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Prelude: When Truth Encounters Us[1]

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Abstract

The proposed text first appeared under the title Prélude. Quand la vérité nous donne rendez-vous *as an introduction to Jean Greisch's volume, Rendez-vous avec la vérité. However, the vortex of metaphors that 'tell' the 'truth' remains hardly reducible to a single 'theory' of 'Truth'. Over the centuries, what-is-'true' has been said in many different ways, starting with the unsolvable opposition between the truth-fidelity of the Jewish tradition and the truth-disclosure/manifestation of classical Greek thought; passing through the truth-regulating, namely the truth-institution of Roman Latin culture, which 'contractualises' what is true; reaching up to the truths of the medieval Anglo-Saxon world (truth-correspondence, truth-coherence, truth-semantics, truth-consent, truth-interpretation). However, that the truth is not objectified does not mean that it is not an existential issue. On the contrary, this seems to be the lesson one can draw from the encounter between Pilate and Jesus: "I am the Truth". Nevertheless, it is possible to observe that some of the best pages from the history of philosophy*

[1] [Trans. by Annie Kunnath].

are not those wondering about what the truth is, but rather those pages allowing their own authors and readers to be questioned by the – sometimes sudden – encounter with the disproportion of Truth. Therefore, not theorising but encountering the truth will be a fundamental question of philosophical research.
Keywords: rendezvous, truth, philosophical anthropology, ontology, critical hermeneutics, wisdom, virtue.

We will never cease questioning the "variegated thing we call 'philosophy'"[2], nor stop it from questioning us.
Such enquiries can take various forms, one being a reflection on philosophical encounters with truth.

The simple metaphor 'encounter' does not seem to carry much weight where fundamental philosophical concepts as truth are concerned. Even the poet Paul Celan warns us against its misuse when it comes to an encounter with truth:

A ROAR: it is
truth itself
stepped among
mankind,
right into the
Metaphor-flurry[3]*.*

How then to encounter truth amid the swirling vortex of metaphors? This question, itself expressed in metaphorical language,

[2] Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Mathematicos* VII, 2.
[3] *Ein Dröhnen: es ist/ die Wahrheit selbst/ unter die Menschen getreten,/ mitten ins/ Metapherngestöber* (Celan 1983: 89; English translation of Pierre Joris).

and liberally inspired by the principles of Hans Blumenberg's "metaphorology", will be the guiding light of this book.

The ideal of the philosopher as seeker and servant of truth found its first literary expression in Parmenides' Poem. Since then, many more encounters with 'truth' were made or scheduled. The numerous "theories of truth" that emerged in the twentieth-century testify that these encounters are not about to end, for the simple reason that a thinker who forgets that (no matter what the problem is), it is with truth that he is first and foremost grappling with, would cease to be a philosopher.

By speaking of an 'encounter with the truth', I run the risk of committing a double categorical contempt.

a) At first sight, there seems to be no ground for changing the adjective 'true' (denoting the quality of a proposition), into a verb (describing an event), namely that of a 'rendezvous' or an 'encounter'. Moreover, 'encounter' is a polysemic word with contextual meaning. Thus, a rendezvous between lovers, an appointment with a dentist or a superior, or a court summons, etc. are all encounters, but of different kinds.

As Georges Brassens sings:

Monseigneur the fiery sun, how little I admire him,
Rob me off his fire, yes, but of his fire I don't give a hoot,
I have a tryst with you!
The light I prefer,
Is that of your jealous eyes,
All the rest I couldn't care less
I have a tryst with you[4]*.*

[4] *«Monseigneur l'astre solaire, Comme' je n'l'admire pas beaucoup,/ M'enlèv' son feu, oui mais, d'son feu, moi j'men fous,/ J'ai rendez-vous avec vous !/ La lumièr' que je préfère,/ C'est cell' de vos yeux jaloux,/ Tout le restant m'indiffère,/ J'ai rendez-vous*

Despite being polysemous, the word 'rendezvous' (French *rendez-vous*), shares certain identifiable family resemblances, like with the verb 'to surrender' (French *se rendre*), and this includes its original military meaning, where '*rendez-vous*' becomes a command, even an ultimatum: 'Admit that you are defeated!'. A rendezvous with truth (if there be any such), leaves us totally disarmed!

It is not always necessary to schedule or arrange meetings. They can also be unexpected. In fact, random encounters are often more consequential than anticipated ones because these 'create events'.

b) By discussing 'Truth', it would appear that we are endorsing the embodiment of an abstract notion, thus opening a door to every kind of rhetorical abuse. I counter this suspicion with the following 'hermeneutical' argument: as long as we do not forget that we are dealing with hypostases, embodiments can have a heuristic function. They enable us to frame questions that we could never have even imagined. For example, the embodiment of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs in the Bible permits the intensification of questions.

It is under the aegis of the metaphor 'encounter with Truth' that I propose to explore the stakes and horizons of the question: 'what is Truth', by 'repeating', within the current intellectual debate, the same clarifying task which Thomas Aquinas undertook in his *De Veritate*.

If, as a hypothesis, we agree to define philosophy as "a knowledge of Truth" (as Aristotle does in the first chapter of the *Book of Metaphysics* 993b 20), how best to define the state of mind required for this kind of research? Or, to ask the question in a more figurative language: if, in some way or the other, the philosopher has an 'encounter' with Truth, what insight can be gained from this encounter?

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avec vous». Georges Brassens, J'ai rendez-vous avec vous. [The English translation is mine; A.K.].

I shall answer this question by first of all reflecting on three texts, of distinct literary styles. Although these texts do not offer an exhaustive answer, they do give us abundant food for thought, even if it is just through the sheer power of the images used. The reading I propose will constitute the 'overture' (in the near musical sense of the term), of our research.

Furthermore, I shall also make two observations, one relating to the vocabulary, and the other to the limits of this work.

1. The archer and the target (Aristotle)

1. It is just as well to begin our enquiry with a word of confidence and encouragement as found at the beginning of Book *Alpha* of the *Metaphysics* (and which provides the link between Books A and B).

Apart from the thorny problems of textual criticism (the authenticity of the text has been questioned since antiquity), what strikes the reader from the outset is the text's focus on the word 'truth', a rare occurrence in Book A. One could almost speak of a scaled-down *De veritate*. From the very beginning, Aristotle reassures us (apprentice philosophers), that we should not be too quick to give in to discouragement, believing that the investigation (*theoria*) of truth would be too tough an enquiry for us!

Aristotle does not declare: "After me the deluge!", thereby implying, "I hold the definitive truth"; nor does he claim: "Before me, there was only error!". On the contrary, he is aware that he is heir to a long line of seekers of truth, and that the search will not end with him.

This is what he is expressing through the proverbial image of an archer aiming at a target

as big as a door. One must indeed be very clumsy to miss it!

"The study of Truth is in one sense difficulty, in another easy. This is shown by the fact that whereas no one person can obtain an adequate grasp of it, we cannot all fail in the attempt […] Thus in so far as

it seems that Truth is like the proverbial door which no one can miss" (*Met* 1, 993a 30-b 7).

This word of encouragement, however, holds a warning: "but the fact that we cannot, although having some grasp of the whole, grasp a particular part, shows its difficulty" (*Met* 1, 993a 30-b 7). It is not sufficient to reach truth; one must also know the kind of truth one has reached. To take recourse to Aristotle's archery and the target metaphor: one must localise the arrow's point of impact.

It is our responsibility to carry out this task of 'localization'; we cannot avoid it by claiming that the truth is inaccessible. A second image, one which Heidegger was fond of quoting, might be useful here: For "just as it is with bats' eyes in respect of daylight, so it is with our mental intelligence in respect of those things which are by nature most obvious" (*Met*. 993b 10; cf. *Met*. Z, 3, 1029b 4).

Aristotle (whose footsteps Thomas Aquinas would follow), shows an open-mindedness that is quite rare among scholars. He was interested in the views of even those whose opinions he did not share, even if this was only because it obliged him to verify his own arguments. As Paul Ricoeur often told me: the philosopher must not meet his opponent in their weakness, but in their strength!

It is in the wake of these two images that Aristotle introduces philosophy as a 'knowledge of truth'. What justifies this definition is that philosophy is a *theoretical* science distinct from practical sciences for it aims neither at the production of *work* (*poièsis*), nor an *action* (*praxis*).

Without mentioning the subdivisions of the theoretical (physics, mathematics, theology) and practical sciences (*poiesis*, *praxis*), which he discusses elsewhere, Aristotle states that the sole aim of 'speculation' – theoretic knowledge (*theoria*) is the search for *truth*: "The object

of theoretic knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action" (*Met*. 993b 27).

But what does it mean 'to know truth'?

The theory of the four causes that Aristotle presents in Book A provides an initial insight: knowledge of the truth is *knowledge of causes*. This does not mean that mere knowledge of the causes would drain the whole idea of truth! What matters to Aristotle is that there is a hierarchy of truths based on that of causes. There are *fundamental* truths and *derived* truths: "the first principle of things must necessarily be true above everything else" (*Met*. 993b 27). *Eternal* truths matter more than *contingent* truths. Aristotle concludes his meditation by formulating an axiom that introduces us to the very heart of our problem: "so as each thing is in respect of existence, so it is in respect of truth" (*Met*. 993b 31-32)!

2) Before we take leave of Aristotle (temporarily, and not permanently), let us look briefly at Book *Gamma* of the *Metaphysics*. It opens with great fanfare thus: "There is a science which studies Being qua Being, and the properties inherent in it in virtue of its own nature". This 'ontological' definition of the task of the 'first philosophy' asserts that the 'knowledge of truth' that philosophy is, may not be reduced to the knowledge of causes. This is confirmed by a statement in the second chapter: "Being qua Being has certain peculiar modifications, and it is about these that it is the philosopher's function to discover the truth" (*Met*. 1004b 15).

What makes the search for truth difficult is that "Being is said in many ways": *to on legetai pollachôs* (*Met*. 1002b 30). It is this very reason (being as having various senses), that forbids us from conceiving being as whole that only needs to be sliced in order to be

understood – just like a cake. But that is precisely the point: "Being qua being" is 'not a cake'!

The concern then is that this irreducible multiplicity of meanings of being may endanger the unity of the 'sought-after science' (*epistèmè zêtoumenè*) that Aristotle seeks to establish. He strives ardently to avoid this danger, arguing that "it pertains to one science to study Being qua Being, and the attributes inherent in it qua Being" (*Met*. 1005a 13-14).

What is taken for granted at the end of the second chapter of the Book is finally not so obvious, for the problem continues to be discussed in the third chapter, in which Aristotle defines the philosopher by his ability "to establish the firmest principles of all beings". From the *knowledge of causes* we now move on to the *knowledge of principles*. Among these, it is the *principle of contradiction* that holds the philosopher's attention: "It is impossible for the same attribute to belong and not belong at the same time, to the same subject and in the same respect" (*Met*. 1005b 20).

For example, it is impossible to affirm that I am both bald and hirsute at the same time, except perhaps by wearing a wig; but then, this would introduce a different "relationship" altogether!

The principle of contradiction applies not only to propositions, but also to things themselves: "it is impossible at once to be and not to be" (*Met*. 1006a 1). One should not invoke the various senses of being to undermine the objective validity of the principle of contradiction, for even though the word 'be' has several meanings, each of these meanings must be specified. When I quote Goethe: "*Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*…"[5] ("over all the mountains is peace"), and when I say: "I am sick", I am attributing to the copula 'be' very different meanings;

[5] See the list of examples cited by Heidegger in his lecture course *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Ga 40: 95–96 (Heidegger 2000: 93). List reworked for the lecture course *Grundbegriffe*, summer semester 1941, Ga 51, p. 30-32 (Heidegger 1985).

however, I have no justification to say in the same breath: "I am sick and in good shape".

Certainly, Aristotle would have been puzzled to hear the Mallorcan storytellers wrap up their stories with the routine formula: "It was and it was not!".[6] For Aristotle, it is obvious that "the term 'to be' or 'not to be' has a definite meaning; so that not everything can be 'so and not so'" (*Met*. 1006a 30). This is a "self-evident truth", and it would be as futile to try to argue about it as to try to justify it. This profound certainty, makes Aristotle concludes – a conclusion decisive for his understanding of language, and of being:

> for not to have one meaning is to have no meaning, and if words have no meaning there is an end of discourse with others, and even, strictly speaking, with oneself; because it is impossible to think of anything if we do not think of one thing (*Met*. 1006b 5-12).

The condition for determining the meaning (a name has a definite meaning and a unique significance), is valid both for subjects as well as for predicates. In Strawsonian terms: the "*identifying* function" and the "*attributive* function" of a language[7]. Just as I cannot describe Socrates as bald and hairy at the same time, I also cannot say that he is man and animal, or that he is both Socrates and Plato.

Ontology, that is, the science of being as being and its general characteristics, must negotiate its way between two equally impracticable solutions.

The first would be a description of the world in which there are no subjects (Strawson calls them "basic particulars"), but only attributes:

[6] "*Aixo era y no era*". See Jakobson 1960: 371; Ricœur 1975: 321.
[7] Strawson 1957; See also, Pariente 1973.

white, black, heavy, light, and so on. It would be a world determined by only one meaning of being: "being by accident" (*kata symbebèkos*). To maintain "that all things are accidents" (*Met*. 1007a 21) is an absurdity, not only because such a world is inconsistent, but because the list of accidents is infinite: "it is indeed impossible to enumerate all the infinity of accidents" (*Met*. 1007a 14); and "the sum of these predications does not make a single statement" (*Met*. 1007b 9).

Aristotle is quite insistent about this, not because he is fighting chimeras, but real opponents in the sophist camp, notably Protagoras.

The second solution, equally impractical, is that of a world in which there are only subjects (in ontological terms: substances), with no predicates that can be assigned to them.

'White + black + red + light + heavy', etc., does not make a 'world', but neither does 'Socrates + Peter + Paul'!

The first 'world', purely accidentalist, resembles a cloud that shifts shape instantaneously; the second resembles a rock quarry where no stones are extracted[8].

To explain how a world that is not governed by the principle of contradiction is not only *inconceivable*, but also *impractical*, Aristotle advances an *ad hominem* argument that he chooses carefully:

> Why does [a man] not walk early one morning into a well or ravine, if he comes to it, instead of clearly guarding against doing so, thus showing that he does not think that it is equally good and not good to fall in? (*Met*. 1008b 15-17).

This question reminds us of the famous anecdote from Plato's *Theaetetus*, where an astronomer-philosopher focused on observing the stars fails to see the well directly in his path and tumbles down,

[8] For an in-depth analysis of this approach, see: Wolff 1997.

triggering the laughter of the Thracian servant girl. Now, if we accept the invitation of Hans Blumenberg[9] and study the several retellings of this 'primitive scene' that punctuate the history of philosophy, we will find that it is Aristotle who gives the first transformative re-reading of this scene. Under Aristotle's gaze the astronomer-philosopher has metamorphosed into a sophist! Not recognising the validity of the principle of contradiction, the sophists suffer from semantic dizziness and vertigo. No wonder they find themselves at the bottom of the hole!

The ability to distinguish between the best and the worst indicates that being "eager for truth" (*Met*. 1008b 28 is no mean feat; just like the prudent human who carefully considers his steps. The task is all the more arduous for one who "forms unqualified judgements" and swears by opinions, for such a human "is not in a healthy relation to the truth"! (*Met*. 1008b 30).

Like error, truth too has varying degrees. One can be more or less near or far from it. What applies to our stand in relation to truth also extends, according to Aristotle, to truth itself: "there will be some truth to which the truer is nearer" (*Met*. 1009a 1).

The Aristotelian criticism of the "undiluted doctrine which precludes any mental determination" (*Met*. 1009a 5), targets a major opponent: Protagoras and his proposition according to which "All appearances, as it manifests itself, are true" (*pan to phainomenon ho phainetai aléthes einai*), a proposition that Aristotle reduces (probably a bit too hastily), to the idea that "everything that appears true to everyone is true".

I will not discuss here in detail the Aristotelian critique on relativism, which led him to refute his own proposition to that of Protogoras': "not every appearance is real" (*Met*. 1010b 1). I will only emphasise that the proposition: "the phenomenon in so far as it appears" (*Met.*

[9] Blumenberg 1987.

1009b 1), cannot leave phenomenologists indifferent. For, to what extent can we trust appearances as true? Is there a 'phenomenological truth', and if so, what does it entail? Does not the notion of "truth phenomenon", often used by Heidegger, contain a *contradictio in adiecto*?

What troubles Aristotle in the theory of Protagoras and his peers is the implicit assumption that truth is likely to be "judged by the number or fewness of its upholders" (*Met*. 1009b 2). But truth does not negotiate through votes, or a bidding process! In a democracy, majority does not mean right.

Aristotle recognises the force of his sensualist opponents, but he does not yield to the temptation to denigrate them outright. What stops him from doing so, is the literary authority of Homer.[10] In the delirium of his injury, Hector "thinks other thoughts, which implies that those who think wrongly still have thoughts, though they are no longer the same". This example puts Aristotle in a quandary: "if both are kinds of thought, reality also will be 'both so and not so'" (*Met*. 1009 b 30). If 'it thinks' even in delirium, it may well be that there is some truth even in madness!

Aristotle's confidence (well evident while proposing the image of the archer and the target), quickly crumbles, giving in to discouragement that is best illustrated through yet another proverb: "the pursuit of truth will be chasing birds in the air".

And even though Aristotle is quick to restore our trust, he has however left us with two contrasting images from proverbial wisdom that are infinitely thought-provoking: the target that is almost impossible to miss, and the birds in flight that are almost impossible to catch.

[10] *Iliad* XXIII, b 98.

2. Oedipus and the Sphinx (Nietzsche)

According to Walter Benjamin, the quotations in his writings are like highwaymen who strip the idle reader of his certainties. Ever since the first time I opened a philosophy book (I was a high school student and the book in question was Romano Guardini's *The World and the Person*), I have been a victim of countless robbers. Paradoxically, far from reducing me to nothing, these destabilising encounters never ceased to keep me awake and Argus-eyed, I would say that they enriched me in the sense of what Franz Rosenzweig calls "experiential thinking" (*erfahrendes Denken*)[11]. In fact, one of the sparks that ignited the questions I am grappling with in this book was Rosenzweig's phrase: "I believe that there are moments in the life of every living being, even a single moment, when he speaks the truth"[12].

In order to 'speak the truth', one must have encountered it. In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, written in June 1885 in Sils-Maria in the Upper Engadin, Nietzsche emphasises that the gender of the noun 'Truth' is feminine. Like a woman, truth wants to be seduced and won over, something that dogmatic, self-assured philosophers are incapable of doing.

From the very first paragraph of Part I which deals with 'The prejudices of philosophers', Nietzsche questions what is "will to truth, or 'truthfulness'" (*Wahrhaftigkeit*), thought to characterise the attitude of philosophers, unlike that of sophists. What is this "will to truth"? Or, as he had written in his first edition of the same paragraph: what is "aspiration to truth" (*Verlangen nach Wahrheit*)? (Nietzsche 1967 [KSA]: 14, 346). It is also in this same first edition that he admits that this is

[11] Rosenzweig 1984.
[12] Rosenzweig 2002: 521.

a very difficult question, but also the most deserving (*fragwürdigste aller Fragen*).

After struggling for a long time with the meaning and implications of desire for truth, he then discusses its value. When re-examined in the perspective of the will to power, it transforms into a question of the "will to truth".

What strikes Nietzsche right from the start, is the figure of Oedipus before the Sphinx. When faced with the question: "What is truth?", we too find ourselves in Oedipus' situation. We have to find an answer at all costs – it is a matter of life and death! At the same time, the question that is strictly Nietzschean: "*What is it* in us that 'tends towards the truth'?", redefines roles. The philosopher in the Nietzschean sense, defined in §2 of *Beyond Good and Evil* as "the philosopher of the dangerous, perhaps in every sense of the term" (5, 17), claims in his turn the right to question the Sphinx the 'Truth':

> The problem of the value of truth presented itself to us, or was it we who presented ourselves to the problem? Which of us is Oedipus here? Who is the Sphinx? It is, it seems, an encounter of questions and question marks (5, 15).

It is not possible to develop here the immense problematic of the Nietzschean status of truth[13]. I will therefore limit myself with a caveat from Nietzsche's text: contrary to appearances, the problem of truth is not a simple academic question; it is a *risky* question that comes at a certain price, which, if necessary, can be very high! This becomes

[13] See Granier 1966.

apparent finally when we discover that we ourselves are implicated in this question.

In the Theban legend of the Oedipus, the Sphinx instigates an enquiry that assumes the innocent guise of a riddle. Oedipus has hardly any difficulty in figuring out the answer which is implicit in the question "what is human?". The answer: an animal who begins walking on four legs, then learns to stand upright on two legs, until old age requires him to use a walking stick.

The significance of Nietzsche's text can be best understood if it is read against the backdrop of the various mythical themes underlying the Theban legend of Oedipus. In her seminal work *Oedipus; or, The Legend of a Conqueror*, Marie Delcourt identifies six major mythical themes that first existed independently, before being merged into a single epic narrative that underlies Euripides' *The Phoenician Women*, and Sophocles' twin tragedies *Oedipus the King*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, the very same tragedies on which Freud based his theory of the Oedipus complex (Delcourt 1981[2]).

In a fascinating investigation Delcourt (who relies on the work of C. Robert)[14], identifies these six mythical themes as: 1. the exposed child; 2. the patricide (in reality the transfer of power between the old and the young king); 3. the victory over the Sphinx; 4. the solution of a riddle; 5. the hero who triumphs over a monster and marries the princess; and, 6. the mother-son incest.

If one wishes to understand what is at stake in Nietzsche's enigmatic thesis, then the third and fourth themes of Delcourt will be particularly instructive.

[14] Robert 1915

2.1. Vanquishing the Sphinx

The victory over the Sphinx is the core of the Theban legend retold by the Tragedies. It represents an ordeal in the strongest sense of the term. The best-known representation of the sphinx shows a winged figure with a leonine body sitting on a column, with Oedipus at his feet, absorbed in his thoughts, not very unlike Rodin's Thinker. And, just like a school teacher, the Sphinx is enthroned above the thinker who, like a good student, concentrates on solving the problem at hand. This representation suggests that his victory is above all a matter of intellectual astuteness – by solving the riddle, the hero proves his intellectual superiority.

In Greek art, there are some terrifying images, where Oedipus and the Sphinx appear to be engaged in a frightful hand to hand combat, and which give much food for thought on its potentially lethal nature. These representations illustrate what is suggested by the folk etymology of the word 'Sphinx', derived from the verb *sphigein*: 'to choke' or 'strangle'. The Sphinx, holding a naked man in its claws, is a bird of prey, ready to devour whoever crosses its path. If she were a demoness, which she is in a way, she would be classified as a succubus, that is, a female devourer of men.

These representations emphasise the two complementary aspects of this monstrous creature: 'the *oppressive nightmare*', and the *Seelenvogel*, the *soul of the dead* represented as a bird. As a '*questioning demon*', the "Sphinx is first and foremost a *crushing demon*", or rather, as Delcourt puts it, she is both a "*crushing demon*" and a "*soul in pain*".

One cannot disassociate the ogress-lion (whose irruption is as terrifying as that of a tornado), from the interrogator, any more than one can separate the grieving soul from the crushing demon. This same

ambiguity is found in the questions which must be answered, or else one will die crushed or suffocated.

'The Anguish': As Nietzsche suggests, in the presence of Truth, we are in the grip of anguishing terror, unable to evade questions that arise, a state very similar to that of Oedipus before the Sphinx. We are therefore summoned to ask ourself what actually transpires during this encounter, and what the defeat of the Sphinx actually means.

In his study on demon inquisitors, Ludwig Laistner claims that the demons subject their victims to three types of tests: caresses, blows, and questions (Laistner 1889). Of these three, the Theban legend only retains the last one, the intellectual test. This rationalisation relegates a central aspect of the myth to the background: "the tempting monster exposes itself to all the dangers it brings". It is this "agonising" dimension that Nietzsche stresses when he suggests that the encounter with the truth is not only a test for the human who accepts to ask himself certain questions, but also (strange as it may seem), for Truth itself! This is what happens in the version tragic of the legend: "the demoness is at the mercy of the man who has answered her question".

As to what constitutes victory, not all answers can be traced back to the one preferred by the Greek classics, that 'a peaceful intelligence, confident in itself' will ultimately triumph over all trials. Other possible answers must also be considered. For example, the *hieros gamos*: nothing prevents Oedipus from marrying the monster to whom he has proved his superiority. Or for that matter the slaying of the monster; or the sharing of a secret that ensures the power of the victor.

2.2. Solving the riddle

The test imposed on Oedipus involves two distinct mythical plots: the encounter with a demon interrogator who is defeated in the act of

answering its questions; and the reward (usually the hand of a princess), that awaits the person who finds the right answer.

How to explain the contradiction between the puerility of the riddle and the gravity of what is at stake? Why is figuring out the answer a matter of life and death?

The riddle is a literary genre that, like the story, appears to be a human universal, found in all sapiential traditions. According to Hegel, the hallmark of the struggle for recognition, itself a life-and-death struggle, is also the structural feature of riddles; it emerges from a questioning monster that the Christian imagination often identifies with the 'Grand Inquisitor', the devil.

According to Delcourt, there are two fundamental types: the "thing you have to *know*' or the "thing you have to *understand*".

In the first type, the person questioned must prove that it been initiated into a secret, or that it knows the esoteric name of a thing or a being, and who could perhaps be the questioner himself. Riddles of this type are the remnants of "the old popular belief that one has a hold on a being as soon as one is master of its name".

It is the same search for a secret name of power that some exegetes find in the biblical narrative of the Revelation of the divine Name in *Exodus* 3:14[15].

The enigma that the Sphinx poses to Oedipus has a distinct character, which one might be inclined to call *anthropological* (the answer to the question as to which animal has four feet in the morning, two at noon and three at night, is 'man'), and *hermeneutical* (to understand in which way the question concerns Oedipus' own *ipseity*).

Even if the formulation of the riddle and its answer goes beyond the search for a name of power or a shared secret, we cannot forget that the reference to the bipedal nature of man is already present in

[15] Ricoeur, La Cocque 1998: 307–310.

the proper name of Oedipus (*Oi-dipous*), who, moreover, is physically deformed: he is lame. There is a kind of circularity between the riddle (*tetrapous*, *tripous*, *dipous*) and Oedipus' very name. The question is therefore not quite neutral. For, underlying the general question, "What is man?", we can discern yet another question, which the 'lame' Oedipus (brilliantly represented in Francis Bacon's painting), would have had great difficulty in answering: "Who are you, Oedipus?". The answer to this question, one involving his 'narrative identity', will be answered in the tragedy, or rather in the *tragedies*, for we must not forget that *Oedipus the King* is followed by *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Again, from a comparative point of view, in tune with what Delcourt calls the "myth of the enigma", we can link it with two major themes: *the struggle with the monster*, and *the conquest of a fiancée* of royal blood.

A biblical example of the second type is found in the narrative of Solomon's encounter with the Queen of Sheba (*1 Kings* 10:1-10). Still another example is the story of Turandot, told by Nizami in *The Seven Beauties*, a story that had significant impact, both in literature (Gozzi, Schiller), and in musicals (Puccini). The nuptial riddles "are always addressed to intelligence, never to the memory" and they "often take the form of action riddles".

If we accept the hypothesis that the first category of riddles, linked to the struggle with a monster, is a substitution for the anguish that follows an oppressive nightmare, we could then compare it with another biblical episode, that of Jacob's struggle with the Angel at the ford of Yabbok (*Gen* 32:23-31).

Even if we resist the temptation to render the angel into a biblical Sphinx, a number of elements in this text call for a closer comparison.

a) The first (accepted by some Talmudists), is that we are dealing with a nightmare. Jacob, well aware that his brother Esau (who is in

mortal conflict with him), is approaching with a troop of four hundred armed men, has valid reason for having a very disturbed night.

b) The struggle with the Angel, which lasts all night: "and someone wrestled with him until the dawn" (v. 25), is about the quest for a secret name of power: "Then Jacob asked, 'Please tell me your name.' He replied, 'Why do you ask my name?'" (v. 30).

c) The struggle ends only at dawn, which is another structural feature of this type of myth: "the interest of the respondent is to keep the game going until his enemy is disarmed".

d) I would add, for good measure (but in a lighter vein), that at the end of this story, Jacob is somewhat more like Oedipus – he limps, for he suffers from a debilitating sciatica:

> When the sun rose, he had passed Penuel and was limping with his hip. Therefore, the Israelites do not eat the sciatic nerve that is at the hip socket to this day, because he had struck Jacob at the hip socket, at the sciatic nerve (v. 32-33)!

While concluding these reflections on the 'Oedipal' aspect of the rendezvous with the truth, I wonder whether, behind the Nietzschean comparison, there is not an indirect reference to the famous letter Schopenhauer wrote to Goethe on 11 November 1815. Hinting at his future works, the young philosopher writes: "I am now facing myself, like an inexorable judge before a prisoner lying on the rack whom he forces to answer until there is nothing more to ask". In Schopenhauer's words, the judge who has to evaluate his actions and intentions is transformed into a ruthless torturer-inquisitor.

"Almost all the errors or ineffable follies", he continues,

> which fill the doctrines and philosophies seem to me to result from the absence of this probity. If the truth has not been discovered, it is not for want of having sought it, but because of the will to discover again and again in its place a ready-made conception, or, at least, not to offend a cherished idea; for this purpose, it has been necessary to employ subterfuge against all and against the thinker himself (*Ib*.).

Schopenhauer and Oedipus, the same struggle! The will to know, that is, the will to truth, must be relentless and not recoil from any sacrifice:

It is the courage to go to the end of the problem that makes the philosopher. He must be like Sophocles' Oedipus who, seeking to understand his terrible destiny, tirelessly pursues his quest, even when he guesses that the answer holds only horror and dread. But most of us carry in our hearts a Jocasta begging Oedipus for the love of the gods not to enquire further; and we give in to her, which is why philosophy is where it is.

To those who, like Schopenhauer, would be tempted to cry out: "Holy Oedipus the Conqueror, pray for us", should we not, when the time comes, respond: "Have mercy on poor Jocasta"?

3. "What is truth?": Jesus and Pontius Pilate

Even if the question "What is truth?" is part of the mandate of any self-respecting philosopher, this question should not be limited to the philosophical realm. There are many other encounters with truth, under other horizons and in various ways.

A very well-known encounter and one which has fascinated many a philosopher, is in the Johannine narrative of the Passion of Jesus. That a trial is a place for a rendezvous with the truth is self-explanatory. What is rather intriguing about this trial (and which lasts a total of five hours from early morning until six in the afternoon), is the comings and goings of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate, who is constantly in and out of the praetorium, as if he were caught between two stools.

At the first hearing, Pilate, who questions Jesus about his claim to kingship, is immediately confronted with a surprising counterquestion: "Do you say this of yourself, or have others told you of me?" (v. 34). The fact that the accused becomes the interrogator makes the supposedly neutral arbitrator, who is not involved in the whole affair, a stakeholder in the trial. Pilate's retort – "Am I a Jew? Your people and the high priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?" (v. 35) – are all clumsy attempts to regain his neutrality as a judge.

The response of Jesus takes the form of a testimony:

> My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have fought so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from here (v. 36).

Saint Augustine commenting on this passage emphasises the significance of this "not from here": "*Non ait: nunc autem regnum meum non est hic, sed: non est hinc*". In itself, this answer would signal the

end of the trial, for if Pilate took Jesus' testimony seriously, he would have to conclude that this man, who is not a political agitator, could not be the subject of a trial. But instead, Pilate interprets Jesus' testimony as an open-ended political claim.

The interrogation takes a new turn from the moment when Jesus, questioned about his claim to kingship, identifies his mission as that of a witness to truth, a truth that would not leave anyone indifferent:

> I was born for this,
> I came into the world for this,
> to bear witness to the truth;
> and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice (Jn 18:37).

Even though Pilate's reaction is in the grammatical form of a question: "What is truth?" (Jn 18:38), it has the intended (or performative) meaning of a dismissal, and can imply both "I am not interested in the truth", as well as "The truth is not my concern or my problem, because I, the judge must enforce the law and decide whether you are guilty or not".

Pilate's interrogation ends with a presumption of innocence: "I find no case against him" (Jn 18:38), a statement that he will repeat three more times before he yields to the clamouring crowd and hands Jesus over to them.

Pilate's question to Jesus: "What is truth?" is grammatically correct, but it was phrased in a manner as to reject right outright all possible answers.

It is not sufficient to ask the question: "What is truth?". What is important is to assume it fully, which means, as Heidegger suggests in §2 of *Sein und Zeit* (where he describes the formal structure of the question of being), that even a superfluous *enquiry* (*Untersuchung*) on

truth (an enquiry is earnest only insofar as it is at the same time a *quest* – *Suche*), which concerns the questioning subject, has three dimensions: *Gefragtes* (the 'questioned'), in other words, the thing *that* is being questioned; that of the *Begfragtes* ('interrogated'), that is, the thing (or the person) *under* investigation (in the Jerusalem Praetorium, the interrogated is Jesus himself); that of the *Erfragtes* ('asked'), "that with which the questioning reaches the goal", by manifesting what is at stake.

'*What is x*?' is not the only method of questioning. In some cases, the question *Who*? is as much, if not more, important. If Pilate shrugs off the question "What is truth?", it is because he has bypassed the question *who*: who is the one speaking to him?, bearing witness to a truth that can only be attained through him. However, in his question to Jesus "Where are you from?" (Jn 19: 8), Pilate seems to have glimpsed the link between the questions "What is truth?" and "Who is this man?".

"God loveth adverbs; and cares not how good, but how well," said Joseph Hall. This maxim alerts us to the importance of the question: 'How?'. There are many possible ways of understanding 'how?'. Thus, the *existential* approach of Kierkegaard, who in his *Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* emphasises on the how of the subjective relationship between the knower and the truth; the *phenomenological* method, which studies the modes of manifestation and givenness of truth; a *methodological* approach that can be resumed in the maxim, "The shortest way to the *why* of things is through the *how* of their manifestation".

4. Lost/found in translation: words to say the "truth"

The authors of the article "Truth" in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, point out that, despite differences, all European languages have integrated, "*in an approximately equal manner*"

[my-emphasis], "an evolution that has freed the notion of truth from its initial poetic, religious and legal context, constituted it as a concept of philosophy, and then introduced it into the field of science".

They add the hypothesis of three main paradigms that underlie the theoretical developments of the notion of truth in the Western tradition: the *Hebrew* paradigm of *Truth-Fiability*; the *Greek* paradigm of *Truth-Disclosure*; and the *Latin* paradigm of *Truth-Order*.

This hypothesis can be traced back to the Orthodox philosopher and theologian Paul Florensky (1882-1943), who like so many other Russian intellectuals, died in the Solovki prison camp. A friend and colleague of Sergei Bulgakov, Florensky defended his thesis entitled *On Spiritual Truth* before the Moscow Academy of Theology, in 1912. This 'essay on Orthodox theodicy' was expanded and reworked, and published in 1914 as *The Column and the Foundation of Truth*.

It was while meditating on life's caducity and mortality that Florensky discovers in himself the desire for an imperishable life: "Everything slides into death's abyss. Only One abides, only in Him are constancy, life, and peace" (12).

It was a verse from the First Epistle to Timothy, which describes "the Church of the living God" as "the pillar and support of the truth" (*stulos kai hedraiôma tès alètheias, 1 Tim* 3: 15), that gave him a foreglimpse of the "total and eternal Truth", "the one Divine Truth", distinct from the "particular and fragmented human truths, which are unstable and blown about like dust chased by the wind over mountains" (12).

But, before asking what certitude (and which theoretical thinking emphasises) can confirm, it is imperative to know what we mean by 'Truth'. Florensky recalls that the Russian word for truth, '*istina*', is linguistically close to the verb '*est*': to be (*istina - estina*). From the outset, it is the ontological dimension that is emphasised (true = authentic = real). One can almost rewrite Parmenides: being and truth are the same! The root of the verb 'to be' can also signify 'to breathe,

to live, to be'. When understood in this way, truth is "existence that abides, that which lives, living being, that which breathes, i.e., that which possesses the essential condition of life and existence" (16).

4.1 Emeth: Truth, a matter of trust (the Hebrew paradigm)

The Hebrew term *'émèt*, translated as *alètheia* in the Septuagint, shares etymological roots that connotes *reliability*: that on which one can count on; in other words, the *reliability* that is constant, proven over time. This reliability has a double justification, *historical* and *theocratic*.

The people of the Promise have an experience of salvation and liberation which gives them unparalleled confidence. *Emet*-truth, has a privileged relationship with the future.

It is not so much a question of relevance of a particular condition, as of a fulfilment of a promise. 'Truth' "is less the permanence of what is above time than the guarantee of a continuity beyond the distance introduced by it." It is on to this core meaning that the associated values of 'security' and peace (*shalom*) are grafted (*Is.* 39:8; *Jer.* 33:6).

God, the Master of history, is the God of the Covenant, bound to His people by an agreement that He will not breach, not even if the people are unfaithful. Because He keeps His promises, the God of the Bible is a "God of truth" (*Ps.* 31:6); an epithet endorsed by divine self-identification in Exodus 34:6: "Yahweh, Yahweh, God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy". A more literal rendering of the latter term would be 'rich in truth' *('émèt*). It is in the same spirit that one can read Isaiah 7:9: "If you will not take your stand on me, you will not stand firm". In the end, it is all a matter of trust in divine truth, in other words, completely reliable.

Floresky's phrase "Truth is Security" captures concisely the essence of the matter. Of course, Security does not mean "State Security" like the KGB which found a complicit propaganda organ in the

Pravda, a newspaper so very injudiciously named. A buttress: these meanings of the Hebrew word draw us nearer to the symbol of the "Pillar of Truth". The liturgical word of consent: 'Amen' belongs to the same lexical category. It is no coincidence that in the Apocalypse of John this Amen is personified: "This is what the Amen says, the faithful and true witness" (*Rev 3:14*).

4.2. Alètheia: the truth that reveals itself (*the Greek paradigm*)

As Marcel Detienne emphasises in his important study on the "Masters of Truth in ancient Greece", one cannot rest content by just listing the various literary occurrences of the term *Alètheia* among the Greek authors. It is also necessary to ask "if truth, as a mental category, is not solidary of a whole system of thought, itself inseparable from the material and social life".

The Greece's terrain includes many types of grottoes, caves, and 'crypts', inhabited by more or less ominous presences, often evoked in the myths. It is not difficult to fathom the concern of the Greeks: what could be lurking in these hollows? Or, what is going in and what will come out?

Even if the "myth of the cave", which I will discuss later, is a literary fiction created by Plato to demonstrate a philosophical problem, in other words an *allegory*, it resonates with many other elements associated with Greek mythology. Given the central importance that this allegory places on the contrast between the hidden and the visible, it is possible to read it as an allegory of *Truth-Manifestation*.

While the Hebrew *emèt* challenges us with a dialectic of trust and distrust, the Greek *alètheia* challenges us with a dialectic of the hidden and the visible. The premise of this understanding is that

> *forgetting* was for the Greek mind not a simple absence of memory, but a special act that destroyed part of the reality

> of what was forgotten; in other words, not a defect of memory, but the force of forgetting. This force was the force of time that devours everything (19).

In Hesiod's *Theogony* (v. 227; 210-232), *Lethe* is part of the funeral procession of the daughters of the Night: Sorrow, Hunger, Suffering, False Words and Perjury. Yet, something resists the all-consuming force of oblivion:

> The truth for the Greek is *a-lètheia*, what can remain from the flow of the oblivion, from the lethal course of the sensible world, something which overcomes the time, which maintains itself without flowing, and which keeps eternally the memory. Truth is the *eternal memory* of a certain Consciousness. It is a value worthy of and capable of perpetual commemoration (*Ib.*).

The truth, we could say, is "the being not forgotten", or that must not be forgotten, that is, literally, the *unforgettable*.

The adjective *aléthes*, older than the noun, is composed of the privative alpha and the root *léthos*, and denotes that which is hidden or concealed, a type of this concealment being *oblivion*. The oft-quoted classic example is that of Ulysses who on hearing the Aedes singing the Iliad hides his tears that would otherwise betray his emotion[16].

The etymological derivative of the term that connotes "un-concealment" (or de-occultation, or dis-closure distinct from "foreclosure"), plays an important role in the Heideggerian concept of *Truth*[17]. By translating the Greek term as *Un-verborgenheit* (rendered in

[16] *Odyssey*, VIII, 93.
[17] For etymological details see: Boeder 1959: 82–112; Helting 1997: 93–107; see also: Snell 1978.

English as "*unconcealment*" and in French as "désoccultation"), Heidegger follows a tradition that was widespread in the nineteenth century: "*Unversteckтheit*" ("un-concealed", F. Passow, 1841); "*das Unvergessene, l'inoublié*" (O. Willmann, 1907²); "*Unvergessenheit oder Unverborgenheit*" (Nicolaï Hartmann). This translation is not restricted to the Germanic world; it is also referred to by C.S. Peirce[18].

In his 1922/23 course on *Systematic Philosophy*, Paul Natorp defined being as that which is "purely and simply manifest" (*schlechthin offenbar*), similar to light itself. This "original openness" (*ursprüngliche Erschlossenheit*) where everything is uncovered, unconcealed, this *Unverborgenheit*, is the immediate, indubitable truth of being, "offered without reluctance to whoever is open to it and does not close himself to it".

It was in October of the same year 1922, that Heidegger translates for the first time *Alètheia = Unverborgenheit*, in his research report entitled, *Phenomenological Interpretation of Aristotle*, hastily written in view of his candidacy for the position of *Extraordinarius* professor. From that time onwards, Heidegger will not cease from emphasising the distinctiveness of the Greek understanding of Truth-declosion, to the risk of being criticized by some as of succumbing to questionable etymologism. He will defend himself against these criticisms in his 1954 conference entitled *Alètheia*, a meditation on Heraclitus' fragment 16.

Those who, like Heribert Boeder, criticize the Heideggerian "etymologism", point out that Homer uses the adjective *alètheiè* in an exclusive manner linked with verbs denoting the act of saying. Since classical antiquity, excepting a few allusions, the etymology of the word *alètheia* no longer played the same role it once did. *Alèthè legein*, 'to speak truth' and the conditions of its possibility, are now more important. In these uses, the adjective 'true' is replaced by *onta*, the

[18] Peirce 1892; Peirce 1935: 32.

being. To 'speak truth' is to say 'what is'. Truth is not primarily the characteristics of certain utterances, but is identified with a given fact, the decisive question being whether the thing is 'really' and 'authentically' what it seems or claims to be.

Right from the start, the problematic of truth overlaps with that of being and appearance which, together with that of being and becoming, formed, according to Heidegger, the principal axis on which ancient ontology was developed.

In her book *L'effet sophistique*, Barbara Cassin quotes the treatise *Peri alètheias* of Antiphon, the sophist and orator of the fifth century B.C. (480-411 B.C.), which transposes the same opposition on the political level: one can escape (*lathei*, literally 'to hide oneself', 'to evade') the laws of the city, but no one can escape the natural law which is, in this sense, 'truer' than the former.

The relevant distinction between the adjective 'true' and the noun 'truth' in daily usage is that of the *real* and the *unreal*. The real is the true, and all that is not real is not true. Hence, our spontaneous cry: "It's not true!" when we hear unbelievable news.

Conversely, the Greek counterpart to our adjective 'real' is *etumos*, the core of the word 'etymology', and which provides its eponymy. Democritus made it a technical term in his atomic theory to distinguish the effective reality as opposed to sensible qualities. To *etumos*, the effective reality, is opposed *pseudos*. We can therefore claim that the 'false' is always a *pseudo-reality*, a mimetic duplicate of *etumos*. In such a context, the term *alètheia* can hardly be reduced to the simple alternative of true and false!

4.3. Veritas or regulatory truth (the Roman paradigm)

Even if there is no evidence that the Greek *alètheia* is essentially untranslatable into Latin – for how else can we explain Tertullian's adage, "Truth has no shame except to be hidden"? – the Latin adjective *verus*

goes back to the Indo-Germanic root **wer* meaning benevolence and its expressions: gifts, protection, fidelity, pact. The truth is benevolent, or it is not! The man with a heart of stone severs himself off from the truth: he is *se-verus*!

The Latin *veritas* is derived from the root *var* with claims to a cultic domain. In Sanskrit the root *vra-ta* refers to a sacred act, such as a vow or a promise. Truth 'is sacred', which in turn suggests that only the sacred is true! According to some etymologists, the root *ver* found in the word *verbum*, and in words from the family of *vereor*, *revereor* (= 'to fear', 'to respect'), *verecundia*, refers to reverential fear. Truth is that which is revered, especially the word that utters truth. This etymological derivation was often preferred in ancient times, for example, Saint Augustin who glosses over the word *verbum* with *verum boare*: 'to proclaim the truth'.

According to Florensky, "strictly speaking, *verus* means protected or grounded in the sense of that which is the object of a taboo or consecration", of a vow or consecration. In modern parlance, this meaning could be expressed as '*Touche pas à ma vérité*!' ('Hands off my truth').

The Latin *veritas* has primarily a juridical sense. *Verus*, *veritas* mean "the truth of the rule, insofar as it is distinct from usage". The *verdict* is the judge's sentence that must be respected. *Veritas* came to be used as a noun rather tardively. Mainly found in the legal sphere, it received a philosophical and gnoseological meaning only with Cicero.

This legal connotation is further reinforced in Late Latin, and will be retained in the Middle Ages, where *verus* signifies 'legitimate', legally authenticated, conforming to enacted law.

In a sense, one could say that "to be in order" is synonymous with "to be in the truth".

If *verus* signifies 'authentic', then this meaning must also be taken in the legal sense of the act of authentication. A 'true' Caravaggio is a painting that has been authenticated by a court-appointed expert. The

relentless battle that certain luxury brands wage against counterfeits (a fake Lacoste shirt, a fake Hermes scarf, etc.), shows the importance that we still attach to this idea of truth, in which the legal sense over-determines not only the moral, but also the ontological sense.

This same legal overdetermination characterizes the uses of the noun *veritas*. What is expected of a witness in court is that he should tell 'the truth and nothing but the truth'. Being sincere is not enough – as in the case of the famous statement of the French politician who while leaving the court where he had been caught in the act of perjury said: "Certainly, I lied, but I was sincere!". The witness must be unimpeachable, *verus testis*, a reliable witness, rendered in English as *truthful*.

This is how the authors of the article "Truth" in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* conclude their description of this third paradigm:

> […] truth comes to be instituted, but not uncovered. *Veritas* qualifies an accreditative function, the power of having the last word, according to Roman law: 'The judgment holds the thing to be true' (*res judicato pro veritate accipitur*) (Digest, 50, 17, 207). *Veritas* is performative: it does not designate a relation of adequacy between the utterance and reality but enacts the authority of judgment, the well-founded juridical utterance (1165).

In a brilliant synthesis of his hypothesis, Florensky writes:

> […] for the Hebrews, Truth is not an ontological concept, as it is for the Slavs. It is not an epistemological concept, as it is for the Greeks. And it is not a juridical concept, as it is for

> the Romans. Instead, it is a historical, or rather, a sacred-historical concept, a theocratic concept (Florensky 1974: 19).

And as a further development of his hypothesis, Florensky suggests conjugating the Russian *istina* and the Hebrew *'emet*, insofar as they refer primarily to the *divine content* of truth, as opposed to the Greek *alétheia* and the Latin *veritas* which privilege its *human form*. And as to truth's relationship with *philosophy*, Russian and Greek are on the same side of the fence, whereas Hebrew and Latin privilege the sociological aspect of *social mediation*.

As audacious as these suggestions maybe, they have an undeniable heuristic fruitfulness that I shall explain by referring to Levinas' remark in the Preface to his *Totality and Infinity*: "Our Western civilization", he says,

> is an essentially hypocritical civilization", because it is "attached both to the True and to the Good, henceforth antagonistic". And he adds, "It is perhaps time to see in hypocrisy, not only a base contingent defect of man, but the underlying rending of a world attached to both the philosophers and the prophets (Lévinas 1974: 24).

Taking the meaning of the term 'hypocrisy' in the Levinasian sense I would say that our relationship with truth is also, "essentially hypocritical", insofar as we must learn to conjugate at least three paradigms of Truth: the Hebrew *Truth-Fiability*, the Greek *Truth-Disclosure*, and the Latin *Truth-Order*.

5. Theoria and *alètheia*: is truth 'theorizable'?

Emmanuel Levinas stresses that the search for truth, "is a more fundamental event than theory". Before concluding that "the relation with others, our master, makes truth possible", we must acknowledge that one of the distinctive signs of the twentieth-century philosophy is the extraordinary proliferation of '*theories of truth*', to which we can apply another remark of Levinas: an analysis of language that focuses on what is said, and not on the saying, is a "respectable, considerable and difficult work".

A discussion on what can or cannot be expected from the different theories of truth (correspondence, coherence, semantic, pragmatic, redundancy, *consensus*, and interpretation, etc.), through the looking glass of our guiding metaphor 'rendezvous with truth' would require altogether another volume.

I shall therefore only present a few hypotheses that need to be verified through a careful analysis of texts.

Kant made a distinction between the "artists of reason" (the logicians) and the philosophers who do not forget that they are "citizens of the world" participating in the "great game of life". Contemporary theorists of truth are no doubt great "artists of reason". Their publications often present the same degree of difficulty as that experienced by an uninformed reader browsing through a professional journal for chess players with analyses of world chess tournaments. While admiring the intelligence of the players, with which he can hardly match, the ordinary "citizen of the world" can, at the very least, try to get a general understanding of the game in question, its rules, as well as the different tactics and strategies used, without forgetting to ask: what is this game?

Hence the interest in asking three preliminary questions: 1. What is a philosophical or extra-philosophical 'theory' of truth? 2. What can we expect from it? 3. Does the philosophical quest for truth necessarily

lead to the elaboration of a 'theory', or is the 'theory' only one of several ways to encounter truth?

In ancient Greek, 'theory' is nothing but idea of truth. According to Ross, the Aristotelian claim that philosophy as such is "the theory of truth" (*hè peri tès alétheias theoria*)[19], means that it has for object "the truth in general, the final nature of things"[20].

In its modern acceptation, the term is based on the model of *scientific theories*[21]. If we refer to its strict sense in contemporary science and epistemology, that is, a system of propositions that can be tested and verified through experiments prescribed by the model, we have valid reasons to question, as Moritz Schlick did as early as in 1934[22], whether a *philosophical* theory of truth can ever conform to such a definition.

The least we can ask of truth-theorists is that they clarify their goals: is it the *concept* (meaning, significance, 'essence', 'nature', etc.), a *criterion*, the *conditions* (or *presuppositions*), or the *relevance* (scope) of truth that is to be determined?

According to L.B. Puntel[23], the enquiry concerning the *concept* of truth can be divided into four categories: 1. What is truth? This question aims at a *definition* of truth, an attempt that some philosophers, like Donald Davidson[24], consider is doomed to failure. 2. What does 'truth' (or 'true') mean? 3. What is the significance of 'true judgment', 'true statement', 'true proposition', 'true assertion'? 4. What is the meaning of 'p is true'?

If we move from *definitional* theories, which seek to define the term 'truth' as precisely as possible (for example, the famous

[19] *Met*. 993a 30.
[20] *Met*. 1.
[21] Seifert 2009: 58–59.
[22] Schlick 1934: 79–99.
[23] Puntel 2009; Puntel 1990; Puntel, 1987.
[24] Davidson 1996.

"semantic" theory of Alfred Tarski), to *criteriological* theories[25], we realize that they are of a different kind based on the idea we have of a 'criterion': a *decision* criterion (when are we dealing with truth?), a discovery procedure (how can we discover truth?), or a 'yardstick' of truth?

The problem becomes even more complicated if we consider the following factors:

1. A philosopher's conception of truth can hardly be separated from the rest of his philosophy. Karl Jaspers' monumental work *Von der Wahrheit* (published in 1947 as the first volume of a philosophical logic of great scope)[26], is an excellent example of this organic bond. It is the same for Husserl and Heidegger.

2. Not all philosophers, far from it, feel the need to write a '*De Veritate*', or '*Quaestio disputata de Veritate*', or '*Entretiens sur la vérité*' as did Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, or Malebranche; but the absence of this urge does not stop them from encountering truth.

3. During the twentieth century, debates about truth theories have become increasingly polarized. We must resist the temptation to reduce everything to a choice between two or three dominant theories, much like the choice we make between a few major political parties at election time. A good part of these debates consists of exchanges between 'experts' who ceaselessly compare their arguments and offer their personal interpretation of their opponents' propositions.

4. A substantial number of these theories are explicitly presented as revisions, developments, or clarifications of an already existing

[25] See: Rescher 1973.
[26] Jaspers 1947.

theory. Almost all theories of truth currently discussed have as models the traditional correspondence theory or Tarski's semantic theory.

5. The key divide is between the 'realist' positions that credits truth with a nature, and which Michael P. Lynch calls 'robust' realism of truth, and the 'deflationary' theories of truth[27] (the 'realists' would undoubtedly call them 'defeatists' conceptions), which assert that the problem of truth is merely a misunderstanding easily cleared by logical analysis or adequate pragmatic approach.

6. From the perspective of the 'realists', the rendezvous with truth is *prima facie* a rendezvous with reality; on the other hand, the 'pluralist' theories of truth make a detour through an epistemic questioning on the validity and verifiability of our convictions and assertions, like Hilary Putnam's 'internal realism' which asserts that "it makes no sense to think that the world is divided into 'objects' (or 'entities') independently of our use of language"[28].

7. One of the major challenges in the debates on theories of truth concerns the very idea of rationality[29]: are these theories meant to justify the superiority of scientific practice, as Putnam asserts, and for whom truth can be understood only as an "idealization of rational acceptability"; or, must we, as Richard Rorty advocates, renounce once and for all the idea that science is our only reliable teacher of truth?

[27] Lynch 2001: 5.
[28] Putnam 1992: 243; Putnam 1984.
[29] See: Williams 2002.

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