

FRANK CHOURAQUI

Ambiguity and the Absolute
Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty
on the Question of Truth



PERSPECTIVES IN
CONTINENTAL
PHILOSOPHY

Ambiguity and the Absolute

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Ambiguity and the Absolute

*Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty
on the Question of Truth*

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First edition

To my friends Judith Walz and Bernie Flynn

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Abbreviations

N.B. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Nietzsche's writings signal the sections, not the pages. All other unpublished notes are from the standard edition Kröner (*KGWB*) and referenced as follows: notebook number, [entry]. Exceptionally, I refer to *KSA* with the notebook number in Latin numerals, followed by the entry number.

N.B. In references to Merleau-Ponty, the first number refers to pages in the English translation, the second one to the original French; "t.a." signals personal amendments to the translations. When only one page number is provided it refers to the French, and the English translation is mine.

<i>AC</i>	<i>The Antichrist</i> , Nietzsche, 1888–1889
<i>AD</i>	<i>Adventures of the Dialectic / les Aventures de la Dialectique</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1955
<i>BGE</i>	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , Nietzsche, 1886
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music</i> , Nietzsche, 1872
<i>CAL</i>	<i>Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language / la Conscience et l'Acquisition du Langage</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1949–1950
<i>Causeries</i>	<i>Causeries</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1948
<i>D</i>	<i>Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality</i> , Nietzsche, 1881
<i>EH</i>	<i>Ecce Homo</i> , Nietzsche, 1888–1889
<i>GM</i>	<i>On The Genealogy of Morality</i> , Nietzsche, 1887

GS	<i>The Gay Science</i> , Nietzsche, 1882–1887
HATH	<i>Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits</i> , Nietzsche, 1878
HLP	<i>Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology</i> / <i>Husserl aux Limites de la Phénoménologie</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1959–1960
HT	<i>Humanism and Terror: The Communist Problem</i> / <i>Humanisme et Terreur, Essai sur le Problème Communiste</i> , 1947
IP	<i>L’Institution, la Passivité: Notes de Cours au Collège de France (1954–1955)</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1954–1955
IS	<i>The Incarnate Subject</i> / <i>l’Âme et le Corps</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1947–1948
KGWB	<i>Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> , Nietzsche
KSA	<i>Kritische Studienausgabe</i> , Nietzsche
N	<i>La Nature: Notes, Cours du Collège de France</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1956–1960
NC	<i>Notes de Cours 1959–1961</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1959–1960
NL	“Notes de Lecture et Commentaires sur <i>Théorie du Champ de la Conscience</i> de Aron Gurwitsch,” Merleau-Ponty, 1960
OE	“Eye and Mind” / <i>l’Œil et l’Esprit</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1960
P	<i>Parcours</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1935–1951
P2	<i>Parcours Deux: 1951–1961</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1951–1961
PP	<i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> / <i>Phénoménologie de la Perception</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1945
Praise	<i>In Praise of Philosophy</i> / <i>Éloge de la Philosophie</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1953
PriP	<i>The Primacy of Perception</i> / <i>le Primat de la Perception et ses Conséquences Philosophiques</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1946
PT	<i>Philosophy and Truth, Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870s</i> , Nietzsche
PW	<i>The Prose of the World</i> / <i>la Prose du Monde</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1951–1952
RC	<i>Résumés de Cours (Collège de France, 1952–1960)</i> , Merleau-Ponty
RL	<i>Rhétorique et Langage</i> , Nietzsche, 1872–1875
S	<i>Signs</i> / <i>Signes</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1960
SNS	<i>Sense and Nonsense</i> / <i>Sens et Non-Sens</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1948
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i> , Nietzsche, 1888–1889
TL	<i>Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952–1960</i> / <i>Résumés de Cours (Collège de France, 1952–1960)</i> , Merleau-Ponty, 1952–1960
UMI	<i>David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer</i> , Nietzsche, 1873

- UMII *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Nietzsche, 1874
- UMIII *Schopenhauer as Educator*, Nietzsche, 1874
- VI *The Visible and the Invisible / le Visible et l'Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty, 1961
- WP *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche, 1883–1889
- WS “The Wanderer and His Shadow,” in HATH, Nietzsche, 1878
- Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche, 1883–1884

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Preface

In 1636, as he was still reeling from the death of his first child, an infant boy named Rumbartus, a young Rembrandt composed one of his most direct and explicit works, the remarkable etching *Abraham Caressing Isaac*. This was not his first attempt at unraveling the mysteries attached to the most famous infanticide in Western culture. In the months following Rumbartus's death, Rembrandt had already used this theme as the basis for one of his early masterpieces, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*.

If the earlier painting used vivid colors to display the brutal resolve of the father in stark contrast with the innocent exposition of the child—with Abraham forcefully covering his son's face, on the verge of breaking his neck—the later etching was more reflexive, and beyond the obvious outrage before the broken filial trust (and, it may be assumed, the incomprehension before a father willingly bringing upon himself the pain that Rembrandt himself was dealt by fate), the etching now asked a question that can be seen no longer as psychological, but as cultural. Rembrandt's etching had now moved to depicting a duel of principles, not of individuals. The etching seems to be asking: What sort of thinking does it take to kill one's own child? And further: What sort of thinking must this child represent that requires elimination?

The etching is not as starkly violent as the painting. A younger Isaac is seen smiling in a near ravished way at an apple he is holding in his hand, half toy, half temptation. The already aged Abraham decorously sits behind the child in great attire, his frame overwhelming the young child's

outlines, and his hand already holding the child's neck with an ambiguous firmness, between protection and strangulation. Abraham is not looking at the child, he is gazing straight into the viewer's eyes with a defiant and self-confident stare. Isaac, however, in his playful fascination with the apple, is oblivious to the threat of the father. The future crime is painted all over the etching, but Rembrandt's choice of an earlier time, long before the divine beckoning and the actual sacrifice, points to his true concern: it is a matter of looking beyond the legend, with its twisted chain of events that conveniently removes all questions of agency by replacing them with a praise of obedience.

Rembrandt seems to suggest that only a personality like Abraham could become this child's killer. In short, he is questioning something we now would call the fanatical spirit, the spirit that values the divine over the earthly, an abstract god over a living child. In this light, many of his visual choices seem to aggregate: Abraham's gaze is untroubled, lucid, and objective; its directness acknowledges the viewer while its defiance establishes an insurmountable distance from them. Judgment is not for the others to give, and Abraham's strength of resolve is clearly drawn from a reference to the absolute that no common moral convention or emotion can break. Isaac, "He-Who-Shall-Laugh," however, keeps nothing at a distance. Indeed, his whole body is enveloped in the frame and heavy clothing of his father, his neck is touched by his father's hands, while his own hands are full—one holding the apple and the other resting on his father's knee. Even his right foot, whose heel is playfully lifted, is resting on his own left foot, maintaining the child's complete embeddedness in the world. The child looks away, and we only have a lateral view of his luminous and joyful face. He is oblivious of us like he is oblivious of his father, so fully involved is he in his relationship with a world he does not keep at bay.

Two spirits, Rembrandt seems to say to us, one of objective consciousness, a piercing gaze whose reference and only allegiance is to the absolute; and the other spirit, one of playful engagement, oblivious to most things, but nonetheless fully saturated with its encounter with the world. The first spirit engaged in a fight to the death against the other.

The Dutch Republic of Rembrandt's time was a country of rationalist optimism where human reason was enjoying an unprecedented triumph, and there is little doubt that the painter himself was sensitive to and influenced by the new ideas. In this context, should we still say that this etching represents the suspicions of an artist before the powers of objective rationality? What is more, it seems that Abraham's absolute resolve rests not on a reference to human rationality, but instead on a reference to the supernatural that the new humanist spirit was committed to rejecting. It

would take Nietzsche, of course, to show how these considerations are not contradictory, how the modern humanist spirit was unable to shake off a reference to the in-itself and how this in-itself constitutes the ultimate refuge of the shadows of the dead god. It would indeed take Nietzsche to show that Abraham and Descartes suffered from the same disease of fanaticism, but even without Nietzsche we may see how Rembrandt's visual train of thought took him to a preliminary conclusion: absolute thinking is locked in a fight to the death with ambiguous thinking, a thinking that is its offspring nonetheless.

This is a large part of the lesson of the critiques of modernity, including those of Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty: ambiguous thinking cannot entirely shed any reference to the absolute, which will always retain an abusive authority over it, and yet any reference to the absolute requires the violent sacrifice of the lived world. The problem that Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty recognize at the dusk of modernity echoes the concern expressed by Rembrandt at its dawn: it is to find a ground for truth that includes the knowledge that the absolute is folly.

This book has many flaws, but in the space between them I see the traces of the inspiring conversations and encouragements of many colleagues and mentors. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Judith Walz and Bernie Flynn (to whom this book is dedicated), Len Lawlor, Glen Mazis, Galen Johnson, Mauro Carbone, Richard Kearney, Herman W. Siemens, Miguel de Beistegui, and to my dear friends Mark Gillingham, Konstantina Rizopoulou, and Xavier Roth, whose philosophical ability to cut the nonsense from the sense has been most precious to me through the years.

Most of the ideas presented here have been developed during my time as a graduate student at the University of Warwick where I have enjoyed and immensely benefited from the enthusiasm and inspiration of my supervisor, Keith Ansell-Pearson. Now as then, his intellectual generosity is a constant reminder that, indeed, there must be something right about wanting to be a scholar. I still have fond memories of the commitment with which many of my fellow students at Warwick and elsewhere engaged with some of the questions addressed here until the small hours of the morning, and of the generosity and depth of their comments. I am particularly thankful for and proud of my intellectual kinship with Richard J. Lambert, Joseph D. Kuzma, Sebastian Stein, Marjorie Gracieuse, Zeynep Talay, Katrina Mitcheson, Lee Watkins, Andreas Vrahimis, and Rainer J. Hanshe.

A version of some parts of Chapter 6 has been presented at the meeting of the International Merleau-Ponty Circle at Asheville, North Carolina,

organized by Duane Davis in September 2010, and published in a revised form in *Chiasmi International* (13 [2011]: 407–28) under the title “Temporal Thickness in the Notes of May 1959.” I take this opportunity to thank the editors for their permission to reproduce a shorter version of this text. A version of some parts of Chapter 2 was presented at the international conference on Nietzsche and Naturalism organized by Peter R. Sedgwick at the University of Cardiff, UK, in September 2010.

A draft of this book benefited from the comments and suggestions of two reviewers whom I wish to thank warmly for their attention and generous readings. My sincere thanks to my editors at Fordham University Press: Helen Tartar for her passion of text, Tom Lay for his constant support and wise advice, and the mighty Erin Schwiderson for the thorough and expert copy editing.

Finally, I wish to thank Natalie Heller for her wisdom that knows how to line the time of thinking with the time of living, and for making sense.

Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) could hardly be more different men or, indeed, different thinkers. Initially, it seems only contrasts can be drawn between them. Jean-François Lyotard calls Merleau-Ponty “one of the least arrogant of all philosophers,” a description hardly anyone would apply to Nietzsche (Lyotard 1989, 189). Nietzsche’s radical temperament gave birth to a “hammer” philosophy that most consider irreconcilable with both Merleau-Ponty’s moderate personality and his entire philosophical edifice, which is often based upon subtle differences of degree and emphasis. In the Anglo-American world, Nietzsche was often denied the status of philosopher, at least until Arthur C. Danto’s *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (Danto [1965] 2005). Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, has been described as “the philosopher’s existentialist” (Warrnock 1970, 71) in opposition to those thinkers-writers identified with the existentialist movement, and with whom Nietzsche has often been associated. The list of such more or less prima facie contrasts could be continued, including the sheer differences in writing styles, historical contexts, and relations with the philosophical contexts of their times and with the traditions of the past. Most important is that the differences in their lives and writing styles express a clear opposition in their relations with the institutional tools of knowledge at their disposal. Both philosophers were active during periods when, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, “the modern philosopher [was] frequently a functionary,” times of professional and institutionalized philosophy (*Praise*, 33). Merleau-Ponty spent all his working life under

these institutions, from secondary education lycées to the accolade of the induction to the Collège de France. He founded, edited, and wrote in several academic journals, taking theoretical stances in the current philosophical debates with those other “functionaries” he considered his colleagues. Nietzsche, the wanderer, left his chair at Basel shortly before the completion of the last of the *Untimely Meditations* in 1876, and although he did not formally retire until 1879 he never formally returned either. By this time, one motif was already entrenched in his outlook: he would be, indeed, an “untimely” thinker. This has important philosophical consequences, as is demonstrated by the sustained frequency of the untimely motif in his subsequent works. Timeliness, for the young Nietzsche, means transitoriness, superficiality, and herd mentality; it is defined by fashions and trends that distract us from reality and numb our inquisitive powers. Timeliness is the opposite of philosophy. More than most other philosophers, Merleau-Ponty was timely. He wrote several articles in newspapers, gave circumstantial papers around the world, and dedicated a good half of *SNS* and *S* to essays relating to current, national, international, and sometimes merely Parisian affairs, not to mention the two remarkably political and, indeed, timely texts *HT* and *AD*. In fact, Merleau-Ponty even voiced his preference for philosophical timeliness. At a congress of thinkers from both sides of the Iron Curtain, Merleau-Ponty refused the terms of his “Soviet interlocutor” who spoke, he declared, in “an untimely [*hors de saison*] language, an intemporal language.” “Those terms,” he continued, “worried” him because they blocked the way to the intellectual’s political “commitment [*engagement*]” (*P2*, 175). This takes us to what I think is the most interesting opposition one may draw between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty: their opposition on the question of politics. When I say the “question” of politics, I really mean two questions. One is what this politics entails for the rest of a philosopher’s thought: What are the politics of this or that thinker, and what is its relation to their philosophy as a whole? For example, in what way, if any, can we still draw a parallel between two thinkers who disagree politically? The other is the question of what should be the philosophical (perhaps even ontological) place, role, and importance of politics.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche passionately pleads against the “most despicable” of possible human types, which he calls the “last human.” The last human knows how to live in a community; he does not seek domination or power, be it political or financial, and he has “invented happiness.” This, Nietzsche thinks, is exemplified by the spirit of progress and humanism that he sees, with a shiver, spread over Europe. There is little doubt that Nietzsche would see this “despicable” spirit at work in the

very endeavors which Merleau-Ponty actively supported and engaged in. In the preface to *SNS*, Merleau-Ponty takes stock of the failure of Marxism as practiced in the Eastern Bloc. Yet, he claims, this failure is precisely the failure to live up to its own promises, an internal failure that does not threaten the fundamental humanism at its core. For Merleau-Ponty, the task has not changed, and this task was always for “men of all countries” to

find the ways to recognize and join each other. Prehistory would finish. A word was said which expected a response from this immense virtual humanity which had since ever kept silent. We were going to witness this absolutely unheard-of world where every human counts. (*SNS*, 4/8)

The rebirth of “this expectation,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “is expressed here [in *SNS*] in several studies” (*SNS*, 4/8). Here, one might argue, Merleau-Ponty shows himself longing for Nietzsche’s last human.

Of course, Merleau-Ponty’s commitment to the politics of the last human must be nuanced—observed through time, from Soviet Marxism to the “non-communist left,” from the activist enthusiasm of the early days to the meditative spirit of the analyses of some items of news in *S*, for example. It has been claimed (wrongly) that Merleau-Ponty, at some point, “retired” (e.g., Goehr 2004, 344) from politics, only to prompt questions about whether retiring from politics without disavowing the past is not itself an eminently political act, or whether one should not see the insistence on doing philosophy as a sign of continued political concern (what are the late analyses on the ontology of history, or the enigmatic references to “the militant infinite” in the context of fundamental ontology, if not a deepening of the political question?), and so forth. What remains, is that Merleau-Ponty’s political project committed him to an egalitarian, state-based, happiness-seeking society. And Nietzsche’s did not—quite the opposite.

This political disagreement may be seen as a sign of a deeper difference. There is underlying it a profound divergence of views regarding the mutual roles of the political and the philosophical. The later Nietzsche repeatedly defines his own project as seeking “an ordering of rank” (*WP*, 287) through a “reversal [*Umwertung*] of all values” (257). This account infuses his whole philosophy with a political coloring. If the political divergence between the two philosophers posed some questions as to the relevance of drawing parallels between them, it may seem that Nietzsche’s philosophical decision to build the political into the horizon of his philosophy transforms this divergence into a clear and systematic opposition. This would

indeed follow if Merleau-Ponty as well considered his political convictions to be the horizon of his own philosophy. This, however, is not the case. It is clear that Merleau-Ponty's investigations on language, perception, and ontology, although not without political consequences, are not subjected to a political project; they are quite traditionally directed toward truth and knowledge, and the deep connections between his politics and his ontology are methodological (indeed, his ontology is itself methodological) more than ideological.

There is also a factual argument that allows us not to reduce Nietzsche's or Merleau-Ponty's philosophies to mere political projects: it is us, readers. A quick glance at any library shelf testifies that we read, admire, and are inspired by these thinkers beyond what they have to say about politics. We look to Nietzsche for insight into metaethics and gender theory but also for views on ontology, metaphysics, and the theory of knowledge or history. Likewise, most recent Merleau-Ponty scholarship is (rightly) occupied with the way Merleau-Ponty connects perception with ontology and language with history, or any combination of the above. In this context, it is not the case that an awareness of the political divergence between the two thinkers condemns to the mere anecdotic level any attempt to build a bridge between their contributions to philosophy at large.

Aims

In view of the numerous oppositions mentioned above, the few recent signs hinting at the fruitfulness of establishing a link between these two philosophers are all the more remarkable. This intuition is in part an expression of the peculiar self-awareness of our modern age. Both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty are now established as important forces behind the present paradigm of most continental philosophy, and modern philosophy's passion for self-analysis leads it to examine this double lineage with renewed attention. The relationships and the more-or-less avowed debt of authors like Jacques Derrida or Gilles Deleuze toward both men and the importance for Merleau-Ponty's development of his encounter with Martin Heidegger, Eugen Fink, and, to a lesser extent, Max Scheler and Karl Jaspers, combined with these thinkers' own well-known engagement with Nietzsche, seem to establish a certain kinship by association between the two philosophers. As two seminal moments in modern philosophy, they are often found associated with its many developments in critical theory, gender studies, investigations on the question of the body and incarnation, the theory of knowledge, and aesthetics. In her interesting *Nietzsche and Embodiment*, for example, Kristen Brown devotes a chapter to Merleau-

Ponty titled, strikingly, “Nietzsche after Nietzsche” (Brown 2006). There, she likens Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the body as a self-sufficient explanatory principle for life and experience to Nietzsche’s idea of the same. In an ambitious study, Deborah Carter Mullen has attempted to establish a link between the works of Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger through a joint analysis of their treatment of art (Carter Mullen 1999). In the manuscripts of his posthumous *The Ontology of Becoming and the Ethics of Particularity*—a book containing two independent manuscripts, one on Nietzsche and one on Merleau-Ponty—which was recently published through the good care of Lawrence Hass, Merleau-Ponty scholar Martin Dillon reveals his longstanding interest in Nietzsche, and one cannot help but be struck to see him passionately working on the two projects at once. Even though no intrinsic—let alone ontological—connection surfaces in those texts, there is no doubt that Dillon’s quest was to elucidate the supposed unique locus of the fascination exercised by both authors on his own thinking (Dillon 2012). Finally, in what is to my knowledge the most sustained effort to build upon the encounter of the two philosophers, Rosalyn Diprose’s *The Bodies of Women* (1994) and *Corporeal Generosity* (2002) propose an original philosophy of sexual and social difference based upon Nietzsche’s and Merleau-Ponty’s accounts of the constitution of identity out of differentiation through intersubjectivity. It is noteworthy that Diprose readily admits that her project is not, strictly speaking, Nietzschean or Merleau-Pontian. Instead it is the elaboration of an original philosophy that utilizes these thoughts to address contemporary challenges (Diprose 2002, 11). In this sense, the works I have just mentioned aim beyond a question that they do not solve: Is there an intrinsic link between Nietzsche’s and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophies? There are several reasons why this question is worth asking with some degree of urgency. First, the interest in Merleau-Ponty continues to grow in the Anglo-American world, while at the same time the field of Nietzsche studies remains impressive in diversity and intensity. Second, in addition to the monographs cited above, we must note the appearance in recent scholarship of a number of articles attempting to establish parallels between specific claims in Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty (e.g., Schenck 1985; Schrag 1992; Johnson 1993; Flynn 1996; Evans 1998; Cazeaux 2001; Dufourcq 2011). Such contributions often offer fruitful advances in the themes they investigate, but their very nature precludes a wider contextualization that alone would provide the very justification for offering parallels in the first place. In the case of Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, even more than elsewhere, differences of contexts, styles of writing, and modes of thinking are so great that one cannot be content with point-by-point comparisons and parallels. In this

setting, such prima facie parallels may conceal second-analysis contradictions. All of this points to the necessity to move away from the anecdotic level toward the question of the intrinsic links between the two thinkers.

The aim of this book is thus to establish an intrinsic and systematic link between the works of Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty. The difficulty, of course, is in the term “systematic.” If by this I mean a full exposition of the two philosophies and the establishment of their link, failure will of course be inevitable and such an ambition will only amount to greater confusion. When drawing strong parallels between authors, it is often possible and useful to be guided by the (sometimes mutual) references made by the authors themselves. In this case, however, this way is also blocked. If Merleau-Ponty did not totally ignore Nietzsche, it is manifest that his knowledge of him was partial and mostly indirect. All we have are inconsequential allusions to only four or five primary texts by Nietzsche, and only once do these signal without ambiguity a direct reading of Nietzsche.¹

Throughout Merleau-Ponty’s minimal allusions to Nietzsche, however, one idea remains constant: Nietzsche is, for Merleau-Ponty, the philosopher of the end of traditional philosophy. With him, philosophy renounced the “thing-in-itself,” transcendence, and any form of absolute. This is why in *PP* Merleau-Ponty credits Nietzsche—along with others—for having “started” (*PP*, viii/ii) phenomenological philosophy. This is not much by way of textual material, but what is being said is that the significance of Nietzsche is in the present. Indeed, there is no doubt that his thought encounters Merleau-Ponty’s in the crucible of modern and postmodern continental philosophy. It is not my purpose to offer here an analysis of modernity in philosophy, but I think it is a commonplace that one of the essential features of philosophy after Nietzsche is a certain distrust of truth discourses, truth practices, and of the very concept of truth, and it is through this question of truth that we must begin.

The “Question” of Truth

It is by borrowing from the structure “world” [*la structure monde*] that is constituted for us the universe of truth and of thought [*l’univers de la vérité et de la pensée*].

Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, 13/29²

The repudiated world versus an artificially built “true,” “valuable” one.—
Finally: one discovers of what material one has built the “true world” and now all one has left is the repudiated world.

Nietzsche, *WP*, 37 [Spring-Fall, 1887]

The view that “there is no truth” (e.g., *WP*, 13) is of course central to both Nietzsche’s and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophies. Yet, it is almost a triviality to say that criticizing truth is a somewhat paradoxical thing to do because it involves that one tells the truth against truth. The sheer rejection of truth is insufficient because it dispenses with an account of the phenomenon of belief while at the same time (because it presents itself as true) confirming it and making use of it. This paradox means that we must think of truth as having two guises. First, there is a truth that is rejected: it is error. Second, there is the truth that remains, even in the refutation of truth: it is what I shall call the “phenomenon of truth.”

Let me clarify this. For both philosophers, a belief in X is a taking-X-to-be-true, and a taking-X-to-be-true is a taking-X-to-be-illustrated in reality.³ Both thinkers see the truth of X as the predication of X to be “like” what we experience—that is to say, reality. This means that even if there is no truth, the concept of truth has meaning because it denotes a fundamentally compelling experience of reality (*PP*, 213/246). It is this experience that gives meaning to truth claims. Merleau-Ponty calls this primary experience the “origin of truth” and Nietzsche calls it the experience of the “only” or “repudiated” world, the world of experience. Thus, all beliefs contain a reference to this ground of reality; they are instances of the “phenomenon of truth.” This phenomenon is a *faktum* that cannot be refuted. The critique of truth means not that truth does not exist (it exists as a phenomenon—the belief in truth) but that it is erroneous. Here we encounter a disjunction of truth and reality: belief in truth is erroneous, yet it is real—it is grounded in experience. If truth is an error, we must ask ourselves how error is possible in reality. Here we are on ontological ground. The task, therefore, is to include error among the real possibilities of Being. How must we think of Being so as to include within it the possibility of error?

Consider, for example, Nietzsche’s conundrum:

And if this moral judging and discontent with the real were indeed, as has been claimed, an ineradicable instinct, might that instinct not then be one of the ineradicable stupidities or indeed presumptions of our species?—But by saying this we’re doing exactly what we rebuke: the standpoint of desirability, of unwarrantedly playing the judge, is part of the character of the course of things. (VII [62])

This prompts Nietzsche’s question: “What is a belief? How does it originate? Every belief is a *holding-to-be-true*” (XI [41]). The reality of beliefs (even though they are erroneous) cannot be rejected; instead, it must

prompt the question of its possibility. Merleau-Ponty states the question in even clearer terms:

If reflection is to justify itself as reflection, that is to say, as progress towards the truth, it must not merely put one view of the world in place of another, it must show us how the naive view of the world is included in and transcended by the reflective one [*la vue réfléchie*]. (PP, 213/247, t.a.)

So, Merleau-Ponty, like Nietzsche, seeks to include errors within his view of reality. It is this question—that is to say, the question of the ground of truth as error—that I shall refer to as “the question of truth.” It is therefore apparent that one cannot take the question of truth as a mere epistemological concern. For both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty the question of truth is an ontological question. Accordingly, our treatment of their dealings with this question can only result in an ontological discussion and not merely an epistemological one.

Ambiguity

By definition, it seems there cannot be any consciousness of ambiguity without some ambiguity of consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty, P2, 331

One should not want to divest existence of its rich ambiguity.

Nietzsche, GS, 373

The implication of the question of truth is that we cannot reduce Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's views on truth to a mere critique. The critique of truth is not the end of their thinking on truth, but its beginning. It frames their driving question: What makes belief and non-belief in truth equally mistaken? Here we arrive at the core of what has been emphatically called Merleau-Ponty's and Nietzsche's “ambiguities.” In “A Philosophy of Ambiguity,” an article from 1947, Ferdinand Alquié gave an account of Merleau-Ponty's work thus far. The expression used by Alquié in his title was so accurate that Merleau-Ponty himself is said to have endorsed it, and Alphonse De Waelhens entitled his own remarkable book on Merleau-Ponty likewise (De Waelhens 1951). It is well known to anyone with a passing interest in Nietzsche that his work distinguishes itself by a singular lack of univocity. Often Nietzsche has been called contradictory and ambiguous. Most perceptive readers, however, have detected in this feature more than a lack of rigor, a philosophical insight: Nietzsche's philosophy,

like Merleau-Ponty's, is not an ambiguous philosophy; it is a philosophy of ambiguity.⁴

The question concerning truth has a privileged relationship with the problematic of ambiguity because the phenomenon of truth escapes the alternative of the true and the false, the empirical and the intellectual, and instead opens up a space beyond these dichotomies where these dichotomies are explicated. Both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty agree to call this ambiguous space "existence." Existence is ambiguity, and, consequently, it is also the awareness of ambiguity. As shown by Merleau-Ponty's quote above, in order to conceive of ambiguity our consciousness must be more than a pure conceptual power; it must be ambiguous itself. For consciousness to be ambiguous means that it must be dependent on the non-conceptual while remaining aware of this dependence. For by showing its own dependence on the ground of experience, consciousness exposes the reality of the non-conscious. In short, it poses the question of truth. Reality (the ground for the predication of truth) does not exist in concepts, and consequently our very *consciousness* of it involves our *experience* of it. The ambiguity of our existence lies in the ambiguity of the question of truth: Why do we experience phenomenal reality as conceptual truth?

My hypothesis is that the question of truth and its treatment by Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty constitute a systematic link running through their two philosophies, and it shall be the guiding thread of my argument. My aim, therefore, will be to address Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's treatments of this question in such a way as to bring to visibility an intrinsic and systematic link between their philosophies. Of course, the very nature of the comparative approach requires making two arguments: A) It demands that I come to some consequential conclusions regarding Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's views on the question of truth as defined above. B) It requires that these conclusions establish a kinship between Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies in a consequential way. In turn, this second requirement will only be fulfilled under two conditions: B, i) I need to demonstrate that the question of truth as defined above does indeed hold a similarly important place within both thinkers' philosophies. B, ii) I must show the similarity of their solutions to the problems posed by the question of truth.

These three requirements apply at different levels. A) requires an in-depth engagement with each of these philosophers on his own terms. B, i) requires a comparative analysis of the structure of each thinker's philosophy, and B, ii) requires a comparative examination of both philosophers' positions. It is impossible in one volume to offer a direct treatment of all three questions. However, the treatment of A) is a necessary condition for

the treatment of the other two and, therefore, I shall focus mainly on A). I will have to restrict my comments on B, ii) to pointing out the similarity between Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's results in the Conclusion. As regards B, i), I shall not provide any explicit argument as to the strategic importance of the question of truth in both philosophers' worldviews or their development even though, as I shall discuss in the Conclusion, there is an implicit argument for this claim running through the book. Giving priority to A) and limiting the space of my discussion of B) entails a certain reduction of the scope of the comparison between Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, but it lends it greater solidity. As I mentioned earlier, the danger of such a project is to collapse into an inventory of more or less anecdotic comparisons.

Textual comparisons, for example, although tempting, leave too much to the intuition of the reader if they make us dispense with an analysis of the context of each author's individual work. Merleau-Ponty himself warned against expressing the potential links between thinkers in purely textual terms. After having presented Nietzsche as one of his predecessors, he adds, however, that "[a] purely linguistic examination of the texts in question would yield no proof; we find in texts only what we put into them" (*PP*, viii/ii). By the same token, breaking down Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's views on the question of truth into a number of themes would run the risk of taking for granted what is to be established (i.e., the comparability between the two philosophies). Moreover, such a "transversal" structure may fail to render the unity of each philosopher's views, and this unity is crucial in any reading of such enigmatic and prematurely interrupted thoughts as Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's. In these cases especially, the only test of the soundness of our readings is consistency. My priority therefore is to establish that it is both *good* Nietzsche scholarship and *good* Merleau-Ponty scholarship to build a link between their philosophies. This requires me to treat each author on his own terms and within his own specific context.

As a consequence, the greater part of this book appears as a juxtaposition of accounts of Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's treatments of the question of truth. In the first part (Chapters 1–3), I examine Nietzsche's efforts to offer a worldview that takes stock of the possibility of the erroneous belief in truth. Chapters 4–6 are devoted to Merleau-Ponty's efforts toward the same end. The juxtapositional structure presents some formal inconvenience, but no truly philosophical one. I see two disadvantages to it. First, of course, it forces the reader through a sharp change of context when moving from Chapters 3 to 4. In order to ease this passage, I have included a short transitional discussion. This contrast, however, is also a

guarantee of the success of this book. As I have emphasized, this project is entirely dependent on the validity and self-sufficiency of my analyses of each philosopher, and it furthers my purpose if the discussion succeeds in immersing the reader in the universe of each thinker. This means that I have kept mutual references between the two philosophers to a minimum, and only when it applied directly to the other author's treatment of the question of truth have I pointed briefly toward the relations. This highlights the second difficulty presented by the juxtapositional structure: any reader with more than a passing acquaintance with both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty will find many possible links ignored. For example, I do not pursue in detail the relations between Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's concepts of event, of interest, or of dialectics. Each of these issues, and others, would deserve a separate project. However, my present aim is to contribute to making such future inquiries possible and, unfortunately, I shall not be able to pursue them here. Let me briefly outline the movement of my argument.

Nietzsche

For Nietzsche, there is an equation of reality and value. As a result, he rejects ascetic (Judeo-Christian and Platonic) values, which he thinks are based on fictional "backworlds" distracting us from our earthly existence and leading us to despise it. This places truth at the core of his ethics. The state that the belief in fantastical fictions throws us in is what Nietzsche calls "sickness." Nietzsche opposes this system of values with an ethics of affirmation. This affirmation, he thinks, has crucial consequences for our "health." Of course, as almost all commentators have emphasized, this places Nietzsche in a difficult position because he seems, on the one hand, to affirm that values exist (otherwise our rejecting them would have no incidence) and, on the other, he seeks to reject them in the name of the affirmation of what *is*. Nietzsche himself, of course, was aware of the paradox of rejecting a (even fictional) reality (values) in the name of reality. In his famous first presentation of the thought of *amor fati*, he presents his task as unrestrained affirmation: "*Amor Fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse. *I do not even want to accuse those who accuse*" (*GS*, 276, my emphasis). A few years later, however, the formulations of affirmation become paradoxical. About the character of Zarathustra, Nietzsche writes:

The psychological problem of the type of Zarathustra is how he, who to an unheard-of degree says No, *does* No to everything to which one

has hitherto said yes, can none the less be the opposite of a spirit of denial. (*EH*, “Books,” 77)

And in the same book, he writes about himself:

I know joy in destruction to a degree corresponding to my strength for destruction—in both I obey my Dionysian nature, which does not know how to separate No-doing from Yes-saying. I am the first *immoralist*. I am therewith the *destroyer par excellence*. (*EH*, “Destiny,” 97)

This signals the paradox of Nietzsche’s immoralism: immoralism is necessary because morality is real and has real (unfortunate) consequences. Paradoxically, morality needs to be destroyed in an act of affirmation. This does not mean that morals themselves are true. This, Nietzsche asserts, is the underlying claim of morality: we must be moral because there are values, the backworlds, that are true. His argument, of course, is that this is false.

The destruction of morality is thus a form of destruction that is not made “in the spirit of denial,” but is a “yes-saying.” For Nietzsche, destroying morality is not like destroying a reality. If it were, it would be an act of denial. This is because, he says, morality is erroneous and does not reflect reality. Here we may say that Nietzsche encounters the distinction between the belief that morals are true and morals themselves. The former is real (it makes us sick, with a real sickness), the latter is not. At this point, Nietzsche can no longer be satisfied by refuting truth (the truth of morals, for example). He must also explain how, if morals are not true, we came to believe in them, and it is at this stage that Nietzsche becomes confronted by the question of truth as defined above.

If Nietzsche’s case against morals is to be persuasive, he must explain how we came to think of the backworlds as true. For Nietzsche, this is a particularly difficult point since he defines truth empirically. Something truly exists only if I have a physical “interest” in it (if it is physically threatening or desirable)—that is to say, what is true must be spatio-temporal. It is clear, however, that believing that values are true does not require that they are empirically proven. Indeed, they belong to the backworlds, the worlds that we, as incarnate beings, cannot access. This means that we came to believe in things that we never experienced. This seems to be enough of an argument against values, but for this argument to hold, Nietzsche must explain how it is even possible that we believe in things we cannot and did not experience.

In Chapter 1, I examine Nietzsche's genealogy of the predication of truth. Nietzsche encounters the question of truth as the question of the meaning of "truth." How do we even conceive of something such as truth?

Concepts, for Nietzsche, are sublimations of our experiences. They are a result of our simplifying and solidifying a perceptual reality (which is always given as indeterminate). This process, which Nietzsche calls "sublimation," makes it possible (theoretically, at least) to trace back a concept to an original experience. The question Nietzsche asks is: How can we have a concept of something that does not exist? Alternately, if the concept of truth did arise from a primary experience, what may this experience have been? In these conditions, it is difficult to explain how truth has come to be attributed to non-empirical objects such as values. If we wish to relate truth to an original experience, Nietzsche thinks, it means that we need to conceive of experience differently. It is no longer possible to envisage experience as the experience of pure immanence. Doing so would make it impossible to explain the separation of truth and experience—that is to say, the fact that we can apply the concept "true" to what is not experienced. In short, Nietzsche is led to claim that any experience involves an implicit predication of truth. The explicitation of this predication, which requires concepts, is thus only a radicalization of the implicit one through language. It is only because we needed to attain mutual comprehension at a linguistic level that this basic form of consciousness expanded. This implicit predication therefore relies on a certain gap between the subject and the object of perception, which makes it possible and necessary. (Merleau-Ponty will call such a gap a "zone of subjectivity.")

For Nietzsche, primary consciousness and implicit predication are correlative. Nietzsche expresses this point most strikingly in his genealogy of human consciousness. For him, human consciousness and self-consciousness are two sides of the same coin. Consciousness is represented as a "gap" between the human subject and the object of consciousness, whereas self-consciousness is represented as a "gap" within the self. For Nietzsche, this double gap is genealogically primary and cannot be conceived as derived from any anterior principle.

Nietzsche conceives of this primary gap as establishing a certain reversibility of the subject-object relation. I shall refer to this reversibility as "self-differentiation." The human subject is self-differentiated because it can take itself as an object and adopt an external outlook toward itself. For Nietzsche, neither the subject (self) nor the object is primary. Anterior to both of them lies a purely intentional structure characterized as "interest." Another name for interest is "will to power." It is this structure that is at

the root of the experience of truth: something is true if I have a relation of interest with it. This interest can be directed toward an external object (for conquest) or toward the self (for self-preservation). In the first case I am the subject of the interest, in the latter I am its object. For Nietzsche, this reversibility of interest is prior even to any subject or object of interest. By contrast, subjects and objects are fictions induced by the structure of interest. Nietzsche not only places self-differentiation within the self, he places it as anterior to the self too. With regard to the question of truth, this suggests two points: first, truth, conceived as structured by objectivity, is impossible (by “objectivity” I shall mean the view that sees subject and object as two opposed, real, and self-identical entities). This is because not the subject, the object, or their separation is primary. Second, it demonstrates how even this error is informed by the real ground of experience: the belief in truth is the inauthentic expression of the authentic ground of interest.

For Nietzsche, we must come to the recognition that truth is a falsification of reality. We *must* do this because our belief in truth supports our belief in values, and these values make us sick. Nietzsche defines “sickness” as an inner antagonism and “health” as inner harmony. As a consequence, Nietzsche seeks a way for us to live according to the truth that he proposes—namely, the truth that truth is a falsification of reality, and that so are values.

In Chapter 2, I examine Nietzsche’s method for attaining an appropriate awareness of this truth. Nietzsche proposes the test of “the incorporation of truth.” The truth referred to in this formula is not the erroneous truth Nietzsche has unmasked before but it is precisely the truth of this unmasking. For us to “incorporate” truth really involves a negative movement of ridding ourselves of our beliefs in fictions such as values, truth, objectivity, and the thing-in-itself that Nietzsche synthesizes under the heading “God.” For him, incorporating truth means accepting, profoundly digesting, that “God is dead.” What is most striking in Nietzsche’s discussions of the incorporation of truth is that it is in the name of truth that we must incorporate the death of god. Yet, truth was criticized for being precisely a falsification. Here Nietzsche operates a subtle reintegration of truth into his thought. Contrary to his earlier works, which embraced the exaltation provided by illusions, the works of the middle and late period contend that one cannot dispense with a reference to truth. This is a consequence of the very question of truth as it has been defined above: for Nietzsche, truth tells lies (it presents the world as objectively structured and perceptual objects as fully determinate and self-identical), but it is grounded in a certain reality (the “phenomenon” of truth). Truth as falsification is the authentic

form of all originary experience; it is our form of life and a sheer rejection of it would be nothing short of self-denial. Incorporating this truth is the only way to attain health. Finally, I argue that Nietzsche gives an ontological status to this health. For him, becoming healthy means becoming oneself, and becoming oneself means being at one with Being.

In Chapter 3, however, I investigate why Nietzsche believes that such a total unification of the self turns out to be impossible. Indeed, if it were possible, the essential self-differentiation established in Chapter 1 would suddenly appear to be rather less than essential. On the contrary, Nietzsche maintains that the self is always self-differentiated. As a consequence, the world also is self-differentiated and, therefore, it always contains sickness. In Nietzsche's metaphorical language, the world is sick and the human is its sickness; the unison of all drives in the world cannot be achieved. This places the self-differentiation established in Chapter 1 on a more fundamental level. This self-differentiation—which guarantees that sickness cannot be eradicated from the human—introduces self-differentiation within Being itself and is thereby shown to be essential. This has strong consequences for Nietzsche's ontology. For him, the inclusion of self-differentiation in Being is correlative with the eternity of becoming. This self-differentiation warrants that the antagonism of drives will remain, and this implies that there will always be change in the form of a rearrangement of these drives. Most important, this self-differentiation precludes any conception of Being as self-identical. As a consequence, the very notion of Being becomes tormented. Contrary to the way Heidegger and others conceive of it, Nietzsche sees Being as purely relative. Being is the very movement of truth, which finds its origin in the authentic experience of the perceptual world and leads into the inauthentic, metaphysical worldview that Nietzsche rejects. Being, in this sense, cannot be envisaged as concealed; it is the concealing itself. Being is not self-falsified; it is self-falsification itself.

Merleau-Ponty

The problem: how come what is open here may be crystallised there? (problem of transcendence).

Merleau-Ponty, *NL*, 328

Contrary to Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty's approach to the question of truth is not subordinate to any ethical concern. Rather, Merleau-Ponty's interest in truth is primarily theoretical. For him, the ability to speak meaningfully about truth is a necessary condition for philosophy. The sheer

rejection of truth is an absurdity because it affirms philosophy even as it throws it to the ground, so that as long as philosophy—as Nietzsche says about God—“remains dead,” it may be said to remain dead for philosophical reasons. In short, the rejection of truth has some claim to truth, and it leads into more paradoxes. For Merleau-Ponty, these paradoxes are not the ruin of philosophy but they delimit its very domain.

The whole of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is an analysis of the concept of relation and of its founding paradox of being at once a separation and a link. As a phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty questions the traditional structure of transcendence in the sense of objectivity. For example, he rejects any idea of the thing-in-itself. In these conditions, of course, truth must be reconsidered. Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty thinks that our spontaneous way to approach the world is erroneous. It is a distortion of the true ground of experience insofar as it presents itself as objectively structured and divided into in-itself and for-itself. As a phenomenologist, however, he affirms that there is nothing else than this very ground of experience. It would follow from this, it seems, that the very distortion is grounded in this world of experience. If we want to truly know the world of experience, then we must get this distortion to uncover for us the unsuspected feature of the phenomenal world that constitutes its ground. The asking of this question constitutes Merleau-Ponty’s step beyond Husserl and frames his question of truth as what he calls the question of the “origin of truth.” Merleau-Ponty’s dossier of candidacy for the Collège de France, where he presented his philosophical project, opened with this declaration:

We do not cease to live in the world of perception, but we go beyond [*dépasse*] it by way of critical thought [*la pensée critique*], to the point that we forget how much it has contributed to our idea of truth.
(P2, 37)

This sentence contains three core elements, each of which will constitute the focus of a chapter: a) the world of perception contains the root of our idea of the true (Chapter 4), b) there is a forgetting of this that takes us “beyond” this ground (Chapter 5), and c) we must account for this “*dépassement*” (Chapter 6) by recalling what was forgotten.

In Chapter 4 I examine Merleau-Ponty’s inquiry into the origin of truth. This archaeology reveals a ground of experience that—not unlike Nietzsche’s—is always-already intentionally structured. Because this structure is not predicative, linguistic, or thetical, Merleau-Ponty calls it the “pre-objective” or, later, “perceptual faith.” Perceptual faith is an implicit affirmation of the object of perception (of course, this is very different from the perception of some true object of faith). The “pre-” in pre-objective

must be taken in two senses: it means obviously that the pre-objective experience is anterior to objectivity, but also that it leads into it. Merleau-Ponty must describe not only the ground of predication, but he also must account for the pre-objective's becoming objective. He achieves this by introducing a teleological structure at the core of perception.

Any act of perception tends toward a total determination of its object. Of course, total determinacy is impossible, so that the movement toward determinacy remains asymptotic. I use "asymptotic" in the sense inherited from the Leibnizian infinitesimal calculus to denote a linear movement, structured by two end points that it never reaches but approaches indefinitely. In this sense, "asymptotic" describes the structure of Being *qua* becoming. Asymptotic intentionality is not equivalent to Kantian teleology, however, insofar as it does not assume that intentionality possesses an intrinsic thematization of its end point. On the contrary, it is the analysis of intentionality that figures it as teleological. With regard to Kant (and, perhaps even more important, with regard to his German Idealist successors including Hegel), this means that intentionality is not foremost and essentially a thematic movement. The asymptotic character of becoming expresses the asymptotic character of intentionality in Merleau-Ponty (the two end points being the subjective and objective poles) and the asymptotic character of self-becoming (the healthy individual forever approaches herself) for Nietzsche. Asymptotic structures maintain both the relevance of the end points (they explicate the movement) and their inexistence (they are never reached).

The impossibility of attaining either pole (or, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, "horizons") is expressed by Nietzsche as the impossibility of self-identity and by Merleau-Ponty as the irreducible presence of a "zone of subjectivity." The zone of subjectivity is for Merleau-Ponty an implicit separation that the objective outlook establishes between the subject and the object. Like Nietzsche's "inner gap," the zone of subjectivity is reversible. In self-consciousness the separation is within the self; in consciousness it lies between the self and the world.

The asymptotic structure explains the appearance of illusions. If the total determinacy of the perceptual object is indeed impossible, it is also taken for granted. We do operate in our lives as if the objects around us (as well as ourselves) were totally self-identical and determinate. This illusion is the result of the process that Merleau-Ponty calls "sedimentation." Sedimentation is the process by which the pre-objective content becomes objective, and is abusively determined (Merleau-Ponty talks of "overdetermination"). We stand atop countless layers of erroneous sedimentations inherited from the history of thought. If we are to interrogate the ground

that the archaeology of truth has uncovered, we need to find a method allowing us to look beyond these sedimentations.

In the phenomenological tradition, the standard such method is Husserl's "phenomenological reduction." Chapter 5 examines Merleau-Ponty's use and reworking of Husserl's reduction. His objective in performing the reduction is different from Husserl's. Merleau-Ponty does not seek pure phenomena; on the contrary, he considers that the impossibility to attain pure phenomena contains a crucial teaching: full transparency does not lie at the ground of our experience. The ground of all experience is always-already intentionally structured. This places phenomenality (the fact that all beings are always-already phenomenal) prior to phenomena (the beings). Here we see how Merleau-Ponty takes the acquisitions discussed in Chapter 4 to the ontological level: Being is phenomenality. This means that both subject and object (as figures of the in-itself) must be regarded as fictions. Indeed, in accordance with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty claims that if Being is indeed defined as phenomenality, it must be neither in-itself nor for-itself. Being cannot be constituted from the point of view of the subject or of the object because it is anterior to them.

In Chapter 6 I examine what such a conception of Being implies. Like Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty conceives of Being as essentially self-differentiated—that is to say, incomplete. However, this incompleteness is not a failure of Being, it is positive incompleteness. Merleau-Ponty describes what he calls this "soft" Being as "flesh." Flesh is defined by its indeterminacy. It is not determinate, and, paradoxically, this constitutes its main determination. As a consequence, Being has no place for fully determinate entities. Yet, as was demonstrated by the archaeology of truth, such determinate fictions arise from the fabric of the flesh through the process of sedimentation. This movement of sedimentation is in fact the essence of the flesh. In other words, the essence of Being *qua* flesh is to falsify itself. It is indeterminate and presents itself as fully determinate. As regards the phenomenon of truth, it is given a central place as the very process through which Being falsifies itself: it is through the belief in truth that Being presents itself as fully determinate. Let me emphasize that I do not mean to say that self-falsification is a feature of Being, or that it is its essential component, or an attribute of Being of any sort. On the contrary, self-falsification is identical with Being. Being is not self-*falsified*; it is self-*falsification*.

Thesis

This is the conclusion Merleau-Ponty reaches at the end of his investigation into the question of truth. As I show at the end of Chapter 3, it is

also Nietzsche's conclusion. Demonstrating this provides a satisfactory and systematic link between the two thinkers' philosophies. The core question of this project is the question of truth, and the thesis I defend is that Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche respond to this question in the same way. This link satisfies the requirement of being systematic and intrinsic because it is placed at the ontological level. This means that it is intrinsically connected with every aspect of each thinker's worldview.

Of course, this involves some presuppositions that I would like to clarify here. For the thesis that Being is self-falsification by way of the phenomenon of truth to fulfill the requirement to establish a systematic link between Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, it must be shown that both philosophies are a) systematic, and b) organized around their ontology. Addressing these two points requires me to return to a claim I have not made explicit above.

I have indicated that I shall not provide any explicit argument for my claim that the question of truth has intrinsic and systematic importance in the works of the two authors. Recall, it was only under this condition—which I labeled B, i)—that my argument can be said to establish any intrinsic link between the two philosophies. I would like to briefly make explicit two arguments (that will remain implicit in the rest of the book) in favor of this claim. The first is that the question of truth leads both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty into a similar, if unusual, ontology. The structural role of this question for their ontology indicates that it is a question that goes beyond the simple anecdotic level. The second argument is related to the structure of the development of both thinkers' ideas on the question of truth. Even though this is not the central concern of this book, it should be pointed out that not only do their treatments arrive at similar conclusions, but that they do so in a similar way. This is visible from the structure of both developments. From what I have said above, it is apparent that Nietzsche's and Merleau-Ponty's treatments of the question of truth are organized around three key ideas. In each part, I have devoted a chapter to each. First, Nietzsche encounters the ground from which the phenomenon of truth arises (Chapter 1). Like Merleau-Ponty, who calls this ground the "origin of truth" (Chapter 4), Nietzsche finds this ground to include a pre-objective, intentional structure. He then seeks a method to attain this authentic ground beyond the false beliefs it has given rise to, like the thing-in-itself, subjects, objects, selves, and values. He finds this method in what he calls the "incorporation of truth" (Chapter 2). Like Merleau-Ponty's idea of the phenomenological reduction (Chapter 5), the incorporation of truth is intended as a means of obtaining direct knowledge of the ground of truth and to undo our belief in sedimented objects.

Finally, both Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche recognize in this ground the ground of Being, and, consequently, they both include its characteristics within the characteristics of Being. As a result, Being becomes conceived as the very movement of self-differentiation from which originates the phenomenon of truth (Chapters 3 and 6).

Nietzsche on Self-Differentiation and Genealogy

In this chapter, I examine the role of predicative truth in Nietzsche's genealogical accounts of 1887. My general claim is that Nietzsche identifies the origin of the vicissitudes of mankind as an essential property of both the self and reality (that is to say, in phenomenological terms, the world) that I call self-differentiation. I mean self-differentiation as the ability of reality to present itself as different from what it is, thereby—paradoxically—uncovering its very structure as self-differentiation. Nietzsche, I claim, attributes these characteristics both to humans and to reality itself.

In the case of humans, this ability is expressed by the originary character of consciousness and self-consciousness. Nietzsche regards consciousness and self-consciousness as a single faculty envisaged from different vantage points. This faculty is the reversibility of our instincts. As humans we possess the ability to direct our instincts inward (toward ourselves) or outward (toward some external object). This phenomenon is described in *GS* (354) and *GM* (II, 16).¹ This essential reversibility warrants the infinity of human becoming because it affirms chaos as an essential feature of the human. Nietzsche regards chaos as the condition of increase and creation. Consequently, human time will never reach a standstill because creation and increase will never stop.

In the case of reality, self-differentiation is expressed through Nietzsche's critiques of the object and of the subject. I argue that these critiques grant priority to the relation of intentionality over and above the distinction of subject and object as intentional poles. Nietzsche describes intentionality

in terms of “interests” and declares that subject and object are construed by derivation from intentionality, not the other way around. Intentionality is ontologically, logically, and chronologically anterior to subject and object, which are its intentional poles. Nietzsche regards subject and object as abstractions and radicalizations arising from the experience of a reality that is not bipolar but asymptotic. This reality is not merely intentional (this would make it an object), it is intentionality itself, and its asymptotic structure involves mere differences of degrees between the subjective and the objective horizons.

There is a correspondence of this ontological structure with the anthropological structure mentioned above (whereby the human is defined on the basis of the reversibility of her instincts). This correspondence lies in the fact that the self constitutes itself as subject (in consciousness) and object (in self-consciousness) of itself through the experience of resistance and that this experience is nothing else than the experience of the reversibility of our drives. The experience of resistance, Nietzsche argues, is identical with reality. This odd claim signifies that reality *qua* intentionality is nothing in-itself, but it is essentially phenomenal. Let me emphasize at once that this does not make Nietzsche vulnerable to objections of the sort “if the experience of resistance is reality, surely, it means that the thing that resists is anterior to it.” This objection, and other variations thereof, does not apply because it overlooks the fact that for Nietzsche there is no will to power without resistance. We should not think of the will to power moving toward resistances, as if it existed prior to them. On the contrary, we must stop thinking of resistance in relational terms, as an encounter.

These claims involve a certain two-sidedness of truth. As Nietzsche makes it clear, predicative truth is falsification. However, Nietzsche is unable to dismiss it because its very existence and its effective power (we act according to it, we sacrifice our health to it) expose the other side of truth: truth signals an authentic experience (self-differentiation) but signals it in an inauthentic way (as self-identity, truth “fixates”). By uncovering the falsity of truth out of the concern for truth, Nietzsche operates what he calls the “self-undercutting” of truth. This paradoxical moment uncovers the double aspect of truth and bestows upon us the challenge to understand truth in a new way.

Truth and Values: From Perceptual Faith to Blind Faith

Basic problem: *whence this omnipotence of faith? Of faith in morality?*

WP, 253 [1885–1886]

In book V of *GS* and in *GM*, Nietzsche is concerned with explaining “the whole inner world” (*GM*, II, 16) in the terms of a “piece of animal-psychology” (*GM*, III, 20). This process unfolds in several steps, to which Nietzsche attributes a degree of importance that varies across different texts. In *GS*, 354, for example, he presents reflexive consciousness as the crucial event that determines the rest of human spiritual development. In *GM*, II, 16, however, it is an event logically posterior to it that is granted decisive importance. At this stage, self-consciousness is already established, and Nietzsche draws from it to explain the further phenomenon of “bad conscience.” In fact, these two texts seek to achieve two slightly different things. *GS*, 354, is explicitly concerned with the appearance of predicative consciousness and leads to a genealogical account of the will to knowledge and self-knowledge: man, “as the most endangered animal [. . .] needed to ‘know’ himself what distressed him, to ‘know’ how he felt, he needed to ‘know’ what he thought.” *GM*, II, 16, however, is concerned with the mechanism by which external constraints made their way into the individual so that one directs oneself no longer spontaneously but according to self-imposed external criteria. This piece of genealogy is concerned with the binding power of values: “Those terrible bulwarks with which state organizations protected themselves against the old instincts of freedom—punishment as a primary instance of these kinds of bulwarks, had the result that all these instincts of the wild, free, roving man, were turned backwards, *against man himself*.” Therefore Nietzsche calls “bad conscience” this self-antagonism of the human. This process is described as the “internalization of man” because it accounts for the human’s turning external constraints into self-constraints—that is to say, the human’s adhesion and collaboration to her own oppression.

Although the focus is slightly different, it is clear that Nietzsche’s intention in both texts is to relate the same event. In *GS*, 354, the pressure from one’s hostile environment—and especially from other humans—leads one’s consciousness to expand, and, Nietzsche says there, “consciousness is almost a disease.” In *GM*, II, 16, “bad conscience” (the self-accusation of the human thrown into the “social straitjacket” [*GM*, II, 2]) is also characterized as a “sickness.” As a confirmation of this link, let me refer to Nietzsche’s earlier characterization of the “evil man” in *D*, 499. In this aphorism, Nietzsche describes sociability as the origin of the “martyrdom of the evil man” who is “evil” only in society. It is in society, Nietzsche insists, that the evil man learns self-reflexivity, and this is his martyrdom: “It is indeed a fact that in the midst of society and sociability, every evil inclination has to place *itself* under such great restraint, don so many masks, lay *itself* so

often to the Procrustean bed of virtue, that one could well speak of the martyrdom of the evil man” (*D*, 499, my emphasis).

Needs and the Experience of Reality

There is a fundamental level that roots both the will to conscious knowledge (related in *GS*, 354) and the striving for becoming moral (in *GM*, II, 16). This level is the starting point of both genealogical accounts; it is the level of needs. In *GS* (354), Nietzsche affirms that “consciousness has developed only under the pressure for the need for communication,” but this is not to say that only this need is at the root of consciousness. In fact, the need for communication covers most other needs and, among them, the need of needs, survival: “As the most endangered animal, [man] needed help and protection, he needed his peers, he had to learn to express his distress.” In *GM* (II, 9), needs present themselves as responses to threats. Threats come in two forms: the first one is the threat of a “savage” and warlike environment that causes the individual to seek the protection of society;² the second is that of the repressive judicial structures of this very society.³ However, Nietzsche writes, the latter threat is only another version of the natural one:

Punishment at this level of civilisation is simply a copy, a *mimus*, of normal behaviour towards a hated, disarmed enemy [. . .] which explains the fact that war itself (including the warlike cult of the sacrificial victim) has given us all forms in which punishment manifests itself in history. (*GM*, II, 9)

The state of nature thus conceived is a state of war, and it is from it that any punishment takes its form. There is no other threat for the animal man than the threat of physical harm. It is her body that the individual seeks to preserve by entering society and, subsequently, by internalizing her drives.

This consubstantiality between natural and institutional hostility is echoed by the parallel between the self-torture described in *GM*, II, 16, as the birth of bad conscience and the torture described in *GM*, II, 3. In this text, Nietzsche gives an account of the dramatic expansion of the mnemonic capacities of man necessary for the functioning of a society based on promise. The self-torture of bad conscience represents the expansion of a “thinly stretched internal world” (*GM*, II, 16). Before “bad conscience,” “conscience” was created out of torture too. The torture that created conscience sought an expansion of the narrow and scarce mnemonic ability inherited from the originary animal psyche (*GM*, II, 3).

Let me emphasize at the outset that in none of these texts is Nietzsche concerned with accounting for a leap from the non-conscious to the conscious, from the absence of an internal world to its appearance, or from the absence of memory to its creation. Indeed, Nietzsche's is not a story of creation; it is a story of expansion. For example, Nietzsche makes no attempt to account for the emergence of such an animal psyche out of anything anterior. Likewise, there is no difference made between a need and the perception thereof. A need is not an external objective constraint, but it is a psychological state. Indeed, the domain of needs is the only domain of the basic animal psyche. This amounts to saying that the emergence of consciousness is not equivalent to the emergence of thought; "man," Nietzsche writes, "like every other living being, thinks continually without knowing it" and "we could think, feel, will and remember, and we could also 'act' in every sense of that word, and yet none of this would have to 'enter our consciousness'" (*GS*, 354). By taking the basic animal psyche and nothing beyond (for example, "matter") as his starting point, Nietzsche offers an unusual characterization of animality not as pure mechanics, but as an intentional form of life. This basic intentionality is represented in different ways in the texts of 1886–1887: as basic memory in *GM*, II, 3; as the basic "internal world stretched thinly as between two layers of skin" in *GM*, II, 16; as subconscious agency in *GS*, 354; and as willful motility in *BGE*, 19. The primacy of intentionality is signaled by the fact that Nietzsche regards needs as the ultimate feature that informed human destiny. A need signals the encounter of the world and the animal. As such, it is the most basic form of intentionality. Consequently, as I will discuss further, it is intentionality and nothing else that is at the root of the human trajectory toward truth and values.

Sublimation and the Thing-in-Itself

Although these texts may be relating the expansion of consciousness only, Nietzsche puts considerable emphasis on this expansion for it is this expansion that created a new form of life (*GM*, II, 16). For Nietzsche, it seems that something was acquired in the process of this expansion from the animal psyche to the full-blown internal world of the sick animal man and this turns a difference of degree (mere expansion) into an apparently radical difference. This question is related to an insight of the young Nietzsche. It is the question of the conceptualization of experience. In 1873's "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," Nietzsche gives a fictional⁴ sketch of the birth of concepts out of experience:⁵ an experience becomes communicated, it becomes a "word," and thereby it becomes abstracted

from its context. At this point, the word becomes a concept and the experience is generalized:

Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original [. . .]. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things. (*PT*, 83)⁶

The consequence of this process is that the experience becomes objectified. This objectification is expressed in *HATH*, I, 1, as “sublimation” and in a note from March-June 1888, Nietzsche uses the concept of sublimation in the same sense, with reference to values: “sublimation,” he now writes, “has torn judgments from their conditionality in which they have grown and alone possess any meaning,” and, thereby, they become “denaturalized” (*WP*, 430). As a result, there is abstraction from the context followed by generalization: the experience is transformed into a piece of knowledge (*WP*, 640). Elsewhere, Nietzsche characterizes this phenomenon as a “hardening” (*WP*, 608), a “simplification,” and a “reduction” (*WP*, 640). This has great consequences: the decontextualization of the experience entails the forgetting of its essentially phenomenal nature and its hardening into an objective “thing.”

In *GS*, 354, this process is described as a necessary condition of language and as a necessary consequence of the emergence of consciousness (consciousness is informed by the need for communication). This “reduction” of the particular (experience) to the common entails the illusion that the object of language is independent from the speaker—that is to say, in Nietzsche’s view it entails the illusion of the “thing-in-itself.”

In *HATH*, I, 1, Nietzsche already saw the basic dualities that underlie metaphysical thought as sublimations:

How can something originate in its opposite, for example rationality in irrationality, the sentient in the dead, logic in unlogic, disinterested contemplation in covetous desire, living for others in egoism, truth in error? Metaphysical philosophy has hitherto surmounted this difficulty by denying that the one originates in the other and assuming for the more highly valued thing a miraculous source in the very kernel and being of the “thing in itself.” Historical philosophy, on the other hand, which can no longer be separated from natural science, the youngest of all philosophical methods, has discovered in individual cases (and this will probably be the result in every case) that there are no opposites, except in the customary exaggeration of popular or metaphysical interpretations, and that a mistake in

reasoning lies at the bottom of this antithesis: according to this explanation there exists, strictly speaking, neither an unegoistic action nor completely disinterested contemplation; both are only sublimations, in which the basic element seems almost to have dispersed and reveals itself only under the most painstaking observation.⁷

The “basic element” that this exaggeration disperses is experience or, as one might say, phenomenality. This, Nietzsche announces, is uncovered by “historical philosophy” (genealogy). In *GS*, 111, Nietzsche reverses the question concerning truth that was here posed by “metaphysics.” It is no longer a question of establishing how truth originated in error, but how error originated in truth:

How did logic come into existence in man’s head? Certainly out of illogic, whose realm originally must have been immense. Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished. For all that, their ways might have been truer.

These ways were “truer” because they did not have recourse to objectification: “those who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously were favoured with a lesser probability of survival.” This establishes the opposition between two unlikely conceptual pairs: truth and “illogic,” on the one hand, and untruth and logic on the other. Nietzsche clearly considers consciousness to be a falsification of experience.

The Objectivity of Values

The process of conceptualization I have just described involves a decontextualization of experience. This is crucial because it entails a disjunction between presence and reality. The human animal learns to consider as real what she is not experiencing, or more precisely, she learns to consider the perception of the concept as the perception of the “thing”; the thing may be absent but attributed reality as if it were present:

First *images*—to explain how images arise in the spirit. Then *words*, applied to images. Finally *concepts*, possible only when there are words—the collecting together of many images in something non-visible but audible (word). The tiny amount of emotion to which the “word” gives rise, as we contemplate similar images for which *one* word exists—this weak emotion is the common element, the basis of the concept. That weak sensations are regarded as alike, sensed *as being the same*, is the fundamental fact. Thus confusion of two sensations that are close neighbours, as we take note of these sen-

sations; but *who* is taking note? Believing is the primal beginning even in every sense impression: a kind of affirmation the first intellectual activity! A “holding-true” in the beginning! Therefore it is to be explained: how “holding-true” arose! What sensation lies behind “true”? (*WP*, 506)⁸

Here, Nietzsche explains how we come to think of a multiplicity of sensations in a unified way; through language and conceptuality different sensations become identified to each other because they are identified to the concept that is unique. In doing so, Nietzsche attaches the basic act of perception with what one may call, for Merleau-Ponty, our “perceptual faith”: compare Merleau-Ponty—“it is because first I believe in the world and in the things that I believe in the order of the connections of my thoughts” (*VI*, 51/75)—and Nietzsche—“Believing is the primal beginning even in every sense impression.” Concepts rely on the kinship between the “sensation” that arises from the words and the sensation arising from the original “perceptual faith.” Let me note in passing that this kinship between the sensation of the word and experience will precisely be investigated by Merleau-Ponty under the heading “sense.” Thanks to this kinship, we gain access to an invisible world. The expansion of man’s basic animal psychology (which offered us memory, consciousness, and the soul) involves the expansion of perceptual faith (the sensation that “lies behind ‘true’”) into imagination. I must stress here how sublimations do not gain any value from being precisely sublimated (conceptualized). On the contrary, they draw their power from being a close neighbor to something real and experienced. In other words, the criterion of value remains in our attributing perceptual faith to an object, that is, in our affirming its reality. This is the reason behind Nietzsche’s bafflement at the ascetic worldview that uses reference to the immanent world in support of a transcendent world, which, in turn, provides ground for denying the immanent world (or in Nietzsche’s ironic language, “the world”).

This accounts for the emergence of second-order knowledge. With it, the question of the witness, of the “truth-sayer,” becomes crucial. In Nietzsche’s terms, of course, the critical point becomes to determine whether and how much a concept is truly close neighbors with an experience. By this transference mechanism, reality (the object of experience) becomes doubled out with truth (the indicator of the degree of closeness of a concept to a reality). This discussion provides some clarification regarding what I have described above as the pairing of truth and illogic. This pair is dissymmetric: truth derives its value from the illogic of experience, and not

the reverse. This is crucial; something is true only if it corresponds to a real experience. The feeling of truth is derived from the feeling of reality.

The emergence of the faculty of imagination entails the illusion of the coexistence of two realms, the empirical and the imagined. Thereby, it provides the structure for what Nietzsche calls other-worldliness. This coexistence, however, is flawed with a paradox: there are two realms but only one way to be real (i.e., the mode of perceptual faith). In the spatio-temporal mode of being, the coexistence itself is impossible (a certain time and space can be occupied by only one thing). This means that the realm of imagination and the realm of perception cannot be indifferent to each other; they are in competition. Consider:

Being and appearance, psychologically considered, yield no “being-in-itself,” no criterion of “reality,” but only grades of appearance measured by the strength of the *interest* we show in an appearance. There is no struggle for existence between ideas and perceptions but a struggle for dominion: the idea that is overcome is not annihilated, only driven back or subordinated. (*WP*, 588)

To put it in abstract terms, the overall reality of these two realms is directed by the rule of a zero-sum. One realm’s increase in reality is the other realm’s loss. It is the individual who attributes reality to one or the other realm. As a result, the individual is placed before a choice and has to affirm a preference. Here, according to Nietzsche, we encounter the structure of valuation. The competition between values (the imaginary world) and empirical reality (“appearance”) should not lead us to believe that Nietzsche treats them symmetrically. In fact, the superiority of the empirical world is unchallenged. This is made manifest by Nietzsche in different contexts. First, there is a genealogical priority of the empirical world; it is out of this world that the imaginary world arises and not the reverse. There is also a necessary priority for the world of experience: we attribute reality to such and such idea because we experienced reality in the form of perceptual faith. However, we know that Nietzsche laments that the empirical world (“this world,” the “only world”) is devaluated by our predominantly Christian-ascetic civilization and that reality is, on the contrary, attributed to what he calls the “backworlds.” How is this reversal possible if the empirical world has such a double priority over the imagined world?

We might find a clue to this in one implication from the note from *WP*, 588, quoted above. For Nietzsche, perceptual faith is experienced in terms of interests. In other words, we do not attribute reality only to what we perceive, but we attribute more or less reality to such and such percep-

tual object depending on how much it matters to us. Before turning to Nietzsche's use of the concept of interest in general, let me try to clarify this question with regard to Nietzsche's account of one of our objects of interests: threats. For Nietzsche, threats are a device designed to secure the individual's preference for the realm of the imaginary. Threats place the individual in front of a choice between the present and the absent, the empirical and the imaginary. Nietzsche defines asceticism as the negation of reality, and the ascetic priest portrayed in *GM*, III, is the champion of the imaginary realm. The priestly types use threats as their weapons of choice in support of the imaginary in its competition with the empirical. Threats are designed to reorganize the opposition between the couples formed by the real and the empirical, on the one hand, and the absent and the imaginary on the other. They seek to twist this spontaneous opposition into the opposition between the perceptual and the imaginary and the absent and the empirical (*TI*, "Skirmishes," 34).⁹ If this torsion is achieved, the individual will believe in the imaginary world more than she believes in the empirical world and give up her empirical claims to the benefit of her newfound imaginary ones; she will become moral. It is remarkable that this distortion hinges on the artificial separation of the perceptual and the belief in "perceptual faith." If threats succeed in making us favor the imaginary realm over the empirical one, it will become possible to have faith without experience—in Nietzsche's words, ascetic faith. This is the phenomenon described in *GM*, II, 16: the individual renounces her claim to discharge her power outward in a bid to avoid the promised retribution. This means that she believes that the retribution will be more painful than the internalization (*GM*, II, 19).¹⁰

I have mentioned earlier that for Nietzsche reality was experienced at first as the hostility of the environment. Indeed, in the original animal psychology, there is a conflation of "interest" (*WP*, 588) and reality.¹¹ As a consequence, for a threat to appear as more real it must appear as more hostile (*D*, 77). Here is one stroke of genius on the part of the ascetic priest: a threat is not more real because it is more likely to be executed (this would be a losing game for the promoters of backworlds such as hell)¹² but because, if executed, it would be more terrible. Nietzsche points out that the unlikelihood of a threat is proportional to its gravity that is meant to compensate for it.¹³ With the theme of threats we have the ideal device by which perceptual faith becomes redirected from the empirical world to the world of values.

Normative Objectivism

In the fifth book of *GS* as well as in the first essay of *GM*, Nietzsche describes values as a certain type of abstractions. Values are an idealization of interest sublimated into an in-itself (*GS*, 354). This means that values as well draw our adhesion from an implicit reference to reality: a value is truly valuable if and only if it refers to a reality.¹⁴ In his recent book, *The Affirmation of Life*, Bernard Reginster remarks that for Nietzsche, values are dependent on their reference to reality: “The legitimacy of our values depends on their objective standing, their independence from our subjective perspectives” (Reginster 2006, 26). In line with others (e.g., Richardson 1996, 145) Reginster characterizes this feature of valuation as “normative objectivism.” For reasons that will become clear in a moment, I would prefer to avoid a reference to objectivity that may commit us too much and simply refer to values’ “reference to reality.”

Reginster divides the ethical objectivism that Nietzsche criticizes into two positions: “Platonic” and “Kantian” objectivism. Kantian objectivism relies on the primacy of practical reason (the “will” in Kant’s sense). The objectivity of a value is not warranted by its existence in the world, but by its necessity, or, according to Reginster, because we, as rational agents, are always already committed to them (Reginster 2006, 56). Platonic objectivism, by contrast, “is the view that there are [. . .] moral facts.” Although it may seem useful, this division between Kantian and Platonic objectivism is clearly foreign to Nietzsche. In Nietzsche’s view, Kantian objectivism is only a variant of Platonic objectivism; its only distinctive feature is to affirm rationality as the “highest value.” This nuance has important consequences because it allows us to understand that the aim of Nietzsche’s argument is not such and such specific value but the structure of valuation itself. Nietzsche objects to valuation because by nature it represents an absent object as more important than a present desire or instinct and describes it as absolute—that is to say, external to any context (for example, as independent from who the “moral subject” is).¹⁵ Nietzsche’s question concerns the status not of any one value (no matter how fundamental) but of the structure of valuation itself.¹⁶ It is thus a realism of the Platonic sort (which includes the Kantian version) that occupies Nietzsche. He remarks that no moral system has ever been able to liberate values from their dependence on reality. On the contrary, the world of values, which he often refers to ironically as the “real world,” is valuable precisely because it presents itself as real, that is, as “close neighbors” to the world of experience: “The ‘real world,’ however one has hitherto conceived it—it has always been the apparent world *once again*” (*WP*, 566).¹⁷ In fact, reality is

the ground of value: we do not value reality because it is good; instead, we value values because they are real (or so we think).

Self-Differentiation

So far, I have been drawing a picture of Nietzsche's account of the relations of truth and values limited to his genealogical texts. It is now possible to draw some consequences as to the ontology that constitutes the theoretical basis for such accounts. In the remainder of this section, I will emphasize the structural importance of the view I find in Nietzsche that both the self and reality are characterized essentially by self-differentiation. By self-differentiation I shall mean no other thing than the ability to be simultaneously subject and object for oneself.

Reality as Intentionality

Mankind's ability to abstract "reality" from the "real" world and to subsequently attribute it to other fantastical object such as values, so-called backworlds, or "god" used to puzzle Kant, who famously pointed out that

Being is evidently not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that can be added to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves. (Kant 1998, A 598/B 626)

For Nietzsche, the problem is—if it is even possible—even more acute. This faculty of abstraction is responsible for intellectual faculties of imagination, memory, sociability, consciousness, and self-consciousness, all of which, in turn, have ethical offspring: bad conscience, morals, and religion. Abstraction is also paradoxical: on the one hand, it presupposes the ability to experience reality as the identity of the thing and of its perceptual presence (faith as "perceptual faith," *WP*, 488, 583); on the other hand, it involves the ability to break this identity in order to abstract the predicate "existence" from it. The result is most unsettling. The world, the experience of which is the ground of our concept of reality, becomes rejected in favor of another world whose reality is an usurpation. "When one separates an ideal from what's real," Nietzsche declares, "one casts down the real, impoverishes it, slanders it" (10 [194], see also *WP*, 37). Mankind starts taking the original for the copy and the copy for the original. The world thereby established Nietzsche calls—not without irony and quotation marks—the "real world" (*WP*, 507) or the "true world" (*TI*, 4).

The Truth of Error

Nietzsche spends a considerable amount of effort to uncover this fallacious process and to undercut its offspring. Yet, he spends even more time investigating the disturbing fact that precisely this double faculty exists, that no appeal to a duality of reality and ideality can obliterate the continuity that leads the one into the non-one, transforms the imagined world into the “real world,” “immorality” into “morality” (X [154]), and the “only world” into the “world of appearance” (*WP*, 488). The very fact that it is possible for the world to be deprived of its reality makes any rejection of transcendence by appeal to the “real” impossible. Consider Nietzsche’s conundrum:

And if this moral judging and discontent with the real were indeed, as has been claimed, an ineradicable instinct, might that instinct not then be one of the ineradicable stupidities or indeed presumptions of our species? —But by saying this we’re doing exactly what we rebuke: the standpoint of desirability, of unwarrantedly playing the judge, is part of the character of the course of things. (VII [62])

In short, there is something authentic about errors, for it is part of the essential possibilities of mankind that it shall build backworlds for itself. My hypothesis is that Nietzsche envisages this paradoxical—but real—faculty that he finds in mankind (and not only in mankind) as the possibility of consciousness as described in *GS*, 354, and *GM*, II, 16, and that he calls “animal consciousness” (*GS*, 354).¹⁸ This faculty is “basic” because it constitutes the basis for further developments of the human psyche, most notably, into consciousness and self-consciousness. It is presented in a minimal way in *GM*, II, 16, where it is described as “the whole inner world, originally [*ursprünglich*] stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin [*zwei Häute*].” In *GS*, 354, this originary dimension is emphasized by the repetition of the notion of “development” [*Entwicklung*] (which appears five times in the aphorism) making it clearly a text about the development of consciousness from a minimal yet consequential basis and not about its emergence out of the non-conscious or the purely physical.

For Nietzsche the structure of other-worldliness stems from the disjunction between reality (4 [23]) and that which is real (i.e., the “empirical world”). We must ask what is meant here by “reality.” As my analysis of threats emphasized, reality is primarily encountered in terms of interests:

But we have only drawn the concept “real, truly existing” from the “concerning us”; the more we are affected in our interest, the more we believe in the “reality” of a thing or an entity. “It exists” means: I feel myself as existing in opposition to it. (VIII [1–5, 19])

Interests as Reality

In *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, Peter Poellner elaborates upon this note to offer a helpful discussion of reality as interest (Poellner 1995). In his reading, Nietzsche considers reality to be essentially relative to a subject *qua* subject of interest. Nietzsche, he writes, “seems to maintain that the idea of objective reality essentially involves that of actual or possible ‘affections’ of a subject” (90) and that there is a “Nietzschean (and idealist) claim that all conceivable objects have subject-implicating properties” (85). Further yet, Poellner makes the “tentative interpretation” that “Nietzsche’s views seem in fact to be closer to idealism than to ontological phenomenalism” (101). There is no doubt that Nietzsche repeatedly places the subject as the source of any notion of reality; indeed, this is one of the most prominent new claims of the year 1887.¹⁹ Consider:

Everywhere, [reason] believes in the ego, in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and it projects this faith in the ego-substance upon all things, only thereby does it *create* the concept of “thing.” (*TI*, II, 5)

And:

[Man] even took the concept of being from the concept of the ego [. . .] the thing itself, to say it once more, the concept of a thing is a mere reflex to the faith in the ego as cause. [. . .] The error of the spirit as cause mistaken for reality! (*TI*, VI, 3)

The “faith in the ego” is the originary experience from which the concept of a “thing” was derived, but—and it is what concerns me here—it is also the source of the idea of reality. This seems to confirm Poellner’s “idealistic” hypothesis: there is no reality outside of the subject’s constituting activity.

Critique of the Subject

However, is this faith in the ego to be taken at face value? Is there any such thing as a subject to begin with? Consider:

“Everything is subjective,” you say: but that itself is interpretation, for the “subject” is not something given but a fiction added on, tucked behind. —Is it even necessary to posit the interpreter behind the interpretation? Even that is fiction, hypothesis. (VII [60])

And:

Must not all philosophy finally bring to light the assumptions on which the movement of *reason* depends? Our *belief in the I* as substance, as the only reality on the basis of which we attribute reality to things in general? At last, the oldest “realism” comes to light: at the moment when the whole religious history of humanity recognizes itself in the history of the soul superstition. *Here is a barrier*: our thinking itself involves that belief. (VII [63])

This latter note is crucial to our understanding of Nietzsche’s critique of the subject because it brings together the two aspects of this critique. First, the critique of the subject of action. As such, it relates to Nietzsche’s more general rejections of free will, agency, and further guilt, punishment, and judgment at large (the “doer” was invented so that humans can be held accountable and be revenged upon says Nietzsche). This critique is, broadly speaking, ethical. Second, there is Nietzsche’s critique of the subjective substratum, the soul and the ego. This critique is related to Nietzsche’s accounts of grammar and logic, and it is epistemological.

In *BGE*, contemporaneous to this note, Nietzsche presents both critiques. The epistemic one famously takes the form of a critique of Descartes’s *cogito*. He writes:

It is *falsifying* the facts to say that the subject “I” is the condition of the predicate “think.” There is thinking, but to assert that there is the same thing as the famous old “I” is, to put it mildly, only an assumption, a hypothesis, and certainly not an “immediate certainty.” And in the end “there is thinking” is also going too far: even this “there” contains an *interpretation* of the process and is not part of the process itself. (*BGE*, 17)

In *BGE*, 54, Nietzsche returns to this argument to present its ethical version:

Since Descartes (and more in defiance of him than because of his example) all philosophers have attempted to assassinate the old concept of the soul, under the guise of criticizing the subject-predicate concept. That is to say, they have attempted to assassinate the basic conception of the Christian doctrine. [. . .] In earlier times, people

believed in the “soul” just as they believed in grammar and the grammatical subject [. . .] basically, *Kant* wanted to prove that the subject could not be proved by means of the subject, nor could the object be proved either. Perhaps he was already familiar with the possibility of an *apparent existence* of the subject (that is, of the soul).

In his commentary on this aphorism, Laurence Lampert rightly stresses that Nietzsche associated himself with the phrase “modern philosophy.” However, Lampert evades the reference to Descartes by asserting—rightly again—that Nietzsche may have not read Descartes “skeptically enough.” In Lampert’s view, this aphorism is related not to Descartes’s *cogito* as presented in his *Discourse* and in his *Second Meditation*, but to his *Treatise of Passions*, “the book that sets forth the first modern account of soul as an epiphenomenon of the machinery of the human body” (Lampert 2001, 112n24–25). I emphasize Lampert’s reading because it seems to me to typify those readings of Nietzsche that remain committed to an alternative between mechanism or naturalism on the one hand and postmodernism or idealism on the other through a refusal to think outside of the alternative of the subject and the object.²⁰ Unlike Lampert, it does not seem to me that in this passage Nietzsche criticizes the non-physicality of the “soul” as much as he criticizes the notion of an independent subject, incarnate or not. As a result, I read Nietzsche not as seeking support in Descartes’s account of the “passions of the soul,” but rather, as prolonging his earlier critique of Descartes’s “faith in grammar.” In this reading, Nietzsche’s critique of the subject is a clear departure from Poellner’s characterization of the subject as the base of all interest and, thereby, of the subject as constituting reality.

It must be added, however, that Poellner does leave open the possibility of Nietzsche’s rejection of the subject. Poellner asks himself:

Doesn’t Nietzsche’s approach, as I have interpreted it, involve [. . .] that there could conceivably be self-conscious subjects prior to the constitution, relative to them, of an external, objective sphere? (Poellner 1995, 98)

However, Poellner’s response is disappointing:

Nietzsche may very well concede that just as there can be no “real” objects without a “subject” that has desires, or, in his terms, interests or values, so there can be no such potentially self-conscious subject without what it takes to be an external, objective sphere. Nietzsche does, as far as I am aware, not explicitly say this, but nothing in what he does say rules out such a response, and this would seem sufficient to deflect the criticism. (99)

This indeed would deflect potential criticisms of Nietzsche's position, and it is the case that Nietzsche, as is manifest from the passages quoted above, actually says this. However, this would put any account of the kind of Poellner's in a difficult place because it would put interest itself, and no longer the subject's attribution of interest (Poellner's hypothesis), at the ground of experience. Consider:

Finally, "the thing-in-itself" also falls, because at bottom it is the concept of a "subject-in-itself," yet we have understood that the subject is fictitious. The antithesis of "thing-in-itself" and "appearance" is untenable. (9 [91])

The difference in the resulting accounts could not be overstated. In his discussion of Nietzsche's supposed idealism, Poellner explicitly refers to a discussion of Husserl, the admission of my view (namely that neither the subjective pole nor the objective pole are constitutive of reality and experience) against Poellner's hypothesis (which still maintains the subject as the transcendental ground for constitution) is consequential because it involves a shift of priority from the poles of the intentional acts (subject and object) to intentionality itself.²¹ This, as we shall see, constitutes the core of Merleau-Ponty's departure from Husserl and the essential and structural link that binds his philosophy with Nietzsche's: intentionality is anterior to intentional objects or subjects.

The Primacy of Intentionality

So, Nietzsche rejects the notion of the object as derived from that of the subject, and yet he rejects the notion of the subject too.²² This is puzzling because it seems to question the very idea of reality as interest. In a strange way, we may be closer to this idea now; it is not just reality *for me* that is interest (in a way that would really place the subject as a reality anterior to it), but interest itself is reality. Let me pause for a moment here and examine what this implies about the nature of Nietzsche's commitment to truth. A direct consequence of my reading thus far is that Nietzsche defines reality as interest. Not just as interest *for me*, but as interest itself (without reference to a subject for whom so and so is interesting in such and such a way).

Maudemarie Clark's *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* provides the most patient review of Nietzsche's views on truth. Her core claim is that Nietzsche is committed to the idea of truth as correspondence even when he criticizes it (Clark 1991, 117). This is because, she says, Nietzsche considers that our intellect (as described in *GS*, 111, 354, and elsewhere) is not

refined enough to provide an adequate picture of the thing-in-itself that is the object of truth discourses. She thus concludes that Nietzsche criticizes truth for not achieving correspondence, which would show Nietzsche to be committed to the view that truth must be correspondence. Of course, Clark is aware of Nietzsche's rejection of the thing-in-itself, and she says his views oscillate between claiming that truth *qua* correspondence is impossible and claiming that it is possible but rare (i.e., most often only to be found in Nietzsche's own writings). This, however, poses one problem that I think is clarified by our discussion so far. Seeing reality as interest and values as arising from needs means that it is the experience of reality that warrants the authority of values. It is impossible—even for Clark—to negate that Nietzsche sees values as binding. In my view, Nietzsche can be said to be committed to truth as correspondence only if we do not agree with Clark (178) in identifying “correspondence” with “correspondence *with the thing-in-itself*.” To be sure, the priority of interest over subject and object (the potential thing-in-itself) makes it the object of truth as correspondence; however, interest can be taken as an “in-itself” only in the sense of Merleau-Ponty's perennial question about an “in-itself for us.”²³ In other words, the object of truth, which Nietzsche claims truth conceals from us, is the experience of reality, not reality itself. This is made obvious by Nietzsche positing interest as a phenomenological and not a metaphysical ground of reality. Let me emphasize that this view does not contradict the idea that interest is ontologically anterior to subject and object. It is clear that interest has an intentional structure and thereby presents itself as an in-itself for a subject. My only claim is that this does not entail the existence of such an in-itself, or of a subject.

Self-Differentiation

Let me try to clarify this question further. What does it mean for interest to be anterior to both subject and object? First of all, it means that there is interest before there is a subject and an object *of interest*. This also means that the notions “subject” and “object” somehow arise from interest itself. Probably the most direct way to clarify this is to have recourse to Nietzsche's hypothesis of the will to power. According to this, the essence of the world is “will to power, and that alone” (*BGE*, 36).²⁴ “That alone,” Nietzsche insists, and especially not a subject or an object *of* the will to power (*WP*, 589).²⁵ As John Richardson rightly emphasizes, the will to power has a “telic” and “intentional” structure, it is “end-directedness” (Richardson 1996, 35). Seen from a formal point of view it implies the thought of an end, a stable and self-identical object of striving. Likewise, it implies the

thought of a subject of the will, which remains stable in time. These are as it were “analytically contained” in the concept of the will to power. This is not to say, however, that the existence of such self-identical entities is in any way affirmed by it.

If we wish to explain how subject and object arise from the non-subjective and the non-objective, it seems we must start here. All the difficulty, of course, is to account for this theoretical point of view from within the will to power. Indeed, it is only this theoretical point of view that accounts for the objective form of our thought. For Nietzsche, the will to power is essentially the drive to “make equal” (*GS*, 354). In biological terms, it means assimilation in the sense of “digestion.” Nietzsche calls this process “incorporation” [*Einverleibung*] and I will discuss it in Chapter 2. However, we should already recall that the will to power is not more physical than it is “spiritual”; its equalizing activity is intellectual too because it “posits things” in a predicative way:

The question is [. . .] whether this creating, logicising, trimming, falsifying is not itself the best-guaranteed reality: in short, whether that which “posits things” is not the sole reality. (IX, [106])

So, it is plausible that the will to power itself acts as a falsifier of itself (there is “nothing besides” will to power to falsify): it presents itself in terms of “subjects” and “objects.” For Nietzsche, of course, such oppositions as subject and object are impossible. In reality, drives merely *imply* a subject and an object by pointing toward them as their regulative horizons perhaps, but at any rate, not as actual realities. There is a gradual continuum that moves toward each pole asymptotically, but this continuum is made of differences of degrees and precludes any leap: “If we give up the soul, ‘the subject,’ there’s no basis for any ‘substance.’ One gets *degrees of being*, one loses *being* as such” (X [19]).

This model has crucial implications for the question of truth. Let me anticipate the rest of the argument. If the will to power is a self-falsifying principle, it means that we have uncovered a certain absolute truth, namely, that the will to power (i.e., Being) is self-falsifying. More important, we may understand better the ontological place of truth or the place of what I have called above something “authentic” about errors. In this view, truth (as the falsification of experience) is the process by which the will to power falsifies itself. I will discuss this view in more detail later, but let me stress that it necessarily doubles out the question of truth. We must ask whether it is indeed true (the traditional question), but also whether it is real (whether it is an essential feature of Being as self-falsification). For now, let me return to the question of interest.

Reflexivity and Resistance

For Nietzsche, the external world can interest us in two basic ways: interest and threat.²⁶ If I apprehend the world as an object of conquest, the object of my interest will be external. If I experience the world as a threat, the object of my interest will be myself. One important implication of this is that interest is essentially bi-directional: it may be directed to the outside world (toward conquest) or to the self (for defense). I must point out a certain dissymmetry between these two modes of interest. In common language, interest implies desire more directly than it implies preservation. This is the case for Nietzsche, too. We remember that the epistemic and ethical critiques of the notion of subject are intertwined (the concept of subject is false and it is designed to allow us to assign blame). This is because, for Nietzsche, the hostility of the environment is always psychologized by the individual. Hostility is always linked to a deed, and a deed to a “doer.” In fact, then, my interest for self-defense presents itself as a form of desire, namely, the desire expressed by the other person (or personified force; *WP*, 775).

This may offer some clarifications on the emergence of the concepts of subject and object. Nietzsche reformulates self-preservation in terms of “passivity” (or “reactivity”) and conquest in terms of “activity.” For Nietzsche, this lexical move uncovers the intimate relationships of the subject and the object at a deeper level. Their relation is chiasmatic: in passivity the object of interest is the self, and its subject is the outside world as threat. In activity it is the reverse. It is thus through the notions of activity and passivity that we must understand subject and object:

What do *active* and *passive* mean? Is it not becoming *master* and being *defeated*? and subject and object? (VII [48])

This indicates that the notions of subject and object do not arise from the experience of the separation of self and world, but emerge from the experience of their contact. This relationship as a consequence is reversible insofar as any act of will implies both activity and passivity. Consider the following two contemporaneous claims.

What is “passive”? resisting and reacting. Being *hindered* in one’s forward-reaching movement: thus an act of resistance and reaction [.]
What is “active”? Reaching out for power. (V [64])

The will to power can only express itself against resistances; it seeks what will resist it—this is the original tendency of protoplasm in sending out pseudopodia and *feeling* its way. (IX [151])

In the experience of reality, the two opposing drives are almost simultaneously subject and object to each other because they resist each other. As a result, we obtain a line of contact across which subject and object of interest indefinitely alternate: the conqueror (subject) is opposed some resistance and thereby becomes object of the resistance imposed to it by the resisting object of the conquest. Conversely, this object, by virtue of its own resistance, becomes subject.²⁷ For Nietzsche, this line of contact is the basic experience upon which we build the concepts of inside and outside and of subject and object. Even though Nietzsche presents this process as essentially a hostile encounter, it also involves and informs the structure of perception. Indeed, Nietzsche regards perception as a function of the drives' resistance-seeking (recall the identity of increase-seeking and perception in the case of the protoplasm, e.g., *WP*, 702). As I will discuss in Chapter 6, Merleau-Ponty too encounters this chiasma and this reversibility between subject and object as the structure of perception and, like Nietzsche, he will hold that this coincidence of perception and the will to increase is correlative to the coincidence of activity and passivity.²⁸ Indeed, as early as 1881, when Nietzsche was still seeking to draw the living from inert matter, he defined the perceptive organism as both a separation from nature and a separation of the self with itself (i.e., self-differentiation):

Let us *not* think of the return to non-perception as a retrogression! We become completely true, we are perfected. Death must be *re-interpreted!* We thus are *reconciled* with reality, i.e. with the dead world. (9 [70])

These unions of opposites are occasioned by the experience of a resistance. Here we arrive at the question of externality. A resistance is the experience of the externality of the external world. Nietzsche also claims that resistances lead to self-consciousness: if this resistance becomes master over me, I become object for myself. Let me emphasize this point that is essential to most of Nietzsche's later worldview: consciousness is always an act of subjection involving a tension between the subject and the object of consciousness. Now we understand in what sense Nietzsche thinks that consciousness is a "disease" (*GS*, 354): "Conscious thought," Nietzsche writes, "is nothing but *a certain behaviour of the instincts towards one another*" (*GS*, 333).²⁹ Here we encounter the unity of consciousness as described in *GS*, 354, and the "bad conscience" of *GM*, II, 16. In both cases, it is a question of opposing drives.

This is the structure that underlies the metaphor of the inner world used in *GM*, II, 16. It is worth quoting it again:

The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin [*zwei Häute*], was expanded and extended itself and gained depth, breadth and height in proportion to the degree that the external discharge of man's instincts was *obstructed*.

In this Nietzsche describes the originary inner world as the origin of the reflexivity of interest: because there is a (ever-so-small) gap within the individual, her drives have the ability be redirected toward her other "half." The self is structured in such a way that there is a potential object of domination within it. This setup allows for an inner relation of forces of the same type as the external one: there is externality *within* the self. This is made possible by the gap between the two "layers of skin," which allows for passivity and activity within the self, and thereby allows for aggression against oneself, which is what Nietzsche describes in the rest of *GM*, II, 16. Although the metaphor does not return in Nietzsche's writings, he maintains in several instances that the rules that apply in external relations of power apply internally too:

I maintain the phenomenality of the inner world too: [. . .] The "apparent *inner* world" is governed by just the same forms and procedures as the "outer" world. (*WP*, 477)

It is useful to bear in mind that this setup, which shows the interconnection of consciousness (external interest) and self-consciousness (internal interest), is similar to the "animal consciousness" described in *GS*, 354, where consciousness and self-consciousness are not distinct.³⁰

Let us recall that for Nietzsche basic consciousness is originary. It is not derived from anything else. There is no genealogical thought capable of seeing beyond it, if there even is anything beyond it. This characterization of the human's originary inner world ("animal consciousness" or "soul") will have great consequences for Nietzsche's ontology and cosmology. This is because Nietzsche's positing of this internal separation within the individual and his subsequent relativization of the notions of internality and externality commit him to a worldview determined by self-differentiation. In line with the above discussion, this involves (among other things) the primacy of intentionality over and above intentional poles like subject and object and the reversibility of this intentionality. For Nietzsche, self-identity is impossible precisely by virtue of the asymptotic character of intentionality:

If we give up the effecting subject, then also the object on which effects are exerted. Duration, *conformity with itself*, being, inhere neither in what is called subject nor in what is called object. [. . .] All these are oppositions which don't exist in themselves and in fact only

express differences of degree that look like oppositions when viewed through a particular prism. (IX [91], my emphasis)

Origin and Becoming

This discussion of the originary inner world of the “animal man” commits me to three claims: first, animal psychology (*GM*, III, 20) must be understood as self-differentiation. Second, the animal psyche stands at the origin of the history told by Nietzsche’s genealogy. Third, animal psychology imposes its heredity upon subsequent modes of being human. By this I mean that the basic features of the animal psyche loosely inform every subsequent mode of existence, fact, and events that will exhibit this structure too. In other words, animal psychology determines the range of human possibilities. I see two such basic features to the animal psyche: a) contingency: any mode of being is contingent upon circumstances, and b) self-differentiation: self-identity is impossible. It is worth pointing out at the outset that these two features warrant the eternity of becoming. The instability of animal psychology will be passed on, and with it, becoming will be incapable of an end (for Nietzsche, becoming would end only in self-identity, but self-identity is impossible, e.g., 9 [19]). I will develop this point in Chapter 3.

Each of these three claims is controversial. Objections to them would come from diametrically opposed sides. First, the postmodernist and structuralist readings of Nietzsche after Foucault’s hugely influential “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” of 1971 would oppose my second and third claims by denying that genealogy proposes any origin and by arguing that, consequently, no starting point can present itself as an essential feature to any future. Moreover, in this reading, there is no continuity of history and therefore any talk of heredity is absurd. Second, the prominent naturalistic trend in current and recent Nietzsche scholarship may object to my first claim: Nietzsche, these authors would say, sees psychology and political and social behaviors as stemming from nature understood as the object of natural sciences. In this reading, the ground is nature, and by definition it is self-identical. Before turning to this line of objection, let me address the first one, drawn from Foucault.

Foucault on Genealogy

Foucault’s “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” is an effort to remove the notion of continuity from the interpretations of Nietzsche’s genealogies and to replace it with the notion of chance (Foucault 1984, 78). It is also a

rejection of the idea that genealogy has anything to do with finding an origin. It is not my purpose here to engage with the entirety of Foucault's writings about Nietzsche, which would require an effort of systematization across a wide variety of texts, possibly overlooking important discrepancies. I focus on this one article from Foucault not with regard to Foucault's thinking per se so much as with regard to what it represents in the general perception of Nietzsche.

Let me thus start with the question of continuity. Foucault makes two points: a) there is no continuity from the past to the present or from the present to the future. The chronological order is not continuous:

Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things. Its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present. (Foucault 1984, 83)

From this, he infers b) there is no continuity from the present to the past; the genealogical order is not continuous.³¹ Hence Foucault's emphasis on documentation: genealogy is not a deduction of the past from the present, it is past documents that will give us access to *their* times. There is no doubt that Nietzsche promotes "*wirkliche Historie*" in opposition to such ideas as those of Paul Rée, which he regards as fantastical constructions (*GM*, preface, 4, 7). However, this does not seem to entail, for Nietzsche, the impossibility to use the present as a mode of access to the past. In fact, Nietzsche's genealogy, for all its praise for "gray history," presents only one piece of documented erudition that has to do with the etymology of the words "good," "bad," "guilt," and "debt" (*GM*, I, 4). Foucault's emphasis on documentation reflects Nietzsche's advertised intentions but not his practice. It prevents Foucault from recognizing that the genealogical account is replete with regressive deductions of the past from the present: "I say of every morality: 'it is a fruit by which I recognize the *soil* from which it sprang'" (*WP*, 257), claims Nietzsche. Consider this even more striking assertion made about nihilism:

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: *the advent of nihilism*. This history can be related even now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere. (*WP*, preface, 2)

Not only can the past be read in the present, but the future too. To be sure, we should not take Nietzsche's self-attributed ability to predict too seriously. The prediction does not refer to minute facts, but to social, per-

haps even cosmic, cycles, and in other instances Nietzsche sharply opposes necessity and predictability. However, there is no question that Nietzsche believes in some sort of historical continuity warranted by “necessity.” In fact, he does so to the point that genealogical thinking looks strikingly like some transcendental deduction of the Kantian sort. Compare Kant’s famous claim that “the principle of continuity forbade any leaps in the series of appearances (alterations) [*in mundo non datur saltus*]” (Kant 1998, B 281; see also B 172) with Nietzsche’s claim:

Natura non facit saltum. However strongly man may develop upwards and seem to leap from one contradiction to another, a close observation will reveal the dovetails where the new building grows out of the old. This is the biographer’s task: he must reflect upon his subject on the principle that nature takes no jumps. (*WS*, 198)

Even though Nietzsche, in this specific aphorism, is concerned with the task of the biographer, there is no doubt that he endorses the Kantian affirmation of continuity. In the context of this aphorism, it seems highly plausible that what applies to the biographer would also apply to the genealogist.

For Nietzsche, the thread that runs throughout history is necessity. As such, it is truly atemporal; it is the eternal that makes becoming possible as continuity. Nietzsche’s use of the term “necessity” crystallizes our difficulty. For Nietzsche, necessity is this atemporal principle; yet, necessity merely stands for the impossibility for anything to be otherwise: “‘Mechanical necessity’ is not a fact [. . .] the rule proves only that one and the same event is not another event as well” (*WP*, 552). Necessity supports absolute immanence: if something is, it is necessarily; if it is necessarily, it is necessity through and through. This raises the question: If an event is entirely spatio-temporal and necessity is not, how can there be necessary events? Nietzsche struggles with this question. In *WP*, 552, he separates necessity and facts: “Necessity is not a fact, but an interpretation.” This seems to contradict the previous passage where “necessity itself” was “at work” in actual events.

Nietzsche seems to believe in two forms of necessity. One is absolute, but it is only interpretation and comes a posteriori (*WP*, 530). It is absolute because it is entirely binding; it is the necessity of an event as identical to this event: if an event occurred, its having been is inescapable and we may interpret it as an expression of necessity. The other one is meant in a stronger sense. It is not mere interpretation, (or at least, not in the same sense) however; it is only partial. It is efficient only as part of the apparently odd couple it forms with chance. For Nietzsche, conditions of exis-

tence result from “partly necessity, partly chance” (*WP*, 898). This second form of necessity structures and restricts the range of chance; I will call it “structural necessity.” Structural necessity does not preclude chance but it embraces it.³²

Those iron hands of necessity which shake the dice-box of chance play their game for an infinite length of time so that there has to be throws which exactly resemble purposiveness [. . .] We ourselves do no more than play the game of necessity! (*D*, 130)

In this aphorism from *Daybreak*, one of his most inspiring, Nietzsche seeks to abolish the opposition between chance and necessity. Events arise from their encounter and they are thus always partly indeterminate and partly determinate. In an early hint at the thought of eternal recurrence, the finite number of possibilities (dice-throws) is affirmed, while the infinity of time entails the infinity of dice-throws. This entails the actualization, sooner or later, of every possibility. As the subsequent elaboration of Eternal Recurrence will make clear, this involves a restriction to the range of possibilities.³³ There are fewer possibilities than there are dice-throws. Every event has an element of necessity and an element of chance. Restriction represents necessity and the unpredictability of dice-throws represents chance. Together, they create events. (See *Z*, I, 16; *Z*, III, “The Seven Seals,” 3; *GS*, 277; and *WP*, 673.)

As regards the question of genealogy, we may obtain some clarifications if we associate these remarks to Nietzsche’s other use of necessity, as “interpretation.” As they happen, the dice-throws of chance turn into interpretative (a posteriori) necessity. As they become past, they become unchangeable and necessary. Chance does not survive the passing of time, which makes it collapse into necessity. Necessity, on the other hand, survives the passing of time, so that interpretative (a posteriori) necessity becomes an interpretation of structural (a priori) necessity. Interpretative necessity does not preclude chance; simply, it envisages chance after it has become necessity. This places the genealogist in a privileged position to interpret history: it is only a posteriori that events may be interpreted. This should partly satisfy and partly dissatisfy Foucault.³⁴ In my view, Nietzsche does include chance in the unfolding of history, but not to the point that it breaks any continuity. Structural necessity is not inconsequential but defines and restricts the range of chance-possibilities. In short, there is cooperation—not incompatibility—between chance and necessity.

This view makes structural necessity consequential enough to present it as a significant origin. Foucault would be dissatisfied. For Foucault,

Nietzsche challenges the pursuit of the origin, at least on those occasions when he is truly a genealogist. First because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their *purest possibilities* and their carefully protected identities because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. (Foucault 1984, 76, my emphasis)

In short, the search for an origin would make Nietzsche a metaphysician. Nietzsche himself asserts clearly:

The world exists; it is not something that becomes, not something that passes away. Or rather, it becomes, it passes away, but it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away—it maintains itself in both. (*WP*, 1066)

This seems to confirm Foucault's rejection of any origin. However, the mere idea of a world that would maintain itself in becoming points to some kind of cosmological structure that is quite foreign to Foucault's account. At any rate, this argument surely suffices to refute any attempt to construe the origin in question as a single self-identical entity (which is what it seems to me that some naturalist readings tend to do) because this entity would be a "beginning," and as such no becoming could flow from it. However, it is powerless if we posit the origin as self-differentiation itself. It is obvious from the previous discussion that the origin we seek is not to be found in self-identity. In my view, the basic animal psyche (which constitutes the origin brought to light by Nietzsche's genealogy) is not the "essence of things," nor is it an "immobile form." It does "precede the external world of accidents and succession," but probably not in the sense Foucault intends. In my reading, this origin determines nothing else than the condition of succession and of externality. As pre-consciousness, for example, it prefigures the division of the external and the internal. It allows the "animal man," like all living things, to perceive the external world as resistance and as the object of its conquest. Thereby, it triggers the unfolding of time that Nietzsche's genealogies relate, and with it, the time of conquest.

Possibilities

There is one feature of my account that Foucault explicitly rejects as characteristic of fantastical origins: possibility. Foucault's point is difficult to oppose because what he means is unclear. Perhaps he means that we should

not construe this origin in an ontological way, thereby reading in it the structure of all possible events. If this is Foucault's claim, it is refuted by Nietzsche's texts in many instances (*WP*, 373, 379, 678, 687, 785). There is no doubt that the combination of chance and necessity must be expressed in terms of a restricted range of possibilities.³⁵ This restriction is not absolute, (this would make it a determinism) but it is efficient and applies its mark on every generation of events as a heredity (a point which, if confirmed, would establish a very strong connection with Merleau-Ponty's ontology of history, as I will show in Chapter 6). As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, there are two features of the structure inherited from this origin: self-differentiation and contingency. In short, the possibilities are restricted to only the possibilities of becoming, and in this sense they are ontological. There is an origin provided by the structure of animal psychology. It is indeed this determinant structure that it imposes that ensures that "becoming does not flow into being" (*WP*, 708).

Naturalism

The notion of self-differentiation may offer us a way out of both determinism and relativism, but it exposes us to some other objections. These would come from one strand of the so-called "naturalistic" readings of Nietzsche. Let me start by explaining in what sense I mean naturalism here. Most authors draw a distinction between epistemological and ethical naturalism. Epistemological naturalism is the claim that consciousness, knowledge, and all the realm of the spiritual can be explained in terms of nature (taken in a broad and certainly problematic sense). Ethical naturalism is the claim that values in particular are derived from nature. This is ambiguous in many ways because it may mean three things. It may imply a) that one justifies one's values with reference to nature, b) that one explains the moral phenomenon as stemming from nature, or c) that one explains the belief in specific values from their relationship to nature. Often b) and c) are conflated.³⁶ The first case is concerned not with Nietzsche's genealogical critique of values, but with Nietzsche's own values (i.e., the values he proposes as a replacement to them). It will be examined in Chapter 3. As regards b) and c), it is apparent that they belong in epistemological naturalism too and I will examine them as such. In what follows, it is not my intention to reduce to a single picture the accounts provided by different authors whose views are often diverse. I will assume, however, that those authors who define themselves as naturalists have in common the view that Nietzsche sees human matters and behaviors to stem from a

natural ground defined as self-identical. In fact, as Richard Schacht points out, this is a view that many self-defined naturalists would not endorse, by invoking the proviso that

[to the project of “translating man back into nature”] it must be immediately added (lest one mistakenly conclude that he thereby opts for a merely “biologistic” approach in these matters) that Nietzsche considers it no less important also to “translate” ourselves back into *society*. (Schacht 1983, 55)

Such a characterization of man as a combination of nature and society is commendably nuanced, but it seems hardly groundbreaking and threatens to reduce Nietzsche’s supposed naturalism—and his commentators’ actual naturalism—to triviality. Consider by contrast Mathias Risse’s description at the beginning of his remarkable article “Origins of Ressentiment and Sources of Normativity”:

This essay is shaped by my view that Nietzsche (at least in the late 1880s) is a naturalist. Following Darwall, I define *metaphysical naturalism* as holding that nothing exists beyond what is open to empirical study; consequently, ethical thought and feeling are empirically ascertainable facts about the world. (Risse 2003, 144)

Consider this other claim by Risse at the beginning of another essay:

This essay [clarifies] the relationship between Nietzsche and Kant in the light of Nietzsche’s physiological, hence naturalistic, ideas about morality. (Risse 2007, 58)

And this other definition by Peter Poellner:

A naturalized approach to epistemological problems [. . .] starts from the “hypothetical” premiss that the subject of knowledge is to be identified with the empirical organism studied by biology and physiology. (Poellner 1995, 140)

The spectrum of naturalism seems to be delineated by these two positions; Schacht’s weaker one, and the more recent, stronger one. In Bernard Williams’s words:

Formulations of the [naturalist] position tend to rule out too much or too little. The position rules out too much if it tries reductively to ignore culture and convention, this is misguided even on a scientific basis, in the sense that to live under culture is a basic part of

the ethology of this species. It rules out too little if it includes many things that have been part of the self-image of morality, such as certain conceptions of moral cognition. (Williams 2006, 301)

In the first case (described by Schacht), the expression “naturalist” is inconsequential; in the other, it covers a strong, if difficult to defend, philosophical position. It is to this second case that I now turn. Let me stress at the outset that this position involves that man, as an object of inquiry, is self-identical, and that so is nature.

Self-Identical Nature

In his article “The Paradox of Fatalism and Self-Creation in Nietzsche,” Brian Leiter presents a view similar to the one I outlined above in response to Foucault, only to reject it. He writes:

So, the paradox [of fatalism and self-creation] is resolved, it seems, by simply recognizing the limited domain of creative work, while allowing for the underlying fatalism which entails only that one’s possibilities are circumscribed. A place for “self-creation” is found precisely in the conceptual space between causal essentialism (the heart of Nietzsche’s fatalism), and classical determinism. Unfortunately, this seemingly attractive solution to the paradox simply doesn’t square with the theory of action that underlies the basic deterministic doctrine [of Nietzsche’s]. (Leiter 2001: 317)

Leiter goes on to give his solution, which is to affirm fatalism over and above self-creation and to characterize his account as “[recapturing] Nietzsche the naturalist.” He goes as far as likening Nietzsche’s views to “biological materialism”:

Have we really done Nietzsche any favour by showing him to believe in “type-facts,” in “human nature,” in the epiphenomenality of consciousness, in the unreality of free-will, in the primacy of physiology? My answer is unequivocally “yes.” (Leiter 2001: 319)

The question of self-creation is only indirectly related to our topic and I will not pursue a discussion of Leiter’s controversial conclusions. However, these remarks may help clarify the naturalist position on the question of self-differentiation. For Leiter, naturalism is equivalent to determinism. It opposes the notions of possibilities and chance, not only in their pure form (as in Foucault’s account), but also as circumscribed “in the conceptual space between causal essentialism and classical determinism” (as in

my account). Leiter does so in the name of the self-identity of nature. The context of his claims is a discussion of agency framed by the question of the relationship of the subject and the object. Creation is the affirmation of the subject and her asserting herself over external objects. Fatalism, on the other hand, affirms the binding power of objects over human subjects. Leiter's conclusion shifts all the weight on the side of the object, affirming "the unreality of free-will." As I have shown before, in my discussion of Peter Poellner's idealist reading, this sharp opposition of subject and object, which arguably leads to sterile idealisms and realisms, is the trademark of most naturalistic accounts perhaps even more than the preference for the objective world. In places, Nietzsche seems to hold that self-identical objects exist. They belong, he says, to the realm of the inorganic: "Everything organic differs from the inorganic insofar as it never is identical with itself" (7 [1]). Elsewhere he says, "unity must be present in the inorganic for the organic already begins with separation" (7 [1]). Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, who quotes these notes from 1883, is careful to emphasize that they should not be taken as Nietzsche's final thoughts on the matter largely because they involve a sharp separation between the inorganic and the organic, which he emphatically repudiates in the later texts. There remains the idea that only the inorganic is self-identical. This means that a naturalist account of Nietzsche must either express nature as inorganic (with obvious difficulties), or nature as self-differentiated (which seems precluded by the idea that natural objects are the objects of the physical sciences).

The Naturalization of the Spirit and the Spiritualization of Nature

My suggestion is that we should place the emphasis not on the opposition, but on the union of the subject and the object. This is possible if one places intentionality at the origin of the vicissitudes of mankind and at the hinge between nature and culture. This is exactly what I take Nietzsche to be doing in *GM*, II, 16, when he refers to the "two layers of skin" that circumscribed the original inner world and made the internalization necessary for civilization possible. I see the same motif in Nietzsche's reference to "a basic piece of animal psychology" in *GM*, III, 20: this expression affirms man's animal ancestry while at the same time affirming the animal kingdom's possession of a psyche. John Richardson, who often appears as a more nuanced naturalist, nonetheless stresses Nietzsche's "naturalist insistence on the deep continuity of the human with the rest of life" and claims that this thesis precludes the inclusion of psychical life in the natural world and makes it an "absurdity" (Richardson 2002, 572). Richardson does not substantiate this claim beyond taking it for granted that this continuity

means the reduction of the human to the material. On the contrary, we have every reason to think that this involves a “meeting in the middle” of animality and humanity, as is indicated by this ambivalence of the phrase “animal psychology.” Earlier in his essay, Richardson makes an argument that would seem to oppose this claim:

While some passages suggest a psychic will, I think there are many more that reject it. Nietzsche attacks not only the “anthropomorphizing” extension of consciousness and intentionality to the rest of life, but even their role in explaining the paradigm human case. He frequently raises doubts against the causality of conscious purposes, and often states these as attacks on “will.” So TI/VI/3 [*Twilight of the Idols*, “The Four Great Errors,” section 3]: “The will no longer moves anything, hence does not explain anything either—it merely accompanies events, it can also be absent. The so-called ‘motive’: another error.” Again we have reason to search for a non-psychic, non-vitalist will to power that can be consistent with Nietzsche’s critical remarks. (547)

It seems to me that such an argument proves less than it claims to. What Richardson—rightly—demonstrates is that the will should not be interpreted as necessarily conscious and representational. He claims that this would refute any idea of the will to power as partly psychic. For Nietzsche, however, there is non-conscious psychical as well as conscious life in nature (*GS*, 354, being only the most explicit exposition of this); disproving the latter says nothing of the former.

Layers of Skin

My interpretation of the “two layers of skin,” of “animal psychology,” and of *GS*, 354, as being the account not of the emergence of consciousness but (as Nietzsche repeatedly asserts) of its development [*Entwicklung*] boils down to this claim: for Nietzsche, the spiritual dimension of existence is and was always-already here. If this claim is right, then this creates a difficulty for the naturalist accounts of Nietzsche.³⁷ It is noteworthy that, to my knowledge, only two authors have addressed (albeit superficially) the enigmatic metaphor of the layers of skin in *GM*. Both belong to the naturalist tradition. Mathias Risse writes:

Prior to the oppression, the “inner world” is merely “thick as extended between two skins,” but as a consequence of the oppression this inner world “has spread and unfolded, has taken on depth, breadth,

height to the same degree that man's outward discharging has been inhibited." (Risse 2003, 142)

More important, this remark bears a footnote that directs us to the other source, Maudemarie Clark and Alan Swensen's edition of *GM*. Risse writes:

The image of the skins is curious. Clark/Swensen suggest that one may think of two layers of an onion. It is important that Nietzsche assumes that there already is a "small" inner world. For that deprives him of the task to explain how there could be any form of inner life *at all*, as opposed to explaining how it could be *expanded*. [. . .] Plausibly, Nietzsche thought this bit of the development of consciousness happened at a pre-social stage. For the development of consciousness under social pressure, cf. also *GS* 354, and see also *BGE* 19. (Risse 2003, 142)

Alas, we know that *GS*, 354, does not provide any account of this "previous stage," and neither does *BGE*, 19. Both these texts start after the presumed original separation. To my knowledge, Nietzsche does not give such an account anywhere. In their translation of *GM*, Clark and Swensen devote a footnote to this enigmatic metaphor without much philosophical emphasis (Nietzsche 1998b, 147). Characteristically, Risse's dismissal of the question—although regrettable—is thorough and precise. It is a dismissal because it evades difficulties by assuming that Nietzsche was thinking something that appears nowhere in his writings. In short, it privileges Nietzsche's perceived intentions over and against his writings. I do not deny that the question of Nietzsche's intentions is open and important. If Risse is right about Nietzsche's intentions and I am right about Nietzsche's text, it would follow that Nietzsche intended to write a naturalistic philosophy and actually wrote a non-naturalistic one instead. Here is why a dismissal will not do: the difference between an origin in self-identity (which is not in Nietzsche's writings) and an origin in self-differentiation (which is) has structural consequences for Nietzsche's entire philosophy. It is nothing but the string of these consequences that I will follow in my overall account of Nietzsche. For now, it might suffice to point out that this importance is expressed by Risse's very remark that Nietzsche's assumption "that there already is a 'small' inner world [. . .] deprives him of the task to explain how there could be any form of inner life *at all*, as opposed to explaining how it could be *expanded*." This remark contains the essence of the problem of any naturalism and asks a question that Nietzsche asked himself many times:³⁸ How does one go about explaining the emergence

of the different from the identical, the emergence of the spiritual from the physical? This is nothing but a reformulation of the naturalistic attitude that seeks monism within a dualistic structure of thought:³⁹ naturalism is on the side of the object in the alternative with the subject; on the side of the physical in the alternative with the spiritual; on the side of the natural in the alternative with the non-natural.⁴⁰ Nietzsche rejects this alternative by finding the origin of the becoming of mankind in self-differentiation, allowing for both chance and necessity (against both determinism and free will), both becoming and eternity (the structure of life is both loose and unchangeable),⁴¹ and both nature and psychic life.⁴²

Self-Differentiation and Perpetual Becoming

In my view then, Nietzsche placing self-differentiation at the beginning of the genealogical unfolding warrants the eternity of becoming. Thereby, it excludes self-identity in the sense in which a certain form of naturalism intends it, or in the form of any alternative between subjectivity and objectivity, whether it leads to an idealist reading or a materialistic one. For Nietzsche, there is no need to postulate self-identical terms as structuring drives that are asymptotic. This idea, he claims, he got from his encounter with Ruggiero Boscovich's dynamic conceptions of matter:

When I think about my philosophical genealogy [. . .] I recognize a family connection with the mechanistic movements (tracing all moral and aesthetic questions back to physiological ones, all the physiological to the chemical, all the chemical to the mechanical) though still with the difference that I do not believe in "material" and hold Boscovich to be the great turning point. (XI [26]; see also *BGE*, 122)

Truth and Values as the Two Pillars of the Ideology of Survival

Before moving to the implications of these views for human existence, I would like to emphasize three key results from the discussion so far. First, the entire development of the spirit stems from a concern for preservation in the physical sense. On this basis, I shall refer to the individual, the institutions, and the fictions informed by this development under the broad heading of "the ideology of survival." Second, the entire ideology of survival relies on two main pillars: truth and values. Truth ensures that values are worth pursuing. Values ensure that we are not a threat for each other.⁴³

Finally, and most important, the relations between truth and value are not symmetrical; values derive their efficient power from their reference to reality. This reference to reality is tested by truth discourses, which are the only way to reconnect to a reality detached from presence. This genealogical dependence of values on truth translates into a logical posteriority. To be valuable, values must be truthful (they must present themselves as having a correlate in reality), but the reverse does not hold: truth does not need to be good in order to be true. This makes truth an epistemologically more powerful (in the sense of more independent) concept.

Asymptote and Eternal Becoming

It has become a *lieu commun* in recent Nietzsche scholarship that Nietzsche “presses power as his alternative to survival” (Richardson 2004, 22; see also Risse 2003). Nietzsche’s definition of life is sufficiently explicit for there to be a broad consensus on the matter: life is “increase,” the will “to become more” (*WP*, 688):

One must want to have more than what he has in order to become more, for this is the doctrine preached by life itself to all that has life: the morality of development. To have and to want to have more—growth in one word—that is life itself. (*WP*, 125)

Let me say a word about what Nietzsche means by “increase.” As I will discuss in the next chapter, Nietzsche envisages increase as “incorporation” [*Einverleibung*]. For now, it is sufficient to point out that Nietzsche measures health according to our ability to incorporate and, conversely, that sickness is the inability to incorporate (Letteri 1990). Life enhancement is Nietzsche’s overriding priority and, so far, its greatest obstacles have been laid by the “ideology of survival.” This ideology has created sickness, two of its forms being consciousness (*GS*, 354)⁴⁴ and “bad conscience.” Yet, Nietzsche writes, “bad conscience is a sickness, there is no point in denying it, but a sickness rather like pregnancy” (*GM*, II, 19). This is because, he predicts, the tensions intrinsic to the sick mode of life will lead it to its self-destruction, and thereby will provide the opening for a new, stronger, and healthier kind of life. In the discussion so far, we have encountered one tension at the heart of the ideology of survival: the tension between truth and values. Both truth and values are necessary for maintaining the ideology of survival; however, Nietzsche diagnoses Europe as in its nihilistic phase, in which the European nihilist will have to choose between truth and values.

End Types

I have argued that Nietzsche saw no possible end to history because of the irreducibility of consciousness. As I explained, consciousness is closely connected with the reversibility of drives, and, consequently, it stands for the compossibility of internalization and externalization. It seems that sickness is part of the essence of life for the human. If this view is to hold, it means that I must account for an interpretation of Nietzsche's "great promise" that would not involve any break or any end of human history. This claim seems to be in direct contradiction with two of Nietzsche's key thoughts as exposed in *Z*: those of the last human and "the *Übermensch*." The last human is Zarathustra's name for the ultimate man of survival. He chose the path of values without truth. The *Übermensch*, in turn, is the ultimate man of life, who can bear truth without values. Both types, in opposite ways, seem to present an end to human becoming. My claim is that these figures should be taken as abstractions, as fantastical endpoints to their respective dynamics. Survival tends toward the last human and life tends toward the *Übermensch*, but neither is to be thought of as actually possible for Nietzsche.

The Last Human

To my knowledge, the expression "last human" appears in the published works only four times and in two senses. In the enigmatic aphorism 49 of *D*, it is given the biological sense of the last member of the human species representing the extinction of mankind. I will return to this aphorism in a moment. In the other three mentions of the phrase, the last human is understood in a sharply different sense. The last human is she who won't disappear. Far from being the end of the human, she represents the human of the end, the individual who has attained the much-anticipated "realm of the ends." All three mentions of the last human in the published works are made in the context of *Z* (*Z*, I, prologue, 5; *Z*, III, "On the Old and New Tables," 27; *EH*, "Destiny," 4). In *Z*, III, the last human is associated with the end of creative existence and "the greatest danger of all human future" (III, "On the Old and New Tables"). This associates the last human with sickness in the sense defined above, as the inability to create. However, the theme of the last human was introduced by Zarathustra and given a prominent place as early as the book's prologue where Zarathustra describes the last human as sterile soil. This sterility comes not from a lack, but from an excess of cultivation: the last human's soil is "poor from cultivation, and no tall tree will be able to grow from it." Culture is sterility because it is

internalization, the inability to create.⁴⁵ Most important, the last human is a master of survival: “Its race is as inexterminable as the ground-flea; the last human lives the longest,” says Zarathustra. Therefore, the last human typifies the ultimate product of the ideology of survival and provides a supplementary qualification for it: survival is the concern for longevity.⁴⁶ I wish to ask whether Nietzsche regards the type of the last human as an actual possibility or whether he presents it as the *horizon* of the ideology of survival. I will argue for the latter.

However, let me start with the two reasons one may have for taking the last human to be a serious possibility. First, Zarathustra declares that the last human is a “danger”—that is to say, at least a possibility. Second, Nietzsche presents the figure of the last man in relation to that of the “Overhuman.” Zarathustra’s description of the last human, which he intended as a chilling warning, is interrupted by the crowd’s plea for the last human:

“Give us this last human, O Zarathustra”—so they cried—“Turn us into these last humans! Then you can have the Overhuman!” And the people all jubilated and clucked with their tongues. (*Z*, 16)

For Nietzsche, the last human is the anti-overhuman. Zarathustra associates closely the last humans to those he calls the “good” (*Z*, III, “Old and New Tables,” 27). The good are those who promote the morality of unselfing, long for the last man, and stand against the overman (26). In *EH*, Nietzsche defines the overman as “a type who has turned out supremely well, in antithesis to ‘modern’ men, to ‘good’ men, to Christians and other nihilists” and he equates the good with the last human: “Zarathustra calls the good now the ‘last men,’ now the ‘beginning of the end,’” writes Nietzsche (*EH*, “Books”). Zarathustra’s prologue shows the last human and the overhuman as two terms of an alternative as the crowd seeks to trade the overhuman for the last man.

The overhuman is one of Nietzsche’s key thoughts and mentions of him are frequent. His association with the thought of the last human lends weight to this thought because it raises the concern that if we cast the last human into the realm of the abstract, we may have to do the same with the overhuman.

Now, is this enough to interpret the last man as a real possibility? I believe not. As I will argue in Chapter 3, there is a strong case against the possibility of the overman himself. The text itself hints on several occasions at the fictionality of the last human. It is explicitly stated that Zarathustra mentions the last human for strategic reasons. After a speech entirely devoted to affirming the overhuman as the object of his love, Zarathustra laments that the crowd does not understand him; they cannot accept the

thought of a better being than they. He summons up the last human as the opposite to the overhuman. This move, he hopes, will allow him to flatter the crowd's pride by showing them something below them. He expects that the repulsion for the last human will allow the crowd to listen to the announcement of the overhuman. "So, Zarathustra decides, I will speak to them of what is most despicable: and that is *the last human*" (*Z*, 15). In short, the last human is intended as a dreadful caricature.⁴⁷ In this respect, it is noteworthy that only in *Z* is the last human described as an extreme. In this text, the good are described as a present and past type of men longing for the last human to come in the future. In *EH*, however, the good are the last human altogether. In other words, Nietzsche reduces the last human from its status as an extreme (in *Z*) to a fact of the present, the good (in *EH*). This suggests that Nietzsche is more concerned with the present reality of the longing for the last human than for the existence of the last human herself. Let me also stress the fact that it is only in *Z*, a text remarkable for its metaphorical and superlative language, that the last man is represented as an extreme and ultimate case.

Beyond textual implications, there is a philosophical reason why we cannot consider the last human to be representing an actual possibility. The last human is an absolute, the last consequence of the ideology of survival. She is not subject to change; she is outside becoming because she is an obstacle to the future. This is not to say that the last human's life does not take place in time, but rather that the time in which she lives has lost its transformative power. In the figure of the last human, becoming (in the sense of creative time) becomes separated from timeliness. The last human has timeliness, but no becoming; she is a "standstill" says Zarathustra. He further expresses this by saying that the last human has eradicated all "chaos" from her being:

"I say to you: one must still have chaos within, in order to give birth to a dancing star. I say to you: you still have chaos within you. Alas! The time will come when the human will give birth to no more stars. [. . .] Behold! I show to you *the last human*." (*Z*, 15)

There is strong evidence in Nietzsche's writings that he does not believe chaos can be entirely eradicated from an individual. In *GS*, 109, Nietzsche states explicitly that "the total character of the world is, [. . .] in all eternity, chaos," and in a note contemporaneous to *Z*, he writes:

"Timelessness" to be rejected. At any precise moment of a force, the absolute conditionality of a new distribution of all its forces is given:

it cannot stand still. “Change” belongs to the essence, therefore also temporality: with this, however, the necessity of change has only been posited once more conceptually. (*WP*, 1064)⁴⁸

Even though Nietzsche describes the last human’s activities as very minimal, he nonetheless attributes her some activities (“one continues to work, for work is entertainment”; “one has one’s little pleasure for the day and one’s little pleasure for the night” [*Z*, 16]). Yet, for Nietzsche, any activity involves an opposition of drives and the success of one drive over the other—that is to say, some degree of chaos: “Every activity is an overcoming of difficulties and resistances” (7 [8]).⁴⁹ It seems that Nietzsche considers the last human not as an actual possibility, but as a horizon.

The Overhuman

The overhuman stands opposed to the last man as the figure of the accomplishment of what I have called the “ideology of life.” The case of the overhuman is more complex than that of the last human. It involves a number of texts starting at least in 1882 and seems to be a more crucial feature of Nietzsche’s entire thought than that of the last human. I will discuss in Chapter 3 why, with regard to the general economy of Nietzsche’s work and his most general thoughts, the overhuman also should be interpreted as an abstract endpoint representing some unattainable absolute. For my present argument, it suffices to point out that the overhuman is a figure symmetrical to that of the last human and they are presented as mirror images of each other in *Z*’s prologue (see also *WP*, 936). This symmetry involves opposition and resemblance; both types stand for an overcoming of chaos. The last human seeks to overcome chaos in passivity for his drives are entirely directed inward. The overman seeks absolute externalization of drives for she is the human of the “great health” (*EH*, “Books”)⁵⁰ and internalization is sickness. Both of them involve a chimeric harmonization of all drives. For Nietzsche, any existence involves chaos. John Richardson says about the overman: “The difficulty of such a synthesis, of achieving that oxymoronic ‘complex unity’ out of this overrich mix, could mean that no one can accomplish it” (Richardson 1996, 67).

This remark raises the question of the continuity between increase and survival. This continuity is figured by the irreducibility of chaos. Nietzsche understands chaos as an internal opposition of drives. One has chaos in one’s soul if some drives are internalized and other drives are externalized. This amounts to repeating that drives are essentially relative and seek a

resistance. In other words, no activity can occur without opposition and any form of life involves chaos. This is why the internal harmonization the last human stands for is impossible.

As regards the external harmonization of the overhuman, it is unattainable because externalization takes time. Ascending life is increase and externalization; it is conquest. Nietzsche is careful to point out that conquest takes time, and often a long time: “It is only within a great duration securely grounded and assured that a constant evolution and an ennobling inoculation are eventually possible” (*HATH*, I, 224). This element of time is introduced by the concern for survival, which is, as established earlier, also a concern for longevity. For Nietzsche, the strongest natures are also those whose periods of weakness are the darkest and the longest. Among the characteristics of the “strong men,” Nietzsche repeatedly mentions patience (*WP*, 993; VII [54]; *Z*, IV, 1).

Asymptote

In spite of the opposition of the principles of survival and life *qua* increase, living requires surviving and surviving requires living. To be a human is neither to be fully living or merely surviving, but it is a compromise between the two. Every human existence is the locus of a tension between security and power, threats and desires. This is not to say that the normative difference between increase (as a superior aim of existence) and survival (as a despicable one) is irrelevant, but it means that between the modes of existence of survival and increase there isn't a sharp break. The separation between them is merely a question of degree, a question of “how far”:

How far to prevail against the conditions that preserve society and against its prejudices?—How far to unchain one's terrible qualities through which most people perish?—How far to oppose truth and reflect on its most questionable sides? —How far to oppose suffering, self-contempt, pity, sickness, vice, with the query as to whether one cannot become master of them? (—what does not destroy us makes us stronger—)—Finally: how far to acknowledge in one's mind the rule, the commonplace, the petty, good, upright, the average nature, without letting oneself be vulgarised by them? (*WP*, 934)

The mode of existence directed uniquely toward increase is impossible; so is that directed only toward self-preservation. Both horizons, if attained, are fatal in a different way. In *D*, Nietzsche already asked, “Do we desire for mankind an end in fire and light or one in sand?” (*D*, 429). The possibilities of human existence are thus spread over a line that stretches asymptotically

toward the overhuman on the one end and the last human on the other. Nietzsche's task is obviously to lead us down the path of the overhuman.

This horizontality of the range of possible modes of existence is a direct expression of the dehiscence that constitutes the human self and which Nietzsche describes as the originary "inner world." I have argued that the world of experience is asymptotically structured on both sides by two self-identical (and fictional) horizons: the objective and the subjective poles. This has consequences for Nietzsche's anthropology too.

Last Human and Overhuman as Object and Subject

This can be illustrated most tellingly with regard to Nietzsche's talk of the objective and subjective types. As may be expected, Nietzsche refers to the "objective men" in similar terms as he refers to the last humans. Their "objectivity," he says, is "lack of personality, lack of will" (*WP*, 79). They are incapable of attaining interest because they deny their own interest (*WP*, 95).⁵¹ They are objective in two senses: first, they do not entertain a relation of interest with reality (this includes scientific "objectivity" as ascetic practice),⁵² and second, and more enigmatic, they are objects themselves. This latter claim is unusual. For Nietzsche, being "objective" means being "depersonalized" (*WP*, 382).⁵³ This is because those who are depersonalized are reflective; they are objects for themselves. Their relationship with themselves is no different from their relation with others or other things. This, remember, was the essential characteristic of bad conscience, as the transfer of the external relationship of aggression within the self. It allows us to reinterpret this "disinterest" as merely the internalization of interest: interest cannot be contained; it can only be redirected. For one to be objective in the sense of disinterested, one must first internalize one's drives. This is something that the true "psychologists" understand. These psychologists are the "subjective men," men of interest and desires. While the "objective man" exhibits "contempt for what is 'natural,' for desire, for the ego: attempt to understand even the highest spirituality and art as the consequence of depersonalization and as *desinteressement*," the subjective man⁵⁴ is not introspective and is not disinterested:

We psychologists of the future—we have little patience with introspection: we almost take it for a sign of degeneration when an instrument tries "to know itself" [. . .], we must not analyse ourselves, "know" ourselves. [. . .] The great egoism of our dominating will requires that we shut our eyes to ourselves—that we must seem to be "impersonal," "*désintéressé*," "objective"!—oh, how much we are the

opposite of this! Just because we are to an eccentric degree psychologists. (*WP*, 426)⁵⁵

Self-Differentiation through Ontology and Anthropology

I have argued above that chaos (the opposition of drives within the self) was an essential feature of existence. This is because existence constitutes itself through the experience of resistance, in which the subjective and the objective alternate indefinitely. This argument led me to argue that the subject/object pair was closely connected to the external/internal pairs. This connection is at work in Nietzsche's characterization of the last human and the overhuman as the objective and subjective types. It is clear that Nietzsche regards the last human as the internal human (she is, after all, the sick animal of the "internalization of man"); her horizons are internal only, and in this sense she is sterile. Conversely, the overhuman could be read as the fully externalized human whose power is discharged outward.⁵⁶ This means that the thoughts of the last human and the overhuman denote unattainable horizons structuring the range of possibilities of human existence.

I have argued that the subject and the object were equally unattainable horizons that structured our worldview but did not reflect reality. This common structure is emphasized by Nietzsche's characterization of these two types as objective and subjective. This establishes a connection between the anthropological horizons of the last human and the overhuman and the logical and ontological horizons of the subject and the object. We must recall that both the structure of intentionality and the structure of the individual are determined by Nietzsche's analysis of the experience of resistance. The self arises through the experience of resistance. Resistance is defined by a conflict of drives both within the organisms and between them. Consequently, resistance involves chaos necessarily. Here, we begin to discern the correlation between the thoughts of the last human and the overhuman as subjective and objective individuals and the abstract concepts of subject and objects. It becomes clear how Nietzsche's asymptotic anthropology and his asymptotic ontology are really two aspects of the same fundamental experience of the impossibility of self-identity, be it full objectivity or full subjectivity.

Nihilism: Truth vs. Values

The impossibility of the last human and the overhuman leads to infinite timeliness; no standstill can be reached. For Nietzsche, there is an intrinsic

link between the historical order and the logical order: history exhausts all possibilities and “if the motion of the world aimed at a final state, that state would have been reached. [Consequently] becoming does not aim at a final state, does not flow into ‘being’” (*WP*, 708). This places the ideology of survival in a precarious situation. The two pillars of this ideology are truth and values. Yet, as I have pointed out, they are in a dissymmetric relationship: values depend on truth but not the reverse, so that truth is bound to be attributed regardless of values. Within the period of stability of the slave rule, the independence of truth from values is benign; it expresses itself when, for instance, truth is attributed to facts that are morally neutral. However, this means that truth itself is morally neutral. Eternal becoming guarantees that truth will one day contradict values. Here we arrive at the crisis of the ideology of survival, or in Nietzsche’s terms, the crisis of nihilism:

Why has the advent of nihilism become necessary? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence. We require, sometime, new values. (XIII [190])

The crisis of nihilism is reached when truth and values oppose each other and their difference turns into incompatibility. Values cease to be “true” and truth ceases to be valuable. This involves a revision of what was hitherto called “truth”: so far, truth was considered to be necessarily useful. Usefulness (in the sense of usefulness for survival), in turn, was the basis for values. It appears now that truth uncovers its own opposition to values and utility, thereby proving that truth itself has been misconstrued. The new truth, which is a more independent version of truth, exposes the other truth as an instrument of morality. Consider:

The position of pure knowledge, scientific integrity, is at once abandoned as soon as the claims of morality must be answered. Morality says: I *need* many answers—reasons, arguments; scruples can come afterward, or not at all. (*WP*, 423)

The will-to-truth uncovers itself as morally informed. Yet, it exceeds its moral prerogatives and becomes able to will truth even against morality and thereby to transform truth into the highest value (*GS*, 344; *D*, preface, 4; *GM*, III, 24). Nietzsche calls this moment the “self-undercutting of truth”: the immoral truth undercuts the moral truth. The self-undercutting of truth is necessarily coincidental to the undercutting of values by truth: “Morality itself, *as honesty*, compels us to negate morality” (V [58], my emphasis). On the one hand, the genealogical account provided by Nietzsche ensured the dependence of values on truth through their reference to

the empirical world. On the other hand, it ensured truth's independence from values: values are valuable because they have a reference to truth (on the assumption that there exists a world where these values are the object of perceptual faith), but truth need not be good in order to be true.

In nihilism, mankind is faced with a painful alternative: truth or values. Choosing values means embracing the path toward the last human. Values serve utility, security, and sociability, all of which are the greater aspirations of the last human. Choosing truth involves a total liberation from values. This liberation is the promise of an overcoming of *ressentiment*, bad conscience, and all sorts of sickness that plague the modern condition. In this respect it means choosing life and the path to the overhuman. This confronts us with the alternative of "passive" and "active" nihilism: Is nihilism a liberation or a cause of despair?

Nihilism. It is *ambiguous*: A. Nihilism as a sign of increased power of the spirit: as *active* nihilism. B. Nihilism as decline and recession of the power of the spirit: as *passive* nihilism. (*WP*, 22)

We then obtain two antagonistic pairs: values and survival on the one hand, and life and truth on the other (*EH*, "Destiny"). The future of mankind will depend on the choice made by those who are undergoing the crisis of nihilism. It is clear that Nietzsche rejects the first alternative. His entire project is directed toward saving us from the pitfall of the last human. It is unclear on what grounds he can advance this project. This question can only be addressed with regard to Nietzsche's cosmological ontology, and this will be my focus in Chapter 3.

Nietzsche's hope is for humanity to embrace the path of truth without values. This path is a "great promise," (*GM*, II, 16) but it is also a frightful prospect because one cannot walk this path with the support of values (*Z*, I, "Pale Criminal"). Indeed, this path involves the liberation from all falsifications, and there lies the "great danger": these falsifications were originally put in place as means of survival. Henceforth, Nietzsche shall seek those able to survive truth. This challenge is first presented in *GS*, 110, as the challenge of the incorporation of truth: "To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question, that is the experiment." It is to this question that I now turn.

The Incorporation of Truth and the Symbiosis of Truth and Life

The Gay Science and the Incorporation of Truth

I have shown in Chapter 1 that the asymptotical structure is an essential feature of the will to power. I have also argued that determinacy, in the form of sublimation, was an essential feature of truth. This presents us with a paradox: the very nature of conceptual knowledge is in contradiction with the nature of reality. In this chapter, I will examine how Nietzsche addresses this discrepancy by an enigmatic recourse to the “incorporation” [*Einverleibung*] of truth. Nietzsche’s invitation for us to incorporate truth amounts to an effort on his part to save us from the path that leads toward the last human. It is also a passionate attempt to salvage truth from its own undercutting. The young Nietzsche posited the opposition of truth and life and questioned the utility of knowledge for life. If faced with the alternative of life or truth, we were to choose life and delusion over truth. This is a view still expressed in the last aphorism of book II of *GS*, “Our Ultimate [*letzte*] Gratitude to Art”:

If we had not welcomed the arts and invented this kind of cult of the untrue, then the realization of general untruth and mendaciousness that now come to us through science—the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge—would be utterly unbearable. (*GS*, 107)

This aphorism is often read as a confirmation of Nietzsche's earlier rejection of truth in favor of art;¹ however, as the German "*letzte*" expresses it better than the English "ultimate," this aphorism is Nietzsche's farewell to the preference for art over and above truth.² This move is made in preparation for the opening of book III, which affirms a renewed commitment to truth by appealing to its incorporation: "To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question, that is the experiment" (*GS*, 110).³ In this aphorism, the subject of the experiment is truth itself, and incorporation is a test for truth. This test is designed to operate a division within truth. There is a dimension (an "extent") of truth that will not endure incorporation and another that will pass the test of incorporation. This dimension, it is assumed, will have to be salvaged. Retrieving it will be the task of a "Gay Scientist," a knower who does not suffer from her knowledge but "endures" it.

In later texts, Nietzsche mentions the incorporation of truth in a different sense. In *EH*, he writes: "How much truth can a spirit *endure*, how much truth can a spirit *dare*? This has become for me more and more the real measure of value," (*EH*, foreword), and in the notebooks of the period of *GM*: "My new path to a 'Yes' [. . .] 'How much 'truth' can a spirit endure and dare?'—a question of its strength" (X [3]). In the same year, Nietzsche clarifies what he means by "truth" in his additions to *GS* by replacing it with the word "faith": "How much one needs faith [. . .] that is the measure of one's strength (of to put the point more correctly, of one's weakness)" (*GS*, 347). In these mentions the incorporation of truth is still a test; however, that which is being tested is not truth any longer, but the *incorporator* of truth (i.e., the human). Nietzsche presents the incorporation of truth as a test of "strength" in the sense of "value" and, consequently, we can read it as addressing the challenge I pointed to at the end of Chapter 1: the incorporation of truth is a device for us to take the path of human flourishing and not of the last human. This is important because it indicates clearly that the reintegration of a concern for truth in Nietzsche's mature period is not a departure from his project of human flourishing and strength. It does not indicate, for example, some ascetic commitment to truth for its own sake.⁴ It is not the preference of truth over strength. Rather—and more interesting—Nietzsche's insight is that the path to the superior form of humanity cannot dispense with truth.⁵ This implies a curious internal motif in Nietzsche's thought: Nietzsche is the philosopher for whom truth undercuts itself by discovering its own untruthfulness. However, he is also the philosopher who attempts to salvage truth from the excesses of this undercutting. Through the appeal to the incorporation of truth, Nietzsche's political-ethical program of breeding

the strong humans of the future and his epistemological concern for and against truth become intrinsically linked.

In this chapter, I examine the relations between the two roles played by the incorporation of truth. How are we supposed to understand the transformation occasioned by the incorporation of truth so that it would prove to transform both truth and ourselves? I will argue first that the truth we have to incorporate is the knowledge of the untruth of objective truth. I shall mean “objective truth” in the sense of conceptual judgment. Second, I will argue that this incorporation is necessary for human flourishing.

What Truth?

First, we must take stock of the implications of Nietzsche’s almost scandalous formulation. The idea that truth should be an object of incorporation, something physical rather than intellectual, goes counter to the entire Platonic-Cartesian model. The discussion in Chapter 1 is helpful here: truth as correspondence relies on the objective structure that opposes a subject and an object and thereby effectively rejects their union. However, this structure itself is in fact an illusory crystallization of the original fact of precisely this union. As I have asserted, intentionality (as the continuity between the subjective and the objective horizons) is primary; the poles are mere abstractions arising from the asymptotic structure of intentionality. This asymptotic character, which structures the will to power in general, and the drives or instincts in particular, is the ultimate reality. Truths are truthful if they are adequate representations of this asymptotic structure. Yet, the very structure of truth as correspondence assumes a separation of the subject and the object. Consequently, truth as correspondence is in contradiction with what it is to be the truth about—namely, the fact that reality is asymptotic and not polar or, in negative terms, the fact that the objective structure is fallacious. So, it seems that in Nietzsche’s view, predicative truth is necessarily untrue. This was, in fact, always Nietzsche’s argument, at least since 1873’s “Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense.” In this sense, we must think of truth in terms other than intellectual and representational.

Gay Science

By comparison with the early texts, what is new about *GS* is the realization that this untruth was perhaps not essential to truth, that there could be something about truth that one might benefit from saving. For Nietzsche, the new (“gay”) science must not “ask the question how error is possible,

but how a kind of truth is at all possible, in spite of the fundamental untruth in knowing” (IX, 11 [325], quoted in Ansell-Pearson 2006, 240).⁶ Here, Nietzsche draws a distinction between two questions: the question of how error is possible and the question of what kind of truth is possible, in spite of the untruth in knowing. Nietzsche seeks to replace the former question with the latter. The opposition between these two questions is curious. It is not clear why the second question substitutes itself to the first or how an answer to the second would address the first. I propose to see the second question (what kind of truth is still possible?) not as a rejection of the first (why is there error?) as being a “wrong” question to ask, but as Nietzsche’s proposal for a more fruitful way of posing the same question. In this reading, Nietzsche’s question is part of the broader question posed in Chapter 1: How come untruth exists? This question asks about error, but it also asks about a certain reality that is revealed by error—namely, that error is possible. By asking this question, Nietzsche wants to go beyond identifying truth as error, but he wants to *explain* the error of the belief in truth. In short, he recognizes that what I called in the introduction the “phenomenon of truth” is a *faktum*. Untruth signals a real potentiality of Being, although it signals it in a false manner. Remember, reality is self-differentiation; as such it is the possibility of error about itself. However, this possibility may be misrepresented (by presenting itself as the possibility of truth) or accurately represented (by presenting itself as the possibility of error). Let me put it in yet another way: it is not because reality is self-differentiation that the concept of error loses any relevance. There is still truth and error even if Being is self-differentiated. The fact that Being is self-differentiated does not make it impossible to be wrong about, or mean that anything goes; it is self-differentiation and nothing else (that is to say, not self-identity). As a result, one may say that the belief in truth is error while the belief in error is truth. What is important is that both beliefs rely on a reference to the phenomenon of truth. The knowledge of this fundamental truth, Nietzsche believes, is expressed—albeit inadequately—in what was hitherto taken as truth—that is to say, predicative truth. This is why we cannot do away with truth: the belief in truth is error but it is not a fact we can ignore. It reveals our necessary adherence to objects of truth; it reveals the phenomenon of truth. It is the nature of this phenomenon that it signals an authentic experience of reality (which I called “perceptual faith”) while exemplifying the self-falsifying properties of reality (it is structured by fictional entities such as subject, object, and the thing-in-itself). As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the experience of this self-differentiation is identical with the experience of reality, for reality is the experience of reality and this experience is falsifying. The problem is

that for Nietzsche, truth, when predicative, expresses the only truth there is (self-differentiation) with the only lie that is possible (self-identity).

Purification

In an interesting article, “Gay Science and Corporeal Knowledge,” Robert Pippin lays great weight on Nietzsche’s peculiar claim from the preface to *GS*: “we no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn” (*GS*, preface, 4).⁷ Pippin remarks that “it is extremely difficult to imagine what Nietzsche might be getting at here” and pursues by offering the suggestion that “here, the language of appearance and reality breaks down in a way that Nietzsche clearly signals as a model for what he means by, hopes for, in a *gaya scienza*, where that breakdown is taken to heart” (Pippin 2000, 151). I have referred—against Clark—to this breakdown of the distinction between appearance and reality as Nietzsche’s replacement of the “thing-in-itself” with an “in-itself for us”: truth is a distortion and we must not strive toward correspondence unless correspondence is meant as correspondence with the “for-itself” (perceptual faith). This is crucial because it means that we do have an experience of the object of truth, and, consequently, that this experience can be retrieved.⁸ Regrettably, Pippin does not mention the theme of the incorporation of truth in his article. It is all the more striking that, by simply following the textual implications of the concept of “gay science,” he arrives at the conclusion that the gay science is a “taking to heart” of the ruin of the “language of appearance and reality.” This taking to heart must be interpreted as incorporation and the ruin of the objective model as the truth we must incorporate. This must be grasped clearly if we are to understand why Nietzsche sees both truth and untruth as coexisting within what was hitherto called truth, and further, why Nietzsche wishes to both half-salvage and half-reject truth.

So, Nietzsche sets out to purify truth of its erroneous character in order to bring out its truthfulness. In an aphorism from *GS* entitled “Long Live Physics!” Nietzsche appeals to physics as a path toward the purification of truth. “Physics” here stands for a fully immanent form of knowledge based not on the unity of concepts but on the manifold of experience: “Let us therefore *limit* ourselves to the purification of our opinions and valuations” (*GS*, 335), writes Nietzsche. Our commitment to physics, he hopes, will teach us truth as the limitation of truth discourses and as precisely the unification of the predicate of reality with the world. In line with the symmetry between the incorporation of truth as a test for truth and for the human, this appeal for the purification of truth finds an echo in Zarathustra’s appeal for the purification of man:

Through knowing, the body purifies itself; experimenting with knowing, it elevates itself; for the one who understands, all drives sanctify themselves; for the one who is elevated, the soul becomes joyful. (Z, I, “On the Despisers of the Body”)

This joyful soul, of course, is none other than the soul of the “gay scientist.”

The Incorporation of Truth as Incorporation of the Death of God

But my truth is *dreadful*, for hitherto the lie has been called truth.

EH, “Why I am a Destiny,” 1

In the third book of the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche introduces the themes of the Death of God and of the incorporation of truth. The very first aphorism of the book announces the Death of God and presents it as a task for us. However, the task is not for us to kill God himself, but his “shadow”—that is to say, God as a belief. The aphorism is worth citing in full:

New Struggles.—After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. —And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too. (*GS*, 108)

In the next aphorism, Nietzsche’s concern appears on first reading to be disconnected from this one and to offer another challenge: to overcome the traditional anthropomorphization of nature and replace it with its “naturalization.” There are thus two challenges: the first is to rid ourselves of the belief in the dead God, and the other is to change our worldview, to no longer see it as subject to “laws in nature,” with “purposes,” “accidents,” and hierarchy—these beliefs are precisely called “shadows of God” (*GS*, 109). The two aphorisms unite into one characterization of the challenge posed by the death of God and make it a much greater task than expected: “vanquishing God’s shadow” means changing one’s worldview in the most radical way. In the rest of book III of *GS*, Nietzsche’s aim will be to find how this challenge can be met, and the next aphorism (*GS*, 110) will propose the incorporation of truth as a tool toward that end: “To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment” (*GS*, 110). The three opening aphorisms of book III of *GS* thus establish the link between the death of God and the incorporation of

truth. The challenge of the former shall be met thanks to the latter. My guiding hypothesis will be that Nietzsche does not mean anything else in the phrase “how much truth can be incorporated” than “how much can the death of God be incorporated.”

We are now in possession of two hypotheses for what Nietzsche means by “truth” in the expression “incorporating truth.” First, it is the truth that truth fails, or in other words, it is the ruin of predicative truth. Second, it is what Nietzsche calls in *GS* the “death of God.” Both truths are in places presented as a challenge for the new man, and so is the incorporation of truth. However, we must ask what relations these two truths entertain. Let me stress that these two hypotheses arise from texts that belong to different periods in Nietzsche’s writings. The first hypothesis is largely based on the discussions from Chapter 1 that concerned the texts of 1886–88. The theme of the death of God is strictly contemporaneous to the first mentions of the incorporation of truth in *GS*, III, of 1882. My suggestion is that the second hypothesis (the ruin of predicative truth) is in fact a reformulation of the death of God.

The first occurrence of the thought of the death of God appears in the first aphorism of book III, quoted above, and is more concerned with the overcoming of the “shadows of God,” than of the death of God itself—in other words, the death of God makes no difference if no one hears of it. This is a clear indication that “God” is here meant as a set of beliefs. As I have argued in Chapter 1, the structure of belief relies on the abstraction of reality from what is real and its reformulation in terms of “truth.” In this sense, the death of God appears as the death of some truths and the impossibility to believe in them anymore. The following aphorisms give a series of examples of the sort of beliefs that have now lost credibility. Remarkably, these are not limited to religious or moral truths. Nietzsche does not seem so keen to reject these beliefs as he is to reject those that we may mistakenly think will survive God. These are, in fact, only extensions of God in secular attire. This is ascertained by *GS*, 110, which calls the “errors” that “proved useful” and helped “preserve the species” “articles of faith.” Among them Nietzsche lists the “logical” (*GS*, 111), any positing of “meaning” in nature (*GS*, 109), and so forth. In book V of *GS*, added in 1887 (at the time of the texts examined in Chapter 1), Nietzsche explicitly refers to the belief in “God” as a concept that belongs to the epistemic realm. The first aphorism of this book is a reminder of the death of God as “the greatest recent event” and poses the problem of our taking stock of the unexpected implications of this event anew. Among those consequences, Nietzsche does mention “for example, the whole of our European morality.” However, immediately

after this aphorism, Nietzsche proposes we understand even more remote consequences. In *GS*, 344, (“How, We, Too, Are Still Pious”), Nietzsche declares that “science also, rests on a faith” and that “the will to truth at any price” amounts to the positing of an “other world” that negates “its counterpart, this world, our world.” This, Nietzsche says, is “God himself,” which “proves to be our most enduring lie.” Nietzsche’s main point is that there is a will to truth that is ascetic: truth for its own sake. We have seen that it is against this will that the incorporation of truth was offered as a purifying device. What is more crucial is that in this passage “God” is the name of any two-world theory. The belief in God and the belief in truth as self-identity and objectivity are one, insofar as they are the affirmation of a world other than the one we live in,⁹ and I have argued in Chapter 1 that it was the basis of morality too. In this sense, killing God must be understood as rejecting the predicative form of attribution of truth. This aphorism from 1887 is thus a bridge between the thoughts of the death of God and the incorporation of truth from *GS* in 1882, and their development into the critique of the “true world” of 1887–1888. The identification of God with the real world allows us to apply the arguments of Chapter 1 to the death of God—namely, that the “true” world is the result of the human ability to predicate truth. This is asserted in Nietzsche’s farewell to the adhesion to art and its delusions in *GS*, 107. Nietzsche says that without it “the realization that delusion and error are conditions of human knowledge would be utterly unbearable.” Art was offering a protection against the unbearableness of the “realization” of the truth about “human knowledge,” an unbearable truth that Nietzsche decides to confront three aphorisms further by appealing to the incorporation of truth. In my reading then, when Nietzsche calls for us to incorporate the death of God or to incorporate truth, he calls for nothing else than the overcoming of predicative knowledge.

This explains how Nietzsche intends to use incorporation as a method for the purification of truth. However, this is not enough to explain why we must retrieve this truth for the sake of “strength,” “power,” and “value.” The model I used above (whereby truth appears as being altogether a support for values and—as the free-spirited truth—a threat to their credibility) may help us clarify this: by undercutting the truth of values, the “free-spirit” undercuts values themselves, and thereby liberates the sick animals we have become. It is expected that truth will offer us the chance of regaining health. However, the loss of values may make life unbearable for those who cannot survive without the stabilizing fictions that were hitherto offered by truth discourses.

Stronger with Truth

Dead are all Gods: now we want the overhuman to live.

Z, I, “On the Bestowing Virtue,” §3

Both the German “*Einverleibung*” and the English “incorporation” denote an organic form of assimilation. Quite literally, organic incorporation (of a body by another body) involves the subduing of some material object by some other. Through incorporation, the incorporator expands to the detriment of the incorporated. It is in this sense that Nietzsche can describe incorporation as the *modus operandi* of the will to power, which always seeks increase: “It is part of the concept of the living that it must grow—that it must extend its power and consequently incorporate alien forces” (*WP*, 728). The main feature of incorporation, thus, is assimilation. By incorporating the alien, the incorporator transcends the difference and literally makes it similar to itself.¹⁰ As a result, the incorporator transforms a qualitative difference into a quantitative one; by making the other similar it becomes more *of the same*. As Eric Blondel points out, the very possibility for the dissimilar to become similar holds only against Nietzsche’s larger monistic framework, according to which the dissimilar is always only different in degree and the difference of nature is only provided by value (Blondel 2006).

The incorporation of truth, however, is of a different type: the incorporation of spiritual things.¹¹ It is here that the idea of incorporation becomes paradoxical: How can something spiritual become something physical? The key to this question resides in Nietzsche’s genealogy of the soul as presented in *GM*, II, and *GS*, 354, and spelled out in Chapter 1. Nietzsche’s purpose in these texts is to draw the human from the animal. I have argued that in doing so, he emphasizes the continuity of the human and animal realms, which involves some degree of naturalization of the human while at the same time spiritualizing nature to the extent that the spiritual realm is originary (and not derived from the physical).¹² In light of the expansion of the primitive memory and soul into long-term memory, and further into a full-fledged capacity of abstraction and consciousness, one can trace the quasi-material descent of all spiritual things. However, while it is perfectly intelligible how amoebas (a favorite example of Nietzsche’s)¹³ increase in size through incorporation, according to the simplest model of nutrition and digestion, it is less clear how one becomes “more” through the incorporation of ideas.

Incorporating Errors vs. Incorporating Truth

Ah, much ignorance and error has become body in us!

Z, “On the Despisers of the Body,” §2

Nietzsche distinguishes two forms of spiritual incorporation: the incorporation of errors and the incorporation of truths. It is clear that he thinks that errors cannot be incorporated in the same sense as truths can be. To be sure, Nietzsche’s texts are replete with references to the incorporation of errors and fictions.¹⁴ Such incorporation, however, unlike organic incorporation, is never accompanied with increase on the part of the incorporator. Precisely because fictions fall within the domain of survival and because survival is “preservation” as opposed to increase, one cannot attain true increase through fictions.¹⁵ It is thus apparent that the incorporation of errors does not bring increase in the same sense as the incorporation of truth is expected to. But in what sense shall the incorporation of truth bring this increase about? First of all, it is important to understand that the question of the incorporation of truth is contextually bound and applies only to the sick animal created by all sorts of ascetic ideologies, and by the birth of consciousness and of all spiritual matters through “the internalization of man,” as described in Chapter 1. Overlooking this point would make us unable to even understand the task of incorporation:

The task is to incorporate knowledge and make it instinctive—a task which will only be seen by those who have grasped that so far only our errors were incorporated and that all our consciousness relates to errors! (*GS*, 11)¹⁶

In other words, the incorporation of truth becomes a task only now that errors have been incorporated. Another question is raised by the apparent clash of levels on which the phrase “incorporating truth” seems to be operating: If truth is not something bodily, then why should one incorporate it? We are now in a better position to clarify it. If one recalls the story given by Nietzsche in *GS*, 354, and *GM*, it becomes apparent that beliefs (in values or in backworlds) are something bodily. In this sense, the ruin of truth is more than a piece of knowledge and requires more from us than merely knowing it as a fact: it demands a bodily change. As incorporation, this change has to bring about an increase for the incorporator. What, then, does the incorporation of truth entail for the physico-psychological structure of the individual?

Redirection and Increase

Under a number of forms, this question has caused great debates among commentators. In fact, Nietzsche's writings are not so much ambiguous as they are ambivalent and plagued with contradictions in this respect. Roughly speaking, they oscillate between two descriptions of incorporation, which are rooted in the ambiguity of his treatment of the phrase "to be or to become *more*." Incorporation in its simplest physical form is always linked to an increase. This is constant in all of Nietzsche's mentions of incorporation in nature. However, the physical model seems to meet its limits here. Nietzsche characterizes man as a "sick animal" and identifies sickness with humanity. In this specifically human context the meaning of the phrase "becoming more" becomes unclear. If I say, "thanks to incorporation, X will be more," to what does the "more" apply? Is it to X, in which case X's incorporation would follow the same model as the amoeba's? Or is it to "be," in which case X will be seen to have attained a higher degree of being? This question goes to the root of Nietzsche's treatment of the relationships between quantity (which man shares with nature) and quality (which is specifically human). What we have for sure is a negative thought: the death of God. On the basis of what has just been said, this could only allow for an annulment of incorporated error, not for positive increase. Nietzsche's most explicit—but by no means only—statement of this claim can be found in *GS*, 115: "If we removed the effects of these four errors [the basic worldview that God stands for], we should also remove humanity, humaneness and 'human dignity.'"¹⁷ Here, Nietzsche establishes a correspondence between all things human and sickness, thereby implying an equivalence between consciousness (which is in turn presented as a sickness in *GS*, 354) and humanity. The challenge is therefore to reduce humanity, maybe even to save the human from humanity as sickness.¹⁸ This aphorism is located among the texts that announce the thoughts of the death of God and of the incorporation of truth. It appears as a development of what is to be overcome, and for a moment it seems that Nietzsche's aim is to merely remove errors and humanity as sickness. However, later texts indicate that Nietzsche sees in the death of God the opportunity for a greater achievement than the simple reestablishment of man as the animal he once was. In the terms of our present question the problem can be formulated thus: Does the incorporation of the death of God expand the self's degree of being (first option), or does it expand its amount (second option)? And, if it does, in what fashion?

In a short but defining contribution to the Royaumont debate of 1964, Jean Granier pleads for the first option and finds great support in texts from *GM*. His remark is worth citing in full:

For Nietzsche however, negation often presents itself as a truly creative work. This theme appears clearly in the texts of *GM* I, 6 and II, 16, where Nietzsche speaks of the phenomenon that makes man “interesting.” He says that man in a certain way made himself sick, tore himself apart, and turned his instincts against himself. Nietzsche speaks there of negation. This negation elevated man from the animal self to the spiritual self. (Granier 1966, 36)

In other words, for all its negativity, the sickness of the animal man itself holds a place in the process that takes us to a superior, “more interesting” existence. As regards truth and its incorporation, this view would entail that the incorporation of truth as the death of God is more than a mere correction, it brings increase: “[We must] overcome everything Christian through something over-Christian, and not merely put it aside,” says Nietzsche (*WP*, 1051). According to this view, one has to support the stronger possibility— that the incorporation of the death of God and its errors cannot be conceived in terms of a return to our original animal selves. Instead, one has to appreciate that the *having been* of God is impossible to annul: “A reversion, a turning back in any sense and to any degree is quite impossible” (*TI*, IX, 43).¹⁹ This is crucial because it concerns the whole of Nietzsche’s obsession for overcoming and redemption; the thing that is to be overcome or redeemed acts as a stepping stone toward its own redemption as overcoming,²⁰ and this overcoming itself is a stepping stone toward a higher state.²¹ In this view then, the man who has overcome his sick self is more “interesting” than the healthy animal he originally (and probably only fictionally) was. In short, we have to take *GM*’s characterization of disease as a “great promise” very seriously.

(Redirection of) Drives

In his *Nietzsche*, Wolfgang Müller-Lauter gives a detailed and generous account of Nietzsche’s view that reality is will to power in terms of drives. His analysis is structured according to Zarathustra’s teaching that the human (and, in general, any organism) is both “a herd and a herdsman” (*Z*, I, “Despisers”; see also *WP*, 561). As a herd it is multiple; as a herdsman it is unified. Müller-Lauter directs his efforts toward understanding in precise terms what kind of unity Nietzsche has in mind when he says that the self both unifies its drives and maintains its own inner diversity. The solution, he finds, is in understanding “the organism as an inner struggle” within which the opposition of drives involves their bond. As the term “struggle” suggests, the opposition referred to here is an opposition of contact

(Müller-Lauter 1999, 131, 176). In this sense, the unity of the organism is not threatened but constituted by its being the stage of disharmonies.

The other important point is that this unity contains the possibility of the overcoming of its own struggles. If one understands this struggle as a struggle between drives, the picture can be refined. For Nietzsche, drives are defined by two factors: a quantum of power and a direction toward which one directs this quantum. In short, drives are thought on the model of geometrical vectors that possess a “direction” and a certain “length” or “magnitude” (which, as the quantifying element of the vector, would stand for its quantum of power). Now, Nietzsche repeatedly claims that the essence of the world is one²² and his most accomplished hypothesis as to what this is, is the will to power. It is not my purpose here to examine this claim as such; however, we can already see that this gives an ontologically essential status to the quantum of power in all drives, leaving the status of its direction secondary.²³ Bernard Reginster gives a clear overview of the major interpretations of the relations between the specific drives and the will to power as unique principle. He outlines six possible interpretations, the last of which is his own. I shall not discuss all six here, partly because it would be covering the ground already covered—albeit in a rather idiosyncratic way—by Reginster, but more important, because it seems to me that most of these views (numbered 2–5 by Reginster 2006, 127–29), are inescapably entangled in a dialectic of ends and means that is foreign to Nietzsche’s thoughts on the will to power. There remain two views: the so-called reductionist view that emphasizes that “the will to power is the essence of life” (a view I endorse), and Reginster’s own interpretation that “the will to power is the will to the overcoming of resistances” (131–32). This view is untenable from the start insofar as Nietzsche makes it clear that resistance presupposes a striving (and not the other way around). Consequently, Reginster’s approach seems to make the will to power a circular concept at best. Reginster seems to consider this objection, and his solution is to posit drives before the will to power. The drives would then be in charge of doing the striving for a resistance, and the will to power would do the overcoming (132). For this view to distinguish itself from the first view (mine) means that it involves an essential distinction between drives and will to power. If this interpretation is perhaps credible philosophically, it is certainly not the view Nietzsche expresses, for he explicitly affirms that the will to power is not distinct from the drives (*WP*, 250 [1883–1888]).

Let me say a word about why Nietzsche rejects any dialectic of ends and means (the reason I ruled out options 2–5). In Nietzsche’s view, this dialectic would operate across two distinct levels. It is clear that Nietzsche sees drives as distinguished from the overall will to power by their object,

the “end” they pursue. For example, “drives to knowledge,” “preservation,” or “sexual instincts” are determined as such on the basis of the object of their striving. The assumption, in the readings I referred to above, is that this distinction is essentially relevant, that it takes precedence over the general characteristics of the will to power. In these readings, the ends of a drive (what it is a will *to*) are just as essential as their being a will to power at all. On the contrary, these distinctions take place within the possibilities defined by the will to power. This is for the simple reason that Nietzsche never describes the essence of the will to power as end-directed in the sense of “representational.”²⁴ If it is indeed teleologically structured, it does not by any means imply that it represents its own object in its striving. One’s ignorance of the object of their striving does not preclude this striving; on the contrary, this striving is blind. As Nietzsche writes as early as his lecture courses of 1869–1870: “That something may be finalised without consciousness is the essence of instincts” (*RL*, 81).²⁵ As I will discuss in the next chapter, the will to power is determined by an origin point (the organism that seeks power) and a direction, not by an end. That a direction may be determined without recourse to an end is implied in the discussion of the asymptotic character of the will to power from Chapter 1, but let me just point to the following argument. Nietzsche’s entire view of history relies on the reversibility of drives. The change in the end-directionality of a drive is the key mechanism for any incorporation²⁶ or for any reversal (like the slave revolt in morality, which relies on the internalization of drives) or any sublimation (the sexual libido redirected toward knowledge in the *libido sciendi*).²⁷ Nietzsche is very clear that this does not mean that for every incorporative event there is an essential transfiguration of the drives, but rather that they are simply redirected (VII [1]; X [7]; X [21]; X [154]). In other words, the end-directionality of a drive is not relevant *on the same level* as its being a drive altogether. One can only conceive of drives as particular wills to power distinguished by their mode of being but not in their being.²⁸ In traditional terms, the direction of a drive is only a secondary quality. As a result, I shall consider that two drives belonging to the same organism and directed in the same direction are essentially unique.

Actualizing Power and Increase, from Sickness to Power through “Creation”

This discussion should put us in a better position to understand the psychophysiological transformations Nietzsche expects we undergo thanks to the incorporation of truth. Nietzsche writes:

Appropriating and incorporation are above all a desire to overwhelm a forming, a shaping and reshaping, until at length, that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and has increased the same. (*WP*, 656)

On the one hand, we have a constant quantum of power within an organism; on the other, we have an increase through appropriation. We know that incorporation involves the subjugation of an incorporated object toward our own ends and that subjugation signifies a redirection of drives. In a certain sense then, appropriation brings about an increase, but only in a certain sense, since the amount of power in an organism can increase only through the incorporation of external drives. In other words, there is, properly speaking, no creation of power but only a rearrangement of the forces across the inside-outside divide. Our question applies to the incorporation between drives within one organism. Let us assume a set of three drives: drive D) is the total one (i.e., the overall organism); drive a) of quantum 5 and drive b) of quantum 5 too, are parts of D but they are in conflict with each other (i.e., they have opposite directions). The overall power quantum of D is clearly 10; however, D finds itself incapable of incorporating any new drive from the outside insofar as a) and b) neutralize each other, making the available power quantum of D null (it always takes power to incorporate).²⁹ In other words, D's quantum of forces is unchanged, but D is impotent.³⁰ This phenomenon is precisely what Nietzsche calls "sickness" and that is why he describes it as the "*internalization* of man" in *GM*, II; the drives "turn inwards," against each other, instead of unifying toward the outside. One understands here how the self can hold the keys to its own being "more" or "less" without changing the amount of its power. If it redirects its opposing drive toward one unique direction, it will turn its power outward. If it creates opposition within itself, it will cause its own sickness. Health and sickness do not depend on one's instincts but on their direction. The mere redirection of such drives is inconsequential in the sense that no more power is created, but it increases the power available to one, and in this sense it is creative. One understands also the ambivalence of Nietzsche's concept of creation: creation is only creative insofar as one is not (actually) as powerful as she is (potentially). As I shall discuss below, creation means actualization.

We are now ready to return to our more general question, which is to decide how the incorporation of the death of God can provide us with greater strength, power, and health. We have a certain set of life-denying errors called God that have been incorporated into the self. We also have

one truth called the death of God. This truth will in turn be incorporated. Most of all, we have the surrounding drives among which these errors and this truth have been and will be incorporated. The question is: How will these errors behave in the presence of the other drives? The answer is, as it were, contained in the premise: any life-denying drive will find itself in opposition with all other drives within an organism. Indeed in the case of God, which is precisely the name of *all* life-denying drives, its incorporation leads fatally to an internal struggle and an internal expense of power. What takes place with the incorporation of truth is not an annulment of the errors as drives but a redirection of them. In short, what is annulled is not the drives but their erroneous character, which was transcribed into the organism as an erroneous direction (self-hatred, for example) assigned to the drives. In this process, the “human animal” attains a superior level and becomes more powerful. Not only does the incorporation lead her to annul her internal struggle, but it turns the previously struggling drives into allies, increasing her external outpouring of power.

The human becomes also more “interesting” insofar as it acquires a new sort of drives, the spiritual drives. To be sure, nothing reduces the original gap between the two layers of skin, and the soul remains a defining element of the human animal. However, the soul and the “whole inner world” are redeemed. As early as the third *Untimely Meditation* (1874), Nietzsche affirms: “you have only to pronounce one heartfelt Yes! And life, though it faces such heavy accusations, shall be redeemed” (*UMIII*, 3). In other words, one “Yes” can redeem anything. For Nietzsche, redemption is taken not as the annulment of the no, but its reincorporation into a larger and newer yes: “to redeem that which has passed away and to re-create all ‘it was’ into a ‘thus I willed it!’ that alone should I call ‘redemption!’” says Zarathustra to the cripples in need of a cure (*Z*, II, “On Redemption”). In a remarkable article, “Nietzsche’s Agon with Ressentiment,” Herman Siemens emphasizes that Nietzsche faces the challenge of promoting an overcoming (of modernity, humanity, morality, asceticism, Christianity, etc.) while still maintaining a purely affirmative attitude. For Siemens, this means that we must be careful not to construe Nietzsche as seeking “redemption” since this would amount to negation (Siemens 2001). Of course, Nietzsche does not use redemption in this sense but rather he sees it as the device that allows negation to be comprised within a larger program of affirmation. This is made possible through incorporation: if, as I contend, redeeming errors means redirecting them, and if the direction of drives is merely contingent, then it follows that incorporating these drives would redirect them toward health without—strictly speaking—negating them. As Nietzsche asserts repeatedly, incorporation preserves the drives

it incorporates (Richardson 1996, 115). This model is not so remote from that of Siemens. For him, we must heal sickness (a “deficit” in power) through the emulation of agonal contest. Unfortunately, if Siemens’s account rightly locates in Nietzsche’s idea of agon a promise of stimulation, it falls short of providing a description of this increase in power. It does not address, for example, the problem of the increase of power regardless of the incorporation of other drives. In this respect, an argument of the sort I developed here, and based on the distinction between *quantum* and *availability* of power, is necessary in order to solve what Siemens himself calls Nietzsche’s “energetic problem” and to explain how one moves from sickness to health without increasing one’s overall quantum of power.

In my reading, then, the truly redeemed human shall be the one that has attained another level where it is *both* healthy and spiritual. The health thereby attained amounts to a unification of the self’s drives, and consequently we must understand health as the unity of the self. The few authors to comment on Nietzsche’s concept of spiritualization take it to be a spiritualization of drives. In short, they take it as a certain instance of the self’s redirecting its own drives, according to the pattern described above.³¹ However, it is clear to me that there is another kind of spiritualization in Nietzsche, and this is the name of the human’s attainment of this higher, “more interesting” level through its own history. It will be discussed as such in the next section. Let me note that with this phenomenon of spiritualization, Nietzsche describes the psychosomatic metamorphosis of man into a higher, perhaps superhuman individual.³²

The Redemption of Truth

At the end of the previous chapter, I pointed out that the self-undercutting of truth involved a certain doubling out of truth. It separates truth into two parts according to their different relation to values; the truth that supported values becomes exposed as fallacious by a more demanding, more free-spirited truth. What is intrinsically wrong about truth, I argued, is that it can be used to support otherworldly claims by making reality into a predicate. This is the applicable model here. Nietzsche’s loose characterization of truth has given rise to interestingly anachronistic complaints. What theory of truth is Nietzsche using, and when? In general, commentaries oscillate between providing an account of Nietzsche’s use of truth as correspondence—attributing contradiction and failure to Nietzsche³³—and a pragmatist idea of truth, making it difficult to see what Nietzsche might find wrong about false truths such as values, at least from a theoretical point of view. These readings shift the weight from truth to belief, con-

struing Nietzsche as approving of truth-beliefs that are useful regardless of their being true beliefs. The problem with such readings is that they are left at a loss when it comes to understanding Nietzsche's later "return" to truth.³⁴ In the terms of this debate,³⁵ it seems clear that Nietzsche proposes a truth as correspondence *about* a pragmatist truth. The truth that truth is only pragmatic is an instance of truth as correspondence. I argued that the incorporation of truth must be understood as Nietzsche's device for carrying out the separation between these two kinds of truth. The test of incorporation is in fact a critical tool that allows the new thinkers to reduce the predicative dimension of truth. Remember the clarifications from book V of *GS*: when Nietzsche urges us to incorporate truth, he has in mind our accessing a form of life where we no longer need "faith" or "certainty" (*GS*, 347) and our overcoming our passion for predicative "knowledge" (*GS*, 344). In contemporary terms, of course, the incorporation of truth resembles the "reduction" of the phenomenologists insofar as it outlines a method toward the overcoming of conceptual judgment and in favor of pure experience.³⁶ For Nietzsche, this involves a reconciliation between truth and reality *qua* "instincts." He writes: "The task of incorporating knowledge and of making it instinctive is only beginning to dawn on the human eye" (*GS*, 11). This is the conceptual framework responsible for Nietzsche's reappraisal of truth. Now, how does it apply *in actua*?

In a way, it is here that we meet the limitations of the comparison of Nietzsche with Husserlian *Epoché*. For Husserl, *Epoché* is only a first step toward a purer form of knowledge; it presupposes the possibility of a return to the conceptual level through "constitution."

Let me clarify the relations between incorporated truth and knowledge. There is no question that Nietzsche sees the self-undercutting of truth as a reflective movement on truth's part. The truth that is undercut and the truth that undercuts are of the same nature; they are both knowledge, a truth that we possess intellectually (*GS*, 355). Moreover, this undercutting provides the truth that Nietzsche proposes we incorporate. However, Nietzsche remains worried lest the news of the death of God becomes merely an item of knowledge, in case it does not suffice to cause our rejection of all the shadows of God. In this sense, incorporation is expected to make a piece of knowledge ("God is dead") attain another, higher status. As I have argued, it is a matter of truth's gaining psycho-physiological importance. In this sense, one can no longer talk about knowledge because through incorporation, representational knowledge is lost (*GS*, 355). The question becomes whether there is a way of possessing truth, call it a form of knowledge or not, that does not present the obstacles of representational knowledge. In his most generous contribution on the incorporation of

truth, Keith Ansell-Pearson opposes Sarah Kofman's view that we are not to seek any "naked truth" since "a text without interpretation is no longer a text," and since "text" is all there is (Kofman 1993, 140; Ansell-Pearson 2006, 240). For Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche does think that a transformation in our knowledge is taking place and that this new mode and practice of knowledge will inform our interpretation and evaluations and provide us with a new spirit of truth and truthfulness" (240). Our discussion so far may enable us to build a bridge between these two views. First of all, let me repeat my analysis of *GS*, preface, 5: if Nietzsche refuses to say that "truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn," it does not mean that any veil will do. As I insisted at the beginning of this chapter and in Chapter 1, it is not because reality is purely intentional that it is relative. Nietzsche is concerned with the essence of some "in-itself for us." For example, it is not because we must include the fact of phenomenality in any truthful account of reality that fixating becoming (for example) is truthful. In this sense, it is not enough to reject any reference to the in-itself and to directly jump with Kofman to calling "good interpretation" that "which allows life to be cherished and embellished" (Kofman 1993, 141).³⁷ As I argued along with Ansell-Pearson, this "embellishment" is no longer the ultimate criterion for Nietzsche. However, we must retain from Kofman the remark that the in-itself as opposed to the for-itself is necessarily untruthful. The object of knowledge becomes thus the very veiling of this truth, and the paradox of this search is that it is a veiling that we must unveil. Let me explain: in the same way as the belief in truth is error, and the belief in error is truth, we must admit that the belief in transparency is error, and the belief in the veiling of truth is true. This means that there *is* a veil. The discussion from Chapter 1 has identified this veil as the essence of the will to power, which is falsification. The will to power is an ontological concept and this makes the quest for the truth about the veiling an ontological quest: Being is this veil. This means that we must reject any idea of knowledge as predicative. Only in this sense of knowledge may we agree with Ansell-Pearson that a new form of knowledge must be embraced (the knowledge about truth, namely that it is false) and that this is necessary for our attaining a higher state of being where we are both truthful and healthier. This new knowledge is itself directed toward its own overcoming through incorporation. Fully incorporated truth should not be viewed as a form of intellectual knowledge. It is a transformation of the knower's self, a transformation that, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, is a move toward truth insofar as it is an attunement with Being.

Of course, one should bear in mind this nuance: in the ideal sense, what is attained is certainly a new condition, and it amounts to the reduction

of predicative knowledge. However, Nietzsche is aware that the incorporation of truth is never total, in the same way (and for the same reasons) that power is never absolute. His challenge is, again, formulated in terms of “how much.” If “how much truth can one dare?” is the real measure of one’s greatness or power, it is precisely because power and incorporation of truth are proportional to each other in more than one way: power is both the condition and the result of the incorporation. Yet, we know that power is by essence a relative concept,³⁸ and that in this sense it shall always meet resistances, leading necessarily to some internalization. In *BGE*, 230, Nietzsche strikingly approaches the question from the other end, claiming that “an approval of ignorance” is “necessary in *proportion to* one’s power of assimilation” (my emphasis). The incorporation of truth is never total.

The Symbiotic Relations of Truth and Self

At the beginning of this chapter, I emphasized that Nietzsche approaches the incorporation of truth from two angles. First, in the texts of *GS* from 1882, he seeks a way to retrieve what is true about truth in spite of the necessary untruth he finds in predicative knowledge. This inquiry into the authentic experience of truth that is at the root of the inauthentic predication of truth will characterize Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “interrogation” (*VI*, 103).³⁹ For Nietzsche, this function will be fulfilled by the incorporation of truth. Second, in book V of *GS* and other texts from 1887, Nietzsche intends the incorporation of truth to provide a purification not of truth, but of ourselves. A closer look at the notion of incorporation showed it to effect a reciprocal transformation between the incorporator and the incorporated material. The incorporator increases and the incorporated drives shall be redirected in accordance to the overall direction of the incorporator’s drives. In the case of the incorporation of truth, the transformation on the part of the incorporator involves the redirection of her drives (the hitherto incorporated “errors”), making it a transformative process for her too. The erroneous drives (expressed as internalized instincts of self-cruelty inherited from asceticism and so forth) are indeed redirected outward, thereby reestablishing health. We can now see how the two aspects of the incorporation of truth merge. Nietzsche regards the incorporation of truth as a symbiotic process between the individual and truth. Through this process, the individual’s health becomes an instrument of truth, and reciprocally, truth becomes an instrument of health. Here, we reach a point that is essential for both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty’s philosophies: the unity of the self (expressed in terms of health by Nietzsche) coincides with the unity of self and reality. In a note contemporaneous to the

thoughts of the incorporation of truth and of the death of God, Nietzsche writes:

Completely false valuations of the perceiving world towards the dead one. How we are it! Belong to it! And yet, superficiality, deception begin with perception [. . .] the dead world! Eternally moved and without error, force against force! And in the perceiving world everything is false, arrogant! It is a feast to go out of this world into the dead world—and the greatest lust for knowledge aims at opposing this false arrogant world with the eternal laws where there is no pleasure and no pain and deceit. (11 [70])

In the next section, I shall seek to gain more clarity as to the meaning and importance of the unification of the self for health and for truth. In what sense does Nietzsche think that health is an instrument of truth? In order to address this question, I propose we turn to Nietzsche's famous imperative: "be thyself."

Self-Becoming and Modes of Being

Nietzsche affirms self-becoming and health as figures of human excellence. It is clear from the discussion in Chapter 1 that sickness involves a sort of internal antagonism and, consequently, that it is tightly connected to alienation: "The antagonism of passions, two three, a multiplicity of 'souls in one breast': very unhealthy" (*WP*, 778). In what follows, I will therefore assimilate "being healthy" with "being oneself" and "being sick" with "being divided." This means that we must already reformulate the questions posed above. As I stressed in the first part of this chapter, the mature Nietzsche values truth on account of its value for health. I also emphasized that the incorporation of truth shall provide us with an access to reality unmediated by conceptual judgment. Consequently, a fruitful way to formulate our question is through the relations of health and reality. Nietzsche addresses this question by affirming that man and world share—to some extent—the same nature, so that being healthy or being one with oneself would ideally entail being one with the world. This would suggest the attainment of a state of truthfulness for the fully healthy individual. Let me immediately acknowledge that this is a problematic claim because it seems to render sickness in principle impossible: How can we differentiate ourselves from the world (i.e., become sick) if our full identity with the world were ever possible? Before turning to Nietzsche finessing this claim through his affirmation of the essential self-differentiation of Being, I shall turn to the first, cruder claim.

Oneself and the World: The Self as Granite of Fate

The relationship with one's own nature appears as a challenge of crucial importance for the young Nietzsche in the context of his relationship with Schopenhauer (and later, in any portrait of the true philosopher until *Ecce Homo's* subtitle: "How one becomes what one is"). In 1868, Nietzsche writes:

Schopenhauer's ethics is often criticised for not having the form of an imperative. What the philosophers call the character is an incurable disease. An imperative ethics is one that deals with the symptoms of the disease. (I [404])

In other words, imperative ethics is absurd because it wrongly assumes that human beings are educable in their "character." Hence, imperative ethics deals only with the expressions of a character. Nietzsche objects that this renders it impossible to judge anyone: "Philosophically speaking, it makes no difference whether a character expresses itself or whether its expressions are kept back. Not only the thought but the disposition already makes the murderer; he is guilty without any deed"(I [404]). If one decides to take ethics seriously, that is, to be able to judge not only the actions ("symptoms") but someone's "character," then ethics has to change one's character. However, Nietzsche argues that this character is "incurable." Already in this early text, Nietzsche's main concern is to draw a radical separation between one's character ("disease") and the expressions ("symptoms") thereof. One is changeable and the other is not.

In 1874's *Meditation* on Schopenhauer, Nietzsche has replaced the Schopenhauerian term "character" with his own concept of "self" and uses it in opposition to becoming:

To the question: "to what end do you live?" they would all quickly reply with pride: "to become a good citizen, or scholar, or statesman"—and yet they *are* something that can never *become* something else. (UMIII, 4)

Here, Nietzsche affirms the self as an unchangeable substratum outside of becoming. This is a thesis that remains throughout Nietzsche's work.⁴⁰

Most important, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche reaffirms his belief in some unchangeable nature intrinsic to the individual:

Deep in us, really "down there," is naturally something uneducable, a granite of spiritual fate, of predetermined decisions and answers

to predetermined selected questions. In every important problem a steadfast “that’s what I am” speaks out. (*BGE*, 231)⁴¹

If it is apparent that Nietzsche offers us this granite as a challenge, as the self that we must become, we now need to appreciate in what sense this granite already *is*. As we saw above, Nietzsche understands all beings in terms of drives. At first sight, it is difficult to see such granite as drives because Nietzsche seems to describe it as altogether opposed to becoming (“they *are* something that can never *become* something else”) or at least something fixed and motionless (“granite”). However, in this passage from *BGE* Nietzsche describes this granite as an instance of preference, choice, and selection. This presents a striking similarity with the will to power that is “this creating, willing, valuing ‘I’ that is the measure and value of being” (see *WP*, 662). In fact, the granite self is to be understood as a drive or a set of drives, which has its own “favourite desire”: “to create above itself” (*Z*, I, 3, “Despisers”).

The Non-Self: The “Sick Animal Man”

However, laments Zarathustra, the self “is not able to do what it would prefer [. . .] it has now become too late for that,—so [the] self wants to go under” (*Z*, I, 3, “Despisers”); her drives are being restricted.⁴² Nietzsche’s appeal to self-becoming as a liberation of this initial set of drives that is our profound self is clear since *UMIII*:

The great man [. . .] is contending against those aspects of his age that prevent him from being great, which means, in his case, being free and entirely himself, [. . .] his hostility is at bottom directed against that which, though he finds it in himself, is not truly himself: against the soldering of time-bound things on to his own untimeliness. (*UMIII*, 3)

Here, Nietzsche portrays the self as oppressed by the non-self within the individual. This is precisely what he calls “sickness.” The effect of this sickness is an internal conflict, the self that once wanted to “create” and expand now longs for her own annulment. This is the process described in *GM*, II, 16: the same power that once wanted increase now seeks its own death. Let us remember that Nietzsche does not need to account for the creation of new drives in order to account for the dramatic change that he describes; he only needs describing it in terms of a redirection of some of these drives against the others. To be sure, this redirection has profound

and grave consequences; yet, it is not strictly speaking a “creation” but a modal transformation whose ambiguity is reflected in Nietzsche’s expression “being the ones we are.”

This leads us to the next question: If we are not what we are, what are we? And in what sense are we it? The answer to the first question is clear in Nietzsche’s mind: we are “the sick human animal” (*AC*, 2).⁴³ We know that for Nietzsche, the term “sickness” always denotes a weakening. This weakening is caused not by a deficit in one’s quantum of power, but by an internal conflict that entails the neutralization of this power. Of course, this term of neutralization should be taken cautiously since Nietzsche always affirms that power is always actually discharged. However, as we saw above, the direction of this discharge can either optimize or minimize one’s available amount of power. It is precisely because drives discharge themselves against each other that one can talk of neutralization.

The redirection of drives that turned the healthy beast man once was into a sick animal was described in Chapter 1. We encounter a new question at this point: If the self is a set of drives and at the same time some “ineducable granite of fate,” how are we to construe this sickening redirection? For Nietzsche, all wills can be reduced to will to power and there is no intrinsic difference between drives except for their direction. A direct consequence of this is that “educating” such drives is to be understood as redirecting them. Yet, the individual’s drives are precisely said to be “ineducable.” How can they at the same time be ineducable and subject to redirection? In other words, if the self is ineducable, how can we ever not be ourselves? This question is related to the question that occupied us earlier with regard to Nietzsche’s claim that man became “more interesting” through the “incorporation of errors.” I concluded that some of the drives now inhabiting the human had been incorporated through her history. This leaves us with two kinds of drives within the self: one set was given to us through our very existence or, as it were, by birth (they are our “untimeliness”);⁴⁴ the other is acquired and does not derive its existence from our character but from our history (they are “time-bound”).⁴⁵ The challenge of self-becoming can now be located as the “soldering” between the two sets of drives mentioned in the quote above from *UMIII*.

This “soldering” can take three possible forms:

- a) The acquired drives align under dominion of the granite of fate: the granite of fate incorporates them.
- b) They oppose each other.
- c) They align under dominion of the acquired drives.

Now, b) is obviously a formulation of sickness, and a) and c) both represent figures of health, for health is defined as the unison of drives toward one direction:

The dominating passion, which even brings with it the supremest form of health; here the coordination of the inner systems and their operation in the service of one end is best achieved—but this is almost the definition of health! (*WP*, 778)

However, only a) represents the project of self-becoming. Before discussing the impossibility of c), let me turn to the question of how we can redirect our drives.

Agency

Both scenarios a) and c) represent the project of self-becoming: educating the drives that are educable in order for them to align with those of our granite of fate. As we have seen in the previous section, the redirection of drives is the prerogative of agency. In fact, we can infer from what was already said in Chapter 1 that, from a genealogical point of view, agency is a direct consequence of its very object: the redirection of drives. As we saw, Nietzsche sees the start of history as signaled by the event of the creation of consciousness, which has the direct consequence of sickness. This event is a redirection of drives and can be read as the disjunction of the direction of the drives from the quantum of power to which they are assigned. This disjunction can in turn be read as the modalization of Being: there are now two ways to be, which we can temporarily characterize as “sickness” and “health.” Once the direction became contingent, room was made for agency to appear. We encounter here another formulation of the “great promise” announced in *GM*, II, 16: the possibility of agency, which had hitherto stood for the possibility of sickness, is also the possibility to reverse the direction of the opposing drives and attain health again and on a higher level.⁴⁶ The appearance of agency is both a condition of decadence and a great promise because it is the appearance of the *reversibility* of drives altogether.⁴⁷

The question of agency is one of the most hotly debated topics in the Nietzsche scholarship. Let me stress that I am not taking any commitment here regarding the nature or consequentiality of the agency I am describing. More specifically, I do not imply that agency involves any radical affirmation of free will. For my present purposes, I simply need to mean agency in the sense of contingency. There is agency insofar as the actions of indi-

viduals are determined by motives that are specific to them, their nature, or their state. This is an acceptable claim for even the most deterministic readings of Nietzsche. Brian Leiter gives one of the most explicit portrayals of Nietzsche as a radical determinist. However, even Leiter admits that external conditions are among the determinations that compel us to act in such and such ways or to believe so and so (Leiter 2001, 1: 250).⁴⁸ He also admits that such beliefs can have causal effects on our actions, only, he says, these beliefs are themselves conditioned. This may perhaps contradict other claims of Leiter's (for instance, the claim that "one becomes what one is *necessarily*"; 223), but in any case, it allows room for different degrees of determinism and thereby introduces contingency. Some of our acts are determined directly, and some others are determined by the whole chain of our past experiences and memories. Beyond the fact that this threatens to make determinism meaningless, it lends great importance on our being "us" (whether that means "being ourselves" in Nietzsche's more demanding sense or not) and no one else. Our actions (that is to say, our directing our drives in such and such a way) are "ours" in a strong sense. In this sense at least, we may define Nietzsche's view of agency; agency is for X to do something because X is X and not, say, Y. It is in this sense that I say agency is the realm of the direction of the drives.

Fate

As we saw, Nietzsche understands health as the unison of all the drives of the organism under the rule of a single dominating drive. This involves either the overpowering of the granite of fate by the acquired drives (form c) above), or the reverse (form b) above). Yet, for Nietzsche, c) is impossible, the granite of fate being precisely uneducable. Here, we uncover the reason of Nietzsche's reintegration of truth in his project of health. The younger Nietzsche's philosophy placed the illusions of art above the drive to truth. In a note contemporaneous to *GS*, Nietzsche writes: "In my first period appears the mask of Jesuitism, I mean the conscious adherence to illusion" (XII [212]).⁴⁹ Starting from *GS*, however, such "Jesuitism" seems to become impossible. This is because Nietzsche considers that the adherence to illusion would amount to opposing the acquired (illusory) drives to our granite of fate. The presence of this granite of fate, which constitutes the umbilical cord connecting us with reality, would always be in opposition with our illusions and consequently, c) is impossible. This seems to leave us with the problem of an essential diversity of drives. Yet, I argued above that Nietzsche refuses to make any essential distinction between drives,

which he differentiates only modally (according to their direction: health or sickness), and hence, only relatively to each other. Yet, Nietzsche sees this essential set of drives that constitutes our personal “kernel” (*UMIII*, 1) as granite *of fate*.

Fate is one of Nietzsche’s names for reality. As always in his complex webs of synonyms, Nietzsche chooses one expression over the other to insist on one or the other aspects of a reality seen as unified. The expressions “fate” (*Fatalität*, but also *Schicksal*, *Fatum*, and *Verhängnis*), although diverse, all have in common the idea of reality seen as necessity (*WP*, 204, 586). Another name for reality is, of course, “will to power.” The expression “will to power” is used in order to insist on the directional aspect of reality. If one assembles these two aspects of reality, we encounter the necessity of the directions that one’s basic drives follow: the fatefulness of the direction. Yet, as we saw, Nietzsche gives only a relative status to a drive’s direction: a direction is only assignable to a drive as opposition or concurrence to another drive; there is no absolute direction. How are we to make sense of the “necessity” and the “fatefulness” of the direction of our basic self? Isn’t the affirmation of the fatefulness of our direction another way to affirm an essential direction?

Fate is will to power, and all reality is will to power. Consequently, all reality is fate. Both the self and the outside world are of the same nature. The granite of self that we are secures the umbilical bond between self and world. As a consequence, I have argued that for the self to align her drives to her granite of fate involves that she also aligns her drives in the direction of reality itself. In other words, drawing from Nietzsche’s affirmation of the “functional” unity of the concurring drives; one’s self is of one piece with the whole of reality and its outwardness is impaired only by the acquired drives that oppose it:

The fatality of [man’s] essence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be. [. . .] One is necessary, one is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole, one is in the whole. (*TI*, “Errors,” 8)

Here we become confronted to a question of balance of powers: In the conflict that takes place within the sick individual, which of the opposing drives has the most power? Nietzsche’s answer is definite: the fate of the world cannot be overpowered, so that any opposition to it can only cause sickness but never a reversal of the power balance toward a new health. This makes c) an impossible option, and any attempt to achieve it is bound to lead to mere conflict and sickness.

Three Beings

We now arrive at the question of Nietzsche's use of "being." Nietzsche's critique of values is made from the point of view of reality: values involve our renouncing the "only world" by appealing to the imaginary "true world." For Nietzsche, the only world is our priority. In Eugen Fink's words, Nietzsche is committed to the "basic ontological equation of being and value" (Fink 2003, 8, 164; also Schacht 1983, 196–97). By urging us to "become ourselves," however, Nietzsche invites us to refine the simple claim that Being is the criterion of values. In fact, this command expresses a preference not between ideals and reality, but between two sorts of realities. If we are to understand Nietzsche's preference, we have to begin by clarifying what distinction he draws between these two realities. We are now in a better position to clarify in what senses "being" is meant by Nietzsche in the expression "become the one you are" (e.g., *Z*, IV, 1).

The first remark we should make in order to understand this distinction is that for Nietzsche neither one of the two selves at play here totally *is*. They both exist as a failed attempt at Being, nothing more. Although they both *are* in a certain sense, and although both senses are required for complete Being, neither possesses all the attributes of Being—in other words they *are*, but only in a modal sense. In what follows, I will show these two modes as the "potential" and the "actual."

Being of the Granite: Potential

When Nietzsche attributes certain granite of fate to every individual by birth, he attributes a certain potential to us. In order to understand this notion of the self as a potential, we need to get back to Nietzsche's general account of fate.

Nietzsche's treatment of fate is generally understood as some sort of fatalism that is, first and foremost, a denial of any sort of agency or free will. Yet, Nietzsche's accounts of fate are never presented only as a metaphysical claim about freedom; rather, they always assume an ethical tone. In the same way as Nietzsche does not care about truth so much as he cares about what we are to do with it, he does not care about fate so much as he cares about what we are to do with it. In other words, fate is not for the human self a fatality, but a challenge. This seems paradoxical: if fate is a challenge, why call it fate at all for the mere term invokes some inescapable *fait accompli*, not just a future project, but a present and binding necessity? In fact, the self is both a challenge and a *fait accompli*, again, in two different senses.

In *BGE*, 230, Nietzsche describes our “granite of spiritual fate” as a constraint, a stubborn reluctance to be educated. Yet, he links this limitation not to a negation but to the affirmation of the self’s identity for this refusal is always expressed on the mode of “that is what I am.” It is helpful to remember these two thoughts from *TI*: “formula to my happiness: a yes, a no, a straight line, a goal” (*TI*, “Maxims,” 44) and “nowadays, one could make the individual possible only by circumscribing it” (*TI*, “Skirmishes,” 41). (Significantly, this latter thought is presented as a definition of freedom.) In these two aphorisms, Nietzsche reaffirms the psychologically constructive value of negation as negation of the non-self. In the second one in particular, Nietzsche refers to the possibility of the “individual” as being open not by the “yes” but by the “no” of restriction. Let me also stress that this claim is merely contextual for Nietzsche; it applies to “nowadays.” In a nutshell, there is something specific in the modern self that requires a “no” in order to be accomplished. As we saw above, the individual of nowadays is the sick animal that is the stage of internal struggles between the self (his uneducable granite of fate) and the non-self (the acquired drives) within himself. What is crucial to our problem here is the affirmation that the modern self will be achieved not through a “yes” but through a “no.” In other words, if the self is not achieved, it is not because it is incomplete but because it is confronted to an obstacle (an obstacle that the “no” will remove). We know that drives discharge themselves constantly (*WP*, 634).⁵⁰ This means two things about the mode of being of the self: as a quantum of power, it is actual; as available power, it is only potential (a drive is defined by a seeking to discharge itself, in this sense it may only be potential; *WP*, 668). Indeed, being confronted to the obstacle of the acquired drives, one can no longer figure these drives as “straight lines” and certainly not as drives with a goal when the opposing drives stand precisely as the obstacle between the self and its goal. Here, Nietzsche draws our attention again to the disjunction that occurred between the drives and their direction.

Actuality: The Sick Animal

The second being at play here is the being that we currently are: the sick animal. For Nietzsche, it is obvious that this type is all that there actually is. In this sense, the existence of the sick animal man takes place on the mode of the actual, and the self is not achieved yet.⁵¹ Yet, we can assert that this actuality is deprived of any potential—namely that the sick animal man is able to maintain itself, yet it is incapable of expanding: to take up our previous example the sick man’s “available power” is null although the

self in question contains the same amount of power as its healthy version. It is sick insofar as it is incapable of increase.

There is a third type of being involved in the paradox of self-becoming when it is expressed as a command: the being of agency. Agency is a modal device—that is to say, in terms of drives, a device that acts upon the direction of the drives. In terms of self-becoming, it is the possibility for the potential self to be actualized; it operates modal transformations. Because one is an agent, one is given the chance to achieve one's own potential. In this sense again, agency is a "great promise," along with the sickness of consciousness on which it depends. In ontological terms, we can now say that agency's own being is the actuality of the potentiality of the healthy self described above. Thanks to it, Nietzsche's appeal for us to overcome the actual on behalf of the potential avoids appearing as some sort of ascetic preference for a non-existent ideal over the present reality. It is to this point that I now turn.

Potential More "Real" than the Actual

But whoever discovered the land "Human" also discovered the land "Human Future."

Z, "On the Old and New Tablets," 28

The paradox of self-becoming seems clarified by a modal approach; however, we must ask this further question: Why does Nietzsche prefer one of these beings over the other? Even more, one can ask: Why does Nietzsche privilege the potential over the actual? Indeed, if the sick animal is the only reality we've got, it must be treated with the regard that Nietzsche wants us to attribute to Being itself.

Nietzsche's standard answer to this question, which he reiterates in many instances, is that only by privileging the potential can we achieve it, and that it is this achievement that is the ultimate aim.⁵² At first sight, this is not a sufficient response, for one would have to explain the shift from a value drawn from Being to one drawn from flourishing. However, Nietzsche's solution is precisely to reduce flourishing to Being, or rather, to make flourishing an essential part of Being. In a certain way, this is the secret and novelty of seeing the world as will *to power*. For Nietzsche, "whatever has being does not become; whatever becomes does not have being" (*TI*, "Reason in Philosophy," 1), yet Nietzsche's first-instance idea of Being is becoming ("the reality of becoming as the only reality") (*WP*, 12; Jaspers 1997, 350). Taken together, these two notes allow for a distinction, at least heuristic, between being and actuality. At any rate, if Being is the

highest value, one should not infer from it that actuality is self-justifying, since for Nietzsche “reality [actuality] is not morality” (*WP*, 685).

The only being that can provide value is will to power, and will to power contains in its essence an “intention”: “One has eliminated the character of the will by subtracting from it its content, its whither” (*WP*, 692; see also *WP*, 2). Hence, the concept of will to power is Nietzsche’s device to introduce intention within Being. Here, it becomes apparent that actuality has no privileged relationship to Being for Nietzsche.⁵³ In a note of 1887–1888, which constitutes an attack upon the Eleatic view of Being, Nietzsche affirms: “One must accept nothing that has being—because becoming would lose its value and actually appear meaningless and superfluous” (*WP*, 708).

We can now return to our question: What sense of being subtends Nietzsche’s preference for the potential over the actual? One way to answer is to stress that the actual is for Nietzsche only a mode of being, but by no means Being proper, or even reality itself. This is the significance of Nietzsche’s rejection of the Eleatic univocity of being. This means that we are now faced with two realities distinguished in their mode of being. Why, however, does Nietzsche privilege the potential being (our granite of fate) over the actual self (the sick animal)?

When Nietzsche opts for a dynamic Being (Nietzsche’s so-called ontology of becoming) over the static traditional one he posits at the same time a more demanding task for reality: to have actuality, to have a direction, a “whither,” and above all, to unite the two—in Nietzsche’s terms, “to create” (*WP*, 662).⁵⁴ From a static point of view, one finds a contradiction between Nietzsche’s call for creation—for example, for self-creation—and his repeated claim that there is a fixed and unchangeable amount of power in the world. From a dynamic point of view, however, the paradox is solved: as we saw, the joining of actuality and its direction is—at the individual level at least—the realm of agency. Hence, creation can only be understood in terms of a redirection of drives:

Regarded mechanistically, the energy of the totality of becoming remains constant; regarded economically, it rises to a high point [. . .] That which constitutes growth in life is an ever more thrifty and more far-seeing economy, which achieves more and more with less and less force. As an ideal, the principle of the smallest expenditure. (*WP*, 639)

For Nietzsche, creation is a question of good economic management. The amount of wealth (or, in this case, of power) at one’s disposal is unchanged, but its “buying power” (or creative power) can be increased. Creation must

be thought of as only the actualization of a power through its acquiring a healthy direction.

Nietzsche's view of Being thus proves more demanding than the traditional Eleatic view insofar as it includes within its essence an "ought," a "whither." Henceforth, when Nietzsche affirms Being as a normative criterion, he really only affirms a new way to think of Being as a replacement for the one given from outside Being (i.e., from the backworlds). In a nutshell, for Nietzsche Being is also what it aims at. In terms of self-becoming, this implies that the actual human, the sick animal, is amputated from any significant future.⁵⁵ She is, as it were, locked up in her own actuality and has no chance to escape it, her power being neutralized. The potential self described above possesses both its own quantum of power and the possibility of directing this power outward (this possibility is figured by agency). It now becomes apparent that the self becomes the only project possible for Nietzsche, the only chance of Being.

We are now in a better position to address the question of the relations between health and truth. The premise of this chapter was that from *GS* onward, Nietzsche came to the realization that truth was necessary to his project of human excellence. However, Nietzsche's critique of predicative truth had shown the concern for truth to have led primarily to more sickness. He uses the incorporation of truth as a device allowing truth to bring health while disposing of the sickness-inducing aspect of truth—namely, its predicative aspect. I also argued that health must be understood as the unity of one's drives. In the section on the gay science and the incorporation of truth I concluded that the incorporation of truth brought health by redirecting the drives resulting from the incorporation of error outward, thereby increasing the power of the healthy human of the future. This harmonization of one's drives is a figure of Nietzsche's cherished self-becoming. In the section on self-becoming and modes of being, I sought to answer one question raised by the preceding argument: Why was the redirection offered by the incorporation of truth preferable to that put forward by the younger Nietzsche—namely, the incorporation of illusions? My answer resides in Nietzsche's later insistence on our being essentially of a piece with Being itself. Nietzsche expresses this consubstantiality of self and world by saying that we possess certain granite of fate and that the world, too, is fate. Consequently, illusions threaten to create an opposition (hence sickness) of the self and its granite nature. Only the incorporation of truth, which clears us from illusions, can achieve our unity with our granite self and, thereby, lead us to health.

Nietzsche completes the model of our overcoming of the self-undercutting of truth and of nihilism with the motif of the incorporation of truth. With

regard to our more general question concerning truth, however, we must inquire further: Is the incorporation of truth nothing more than the figure of our renouncing our will to truth? It is quite apparent that this is impossible, insofar as the event of the self-undercutting of truth showed us that erroneous beliefs lead to sickness. This means that if truth leads to health, the reverse is true as well. However, as I argued, we must stop thinking of truth in terms of predicative knowledge. In what sense, then, must we conceive of truth? And what does the answer to this question entail for Nietzsche's worldview? It is to this problem that I turn next.

The Self-Becoming of the World and the Incompleteness of Being

The Symbiotic Relations of Truth and Self

The relationship between the value of self-becoming and Being has just been clarified in modal terms. It is now apparent that Being *is* in the full sense only when the potential and the actual are connected. We now need to ask what consequences can be expected from achieving our individual task of self-becoming, for if one needs to become oneself for the sake of Being, the benefits must be expected on a higher level than the mere individual herself. If I am right to interpret this individual ethics as drawing its value from the nature of the will to power, this means that this ethics may be a fruitful medium to use in order to reveal how Nietzsche thinks about the ontological relations of self and world and, it is hoped, to provide clarifications on the connections between being oneself and possessing truth, or being truthful.

Economics and the Reestablishment of the Healthy Power Relations

We know that sickness is Nietzsche's name for the disjunction of actuality and potentiality and that Nietzsche's aim is their reconciliation. At the individual level, Nietzsche's name for this reconciliation is self-becoming.

As I have previously indicated, Nietzsche's attacks on ethical actualism (which draws values from actuality) are made from the perspective of a more demanding Being, one that requires more than actuality. This is the case for most of Nietzsche's attacks on Darwinism. For Nietzsche, Darwin

describes a world where the strong dominate the weak. This world is, in fact, not the one we live in; it is the world we must achieve. Nietzsche attacks Darwin for presenting it as an actual state of affairs. In a note entitled “anti-Darwin,” he asserts:

Strange though it may sound, one always has to defend the Strong against the Weak; the fortunate against the unfortunate; the healthy against those degenerating and afflicted with hereditary taints. If one translates reality into a morality; this morality is: the mediocre are worth more than the exceptions. (*WP*, 685)

In other words, there is a disjunction between power and domination: the weak dominate the strong and before Darwin (or what Nietzsche takes to be Darwin’s position) can be proved to be right, the relations of power have to be reversed.¹ The story of this disjunction is told in *GM* and I have presented it already: *ressentiment* and the slave revolt in morality bring about a society in which powerful individuals become weakened so that the weak come to dominate them. The reestablishment of a hierarchy based on power and not on sickness is Nietzsche’s political priority (*WP*, 287). I shall argue that self-becoming is his device of choice to attain this.

First of all, I have argued that self-becoming amounts to an externalization of one’s drives. We also know that sickness involves the internalization of these drives. The healthy individual applies her power to the outside in every circumstance (there is no latent power). This means that one’s power is entirely available and put to use in any struggle of the individual. In the case of the healthy humans then, one’s weakness and one’s strength (not sickness and health) are the real determining factors of domination: “What determines rank, sets off rank, is only quanta of power, and nothing else” (*WP*, 855). However, the present human is sick.

Nietzsche views the goals of humanity and of culture to be the promotion of the great individuals. For him “people obviously refuse to admit that the great human beings are the apex for whom everything else exists” (*WP*, 351) and “the many are only a means” toward this great individual (*WP*, 681; see also *WP*, 766). However, if the final goal must be placed in the single individual, Nietzsche’s conception of this “toward” has always oscillated between two views—one cosmological and the other political—before being reunited at the very end of Nietzsche’s writing career.

The Cosmological Role of Culture

The cosmological view became one of Nietzsche’s main concerns in the year 1874 while preparing the manuscript to the *Meditation* on Schopen-

hauer. In section 7 of this text, Nietzsche discusses the appearance in the world of a true philosopher. For him, “Nature propels a philosopher into mankind like an arrow; it takes no aim but hopes the arrow will stick somewhere” (*UMIII*, 7). Of course, we must understand the reference to nature as the intentional cause for the appearance of a philosopher: a philosopher achieves a purpose assigned to him or her by nature. More important, however, is the fact that Nietzsche expresses a problem that will remain in his thought till the end: nature shoots at random. This means two things: First, each individual is to be understood as a mere experiment, a trial, an “arrow” whose purpose is only very seldom attained. Second, one holds the justification for one’s existence from the very purpose that she is an attempt at. For Nietzsche, this aim can only be achieved by those he calls the “lucky strokes,”² the strong. At this stage, the young Nietzsche still presents his views in metaphysical, quasi-mythical ways, by anthropomorphizing nature and attributing it goals and purposes. He also suggests that he can read the purposes of nature in a way that the later Nietzsche would surely reject as presumptuous. However, as the notes from 1887–1888 quoted above demonstrate, this does not entail that the structure of this worldview—and especially the idea that only the exceptions are valuable—changes very much in his subsequent work.

This opens up two possibilities for the weak: first, they can be put to use for the enhancement of the life of the strong, as slaves “simply because we feel it is not possible for man, fighting for sheer survival, to be an artist” (“The Greek State,” 165). In “The Greek State,” which precedes *UMIII* by two years, Nietzsche encounters the same problem in his analysis of the social structure that promotes greatness, that of the Greeks. This point is taken over in *UMIII* and later through *Z* and the later notes: in subjection, the weak find redemption to their weakness, they make themselves useful to a greater goal, that of the great man. As Fink puts it: “Life creates the mass of average people as the basis for a higher type of man” (Fink 2003, 158).³

The second possibility is for the weak to simply vanish and die. As failed experiments, they have no claim to existence. To this line of argument belong Nietzsche’s repeated claims that “all that exists that can be denied deserves to be denied” (*UMIII*, 4) and his characterization of eternal recurrence as a “great cultivating idea”⁴ that “gives to many the right to erase themselves” (*WP*, 1056) and appears as “a selective principle, in the service of strength (and barbarism!!)” (*WP*, 1058). The reason for Nietzsche to envisage the pure and simple annulment of the failed experiments is to do with their place in the world. For Nietzsche, all the individual attempts that constitute the masses are brought about by an essentially blind and wasteful nature, which exhausts itself in spending on the weak. Consider:

“Nature is just as extravagant in the domain of culture as it is in that of planting and sowing. It achieves its aims in a broad and ponderous manner, and in doing so it sacrifices much too much energy” and “nature is a bad economist, its expenditure is much larger than the income it procures” (*UMIII*, 7). The weak appear as the superfluous expenditure, as “dead weight” to the world:

Life itself recognises no solidarity, no “equal rights,” between the healthy and the degenerate parts of an organism, one must excise the latter. (*WP*, 734)

The economical analogy reappears surprisingly in an aphorism from Nietzsche’s very last active months. In this text, Nietzsche brings together the two aforementioned options as two sides of an alternative that is to be decided over in terms of an optimization of power. When Nietzsche ponders the necessary balance one has to achieve between the largest proportion of strong “races” and their survival (which implies the existence of the weak, better at preserving the species and at serving the strong) Nietzsche concludes: “We stand before a problem of economics” (*WP*, 864). In other words, it is a dialectic of cost and advantage that decides whether the weak are to be used or destroyed.

Nietzsche’s view of culture and breeding is thus concerned with the management of the overall and fixed quantum of power of the world. As we saw, in a world where the quantum of power is not subject to becoming, the task can only become to “optimize” this power (*WP*, 639). In the case of the human, this is achieved through a redirection of the drives that constitute the individual. Once this is achieved, the former balance of power between individuals becomes reversed: the weak lose their power and become conquered by the strong; strength and domination become reconciled.

This domination takes two forms: the death of some of the weak and the subjection of some others. In the first case, this involves liberation of the quantum of power of the deceased weak, the “superfluous,” whose death is a “promise” that we can now interpret as a promise of health for the world (e.g., *Z*, I, “Free Death”). In the other case, their power is not liberated but incorporated into the power of the Master: as a slave, the weak submits her power to her master and—just like a protoplasm becomes a function of a higher organism through incorporation—the weak becomes a function of her master who increases (in power) by the same measure. In such a world, human quanta of power are optimized.

This economical view is at the root of Nietzsche’s politics. However, in the same way as we were not satisfied by anthropomorphically eudaemonic

understanding of Nietzsche's commands, we must now ask what gives the political project its value: What is at stake in the political realm for Nietzsche? The answer is in the cosmos.

The Self-Becoming of the World and the New Truth

The strong human is not herself the final aim; instead, she is presented as a means, responsible for an adequate management of the energy available in the world. We know however that the human occupies a specific place in the world, but this is because of the fact that she is the only sick being.⁵ As the only locus of sickness in the world, the human represents the challenge of the optimization of the overall quantum of power. We must remember how sickness is for Nietzsche “a sickness rather like pregnancy” that contains a “great promise.” In Chapter 1, I argued that this sickness must be regarded as the reversibility of our drives. In Chapter 2, this reversibility has appeared as the possibility of agency. Agency is a promise because it contains our ability to regain health on a higher level. Now, it appears that thanks to agency, the human holds in her hands the key to the overcoming of human sickness, the key to the healing of the world.

We must ask ourselves if this positing of the human's sickness with regard to the world is of any relevance for Nietzsche. Indeed, Nietzsche repeatedly uses the expression “the world” to refer to reality as a whole, but he also consistently claims that there is no “world [All].” A chronological approach to this question throughout Nietzsche's writings will provide some clarifications.

The Aims of Nature (1874)

The question of the cosmological stakes of ethics comes to prominence with the year 1874 and the *Meditation* on Schopenhauer. In this text, Nietzsche expresses his basic intuition as to the frightening⁶ responsibility of the healthy man, whom he calls the “healthy philosopher” an “untimely” individual who is entirely “himself.” The role of such an individual and his greatest ambition is to complete “nature” with knowledge:

It is the fundamental idea of culture, insofar as it sets for each of us but one task: to promote the production of the philosopher, the artist and the saint within and without us, and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature. (*UMIII*, 5)

This definition of culture will remain through Nietzsche's writings: culture is the form of civilization that promotes the greatest men and their self-

becoming, toward a goal posited by nature itself. Here, it is apparent that the young Nietzsche envisaged the great human as a means and not a final end; she had a task that went beyond herself: completing the world by leading becoming into being.

Although it is not elaborated here as precisely as it will be in the later texts, it is important to stress that the discussion of the complementarity of man and world (human action as the key to the world's attaining self-identity) is done from the point of view of a dialectic of Being and becoming. For Nietzsche, one becomes oneself by reconnecting with the "untimely" in oneself and, thereby, with what he calls nature's "original intention" (*UMIII*, 7), of which the individual is only a symptom. The way for the self to achieve this is, as we have seen, to struggle against all that is not "him" in himself, and Nietzsche consistently connects these alien elements with becoming. They are a result of social uniformization and pressure and they stand between one and oneself: "This eternal becoming is a lying puppet-play in beholding which man forgets himself" (*UMIII*, 5). We can now understand what Nietzsche calls the "truthfulness" (5) of the philosopher: a refusal of becoming from the point of view of being.

Yet, for Nietzsche, this truthfulness involves an ontological leap that transcends subjectivity, for a truthful philosopher will lose himself at the very moment he becomes himself:

The aspiration to be truthful is [a] destructive aspiration, yet it makes the individual great and free, perhaps he will perish from it outwardly, not inwardly. (34 [36])

This superb note from the middle of 1874 potentially contains most of Nietzsche's later ethics. Let us stress for the time being that Nietzsche links man and the world in an ontological manner: if one is truly oneself, one will not die "internally" (which Nietzsche will go on to characterize as "sickness"—the "internalization of man"), but "externally" (that is, he will die as an "ego"):

There are moments and as it were bright sparks of the fire of love in whose light we cease to understand the word "I." There lies something beyond our being which at these moments move across into it, and we are thus possessed of a heartfelt longing for bridges between here and there. (*UMIII*, 5)⁷

This is Nietzsche's first approach of the question of subjectivity and, as it were, of its overcoming through the co-substantiality of man and "nature."⁸

The World as “Chaos” (1885)

In 1885, Nietzsche was led to reexamine the question of a so-called self-becoming of the world and of the potential responsibility of man with regard to it. For him, this question became problematic because he now saw the world as “chaos” (*WP*, 711).⁹ Authors such as Wolfgang Müller-Lauter (1999), Richard Schacht (1983), and in some respects Michel Haar (1996) attempt to do away with the difficulties of Nietzsche’s account of the world as chaos by presenting it as “a preventive concept, one forbidding us from essentializing, eternalizing and deifying nature” (Haar 1996, 115) and not one positively presenting Nietzsche’s doctrine. In fact, it appears that Nietzsche’s investigation on time and eternal recurrence led into a new idea: “If the motion of the world aimed at a final state, that state would have been reached” (*WP*, 708).¹⁰ Let us stress already that this idea is presented by Nietzsche as a “fact,” not a principle (this will take great significance in a moment). For Nietzsche, the present historicity (i.e., the instability of the world) is a proof that stability is impossible. I will return to this thought later with regard to the doctrine of eternal recurrence, but let me already stress that this induces a clear shift in Nietzsche’s preference of being over becoming.¹¹ For Nietzsche then, only eternal becoming is possible and this implies a view of the world as essentially “chaos.” This leads us to the core of the question that occupied Nietzsche in the years 1885–1886—the connection between monism and plurality or, in other words, the question of difference.

Nietzsche gives his first mentions of the “will to power” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. At this point, the will to power is mainly presented as a psychological (*Z*, “Self-Overcoming”) or a psycho-sociological principle (*Z*, “Goals”), but most important, Nietzsche presents it as a biological discovery; it is the essence of life: “where I found the living, there I found will to power.” This discovery, however, is still only applied to the living: “only where life is, there too is will” (*Z*, “Self-Overcoming”). This leads to conceiving life as having a double structure. First, it is unified under one principle, the will to power; second, because the will to power is essentially relational, it introduces difference. It therefore seems possible to say that identity and difference coexist in the realm of life.¹² This is what the double affirmation of “chaos” as the generalization of difference on the one hand and “will to power” as a unifying principle on the other amounts to. Chaos is differentiation through opposition, it is the way of being of the will to power, but its essence is unified under the heading of will to power. As was demonstrated in Chapter 1, this combination of identity and difference informs the eternal becoming of the world.

With the discovery of the fact that the world's journey has no end, Nietzsche is led to affirm becoming against being: the only possibility of maintaining being was to posit a potential point of stability at the end of the becoming that is everywhere actual (*GS*, 109). This possibility is now ruled out by experience.

For Nietzsche, this renders the value of anything, and especially of human existence and human actions, problematic: we cannot aim at anything anymore and, as Nietzsche repeatedly insists, the meaning is now to be found in ourselves, and this is why the criterion of valuation shifts from Being to health. That is to say, the guiding will to power for the individual to follow is her own will to power, no longer any higher project represented as an end. Let me stress that, as I discussed in Chapter 2, this aspect of Nietzsche's views on becoming can be understood only if we detach the structure of the will from the structure of end-representation. We can find value in ourselves only if we understand our own existence to be always already ekstatic while avoiding representing a point that we project ourselves toward. Nietzsche suggests that it is by placing our preference on the present that we place our preference on what it projects itself toward because our present itself is ekstatic. This has the advantage of ridding any structure of otherworldly valuation from Nietzsche's doctrine, but it leaves us with little more than a—albeit sophisticated—form of eudemonism. I will return to this question shortly.

The Reconciliation (1886–1888)

The last phase in Nietzsche's treatment of the role of man toward a supposed aim of the world is initiated with Nietzsche's transformation of the doctrine of the will to power from biology to ontology. The term ontology should not deceive us here. If it has been applied to Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power, it is only in the sense of a description of the entirety of Being *qua* reality. "Ontology" here should not be taken in the most demanding sense inherited from Heidegger, for instance. Even if it will appear that this purer sense was not overlooked by Nietzsche, it is clear that the Nietzschean doctrine of the will to power does not, for example, address the question of what it is to "be" a will to power, which is the background against which any characterization of reality as "will to power" (or as anything else) makes any sense. Rather, ontology here refers to a doctrine that applies to all instances of existence, to all *the* beings.

Nietzsche's unification of all beings under the concept "will to power" comes from his late rejection of the separation between the "organic" (which was so far the only realm of the will to power) and the inorganic. Nietzsche

now writes, for example, “thinking, in primitive conditions (pre-organic), is the crystallization of forms, as in the case of crystal” (*WP*, 499).¹³ This implies that from now on “*the world* is essentially will to power” (*BGE*, 186, my emphasis). Despite his former reluctance, Nietzsche reestablishes the world as a single essence, which he names will to power. The immediate consequence of this move is that Nietzsche henceforth is able to view the world as an “overall quantum of power” (*WP*, 1067), which he regards as fixed (*WP*, 639). This establishes a link with the characterization of creation discussed above. There, creation was understood as actualization and actualization as the externalization of power. If creation in the strong sense (*ex nihilo*) becomes impossible, the only becoming possible for the world would consist in a reorganization of its own forces:

Supposing that the world had a certain quantum of force at its disposal, then it is obvious that every displacement of power at any point would affect the whole system—thus together with sequential causality there would be a contiguous and concurrent dependence. (*WP*, 638)

For Nietzsche, such a reorganization can only be brought about through incorporation, which is the basic mechanism of the will to power. Let me recall three basic traits of incorporation: i) incorporation is the means by which an organic ensemble of forces increases its power at the expense of the organism it subjects; ii) it is characterized by the redirection (and thus preservation) of the drives of the incorporated toward a goal posited by the incorporator; iii) this redirection unifies formerly opposing drives into one single drive of a greater quantum. If the world itself is will to power with incorporation as its basic mechanism, this means that we now must conceive of the world as a quantum of power forever reconfiguring itself through the internal struggles and incorporations of its components: the becoming of the world is nothing but the world’s self-incorporation.

Teleological Cosmology

In the following discussion, I investigate this conception of the world. I will be ignoring—for the time being—the crucial addition whereby “if the motion of the world aimed at a final state, that state would have been reached” (*WP*, 708). It is only by clarifying the worldview in which this claim takes place that we can clarify its consequences. Nietzsche himself sometimes proposes the hypothesis that the becoming of the world was headed toward a high point, which he calls, surprisingly, “god”:

The sole way of maintaining a meaning for the concept “god” would be: God not as a driving force, but God as a maximal state, as an epoch—a point in the evolution of the will to power by means of which further evolution just as much as previous evolution up to him can be regarded. (*WP*, 639)

From a description of the world as an overall quantum of power comprising a diversity of conflicting drives, one is bound to come to a pyramidal structure. Indeed, if every healthy structure is healthy precisely because it is ruled by only one drive, this structure resembles a pyramid whose body is constituted by a cooperation of drives ruled by the “top” drive.¹⁴ In the case of a political organization, we already know that this is exactly Nietzsche’s conception of a healthy society, with the strong at its summit.¹⁵ Nietzsche also draws from the unicity of the nature of the world that everything in the world is a potential master or slave to everything else: everything can be incorporated by everything else. In theory, there is no obstacle for the world to be someday unified under the rule of one supreme organism, which would contain the ensemble of the former organisms as its functions. In fact, Nietzsche multiplies the descriptions of specific organisms as such pyramids of pyramids (*WP*, 703).¹⁶

Let us assume for the sake of argument that this is the aim Nietzsche attributes to the development of the overall quantum of power (i.e., the world). In that case, the first requirement is the alignment of all drives in the world. The discussion from Chapter 1 entails that the alternative of health and sickness is specifically human, because only the human is given the ability to split herself into two opposing halves (*GM*, II, 16). We know as well that self-becoming stands precisely for a human attaining her uttermost health. Here, the responsibility of the human becomes cosmological: she is the locus of sickness in the world; hence, she is the site of the project of the self-becoming of the world and holds the key to it, under the form of agency. This sheds new light on *amor fati*. *Amor fati* is for Nietzsche a criterion of greatness, of “virtue.” Virtue, in turn, qualifies one’s becoming a function of something greater, be it society (for the individual; *GS*, 21)¹⁷ or some greater organism (for the cell).¹⁸ I have pointed out above that any incorporation involves the loss of identity of the incorporated unit precisely because it becomes a mere function and now holds its identity from the higher being in which it participates. This means only one thing as far as the individual is concerned: Nietzsche has reactivated his early intuition that the achievement of the self is a loss of self, as described in *UMIII*, whereby in the “fire of love [*amor fati*] . . . we cease to understand the word ‘I’” (*UMIII*, 5).

Ontological Truth

Here, we arrive at a crucial point with regard to our general question concerning truth: through this experience of the loss of self through self-becoming, Nietzsche proposes a new and higher type of truth, which I shall call “ontological” insofar as it is a truth that transcends the subject-object distinction. For Fink, Nietzsche promotes “the divinatory intuition of the essence of the cosmos” and demonstrates that “the highest truth is ‘showing’” (Fink 2003, 169). Fink means this showing in opposition to any predicative distortion. The showing does not transform what it is about into symbols and, consequently, it avoids the critique of predication. In this sense, Nietzsche tries to maintain an idea of truth beyond the subject-object distinction—that is, a truth that remains once the subject has merged into the object. In Müller-Lauter’s words: “The new truth (which was always the only truth, but in the past was hidden) consists in being at one with the will to power” (Müller-Lauter 1999, 70).

We must therefore confront a truth that breaks the predicative framework. This truth was, as I said, “salvaged” by the incorporation of truth; it is the authentic experience that provided the basis for the beliefs exemplified in untruth. Again, Fink declares, “the real distinction is not one between any intuition and any concept but between cosmic intuition and the categorical concept” (Fink 2003, 150). It is a truth that is brought about by the “surrender” of the great man whose agency, as it were, commits suicide. This is what Nietzsche aims at when he uses the expression *amor fati* to represent “the last and the greatest will [namely] to will the necessary” (Fink 2003, 94). For Müller-Lauter, such a paradox as willful submission of free will “can be understood not as a transition but only as a qualitative leap” (Müller-Lauter 1999, 78). This leap is precisely the leap from the metaphysical to the ontological and it takes place beyond the subject-object distinction precisely because it takes place at the very moment that the subject disappears as such.

This second form of truth, however, should not be opposed to the first one. Nietzsche regards the truth about god as the dialectical device by which we can arrive at this second, more enigmatic truth. As I have argued in Chapter 2, the movement that goes from a predicative truth about predicative truth (namely, that it is false) to a non-predicative one—such as the truth in Being—is mediated by our attainment of health made possible by the former and leading into the latter. It is in this sense only that we may understand the thesis that existence is an instrument of truth.

Will to Power as Metaphysics

Here, the ontological role of the human becomes apparent: by holding the key to her own health, the human individual holds the keys to the health of the entire world, so that the self-becoming of the world depends on the self-becoming of every human individual (or their death). This final, perfect stage is equivalent to the full incorporation of the world. The overall quantum of power in the world becomes one unique drive. Yet, to what would this drive oppose itself? The fact that there is no answer to this question means that the doctrine of the will to power is not, strictly speaking, ontological but metaphysical. That is to say, it is a doctrine that describes accurately the world not in its Being but as it actually is. Indeed, for a theory to give a truly ontological account of the world as we describe it, it should be able to give us an account of what it would be for the world to “be” self-identical. Yet, an account of self-identity in terms of will to power is impossible because a will to power exists only against another will to power; the world as will to power is by definition self-differentiated and thereby unfit to account for the supposed final, self-identical state of the world.

Eternal Recurrence: The Failure of Teleological Becoming

We have just examined a worldview that could have been Nietzsche’s final cosmology. Such a worldview is teleological; it generalizes the teleological structure of the single wills to power to what Nietzsche calls “the overall quantum of power” (i.e., the world). In this view, the world itself is like an organism; it is going somewhere and the final point of its evolution is absolute Being, understood as self-identical (we saw that the whole process could itself be understood as the self-becoming of the world). This worldview attributes a contradiction to Nietzsche’s thought because it construes the will to power as a concept that leads to its own inconceivability: it seeks total unity while being defined by opposition and externality.¹⁹

The Disparity of Power and Time

Yet, Nietzsche makes it explicit that this contradictory view is not his view. This is because of the confrontation between the cosmological model described above and Nietzsche’s belief in the eternity of time. Nietzsche’s most succinct expression of this confrontation is in the note from 1887–1888 already mentioned: “If the motion of the world aimed at a final state,

that state would have been reached” (*WP*, 708). This is a fundamental remark for Nietzsche’s project because it tells us what this project *cannot* aim for: “every philosophy and scientific hypothesis (e.g., mechanistic theory) which necessitates such a final state is *refuted* by this fundamental fact” (*WP*, 708). In other words, this discovery has to be granted the status of a fact in the strong epistemological sense: a fact has a critical power, it can refute.²⁰ This constitutes a new challenge for Nietzsche: “I seek a conception that takes this fact into account,” he writes. Let me stress that the first mention of this fact takes place late in Nietzsche’s work; in fact, it appears only in Nietzsche’s second to last notebook of 1887 (*WP*, 639) and becomes a challenge only in the later fragment quoted above, about four years after the first mention of the will to power and its development into a metaphysical ontology. Although the fragment is explicitly (although not exclusively) intended as an attack on the “mechanistic theory” it seems highly plausible that it was intended to express Nietzsche’s awareness of the incompleteness of his own doctrine of the will to power.

This note relies on a concept of time extending infinitely into the past. If the past is infinite, then everything that is possible must have already happened. In *WP*, 639, Nietzsche addresses the same question in terms of a disparity between a limited number of possible “events”²¹ and the eternity of time in which they take place:

The absolute necessity of similar events occurring in the course of one world, as in all others, is in eternity not a determinism ruling events, but merely the expression that the impossible is not possible.

This problem leaves his cosmology unachieved, for as Nietzsche writes, “consequently one must conceive [the world’s] climactic condition in such a way that it is not a condition of equilibrium.” As a result, this insight constitutes the opening of the space in which the thought of eternal recurrence takes place:²² “The principle of conservation of energy demands *eternal recurrence*” (5 [54]).

The disparity between the finitude of the number of possible events and the infinity of time can only be resolved into a repetition of events and of sequences of events; the repetition itself being not an event but simply the conjunction of time and events and the expression of their disparity.²³ Nietzsche still conceives of becoming as a sequence of incorporative events:²⁴ the will to power is an event-making force, it “expresses itself in the interpretation, in the manner in which the force is used up; transformation of energy into life” (*WP*, 1067). This is, of course, the challenge of health: events are reorganizations of drives toward life. If becoming is

composed only of these events, it is highly plausible that the history of becoming must be read as the history of self-becoming, of the becoming healthy. To be sure, Nietzsche envisages two kinds of becoming. The first one is ontological; it has to do with the very fact that time is eternal and that everything takes place in time. It is the milieu of absolute health, as is represented by wildlife for Nietzsche: the eternal timeliness of healthy animals. This becoming is qualitatively stable because it is a stable and self-identical maximum incapable of losing its balance, of becoming sick. The other one is metaphysical and has to do with the succession that takes place within the ontological becoming; this second one we may call “sequential becoming,” it is the becoming toward. Sequential becoming is another name for the realm of man’s agency, which is, as we saw, the name of the frontline in the struggle against sickness.

The Non-Birth of Consciousness as Warrant to the Eternity of the Past History

Both of the aphorisms at work here indicate that the teleological form of becoming is an illusion; there is no absolutely healthy (self-identical) state of the world. I would like to suggest the following hypothesis that permits us to trace the late-found impossibility of cosmological teleology to the roots of Nietzsche’s understanding of history.

In *GM*, II, 1, Nietzsche characterizes history as the becoming of consciousness. There is for Nietzsche no history before the birth of consciousness precisely because history is the history of disease, convalescence, and overcoming brought about by consciousness. I claimed at the end of Chapter 1 that the absolute overcoming of consciousness was impossible a priori because sickness and health, although opposed to each other, needed each other. Consequently, I have described absolute sickness and absolute health as mere horizons and the stake of history altogether was to be seen in terms of degrees of life, not in absolute terms. This precluded any future leap into absolute health. Yet, in accordance with my analysis of Nietzsche’s animal psyche and his metaphor of the inner world as “stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin,” the notes at hand here indicate that it is precisely the past that never saw such a leap happen, for we can now see that this leap amounts to a necessarily impossible leap from metaphysical (self-differentiated) becoming to ontological (self-identical) becoming where eternity is nothing more than some eternal present: if stability were possible, it would have happened already, and if it had, it could not have been lost. Nietzsche’s conclusion is that *some* sickness was always here.

Becoming and Being

In terms of the relationship between the two sorts of becoming outlined above, this means that history (the history of sickness) and timeliness (ontological becoming) are strictly coextensive; there is no real distinction between the two, only a conceptual one. This means that both the relationship of being and becoming and the relationship of metaphysics and ontology are to be reevaluated from this point of view.

First, the question of time. In 1886–1887, Nietzsche declares: “That everything recurs is the most extreme approximation of a world of becoming to one of being” (7 [54]). Beyond the overt project not to affirm becoming over being but to reconcile them, Nietzsche offers another formulation of the distinction between what I have called ontological and sequential (metaphysical) becoming. For Nietzsche, ontological becoming is Being itself. In fact, it is a constant assumption of Nietzsche’s that becoming is only said of a succession, that is, of events. An event is not only a reorganization of drives, but it is a reorganization that affects the overall “economical energy” (*WP*, 639) of the world, making the quantum of power of the world more or less effective, more or less healthy. However, Being as self-identity (7 [1]) is understood by Nietzsche as stability through time—that is, not the negation of time, but the negation of the qualitative difference between instants in time. In other words, in Being, time becomes ineffective, a mere abstraction: *Being is time without becoming*.

If this characterization of being and becoming is accurate, it entails that eternal recurrence can be the thought that links the two together. In more than one way, eternal recurrence is a thought of inefficiency. For the human agent, it is a despairing thought precisely because it amounts to the impossibility for any difference to occur—for any better tomorrows, for example. Inefficiency of time within eternal recurrence makes all moments qualitatively similar to each other. Yet, eternal recurrence is foremost an affirmation of becoming as sequence because it is thought from the point of view of the so-called cosmic year, which is nothing but the overall possible (hence necessary) sequence of events. Here, absolute becoming and absolute Being seem to merge into the thought of eternal recurrence or, to borrow Löwith’s words: “By means of the eternal recurrence of the same, Eleatic being is transferred into Heraclitean becoming” (Löwith 1997, 170).

Metaphysics and Ontology

The reference to the canonical divide between Parmenides’s philosophy of Being as the self-identical One and Heraclitus’s becoming as the self-

differentiated multiple leads us to a deeper insight into Nietzsche's thoughts regarding the relationship between ontology and metaphysics. In fact, considered from a traditional point of view, the merging of becoming and being remains on the level of the metaphysics of time. Yet, in Nietzsche's case, the relationship between being and becoming roots the distinction between metaphysics and ontology. For Nietzsche, metaphysics is understood "only in the sense of a two-world theory" (Müller-Lauter 1999, 122). We saw in Chapter 1 that for Nietzsche, any "two-world theory" amounts to the possibility of "passing sentence," of the disjunction between reality and justification.²⁵ In other words, the rejection of any two-world theory is the rejection of the structure of moral judgment. Yet, Nietzsche insists everywhere that the will to power is precisely one such instance of valuation (from *GM*, I, "pathos of distance" to all forms of Christian morality all the way down to the protozoa). This is largely because the will to power is an essentially relative concept, which operates on the mode of the two as the "me" and the "non-me," and, consequently, in terms of "advantage." Indeed, I have argued in Chapter 1 that the "me" and the "non-me," as subject and object, were constituted in the very experience of resistance. We have seen above that the concept will to power stands for the whole realm of becoming. In a note from 1888 Nietzsche describes all becoming as "an encroachment of one power over another power" (*WP*, 689), turning difference into the prime engine of becoming. However, we recall that the will to power operates through assimilation and thus is ultimately directed to overall unity (this is the cosmological paradox of the will to power outlined above). This is all evidence that Nietzsche thinks of becoming as metaphysics (as two-ness). It is plausible to read the discussion of becoming and being as probing the opposition of Being and metaphysics. Admittedly, this is an unusual claim given that Nietzsche seems to affirm becoming as the only Being, thus apparently granting it an ontological status. Yet, it has now been made apparent in such claims that Nietzsche is really working his way not toward a description of Being, but a description of what stands between metaphysics and ontology. For Nietzsche, the crucial point is that ontology is not the accurate way to look at the world because ontology is concerned with Being and because Being appears to him as an unattainable challenge. All we have left is the metaphysical two-ness of becoming.

Roughly speaking, metaphysics is concerned with what things are while ontology is concerned with what it is for anything to be. As we know, Nietzsche's chief metaphysical thought is the will to power. It is metaphysical because it describes accurately the things, but it is an ontologically invalid concept because it would not exist outside of the things or, in other

words, once being is attained. In that event, it would disappear for want of an external “thing” to *be* anything against. As such, and as a fundamentally relative concept, requiring two-ness to be valid at all, the will to power is the warrant of becoming. Thus, when Nietzsche claims that becoming and being merge in the thought of eternal recurrence, we can expect it to mean that eternal recurrence brings will to power and being together. If one understands Being as eternal timeliness (as I did above), things become clearer: the ring of becoming takes place within Being, which grants it its being as time, and thereby identifies itself to it, becoming altogether fixed and sequential. This claim of Nietzsche’s offers, as it were by contrast, his theory of the distinction between ontology and metaphysics. By way of its ultimate concept of the will to power, metaphysics is projecting itself toward its own overcoming into ontology. Yet although there is an intrinsic “whither” lying at the bottom of the essence of the will to power, this whither that we identified as directed toward Being (seen as self-identity) remains unattainable. Consequently, the relationship between the metaphysics of becoming (as will to power) and the ontology of time (as timeliness) can only merge within the “approximation” that is eternal recurrence. This is a crucial point: for Nietzsche, becoming cannot lead into being and, alas, becoming is all there is.

Transition: Vicious Circles, Virtuous Circles, and Meeting Merleau-Ponty in the Middle

Between Metaphysics and Ontology

“The earth,” he said, “has a skin; and this skin has diseases. One of these diseases is called, for example, ‘humanity.’”

—Z, II, “On the Great Events”

Nietzsche’s efforts are all directed toward health and against sickness. In this sense, the concept of self-becoming represents the crux of Nietzschean ethics. However, Nietzsche’s fundamental monism envisages both the individual’s self and the very structure of reality as “fate” and it does not allow for any event in the individual to be considered separately from the overall fate of the world itself. The human is the locus of self-differentiation *qua* sickness in the world. As a result, self-becoming attains a cosmological status: by becoming healthy again, man makes the world healthy again. The existence of the human is thus instrumental to the fate of the world, and mankind’s mission is to achieve the self-becoming of the world by overcoming its own sickness. For Nietzsche, this overcoming has everything to do with truth. The very reason that humanity is “the hidden spring in the ‘great clock of being’” (Löwith 1997, 215) is the promise of a new relationship with the world for the human individual—a relationship based on the consubstantiality of man and world, of subject and object, that takes the form of an ontological truth lying beyond intentionality. This means that human health is not by necessity the ultimate Nietzschean value; rather, it is a mere means toward the health of the world, which Nietzsche calls “being.” It is this being that constitutes the ultimate value for Nietzsche.

Still, this value must be reconsidered in light of the impossibility for becoming to ever lead into being. This impossibility, which at the individual level is the impossibility for the ontological truth to be fully attained, is

secured by the necessary existence of sickness in the form of consciousness. What Nietzsche refuses to explain in his original accounts of consciousness (as discussed in Chapter 1) becomes what makes him unable to fully account for a final state: strictly speaking, sickness was never born; it was always already here and, consequently, it will never be totally overcome. This leads Nietzsche to reject any teleological cosmology because the world is not aiming toward any endpoint. Health, however, remains the criterion of value because it may be gradual. Although absolute health is impossible, it remains possible for one to be more or less healthy. The challenge thus becomes to obtain the most health for the world, moving from the formerly envisaged jump into the fully self-identical Being to a question of “how much,” a question of degree echoing the question posed at the end of Chapters 1 and 2.

The resulting worldview is torn between being and becoming, the latter standing for the only reality there actually is, and the former for its unattainable—yet structurally unavoidable—horizon (Nietzsche’s formula for this is “eternal recurrence”). This involves a characterization of becoming as metaphysics: becoming is determined by the existence of opposition. Here lies Nietzsche’s ultimate vision of the relationship between becoming and Being and, further, of the relationship between metaphysics and ontology: in the same way as subject and object are abstractions drawn from the asymptotic structure of intentionality, Being is represented through becoming but it is not thereby established. The human therefore holds in her hands more than the fate of Being (its movement toward self-identity), she holds its essence as self-differentiation.

What I called above “ontological truth” must in the final analysis be reformulated. For Nietzsche, self-becoming does not offer us Being as an object of knowledge, but instead it offers us ontological truth in flesh and blood, in our existence. We can now clarify in what sense existence becomes a means of knowledge. We know from Chapter 2 that self-becoming makes one fully healthy (Nietzsche calls this the “great health”; *GS*, 382; *EH*, “Books,” 2). We also know from Chapter 3 that self-becoming involves that we “become one with Being.” However, we know from Chapter 2 that health means power, that power is always actually discharged, and that the name of this discharge is incorporation. In short, being at one with being means incorporating and nothing else. As a consequence, it becomes clear that Nietzsche envisages Being as none other than incorporation: Being is in fact the process of incorporation, a process that, as I argued in Chapter 1, is first and foremost a process of falsification.

This should place us in a position to address two possible objections to the reading of Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty I am presenting here. I believe

these may be addressed—at least in a preliminary fashion—even before turning to a close examination of Merleau-Ponty’s ontological thought. These two objections would come from either a Deleuzian or a Heideggerian angle.

Although Deleuze’s philosophy arguably owes much to Merleau-Ponty, it seems the rare texts where Deleuze enters a dialogue with his former teacher are polemical. In his Foucault book, for example, Deleuze reproaches Merleau-Ponty for putting forward some sort of idolatry of being akin to what he diagnoses in Heidegger’s philosophy as well. Of greater concern to us is Deleuze’s claim that it is precisely this idolatry that makes Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty opposite figures. To Deleuze, we must regard the field as structured by the opposition of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty on the one hand and Foucault and Nietzsche (and, one can assume, Deleuze himself) on the other. He asks about Foucault:

In what ways is he similar to and different from Heidegger? We can evaluate them only by taking as our point of departure Foucault’s break with phenomenology in the “vulgar” sense of the word: with intentionality. The idea that consciousness is directed towards the thing and gains significance in the world is precisely what Foucault refuses to believe. In fact, intentionality is created in order to surpass any psychologism or naturalism, but it invents a new psychologism and a new naturalism to the point where, as Merleau-Ponty himself says, it can hardly be distinguished from a “learning” process. It restores the psychologism that synthesizes consciousness and significations, a naturalism of the “savage experience” and of the thing, of the aimless existence of the thing in the world. (Deleuze 1999, 89)¹

So Deleuze takes phenomenological intentionality to be object-directed in the sense of object-affirming—arguably a wild misreading of at least the whole of Merleau-Ponty’s writings since the foreword to *PP*—to the point that he interprets Merleau-Ponty’s mention of a learning process (which is meant as an expression of the self-constituting of the world) as referring to the acquisition of some supposed objective knowledge. Further, Deleuze develops this reading to associate Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger as thinkers of a being that surpasses metaphysics into a theory of the fold by overlooking the possibilities of immanence:

In Heidegger, and then in Merleau-Ponty, the surpassing of intentionality tended towards Being, the fold of Being. From intentionality to the fold, from being to Being, from phenomenology to ontology. (Deleuze 1999, 90)

The problem with this Heideggerian (and, Deleuze thinks, Merleau-Pontian) move lies in its pacifying tendencies, which Deleuze expresses as a loss of the lesson contained in Nietzsche's metaphysics of power:

Heidegger is Nietzsche's potential, but not the other way around, and Nietzsche did not see his own potential fulfilled. It was necessary to recover force, in the Nietzschean sense, or power in the very particular sense of the "will to power," to discover this outside as limit, the last point before Being folds. (Deleuze 1999, 93)

As we shall see in Chapter 4, this concern to recover this particular "point before Being folds"—a point I discuss under the heading "folding"—is crucial to Merleau-Ponty precisely against Heidegger and it constitutes one of the connections between Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche. It seems that Deleuze doubles out a correct description of the tensions between Nietzsche and Heidegger with an incorrect conflation of Merleau-Ponty with Heidegger. Regardless of Deleuze's more or less verifiable arguable misreadings of Merleau-Ponty, we might wish to retain the idea that the line of demarcation between Nietzsche and Heidegger is the question of the fullness of Being, and it is with reference to this line of demarcation that we must decide to which camp Merleau-Ponty would belong. This leads us to the other possible objection announced above, that coming from the Heideggerian side. It will soon become apparent how addressing the Heideggerian objection allows one to address the Deleuzian one.

In his *Holzwege*, as well as in his lecture course on Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger exposes the view that Nietzsche represents the end of metaphysics as its culmination. This grants Nietzsche a privileged position within metaphysics but it also entails that his philosophy must be overcome alongside metaphysics. Both Nietzsche and Heidegger conceive of metaphysics as a "two-world" theory structured by the opposition of subject and object (Müller-Lauter 1999, 122, 130, 218), and Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche relies heavily on Nietzsche's repeated affirmation that Being is will to power. In fact, I have myself construed the will to power as a principle that does not permit us to go through and beyond metaphysics. It is, in my view too, "only" a metaphysical concept. For Heidegger, however, the will to power is Nietzsche's only attempt at ontology, one that remains within metaphysics to the point that Heidegger assumes that Nietzsche knows how to say "being" only in the metaphysical sense: "'Being'" for Nietzsche "thinks being as a whole [*das Seiende im Ganzen*]. We call such a thought 'metaphysical'" (Heidegger 1991, 2: 184). From this understanding of Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power, Heidegger goes on to deny that Nietzsche had any awareness of the "question of Being." It is not the

place here to engage in depth Heidegger's position; however, what has been said hitherto can help reexamine a few of his postulates.

The first remark we must make is that, paradoxically, Heidegger seems to be overlooking the role of the question of time in Nietzsche's philosophy. I have argued above that Nietzsche's reflections on time led to a profound reevaluation of the relationships between being and becoming. More important, I have claimed that the question of being and becoming led Nietzsche to the question of Being: precisely because Nietzsche understands becoming as will to power and will to power as metaphysics, he is led to offer an account of the non-metaphysical. Because the will to power is unable to account for its own ultimate achievement (a totally unified and healthy world) Nietzsche becomes acquainted with the idea that Being is the background against which all events (as beings) unfold. This coexistence of ontology and metaphysics in Nietzsche's thought bears the name "eternal recurrence." Here the originality of Nietzsche's thought surfaces and shows him to have arguably gone one step further than Heidegger believes, for Nietzsche contends that being and becoming merge into eternal recurrence only as an approximation.²

Let us pause here. Heidegger reads in Nietzsche's thought of *amor fati* a genuine ontological questioning (Heidegger 1991, 2: 216) but, he complains, Nietzsche's philosophy does not live up to this thought. Heidegger rightly interprets *amor fati* as the effective identification of self and Being. In terms of my discussion so far, this amounts to the attainment of ontological truth through self-becoming. Heidegger thinks that one must locate the culmination of Nietzsche's philosophy in this thought, but he regrets that Nietzsche forgets this thought in his later texts and returns to an imperfect view of our relations with Being. As I have argued, eternal recurrence is the name of this failed relationship. Nietzsche understands that Being cannot be envisaged from the point of view of a world of becoming. Still, the world of becoming is the world all subjects are actually embedded in. For Nietzsche, unlike Heidegger, Being is a challenge; it is not always already here. Our response to Heidegger hence takes an unusual form: yes, Nietzsche refuses to do ontology in the Heideggerian sense, but no, it is not because he overlooks the question of Being but because he considers this question to be irrelevant as long as Being is not achieved. It is inauthentic to view inauthenticity from an authentic point of view. It is not Nietzsche's thought that locks us up into metaphysics as a way of thinking, but rather the world as metaphysics itself.³ For Heidegger, Nietzsche represents the moment where "the *essential possibilities* of metaphysics are exhausted" (Heidegger 1991, 4: 148). Nietzsche would read this as the end of chaos, an idealization indeed.

In fact, for Nietzsche neither metaphysics nor ontology is of great importance, only mundane reality (or in Heidegger's language "being as a whole") is. Therefore, the question has to be reformulated: Which of metaphysics and ontology is most able to account for reality? It is obvious that reality strives toward Being, but it is also obvious that it fails, locking itself up into metaphysics. In a sense then, metaphysics is the only true way of looking at the world because the world is itself metaphysical and structured by the subject-object distinction. Indeed, Nietzsche's position is strikingly radical insofar as it shows the structure of the world to be affected by how the human views it.⁴ If the human sees things in a metaphysical way, it is because she is sick, and because the human is sick, the world itself is sick, split between subject and object, metaphysical, and the human is proven right to see the world metaphysically.⁵

However, one must admit that this metaphysics itself is structured around a horizon constituted by Being. This puts Nietzsche in opposition to both traditional metaphysics (that sees Being as a fixed thing or collection of things) and modern ontology (which considers Being as the background against which everything that is *is*, and not as a challenge). If Nietzsche refuses to do ontology, it is not because he was unable to come out of metaphysics, but rather because he was able to come out of both metaphysics and ontology, and consider reality as being delineated by the space separating them.

The vantage point from which Nietzsche's view is formulated constitutes a new philosophical ground. Modern ontology, in Heidegger's sense, has overcome the dualities that constituted the foundation of traditional metaphysics. In so doing, it has established the duality of metaphysics and ontology. Nietzsche's task, as I have attempted to present it above, seeks to overcome this new duality itself. The impossibility of Being *qua* self-identical Being is constituted by the irreducible self-differentiation at the heart of human existence, what we may call a "quantum of sickness." This quantum of sickness is presented as the reversibility of the subject-object relations that I have described in Chapter 1. For Nietzsche, this reversibility is the essence of reality. Heidegger, however, thinks that "we must grasp Nietzsche's philosophy as the metaphysics of absolute subjectivity." I think that this is the crucial mistake in Heidegger's account: for Nietzsche, it is not the subject but intentionality itself that is first. In my discussion of Poellner and others' idealist readings of Nietzsche in Chapter 1, I insisted that Nietzsche conceives of the subject as secondary. Univocity and self-identity arise as fictions from this unstable ground. Yet, this very arising, which I called self-falsification, is the essence of this reversibility. To be sure, this places the human subject in a crucial position within reality but

only insofar as she is what this falsification is *for*. Being falsifies itself in the eyes of the human subjects. This poses what Merleau-Ponty calls the problem of a “genuine ‘in-itself’ for us.” Because reality is intentional, it is “for us” but because it is anterior to us (which it constitutes), it is “in-itself.”

In Chapter 3, I have sought to draw the cosmological consequences of this point from Chapter 1. The essence of the will to power lies in opposition, and in this sense, self-identity is unattainable. Self-identity is impossible insofar as all reality is will to power and the essence of the will to power is differentiation through opposition. Nietzsche implicitly places an opposition here, or—to use the terms of Chapter 1—he places a resistance as the grounding principle behind the will to power. There is no will to power without resistance. Resistance is not a consequence of the will to power; it is its essence (*WP*, 533).⁶

This leads us to Heidegger’s other complaint. For him, Nietzsche’s metaphysical outlook commits him to providing “ways of being” in place of “Being.” What was said hitherto should address this claim: *ways to be is all there is*. Nietzsche’s ontology takes stock of the impossibility of complete self-becoming or of the inability for becoming to “flow into Being.” These two impossibilities are really one and the same, since we now know that anthropological and ontological self-identity are coincidental. The integration of the fact of this impossibility within Nietzsche’s ontology transforms the way we must conceive of Being: Being can no longer be thought of as an object of knowledge, or even of experience. It is no longer what we must rejoin; it is the rejoining itself. Nietzsche’s account avoids this duality between Being and ways of being. It does so not—as Heidegger believes—by proposing the beingness of beings (while forgetting about Being), but by proposing Being as way to be. This is repeatedly asserted after 1886 and the enigmatic preface of *GS*: “We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn.” Here, and elsewhere, Nietzsche means that Being must be represented as represented because only in representation do Being and its way to be coincide.

Here, the problem of truth regains prominence. In Nietzsche’s view, the phenomenon of truth exemplifies these two aspects of reality by representing it as unrepresented. It does so inaccurately, however. Because truth presents itself as compelling, Nietzsche understands that it denotes an authentic experience, but because it transforms indeterminate experience into determinate objects, it is inaccurate. Yet this inaccuracy is uncovered by truth itself, which reflects upon itself in a self-undercutting movement. This entails a certain doubling out of the very doubling out of self-differentiation: reality is self-differentiation (first doubling out), which presents itself as different from itself (i.e., as self-identical) in truth

discourses (second doubling out). Truth, in turn, presents itself again as self-differentiation (falsification of the perceptual faith) when it undercuts itself (separating itself from this falsification). Is this common structure shared by truth and reality a mere coincidence? Hardly. In fact, it is apparent that the self-differentiated structure of human existence and the self-differentiated structure of the reality that constituted it are coincidental. This is valid at the level of the constitution of the self (Chapter 1) as well as the cosmological level (Chapter 3). All this gives an ontological value to truth. Truth represents the essence of reality as self-falsification: reality falsifies itself through truth, and self-falsification is all there is. For Nietzsche, once again, Being is the movement of truth as falsification.

The Ambiguities of Ontological Phenomenology: Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty

From the point of view of Heidegger's ontology, therefore, Nietzsche's position is ambiguous. This ambiguity itself is ambiguous because it is both "good" and "bad" ambiguity. The "bad" ambiguity is best illustrated by the circularity of Nietzsche's argument for self-differentiation. It is now apparent that the self-differentiation we found at the heart of the self in Chapter 1 coincides with the self-differentiation we encountered in Chapter 3 at the cosmological and even (in the sense defined above) ontological levels. Yet "coincidence" is too vague a word. It seems to cover two possible senses. First, this coincidence may denote the central role of the self for the structure of Being: Being is self-differentiated because the self is self-differentiated, and consequently Being is constituted by the self. This is supported by Nietzsche's unification of perception and apperception and of consciousness and self-consciousness. Second, and conversely, it may signify that Being (as will to power) determines the structure of the self as self-differentiation. In the first case, the thought of the will to power would be posterior to the definition of the self as self-differentiation. In this case, one finds the will to power to be an explanation of the self-opposition within selves and the opposition between organisms (and, therefore, of self-consciousness and consciousness). In the second case, the will to power is posited first and the self-opposition of the self becomes formulated in accordance to it. The vagueness of the term "coincidence" to describe the relation between the structure of the self and the structure of Being requires clarifications in terms of anteriority: Which of the two determines the other? The consequences are bound to be significant: if we grant priority to the structure of the self, we will take the path of a phenomenological ontology. This is because in this case, Being shall be structured by the

nature of the self and of its relations with other beings. In the other case, we will be dragged back into some metaphysics of the will to power of the kind Heidegger suspected. As Leonard Lawlor writes:

In Heidegger's eyes, beings still determine Nietzsche's fundamental metaphysical position; the most basic principle of Nietzsche's thinking—the will to power—still revolves around the being. Such a beginning in the Being implies that his thinking remains firmly entrenched in Platonism. (Lawlor 2003b, 97)

Nietzsche, to my knowledge, does not provide any explicit answer to the question of which of beings (selves and perceptual objects) or Being precedes the other. One can find moments in his writings that hint in either direction. As I mentioned earlier, Zarathustra first presents the will to power as a literally meta-physical (or meta-biological) discovery; it qualifies everything that has “life.” No problematization of the subject who makes such a discovery can be found there. However, it is clear that the critique of the subject, which I have discussed in Chapter 1, makes the will to power anterior to the subject itself, as the only necessary candidate for Being.

This ambiguity may be conceived as “good” ambiguity if we take it to be an acknowledgment of the interdependence between beings and Being. In this view, which informs my reading of Nietzsche, this ambiguity reveals the need for us to unify phenomenology and ontology. Let me clarify this. On the one hand, Nietzsche overcomes metaphysics in a way more radical than Heidegger seems to have considered because it overcomes the dialectic of representation and the structure of objectivity. On the other hand, however, it refuses to provide any account of Being outside of experience, that is to say, outside of *the* beings. This ambiguity questions both Being and ontology in a single gesture. For Nietzsche, the question of Being involves the question of the relationship of the beings (and, in particular, the sentient beings) to Being. This relationship, of course, being instantiated in every perceptual and intentional act, is the object of study of phenomenology. It is, however, also instantiated in ontology since ontology is one of the ways we relate to Being. This means that if it is to truly be worthy of its name, ontology must include a phenomenology of ontology, and this opens the space for an original philosophy.

These are the two ambiguities that Nietzsche leaves us pondering. If Nietzsche is to remain a driving force for philosophy, we must find a way to make the “good” ambiguity triumph. In order to do so, we must ask two questions: a) What are the relations between the beings and Being? Can one, like Zarathustra, discover the essence of Being by observing the beings? And if so, what does it imply for the primacy of Being? And b) Is

it possible to do a phenomenology which would at the same time be an ontology? Of course, it is only by finding a way of answering these two questions by the affirmative that Nietzsche's philosophy can justify the interest that modernity has set aside for it. In the other case, Nietzsche is merely the end of an obsolete metaphysics.

The project of answering these two questions affirmatively defines the scope of Merleau-Ponty's investigation. In a work he describes as his "Merleau-Ponty book," Leonard Lawlor notes (in ways strongly reminiscent of Deleuze) that "Merleau-Ponty's ontologization of phenomenology" was implemented "following Heidegger's ontologization of phenomenology" (Lawlor 2003b, 97; see also Deleuze 1999, 87, quoted above). The reason why Merleau-Ponty's "ontologization of phenomenology" is not (as Deleuze and Lawlor believe) a mere repetition of Heidegger's, however, is his disagreement with Heidegger on the question of the primacy of Being over the beings. For Merleau-Ponty, there is a sense in which it is possible to place the beings before Being. This disagreement between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty connects to the point of conflict between Heidegger and Nietzsche: for Heidegger, Nietzsche places being before the Beings, and therefore, misses the chance to provide an authentic ontology. This, we can now see, follows only if the "bad" ambiguity of Nietzsche's account proves ineradicable. In my reading, Merleau-Ponty's project allows us to conceive of a philosophy where this ambiguity becomes clarified. Merleau-Ponty famously encounters Nietzsche's "*circulus vitiosus Deus*" in his own philosophy (VI, 179/231). As I shall argue in the next chapter, he saw this circle as a representation of the crossing of the logical and ontological orders to which his "intra-ontology" commits him. Contrary to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty accepts the anteriority of the beings over Being, even if in a sense only. In his intra-ontology that seeks "Being in the beings," Being is granted ontological priority, as the essence of the beings, but it is, logically speaking, accessible only through the beings and, therefore, it is in that sense posterior to them. This distinction between the two orders, the logical and the ontological, as is apparent from my discussion so far, is absent in Nietzsche. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Merleau-Ponty's guiding question is the enigma of "an in-itself for us." This question, in short, summarizes what Lawlor calls Merleau-Ponty's "ontologization of phenomenology." There is some hope, therefore, that Merleau-Ponty might provide us with some clarifications of the question raised by Nietzsche's ambiguous relationship with ontology.

In fact, the two questions are correlative: Merleau-Ponty's clarification of the circle we found in Nietzsche as the opposition of the logical and the ontological orders does not alleviate the tension between metaphysics

(which considers beings) and ontology (which considers Being) because it affirms the interdependence between beings and Being. As is well-known, Merleau-Ponty's solution is to establish a ground that stands, as he writes, "half-way" between a thing and an idea and that he calls an "element." Under the name of "flesh" this element will constitute the object of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. This half-thing, which stands in the middle between the ontic and the ontological, offers new insight into the ambiguity that constitutes the heart of both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty's concerns. Indeed, this middle ground between Being and the beings is the point of encounter between the two thinkers.

Nietzsche's ambiguous relationship to ontology, which goes beyond the ontic but falls short of affirming Being as the object of its investigations, is echoed by Merleau-Ponty's "intra-ontology," which locates its object in the interstice between metaphysics and ontology. We may therefore find in the difference between Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's "ontologizations of phenomenology," a distinction that echoes the difference I have discussed between Nietzsche and Heidegger, and that clarifies the kinship between Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche. They stand alongside each other in the double movement that takes the thinking subject from the beings to Being and that makes beings arise from Being.⁷ It is this position of Merleau-Ponty's that I shall seek to examine in order to dissipate the bad ambiguity in Nietzsche's worldview while bringing to prominence its good ambiguity: it is no longer confusion on Nietzsche's part to affirm the essence of the will to power as structuring the self or vice-versa. Thanks to Merleau-Ponty, it will become apparent that this ambiguity reflects the necessary conjunction of Being and phenomena (or the beings) within a truly phenomenological ontology.

The Origin of Truth

What is it in us that really wants the “truth”? It is true that we paused for a long time to question the origin of this will.

—Nietzsche, *BGE*, 1

Merleau-Ponty’s masterwork *The Visible and the Invisible* was originally to be entitled *The Origin of Truth* (*P2*, 44; *SNS*, 97n15/118n2) or *Genealogy of Truth*. For Merleau-Ponty, the question of the origin of truth synthesized both the critical and the positive aspects of his project. Finding the origin of truth meant finding what the truth criticized by phenomenology was a falsification *of*. It also meant finding what object we now must assign to our philosophical endeavors. Finally, it meant finding the authentic truth expressed (wrongly) by the objective truth of traditional philosophy. As I have argued in Chapter 2, Nietzsche too reads the phenomenon of truth as the sign of an authentic experience. It is no longer enough to reject truth for its errors since the very belief in truth points to an experience of reality that we must retrieve. For Merleau-Ponty as well, critique should not be mere rejection but recuperation:

If reflection is to justify itself as reflection, that is to say, as progress towards the truth, it must not merely put one view of the world in place of another, it must show us how the naive view of the world is included in and transcended by the sophisticated one. Reflection must elucidate the unreflective view which it supersedes, and show the possibility of this latter, in order to comprehend itself as a beginning. (*PP*, 213/247)

Facing the same problem, Nietzsche turns to genealogy (*HATH*, 1; *BGE*, 2) and so does Merleau-Ponty. For Nietzsche, the origin of truth determines

the range of possible events (Chapter 1). For Merleau-Ponty also: “Genesis properly understood must exhibit a relation to the whole” (*N*, 292–93).

Even if the full-scale project of an inquiry into the origin of truth comes to the fore in the preparatory work to the late *VI*, it is by no means the first occurrence of such reflections in Merleau-Ponty’s writings. In 1947’s “The Metaphysical in Man,” written immediately after the publication of *PP*, Merleau-Ponty announces in a footnote that an important task shall be the following:

To give a precise description of the passage of perceptual faith into explicit truth as we encounter it at the level of language, concept, and the cultural world. We intend to do so in a work entitled “the Origin of Truth.” (*SNS*, 94/115)

Accordingly, *VI* locates the origin of truth in what he calls “perceptual faith” and declares that it is the forgotten object of any authentic search for truth; it is the originary reality. Let me stress that for Merleau-Ponty nothing, especially not “objective reality,” is anterior to perceptual faith. This means that even our most primary encounter with the world involves distance, a certain *aboutness* that grants a pre-predicative dimension to our experience: perceiving X is always also affirming X to be true. This pre-objective belief is, strictly speaking, the experience of truth (this is emphatically *not* to say that it is a true experience). Before calling it “perceptual faith” in *VI*, Merleau-Ponty defines it as an originary form of certainty in 1947’s *IS*:

Certainty is, on the contrary, a prerequisite for analyses and perception: it is certainty that makes them possible. This experience of truth must be there first. If I call it into question, my search for truth loses all meaning. (74/66)

Let me insist on this expression: certainty is the “experience of truth.” By tying truth to an experience, Merleau-Ponty establishes that one can make a phenomenology even of truth.¹ This will be his ambition in *VI*.

This faith or certainty is necessarily contained in all perceptions because perceptions present their objects as external to us, as being at a distance from us: “The distinction between appearance and reality immediately [*d’emblée*] has its place in the perceptual ‘synthesis’” (*PP*, 432/376, t.a.). This distance is described by Merleau-Ponty as a certain “zone of subjectivity” standing between the subject and the object of perception, and thereby maintaining their link (this will be examined below). Even though reversibility will be thematized more rigorously in *VI*, it is clear as early as *PP* that this zone of subjectivity is reversible: it is alternately located be-

tween self and world (in perception), or within the self (in apperception). This zone, which is as primary as perception (it is its condition), places differentiation at the heart of being.

In this chapter, I will present some preparatory—and relatively uncontroversial—remarks on Merleau-Ponty's account of the "Origin of Truth" in his works from the forties. Although most of the ideas from these works were re-elaborated in the later works, it is a good test of the structural importance of these claims that they appear prominently in the earlier works too. My aim is to clarify the structural role played by the zone of subjectivity in the structure of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. First, I shall give an account of the place of the zone of subjectivity in Merleau-Ponty's analyses of perception. I shall insist on the fact that it construes perception as what Merleau-Ponty calls the "open infinity of the perceptive process" (*NL*, 330), that is to say, a temporal process of infinite determination. Second, in the same way as I have emphasized the role of the originary "inner world" Nietzsche sees stretching "as between two layers of skin" in *GM*, II, 16, I will focus on the way the zone of subjectivity secures the impossibility of an end of history and how it structures it asymptotically by precluding the attainment of self-identity in being. Like Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty believes that the distance represented by the zone of subjectivity has ontological importance. It is eternal and informs all possibilities. He writes in striking language: "There is a transtemporality which is not idealistic, it is that of the deepest, incurable wound" (*PW*, 63).²

The Zone of Subjectivity

If perceptual faith is the origin of truth, this places the zone of subjectivity at the center of our question because, as I have discussed, it informs the structure of perception as including perceptual faith. For Merleau-Ponty:

To see an object is either to have it on the fringe of the visual field and be able to concentrate on it, or else to actually respond to this summoning by concentrating upon it. When I do concentrate my eyes on it, I become anchored in it, but this coming to rest of the gaze is merely a modality of its movement: I continue inside one object the exploration which earlier hovered over them all, and in one movement I close up the landscape and open the object. The two operations do not coincide fortuitously. (*PP*, 67/81, t.a.)

Here, Merleau-Ponty presents the structure of perception under two key aspects that are correlated intrinsically: distance and dynamics. When the distance seems abolished (in the anchorage of my glance into the object),

the glance is not stopped. Instead, it continues internally the movement it was performing externally. Or so it seems. If Merleau-Ponty maintains the language of movement for the new form of inquiry taking place here, we should not be mistaken: the spatial movement that transcended distance has now become a temporal gesture. Perception is shown in the play of mutual solicitation of the object and the subject, a dialogue that involves intentionality and, therefore, a certain distance. This distance precludes transparency between the subject and the object of perception, and this non-transparency translates into the indeterminacy of perception. The very structure of perception is non-completeness and this elemental indeterminacy provides the milieu of a quest for greater determinacy. This quest, being grounded in the structure of perception itself, cannot abolish the distance that makes it possible. As a consequence, we must understand this distance to ensure that the act of perception will never come to a stop. It is these two features of perception—its indeterminacy and its temporality—that we must examine.

PP, PriP, and SNS on the “Prospective Activity” of Perception (P2, 38)

Perception has a paradoxical structure. As a relation, it dwells in distance but aims at union; as Françoise Dastur says, “the distance that separates us from Being is also what attaches us to it” (Dastur 1993, 32). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty writes:

Such indeed is our initial situation: we feel ourselves to be the indispensable correlative of a being which nevertheless resides in itself. Such is the *contradiction which links us* to the object. (*SNS*, 73/91, my emphasis)³

There can be perception only if the perceiver and the perceived are external to each other: presence and absence are conditions of each other and find stability and determinacy in no middle term. Merleau-Ponty’s insight is precisely to interpret this “contradiction” as a relation.⁴ This move allows for the reestablishment of some commensurability between presence and absence without yet reducing one to the other or both to a third common term. It opens up the possibility of what Merleau-Ponty calls a “zone of subjectivity” (*PP*, 212/246),⁵ that is to say, a distance that is the condition of possibility of the relation and the impossibility of identity. Yet, the paradox of relation remains: distance is maintained, as it were, in minor, as a function of the closeness within the structure of perception, and also as an obstacle to pure presence that Merleau-Ponty defines as absolute determination. This absence of absolute determination implies that we only

ever interact with degrees of reality, but never with a pure, wholesome reality: “There are degrees of reality within us as there are, outside of us, ‘reflections,’ ‘phantoms’ and ‘things’” (*PP*, 378/433). If perception is indeed transcendence, that is if we do not reduce perception to either apperception or a purely mechanical reflex, then it becomes clear that the perceived thing must remain distant from the perceiver while still remaining accessible (*PP*, 377/432).⁶ This is the paradox that the evanescent character of perceptual reality serves to solve. If I can have access to only “degrees of being” this means that I may have an imperfect access to objects, and thus, that one may conceive of perception as a relation in both senses of the term, that of link and that of distance.

This “imperfection” is grounded in two forms of indeterminacy. First, and drawing from the very structure of perception as transcendence, there is what we may call a qualitative indeterminacy, which accounts for the evanescence of perception itself or rather, that allows us to see perception as essentially evanescent. Indeed, it would be absurd to think of this evanescence as a limitation or as a failed perception; instead, it is its nature of “intentional act” to be indeterminate because perception and absolute determination are contradictory: “The absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness,” writes Merleau-Ponty in *PP* (71/86).⁷

The Teleology of Determinacy

Consciousness—that is to say, perception—feeds on indeterminacy; yet, and this is crucial, this very indeterminacy maintains consciousness alive only insofar as it is the milieu of its movement toward determinacy. In a famous passage, Merleau-Ponty describes the experience of the state of indeterminacy:

If I walk along a shore towards a ship which has run aground, and the funnel or mast merges into the forest bordering on the sand dune, there will be a moment when these details suddenly become part of the ship, and indissolubly fuse with it. As I approached, I did not perceive resemblances or proximities which finally came together to form a continuous picture of the upper part of the ship. I merely felt that the look of the object was on the point of altering, that something was imminent in this tension, as a storm is imminent in storm clouds. Suddenly the sight before me was recast in a manner satisfying to my vague expectation. (*PP*, 20/24)

The movement toward determinacy feels itself incomplete, which results in a tension that can only be overcome in the satisfaction of final determi-

nacy. This helps characterize further the zone of subjectivity: because it is an ambiguous milieu, this very zone aims beyond itself and cannot find rest. The essential unachievement of perception due to this zone expresses itself as a quest: the desire for determinacy is not superadded to perception; instead, it is its nature.

This teleological structure also includes the dimension of temporality. Our perception, being always local, operates through “perspectives,” structures that give us a restricted access to the object.⁸ This indeterminacy can only be solved by gathering a larger number of different perspectives of the same object, or as Merleau-Ponty says, by turning around it.⁹ Here, the quest for determinacy clearly involves temporality because it involves movement (*PP*, 83).¹⁰ The original paradox of perception finds yet another expression in the paradox of a necessary indeterminate perception seeking full determinacy (i.e., seeking to overcome itself). Like in Nietzsche, this paradox is solved by transferring the tension that opposes teleology and its impossibility into teleology itself. Merleau-Ponty achieves this by borrowing the synthezizing notion of “horizon” from Husserl.¹¹ A “horizon” is the name of an unattainable object of quest, which accounts for both its unattainability and the directionality it provides as representing a “goal.” As such, it provides structure to a dynamic without having to be proven real or attainable¹² and introduces a new intentionality that does not establish its object as such, but only its own directionality toward it. In the case of perception, the concept of horizon opposes the objectivity of scientific inquiry, which has a project not structured by a horizon, but by a fully determined object understood as attainable. For Merleau-Ponty, the horizon is indeed the fully determinate object, but it is itself understood as a horizontal synthesis of horizons. In other words, the “world” is an imperfect synthesis of imperfect objects in opposition to the “universe” of the scientists:

Thus the positing of one single object, in the full sense, demands the compositive bringing into being of all these experiences in one act of manifold creation. Therein it exceeds perceptual experience and the synthesis of horizons—as the notion of a universe, that is to say, a completed and explicit totality, in which the relationships are those of reciprocal determination, exceeds that of a world, or an open and indefinite multiplicity of relationships which are of reciprocal implication. (*PP*, 71/85)¹³

We are now in a better position to understand the status of perceptual faith and its relations with the zone of subjectivity. In fact, perceptual faith may just as well be read as “faithful perception” since we now know how

the very structure of perception is the structure of faith and vice versa. Indeed, we have seen how perception involves both the affirmation of distance and of proximity, the maintaining and problematization of the subject-object distinction and the very structure of certainty and confusion (as satisfaction and indeterminacy).

The Pre-Objective

Yet, there is a nuance in the word “faith” [*la foi*] that involves a distinction from “knowledge,” or even “certainty.” Faith is the germ of knowledge, like the subject-object distinction is the germ of the subject-object divide. Faith is the experience of truth. Thus, it is the origin of the search for, belief in, and concept of knowledge. Merleau-Ponty somewhat problematically expresses this relation on the mode of the “pre-”: faith is a pre-knowledge like perception is “pre-objective” (*PP*, 12/14, 79/92),¹⁴ “pre-thetic,” “pre-conceptual,” or “pre-linguistic.” The use of the prefix “pre-” implies a transitional concept. To take up an analogy used by Merleau-Ponty himself, in the same fashion as Freud’s topic of personality places the unconscious between the “organism” and “ourselves as a chain of deliberate acts” as its ground, Merleau-Ponty places the pre-objective as a ground and a justification for the objective (*S*, 229/374).¹⁵ Yet, the pre-objective remains a transitional concept insofar as it is wholly directed toward its own ekstasis into the objective as horizon:

There is an *opinion* which is not a provisional form of knowledge destined to give way later to an absolute form of knowledge, but on the contrary, both the oldest or most rudimentary, and the most conscious or mature form of knowledge—an opinion which is primary in the double sense of “originary” and “*fundamental*.” This is what calls up before us *something in general*, which positing thought [*la pensée thétique*]—doubt or demonstration—can subsequently relate to in affirmation or denial. (*PP*, 396–97/454, t.a.)

The pre-objective is this whose destiny is the objective and it progresses toward it through the dynamics of determination I have described above. So one may locate the origin of truth in the realm of the pre-objective: it is pre-objective knowledge that necessarily becomes objective knowledge.

The problem of the origin of truth, then, becomes to understand the process by which the “pre-objective” has been turned into the objective. In a certain way, it is obvious that there is a dimension of fallacy in the assumption of a transitional realm. In fact, Merleau-Ponty himself opposes the Zeno-like attitude that multiplies the discrete points to explain a tran-

sition that can only be expressed outside of the discrete. In *PP* he writes: “If we want to take the phenomenon of movement seriously, we shall need to conceive a world which is not made up only of things, but which has in it also pure transitions” (*PP*, 275/318). This suggests that we should read the concept of the pre-objective not as referring to a new intermediary instance but to a “pure transition.” Yet, it is clear that the concept of the pre-objective can only deliver solutions if it counts as a solidified and discrete element. Otherwise, it will merely remain the name of a problem. We are thus permitted to worry as to whether the transition between the pre-objective and the objective is any easier than the transition between the objective and subjective worlds stipulated by both naturalism and intellectualism. Of course, as I mentioned in passing, this problem is postulated by Merleau-Ponty’s very project that is to place the ambiguity of perception at the heart of a new philosophy, forcing one to choose between inconceivable concepts (“pure transition”) or unrealizable concepts (discrete entities). Yet, unlike the other ambiguous concept examined above, the concept of the pre-objective is not a synthetic concept that unifies the opposites within itself. In fact, it seems to be an analytic one that extracts the relation between perception and objective thought and takes it away from them by the very act of naming it.¹⁶

The reason for this move on Merleau-Ponty’s part is subject to debate. Renaud Barbaras makes the strong case that Merleau-Ponty remains trapped in the conceptual framework of the very intellectualism he seeks to oppose and he locates the core of this problem in Merleau-Ponty’s use of the “phenomenological cogito” in *PP* (Barbaras 1998, 160–83).¹⁷ Indeed, the answer to the question of whether the pre-objective can be understood as pure transition or as a discrete entity must pass through an examination of the role of the cogito. This is because, if Barbaras is right, the “phenomenological cogito,” by giving priority to the subject’s body, commits Merleau-Ponty to a traditional account of intentionality in terms of intellect and matter.

It is clear from the working notes of *VI* that Merleau-Ponty relinquishes his phenomenological cogito (I will return to this) and it is just as clear that Barbaras is right to see the affirmation of the cogito (albeit arguably reworked by Merleau-Ponty to the point of inconsequentiality) as revealing some “awkwardness” in *PP* (Barbaras 1998, 180). Furthermore, Barbaras is right to point out that the cogito reveals a tension that is constitutive of the whole of *PP*. According to him, this tension stems from the inadequacy of Merleau-Ponty’s concepts to the consequences of his thoughts.¹⁸ These consequences, Barbaras thinks, remain unthought by Merleau-Ponty because of his obsolete conceptual framework. If Merleau-

Ponty uses the conceptual field that he seeks to oppose, it could be for one of two reasons: Barbaras's view is that Merleau-Ponty is still victim of a constraining philosophical tradition to which he borrows his concepts for want of better ones but ends up trapped in them. It must, however, be stressed that Merleau-Ponty considered his project to be a rejuvenation of traditional metaphysics (this is also why he concerns himself with the question of truth: we must know what is the true experience that traditional metaphysics wrongly expresses). His reappraisal of the cogito may probably be read in a more charitable manner as a questioning of the truth hidden within the false cogito. This question is of some significance with regard to our inquiry into Merleau-Ponty's treatment of truth for it highlights his basic attitude toward it: the traditional project of philosophy is to problematize and seek truth. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty's project is deeply traditional. However, it is clear to Merleau-Ponty that philosophy has come to a critical point in its history where the discrepancy between this spirit (the experience of truth *qua* perceptual faith) and the traditional methods (those of intellectualism and empiricism) used to attain it has become so great that one must make a choice between the two. For Merleau-Ponty the traditional concept of truth contains some authenticity that is now choked under inauthentic determinations and must be retrieved. It is precisely this movement of retrieval that Merleau-Ponty calls the archaeology into the "origins" of truth.

So, if Merleau-Ponty takes over the questions of the tradition, he nonetheless seeks to liberate himself from its form, which was always the focus of his critique.¹⁹ According to him, this form is defined by the alternative of intellectualism and realism. Barbaras's account rests on his general contention that in *PP*, Merleau-Ponty sees naturalism as an avatar of intellectualism. This reduces the field of action of *PP* to a critique of intellectualism and its offspring (including naturalism). This leads him to read the cogito as being not a critique of the alternative between intellectualism and realism (my reading) but a critique of intellectualism. It is more fruitful to examine the movement of *PP* from a point of view that would not see a divide between intellectualism and realism but would see them as unified through the third term, which is objective thought.²⁰ If this is correct, *PP* is not an attack on either intellectualism or realism, but it is an attack on the ground that posits their alternative. Naturally, Merleau-Ponty proposes to seek a ground beyond this divide and finds this ground in transcendence itself.²¹ Indeed, both intellectualism and naturalism are grounded in the impossibility of transcendence and this is the proper aim one should take when attacking objective thinking. Hence, my contention is that Merleau-Ponty maintains the structure of the cogito in order to be led beyond it.

He maintains subject and object as absolute and incommensurable poles in order to interrogate their origin; an origin he finds not in their opposition but in their union. This union is found in the “prereflexive cogito” (as pre-apperception) or “perceptual faith” (as pre-perception). This is why Merleau-Ponty defines the prereflexive cogito in the following way:

Once reflection had occurred, once the “I think” had been pronounced, the thought of being became so much part of our being that if we try to express what preceded it all our effort is only directed at proposing a *prereflexive cogito*. (*S*, 152/246, t.a.)

This is of interest for us because it helps unravel further Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the pre-objective. In *PP*, he introduces pre-objectivity as a middle term between perception and objective thinking. It is obvious that the aim to bridge this gap is valid, as will be demonstrated in *VI*. However, by introducing this new concept within a framework that it indeed threatens, Merleau-Ponty adds a non-philosophical ambiguity to his very philosophical ones: the pre-objective is described with reference to the object and the subject and thereby affirms them as such. Yet, for a subject to be fully a subject and for an object to be fully an object excludes any transcendence because we remain in a framework of discrete entities and differences seen as leaps.²²

In fact, by retaining the basic structure of objectivity while adding to it a dimension that unifies them, Merleau-Ponty opens two alternating problematic zones. He writes:

Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we would not be searching for it. (*PP*, 37/36, t.a.)

This alternative is a distinctive feature of existential philosophies since Pascal’s “Mystery of Jesus-Christ” (*SNS*, 92/115)²³ and it traditionally leads into a discussion of alienation: if I ignore what I know, it is because there is a divide inside me and the acquisition of knowledge becomes understood as a movement of knowledge from the side of the self that possesses it naturally to the side that ignores it.²⁴ It is clear that this is the sort of problem Merleau-Ponty has in mind when discussing apperception in his chapter on the cogito. We can see how the project of addressing empiricism and intellectualism in one single gesture involves proving empiricism wrong by refuting the gap that it draws between subject and object and conversely proving intellectualism wrong for establishing a fully self-transparent subject.²⁵ As a consequence, Merleau-Ponty actually ends up doubling his

burden because he is left to confront two divides: the “zone of subjectivity from which [the world] shall be seen or heard” (*PP*, 212–48, t.a.; which represents the divide posited by intellectualism) and its counterpart (which represents the divide posited by empiricism), which he calls a “primal acquisition”: “Between my sensation and myself there stands always the thickness of some *primal acquisition* which prevents my experience from being clear for itself” (*PP*, 216/250, t.a.).²⁶ This means that we are now confronting a divide separating objectivity from the pre-objective and another separating the pre-objective from the world.²⁷ The unity of empiricism and intellectualism under the heading of “objective thought” as well as the two separations it involves are contained in Merleau-Ponty’s defense of the life-world:

[When] I cease to adhere to my own gaze, and when, instead of living the vision, I question myself about it, I want to try out my possibilities, *I break the link between my vision and the world, between myself and my vision*, in order to catch and describe it. When I have taken up this attitude, at the same time as the world is atomized into sensible qualities, the natural unity of the perceiving subject is broken up, and I reach the stage of being unaware of myself as the subject of a visual field. (*PP*, 227/262, my emphasis)

This explains the alternating theme in *PP* where perception is placed here between the bodily self and the world and there between the worldly body and the subject; consider these three utterances from *PP*:

Each time I experience a sensation, I feel that it concerns not my own being, the one for which I am responsible and for which I make decisions, but another self which has already sided with the world, which is already open to certain of its aspects and synchronized with them. (*PP*, 250/216)

Thus we are not perpetually in possession of ourselves in our whole reality, and we are justified in speaking of an inner perception, of an inward sense, an “analyser” working from us to ourselves. (*PP*, 435/380)

What has been said of external can equally be said of internal perception: that it involves infinity, that it is a never-ending synthesis. (*PP*, 439/383)

Here, Merleau-Ponty seems to be hesitating between attributing primacy to the objective or the subjective pole in much the same way as Nietzsche hesitated in his notebooks of Spring-Fall 1887 (see Chapter 1). This am-

bivalence, which translates into a lack of clarity regarding the status and place of the pre-objective (and, consequently, of the cogito), presents a difficulty for Merleau-Ponty for it signals a tension between Merleau-Ponty's thought and his conceptual apparatus (as examined above) that Merleau-Ponty will not be able to relieve until *VI*.²⁸ Hence, Merleau-Ponty's characterization of perception as a pre-objective instance allows him to escape the traditional model of physical sensation and intellectual synthesis and to replace it by perceptual faith. This faith involves both the recognition of the perceived object as external and its accessibility. As such, it dialectizes the very idea of externality and of accessibility by making the object of perception always indeterminate (or, rather, forever-being-determined) and by preventing externality from being so radical that it could complete this constant movement toward determination (which *VI* refers to as "interrogation"). In fact, as we have seen, this movement itself takes place inside the translucent zone of subjectivity that acts altogether as a conducive and as a resistance to pure coincidence of the subject and the object.²⁹

The translucidity of the zone of subjectivity is instrumental to understand the birth of the idea of truth. Translucidity means a combination of transparency and opacity. The quotient of transparency is responsible for the experience of truth that we always try to recuperate. The quotient of opacity accounts for the impossibility to reach such truth and leaves us with perhaps the most striking feature of the notion of truth: it is desired by us but forever distant. This desire and this distance together ensure the dynamism of the movement toward determinacy.

We now understand how the structure of perception prefigures that of predicative knowledge. Yet, this is only the first step in explaining the movement that goes from perception to "truth" as we know it. Of course, Merleau-Ponty maintains a distinction between perception and knowledge: the former gives "presences" and the latter gives "truths":

This formula: "It is true," does not correspond to what is given to me in perception. Perception does not give me truths like geometry but presences. (*PriP*, 45/14)

The next step in Merleau-Ponty's archaeology of truth is therefore to account for the move from "presence" to "truth." Or as he puts the question elsewhere:

What could be the relation between this tacit symbolism, or undividedness, and the artificial or conventional symbolism, which seems to be privileged, to open us towards ideal being and to truth? (*TL*, 180/131)

The problem is defining of philosophy itself: How do we move from “mute experience” to predicative truth? Must one find a middle term that could bridge the gap? In “Communauté, Société et Histoire,” Marc Richir insists that this question was left unresolved by Merleau-Ponty’s sudden death. This is made plausible by the late date of the quote cited above and has the advantage, for Richir, to maintain the possibility that if he had lived to answer this question, Merleau-Ponty would have done so along Richir’s own lines (lines that run the risk of obliterating the level of “brute being” itself; Richir 2008, 26). In fact, there are clear indications that Merleau-Ponty did investigate this question in *PP* and that he sought to do so in ways almost contrary to Richir’s: instead of positing, like Richir, a model of incommensurability between the pre-objective and the objective (24),³⁰ Merleau-Ponty’s intention was to maintain the contrast within the continuity of the two realms. Consequently, he regards the movement that goes from the pre-objective (or, as he says later, “the logos of the sensible world” [*PW*, 69/97]) to the objective (or “the explicit logos” [*Praise*, 199]) as a translation, not a leap. This translation, Merleau-Ponty calls “sedimentation” and the device in charge of this translation is the experience of error: perception “cannot present me with a ‘reality’ otherwise than by running the risk of error” (*PP*, 377/432) and, consequently, the truth of objectivity finds its grounding in the experience of error: “Critério-logical philosophy [is] based on the *experience* of error” contrary to a “philosophy [true phenomenology] supported by the *experience* of truth” (*IS*, 74/66, my emphasis). Merleau-Ponty continues:

We know that there are errors only because we possess truth, in the name of which we correct errors and recognize them as errors. In the same way the express recognition of a truth [. . .] presupposes questioning, doubt, a break with the immediate, and is the correction of any possible error. (*PP*, 295/341)³¹

In other words, truth arises from the experience of *verification*.

Dialectics

The distance from presence to truth is thus travelled thanks to the mechanics of dialectic. Let’s take the following example: I am walking in the woods and come across a puddle of water that I need to jump over. My perception pre-linguistically includes: “*I can* jump over this puddle” (all perception, says Merleau-Ponty, is performed on the mode of the “*I can*” [*PP*, 137/160]).³² When I jump, however, I realize that a reflection on the puddle made it look smaller than it really was. I land in a splash: my pre-

objective “I can” proves erroneous and leaves me with an experience of unfulfilled expectation. It is the experience of this disappointment—and nothing before it—that highlights the expectation that one instant ago lined the fabric of perception into the consciousness of an “I *thought* I could,” triggering the project of verification. It is clear here that the experience of the antithesis (the error: the puddle was larger than I perceived it to be) serves as a bridge toward explicitation in a typically dialectical movement.³³

Now, if we consider the aforementioned retention of a past perception into a present one (which is also of the self as a past perceiver into a present one), we obtain again a dialectical structure: this past perspective remains within me as “sense,”³⁴ which will couple with the new one (“I was wrong”) into a determinate synthesis: a concept. This synthesis is only possible as a synthesis of perspectives for the ability to synthesize perspectives involves a transcendence of the present into the untimely or, rather, an extraction of the perception from its temporal context in order to create an object seen from many perspectives but from which the time factor is absent. This ability to unify perspectives coming from different viewpoints supports our ability to abstract our perception from the spatio-temporal context that we *are*—that is, to understand perspectives in a non-personal way. This transcendence has important consequences for Merleau-Ponty: chiefly that fact that we can include someone else’s perspective into our synthesis, given that we can acknowledge the other as another viewpoint on the same object (VI, 11/27;³⁵ i.e., as another perceiver [*PriP*, 17/52]).³⁶ The means for the inclusion of the other’s perspective is, of course, language.

Thanks to the notion of perspective, Merleau-Ponty deepens the structure of dynamic determination, which morphs into the structure of alterity and, further, into the structure of language. We now understand how with recourse to no other structure than perception, one goes from presence to “truth.” This mechanism is crucial in Merleau-Ponty’s project to go beyond the mere *description* of perception into a *philosophy* thereof because it shows how perception can give rise to its other, the abstract (in this case, objective synthesis) and hence, how it qualifies as an explicative principle.

Sedimentation

I have just outlined Merleau-Ponty’s gradual strengthening of the thesis of the primacy of perception. This movement has great metaphysical consequences: it establishes the link between the natural and the human, between the “mute experience” and the instituted world, and defines the world of objective truth as derived from the world of perception. It is not

my concern here to investigate the relationships between truth and culture or society, but we have to note readily that the inclusion of a linguistic element within truth entails that truth belongs to the cultural world. The process by which the development of the world of perception gives rise to the cultural world goes under the heading of “sedimentation” in Merleau-Ponty’s earlier texts, before being partially replaced by the concept of “institution.” For the inquiry into the origin of truth to be conclusive, we need to account for the final stage of truth, the sedimentation of the predicative into the “in-itself.”

In *PP*’s chapter “The Body as Object and Mechanistic Physiology,” Merleau-Ponty examines in great detail the case of the “phantom limb,” a mental condition whereby an amputee behaves as if she was still in possession of the amputated limb. Descartes used this phenomenon in his sixth meditation to prove that the locus of sensation was not the body but the soul. Merleau-Ponty, in turn, takes the same example to diametrically opposed conclusions:

The phantom limb is not the mere outcome of objective causality; no more is it a *cogitatio*. It could be a mixture of the two only if we could find a means of linking the “psychic” and the “physiological,” the “for-itself” and the “in-itself,” to each other to form an articulate whole, and to contrive some meeting point for them. (*PP*, 77/92, 322/372)

For Merleau-Ponty, the solution lies in understanding the subject as existence—that is, as being-in-the-world [*être-au-monde*].

Merleau-Ponty describes “*l’être-au-monde*” as the middle term between the first person (connected to the “for-itself”) and the third (connected to the “in-itself”) because its structure is pre-objective like that of perception.³⁷ In the case of the phantom limb, there is a discrepancy between the being-in-the-world of the subject and his or her objective body;³⁸ the first one has an arm while the second one does not. This case allows Merleau-Ponty to place transcendence at the heart of the pre-personal constitution of the subject: there is a “for-itself” and an “in-itself” of the subject himself. I have suggested in the previous section that this question leads to difficulties for Merleau-Ponty.³⁹ However, we can now outline how Merleau-Ponty may find a solution to these difficulties. It is clear here that this distinction between in-itself and for-itself arises through the experience of their communication. I take my “for-itself” to be an “in-itself” when I set out to walk although my left leg is missing; my for-itself is by nature *about* my in-itself. The key move in Merleau-Ponty’s account comes out of this very point and essentially amounts to a dramatization of the use of error described above:

It is precisely when my customary world arouses in me habitual intentions that I can no longer, if I have lost a limb, be effectively drawn into it, and the utilizable objects, precisely insofar as they present themselves as utilizable, interrogate a hand which I no longer have. (*PP*, 82/97, t.a.)

This “interrogation” is the key to one’s thematization of the implicit in-itself that her habitual self was always directed toward. Because I experience this inability to grab the doorknob (as I experience my effective inability to jump over the pool), I am thrown into an interrogation that highlights the objective directionality of my subjectivity. As a result, I become able to understand an object as “to be grabbed” outside of my personal relationship to it. I become able to think in a third person mode, to see what was the “for-itself” of the habitual self as an “in-itself” of the object and to transfer the ability to grab that my habitual self reserved for itself into a “grabability” of the object.⁴⁰

The manipulatable must have ceased to be what I am now manipulating, and become what one can manipulate; it must have ceased to be a thing *manipulatable for me* and become a thing *manipulatable in itself*. (*PP*, 82/98)

This first sketch of the notion of sedimentation therefore contains the seeds of Merleau-Ponty’s further developments on this notion. These cover an impressive range and we will see in Chapter 6 how their common structure of sedimentation is the key to the systematic dimension in Merleau-Ponty’s work. In fact, sedimentation is Merleau-Ponty’s name for the unfolding of time so that his account of it holds for all things temporal—that is all things human, for “man is a historian because he belongs to history, and history is only the amplification of practice” (*TL*, 33/50).

From Being-in-the-World to Being-in-the-Word

There remains for us to establish how the concept of truth, which we have described as derived from experience, became understood as truth beyond experience. Merleau-Ponty is confident that the descent of truth is not only the archetype of any sedimentative process, but it is also the starting point of any institution. In a certain way, we have already addressed this question by locating the birth of the explicit realm out of the experience of error and by further tracing it back to the primordial source of dynamism, which is no other than the quest for determination at work within perception. Thanks to the descent of truth described above, we now understand

how the history of truth amounts to the truth of history: because defining truth (the history of truth) requires a clear concept of how truth was lost (the truth of history).

If we are now to address the problem of the self-forgetting of truth that we see at play within the traditional concept of truth as beyond perception, we need to turn to another aspect of sedimentation. For Merleau-Ponty, the sedimentation of an “I can” (*PP*, 137/160) into a “there is” is correlative to that of a phenomenon into a thing-in-itself for it involves the disjunction of “perception” from “faith.” Although Merleau-Ponty is indeed borrowing the concepts of *Stiftung* and *Urstiftung* from Husserl, his preference for the French equivalent is meaningful: beyond a simple building up suggested by the German terms, the French word *sédimentation* contains mineral connotations and, indeed, Merleau-Ponty’s sedimentation appears often as a figure of crystallization. Through sedimentation, he writes, “that which is true [*le vrai*], constructed though it may be [. . .] becomes as solid as a fact” (*S*, 154/250). This crystallization into a “fact” understood as the sedimented version of a presence (“*le vrai*”), shows sedimentation to be—through a history of truth—a history of objectivism itself (*TL*, 115/161, t.a.).⁴¹ Indeed, Merleau-Ponty reproaches intellectualism precisely for solidifying experience into concepts that in turn lack the flexibility required to account for the true (“*vrai*”) world. Sedimentation is therefore the process by which the chiaroscuro of the zone of subjectivity becomes solidified into full opacity (intellectualism) or full transparency (realism) and, further, into their divide (*S*, 174/284). To be sure, the concept of sedimentation itself makes this disjunction impossible since it proceeds through a dialectic that warrants the continuity between all events. Yet, according to Merleau-Ponty, truth is mistaken about itself insofar as it takes itself to be independent from experience—that is, insofar as it is unaware of being the result of sedimentation. This mistake made by objective thought becomes a problem for Merleau-Ponty. If he wishes to maintain sedimentation as the unique mechanism of history, and thus make it an explicative principle—as part of the overall project to create a philosophy of perception—Merleau-Ponty needs to account for the possibility of this very error *in terms of sedimentation*.

Sense

First of all, there is no question that the solution will have to do with the notion of sense developed in the second half of Merleau-Ponty’s career. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty uses his concept of sense in order to account for the birth of language, and it is obvious that the story he has to tell on

this side is analogous—if not included in⁴²—the one told above about the movement from the pre-objective to the objective. Sense is the pre-word, like “I can” is the pre-“there is” and presence is “pre-truth.” To put it in trivial, yet not incorrect terms, the sense of a word is what I have when I have the word on the tip of my tongue. In the upward movement from the pre-objective to the objective, sense plays a transitional role that allows the dialectic to operate: it is the common element in the word and the experience. However, in the opposite movement, which is that of Merleau-Ponty’s archaeological inquiry (*S*, 267), the sense of “truth” must be able to open up to the perception that relates to the word by way of itself. In other words, sense is the warrant that a word has a *relatum* in the world of experience. Let me pause here to recall Nietzsche’s views on the very same question as I have examined it in Chapter 1. For Nietzsche, a concept is the contingent and falsified expression of an authentic manifold of experiences. The value of the concept (that is to say, its ability to present itself as representing reality, as true) is warranted by the fact that this concept shares a “tiny amount of emotion” with all experiences. Recall Nietzsche:

The collecting together of many images in something nonvisible but audible (word). The tiny amount of emotion to which the “word” gives rise, as we contemplate similar images for which *one* word exists—this weak emotion is the common element, the basis of the concept. That weak sensations are regarded as alike, sensed *as being the same*, is the fundamental fact. Thus confusion of two sensations that are close neighbours, as we take note of these sensations; but *who* is taking note? Believing is the primal beginning even in every sense impression: a kind of affirmation the first intellectual activity! A “holding-true” in the beginning! Therefore it is to be explained: how “holding-true” arose! What sensation lies behind “true”? (*WP*, 506)

For Nietzsche, this leaves us with an elemental theory of error: a wrong concept is a concept that is not attached to any experience, a concept with no sense. This would seem to provide a simple criterion for the validity of the concept of truth. However, it will not help Merleau-Ponty to prove that “absolute truth” is an absurd concept because it would throw us back into the question of the fact of its existence (as concept or as belief), or as it were, its birth *ex nihilo*. It is this fact that the entire theory of sedimentation is designed to account for. Recall that the same realization caused Nietzsche to abandon his pure rejection of truth and his preference for life-affirming artistic delusions (Chapter 2). Merleau-Ponty, like Nietzsche, adopts a middle way: yes, “absolute truth” is a concept drawn from experience; but it is a concept that is mistaken about this experience.

This is what the concept of “negintuition” in *VI*⁴³ allows for: we have an intuition of absolute being; only, it is a negative intuition, the intuition of an absence.⁴⁴ In other words, there is no absolute sedimentation into solid facts and the absence of a pure subject entails the absence of any in-itself; saying otherwise would lead to negating precisely the zone of subjectivity that is the original step toward sedimentation:

This *separation* [*écart*] which, in first approximation, forms meaning, is not a no I affect *myself* with, a lack which I constitute as a lack by the upsurge of an *end* which I give myself—it is a *natural* negativity, a first institution, always already there. (*VI*, 216/266)

By defining the subject as determined by negativity (in a sense that will be clarified shortly), Merleau-Ponty is laying the ground for his rejection of the realm of the in-itself and the truth that is associated with it for “in fact, we do not see the world in itself. This appearance is our ignorance of ourselves, of our soul, and of the genesis of our modalities” (*S*, 144/234).⁴⁵ Hence, it is clear that the discussion of negintuition as the primary determination of the subject applies to the object in the same way. Indeed, we know from *PP* that this “negintuition” finds its primary example in the asymptotic movement of determination (or interrogation) that is regulated by a horizon and, as such, directed to something best conceived as ever absent. The problem with absolute truth is that it turns its meaning around: it reinterprets a sign of an absence as a presence. Here, it becomes possible to put Merleau-Ponty’s critique of truth in a nutshell: absolute truth excludes the *écart*, but the *écart* “*fait le sens*.” Absolute truth has no meaning; instead, the meaning hitherto wrongly attributed to it is its opposite: *the absence of absolute truth has hitherto been taken for its presence*.

The Universal Commensurability of the Sedimented World

Now that we have located the place of “sense” in the primary dialectic of sedimentation, it is possible to complete our account of the movement that goes from perception to culture. The core of the question is concentrated in Merleau-Ponty’s reworking of Ricoeur’s notion of “advent” (*S*, 68/109). For Merleau-Ponty, the traditional view of history as a succession of events “leads to scepticism as long as it is objective history because it presents each of its moments as a pure event and locks itself up into the single moment where it [history] is written” (*PW*, 31/36, t.a.). In other words, objective history surrenders its historical endeavor to its objective method and squeezes the historical out of history: an objective account of history alien-

ates its very object (continuous becoming) just like a Zenonian account of movement talks of everything but movement. In order to reestablish history in its dynamics, Merleau-Ponty needs to build upon Husserl's idea of a temporal retention that allows for an overlap ("*empiètement*") between events or, rather, that turns "events" [*événements*]"—that break the temporal chain down to discrete entities—into "advents" [*avènements*]" that arise from the general movement of history. He writes:

We propose on the contrary to consider the order of culture or meaning as an original order of advent, which should not be derived from the order of mere events, if it exists, or treated as simply the effect of extraordinary conjunctions. If it is characteristic of the human gesture to signify beyond its simple factual existence, to inaugurate a meaning, it follows that every gesture is *comparable* to every other and that they all arise from one single syntax, that each is both a beginning and a continuation which, insofar as it is not walled up in its singularity and finished [*révolu*] once and for all like an event, points to a continuation or recommencements. It applies beyond [*il vaut au-delà*] its simple presence, and in this respect it is allied or accompliced in advance to all other efforts of expression. (S, 68/109, t.a.)

This thesis is particularly radical insofar as it involves considering history as an essential link between all events that become "comparable," that is, commensurable on the basis of a "unique syntax." Of course, everything we said so far shows that this syntax is precisely provided and determined by the structure of perception. It is the zone of subjectivity with its dynamic potentialities and its primordial temporal retention that provides the space of infinite sedimentation. Because it introduces the dynamics of determination into the world, perception triggers the dialectical movement of history, but because it introduces the principle of indeterminacy in the world, perception ensures that all events will be contained within the homogenous milieu of indeterminacy that is the vital element of consciousness and, further, of history itself. This amounts to saying that the structure of perception as self-differentiation (within the self and of the self with the world) imposes its heredity over human history. This is an essential and structural similarity with Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche who sees the separation at the heart of the human self (which coincides with the separation of self and world) as imposing its heredity over the rest of human history, Merleau-Ponty sees the zone of subjectivity as the thread that informs all events. For both philosophers, the mark of this initial self-differentiation is the same: it is the impossibility of complete determinacy.

We can now understand how Merleau-Ponty's rejection of communism was soon followed by the rejection of Marxism itself as positing an end to history:

What then is obsolete is not the dialectic, but the pretension of terminating it in an end of history, in a permanent revolution, or in a regime which, being the contestation of itself, would no longer need to be contested from the outside and, in fact, would no longer have anything outside it. (*AD*, 206)

Indeed, the warrant of becoming is the margin of negativity that, as it were, makes room for movement. An end of history is correctly understood as the eradication of such a "zone," but, incorrectly, it takes this zone to be contingent when sedimentation itself and the dialectic that arises from it establish it as necessary; a dialectic with an end is impossible (*AD*, 206).

In fact, it becomes clear from his critique of the notion of events that Merleau-Ponty has ceased to consider history in successive terms altogether. History is the milieu of becoming insofar as it is an unfinished unfolding of a certain syntax. However, insofar as it is merely the unfolding of a preexisting syntax, it is grounded in being to the point that Merleau-Ponty can declare: "Perhaps time does not flow from the future or the past" (*S*, 27/48). In other words, there is an atemporal structure to time. To be sure, this preexisting "syntax" is not to be understood as implying that the adventures of history will not exist (*S*, 68/110).⁴⁶ In fact, history and sedimentation carry in themselves the atemporal style that informs their being and that lies nowhere outside them; it exists only as their principle: "There exists a place [*lieu*] where everything that is and will be is preparing itself for being said" (*PM*, 11). The "saying" itself shall take place in time.

The unity of this source (which is the unity of perception insofar as it informs the consubstantiality of all historical developments) leads Merleau-Ponty to a vertical view of history in the sense that the present contains the past and appears as its summit: sedimentation is an incorporative process that maintains the past into the present.⁴⁷ This has two implications: the past is always present and history is one transtemporal event always being completed—Merleau-Ponty talks of the "event of the world" (*VI*, 199/249). For him, "all the gestures by which a culture exists are by principle partaking in a consubstantiality by which they are but moments of one unique task" (*PW*, 81/113) and the diversity of advents is understood only against the background of the unity of the general event that is history⁴⁸ and within which any sequencing is arbitrary. By positing becoming as the infinite movement taking place between the two terms of the

“en-soi” and the “pour-soi” and not allowing it to reach either term (what I called the asymptotic character of perception), Merleau-Ponty resolutely engaged in a homogenous view of history:

Thus what we understand by the concept of institution are those events in experience which endow it with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will acquire meaning, will form an intelligible series or a history. (*TL*, 40/61)

This persistence of the past into the present (that is, sedimentation) raises the following question: What is it that makes the past past and the present present if they are both here now?⁴⁹ As always, the answer lies in the careful appeal to distinction without divide: there is a difference in modes of being present between the past and the present; the past is present as forgotten (that is to say, as sedimented).

Constitution escapes the alternative of the continuous and the discontinuous. It is discontinuous, since each layer is made from forgetting the preceding one. It is continuous from one end to the other because this forgetting is not simply absence (as if the beginning had not existed) but a forgetting what the beginning literally was in favour of what it has subsequently become—internalization in the Hegelian sense. (*S*, 176/286)

In fact, sedimentation *requires* that the past be past. In his analysis of the phantom limb, Merleau-Ponty writes:

The phantom arm is, then, like repressed experience, a former present which cannot decide to recede into the past [*un ancien présent qui ne se décide pas à devenir passé*]. (*PP*, 85/101)

The discrepancy observed earlier between the habitual body and the objective body informs the temporality of the trauma as well. The objective pastness of one’s arm is resisted by the historical self whose temporality is at odds with the objective one: the habitual body still lives before the amputation, while the objective body is amputated.⁵⁰ As a result, the past and the present have different modes of presence.

In *VI*, Merleau-Ponty examines the phenomenon of forgetting not as a disappearing but as the ultimate remembering. Forgetting is solidification into sedimentation and incorporation into the self. It appears as the healthy counterpart to the trauma described above. For Merleau-Ponty, forgetting is also the opposite of perception; perception presents the outside as outside whereas forgetting is internalization through sedimentation:

To understand perception as differentiation, forgetting as de-differentiation. The fact that one no longer sees the memory = not a destruction of a psychic *material* which would be *the* sensible, but its desarticulation which makes there be no longer any *separation* [*écart*], any *relief*. (VI, 197/247, t.a.)

Characterizing forgetfulness as “de-differentiation” is precisely describing it as the process by which a “psychic material” becomes part of, assimilated into, the self. In the case of the trauma however, the trauma continues to behave as an external body and cause tensions within the self. In other words, forgetfulness preserves the experience by changing its status and this movement is necessarily attached to the movement of “making past.”⁵¹

This making past in turn needs to be qualified. Merleau-Ponty affirms sedimentation through the negative process of forgetfulness. It is a matter of a negation seen as a preserving force:

Already in Plato, as is shown by the famous parricide in the *Parmenides*, the notion of genesis or historical filiation is included among those negations which interiorise and conserve. (*TL*, 57/81)⁵²

We can see more clearly how the movement into the past is a movement into the untimely by which the fleeting thought becomes immortalized:

If [the action of thinking] holds out, it does so through and by means of the sliding movement which casts it into the inactual. Indeed, there is the inactual of forgetting, but there is also the inactual of that which is acquired [*l'acquis*]. (*S*, 14/26)

This has one important consequence: the making past that allows for sedimentation is paradoxically a leap into the untimely. By making the memory past (by forgetting it), I assimilate it so that it becomes unaffected by time, and paradoxically again, ever present. In fact, it is present *of my own presence* because it is now a part of me.⁵³ We are now dealing with two possible modes of presence. The first one is on the mode of the differentiation: it is the presence of the present, which presents itself as external. To which should be added the presence of the traumatic past insofar as it has by definition not been “made past.” The second one is the mode of the de-differentiation; it is the present of the past through the making past of sedimentation, the present of the self containing the sedimented past.

This process is crucial to the very endeavor of an inquiry into the origin of truth insofar as such a project presupposes that the origin of truth is totally forgotten because it is sedimented. As a consequence, any account of descent will be seen not as remembrance, but rather as archaeology;

archaeology, unlike recollection, is always made on the impersonal mode of the “*on*.” This is important because it allows for a generalization of the domain of the origin. Archaeology does not lead into the origin of such and such a thing. On the contrary, it must be conceived as the matrix of all things. As a consequence Merleau-Ponty discovers the origin of truth everywhere and particularly in the individual’s development and in history.⁵⁴ Let me clarify: sedimentation is the stuff that all human world is made on, and as such its origin is everywhere present, albeit sedimented. In his fine article “Présence entre les signes, absence,” J-B Pontalis writes:

The search for a “primal layer” [*couche primordiale*] of language, for a coat of “brute meaning” [*sens brut*] is strictly correlative to the search for “wild being.” Neither is it to be understood as a form of nostalgia for the origins. It is in the present, in the incomplete [*lacunaire*] fabric of the unachieved present that one is to grasp the originary. (Pontalis 1990, 59)

Since our access into this immense sedimented mass is not our position as a result of it (forgetfulness precludes it) but only as part of it, the archaeology that seeks to operate the reverse movement can only be achieved at the general level of ontology. This means that sedimentation gains an ontological status as not only the mechanism of the dynamic of human history, but beyond it as the eternal rule of existence itself. In one of his final notes, Merleau-Ponty writes:

It is a question of finding in the present the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an “ever new” and “always the same”—A sort of time of sleep (which is Bergson’s nascent duration, ever new and always the same). The sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction, realize from within a passage from one to the other—Existential eternity. The indestructible, the barbaric Principle. (VI, 267/315)⁵⁵

Merleau-Ponty’s archaeology of truth brings to light the process through which perceptual faith becomes sedimented into predicative truth, and it shows sedimentation to be the unique structure that informs both history and perception. Merleau-Ponty describes sedimentation as an infinite process of determination and temporalization that is exemplified in the dynamics of perception as the temporal progress toward the determination of the perceptual object. In turn, this movement informs historical sedimentation. Both processes are necessarily tangential—that is to say, they are infinite and gradual.

Existential Reduction and the Object of Truth

The phenomenological reduction is the locus of normativity in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It is assigned the task of discriminating between the true and the false within the phenomenal world. Thanks to it, Merleau-Ponty conquers the chance to build—beyond a descriptive phenomenology—a philosophy of perception. This is made possible by the fact that the reduction gives the philosopher access to the openness of perception as such, irrespective of a conceptual content that constantly and “in principle” always “fills it” (*S*, 14/27).¹ The reduction enables Merleau-Ponty to conceive of perception as a foundation and to complete in his own way the phenomenological project to access an experience of essences (although it will soon become obvious that the idea of essence itself is tormented by Merleau-Ponty). I argued that the original openness of perception (as described in *PriP* and *PP*) provides the origin of the movement of sedimentation. It is apparent now that the same openness becomes—in a strictly symmetrical movement—the final result of Merleau-Ponty's reduction. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's use of the phenomenological reduction functions as a movement of *de*-sedimentation. The previous chapter was dedicated to understanding the implications of a search for the origins of truth. First, it appeared that “truth” (that is to say, the concept of truth) was the result of a development of the very elements contained in the primary structure of perception. Second, it was highlighted that this very development led into a misconception of truth. The works of the forties examined above do place perceptual faith at the heart of any perception; that is why they

present differentiation as the structure of all experience. However, do they fail to provide a clear idea of the originary experience that stands as the origin of truth and as the link between reality and truth? In order to clarify this question, I now turn to an examination of Merleau-Ponty's use of reduction.

Epoché: Merleau-Ponty contra Husserl

The phenomenological reduction is a famous trademark of Husserlian phenomenology and has often been taken to be the root of Husserl's so-called transcendental idealism. We thus need to ask ourselves how Merleau-Ponty was able to give it such a crucial place when his project precisely sought to oppose such idealism. Merleau-Ponty's reworking of Husserl's idea of the phenomenological reduction is spelled out most directly in two key writings. First, in the foreword to *PP*, written as an afterthought to the book, Merleau-Ponty takes the pretext of a presentation of phenomenology to propose his own reworking of Husserl's concept. Second, *S*'s beautiful essay and tribute to Husserl, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," is an attempt to stage the dialogue between Husserl's "thought" [*pensé*] and his "unthought" [*impensé*] even more explicitly than in *PP*. Merleau-Ponty devotes the first section of this work to the question of the reduction. For Merleau-Ponty, the span of Husserl's work is larger than his writing, for it contains and delimits an unthought that still belongs to Husserl but was passed on to us as a "task."² In fact, the entire argument of "The Philosopher and His Shadow" is structured by a dialectical movement in which Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the conventional interpretation of Husserl while putting forward and counterbalancing it with Husserl's "shadow" position. In this context, there is no doubt that sometimes Merleau-Ponty allows himself to overlook Husserl's "letter" in order to stay faithful to his "spirit" and, further, to present his own work as the continuation of Husserl's inspiration, beyond apparent paradoxes. Even though it has given rise to wide and fascinating discussions, the debate as to whether Merleau-Ponty's reading is faithful to the Husserlian inspiration beyond the Husserlian writings has little relevance to our problem. However, the encounter of Merleau-Ponty with Husserl on the question of reduction will help characterize further the nature of Merleau-Ponty's project.

From Phenomena to Phenomenality

For Merleau-Ponty, existence is the "being of the subject," that is to say, intentionality or "being-in-the-world." Husserl's idealism, however, is taken

to understand all phenomena through the subject and thus to choose the subject over its openness onto the world. Merleau-Ponty understands the subject through its openness to the world while Husserl ultimately understands the openness with reference to the subject (Husserl 1989, 179).³

The Husserlian reduction is based on three assumptions:

- a) There is a thesis of the world (*Weltthesis*) that affirms the existence of the world (Merleau-Ponty will understand it in terms of “objective thought”).
- b) This thesis of the world is a result of the “natural attitude.”
- c) This thesis blocks our access to “the things themselves,” pure phenomena.

These three assumptions lead to a characterization of reduction as:

A reduction of the natural attitude.

A reduction whose method is “epoché,” the suspension of judgment.⁴

The result expected by Husserl is a reduction to phenomena (“hyletic reduction”) and, for the later Husserl, to essences (“eidetic reduction”).

Natural Attitude vs. Weltthesis

It is clear that Merleau-Ponty subscribes to both ends of this process: judgment does stand between us and phenomena and reduction should lead us to pure phenomena, to the essences. Merleau-Ponty departs from Husserlian orthodoxy however by requalifying the “natural attitude.” For him, the thesis of the world—like any thesis—is already sedimented. It does not belong to the world of what he will later call the “savage being” or even “Nature.”⁵ In fact, he contends, seeing the natural attitude as thetical is a contradiction:

What is false in the ontology of *blosze Sachen* is that it makes a purely theoretical or idealizing attitude absolute, neglecting or taking as understood a relation with being that grounds [it] and measures its value. Relative to this scientific naturalism, the natural attitude involves a higher truth that we must regain. For the natural attitude is nothing less than naturalistic. (*S*, 163/265, t.a.)⁶

What is truly natural, then, is perception and in it the perceptual faith that is, as we know, *pre*-thetical. This distinction, it will be argued, is also present in Husserl. In *Ideen I*, for example, he writes: “When we express this judgment, we very well know that we have transformed what was

already implied in the primary experience into a ‘theme’ and grasped it in a predicative way” (Husserl 1950, § 31). This admission only makes the disagreement between the two thinkers more obvious. Husserl sees a distinction but deliberately refuses to give it any philosophical significance. For Husserl, the implicit character of perceptual faith has no bearing on the concept of reduction so that both the pre-thetical and the thetical are subject to suspension: “We may impose on the potential and implicit thesis the same test as that of the explicit judgment,” he continues. Merleau-Ponty, however, greatly emphasizes the distinction between perceptual faith and *Weltthesis* and this allows him to subtract the former from the reduction of the latter:

Seeking the essence of the world does not mean seeking what it is as an idea, once it has been reduced to a theme of discourse; it is seeking what it is in fact for us *prior to any thematisation*. (*PP*, xii/x, my emphasis)⁷

In other words, the truly natural attitude, which is that of the pre-objective, is not to be reduced. Instead, it is the objective attitude that is the proper target of reduction. We are left with a tripartite structure of intentionality comprised of subjectivity, pre-objectivity, and objectivity. For Husserl, the latter two are assimilable to each other insofar as they are two instances of the *Weltthesis*. As a consequence, he seeks to reduce them. It is clear here that by reducing these, Husserl de facto reduces all intentionality and finds refuge in the subject above experience: “The *epoché*, says Husserl, gives us the attitude *above* the subject-object correlation which belongs to the world” (Husserl 1989, § 53).⁸ For Merleau-Ponty, however, it is a question of reducing objectivity only, which allows him to aim “below” this relation at its condition of possibility; this is in fact a move he attributes to Husserl himself: “From *Ideen II* onwards Husserl’s reflections escape this *tête-à-tête* between pure subject and pure things. They look *deeper down* [*au-dessous*] for the fundamental” (*S*, 163/265).⁹ In this sense, both the subjective and the pre-objective remain possible bases from which to perform the reduction. It is important to point out that this alternative entails a radical difference in methods. If one (like Husserl) grounds the transcendence in the intellectual subject, the only method available will be entirely subjective; it is the intellectual act of “*epoché*.” If, on the contrary, one decides to perform the reduction from the point of view of the pre-objective, we will be left with an existential reduction of a form that remains to be defined.

Reduction as Successful Failure

We are now in a better position to define the movement that takes Merleau-Ponty from the preface of *PP* to “The Philosopher and His Shadow” and that allows him to outline his concept of reduction. In the foreword to *PP*, Merleau-Ponty puts forward two strong theses: phenomenological reduction is not idealistic (*PP*, xii/vi) and “the most important lesson that the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (xv/viii). In fact, these two theses are necessarily connected in Merleau-Ponty’s general argument about Husserl: the difference between Husserl and those non-orthodox phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty calls “existential dissidents” is a mere “misunderstanding” (*PP*, xiv/viii) for one could find in Husserl’s texts themselves the possibility of an existentialist reduction. This possibility is formulated by Fink: “The best formulation of the reduction is probably that given by Eugen Fink, Husserl’s assistant, when he spoke of ‘wonder’ in the face of the world” (xv/viii). Such a sense of wonder teaches us “nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world.” We will turn to the implications of this expression of “wonder” in the next section, but we must already point out that this account of reduction appeals to an existential reading insofar as it presents the “upsurge of the world” as “unmotivated”—that is to say, non-thetical.

Regarding the thesis of the impossibility of complete reduction, there remains an ambiguity as to whose voice (Merleau-Ponty’s, Husserl’s, or both) asserts that a failed reduction is its own greatest achievement. The paradoxical phrase implies one of two things:

Either the project of reduction was a blind endeavor not destined to attain any particular thing, launched as it were “just in case,” and there is no contradiction between its failure and its success because there is no original aim against which one could actually measure success or failure.

Or the reduction was destined to achieve one thing and eventually achieved something else, which is an achievement anyway, albeit not at the level expected but rather according to another coexisting endeavor.

It is obvious from Husserl’s texts that reduction is intended as a method destined to solve a preexisting problem. The first option has to be ruled out. The second option, however, leads to more complication because we now need to ask ourselves what original inspiration a failed reduction fulfills, whose achievement is great enough to override the failure itself. As the reduction of the “sense-giving” [*Sinngeben*], Husserl always intended

the reduction to give access to pure hyletic phenomena. The failure of the reduction means that the *Sinngeben* can never be entirely reduced and, consequently, that pure phenomena cannot be reached. If there is a higher purpose that this discovery fulfills, it is a purpose that goes beyond the intention of reduction itself, a purpose that only an emphasis on Husserl's shadow philosophy can bring to light.

Merleau-Ponty's affirmation of reduction as the breakthrough of Husserlian phenomenology was often opposed to Sartre's earlier emphasis on Husserl's discovery of intentionality (Alloa 2008, 13). It seems, however, that the contrast between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre is—in this case—misleading. In fact, the only way to make sense of the paradox of the successful failure of reduction is to detach it from the theme of phenomena. My contention is that, instead of phenomena, the successful failure of reduction shifts its success to the theme of intentionality: it is a success because instead of giving us pure phenomena, the reduction teaches us something about the essence of phenomenality (or in Husserl's terms, *Erscheinung*). The great acquisition is thus the primacy of intentionality and its advantage over the primacy of phenomena. This is a crucial point because it is the origin of the bifurcation of phenomenology into existentialism and idealism. With the impossibility of absolute reduction, we no longer attain phenomena but phenomenality—that is to say, the structure that gives rise to them. This also implies that intentionality is anterior to intentional subject and objects. “The Philosopher and His Shadow” clarifies this move while attributing it to Husserl:

What is this internality which will be capable of the relationships between interior and exterior themselves? The fact that Husserl, at least implicitly and *a fortiori* raises this question means that he does not think that non-philosophy is included in philosophy from the outset, in the immanence of constituting consciousness [not more than the transcendent “constituted” is included]. It means that he at least glimpses, behind transcendental genesis, a world in which all is simultaneous, *omnino in panta*. Is this last problem so surprising? Had not Husserl warned from the outset that all transcendental reduction is inevitably eidetic? This meant that reflection does not coincide with what is constituted but grasps only the essence of it. (*S*, 179/291–92)

This passage should draw our attention to four things: first, we find a new formulation of what we have called phenomenality as “this internality which will be capable of the relationships between interior and exterior” and as “non-philosophy,” that is to say, the pre-objective. Second, the acknowledgment of this pre-objective dimension allows for a distinction

between “immanence” and “constitution.” Third, the reduction that brings this underlying “dimension” to light is described as an “eidetic” reduction. This dimension is the “essence” of phenomena: phenomenality. Finally, we access only this essence and not pure phenomena. (I shall discuss the idea that the essence is in the instituted objects “*omon in panta*” in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s intra-ontology in the next chapter.) In other words, pure phenomena are paradoxically hidden behind the essence that supports them. This, of course, is made possible by the openness of intentionality that makes pure phenomena impossible altogether. As we suggested earlier, this openness attracts in principle its own fulfillment: an impure phenomenon (impure for being mixed with some degree of conceptuality). In fact, this openness is nothing but another word for the essence of impurity: what is primary is not phenomena, judgment, and concepts, it is the continuum between phenomena and judgment, where neither one exists in its pure state.

We now understand better the success of a failed reduction: the reduction is failed from the point of view of Husserlian idealism insofar as it provides no access to pure phenomena. It does not succeed in bridging the primeval zone of subjectivity but it encounters it instead. In terms of Husserl’s shadow philosophy (Merleau-Ponty’s own philosophy in this case) it is a success because it opens up to the essence of phenomenality as the zone of subjectivity described earlier:

It seems clear that reflection [the movement of reduction] does not install us in a closed, transparent milieu, and that it does not take us (at least not immediately) from “objective” to “subjective,” but that its function is rather to unveil a third dimension in which the distinction becomes problematic. (*S*, 162/264)¹⁰

Saying that the lesson of the reduction is its impossibility exposed three implicit theses. First, this implies that it is one thing to reduce the *Weltthesis* and quite another to reduce the intentional (ekstatic) structure of perception. Second, this means that what the reduction brings out is the reality of the distinction between the objective and pre-objective (the former can be reduced, the latter cannot). Finally, this involves a shift in the object of the phenomenological reduction: no longer pure phenomena but phenomenality, no longer *hyle* but *eidōs*.¹¹

The Ambiguity of “Wonder”

This may help us clarify the question of the sense of “wonder” that, according to Merleau-Ponty, (relying on Fink) is the defining feature of reduc-

tion. It is well known that reduction—whether existential or idealistic—is a “bracketing” of judgment (e.g., Husserl 1989, § 18). Yet, there is something paradoxical in the idea of wonder without judgment. On the one hand, the making familiar that judgment involves is bracketed and the world now appears to us as unfamiliar, and this seems to account for some sense of wonder. On the other hand, let us recall that the French word “*étonnement*,” translated as “wonder,” contains a strong element of surprise and unexpectedness. It is difficult to think of surprise with no judgment whatsoever. How can we find something to be unexpected and how can we even consider it if we do not see it against the background of the *not-wondrous*, of the expected? In fact, this characterization of reduction borrowed from Fink (which Merleau-Ponty attempts to present as Husserl’s own)¹² contains already a rejection of the Husserlian project to access pure phenomena. For Husserl, pure phenomena are “flat”¹³ (Marion 1989, 97): were judgment entirely reduced and were phenomena entirely pure, there would be no possibility to even feel them as surprising or relate to them on the mode of “wonder” for they would not stand in contrast to anything. This rejection itself leads to Merleau-Ponty’s main thesis of the impossibility of absolute reduction.¹⁴

However, it is impossible for Merleau-Ponty to make room for conceptual judgment at the core of this “*étonnement*.” In his famous analyses of the sublime, Kant arrives at a position very close to Merleau-Ponty’s. For Kant, the sense of the sublime is given by the indeterminacy of the movement of the understanding. In other words, we feel the awe of the sublime through judgment but precisely because judgment is denied access to full determinacy. The feeling of the sublime is given by the faculty of judgment as opposed to any specific judgment. In fact, for Kant the feeling of the sublime arises from the faculty of judgment having no content (or object) while seeking one. Ultimately, the sublime is the experience of the understanding prior to its object, prior to any of its content. This ambiguity of a judgment giving rise to a feeling through its unachievement is in profound agreement with Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of intentionality. In the sublime, the faculty of the concepts shows itself before any concept is given in very much the same way as Merleau-Ponty shows phenomenality to appear in reduction before any phenomenon is given. The Kantian account strikes the right balance between the presence and the absence of judgment that accounts for a feeling of “astonishment.”¹⁵

This account is considerably refined and reworked by Merleau-Ponty, whose major move is to distinguish strongly between the realm of the pre-objective and those of the objective and the subjective.¹⁶ As a result, what is found is not a primary faculty that would belong to the subject and take

us back to a sort of transcendental idealism. Hence, it looks like Merleau-Ponty entitles himself to locate a certain astonishment experienced from the point of view of reduced consciousness because reduction does not apply to the pre-objective. In other words, one may be pre-objectively expecting something and on this basis experience astonishment. This is the mechanism I have described in Chapter 4: our pre-objective perception is an “I can” that attains objectivity when we become stunned by its failure. The incapacity of determination to reach a satisfactory level accounts for the feeling of astonishment to the point that this feeling becomes the privileged empirical manifestation of the pre-objective. As I established earlier, the success of the reduction is to bring out the realm of the pre-objective and it is precisely what the sense of wonder performs, or in Merleau-Ponty’s words: “In order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it” (*PP*, xv/viii). This break is experienced as “*étonnement*.”

Reduction vs. Epoché

We are now ready to turn to the question of the method of the reduction. Oftentimes, there is some confusion in the literature as to the respective statuses of reduction and epoché and as to the significance of their distinction. In most cases, they are simply read as synonyms. In this case, the very status of this one thing with two names is unclear: it is here supposed to be the “method” (e.g., Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch 2003, 4) of phenomenology, there a “discovery” (e.g., Moran 2000, 124–25) of phenomenology. The blame for this confusion lies partly on Husserl’s writings and their early conflation of the objective and the pre-objective. If both are one, then reduced objectivity becomes another name for intentionality and, as a consequence, reducing judgment means reducing all intentionality. As we saw, Husserl sees this as cause for satisfaction: “Thanks to our method of the epoché, *all* the objective is now subjective” (1989, § 8, my emphasis).¹⁷ This move is attributed to epoché, a fundamentally subjective act. Yet, there is an ambivalence in Husserl (the very ambivalence that Merleau-Ponty builds on in “The Philosopher and His Shadow”) whereby it seems conceivable to speak of reduction without involving epoché. The link between epoché and reduction does not seem to be necessary, and their assimilation by Husserl is less than justified. As a consequence, I must disagree with those phenomenologists who claim that epoché cannot necessarily lead to idealism on the basis that many existentialist philosophers subscribe to the project of reduction (Lavigne 2005, 34) on the ground

that reduction is not, strictly speaking, epoché. I shall argue that epoché does lead into idealism, not necessarily reduction.

We must understand this contingency of the link between epoché and reduction as grounded in their difference of status: epoché is the method chosen by Husserl to perform the reduction. Reduction is the aim and epoché the tool. This distinction is crucial because it means that the descriptions of epoché do not necessarily apply to those of the reduction. In Merleau-Ponty's case, it means that by subscribing to the project of reduction, Merleau-Ponty is not compelled to endorse epoché.

The fact that Merleau-Ponty never uses the term epoché to describe either his or Husserl's project is generally overlooked presumably as a consequence of the general neglect for the distinction between reduction and epoché.¹⁸ In order to understand the surdetermination that epoché forces onto reduction, we must ask how the method can affect the outcome. From Husserl's first "Cartesian Meditation" onward, the suspension (epoché) is defined as the suspension of judgment—an act whose intellectual nature is confirmed by the fact that it leaves the world as it is. It is thus a reflexive act: a judgment about judgment. This is only possible if one could draw a strict distinction between the realm of the intellectual and that of the world and attribute all transcendence to subjective judgment. This is indeed the root of Husserl's transcendental idealism and, as a consequence, it removes any external grounding to transcendence.¹⁹ Consequently, epoché *stems from* idealism before it leads to it. We must understand that the only way for the reduction to be achieved without transforming its object is for it to be a fully intellectual act. This attitude single-handedly commits us to idealism. This means that if one—like Merleau-Ponty—wants to avoid idealism, he needs to accept to change the very object he is looking at; reduction must be carried out in an existential way. This exposes another development of the successful failure of the reduction: insofar as this failure gives access to phenomenality before the pure phenomena, it also makes pure phenomena impossible to attain. It makes local phenomena invisible in order to bring the structure of phenomenality to light. In one word, the non-idealistic use of reduction necessarily entails the rejection of epoché. As a consequence, one is led to give up phenomena for phenomenality.

Merleau-Ponty's departure from Husserlian orthodoxy on the question of the reduction, although presented as nothing else than a reading of Husserl himself, has enormous philosophical consequences. The difference can be traced back to the disagreement over the distinction between the objective and the pre-objective. For Merleau-Ponty, this distinction prevents the

pre-objective from being reduced alongside the objective. This distinction in turn allows for a distinction between the natural thesis and the *Weltthesis*, the truly natural attitude being pre-thetical. This means two things of importance with regard to the development of Merleau-Ponty's work. First, the object of the phenomenological inquiry has now shifted from pure phenomena to phenomenality; there is a reversal of priority (both in the logical and ontological senses) between phenomena and phenomenality.²⁰ Second, epoché is no longer the preferred method for the reduction. It has now become possible to achieve the bringing to light of the pre-objective thanks to the pre-objective itself. For Merleau-Ponty, it is no longer a question of performing some negative act like some "suspension," but to "re-awaken" (*PP*, xv/viii) the sedimented, pre-objective structure of intentionality—the truly natural attitude precisely—because it is only this that will give us the "world":

The natural attitude really becomes an attitude—a tissue of judicatory and propositional acts—only when it becomes a naturalist thesis. The natural attitude itself emerges unscathed from the complaints which can be made about naturalism, because it is "prior to any thesis," because it is the mystery of a *Weltthesis* prior to all theses. It is, Husserl says in another connection, the mystery of a primordial faith and a fundamental and original opinion (*Urglaube, Urdoxa*), which are thus not even translatable in terms of clear and distinct knowledge, and which—more ancient than any "attitude" or point of view—gives us not a representation of the world but the world itself. (*S*, 163/266)

Performing the Existential Reduction

Forgetting the individual case involuntarily is philosophical—but wanting to forget it, deliberate abstraction is not: rather, the latter characterises the non-philosophical nature.

Nietzsche, 9 [66], Autumn 1887

The confrontation with Husserl allows us to reapprehend Merleau-Ponty's concept of reduction on the basis of its object: no longer phenomena but phenomenality—that is to say, neither the self nor the world but their consubstantiality ("*connaturalité*"). From now on, Merleau-Ponty understands the phenomenological project as an effort to bring out this dimension of Being. We must now ask what it means in practice to perform this renewed form of reduction.

First, let me stress that as a result from our discussion so far, the movement of reduction implies that we must conceive of reduction in a positive way (as *bringing something out*) (S, 187/304).²¹ To be sure, it is the aim of Husserlian reduction as well to bring out pure phenomena by uncovering them. This uncovering, however, is a negative gesture. By contrast, in the case of Merleau-Ponty's reduction, there is nothing to be uncovered; intentionality is itself uncovered. It is merely misunderstood insofar as it is taken to be secondary to the intentional subjects and objects. The task of philosophy, then, is to reverse this order of priorities. Yet, if the object of reduction is precisely not reducible, if it is ever present and indeed omnipresent, what need is there for a reduction to precisely bring it to light? It is true that in Husserl's case, one could accept the reduction as a way to bring out what was concealed by judgment. In Merleau-Ponty's case, however, one is left to wonder why reduction remains the privileged method of a thought that seeks to bring out what it is supposed to reduce: intentionality. In fact, the answer was addressed in the previous chapter: what needs to be reduced is not so much an attitude as it is a mistaken judgment precisely about phenomenality—namely, that phenomenality is a relationship between a subject and an object as fully external to each other. It is the same mistake that gave rise to the fallacious concept of the in-itself. In order to correct this mistake, the task of Merleau-Ponty's existential reduction should be to reduce this judgment. However, we have already established that the attitude that understands phenomenality as an external relationship does not do so by accident, but that it is the nature of judgment to see relations as external. Here we encounter another motive for Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserlian epoché. According to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl makes the reduction dependent on a decision²² on the part of the subject, thereby affirming judgment as it reduces it.²³ If it was judgments (plural) that were to be suspended, then the reflective power of the faculty of judgment would be sufficient for this; one can use a judgment to oppose another. However, the whole sense of Merleau-Ponty's reduction is to move from phenomena to phenomenality—that is to say, to reduce judgment as a general attitude, not any number of single judgments. As a result, the entire Husserlian setup finds itself transposed at the level of essences. The reduction of the judgment of existence (the "*Weltthesis*") intended to lead one to pure phenomena becomes the reduction of judgment altogether, leading into phenomenality. This poses a new problem: once deprived of the reflexive power of judgment, Merleau-Ponty needs to provide a new factor of reduction that would not appeal to self-reflective judgment. The solution is contained in the very failure of reduction. If the failure of reduction is explained by the omnipresence—

and irreducibility—of pure intentionality and if pure intentionality is at the same time the aim of the reduction (VI, 178/230),²⁴ then this reduction can actually be performed by this intentionality itself.

Transcending the Passive/Active Divide

Seeing is not having to form a thought.

Merleau-Ponty, *PP*, 274

If this reduction is to truly be a philosophical *act* and not simply an inconsequential description, it has to demand that intentionality exist on such a mode that would affect the judgment Merleau-Ponty seeks to reduce (i.e., the misconception of intentionality as objectively structured). This mode, I shall argue, is the mode of saturation.²⁵

I have emphasized that the judgment that is to be reduced is at once a singular judgment (“intentionality is objective”) and a general faculty (the attitude of judgment is the objective attitude). It is clear that one cannot reduce the first without reducing the latter. We have also seen that for the same reason, one cannot expect from judgment to reduce *itself* (Husserl’s solution), but one must rather rely on another attitude to reduce judgment. We know that Merleau-Ponty reversed the Husserlian project by seeking no longer to reduce pure intentionality but instead to bring it to light. This is, in a nutshell, the sense of the successful failure described above. Thereby, the original Husserlian setup according to which perception is the locus of the competition between phenomenality and judgment is maintained. Merleau-Ponty talks about a “rivalry” “between perception and thought” (*NL*, 336)²⁶ and grounds his reduction into this competition: if one wished to bring out intentionality *and* to reduce judgment, one would need to give a competitive advantage to intentionality itself.

Merleau-Ponty describes reflective judgment as “the surplus of our existence over natural being” (*PP*, 197/229).²⁷ If the reduction is to be the reduction of judgment, it must annul this surplus. For Merleau-Ponty, this means that we must, as it were, “inflate” what he calls “natural being” to the point that it matches our “existence”: we must saturate our “existence” with “natural being.” In this context, it is clear that Merleau-Ponty means “natural being” as the world of perception. As a result, what Merleau-Ponty suggests is that we must immerse ourselves in perception:

The sensible gives back to me what I lent to it, but this is only what I took from it in the first place. As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not set over against it as an acosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out towards it some idea of blue such as

might reveal the secret of it, I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it “thinks itself within me,” I am the sky itself as it is drawn together and unified, and as it begins to exist for itself; my consciousness is *saturated* with this limitless blue. (*PP*, 212/245, my emphasis)²⁸

The saturation of consciousness occasioned by the purity of perception presents itself as the forgetting of subjectivity according to the mechanics of perception described above. Here, consciousness is presented as a container in a way that prepares the metaphor of saturation:

My act of perception *occupies* me, and occupies me sufficiently for me to be unable, while I am actually perceiving the table, to perceive myself perceiving it. When I want to do this, I cease, so to speak, to use my gaze in order to plunge into the table, I turn my back on myself who am perceiving. (*PP*, 238/275, t.a.)²⁹

That is to say, by saturating intentionality, sensation leaves no room for reflective judgment. Merleau-Ponty relies on perception itself to bring out its own nature.³⁰ Of course, this saturation can never be totally achieved but it is itself asymptotic. It represents a ratio: a maximum of perception for a minimum of judgment:

I can at each moment absorb myself *almost* wholly into the sense of touch or sight, and even that I can never see or touch without my consciousness becoming thereby *in some measure* saturated, and losing *something* of its availability. (*PP*, 256/221)³¹

This “almost” will be discussed in the next chapter, but it is worth noting here that it is a consequence of the necessary link between pure intentionality and judgment, the phenomenon by which pure intentionality always becomes “filled” by judgment.

However, this leads into further difficulties that account for a certain ambivalence in *PP*. It seems from the passages quoted above that saturated perception allows for a reduction of subjectivity in favor of the object insofar as it is the “I” that is forgotten in the ekstasis of perception. This is the line of argument that Sara Heinämaa has in mind when she defines reduction as performed thanks to the “passion” of “wonder,” and, hence, sees it as an essentially passive process.³²

This reading overlooks the fact that the “passion” envisaged by Merleau-Ponty is really a synthesis of activity and passivity. As early as the introduction to *PP*, in the section “‘Attention’ and ‘Judgment,’” Merleau-Ponty demonstrates a clear awareness of a task that will inform the course of his

further investigations: to succeed in thinking the passive and the active together (*PP*, 26–51/34–64). In this text, Merleau-Ponty approaches this task through his rejection of both empiricism and intellectualism. Empiricism promotes attention as an essentially passive form of intentionality that attributes to the object the privilege to reach the subject. Intellectualism, however, promotes judgment as an active positing of the subject by the object. In both cases, one pole “owns” the access to the other one, making itself active and the other pole passive. Eventually, they are both wrong for operating within the objective framework. For Merleau-Ponty, of course, this access is anterior to its subject or its object. If one wished to account for the encounter of self and world, one would need to overcome the duality of the passive and the active: “Where empiricism was deficient was in any internal connection between the object and the act which it triggers off. What intellectualism lacks is contingency in the occasions of thought” (*PP*, 28/36). As Heinämaa rightly points out, this contingency—which is incompatible with the spontaneity promoted by intellectualism—characterizes what Merleau-Ponty means by “wonder” [*étonnement*]. However, as I argued earlier, if one takes wonder to be simply passive then it becomes impossible to account for the element of surprise in the term and one becomes unable to perform any sedimentation. Therefore, the emphasis on passivity fails to bring “mute experience [. . .] to the pure expression of its own significance” (*PP*, 219/254).³³ In short, seeing the reduction as purely passive is ignoring that the pre-objective is always toward the objective.

In his lecture course of 1954–1955 devoted to passivity, Merleau-Ponty declares that:

The antinomy of activity and passivity cannot be overcome frontally, on the basis of these notions, and if we say that what is true is their couple, me positing myself [*moi m'autoposant*], then we obtain a third position. (*IP*, 157n“d”)

A few pages further, Merleau-Ponty clarifies this notion of “autoposition”: “The Self-positing-Doing [*l'Autoposition-Faire*],” he writes, “it is indeed the only solution” (*IP*, 161). If pure ekstastic perception runs the risk of falling back into some form of empiricism, he continues, it is because by transcending objectivity, it transcends it too much, making itself incapable to account for the fact of the meaningfulness of the objective structure (to the fact that perception is always pre-objective) and leading us into sheer “insanity.”³⁴ Therefore, Merleau-Ponty insists, “absolute plenitude is a result of the isolating analysis” (*IP*, 167). This poses the challenge encountered by the Husserlian reduction anew: saturated perception as passivity gives me the phenomenon (the pure blue of the sky, beyond the concept

of blue), not phenomenality. In a sense, it gives us only the pure object when what we are after is the link between the object and the subject. In order to move again to the level of phenomenality, Merleau-Ponty needs to introduce activity within his concept of reduction.

This is precisely what the understanding of a “third way” as “autoposition” and, in turn, of “autoposition” as “faire” (a “doing”) is intended to achieve. The concrete praxis of existential reduction is praxis itself and the saturation of perception becomes the saturation of perceptivity. Here is the key to Merleau-Ponty’s widely discussed equation of perception and motility:³⁵ the act of moving toward the object is always correlative to a passive impression of the object. Merleau-Ponty understands activity as the transcendence of the active/passive duality and as such, as the mode of saturated intentionality.³⁶

In fact, it is with activity that Merleau-Ponty finally succeeds in finding a concrete experience of non-objectivity because activity provides the experience of an intentionality described neither from the point of view of the subject (the activism of intellectualism) nor from the point of view of the object (the passivism of empiricism). As such, we can see that Merleau-Ponty regards activity as performing two syntheses or, to be more accurate, as refuting two distinctions affirmed by objectivism: that, internal, of the body and the soul, and that, external, of the self and the world.

The Union of the Self

It is significant that even as he struggles with the duality of passivity and activity in the opening of *PP*, Merleau-Ponty refers to Descartes’s letter to Elisabeth of June 28, 1643,³⁷ where Descartes writes:

It is only thanks to the use of [*en usant de*] life and of ordinary conversations, and by refraining from meditating and studying the things which stimulate our imagination, that one learns how to conceive of the union of the soul and the body. (1989, 74)

Earlier in the letter, Descartes wrote that the interaction of body and soul is experienced in the “senses” and “movements,” and we must interpret “life” in this quote in the sense of “perceptual life” and “activity.” It is remarkable that Descartes talks of “using” life to philosophical ends, readily admitting that there are realities that our soul cannot apprehend and, more important, that our functional body may prove an instrument of knowledge. It is striking how Descartes’s position anticipates Merleau-Ponty’s by combining a negative move toward judgment (“refraining from meditating”) with a positive one toward life as activity, thereby shifting the

balance within intentionality toward a saturation of perception designed to “conceive” the union of the body and the soul (e.g., *VI*, 8/23).³⁸ The unity of the self is conceived *in actu* and apperception is no longer self-opposition. The self as subject and the self as object of apperception become one within activity. Merleau-Ponty did adopt this idea and maintained it in his subsequent works. In *VI*, for example, he writes: “The passive-body and the active-body are welded together in *Leistung*” (*VI*, 246/295).³⁹

Self and World

Insofar as it allows one to experience the body-object and the mind-subject as one, this unification of the self is an instance of the transcendence of the subject-object distinction. For Merleau-Ponty then, there is no essential distinction between apperception and perception; they are one in activity. By allowing for the transcendence of both the internal and the external divide, activity opens up to the experience of the body as the milieu of transcendence:

The usual alternative: the body as one thing among others, or the body as vantage point on things, is questioned [. . .] the relationship to the world is included into the relationship of the body with itself. (*N*, 287)

Indeed, by portraying both apperception and perception as transcendence, and by showing both transcendences to be essentially the same, Merleau-Ponty reduces all transcendental to the intentional body, which extends its intentionality both inward and outward. This, as we will see, is the key to understanding the body as flesh (*VI*, 271/319).⁴⁰ Conceiving activity as transcendence is crucial because it takes one more step toward unifying the passive and the active; it does so by preliminarily unifying the inside and the outside (*PP*, 382/438; Barbaras 1998, 17). In *S*, Merleau-Ponty writes: “To possess ourselves, we must begin by abandoning ourselves; to see the world itself, we must first withdraw from it” (157/255). This two-way movement from the world toward us and from us to the world emphasizes the thesis inherited from Maine de Biran that perception is always also apperception,⁴¹ so that the nature of the flesh itself pairs up every affection with an equal auto-affection. At this point, the internal/external divide disappears, and the active/passive one with it.

In his important article “The Thinking of the Sensible,” Mauro Carbone adopts a position close to the one I have just defended, with one important difference. Carbone does locate Merleau-Ponty’s intentionality “beneath” the “distinction between activity and passivity” (Carbone

2000, 126). He construes this position by contrast with Heidegger's claim that the "letting-be" of disinterestedness is in fact "the supreme effort of our essential nature" (Heidegger 1999, 1: 109 quoted by Carbone 2000, 125–26). Here, says Carbone, Heidegger entrenches the duality of activity and passivity and leaves us at best with an "oscillation" between these two poles (Carbone 2000, 125).⁴² This effort toward letting-be in fact resembles strikingly Husserl's idea of epoché, and we know then that it entrenches this duality precisely because it constitutes an affirmation of the subjective pole. The ground that lies "beneath" the passive/active duality also lies beneath the subject/object duality, and this ground is what I have called intentionality. Carbone does not say much about this ground. For example, he does not say how we may attain it. There are two ways to conceive of this ground and of its attainment: first, one may say that there is nothing to say about it beyond the fact that it is somewhat more true than the duality of activity and passivity. It is literally defined by its *not* being active or passive. This is Carbone's view (Carbone 2000, 125–27). The problem with this idea is that it makes it impossible to present as an imperative the reduction required in order to attain it. We literally must not *do* anything toward it; this would be an "effort" in Heidegger's sense. Yet, not doing resembles dangerously mere passivity, and the appeal to any *beneath* of the ground of the passive/active distinction loses substance. Paradoxically, it places this ground beyond possible experience.

I would like to suggest that it is impossible to place oneself beneath the duality of activity and passivity. Instead, Merleau-Ponty wants us to think of activity and passivity in a different way whereby they are not transcended but unified. Carbone does refer to Merleau-Ponty's appeal for philosophy to talk of "the passivity of our activity," but he does not seem to take it as an affirmation that activity is precisely the level where passivity and activity are reunited. Merleau-Ponty means that activity and passivity become parts of activity itself. Therefore, activity is meant in two senses: the active principle (the activity of our activity) and the activity one undertakes (the process of acting). The latter comprises the "activity of the activity" and the "passivity of the activity." Carbone is unable to offer any method for the overcoming of the duality because he conflates these two senses of activity. In seeking to reject activity taken in a sense that opposes passivity, he also rejects the activity that operates the union of these two. However, the experience of the unity of activity and passivity is attainable within activity. In the notes of May 1959, Merleau-Ponty calls this a "lateral apprehension." I shall develop this notion in Chapter 6, but let me use a schematic account of it here. The "frontal" apprehension is indeed purely active (maybe even on the mode of *ustensility* described by Heidegger),

but in the action that I unfold toward an objective end, I attain (laterally) a state of being where active and passive become unified. This allows us to think of Merleau-Ponty's reduction as not just an idealization but as an actual method.⁴³ This also entails the problematic consequence that the authentic apprehension, if lateral, cannot be the apprehension of an object, but only of Being itself. Here, we encounter Merleau-Ponty's "intra-ontology," which seeks "Being through the beings" as a "lateral" experience: by aiming toward an object, I attain (laterally), the "realm of reduction" (*S*, 162/264). Hence, we can only attain the object under the condition that we do not posit the "frontal" object of our activity at the same time as we experience laterally the unity of activity and passivity. This proviso is satisfied by Merleau-Ponty's "perspectivism."

Perspectivism

Merleau-Ponty's idea of truth is often summarized under the foggy brand of "perspectivism."⁴⁴ Even if most readers maintain that this perspectivism should not be likened to relativism, it is often unclear how one may reduce Merleau-Ponty's views on truth to perspectivism without falling into relativism. Most readings rely on intersubjectivity and language to describe this perspectival truth as a social, sedimented one.⁴⁵ I argue, by contrast, that one should read Merleau-Ponty's perspectivism in the context of an existential reduction seen as activity. If it is understood that reduction now seeks phenomenality and no longer phenomena, and that it could only be reached through praxis, perspectivism may be construed as the existential analogous to Husserl's movement of constitution: the movement that rises from pure experience to the awareness of its essence. In fact, it is clear that activity always reveals general intentionality by way of particular endeavors and of the interaction with particular objects:

How have we managed to escape from the dilemma of the for-itself and the in-itself, how can perceptual consciousness be saturated with its object, how can we distinguish sensible consciousness from intellectual consciousness? Because: (1) every perception takes place in an atmosphere of generality and is presented to us anonymously. I cannot say that I see the blue of the sky in the sense in which I say that I understand a book or again in which I decide to devote my life to mathematics. My perception, even when seen from the inside, expresses a given situation: I can see blue because I am sensitive to colours, whereas personal acts create a situation: I am a mathematician because I have decided to be one. So, if I wanted to render

precisely the perceptual experience, I ought to say that one perceives in me, and not that I perceive. Every sensation carries within it the germ of a dream such as we experience in that quasi-stupor to which we are reduced when we really try to live at the level of sensation. (*PP*, 215/249)

This involves a redefinition of the method of attainment of truth but also of the object of truth. The truth attained by perspectivism should not be conceived as the truth aimed at *by the perspectives* (this truth is the business of “intellectual consciousness”). If A and B have two different perspectives on X, perspectivism will not seek to construe X from these two perspectives; instead, it will gather from these perspectives some insight about what *a perspective* is (it is *a* perceiving, not *my* perceiving, for example). For Merleau-Ponty, there is a single element of generality in all experiences, an element that is not restricted by its being A or B’s perception, but rather one that, through saturation, generalizes A or B’s individuality. This is the element that perspectivism seeks to bring to light.

Toward Ontology

In *PP*, perspectivism is introduced as the process of determination or objectivation: a cube reveals itself as an object through a synthesis of the successive perspective views that I grasp of it (*PP*, 198/235–36). This draws Merleau-Ponty’s attention to the interdependence of perception and motricity. This interdependence in turn installs a relationship between the active and the passive on two different levels (*PP*, 137/160).⁴⁶ First, by moving my body around the object, I ascertain that I am myself an agent of my perception so that any complete perception contains a bodily act as well as a sensible and passive impression. Second, this affirms the activity of the synthesis that I carry out in order to unify the different perspective views into the view of one object, an active synthesis that, again, is coupled to a passive sensation (*PriP*, 14/45).⁴⁷ Of course, these two aspects are readily unified if we consider that the synthetic unity of the self is itself made possible by the pre-objective unity of the bodily self through time and space—that is, through motion.⁴⁸ The experience of synthesis is thus granted great importance because in Merleau-Ponty’s view it associates the experience of the transcendental “I” of traditional metaphysics with that of the bodily self through motion (*PP*, 360–61/458). This means that the unity of the object of perception is correlative to that of the subject and vice versa because this synthesis is the result of a collaboration between the perceiver and its object. Consequently, intentionality must be conceived as

the ground of objectivity—that is to say, once again, that phenomenality is given logical precedence over phenomena. As I have argued, this phenomenality is precisely the object of philosophy and it is brought to light only in activity, in motion associated to perception.

Some readings of Merleau-Ponty's perspectivism make it an arithmetic form of relativism that would seek as many perspectives over one "thing" as possible in order to deduce from it an approximation of objective truth, proportional to the number of different perspectives available. In this reading, perspectivism becomes a method to attain objectivity through universality. This, however, is forgetting that Merleau-Ponty's project is precisely not to reach objectivity. In fact, Merleau-Ponty explicitly repudiates any idea of "the Great Object" in the section "Science Presupposes the Perceptual Faith but Does Not Clarify It" (VI, 14/30). Merleau-Ponty aims below objectivity to what supports and altogether refutes it: perceptual faith. For Merleau-Ponty, we must find this perceptual faith behind the manifold of perspectives. It is "the formula that permits one to pass from one real perspective [. . .] to another and which, being true of all of them, goes beyond the *de facto* situation of the physicist who speaks" (VI, 15–16/32).⁴⁹

Perspectivism is not designed to offer a view of the object or of the universe that would belong on the same level as the perspectives themselves (assuming that every perspective is a partial truth). It seeks to attain a truth placed at another level; not a cumulative truth but a truth accessed through a confrontation of the singular perspectives and a subsequent reduction to their common general features. The truth of perspectivism is not about objects; it is about perspectivity itself. Thanks to perspectivism, therefore, general intentionality (perspectivity) will be brought out of the manifold of intentional objects (perspectives).

The error of the cumulative view stems from a misunderstanding of the place of language and science in Merleau-Ponty's perspectivist project. For Merleau-Ponty language and science do not offer the cumulative rules supposed to correctly implement perspectivism for these rules are perspectives themselves:

It is a question, to acquaint ourselves with the being that surrounds [*embrasse*] altogether the perceived in the restricted sense and the so-called objective i.e., idealised being by way of this lived experience [*vécu*] or this perceived [*perçu*]. Science is rejected as a dogmatic ontology of the in-itself, but it is integrated to the realm of the perceived, and true within this horizon. (*IP*, 171)⁵⁰

Unlike objects, which could only be approximated through cumulative perspectivism, phenomenality is indeed fully grasped in any act. Merleau-Ponty's concern is no longer to multiply the perspectives themselves but to multiply the perceptual acts that are embedded in them in order to obtain saturation. This saturation will in turn provide access to pure transcendence by disabling reflective consciousness according to the mechanism I have described above. Beyond what the perspectives are about, it will show the essence of the world to be perspective. It is only once this point against a relativistic-objectivist reading of perspectivism in mind that we can understand the remote implications of Merleau-Ponty's repeated claim that "everything is interesting, and in a certain way, true—in the sole condition that we take things as they are presented in our fully elucidated experience" (*PriP*, 35/89, my emphasis).

Both saturated intentionality and perspectivism present themselves as paradoxical. By placing themselves below judgment they seek the one by way of the multiple and the general by way of the local. Merleau-Ponty writes: "My point of view is for me not so much a limitation of my experience as a way I have of infiltrating [*me glisser*] into the whole world" (*PP*, 329/380, t.a.). According to Merleau-Ponty, this is made possible by the very nature of the generality that is to be uncovered: it is the generality of the relationship between the local subject and the general world (i.e., "subjectivity"). He writes: "Subjectivity is neither thing nor substance, but the extremity of both the particular and the universal" (*S*, 153/250, t.a.), and "just like the world, this generality is before the one and the multiple" (*NL*, 328). So subjectivity (phenomenality) is double. First, it is present in any intentional act regardless of its form. Second, more than making intentional acts both particular and general, it makes them the substance of the relation between the particular and the general.

We know from the dynamics of perception described in Chapter 4 that perspectives (intentional acts) are essentially directed toward determination and, consequently, objectivation. However, Merleau-Ponty makes them his method for the overcoming of objectivation, seeking intentionality through intentional acts. Yet, this very directionality of perspectives toward objectivation clearly makes it oblivious of the underlying essence that supports it. This paradox is why saturation must be envisaged in connection to perspectivism: only saturation can achieve the reduction from the intentional acts to intentionality and find the single through the multiple because only in the manifold do intentional acts exhibit their specific determinations (their object) *as specific* (*VI*, 15–16/32). Consequently, they exhibit—as it were, negatively—their common core. According to Merleau-Ponty:

For a truly phenomenological philosophy, the relations between regional ontologies and philosophy is not the subsumption of the special under the general, but the relationship between concentric circles. (*IP*, 164)

This common center, which is the object of the reduction,⁵¹ can only be uncovered as a center through the apprehension of the circles it generates. This indirect move, which makes us acquainted not with phenomena but with phenomenality (that is to say, not with the perceptual objects but with perception itself) is destined to bring out what Merleau-Ponty's ontology will call the "invisible." This move is described by Merleau-Ponty as specifically ontological:

One cannot construct a direct ontology, my indirect method (being in the beings) alone corresponds to being—negative philosophy like negative ontology. (*VI*, 231/179)⁵²

Conclusion: Indirect Ontology

The reelaboration of the reduction is the decisive move that informs the rest of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and, in particular, his ontology. Framing intentionality as the obstacle that confronts reduction involves a double reversal of the traditional structure of phenomenological ontology. First, it exposes not the subject or the object, but intentionality itself (Merleau-Ponty also says "transcendence") as primary. Second, it presents the unity of intentionality as anterior to the objective duality. This move also adds to the traditional "order of reasons," still followed by Husserl, an "order of matters" rigorously obverse to it. To Husserl's transcendental idealism, the logical origin of the thought process was grounded in its ontological priority. Hence, thought and matter were equated. In Merleau-Ponty's view, if philosophical reasoning is indeed grounded in dualism, the same is not true of Being. We encounter subjects and objects first, but these are distorted signs of the underlying reality of transcendence and only this transcendence is ontologically primary. In order to attain this transcendence, objective thought must be used toward its own overcoming. This is what Merleau-Ponty means by reduction, and it is achieved through perspectivism.

As I alluded to earlier, an intentional structure—any relation in general—is paradoxical because it affirms its terms as separate while asserting their union as well. Merleau-Ponty grants priority to the union and thereby points the way toward a correct application of the reduction. The reduction must give the advantage to the union implied in the objective relationship

over and above the opposition of subject and object. This can only be performed through a process of saturation of consciousness. This saturation is obtained thanks to activity. Merleau-Ponty says that when saturated, activity is “blind,” that is to say, unreflexive.⁵³ Indeed, saturation offers the model of the overcoming of most oppositions both internal (within the self) and external (between the self and the world). This is possible because it is perception itself that saturates consciousness, and perception is both internal and external transcendence. Perception is always apperception *and* motion, always activity *and* passivity; this is what Merleau-Ponty calls “the passivity of our activity” (VI, 221/270). For Merleau-Ponty, then, the reduction is the discovery of transcendence through the praxis of transcendence. The subject of Merleau-Ponty’s reduction is perception and so is its object: “It will always be the task of perception to know perception” (PP, 42/53).

Merleau-Ponty's "Soft" Ontology of Truth as Falsification

It is now clear that Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of the Husserlian reduction as existential reduction gave priority to phenomenality over phenomena and to the "one" over the multiple. In Merleau-Ponty's view, this amounts to a reduction to the ontological. In Chapter 4, we had encountered this "one" as the zone of subjectivity that structures perception and constitutes the "syntax" of history. In Chapter 5, we encountered it as phenomenality, intentionality, or transcendence. In his last and unfinished work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty describes this "one" as an "existential eternity" (VI, 267/315).¹ This places us resolutely on the ground of ontology. In this chapter, I argue that Being is neither subject nor object, and indeed if one means by those notions any self-identical entity, Merleau-Ponty's ontology rejects them. For Merleau-Ponty, intentionality is all there is and it is as an infinite movement of self-determination. Sedimentation is the way it determines itself, that is to say, the way it objectifies itself. In this sense, intentionality is productive for it is the possibility of events. Events, however, are merely overdeterminate sedimentations, a falsification of intentionality insofar as they are its objectivation. The mode of being of intentionality is therefore self-falsification. I shall conclude that Being is self-falsification and truth is the movement by which Being falsifies itself.

In order to reach this conclusion, I shall first argue that Merleau-Ponty rejects any idea of self-identical Being. Instead, he envisages Being as including non-being. This is what I shall describe as Merleau-Ponty's "soft-

ening” of Being. As a result of this softening, Being is presented as self-differentiated. I then turn to Merleau-Ponty’s account of the dynamics of Being that ensue from this definition of Being as self-differentiated. I find that this instability of Being is creative of history. Finally, I draw the consequences of these two arguments by examining how Being is conceived as less-than-actual and creative (as potential) and what this potential is the potentiality of—namely, as I shall argue, error.

Presence and the Softening of Being

There is no question that *VI* is concerned with Being and it is how the Merleau-Ponty scholarship has always envisaged this work in the wake of the two monuments that are Renaud Barbaras’s *The Being of the Phenomenon* and Martin Dillon’s *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*. It is, therefore, striking that, in a working note to *VI*, “Metaphysics—the Infinite/*World-Offenheit*,” Merleau-Ponty writes unequivocally: “I am for metaphysics” (*VI*, 250/300). This ambiguity is a direct consequence of the philosophical method that Merleau-Ponty calls his “indirect ontology” or “intra-ontology” that seeks “Being through the beings” (*VI*, 225/275) and thereby avoids the distinction between the metaphysical (concerned with the beings) and the ontological (concerned with Being). On the contrary, it places their link at the core of its inquiry.

In the chapter “Interrogation and Dialectics” in *VI*, Merleau-Ponty embarks on a criticism of the Sartrean ontology and its sharp opposition between Being and nothingness. This opposition, Merleau-Ponty believes, makes ontology nothing more than a form of metaphysical dualism. The cost of this ontology is too high insofar as it sacrifices precisely the phenomenality (or, as he calls it in *VI*, the “transcendence” [*VI*, 193/244]) that Merleau-Ponty places at the center of his philosophy. In a dualistic ontology, one does not see how Being and nothingness can meet. Yet, it is precisely the lesson of perception that their encounter—not their purely conceptual opposition—is the proper domain of philosophy (*VI*, 72/100). It is this transcendence—the commensurability of Being and nothingness—that Merleau-Ponty seeks in “Interrogation and Dialectics.”

Two Dualities

If this project is indeed widely acknowledged in the Merleau-Ponty scholarship, there remains an ambiguity in most analyses as to the structure of Merleau-Ponty’s way out of this dualism. Merleau-Ponty’s ontology is an effort to overcome two correlative dualities: the duality of the subject and

the object and that of Being and nothingness. There are two standard ways to overcome dualism: first, one may add a middle term to the two incommensurables, thereby replacing a dualism by a trialism (two transcendences are now necessary). The second is to incorporate the two opposites into a greater whole. In Merleau-Ponty's view, neither is acceptable.

In *La Résistance du Sensible*, Emmanuel Alloa claims that Merleau-Ponty chose the first path. He states that "Merleau-Ponty failed to detach himself from a conception of the world directed by a subject-object divide" (Alloa 2008, 99), and that "the distance that makes vision possible, is still thought [by Merleau-Ponty] on the mode of the 'void' between vision and what it sees, as in Democritus' theory" (100).² He concludes that:

One fails to shake off the impression that Merleau-Ponty is caught in his own trap. Even as he seeks to overcome the diplopia of Western dualism thanks to what resembles a correction of the gaze, he confirms the relevance of this diplopia. (Alloa 2008, 97)

Even though he seems to endorse another reading in earlier works such as his remarkable analysis of the reduction in *Desire and Distance's* "Phenomenological Reduction as Critique of Nothingness" (Barbaras 2005, 45–61),³ some of Renaud Barbaras's more recent contributions seem to return to a reading of this sort. In "Life and Perceptual Intentionality" (2003), he writes:

Merleau-Ponty [. . .] radically criticizes the philosophy of consciousness and recognizes that it is necessary to take another starting point; that is, he recognizes that one must seriously take into account the fact of embodiment. However, this new starting point still maintains the duality of subject and object, consciousness and the material body, because it is described in terms of the visibility of the seeing and the unity of touching and touched. (159)⁴

This way of reading Merleau-Ponty's final efforts is in fact omnipresent in the Merleau-Ponty scholarship in forms often subtle and sometimes even contradictory.⁵ The argument developed by these readings, namely that one cannot maintain subject and object in their radical form while maintaining their union on the other, is correct. Their premise, however, which assumes that Merleau-Ponty seeks to maintain these, is erroneous. In fact, as early as his course on passivity of 1954–1955, Merleau-Ponty defends himself sternly against such misunderstandings of his position:

Objection (Lachièze-Rey): so, if this is the case, if the body is indeed the mediator of our relation with the world, and if you reject the

radical distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, it is finalism or vitalism. You admit that there is a pre-ordination of the body to its fields and to the “things” through a finality that transcends you; or else, a presence of the whole in the parts thanks to a quasi “*soul of the body*.” (*IP*, 165–66)

This exemplifies the contradictory position ascribed to Merleau-Ponty: one rejects the distinction of body and soul only to express this union in dualistic terms and ends up trapped in an unfruitful alternative between “finalism” or “vitalism.”⁶ This position appears not as a choice in favor of the transcendence between two poles, but rather as a choice in favor of one of them. This view is rejected as a misconstruction of his ideas by Merleau-Ponty, who wishes to “make this [his] project understood, and thereby [to make understood] the overcoming of the problem of activity (idealism) and passivity (finality)” by “venturing further into the elucidation of the world and the subject” (*IP*, 166–67).⁷ This will be achieved in *VI*. In the meantime, we already know that the “elucidation” of an ontology of the union will have to avoid a double trap:

Philosophy is itself only if it refuses the comforts [*facilités*] of a single-entry world [*un monde à une seule entrée*] as well as those of a multiple-entry world, which are all accessible to the philosopher. Philosophy stands, like natural man, at the point where one passes from the self [*le soi*] into the world and into the other. At the crossroads. (*VI*, 160/210)

The first danger is to merge these two poles into an all-encompassing third term. The second is to place a middle term between the two poles (the dualism I have just mentioned). The problem with the first strategy is that it makes itself unable to account for the distinction of the two poles, which it eventually apprehends as one. If he seeks to examine relation itself, by “placing himself at the crossroads,” Merleau-Ponty will have to navigate between these two traps by inaugurating a novel osmosis between them, one that would accommodate the ontological unity and the dualism of objective thought altogether. He calls this his challenge to “open the concept without destroying it” (*S*, 138/224)—that is to say, to maintain the meaningfulness of the concept without maintaining its impossible self-identity.

The Subject/Object Distinction

Hence, the project of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology is to make of the subject-object relation the milieu of reality. This involves a peculiar model of Being

because it ceases to understand the relation by derivation from its terms. Indeed, I have argued in Chapter 5 that such terms as subject and object disappeared in the phenomenological reduction, along with the internal/external and passive/active distinctions, leaving only phenomenality as the irreducible object of philosophy (VI, 251/299).⁸ In VI, then, Merleau-Ponty seeks to describe Being as a relation without terms.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was revitalized by the discovery of Saussurean linguistics and its description of linguistic syntax as a network of "differences without terms" (S, 39/63).⁹ There is no doubt, as it has often been remarked (Lawlor 2002; Dillon 1988, 181–86), that this discovery was decisive for the future developments of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology because of its direct implications for the concept of intentionality, but it seems to me that not enough emphasis has been placed upon the fact that it also provided Merleau-Ponty with the tools necessary to conceive of intentionality independently of its terms. In this view, it offered promising perspectives toward answering the question first formulated in *PP*: "We must understand how, paradoxically, there is an *in-itself for us*" (*PP*, 71/86). In VI, therefore, after his encounter with Saussure's structural linguistics, Merleau-Ponty declares: "I describe perception as a diacritical, relative, oppositional system" (217/267).

The Cogito

The effect of the new possibilities offered by diacriticism is most direct in connection to Merleau-Ponty's rejection of his earlier account of the "phenomenological cogito" in *PP*. In the notes of January and February 1959, Merleau-Ponty is concerned with two issues. One is the application of diacriticism to ontology; the other is a self-critical evaluation of the "phenomenological cogito" he elaborated in *PP*. What is the connection between these two questions? The discovery of diacriticism introduced Merleau-Ponty to the awareness that language was logically anterior to the objective structure of the world, not the reverse. This realization, in turn, led to the possibility to separate the apparently necessary pairing of relation and terms. As regards the cogito, this means primarily that there cannot be a "pre-linguistic" or "pre-objective" cogito because the affirmation of the subjective pole it implies is derived from language and not anterior to it: "What I call the tacit cogito is impossible. To have the idea of 'thinking' [. . .] it is necessary to have words" (VI, 171/222).¹⁰ As I pointed out in Chapter 4, this rebalancing of the subjective and objective poles through a withdrawal of the subjective was already initiated in "The Metaphysical in Man" (1947) where Merleau-Ponty transferred the cogito from the subjec-

tive pole to the interpolar relation itself: “The fundamental metaphysical fact is this double sense of the cogito: I am sure that there is being—under the condition that I do not seek another sort of being than being-for-me” (*SNS*, 93/114, t.a.). In other words, there is neither Being nor myself; only Being-for-me, only intentionality.

The Object

The rejection of the objective pole, although structurally connected to that of the subjective one,¹¹ is clarified by Merleau-Ponty in terms of a continuity of the visible and the invisible. Although I will specifically discuss the relation of the visible and the invisible in a moment, let me already assert that their interdependence (which Merleau-Ponty stresses everywhere) coincides with the rejection of the objective pole. For Merleau-Ponty, this interdependence shows that objectivity and subjectivity are both falsification of each other (*PP*, 220/254; *VI*, 160/210–11)¹² and that the object is nothing more than the approximation of the fully determined object one guesses to be pointed at by an essentially unfinished set of properties:

I say that I perceive correctly when my body has a precise hold on the spectacle, but that does not mean that my hold is ever all-embracing; it would be so only if I had succeeded in reducing to a state of articulate perception all the inner and outer horizons of the object, which is in the nature of things impossible. In experiencing a perceived truth, I assume that the concordance so far experienced would hold for a more detailed observation; I place my confidence in the world. (*PP*, 297/343)¹³

In other words, we do not perceive the contours of the object; we divine them.¹⁴ The object as fully determinate self-identity is always inaccessible. This essential horizontality of the object is warranted by the interdependence of the visible and the invisible. The “overdetermination” (*VI*, 240/289) that arbitrarily determines the horizontal object is, like in the case of the subjective pole, derived from the concept *as horizon* sedimented into an illusionary object. This most emphatically responds to Deleuze and Guattari’s implicit criticisms of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of horizon in their distinction of the Plane of Immanence: for Merleau-Ponty, horizons not only are horizons unable to attain their objects (something Deleuze and Guattari would acknowledge), they are not even structured by their object. In short, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the horizon corresponds exactly to Deleuze and Guattari’s absolute horizon, despite the latter’s intention of correcting Merleau-Ponty’s allegedly insufficient concept (See Deleuze

and Guattari 1994, 36–37).¹⁵ Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty “each fact can be a dimension” (*S*, 15/29) and

Every concept is first a horizontal generality, a generality of style—there is no longer a problem of the concept, generality, the idea, when one has understood that the sensible itself is invisible, that the yellow is capable of setting itself up as a level or a horizon. (VI, 237/286)¹⁶

These statements point to a continuum between the visible and the invisible, between the determinate and the indeterminate, reducing both poles to the status of horizons. In fact, visible and invisible are “negation-reference” for each other, not so much each other’s opposite as each other’s horizon, the “degree zero” of each other (*VI*, 257/305). Through this concept of “negation-reference” Merleau-Ponty transforms the duality of the visible and the invisible into a continuum.

These remarks about the horizontal status of the subjective and objective poles as clearing room for their relation are a mere translation of the acquisitions of Chapter 5 (where “relation” was described in terms of phenomenality or intentionality) into an ontological language. However, they bring out the implications of the renewed concept of reduction to the ontological realm. By letting the two poles of the subject-object relation vanish over the horizon, Merleau-Ponty focuses his ontological investigations on the unity of their bifacial relation, and he betrays the fact that reduction to phenomenality was all along a reduction to the ontological. In so doing, he installs the “general” phenomenality mentioned above in the place of Being *qua* “flesh” (*N*, 273).¹⁷ At this point it is necessary to recall that this “ontological” investigation (precisely because it focuses on the transcendence between the external poles and thereby rejects those very poles outside of Being) was first apprehended by Merleau-Ponty not as an ontology but as the defining inquiry of metaphysics. In “The Metaphysical in Man” immediately after transforming the cogito into an affirmation of the link between man and world, Merleau-Ponty writes: “Metaphysics is the deliberate intention to describe this paradox of consciousness and truth, of exchange and communication” (*SNS*, 95/115). Recall that it is in this same work that Merleau-Ponty first urged himself to undertake an inquiry into the origin of truth. Such a metaphysical characterization of his ultimate project is only reinforced by the note from *VI* quoted above in which Merleau-Ponty declares himself “for metaphysics.” Although there is no question that in many instances Merleau-Ponty explicitly refers to his project as an ontology, there is, to my knowledge, no significant occurrence of the words “ontology” or “ontological”¹⁸ in any of his published writings past the date of this declaration in May 1960. As I said, this profession of

faith of “metaphysicism” is intended as an opposition to a certain ontology that finds its ground in an opposition of Being and nothingness. For Merleau-Ponty, there would be no sense in patiently overcoming the distinctions we have seen him undo only to finally succumb to this later one.

Ontic and Ontological

In “Interrogation and Dialectics” in *VI*, the strategy of Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Sartre’s dialectic of Being and nothingness is to demonstrate first that the absolute externality of the two principles is incompatible with their communication, and second, that the impossibility of their communication makes even their difference impossible as such: absolute difference is indifference. If the two poles are determined with reference to each other when such an opposition is impossible (because it would require communication), the absolute determinacy of Being and the absolute indeterminacy of nothingness eventually translate into each other: “We are beyond monism and dualism, because dualism has been pushed so far that the opposites, no longer in competition, are at rest the one against the other” (*VI*, 54/79). Indeed, this makes Being and nothingness “synonymous” (*VI*, 237/287). Further, the ontology of Being and nothingness that states their absolute externality makes the fact of incarnation (a subject—nothingness—inside an object) impossible. As such, it is unable to provide an account for the ontic level and is hardly an ontology at all.

This critique delineates the task at hand for Merleau-Ponty: his ontology will have to account for an unbroken link between Being and the beings under penalty of missing the “most important,” which is “the experience which passes through the wall of Being” (*S*, 22/40, t.a.). In short, it will have to pass the test of the ontic. This is reinforced by a consequence of the critical remarks addressed to Sartre: the absolute externality of Being and nothingness problematizes the voice of the philosopher who formulates it insofar as it drowns it into externality or internality, which are the same thing. For Merleau-Ponty, as we saw, “direct ontology” is impossible because to access Being as such one would have to be a non-perceptual Being. The solution lies in his “indirect ontology (Being in the beings),” which allows him to elaborate an ontology from within Being:

Wild or brute being, contra sedimented-ontic being. Ontology which defines being from within and no longer from without: on every level, being is infrastructure, [*membrure*], hinge [*charnière*] and not offered in perspective and demanding the construal of what lies behind these appearances. (*N*, 282)

This signifies that the very possibility of ontology is dependent on the link between the ontological and the ontic because ontology reaches Being only through the beings. As such, this ontology must seek Being as “infrastructure,” that is to say, it must seek the general located inside the particular. We can now understand Merleau-Ponty better when he writes:

The distinction physico-chemistry-life=distinction of the eventful [*l'évènementiel*] and the structural;—of the ontic and the ontological;—of individual spatio-temporal facts whose localisation is unique and the architectonics. (*N*, 268)

This remark from the lecture courses on nature is precious because it establishes a web of equivalences between distinctions (eventfulness and structure; the ontic and the ontological; the spatio-temporal and architectonics) that frames the question that the concept of “flesh” is designed to address: the question of the relations of the particular and the general (*VI*, 147/191).¹⁹

To begin with, one of the lessons of the critique of the Sartrean absolutization of Being and nothingness is that overcoming such an opposition can only be achieved by a softening of the distinction between the local and the general. Indeed, how could we transcend the objective world if there was no generality located within the “spatio-temporal objects”? Conversely, how can the general have any relation to the local as its principle if precisely it is deprived of locality?²⁰ This, of course, is no question for traditional metaphysics for which “all the determinations are negation in the sense of: are *only* negations” (*VI*, 169/221).²¹ For such metaphysics, the local does not have to be accounted for as such because the general contains it; there is nothing that the local has that the general does not. The local is “just” a restriction of the general. For Merleau-Ponty, however, locality must be given a positive value precisely because its finitude is anterior to the thought of the infinite; it is within facts that we find essences²² and not the other way around. It is a consequence of Merleau-Ponty’s rejection of the ontic-ontological divide that phenomenal reality cannot be reduced to anything else. Instead, the ontological principle has to be phenomenal too.

Merleau-Ponty’s ontology will thus seek to integrate the principle of localization within Being. This gives Being (*qua* flesh) a phenomenal dimension:

The flesh [*la chair*] is not matter, is not spirit [*esprit*], is not substance. To designate it, one should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth and fire, that is, in the sense

of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an “element” of being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to location and to the now. Much more: the inauguration of the where and the when, the possibility and exigency for the fact; in a word, facticity. What makes a fact be a fact. (VI, 139–40/181–182)²³

Facticity is the essence of fact; as such it is neither essence nor fact. It must, for this reason, lie midway between the thing and the idea. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty rejects facts and essences as overdeterminate.²⁴ We also know that overdeterminate terms are incompatible with their mutual relation. This makes the status of the element problematic because it means that in an objective world there cannot be any midway between these two poles because between them there is no “way” to speak of.

So far, we have approached Being as element only with reference to the overdeterminate terms of fact and essence. It is clear now that this approach is impossible. This means that Merleau-Ponty will have to reverse the traditional account of relation as derived from its terms into an account of the terms as derived from the relation. In order to address this question, we must first examine the status of these “horizons” or “poles” in greater detail.

Less-than-Determinacy

Merleau-Ponty’s rejection of polar thought amounts to a rejection of absolute determinacy. In fact, as I pointed out in Chapter 4, the thought that absolute determinacy meant the “death of consciousness” has guided much of his work since *PP*. Now again it becomes apparent that the solution to all dualisms for Merleau-Ponty is to be found in a horizontalization of the poles.

In order to examine Merleau-Ponty’s use and understanding of indeterminacy, we must make a quick detour through his reading of Bergson. As regards the misconception that Being and nothingness are absolutely determinate and mutually exclusive poles, Bergson’s alleged positivism is in the same basket as Sartre’s negativism. This is because Merleau-Ponty’s target is not negativism or positivism, it is the very alternative they both posit:

At first sight, it may seem paradoxical to compare two philosophies of which one is essentially a positivism, and the other a negativism. The fact of the matter is that neither accepts any mixture [*mélange*] of being and nothingness. (N, 101)²⁵

Beyond this critique, however, Merleau-Ponty detects in Bergson's positivism an inconsistency that points in a promising direction for his own project: "The genuine sense of Bergsonian philosophy is not so much to eliminate the idea of nothingness than to incorporate it into the idea of being" (*N*, 97). This, of course, is contrary to Bergson's intentions, but for Merleau-Ponty it is also the way toward the solution of most of Bergson's aporiae. This peculiar use of Bergson's "shadow philosophy" on Merleau-Ponty's part has far-reaching consequences in two respects: on the question of solving the divide between "*nature naturée*" and "*nature naturante*" (Bergson's own ontic/ontological divide) and on the solution to the question of history. This latter point will be discussed later but it is now time to examine the first one.

To Merleau-Ponty, Bergson's inability to overcome the divide between "*nature naturante*" and "*nature naturée*" is due to his extreme positivism that leads him to construe the question of determination in a less than rigorous manner. In his course on Bergson, Merleau-Ponty formulates Bergson's problem: "Life is mobility, and it makes determinate forms appear within itself. However, this determinacy of the living forms separates them from the *élan*" (*N*, 89). This is due to the definition of the "*nature naturée*" as contingency, as opposed to the fully positive "*nature naturante*" (90). For Merleau-Ponty, the divide is unbridgeable as long as determination is conceived as negativity. This problem cannot be solved if the conception of Being it relies on remains unquestioned. Paradoxically, Merleau-Ponty finds this conception of Bergson's to be rooted in the idea of the "positive infinite" of Descartes and the Cartesians, and he regards this common ancestry between Bergson and Sartre as the third term that reunites them. In the case of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty explicitly refers to the dialectic of Being and nothingness as applicable only to a Cartesian universe (*NC*, 234).²⁶ In the case of Bergson, however, everything seems to contradict this assertion. Bergson precisely opposes the Cartesians who thought that "in order to triumph over non-existence, they needed necessity [*le nécessaire*]" (*S*, 186/304).²⁷ The Cartesians establish nothingness first and against this background only demanded justification for existence. Bergson sees positivity as primary and rejects any idea of nothingness. Yet, deducing from this polar opposition an incompatibility between the Cartesians and Sartre on the one hand and Bergson on the other would be to overlook Merleau-Ponty's repeated claim that absolute Being and absolute nothingness are the same (*VI*, 228/280). In "Everywhere and Nowhere," he presents absolute positivity (in the form of the "infinite infinite") as "the secret of the Great Rationalism" (*S*, 149/242, t.a.) of Descartes. Indeed, this absolute positivity was affirmed by the Cartesians precisely because a final victory

over nothingness was required, and it is only in this sense that one can understand determinacy as negativity. In other words, any limitation to absolute positivity is so much ground *relinquished* to nothingness. It appears, then, that the absolute positivity of the Rationalists with its background in nothingness represents the paradigm for both Sartre's and Bergson's philosophies for opposite—that is to say, identical—reasons:²⁸ they both see restriction as negativity. This outlines *a contrario* the route Merleau-Ponty needs to follow:

What we are seeking, on the contrary, is a genuine explicitation of Being, i.e. not the display of a being, even infinite, in which would take place—in a way which is in principle incomprehensible to us—the articulation of the beings with each other, but the unveiling of Being as what they modelise or cut out [*découpent*]. (N, 266)

On the basis of the synonymy of Being and nothingness, it is impossible to regard beings as failed (determinate *qua* restricted) absolutes because they would be failed with regard to literally nothing. This means that determination cannot be accounted for by a concept of Being that would not also exemplify determination. Determination is not less than absolute, it is other-than-absolute, and any concept of Being must be able to account for this. But, laments Merleau-Ponty: “Bergson never sees the positive value of our finitude” (IS, 101/102).²⁹ If he wants to provide a concept of Being that includes in itself the principle of spatio-temporality, Merleau-Ponty needs to liberate his ontology from the alternative of determinacy and indeterminacy in the same way as he liberated it from that of facts and essences. We have seen that a semi-determinate ontological principle is approximated through the concept of the “element.” This involves a seemingly contradictory double movement of promoting determinacy *and* indeterminacy or, more accurately, of establishing a concept of indeterminacy that unifies the two. That is to say, we must take indeterminacy in the literal sense, as neither fully determinate nor indeterminate. Because of the usual sense of “indeterminacy” as “non-determinacy,” I shall refer to this notion as “less-than-determinacy.” This concept is clarified in the analyses of the relations of the visible and the invisible.

Being as Presence

Both the visible and the invisible are principles of restriction for each other.³⁰ It is in the structured balance between these two principles that the perceived world—that is, the world—surges (Barbaras 2004, 231–32).³¹ This is a radical shift from the philosophies of the absolute because

it brings restriction to the status of an ontological principle. It is no longer the mere consequence of the (inexplicable) encounter of Being and nothingness. The opposition *and* interdependence of the visible and the invisible precludes the positing of the one or the other as absolutes.³² In their pure form, they are but horizons (“negation-reference” [VI, 254/305]) of each other; in experience, they are placed on a continuum. This means that there is an invisibility of the visible as well as a visibility of the invisible. This is why it is impossible to conceive of the title of *The Visible and the Invisible* as announcing a duality in the way that the title of *Being and Nothingness* did. One cannot say, as is often heard, that Merleau-Ponty replaces a dialectic of Being and nothingness with a dialectic of the visible and the invisible because Merleau-Ponty’s book is concerned only with the “and” of the title. If, strictly speaking, there is no visible *or* invisible, there is no question that there is the pair of the visible and the invisible. This pair is anterior to either term. Merleau-Ponty unifies it under the heading “visibility” before designating it by his final concept of “flesh.” The intertwinement between the visible and the invisible entails that the perceptual world is essentially indeterminate in the sense of less-than-determinate.

We may now return to Merleau-Ponty’s preference for metaphysics by looking at the complex passage that is the context of this striking declaration:

World and being: their relation is that of the visible and the invisible (latency) the invisible is not another visible (“possible” in the logical sense) a positive only absent.

It is *Verborgenheit* by principle i.e. invisible *of the visible*, *Offenheit* of the *Umwelt* and not *Unendlichkeit*—*Unendlichkeit* is at bottom the in-itself, the object—For me the infinity of Being that one can speak of is operative, militant finitude: the openness of the *Umwelt*—I am against finitude in the empirical sense, a factual existence that has limits, and this is why I am for metaphysics. But it lies no more in infinity than in the factual finitude. (VI, 251/300)

The stakes are high. Merleau-Ponty reintroduces negativity within Being with startling results. The invisible cannot be conceived as “absent,” for two apparently contradictory reasons, as follows.

First, the invisible conceived as the absence of the visible makes it a positive visible only to be seen elsewhere, in another visual field. This contradicts the nature of the invisible because it fails to acknowledge the invisible as inherent to the visible (VI, 257/305)³³ or, to put it differently, it fails to acknowledge that we *imperceive* even as we *perceive*. Furthermore, it contradicts the nature of the visible itself by assuming that the visible can

be itself without being supported by the invisible:³⁴ there is a simultaneity of the visible and the invisible in visibility.

Second, and paradoxically, seeing the invisible as the negative of the visible makes it possible for it to be present while still being invisible; it is present precisely as the principle of this visual field.³⁵ Thus, Merleau-Ponty seems to radicalize the invisible's absence only to make its presence possible, as "presence of an absence" (*IP*, 178).³⁶ This presence is the object of an "imperception" (Lefort 1990, 17)³⁷ that is nothing else than the reverse of perception itself, its "invisible" as it were.³⁸ At this point, it is worth recalling *PP*'s process of perceptual determination as described in Chapter 4 and that is at work in *VI*: perceptual determination is an essentially infinite process whose "negintuition" of its own incompleteness is always somewhat perceived (as "dissatisfaction," says *PP*) although not necessarily always noticed until it raises to conceptual awareness through sedimentation. The pairing of the visible and the invisible seems to translate this impossibility of absolute determination into the ontological realm: visible and invisible lead into each other indefinitely.

This is crucial because it shows a clear choice on Merleau-Ponty's part: when confronted to the alternative of weakening the notion of Being in its opposition to nothingness or that of presence in its opposition to absence, Merleau-Ponty chooses to save presence. He would rather have a negative present (the invisible) than a positive absent (the visible elsewhere). Contrary to the polar philosophies, presence unifies the opposites; there is the presence of absence and the presence of presence. The choice is clear: admitting the possibility of absence would be affirming the "bad" infinity of positivity, which eventually leads into the "in-itself," and the "death of consciousness" under the blows of full determinacy. It would give a negative ontological value to the empirical limitations of our field of vision as *limitations* ("finitude in the empirical sense"). Instead, Merleau-Ponty chooses to give a positive ontological value to our locality no longer as limitation but as the very access into generality, and favors the odd couple of empirical infinity (as "openness") and ontological finitude. However, this is problematic because it involves that the "metaphysics" in question here is just as little conventional a metaphysics as it is an ontology. If—as we have just seen—ontology is the overdetermination of Being, for Merleau-Ponty, "metaphysics [. . .] is a sublimation of the being [*l'étant*]" (*VI*, 186/238)—that is, a belief in absolute determinacy. It is not surprising then that in the perspective of building a doctrine of indeterminacy as "less-than-determinacy," the metaphysical pole seems as remote as the ontological one from the ground sought, since it is a ground that allows for a restricted kind of infinite.

This is why Merleau-Ponty makes a choice, chooses one “kind of infinite,” the “militant infinite,” the infinite of human possibilities (and of historical becoming), which I shall return to later. This means that Merleau-Ponty sacrifices the fullness of Being to an ontological account of locality. This, he says, is “why [he is] for metaphysics.” From an orthodox ontological point of view, however, the concept of Being proposed here remains unsatisfactory because it falls short of respecting the ontic/ontological divide. This is why Merleau-Ponty refers to the flesh as “being that is not full [*de l'être qui ne soit pas noyau dur*]” (N, 286) or to presence as a weak version of the Being of traditional ontology. Of course, the weakness of Merleau-Ponty’s Being is an attribute of its indeterminacy. Given the indeterminate character of both the visible and the invisible, the concept that reunites them must be carefully chosen in order to avoid achieving their unification by overdetermining them.³⁹ It must be a “less-than-determinate” concept whose (few) determinations must be encountered in both the visible and the invisible.

The concept of presence satisfies both the visible and the invisible without reducing one to the other insofar as they remain horizontally distinct in presence: they have different modes of presence—namely, perception and imperception. This is what Merleau-Ponty means with his famous formula “seeing is by principle seeing more than one sees” (S, 21/38). Seeing is both perceiving and imperceiving. Furthermore, the concept of presence possesses the characteristics of an “element.” It stands halfway between a thing and an idea because it offers a generality that is coextensive to the world itself (the phenomenal world—the only world—is entirely present as either visible or invisible) and at the same time it exhibits the determinability of locality, precisely insofar as it holds the invisible—that is to say, the principle of locality—within itself. This union of the horizontally distinguished poles within presence contains the principles of spatio-temporal existence and thus amounts to a “softening” of the notion of Being:

Being and the imaginary are for Sartre “objects,” “entities”—For me they are elements (in Bachelard’s sense), that is, not objects, not fields, soft being [*des êtres doux*], non-thetic being, being before being [. . .] dehiscence that knows itself as such. (VI, 267/314, t.a.)⁴⁰

In a section of the appendix to VI named “Presence,” Merleau-Ponty offers another description of these “fields”:

The thing, the pebble, the shell, we said, do not have the power to exist no matter what; they are only soft forces [*des forces douces*] that de-

velop their implications on condition that favourable circumstances be assembled. (VI, 161/212)

In these passages, there is a clear identification of the softening of Being and its indeterminacy leading into openness as contingency.

The Human within the Infinite

In his critique of the absolute of the Cartesians, Merleau-Ponty opposes the “positive infinite” not with a negative one, but with a “restricted” one, which he calls “a certain kind of infinity.”⁴¹ For Merleau-Ponty, the way out of—or rather, the way between—both indeterminacy and absolute determinacy is offered by the very nature of the infinite: there are different kinds of infinities, some infinities are determinate in the sense of less-than-determinate.⁴² The infinite of the perceptual movement of infinite determination (discussed in Chapter 4), being circumscribed by the visible and the invisible, is one of them. This infinite is structured (restricted) enough to provide the framework necessary to support a meaningful concept of Being as both general and specific enough for accounting for everything in its phenomenological visibility (that is, determinacy). In fact, a rigorous understanding of the concept of infinite reveals that there cannot be any absolutely indeterminate infinite, that the infinite infinite is impossible:

[The Cartesians’] notion of infinity is positive. They have devaluated the closed world for the benefit of a positive infinity, of which they speak as one speaks of some thing, which they *demonstrate* in “objective philosophy”—the signs are reversed: all the determinations are negations in the sense of: are *only* negation—this is an avoidance of the infinite rather than an acknowledgement of it—Infinity congealed or given to a thought that possesses it at least enough to be able to prove it. The veritable infinity cannot be that: it must be what exceeds us: the infinity of *Offenheit* and not *Unendlichkeit*—Infinity of the *Lebenswelt* and not infinity of idealization. Negative infinity therefore. (VI, 169/221)

The infinite cannot be at the same time a thing (objectivation is determination-restriction) and absolute positivity. Maintaining this contradiction would jeopardize the *Lebenswelt*. This takes us back to the issue of the voice of the philosopher. Indeed, positing an absolute infinite is a contradiction because it casts the subject who posits it outside of it in a way that attributes an outside to this infinite. It does away with the ontologi-

cal importance of spatio-temporal existence by depriving it of its claims to ontology. Yes, there is a thought that “possesses” this infinite, but no, this thought is not incarnate; indeed, it is infinite itself, precisely because it “possesses” the infinite. The positivism of rationalism amounts here to the rejection of incarnation. As a consequence, one believes that spatio-temporal reality is only a degenerated (restricted) version of this infinite. At this point, the “signs are upside down” because instead of seeing the infinite as arising from existence, it sees existence as arising from the infinite: for Merleau-Ponty—against Sartre (VI, 237/285–86)⁴³—the *Lebenswelt* is the world whose being is in question⁴⁴ and this world is not all positive in the sense of self-identical. In existential terms, Merleau-Ponty seeks to oppose an inauthentic philosophy of authenticity with his own authentic philosophy of facticity.

This means that any consistent concept of the infinite must include human existence and be granted *some* determination; it must be merely a “negative infinite” in the sense of a “non-finite” (VI, 169/221).⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty’s rejection of the absolute infinite amounts to a choice in favor of one “kind of infinite.” This infinite will characterize both Being and the beings; it is the structure of less-than-determinacy. Such infinite that cannot be restricted on *all* sides (it would be finite) must be restricted on *some* sides if it is to be *a* specific infinite. Merleau-Ponty uses the metaphor of openness (“*Offenheit*,” “*Béance*”) or of a mouth whose lips (VI, 137/177) are like lines of flight or horizons.

The Mechanics of the Flesh

The concept of openness used by Merleau-Ponty to designate Being must be qualified in order to avoid misunderstandings. The openness and the metaphor of the lips that supports it should not be understood as casting determinacy to the outskirts of Being and leaving absolute indeterminacy within those boundaries. This, in fact, would amount to a return to a Cartesian conception of Being on a background of non-being and Merleau-Ponty’s efforts would be lost.

Reflexivity: Horizons vs. Principles

This openness must be understood as a unique milieu. This, however, leads to the usual toils and traps of monism: How can monism account for the experience of externality—illusory or not—as exemplified by the very dualities unraveled so far? Merleau-Ponty’s solution will lie in the notion of

a certain reflexivity *of* Being: Being has a reflexive relationship to itself, as such, it is one but presents itself as two.

If the lips, taken as horizons, are not to be conceived as the external limits of Being, this calls into question the concept of horizon. Although it appears in Merleau-Ponty's writings since *PP*,⁴⁶ the concept of horizon comes to ontological prominence in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl's *Ursprung der Geometrie*. In his lectures on the text (*HLP*, 264–386), horizons are described as the transcendental that warrants the continuity between perceptual faith and ideality. They are heuristic concepts thanks to which the structure of existence may be grasped (*TL*, 117–18/163–64, 119/166).⁴⁷ In the notes of *VI*, this concept becomes doubled with another concept, yet to be defined, that of “principle” (e.g., *VI*, 23/41).⁴⁸

For Merleau-Ponty, the horizon “is no more than the sky and the earth a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception or a system of ‘potentiality of consciousness’” (*VI*, 149/193, t.a.). Conceiving the horizon in this way, says Merleau-Ponty, is a lack of “rigor” (149/193). Instead, we must think of the horizon as “a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens up is caught up, included within it” (149/193). In one word: the horizontality of Being is *intensive*. The horizon, unlike our common idea of it as the meeting point of the earth and the sky, *over there*, in the distance, or like the metaphor of the lips might have led us to believe, is not unfolded before us, as a limit to the void that separates us from it. On the contrary, it is given an intensive quality; it is around us in the sense that we are within it, its texture itself is horizontal. Horizontality is the texture of the less-than-determinate infinite affirmed by Merleau-Ponty. Horizontality therefore qualifies the texture of existence and not a cosmological or metaphysical structure.

However, Merleau-Ponty encounters horizons in another sense in Husserl's text.⁴⁹ For Husserl, a horizon is an unattained reality (*VI*, 112/149) and Merleau-Ponty reads Husserl's concept of *Ursprung* as “operative ideality”: “This, he asserts, requires that we clarify two terms: speech as *funktion* [and] world as *horizon*” (*HLP*, 335). *Ursprung*, for example, is an operative ideality because it is a horizon solidified into an object of thought, and subsequently, of striving. Let us recall that it is through the sedimentation of a concept in “speech” that an ideality can have any “operative” quality and can motivate human action.⁵⁰ This also means that it is through language that horizontality becomes sedimented into a fact (*NL*, 328).⁵¹ If it is true, then, that a horizon is a horizon as sedimented through language, this must draw our attention to the fact that there cannot be any horizon prior

to sedimentation. Merleau-Ponty refers to sedimented horizons as “principles,” in the sense we encounter in expressions such as “in principle” (*de principe* or *en principe*) usually employed to express some sort of awkward application of the theoretical to an empirical world that eludes it: “In principle, the L train runs every two minutes.” If a principle is truly an efficient cause, then we must be careful as to what precisely it causes.

A principle, therefore, is a horizon made into a thing. When Merleau-Ponty writes, for example, that “reversibility is not an actual identity of the touching and the touched. It is their identity of *principe* [*identité de principe*] (always abortive) [*toujours manquée*]” (VI, 272/320, my emphasis), he posits the distinction of principle and “actuality.” As “always failed,” the principle can only be efficient in explicating the flesh, not in constituting it. This ambivalence whereby the principle exists (as an explanatory concept) and is always inactual (as a reality) is problematized by Merleau-Ponty in his response to Gurwitsch’s idea that time has “in principle” a continuity. Merleau-Ponty replies:

What does “in principle” mean? What possibility are we talking about? This is saying too much or too little. Too much: this continuity is unrealisable. It is not merely impossible in fact, it is impossible in right [*impossibilité de droit*]; the present is itself unachieved, transcendent. Too little, the possibility is grounded upon the structure, hinges and setups [*montages*] of my life. (NL, 337)

If by “in principle” we mean that the principles exist, allowing for the fullness of the present and its continuity with the future and the past, then we derive a reality from a possibility, and we fall back into the fallacy of reading completeness in incompleteness. If, however, we mean “principle” as an ungrounded, fantastical possibility, then we say too little because this possibility—that is, the thought of the self-identity that is possible only in principle—is itself inscribed in the structure of existence. I shall return to the question of the relations between reality and possibility in a moment, but we can already see that Merleau-Ponty seeks to ground the error of believing in the reality of horizons (Husserl’s error) within the structure of Being, in a movement that coincides with the project of finding the “origin of truth.”

For example, one may say that the mechanics of flesh tend toward full determinacy (“identity”) and thereby see the principle of determinacy as an explanatory concept for the dynamic structure of the flesh (through this concept we grasp the structure of flesh). Affirming the “principle” as real, however, is transforming the implications of horizontality into an affirmation of existence. The principle may be real as an explanatory concept but this does not make it ontologically real.⁵² By overlooking this distinction,

we start conceiving of the milieu from the point of view of the outside⁵³ and no longer—as would be correct—from within Being. Merleau-Ponty writes: “Every concept is *first* a horizontal generality” (VI, 237/286, my emphasis). The critique he addresses to Husserlian horizontality is that it reverses this priority: the concept (*qua* self-identical entity) arises from the openness of horizontality, not the reverse (Carbone 2000, 122–23). This is reiterated in the notes to VI dating from the period of his lectures on *Ursprung der Geometrie* (VI, 237/284).⁵⁴ The horizon of openness is self-identity. Metaphysics in the Cartesian sense (which sees the absence of full Being as a scandal) affirms self-identity as a reality and turns it into a principle. For Merleau-Ponty, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, there lies the origin of error: taking the perception of an absence (the absence of self-identity) to be the perception of a presence or as Merleau-Ponty writes abruptly: “Consciousness of incompleteness is not consciousness of completeness” (NL, 329).⁵⁵ In other words, like it was the case with the relations of infinite and nothingness in the Cartesians’ worldview: the incompleteness cannot be understood from the point of view of a completeness that is only secondary to it (NL, 330). (Husserl, however, continues to envisage horizontality negatively as “non-completeness” [NL, 331].) This means that Merleau-Ponty regards the “operative” quality of the horizon according to Husserl as operating falsification: the horizon presents itself as a determinate object for it presents itself as non-horizontal. Less-than-determinacy points at determinacy and, as a consequence, presents itself as *failed* determinacy. Enter the “Great Rationalism.”

This means that we must include within less-than-determinacy the possibility of imperceiving determinacy. In the same way as the pre-objective was always toward the objective, the concept of horizon establishes the continuity between perceptual faith and objective “truth” and between truth (as less-than-determinate) and error (as full determinacy). If the world is essentially horizontal, it means that it contains in its structure the thought of non-horizontality; it presents itself as pointing toward determinacy. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls the “ideality of the horizon” (VI, 153/196). This is important: neither principles nor horizons in the Husserlian sense are false, it is positing their priority that is. Mauro Carbone formulates it very well:

The passage from the ideality of the horizon to “pure ideality,” from “sensible ideas” to “ideas of the intelligence,” that is, from the “conceptless” to the “conceptual,” does not imply a liberation from every visibility, but rather a *metamorphosis* of the flesh of the sensible into the flesh of language. (Carbone 2000, 121)

The illusion of determinacy must be included: Being thinks and thereby creates truth about itself. This is why the archaeology of truth is essentially ontological. It is what Carbone calls the “thinking of the sensible.” This thinking, as I have repeatedly claimed, is sedimentation—that is to say, overdetermination. Overdetermination is the creation of fully self-identical, solid beings, in opposition to Merleau-Ponty’s soft beings. The typical motion of the “thinking of the sensible” is thus the disentangling of the Being and non-being that lie within the soft being of presence: every act of “thought” of the sensible involves the sedimentation of a soft Being into a hard one. Where, then, does all the non-being (which was responsible for the coefficient of softness of the soft Being) go? This is, of course, a dangerously schematic question, but answering it will prove helpful. There are two typical ways in which negativity and positivity may organize themselves. Either i) positivity holds the center and casts negativity to the outer edges of the space (Bergson’s view), or ii) conversely, negativity may find itself holding the center, separating positivity on both sides of it (Sartre’s view). These two typical cases are mere idealizations and, as such, they are impossible because they rely on the absolute distinction of the positive and the negative. They represent two forms of what the determinative thinking of the sensible strives toward. To be sure, the attainment of these idealized configurations is impossible, but the movement toward them does exist; it is the work of the “thinking of the sensible.” Hugh J. Silverman expresses this by saying that Merleau-Ponty’s “dialectics is more of a tension between existence and dialectics, an ambiguity between the two” (Silverman 2000, 136).⁵⁶ In other words, Merleau-Ponty conceives of Being as torn between the unity of the dialectical poles (positivity and negativity) and their opposition (represented by Bergson and Sartre). It is in this tension that it finds its equilibrium. As a result, the poles are neither unified nor fully separated. The result will thus be a “fabric of Being” made of relief, “hollows” (more-than-negative [VI, 227/276]) and “fulls” (less-than-positive). In his course on nature, Merleau-Ponty asserts:

There are two sorts of mass realities [*réalités de masse*]: one is static-random [*statique aléatoire*] distribution, an entropic phenomenon, the other is counter-random distribution [*la distribution contre-aléatoire*] which does not direct itself towards equalisation and relief [*la détente*]. (N, 269)

The first option corresponds to the unity that Silverman calls “existence.” It is ruled out by the very fact that, being “static,” it precludes sedimentative events. It is, of course, the second one that Merleau-Ponty chooses. It comprises a non-homogenous distribution of positivity and negativity,

which creates hollows and fulls. Merleau-Ponty calls the unit combining hollows and fulls “folds” (VI, 93/126, 115/152, 216/265).

Folds

The “fold” (“*pli*”) is a key theme in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. It allows him to account for the very possibility of deriving the multiple from the one—that is to say, to justify the experience of externality without granting it any existence. As is to be expected, Merleau-Ponty’s solution is to admit only for “soft” distinctions between objects, so as to maintain their whole as a unified “fabric” (VI, 272/320). These distinctions signal the uneven distribution of negativity and positivity within Being, and their being consequently distributed into shades. In an unpublished note Merleau-Ponty writes:

I am seeking an ontological midpoint, the field which reunites object and consciousness . . . but the field [. . .] must not be conceived as a cloth in which object and consciousness would be cut out. (unpublished note, file 22)⁵⁷

As Barbaras points out, “the only way out consists [. . .] in determining an original plan in which this duality is resolved internally but in the centre of which it is also rooted” (2001, 31). Indeed, it is hard to see what else than pure nothingness could play the role of the scissors cutting out the objects from the world, and we know that pure nothingness is impossible. This motivates a move from the model of the “cut-out” to that of the “fold,” which is a softening of the distinction of object and element into the Gestaltic model of the continuum of form and content reworked, as we saw, into the continuum of the visible and invisible.

The chiasmatic structure of perception and its figuration in terms of folds has been well recorded and this is not the place to propose a new elucidation of it. However, it is worth pointing out in which sense the fold is a combination of positivity and negativity in order to be able to account for the manifold of Being. A fold is a continuity of three “moments” that—precisely because it is a continuity—are horizons of each other: two “flaps” (“*feuilletés*”) separated and linked by the very “point of reversal” (VI, 263/311) that I shall call the *folding*. This “point of reversal,” Merleau-Ponty says, is made of negativity:

The only “locus” where the negative truly is is the fold, the mutual application of the inside and the outside, the point of reversal. (VI, 263/311)⁵⁸

This “folding” is the key mechanism for what Merleau-Ponty calls the “chiasma” of perception that he regards as the general structure of the flesh. The chiasma is an eccentric identity—that is, a fold that is almost exact, were it not for the “folding” itself that maintains the non-identity of the two “*feuilletés*” at the same time as it ensures their junction (VI, 272/320).⁵⁹ In perception, the figure of the chiasma accounts for the fact that perception is always doubled (“lined by”) by apperception. It is exemplified most strikingly through the specularity of mirror-like perceptions (VI, 139/181, 145–46/189) and the phenomenon of the “touched-touching.” If I touch my left hand with my right, I obtain a configuration of four terms whose relations cross at a point blank that belongs to none of the four terms and, as a horizon (and as a horizon only), to all four of them: my left hand as touching encounters my right hand as touched, and my right hand as touching encounters my left hand as touched (VI, 256/303). The center point of this relationship is the surface of both hands taken in a rigorous sense, that is, in the sense of an intensive horizon (since their contact makes a pure surface impossible, one hand leading directly into the other [VI, 148–49/191–92, 263/311]). For Merleau-Ponty, this experiential simultaneity of perception and apperception is not absolute because it never happens that the touching entirely fuses into the touched to the point that the intimacy of the relationship self-self would be equaled by the relationship self-other: my left hand will never take itself for my right hand and I will never take myself to be the other.⁶⁰ The distinction is grounded in the difference between the “flaps,” a difference itself grounded in the negativity of the “point of reversal.” This means that the structure of the flesh is primarily reflexive. This is fundamental because it incorporates an intentional structure within Being: “What replaces the antagonistic and solidary reflective movement [. . .] is the fold or hollow of being [*creux d'être*] having by principle an outside” (VI, 227/276). The fold grounds the experience of externality, as it were, from *within* Being. There is transcendence from one flap to the other, but this is only because they were never truly separate:

One cannot account for this double “chiasma” by the cut of the for-itself and the in-itself. A relation to being is needed that would form itself *within* being. (VI, 215/264)

Expression

The fact that the ontological concept of the fold and the phenomenological concept of the chiasma are different aspects of the same property of

Being is crucial because it opens up to an ontology of the human. Merleau-Ponty defines flesh as the “animated body” (*S*, 227/370). In a certain sense, it is obvious that perception requires for the perceiver to be sentient, that is, animated. This means that animated bodies are the locus of the reflexivity of Being because the folds of Being designate perception:⁶¹ when my hand touches my pen, it is really touching—*folding onto*—itself.⁶² This adds a new layer to the rejection of the active/passive divide discussed in Chapter 5. Passivity and activity come together in subjective intentionality. Because it is my intentionality, it is active, but because it is the intentionality of Being happening through me, it is passive: “Every relation with being is simultaneously a taking and a being taken” (*VI*, 271/319).⁶³ Thus, Merleau-Ponty affirms that the “jointing and the hinge [*membreure*] of being [. . .] is being realised through man” (*S*, 181/295).⁶⁴

Yet, this is not how it appears to us at first glance. At first, I assume that the pen and I are separate spatio-temporal entities and that our relation is of an external order. Proving this approach to be erroneous is not as crucial for Merleau-Ponty as it is to prove that his idea of Being suffices to account for the fact of this error. If he wishes to elaborate a monistic ontology, Merleau-Ponty needs to account for the experience of externality *as illusory*. We primarily think of an error in terms of the inadequacy of the claim it makes to the reality to which it refers. It is this separation that makes errors possible and that Merleau-Ponty investigates. This question is the guiding problem of the inquiry into the origin of truth—an inquiry that, as we saw, asks the question: “How come error has come to be known as ‘truth?’” I have discussed this question in Chapter 4 already with appeal to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of sense and in connection to the experience of error. However, the examination of the chiasma can provide some further clarifications.

The errors Merleau-Ponty opposes are the dualistic premises of objective thought. Thanks to the description of flesh as essentially reflexive, Merleau-Ponty enables himself to account for the fact of the structure of objectivity. Reflexivity formally presents itself as a subject-object relation where the subject and the object are one and the same. Still, the distinction of principles and horizons showed us that the structure of intentionality does not necessarily entail the affirmation of its terms. In its objective and sedimented form, however, reflexivity affirms terms that are posited and conceived of independently of each other and of their relation. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty calls the incompatibility of these two claims “the problem of a genuine in-itself for us” (*PP*, 77/92, 322/372). We have also seen that he addresses this problem thanks to his concept of sedimentation that solidifies the experience into an objective relation. If sedimentation

indeed seems to solve this problem, it might also lead us to greater difficulties. Martin Dillon calls sedimentation the “settling of culture into things” (1988, 101). This is acceptable only under the proviso that we understand “things” as an approximation of the object by the subject, an arbitrary stop put by the subject on the infinite process of determination, an “overdetermination.” Indeed, we now know that we deal with “things” only insofar as we sediment the world into them. This means that “things” are nothing more than moments of our relationship to the world. Furthermore, the term “moment” in this case must be understood in its temporal sense as well. In Chapter 4, I established that the concept of sedimentation provides the principle of historical succession, eventfulness, and becoming. Consequently, I shall prefer to call sedimentation a settling of culture into *events*.⁶⁵

History and Becoming

Until now, we were concerned with solving the problem of the relation of the general and the local, a problem that remained “spatial.” This spatial problem has led us to a temporal one through the themes of reflexivity and sedimentation and we must now turn to the question of the relations of the eternal and the temporal. In many ways, of course, this question is merely another version of the previous one⁶⁶ and many aspects of the answer have already been discussed. However, if we wish to understand further the implications of an ontology of less-than-determinacy, we must ask what status Merleau-Ponty gives to the notion of time.

In many places, Merleau-Ponty refers to Being as “eternal”⁶⁷ and as an “existential eternity” (VI, 144/187):

It is a question of finding in the present the flesh of the world (and not in the past) an “ever new” and “always the same”—a sort of time of half-sleep (which is Bergson’s nascent duration, ever new and always the same). The sensible, Nature, transcend the past-present distinction, realise from within a passage from one to the other. Existential eternity. The indestructible. (VI, 267/315)

This characterization gives the moment as a mode of access into the eternal in much the same way as earlier; the local object was given as a mode of access to the general. As it has been shown with regard to the relations of the local and the general, there are two ways to bring the eternal and the temporal together: one is to unify them into a greater whole and the other is to regard temporality as an incarnation of the intemporal. We know from the earlier discussions that Merleau-Ponty will choose the latter. However,

several authors, when confronted to the question of temporality, opt for the first. In “World, Flesh, Vision,” Françoise Dastur likens Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh in *VI* to his concept of world (“*le monde*”) in *PP* (Dastur 2000, 31–32).⁶⁸ As I discussed in Chapter 4, the concept of the “world” is introduced in its opposition to that of the “universe.” The world is co-extensive to the universe, and yet it approaches it in an opposite way. The universe is a sum of spatio-temporal, supposedly fully determinate entities and, as such, it is a scientific fantasy. The world, however, is the milieu of our life and experience, the *Lebenswelt* (*PP*, 381).⁶⁹ As such, the world (as opposed to the universe) is egocentric and localized (see *HLP*). Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, every individual *is* and *has* a world, which is made of beliefs, pieces of knowledge, objects, and a perceptual milieu. A world, therefore, is made of sedimentations.⁷⁰ In these conditions, we have to recognize that a world is also temporally determinate. This is a difference between world and flesh (as eternity) and it suggests that we should revise Dastur’s description of the relations between the flesh, the universe, and the world. I would like to propose the hypothesis that the world is the ensemble of the spatio-temporal *and* the eternal, that is, an ensemble of the universe *and* the flesh.⁷¹ Indeed, what is lacking in the notion of “universe” is the recognition of the consubstantiality of all objects, and thus, of their common ground. It is, in other words, the recognition of the less-than-determinacy of Being. However, the flesh as eternal seems to be lacking temporality and differentiation. In these conditions, the concept of the “world” seems to offer a synthetic unification of the two notions within a greater whole because the world is not an object (this distinguishes it from the “universe”), but it is made of objects (this distinguishes it from the “flesh”). If it is right to propose the equation *flesh = world - universe*, then we shall encounter problems if we identify flesh and world because this would mean that we pose the flesh *qua* world as a greater whole including the objective sedimentations. We have seen that this is impossible; there is no greater whole possible. The discussion of the duality of the subject and the object and other dualisms have shown that the transcendental can only be found in a relation without terms. In this sense, the flesh does not include the objects; it is the formula of their sedimentation. Therefore, the position that incorporates both temporality and eternity within the flesh makes it impossible to account for the union of the temporal and the atemporal because it is a notion that includes the principles of objective thought in too radical a form. Instead, Merleau-Ponty decides to soften the notions of the temporal and the atemporal in the same fashion as he previously softened the poles into horizons in order to make them commensurable.

Time as Sedimentation

In an article informed by what I called trialism, Marc Richir portrays Merleau-Ponty's ontology of society and history as coming to an "irreducible aporia" (2008, 19) when unable to address the following question: "can existential eternity, which is also immemorability of the flesh and the spirit, accommodate any intrinsic and wild historicity without contradiction?" (Richir 2008, 19). In the subsequent pages, Richir seeks to rescue Merleau-Ponty's philosophy from this problem. There is no need to do so. This question is precisely what the constitution of Being as flesh is an answer to. Richir's misunderstanding comes from his reading of the note from February 1959, "Tacit Cogito and the Speaking Subject." In this passage, Merleau-Ponty urges himself to:

issue in [*aboutir à*] a theory of the savage mind which is the spirit of praxis [*l'esprit de praxis*]. Like all praxis, language supposes a *Selbstverständlich*, an instituted, which is *Stiftung* preparing an *Endstiftung*—the problem is to grasp *what*, through the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects, *wishes, speaks*, and finally *thinks*. (VI, 175/228)

For Richir, this original "institution" must be read as a break away from the ground of flesh and, as such, it poses the problem of the genesis of the instituted out of the non-instituted.⁷² Such a reading, however, overlooks the answer provided by Merleau-Ponty to his final question: *What* precisely "through the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects, *wishes, speaks*, and finally *thinks*" is the flesh itself. The institution of language and culture is not some inexplicable emergence of the temporal out of the intemporal. It is not a creative event in the strict sense as much as it is a reflexive event: culture is not a "cut out," it is a "fold." For Richir, there is temporality before there is man (the sedimenting being). This portrays man as a somewhat late addition to "wild being." This contradicts Merleau-Ponty's recognition that the problem at hand in this note is bound up with that of the cogito, a link that Richir says nothing about. The problem of the cogito is that it poses the subject as independent and then extracts it from the flesh. This precludes accounting for subjective creations as reflexive movements of the flesh rejoining itself by way of the subject. Since *PP*, Merleau-Ponty insists that there is no Being without the human because the human (as the instance of sedimentation) is constitutive of it. This is what he calls the "transcendence" of sedimentation (VI, 191/242). This means that sedimentation is logically anterior to temporal-

ity and that temporality is by definition *the* temporality of sedimentation (VI, 190/241).⁷³ The essential inclusion of consciousness within Being (its incarnation [*PP*, 331/382])⁷⁴ is the inclusion of history and the critique of the cogito emphasizes that the human has no right to separate itself from Being and build itself into a first principle. Flesh and humanity are rigorously contemporaneous.

Ontogenesis vs. Foldings

More than it explicates Merleau-Ponty's idea of ontogenesis, however, this merely introduces it as a question. In "Bergson in the Making," Merleau-Ponty laments on Bergson's lack of interest for the philosophy of history and attributes it to his inability to thematize the in-between of the *naturant/naturé* divide, where "history, oscillating between *naturant* and *naturé*" belongs (S, 188/308, t.a.).⁷⁵ This, Merleau-Ponty writes, leads Bergson to consider the genesis of the nature *naturée* by the nature *naturante* as "a bogged-down effort [*un effort enlisé*], and human history as an expedient to set the mass in motion again" (S, 188/308). We have seen that Merleau-Ponty finds a way out of the Bergsonian corner through the idea of a "less-than-infinite infinite," at once infinite and (partly) determinate. For Merleau-Ponty then, it is a matter of conceiving of this very creation as "a drama going towards the future" (S, 188/308)—that is to say, a determination that opens to new infinities.⁷⁶ This is, as Chapter 4 has established, the definition of Merleau-Ponty's concept of "advent."

An advent is possible precisely because, as we have just seen, one should not take man himself to have any genesis in the world since there is no anteriority of world over perception. History was never started, and becoming is not an accident of Being. If there is any sort of simultaneity between man and world, it is because they are both defined with reference to each other. As we have seen, this is why Being is to be approached as a relation without terms and, consequently, as reflexivity, and man as the locus of its folding. This signifies that man has a constituting relation to the world:⁷⁷ "Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it" (VI, 197/248). Here, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that this constitution cannot be complete and portrays reality as an encounter of Being and man through creation. It also poses certain limits to the comparisons with Leibniz established by Barbaras and influential since⁷⁸ because Merleau-Ponty's thesis of reciprocal creation precludes the subordination of the local monad to the general Being as its means of expression.⁷⁹ This means that we have to nuance the statements made above where it seemed that the human was Being's bridge

toward itself because the human determines Being at the very moment she holds the mirror to it. For Merleau-Ponty then, Being is not *a* reflexive Being, rather, it is *defined* by reflexivity, which is this “*empiètement*,” the ability to be itself while being *about* itself.

In his review of Eugen Fink’s *Sein, Wahrheit, Welt* of 1960, Jean Wahl reports: “There is, according to Fink, a union of the two Aristotelian categories of relation and substance” (1960, 191).⁸⁰ Further on, Wahl opposes a claim of Fink’s by asserting that “one could maintain, with Hartmann for example, that there are [. . .] levels of being, and that it is one of the functions of philosophy to study them” (191). As to Fink’s analysis of the “thing,” he adds:

One could only admire the efforts of the philosopher to grasp beyond the concept these cores of thingness [*choséité*] that he mentions. Yet, can we truly grasp them? Is there any other thing than those things that are the work of our hand and our intelligence? We have to question ourselves in order to establish whether this idea of a thing which seems to fascinate contemporary thought can truly become incarnate or whether, like a Kantian idea, it is not something that flutters before our mind and directs it, without our being fully able to see in reality a centre that would truly correspond to it. One could maintain, along with Hartmann for example, that there are layerings [*des étagements*] of phenomena, some levels of being, and that it is one function of philosophy to investigate them. (193)

In a footnote to *VI*, Merleau-Ponty refers to Wahl’s review when he explains:

There is therefore no need to add to the multiplicity of spatio-temporal atoms a transversal dimension of essences—what there is is a whole architecture, a whole “levelisation” [*étagement*] of phenomena, a whole series of “levels of being,” which are differentiated by the coiling up [*l’enroulement*] of the visible and the universal over a certain visible where it redoubles and inscribes itself. Fact and essence can no longer be distinguished, not because, mixed up in our experience, they in their purity would be inaccessible and would subsist as limit-ideas beyond our experience, but because—being no longer Being *before me*, but surrounding me and in a sense traversing me, and my vision of Being not forming itself from elsewhere, but from the midst of Being—the alleged facts, the spatio-temporal individuals, are from the first mounted on the axes, the pivots, the

dimensions, the generality of my body, and the ideas are therefore already encrusted in its joints [*jointures*]. (VI, 114/151–52, t.a.)⁸¹

This shows how, for Merleau-Ponty, the three remarks drawn from Wahl's article are correlated: it is precisely because Being is relation that the fully determinate object is inexistent, insofar as the locus of perception lies *within* Being and, as such, perception is incapable of abstracting itself from any other Being. As a result, fully determinate objects are not inaccessible but in principle inexistent. More important, this means that one's inherence to Being implies a mechanics of perception as ongoing determination of the kind described in *PP*, and this in turn means that Being must be structured in terms of levels because the dynamics of determination in perception are productive of accumulative sedimentations:⁸² "There is no longer anything but representations on different scales" (VI, 222/275). Indeed, Wahl's levelization model—which Merleau-Ponty calls a "structure"—is completed by the model of concentric circles (discussed in Chapter 5) where different types of being are organized around each other so as to account both for their different degrees of distance from the center and for their being structurally unified around it anyway (VI, 186/237; see also *IP*, 164). This is what sedimentation accounts for in a different way: any degree of sedimentation requires so much archaeology to attain its center and in so doing it distances us from it. In its very form, however, it gives away the position of this center and thereby gives us a direct access to it. This center remains eternal within the becoming that adds layers of sedimentations over it. This is why Merleau-Ponty affirms "Eternity is not another order of time, but the atmosphere of time" (*PP*, 393/451, 423/484).⁸³ But what is the center discussed here? As the discussion of reduction (which we now can see is nothing else than de-sedimentation) has made clear, it is intentionality itself that defines Being as relation: flesh. As a result, it becomes apparent that opposing Merleau-Ponty with the problem of the temporality of Being is a misreading of a large part of his ontology because it amounts to demanding of him to draw perception *from* Being when Being is precisely defined with reference to perception; in simpler terms, it is forgetting that Merleau-Ponty is a phenomenologist.⁸⁴

Flesh as the Pregnancy of History

There is another aspect to the question of ontogenesis that uncovers one of the most remarkable features of Merleau-Ponty's ontology but requires clarification. It is, as Miguel de Beistegui puts it in "Science and Ontol-

ogy,” the problem of “the necessity to define a sense of being that no longer coincides with actuality alone” (Beistegui 2005, 115). Indeed, how can we conceive of an all-encompassing Being that would still draw new beings from itself? In a certain way, this is a question we have already addressed with reference to Merleau-Ponty’s softening of Being into presence. We have seen that presence as a compound of perception and imperception must be regarded as less-than-determinate Being, and that less-than-determinacy in turn finds its expression in the idea of a non-absolute infinite. We have then observed that this restricted infinite really amounted to an unstable coexistence of positivity and negativity, accounting for the folding back of the flesh onto itself and making it an “interiorly worked-over mass [*masse intérieurement travaillée*]” (VI, 147/191). Finally, we have identified this “working-over” as sedimentation. This means that sedimentation is not a layer superadded onto flesh but, instead, that it is its essence. This essence, whose dimension is time, seems in turn to affect flesh with incompleteness: as a direct consequence of its partial determinacy, we are to understand Being as essentially incomplete⁸⁵ and, consequently, essentially productive of history.

By defining history as sedimentation, Merleau-Ponty portrays time as accumulative: every sedimentation is grounded in the previous one.⁸⁶ We have seen in Chapter 4 how this phenomenon warrants the possibility of archaeology (VI, 187/239). However, this bears consequences on our present discussion on the relations of the eternal and the temporal. We have encountered the invisible as the element of indeterminacy in perception and as the condition of visibility of the visible. As a consequence, we must think of sedimentation as an obliteration of the invisible. Indeed, if sedimentation is overdetermination, it must be understood as a reduction to the visible. Yet, when reduced to itself, the visible becomes fully visible—that is to say, invisible.⁸⁷ This is why Merleau-Ponty describes sedimentation as de-differentiation (VI, 197/247): historical sedimentation is the production of an event within which the previous event has been assimilated. This has strong implications with regard to the reflexivity of Being because it means that one must not only characterize history as a process of de-differentiation of Being with itself, but also as a process of continuous determination, a macro-process not dissimilar to the micro-process of determining intentionality, which supports it. Nevertheless, it should be noted that according to Merleau-Ponty this process is by nature infinite because Being is itself a determinate infinite: the expansion of the determinacy of Being cannot exhaust its infinity. This gives special value to sedimentative events that appear as determining an ever narrower yet always infinite field of possibilities.

Being as Possibility

Let us gather our thoughts: flesh as Being is a restricted infinite that indefinitely restricts itself, making this infinity essentially temporal. This is a quotient of indeterminacy and the flesh is less-than-determinate Being as a combination of determinacy and indeterminacy whose unity lies in a softer Being called “presence” (in “Presence and the Softening of Being”). It is this softening of Being that warrants its eventful productivity and maintains the umbilical cord that links it to the beings that are its expressions (in “The Mechanics of the Flesh”). Consequently, we must arrive at a characterization of being as soft as well as productive. In this section, I shall try to construe the view that for these reasons, Being must be defined as potentiality.

There are formal reasons for this. The question of ontogenesis has demonstrated that “less-than-determinate” Being really amounts to a “less-than-actual” Being.⁸⁸ It is clear that the challenge Merleau-Ponty poses for himself—namely, to make the multiple not just a weakening of the One, but an essential feature of the beings—forces Being to account for the multiple—and, indeed, the contingent—from within itself. This means that we must find a characterization of Being according to which Being would not be lost in multiplicity or in spatio-temporal incarnation. The notion of possibility fulfills this proviso. It is a feature of the logic of possibility to survive actualization: no “thing’s” actuality stands as a denial of its own possibility.⁸⁹ Finally, the notion of the possible allows us to accommodate for a truth—albeit softened—even within indeterminacy: the truth of a possibility is less demanding than the truth of an actuality. This is crucial because, for all his deconstruction of the concept of truth, Merleau-Ponty intends his own ontology to include the possibility of truth; indeed, he presents Being as flesh as the authentic experience of truth that initiated the process of sedimentation into the truth as we know it (i.e., error).

Possibles: Real vs. Ideal

All through *VI*, however, Merleau-Ponty seems reluctant to characterize his notion of flesh in terms of possibles. Well before the analysis of the chiasm, he declares:

My incontestable power to take leeway, [*de prendre du champ*], to disengage the possible from the real, does not go as far as to dominate all the implications of the spectacle and to make of the real a simple variant of the possible. (*VI*, 112/148)

Later on he adds: “The invisible is not [. . .] *possibly* visible” (VI, 228n63/277n1).

The first statement is obviously an anti-idealist declaration on Merleau-Ponty’s part, designed to establish that his ontology of the element does not lead to any idealism because ideas are impossible without an incarnate subject. In the same vein, the second statement is designed to maintain that there is no absence in Being: Being is not less than it could be. The purpose of the establishment of the presence of the invisible is, as I said, to overcome the characterization of the locality of incarnation as negative limitation. In fact, these two statements are not a rejection of the ontology of possibility, but they serve to delineate Merleau-Ponty’s reevaluation of the concept of possibility.

Conditions of Possibilities vs. Experience

In the first statement, Merleau-Ponty distances himself from any transcendental idealism of the Kantian sort. In “Interrogative Thought, Merleau-Ponty and the Degree Zero of Being” (1973), Garth Gillan gives an account of Theodore Geraets’s transcendental reading of Merleau-Ponty (Geraets 1971) before concluding that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh is “neither the domain for a new transcendental philosophy, nor for an uncritical ontology” on the grounds that for Merleau-Ponty “there is an ontogenesis of Being; there is Being, beings appear” thanks to “the phenomenalization of Being and of man effected in the interrogation of the flesh, [which] is the destruction of positivity, both in the being of the world and in the being of subjectivity” (Gillan 1973, 73), thereby making Being incarnate. This means that there is a distinction between the transcendental deduction (which draws from experience its conditions of possibility) and Merleau-Ponty’s indirect ontology (which draws “Being from the beings”) and that this distinction is grounded in incarnation.

For Merleau-Ponty the stakes are in fact higher than Gillan recognizes. It has become more and more worrying as we unfold Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the element that the indirect method may put just as much in Being on the one side as it collected in an ontological language on the other. This seems confirmed by the fact that Merleau-Ponty seems to have dissolved the notion of the object to the extent that he has solidified that of Being, turning both into a “semi-thing.” If he wishes to escape this circle, Merleau-Ponty has to relate his accounts of flesh as element and of the determinate object as horizontal to an experience that does not depend on the mind. In fact, this is the question of the reduction posed all over again. In

his critique of the reduction (which saved his philosophy from becoming a transcendental idealism of the Husserlian kind), Merleau-Ponty invokes the impossibility of absolute reduction as an obstacle to the almightiness of the mind: the reduction is impossible because there is one experience that cannot be reduced, the experience of intentionality itself. In other words, Merleau-Ponty's method does not so much oppose Kant's as it carries it further, to an "object" lying beyond what Kant took to be the final ground and that he failed to glimpse:

The progress of interrogation towards the centre is not the movement from the conditioned to the condition, from the founded unto the *Grund*: the so-called *Grund* is *Abgrund*. But the abyss one thus discovers is not such by lack of ground. It is upsurge [. . .] of a negativity that *comes to the world*. (VI, 250/298)

Merleau-Ponty aims not just at the ground of phenomena, but he aims at a ground which would be fundamental enough to be both what it is *and* what it is *about*; the ground of experience and the ground of the notion of ground at once:

The essence is certainly dependent. The inventory of the essential necessities [*nécessités d'essence*] is always made under a supposition (the same as that which recurs so often in Kant): if this world is to exist for us, or if there is to be a world, or if there is to be something, then it is necessary that they observe such and such a structural law. But whence do we get the hypothesis, whence do we know that there is something, that there is a world? This knowing is beneath the essence, it is the experience of which the essence is a part and which it does not envelop. (VI, 109/145)⁹⁰

This experience is the ground of the idea of ground, the origin of truth, the perceptual faith, and the very place of reflexivity where Being as object becomes Being as subject, where Being becomes both idea and thing (VI, 222/271). It is the "phenomenon of truth." By replacing the reduction to essences with the reduction to experience, Merleau-Ponty moves from the level of metaphysics to that of (qualified) ontology. More important, he introduces negativity into Being in the context of the very question of possibility, and with it he transforms a movement that was both ideal ("*idéal*" [VI, 229/278])⁹¹ and transcendental into a movement of reduced consciousness toward its environment of copresence, a movement neither transcendental nor deductive. Merleau-Ponty's opposition to Kant is therefore based on a disagreement on the status of the possible: for Kant,

the possible is not grounded in the experience of the common ground of thought and reality, and this makes it “possible” only in the logical sense (VI, 145/109–10).

This takes us to the second statement: How can we maintain an idea of the possible in an ontology of presence? In what sense can there be a possible that, although fully present, is not fully actual? The history of Merleau-Ponty’s confrontation with this question adopts the contours of that of his relationship with Bergson.

Ideal and Real: The Truth of the “Retrograde Movement of the True”

In *la Pensée et le Mouvant*, Bergson rejects any attempt to approach “*durée*” and eternity together. *Durée*, which is the time of events, is not set against a background of eternity, even less is this eternal possibility anterior to the actual event. Such an approach, he states, is the result of a “retrospective illusion” that derives from the actuality of the present its possibility in the past; a possibility that is thereby seen as permanent. This “retrograde movement of the true” (Bergson 1969, 10–17, 56–65), he believes, is really an attempt to deny temporality and explain it away in atemporal terms. This is because it links all present to a past that is seen as its possibility and reduces temporal flow to the unfolding of one stable, unique, and eternal entity whose rule of continuity is understood as causal. It assumes that there is an eternal truth that is not subject to *durée*. This atemporality leads to the application of logical (hence atemporal) categories to the unfolding of time. This argument leads Bergson to reject any account of eternal truth. For Merleau-Ponty, however, the possibility to envisage the single event, the eternal, the multiple, and the successive together is a necessary condition for any ontology. As a result, he offers his concept of temporality as sedimentation, making it a temporal flow that does not annihilate the past but rather maintains it by making it internal to—and undistinguishable from—the present. In all the published notes from the month of May 1959, Merleau-Ponty is seen confronting the Bergsonian notion of an illusory “retrograde movement of the true.” In these fragments, Merleau-Ponty lays down a network of concepts whose connection depends on the characterization of Being as possibility.

These passages are complex and before examining them in detail it might be helpful to present their key themes. There are two main claims in this series of texts:

- a) Full actuality is an illusion. It is presented under three guises: (i) the present is not equivalent to the actual (“transcendence of the thing

and transcendence of the phantasm” [VI, 191/242] and “‘thought,’ consciousness and being-at . . .” [VI, 191–92/243]; (ii) there is no direct access to the present (“Perception-unconscious-one-retrograde movement of the true . . .” [VI, 189/240]); (iii) the distinction of the passive and the active is erroneous (“Perception-unconscious-one-retrograde movement of the true . . .” and “[Bergson], transcendence, *forgetting*, time” [VI, 193/244]).

- b) Being as the structure of events is eternal; this thesis is presented under two guises: (i) the object of all philosophies is unique, so is its subject, and they are one and the same (“Being and the World, [on Descartes, Leibniz etc.]” [VI, 187/237–38]); (ii) Myths are temporal events that appeal to the eternal (“Visible and Invisible” [VI, 188/238–39]).

We shall see that the two theses come together if we conceive both the eternity of possibility and the presence of actuality as pertaining to the actuality of possibility.

Bergson’s rejection of the possible in the first essay of *la Pensée et le Mouvant* also relies on two theses: a) the present is fully actual, and b) the possible is fully ideal (*idéal*), that is, fully inactual. It is obvious how these two theses flow from Bergson’s alleged positivism, and Merleau-Ponty’s reaction, which is to overcome the positivism/negativism divide by softening the opposition of the possible and of the actual, is quite predictable.

The Rejection of Actuality

Let us start with the first of Merleau-Ponty’s theses, which states that the present is not fully actual. For Merleau-Ponty, the term “transcendence” (VI, 186/237) qualifies Being as transcending the subject-object divide as well as the temporal-intemporal divide and the divide between the three instances of time. Merleau-Ponty integrates this transcendence—which Bergson would classify as atemporal—to the present itself: “The present itself is not an absolute coincidence without transcendence” (VI, 195/246). Conversely, it is wrong to think of the past and the future as pure nothingness:

The future is not nothingness, the past is not the imaginary in Sartre’s sense—to be sure *there is* the present, but the transcendence of the present makes it precisely able to connect up with a past and a future, which conversely are not a nihilation [*néantisation*]. (VI, 196/246)

Merleau-Ponty believes that this continuity between the instances of time is a result of the phenomenal nature of the world (which is a sedimentation of the structure of Being). Since every moment is defined as the time of a sedimentative act, it is also defined as the time of determination. This determination takes place in time in one respect while it is timeless in another (since it *is* time). Time as *durée*, if correctly understood as the time of determination, is *not* pure flow. Indeed at the micro-level it seems that the metaphor of time as space (that is to say, of time as also reversible) is validated by Merleau-Ponty because the time of the understanding of signification seems to be reversible. In it, what comes later may appear to consciousness earlier than what comes earlier: “There is *germination* of what *will have been* understood,” writes Merleau-Ponty of his experience as a foreigner in England, when he seems to understand people with a delay, but “all at once” (VI, 189/240). For Merleau-Ponty, in hermeneutic fashion, we understand the whole of an utterance before we understand its parts, but at the same time we would not understand it without understanding its parts too. This circularity is broken only by positing a ground that precedes the utterance and that we share with our interlocutor, thereby enabling us to communicate. Merleau-Ponty sees here a “lateral communication,” where signs and signifieds both stem from a common context shared by the two interlocutors (VI, 189/240). This lateral communication transforms the circle of signs and signifieds into a temporal circle where the pre-existing context (which we share with our interlocutor) becomes clarified by the utterance that succeeds it only to clarify this utterance in return. This leads Merleau-Ponty to this surprising conclusion that the understanding of significations does not take place in a linear time: *to understand the present signifies to understand the future understanding the past*. This is nothing new to Bergson’s concept of the “retrograde movement of the true” if we remember how Bergson also considered that “signs” (in the historical sense this time) were understood as such only after what they were signs for was understood (Bergson 1969, 14).⁹² However, Bergson rejects the retrograde movement of the true on the basis that: “Neither the course nor the direction, nor consequently its term were given when those facts took place, hence, those facts were not yet signs” (14).

For Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, the signs were signs all along, but they were not signs *for me*: “Once the meaning is given, the signs take on the full value of ‘signs’” (VI, 189/240). Of course, one may explain away this contrast between the two thinkers by appealing to the distinction between the two senses of the word “signs,” the historical (Bergson) and the linguistic (Merleau-Ponty). It is true, after all, that the question of time is involved in different ways depending on the meaning one uses. Yet, this

would be missing the substance of Merleau-Ponty's argument: historical and linguistic signs are both sedimented and, consequently, they are both subjected to the same logic. This is indeed what is at stake in the attribution of transcendence to the present: as transcendent, the present always *signifies*. The a posteriori attribution of meaning to the past (which turns it into a system of omens) is not a fallacy; it is the very accomplishment of this past that projects itself toward future sedimentations thereby offering itself to the future as a sign. This allows Merleau-Ponty to portray this phenomenon not as an illusion, but as the nature of time: if time is sedimentative eventfulness, and if sedimentation relies on the retrograde principle, time must be understood as essentially—not erroneously—also retrograde.

The Partial Idealization of Reality

This has strong consequences regarding the essence of the “logical possible” (the second claim announced above [VI, 227/278]). For Bergson, ideality is negativity and the present is fully positive and actual. As a consequence, reducing the past to the possible is a purely ideal act, and it is necessarily fallacious because it reduces a *positive that has been* into a *negative*. In the case of the movement of determination in consciousness, Bergson describes it as a “*va-et-vient*” made of a series of inductions (VI, 189/240). For Merleau-Ponty (who quotes this expression) this is insufficient, and this insufficiency leads to a misunderstanding: “it is not a series of inductions” (189/240) in the sense of an approximation of the absent from some present. Instead, it is the movement of the sedimented invisible coming to visibility and this movement is, indeed, partly subjective. This is fully consistent with the analysis of presence, which makes any induction in the strict sense impossible: one does not perceive the absent (induction), one imperceives the invisible. From a Bergsonian point of view, of course, the rejection of induction does not suffice to cleanse the field of the possible from any mental operation (after all, it is a question of determination and signification). Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that there is no presence without mental operations. Hence, moving from the present to the past as its possibility does not entail a “weakening” of the actual into the virtual. Instead, it is the present itself that is construed as virtual (in the sense of less-than-actual) or, in more Merleau-Pontian terms, the virtual itself is the actual.⁹³ This is crucial because it brings to light the implications of the model of the circumscribed infinite: for a Bergsonian metaphysics of positivity, imagination appears as infinite negativity—that is, as an absolute virtualization of all actuality. In this sense, imagination is the source of all

philosophical error in much the same way and for the same reasons as for Descartes the discrepancy between the infinite freedom of my imagination and the restricted nature of reality opens up the space of error (Descartes 1996, 37–44).⁹⁴ For Merleau-Ponty, Bergson “makes the essential difference between perceived and imaginary impossible” (VI, 194/245, t.a.).⁹⁵ Bergson’s view entails that one be unable to distinguish between the experience of an imagining and the experience of reality because the full activity of imagination does not require any passivity, any contact with reality in order to present itself as real. In Cartesian terms again, Bergson is unable to account for the moment when we wake from our dream and realize it was only a dream. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty’s less-than-determinacy of Being precludes any absolute infinite (while leaving open an infinite space) and thereby preserves the distinction between the perceived and the imaginary. Let me clarify this. The “perceived” is, for Merleau-Ponty, a combination of “perception” and “imperception,” that is to say, of passivity and activity (VI, 190/241). The imaginary as Bergson conceives it is, however, purely active. In Merleau-Ponty’s view, the distinction of the perceived and the imperceived is itself perceptible and amounts to what Kant would call an “indicator of reality” (PP, 343/395). This means that Being does not need to be fully actual in order to be distinct from illusion, rather, it needs to be partly indeterminate (in the sense of partly independent from me). I must then requalify what I called the arbitrary determination of sedimentation and now construe it as a “less-than arbitrary.” Indeed, even if determination is free it is bound by a range of impossibilities figured by the “perceived.” In short, the union of infinity and determination in the circumscribed infinite warrants that the possible is not only fantastical, but also real as possible.⁹⁶

Myth, Lateral Communication, and the Continuity of Human Time

In *PW*, Merleau-Ponty takes over the question of the pre-understanding of the sense and its “*va-et-vient*” movement toward the sign. Here he finds that the real is not the only possible but he doesn’t conclude that its realization is fully contingent:

Notion of the possible: no arbitrary appearance [*surgissement*], *ex nihilo*, but lateral appearance of an apparatus of meaning [*appareil de sens*] which unfolds its content only gradually. (*PW*, 45/64, t.a.)⁹⁷

In a note from *VI*, in the context of a discussion of Freudian association and more widely of the interaction between sign and sense, Merleau-Ponty returns to this idea of some “lateral apparition.” The lateral apparition es-

establishes the *coappartenance* of two words to the same “radius of being.” This radius of Being acts as the common ground thanks to which two words can express themselves through each other (in the case of Freudian association, for example [VI, 239/289]). In the note of May 1959 discussed above, Merleau-Ponty explains the “occult in psychoanalysis” and even “telepathy” because of this idea: between the woman who, feeling herself being watched, rearranges her dress, and the voyeur watching her there is a lateral community that ensures that the woman will know, in an “occult” sense, that she is being watched and, *on the basis of this knowledge*, will become able to understand her own actions as a response to the glance. Again, it seems that the meaning is given before the sign. This, Merleau-Ponty says, is due to the woman and the stranger sharing “a wave [*une onde*] that runs in the field of the *In der Welt Sein*” (VI, 190/241). What exactly is this waveline, this “radius of the world”?

Triggered by Proust’s description of the experience of reading Mme de la Fayette’s *la Princesse de Clèves*, Merleau-Ponty engages in a meditation over the “bond between the flesh and the idea” (VI, 149–55/193–201): What does it mean for the flesh to be both sign and signification? He approaches this question through the analysis of the nature of a “myth,” or as he says elsewhere, a “classic” (S, 11/21). When a work of art such as a novel becomes a myth, it becomes a spatio-temporal incarnation of the eternal flesh. For Merleau-Ponty, the enduring importance of a work like *la Princesse de Clèves* testifies of the sedimentation of the work itself. It is because the work has become invisible (in the sense of fully visible—lacking a background) that it has become a myth: “The (mythical) significance would be created by the ignorance of the social background [*fond social*]” (VI, 187/239, t.a.), says Merleau-Ponty. The Gestaltic metaphor of a work’s presenting itself against a background is significant: in achieving mythical status the original signification of the work will be obliterated and converted into another, wider one. In becoming a myth, *la Princesse de Clèves* has ceased to be about anything specific; it has left the “serial time, that of ‘acts’ and decisions” when the “mythical time was reintroduced” (VI, 168/220). In other words, a work’s access to the status of a myth must be recognized as a “reduction to transcendental immanence” (168/220) that (as was described in Chapter 5) sees beyond “facts and decisions” toward “facticity” (168/220). A myth is a myth because it is not about sedimented facts, but about Being itself. This reduction of the manifold to the one, this “de-overdetermination,” was encountered in Chapter 5 under the heading of “perspectivism.” As I argued, perspectivism is *not* a method that would combine many facts to offer one global ontic picture. It seeks to de-sediment facts by confronting them with each other in order to re-

duce them to their common core: Being as transcendence. Perspectivism is the reduction of facts to facticity. The process of mythification is similar because it strips the work of its local determinations, thereby making it an incarnation of the general—that is to say, of Being. In this sense, it loses its separation (its specific “social background”) from our everyday experience, which is the experience of Being, and in this sense, it becomes invisible. In another note from May 1959, Merleau-Ponty applies this method to the history of philosophy:

Our problems and the problems immanent in a philosophy. Can one pose the first to the second? [. . .] There is but one solution: show that there is transcendence. To be sure, between the philosophies no reduction to one unique plane, but that in their spread staggered out in depth [dans cet échelonnement en profondeur], they nevertheless refer to one another, it is nevertheless a question of the same Being. (VI, 189/237, t.a.)

Here we are presented with a history of philosophy unified thanks to a transfer from “serial time” to “mythic time,” a transfer from the time of things to the time of meanings. In serial time philosophies do not apply to each other; in mythic time they encounter each other and meet at the nexus of their concern (i.e., Being).

Just as the sense of the Englishman’s words anticipated them, myths reverse the question of the “exceeding of the signified by the signifier” (VI, 168/220) because they “remain meaningful beyond statements and propositions” (S, 11/21, t.a.). What exactly can they be talking about if their meaning is to be found not in their words, but beyond them? The question is wrongly posed: “classics” like *la Princesse de Clèves* still signify without talking about anything any longer. Indeed, says Merleau-Ponty, we no longer “read” them (VI, 189/240) precisely they cease to be about anything. Instead, like the lady and the voyeur, we share a “modulation of the being-in-the-world” with them (VI, 193/144) and their interaction with us is no longer causal. The book no longer affects me as an active element affects a passive one. Instead, this duality vanishes in the coexistence that the mythical status of the myth opens up: the myth, like the history of philosophy is “all in the present.”⁹⁸ Merleau-Ponty calls this power of “exceeding the signified [which belongs to the serial time] by the signifier [which is in the mythical time]” “symbolism” (VI, 122/198, 192–93/243). Symbolism characterizes the overlap of the present over the future. For Merleau-Ponty, the present does not so much “explode towards the future” in a Husserlian way as it is “a symbolic matrix” that leads itself outside of its own domain and toward the future (192–93/243). The pregnancy of

the mythical text parallels the pregnancy of the present because they both possess an ability to be more than what they are as signs, more than part of the flow of serial time, more than “overdeterminate” facts (VI, 241/289). They remain themselves while remaining invisible.

For Merleau-Ponty, then, it is impossible to conceive of time while claiming that actuality is fully positive and the ideal fully negative. This, as his analysis of Bergson shows, makes the continuity of time impossible and, consequently, it reduces *durée* to the time of the clock. Merleau-Ponty introduces ideality within the present and thereby reduces it to the (partly) virtual. This allows him to account for the continuity of the three instances of time. First, because they are all partly virtual, the move from the present to the future (or the past) does not appear any longer as a leap from the actual to the possible: even the present itself is not fully actual. Second, the present always maintains a “symbolic” link with the next moment, a link that is untimely.⁹⁹ All of this establishes a distinction between the possible and the purely ideal. The openness of flesh (conceived as determinate infinite) merges actuality and possibility. As a result, the possible is no longer conceived as pure abstraction, but is viewed as the possibility of sedimentation—that is, the possibility of actuality. This possibility, in turn, is recognized as a creative principle and as such it is granted reality. The “ideal” or “logical” possible opposed by Bergson becomes replaced with the actuality of the possibility of events: flesh as productivity.¹⁰⁰

The confrontation with Kant construed flesh as intentionality or transcendence not as a set of conditions of possibility of experience placed on another level. The confrontation with Bergson shows it to be possibility not in the logical or ideal sense but in the sense of actual possibility. This saves Merleau-Ponty from accusations of idealism because it establishes a possibilism grounded not in ideality but in the reality of the structure from which single facts or events are only lateral variations:

Universality of our world, not according to its “content” (we are far from knowing it entirely), not as recorded fact (the “perceived”), but according to its configuration, its ontological structure which envelops every possible and which every possible leads back to. The eidetic variation, therefore, does not make me pass to an order of separated essences, to a logical possible, the invariant that it gives me is a structural invariant, a Being of infrastructure [*un être d'infrastructure*]. (VI, 229/278)

At the same time as he establishes flesh as potentiality, Merleau-Ponty explains what the flesh is to be the possibility *of*: flesh as “less-than-determinate” is the possibility of overdetermination, of sedimentation, of

events (*OE*, 61)¹⁰¹ and of their encroachment over each other. Flesh being the openness of which facts are the variations as well as the rule of this variation is the possibility of history.

Truth and Error

In Chapter 4, I examined how the research of truth involved an inquiry into the origins of truth and how this entailed that truth must altogether be considered as eternal and originary: the object of truth is the origin of truth. In this chapter, I have come to the conclusion that Being must be construed as the possibility of history. This brings us back to the question of truth. It was made clear in Chapter 4 that the very idea of an inquiry into the origin of truth was somewhat paradoxical: How can we establish some continuity between the true and the untrue? And if there is no continuity, how can we practice an archaeology that would lead us from the mistaken truth to the “true” truth? Furthermore, doesn’t this continuity involve, in fact, a reduction of the true to the untrue or at least some degree of unfathomable mixture of the two? In the first pages of *VI*, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges this problem:

Philosophy must tell us how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains at each instant possible even though we are naturally endowed with light. The philosopher must understand how it is that these two possibilities which the perceptual faith keeps side by side within itself do not nullify one another. (*VI*, 28–29/48)

This is a matter of explaining the contradictory possibilities lodged in Being: How can both the possibility of truth and the possibility of error co-exist within a unique Being?

For Merleau-Ponty, the traditional concept of truth as correspondence is erroneous. The reason for this, obviously, is that it is structured according to the subject-object distinction, a distinction that results from a process of overdetermination. This process (sedimentation) is the essence of history and history is the essence of Being. As a consequence, the erroneous concept of truth must be understood as an act of sedimentation, a historical event. This amounts to saying that *Being must be understood as the possibility of error*. This statement would be nothing more than yet another characterization of Being if it was not drawn directly from the essence of the historical process itself: the essence of sedimentation. Indeed, the confrontation of Merleau-Ponty with Bergson has exposed that no event is absolutely objective, complete, or actual. On the contrary, any event is the

result of sedimentative overdeterminations, hence it is partly ideal. This process of overdetermination is, therefore, the principle of history at the same time as it is the principle of falsehood.

Being is the possibility of history; history, in turn, is the possibility of error. Furthermore, we must remember another guise of Being: Being is also intentionality—that is to say, a relation without terms. This was established through the analysis of Being as reflexivity that in turn allows for the overdetermination of reflexivity (where subject and object are two guises of the same) into an objective structure (where subject and object are distinct). This accounts for sedimentation and, consequently, for history, and ultimately error. In fact, I made clear in Chapter 4 that the infinite process of determination lodged in perception was the micro-origin of *any* becoming, including macro-historical becoming. This should help us make some clarifications: if Being is a relation without terms, and if “overdetermination *always* occurs” (VI, 240/289), there will always be an overdetermination of intentionality into an objective structure. There is no Being without its sedimented manifestations and yet, these are erroneous. This means that Being is more than the possibility of error; it is its necessity. Of course, the problem with defining Being with reference to error is that it seems to make error look rather truthful: How can error still be error if there is no possibility to approach Being but through error’s distorting mirror? Is there even a vantage point from which we can reveal this mirror as distorted? In a certain way, the very possibility of a philosophy such as Merleau-Ponty’s is a factual response to this objection. Yet, it is only factual until we recall that all facts reflect a possibility of Being. The possibility of a philosophy that is able to perceive sedimented truth and other sedimentations as surdeterminations—that is, as errors—emphasizes an aspect of historical development that I have mentioned before: history is a process of determination, but being a continual narrowing of a “less-than-determinate” infinite, it is itself an infinite process. No absolute determination is possible. Indeed, if absolute determination were possible, reflexivity would never show itself as such; instead, the folds would appear not as reflexive but as transcendental structures and the world would be Cartesian. The infinity of the determination process ensures the impossibility of such a scenario, and the possibility of an ontology of Merleau-Ponty’s type.

The relations between the impossibility of absolute determinacy and the possibility to apprehend error require some clarifications. As we have seen, the irreducible quotient of indeterminacy at the heart of Being allows for Being’s reflexivity by means of the folds (one of the folds being philosophy itself).¹⁰² We have also seen how the erroneous concept of truth was altogether the sharp end of the historical process hitherto and the

beginning—and grounding—of the reverse process engaged into by the philosopher-archaeologist (Merleau-Ponty refers to this feature of his philosophy as a “vicious circle” [VI, 179/231]). The possibility of reflexivity exposes objectivity as a contradiction insofar as objectivity affirms a structure that roots the philosophy that seeks to invalidate it. It posits subjects and objects as self-identical and mutually different and, at the same time, seeks to account for their encounter made impossible by their very definition. In short, it is incapable of eradicating transcendence in the sense of the subject-object union.¹⁰³ Indeed, this union is so ineradicable that it is the obstacle to total reduction; as such it grounds Merleau-Ponty’s ontology.

The contradictory character of error can be deepened. We have seen, through the discussions of Sartre’s negativism and Bergson’s positivism, that the mere fact of perception contradicts objectivity. For a philosophy—even an idealism—to account for experience it must put to use the reflexivity of Being that alone ensures the possibility of any experience, or else it must vanish into full nothingness or full Being (which are the same). Objectivity ignores this reflexivity, however, leading into contradiction. An interrogative philosophy like Merleau-Ponty’s not only embraces and exemplifies this reflexivity (since it is a philosophy), but it reflects on this reflexivity itself: it takes this reflexivity to the awareness of itself, dialectically moving up to the ontological level and changing the “bad” reflexivity of self-contradiction into the “good” reflexivity of expression. This contradiction is contained in the very idea of a determinate object: if an object is determinate, says Merleau-Ponty, it is not an object, because as determinate and external it would be inaccessible, intemporal, and sterile. Hence, the contradiction of full determination can be expressed in terms of possibles. Determination is the rejection of possibility; it is absolute restriction, absolute actuality. This, as we saw, makes the continuity of time as well as any productivity impossible. Determination appears as error insofar as it appears as the denial of possibility—that is, the denial of Being. This is, as I said, the “bad reflexivity” of error, the reflexivity by which Being as possibility presents itself as Being *qua* actuality. Just as Being is the possibility of error, error is the impossibility of possibility. In this sense, error remains a meaningful concept. Nothing is erroneous which admits that it may be wrong. Error is possible only in claims that deny themselves the possibility of Being wrong. A “maybe” (which expresses a possibility) is never wrong, only a “definitely” (which expresses a “truth” and thereby shuts off possibilities) is, possibly, wrong.

We asked the question of the distinction of truth and error in spite of their cohabitation within Being. It seems we can now answer this: error is the belief in determinacy; truth is the belief in less-than-determinacy. Both

are grounded in Being: error is grounded in the indeterminacy of Being and truth into both its determinacy and its openness. It is a feature of the contradictory character of error that it is made possible by the indeterminacy of Being, but it affirms only its determinacy. Yet, this contradiction itself is grounded in the contradiction at the heart of truth: the illusion of determinacy is the principle driving the historical process. If we must understand history as an infinite process of determination, we must also accept that history itself, as Being, is to be conceived as nothing else than an infinite movement of self-falsification.

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Conclusion

To insert truth as a processus in infinitum, an active determination, not a becoming conscious of something that is “in itself” fixed and determinate.

—Nietzsche, IX [91], Fall 1887

The parallel between Nietzsche’s and Merleau-Ponty’s treatments of the question of truth leads to a single ontological claim: Being is self-falsification through truth, and the phenomenon of truth is its essence. As regards Nietzsche, I argued in Chapter 3 that he views Being as the very movement by which the indeterminate presents itself as determinate. I argued that this self-falsification of the indeterminate is the movement of truth. With regard to Merleau-Ponty, I came to the same conclusion in Chapter 6: Being is self-falsification. These claims of Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty raise several questions that I shall briefly address below. First, however, let me recapitulate the movement of the argument that led to this conclusion.

Common Structure

The movements of Merleau-Ponty’s and Nietzsche’s arguments have a common structure. First, (Chapters 1 and 4) it is shown that the ground of experience is structured in a pre-objective way. The experience of X is always already the experience of X as being real. For Nietzsche, this is implied in the definition of experience as the experience of interest. I experience X through the mutual resistance X and I oppose to each other in our interested striving and this resistance entails X’s reality. Merleau-Ponty expresses this by placing perceptual faith at the basis of all perception. Perceptual faith is grounded in self-differentiation. Self-differentiation offers what Merleau-Ponty describes as a zone of subjectivity and what

Nietzsche metaphorically refers to as a gap between the two layers of skin of the self. This void space is the underlying condition for the primary and pre-objective attribution of reality of perceptual faith. Both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty show how this gap increases to the point of divorcing the attribution of reality from the experience that gave rise to it and transforming it into a predication of truth. The process responsible for this phenomenon is what I called falsification. Nietzsche refers to it as sublimation and Merleau-Ponty as sedimentation. This movement falsifies experience because it attributes self-identity and full determinacy to objects of perception when the authentic perception testifies only to an indeterminate milieu.

Second (Chapters 2 and 5), Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty seek a method to uncover this originary experience that lies prior to its falsified, predicated counterpart. Nietzsche appeals to the process of incorporation of truth. The incorporation of truth amounts to a transformation of ourselves in accordance to the discovery that all truth-beliefs are, in fact, arbitrary falsifications. Nietzsche thinks that the incorporation of truth will enable us to attain direct knowledge of the world insofar as it clears us of our delusions. This direct knowledge amounts to a unification of the self (self-becoming) and a unification of the self with the world *qua* fate. Fate, when employed to characterize the world at large, is described as will to power, an essentially intentional principle. Merleau-Ponty, of course, proposes his own version of the phenomenological reduction as a way to gain access to the ground of experience. Like Nietzsche, the ground of experience that he uncovers is intentionality itself (Chapter 5). This entails that neither the subject nor the object of experience is primary; it is their relation that is.

It must be stressed that both Nietzsche's incorporation of truth and Merleau-Ponty's existential reduction amount to a reduction to the ontological. By this I mean that they provide us not with any particular piece of knowledge but with a general truth—namely, with the essence of truth. This essence is described by both thinkers as the very transformation of experience into predication. As a result, the perceptual faith that was uncovered in Chapters 1 and 4 is granted ontological status. As the ground of experience, whose nature is to falsify itself (by becoming predicative faith), it is the very essence of Being.

This is what I investigate in Chapters 3 and 6. One of the implications of Chapters 2 and 5 is that Being is a relation without terms. It is also clear from Chapters 1 and 4 that Being is an asymptotic movement projected toward such fictionally postulated terms. Hence, Being is in motion. Both thinkers indeed propose an ontology of becoming and oppose becoming to Being. Being is self-identical, whereas becoming is an infinite

striving toward self-identity. This striving is equivalent to the process of determination of Being through incorporation (Nietzsche) or sedimentation (Merleau-Ponty). For both thinkers, this process is the essence of history. Consequently, history becomes understood as an infinite movement of self-determination of the world. Historical time is made of incorporative or sedimentative events. This is why Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty understand Being *qua* self-differentiated Being in modal terms: Being is not actuality (it is, Merleau-Ponty says, “softer” than actuality), it is productivity—that is to say, the possibility of sedimentative or incorporative events.

We know from Chapters 2 and 4 that incorporation and sedimentation are processes of falsification or, as the later Merleau-Ponty writes, processes of overdetermination. This overdetermination is the phenomenon of truth, and it is a falsification. Yet, this falsification is the essence of Being, so that truth *qua* falsification becomes an authentic feature of Being; indeed, its essence.

The account of Nietzsche’s and Merleau-Ponty’s treatments of the question of truth indicates their agreement in claiming that Being is self-falsification through truth. This is the claim I have defended in this book. However, the task I gave myself demanded altogether more and less than the simple establishment of this claim. It required that I establish a systematic and structural link between these two thinkers’ philosophies. This aim is somewhat less demanding because it seeks to defend a mere possibility: the possibility that it may be fruitful to compare these two philosophers. It is more demanding, however, because it requires of me more than the demonstration that Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty agree on such and such specific points. As I insisted in the Introduction, this project could truly be a contribution only if it had no reliance on any anecdotic or local comparisons.

The Primacy of Intentionality

I think that the establishment of the common thesis that Being is self-falsification through the phenomenon of truth provides a link that goes beyond a mere local agreement. It is a claim that would prove central to any consistent worldview. It is, after all, a claim about Being. I have pointed out in the Introduction that a comparative effort must also establish a structural link between the compared worldviews. I did indicate that this more demanding requirement could not be included in the scope of this book but we are now in a position to analyze the role of the question of truth anew, if briefly. I have proposed the hypothesis that the fact that both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty regarded the examination of the question of

truth as one of their tasks would lead to interesting ways to establish correspondences between their two philosophies. Now that their treatments of this question have been examined, it is apparent that for them to share this question as a common starting point entails some strong similarities that run down the entirety of their philosophies.

This common project led both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty to posit the primacy of intentionality over and above intentional subjects and objects. This primacy is ontological. The fact that this move exists in both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty is apparent from the discussions in Chapters 1 and 5 but it seems, in fact, to be a necessary consequence of the question of truth itself. The question of truth requires one to include the possibility of error within one's worldview. As Kant famously remarked, all ontology is about possibility. In this case then, the possibility of error must be integrated within Being. Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty can only address the question of truth by way of an ontology of error. Ontology as a whole becomes irreversibly affected by the introduction of the possibility of error within it because it transforms it into an ontology of self-differentiation. Indeed, as was shown by both thinkers, the possibility of error relies on the reality of self-differentiation, and any ontology—or at least any monistic ontology—cannot include both self-differentiation and self-identity side by side within Being. This leads us to the primacy of intentionality: the impossibility of self-identity entails the impossibility of a pure subject or a pure object (in the senses that Merleau-Ponty believes that Sartre, for example, gives to these terms). Yet, taking the question of truth seriously involves that the subjective and the objective have *some* meaning—that is to say, that there is an experience of objectivity. This indicates that Being must be conceived as involving the phenomenon of objectivity. I expressed this by describing Being as a space expanding asymptotically toward the subjective and the objective poles. This idea is contained in both thinkers' claims that intentionality is anterior to subject and object, but that it is dynamic (infinite determination for Merleau-Ponty, resistance-seeking for Nietzsche) and, thereby, gives rise to our belief in subject and object. This belief is the result of a sublimation (Nietzsche), or an overdetermination (Merleau-Ponty), which are the essence of intentionality.

The positing of intentionality as anterior to subject and object satisfies both Merleau-Ponty's well-known opposition to the two-headed monster of idealism and empiricism and Nietzsche's rejection of both idealism and naturalism. The problem with these dualities, they contend, is that they offer no choice about what truly matters. Since each pole agrees with the other that the world is bipolar, we have no choice but to conceive of a bipolar world. Both the idealist pole and the empiricist/naturalist one place

the opposition of subject and object first and then proceed to account for their link. It is precisely this structure that we need to opt out of and, indeed, recover from. For Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, escaping this structure means positing not subject and object (this leads to their opposition) but their link first. This key move has great consequences for the rest of their worldviews. These consequences often signal the profound kinship that links the two philosophers. This ranges from their philosophies of history and culture to their discussions of incarnation. On the basis of the previous discussions, I would like to briefly indicate what I think are the two most general of these consequences.

Ontology of Becoming

Both Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche subscribe to an ontology of becoming. They both define becoming as eventfulness. For Nietzsche, all events are incorporative events and for Merleau-Ponty they are sedimentative. We know that both incorporation and sedimentation are made possible by the self-differentiation of Being. For Nietzsche, events are dependent on chaos and chaos is understood as the inner opposition of drives. This opposition is due to the self-differentiation of the individual. For Merleau-Ponty, sedimentation is dependent on our partial disconnection from the world of experience, figured by the zone of subjectivity. The zone of subjectivity creates an “*écart*” between us and the perceptual objects that secures a certain coefficient of indeterminacy of the perceptual object. It warrants that what Merleau-Ponty calls the “prospective activity” of determination is infinite. At the individual level, then, the impossibility of full determinacy involves becoming. This becoming is asymptotic and tends toward full determinacy because any event (sedimentative or incorporative) is a progress in the ongoing determination of the perceptual world. As Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty claim, sedimentation and incorporation are de-differentiation (i.e., identification).

There is more. Although this movement is first observed as the “micro”-becoming of the individual world of experience, both thinkers see the “macro”-becoming of history to be at work in this process. For Merleau-Ponty, history appears as a movement toward self-sedimentation—that is to say, toward full determinacy (it is established that full determinacy amounts to self-identity). For Nietzsche, history is the movement of the world toward total self-identity. This movement, of course, is infinite for Nietzsche as well as for Merleau-Ponty.

We must, however, clarify what supports the passage from individual to historical becoming. Nietzsche expresses this passage by saying that the

sickness of the human (that is to say, her inner chaos) is the sickness of “the earth.” This means that the human is the locus of the inner gap within the world itself. The gap between me and myself is also the gap between the world and itself. This gap, I argued, is the condition of the reversibility of the drives and it expresses itself as the inter-changeability of the subject and the object: I can alternately be an object or a subject for myself and for the world. I am the locus of the reflexivity of Being and, consequently, I am the agent of determination in the world. This seemingly teleological language should not make us forget that Nietzsche’s major point is that this self-identity is only a fantasy. If it gives us an accurate description for the becoming of the world (as a movement toward self-identity), it remains that the object of this striving is illusory. The same applies for Merleau-Ponty. For him, history is the history of sedimentation and sedimentation is the lot of conscious beings. Merleau-Ponty subscribes to the schema whereby one’s own inner reversibility is also the reversibility of Being: the human, as a fold of Being, is the locus of Being’s reflexivity and of its self-differentiation. Being sediments itself through the human.¹ Again, this does not substantialize, anthropomorphize, or deify Being. In fact, assuming this would be forgetting the primacy of intentionality. Merleau-Ponty’s and Nietzsche’s idea is that this movement is anterior to the thematization of the individual, of Being, or even of sedimentation or incorporation. Saying that the individual is the locus of the reflexivity of Being is a definition of the individual with reference to Being, not the reverse. The same goes for reflexivity. It is only from a worldview shaped by objectivity that such a claim may be taken as theological.

Phenomenological Ontology

Another consequence of the primacy of intentionality is that philosophy must be ontology and that ontology must be phenomenology. The investigation into the question of truth has shown that individual truths can only be regarded as falsifications. In fact, the proper domain of philosophy is only the domain of what I have called the “phenomenon of truth.” This is a necessary consequence of the essential ambiguity of the phenomenon of truth. Both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty consider that truth is in a sense true and in a sense untrue. It is untrue because it does not exist: truth is impossible because it relies essentially on a fantastical setup including self-identical subjects and objects and a transcendence between them. These two requirements are contradictory, as is shown by both Merleau-Ponty (in his critique of Sartre) and Nietzsche (in his critique of the thing-in-itself). As a phenomenon, however, truth is true because it signals a

possibility of Being; indeed, *the* possibility of Being: self-differentiation. As both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty claim, the ground of perception—which is the ground of Being—is always-already self-differentiated (it is this self-differentiation—gap or zone of subjectivity—which allows for the phenomenon of truth). This means that any inquiry must be limited to the domain of the phenomenon of truth—that is to say, to the domain of intentionality. As a consequence, any meaningful inquiry must be phenomenological. Further still, not only all reality is phenomenal but it is also asymptotic because phenomena are themselves overdeterminations. As Merleau-Ponty shows, the perceptual object dissolves in true perception, leaving us with perception itself (that is to say, intentionality) and without any phenomena. This means that the only knowledge we may possess is the most fundamental knowledge. We know about Being (intentionality) before we know about the beings (intentional objects). As a result, the only foundation for philosophy must be sought in ontology.

Here we encounter a difficulty. I have just asserted that we know Being and not the beings. However, both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty subscribe to an indirect ontology (or “intra-ontology”) that is meant to “access Being through the beings.” In the case of Nietzsche, this is indicated by the necessity of the incorporation of truth as a movement toward ontological knowledge (in the form of a quasi-unity of the self with Being). This is also made most obvious in Nietzsche’s discussions of perspectivism, which I have examined only briefly. Nietzsche’s conception of perspectival truth is equivalent to Merleau-Ponty’s. As I argued, it is not a cumulative but a reductive view: by gathering several perspectives and confronting them, one draws the general from the manifold one finds in each one. This generality, Nietzsche says, is representation itself (Chapter 2). Merleau-Ponty, as I have argued, uses perspectivism to the same ends and explicitly promotes his “indirect ontology (Being in the beings).” This challenges my two previous assertions, namely that one *must* do ontology and that Being is anterior to the beings.

In order to address this possible objection, let me first point out that this indirect ontology that is shared by both thinkers forces us to reexamine the term “ontology.” As I have argued in Chapters 3 and 6, Nietzsche’s and Merleau-Ponty’s relationships with ontology are ambiguous. For Nietzsche, Being is will to power, an essentially relational concept that does not allow for the unity of Being. In turn, Merleau-Ponty himself opposes ontology by affirming that he is “for metaphysics.” As I have argued throughout the book, Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty conceive of Being only in a “soft” sense. This is made obvious by the necessity to account for the spatio-temporality of Being. If “intra-ontology” or “indirect on-

tology” is to be possible, it means that Being manifests itself fully in *the* beings. As a result, Being must be conceived as a spatio-temporal generality. Merleau-Ponty calls this Being an “element” and defines an element as lying midway between a thing and a principle—that is to say, midway between metaphysics and ontology. It is only under these conditions that one may—indeed must—still do ontology.

Circulus Vitiosus Deus

Second, the “indirect method” in ontology, which “seeks Being in the beings,” poses a challenge to the idea that Being is anterior to the beings since it seems that our only access to Being is precisely the beings. This, Merleau-Ponty admits, commits his account to a certain circularity: beings are logically anterior to Being, which is ontologically anterior to them. We need beings to access Being as anterior to them. This circle, Merleau-Ponty says in his only direct quote from Nietzsche, commits him to a “*circulus vitiosus deus*”:

This reversal itself—*circulus vitiosus deus*—is not hesitation, bad faith and bad dialectic, but return to $\Sigma\upsilon\gamma\epsilon$, the abyss. One cannot make a direct ontology. My indirect method (Being in the beings) is alone conformed with Being—“negative philosophy” like “negative ontology.” (VI, 179/231)

Ontology can only be performed once sedimentation has constituted beings within which one finds some way of accessing Being. As I have discussed in Chapter 5, Merleau-Ponty’s reduction is affirmative through negativity. It brings out the authentic ground of experience as an obstacle to reduction: it is the impossibility of reduction (which he returns to in the very same note) that opens our access to Being.

This circularity is also expressed by Merleau-Ponty as the anteriority of the ontological discovery over the ontological research: “the end of a philosophy is the account of its beginning,” he writes, and this beginning-conclusion is “a pre-knowing, a pre-meaning, a silent knowing” (VI, 179/231). Although the context of Nietzsche’s text quoted by Merleau-Ponty here is even more enigmatic (the ambiguity of the Latin even makes it impossible to determine how this *circulus vitiosus deus* must be translated), it is clear that it has to do with the same circle and with the idea of an original and final “pre-knowing.” Nietzsche writes:

Anyone who has struggled for a long time, as I have, with a mysterious desire to think down to the depths of pessimism [. . .] this person

may, without really intending it, have opened his eyes to the opposite ideal [. . .] Well? And wouldn't this then be—*circulus vitiosus deus?* (BGE, 56)

The key to this aphorism is Nietzsche's mention that the desire for the overcoming of morality and pessimism is "mysterious." Here Nietzsche takes his own desire to be the expression of something he ignores. The negative movement of "thinking down," "pessimism," is thereby associated with a positive one: the affirmation of this mysterious reality from which this desire arises. My hypothesis—which I shall not defend further here—is that this mysterious desire is the symptom of a reality that refuses to be denied. This desire is the expression of a "pre-knowing" of the same sort as Merleau-Ponty's, expressing itself only as a *reaction* (against pessimism) and presenting itself as an "ideal." This ideal rises from the mysterious pre-knowing to consciousness through "opposition." Here, Nietzsche asserts again that renouncing this original truth would be an instance of self-denial. In short, he poses the question of truth over again. Like Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty establishes this adherence to truth that we possess (insofar as we are the locus of the movement of Being) as the original intuition that led to the establishment of their ontologies as well as their final conclusion. Both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty seem to agree that intra-ontology is their philosophy, that it operates a negative movement, and that it is circular insofar as its conclusions lead to its own premises.

Only a few months after writing this note, Merleau-Ponty tackled the same themes together again, in his commentary on the preface to *GS* (his only commentary on Nietzsche). The passage begins with a repetition of the theme of the "negative philosophy (in the sense of the 'negative theology')" (*NC*, 275) and goes on to describe Nietzsche's own view of philosophy as circular by way of a reminder of his indirect ontology (this "true philosophy" gives access to "another order, which demands the lower order" and "is accessible only through it" [*NC*, 275]). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty sees the same circle as his own at work in Nietzsche and describes it, like he described his own, as "abyss": "True philosophy is [. . .] great suspicion, abyss, non-philosophy arising from our loyalty to what we live in." This philosophy, Merleau-Ponty writes, quoting Nietzsche, is a circular movement of the lived world toward its own "regeneration" by way of the "true philosophy" (*NC*, 278). In this circle, the lived world is the origin and the destination; philosophy is the movement. It becomes clear how the circle remains "good philosophy," therefore. It is circular, but it is not inconsequential. This circle transforms the indeterminate intuition expressed by

the mystery of the desire into determinate philosophical knowledge. This very circle itself is sedimentation.

In this sense, Merleau-Ponty says, the account offered by this ontology includes itself within its object: this ontology is nothing but a sedimentation of the phenomenon of truth, and thereby takes its rightful place within its own account as a sedimentative event. For both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenon of truth signals that we possess a certain adherence with Being and it is by examining this adherence that we both clarify and determine it. This adherence, I said, is nothing else than Being itself in its movement of self-falsification. In this sense, the ontology that determines it thusly takes place within this grand movement of self-falsification. It provides us with some truth insofar as it repudiates beliefs in self-identity (this is the role of “negative ontology”), yet it provides more determination because it offers itself as a determination of Being as self-differentiated. This determination seems to avoid the blows of its own critique because it regards Being as openness and therefore refuses to determine it too much. Yet, if one wishes this determination of Being to remain a philosophical thesis, it must have *some* significance. I have pointed out at the end of Chapter 6 that its main implication is that self-differentiation is not self-differentiated. Being is self-differentiation and nothing else (i.e., not self-identity). Here, it seems, we find the fundamental contradiction of indirect ontology: once again, we have made Being into an object possessing determinations. As I have argued, both Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty want us to think of Being as less-than-determinate (or horizontal). This horizontality is not extensive, but intensive. This thought is contradictory with even the characterization of Being as self-differentiation because it indicates that we cannot take Being as an object, that we cannot say what *is* Being.

Neither Nietzsche nor Merleau-Ponty discusses this point further. However, let me point out that the argument outlined here shall only confirm the conception of history given by Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty. The charge of contradiction calls for a critique, which will offer a renewed negative truth because it shall be a truth attained by negation of the new truth brought about by Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty. In doing so, it will be confirming their claim that history is an infinite determination of the indeterminate. Within this movement it is the history of philosophy that takes place as it appears as the infinite determination of indeterminacy. For Merleau-Ponty, it is not a matter of providing a final conclusion (this would be dangerously determinative), but instead, it is a question of “disclosing” “little by little by little—and more and more—the wild and vertical world” (VI, 179/231).

The ontology Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty offer us does indeed determine Being, and in so doing it falsifies it. At the same time, however, it perpetuates it (since its nature is self-falsification). In doing so, this philosophy calls for its own overcoming. Here ontology undergoes a certain transformation. From being the subject of the discourse on Being it gets to sediment itself to become part of its own object. This process, which is “infinite” because it reflects and transforms itself as it goes, is the process of history.

Differences and Complementarity in Ethics

My project in this book was to establish a valid link between two of the seminal philosophies that constitute and will continue to constitute our philosophical environment. Such a project has any meaning only as a precondition for further work. This should draw our attention to a certain ambiguity of any comparative project: if a comparison is to be fruitful, it must be profound (or as I have said so far, “systematic”) but it must not amount to an identification of two philosophies. Such identification, besides being almost certainly bad philosophy, is sterile. On the contrary, we must find through any comparison an access to new thoughts, thoughts that our knowledge of Nietzsche or of Merleau-Ponty alone would not provide. It is not my task to discuss these here, but it is certainly necessary that my account does not preclude them. The parallel I have drawn leaves plenty of room for differences. However, it allows us to look at such differences as taking place within a certain common framework. I would like to return to what I think is the most significant difference between the two philosophers: the question of health. Only an awareness of such differences combined with an awareness of what is the very deep kinship I have examined so far may enable a fertile encounter.

As I have emphasized, my conclusions favor conceiving of philosophy as phenomenological ontology. Necessarily, as a phenomenology, this ontology places the human subject at its center. As an ontology, it considers her in her being: the human’s being is to be the space of Being. This delineates an ethical dimension to the question of truth. The question of truth, in my account, is the question of the human’s place in the world. As I have indicated in the Introduction, Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty encounter the question of truth in different contexts. Merleau-Ponty repeats, without further elucidation, that if philosophy is to be true philosophy, it must account for the ground of experience as perceptual faith. For Nietzsche, who is wary of placing philosophy as a first imperative, the question is justified ethically. It is a matter of overcoming the “sick animal man” and regaining

health. Soon, Nietzsche finds that one must liberate herself from the belief in specific truths (values and the like), but that it is at the same time just as unhealthy to believe in nothing. Indeed, skepticism is nihilistic (*WP*, 43). It is now easy to see why: one's belief in values (for example) creates opposition with oneself, even self-hatred. One's refusal to hold anything as true creates self-opposition because it denies our existence insofar as it necessarily involves faith. It denies that our "mysterious desire" for truth is deeply rooted in us. Denying ourselves truth is just as fallacious as attributing ourselves truth. For Nietzsche, consequently, one must make room for health in the space between these two obstacles. This ground is found in what Nietzsche calls "perishing outwards" or being at one with becoming (Chapter 2). In this mode of being, the individual neither believes in specific truth nor is she deprived of her ordinary adherence to what she encounters. This means, of course, that this encounter is not with "objects" but with a milieu, the perceptual world, Being *qua* becoming.

Merleau-Ponty clarifies this point that Nietzsche leaves open to interpretation because it is so metaphorical. This unity with becoming is beyond judgment. It does not affirm specific truths (these are idealizations and separate us from ourselves), but it does not deprive us of our involvement in life (this would be returning to Husserl's reduction). This stage that Nietzsche calls health is accessed by Merleau-Ponty through the existential reduction, a reduction one achieves through activity (Chapter 5). When we leave the practical level for the theoretical level, then, it seems Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche's accounts accord themselves again. It remains, however, that Merleau-Ponty, unlike Nietzsche, does not have an ethical answer to the question "why tackle the question of truth?" It is true that he—albeit rarely—uses strikingly Nietzschean terms to characterize the role of philosophy in relation to health; consider: "Philosophy would be overcome only if man had become the so-called total man, clear of all enigmas and difficulties with himself" (*P2*, 291), or "The 'healthy' man is not so much the one who has eliminated his contradictions as the one who makes use of them and drags them in his vital labors" (*S*, 131/211). However, it remains that the question of truth is for Merleau-Ponty chiefly theoretical. Of course, the purely theoretical option is fully legitimate, but the awareness of the circle described above expresses a certain longing for a higher imperative. Merleau-Ponty seeks the foundation of the search for truth and searches for a justification to this longing outside of mere theoretical curiosity. One may find it in Nietzsche's question asked in *BGE*: What is this *mysterious* longing for truth? It is part of the essence of the circle examined above that this longing signals a truth as much as it

demands one and Merleau-Ponty is aware that Nietzsche proposes the following answer: the question of truth is a matter of health. This is the central theme of the preface to *GS*, the only one of Nietzsche's texts to which Merleau-Ponty devoted any sustained thinking (*NC*, 276). My point is not that Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche disagree on the role of philosophy toward health; it is, rather, that this remains implicit in Merleau-Ponty and that Nietzsche may provide us some keys to help us understand this "unthought" of Merleau-Ponty's. In the text on which Merleau-Ponty chose to comment, Nietzsche's concept of health offers perspectives regarding ethics in the contemporary sense of the "care of the self" because it builds an unbroken circuit between knowledge and ethics through the notion of identity. For an individual to be (in the sense of to be *someone*) is for her to possess beliefs. We are ontologically defined as the locus of truth and for us existing and knowing are conditions of each other. Their interdependence combined with their opposition (as traditionally conceived) operates a mutual reduction that opens us up to the ground of authentic experience, the ground of the overlap ("*empiètement*") of Being and knowing, which is the domain of the question of truth and leads us in one single gesture to true Being and to authentic truth.

The essence of this truth, indeed, is to disfigure itself. It transfers the self-evidence of perceptual faith to the level of fantasies, leading us to wrong beliefs. This mutual reduction of Being and truth suggests a non-conceptual possession of truth. Truth, if adequate to Being, must be, like Being, dynamic, antepredicative, and self-differentiated. "It is with a non-coincidence that I coincide" (*S*, 184/299, t.a.), writes Merleau-Ponty. It is after all the truth of self-falsification, the truth of becoming, of the constant instability of its object; it is a truth that truth shall objectify and, thereby, falsify.

In a world Bewitched the question is not to know who is right, who follows the truest course, but who is a match for the great deceiver, and what action will be tough and supple enough to bring it to reason. (*S*, 32/55)

It is the great deceiver that makes our world, and belief in truth outside of this great deceiver is belief in nothing. As Nietzsche says in the text quoted by Merleau-Ponty, "we no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn" (*GS*, preface, 4; *NC*, 277–78). The truth we must attain cannot have the semblance of stability that was uncovered as fictional. It must be asymptotic too—that is to say, indeterminate, infinite, and therefore dynamic. The acquaintance with this truth is the acquaint-

tance with becoming; it is our own becoming, a progressive movement toward error as overdetermination. The continuity that leads from truth to delusion is the object of the deeper knowledge shared by Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty; it is this great deceiver we must know, lest we know only great deceptions.

Notes

Introduction

1. In addition, we find references—implicit or explicit—to Löwith's and Heidegger's readings of Nietzsche, and, of course, Merleau-Ponty, as editor of the reference project on *Les Philosophes de l'Antiquité au XXe Siècle*, included Löwith's remarkable essay on *UMII* as a presentation of Nietzsche, which he had decided to place in the section "The Discovery of History." The only textual reference is to the preface of *GS* in *NC*, 278. In the working notes to *VI* we find an allusion to the enigmatic "*circulus vitiosus deus*" from *BGE*, 56 (*VI*, 179/231; also in Heidegger 1991, 2: 65, 258, and Löwith 1997, 54, 219). In another note, Merleau-Ponty writes that the visible "comes on the scene laterally, it does so 'noiselessly'—in the sense that Nietzsche says great events are born *noiselessly*" (*VI*, 246/295). The source is *Z*, II, "On the Great Events," where Zarathustra declares: "And believe me, friend Hellishnoise! The greatest events—those are not our loudest but our stillest hours. Not around the inventors of new noise, but around the inventors of new values does the world revolve; *inaudibly* it revolves." This thought is mentioned in Löwith (1997, 64). In his notice on Jean-Marie Guyau, Merleau-Ponty writes: "Like Nietzsche who attacked the 'cultural camels,' the 'Philistines' in the name of a disquieted immoralism, Guyau regards analysis as a 'dissolving force'" (*Les Philosophes*, "Jean-Marie Guyau," 989). The reference is to Zarathustra's prologue and probably to *UMI*, 2, where Nietzsche inaugurates the expression "Cultural Philistines." It may also be found in Heidegger 1991, 1: 124. Finally, we find a quick allusion to *BT* in Merleau-Ponty's presentation of Greek philosophy: "Apollo, as Nietzsche said, would have nothing to do if it weren't for Dionysus, or Socrates if it weren't for Oedipus" (*Les Philosophes*, 122; also in Heidegger 1991, 1:

94–95). There is an allusion to the Dionysus-Apollo duality in Merleau-Ponty’s commentary of *GS* mentioned above. In an interview from 1958, Merleau-Ponty expresses his disagreement with Nietzsche on the question of the timeliness of the philosopher. There he clarifies what he does not mean by his expression “the philosophical life”: “Nietzsche thought that a married philosopher is a comical character [*un personnage de vaudeville*], that one cannot be a philosopher and take part in secular life, it is not what I have meant to say” (*P2*, 285). The reference is to *GM*, III, 7. I did not detail the few allusions to the “Death of God” (*PriP*, 72/27; *NC*, 279) or the mentions of Nietzsche’s name, always in an enumeration including Marx, Freud, and/or Kierkegaard and Hegel (see, for example: *VI*, 183/234; *TL*, 100–2/140–44; *PP*, viii/ii). Merleau-Ponty’s first engagement with Nietzsche was—to my knowledge—his review of the French translation of Max Scheler’s *Ressentiment* (in French, *l’Homme du Ressentiment*). Merleau-Ponty’s short review “Christianisme et Ressentiment” (1935, reprinted in *P*) offers three allusions to Nietzsche, which we can find reminiscences of in 1946’s *PriP* (72/27) where Merleau-Ponty repeats that Nietzsche’s “dead God” is equivalent to the dead God of Christianity.

2. See also *RC*, 168–69, on the “ground” (“*Boden*”) “as the background against which all rest and all movement is outlined [*se détache*].” Strikingly, this argument, which states that science is always secondary, is already put forward alongside the first mention of the “origin of truth.” In a note, again, Merleau-Ponty praises Bergson for having “perfectly defined the metaphysical approach of the world” as “the deliberate exploration of this world prior to the object of science to which science refers.” As will be discussed later, the context of the article leaves no doubt that “metaphysical” in this context qualifies the project Merleau-Ponty is assigning to himself (*SNS*, 97n15/118n2).

3. Let me stress that both Nietzsche’s and Merleau-Ponty’s critiques of truth are critiques of truth *qua* correspondence. This has been covered convincingly in the past, and we can convince ourselves of this by recalling that their critiques of truth are always related to the critique of the thing-in-itself. One sufficient example is Clark (1991). Even though I disagree with Clark’s account on several key issues that I shall discuss in Chapter 1, I remain convinced by her overall claim that Nietzsche conceives of truth as correspondence.

4. The most explicit example is Müller-Lauter (1999). Müller-Lauter opens his book with a survey of the positions of Nietzsche scholarship on the question of Nietzsche’s contradictions, ambiguities, and equivocalities (Müller-Lauter 1999, 1–6).

1. Nietzsche on Self-Differentiation and Genealogy

1. The two texts are intimately linked; in *GM* (III, 24) Nietzsche refers to “the whole fifth book of [*GS*]” as a development of his discussion.

2. “You live in a community, you enjoy the benefits of a community (oh, what benefits! Sometimes we underestimate them today), you live a sheltered, protected life in peace and trust, without any worry of suffering certain kinds of harm and

hostility to which the man *outside*, the ‘man without peace’ is exposed [. . .] you make pledges and take on obligations to the community with just that harm and hostility in mind” (*GM*, II, 9).

3. “The lawbreaker [. . .] is reminded how important these benefits are. [. . .] The community makes him return to the savage and outlawed state from which he was sheltered hitherto: he is cast out—and now any kind of hostile act can be perpetrated on him” (*GM*, II, 9).

4. This text may be viewed as genealogical. However, it is clear that genealogy should be taken in another sense in this case, insofar as it does not have any claim to historical verifiability. In *GM*, on the contrary, Nietzsche makes it clear that he intends to offer “a real history of morality,” a “grey” history, “which is to say, that which can be documented, which can actually be confirmed, which has actually existed” (preface, 7). It is for this reason that I prefer to describe this text as fictional.

5. The importance of the early texts with regard to this question does not undermine the necessity of an emphasis on the texts of 1887. It simply requires that we consider the later texts as a genealogical consolidation of the claims of the early Nietzsche. In the preface to *GM*, Nietzsche traces his interest for the genealogical form of inquiry to 1878’s *HATH*, and, he adds: “the thoughts themselves go back further” (preface, 2).

6. See also *GS*, 111: “Innumerable beings who made inferences in a way different from ours perished; for all that, their ways might have been truer. Those, for example, who did not know how to find often enough what is ‘equal’ as regards both nourishment and hostile animals—those, in other words, who subsumed things too slowly and cautiously—were favoured with a lesser probability of survival.”

7. This thought from 1878 is remarkably echoed by the second aphorism of 1886’s *BGE*, which demonstrates Nietzsche’s continued emphasis on this question. Consider: “How could something arise from its opposite? Truth from error, for example? Or the will to truth from the will to deception? Or altruism from egoism? [. . .] Such origination is impossible, whoever dreams of it is a fool, or worse; those things of highest value must have a different origin, their own; they cannot be derived from this perishable, seductive, deceptive, lowly world, from this confusion of desire and delusion! Rather, their basis must lie in the womb of existence, in the imperishable, in the hidden god, in the ‘thing-in-itself’—and nowhere else! Judgments of this kind constitute the typical prejudice by which we can always recognize the metaphysicians of every age. [. . .] The metaphysicians’ fundamental belief is the belief in the opposition of values . . .” (*BGE*, 2). For an illuminating discussion of the implications of Nietzsche’s rejection of the opposition and its replacement by differences in degrees, see Jean Granier’s commentary on this aphorism: Nietzsche, he says, rejects the “metaphysical thinking [that] overlooks all nuances, degrees and transitions. On the level of phenomena, it stresses systematically the virtual points of rupture and highlights all contrasts so as to exaggerate the differences into irreducible contradictions” (Granier 1966, 41). See also *WS*, 67.

8. On the coincidence of the development of consciousness and the development of the faculty of imagination, see *GM*, I, 10, 15; *GM*, II, 18, 19, 23; *GM*, III, 12; *GS*, 107, 294, 359.

9. “The ‘last judgment’ is the sweet comfort of revenge—the revolution, which the socialist worker also awaits, but conceived as a little farther off. The ‘Beyond’—why a beyond, if not as a means for besmirching *this* world?” (*TI*, “Skirmishes,” 34).

10. Raymond Geuss presents an illuminating diagram in which he shows bad conscience to rely on both external constraints (“urbanization”) and imaginary constraints in the shape of threats, which he calls the “expectation that one will suffer if one violates custom” (Geuss 1994, 288).

11. *GS*, 354, makes it clear that consciousness is the awareness of the environment as real and that reality means bodily reality: physical threat. In Nietzsche’s view, the representation of reality as also a possibility of pleasure is a late and decadent addition (2 [144]).

12. “The concepts, ‘beyond,’ ‘last judgment,’ ‘immortality of the soul,’ and the ‘soul’ itself are instruments of torture, systems of cruelties by virtue of which the priest became master, remained master” (*D*, 38; see also *AC*, 26, 42, 158; *D*, 109).

13. Nietzsche sees the adhesion to the “*absurdissimum*” of faith for fear of taking any risk exemplified in the figure of Pascal and his famous wager: “Even if Christian belief could not be disproved, Pascal, in view of a dreadful possibility that it might yet be true, considered it prudent in the highest sense to be a Christian” (2 [144]). See also *WP*, 929 (“Are we others despisers of life? On the contrary, we seek life raised to a higher power, life lived in danger—But that, to repeat it, does not mean we want to be more virtuous than others. Pascal, e.g., wanted to risk nothing and remained a Christian: perhaps that was virtuous”) and *BGE*, 46. For a discussion of Nietzsche’s reading of Pascal’s wager, see Birault (1988).

14. Peter Poellner goes even further and asserts: “My belief is useful, it seems, because it is (approximately) true” (Poellner 1995, 143).

15. I find evidence of this not only in Reginster’s admission that “Nietzsche produces no argument of his own against Kantian objectivism,” but also in texts such as *AC*, 11: “One more word against Kant as moralist. A virtue must be our own invention, our most necessary self-expression and self-defence [. . .] Nothing ruins us more profoundly, more intimately, than every ‘impersonal’ duty, every sacrifice to the Moloch of abstraction.” See also *D*, 173: “In the praises of actions that are selfless and useful to all: the fear of everything that is individual.”

16. Reginster seems to implicitly admit this when he calls the question of objectivism a “metaethical question” (Reginster 2006, 58).

17. This is a question that intensely occupied Nietzsche in the second half of 1887. See in particular Notebooks 8, 9, and 11 of 1887. On the “real world” being an imitation of the world of experience see also *TI*, “Skirmishes.”

18. It is clear from the beginning of *GS*, 354, that this faculty is subconscious in the sense of non-thematic. However, it is unclear whether Nietzsche considers this faculty as a minimal form of consciousness or as a preconsciousness.

19. To be sure, Nietzsche's critique of the subject is hardly a late feature of his philosophy. Since at least *HATH*, the subject is presented as an illusory unification of a multiplicity. However, there is a radicalization of this claim in the late notebooks. The earlier critique of the subject was a critique of our concept of the subject. Roughly speaking, we were thinking of something (a multiplicity) as something else (a unity). In the later texts, it is no longer a question of correcting our idea of the subject in order to match it more closely to what it signifies; it is a question of denying that there even is such a thing. The very subjective pole is rejected.

20. In a truly exhilarating article, Jane Bennett and William E. Connolly remark: "Some representations of Nietzsche misrepresent his account of thinking as 'idealistic' because they leave his prior transfiguration of the nature/culture pair out of the picture" (Bennett and Connolly 2002, 158).

21. Hales and Welshon (2000) declare "of course, even if selves are bundles, it is not clear what individuates them" and conclude that "in fact, virtually all of Nietzsche's thoughts about the self assume that there is some principle of individuation for the self intrinsic to it" (159–60). Like in the case of Poellner's account, the point, however, is that the phenomenological importance of the experience of resistance evades a priori the possibility that the object be secondary.

22. This reciprocal constitution of subject and object (and its dialectical implications) that leaves us wondering what came first was announced in the richly ambivalent aphorism 48 of *D*: "*Know yourself' is the whole of science.—Only when he has attained a final knowledge of all things will man have come to know himself. For things are only the boundaries of man.*"

23. The expression is used by Merleau-Ponty (*PP*, 97) in a strikingly similar context. I find a similar position (albeit without mention to Merleau-Ponty) in Alison (1981).

24. See also *WP*, 1059, where the hypothetical nuance is absent: "Do you want a *name* for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men?—*This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power—and nothing besides!" John Richardson remarks that Nietzsche calls the will to power the "essence" of the world, using both *Wesen* (*BGE*, 259; *GM*, II, 12; *WP*, 693) and *Essenz* (*BGE*, 189) (Richardson 1996, 18).

25. See also *WP*, 635: "The will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos*—*the* most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge."

26. "In *valuations, conditions of preservation and growth* express themselves" (9 [38]).

27. Obviously this line is not a place of stability insofar as total conquest is eventually possible. However, any process of subjection always begins with a resistance.

28. For the identity of perception and passivity, see *WP*, 611.

29. The same idea appears in *BGE*, 36. See Parkes (1996, 353) and Thiele (1990, 51–53).

30. In the first paragraph of the aphorism, Nietzsche describes “consciousness” as a “mirror.” In the third one, he writes: “[Man] needed ‘consciousness’, first of all, he needed to ‘know’ himself what distressed him, he needed to ‘know’ how he felt, he needed to ‘know’ what he thought.” All features of what we would usually call “self-consciousness.” The conflation is, of course, purposeful on Nietzsche’s part; it is the same need (arising from the hostility of the environment) that gave rise to both consciousness and self-consciousness.

31. I see these two views also instantiated in Raymond Geuss’s Foucault-influenced “Nietzsche and Genealogy” (Geuss 1994).

32. Even though Nietzsche does go back and forth on the question of the existence of chance and necessity, he never questions their interdependence. In his view, if there is the one, there is the other too. His indecision is only directed at whether one should talk about chance and necessity at all (e.g., *GS*, 109).

33. One of Nietzsche’s most accomplished substantiations of the thought of eternal recurrence is that it is the necessary result of the discrepancy between a limited number of possible events and the infinity of time. See, for example, *WP*, 1063: “The law of conservation of energy demands eternal recurrence.”

34. In a noteworthy attack on some postmodern readings of Nietzsche’s theory of the self, Ken Gemes (2001b) offers an interesting account of Nietzsche’s use of the term “unity” [*Einheit*] in order to challenge Foucault’s insistence on Nietzsche’s rejection of unities. It seems to me that Gemes misses the somewhat deeper implications of the ambivalence on the question of unity—namely that Nietzsche seeks unity as the source of diversity or, in one word, self-differentiation. It is a general feature of the critiques of Foucault’s views on Nietzsche that they tend to oppose Nietzsche’s fragmentation with unity when it seems to me that it is their reconciliation that Nietzsche always sought.

35. I find a similar idea in Bennett and Connolly (2002, 151–52).

36. This conflation, which amounts to a confusion of levels between metaethics (concerned with the fact of valuation) and ethics (concerned with specific values)—a distinction that Nietzsche alludes to in *D*, 103—has done much to create the current debate around Nietzsche’s alleged failure to avoid the so-called genetic fallacy (according to which Nietzsche believes himself to refute morals with genealogy, and in fact fails). It is remarkable that this debate really comes down to defining what Nietzsche seeks to oppose by the genealogical method. If he seeks to oppose specific values, he is arguably guilty of indulging in the genetic fallacy (one can still claim that what was hitherto taken as good is good, for renewed reasons). If it is valuation itself that he seeks to refute, he is not guilty because he shows it to stem from the non-moral (support for valuation becomes meaningless). For a thorough literature review on this debate and a convincing rejection of the charge, see Loeb (1995).

37. Let me point out that one possible—albeit somewhat weak—way to maintain naturalism in this case would be to introduce the spiritual within nature as precisely this “non-conscious, psychical life.” It is all too clear how this claim would be naturalistic in only an inconsequential sense; by this token, any monism, since

it includes the natural world, would be a naturalism, and we would be taken back to the weak form of naturalism discussed previously. It is worth remarking that in all the few instances in which Nietzsche accepts to see nature as self-identical it is in order to separate the human from it. There is a trade-off between humanity and self-identity that belies naturalism insofar as it is a monism that defines reality as nature *qua* self-identity. See Nietzsche's note from 11 [70].

38. See above, my quick remarks on *HATH*, 1, and *BGE*, 2.

39. Consider Risse's later recognition that an essential feature of naturalism is Nietzsche's rejection of the "juxtaposition of 'man and world'" in *GS*, 346. I have argued that the rejection of the "opposition of subject and the object" in *GS*, 354, is really a rejection of the bipolarity, not the establishment of their identity. By the same token, *GS*, 346 is concerned with emphasizing man's inclusion within the world, not his identity with it. Indeed, such an identity would rule out the question mark invoked by the title to the aphorism. This question mark asks precisely how much the condemnation of man's self-exclusion from the world entails a condemnation of the world, or, in other words, how much man's self-exclusion from the world is one of the intrinsic possibilities of the world. (See Risse 2007, 58n2.)

40. Let me repeat that this argument involves the rejection of the idea that Nietzsche's worldview reduces everything to nature as self-identical (as the object of physical sciences, for instance). My view, in this sense, contradicts neither Nietzsche's project to translate man back into nature or the claim that our origin is "more dignified" than nature (*BGE*, 230). I propose another way to think of nature as self-differentiated. This opposes the naturalist readings while making Nietzsche's appeals to translate man back into nature consistent with his contemporaneous critiques of the natural sciences.

41. Bennett and Connolly (2002, 152) characterize Nietzsche as "the philosopher of duration as becoming." Their article opens up perspectives for a renewed form of naturalism by precisely rebuilding the concept of nature as self-differentiated along lines inspired by physicist Ilya Prigogine's worldview. One of their conclusions is that "thinking" permeates nature at large, not merely the human.

42. Let me stress that none of this implies that Nietzsche is a dualist. The question is the nature of his monism. My claim is that he considers being as homogenous (everything is will to power) without accepting that it is, was, or ever will be, unified.

43. Apart from the discussion of the "internalization of man" in *GM*, II, 16, (which is a response to the human's becoming peaceable) I have not addressed this latter (and rather uncontroversial) point. See, for example, Schacht (1983, 388–389).

44. "Consciousness is a danger, and whoever lives among the most conscious Europeans knows even that it is a disease" (*GS*, 354).

45. On the sterility of the last human, Kathleen Higgins writes: "A second challenge for the potential creator of values has to do with the cultural climate. Zarathustra's caricature of 'the last man,' the person so concerned with his own comfort

that he aspires toward nothing, describes the condition of much of modern society. The strategy of the last man, geared as it is toward self-protection, is inimical to fervent involvement in anything. A society full of last men is incapable of generating new values because they lack the passionate basis for doing so. Indeed, Nietzsche sees many of the conditions of modern society as passion-eradicating. This raises the question of how Zarathustra could propose new values that would actually result in cultural transformation” (Higgins 2007, 47).

46. See also, *Z*, I, “On Free Death,” where Zarathustra refers to the “good” as “the preachers of slow death.”

47. Higgins also calls the last man a “caricature” (Higgins 2007, 48).

48. See also *WP*, 83: “‘Without the Christian faith,’ Pascal thought, ‘you, no less than nature and history, will become for yourselves *un monstre et un chaos*.’ This prophecy we have fulfilled, after the feeble-optimistic eighteenth century had prettified and rationalized man;” and *WP*, 639: “That the world is not striving toward a stable condition is the only thing that has been proved. Consequently one must conceive its climactic condition in such a way that it is not a condition of equilibrium.”

49. See also *WP*, 661, and 9 [111]. Müller-Lauter writes: “the resulting conflict of the drives is thus a condition for all events. This conflict can never come to a standstill” (Müller-Lauter 1999, 13). For an extensive demonstration of this point, see “The Organism as Inner Struggle” in Müller-Lauter (1999).

50. In this passage, which returns to *GS*, 382, Nietzsche associates the “great Health” with Zarathustra and those who announce the overhuman.

51. “Further theories: the doctrine of objectivity—‘will-less’ contemplation—as the only road to truth; also to beauty (—also the faith in the ‘genius’ to justify a right to submission); mechanism, the calculable rigidity of the mechanical process; the alleged ‘naturalism,’ elimination of the choosing, judging, interpreting subject as a principle” (*WP*, 95).

52. “The great crimes in psychology: [. . .] that everything great in man has been reinterpreted as selflessness, as self-sacrifice for the sake of something else, someone else, that even in the man of knowledge, even in the artist, depersonalization has been presented as the cause of the greatest knowledge and ability” (*WP*, 296). See also *WP*, 442, and *AC*, 20.

53. “The moral value of ‘depersonalization,’ as the condition of spiritual activity, of ‘objective’ viewing” (*WP*, 382).

54. Those who can survive the thought of eternal recurrence are those who embrace their own subjectivity and value it above objectivity (see *WP*, 1059).

55. On the characterization of the last human as objective and its opposition to the strong human as subjective, see in particular: *WP*, 79, 84, 95, 296, 379, 612, 721.

56. Ken Gemes arrives at a similar characterization of the last human and the overman: “For Nietzsche, where the Overman is a labyrinth whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere, the Last Man, his prescient prefiguration

of postmodern man, is a labyrinth whose center is nowhere and circumference everywhere” (Gemmes 2001b, 359).

2. The Incorporation of Truth and the Symbiosis of Truth and Life

1. One significant example is Clark (1991, 102).

2. This is confirmed by the implicit references to *BT* in *GS*, 107, as well as from this note from the *Nachlass* of the same period, referring to *BT* in these terms: “In my first period appears the mask of Jesuitism, I mean the conscious adherence to illusion” (12 [212]).

3. I will discuss later the role of aphorisms 108 and 109 in preparing the thought of the incorporation of truth.

4. “‘Beauty for beauty’s sake,’ ‘Truth for truth’s sake,’ ‘Good for good’s sake’—for the real, these are three forms of the *evil eye*” (10 [194]). I agree on this point with Clark (1991, 198), who claims: “Given my interpretation of Nietzsche’s analysis of the will to truth, it follows that he cannot advocate pursuing truth out of commitment to the ascetic ideal.” See also Clark (1991, 180–93). Barbara Stiegler (2005) sees the shift in Nietzsche’s position but calls it an ascetic “critique of the flesh.” In so doing, she overlooks the ability of the healthy organism to restrict itself without appeal to any external constraint. Consider *WP*, 122: “*What I warn against*: the instincts of decadence should not be confused with *humane-ness*; the means of civilization, which lead to disintegration and necessarily to decadence, should not be confused with culture; the libertinage, the principle of ‘*laissez aller*,’ should not be confused with the will to power (—which is the counterprinciple).”

5. See, for example, Müller-Lauter (1999, 30–37).

6. Keith Ansell-Pearson (2006) is my source for all references to the *Nachlass* of 1881 used in this chapter.

7. This text is from 1887. See also Ansell-Pearson (2005).

8. Let me point out that interpreting Nietzsche as a standard skeptic who rejects truth because he is committed to a correspondence theory of truth and finds it impossible makes one unable to account for Nietzsche’s appeal to incorporate truth. Only if one believes that we do possess some truth can one grasp the thought of the incorporation of truth. This explains the peculiar lack of references to the incorporation of truth in Clark and other authors who see Nietzsche as committed to the correspondence theory of truth.

9. This is a thought that recurs often in the writings of 1887–1888 (see, for example, *WP*, 7, 573).

10. “The process of making equal is the same as the process of incorporation of appropriated material in the amoeba” (*WP*, 501).

11. The application of the digestion model to the incorporation of something spiritual is justified by Nietzsche in several instances in *GS*, “Joke, Cunning and Revenge,” 54, titled “To my Reader”: “I am the cook/Good teeth, strong stomach with you be!/And once you have got down my book/You should get on with me.”

In *Z*, III, “Old and New Tablets,” 16, Zarathustra proclaims: “Verily, my brothers, the spirit *is* stomach.”

12. As I have argued, Nietzsche can be regarded as a naturalist only according to a spiritualized notion of nature.

13. See *WP*, 501, 653, 656, 702.

14. See, for example, *D*, 148, where erroneous devaluations cause the actions thereby condemned to be carried out less often: “Will they from now on be performed less often because they are valued less highly? —Inevitably!” In a certain sense this question occupies the whole of book II of *D*. In it, Nietzsche explores the interactions between thoughts, representations, and opinions with our body; he explores the themes of habituation, practice, and asceticism as an exercise of the body on the spirit or vice versa, as figures of the incorporative process. This constitutes Nietzsche’s first account of the incorporation of errors (essentially moral values) and it is performed from the angle of the loss of self this incorporation involves. As such, it is diametrically opposed to the incorporation of truth that gives the self back to itself. See in particular *D*, 108, 109, 116, 142.

15. As we shall see below, there is an increase brought about by the incorporation of errors, insofar as it leads to the creation of new drives. However, this increase is of a very peculiar type, which makes us weak and sickly and can only be redeemed by the incorporation of truth itself.

16. For a development of this idea, see Ansell-Pearson (2006, 236).

17. See also *TI*, “Errors,” and *GM*, II, 18–25, where the humanity of the animal man is shown as sickness and where Nietzsche calls for its “reversal”: “A reverse experiment should be possible *in principle*, but who has sufficient strength?” (*GM*, II, 24).

18. Through different channels, Ansell-Pearson (2006) arrives at the conclusion that the incorporation of truth is Nietzsche’s path toward the overhuman. My argument is largely parallel to Ansell-Pearson’s insofar as he sees that the overhuman may be understood as the human who attained the “great health” (*GS*, 382; *EH*, “Books,” “Zarathustra,” 2)—that is to say, the perfect unison of all his drives.

19. See Müller-Lauter (1999, 37) for an elaboration.

20. See *Z*, II, “On Redemption.”

21. For another version of this argument and its Hegelian undertones, see Granier (1966, 46–52): “Nietzsche preserves the great Hegelian idea according to which the negative—the contradiction—possesses a mediating and creative energy.” Granier (1966, 39–43) insists that Nietzsche opposes metaphysical dualism and shows how he uses negation as the mechanism of overcoming missing in any monism: without recourse to any external principle, negation allows one to move to another level. This is largely why, in Nietzschean genealogy, historical becoming starts with the no, the original yes making Being unable to create anything else than itself from itself. “Human history is the continuation of the history of the organic, which itself has no beginning” (Müller-Lauter 1999, 32).

22. This does not mean that this essence cannot divide and rearrange itself. This rearrangement is the basis of the ontology of becoming.

23. For a detailed account of this claim, see Müller-Lauter (1999, 175). Müller-Lauter shows that a drive always maintains its own quantum of forces; however, its direction depends on “perceptions” of where the resistances are lying, so that resistances actually attract the discharge of the drive onto themselves. In drives, quanta of power are essential and directions are contingent. This direction is precisely the domain of the self and its agency. It is only by understanding this that one can understand Nietzsche’s alleged determinism along with the fact that his works are saturated with the language of command. Agency has no directly essential role; in this sense, Nietzsche rejects it and regards it as inconsequential. However, the self can change the direction of its drives, and every task that Nietzsche ever assigns to man is the task of redirecting drives. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

24. This is not to say that the will to power does not provide representations; my point is rather that representations are not *essential* to the will to power. One can seek power without doing so consciously, or even without any awareness of any sort that they are indeed seeking power. Nietzsche sometimes expresses this idea by saying that there is no “will” in the sense that “will” is a psychological metaphor. See Richardson (2006, 27–34). Richardson claims that Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power can only be understood as non-mental if explained in terms of Darwinian evolution. I cannot subscribe to this view insofar as it places the principle of selection prior to that of the will to power. Although he is aware of this objection, Richardson claims, unconvincingly, that Nietzsche does not reject such an idea. This bias of Richardson’s is based on his starting hypothesis that Nietzsche’s criticisms of Darwin can be boiled down to the claim that Darwin (allegedly) misses that living things seek increase and not preservation. On the contrary, Nietzsche’s most profound qualm with Darwinism is that Darwin believes that the stronger survives. This is a blatant misunderstanding of Darwin’s idea of fitness but it involves a consequence that poses difficulties for Richardson—namely, that the will to power is not an empirical fact identified by Nietzsche in actuality, but a philosophical hypothesis. One of the important consequences of this view is that Nietzsche can use the will to power as a critical tool against some natural facts. This would be impossible were Nietzsche holding only the view Richardson attributes to him. I shall discuss this last point in Chapter 3. See Richardson (1996, 556–70).

25. I will discuss this claim in the next section. For now, let me just stress that this idea is not specific to the young Nietzsche. Consider this very important remark from *EH*: “That one becomes what one is presupposes that one doesn’t have the remotest idea *what* one is” (*EH*, “Clever,” 9).

26. “What has been overpowered [incorporated] can, with some remodeling [redirection], be put into service by the overpowerer” (Müller-Lauter 1999, 175). See also 7 (220), 8 (88), and Richardson (1996, 33): “Mastery is bringing another will into a subordinate role within one’s own effort, thereby ‘incorporating’ the other as a sort of organ or a tool.”

27. *WP*, 255: “All virtues physiological *conditions*: particularly the principal organic functions considered as necessary, as good. All virtues are really refined *pas-*

sions and enhanced states. Pity and love of mankind as development of the sexual drive. Justice as development of the drive to revenge. Virtue as pleasure in resistance, will to power. Honor as recognition of the similar and equal-in-power.”

28. I find support for this claim in Müller-Lauter’s discussion of the difference between “will to power” and “*the* will to power.” Müller-Lauter states clearly that the second phrase only denotes a specific instance within a general and overarching principle that is “will to power.” See Müller-Lauter (1999, 133).

29. A most reliable demonstration of this claim of Nietzsche’s can be found in Letteri (1990).

30. Letteri (1990, 411) defines “sickliness” as the inability to incorporate. The distinction between “sickness” and “sickliness” is largely specific to Letteri and I will overlook it in the present discussion.

31. For example Richardson (1996) offers several insights on spiritualization, drawing mainly on *TI*, V, where “spiritualization” is meant in much the same way as Freud would later define “sublimation” (“the spiritualization of sensuality is called *love*,” *TI*, V, 3). I, however, wish to explore spiritualization as an event in the history of man where it accompanies the attainment to a higher level.

32. Drawing on Nietzsche’s very first sketch of the eternal return from August 1881, Keith Ansell-Pearson forcefully establishes a network of connections between several key thoughts of Nietzsche’s, including *amor fati* and the incorporation of truth as a path toward the thought of the superhuman. See Ansell-Pearson (2006).

33. See, for example, Clark (1991, 117–25).

34. See, for example, Gemes (1992, 47–65).

35. For enlightening remarks on this debate, see Robert Nola (1987).

36. Nietzsche’s “purification” of “opinions” echoes Husserl’s appeal to a “purification” of experience (“We must sharply distinguish the pure sense free of all positing and the sense of the expressions in question which is encumbered with judgment-theses.” [Husserl 1950, 2 §7]) and his appeal to the “phenomenological reduction” to grasp the “pure, absolutely posited lived-process” (2 §12). For the characterization of reduction as purification from predication, see also among many others: “We would like to proceed here by introducing the transcendental reduction as built on the psychological reduction—as an additional part of the purification which can be performed on it any time, a purification which is once more by means of a certain Epochè” (Husserl in Kockelmans 1994, 209–12).

37. It is remarkable that in the context of a discussion of texts from *BGE* (1886) and later, Kofman supports her conclusion with texts from 1882’s *GS*, 301, thereby construing Nietzsche’s preference for art above truth as his so-called mature claim.

38. “It should be kept in mind that ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ are relative concepts” (*GS*, 118).

39. “Philosophy interrogates the perceptual faith—but neither expects nor receives an answer in the ordinary sense because it is not the disclosing of a variable

or of an unknown invariant that will satisfy this question and because the existing world exists in the interrogative mode. Philosophy is the perceptual faith interrogating itself about itself" (VI, 103).

40. Zarathustra, for instance, defines what he considers to be his own self as both unchangeable and distinct from its expressions when he declares: "By me I mean what is inexorable and silent in me" (Z, I, "Despisers").

41. Strikingly, the analogy of the self as "granite" comes from Nietzsche's preparatory notes to the *Meditation* on Schopenhauer. In the *Nachlass* of 1874, he writes: "[Schopenhauerian] philosophy transports us to the icy purity of the highest alpine air so as to let us read the primordial granite characters inscribed there by nature" (34 [21]). See also *BGE*, 264.

42. See *TI*, "Skirmishes," 45, where the "physiological degenerescence" of bad conscience is described in the same terms as in *GM*, II, 16, and also in terms of the inability to do what one "prefers."

43. This is a key theme made explicit in *GM* and that remains constant in all of Nietzsche's subsequent writings.

44. The starting point of Nietzsche's investigation in the nature of the self and its individuality is deeply aristocratic in inspiration; one is born with such and such ethical rank: "There is an ethical aristocracy just as there is a spiritual one. One cannot enter it by receiving a title or by marriage" (1 [404]). See also *BGE*'s section "What Is Noble." That section addresses questions of racial nobility and inherited fate as beyond the reach of education and "culture" in the sense of the culture of the last humans.

45. Nietzsche formulates the distinction between these two sorts of drives in various different ways. Attention must be given to the apparent paradox of these acquired drives being called "instincts" in *GM*, II, 16, for example, "the instincts turned inwards." Here the theme is the education of the granite of fate as well as the acquired drives. Yet, this redirection is possible only through the division of the self, which is itself acquired. We are left with two models to describe one reality: either one sees the drives as still (albeit only formally) directed outward (to the other half of the split self) and creating internal tensions only from the point of view of the unity of the self; or one sees the drives as turned within the self against some other drives inhabiting the same self. This question reminds us of the importance of Nietzsche's positing the relativity of the inside and the outside. Given this key thesis, the distinction between these two formulations becomes very faint: in both cases, what is described is an internal struggle made possible by the incorporation of errors.

46. I find the claim that agency is grounded in the inner separation of the self in Diprose (1994, 85).

47. This is also the thought that infuses Nietzsche's views on nihilism. Being divided into "passive" and "active," nihilism appears as the double-faced chance of agency, leading to sickness or health.

48. Here we may discern a very pressing issue with regard to Nietzsche's entire philosophy—namely, the question of Nietzsche's voice: What place does Nietz-

sche attribute to himself in his own worldview? If he really is a fatalist, why does he even bother to command, inspire, and summon us to do so and so? I, unfortunately, do not have the space here to address this question. Let me point out to some ways we can approach the problem. The question of Nietzsche's voice is the question of the efficient power of opinion and of expression. Nietzsche may trigger an effect in our actions by a) causing us to hold an opinion (indirect effect), or b) compelling us in some way to do so and so (direct opinion). In a) we should include the possibility of our holding an opinion expressed by Nietzsche to be a transformative experience (there is indication that Nietzsche believes such thoughts exist and that the thought of eternal recurrence, for example, is one such thought). In b) we should include the possibility that Nietzsche may have an implicit mechanical view of the power of language, spoken or written. In this hypothesis, our research should perhaps start with Nietzsche's reading of Empedocles and of the Sophists, such as Gorgias, who both believed that language has a mechanical power that robs one of her free will. Some indication of Nietzsche's interest in those theories may be found in his early lectures on Greek and Roman rhetoric of 1872 and, more largely, the lectures of the years 1869–1878. See, for example, Nietzsche's *Werke*, Vol. X, edited by C. G. Naumann (Leipzig, 1896), 450–51. For bibliographical references, see Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's "Présentation" to Nietzsche's *RL* (11–19).

49. See also letter 147 of 1888 where Nietzsche writes: "Wagner was a genius of the lie and I was a genius of the truth." The letter is quoted by John Richardson (1996, 255).

50. "There is no law; every power draws its ultimate consequences at every moment" (*WP*, 634).

51. "Be your self! All you are *now* doing, thinking, desiring is not yourself" (*UMIII*, 4, my emphasis).

52. "Value is the highest quantum of power that a man *is able to* incorporate" (*WP*, 713, my emphasis). See also *WP*, 674.

53. In the healthy realm (which is ruled by fate) actuality is equated to fate *qua* necessity. What is at stake here, however, is precisely the gap that has occurred between actuality and necessity, and that is signposted by agency: not every actuality is necessary. In a certain way, the reunion of actuality and necessity is the challenge of self-becoming: "I am not injured by what is *necessary*; *Amor Fati* is my innermost nature" (*EH*, "Books"). In fact, this is actually the crux of Nietzsche's rejection of "Turkish fatalism": for Nietzsche, Turkish fatalism is a passive relationship to fate. Instead of affirming or challenging fate, the Turkish fatalist affirms not fate, but the fatality thereof (its inescapability). Turkish fatalism thus appears as the affirmation of actuality. Nietzsche's doctrine of *amor fati*, which has led many to call him a fatalist (Solomon 2002; Leiter 2001; Clark 1991), consists in a *realization* of fate: in other words "Amor Fati *complements* fate" (Jaspers 1997, 369), considered here again, as a project.

54. Nietzsche understands all creation as realization: "Creation—as selection and finishing of the thing selected" (*WP*, 662).

55. One should bear in mind that the instances of time are always differentiated qualitatively for Nietzsche so that any future is marked by an event. In many instances Nietzsche equates uneventful time to a perennial present. Besides, we know that an event for Nietzsche is always said of an attainment of power: “Every event presupposes a resistance overcome” (*WP*, 702). An individual with a future is an individual able to overcome resistances, one whose power is directed outward. This is precisely what the sick animal man, according to Nietzsche, is not.

3. The Self-Becoming of the World and the Incompleteness of Being

1. In recent years, Richardson (2002 & 2006) has forcefully investigated the relationships between Nietzsche and Darwinian evolution. Nietzsche addresses two main criticisms to Darwin. The first, which is presented here, is Darwin’s alleged claim that the strong are better at surviving than the weak. The second is that living organisms seek reproduction and not increase. Richardson builds this latter claim into the kernel of Nietzsche’s critique of Darwin and regards the first one as an extension of it. However, it would be more relevant to Nietzsche’s project to affirm the first claim instead. For some clarification on the former claim and its relation to other claims, see Call (1998).

2. See *UMIII*, 2. This is an expression that did not leave Nietzsche’s vocabulary until the very end. See, for example, *WP*, 684.

3. Fink’s reading is ambiguous insofar as it uses anthropomorphizations to describe both life and the world. It is difficult, on the basis of Fink’s text, to establish whether this is only a stylistic feature or, indeed, a philosophical claim on his part. In any case, I shall not follow his lead on this issue.

4. On eternal recurrence as a breeding device, see Deleuze (2006, 70). In the rest of this section, Deleuze stretches this aspect to ontological dimensions without recourse to any appeal to anthropological transformation in ways that are difficult to relate to Nietzsche’s own writings. In his view it is through a rejection of all life-negation that the eternal recurrence transforms the structure of the individual. In consideration of Paolo D’Iorio’s (1998) keen criticisms of Deleuze’s interpretation, it seems to me that we must present the selection provided by eternal recurrence as foremost anthropological and only consequently ontologico-cosmological. This is the approach I will be taking in the remainder of this chapter.

5. We remember that sickness comes from consciousness, which is itself the product of man’s original distinctive feature: he is the weakest creature in the world (*GS*, 254).

6. See 35 [14] and *UMIII*, 157–58.

7. See also *EH*, “Books,” where the Zarathustran man “is not estranged from or entranced by [reality], he is *reality itself*.”

8. This is a view Nietzsche still explicitly holds in much the same terms in 1881. See 11 [70].

9. “The world is not an organism at all, but chaos” (*WP*, 711).

10. “That the world is not aiming at the final condition is the only thing that has been proved” (*WP*, 639).

11. This discovery follows directly Nietzsche's thoughts of 1885–1886 on the genealogy of the concept of "being," which Nietzsche sees as derived from the concept of the ego. See, for example, *WP*, 518.

12. This is what Fink has called Nietzsche's "negative ontology of the thing," where a "thing" is defined as a point of opposition between wills to power. See Fink (2003, 145–54).

13. Although this note is from 1885, it is at odds with the characterization of will to power as applying only to Life in *Z*, which it is only slightly posterior to. It presents the pre-organic and the organic, the mineral and the intellectual as consubstantial. This is also a reprise of a theme introduced in 1882 in *GS*, 109: "The living is merely a type of what is dead and a very rare type." The disappearance and reappearance of this theme is linked to the paradox described above: Nietzsche was torn between the need to account for difference and unity. With the will to power, he found a solution to merge both separation and consubstantiality. However, Nietzsche's first conception of the will to power relied on the sharp distinction between organic and inorganic. In the years 1886–1888, he solves this problem by generalizing the will to power to everything that is (while at the same time trying to avoid jumping from the unity of the world under one will to power to the *organicity* of the world).

14. Thomas Hurka (2007) proposes a figure of human perfection according to Nietzsche as pyramidal. It is worth noting that all "perfectionist" readings of Nietzsche operate in the scope of this section—that is to say, they do not include Nietzsche's idea that an end of history, as end of chaos, is impossible. In my view, this does not make the perfectionist readings of Nietzsche wrong, but it does make them partial: Nietzsche may be aiming at perfectionism, but his cosmology makes human excellence always imperfect. On the perfectionist readings of Nietzsche, see, for example, James Conant (2001). For a valuable assessment of perfectionism (albeit without references to Nietzsche's cosmology) see Lemm (2007).

15. See, for example, the early "Greek State" of 1871.

16. "The whole organism is such a complex of systems struggling for an increase of the feeling of power"; See also Müller-Lauter's exposition of "the organism as inner struggle" (Müller-Lauter 1999, 161–82).

17. "The unreason in virtue that leads the individual to allow himself to be transformed into a mere function of the whole" (*GS*, 21).

18. "Is it virtue when a cell transforms itself in a function of a stronger cell?" (*GS*, 118). Nietzsche denies that this could be called the virtue of a cell, not because this action would not be virtuous, but rather because it is not, properly speaking, an action—that is, it does not fall within the realm of morality and agency. When it comes to the agent, however, which is our concern here, this provides Nietzsche's idea of a virtue: becoming the function of a higher being.

19. See Heidegger (1991, 2: 205–7).

20. On the interactions between Nietzsche's readings on thermodynamics in the years 1881–1887 and their consequences on his doctrine of eternal recurrence, and in particular on the prefiguration of this view by Otto Caspari, see D'Iorio

(1995, especially 108–12). The philological elements presented by D'Iorio strongly connect the thoughts of the death of god, the eternal recurrence, and the incorporation largely through their interconnectedness in Notebook III, 1, of 1881. For a philosophical elucidation of this web of implications in this notebook, see Ansell-Pearson (2006).

21. This point is crucial and problematic. Nietzsche approaches it in two alternate ways: First, if there is a certain limited quantum of power within the world, then there are only a certain number of possible combinations thereof (events). Second, Nietzsche affirms that the will to power has no “atoms,” no elemental unit, so that, in theory at least, it can be indefinitely divided, making the number of possible events infinite. After Georg Simmel, Müller-Lauter calls this a plain “contradiction” on Nietzsche’s part: “Nietzsche accepts more than a limit to the possible number of *power-situations*. In so doing, he contradicts himself: infinite divisibility of forces, which excludes any thoughts of a quasi-substantiality of wills to power leaves room for the thought of infinitely many power-combinations” (Müller-Lauter 1999, 140). For an effective review of the standard positions on this question, and attempts at refuting Simmel and Müller-Lauter’s objections, see Loeb (2011).

22. To be sure, the thoughts of eternal recurrence and the will to power are both contemporaneous and are anterior to the explicit formulation of the problem at hand in late 1887. Indeed, there is no denying that the thought of eternal recurrence stands on its own. My assumption here is that Nietzsche’s worldview was transformed by his thoughts of 1885 on time and was revised into a mature worldview, largely based on the affirmation that there will never and has never been any totally healthy and stable state. This renewed worldview was brought about by the transitional years 1885–1886.

23. This point can contribute to the general question of what kind of repetition is involved here. It is clear in my analysis that the repetition cannot be perceived as accumulation, but rather as the repetition of the first as first, eternally.

24. I find the claim that becoming is the temporality of incorporation developed in Diprose (1994, 84–87).

25. See, for example, *TI*, “Skirmishes,” 32: “What justifies a man is his reality—it will justify him eternally. How much more valuable an actual man is compared with any sort of merely desired, dreamed of, odious lie of a man? With any sort of ideal man?”

Transition: Vicious Circles, Virtuous Circles, and Meeting Merleau-Ponty in the Middle

1. This “learning” preoccupied Deleuze, who returned to it in his course on Leibniz in the year following the publication of his Foucault book. Remarkably, he no longer attributes this learning to Merleau-Ponty himself, but he recognizes that Merleau-Ponty used this concept to denounce Husserl’s psychologism. At the same time as he seems to nuance his position toward Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze begins to acknowledge the difference between Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. He now writes: “In effect, being-in-the-world fits pretty well with Merleau-Ponty’s

text where he says: it was really necessary to break with intentionality because intentionality by itself, such as Husserl defines it, does not guarantee that it is something more than a simple ‘learning,’ a simple psychological apprenticeship. Therefore, if you want to escape from psychology, intentionality is not enough. [. . .] At the end, Merleau-Ponty oscillates a bit between Leibniz and Heidegger.” Which is, Deleuze believes, a good thing (Deleuze 2011, 175). See also Claudio Rozzoni (2011).

2. This is something Heidegger overlooks. See, for example, Heidegger 1991, 2: § 1, 25; Heidegger 1991, 3: § 22.

3. I find a similar idea in Deleuze (2006, 220n31). Deleuze refuses that one applies the question of Being to Nietzsche because Being is not a proper ground for affirmation; instead, affirming Being amounts to a reaction against reality (which is not Being) (Deleuze 2006, 185).

4. The value of eternal recurrence as a “great cultivating idea” relies on the same assumption; see *WP*, 1057: “Probable consequences of its [the thought of eternal recurrence] being *believed* (it makes everything break open).”

5. Nietzsche shares this curious circle with Merleau-Ponty, who explicitly mentions it in *VI*, 231/179.

6. *WP*, 533: “The feeling of strength convinces us that there is something here that is being resisted.”

7. I find this characterization of Merleau-Ponty’s position in Henri Maldiney’s very important “Flesh and Verb in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty” (2000). On the opposition between this position of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, see especially pages 54–55. It is also quite clear how Maldiney’s line of thinking influenced Lawlor in the article discussed here.

4. The Origin of Truth

1. One may say this amounts to a phenomenological ontology. On Merleau-Ponty’s efforts to provide a philosophy of sensory experience and not just a phenomenological description, see Barbaras (1998).

2. Fabrice Colonna (2008) has forcefully established the influence of Charles Peguy’s posthumous text on history, *Clio*, as Merleau-Ponty’s source for this expression. In Peguy’s text, the similarity with Nietzsche’s view is, if possible, even more striking. In a very inspiring article, Koji Hirose (2008) takes the same note as his departure point and goes on to describe this fracture as determining both our bodily existence (and thereby the coincidence of bodily consciousness and self-consciousness) and the nature of permanent becoming. He writes: “Coincidentally to the indefinite doubling out of the event, a deep crack appears within bodily existence [*corporéité*], by which the outside introduces itself. This is why [*la corporéité*] is defined as ‘two-faced or two-sided being’ (*RC*, 177)” (Hirose 2008, 182). The similarity between this account and my analysis of Nietzsche’s zone of subjectivity is striking insofar as it finds this inner separation to be a determining feature of the openness of becoming through the external character of perception and gives it an ontological dimension, placing self-differentiation in the ontologi-

cal realm. See also Merleau-Ponty's remark: "This is time: sedimentation and fracture [*déchirure*]*—*sedimentation means that the new situation erases everything, that being is always complete—and yet, we very well know that there has been something else [. . .]. There is something else: the present torn apart by sensation" (*RC*, 208).

3. See also *S*, 157/255: "Mediation is only the resolute recognition of a paradox that intuition, willy-nilly, suffers: to possess ourselves we must begin by abandoning ourselves; to see the world itself, we must first withdraw from it," and in *VI*: "This distance is not the contrary of this proximity, it is deeply consonant with it, it is synonymous with it" (135/176).

4. This distinctive move is at the root of Merleau-Ponty's critique of the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*. In 1947 he writes: "In my opinion, the book [*Being and Nothingness*] remains too exclusively antithetical: the antithesis of my view of myself and another's view of me and the antithesis of the *for itself* and the *in itself* often seem to be alternative instead of being described as the living bond and communication between one term and the other" (*SNS*, 72/89–90).

5. "If seeing or hearing involved extricating oneself from the impression in order to lay siege to it in thought, ceasing, that is, to be in order to know, then it would be ridiculous to say that I see with my eyes or hear with my ears, for my eyes and ears are themselves entities in the world and as such are quite incapable of maintaining on the hither side of it that zone of subjectivity from which it is seen or heard" (*PP*, 212/246, t.a.).

6. "It is absolutely necessarily the case that the thing, if it is to be a thing, should have sides of itself hidden from me, which is why the distinction between appearance and reality straightway has its place in the perceptual 'synthesis.'" (*PP*, 377/432).

7. Rudolf Bernet understands this claim as affirming the impossibility of individuation: "A thing can only be perceived through and according to the things that surround it" (1993, 64). In doing so, Bernet rightly emphasizes that Merleau-Ponty sees objects as impossible to abstract from their context. However, a look at the textual context shows that Merleau-Ponty's point has further-reaching consequences. Merleau-Ponty writes: "The absolute positing of a single object is the death of consciousness, since it congeals the whole of existence, as a crystal placed in a solution suddenly crystallizes it" (*PP*, 71). For Merleau-Ponty, as the metaphor of the crystal shows *a contrario*, the necessary indeterminacy of intentional objects establishes becoming: consciousness is a dynamic process.

8. "The object-horizon structure, that is to say the perspective, is no obstacle to me when I want to see the object: for just as it is the means whereby objects are distinguished from each other, it is also the means whereby they are disclosed" (*PP*, 68/82, t.a.).

9. See the enlightening comments on this question by Etienne Bimbenet (2008, 99–108).

10. We must therefore reinterpret what Merleau-Ponty called the "satisfaction" of determination since it is obvious that this determination will never be reached.

It seems such a satisfaction does not express a reaching absolute determination, but merely a satisfactory state of determination. Yet, if satisfaction can occur “suddenly” within a continuum of indeterminacies, it is clear that the feeling of satisfaction is extrinsically given. This satisfaction arises through its reference to a purpose; the determinacy is satisfactory because it is “good enough” for what we need it for. Even though Merleau-Ponty does not investigate this extrinsic incursion of personal projects or interests within perception in this form, preferring to attach it to his theory of sense, it is obvious that the contingency of the satisfaction provided by determination is a key link between Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche’s theories of consciousness as presented in *GS*, 354.

11. I will discuss Merleau-Ponty’s use of the concept of horizon in Chapter 6. For now, see, for example, Carbone (2000, 39–40).

12. This, of course, can only emphasize the Kantian inspiration that underlies this concept.

13. This will be a defining factor of Merleau-Ponty’s forthcoming ontology of openness.

14. “It is this pre-objective realm that we have to explore in ourselves if we wish to understand sense-experience” (*PP*, 12/14). “The reflex, in so far as it opens itself to the meaning of a situation and perception; in so far as it does not first of all posit an object of knowledge and is an intention of our whole being is a modality of a pre-objective view that we call being-in-the-world” (*PP*, 79/92).

15. Yet, contrary to Freud, whom he criticizes precisely on this point, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that an experience that is not experienced is nothing to us and rejects the non-objective like he rejects the unconscious to find the ground in the pre-objective. In fact, there is no absolutely objective ground whose expression into a subjective level needs to transit through the pre-objective; rather, the pre-objective is the very ground itself. It remains true, however, that even though the elaboration of the ideas leading to this conclusion is well under way at the time of *PP*, Merleau-Ponty lacks any formal thematization of it until the lectures on passivity and institution of 1954–1955, the consequences of which we will soon turn to.

16. We shall see that this distinction is the battleground of Merleau-Ponty’s evolution toward ontology.

17. Barbaras writes: “His goal would then be to grasp in light of this originally Cartesian concept, some results that in fact, represent a radical questioning of Cartesianism” (Barbaras 1998, 160–61).

18. “This move is but the expression of a more general inconsistency which indicates the unbridgeable gap between the perceptual world revealed by Merleau-Ponty and the conceptuality thanks to which he approaches it” (Barbaras 1998, 180).

19. See his idea of existentialism in *SNS* as well as Lévi-Strauss’s reminiscence of Merleau-Ponty describing existentialism to him: “He told me that it was an effort to restore metaphysics as it was exemplified by the great philosophers of the past” (Lévi-Strauss 1990, 42). This anecdote, Lévi-Strauss recalls, took place in “the winter of 1944–5,” that is, at the end of Merleau-Ponty’s work on *PP*. This

is a move made most explicit in “The Philosopher and his Shadow” (which I will discuss shortly) where Merleau-Ponty presents Husserl’s shadow philosophy (his inspiration) as the focus of his interest over and above his “explicit” philosophy.

20. It has been made clear that *PP* inaugurates for Merleau-Ponty the move from a critique of the scientific spirit as it appears in the *Structure of Behavior* to a critique of intellectualist philosophies. However, it is not obvious that this move should be seen as anything more than a broadening of the scope of the critique, rather than a change of focus.

21. See also Ted Toadvine (2004). Toadvine describes the break in Merleau-Ponty’s thought as a move away from the phenomenological cogito to the primacy of nature as sense. As will soon become clear, I fully agree with Toadvine that this is the key to Merleau-Ponty’s ontology. In my opinion, it is, however, possible to construe this claim as resulting not from a break, but from a natural evolution in Merleau-Ponty’s thought. It is not obvious that the phenomenological cogito does anything more than actually positing already this primacy of sense over the subject, albeit admittedly in a less than explicit way.

22. At the time of writing *VI*, Merleau-Ponty accuses those he calls the “humanists” of falling into the trap of explaining a continuum in term of discrete entities: “They presupposed a second man behind the retinal image who had other eyes, another retinal image in charge of seeing the first. But with this man within man, the problem remains untouched” (*S*, 240/392, t.a.).

23. “A truth which, as Pascal said, we can neither reject nor completely accept” (*SNS*, 92/115).

24. In his foreword to *PP*, Merleau-Ponty defines the task of philosophy as this making manifest (*PP*, xv).

25. This is the line of argument that Emmanuel Alloa brings out most prominently (Alloa 2008).

26. Even though this primal acquisition is here presented as the separation more than the link between me and myself, it is clear that this only reflects the ambivalence of the zone of subjectivity in external perception.

27. I find a similar idea in Toadvine (2008, 161).

28. This hesitation can only be expressed as some inconclusive to-and-fro as long as one remains on the level of its terms. One can discern here how this problem led to Merleau-Ponty’s passage to the ontological level in *VI*. There, as I shall discuss in Chapter 6, Merleau-Ponty is no longer shackled in the three terms (self, being-in-the-world, and in-itself) and their two possible combinations (self and being in the world vs. in-itself—the intellectualist solution—and self vs. being-in-the-world and in-itself—the realist solution). In *VI*, it is the middle term itself that attains to the status of Being and grows to include the other two terms as its horizons. This will be developed in Chapter 6.

29. On the question of the difference between transparency and translucidity, see Alloa (2008, 17–20).

30. Richir sees the broken link between the pre-objective and the objective in terms of an impossible passage from the “tacit symbolism” to the “conventional

symbolism” because he fails to see that the objective is the destiny of the pre-objective.

31. See also *TL*, 120/167: “The true cannot be defined outside of the possibility of the false.”

32. “Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can’” (*PP*, 137/160).

33. It is worth noting that Nietzsche proposes the same account of the becoming conscious of the object of our perception: “Our knowledge of what is was only the outcome of our asking: ‘How? Is it possible? Why precisely like that?’ Our wonder at the discrepancy between our wishes and the course of the world has led to our becoming acquainted to the course of the world” (7 [15]). In both cases, of course, what must be retained is the continuity of the movement that leads from the pre-objective to the objective.

34. On this specific question, Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl’s theory of temporal retention in the *Zur Phaenomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*.

35. “And it is this unjustifiable certitude of a sensible world common to us that is the seat of truth within us” (*VI*, 11/27).

36. “The thing imposes itself not as true for every intellect, but as real for every subject who is standing where I am.” Empathy is described in *VI*, 10–11/26–27 as the specific “I can” that accompanies the perception of the other (“*autrui*”).

37. “It is because it is a preobjective view that being-in-the-world can be distinguished from every third person process, from every modality of the *res extensa*, as from every *cogitatio*, from every first person form of knowledge—and that it can effect the union of the ‘psychic’ and the ‘physiological’” (*PP*, 80/95).

38. Which Merleau-Ponty calls respectively, the “habitual” and the “actual” bodies: “Our body comprises as it were two distinct layers, that of the habit-body and that of the body at this moment. In the first appear manipulatory movements which have disappeared from the second, and the problem how I can have the sensation of still possessing a limb which I no longer have amounts to finding out how the habitual body can act as guarantee for the body at this moment [*se porter garant pour le corps actuel*]” (*PP*, 82/ 98).

39. In fact, Merleau-Ponty includes an argument of the sort described earlier in his present account. In the same way as seeking is paradoxical because one has to both ignore and know what they seek, this is denial as described by psychoanalysis: “The patient therefore realizes his disability precisely in so far as he is ignorant of it, and is ignorant of it precisely to the extent that he knows of it. This is the paradox of being in the world” (*PP*, 82/97).

40. It is crucial to point out that most of the work is performed by the notion of habitude—that is, a surviving of the past experience into the present. This will be one of the avenues Merleau-Ponty will explore later on in his accounts of sedimentation, but it is important to point out how the minimal memory involved in the process of determination becomes sedimented as habitude. As we mentioned earlier, the process of determination relies on the possibility to remain the same through time in front of an untemporal object. In a significant note, Merleau-

Ponty writes: “Bergson saw that the body and the mind communicate with each other through the medium of time, that to be a mind is to stand above time’s flow and that to have a body is to have a present” (*PP*, 78n2/93n2). The present case offers a sedimentation of the persistence of the self through time into a habitual self and a sedimentation of the object into an essence whose qualities become essential (from “I can grab it” to “it is to be grabbed”).

41. “Ideality and historicity have a common source. In order to discover it, one has only to locate between the flow of events and the intemporal meaning, a third dimension, that of history of depths [*l’histoire en profondeur*] or of ideality in genesis [*l’idéauté en genèse*]” (*TL*, 115/161, t.a), that is, as we have seen, the intentional structure of perception.

42. Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on language has led many of his readers to see him as a philosopher of language. However, he himself always insisted that he interrogated language to clarify Being. In 1960, he declares: “I sometimes feel an unease when I see the category of language take all the space,” and in the report to his lecture on “Language and the Subconscious” he is said to have insisted that “in his view, the openness to Being is not linguistic: it is in perception that he locates the birthplace of speech” (*P2*, 273–74).

43. Merleau-Ponty’s use of the notion of “negintuition” is complex. At first he presents it through Sartre’s thesis of the negintuition of nothingness and rejects it (*VI*, 53/77). Yet, it is clear that what is rejected there is not the intuition of an absence but the idea of this intuition applying to nothingness in the radical sense developed by Sartre. In a note from June 1959 (*VI*, 196/247), when Merleau-Ponty was working on his critique of Sartre as exposed in the chapter “Interrogation and Dialectic,” he writes: “The negintuition of nothingness is to be rejected because nothingness also is always *elsewhere*” (this idea of absence as presence elsewhere will undergo great reworking later, in May 1960 [*VI*, 251/300]). Indeed, Merleau-Ponty uses negintuition against Sartre himself when he shows that one must choose between negintuition and absolute nothingness. There, he chooses negintuition: “If on the contrary [to Sartre], we follow out the consequences of the negintuition all the way, we understand how our transcendental being and our empirical being are the obverse and the reverse of one another” (*VI*, 61/87). I shall discuss Merleau-Ponty’s own concept of “imperception,” which is the perception of presence of the absent in Chapter 6.

44. In his superb article “Le Corps, La Chair,” the late Claude Lefort makes the point that “among all the senses there is now one which affects all of them, the sense of lack” (Lefort 1990, 15).

45. The context of this quote is Merleau-Ponty’s account of Malebranche but it is clear that this specific section contains what Merleau-Ponty regards as seminal in Malebranche for the new philosophy that he advocates. Besides, the correlation of an absolute subject and an absolute object is precisely the stakes of Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of negintuition in *VI*.

46. “The difficult and essential point here is to understand that by positing a field distinct from the empirical order of events, we are not positing a Spirit of

Painting [. . .] Cultural creation [*la création de la culture*] is ineffectual if it does not find a vehicle in external circumstances” (*S*, 68/110).

47. This is what underlies the very endeavor of an archaeology of truth: to find the forgotten not through a backward glance to the past—time is irreversible—but through an inquiry grounded into the present.

48. *PP* proposes the striking analogy of the water fountain [*jet d'eau*] as the eternal milieu of becoming: “We say that there is time as we say that there is a fountain: the water changes while the fountain remains because its form is preserved; the form is preserved because each successive wave takes over the functions of its predecessor: from being the thrusting wave in relation to the one in front of it, it becomes, in its turn and in relation to another, the wave that is pushed; and this is attributable to the fact that, from the source to the fountain jet, the waves are not separate; there is only one thrust, and a single air-lock in the flow would be enough to break up the jet. Hence the justification for the metaphor of the river, not in so far as the river flows, but in so far as it is one with itself. This intuition of time’s permanence, however, is jeopardized by the action of common sense, which thematizes or objectifies it, which is the surest way of losing sight of it” (*PP*, 421–22/483). See also the comments on this passage by Colonna (2008, 141).

49. On the Husserlian roots of this question in Merleau-Ponty, see David Farrell Krell (1982). Krell establishes a contrast between Merleau-Ponty’s incorporative model of forgetting and Locke’s. Curiously, I find a similar argument that draws an opposition between Locke’s account of memory and forgetting and Nietzsche’s own incorporative model in Rosalyn Diprose (1994, 84).

50. This structure that takes place within the space of intentionality and creates an internal tension by turning one’s objective half against her subjective one is precisely what Nietzsche describes as the structure of sickness arising from self-consciousness, with the result that it creates fantasies that maintain both the sickness and the survival by avoiding having to face one’s trauma.

51. Just as the trauma is described in *PP* as a present that refuses to be past, memory is understood in *VI* as impossible as coincidence. Memory cannot be coincidence for this would preclude memory to appear as past; in order for a memory to appear as past, there has to be a coefficient of non-presence: sedimentation. “There is no real coinciding with the being of the past. If the pure memory is the former present preserved, and if, in the act of recalling, I really become again what I was, it becomes impossible to see how it could open to me the dimension of the past [. . .] The truth of the matter is that the experience of a coincidence can be, as Bergson often says, only a ‘partial coincidence’” (*VI*, 122/161). See also *PP*, 413/472: “But these traces in themselves do not refer to the past: they are present; and, in so far as I find in them signs of some ‘previous’ event, it is because I derive my sense of the past from elsewhere, because I carry this particular significance [*signification*] within myself.”

52. See also *SNS*, 94/115: “The history of humanity [. . .] is not empirical, successive history but the awareness of the secret bond which causes Plato to be still alive in our midst.”

53. The idea of a making past as integration and preservation has not changed since *PriP*: “Do I not know that there is a life of ideas, as there is a meaning of everything I experience, and that everyone of my most convincing thoughts will need additions and then will be, not destroyed, but at least integrated into a new unity?” (20/58).

54. This is what supports his intra-ontology, the method by which we may access the general by way of the local. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 6.

55. In the preface to *S* written two months earlier (September 1960), Merleau-Ponty praises Marxism for having “uncovered all the abstract dramas of being and nothingness in history. It had invested it with an enormous metaphysical charge—and rightly so, since it was thinking of the overlap [*membrure*] of the architectonic structure of history, of the merging of mind and matter, man and nature, and consciousness and existence” (6/14, t.a.).

5. Existential Reduction and the Object of Truth

1. “The opening is in principle [*par principe*] immediately filled” (*S*, 14/27).

2. Recall how the thesis of sedimentation made it possible to see in Descartes the outline of his own overcoming.

3. “In the pure attitude [. . .] the objective becomes itself something subjective,” says Husserl (1989, § 53).

4. The distinction between “epoché” and “reduction” (the latter being the method of attainment of the former) is often overlooked by both Husserl and his readers.

5. It will become increasingly clear as we unfold Merleau-Ponty’s movement toward an ontology as a consequence of his reappraisal of reduction that Merleau-Ponty’s interest in the concept of Nature has a lot to do with a coming to terms with his own disagreement with Husserl on this very concept. See, for example, Ted Toadvine (2004).

6. The French goes thus: “Ce qui est faux dans l’ontologie des *Blosze Sachen*, c’est qu’elle absolutise une attitude de pure théorie (ou d’absolutisation), c’est qu’elle omet ou prend pour allant de soi un rapport avec l’être qui fonde celui-là et en mesure la valeur. Relativement à ce *naturalisme*, l’attitude *naturelle* comporte une vérité supérieure qu’il faut retrouver. Car elle n’est rien moins que naturaliste.” The original English translation reads “*celui-là*” in the feminine, as if referring to “the purely theoretical attitude” (“*une attitude de pure théorie*”). The grammatical context makes this impossible. The text quoted is amended, with “*celui-là*” taken to refer to “*l’être*.”

7. Merleau-Ponty attributes even this thesis to Husserl by building up on Husserl’s acknowledgment of the pre-objective (a “below” of objectivism) and overlooking the characteristic Husserlian move to not grant any ontological bearing on this distinction. In “The Philosopher and His Shadow” Merleau-Ponty writes: “Even as Husserl’s reflection tries to grasp the universal essences of things, it notes that ‘in the unreflected, there are syntheses which dwell underneath [*en-deçà*] any thesis’” (*S*, 163/266, t.a.).

8. For Merleau-Ponty, Maine de Biran's anti-idealism has "often remained below [*au-dessous de*] philosophy" (*IS*, 66/56, t.a.). It seems clear here that the "above" of Husserl and the "below" of Maine de Biran constitute the two terms whose middle is the object of Merleau-Ponty's quest.

9. It is significant that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the term "*au-dessous*" as a response to the generally acknowledged view of Husserl as aiming "above" the subject-object relation. Merleau-Ponty presents this contrast as a chronological evolution when it is obvious that Husserl maintained his idea in the subsequent *Crisis*. See also *IP*, 168: "Returning *beneath* reflective consciousness, in order to find the way out of these antinomies [of the in-itself and the for-itself]" (my emphasis).

10. See also *N*, 103–4: "The unreflected [*l'irréfléchi*], in [Husserl], is neither maintained as such, nor is it suppressed, it remains a weight and a launchpad for consciousness. It plays the role of a foundation and a founded, and reflecting, thus, means unveiling the unreflective. Hence a certain strabism of phenomenology." It seems Merleau-Ponty was never so close to acknowledging that Husserl's philosophy and its shadow were irreconcilable.

11. Merleau-Ponty does write in his notes on Gurwitsch that "the eidetic method is responsible for Husserl's intellectualism." This claim does not mean that the reduction shall not give access to essence, only that Husserl's use of it relies on the wrong idea of essences. Husserl seeks essences as the essences of intentional objects; Merleau-Ponty seeks the essence of intentionality itself. The quote continues: "The eidetic method turns the perspectivism and the infinite which is open to the thing into an ideal truth, when it is its opposite" (*NL*, 328). In the next page, Merleau-Ponty disapprovingly describes Husserl's notion of essence as "the principle of identity" and comments: "In fact, essence is an invariant, i.e. it is a hinge, not a quiddity" (*NL*, 329). In this sense, intentionality is of course not the essence Husserl seeks. For an example of the alternative reading of this claim, see Toadvine (2002b, 278).

12. "Fink, *Husserl's assistant*" (*PP*, xv/viii, my emphasis).

13. Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty uses the same term to qualify the object of science according to Kantian transcendental idealism in *S*, 155/253.

14. As I discuss in Chapter 6, Merleau-Ponty makes a similar point against Bergson in *VI*. This insistence on accounting for what he calls in *PP* "the indicator of reality" is, of course, directly correlative to the emphasis of the question of truth.

15. I find a remarkable account of Merleau-Ponty's project in terms of Kant's Third Critique in Stephen Watson (2007, 525–50). See also Watson (2009a and 2009b).

16. This is, of course, a distinction foreign to Kant due to his quasi-substantialization of the faculties, which makes it inconceivable to distinguish between the successful quality of determinative judgment and its unsuccessful one that is at play in the experience of the sublime in any other way as precisely the difference between success and failure. The comparison between both thinkers should not

lead one to think that Merleau-Ponty is committed to any such substantialization of the faculties. One should always bear in mind that the only reality referred to here is the experience of intentionality.

17. In *NL* Merleau-Ponty sees the same claim in Gurwitsch and rejects it abruptly: “Gurwitsch: ‘the ultimate task of philosophy . . . accounting for all sorts of objects, and for objectivity in all possible senses in terms of subjectivity’” (137).

18. For example, the argument presented by Natalie Depraz in her fine article “What About the Praxis of Reduction?” is somewhat impaired by the absence of such a distinction (Depraz 2002).

19. Merleau-Ponty sees this move in Husserl, but sees in Husserl’s shadow philosophy its opposite too: “The very transcendence of this world must retain a meaning in the eyes of ‘reduced’ consciousness and transcendental immanence cannot be simply its antithesis” (*S*, 162/264).

20. In his notes on Gurwitsch, Merleau-Ponty affirms that his starting point in the *Lebenswelt* involves a reversal of Husserl’s method (*NL*, 338).

21. “Perceived being is this spontaneous and natural being which the Cartesians did not see because they were seeking being against a background of nothingness, and because, Bergson says, they lacked what is necessary to conquer ‘non-existence.’ Bergson himself describes a pre-constituted being that is always presupposed at the horizon of our reflections, and is always already there to lift the fuse out of the anguish and the vertigo that are about to explode within us” (*S*, 187/304). Through a different route, Renaud Barbaras encounters the necessary links of Merleau-Ponty’s reduction and positivity. See Barbaras 2005 (44–61). On this question, see also Kojima (2002, 99).

22. In *IP*, 157–58, it is along the same lines that Merleau-Ponty criticizes the Sartrean account of liberty within determinism as a “decision”: a decision can only affirm the determinisms that led to it; it is not an act of freedom. We will discuss in the next chapter how these criticisms will develop into a full-fledged reflection on the concept of a transition and lead Merleau-Ponty to reject both Husserl and Sartre’s ontologies on the basis that they are unable to account for transitions. In the present case, the question asked to Husserl is: How can one make the transition from judgment to reduction? That asked to Sartre is: How can one make the transition from determinism to freedom? See also Heinämaa (2002). In Heinämaa’s view, Merleau-Ponty’s opposition to the decisional aspect of reduction is supported by an opposition to the idea of an active reduction and a preference for passive reduction. It will become clear in a moment that this view is untenable. Instead, I will argue that it is the very opposition between passivity and activity that Merleau-Ponty seeks to dispute.

23. “Reflection never lifts itself out of any situation,” says Merleau-Ponty (*PP*, 42/53).

24. The incompleteness of reduction “is the reduction itself” (*VI*, 178/230).

25. On the question of saturation in Merleau-Ponty, see Anthony J. Steinbock (2000). In recent years, the question of saturation in phenomenology has received

long overdue attention, especially in the works of Michel Henry (who describes saturation in terms of “auto-affection”) and Jean-Luc Marion (1996).

26. This clearly anticipates Jean-Luc Marion’s definition of saturation as the excess of intuition over intention (Marion 1996).

27. “Speech is the surplus of our existence over natural being” (*PP*, 197/229). For the equivalence of speech and reflective judgment in this context, see *PP*, 174/202.

28. See also *N*, 351: “It is the sensing [*le sentir*] itself insofar as it is not the *thought* of sensing (possession) but de-possession, ek-stasis, partaking or identification, incorporation or ejection. In one word, coincidence, blind acknowledgment [*reconnaissance*] (of the touching and the touched, of me and my image over-there). Non-difference, degree zero of difference. The felt [*le senti*] = I do not know and I’ve always known, we do not need to know what it is we are seeing since we are seeing it. Being towards [*Etre à*] . . . fascination or deduction of the sensible. To see is to think.”

29. On the metaphor of the container, see also the formula from *S*, 14/26, quoted above: “The opening is by principle immediately fulfilled.”

30. At this point, one may ask what mechanism makes this saturation possible—that is, how it is possible that reflective consciousness be, as it were, left behind by perception. It is a question that Merleau-Ponty does not address directly, but we may propose the following conjecture: the determining process was described as taking place in time, as never immediate. It seems that this temporality of reflective consciousness confronted to the supposed instant grasp of perception would allow for the competition between perception and reflective consciousness to be described as a race: if there is saturation of perceptual contents, then, reflexive consciousness lacks the time to perform determination and is thereby “short-circuited.”

31. It is clear from passages like this and those quoted above that the treatment of saturation in *PP* remains ambiguous and needed to be completed by the course of 1954–1955. In *PP*, the asymptotic nature of saturation and reduction, if clearly intuited (as shown in this passage), is either played down or ignored (as in the passages quoted above). It seems that the first clear declaration that reduction is necessarily asymptotic is to appear in the foreword to *PP*, discussed above, and it is useful to remember that it was not until after having completed the full draft of *PP* that Merleau-Ponty added this foreword, at Brunschwig’s insistence. In any case, it is only later, in the courses of the fifties, and largely thanks to a clarification of his rejection of Sartrean existentialism, that Merleau-Ponty will make the asymptotic of reduction the centerpiece of his philosophy. See also, for a somewhat tentative approach to asymptoticism, *PP*, 331/382.

32. See Sara Heinämaa (2002). Heinämaa, like many others, emphasizes passivity over activity.

33. This formula from Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* is quoted in many occasions by Merleau-Ponty, beginning with *PP*, 219/254.

34. Merleau-Ponty criticizes the Sartrean position for making the distinction me-the world obsolete: “The Sartrean subject is absolute individuality. As a result,

immediate unity of the for-itself and for-the-other [*du pour soi et du pour autrui*]. It is required, in order to evade this *equivocity* or *madness* (I am this *and* I am all, *this is all* and *all is this*) that both the individuality of the flow and of the body and the absolute universality of the subject be broken . . ." (*IP*, 162).

35. See, for example, Barbaras (1998, 225–40) and Carbone (2000).

36. *PP*, 102/119: "It is clearly in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being, and an analysis of one's own movement should enable us to arrive at a better understanding of it. By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and, moreover, time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them." See also *N*, 270–78.

37. "When Descartes says that the understanding knows itself incapable of knowing the union of soul and body and leaves this knowledge for life to achieve, this means that the act of understanding presents itself as reflection on an unreflective experience which it does not absorb either in fact or in theory" (*PP*, 42/52). See also *PP*, 198–99/231: "Thus experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other, and which gives us only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality. Descartes was well aware of this, since a famous letter of his to Elizabeth draws the distinction between the body as it is conceived through use in living and the body as it is conceived by the understanding."

38. "The 'natural' man holds on to both ends of the chain, thinks at the same time that his perception enters into the things and that it is formed this side of his body. Yet, as much as the two convictions coexist without difficulty in the exercise of life, once reduced to theses and to propositions, they destroy one another and leave us in confusion" (*VI*, 8/23, t.a.). See also *OE*, 54–55: "[The soul] conceived as unified with the body, it cannot, by definition, be conceived entirely. One may practice it, exercise it, and as it were, exist it."

39. See also *PP*, 295/343: "My absolute contact with myself, the identity of being and appearance cannot be posited, but only *lived* as anterior to any affirmation" (my emphasis); *PP*, 358/410–11: "Every commitment [. . .] testifies to a self contiguous with itself before those particular acts in which it loses contact with itself;" and *PP*, 382/438: "All inner perception is inadequate because I am not an object that can be perceived, because I make my reality and find myself only in the act."

40. "The flesh of the world = its *horizonthaftigkeit* (internal and external horizon) surrounding the thin pellicle of the strict visible between these two horizons" (*VI*, 271/319). See also *VI*, 132/173: "A visible is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open." This "straits," of course, is intentionality itself *qua* flesh.

41. This is what Maine de Biran calls "the reflectible element of our sensations." See, for example, Maine de Biran (1952, 239). On Merleau-Ponty's reading

of Biran, see *IS*, 59: “Biran seems to direct himself towards a philosophy which would be indifferent to the distinction of the inside and the outside.” On the question of auto-affection, see Barbaras (1998, 137–55).

42. Remarkably, this reading of Heidegger with its Husserlian overtones is echoed by Husserl himself in his concept of a “phenomenological flickering” or “oscillation.” This is a problem arguably overcome by Merleau-Ponty. It is significant, with regard to Richir’s Husserlian reading of Merleau-Ponty, that he overlooks Merleau-Ponty’s responses to this and maintains that this flickering is a core problem of phenomenology (Richir 2001).

43. In “What about the Praxis of Reduction? Between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty,” Natalie Depraz addresses the question I just discussed. She concludes, in a way reminiscent of Heinämaa, that what she calls the “praxis of epoché” involves three elements, none of which is active in more than an intellectual, Husserlian sense. She concludes that we must “let-go” and “transform our looking-for” into a “letting-come” thanks to a “turning of the direction of attention from the exterior to the interior” (Depraz 2002, 124). This sophisticated account amounts to seeing the reduction as a mode of passivity and, more important, it overlooks the lateral experience of Being that we encounter regardless of the object of our activity.

44. See, for example, Bimbenet (2008) and Schenck (1985).

45. Of course, this leads to—or stems from—the so-called postmodern readings of Merleau-Ponty. See, for example, Bernhard Waldenfels (1991) and Douglas Low (2001).

46. “Motricity as original intentionality” (*PP*, 137/160).

47. “Perception is a practical synthesis” (*PriP*, 14/45, t.a.). See also *IP*, 193, which discusses the relations between “perceptive [passive] consciousness” and “imaging [active] consciousness.”

48. “In the inner and outer horizon of the thing or the landscape, there is a co-presence and co-existence of outlines which is brought into existence through space and time” (*PP*, 330/380–81).

49. It is useful to remember that for Merleau-Ponty, the universe (“*l’univers*”) is opposed to the world (“*le monde*”) as its objective-metaphysical version. See *PP*, 44/51.

50. In fact, this is a point that Merleau-Ponty has made time and time again. In *PriP*, for example, he praises science because, in its “mature” form, it “leads us back to the *structures* of the perceived world, and somehow recovers them” (*PriP*, 37/92, my emphasis). On the same argument made about language, see *VI*, 113/146. On the idea that “everything is true” (not just science) as long as it is interrogated correctly, see *PriP*, 35/89. Against the cumulative view of perspectivism and its scientific forms, see *PP*, 291/337–38. Against the view that science is able to overcome its computational method into interrogation, see *P2*, 290, 337; *VI*, 16/32 (“blindness towards being was the price that [*science*] had to pay for its success in the determination of beings,” t.a.); *VI*, 231/179 (“[the pre-scientific] is even disclosed through the constitutive movements of science *on the condition that*

we reactivate them, that we see what left to themselves they verdecken,” my emphasis). On a differing interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s relation to science and the idea that Merleau-Ponty confides in “scientific thought,” see Miguel de Beistegui (2005, 113).

51. Merleau-Ponty makes it clear that he considers phenomenology to be defined as the practice of reduction (*PP*, foreword).

52. The problem of “direct ontologies” is exposed as early as the opening of *PP* with regard to the possibility and prerogatives of reduction: “Natural judgement is nothing but the phenomenon of passivity,” writes Merleau-Ponty (*PP*, 42/53). This implies that any direct ontology is impossible because it would construe Being as an object, abstracting the philosopher from it or abstracting it from the philosopher. It is because natural judgment cannot be bracketed that one needs to seek reduction not outside judgment but beyond it, leading to an ontology necessarily indirect insofar as it knows itself to be incapable of seeing being as such. This is one of the many points where the continuity of *PP* and *VI* seems flawless: this invisible being that can only be approached indirectly is the “Invisible” of *VI* that will be approached through “imperceptions” (see *PP*, 42/53).

53. “The only way [. . .] into ‘sincerity,’ is by forestalling such scruples and taking a blind plunge into ‘doing’” (*PP*, 382/438).

6. Merleau-Ponty’s “Soft” Ontology of Truth as Falsification

1. Colonna encounters this “existential eternity” as the infinity of becoming in the sense I have given to the “syntax of history” in Chapter 4. He also links the two phrases (Colonna 2008).

2. Merleau-Ponty insists that this “void” is “not an ontological void, a non-being” (*VI*, 192).

3. See also Barbaras (1998, 201–23).

4. It is apparent here how the reader might get confused in what Merleau-Ponty called the “vicious circle” of his philosophy: expressing the non-conceptual through the conceptual does not affirm the latter. This will be examined later in this chapter and in the conclusion.

5. See, for example, Low (2001).

6. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty does not see this objection as an obstacle to his doctrine but as a misunderstanding: “In short, they are trying to pull me towards idealism or towards monadology when my goal was to affirm the identity with the perceived world as such. *In order to explain this project*—and thus the overcoming of the problem activity (idealism) and passivity (finality)—one must enter further into the elucidation of the world and the subject” (*IP*, 166–67, my emphasis).

7. I have made clear in Chapter 5 how we consider that the flesh can only be attained through an overcoming of the passive/active divide. In fact, it seems clear to us that the “trialist” option must be ruled out on account of Merleau-Ponty’s departure from Husserlian orthodoxy. The impossibility of total reduction is, in fact, the mark of the irreducible and originary union between subject and object.

It is also remarkable that Merleau-Ponty's reformulation of the subject-object divide in terms of activity and passivity offers some insight into Alloa's misreading that takes place in a context that considers that "the flesh offers Merleau-Ponty the template for an ontology of passivity" (Alloa 2008, 96).

8. "What is primary, is not the diffuse 'consciousness' of the 'images' [. . .] it is Being" (*VI*, 251/299).

9. See also *CAL*, 96: "In a language, Saussure says, all is negative; there are only differences, and no positive terms," which is an approximation of a direct quote from Saussure in *PW*, 31/45.

10. The self-criticisms regarding the cogito have led some to read Merleau-Ponty's thought as having undergone a break somewhere between *PP* and *VI*. This question depends on the structural weight one places on the cogito in *PP*. For Lawlor and Barbaras ("Conscience et Perception, le Cogito dans la *Phénoménologie de la Perception*," Barbaras 1998: 159–83), the cogito informs the rest of *PP*. Those who seek to maintain the continuity in Merleau-Ponty's thought are sometimes led to minimize Merleau-Ponty's self-criticisms and thereby are led to the trialist position described above (e.g., Low 2001). There is another way to maintain the continuity of Merleau-Ponty's thought, which is indeed distinctly Merleau-Pontian inasmuch as it reads a unique inspiration beyond its successive, and sometimes mistaken, textual incarnations. Such a reading sees Merleau-Ponty's evolution as an explicitation; see, for example, Dillon (1988).

11. This is made most obvious in "The Philosopher and His Shadow," where Merleau-Ponty, in the space of three pages, rejects the objective and then the subjective poles outside of Being. First, he writes: "In the realm of reduction, there is no longer anything but consciousness, its acts and their intentional objects. This is why Husserl can write that Nature is relative to mind and that Nature is relative and mind absolute" (*S*, 162/264) and then quote Husserl: "'The existence of mental realities, and a real mental world is tied to the existence in the first sense of the term, to the existence of a material nature, and it is so linked not for contingent reasons but for reasons of principle' [. . .] We quote those lines," writes Merleau-Ponty, "only to provide a counterpoise to those which affirmed the relativity of Nature and the non-relativity of the mind and demolished the sufficiency of Nature and the truth of the natural attitude that are here reaffirmed. In the last analysis, phenomenology is neither a materialism nor a philosophy of mind" (*S*, 164–65/268, t.a.).

12. "The unity of the subject or that of the object is not a real unity, but a supposed unity at the horizon of experience" (*PP*, 220/254).

13. See also *VI*, 246/295: "When [the visible] arises frontally [*de face*]; it is from [*c'est à partir de*] the horizon."

14. For a thorough account of the Gestaltic foundations of this claim, see Henry Somers-Hall (2006).

15. The fact that Deleuze and Guattari regard the discussion of an absolute horizon as necessary to the establishment of the plane of immanence seems to

point to an elucidation of Deleuze's arguably uncharitable reading of Merleau-Ponty whose ontology is, he claims, insufficiently immanent. In the same text, they famously attack Merleau-Ponty's "curious fleshism" that, they contend, represents the "last avatar of phenomenology." Alas, they quip, "the flesh is too tender" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 177–78).

16. On the question of the horizontality of colors, see Jacques Garelli (2008). See also *VI*, 272.

17. "No longer two natures in it [the subjective body], but a double nature. The world and the others become our flesh" (*N*, 273).

18. There is one reference to "Sartre and classical ontology" (*VI*, 254/302). As regards "ontological," Merleau-Ponty uses the word to qualify the anal instinct in the child according to Freud as a "concrete ontology," but it is fair to say that this hardly constitutes an affirmation of ontological faith. If anything, it is an affirmation of ontology beyond the ontic/ontological divide insofar as it is seen as "concrete ontology." See *VI*, 269/317. In any case, neither of these two references can be understood as self-descriptive.

19. One of Merleau-Ponty's first concerns in *VI* is to reduce this manifold of dualities to a unified denomination. Eventually, it is the local/general divide that will show itself to be the central problem, under the heading of the opposition of facts and essences: "This double thinking which opposes the principles and the fact saves with the term 'principle' only a presumption [*préjugé*] of the essence" (*VI*, 112/149).

20. Merleau-Ponty attributes a similar point to Hegel in his contemporaneous lecture course of 1959–1961: "Principle posited by Hegel: it is by way of a phenomenology (apparition of the spirit) (spirit in the phenomenon) that we access the absolute. Not that the spirit phenomenon is a means, a ladder after which one accesses the absolute, but because the absolute would not be absolute if we didn't appear in this way" (*NC*, 275). This is why Merleau-Ponty seeks to include locality as a component of Being: "An impossible labour of experience on experience [*de l'expérience sur l'expérience*] that would strip it of its facticity as if it were an impurity" (*VI*, 112/149).

21. This is an idea probably inspired by the study of Malebranche. Compare Ginette Dreyfus answering Merleau-Ponty's question regarding the way Malebranche "finds a way" between Being and nothingness less than a year after this note was written: "There is a new form of thought," says Dreyfus, "the negative is not a diminutive Being any more" (*P2*, 269).

22. "The things are essences at the level of nature" (*VI*, 273/220).

23. This text was presumably written in the early months of 1961. The concept of "element" is first employed in this sense by Merleau-Ponty in his account of Bergson given as a paper in May 1959 and published the next year in *S*, and it is noteworthy that it is already given as a solution to the problems raised by a pure concept of essence and of an infinite as absolute indeterminacy: "Bergson's God is immense rather than infinite, or He is a qualitative infinite. He is the element of

joy or love in the sense that water and fire are elements. Like sentient and human beings, He is a radiance, not an essence” (*S*, 190/309). A few months after the text on Bergson, in the Fall of 1959, the notion resurfaces in the sessions of the course on nature devoted to Bergson, as a note stressing the necessity to “define a Being in-between, an inter-Being [*un inter-être*]” (*N*, 292).

24. “The facts and the essences are abstractions” (*VI*, 117/154).

25. Later on in *VI*, Merleau-Ponty will reject the term *mélange* to designate the fusion of Being and nothingness. The confrontation with this passage from *N* makes it obvious that it is not the *mélange* so much as the assumption that a *mélange* affirms its ingredients as primary over the mixture that Merleau-Ponty rejects: his ontology is one of the *mélange* if seen from the inauthentic point of view of the polarity of Being and nothingness. See *VI*, 237/285: “For me, the negative means absolutely nothing, and the positive neither (they are synonymous) and that not by appeal to a vague ‘blend’ [*mélange*] of Being and nothingness, the structure is not a ‘blend.’”

26. “For Descartes, a philosopher is he who posits the alternative between Being and Nothingness” (*NC*, 234). See also *NC*, 98–99, and *N*, 85.

27. My translation. The published translation is clearly wrong at this point. On the apparent proximity between Merleau-Ponty and Bergson against the Cartesians and Sartre and its eventual unraveling, see Barbaras (2000, 78–81).

28. See *VI*, 196/246–47: “It is Sartre, it is Bergson, negativism or ultra-positivism (Bergson)—indiscernible.”

29. The emphasis is in the text. It is clear from the context that the finitude in question is that of incarnation.

30. See *VI*, 215/265: “The Visible itself has an invisible inner framework [*membraire d’invisible*] and the invisible is the secret counterpart of the visible,” and *VI*, 257/305: “The invisible is [. . .] relative to the visible” (t.a.).

31. For Bergson’s version of this claim, see *N*, 84.

32. An absolute visible, like an absolute invisible, amounts phenomenologically to nothing by annihilation of the perceiving subject or the perceptual object. See *VI*, 131/171.

33. For the equivalence of the couple negative/positive and invisible/visible, see also *N*, 275.

34. In fact, the naive readings of perspectivism addressed in the previous chapter, which read Merleau-Ponty as building perspectival truth through a synthesis of multiple perspectival truths without realizing that the truth thus gained cannot be of the same level as those, make precisely the mistake of assuming that all the truth is visible, only to be seen in different places, through different perspectives. This is made impossible because it loses precisely the crux of Merleau-Ponty’s efforts: to understand locality as ontologically relevant. It is clear that this view of perspectivism that seeks the object as self-identical, as in the sciences, loses precisely the invisible as ontologically valid. It maintains the Cartesian idea of negativity as mere restriction.

35. This separation of presence and visibility indeed figures the possibility of ontology itself: there can be access to an invisible through experience.

36. “What resists to objectivistic ontology: *Dingwahrnehmung* as mute contact with a term: [s]*elbstgegebenheit, leibhaftigegeben*, presence. In fact, even at this level of Nature, it is presence of an absence: infinite content, presentation through *Abschattungen*” (*IP*, 178). See also *VI*, 167/219–220, and *OE*, 85: “The property [*le propre de*] of the visible is to have a lining of invisible in the strict sense, which it makes present like a certain absence.”

37. “The invisible is all at once the pure difference that supports visibility, the common share of the visible and the seer, and pure indifference; to see is to overlook what allows one to see, to see is to imperceive the gap [*écart*] between the figure and the background” (Lefort 1990, 17).

38. See, for instance, the very important note of January 1960 where the child’s intuitive understanding of the “male-female relation” is seen as a case of imperception (the other sex [*VI*, 226/277]).

39. In *PP*, presence is already presented as the union of the abstract entities that are the subject and the object: “Subject and object are two moments of a unique structure which is presence” (*PP*, 492/430).

40. See also the side note of 109/144: “What is not nothing is *something*, but this something is not hard as diamond, not unconditioned.”

41. The infinite of the Cartesians is a “*positive infinite*,” or (since every restriction to a certain type of infinite would be a seed of negation) an “infinite infinite” (*S*, 149/241).

42. A standard illustration of this is the relation of the series of natural numbers with the series of the evens: they are both infinite series although the first one is twice as long as the second one, which is determined/restricted by the extra requirement to “be divisible by two.”

43. “I take my starting point where Sartre ends, in the Being taken up by the for-itself—it is for him the finishing point because he starts with being and negativity and constructs their union. For me, it is structure or transcendence that explains, and Being and nothingness (in Sartre’s sense) are its two abstract properties” (*VI*, 237/285–86).

44. “This is not at all this [the analysis of Kant and Descartes] which Husserl’s *Offenheit* or Heidegger’s *Verborgenheit* means: the ontological milieu is not thought of as an order of ‘human representation’ in contrast with an order of the in-itself—It is a matter of understanding that truth itself has no meaning outside of the relation of transcendence, outside of the *Überstieg* towards the horizon” (*VI*, 185/236). This is a problematic that has not left Merleau-Ponty’s concern ever since *PP*; see, for instance: “The contradiction which we find between the reality of the world and its incompleteness is the contradiction between the omnipresence of consciousness and its involvement in a field of presence.” In other words, a consistent ontology needs to account for the fact of incarnation under penalty of being contradicted by it (*PP*, 331/382).

45. See also VI, 166/218: “There was a passage to the infinite as objective infinity—this passage was thematization and forgetting of the *Offenheit* and of the *Lebenswelt*” (t.a.).

46. See, for example, Martin Dillon’s account (1988, 77–81).

47. See also NC, 330: “One needs a term for there to be openness, but a term which is not a closing, this is the horizon.”

48. “Perception, whether it be given to itself through ‘introspection’ or whether it is a constituting consciousness of the perceived, should be as it were by position and by principle, self-knowledge and self possession. It could only ever open up to horizons and distant objects [*lointains*] that is to say, to a world that is there for it at first and only on the basis of which it could become the anonymous accredited towards which the perspectives in the landscape make their way. The idea of a subject, just like that of an object transform the relations with the world and with ourselves which we possess from within perspective faith into knowledge [*connaissance*]” (VI, 23/41). In *HLP* Merleau-Ponty refers to another text of Husserl’s, the *Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre* of 1934 (see *HLP* and *TL*, 121–22/168–69), and shows how the “Copernican man” ceases to see the earth as his own point of view, and begins to reverse his worldview, from the view of the horizons as far away from the ethnocentric world, the Copernican man seeks to apprehend himself from the point of view of the horizons themselves, paradoxically making himself the horizon of his own view. This, for both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, is the result of a flight outside of phenomenological thought into objectivity. As is attested by the passage from VI reproduced above, Merleau-Ponty’s reading of the concept of horizon performs a reversal of the Copernican revolution by insisting on the locality of the point of view from which anyone sees the world and by showing this locality to be the condition of the visibility of the world.

49. Of course, it is clear that, according to his custom to read the “invisible” of Husserl (his “shadow philosophy”) as his “visible,” Merleau-Ponty presents his own reworking of the Husserlian concept of horizon to be contained in Husserl’s texts, if not explicitly, at least implicitly (there is an “unreading” of Husserl by Merleau-Ponty through Husserl’s texts just as much as there is an imperception of the invisible through the visible). However, as Françoise Dastur remarks, Husserl still conceives of the horizon as a “potentiality of consciousness” (Dastur 1993, 27–28).

50. To be sure, there is a problem concerning the uncovering of such a principle as contingently sedimented because the awareness of its being sedimented deprives it of its efficacy, makes it less convincing, and may transform the philosophical movement of interrogation into a movement by which the philosopher withdraws from action. It is certainly in this sense that we must interpret the note of February 1959, where Merleau-Ponty recalls Husserl’s remark that “phenomenological reduction *transforms universal history*” because it reveals that it is not “pure actualism” (VI, 172–73/224–25). This gives political importance to the epoché because it uncovers history as an illusion. We can also sense the political questions this raises, questions left unanswered although the rest of the commen-

tary and the references to Machiavel in *VI* give some insight as to the direction in which to seek their answers. See, for example, this comment between brackets from a note of May 1959, presumably the period of the preparation of the course on the *Ursprung*: “Lefort’s presentation on Machiavelli: how, in what sense can one intend to go to the things themselves, while denying this right to others” (*VI*, 186/237). On the relation to interrogation, see the following note bearing the same date (*VI*, 187/238).

51. For Merleau-Ponty’s opposition to Husserl’s idea of horizon in this connection, see 335–36. For Merleau-Ponty’s equation of sedimentation and language: “Sedimentation, that is to say, expression.”

52. This is one form of Merleau-Ponty’s self-attributed *circulus vitiosus deus*, which I shall discuss in relation to Nietzsche in the Conclusion: it takes principles to demonstrate the fallacy of principles. For Merleau-Ponty, as Mauro Carbone shows it in the opening pages of “The Thinking of the Sensible” (Carbone 2000), concepts arise from “horizontal generality.” This ground of openness is thus granted anteriority in both a chronological and logical sense. Concepts are posterior to it in both these senses too. In this sense, they are sedimented. The movement of reduction is, however, reversed from the point of view of this order. In this sense, reduction is de-sedimentation. Consequently, we may think of sedimented concepts as alternately primary (in the reductive order) and secondary (in the ontological order). Conversely, the ground of openness is the origin of the movement of sedimentation, but it is also the end point of the reductive movement. In the reductive order, it takes indeed an “effort” to move from sedimented objects (or, in Heidegger’s language, the point of view of *ustensility*) to the original ground of openness. In the sedimentative order, it takes an intellectual act to move from the indeterminate to the concept.

53. I find a similar idea in Marjorie and Lawrence Hass (2000, 184–86). The authors see a similar disagreement between Merleau-Ponty and Husserl with reference to Merleau-Ponty’s texts from the forties. Remarkably, they allude in passing to Husserl’s view as based upon an “explicative” stance.

54. On the evolution of Merleau-Ponty’s relations with Husserl in the last months and, in particular, on the question of intra-ontology, see Toadvine (2002b, 278–84).

55. Recall Nietzsche’s very same complaint regarding the intellect’s tendency to consider self-differentiation as a failed self-identity and, thereby, of inferring the existence, somewhere, of this self-identity: “*Psychology of metaphysics*: This world is apparent: consequently there is a true world;—this world is conditional: consequently there is an unconditioned world;—this world is full of contradiction: consequently there is a world free of contradiction;—this world is a world of becoming: consequently there is a world of being;—all false conclusions” (*WP*, 579).

56. Silverman shows how the ambiguity that is the object of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of existence is one with the ambiguity of Merleau-Ponty’s place in the history of philosophy, which makes existence an eminently philosophical prin-

principle and philosophy an eminently existential matter and shows philosophy as the place of the reflexivity of Being (Silverman 2000).

57. “The only ‘locus’ where the negative truly dwells is the fold, the application of the outside and the inside to one another the flipping point [*point de retournement*].” The note belongs to file 22, dated 1958–1959; it is quoted in Renaud Barbaras (2001, 31).

58. See also *N*, 275, where Being is described as “internally knit with negations.”

59. “*Réversibility* is not actual *identity* of the touching and the touched. It is their identity in principle, always unachieved [*toujours manquée*]” (*VI*, 272/320, t.a.).

60. “It is a reversibility always imminent and never realized in fact. My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never attain coincidence” (*VI*, 147/191, t.a.). See also *VI*, 272/320.

61. This clearly brings out the intimate kinship between *PP* and *VI* through the descent of the zone of subjectivity discussed in Chapter 4 and the negativity in the fold presented here.

62. This is what Merleau-Ponty means when he declares that “things have us, and it is not us who have the things” (*VI*, 193–94/244, t.a.). See also *S*, 19/36.

63. See also *VI*, 221/270.

64. On the ontological importance of man, see Mauro Carbone (2000, 32–33).

65. Miguel de Beistegui, while recognizing the necessity to operate “the shift [. . .] from beings as things to beings as events,” contends that this shift is not entirely performed by Merleau-Ponty and calls on Simondon to complete the work. I differ from this reading on account of the discussion of the mechanism of perception as infinite determination provided in Chapter 4 that shows that any sedimentation is but an illusory settling into Being, but is in reality a reducing to an “event” in the sense of fact. See Beistegui (2005, 115).

66. *VI*, 139/182: “The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being. Not a fact or a sum of facts, and yet adherent to location and to the now. Much more, the inauguration of the where and the when, the possibility of exigency for the fact; in a word, facticity, what makes the fact be a fact.”

67. See Colonna (2008). Colonna encounters eternity as the fabric of becoming in much the same way as I have described the cooperation of chance and necessity, with necessity as the permanent thread of becoming in Chapter 1.

68. The distinction of the concept of world as opposed to that of universe was discussed in Chapter 4; it can be found in *PP*, 381. Martin Dillon (1988, 79) makes the same parallel.

69. It is indeed the distinction that is at stake in Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Husserl’s lectures on the Copernican man.

70. See, for example, the radio broadcast *Causeries* of 1948, 36–37 (the first “causerie” of the series is indeed an extended discussion of the distinction between world and universe).

71. The world is in time as regards its content, and not in time with regard to its being. This is expressed clearly and subtly by Colonna (2008, 153): “Eternity is for Merleau-Ponty necessarily the eternity of the world itself. In which sense? Not, to be sure, in the sense in which the content of the actual world would be immortal, but in the sense where any other possible world will always possess the typicality of the world such as we experience it in sensation [*le sensible*].” The world is thus more than flesh because it includes a content that is not eternity.

72. In a certain way, this is a return to the problems arising from Bergson’s *naturant/naturé* divide as described in *IS* and *N*. See above section “Presence and the Softening of Being.”

73. “H[usserl] a raison de dire que ce n’est pas moi qui constitue le temps, qu’il se constitue, qu’il est une *Selbsterscheinung*—mais le terme de réceptivité est impropre justement parce qu’il évoque un soi distinct du présent et qui le reçoit” (“H[usserl] is right to say that it is not I who constitutes time, that it constitutes itself, that it is a *Selbsterscheinung*—but the term ‘receptivity’ is improper precisely because it evokes a Self distinct from the present and who *receives* it” [VI, 190/241]). Time, as sedimentation, creates itself and is not pre-existent to its content, including the self. It is significant that Marc Richir overlooks such remarks based on an opposition to Husserl in an article that seeks to demonstrate that “Merleau-Ponty owes much more to Husserl than is generally believed” (Richir 2008, 20–21). See also *PP*, 451: “The relation of reason to fact, or eternity to time, like that of reflection to the unreflective, of thought to language or of thought to perception is this two-way relationship that phenomenology has called *Fundierung*: the founding term, or originator—time, the unreflective, the fact, language, perception—is primary in the sense that the originated is presented as a determinate or explicit form of the originator, which prevents the latter from re-absorbing the former, and yet the originator is not primary in the empiricist sense and the originated is not simply derived from it, since it is through the originated that the originator is made manifest.”

74. “The contradiction which we find between the reality of the world and its incompleteness is the contradiction between the omnipresence of consciousness and its involvement in a field of presence” (*PP*, 331/382).

75. This divergence on the question of history is already formulated in “The Metaphysical in Man” (*SNS*, 118n2). On the history of Merleau-Ponty’s relationship with Bergson, see Belot (2006, 79–90).

76. See Barbaras (2001, 26): “The latency of the pre-objective meaning has a temporal significance: it corresponds to the open ensemble of its possible renewals.”

77. This is a point made most strongly by Renaud Barbaras (2004, 229–34) where he likens Merleau-Ponty’s ontology to a Leibnizian philosophy of expression. See also on this question, Bernhard Waldenfels (1991, 189–90) and Claude Lefort (1990, 9–10).

78. Merleau-Ponty is explicit on this question: it is the definition of the world as the world of perception and, consequently, a human world that distances his

ontology from Leibniz's: "It is the reprise of the theme of perception which transforms the reach of the Leibnizian idea of expression" (VI, 272).

79. "It is not because they [thought and language] are parallel that we speak, it is because we speak that they are parallel. The weakness of every 'parallelism' is that it provides itself with correspondences between the two orders and conceals the operations which produced these correspondences by encroachment to begin with" (S, 34).

80. This is a claim that Merleau-Ponty makes his entirely, as is demonstrated by Renaud Barbaras in his extraordinary chapter from *le Tournant de l'Expérience* titled "de l'Ontologie de l'Objet à l'Ontologie de l'Élément" where he writes: "The flesh is pure dynamism, the element of the absolute identity of being and mediation." (Barbaras 1998, 223). See also VI, 162/212: "Facticity as condition of the essence."

81. On the equivalence of facticity, relation, and essence, see also VI, 162/212.

82. "Thus I function by construction. I am standing atop a pyramid of time which has been me" (S, 14/28, t.a.).

83. "What does not pass in time is the passing of time" (PP, 423/484, t.a.). See also Colonna (2008, 153–54).

84. "The visible has to be described as something that is realized through man, but which is no-wise anthropology" (VI, 274/322).

85. It is remarkable that this mechanism that essentially transforms logical horizontality into a temporal one comes very close to leading into a theory of spirit. Even though Merleau-Ponty did not, in his interrupted work, tackle this question directly, some elements may be found in the lecture course "Philosophie et Non-philosophie depuis Hegel," in NC, 159–61, and VI, 271, where Merleau-Ponty finds a common structure to thought and world.

86. For a detailed account of the logic of eventful time in Merleau-Ponty starting from the texts from early fifties, see the very reliable article by Koji Hirose (1999).

87. This is most apparent in Merleau-Ponty's account of forgetfulness as "de-differentiation."

88. VI, 228/277: "This unique possible which is our world, is not, in its very fabric, made of actuality."

89. Merleau-Ponty demonstrates a strong awareness of this in the working notes where he repeatedly stresses the continuity between the possible and the real, or the necessary. See, for example, VI, 228/277. What Being as possibility precludes, however, is actuality defined as self-identity. I discuss this below.

90. See also VI, 33–35/53–56.

91. "The eidetic variation, therefore, does not make me pass to an order of separated essences, to a logical possible, the invariant that it gives me is a structural invariant" (VI, 229/278).

92. "Annunciating signs are, to our mind, signs only because we now know the course, because the course has been completed" (Bergson 1969, 14).

93. In his account of Merleau-Ponty's course on nature, Renaud Barbaras appeals to Deleuze and Bergson in order to attain this idea: "It appears to us that the answer resides in the virtual in the sense that Bergson and Deleuze thematize it: the being of natural Being is virtual Being. Indeed, the virtual is not the possible, it is real as virtual; but it has the reality of a task to fulfill" (Barbaras 2001, 36). It is hopefully clear by now that no appeal to external sources is necessary to attain this thought that is, in fact, the guiding thought of Merleau-Ponty's ontology. The reference to Bergson may seem misleading insofar as it obliterates Merleau-Ponty's distinction between logical and real possibilities and replaces it with the distinction of the possible and the virtual. This may lead one to overlook (as seems to be the case with Barbaras here) Merleau-Ponty's own version of this thesis, which is expressed in the former distinction.

94. What matters for Descartes is that this explains how we can be both truthful and erroneous at the same time.

95. This is a question dear to Merleau-Ponty since *PP* where he calls for a philosophy that could account for what he there called the "indicator of reality" (*PP*, 343/395).

96. In his comments on Gurwitsch, Merleau-Ponty reiterates the claim that for a thing to be a thing, it must be co-created by us; that is to say, it is partly actual and partly inactual: "Gurwitsch does not see that, if the thing were to be prepared by this process where actual and inactual switch places, there would never be any 'thing.' The zone of the actual, of the sensible, can only crystallise thanks to this figurative consciousness of 'something' which one attempts to deduce from it" (*NL*, 330). A few pages further, Merleau-Ponty declares "sedimentation" to be "the reality of the possible" (*NL*, 336).

97. The English translation gives "nonappearance," following an error from the French editors who give "non-appearance" for "non appearance." My reading "non appearance" (without the hyphen) is fully justified by the context. In addition, consider the following passage from *S*'s "Indirect language and the Voices of Silence," which is an extract from the unpublished *PW*. Here, Merleau-Ponty relates this determinate-indeterminacy that attains determinacy only retrospectively in the same way: "That same brush which, seen with the naked eye leaped from one act to another, was seen meditating, in a solemn and expanded time, in a creation of the world-like imminence—trying ten possible movements, dancing in front of the canvas, brushing it lightly several times, and crashing down finally like a lightning stroke upon the only line necessary. Of course, there is something artificial in this analysis. And Matisse would be wrong is, based on the testimony of the film, he believed that he chose between all possible lines that day and, like the god of Leibniz, solved an immense problem of maximum and minimum. He was not a demiurge; he was a man. He did not have in his mind's eyes all the gestures possible, and in making his choice, he did not have to eliminate all but one. It is slow motion which enumerates the possibilities [*les possibles*]" (*S*, 45/73–74).

It seems that this description of Matisse was especially intended to take place in Merleau-Ponty's debate with Bergson, echoing Bergson's statement in his section

on the retrograde movement of the true: “The truth is that most of these facts did not yet exist as facts at the time, they would exist retrospectively for us if we could now resurrect entirely this epoch and cast the ray of light of this very particular idea which we call the democratic idea over the undivided block of the then reality: the sections being thus lit, cut out in the whole following the contours just as original and unpredictable as the drawing of a great master” (*PW*, 14).

98. On this expression applied to the classics of literature, see *S*, 80/130; on the same expression applied to the history of philosophy, see *Praise*, 153. The same claim is also made about Being and nature (*VI*, 210/260). I find a similar analysis of the intemporality of Being in Carbone (2001, 119).

99. These last two points are forcefully affirmed by Merleau-Ponty as early as *PP*: “Every present as it arises is driven into time like a wedge and stakes its claim to eternity. Eternity is not another order of time, but the atmosphere of time. It is true that a false thought, no less than a true one, possesses this sort of eternity: if I am mistaken at this moment, it is forever true that I am mistaken. It would seem necessary, therefore, that there should be, in true thought, a different fertility, and that it should remain true not only as a past actually lived through, but also as a perpetual present for ever carried forward in time’s succession. This, however, does not secure any essential difference between truths of fact and truths of reason. For there is not one of my actions, not one of even my fallacious thoughts, once it is adhered to, which has not been directed towards a value or a truth, and which, in consequence, does not retain its permanent relevance in the subsequent course of my life, not only as an indelible fact, but also as a necessary stage on the road to the more complete truths or values which I have since recognized. My truths have been built out of these errors, and carry them along in their eternity. Conversely, there is not one truth of reason which does not retain its coefficient of facticity” (*PP*, 393–94/459–60).

100. Recall that “sedimentation” is “the reality of the possible” (*NL*, 336).

101. “There lies in the flesh of contingency the structure of the event” (*OE*, 61).

102. See Silverman (2000).

103. We have seen that this was the sense of Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the impossibility of a complete reduction, which encounters the obstacle of the fact of transcendence, and, consequently, of Merleau-Ponty’s departure from Husserl’s transcendental idealism.

Conclusion

1. “I must show that what one might consider to be ‘psychology’ (*Phenomenology of Perception*) is in fact Ontology” (*VI*, 176/228).

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