), then the philological method requires the philosopher to attempt to think of the whole of reality according to them. Furthermore, if there is no in-itself anymore, then why couldn't truth – if it is understood philologically as simply a faithful description of experience – be about relations? Language can only be false if its aim is to provide positive definitions about isolated beings, considered in-themselves. But if language aims at describing experience and relations, then it is not deceitful nor lying anymore, it is adequate for this task since it expresses relations, diacritic and opposite systems (in the same way as the senses and perception), and in return there can be a “truth” (or rather a faithful description) of language. And yet, Nietzsche did not bother trying to describe the relations as we experience them. In fact, the very next aphorism (that follows directly the last one quoted) interprets relation and perspectivism as a construction, an idealist and subjective fabrication: “the interpretive nature of everything that happens. There are no events in themselves. What happens is a set of phenomena chosen and brought together by an interpreting being”<sup>256</sup>. This statement completely misses the status and modality of being or presentation of the living relation, it considers it already over and producing an isolating term. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche's position towards relations is ambiguous or even paradoxical. At times, Nietzsche rejects living relations and perspectivism altogether as simply an organic invention, absent from reality. In this way, he wrote that we should “acknowledge, and in an absolutely exact manner, perception even in

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a relationship with something »... it is therefore, in any case, a way of noting, designating, making aware of relationships (not of scrutinizing beings, things, « in-itself »). Knowing is immanent to Being, « subjectivity » – the existence of a multitude of « points of view » – is not an accident that would happen to Being and compromise its Truth, it is an essential moment in the very life of this Being: « That things can have a nature in themselves, independently of interpretation and subjectivity, is a perfectly idle hypothesis; it would suppose that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a thing detached from all its relations is still a thing »”. Granier quotes: Nietzsche, *La Volonté de puissance*, t. I, 1. I, §175, p.92; and *ibid.*, t. I, 1. I, §205, p.101.

<sup>255</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XII*, 1 [114], p.47.

<sup>256</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XII*, 1 [115], p.47.

the inorganic world: there reigns « truth »! With the organic world begins indeterminacy and appearance<sup>257</sup>. Some other times (and probably the most often), Nietzsche claims that the world is made of relations, but he immediately opposes that our language is not a relation, that it fixates terms out of the relations and separates us from Being (understood as the primordial web of true, ontological relations) instead of connecting us to it. Thus, Nietzsche either debased the relation as something not worthy – thus still opposing to experience (which is always presenting relations) an ideal of objectivity and of the in-itself (or at least a transcendental) through his conception of the inorganic world –, or he considered that reality is indeed made of relations but that they are inaccessible to us and that language would always, intrinsically and inherently, intend isolated, positive objects instead of relations. The two options can be merged into one, if we admit of infra-conscious inorganic relations constituting the whole of reality. However, from the standpoint of philology, what do we have left if we reject and remove both the in-itself and conscious relations? Only relations “in-themselves”! Occurring between what and what? What is a relation that is not felt nor connecting a “subject” (or rather a sensing being) to the world directly? How can the relation be conceived only externally? As such, it would be an object and not a living relation. Nevertheless, as Nietzsche formally rejects the in-itself and speaks of the world as a world of relations, he does so only externally: “the world, apart from the necessity for us to live in it, the world that we have not reduced to our « being », our logic, and our psychological prejudices, does not exist as a world « in-itself ». It is essentially a world of relations<sup>258</sup>. It follows from this text that, if Nietzsche admits of a world of relations, it is one that we do not experience. It exists without us, preceding our existence, unfolding infra-consciously. Hence, Nietzsche revives the opposition between a falsified conscious experience versus an in-itself once again (unknowable to consciousness and to experience). This conclusion led

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<sup>257</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XI*, 35 [53], p.265.

<sup>258</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [93], p.67.

Nietzsche to leave the field of experience, since experience is always a living relation occurring through consciousness' openness and *ek-stasis*. Nietzsche probably felt that this philosophical situation was not satisfying, but the only radical solution he found was not a philological one: he decided to shift to the axiological field of genealogy (that he proposed to conceive, at the same time, as the transcendental sphere of the drives that create our falsified language and conscious experience). It would have been possible to philologically describe the relations in their living and ontological or cosmological aspect, but Nietzsche gave up on the method, task and idea of philology and truth – to describe experience and the modality of being of the living relation – altogether and turned towards genealogy (taking language and relations not literally and for themselves but as symptoms, thus stepping away from them). Therefore, Nietzsche departed from experience (and knowledge) at the exact place where he could have been introduced to it in a philological manner, in a superior *Einfühlung*, by developing a description of the living relations, as we experience them. In other words, Nietzsche missed the opportunity to reevaluate the epistemological status of the relation once we got rid of the in-itself. If the only reality to know does not reside in-itself, cut off from any relations, then our relations, even if they are “conscious”, do not lie anymore nor are they inadequate. Once we have rid ourselves of the in-itself, all that remains are living relations, so they become the only adequate knowledge. But to conceive them so, we must refrain from the strong cultural drive that incites us to “leave” the relation and posit an isolated and objectified term. Thus, there could be an adequate mode of expression of the relations, by changing our categories and by trying to describe and express not anymore objects or subjects, as isolated and positive entities, but, precisely, relations, in which we are taking part, bringing us back to our very experience, as it is lived in our present and by our consciousness, which is not a substance but a name for our relating to the world. Achieving this expression is the attempt undertaken by Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, which explains and

justifies the use by Merleau-Ponty of the phenomenological method in order to suspend the in-itself and retrieve the relation as an experience that does not present objective terms but phenomena in which we are taking part and that we cannot objectify, exhaust nor isolate. This is also the meaning of the structure figure-against-a-background: it is a relation between our sensible and perceiving self and a figure (instead of an object). What differentiates the figure from the object is that the figure cannot be isolated and posited alone but is always co-dependent on a background against which it appears, constituting a whole together that can be experienced as such only in a living relation, in which we did not cut off the link between our perception and the whole voluminous field of the world. The point of an epistemology and ontology based on the relation is not to reduce our experience to the fixation and position of isolated, objective entities, but on the contrary it is to take it as it comes, in its syncretic and fluid form, as a contact-distance with thick flesh that we cannot exhaust nor abstract from the context of the whole world nor from our living present. Therefore, what Merleau-Ponty proposes instead of Nietzsche's position is to find another (more philological) ontology and epistemology<sup>259</sup> which is unveiled once we grasp language with its roots, more deeply, relationally, as a whole system that expresses the sensible experience as a system too, in which we take part in our thinking and sensible life and that expresses our situation in the world and our relation to the others and to the sensible beings. Hence, Merleau-Ponty returns to the oppositive and diacritic nature of the relation that Nietzsche missed. He rediscovers the fact that "even" our conscious experience is adequate to know a pre-objective reality, not as an object but as a system, as differentiations or deviations within a whole. The deviation cannot be an object, for there is no "deviation in-itself", a deviation can only be a contrast to a norm and involves a whole system (subject-

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<sup>259</sup> A new philological ontology and epistemology based on the living relations and the sensible that – as we will see – will be able to solve or overcome the problems Nietzsche's conception still had (*i.e.* the aporia of the source of his knowledge of the Will to Power and the impossibility of expressing it with his conception of language, as well as the necessity to posit a transcendental infra-conscious instance).

world). In the same way, the whole, the structure or the totality is a modality of being (uncovered by the *Gestalt*) that overflows the ontology of the object since it cannot be reduced to any of its parts and it thwarts the process of objectivation: its holistic being precedes the parts and transcends their individual meaning or modality of being. Thereby, a relation is the philological approach to experience that presents not an object but a whole (in which we are taking part). However, Nietzsche rejected living relations (and therefore consciousness, perception and language) because they present wholes, and he denied the existence of wholes. It could seem almost paradoxical that Nietzsche – a philosopher who is known as the thinker of becoming and perspectivism – disregarded the living relations, perspective and language, seeing them as something always already inert and fossilized, always already fixated, isolated and presenting an identity or object. Nonetheless, I think that there is a reason for Nietzsche's attitude. Indeed, his thematizing and acknowledgement of the living relation was impossible because, on top of his transcendentalist framework (and in solidarity with it), Nietzsche conceived the sensible experience according to the paradigm of the impression, which treats sensation as a collection of figures already isolated from one another and cut off from the relation. Only a whole given in a living relation can escape the ontology of objects, but Nietzsche acknowledged parts always already isolated as the only reality. He saw the wholes as a mere after-product of the real infra-conscious "relation". In this way, he wrote: "in a world where Being does not exist, a certain rational world of identical cases must first be constructed through « appearance »: a « tempo » in which observation and comparison are possible, *etc.* « Appearance » is an arranged and simplified world, which our practical instincts have worked to create"<sup>260</sup>. Nietzsche sees the sensation as the basis of our knowledge, and it is because he understands sensation as a falsification that he conceived the rest of our knowledge as a falsification too. In this way, he asserted in

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<sup>260</sup> Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes XIV*, 14 [93], p.67.

*Dawn*: “the habits of our senses have bound us to the lies and deceptions of sensation, which in turn are the foundations of all our judgments and « knowledge »”<sup>261</sup>. Thus, my hypothesis is that the root of most of Nietzsche’s prejudices (namely, his rejection of language, of relations and his transcendentalism) lies in his atomism or empiricism about perception<sup>262</sup> (and therefore his idealism) and his refusal to acknowledge wholes. Indeed, positing a plurality of sensations or impressions is what prompts Nietzsche to posit a corresponding plurality of subjects (the drives or wills to power) to receive one by one these impressions directly and then synthesize, give shape and artistically create our representation (this is where Nietzsche’s idealism lies, a natural consequence from his empiricism of sensation). The wills to power – that assimilate one another – create our experience, mediating it with the primordial chaos (giving shape to the plural mass of sensations). Hence, the transcendental approach serves the purpose of explaining the perceived unity as a creation. Nietzsche can contest language and perception only if he understands perception as a reception of isolated objective *stimuli* that our artistic body wrongly identifies and unites. Against the wholes and living relations presented in experience, Nietzsche opposes a real existing plurality. Thereby, the privilege granted to the body can be understood as the original and plural receptor of a multiplicity of unfelt, infra-conscious *stimuli* or impressions. It is on the basis of such an insensible (in the sense of infra-sensible) plurality that Nietzsche refuses to grant any validity to language, consciousness and perception. For they do not express, reflect or respect the absolute plurality of the world, living relations (expressing wholes) are discarded by Nietzsche, he deems them not worth describing and basing a philology upon. If a faithful language would be possible in Nietzsche’s framework, it would have a unique

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<sup>261</sup> Nietzsche, *Aurore*, §117, pp.117-118. See also, for instance and among many texts: Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §179, p.202: “Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings – always darker, emptier, simpler than the latter”.

<sup>262</sup> Which is the reason why I have insisted so much in the previous part on Nietzsche’s idea of an absolutely plural world, for it determines every other prejudice we have highlighted.

and different word for each experience (or even impression), since Nietzsche believed that each experience was absolutely unique, never repeating nor displaying any similarity to another one. This was shown in his description of concept as the omission of all the distinctive characteristics of individual experiences. Indeed, Nietzsche wrote that the concept “must not serve as a memory for the original, unique and completely singular experience to which it owes its birth, but must also adapt to innumerable cases that are more or less similar – in other words, strictly speaking, never identical – and therefore to a multitude of different cases”<sup>263</sup>. However, according to Merleau-Ponty, this position of an absolute plurality (with no similarity between the experiences, being always absolutely unique and distinct) is a prejudice that goes against experience and that he criticized as such in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. Let’s examine how Merleau-Ponty opposes the primacy of wholes to the conception of sensation as “impressions”, which is the one implicitly adopted by Nietzsche.

### ***A) Merleau-Ponty’s Conception of Sensation: Gestalt Versus Impressions***

To give some credit to my hypothesis, let us first establish the similarity between Nietzsche's conception of perception and that of the empiricists, through their common

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<sup>263</sup> Nietzsche, *Vérité et mensonge au sens extra-moral*, pp.14-15. See also the next sentence: “As surely as one leaf is never entirely identical to another leaf, so surely is the concept of a leaf formed by the deliberate abandonment of these individual differences, by the oblivion of the distinctive”.

implication of the impression. I will specify already that, even if my hypothesis would turn out incorrect, it would not impact on the rest of the thesis, for this supposition of mine is mainly a way of introducing to Merleau-Ponty's ontology, although I believe it has some merit. The paradigm of impressions (or sense data) refuses the originary existence and perception of wholes, reducing them to a pure plurality of *stimuli* that are perceived by the body (also understood as a plurality of individual sensory receptors<sup>264</sup> that do not initially communicate or collaborate together), presenting first a pure plurality that will be synthesized later to produce, in a second time and in an arbitrary or at least subjective and habitual way, through association, totalities. This empiricist and pluralist approach to sensation is the one Nietzsche had explicitly in *Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense*, reducing the sensible experience to stimuli (in his words, to a "nervous excitation"), but it is also implicitly this approach to sensation that forced him, throughout all of his works and up until he died, to discard the relations we experience as something illusory and false (which in turn led him to reject the possibility of an expressive language). In *Human, All Too Human* Nietzsche continued to adopt an empiricist terminology and outlook; see for instance: "If we close our eyes, the brain produces a multitude of light and color impressions, a sort of extension and echo of all the light effects that reach it during the day. [...] During the day, with our eyes open, it is accustomed to finding a triggering cause for every color, every light impression"<sup>265</sup>; or:

All relatively strong states of mind trigger a resonance of related feelings and states of mind; they somehow bring back memories. [...] This is how rapid, habitual associations of feelings and thoughts are formed, which we end up experiencing, when they follow one another at lightning speed, not as complexes but as units. [...] Here too, as is so often the case, the unity of

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<sup>264</sup> See for instance Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*, p.101: "The body is made up of a multitude of perceptive apparatuses, a multitude of « souls »".

<sup>265</sup> Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain*, I, §13, pp.71-72.

the word in no way guarantees the unity of the thing. Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain*, I, §14, p.73.

Thus, in this book, Nietzsche understands the impressions as coming first, being the basis of experience, which are recomposed in a second time into a unitary cause supposed to exist outside of us and being retrospectively posited at the origin of experience, coming before the impressions. In *Dawn*, Nietzsche continues this line of thought, although now the unitary cause preceding the impressions is even more frontally questioned and criticized:

Needless to say, our impulses in the waking state do nothing more than interpret nervous stimuli and attribute to them the “causes” that suit their needs. [...] That even our moral evaluations and judgments are nothing more than images and improvisations on a physiological process unknown to us, a kind of adopted language to designate certain nervous *stimuli*? That everything we call our consciousness is nothing more than a more or less far-fetched commentary on an unknown, perhaps unknowable, but felt text? Nietzsche, *Aurore*, §119, p.120.

Therefore, Nietzsche rejects the causalist framework, but he does so in order to thematize and acknowledge the impressions for themselves, as he thinks they are the first and originary component of perception, barely felt. The later works and even the posthumous notes will continue to confirm this paradigm of Nietzsche, making perception mainly infra-conscious, as he wrote for instance: “sense perception takes place without our knowledge; everything of which we are aware is already an elaborate perception”<sup>266</sup>, built on the basis of the singular

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<sup>266</sup> Nietzsche, *La Volonté de puissance*, t. I, 1. II, §268, p.280; quote that I found in Granier, *Le Problème de Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.474. See also Granier, *ibid.*, p.524, quoting Nietzsche’s *Will to Power* once again: “« The first impression of the senses is processed by the intellect, simplified, rectified according to previous schemas; the representation of the phenomenal world, insofar as it is a work of art, is our work ». [...] « Every organic being, who ‘judges’, acts like the artist: he elaborates a totality from particular impulses and excitations, leaves aside a large number of them and operates a simplification... »”; and Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.249, quoting Nietzsche, *Posthumous Fragments Summer-Fall 1884*, 26 [114]: “There are no immediate facts; the same is true of sensations and thoughts; as soon as I become aware of them, I abstract, I simplify, I attempt a construction; that is what we call becoming aware of things, it is a very active way of arranging them (...). A thought, a sensation are the signs of certain phenomena. It is a temporarily permitted simplification of the true state of facts”.

impressions. This interpretation was present in *Gay Science* too, in which Nietzsche asserted: “when we see a new image, we immediately construct it using all our past experiences, according to our degree of integrity and fairness. There are no experiences that are not moral, even in the realm of sensory perception”<sup>267</sup>. This empiricist-leaning tendency (although the traditional empiricists and atomists conceived the atoms – sources of the impressions – as substances, conception criticized by Nietzsche for he does not acknowledge a stable or permanent sum of plural realities, but a fluid and changing one; nevertheless, Nietzsche is still close to them as he posited an ontologically existing plural reality) is visible in Nietzsche’s conception of the world as a chaos or even in the wills to power. In spite of Nietzsche’s change of ontological and theoretical framework, this tendency remains and persists through Nietzsche’s continuous attempt at reducing the perceived totalities we encounter in experience to a construction based on a much more complex plurality of sensations, of which the totalities are just a coarse simplification or approximation (so coarse that it becomes a falsification and a construction: there are no totalities but only an undefinable plurality). In this way, *Gay Science* announces how Nietzsche will adapt his view of sensation as impressions to the framework of the Wills to Power: “Before knowledge is possible, each of the drives must first express its partial point of view on the thing or event; then the struggle between these partialities arises, and from this, sometimes, a middle ground, a reconciliation”<sup>268</sup> can give rise to our conscious perception, but as a simplification and falsification of these initial drives and views. Thus, each Will to Power is also a view, a point of view, and is capable, in its individual state, to receive an impression directly, or maybe each Will to Power is itself the impression, without yet being synthesized into an

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<sup>267</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §114, p.169. Book in which Nietzsche still talked of sensory impressions, as such in *ibid.*, §354, p.303: “Our awareness of our sensory impressions, our ability to immobilize them and, in a way, to place them outside ourselves, has increased as a result of the growing need to convey them to others by means of signs”.

<sup>268</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §333, p.267.

abstract unity. Only the conflict of the Wills to Power and of the impressions they hold (or are) can become the wholes we perceive in conscious perception, in a second time and as a falsification. Blondel quoted a posthumous note that affirms the same perspective: “It is our needs that interpret the universe; our drives, their pros and cons. Every drive is a kind of ambition to dominate; each has its own perspective, which it tries to impose as the norm on all other drives”<sup>269</sup>. Thereby, Nietzsche abandons the explicit framework of the impressions, he talks instead of the drives directly as perspectives. However, the drives thus conceived keep fulfilling the same role and function as the impressions, as an infra-conscious plurality of views of reality that becomes processed and unified in a second time. Similarly, the empiricist concept of association or lightning-fast succession of views is given up too, but the concept of infra-conscious struggle of the drives is its equivalent, its translation in Nietzsche’s new ontology that maintains a similar epistemological framework. This is revealed by Blondel who implicitly ties together Nietzsche’s understanding of the body as Wills to Power – which are the real and total subject – with the idea of “small perceptions”:

Conscious thought is only a part of it [of the thought of the body], an accident or, as Leibniz would say, a *relatio* rather than a *res*. Nietzsche uses the term perspective. The reality of the body is more movement and relation of forces than substance or thing: this is what the idea of the will to power as ontological determination will indicate. [...] “It is only now that this truth comes to light, that the greater part of our intellectual activity takes place unconsciously, insensible to us” [*Gay Science*, §333]. According to Leibnizian terminology, conscious thought is incomplete knowledge, and therefore obscure and inadequate, even blind or symbolic. Yet, confused perception is synonymous with passion, and action goes hand in hand with distinct perception. For Nietzsche too, it is the confusion of conscious perception that implies the passivity of conscious thought. For him, the body is the totality of perceptions (“small” perceptions), of

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<sup>269</sup> Nietzsche, *KGW*, VIII, 1, 7 [60], found in Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.251.

which consciousness is only a part, and thus a confused perception. Blondel, *Nietzsche. Le corps et la culture*, p.225.

Therefore, even in the framework of the Will to Power, Nietzsche posits an existing plurality of impressions or small perceptions that the body receives adequately (for it is itself plural) but infra-consciously. By doing so, Nietzsche denies any context, background or horizon: these notions are only due to a perspectival defect (as Blondel underlined<sup>270</sup>, Nietzsche uses the term “perspective” for the conscious thought or perception in which we encounter these illusory notions), they are human, subjective flaws due to our attempts at synthesizing the plurality for the needs of life, instead of being conceived as the original modality of being of the world and of experience. Even when Nietzsche argues for trusting the testimony of the senses, he does so not in order to acknowledge wholes, but, on the contrary, to acknowledge an irremediable plurality:

Heraclitus also committed an injustice towards the senses. They do not lie, as the Eleatics believed, nor as he believed – they do not lie at all. It is what we do with their testimony that introduces falsehood, for example, the falsehood of unity, the falsehood of thingness, of substance, of duration... “Reason” is the cause of our falsification of the testimony of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, flow, change, they do not lie... Nietzsche, *Le Crépuscule des idoles*, Reason in Philosophy, §2, p.138.

Merleau-Ponty could have absolutely agreed with the first part of Nietzsche’s second sentence. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty also believes that the senses do not lie and that we can find the truth of Being thanks to their testimony, by undermining the abstract falsifications of reason and intelligence that have been added to them in a second time, distorting their

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<sup>270</sup> See also Granier, *Le problème de la Vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, p.517: “Since we are beings immersed in life, it is pointless to try to break the system of illusions with which life envelops itself in order to preserve and grow; we must accept that our relationship to Being is only an oblique one, which imposes a detour through the perspectivist error”.

testimony by a non-philological interpretation. And yet, Merleau-Ponty would have strongly opposed the rest of Nietzsche's text; more specifically, his interpretation that the given from the senses is a pure plurality. It is indeed in this sense that Nietzsche argued, since he denied any unity and – a few pages further from the previous quote – referred (in a very empiricist fashion) conscious perception to bodily processes and impressions:

Most of our general feelings – all kinds of inhibition, pressure, tension, and outbursts in the interplay of organs, such as the state of the *nervus sympathicus* in particular – stimulate our causal drive [...] Memory, which in such cases comes into play without our knowing it, brings up previous states of the same kind, as well as the causal interpretations that are intertwined with them. Nietzsche, *Le Crépuscule des idoles*, The four great mistakes, §4, p.155.

Against such a physiological view of perception, Merleau-Ponty opposed that: “when we sense, we do not perceive our sensation as an object constituted in a web of psychophysiological relations”<sup>271</sup>, “we are not a mere collection of eyes, ears, tactile organs, and their prolongations to their respective parts in the brain”<sup>272</sup>; and that “to perceive is not to experience a multitude of impressions that bring along with them some memories capable of completing them, it is to see an immanent sense bursting forth from a constellation of givens without which no call to memory is possible”<sup>273</sup>. According to Merleau-Ponty, the impression is a mere abstraction and construction that departed from actual experience, it is a product (of a particular attitude) we find within (or after) perception much rather than at its origin, as its supposed (and not experienced) reality or initial component. Indeed, he wrote that “the determinate quality by which empiricism wanted to define sensation is an object for, not an element of consciousness, and it is the recently introduced object of scientific consciousness. For these two reasons, the notion of quality conceals rather than reveals

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<sup>271</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.507.

<sup>272</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.334.

<sup>273</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.23.

subjectivity”<sup>274</sup>. Against such a view of the mind and reconstruction of experience, dismembering it into parts and trying to reconstitute it from them *a posteriori*, Merleau-Ponty’s solution will be the same as always; namely, the philological one that consists in returning to the testimony of phenomena and of perception as we live them. Pursuing this direction of thought, Merleau-Ponty asserted that:

If we return to phenomena, they show us that the apprehension of a quality – exactly like the apprehension of size – is tied to an entire perceptual context, and the stimuli no longer give us the indirect means that we sought for delimiting a layer of direct impressions. But not only does the physical stimulus elude us when we seek an “objective” definition of sensation. The sensory apparatus itself, as modern physiology imagines it, is no longer appropriate to the role of “transmitter” that it was made to play by classical science. [...] At the elementary level of sensibility, we catch sight of a collaboration among partial stimuli and between the sensorial system and the motor system that, through a variable physiological constellation, keeps the sensation constant, and thus rules out any definition of the nervous process as the simple transmission of a given message. [...] And if we try to grasp “sensation” from the perspective of its preparatory bodily phenomena, we do not discover a psychical individual, a function of certain known variables, but rather a formation already tied to an ensemble and already endowed with a sense, which is only different in degree from more complex perceptions and which thus does not move us forward in our delimitation of the pure sensible. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.8-9.

Thanks to the experience of the perception of forms uncovered by *Gestalt* psychology, Merleau-Ponty can claim that we do not first perceive (unconsciously and through the body) *stimuli* that we would then synthesize (erroneously according to Nietzsche), but we perceive wholes, forms and totalities. In other words, Merleau-Ponty finds at the core or basis of our perception not impressions but wholes, which leads him to revise the role and status of the

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<sup>274</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.7.

impressions as well as the sense or direction of experience. Thus, it is not the whole that is made of parts and singular impressions, but, rather, it is the impressions that are distinguished after the perception of wholes; they are already endowed with a context and a holistic meaning or global sense before they can be conceived separately. The wholes precede the parts; they must first be perceived holistically before we can analyze them and decompose them into various *stimuli*. It is a very similar decomposition that occurs to the body in the Nietzschean and empiricist framework, turning into a plurality of individual sensory elements that do not collaborate nor work together as a whole, but as parts, and that we would only be conceiving as a unity erroneously and afterwards). Against these two correlated decompositions, Merleau-Ponty argues that, in living perception and experience,

the elementary is no longer that which, when added together, will constitute the whole, nor is it a mere occasion for the whole to constitute itself. The elementary event is already invested with a sense, and the higher-level function will only achieve a more integrated mode of existence or a more valuable adaptation by utilizing and by sublimating the subordinate operations. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.10.

Therefore, the “impressions” (if we insist on using this term) are not mute and relevant only to their attributed “receptor”. They are communicating with one another, functioning in solidarity with each other and possessing from the start a holistic meaning, communicating with our whole body all at once and expressing not only a local and fragmented reality but a whole inter-sensory thing. Hence, Merleau-Ponty could write: “a sensation would be no sensation at all if it were not a sensation of something”<sup>275</sup>, and, reciprocally:

a thing is a thing because, no matter what it says to us, it says it through the very organization of its sensible appearances. The “real” is this milieu where each moment is not only inseparable from the others, but in some sense synonymous with them, where the “appearances” signify each

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<sup>275</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.225.

other in an absolute equivalence. The “real” is the insurmountable plenitude: it is impossible to describe fully the color of a carpet without saying that it is a carpet, or a woolen carpet, and without implying in this color a certain tactile value, a certain weight, and a certain resistance to sound. The thing is this manner of being in which the complete definition of an attribute demands that of the entire subject, and where, consequently, its sense is indistinguishable from its total appearance. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.337.

The unity of the thing is correlative to that of my body; it is unitary because it speaks pre-objectively to my whole pre-objective body at once:

it will not be a question of defining the inter-sensory thing in which they unite by a collection of stable attributes or by the notion of this collection. The sensory “properties” of a thing together constitute a single thing just as my gaze, my touch, and all of my other senses are, together, the powers of a single body integrated into a single action. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.332<sup>276</sup>.

This account of perception leads Merleau-Ponty to acknowledge that synesthesia comes first, and that the division of meaning (or reality) into different senses comes only in a second time. As he highlighted:

Synesthetic perception is the rule and, if we do not notice it, this is because scientific knowledge displaces experience and we have unlearned seeing, hearing, and sensing in general in order to deduce what we ought to see, hear, or sense from our bodily organization and from the world as it is conceived by the physicist. It is said that vision can only give us colors or lights, and with them forms (which are the contours of colors) and movements (which are the changes of position of patches of color). But how should we situate transparency or “blurred” colors on the color-scale? In fact, each color in its inmost possession is but the inner structure of the thing manifested on the outside. The brilliance of gold presents its homogeneous composition quite noticeably,

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<sup>276</sup> See also: Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.328: “the « impressions » provided by each of them [organs or senses] are not really distinct and merely connected through an explicit interpretation; they are immediately given as different manifestations of « real » weight [for instance], the pre-objective unity of the thing is the correlate of the pre-objective unity of the body”.

and the dull color of wood presents its heterogeneous composition. By opening up to the structure of the thing, the senses communicate among themselves. We see the rigidity and the fragility of the glass and, when it breaks with a crystal-clear sound, this sound is borne by the visible glass. We see the elasticity of steel, the ductility of molten steel, the hardness of the blade in a plane, and the softness of its shavings. The form of objects is not their geometrical shape: the form has a certain relation with their very nature and it speaks to all of our senses at the same time as it speaks to vision. The form of a fold in a fabric of linen or of cotton shows us the softness or the dryness of the fiber, and the coolness or the warmth of the fabric. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.238<sup>277</sup>.

Thus, Merleau-Ponty affirms the perception of forms against the sensation of impressions. However, he does not conceive these forms like ideas opposed to matter, as essences in the traditional sense of the term<sup>278</sup>, but as *Gestalt*, as styles or a principle of solidarity and communication between all the sensory aspects of a thing. In this way, he wrote with more precision in *The visible and the invisible*:

There is no location in space and time that is not connected to others, that is not a variant of others, as they are of it; there is no individual who is not representative of a species or family of beings, who does not have / who is not a certain style, a certain way of managing the domain of space and time over which it has jurisdiction, of pronouncing it, of articulating it, of radiating around a wholly virtual center, in short, a certain way of being, in the active sense, a certain *Wesen*, in the sense, says Heidegger, that the word has when it is used as a verb. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.152.

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<sup>277</sup> See also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.332-333: "Cézanne said that a painting contained, in itself, even the odor of the landscape. He meant that the arrangement of the color upon the thing (and in the work of art if it fully captures the thing) by itself signifies all of the responses that it would give to the interrogation of my other senses, that a thing would not have that color if it did not have this form, these tactile properties, that sonority, or that odor; and that the thing is the absolute plenitude that projects my undivided existence in front of itself".

<sup>278</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.257: "The *Gestaltung* is not being by definition, essentialization".

This “form” is not actual or objective, fully present in one single aspect of the thing, but it is not outside of the sensible either: it is the virtual membrane that lies between all of the aspects; it is their depth or thickness that involves implicitly all the other aspects in each of them and ties them together. Even though the qualities or « impressions » are not objectively the same (hence not an actual sameness, which is the aspect overemphasized by the empiricists, that there is never objectively anything that is the same), there is a familiarity of structure that makes us perceive a same “thing” in different contexts or times. This unity or sameness is not actual, but it is not ideal either:

Essence, *Wesen*. The deep connection between essence and perception: essence, too, is a member [membrure]; it is not above the sensible world, it is below it, or in its depth, its thickness. It is the secret link. [...] The generality of things: why are there multiple copies of each thing? This is imposed by the very definition of things as beings of field. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.269.

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty uncovers a new sense or modality of generality and sameness: the sensible thing is “the same, not in the sense of ideality or real identity. [It is] the same in a structural sense: same structure, same *Gestalthafte*, the same in the sense of opening up another dimension of the « same being »”<sup>279</sup>. Elaborating on this structural definition of the *Gestalt*, Merleau-Ponty specified that “it is a principle of distribution, the pivot of a system of equivalences, it is the *Etwas* whose fragmentary phenomena will be the manifestation”<sup>280</sup>. This structure is invisible as such, but it is the same kind of invisible as I presented in the previous part: namely, the invisible of the visible, the lining or inner coat of all its aspects, present virtually in all of them. As Merleau-Ponty highlighted, “the thin film of quale, the surface of the visible, is, across its entire expanse, lined with an invisible reserve”<sup>281</sup>. Thus,

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<sup>279</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.309.

<sup>280</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.255.

<sup>281</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.197.

if we grasp the visible and invisible together by perceiving “figures against a background” instead of impressions, then the simplest perception of any quality immediately takes us further than this supposedly lone quality; it takes us straight to the thing as a structural unity. As such, we must say that we perceive things (or at least “something”), not qualities, and that the “things are structures, members [membres], the stars of our lives: not spread out before us like perspective spectacles, but gravitating around us”<sup>282</sup>. Moreover, that is not all, the things are connected to one another too, belonging to the same field of the world. Any experience, far from being isolated and turning into an impression, involves the whole of Being. In this way, Merleau-Ponty asserted that

the characteristic of the sensible (as of language) is to be representative of the whole, not in terms of sign-signification or of the immanence of the parts to each other and to the whole, but because each part is torn from the whole, comes with its roots, encroaches on the whole, transgresses the boundaries of others. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.267.

Even a simple reflection on the perceptual concepts of directions can lead us to the whole of Being: “Reflecting on the right and the left: these are not simply contents in a spatiality of relation (i.e., *positive*): they are not parts of space (Kant's reasoning applies here: the whole comes first), they are total parts, divisions within an encompassing, topological space”<sup>283</sup>. In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty will generalize even more this statement: “depth, color, form, line, movement, contour, physiognomy are all branches of Being, and each entwines the tufts of all the rest”<sup>284</sup>. Therefore, as soon as we would like to focus on one impression or quality, we are brought to the style of a particular thing and, with it, we are brought to the world as the style of all styles, or the field of all fields<sup>285</sup>. In this sense, any part of experience is a

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<sup>282</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.269.

<sup>283</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.266.

<sup>284</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.376.

<sup>285</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.476: “The natural world, as we have seen, is nothing other than the place of all possible themes and styles”.

total part, it involves the whole of Being, and we cannot conceive of an absolutely isolated impression. As Merleau-Ponty underlined, “there is no absolute flow of singular *Erlebnisse* [experiences]; there are fields and a field of fields, with a style and a typicality”<sup>286</sup>. Thereby, it is unquestionable that Merleau-Ponty comes to an account of experience that is very different from Nietzsche’s one, affirming a same and unique world, “one sole Space that separates and reunites, that sustains every cohesion”<sup>287</sup>, instead of a pure plurality that would be given in singular impressions.

As a result, we might be led to a limit of the philological method. Indeed, this method incites the philosopher to refer to experience and only to experience. However, what happens when two philosophers possess an irreconcilable interpretation of experience? Nietzsche seems to live experience in the same way as Hume, namely as the reception of a multitude of isolated, plural and local impressions, while Merleau-Ponty understands experience as presenting wholes and figures against a background. Should all philological philosophers converge towards a similar account of experience, or are radical disagreements tolerable? And, in case of the latter, then what to do with philology? In that case, philology would still retain some value, not anymore as a way to reach Being in experience and overcoming the possibility of the “in-itself”, but rather as a way for the philological philosophers to polish to the maximum their prism, removing all unnecessary principles thanks to the principle of economy and presenting the most radical version of their outlook on the world and on experience. Nevertheless, is it necessary to reach such a conclusion and to relativize philology? Certainly, if perception would turn out to be a reconstructed lie, a fiction that

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<sup>286</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.223.

<sup>287</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.375.

comes only after the infra-conscious impressions, then Merleau-Ponty's philosophy would be denied, for it rests completely on this living experience, and Nietzsche's account of experience could be opposed to Merleau-Ponty's. Merleau-Ponty is aware of this possible objection, as he wrote:

The relations "figure" and "background," "thing" and "non-thing," and the horizon of the past would thus be structures of consciousness irreducible to the qualities that appear in consciousness. Empiricism will forever hold onto the possibility of treating this *a priori* as the result of some mental chemistry. It will concede that every thing is presented against a background that is not itself a thing, or that the present is between two horizons of absence, the past and the future. It will go on, however, to claim that these significations are derived. The words "figure" and "background," "thing" and its "surroundings," and "present" and "past," summarize the experience of a spatial and temporal perspective, which in the end amounts to the effacement of either memory or marginal impressions. Even if these structures, once formed in actual perception, have more sense than could be offered by a quality, I must not limit myself to this evidence from consciousness, and I must rather reconstruct them theoretically with the aid of the impressions whose actual relations they express. On this level, empiricism is irrefutable. Since it refuses the evidence of reflection and since it engenders, by bringing together external impressions, the structures that we are aware of understanding by going from the whole to the parts, there is no phenomenon that could be held up as a definitive proof against empiricism. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.24<sup>288</sup>.

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<sup>288</sup> See also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.24: "The physicist's atoms will always seem more real than the historical and qualitative picture of this world; the physico-chemical processes more real than organic forms; empiricism's psychic atoms more real than perceived phenomena; and the intellectual atoms (namely, the Vienna Circle's « significations ») more real than consciousness, so long as one seeks to construct the picture of this world, life, perception, or mind, rather than recognizing the experience we have of them as the immediate source and as the final authority of our knowledge. This conversion of the gaze, which inverts the relations between the clear and the obscure, must be accomplished by each person, and it is only later that it is justified by the abundance of phenomena that it renders understandable. But prior to the conversion, these phenomena were inaccessible, and empiricism can always respond that it does not understand the descriptions given of them". In this way, we understand how Nietzsche could believe that the body is more real than the "Ideal" (for conscious experience was conceived as an ideal illusion by Nietzsche) or consciousness and make it the ground of his ontology of the Will to Power; nevertheless, this prejudice (related to the empiricist one) should have been overcome once he denied the distinction between appearance and "in-itself" and came back to the phenomena. Maintaining a superior reality of the body over the rest of perception

At first, we might seem to face an equivalence of opposing views here. Nonetheless, and thanks to philology (and the principle of economy), we can grant our preference to Merleau-Ponty because his account posits only the world of conscious perception, whereas Nietzsche still needs to talk about the perception of wholes and explain it as a fiction (which means that he confesses that he is experiencing such a world made of wholes too, and he has to rationalize *a posteriori* his rejection of it) and, on top of it, to posit besides it or prior to it the plural world of impressions. In this way, Nietzsche does not simply borrow from empiricism, but from intellectualism too, for he constructs the perception of wholes by a judgment or mental (and artistic) act operated by the infra-conscious sphere of the body and of the wills to power, to explain how we perceive wholes instead of isolated impressions. As Merleau-Ponty underlined, “judgment is often introduced as what sensation is missing in order to make a perception possible”<sup>289</sup>, and

judgment is everywhere that pure sensation is not, which is to say that judgment is everywhere.

The evidence of phenomena will thus be everywhere denied. [...] Intellectualism defines sensing as the action of a real stimulus upon my body. Since there is no real stimulus here, it will thus be necessary to say that the box is not sensed, but judged to be heavier [...] there is no sensible knowledge and that one senses insofar as one judges. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.36.

Indeed, in Nietzsche’s framework, all our conscious perception is a judgment, because the *stimuli* are never felt, or not by consciousness. The fact Nietzsche denied the testimony of consciousness as a lie and had to adopt a transcendental perspective reveals that the impressions (with which he wants to understand reality) are never perceived by us. This is

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means that Nietzsche did not fully return to experience, for it does not only present the body or impressions but the whole perceptual context too.

<sup>289</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.34. See also *ibid.*, p.35: “Once vision has been defined in the empiricist manner as the possession of a quality inscribed upon the body by the *stimulus*, the slightest illusion, since it invests the object with properties it does not have on my retina, suffices to establish that perception is a judgment”.

the reason why Nietzsche had to posit another sphere of reality: the drives, being plural themselves, can receive the “*stimuli*” or perceive the real plurality of the world, while consciousness cannot, so the drives serve the purpose to justify his view of the world as a pure plurality of impressions. Then Nietzsche can claim that these drives emit a judgement creating our conscious experience (hence Nietzsche’s transcendentalism), that our consciousness passively receives, in which the real content and plurality is lost to be confronted only with a falsified simplification that presents wholes (as a pure illusion and error). Thus, on the basis of an empiricist outlook on reality, Nietzsche adds an intellectualist account of consciousness and perception in which “the words « seeing », « hearing », and « sensing » lose all signification, since the slightest glance goes beyond the pure impression and thereby falls under the general rubric of « judgment »”<sup>290</sup>. However, this is not a philological perspective, Nietzsche does not try to return to the experience of perception but, instead, he constructs it based on the prejudice that reality is made of impressions (without ever interrogating this prejudice) and adopts a whole intellectualist framework as an *ad hoc* hypothesis simply to save and justify this prejudice. Merleau-Ponty criticized this view for its lack of philology:

rather than being the act of perceiving itself grasped from the inside by an authentic reflection, judgment – which was introduced in order to explain the excess of perception over the retinal impressions – itself becomes a mere “factor” of perception charged with the task of providing what is not provided by the body. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.35.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty also showed that:

This passage from thesis to antithesis [attributing them to two different spheres of reality in the Nietzschean framework: empiricism for reality and intellectualism for consciousness], the

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<sup>290</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.35. See also Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.365: “Everything we say and think of vision turns vision into a thought”.

reversal of the arguments for and against, which is the constant procedure of intellectualism, leaves the point of departure of the analysis unchanged. We began from a world in itself that acted upon our eyes in order to make itself seen by us; we have arrived now at a consciousness or a thought about the world, but the very nature of this world is unchanged. It is still defined by the absolute exteriority of its parts and is merely doubled across its extension by a thought that sustains it. We pass from an absolute objectivity to an absolute subjectivity, but this second idea is worth only as much as the first, and only finds support in contrast to the first, which is to say, through it. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.41.

Nonetheless, when for Merleau-Ponty this argument highlighted that intellectualism relied implicitly on an empiricist conception of sensation, I think that, in the case of Nietzsche, “leaving the point of departure of the analysis unchanged” was the goal: his intellectualism was required so that he could keep on thinking reality as an absolutely plural and external sum of parts that impress our body one by one, individually and in isolation, but that we do not perceive. Conversely, his intellectualism – supposed to illuminate our conscious perception – also demonstrates that the impressions do not appear as a direct relation to experience, and that they are thereby a reconstruction and an *a posteriori* interpretation that distorts and replaces it. As underlined by Merleau-Ponty, “empiricism does not merely deform experience by turning the cultural world, which in fact nourishes our existence, into an illusion [through intellectualism and understanding consciousness as a creation]. The natural world in turn is also distorted, and for the same reasons”<sup>291</sup>; namely, because empiricism attempts to construct the view of the natural world based on impressions while they are never perceived. Nietzsche might argue that pure sensation is made of impressions, that our consciousness is falsified and hides these impressions, but such a pure sensing is not the one found in experience, it would be a sensing only for drives that precede our conscious experience, and it should therefore be rejected (along with the view of the world that it

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<sup>291</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.26.

involved) by a philological attempt that deals only with our experience. Thus, in a philological framework, it is Nietzsche's view that is a reconstruction, for it leaves the field of living experience so as to explain and create it, instead of maintaining contact with it, getting informed by it and shaping his theory according to it. In this way, and although Nietzsche claims that it is unity that is a reconstruction that follows the impressions, it is revealed that, on the contrary, it is Nietzsche's conception of the impression that is an *a posteriori* reconstruction of the experience of perception, that he projects retrospectively at its origin. As such, it is an anti-philological prejudice that Nietzsche did not overcome. This outcome was probable, since Nietzsche had this conception already in *Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense*, along with the belief in the in-itself and his absolute rejection of language and consciousness, which we have shown were anti-philological prejudices. Hence, Nietzsche might have denied the "in-itself" later, but he did not deny the contemporary prejudice of the sensation as impression, it is still infused in his conception of the Wills to Power and prompts him to keep rejecting the testimony of consciousness and of perception, for they are determined by infra-conscious instances. Yet, as Merleau-Ponty rightly noted,

the supposed conditions of perception become anterior to perception itself only when, rather than describing the perceptual phenomenon as a primary opening up to an object, we presuppose around it a milieu in which all of the developments and all of the cross-checking that will be performed by analytical perception are already inscribed, and in which all of the norms of actual perception will be justified – a realm of truth, a world. By presupposing this realm, we strip perception of its essential function, which is to establish or to inaugurate knowledge, and we view perception through the lens of its results. If we hold ourselves to phenomena, then the unity of the thing in perception is not constructed through association, but rather, being the condition

of association, this unity precedes the cross-checkings that verify and determine it, this unity precedes itself. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.17<sup>292</sup>.

Instead of supposing the world as given (even as Wills to Power or as a chaos), without interrogating its modality of being and positing that it is a real plurality, a philological philosophy should suspend this realm and come back to perception as the original presentation of Being and the source of all our knowledge. Nietzsche, just like empiricism and intellectualism, overlooks and ignores the modality of being that is present (and presented) in perception. As Merleau-Ponty highlighted, “both [empiricism and intellectualism] take the objective world as their object for analysis, which comes first neither in time nor according to its sense; both are incapable of expressing the particular manner in which perceptual consciousness constitutes [or, in non-transcendental terms – that Merleau-Ponty overcomes in the *visible and invisible* –: relates and opens to] its object. When it comes to perception, rather than sticking closely to it, they both keep their distance”<sup>293</sup>. However, if we want to give a chance to philology, to try this *Versuch* and be economical, then we have to refer to experience without conceiving it as a reconstruction and falsification. By coming back to perception as we are living it, Merleau-Ponty is able to trace the genesis of the concept of impression as a series of reductions and a departure from

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<sup>292</sup> See also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.42: “Empiricism remained within the absolute belief in the world as the totality of spatio-temporal events, and treated consciousness as a region of that world”; and p.5: “The supposed evidence of sensing is not grounded upon the testimony of consciousness, but rather upon the unquestioned belief in the world [le préjugé du monde]. We believe we know perfectly well what it is « to see », « to hear », or « to sense », because perception has long given us colored or sonorous objects. When we want to analyze perception, we transport these objects into consciousness. We commit what psychologists call the « experience error », that is, we immediately assume that what we know to exist among things is also in our consciousness of them. We build perception out of the perceived. And since the perceived is obviously only accessible through perception, in the end we understand neither. We are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in detaching ourselves from it in order to shift to the consciousness of the world. If we were to do so, we would see that the quality is never directly experienced and that all consciousness is consciousness of something. This « something », moreover, is not necessarily an identifiable object. There are two ways of being mistaken regarding quality: the first is to turn it into an element of consciousness when it is in fact an object for consciousness, to treat it as a mute impression when it in fact always has a sense; the second is to believe that this sense and this object, at the level of quality, are full and determinate”.

<sup>293</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.28.

experience. Indeed, he affirmed that, to get the concept of impression, I must reduce and impoverish the initial experience. Thus, if I see a die for instance:

First, I notice that this die is only for me. Perhaps my neighbors do not see it after all, and from this first observation the die already loses something of its reality; it ceases to be in itself in order to become the center of a personal history. Then I notice that the die is only, strictly speaking, given to me through vision, and suddenly I merely have the envelope of the total die, it loses its materiality, it empties out, and it is reduced to a visual structure of form and color, shadows and lights. At least form, color, shadows, and lights are not in the void, they still have a support, namely, the visual thing. [...] Through a third reduction, we move from the visual thing to the perspectival appearance: I observe that all of the die's faces cannot fall beneath my gaze, and that certain of them undergo deformations. Finally, through a last reduction, I reach the sensation that is no longer a property of the thing nor even of the perspectival appearance, but rather a modification of my body. The experience of the thing does not go through all of these mediations and, consequently, the thing is not presented to a mind that would grasp each constitutive layer as representative of the higher layer and that would construct the thing straight through. Before all else, the thing is in its evidentness, and every attempt to define it – either as the pole of my bodily life, as the permanent possibility of sensations, or as the synthesis of appearances – substitutes for the thing itself in its originary being an imperfect reconstitution of the thing with the help of subjective bits and pieces. How might we simultaneously understand that the thing is the correlate of my knowing body and that the thing denies this body? Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.339.

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty shows that we never deal with impressions in living perception, but only with things, and that it is a particular attitude, occurring only in a second time (which relies on the first, global and holistic perception as the initiation to the world), that can give me the idea of impressions. Thus:

The whiteness of the sheets of paper in the shadow does not admit of a precise classification on the scale between black and white. It had no definite quality; I made the quality appear by

focusing my eyes upon a portion of the visual field: then, and only then, did I find myself in the presence of a particular *quale* into which my gaze is plunged. Now, what does it mean “to focus” [qu’est-ce que fixer]? On the side of the object it means to separate the region focused upon from the rest of the field, to interrupt the total life of the spectacle, which assigned a determinate coloration to each visible surface, taking the lighting into account; on the side of the subject it means substituting for overall vision, in which our gaze lends itself to the spectacle and allows itself to be invaded by it, an observation, that is, an isolated vision that the subject directs at will. Far from being coextensive with perception, the sensible quality is the peculiar product of an attitude of curiosity or observation. The sensible quality appears when, rather than abandoning my whole gaze to the world, I turn toward this gaze itself and I wonder what I am actually seeing; the quality does not figure in the natural exchange between my vision and the world. It is the response to a certain question posed by my gaze and the result of a second-order or critical act of vision [...] that I employ when I am worried about being tricked or when I wish to commence a scientific study of vision. This attitude makes the spectacle disappear. [...] Thus, there is a natural attitude of vision where I join with my gaze and deliver myself over to the spectacle through it: here the parts of the field are linked in an organization that makes them recognizable and identifiable. The quality, an isolated sensoriality, is produced when I break this total structuration of my vision, when I cease to adhere to my own gaze and, rather than living within vision, interrogate myself about it, when I wish to test out my possibilities, or when I untie the link between my vision and the world or between myself and the world in order to catch it in the act and to describe it. From within this attitude, at the same time that the world is pulverized into sensible qualities, the natural unity of the perceiving subject is shattered and I become unaware of myself as the subject of a visual field. But just as we must discover the natural unity from within each sense, we will reveal an “originary layer” of sensing that is prior to the division of the senses. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.235-236.

This is the reason why Merleau-Ponty affirms that the impressions are not the foundation of perception and experience, but an artificial product that comes after it (and from which we cannot understand the whole of perception): “like the experience of the sensible quality, the experience of isolated « senses » takes place only within an abnormal attitude and cannot be

useful for the analysis of direct consciousness”<sup>294</sup>, “the nature that empiricism speaks of is a sum of stimuli and qualities. It is absurd to claim that this nature is the primary object of our perception, even if only intentionally: such a nature is clearly posterior to the experience of cultural objects, or rather, it itself is a cultural object”<sup>295</sup>, and that, as a result: “we must not set up determinations within primordial experience that will only later be obtained through the critical attitude, and therefore we must not speak of an actual [or infra-conscious] synthesis when the manifold has not yet been dissociated”<sup>296</sup>. Thus, in authentic perception and lived experience, it is not the impression that appears first but wholes, and it is only

because we first perceive a whole as a thing, [that] the analytic attitude can later discern resemblances or contiguities there. This does not only mean that, without the perception of the whole we would not imagine observing the resemblance or the contiguity of its elements, but rather, literally, that the elements would not be a part of the same world and that resemblance and contiguity could not exist at all. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.16-17<sup>297</sup>.

Merleau-Ponty elaborated on this point, explaining that the perception of *Gestalt* is not only relativizing the conception of sensation as impressions but makes it impossible for the impressions to be perceived at all, and are consequently a product of thought, outside and subsequent to experience. In this fashion, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

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<sup>294</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.234.

<sup>295</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.26.

<sup>296</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.251. See also *ibid.*, p.39: “Sensation is not sensed and consciousness is always consciousness of an object. We hit upon sensation when, while reflecting upon our perceptions, we want to express that they are not absolutely our doing. Pure sensation, defined as the action of stimuli upon our body, is the “most recent product” of knowledge, and particularly of scientific knowledge, and through an illusion, albeit a natural one, we place pure sensation at the beginning and believe it to be anterior to knowledge. It is the necessary, and necessarily erroneous way that a mind must imagine its own history. Pure sensation belongs to the domain of the constituted, and not to the constituting mind”. Merleau-Ponty still had a transcendentalist vocabulary here, but this does not weaken his point that the impression is an after-product that cannot be placed at the origin of perception.

<sup>297</sup> See also *ibid.*, p.16: “The notion of sensation precludes every philosophy other than nominalism, that is, the reduction of sense to either the error [contre-sens] of confused resemblance or the non-sense of association through contiguity. And yet sensations and images, which were to begin and end all knowledge, only ever appear within an horizon of sense, and the signification of the perceived, far from resulting from an association, is in fact presupposed in all associations”.

Each part announces more than it contains, and thus this elementary perception is already charged with a sense. The objection will be raised that if the figure and the background are not sensed as a whole, then they must surely be sensed in each of their points. This would be to forget that each point in turn can only be perceived as a figure on a background. When *Gestalt* theory tells us that a figure against a background is the most basic sensible given we can have, this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception that would, in an ideal analysis, leave us free to introduce the notion of impression. Rather, this is the very definition of the perceptual phenomenon, or that without which a phenomenon cannot be called perception. The perceptual “something” is always in the middle of some other thing, it always belongs to a “field.” A truly homogeneous area, offering nothing to perceive, cannot be given to any perception. The structure of actual perception alone can teach us what it is to perceive. Pure impression is thus not merely undiscoverable, but imperceptible, and therefore is inconceivable as a moment of perception. If it is introduced, this is because, rather than being attentive to perceptual experience, this experience is neglected in favor of the perceived object. A visual field is not made up of isolated visions. But the viewed object is made up of material fragments, and spatial points are external to each other. An isolated perceptual given is inconceivable, so long as we perform the mental experiment of trying to perceive it. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.4.

In this way, if we really try to perceive, with all the implications of authentic perception and not simply in an isolating attitude, we can notice that:

Rather than providing a simple means of delimiting sensations, the quality, if we consider it in the very experience in which it is revealed, is just as rich and obscure as the object or as the entire perceptual spectacle. The red patch I see on the rug is only red if the shadow that lies across it is taken into account; its quality only appears in relation to the play of light, and thus only as an element in a spatial configuration. Moreover, the color is only determinate if it spreads across a certain surface; a surface too small would be unqualifiable. Finally, this red would literally not be the same if it were not the “wooly red” of a carpet. Analysis thus discovers the significations that reside in each quality. Might the objection be raised that only the qualities of our actual experience are at issue here, overlaid with an entire body of knowledge, and that we still have the right to conceive of a “pure quality” that might define “pure sensing”? And yet, as we have

just seen, this pure sensing would amount to not sensing anything and thus to not sensing at all.

Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.5.

Hence, a philological return to perception teaches us that Nietzsche's account of sensation as a collection of impressions denies many aspects of experience (namely, the whole perceptual context, as well as my own situation as a perceiving and thinking being) and grants an undue ontological status to impressions, which are in fact fragmented, impossible views. As a result, the hypothesis of the impressions should be rejected as an anti-philological prejudice. Moreover, coming back to perception as we live it is not only economical in the sense that it allows not to add to experience the existence of "real", plural impressions that are only an artificial moment and invention, but it also allows to illuminate a modality of being that is overlooked and denied by the empiricist's approach and by Nietzsche's. Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty:

The weakness of empiricism, just like intellectualism, is to fail to recognize colors other than the congealed colors that appear in a reflective attitude, whereas the color in living perception is an initial approach to the thing. This illusion that the world is made up of color-qualities – which has been kept alive by physics – must be eliminated. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.318-319<sup>298</sup>.

A *quale* (which, in empiricism, is supposed to be the given content of an impression) is not only tied to the other qualities and aspects of the thing it is an expressive part of (as a total part, as we have seen), but it is also always seen from a particular dimension that grants it its value. And this dimension is not an idea or another visible, but it is a *quale* in which we settle, according to which we see. The dimension is a new ontological category uncovered by Merleau-Ponty (that he sometimes refers to as level as well). This category (or, rather,

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<sup>298</sup> See also Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.370: "The return to color has the virtue of getting somewhat nearer to « the heart of things », but this heart is beyond the color envelope just as it is beyond the space envelope".

modality of being) can be found in the experience of colors for instance, which are always perceived in the context of a particular lighting that is not seen for itself but that determines the value of each perceived color. The lighting is, strictly speaking, a color too, but a color turned dimension (or level). Thus, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between lighting and illuminated-object<sup>299</sup> or between color-*quale* and color-function:

It must not be said that the yellow light, to the extent that it is generalized, is seen with the appearance of daylight and that thus the color of other objects truly remains constant. Rather, we must say that the yellow light, by taking on the function of lighting, tends to situate itself as prior to every color, tends toward the absence of color, and that correlatively objects distribute the colors of the spectrum according to the degree and to the mode of their resistance to this new atmosphere. Every *color-quale* is thus mediated by a *color-function* and is determined in relation to a level that is variable. The level is established, and along with it all of the color values that depend upon it, when we begin to live within the dominant atmosphere and redistribute upon the objects the colors of the spectrum in function of this fundamental tacit agreement. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.324-325.

As a level or atmosphere, lighting or any dimensions are not perceived anymore for themselves (like definite and thematized qualities), but they are that according to which we perceive, they are a function or operator of our perception and grants value to the rest. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty underlined that “lighting and reflection only play their role if they fade into the background as discreet intermediaries, and if they direct our gaze rather than arresting it”<sup>300</sup>. In other words, the lighting or levels in general are the invisible backgrounds against which figures can appear, and any figure always involves such a background. That

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<sup>299</sup> See for instance Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.337: “With the lighting / object-illuminated structure, foreground and background are possible”; and also *ibid.*, p.320: “The distinction between the lighting and the object’s own color does not result from an intellectualist analysis, it is not the imposition of notional significations upon a sensible matter; rather, it is a certain organization of color itself, the establishing of a lighting/object-illuminated structure, which we must describe more closely if we want to understand the constancy of the thing’s « own » color”.

<sup>300</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.323.

is why, strictly speaking, we only perceive “figures against a background”; there is always a background involved with the figure, that is not seen for itself but that allows to see, in which we implicitly settle to perceive anything. This is the true ontological sense of the *Gestalt*; namely, the acknowledgement that any possible knowledge is a figure against a background. The figures cannot be separated from the background and posited in-themselves, as if this background was simply a secondary moment required by a defect of our vision. Conversely, the background cannot be seen for itself – we notice it only implicitly when we settle in a new one, seeing how the figures change meaning, coloration and value –, but it is nonetheless an irreducible and crucial part of experience, which is missed by Nietzsche and the empiricists. The conception of impressions does not allow to understand the ontology of the level, for it attempts to reduce the whole experience to a sum of qualities, which are just punctual and smaller figures, isolated from any background. As Merleau-Ponty rightly highlighted, “the theory of sensation, which composes all knowledge out of determinate qualities, constructs objects for us that are cleansed of all equivocation, that are pure, absolute, and that are the ideal of knowledge rather than its actual themes”<sup>301</sup>. Nietzsche displaced this positivity in another sphere of reality, below the consciousness, as drives or Wills to Power, but he still maintained a positivity and “real” existence of the drives (reducing reality to them) instead of understanding that they can be dimensions of our conscious perception. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty’s paradigm is more economical, for it requires only one sphere of reality or experience. Therefore, rather than having two ontological spheres of reality that are strictly separated and do not intermingle (namely, the real one of the drives and the fictitious, created sphere of consciousness), in Merleau-Ponty’s framework there is only one thick or voluminous experience that is distributed according to the structure figure-against-a-background, thus abolishing the hope or need to find pure

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<sup>301</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.11.

figures. By positing the drives in a separate ontological realm, Nietzsche did not understand the depth of reality – its excess over actual, intelligent and objectified consciousness – adequately, he still conceived the drives as a positivity, just inaccessible to the consciousness, while the modality of being of the level can radically and philologically abolish the positive ontology by overcoming the distinction between subject and object. Indeed, according to Merleau-Ponty,

We can only understand this phenomenon if the spectacle, far from being a sum of objects, or a mosaic of qualities spread out before an acosmic subject [or infra-conscious drives], circumvents the subject and offers him a pact. Lighting is not on the side of the object, it is what we take up, what we adopt as a norm, whereas the illuminated thing stands in front of us and confronts us. Lighting is in itself neither color, nor even light, it is prior to the distinction between colors and lights. And this is why it always tends to become “neutral” for us. The shadowy light in which we remain becomes so natural for us that it is no longer even perceived as shadowy. Electric lighting, which seems yellow to us when we first leave the daylight, soon ceases to have any definite color for us, and, if some remnant of daylight penetrates into the room, it is this “objectively neutral” light that appears to us as tinted blue. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.324.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty emphasized that there is not a strict distinction between parts of reality that would always be figures and other ones that would intrinsically be backgrounds or dimensions, but that, on the contrary, the structure is reversible and that any figure or any *quale* can, if we settle in it, become a dimension and the invisible background that allows us to perceive and grants its values to other figures. For instance,

red has in itself [en lui-même, as a color] the potential to become neutral (when it is the color of the lighting), dimensionality – This becoming-neutral is not a change of red into “another color”; it is a modification of the red by its own duration (just as the impact of a figure or a line on my

vision tends to become dimensional, giving it the value of an index of the curvature of space).

Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.296.

The color does not even have to become a lighting to be a dimension (which could prevent some colors from being a dimension), but it can simply be a norm of my perception. Indeed, if I am looking for a particular shade of yellow, it will become the level according to which I will perceive the other ones, judging them too clear or too dark. In this way, the sensation or *quale* (for example color, but more generally any sensible aspect) can always become a dimension and are neither subject nor object but are: “these junctions [or hinges: *charnières*] of Being, these structures accessible through both quality and quantity”<sup>302</sup> that overflow and overcome the objective and dualist ontology. As Merleau-Ponty emphasized,

the supposed “contradiction” of yellow as something and yellow as the title of a world: this is not a contradiction, because it is precisely within its particularity as yellow and thanks to it that yellow becomes a universe or an *element* – That a color can become a level, a fact a category, (exactly as in music: describing a note as particular, *i.e.*, within the range of another *tone*, – and “the same” [note] becoming the one in whose tone a piece of music is written) = the true march toward the universal. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, pp.267-268<sup>303</sup>.

A consequence of the reversibility of the structure figure-against-a-background is that any figure can become a background, thematizing parts of the previous background, and that therefore the drives or values do not have an absolute ontological priority. Certainly, they can be a dimension of experience (as Nietzsche demonstrated), granting values to figures of our life, but they can also be seen from another dimension and become figures, thus inverting the ontological roles. Thereby, the drives are not autonomous or primordial, we cannot

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<sup>302</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.285.

<sup>303</sup> See also Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.286: “There is no longer any problem with the concept, generality, or idea once we understand that the sensible itself is invisible, that yellow is capable of establishing itself as a level or horizon”.

reduce the whole reality to them and Nietzsche added to experience when he reified them (while also missing the ontology of dimensions which remains within experience). He overlooked the possibility that the drives are in fact only one dimension among many others. In order to better grasp the ontological category of the dimension – which can be used to understand the whole ontology of Merleau-Ponty, as Colonna convincingly demonstrated<sup>304</sup> –, and how the drives or values can be understood within this framework (and what consequences this understanding entails for the relation between philology and genealogy), let's examine how Merleau-Ponty developed this notion.

## ***B) The Ontological Notion of Level or Dimension and the World as Dimensionality***

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<sup>304</sup> The notion of dimension is not explicitly thematized by Merleau-Ponty as the main prism that allows to articulate his whole philosophy. His writings about this notion from an ontological standpoint are disparate, scattered, and not forming one system. Just like for Nietzsche, we find some of the most important clues for grasping Merleau-Ponty's ontology in fragments of the posthumous notes. Nevertheless, and just as it did not prevent the Nietzschean philosophers from retrieving a Nietzschean philosophy, Colonna brilliantly showed in his book *Merleau-Ponty et le renouvellement de la métaphysique* that Merleau-Ponty's whole ontology can be read thanks to the prism of the dimension or level. See for instance p.177: "The notion of level is central and structuring in Merleau-Ponty's work, to the point that it can be considered one of the most fundamental matrices of his thinking. Present everywhere but difficult to see".

## 1) The Genesis of the Notion of Level

Besides the example of the lighting, which we have already discussed, Merleau-Ponty uncovered the experience of the dimension or level in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (although he did not grant it an ontological status yet) thanks to Stratton's and Wertheimer's psychological experiments on the concepts of direction and orientation. According to Merleau-Ponty, and in a philological endeavor, he had to refer to psychological experiments because the experience of the level cannot be seen for itself in normal perception, not because it is absent from it but because it is always already determining our vision. Thus, Merleau-Ponty wrote: "we cannot grasp this experience in the everyday course of life, for it is already concealed beneath its own acquisitions. We must look to some exceptional case in which it breaks down and rebuilds itself before our eyes, such as in the case of vision without retinal inversion"<sup>305</sup>. So, what is Stratton's experiment, and what does it reveal? The experiment consists in providing to a subject goggles that invert the visual *stimuli* vertically, which allows to notice a change that does not depend solely on the *stimuli*. Indeed,

If a subject is made to wear goggles that turn the retinal images upright, then the whole landscape at first appears unreal and inverted. On the second day of the experiment, normal perception begins to be reestablished, except that the subject has the feeling that his own body is inverted. [...] From the third day to the seventh day, the body is progressively brought upright and appears to be finally in the normal position, above all when the subject is active. [...] The new visual appearances, which were initially isolated against the background of previously oriented space,

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<sup>305</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.254-255.

soon become surrounded by an horizon that is oriented like them at first (on the third day) through a voluntary effort, and then later (on the seventh day) without any effort at all. [...] When the goggles are removed at the end of the experiment, objects do not, of course, appear inverted, but they do appear “strange,” while motor reactions are reversed: the subject extends his right hand, for example, when the left one would be required. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.255.

This experiment shows how a whole part of experience can change value at once, going from being perceived as “upside-down” to being perceived as “upright”. The retinal *stimuli* are inverted by wearing the goggles, and a corresponding change of the visual field follows, so, at first, there could be an empiricist explanation (namely, that we perceive according to the impressions). However, over the course of the experiment and the habituation of the subject there is a second change occurring even though the *stimuli* are still objectively the same; now the visual field appears “upright” but the body feels inverted, and then a third change occurs when both the body and visual field align and become “upright” together. In this way, and thanks to Stratton, Merleau-Ponty uncovers

systems of appearances whose orientation varies over the course of experience, even when there is no change in the constellation of *stimuli*. And the question is precisely what happens when these floating appearances suddenly drop anchor and become situated within the relation between “up” and “down” [...]. The question is precisely how an object can appear to us as “upright” or “inverted,” and what these words mean. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.257.

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty tries to understand this function of perception that can redistribute the whole meaning or value of the visible in a partial or relative independence from the impressions. Indeed, since the impressions remained the same while a whole change of orientation occurred, it seems that this function depends on a context or anchoring of the subject that cannot be reduced to the *stimuli* or given only through them. Some might say

that the changes of directions are just a subjective illusion created by the unconscious, but then we need to posit a transcendental sphere again that preexists to the consciousness and shapes it, which is not an economical attitude. In a superb philological fashion, Merleau-Ponty argued: “since perception is the initiation to the world and since, as has been insightfully put, « there is nothing prior to perception that could be called mind » [Paliard, *L’illusion de Sinnsteden et le problème de l’implication perceptive*, p.383], we cannot import objective relations into perception that are not yet constituted at its level”<sup>306</sup>. Moreover, positing a transcendental subject would not explain why the changes of orientation would only concern some parts of experience at a time. Indeed, why would the visual field and the body enter in conflict if all our experience was constituted<sup>307</sup>? The *stimuli* or impressions cannot give an answer alone either, because to explain this experiment we should acknowledge that the contents of perception possess an orientation in themselves, which is non-sensical: “« Inverted » in itself and « upright » in itself clearly signify nothing”<sup>308</sup>. The orientation or direction can have a sense only for a situated subject, but this experiment also shows that the subject is not free to change the orientation however they please, it does not depend solely on the subject and its body (*i.e.* our own orientation, with the head being “up” and the feet being “down”), the body does not simply give or impose its own orientation to the rest of the visible. This is shown by Wertheimer’s experiment, who constructed a situation

in which a subject only sees the room he is in through the intermediary of a mirror reflecting the room at a 45° angle from the vertical. The subject at first sees the room as “oblique.” A man

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<sup>306</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.268. See also *ibid.*, p.267: “But we do not yet know of anything about the world or about objective space; we are attempting to describe the phenomenon of the world, that is, its birth for us in this field into which each perception puts us”.

<sup>307</sup> Nietzsche’s conception of the Wills to Power has the advantage of providing an explanation of this differentiation thanks to the struggle between different drives, but his conception remains less economical than Merleau-Ponty’s one and still posits the constitution of experience in a transcendental manner, beneath and prior to perception.

<sup>308</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.257.

moving through the room seems to lean to the side as he walks. A piece of cardboard falling along the doorframe appears to fall diagonally. The whole thing is “strange.” After a few minutes, a sudden change takes place: the walls, the man moving through the room, and the direction of the falling cardboard all become vertical. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.259.

In this experiment, the subject does not progressively adapt the visual field to the orientation of their own body, but, on the contrary, they perceive according to the initially “oblique” visual field that the subject then institutes as a norm and that becomes “upright”. As a result, Merleau-Ponty concludes

that the “spatial level” does not merge with the orientation of one’s own body. Although the consciousness of one’s own body undoubtedly contributes to the constitution of the level – one subject, whose head is tilted, places a string on an angle that he had been asked to place vertically – it is, in this function, in competition with the other sectors of experience, and the vertical only tends to follow the direction of the head if the visual field is empty, and if the “anchorage points” are absent, such as when one moves about in the dark. As a mass of tactile, labyrinthine, and kinesthetic givens, the body has no more precise an orientation than other contents, and it itself receives this orientation from the general level of experience. Wertheimer’s observation shows precisely how the visual field can impose an orientation that is not the orientation of the body. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.260.

It is in order to describe this experience of instituting or settling in norms of perception which are proposed by the visible itself but that can be in competition with one another, a competition to grant meaning and orientation to our whole experience, that Merleau-Ponty elaborated the notion of levels or dimensions, as thus:

Let us say that perception accepts, prior to the experiment, a certain *spatial level* in relation to which the experimental spectacle at first appears oblique, and that, during the experiment, this spectacle induces another level in relation to which the whole of the visual field can, once again, appear upright. Everything happens as if certain objects (the walls, the doors, and the body of

the man in the room), determined as oblique in relation to the given level, aspired by themselves to provide the privileged directions, attracted the vertical to themselves, played the role of “anchorage points,” and caused the previously established level to tilt. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.259.

These anchorage points are themselves *qualia* or visibles that can turn into dimensions or levels, exactly as we have seen with the example of color that can turn into lighting or a norm of our perception and of other colors. Thus, we find a norm of the visible that is not ideal nor outside of the visible; it becomes invisible as a level, but it is part of one single experience. Each “part” of experience is not only an actual figure but can also become the virtual lighting or level according to which I see the rest, all diffracting the world in a different way. This plurality of levels is accessible to each of us to some extent, since, as a situated dimensional being myself, I am not restricted to one single level forever, but I can change levels and understand the world according to different backgrounds or dimensions, as

I go from one system of positions to the other without having the key of either and in the manner that a man without any musical knowledge sings a tune he has heard at a different pitch. The possession of a body brings with it the power of changing levels and of “understanding” space, just as the possession of a voice brings with it the power of changing pitches. The perceptual field rights itself [...] because I live within it, because I carry myself into the new spectacle entirely, and because I locate my center of gravity, so to speak, within it. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.262.

This experience of anchoring ourselves in a level, at first discovered at the occasion of the orientation in space, will be progressively extended by Merleau-Ponty until he realizes that it is in fact the framework of any experience. Thereby, the experience of the level can illuminate a lot of facts, for instance the color as we have seen but also the one of movement,

the principle of inertia and the physics of relativity, revealing them as a knowledge in situation:

As with up and down, movement is a phenomenon of levels, every movement presupposes a certain anchorage that can vary. [...] . But what exactly is anchorage and how does it constitute a background at rest? This is not an explicit perception. Anchorage points, when we focus upon them, are not objects. [...] It is essential to the supposed reference points of movement not to be thematized in actual knowledge and to be always “already there.” They are not presented directly to perception, they circumvent it and haunt it [...]. Even if we can break with a human world, we cannot prevent ourselves from focusing our eyes – which means that so long as we live we remain engaged, if not in a human milieu, then at least in a physical milieu – and for a given focusing of the gaze, perception is not facultative. It is even less so when the life of the body is integrated into our concrete existence. I am free to see my train or the neighboring train moving, whether I do nothing or whether I examine myself on the illusions of movement. But: “When I am playing cards in my compartment, I see the train move on the next track even if it is in reality my own train which is moving, but when I am looking at the other train, searching perhaps for an acquaintance in the coach, then it is my own train that seems to be moving” [Koffka, *Perception*, p.578]. The compartment where we take up residence is “at rest,” its walls are “vertical,” and the landscape passes by in front of us; on one side the fir trees seen through the window appear to us as diagonal. If we place ourselves at the window, we re-enter the large world beyond our small one, the firs straighten up and remain immobile, the train leans with the slope and speeds through the countryside. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.292.

Thus, if I am in a train, I will not see the objects or persons inside as “moving”, because the moving train became my reference frame or level; but if we take the Earth as the reference frame (and situate ourselves in it), then the train and everything inside of it are moving. Therefore, there is never an objective fact, for example there is not an objective movement, but always only a knowledge situated in a particular reference frame. The Earth itself is moving according to the reference frame of the Sun, and the solar system or even our galaxy

are moving too according to the reference frame of another galaxy. None of these reference frames are truer nor falsier than the others, they all simply express our situated experience of space that none can exhaust or know in-itself. Our experience of space demands to be perceived from a reference point or level and becomes non-sensical if we try to think about an objective space or a space in-itself. The idea of objective space or movement is just the result of an abstraction that departed from experience and contradicts the experience of space. It posits implicitly, somewhere inaccessible for us, a universal reference frame, but such a notion is self-contradictory since a level is always particular, changeable and based on another level. The same goes with time, our relation to time is also a case of level. The notion of level even allows to understand the pseudo “paradox” of the twins better than one who would ignore the lesson of relativity and would still attempt to speak of time objectively or according to a neutral reference frame (which cannot exist). This thought experiment consists in having one twin that stays on Earth and one who travels very fast in space, in a way that the time goes slower (thanks to the tremendous speed) and comes back to Earth many years later, with now an age gap between the twins. Some might be tempted to interpret this experience by stating that the younger twin who went in space “came back in time”. However, this interpretation implicitly adopts the reference frame of Earth and applies to the twin that went in space this level while it does not apply anymore, by going to space the new reference frame is the spaceship, in which the time flows differently, slows down or dilates (according to the level of the Earth) thanks to speed, but that does not go backwards. There is not an objective or universal time according to which we could tell the twin “went back”. This twin simply changed reference frame, they still had their own present and time – in another reference frame – that kept moving forward. We cannot even state that time objectively slowed down for the twin in space, nor that he had “less time”, by measuring for instance the seconds passed according to a clock based on Earth’s time. The reference frame

of the twin in a spaceship is as valid as the Earth's one, so he or she could also tell that the time on Earth sped up, flowed more quickly or contracted according to their reference frame. None of the reference frames are truer than the other. It is a paradox only if we try to think about it in terms of objective time; however there is no such thing as objective time, the "time of the clock" is only one particular frame of reference, the one of Earth (objectified), and it cannot be treated as a universal level, it does not apply relevantly to the twin who went in space and lived time according to another level. We might translate all of the other times according to one reference frame (let's say the Earth's one), but that does not mean that it is the original or primordial level; the same translation could be done from any other time level. All reference frames or levels can be applied, individually, to the whole experience, but they only grasp it from a partial point of view, they ignore the viewpoints of all the other levels, which frame experience differently, from another direction, or even emphasizing other aspects (and putting others in the background). More generally, even outside of space and time, we can never find a universal or objective level, we can simply go from one to another and we always already start in one; if not, we would not have any experience at all. As Merleau-Ponty highlighted, the "level is that always precedes itself, every constitution of a level presupposing another preestablished level"<sup>309</sup>, which entails that "the positing of a level is the forgetting of this contingency, and space is established upon our facticity"<sup>310</sup>. Attempting to find a first level amounts to search for a cause of the levels of perception, something that precedes them and that would be objective or in-itself, but that we would perceive subjectively according to a particular level only because of a flaw in our perception, which would be its situatedness. However, all we can say, perceive or know – from the philological standpoint – is already a situated knowledge. Therefore, trying to find a primordial level would be escaping experience. There is not a first level, for it would require

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<sup>309</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.259.

<sup>310</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.265.

not having any situation at all, which would make experience impossible: “the first spatial level could not find its anchorage points anywhere, since these would have needed a level before the first level in order to be determinate in space”<sup>311</sup>. The levels are not contained in one another, like Russian dolls, with a bigger and final level that would exist on the same modality as the others and contain them all; instead, they are our existence in situation in an open field that is partially thematized by each of them. In this way, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

Thus, since every conceivable being relates directly or indirectly to the perceived world, and since the perceived world is only grasped through orientation, we cannot dissociate being from oriented being; there is no reason to “ground” space or to ask what is the level of all levels. The primordial level is on the horizon of all of our perceptions, but this is an horizon that, in principle, can never be reached and thematized in an explicit perception. Each level in which we live in turn appears when we drop anchor in some “*milieu*” that is offered to us. This *milieu* is itself only defined spatially for a previously given level. Thus, each of our experiences in sequence, back to and including the first, passes forward an already acquired spatiality. Our first perception in turn could only have been spatial by referring itself to an orientation that preceded it. Thus, our perception must already find us at work in a world. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.264.

How to interpret the Being at stake between the levels and in which we are always already situated? To what ontology does the notion of level lead? Merleau-Ponty will provide a definitive answer only in his later works.

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<sup>311</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.264-265.

## 2) The Ontological Significance of the Level and Being's Polymorphism

We have established that we do not have pure figures or facts, we have a field of experience that admits (and makes possible) several norms and we always perceive by settling in one of them to know figures against a background. We cannot escape this knowledge in situation, it is our necessary condition: "Being aware = having a figure against a background – we cannot go back any further than that"<sup>312</sup>. However, this should not be deemed as "something to be escaped" in the first place. Indeed, those who deplore this state of fact are those who hope to achieve an external and exhaustive view of the world (*i.e.*, the world in-itself), but such hope was born in experience and strives to submit it to the frames of our intelligence, which is not a philological attitude. In philology, it is not intelligence that prevails over experience, but experience that has the priority. Thus, if experience shows us that we cannot adopt an external view on the world and that we must settle in an anchor point to perceive, think and talk about it, then we should give up on the too-human standard of knowledge that values only causes or things in-themselves. In *The visible and invisible*, Merleau-Ponty – with the example of scales as another case of level – criticizes the attempt to find an in-itself behind our situated views. Indeed, he wrote:

Scale: projective concept: we imagine a being in-itself transferred to a plane in-itself where it appears transposed according to a certain ratio of size so that representations at different scales are various "visual tableaux" of the same thing in itself. We take a step further by removing the model in-itself: there are only representations at different scales. But they remain in the realm of the "visual tableau" or the in-itself, due to an inevitable inconsistency as long as we have not

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<sup>312</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.242. See also *ibid.*, p.240: "We only perceive figures on levels", and p.313: "There is no meaning other than the carnal, figure and ground – Meaning = their dislocation, their gravitation".

addressed the question of philosophy. – It is a matter of understanding that the “views” at different scales are not projections onto corporealities - screens of an inaccessible in-itself, but that they and their lateral implication in each other are reality, exactly: that reality is their common structure, their core, and not something behind them: behind them, there are only other “views” [or levels] still conceived according to the self-projection scheme. The real is between them, beneath them. The macro-phenomenon and the micro-phenomenon are not two more or less enlarged projections of a real in-itself behind them: the macro-phenomena of evolution are no less real, the micro-phenomena no more real. There is no hierarchy between them. The content of my perception, microphenomena, and the large-scale view of envelope phenomena are not two projections of the In-itself: Being is their common structure. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, pp.275-276.

This means that, instead of an object in-itself that would be the cause of our “representations”, fully external to them, there is one voluminous Being that resides *between* all of our views, that we all share and in which we are situated and encompassed. Merleau-Ponty elaborated on his rejection of the causalist framework in several work notes from *The visible and invisible*, for instance through a comparison with Leibniz in this one:

By rejecting the concept of perception-reproduction (of my body as such in relation to the external thing as such) [of which the visual tableau examined in the previous quote is a particular case], I open up access to a raw Being with which I will not be in a subject-object relationship, and even less in a cause-effect relationship. The relationship of *In der Welt Sein* [Being-in-the-World] will take the place occupied by Leibniz's relationship of reciprocal expression of perspectives taken on the world. [...] The expression of the universe within us is certainly not the harmony between our monad and others, the presence within it of the ideas of all things – but it is what we observe in perception, to be taken as it is rather than explained. Our soul has no windows: this means *In der Welt Sein* – Pre-established harmony (like occasionalism) still maintains the in-itself and simply links it with what we experience through a substance-to-substance relationship founded in God, – instead of making it the cause of our thoughts – but it

is precisely a matter of rejecting the idea of the In-Itself altogether. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.271<sup>313</sup>.

Or by proposing, instead of a linear series of events and a first cause, an eternal and ubiquitous existence of the world, which cannot be found in our ontic conceptions of time or space from which the concept of cause is derived because these conceptions are views or segregations contained within the eternal texture of Being, or, in other words, secondary “differentiations of spatio-temporal architectonics [in the singular in French]”<sup>314</sup>. Thus, Merleau-Ponty spoke of a

cosmology of the visible in the sense that, considering endo-time and endo-space, for me there is no longer any question of origins, limits, or series of events leading to a first cause, but only a single burst of Being that is eternal. Describing the world of “rays of the world” beyond any serial-eternal or ideal alternative – Positing existential eternity – the eternal body. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.313.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty opposed to the causalist framework the idea of transcendence in the following work note: “what replaces causal thinking is the idea of transcendence, that is, of a world seen in its inherent connection to this world, thanks to it, of an intra-ontology, of an encompassing-encompassed Being, of a vertical Being, dimensional, dimensionality”<sup>315</sup>. This experience of the transcendence of Being, which does not rest in-itself but between the views, connecting and justifying them all – although they express this transcendence only partially and as an horizon that can never be made fully explicit –, is

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<sup>313</sup> For another work note of Merleau-Ponty that radicalizes Leibniz’s thought, see *ibid.*, p.310: “Visible-seeing = projection-introjection. They must both be abstracted from a single fabric. Visible-seeing (for me, for others) is not something psychic, nor a behavior of vision, but a perspective, or better: the world itself with a certain coherent distortion – The chiasm = the truth of pre-established harmony – Much more accurate than it: for it is between local-individualized facts, and the chiasm links as front and reverse [or « other side »; « lie comme envers et endroit » in French] previously unified sets that are in the process of differentiation, resulting in a world that is neither one nor two in the objective sense – which is pre-individual, generality”.

<sup>314</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.281.

<sup>315</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.276.

exactly what is at stake and what is given through the cases of temporal and spatial levels we examined previously, that Merleau-Ponty managed to express as such only in his later works. Thus, Merleau-Ponty wrote:

The fixity of the fixed point and the mobility of what lies beyond it are not partial, local phenomena, nor even a cluster of phenomena: they are a single transcendence, a single graduated series of differences – The structure of the visual field, with its near and far points and its horizon, is essential for transcendence to exist; it is the model for all transcendence. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.280.

In a similar manner, he asserted that: “in truth, movements, rest, distances, apparent sizes, *etc.*, are only different indices of refraction of the transparent medium that separates me from things themselves, different expressions of that coherent swelling through which Being shows itself and hides itself<sup>316</sup> simultaneously. This simultaneity of a manifestation or presentation [monstration] and of a concealment expresses the idea of a transcendence that is immanent to experience, that can only be given as an unreachable horizon because what is at stake is not a figure but the voluminous Being that cannot be presented by a single level. Being is not fully present in the figure-grounds we perceive, but it is not fully absent from them either, it does not rest in-itself but is presented as the unrepresentable that exceeds them. In other words, Being is present as this *milieu* always already there that we cannot perceive externally because it encompasses us temporally, spatially and ontologically. By analogy, Being is like something that would be far too close to my eyes to see, touching them, that I cannot see not because it is somewhere else, at a tremendous distance, but, on the contrary, it obstructs my view because it is saturating and overflowing it, always already too close to me and encroaching upon me. This analogy is of course flawed, Being is not something fully external to me, it is not the case that I cannot see it because it is too close to me, but, even

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<sup>316</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.279.

more radically, I cannot see it because we are always already intertwined. Thereby, Being infringes upon me and I infringe upon it too. Attempting to see Being directly would be like trying to see directly the back of my head. However, just as the back of my head is part of my being and is not fully absent from me or from my visual field, remaining at its horizon or as its counterpart and other side, Being is also not resting in-itself but is involved implicitly or virtually in my perceptions and knowledge, as the other side or counterpart of the visible. Merleau-Ponty used the terms of chiasm, intertwinement, encroachment (and all their synonyms) as well as the term *Einfühlung* (empathy) to describe our relation to the world, as sharing the same flesh, for example as such:

The flesh of the world, described (in terms of time, space, movement) as segregation, dimensionality, continuation, latency, encroachment – Then (we must) question these phenomena-questions again: they refer us back to the *Einfühlung* perceiving-perceived, because they mean that we are already in the being thus described, that we are part of it, that between it and us there is *Einfühlung*. This means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and that moreover this flesh of my body is shared by the world, it reflects it, it encroaches on the world and the world encroaches on my flesh (the felt, which is at the same time summit of subjectivity and summit of materiality), they are in a relationship of transgression or overlap. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.297.

In another lexical field, the description of Being as “encompassing” expresses the same idea as the *Einfühlung* or chiasm; namely, that Being cannot be adequately described because it is already encompassing us and overflowing us, and any reference frame or level we choose and anchor ourselves in is only a part of it; but at same time Being is present in all of them and we are a part of this total Being too. Thus, the figures can appear clearly because we segregate them from a particular background and isolate them, we perceive them frontally as something different from us and from the implicit level and from the other figures (which gives rise to the ontology of the object if we attempt to reduce the whole experience to them).

By contrast, the world always already has us; its participation to all levels makes it impossible for us to thematize it frontally or in isolation, it always already infringes upon our very being, we are in and of the world (it is probably the sense of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Heidegger's *In der Welt Sein*) and therefore we cannot separate it from us nor isolate it, and as a result it cannot be seen as clearly as a figure (*i.e.* as an object, cause or "in-itself"). Consequently, instead of being an object that we could thematize explicitly, the world is the common field in which we segregate and settle in levels. Hence, it is once again the same idea (or, rather, modality of being) that Merleau-Ponty expresses when he asserts that the world is a field. As a field in which we are always already situated, the world appears as this thick crossroads (of all levels and all views) that encompasses us, always already there. It is the world that, as a field, institutes for us the possibility of adopting many different levels and changing levels, but it also forces us to adopt one at any time to perceive anything because it exceeds them all. The world is present everywhere in our perception and thoughts, but it is never wholly present because it encompasses them all, always exceeding and preceding them. Therefore, the transcendence of the world and Being can be maintained without having to posit them "in-themselves", nor disparage our knowledge (by making it subjective or erroneous, artificial and illusory). Thereby, the disappointment in our situated knowledge ceases once we do not conceive the world as an in-itself anymore and instead acknowledge that "the world is an open and indefinite unity in which I am situated"<sup>317</sup>, that it "is a field, and as such, it is always open"<sup>318</sup>. As an open and indeterminate field, the world holds all possible meanings, levels and figurations; it can be understood as a "fundamental polymorphism [...]. There is the vertical or carnal [charnel] universe and its polymorphic matrix. The absurdity of the blank slate [or primordial and universal level] on which knowledge would settle: not because there is knowledge before knowledge, but because

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<sup>317</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp.317-318.

<sup>318</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.236.

there is the field”<sup>319</sup>. Such a view of the world, as that which encompasses us and every possible meaning, always seen as a figure-ground, is the most philological philosophical paradigm because it grasps us within experience, in our figurations and levels and in the field of life, perception, language and knowledge.

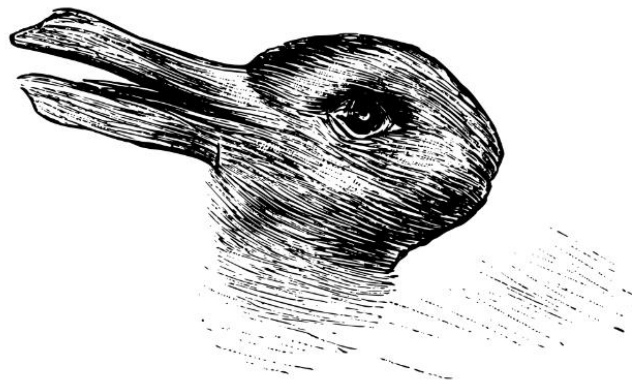
Thus far, we have shown that any knowledge always follows the structure figure-ground, that we must settle implicitly in a particular level so that explicit figures can be known to us or perceived by us, and that it is the level that grants the figures their meaning and value. We have also seen that we can change level by settling in another reference frame or norm, which entails a redistribution of the meaning of experience. Nevertheless, we have not yet examined if we can possess several levels at the time, nor how do the multiple levels intersect, communicate, are articulated together and coexist. Indeed, for now, we have only examined changes of levels that occur within a same element of Being; for instance, changing reference frame for movement or for time but remaining in the spatial or temporal dimension, and because of that, the new level could seem to chase or replace the previous one. Yet, it is not the case. Countless levels coexist at the same time, although we can often thematize only one at a time. Indeed, Stratton’s experiment already showed that the levels can coexist at the same time and that we can have different levels for different parts of our experience (when the body and the visual field are seen from a different level for instance, and that only one of them feels “inverted”). Outside of this experiment, we can easily attest of the coexistence of levels in the “rabbit-duck illusion” for example, made famous by

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<sup>319</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.270.

Wittgenstein, which is in fact not an illusion but simply an image where more than one level can apply in a very clear fashion.

**Welche Thiere gleichen ein-  
ander am meisten?**



**Kaninchen und Ente.**

Figure 1. “*Kaninchen und Ente*” (“Rabbit and Duck”), the earliest known version of the duck–rabbit illusion, from the 23 October 1892 issue of *Fliegende Blätter*, unknown artist.

According to one level, we can see this figure as a duck, but according to another one we can see it as a rabbit. We can adopt only one level at a time, but we clearly sense that the figure is not meant to be resolved or reduced to a single one, and we can always return to the other level. The two competing levels do not annihilate the other forever, we can dance between them. The very possibility of this never-ending dance is the expression of the polymorphism or voluminosity of the phenomenon at stake, that exceeds the reduction to one level and impinges upon several at once. We could also look at this figure from the level of the art style for instance, in which we will not see a duck or a rabbit anymore but a certain modality or style of the pencil strokes, seen against the background of the whole history of

drawing. Wittgenstein deduced from this experience a particular modality of seeing, that he qualified in his *Philosophical Investigation* as a “seeing as”, but he thought that it is only a modality of seeing among others and that it applies only to ambiguous figures. On the contrary, in a Merleau-Pontian framework, the case of the duck-rabbit makes it easy to observe, but the simultaneous belonging to many levels is not the privilege of “ambiguous” figures; or, rather, every figure is in fact “ambiguous” (*i.e.*, a positive and ontological ambiguity, which consists in the encroaching upon multiple different levels that cannot be united in a single frame). Merleau-Ponty invites us to acknowledge that we always only see, perceive and know “as”, according to levels and never in-itself; but this seeing is not a mere interpretation that depends solely on the subject, it expresses a thickness and overdetermination of the phenomena. Merleau-Ponty dedicated a work note to the ontological meaning of this overdetermination of experience:

Overdetermination (= circularity, chiasm) = everything can be *emphasized* [accentué] as an emblem of Being (= character), and should be read as such. [...] These are not chains of causality; it is, starting from a polymorphism or amorphism, which is contact with the Being of promiscuity, of transitivity, the fixation of a “character” through investment in an ontic Entity [Etant] of the openness to Being, – which, from now on, is done through this Etant. [...] The entire architecture of psycho-logical concepts (perception, idea, affection...), all this jumble suddenly becomes clear when we stop thinking of these terms as *positive* and start thinking of them – not as negative or negations [négativités] (because this leads to the same difficulties) –, but as *differentiations* of a single, massive adherence to Being, which is flesh (possibly like “laces”) – [...] There is no *hierarchy* of orders or layers or planes, always based on the distinction between individual and essence; there is the dimensionality of all facts and the facticity of all dimensions – This by virtue of the “ontological difference”. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, pp.317-318.

Thereby, it is the nature of every single figure or phenomenon to be polysemic because they borrow their meaning from (or become the emblem of) a reality that is a thickness or voluminosity that infringes on a multitude of levels. I speak of thickness here to underline this new modality of being uncovered by Merleau-Ponty (the “ontological difference” mentioned by the previous quote), which is opposed to the flatness of a figure which would be exhausted by a single frame or level and would pertain to the ontic ontology of the entity (*étant*) or of the object. As Merleau-Ponty underlined: “the world, Being, is polymorphic, mysterious, and by no means a layer of flat entities or of in-itself”<sup>320</sup>. This conception of reality as voluminous and the coexistence of the levels become even clearer when we leave the strict field of time, space and visual levels to broaden this ontology and epistemology to our entire experience. Religion for instance, is a phenomenon that can be understood from many different levels or dimensions at the same time. Sociology, anthropology, spirituality, psychology and even Nietzsche’s axiological and genealogical point of view all tackle the topic of religion but very differently. They all look at it from a different level (which is set by their methodology), and thus they emphasize very different aspects of the religious phenomenon. The aspects thematized by one of these levels will be mostly irrelevant to the other prisms. They will not focus on the same aspects at all: anthropology will highlight the cultural ones and the ethnological differences with different types of religiosity, sociology will underline the logic of human groups, the primary socialization and the peer pressure in smaller groups (for instance villages), spirituality will thematize the personal experience of a relation with God and how it affects the believer, psychology will maybe mention the fear of death as a source of the need to believe or will understand the visions of the prophets as a case of psychopathology, and genealogy will insist on the values, the judgment on existence and the way of living entailed by religion. Nevertheless, what to do with this plurality? They

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<sup>320</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.300.

are all true at the same time, or, rather, they are beyond the dualist and objective opposition between true and false that involves a pure figure, while we are now aiming at a figure against a background, or, any other words, a thick phenomenon. Coexisting simultaneously, all these views express the complex, rich and polymorphic reality of the religious phenomenon. And yet, most sciences still adopt a causalist framework (even if implicitly) and are looking for a single type of explanation that should explain the whole of the phenomenon of religion, which can then be reduced to this single aspect or level as its origin or principle. The sciences are opposing one another and consider the other ones as less relevant, or at least they do not communicate with one another and treat (maybe as a working or operative hypothesis) religion (or any phenomenon) as if it was entirely understandable from within their exclusive level or prism. In fact, the sciences are encouraged to do so because of the nature of the level, which can apply to the whole experience. However, what they underestimate in this endeavor is the fact that their level only thematizes one type of aspect of reality and overlooks a multitude of them, which have been implicitly relegated to the invisible background so that their figures (dependent on their particular level) can appear. Thereby, Merleau-Ponty prompts us to distinguish between two different universalities: a superficial one that applies to the whole world but only according to one level, one type of aspect (thus, mathematics for example can be applied to the whole world but they grasp only its quantitative aspects), and a deep or thick universality that is the universality of the world with all of its dimensions and levels, as the total Being or Being-not-yet-divided, that all our levels (as divisions and segregations of this Being) thematize but never exhaust. It is according to this distinction that we can understand the work note that speaks, in opposition to the superficial universality, of a

true march toward the universal. The universal is not above, it is below (Claudel), it is not in front of us [spread as unambiguous, univocal figures according to a single level], but behind us

[thick, taking part in all levels at the same time] – atonal music [which can participate in all particular tones or musical levels] = the equivalent of the philosophy of the Being of undividedness [l'Être d'indivision]. [...] *Transponierbarkeit* is a special case of a more general transposition, of which atonal music is the thematization. All this presupposes the Being of undividedness – This universality of the sensible = *Urpräsentation* of what is not *Urpräsentierbar* = the sensible carved out of being without restriction, this Being that is between my perspective and that of others Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, pp.267-268.

Therefore, following this distinction between two universalities and referring to reality as the Being that is not yet divided and participates to all levels, Merleau-Ponty proposes to conceive religion (and any phenomenon) as a multi-dimensional thickness that encroaches upon many different levels, comprising simultaneously very diverse aspects that cannot be exhausted by any single frame, instead of understanding them according to one single level (which would miss a lot of aspects and be anti-philological). With such a prism, Merleau-Ponty manages to unite all the sciences. Indeed, thanks to him, instead of being strictly separated – relegated to different ontologies or spheres of reality – and in the impossibility to communicate, opposing to each other their own interpretation of the “real cause” of the phenomena (while it is always only a partial view that misses some aspects of total Being), the sciences can now be considered as levels that all describe the same voluminous Being but according to different dimensions. In this way, Merleau-Ponty wrote: “there is transcendence, certainly, between philosophies [and between the different sciences or methodological prisms, as different levels], no reduction to a single plane [or level], but that, in this staggering in depth [cet échelonnement en profondeur, thanks to the concept of voluminosity], they still refer to each other, it is still the same Being that is at stake”<sup>321</sup>. What we have just said about religion is true of any phenomenon. They are always a figure-ground

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<sup>321</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.237.

applied on a voluminous, polymorphic reality that participates in a multitude of levels simultaneously. Let's give a few more examples, although the list could be infinite and our whole experience can be described in this way, in any of its fields. The ontology of the level can explain the prejudices and misunderstandings, by not settling in a level and judging it as a whole – or all its figures – from afar, or rather from another level that is too distant or foreign to discern these figures with nuance, precision and wealth. The most crucial cases that deny the flesh (which is Merleau-Ponty's ontological term to designate the participation in a multiplicity of dimensions) and reduce phenomena to a single level, thus flattening them to a superficial aspect, are racism and sexism. We can think of Frantz Fanon for instance, who was a reader of Merleau-Ponty and showed how racism is an outlook on the world that grasps people according to only one level, and a superficial one, *i.e.* the level of the skin. The perceived skin color (which, interestingly enough, is perceived according to a level that can vary too: an Italian or Spanish person will be considered as white in Europe but will be perceived as "Mexican" and part of a minority in the United States, which shows the vacuity of the racist claims, that ignore the ontology of the level and try to judge "in-itself" the value of individuals based on their skin) becomes the superficial mask to which the racists reduce the whole flesh of individuals. Fanon explained how colonialism not only looks at individuals superficially but also forces the "people of color" to perceive themselves only through such a superficial mask too and how psychopathologies develop and are fostered when one's own flesh is denied to themselves. Sexism also reduces the whole voluminous flesh of individuals – with all their interests, the wealth of dimensions in which they partake, *etc.* – to simply reduce them to a few sexual features, which prevents any genuine relation and objectifies the others by flattening them (and which can lead to self-objectifications and psychopathologies too). Besides, reducing animals, plants or any living beings to mere objects and mechanisms also denies their flesh. In this way, scientism follows the same

approach of objectivation and reduction than sexism and racism. These cases are the most critical ones, when the other dimensions are frontally denied, but in most cases the other aspects are simply ignored or overlooked; they never fully disappear, they are simply forgotten but are open to being thematized if we settle in another level that focuses on them, hence retrieving these aspects. The aspects can always become thematized again because the voluminous phenomenon lies at the horizon of any of my perceptions and unites them, promises me more to see in the background, that can become clear if I adopt another level. Thus, any given figures from a given level might seem like a homogenous and undifferentiated mass to people who do not settle at this level, but, for the passionate person who settles at this level, each work or individual figure will be very different. There are many example; we can think of blues for instance, where the similarity and simplicity of chord changes might sound like they are all the same for one who settles in the broad level of music in general, comparing musical styles as single blocks, but for the blues enthusiast, who settles in the particular level of the blues itself, there are many intricacies that make each song unique. Manga too, for those we have never even attempted to read one (or watch as an anime), they are seen from a condescending level that deems them as cartoons for children (which is also a prejudice to think that cartoons are necessarily for children), sexualizing and full of violence, while one who settles at the level of manga knows that they are very diversified, that the violence in them (when there is any) is rarely gratuitous but is rather a metaphor for a clash of ideals and that they can be profound, poetic and philosophical. Finally, in the level of our daily life, when we need to post a letter or send a package, the traits of the stamp will be irrelevant and overlooked, we will simply look at the stamp as falling under the category that it can be used or not (for instance is it an international one if our parcel needs to go abroad), but one who is interested in them and starts a collection for instance can observe all the individual differences, their rarity, their art and the figures

depicted on them or their country of provenance. Our daily life is full of such omissions because many different levels are proposed to us at any time, or, in other words, our life and existence are always at the crossroads and intersection of many different levels that encroach upon us and upon one another. During my walk to the grocery store I could always stop and start gazing at a particular tree and focus on its intrinsic and idiosyncratic qualities, or focus on the architecture around me, or in the specificities of the song I am listening to, but usually all of that is relegated to the background of my action for it is not relevant to the current level in which I am settled. Thus, all of our sensible perception is done according to levels, but all of our human world of judgments and emotions is also fully determined by the ontology of the level. When I am looking for a job, I can consider the different offers according to several levels that pertain to different dimensions; for instance the salary (so the economic level), the self-fulfillment and sense of being useful (so an existential level), from a moral point of view (is this company detrimental to life, to the environment or to others), from a pragmatic perspective (is the job a home-office, and if not is it far from my home, what kind of transportations I could use to go there) and so on... The job offer will appear enticing depending on the level I settle in, or even according to a mix of levels, but what matters is that different levels can be valid and provide different judgments on this offer because it is rooted in a voluminous field which is traversed by many dimensions at once; it can be thematized from the social, political, economic, personal or emotional, physical, or moral levels and more. The term of dimension here, although it can be synonymous to the level and pertains to the same ontology, allows to emphasize that we do not simply change levels in a single, particularized field (for example changing of lighting, which pertains to the realm of colors and visual perception), but that there are also many different fields, each with their own multiple levels, segregating or underlining different aspects of Being. In this way, since each dimension can be seen as having its own diversity of levels and corresponding

figurations, Merleau-Ponty sometimes speaks of them in terms of a small “world”, all contained in the encompassing one (*i.e.* total Being), for example as thus: “perception is not perception of things first, but perception of elements (water, air, etc.), of rays of the world, of things that are dimensions, that are worlds”<sup>322</sup>, or likewise:

A “world” (it is a whole world, the world of sound, color, *etc.*) = an organized whole, which is closed, but which, strangely, is representative of everything else, has its symbols, its equivalents for everything that is not itself. Painting for space, for example. A “world” has dimensions. By definition, they are not the only ones possible (by moving to a third dimension, spatial beings separated in the first two can be connected). But by definition, they also have structural value; they are more than just singularities of content: the values in a pencil drawing are representative of the whole. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.272.

That a dimension is a world that seems to be closed on itself echoes what we said before about the superficial or relative kind of universality, which is often confused with true universality precisely because the dimension applies to the whole world, even if it is ever only according to a single type of aspect. Thus, it is the breadth of application of the dimension that can lead to the wrong impression that the thematized aspect is enough to understand fully the whole world, and that, ultimately, total Being can be reduced to this dimension. Treating a single dimension as the entire world overlooks the ontological difference between the dimension and the world as the dimensionality from which all dimensions are taken. The dimension, although it expresses it, is not total Being, which is the “matter” or space of undividedness on which we apply the structure figure-ground by settling in a dimension that we draw from Being, that we measured on Being but that reveals only the aspects that can lend themselves to this measurement and dimension. In this way,

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<sup>322</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.267. On the notion of element, see *ibid.*, p.191: “We must think of flesh, not in terms of substances, body, and spirit, because then it would be the union of contradictions, but, as we said, as an element, a concrete emblem of a general way of being”.

treating the dimension as the whole Being would amount to forgetting that “it is a matter of *Normierung* [Standardization]. *I.e.* (Heidegger) of the position of a measuring [d'un mesurant]. We then see that the norm and the diaphragm, *etc.*, derive from a total phenomenon that is ultimately the « world »<sup>323</sup>. In this way, the dimensions are indeed a “world”, and they express more than their own particularity, they are not fully closed on themselves when we take into account their horizon that involves total Being, but they are not the primordial reality, they are derived from it. Merleau-Ponty granted to the dimensions an ontological power of expression, but only if they are understood as a “sample taken from a world whose structure is made explicit by”<sup>324</sup> them, always partially and from a particular angle that thematizes only a kind of aspect of the world, which remains, as the totality, at their horizon. As Merleau-Ponty underlined, we usually look at a specific dimension as if it could translate the meanings or phenomena of the other ones, we try to understand them all according to a particular one,

we dream of systems of equivalences, and they do indeed work. But their logic, like that of a phonemic system, is summarized in a single cluster, a single range; they are all animated by a single movement, each and every one of them a single whirlwind, a single withdrawal from Being. What is needed is to make explicit this totality of horizon, which is not synthesis.  
Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.261.

Thereby, the dimensions can be understood by Merleau-Ponty as “the « rays of the world » [which] are not synthesis and not “reception”, but *segregation*, *i.e.* it supposes that we are already in the world or in being. We cut into a being that remains in its place, of which we do not make a synopsis – and which is not in itself”<sup>325</sup>. Through this operation of segregation, every dimension institutes or establishes a diacritic and oppositional system expressing total

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<sup>323</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.246.

<sup>324</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.296.

<sup>325</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.290.

Being in a particular fashion, in the same way as the different languages all express, relatively and in their own way, the whole world or experience. Hence, just like for language, Merleau-Ponty “describes perception as a diacritical, relative, oppositional system – primordial space as topological (that is, carved out of a total voluminosity that surrounds me, where I am, behind me as well as in front of me...)”<sup>326</sup>. Reciprocally, even sentences or words are the expression of the thick and polymorphic reality, it is for that reason that they can fit many contexts and that a same sentence can be interpreted differently depending on the level or context of the speaker and of the listener. The misunderstandings or disagreements between philosophers can be understood as cases of not settling in the same level, and therefore granting different meanings to the same words or figures. Thus, both in perception and language (and also in thought: “thoughts are the currency of this global being – Delimitations – within it”<sup>327</sup>), we find dimensions that segregate or differentiate – in the same total, voluminous Being – signs-significations or figures-grounds, always in a partial way but grasping a root or foliage of Being nonetheless. This ontology that radicalizes and generalizes Saussure’s framework is Merleau-Ponty’s solution to

restore the world as a sense of Being that is absolutely different from the “represented”, namely as the vertical Being that none of the “representations” exhaust and that all “reach”, the wild Being. This applies not only to perception, but also to the universe of predicative truths and meanings. Here too, meaning (wild) must be conceived as absolutely distinct from the In-Itself and from “pure consciousness” – truth (predicative-cultural) as that Individual (prior to the singular and the plural) on which the acts of meaning intersect and of which they are splinters. [...] The meaning to be revealed: it is a question of showing that the ontic, the “*Erlebnisse*”, the “sensations”, the “judgments” – (the objects, the “represented”, in short, all the idealizations of the Psyche and Nature), all the bric-a-brac of these so-called positive psychic “realities” (which

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<sup>326</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.263.

<sup>327</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.273.

are incomplete, “insular,” without their own *Weltlichkeit*) is in reality an abstract division in the ontological fabric. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.301.

Merleau-Ponty often speaks of total Being as an ontological fabric or thick topological space: “therein lies the common fabric of which we are made. The Wild Being”<sup>328</sup>; “the common fabric of which all structures are made is the visible, which itself is in no way the object, the thing in itself, but the transcendent”<sup>329</sup>. He did so because he acknowledges the unity of the world beneath the plurality of the dimensions, not as something ideal – the world is not “outside” of the dimensions – but as the voluminosity that encompasses them and of which they are made, the dimensionality from which all dimensions are drawn. Conversely, in the same way as Being is

not an objective positivity, the invisible [*i.e.* the dimensions] cannot be a negation in the logical sense – it is a negation-reference (zero of ...) or deviation. This negation-reference is common to all invisible things because the visible has been defined as the dimensionality of Being, *i.e.*, as universal, and therefore everything that is not part of it is necessarily enveloped in it and is only a modality of the same transcendence. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.305.

Therefore, the relation between the dimensions and Being are that of “total parts, cut-outs in an encompassing, topological space”<sup>330</sup>. The dimensions are a differentiation made from the texture of Being, from within it, like a single fabric that we would fold in a certain fashion, without breaking it nor becoming something else (*i.e.* changing of nature). This means that the dimensions are never fully closed on themselves either, that they are connected thanks to their common fabric (namely, Being), that they communicate and that we can go from one to another. It also means that they criss-cross or intertwine, which is why the structures or phenomena we perceive and know partake to many dimensions at once. Thus, the

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<sup>328</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.253.

<sup>329</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.250.

<sup>330</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.266.

dimensions are indeed “worlds” or fields (opening the possibility for settling in many levels and seeing many figures), but they are “intersecting fields, in a field of fields”<sup>331</sup>, namely, Being, which is ontologically superior to them and encompasses them all. If we were to assume that a single dimension is the whole of Being, then we would miss the transcendence of Being, the relativity of the dimension, and we would overlook the fact that all the diverse dimensions are “enclosed within Being as the universal dimensionality”<sup>332</sup>. In this way, the ontological nature of Being is different from that of the particular dimensions, and it is not simply a sum of dimensions. As Merleau-Ponty wrote, we must “understand that space does not have three, neither more nor less, dimensions, as an animal has either four or two legs, that dimensions are taken by different systems of measurements from a single dimensionality, a polymorphous Being, which justifies all of them without being fully expressed by any”<sup>333</sup>. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty’s dimensional ontology is economical because all the ontological layers communicate or are integrated together and constitute one single experience or reality. However, how should we understand their articulation? I think that the best metaphor to clarify and understand better the relation between the dimensions and the world as the dimensionality from which they are all drawn is that of the relation between a 3D object (let’s say a sphere) and all the 2D diameters or planes that can be traced within it without ever exhausting it:

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<sup>331</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.276.

<sup>332</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.285.

<sup>333</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.364.

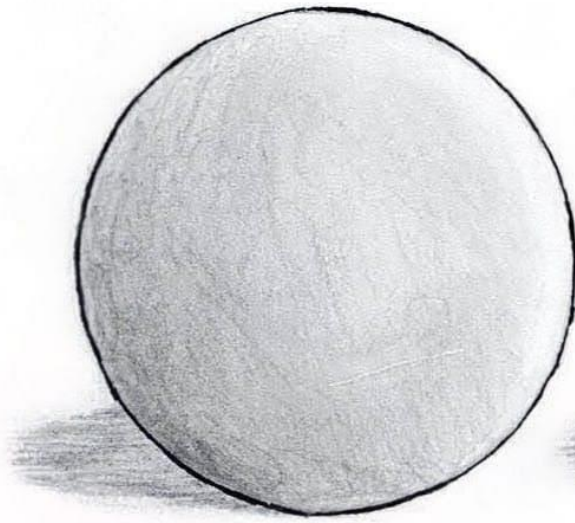


Fig. 2

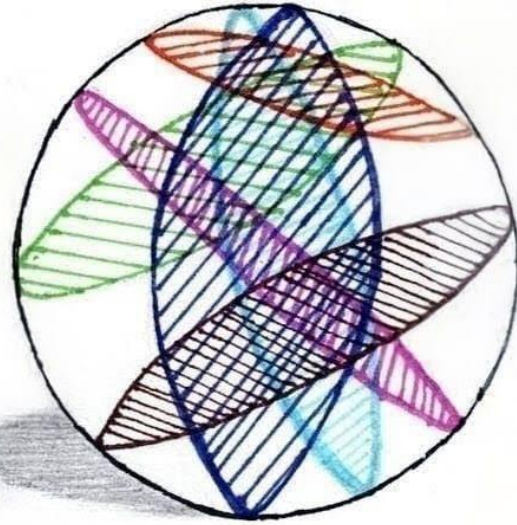


Fig. 3

Fig. 2 is the voluminous world of undividedness, the unique topological space, the whole Being, the primordial fabric from which everything is cut out, the true universality and the dimensionality itself on which any of our measures or segregations are operated. Fig 3. is the same world but this time with an emphasis on the dimensions that take place within it, as 2D cross-sections of this 3D Being, with each different color representing a different dimension. The number of depicted dimensions is limited here to remain legible, but 3D Being is full of them, exhausted by none, and can be traversed by possibly an infinity of them. These are my own drawings.

Thus, the 3D sphere is the world not yet divided, Being without restrictions nor segregations, in which we are encompassed. We are situated within this sphere and nothing exists outside of it, it is the whole world or reality and the supreme ontological layer of reality, from which all the rest is derived. But how is the rest derived? Thanks to this figuration, we can understand that each dimension is in fact a cross-section of Being. The 2D dimensions are all expressing the same 3D object, which is their common fabric, but they

are situated at a lower scale or ontological dimensionality that is nevertheless not separated from Being. Thus, each of the 2D planes are not resting somewhere else than in the world as the 3D sphere, they are simply a differentiation or deviation and segregation within it according to a lower dimensionality. The 2D dimensions are also separated from one another (with each their own 1D figurations) but they can intersect at several locations, where the thick phenomena lie (that Merleau-Ponty calls “flesh”), at the crossroads of several dimensions, that we can perceive or know by settling “neither in the for-Self nor in the in-Self, [but] at the junction where the multiple entrances to the world intersect”<sup>334</sup>. The fact that several dimensions can intersect leads Merleau-Ponty to speak of Being and the flesh (even our own, or that of the things and phenomena) as vertical, which means that the flesh, instead of being flat and belonging to only one 2D dimension (like objects), overflows it and refers for Merleau-Ponty to the voluminous reality in which all the dimensions intertwine. In this sense, if one particular 2D dimension in which we settle is considered “horizontal”, as the ground on which figures appear, then the flesh or phenomena that borrow their being from the 3D sphere must be considered vertical as they encroach on many dimensions at once. If seen from above or horizontally and one by one, each cross-section seems independent, but taken vertically or in depth, according to the whole Being, they encroach on one another. Each of the 2D dimensions expresses the total sphere in their own dimensional level (*i.e.* the 2D), they exist as a 2D modality of it, of the same Being. We may understand their relation to 3D Being in an analogous way to Spinoza’s (according to Deleuze’s *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression*, in which he conceives the relation between the substance and the attributes as one of envelopment), for whom there is an infinity of (2D) attributes that express, only partially, the (3D) substance and are contained in it. However, in opposition to Spinoza, all the dimensions (the equivalent of Spinoza’s attributes) do not

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<sup>334</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.308.

need to be strictly parallel for Merleau-Ponty, they might come from different angles and thematize different aspects of Being's fabric, even though they are an expression of the same total world (3D). Thereby, in the same way as Spinoza acknowledges a knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* (from the perspective of the eternal), ontologically different from simply a view settled in the attributes, we can observe emerging in Merleau-Ponty a knowledge *sub specie carnis* (from the perspective of the flesh), that considers phenomena in the light of the 3D voluminous Being, so as to not only posit flat beings but retrieving, through them and their participation in the flesh of the world, "the [3D] Being of this [2D and ontic] being [étant]"<sup>335</sup>, without which it would be incomplete and too-human. Indeed, if we consider only the 2D dimensions or attributes, we notice that they cover the whole width or diameter of Being, but they actualize or thematize its thick fabric only partially. A width or cross-section is not adequate to exhaust the whole of Being because it expresses only one 2D plane, while the voluminous 3D Being overflows these flat planes, therefore it cannot be reduced to them. Being contains an infinity of possible 2D planes and unites them all in its depth, which is why we can say with Merleau-Ponty that "Being is their common member [membrure]. Each field is a dimensionality [as a 2D cross-section], and Being is the dimensionality itself [the 3D one that encompasses them all]"<sup>336</sup>. Thus, the voluminous 3D reality is at the horizon of every single 2D dimension, it grants them their meaning, they are a particularization of it, a segregation or cross-section operated at the heart of it and from within. Now, thanks to this schematization, we can understand this unity of horizon as the superior dimension (3D) that haunts the inferior ones (2D). The former undermines the claims of objectivity of the latter, but the latter can never thematize adequately the former, it can only give 2D renditions of it that will distort it and be partial. Which is the reason why an ontology that would not acknowledge the ontological difference and the voluminous

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<sup>335</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.196.

<sup>336</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.276.

Being would be missing a crucial aspect of experience. Ignoring voluminous Being and the plurality of dimensions can lead to two outcomes. Indeed, it can lead to the objective ontology, which completely ignores the modality of being and knowing of the dimension, and posits – from within an implicit dimension elected as a universal level, for instance the quantitative or the biological – the world as a mere collection of figures, parts or impressions, that all amount to a 1D reality, reducing the world to a flat, homogeneous collection or juxtaposition of them. The other possibility is a transcendental ontology, which acknowledges that the figures emerge from a background (that grants them meaning and value), that there is a normativity or productivity at stake, but this ontology posits only one single dimension, that is usually reified, instead of being understood as a differentiation or segregation within a thicker reality. In this way, the 2D dimension becomes the whole of reality for the transcendental ontology, which looks at the sphere from the position where the selected plane seems to cover the whole surface of it:

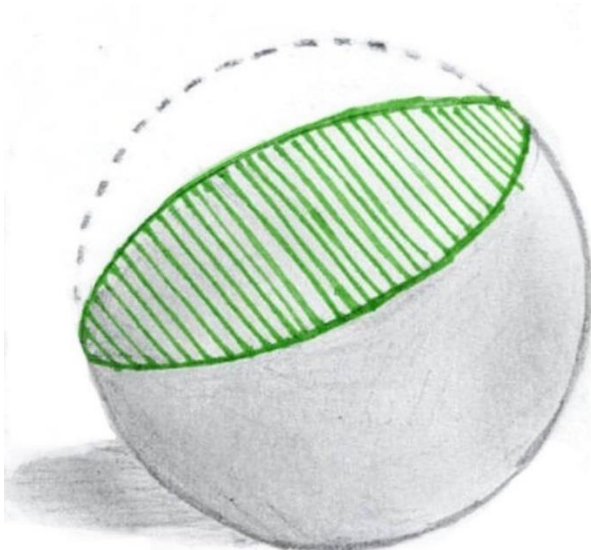


Fig. 4

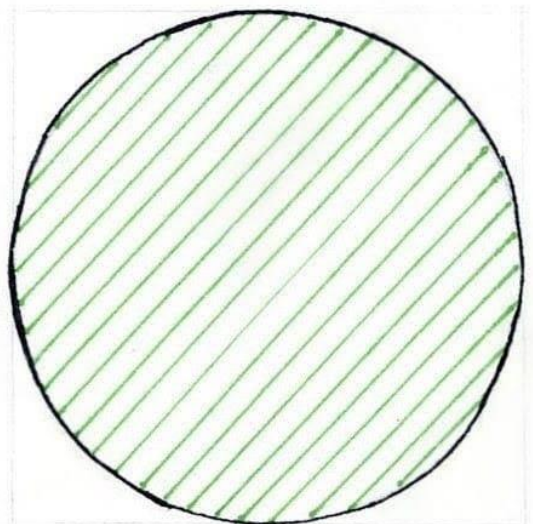


Fig. 5

In Fig. 4, we have a particular 2D dimension of 3D Being seen in its inherence to the whole, which makes it clear that it is only a partial cross-section of it. Nevertheless, in Fig.

5 we see the same elected dimension or cross-section but from the angle according to which it covers the whole surface of Being. In this perspective, the dimension can appear as the whole of the world, but it can appear so only by reducing reality to it and ignoring the other dimensions and the depth of Being (which is the reason why I did not draw a shadow in this picture). Therefore, we go from a 3D ontology to a flat, 2D one (or from a sphere to a cercle), and, along with it, we go from the true universality to a relative and superficial one, understanding the world or Being not as a voluminous dimensionality anymore but as a painting with all its parts juxtaposed in the distance and in front of an abstract viewer or thinker who is not situated in this world (which is why I outlined lightly a square frame outside of the cercle, to underline that the world is now considered as a distant flat surface, seen from the implicit point of view of a spectator not situated within it and whose gaze can exhaust the whole meaning of the world).

As a result, by looking at the world from only one angle, the transcendental ontology misses the wealth of other dimensions, the fact any figure can turn into a dimension (*i.e.* the reversibility of the *Gestalt* structure figure-ground) and it misses the world as a thickness and a transcendence, as the dimensionality itself that encompasses us and from which all the dimensions are drawn, so it remains a flat ontology. Thus, a 2D region of the world is treated as the whole world, which means that the latter is flattened (and therefore reduced). The “world in-itself”, according to which we debase experience, language and perception, is just such a flat frame, purified from all ambiguity, polymorphism and overdetermination; it becomes a clear and unequivocal homogeneous flat surface on which all figures are clear and do not encroach on one another. It is such an abstraction that is opposed to our

experience, while, if we consider it like Merleau-Ponty as a voluminosity, then Being is everywhere in our experience, it is not removed from it nor outside of it but overdetermines it, and the segregation we operate on it is still situated within it, settled in it and expressing it “in the flesh” to us. We perceive and think Being from a point of view, but this point of view does not involve the creation of a whole separated, purely subjective realm. Often, most philosophers think so precisely because of the overdetermination, relativity and ambiguity of experience, that they consider as arguments against the ontological reach of experience and perception because they would like to reach a flat and clear in-itself. However, we realize with Merleau-Ponty that these characteristics of experience are the only way to express and become aware of the transcendence of Being as the voluminosity that encompasses us. Thereby, Merleau-Ponty’s dimensional ontology is the most faithful to experience because it retrieves and acknowledges the multiplicity of dimensions, our knowledge as a situated relation that settles in them (seeing according to them), and it also comprehends or rather accounts for the voluminosity of the world we find by criss-crossing several dimensions, as their crossroads or thick fabric. It is Merleau-Ponty’s acknowledgement of this voluminous reality that makes it possible to not posit an in-itself outside of experience anymore, by conceptualizing the transcendence as a superior dimensionality that takes part in all the dimensions and ensures their communication but that none exhaust. As he wrote himself, “what matters is to describe the vertical or wild Being as that pre-spiritual medium without which nothing is conceivable, not even the mind, and through which we pass into one another, and ourselves into ourselves [...]. It is philosophy alone that gives it”<sup>337</sup>, thanks to a philological and dimensional approach.

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<sup>337</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.254.

### 3) Our Insertion in the World through Participation in Elements

I am well aware that this metaphorical depiction or schematization is, without the shadow of a doubt, inadequate because we do not perceive Being from outside, as if we were not situated within it. We cannot have such a clear view of Being as dimensionality itself, but this schematization has nonetheless helped us describe the articulation between the world and the dimensions. Now that their relation is specified, we can focus on Merleau-Ponty's account of our insertion within voluminous Being. Merleau-Ponty's answer was to conceive the body as a voluminous flesh that is part of the world, encompassed in it, and that partakes in many dimensions too. However, the particularity of our flesh, in comparison to the things, is that it is not only a visible, but it is also a seeing, or a sensible-sensing:

What feels = I cannot pose a single sensible without posing it as torn from my flesh, taken from my flesh, and my flesh itself is one of the sensibles in which all the others are inscribed, a pivotal sensible in which all the others participate, a key-sensible, a dimensional sensible. My body is, to the highest degree, what every thing is: a dimensional thing [un ceci dimensionnel]. It is the universal thing – but while things only become dimensions insofar as they are received within a field, my body is that very field, *i.e.*, a sensible that is dimensional in itself, a universal measuring [mesurant]. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.308<sup>338</sup>.

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<sup>338</sup> See also *ibid.*, p.298: “The flesh of the world is not a sensing like my flesh—it is sensible and not sensing”.

Nevertheless, even if Merleau-Ponty sometimes conceives the sensing body as the “*Nullpunkt* of all dimensions of the world”<sup>339</sup>, measuring them all, he still refused to grant it an absolute priority or even an ontological difference from the sensible and the world.

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty also underlined that:

Conversely, if it [the body] touches and sees, it is not that it has visibles in front of it like objects: they are around it, they even enter its enclosure, they are within it, they cover its gaze and its hands from the outside and the inside. If it touches and sees them, it is only because, belonging to their family, visible and tangible itself, the body uses its being as a means to participate in theirs, that each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, that the body belongs to the order of things just as the world is universal flesh. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.179.

Therefore, my body does not create the visibility of the other visible things, but it simply collects or gathers a visibility that precedes it and to which it has access because it participates in it too. In other words, it is not because we have eyes that there is a visible, but it is rather because there is the visible, *de jure* or always already there, as an element of the fabric of Being, that we can have eyes and see, by plugging ourselves into this existing dimension, into the circuit of the visible. Thus, the visible precedes us, or, rather, from the moment it exists it also already encompasses and contains its visibility, at least virtually, as a possibility that the emergence of visible seeing bodies will actualize. As a result, it is not from my body that I understand the sensible and the world, but, on the contrary,

it is through the flesh of the world that we can ultimately understand our own body – The flesh of the world is the seen Being, *i.e.*, it is a Being that is *eminently percipi* (perceptible), and it is through it that we can understand *percipere* (to perceive): this perceived that we call my body applies to the rest of the perceived, *i.e.*, it treats itself as something perceived by itself and therefore as a perceiver. All of this is ultimately only possible and only means something because

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<sup>339</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.297.

there is Being, not Being in-itself, identical to itself, in the night, but Being that also contains its negation, its *percipi*. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.299.

In this way, perception, knowledge or the “subjective” are not something that we add to Being and that exists outside of it, as ideas or representations, but it is the other side of the visible, its invisible lining that constitute, together, its voluminosity. In contrast to a flat ontology that thinks in terms of objects and can only oppose the subjectivity to them, conceiving the two as different ontological spheres or realms, Merleau-Ponty’s dimensional ontology allows to understand

Being as the “place” where “modes of consciousness” are inscribed as structures of Being (the way a society thinks about itself is implied in its social structure), and where the structures of Being are modes of consciousness. The integration in-itself – for oneself occurs not in absolute consciousness, but in the Being of promiscuity. The perception of the world takes place in the world, the experience of truth takes place in Being. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.302.

Merleau-Ponty thinks the flesh in terms of mutual encroachments and infringements that are possible because the sensibles share a same dimensionality or element that prevails over their differentiation or distance and maintains them united as parts of the same fabric, even between the perceiving and the perceived. In this fashion, he asserted that “the sensible introduces me to the world, just as language introduces me to others: through encroachment, *Ueberschreiten*”<sup>340</sup>. Merleau-Ponty used in several different contexts the example of the perception of a cube to clarify his paradigm. Thus, he wrote:

if there is flesh, that is to say, if the hidden side of the cube shines somewhere as well as the one I see before my eyes, and coexists with it, and if I, who see the cube, also belong to the visible realm, I am visible elsewhere, and if he and I, together, are caught up in the same “element” –

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<sup>340</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.267.

should we say of the seeing or of the visible? – this cohesion, this visibility of principle, prevails over any momentary discordance. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.182<sup>341</sup>.

According to Merleau-Ponty (and to a certain extent, to Nietzsche too, when he speaks of the “opposites” and how they can engender one another), we often over-emphasize the distinctions, for instance we understand our vision and our body as two different things, each closed on themselves, and we miss what is common to every single phenomenon; namely the fact that it is never exhaustible, that it encroaches or infringes on the rest of reality by participating all to the same common reality (*i.e.* 3D Being). When we stop conceiving things in isolation, we can find what Merleau-Ponty calls “« elements » (in Bachelard's sense), that is, not objects, but fields, gentle beings, non-thetic, [3D] being before [2D] being, – and moreover, they comprise their self-inscription, their « subjective correlate » is part of them. *Rotempfindung* is part of *Rotempfundene* – this is not a *coinciding*, but a dehiscence that knows itself as such”<sup>342</sup>. We can understand the dimensions as such elements. All actions or phenomena share a same texture; there is a fabric of Being made of different elements. Most actions, for instance, participate in the sonorous element. Even if our goal is to build something, hitting a nail and a wooden plank with a hammer will nonetheless always make a sound, even walking or turning a page makes a sound. Usually we ignore these sounds because reality is polymorphic, it participates in many dimensions and elements at once, and we focus on other ones. Therefore, the rhythm of our footsteps, the sound they make depending on the texture of the ground we are walking on, all of this is ignored because it is

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<sup>341</sup> See also *ibid.*, pp.252-253: “openness to the cube itself through a view of the cube that is distancing, transcendence—to say that I have a view of it is to say that, in perceiving it, I go from myself to it, I step outside myself into it. I, my *view*, we are, with it, caught up in the same carnal world; *i.e.*: my view and my body themselves emerge from the *same* being which is, among other things, a *cube*. [...] I do not even see myself seeing, but by *encroachment* I complete my visible body, I extend my being-seen beyond my being-visible for myself. And it is for my flesh, my body of vision, that there can be the cube itself that closes the circuit and completes my being-seen. So ultimately, it is the massive unity of Being as encompassing both me and the cube, it is the wild, not stripped down [non épuré], « vertical » Being that makes the cube exist”.

<sup>342</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p.314.

irrelevant and not thematized for itself, it is simply the background of our action. Nevertheless, because all of these actions still partake in the sonorous element, it means that we always have the possibility to settle in this level and undertake an exploration of the sonorous texture of the world and experience; we can start listening to these sounds for themselves, according to this element, and retrieve soundscapes. We can do that because we partake in this element too, in the same way as we can see because we are part of the visible. All the things or phenomena with which we share a same wave of being, being branches of a same differentiation or deviation (from silence for instance) can be perceived by us, known, thematized, and seen according to this common level. Thereby, for a level or dimension to be an effective and possible anchor for my experience (in the sense that it allows me to perceive other beings or any figures), I must belong to it, be situated in it and be made of the same element. This is what Merleau-Ponty means when he argues that we can settle in visual levels because we are ourselves a visible who can see. Therefore, there are as many dimensions as there are elements, fields or regions of experience that my being (that Merleau-Ponty qualifies as “flesh” to emphasize its voluminosity) participates in or pertains to. Or, rather and conversely, we can adopt as many levels as our existence comprises of dimensions or elements, which can be various (for instance emotional, social, political, sensible, cultural, axiological...) and new ones can even be institutionalized thanks to the amorphism or polymorphism of voluminous Being. Hence, the inscription of our body in the world occurs through its participation in common dimensions or elements that apply to the whole of Being (according to one aspect, as a cross-section) prior to the distinction between subject and object or between in-itself and for-itself. Thus, all the levels or dimensions thematize some aspects or elements of Being as the common fabric that encompasses us all and in which knowing or perceiving and being are not opposed anymore but are a structuration and differentiation of a same whole.

It is already a crucial ontological progress to have acknowledged the world as the voluminous total Being in which we are situated and from which we segregate levels in which we then settle to perceive and know figures. However, such a view is still talking about Being externally (*i.e.* not from our situation within it but according to an abstract point of view) instead of finding it in experience, in which we only have figures against a background and not a presentation of total Being. This paradigm affirms that we are within Being, but there is never an “intuition” or rather experience of the voluminosity as such, therefore it seems that it is not entirely a philological perspective. This situation is analogous to Nietzsche’s, who claimed that we are Wills to Power but without providing a single experience in which we can attest it, thus leaving the ground of philology. I think that the reversibility of the levels and dimensions is already enough proof that they are intertwined and encroach upon a voluminous world that contains them and underlies them as their common fabric; nevertheless, since this reversibility is discovered through a temporal exploration of experience, some might say that each time a new world is created and that the communication between the dimensions is simply a subjective illusion or a human error. Therefore, to undermine this argument and to ascertain that we remain strictly within the framework of living experience (so as to be philological), is there any experience that introduces us more directly to the voluminosity of the world? Is there an experience in which we could sense the encroachment of the different levels and dimensions? Merleau-Ponty affirms that there is one, and that the answer lies in the perceptual experience of depth. As he announced in a work note: “to study the insertion of any dimensionality into Being, study the insertion of depth into perception”<sup>343</sup>.

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<sup>343</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.285.

#### 4) Depth as the Experience of the Voluminous World

Merleau-Ponty will develop the full ontological consequences of the experience of depth in their radicality only in *The visible and invisible* and in *Eye and Mind*, but it is worthy to remark that already in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty attributed a special status to depth:

This simultaneous presence to experiences that are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of the one in the other, and this contraction into a single perceptual act of an entire possible process are what make up the originality of depth; depth is the dimension according to which things or the elements of things envelop each other, while breadth and height are the dimensions according to which they are juxtaposed. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.276<sup>344</sup>.

According to Merleau-Ponty, breadth (or width) and height, if they are taken alone, are two dimensions that lead to the flat ontology. Indeed, they are only two dimensions and allow

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<sup>344</sup> See also *ibid.*, p.267: “Depth, more directly than the other dimensions of space, obliges us to reject the unquestioned belief in the world and to uncover the primordial experience from where this prejudice springs forth. Of all the dimensions, depth is, so to speak, the most “existential,” because – and this is what holds true in Berkeley’s argument – it is not indicated upon the object itself, it clearly belongs to perspective and not to things. It can, then, neither be extracted from the perspective, nor even placed there by consciousness. It announces a certain indissoluble link between the things and me by which I am situated in front of them, whereas breadth can, at first glance, pass for a relation between things themselves in which the perceiving subject is not implicated. By uncovering the vision of depth, that is, a depth that is not yet objectified and constituted of mutually external points, we will again overcome the classical alternatives and clarify the relation between the subject and the object”.

just a 2D view, which contains all the prejudices we have previously highlighted. A flat ontology misses the voluminosity of the world and the flesh of things, that are understood simply as objects that can be juxtaposed and isolated from one another, clear and unambiguous, ready to be dominated by the thinking mind. Depth, by adding a third dimension and unveiling the overdetermination of things and their encroachment upon many levels, could thwart the project of this ontology. Which is the reason why the experience of depth is denied by philosophies who rely on a flat ontology. All of them objectify depth and make it compatible with their framework by positing that depth is not an ontological introduction to the voluminosity of the world but is merely “another width”<sup>345</sup>, a width seen from another position, which, in this way, makes depth simply a “*third dimension* derived from the other two”<sup>346</sup>. As such, the experience of depth would not undermine the juxtaposition of things as objects anymore, it would complete it and close the picture of a flat world. Merleau-Ponty summarized the consequences of such a prism as such:

Thus I see each thing outside the others, according to a width measured differently. We are always on the hither side of depth, or beyond it. Never are the things one behind the other. The encroachment and latency of the things do not enter into their definition. They express only my incomprehensible solidarity with one of them – my body; and by their positivity they are thoughts that I form and not attributes of things. I know that at this very moment another man, situated elsewhere – or better, God, who is everywhere – could penetrate their hiding place and see them openly deployed. [...] This two-dimensional being, which makes me see a third, is a being that

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<sup>345</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.363. See also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 266: “Depth is tacitly assimilated to breadth considered in profile, and this is what makes it invisible. If made fully explicit, Berkeley’s argument is more or less this very argument. What I call depth is, in fact, a juxtaposition of points comparable according to breadth. Only I am poorly situated to see it. I would see the depth if I were in the place of a lateral spectator, who can see at once the series of objects arrayed before me, whereas for me they conceal each other – or who is in a position to see the distance between my body and the first object, whereas for me this distance is condensed into a point. What makes depth invisible for me is precisely what makes it visible for the spectator under the aspect of breadth: the juxtaposition of simultaneous points along a single direction, namely, the direction of my gaze. The depth that is declared invisible is thus a depth already identified with breadth, and without this condition, the argument would not have even a semblance of consistency”.

<sup>346</sup> Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.362.

[...] opens only upon *partes extra partes*, upon height and width merely seen from another angle – upon the absolute positivity of Being. Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.363.

Strongly opposed to the flat ontology and to this understanding of depth, Merleau-Ponty affirms that: “we must rediscover beneath depth as a relation between things or even between planes (which is an objectified depth, detached from experience, and transformed into breadth) a primordial depth”<sup>347</sup>. First of all, Merleau-Ponty argues that depth cannot be objectified without being fundamentally altered because the originality of its modality of presentation is precisely to contradict or overflow and precede the impressions or objective data. Indeed, even if objectively the impressions are those of two converging lines, the distant road is still perceived by me as parallel because the road is given in depth. According to Merleau-Ponty, the fact that the road is experienced as parallel does not result from an *a posteriori* judgement, which would come only after receiving objective *stimuli* and then correct them subjectively. In fact, such a judgement always already presupposes depth. The precedence of depth is exactly what Merleau-Ponty opposes to intellectualism:

Intellectualism answers: it is the thought of the cube as a solid constructed from six equal sides and twelve equal edges that are cut to right angles – and depth is nothing other than the coexistence of equal faces and equal edges. But here again we are offered a definition of depth that is merely a consequence of it. The six equal faces and twelve equal edges do not make up the whole sense of depth and, on the contrary, this definition is meaningless without depth. The six faces and twelve edges can only simultaneously coexist and remain equal for me if they are arranged in depth. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.276.

On top of rejecting *a posteriori* judgements, Merleau-Ponty also asserts that perception does not start with an objective reception of impressions, but that the phenomena are always given

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<sup>347</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.278.

through a coherent distortion that gives them in their flesh, their reality and their place. Our first perception is always already a perception in depth, and it is only in a second time that we can break the total structuration of it, the whole context, and focus on the perspectival appearances for themselves, seen according to a level that abstracts them from my total and original perception in depth. Thus, we do not have a flat and objective reality that we could know in spite of the perspectival appearances, but on the contrary, when we come back to experience, we find in depth the original mode of presentation in which the aspects of the things must be distorted in order to present a vertical or transcendent thing, a flesh, that is given as such precisely through the consistent or coherent deformation, that involves my point of view and its relation to the things. As a result, says Merleau-Ponty,

when through the water's thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it despite the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if I saw, without this flesh, the geometry of the tiles, then I would stop seeing the tiled bottom as it is, where it is, namely, farther away than any identical place. Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.371.

Therefore, the visual presentation seems distorted (to see converging lines for the road instead of parallel ones, or to see rhombuses for the side of the cube instead of squares) because it is the only way to know a transcendent existence, a vertical relation from a being situated in the world to another one, encroaching on one another and coexisting in the distance. There is the world and other fleshs between me and the road or between me and the tiles of the pool, which is why my perception seems “distorted”, not because it is an illusion but because it takes the voluminosity of the world into account as well as my situation in it. The perspectival appearances seem subjective and internal only if we think in terms of object (to flatten them) and in isolation from the context; but, as a contact to a

vertical, voluminous flesh, our figures against a background are a non-exhaustive and non-objective presentation in person, which can be presented as such only thanks to depth. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty argues against the conception of depth as breadth that it is not philological, depth is never lived as such in our experience. Indeed, to conceive perception as a breadth, one must posit either a God who sees all or another person who sees from another place and then fuse these two views as if they were of the same nature or lived simultaneously by me and could remove all ambiguity and hiddenness from experience. However, I cannot occupy two places at the same time, even in thought, and therefore depth cannot be spread out before me as a second width. Thus, Merleau-Ponty criticized both empiricism and intellectualism jointly for the fact that,

as opposed as these two doctrines are, they imply the same repression of our actual experience. [...] Intellectualism can only make a thinking subject who accomplishes the synthesis of depth appear in the experience of depth because it reflects upon an actualized depth, upon a juxtaposition of simultaneous points, which is not depth as it presents itself to me, but rather depth for a spectator placed laterally, or, in other words, breadth. By immediately assimilating depth and breadth, both philosophies assume as self-evident the result of a constitutive labor whose phases we must, on the contrary, retrace. In order to treat depth as a breadth considered in profile and to arrive at an isotropic space, the subject must leave his place, his point of view upon the world, and conceive of himself in a sort of ubiquity. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.266.

For Merleau-Ponty, the fact that experience presents me only with some sides of things and that others remain hidden is something crucial and that cannot simply vanish by multiplying my view and projecting it somewhere else. If I am really situated in the other place from which my previous depth now appears as a breadth, then my previous breadth would now appear as a depth and some faces of the things would always remain hidden, enveloped in the ones that are visible to me at this very moment. We are always anchored to a point of

view with its own invisible. Denying it amounts to deny experience and leaving the frame of philology, on top of missing the ontological specificity of depth. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty affirms that it is necessary to maintain the invisible that is presented to us by the experience of depth:

We must not consider the invisible as *another* “possible” *visible*, or a “possible” visible to another: that would be to destroy the member [membrure] that connects us to it. Just as it would destroy the “other” who would “see” it, – or this “other world” that it would constitute would necessarily be connected to ours, the true possibility would necessarily reappear in this connection – The invisible is *there* without being an *object*; it is pure transcendence, without an ontic mask. And even the “visibles” themselves are ultimately centered on a core of absence.  
Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.278.

Thus, there is indeed an intersubjectivity, but it does not consist of only breadths and juxtaposed objects. On the contrary, the true intersubjectivity can only take place thanks to depth, in depth and in a voluminous Being that tolerates and unites the impossible views by escaping each of them (with their invisible), overflowing their objective frame to point towards the never fully visible 3D thick world. Thereby, intersubjectivity does not reduce our perspectives to a flat 2D world, but it lives in the invisible of all our views, in between them. In the same way, Merleau-Ponty locates in the invisible presented or entailed by depth the possibility to change point of view, situation and level. The different levels are encroaching and communicating in depth, with the world as their common horizon. Indeed, the thing I see in depth is already standing at the crossroads of many views, and by presenting to me clearly only its front side, it indicates to me – through its back side that I cannot see (hence it is an invisible) but that I nevertheless have in the presentation of the thing as having this other side, which I know is not reduced to the aspect that blocks my view – that I do not exhaust its visibility, that it has another visibility that I could see if I changed levels. This

other visible can be seen by others at the same time as I am perceiving the front side, but they will have their own invisible too. All these perspectives cannot be clarified, their invisible cannot vanish, which is not necessary because they coexist in depth, precisely through their respective invisible. More radically, it is necessary for each view to maintain an invisible and not be fully explicit, or it would not present a flesh anymore (which is the encroachment of a thing upon several levels and dimensions), and the views would no longer coexist. As Merleau-Ponty wrote – already in *The Structure of Behavior*, his very first published book (1942):

For there to be perception, that is, apprehension of an existence, it is absolutely necessary that the objects not be completely given to the look which rests on it, that aspects intended but not possessed in the present perception be kept in reserve. A seeing which would not take place from a certain point of view, and which would give us, for example, all the sides of a cube at once is a pure contradiction in terms. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, pp. 212-213.

Thus, depth is the union of the impossible aspects and views, which are impossible because they must maintain an invisible and be ambiguous to present things. That is why Merleau-Ponty describes depth as the dimension of the hidden (*i.e.* the sides that I do not see, the invisible) and simultaneity (*i.e.* the coexistence of these sides with the one I am actualizing and seeing explicitly):

Depth and “back” (and “behind”) – This is the dimension of the hidden par excellence – (every dimension is hidden) – There must be depth since there is a point from which I see, – that the world surrounds me – Depth is the means by which things remain clear, remain things, while not being what I am currently looking at. It is the dimension par excellence of simultaneity. Without it, there would be no world or Being, there would only be a mobile zone of sharpness that could not be brought here without leaving everything else behind, – and a “synthesis” of these “views”. Instead, through depth, they coexist side by side, sliding into one another and integrating. It is therefore depth that gives things a flesh: that is to say, it opposes my inspection with obstacles,

a resistance that is precisely their reality, their “openness,” their *totum simul*. The gaze does not overcome depth, it turns it. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.268.

Therefore, we should not aim at dissolving the invisible of perception, we cannot overcome depth and make it disappear. Even if we could, it would be counterproductive, we would be stuck with flat pictures of the things – in other words, with objects. Indeed, it is depth as the invisible or the “other side” of the thing that holds all the places and points of view together, it is the member that ties them all and that I see only from one branch or angle but that nonetheless connects me to the rest thanks to this invisible where all views intersect. Hence, depth is the presentation of voluminous Being, with all its dimensions, in our bi-dimensional experience (always already settled in a particular level), that can be only presented as a certain kind of absence or invisible that is nevertheless given or rather alluded and entailed in my vision of the visibles, as something not complete nor fully clear for itself, with an opacity and a non-exhausted wealth of aspects. It is only in the invisible of depth that the transcendence of voluminous Being and intersubjectivity can be maintained without resting in-themselves. Consequently, depth, as the experience that introduces us to the invisible of the world, is an ontological experience of the coexistence of several dimensions and of the transcendence of voluminous Being. Merleau-Ponty elaborates and states that,

once depth is understood in this way, we can no longer call it a third dimension. In the first place, if it were a dimension, it would be the first one; there are forms and definite planes only if it is stipulated how far from me their different parts are. But a first dimension and one that contains all the others is no longer a dimension, at least in the ordinary sense of a certain relationship according to which we make measurements. Depth thus understood is, rather, the experience of the reversibility of dimensions, of a global “locality” in which everything is at the same time, a locality from which height, width, and distance are abstracted, the experience of a voluminosity we express in a word when we say that a thing is there. In pursuing depth, what Cézanne is seeking is this deflagration of Being, and it is all in the modes of space, and in the form as well.

Merleau-Ponty, « Eye and Mind », in: Toadvine and Lawlor (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, p.369.

Thereby, Merleau-Ponty sees in depth the experience of the voluminosity of the world and the reversibility of the dimensions, thanks to the fact that it takes our experience and situation into account (*i.e.*, that we are always attached to a point of view and a level) and only presents to us a side of the things, always promising that there is more to see thanks to its invisible. With this union between the visible (the side I am seeing) and the invisible (the other sides), depth makes each perspective overflow the 2D, objective, flat frame and can provide to the things their flesh. The flesh of the thing (or the thing in depth) is precisely the coexistence of all these views (according to many levels) and their invisible, it is a voluminous, intersubjective existence that participates in many encroaching dimensions, and, as such, it is my introduction to Being as the transcendent dimensionality within which I am situated.

### ***C) The Place of Values in Dimensional Ontology and its Consequences for the Relation Between Philology and Genealogy***

Since we have presented Merleau-Ponty's dimensional ontology, that proves to be more philological than Nietzsche's ontology of the Wills to Power – by taking more aspects of experience into account and by not requiring the position of an in-itself or sphere of reality that escapes experience –, we can finally examine how the values and genealogy can be

integrated into this dimensional framework, which will lead to a revision of the relations between philology and genealogy. Merleau-Ponty did not focus on the topic of values, it is not his main task and interest, unlike Nietzsche. Nevertheless, and even though Merleau-Ponty's ontology did not adopt the genealogical method and was even built independently of genealogy (see again Merleau-Ponty's reference to Nietzsche in *Eye and Mind*), it can still describe the values-criteria according to their most general structure, which is that of a level, a background against which figures of our experience appear. In fact, we have already seen an example of values as levels when we examined the various criteria according to which we could judge and evaluate a job offer. As such, they are partaking in a particular element of Being, namely, the axiological one, and we can adopt many different levels in this dimension (corresponding to the various values). Thus, Merleau-Ponty understands the drives and values from a totally different ontological standpoint than Nietzsche's Will to Power and genealogy: in Merleau-Ponty's paradigm, the values-criteria can be interpreted as a case of dimension (instead of being the whole of reality). Nietzsche was right to say that the values-criteria are granting value to our thoughts, judgments and actions and that we can conceive them as an origin for they are a background against which many of the figures of our existence appear, become differentiated and take value. In this sense, Nietzsche uncovered the transcendental nature of the dimension, and Nietzsche's philosophy could have been a dimensional one. Moreover, he was also right to affirm that the Will to Power can be applied to the whole world. Since the values, drives and Wills to Power constitute together a dimension (the axiological one), it means that we can look at the whole world through the lens of values (which is what Nietzsche did). However, Nietzsche made a fundamental oversight in his attempt at the philological reduction. Indeed, Nietzsche's mistake consists in having thematized only one dimension, and not even as a dimension. Nietzsche did not realize that the values are simply a cross-section of Being, a superficial

universality, a region of the world, and he reduced the whole of reality to them. The question asked by the ontology of the level is also: “from where is someone speaking, judging, acting, *etc.*?”, but the answer is not only restricted to values; there are many dimensions and levels according to which one may perceive, act or think. It is precisely these other dimensions that are overlooked by Nietzsche. He claimed that everything can be reduced to a case of values or drives, but these categories do not exhaust all the meaning and being of the world. There are countless other levels or dimensions through which we can see the world too, that are just as valid as values. A different level and dimension overlooked by Nietzsche is that of the sensible for instance, that he considered as an illusion of the senses and of falsified consciousness. Nietzsche almost never speaks of perception as such (as we experience it), his interest in the sensible is superficial. He does not study the experience of perception from within and does not elaborate on orientation, on the transcendence of our experience, on its inner life... He grasps perception only through the question of its origin, which is an external approach that distorts it. Nietzsche also overlooked intersubjectivity. He was probably too much of a nihilist to accept consciousness, language, perception and relations. Nevertheless, if we exclude these other dimensions, if we deem them cases of values, then we lose a lot of aspects of the world and we lose the world as the voluminous dimensionality expressed in each of them and that none exhaust. In other words, we lose the dimensional ontology and the unity in depth of the world, thus ending up with no other option than coming back to a flat (or unidimensional) ontology and to separate, infinitely plural views. Thereby, because he did not accept the unity of the world and because he denied most of the dimensions as lies and creations that have solely an axiological and psycho-physiological origin, it is now clear that Nietzsche did not have a general enough view to embrace the whole of experience and reality. Certainly, Nietzsche saw the productivity and normativity at stake in the level or dimension of the values, he saw how it determines the rest of experience. However, because

he did not acknowledge any other dimensions or levels, he turned the values into reality itself (or realities in-themselves) instead of understanding them as a particular segregation of Being. Therefore, Nietzsche ontologizes or reifies the drives while they are in fact figures that appear against the background of the voluminous world (which is why a whole picture of reality made out of drives can only be flat and unidimensional, since it lacks the background or context that maintained the thickness and depth). When we settle in the axiological dimension (*i.e.* looking at the world through the axiological prism) values can appear, but they are still a part of experience, contained within a wider – or rather thicker – whole. In this way, Nietzsche is not philological because he adds too much ontological weight or status to the drives and values-criteria as he posits them infra-consciously, apart from conscious experience, existing in-themselves and reduces reality to them, making our experience a fictitious, fabricated lie. Furthermore, Nietzsche also removes from experience by ignoring the other dimensions, figures and their reversibility, *i.e.* the fact that other types of figures can all become dimensions and are therefore ontological while remaining in experience. The reversibility of the structure figure-ground prevents anyone from crowning only a single dimension as the unique one, which would flatten the whole world and distort the whole experience, making it a mere production or creation instead of a contact with and expression of voluminous Being. Every element can be seen according to the axiological dimension, but conversely the values and axiology can be seen according to other levels, and – as a result of this chiasm or reversibility (and, *in fine*, of this equivalence) – none of the levels, taken individually, prevail over the other ones. Thus, Nietzsche's philology or ontology can be contested because he focused arbitrarily only on one sole dimension, and other perspectives adopting the same approach (although focusing on another dimension) would have the same ontological and epistemological status or claim as his and could therefore be opposed to the one he proposed. Indeed, it can be argued against Nietzsche that

the other sciences as other perspectives of a flat ontology, adopting other methods and settling in other levels, can also reify their dimension and their figures as the unique reality and as the cause of our experience. Then, there is no solution to decide between these methods because they refute one another and mutually limit their ontological claim, by all pretending to be the exclusive proper view on a unidimensional reality that is exhausted by their single dimension. In this way, as Merleau-Ponty underlined, “psychology, logic, ethnology [and, in the case that interests us, genealogy] are rival dogmatisms that destroy each other; philosophy [or philology] alone, precisely because it aims at the total domain of Being, makes them compatible by relativizing them. Left to themselves, the regions of knowledge are in conflict and contradiction”<sup>348</sup>. Thereby, instead of speaking all in their separate worlds and in a lethal struggle, neutralizing one another, the sciences can be understood by Merleau-Ponty as all belonging to and speaking of the same world, simply according to different dimensions, emphasizing different aspects, dimensions or regions of Being. We do not have to choose between them, and we cannot find a cause of experience and life in any of them. Much rather, they are all a part and perspective on experience, and Merleau-Ponty is the one who thematizes the thickness that unites and separates them all. Usually, at first, a new field of science will ignore its own limits, but with more maturity it can understand itself as a specialized field in a broader totality that tolerates other approaches and possible dimensions. Thus, thanks to philology, we can retrieve, starting from any dimension, its insertion into a voluminous whole that overflows it and on which it rests. Nevertheless, to do so, one must acknowledge the relativity of the particular dimension or level in which they settle. Therefore, Nietzsche’s genealogical ontology is not philological because, by claiming it exhausts the whole reality, it misses (or does not intend) the voluminous Being that admits all the dimensions simultaneously (and not in opposition to

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<sup>348</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p.254.

one another)<sup>349</sup> and underlies them all. As a result, Nietzsche's ontology must be relativized and understood as a region of total Being, that cannot claim to exhaust it all. We cannot operate the reduction to the genealogical method anymore because it is a dimension that can apply to the whole world but never exhaustively. Far from turning all the elements or dimensions into a case of values, it is in fact genealogy that turns out to be a particular case of dimension and only a specific region of Being. In this way, there is no longer any need to sacrifice philology and the quest for truth on the altar of genealogy. Instead, it is genealogy that is – not sacrificed to philology, but much rather – reintegrated into the bigger (or rather thicker) frame of the world. The genealogical method does not invalidate the search for truth and the description of the sensible and of voluminous Being; it can in fact be applied from within this whole and does not challenge its truth. Certainly, genealogy sees the culture, drives and values that have pushed an author to become philological, but this part of experience – this axiological aspect – does not deny the voluminous whole and the result of the philological investigation; it only operates within it. The drives are not the primordial origin or cause, Being is. Our philological knowledge of experience retrieves a situation in the world that precedes us and our desire to know. Nonetheless, the description of voluminous Being does not annihilate the task and method of genealogy either, one may still evaluate the value of our values (as levels and dimensions): it simply relativizes the absolute claim of genealogy's derived (and flat) ontology. We can compare and evaluate our drives and values without having to reduce the whole of reality to them beforehand. Nietzsche's attempt to reduce the whole reality to the Will to Power (and the ontology, epistemology and metaphysics entailed by this attempt) is only one contingent mask under which the

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<sup>349</sup> The voluminous world is also what supports the unity of all the views, perspectives or figures-grounds, their communication and simultaneity too. Thus, it becomes possible now to retrospectively understand that Nietzsche could not guarantee an interplay of perspectives nor a new language that goes from perspective to perspective and maintains the continuity of the world because he missed the experience of depth and the voluminosity of the world that keeps all the views connected to one another.

genealogical method has appeared historically, but genealogy can be broadened and become autonomous, independent of this specific framework. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's ontology shows that genealogy can also be understood from the framework of the world as dimensionality, within which genealogy focuses on a regional aspect (through the particular prism of axiology) without reducing the whole world and the other dimensions as cases of genealogy. The fact that the genealogical method can be comprehended within dimensional ontology means that the Will to Power, as an ontological hypothesis, does not have the priority or privilege anymore, it is not required to be held as true to conduct genealogical investigations and it can be maintained simply as an operative framework or a working hypothesis whose lack of ontological relevance or accuracy does not prevent genealogy's undertaking nor undermine its results. Moreover, if this ontological mask of the Will to Power proves to impede the genealogical research by implying anti-philological prejudices and denying some aspects of reality, repeating some ancient biases (slandering consciousness, perception, language and relations), then it should be abandoned. Thus, overcoming the Will to Power's framework could even help strengthening the genealogical method. As a matter of fact, once understood within dimensional ontology, genealogy gains an enhanced ontological reach because it does not apply simply to human creations anymore, to mere fictions and subjective fantasies, but it evaluates and compares dimensions in which we settle implicitly and that can constitute elements shared by our life and the flesh of Being. Conceived in this way, genealogy is not opposed to philology anymore, it does not annihilate or subordinate its task, and they can coexist as two valid outlooks or philosophical interrogations. In this way, Merleau-Ponty focuses on our flesh and our insertion in total Being, whereas Nietzsche focuses on our values and ways of life. To describe and to evaluate; these two tasks or approaches are different, but they coexist simultaneously at different levels or layers of reality, one does not need to be subordinated to the other. They

are questions and prisms that do not exclude one another: we can describe the world *and* evaluate the dimensions in which we settle. Genealogy does not absorb philology and the quest for truth, but it coexists with them (laterally) and can be understood as a part of the voluminous world uncovered by philology. The coexistence of the methods is possible because what is fundamentally at stake in genealogy is not the knowledge of some aspects of the world *per se* (unlike most other sciences), but it is to know how each dimension makes us live (if we settle in them). Because genealogy is not a theoretical question, it is independent of any ontological, epistemological, metaphysical and even philological thesis, it is an autonomous method that the comparison with Merleau-Ponty frees from the restrictive framework of Nietzsche's philosophy. Thereby, genealogy is a transversal question, aiming at life and at all the dimensions, which is not a unique trait – other dimensions do that too (as cross-sections of Being) –, but genealogy's angle is very interesting since it tackles life, existence and culture. Indeed, genealogy, as an axiological question and investigation, allows to hierarchize the different dimensions – not anymore according to their supposed truth, but – according to the kind of life they promote. In this context, philology aims at describing the general structure of experience, finding not only the dimensions but the dimensionality that links and underlies or encompasses them all, while genealogy focuses on evaluating the kind of life each dimension promotes (by settling implicitly in the axiological-genealogical dimension). Therefore, they certainly have a different angle or direction of gaze, and they do not share the same goal, but (or, rather, thanks to this difference) they can apply to the same world and coexist in the same whole. Consequently, thanks to Merleau-Ponty's philology, we can put Nietzsche's genealogical philosophy at its proper place, namely as emphasizing the particular dimension of values, which is one outlook on the world as the whole dimensionality where all the dimensions coexist. Situated at the meta-dimensional level (the one of Being of undividedness),

Merleau-Ponty allows to understand philology and genealogy together, as two different ontological layers: philology should find the general dimensional structure of being, the universal and primordial cohesion of all outlooks; while genealogy is the method that results from settling in a particular dimension (*i.e.* the axiological one), that does not look for this dimensional whole and, as a result, does not find it (which is not its goal). Genealogy is not denied by philology and voluminous Being, it is integrated within it, and genealogy does not deny this whole and the other dimensions either, except if we attempt to reduce all experience to it, which cannot be done philologically for it misses too many aspects of experience (namely, the rest of the dimensions and the world as their cohesion and common texture, fabric or member (*membre*)). Thus, the peaceful coexistence between philology and genealogy has been re-established, the two undertakings have been safeguarded and can be pursued independently without blocking each other nor subordinating the other question and task to their own. There is a Being to uncover that is not simply made of drives or values, that overflows the axiological dimension; and there is an evaluation of the diverse dimensions in which we settle that is independent of their truth or epistemological status since they are all figures against a background but whose value for life can differ significantly.

## Conclusion:

Now that we are reaching the end of this thesis, it is time to reflect on what we have learned through this philosophical journey. The first point that has been established is the relevance of the comparison between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty. On the one hand, Nietzsche's prism of philology helps us understand what exactly the method of Merleau-Ponty is, which he rarely made explicit. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty gave the title of "phenomenology" to his early-period book, but it still contained subjectivist or idealist and transcendentalist prejudices he overcame later by developing a dimensional ontology. Within Merleau-Ponty's texts, it can be hard to spot the continuity between *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*. However, thanks to Nietzsche's coining of the term "philology", it becomes apparent that the common thread Merleau-Ponty followed throughout all of his life was the faithfulness to experience and the principle of economy, which led him to propose a philosophy of experience devoid of in-itself. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty's purely philological philosophy, independent of genealogy, subtly adds to Nietzsche's philology and his description of perception, radicalizing his views on the "nearest things" and on the sensible or phenomenal world as the only world, beyond truth and falsehood. When I criticized Nietzsche through the prism of Merleau-Ponty, my aim was not to prove the superiority of the latter; I simply wanted to demonstrate that the arguments from the Nietzschean corpus that could be opposed to philology's autonomy or relevance

(and therefore to the whole of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical undertaking) are not philological and not faithful to Nietzsche's own requirement of economy. I do not mean to prevent people from interpreting Nietzsche favorably, he has several excellent philological aphorisms (although he did not provide an epistemology or ontology to justify and explain them). Nevertheless, it is clear that the plethora of aphorisms written by Nietzsche is not uniformized nor homogeneous and therefore not philological to the same degree. Nietzsche's perspective alone does not provide enough distance, contrast or clarity to select among his own texts, in which the philological and non-philological intermingle, making it extremely difficult to determine which conclusions we should follow, and which ones should be rejected. On the contrary, the comparison with Merleau-Ponty allows us to sort the wheat from the chaff among Nietzsche's aphorisms. Thus, we discover that all the aphorisms that deny consciousness, perception, language, wholes and relations imply surreptitiously a revised form of in-itself, and that it is this persisting shadow of the in-itself that makes philology ultimately useless and worthless to Nietzsche, who ended up reducing it to a tool of the genealogical method. Therefore, by rejecting the in-itself and non-philological biases that still contaminated some of Nietzsche's texts, Merleau-Ponty managed to ensure the coexistence of genealogy and philology; he provided a philological and ontological framework in which genealogy can be applied without reducing the whole experience to values. The philology that Nietzsche can subordinate to genealogy is a superficial philology that has not been pushed to its full radicality and that did not develop its full consequences, for it gave up on (or did not reach) the description of the sensible and of voluminous and encompassing Being. Only if the world is reduced to the Will to Power can the relation between philology and genealogy be unilateral. In this case, philology leads to acknowledge the drives, instincts and values as the only reality that is worth describing and can be left behind, allowing the philosopher to dedicate themselves to the genealogical task of

evaluation and hierarchization of values. But if philology is broader than the Will to Power and genealogy – in other words, if both of them are encompassed in voluminous Being –, then philology cannot be reduced or subordinated to genealogy because it becomes the only method that introduces us to this transcendence that is immanent to experience. When genealogy emits ontological claims, it leaves its own axiological field and enters the philological domain, so its claims should be judged according to it. Yet, on this ground, the discovery or retrieval of thick Being forbids reducing all interpretations or perspectives to mere subjective creations and to interpreting drives or values (because doing so would flatten the experience of the world). Thereby, philology is not merely a first step that must then be abandoned and that can only lead to genealogy and become its servant: no! Philology has its own dignity, with radical results that can only be obtained by following it thoroughly and radically. It can coexist with genealogy, side by side, as two different methods that pursue different goals without competing with one another. Nietzsche started with philology and then decided to focus mainly on genealogy, that he discovered as being his idiosyncratic task, his philosophical purpose and the path he must follow, proper only to him. As he wrote in the Preface to *Human, All too Human*, it can take some time and previous detour to find one's task:

The violence and secret necessity of this task will reign among and within one's particular destinies, like an unconscious pregnancy, – long before they have perceived this task itself and know its name. Our vocation disposes of us, even if we do not yet know it; it is the future that prescribes its rule to our present. Assuming that it is the *problem of hierarchy* that we, as free spirits, have the right to call *our own*: it is only now, at the midpoint of our lives, that we understand what it took for this problem to arise – the preparations, detours, trials, temptations, and disguises – before it had the right to stand before us. Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain* I, Préface, §7, pp.56-57.

It is probable that philology was, at least to some extent, such a detour for Nietzsche. However, this does not make the philological task any less valid, relevant or important. First of all, it is a method to which Nietzsche chose to dedicate many years of his philosophical life, and that he never totally gave up for he kept talking of philology even in the *Antichrist*, even though it was mostly used to criticize Christianity, as a way to attack their nefarious values. Second of all, despite Nietzsche's decision, ultimately, to set the philological method aside, it is not the fate of every philology: its task can be pursued for itself and provide illuminating descriptions of experience. Other philosophers who have philology as their idiosyncratic task can, should and will pursue it, like Merleau-Ponty did. Hence, even though Merleau-Ponty did not conceive his own philosophy as mainly influenced by Nietzsche – it is not the author on who he reflected the most, far from it –, the comparison of the two is relevant because, beyond terminology, tradition or doctrine, what these two philosophers shared was (at least temporarily) a common task, supremely guiding their philosophical endeavors. In this way, they both took as their starting point the diversity and wealth of experience. Both authors rejected the positive and objective outlook on the world (which intends it as a “world in-itself”) and acknowledged instead the primacy of experience and the ineluctable influence and presence of our situation in anything we perceive, think or do. Thus, the two authors built their philosophy on the necessary acknowledgement of perspectivism, not understood in a negative and privative way, but on the contrary as the only reality (in philology's attempt at an economical reduction). With perspectivism, the two authors are confronted with a multiplicity of human experiences, diverse in cultural and historical ways, pertaining to countless different levels. From this shared starting point, it is the question or matter of “what to do” with this plurality that will separate and distance the two authors. Two distinct directions and tasks will emerge. Starting with the multiplicity found in experience, we can either aim for their common ground or *embrure*, retrieving the

general epistemological and ontological situation of any living being, or we can delve into this multiplicity and compare it, evaluating the different perspectives to see what kind of life they allow to lead. Merleau-Ponty, with the help of philology alone, focused solely on the former task, striving to uncover the general structure of experience and elucidate its ontological and epistemological status. For doing so, he looked at the dimensions and their figurations not so much for their particular content but rather so that he could criss-cross and intertwine the different views to unite them in depth. This is how Merleau-Ponty uncovered the ontological dimensional structure of the world, finding what is pre-personal and more-than-human in experience, at the crossroads or horizon of any experience and perspective. This approach to experience could be said to go “upwards” (vertically), or in depth, finding the general structure and the encompassing 3D ground through the intertwining of perspectives. Nietzsche, for his part, turned to genealogy for fulfilling another purpose, taking experience in another direction to compare, select and promote. To do so, he, too, explored the diversity of the perspectives and dimensions; however, it was not to elucidate their status nor to find something general but he did so to become acquainted with their idiosyncrasies and see what kind of life they allow to live, so that we could compare them and hierarchize them or at least choose the ones that we find more favorable for a vigorous existence. Thereby, Nietzsche did not merge the views in depth, but, rather (and as a different direction of experience), he juxtaposed them “horizontally” so as to be able to compare them and elaborate a judgment and a hierarchy, instead of aiming to describe for the sake of knowledge alone. Hence, in Nietzsche’s genealogical framework, the philological description became subordinated to the task of evaluating the human diversity found in experience, but this does not exhaust the whole meaning, task and possibility of philology. The two tasks coexist, and it is more accurate to say that it was Nietzsche who distanced himself from philology, that he stopped pursuing its task and placing his philosophy under

its emblem and method, rather than claiming that the whole philology is subordinated to genealogy. Therefore, the difference between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty is that the latter dedicated his whole life to the philological task, while the former adopted another method, directed towards another goal. Although he could not have known Merleau-Ponty, I feel that Nietzsche's 279<sup>th</sup> aphorism from *Gay Science* describes very accurately (through the prism of the task and method) his philosophical relation with him, as a stellar friendship:

We were friends, and we became strangers. [...] We are two ships, each with its own destination and route; we may well cross paths and celebrate together, as we did – the brave ships lay so peacefully in the same harbor, under the same sun, that they could give the impression of having already reached their destination and of having had one and the same goal. But then the almighty force of our task separated us again, pushing us towards different seas and lands with different suns [...]! That we had to become strangers is the law above us. Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §279, p.228.

The law separating the two authors is the very task that each method strives to fulfill. Both authors started in the port of philology, but then the winds of genealogy brought Nietzsche to another philosophical position, pursuing another task as another sun or harbor. It was important for me to posit the two tasks and methods as intrinsically distinct positions, against the temptation to interpret philology and genealogy as a single method and pure continuity. It is precisely their distinction that makes these two methods compatible, independent and both sovereign over their own domain (truth for philology and life and values for genealogy), impossible to reduce and subordinate. Conceiving them separately (at least in a first time) prevents obfuscating the comprehension of their respective tasks and ensures their autonomy and irreducibility. Only then can their relation be thought deeply and adequately. Thus, now that each task is clearly and distinctly understood, we can start interrogating their relation once again, which will finally reveal its full scope, whereas previously (*i.e.* in the sole

framework of Nietzsche's philosophy) it was underestimated and hindered by the *a priori* subordination of philology to genealogy.

From the apparent opposition or at least distinction between the tasks of philology and genealogy and between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, we may find, on a broader scale, a collaboration, reciprocity or interrelation between them. Nietzsche thematized this possibility, by writing (still in *Gay Science's* 279<sup>th</sup> aphorism): "there is probably a huge invisible curve and sidereal trajectory within which our very different paths and goals can fit together like small segments. [...] We therefore want to believe in our friendship of stars"<sup>350</sup>. In this way, if the two directions that the philosophers follow are not simply parallel lines that go in opposite sense, but if they are curves integrated as parts of a single circular trajectory, then Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty can respond to one another. Hence, it is not the case that one is just one superior to the other (in one sense or another) and absorbs it, but, by not focusing their work on the same problem, they in fact complement each other, strengthen the other segment and constitute together the common circular axis of experience. Let us now examine how each method helps the other accomplish its task, without sacrificing their own (which was the risk in Nietzsche's philosophy, in which philology lost its autonomy). As we have already seen, dimensional ontology can bestow to genealogy a philological and ontological reach, basis and justification. Moreover, thanks to Merleau-Ponty's ontology, we can finally find the epistemological or ontological difference that Nietzsche was lacking and that Schacht was looking for to justify granting a privilege to Nietzsche's perspective over others. Nietzsche proposed his hypothesis of reality as Wills to Power, but this ontological

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<sup>350</sup> Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, §279, pp.228-229.

interpretation cannot be experienced consciously. It is therefore excluded from experience; it pertains more to a kind of idealism that intends an infra-conscious in-itself. Nonetheless, and precisely because it cannot be experienced, other positive and dogmatic interpretations of the in-itself can be opposed to Nietzsche's interpretation. Since they all left the field of experience, no epistemological criterion could help discern between these interpretations and choose a more economical and faithful one: they all aim for positive, fully determined, flat, external and juxtaposed realities that cannot be given through relations (which is our only kind of knowledge). By contrast, Merleau-Ponty, with his dimensional ontology that he found as a transcendence within experience that unites us all, can discern between the interpretations that acknowledge perspectivism (and dimensional Being) and those who do not and leave experience. This seems to be the same criterion as the one proposed by Sarah Kofman; however, the difference now is that Merleau-Ponty's ontology can be attested by and in experience and without reducing it, whereas Nietzsche had a dogmatic, infra-conscious position of the Wills to Power, to which he reduced reality – thus missing a lot of aspects of the world (namely, everything that overflowed the field of values). Therefore, Merleau-Ponty's epistemological criterion is more philological as it distinguishes between perspectives or philosophies according to whether they acknowledge the primacy of the structure figure-ground and aim at total, voluminous Being or if they settle in a region of the world and take it for the whole reality (which is what Nietzsche did with genealogy), flattening it and intending entities without depth, unidimensional, unambiguous and that rest in themselves. Nevertheless, besides this point that allows Merleau-Ponty's view to be epistemologically and philologically superior, there is no way to hierarchize further between the different perspectives – or between the different levels according to which we perceive figures against backgrounds – because each of them expresses the whole world, with a few aspects being highlighted and a lot of aspects receding into the background. We can

acknowledge the whole of Being with Merleau-Ponty and perception as our anchoring in levels, but even after retrieving and accepting these crucial structure of experience we are left with no way to compare epistemologically the different levels since we always already settle in one, with its own implicit, so we do not know all of its biases nor all the dimensions and aspects that are ignored and overlooked. Merleau-Ponty is aware of this flaw, and he specified:

If the philosopher does not grant to themselves the power to unconditionally think all over their own thought – if they concede that their “ideas”, their “self-evident facts” are always naive to some extent, and that, embedded in the fabric of the culture to which they belong, it is not enough – for knowing them truthfully – to scrutinize and vary them in thought, they must be confronted with other cultural formations, seen against the background of other prejudices. Merleau-Ponty, « Le philosophe et la sociologie », in: *Eloge de la philosophie*, pp.114-115.

Nonetheless, this commendable attempt to limit the biases of the various cultural levels by criss-crossing them can never be finished, it is an endless task, and it is impossible for us to change the status of our knowledge since we always adopt a level. We can never have the implicit fully revealed to us, it always remains hidden or invisible. In the same way, voluminous Being, if never fully absent, is never fully present either, it remains at the horizon of all our perceptions and knowledge. Thus, we could criss-cross various cultural perspectives forever, we would still never reach a “truth in-itself” and escape the epistemology of the figure-ground. The question of truth, taken in a philological context, is not relevant anymore, or rather it is no longer the same problem or concept. Philological truth is not about objects and statements that are either true or false; it is a whole situation or living relation and as such it is unescapable. No one can be absolutely wrong or erroneous anymore. Any sentence – even the least intelligible or agreeable one – should be understood in the context of the whole of experience. As such, it has an intersubjective meaning that lies

in the implicit or “other side” of the sentence (for instance, in the body of the speaker, in their belonging to a culture, social and personal history, maybe a pathology and so on). The flesh (my own and the world’s) constitutes the “other side” of language (or any explicit meaning), and it integrates any figure or sentence into the truth of total Being, as a particular deviation or segregation whose figures would be false as separated, isolated objects, but which are true as an expression of the whole system. In other words, since every knowledge is a figure against a background, it can never be outside of truth: the whole relation, involving voluminous Being and our own flesh, is true as such, as a knowledge in situation from within Being. Thus, Merleau-Ponty affirmed that we should not

see in our situation only a principle of error. If I have once recognized that through it I am grafted onto every action and every piece of knowledge that can have meaning for me, and that it contains, step by step [de proche en proche, highlighting a continuity], everything that can be for me, then my contact with society [for instance] in the finitude of my situation reveals itself to me as the point of origin of all truth, including that of science, and, since we are in truth and cannot escape it, all that remains for me is to define a truth in the situation. Merleau-Ponty, « Le philosophe et la sociologie », in: *Eloge de la philosophie*, p.116.

Thus, our situation in voluminous Being is both what ensures we are in the truth and what separates us from making it explicit (by overflowing our flat figures). The truth is tied to our situation, and, like it, it can never be escaped; and yet, the philological truth is never juxtaposed in front of my gaze nor is it exhaustive. It stays true only with its implicit, non-thematized levels and dimensions, constituting an invisible thickness or depth. Therefore, the question of truth loses its relevance. Merleau-Ponty can justify his own philological ontology; however, he is unable to segregate between the different levels. All the perspectives are as true as any, partaking in the same epistemology because every knowledge follows the figure-ground structure. We can only distinguish epistemologically between

philosophies or perspectives based on whether they admit voluminous Being or no, if they are aware of it and acknowledge it or if they forgot it and ignore it, but this situation is unavoidable and every knowledge is a situated perspective, which means it is a partial segregation and figuration of Being that stands beyond truth and error. Hence, if we adopt only the philological method, we are left with undifferentiated levels and philology can never finish – or maybe it accomplished its task by retrieving voluminous Being and the epistemology of the figure-ground. Which is the reason why adopting another criterion than truth or faithfulness and economy in order to hierarchize between the different levels – for instance with the criterion of values and life to select the dimensions that allow to live better – can be a very nice addition to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Indeed, from the point of view of philology alone, which sees experience in its nascent state and integrated to (or deviating from) voluminous Being, as the Being not yet divided, the values cannot appear as such and be compared, for they can be compared only as figures that have been already particularized and detached from Being. The values are obtained at the end of knowledge and of the process of singularization or differentiation, while Merleau-Ponty's goal, to be economical, is to find the whole of Being, before the divisions (precisely so that they can be understood as such, as segregations of totality). As a result, the direction of Merleau-Ponty's gaze, adequate for philology, was unable to focus on the values, which require another direction of gaze and method that Nietzsche had. Colonna quoted Fink, who was one of Merleau-Ponty's inspiration and affirmed explicitly that total Being is more originary than values and is therefore devoid of them or useless to try to segregate them:

Without reason and without end, without meaning and without purpose, without value and without plan [or plane? in French the word is "plan", which could be either], the world has within it all the reasons for all intra-worldly beings, which all have a foundation. In its universal uselessness, it encompasses the paths along which we strive to achieve ends and goals. This world, even without value, embraces ontic being, which is differentiated in multiple ways

according to the degree of its power to be; it keeps open the spaces and times for the being of things, which has a reason and an end, which is full of meaning and charged with value. But we must have a clear and distinct awareness that the non-causality of the world, its absence of purpose, end, value, and plan, cannot be thought of, for example, on the model of an intramundane thing deprived of value. The absence of reason in the world is no less, it is not inferior to the fact that being is founded, it is something much more originary. Fink, *Le Jeu comme symbole du monde*, p.235.<sup>351</sup>

Understood from the paradigm of Merleau-Ponty, Fink's statement does not mean that the knowledge of the world as the encompassing voluminosity has a negative value – in other words, that it is an expression of the ascetic ideals that turned against life –, but, in fact, it means that the world is beyond or beneath the question of value, it overflows and encompasses all the dimensions and therefore it also encompasses all the affirmations or negations of life we will develop by settling in particular levels. In this way, philology is not invalidated by genealogy, it precedes it and is more originary than it. Philology simply does not help genealogy directly, nor is it relevant to its task, but that does not mean it should be given up on since it fulfills its own task of ontological description. Hence, genealogy is not entering into a conflict with philology anymore, it does not limit its rights nor the scope of its ontological findings, it is but a part of voluminous Being and cannot reduce it. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty managed – with a single ontological principle – to integrate genealogy to his framework; however, he still needs genealogy as a second task and method in order to see the values in their difference and to hierarchize them. We can now reassess the genealogical method from this new situation. Once philology has established dimensional ontology, genealogy tackles the remaining and very important question of which dimension we want to settle in and promote. Changing criterion and task here allows the philosopher to shift

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<sup>351</sup> Quote that I found in Colonna, *Merleau-Ponty et le renouvellement de la métaphysique*, p.375. Fink develops this issue in his book *La Philosophie de Nietzsche*, and in his text: « Nouvelle expérience du monde chez Nietzsche », pp. 345–364, in: *Nietzsche aujourd'hui*, vol. 2.

from an endless description towards a normative or selective approach that helps us strengthen life. Thereby, once voluminous Being has been acknowledged, we can turn to the exploration of the diversity of levels in an attempt to hierarchize them, not according to their truth (since it is not a segregating criterion), but according to the criteria of life, values and culture. This shift of criterion, outlook and task requires a change in method too, and this is where Nietzsche's invention of the genealogical method shines and reveals its utmost importance and originality. Thus, even after pointing out the philological flaws of Nietzsche's ontology, his genealogical approach remains relevant as it does not have theoretical or epistemological claims but axiological ones. We can examine, thanks to genealogy, what kind of life is involved or emphasized by particular dimensions and therefore the whole genealogical method becomes relevant once again, feeding on all of Nietzsche's developments, but now thanks to the detour through Merleau-Ponty's philological ontology the genealogical method becomes grounded and justified, it can be conceived as a proper continuation or addition to the philological method instead of opposing it and relativizing it like it was the case in Nietzsche's philosophy. The specificity of genealogy that makes it compatible with philology is precisely the fact that is not strictly or not only philological, it consists mostly in a judgment that is not (and cannot be) a pure description, it does not partake only (or even mainly) in the field of knowledge and is subordinated to another task (namely, the evaluation of the values' value). It is because it dedicates itself to another task than knowing and describing that genealogy can judge the levels, which were homogeneous and equal from the standpoint of their insertion in voluminous Being (*sub specie carnis*). Therefore, once genealogy is separated from the question of truth and philology, it does not subordinate philology to itself and, conversely, it cannot be "proven" wrong and overcome either, it remains an original method that settles in a particular dimension of Being and allows us to thematize values, compare them and choose

the way we want to lead our life. As a result, the genealogical method can now be adopted as a second tool or outlook to the philological philosopher in order to fulfil a second task besides the descriptive one, to compare, evaluate and hierarchize the different perspectives, not according to their truth but according to the kind of life they promote, so that we can choose in which level we want to settle. Reflecting on and seeing the world is one thing; it is the backdrop to our existence. But examining how we live our lives on the surface of this thick ground or fabric is something else entirely, and it is just as important, if not more so! It is a whole new task and problem that Nietzsche brought to philosophy, and that any philosopher can try to tackle independently of the ontology they adopt. Interestingly, even though Nietzsche did not find the ontology of voluminous Being and lacked radicality in his philology, he had the remarkable philological intuition that something was wrong, which led him to change his field of inquiry to safeguard his probity. However, Nietzsche misidentified the problem as being the whole search for truth and knowledge. Nonetheless, this “mistake” prompted him to develop the genealogical method, which is a great addition to the traditional search for knowledge, allowing the philosophers to discriminate and hierarchize the different levels. Merleau-Ponty agrees with Nietzsche that our perception is culturally informed, and he drew the epistemological implications of this fact. Nevertheless, he failed to observe or mention and tackle the axiological consequences of this situation, which is why Nietzsche is a great addition to Merleau-Ponty’s description, allowing, taken together, to draw the two sets of conclusions, resting on different grounds and fulfilling different tasks that are not incompatible nor opposed to one another. Merleau-Ponty’s task, just like Nietzsche’s, also requires an exploration of human cultural diversity for it is the intertwining and reciprocity of several dimensions that allows us to find the universal, deep and dimensional structure in which we are all situated. But Nietzsche explored the diversity of cultures more concretely than Merleau-Ponty, so his outlook would strengthen Merleau-Ponty’s ontology.

Conversely, and even though Merleau-Ponty did not elaborate his philosophy with this goal in mind, finding the dimensional structure of the world and overcoming the dichotomy between in-itself and representation might very well entail or result in a healthy and strong existence. As a result, probity would be a value that is positively assessed by genealogy. In this line of thought, Bergson wrote a vibrant and inspiring praise of philological philosophy for its effect on life, which echoes strongly with Merleau-Ponty's dimensional ontology:

Through [philological] philosophy, we can accustom ourselves to never isolating the present from the past [or the figures from the thick fabric of the total world] that it carries within it. Thanks to it, all things acquire depth – more than depth, something like a fourth dimension that allows current perceptions, and the immediate future itself, to take shape in part in the present. Reality no longer appears static [or flat] in its modality of being; it asserts itself dynamically [or voluminosity, in the flesh], in the continuity and variability of its tendency. What was immobile and frozen in our perception warms up and starts to move. Everything around us comes to life, everything within us is revived. A great momentum [and fabric] carries beings and things along. Through it, we feel lifted, carried, transported. We live more fully, and this increase in life brings with it the conviction that serious philosophical enigmas can be resolved or perhaps even that they should not be asked, having arisen from a frozen [or flattened] vision of reality and being only the translation, in terms of thought, of a certain artificial weakening of our vitality. And the deeper we sink into it, the more we realign ourselves with the direction of the principle, however transcendent, in which we participate. Bergson, « La perception du changement » in: *La pensée et le mouvant*, pp.175-176.

Bergson emphasized the living experience of duration, against fossilized time; but the same description and conclusion (of an intensification of life) can be done through Merleau-Ponty's description of the flesh, perceiving *sub specie carnis* and breaking the cold wall between the in-itself and the for-itself. With Merleau-Ponty, what is traditionally considered as being solely "in" us, for instance perception, is not an internal representation anymore, but it is the sensible world that we perceive, non-exhaustively but nonetheless in the flesh

and with no intermediaries nor absolute distance. On the contrary, Nietzsche still struggled with the problem of the distinction between in-itself and for-itself, due to his flat ontology and his rejection of consciousness, language and perception. This anti-philological position of Nietzsche entails or stems from a weakened vitality according to Bergson. It is Nietzsche's pessimism and pathological mistrust towards experience that led him to his flat ontology and solipsism. When we do not believe anymore in what we see as being an expression of the flesh in person, then it becomes a mere superficial and artificial erroneous image, only inherent to our consciousness which constitutes our fabricated prison that cuts us off from the existing world, which turns into a world in-itself because of this distance. Nietzsche's prism led him to believe that he was isolated and trapped in such subjective and fabricated fictions. Everyone knows how Nietzsche suffered from solitude, despite him often boasting that he was unaffected or even strengthened by it. In contrast to the cold loneliness of the traveler in the desert, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy displays the warmth of the thick and intersubjective world: in contact with all and everyone, I am never alone – even in my most private thoughts –, always situated at the crossroads of all views. Breaking away from Nietzsche's pessimism and pathological mistrust, Merleau-Ponty does not conceive our perception as simply a false creation anymore. We are not, like a solipsist, isolated in our own mind, trapped between its subjective, too-human walls, but we are in the world, *In der Welt Sein*. Such a framework radically modifies our relation to the world, to ourselves and to others: every experience becomes communication with a vertical existence, or, in other words, with a transcendence that shares the same sensible world as us, coexisting simultaneously and in chiasm with us, without a screen in between. All experience becomes warmer and more direct, involving us fully and encroaching on everything. Touching your loved one was, in Nietzsche's framework, a mere fictitious interpretation of electro-chemicals signals that meant that you could never really touch this person, it was all “in your

head”, an artificial illusion produced by your brain or the interpreting drives, but now, with Merleau-Ponty, this same experience becomes a contact flesh-to-flesh, direct and in person, and the warmth of this feeling is incomparable to the coldness of representation. This also allows us to care far more for all the little or mundane things around us, for they are not tools nor illusions, but they become full-fledged others, sensible vertical existences co-existing in the same world as we do. In the preface he added later on to *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche thematized the acknowledgement and attention to the “nearest things” as a sign of recovery thanks to experience becoming warmer:

Another step onward in convalescence. The free spirit again approaches life, slowly, of course, almost recalcitrantly, almost suspiciously. It grows warmer around him again, yellower, as it were; his sensitivity and compassion deepen, winds of thaw of all kinds blow over him. He almost feels as if his eyes were only now open to *what is near*. He is amazed and speechless: *where had he been?* These near and nearest things, how transformed they seem to him! What softness and magic they have taken on since then! Nietzsche, *Humain, trop humain* I, Préface, §5, pp.53-54.

The place where Nietzsche was and where things lost their warmth and their thickness was his own consciousness, which formed the walls from which he could not escape: his prison. Nevertheless, at his healthiest point, Nietzsche realized that we in fact live in the world. The experiences we live are meaningful and ontological, not as the presentation of represented or fabricated “objects” (as something purely positive and/or subjective), but as a carnal contact in the flesh thanks to depth, making every phenomenon supremely real. This path to healing and recovery, that Nietzsche acknowledged himself as such, could have been reached thanks to Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty’s philological and dimensional ontology of perception and the understanding of perspective as a contact with voluminous flesh and otherness could have been an “interpretation” that would have allowed

Nietzsche to live better, more healthily and strongly. Dimensional ontology or philology is not the only way to increase vitality, but it is certainly one of them, and therefore it can be valued positively by genealogy, perhaps (or even probably) more than Nietzsche's own ontology, philology and epistemology. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche confessed, implicitly, that he did not possess the key to his own chains, but that he could nonetheless hold the key to other people's problems: "A false saying goes as follows: « those who do not redeem themselves, how can they redeem others? ». If I have the key to your shackles, why would your lock and mine have to be the same?"<sup>352</sup>. This is in fact another metaphor that holds the same meaning as the star friendship. Indeed, Nietzsche's genealogy is what allows to continue the philosophical investigation in a meaningful way (*i.e.* to help us choose between levels) after recovering dimensional Being, so it is the key to Merleau-Ponty's lock, and Merleau-Ponty's dimensional ontology is the key that could have allowed Nietzsche to live better by regaining confidence in perception, consciousness and the relation with others, getting him out of his state of absolute isolation. Thereby, while still pursuing their own task, each method can – at least partially – help the other one.

Therefore, I still affirm a link between philology and genealogy. My only grievance against Nietzsche, who also affirmed this link, is that he demanded genealogy to fully and wholly fulfill two different tasks at the same time. Indeed, the problem in the Nietzschean framework taken alone is that genealogy (understood as the hypothesis of the Wills to Power)

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<sup>352</sup> Nietzsche, *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Summer 1882 – Winter 1883/84)*, 4 [4], p.94. The French translation (Nietzsche, *Fragments Posthumes IX*, 4 [4], pp.119-120) chooses the verb "délivrer" instead of redeem, which entails more the idea of breaking free (from chains), and implies by contrast that Nietzsche was not free, that his own philosophy did not solve all of his problems and that another one (for instance Merleau-Ponty's) could have helped him, being the appropriate key for his own lock.

had claims not only on the axiological domain but also on the philological and ontological one. This hope for genealogy was excessive and made it impossible to fulfill its task, becoming too broad and diffuse. Nevertheless, instead of lowering his requirements regarding genealogy and focusing on its axiological task, Nietzsche diminished the importance of the philological task, making it a case of genealogy. Yet, doing so implies reducing reality to the ontology of the Will to Power and losing aspects of the world and of experience (namely, the plurality of dimensions and total Being as the dimensionality), which is therefore not a philological solution. It seems that, ultimately, experience cannot be reduced to a single principle, method and outlook. To be philological is to be as economical as possible; however, being the most economical also entails not sacrificing and missing aspects of experience. Hence, we should reduce to the minimum the number of principles we need, but only insofar as it does not miss aspects of experience. And it appears, thanks to the comparison between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, that the minimum number of principles, methods and prisms required to adequately understand experience cannot be less than two. Thereby, it is better (in the sense that it is more faithful to experience) to grasp ontology and axiology as two distinct tasks that are fulfilled by two distinct methods. This implies to comprehend genealogy outside of the purely Nietzschean framework of the ontology and epistemology of the Will to Power, so that it can be adopted by anyone and can be practiced without having to reduce the whole of reality to values before-hand. Prior to the comparison with Merleau-Ponty, genealogy was ensnared in the mesh of the Will to Power, particularizing it according to this ontological and epistemological option, thus making it less available to others than it should as a whole method, task and field of experience. When people hear the word “genealogy”, they immediately think of Nietzsche and no one else, while it could become a method as broad as sociology or anthropology (which both also study particular dimensions of cultural experience), with disciples, different

currents of thought and different hierarchies, for instance by focusing less on Christianity<sup>353</sup> or by evaluating positively egalitarianism and democracy (as political systems fostering more individual potentialities and creativeness) in opposition or difference to Nietzsche's aristocratic taste. Therefore, by showing that values and genealogy can be integrated within a broader ontological and epistemological frame (like the dimensional one), Merleau-Ponty freed genealogy from Nietzsche's monopoly and from a restrictive understanding. Now genealogy is more accessible and can be conceived as a fully autonomous method. As a result, more people could become interested in genealogy and new hierarchies or even creation of values might emerge and could change the course of humanity. Moreover, and in the same way, the comparison between Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche also demonstrated that it is not necessary to give up on philology and on a faithful and economical description of reality. Merleau-Ponty proved that we can have a philological approach that does not have any *a priori* claim on our values or on the way we live, which makes it compatible with genealogy (since it does not compete with it), while also uncovering a dimensional ontology inaccessible to genealogy alone. By doing so, he defended the independence and relevance of the philological method. Then, now that they are autonomous, these methods can collaborate (as we have seen), but they do not reign over nor dominate the other domain and do not reduce it to themselves. By contrast, and even though he coined two different methods, Nietzsche underestimated the fact that experience could require two distinct (but coexisting) outlooks or even directions of gaze in order to be expressed fully, both under the

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<sup>353</sup> See for instance in Nietzsche, *L'Antéchrist*, §46, p.104 in which Nietzsche formulates his table of values not positively, in his own sovereignty, but only in opposition and contrast to the Christian one: "Every word that comes out of the mouth of a « first Christian » is a lie, every action he performs is instinctively false – all his values, all his goals are harmful, but the one he hates, that is what has value... The Christian, the Christian of priests in particular, is a criterion of values". Nevertheless, this seems like a reactive way of establishing values and might therefore not be the strongest or healthiest table of values. Indeed, a reaction against the weak and unhealthy might still be contaminated by their way of framing the issues, so inverting the value might not be radical enough, new values should be created from the inner necessity of the strong. I do not claim Nietzsche only posited his values reactively, but I wanted to point out that another author who would attempt using the genealogical method with less emphasis on religion might produce different results.

aspect of voluminous Being and under the aspect of our human life with goals and particular values. Only the combination of philology and genealogy – as two distinct and independent methods reintegrated as segments of the circular axis of our existence situated in voluminous Being – can express the whole of experience. Thus, the stellar friendship between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty stands as the coexistence and collaboration of philology and genealogy, as two viewing directions of the diversity of experience, each of which fulfills a task in which the other can participate, but which it cannot complete, exhaust or replace. This more nuanced or complex view allows philology and genealogy to be distinct and yet to still cooperate, as two tasks and methods for anyone who wants to take part in a philosophy that overcame and rejects the non-economical and nefarious (for life) hypothesis of the in-itself.

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