

«ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE»

Reflections on Deleuze's ontology

Mon discours est logiquement ou proprement philosophique [...] quand je dis le sens de ce que je dis, et quand ainsi l'Être se dit.

Gilles Deleuze¹

1. Ontology

Philosophy is ontology. This is undeniably the most basic assumption in Gilles Deleuze's thought. Bergson, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, the main references in his oeuvre, are all ontological thinkers, or at least read as such (Nietzsche).² Philosophy as ontology is even one of the few theses – if not the single one – he shares with Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, his greatest enemy in philosophy. “Philosophy must be ontology”, so Deleuze approvingly quotes the most important Hegel specialist of his days, Jean Hyppolite³, in one of his earliest articles, a review on Hyppolite's book on Hegel, *Logique et existence*⁴:

La philosophie doit être ontologie, elle ne peut pas être autre chose ; mais il n'y a pas d'ontologie de l'essence, il n'y a d'ontologie que du sens.

Philosophy can only be ontology, and ontology cannot be an “ontology of the essence”; it can only be an “ontology of the sense”. Ontology of the essence, so Deleuze explains, supposes essence or Being separated from thought or reflection; it assumes that “reflection is at one side, Being is on the other side”. In other words, it denies the *being of* that very reflection, the *being of* thought (thinking about Being). So, it is crucial here to consider the status of the very question that questions Being. Can it be something else than Being at all? This seems impossible, for, like anything that is, a question (even if it questions Being) cannot but be.

¹ Gilles Deleuze (2002), “Jean Hyppolyte, *Logique et existence*”, in : *L'île déserte et autres textes. Textes et entretiens 1953-1974*, Édition préparée par David Lapoujade, Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, p. 21.

² See, for instance, Michael Hardt (1993), *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy*, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.

³ As Deleuze himself says in *Dialogues*, Hyppolite was one of the “two professors which I admired very much”. The other was Alquié ; G. Deleuze (1977), *Dialogues*, Paris : Flammarion, p. *** ; (1987), *Dialogues*, translated by H. Tomlinson and B. Habbarjam, New York: Columbia University Press, p. ***. (ned versie p. 30)

⁴ Deleuze 2002 : 18. L'article original est paru in : *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, vol. CXLIV, n° 7-9, juillet-septembre 1954, p. 457-460.

It sounds abstract, but it is as simple as can be. That question simply is. Of course, one can ask if everything really is, but at least that question is. Reflection about Being *is*. So, if one defines such a reflection as philosophy, philosophy *is*. Which is to say: philosophy is ontology: not in so far as it is a question *about* Being, but only in so far as it is a question knowing– and proceeding from – the very fact that it is, that it is itself *being*.

Yet, how then can I question its quality of being? Not by making Being the *object* of my question, i.e. to ask for the *essence* of Being. For, then, I suppose this essence to be separated from the world of appearances in which I ask that question. Then, I imagine myself and my question to be part of a platonic cave asking how we could find the ‘real Being’, the ‘essences’ *outside*. Yet, since my question *is*, since my question shares the ontological status of its object⁵, my thus ontological question must ask in what *sense* Being itself leads to that question. What makes Being to be questioned in my question? What kind of ‘sense’ – also in the sense of ‘direction’ – is there in Being, that it leads me to questioning Being, i.e. that leads me to ontological questions, to philosophy? So, a question is ontological only insofar as it investigates Being’s *sense* (instead of Being’s essence)? And since that question *is*, as well as the language – the *logos* – it uses, also my *logos* is inhabited by that sense. It is a question investigating the “logic of the sense”.

In the review of Hyppolite’s book, which I still follow, we read indeed the expression “logic of the sense”. Already at that moment, it describes Deleuze’s view on what ontology – and philosophy is about. Fifteen years later, it will become the title of one of the first books in which he proposes an own philosophy (*Difference and repetition*, 1968, and *The logic of the sense*, 1969).⁶

Yet, let us not forget, that, in this early article, the “logic of the sense” expresses first of all Hegel’s definition of philosophy. There is no other world, thus Hyppolite summarizes “the core proposition of Hegelian logic”, and this implies that “metaphysics” is transformed into “logic”, more precisely in “logic of the sense”.

⁵ Or, to put in another way, since my question already relates to its object – for that object, Being, is nothing but relation. This is the core insight of Hume’s empiricism. See his book on Hume: G. Deleuze (1953), *Empirisme et subjectivité: Essai sur la nature humaine selon Hume*, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France; see also Deleuze 1977 : *** ; 1987 : *** ‘*Dialogues*’ ed 89-91)

⁶ After a lot of books on other philosophers (Bergson, Hume, Leibniz, Nietzsche), these were the books he wrote “more on his own account”, so he declares in *Dialogues* (Deleuze 1977 : *** ; 1987 : ***). [Ned. Ed p. 35]. G. Deleuze (1969), *Logique du sens*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuits; (1990), *The Logic of the Sense*, translated by M. Lester and C. Stivale, edited by C.V. Boundas, New York: Columbia University Press; (1968), *Différence et répétition*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France; (2001 [1994]), *Difference and Repetition*, translated by P. Patton, London : Continuum.

Qu'il n'y ait pas de second monde est ainsi, selon M. Hyppolite, la grande proposition de la Logique hégélienne, parce qu'elle est en même temps la raison de transformer la métaphysique en logique, et en logique du sens.⁷

And since there is no other world beyond this one, Deleuze continues, since there is no world beyond thought (because "it is Being itself which talks through thought"), there is, in thought itself, nothing beyond language.

Qu'il n'y ait pas d'au-delà signifie qu'il n'y a pas d'au-delà du monde (parce que l'Être est seulement le sens), et qu'il n'y a pas dans le monde un au-delà de la pensée (parce que la pensée, c'est l'être qui se pense), enfin qu'il n'y a pas dans la pensée même un au-delà du langage.⁸

Philosophy is ontology: it is 'to on' ('Being') speaking through 'logos', which means not only through thought, but also through language. In that language, we can trace the sense of Being. There, we can trace Being as having a sense leading to itself, to the sense even present in the question questioning its being.

This is why, in Hegelian perspective, empirical knowledge, logical knowledge and purely speculative knowledge all deal with "absolute knowledge": not with man knowing all what is (it is against this "anthropological" interpretation of Hegel Hyppolite takes position), but with a knowledge in which Being itself is expressed, where Being's "sense" expresses itself.

And what is "Being itself"? What is that "sense", that 'direction' or 'orientation' that leads the question to its own being, showing that Being's sense is nowhere else than in itself? The Hegelian – and, as will become clear in the development of his oeuvre, also the Deleuzian – answer is "difference". In a question, Being takes a distance towards itself and, so, creates a difference. It is as if the question takes position outside the thing it is thinking about and, thus, differs from it. Yet, that very distance, that very difference is precisely being *as such*. Being is taking distance towards Being; it is differring from itself. What is at work in Being, what makes Being to what it is, is the force of difference, or, as Hegel puts it, the "portentous power of the negative".⁹ Negating Being, which is what occurs in questioning and thinking, *is* being; it is being 'itself', it is the active self of Being, a self which is difference. It is the sense of Being as well as the sense of thinking and of *logos*. "Cette identité absolu de l'être et de la différence s'appelle le sens."

⁷ Deleuze 2002: 20.

⁸ Deleuze 2002: 20.

⁹ See for instance, in the "Preface" of the *Phenomenology of the Mind*, the passage on the "ungeheure Macht des Negativen"; G.W.F. Hegel (1970), *Werke in zwanzig Bänden, 3: Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, p. 36.

Deleuze approves Hegel's point of view almost entirely: philosophy is ontology, an ontology not of the essence but of the sense, a sense which is the identity of Being and difference; and he even does not make any comment on the idea that philosophy/ontology establishes an "absolute knowledge", "not a reflection of man, but a reflection of the Absolute in man".¹⁰ All this is approved in this early article, and in a way they list many of the main theses of Deleuze's entire oeuvre. But he definitely does not take one thing from Hegel, which is his notion of 'the negative', or, as Deleuze calls it in this article, the notion of "contradiction". Contradiction is not the "absolute" of difference as Hegel and Hyppolite state. As a figure of difference, contradiction is too "reflective", too well-balanced between the one and "his" other.¹¹ It interpretes the different or other as *his* different, *his* other, and so, in a Hegelian way, sublates in the end all difference and otherness. At the end of his review, Deleuze writes:

Après ce livre si riche de M. Hyppolite, on pourrait se demander ceci : ne peut on faire une ontologie de la différence qui n'aurait pas à aller jusqu'à la contradiction, parce que la contradiction serait moins que la différence et non plus ? La contradiction n'est-elle pas seulement l'aspect phénoménal et anthropologique de la différence ?¹²

Deleuze's entire oeuvre is an attempt to give a positive answer to these questions. Difference should be thought in a way that goes beyond contradiction, for contradiction is not the acme of difference. The way Being 'operates' is not by opposition, i.e. by things opposing themselves to 'their' opposite, in order to find, in 'their' opposite as well as in the opposition as such, the difference they are. This procedure neutralizes, 'sublates' the difference, as Hegel's dialectics shows. Deleuze's attempt is to acknowledge the difference *as such*, 'unsublatedly'. Not as the other *of* Being (as for instance Levinas' notion of '*autrement qu'être*'), but as Being itself, as the "sense" of Being. Being moves towards itself as towards differences which are more different than oppositions can suggest.

2. Knowledge, ...

In this early review of Hyppolite's book on Hegel, Deleuze – like Hyppolite – stresses that Hegel's philosophy is not an "anthropology", i.e. it is not a logos proceeding from and speaking about the *anthropos*, about man. Undoubtedly, Deleuze refers to the interpretation of Alexandre Kojève, which

¹⁰ "Le savoir absolu n'est pas un réflexion de l'homme, mais une réflexion de l'Absolue dans l'homme" (Deleuze 2002 : 21).

¹¹ "[...] elle [la chose] se réfléchit seulement en se réfléchissant dans l'autre, puisque l'autre est son autre" (Deleuze 2002 : 22).

¹² Deleuze 2002 : 22.

has been so dominant in the French intellectual climate of the midst of the 20th century. That anthropological reading made Kojève saying that Being as such – Being as difference, which for Hegel is self-conscious Being – was represented in that one ‘anthropos’, that single person who dared to oppose the entire world: not Napoleon, as Hegel himself mistakenly thought¹³, but Stalin¹⁴, the ‘dictator’ contradicting the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, and thus (since contradiction is the acme of difference and, consequently, of Being) representing that very proletariat. In this single individual, the ontological layer of history – and of being as such - was represented and, thus, supposed to be simply present.

From a Deleuzian perspective, it is this kind of anthropological approach that keeps Kojève locked up in a representational logic which, unlike Kojève says himself, does *not* render present being as such. The idea that a single *anthropos* is able to think – i.e. to represent – the entire realm of Being, supposes Being to be locked up in a closed representational totality. This simply denies Being’s very essence, which is difference – radical and therefore open difference. In representational thought, being is supposed to coincide with the totality of representable differences and so gets locked up within the limits of representation. Its power is indeed the “power of the negative”, but in the sense it really negates Being. Its power – as well as the power of all representational logic – is a false one if only because of the fact it solely maintains the kind of difference that oppresses instead of liberates. The one individual representing the totality of differential Being, of human beings for instance, in fact tyrannizes the totality of that people. Here, the example is again Stalin who was responsible for a regime of real dictatorship including its dimension of terror.

An anthropological reading of Hegel leads to an approval of a dubious dictatorial character in representational thought, killing literally all difference, all creative life. It turns thought and philosophy into instruments of control and oppression, thus the basic idea behind Deleuze’s criticism of the representational logic at work in Kojève and in that of others. And this is the reason why, in the early fifties, he really appreciated Hyppolite’s non-anthropological (i.e. anti-Kojévian) reading of Hegel.

He also approves Hyppolite’s criticism of an all too easy interpretation of Hegel’s idea of “absolute knowledge”. As if the knowledge of an individual is able to be “absolute”, i.e. to contain the limitless realm of Being’s differences. It is not thought that appropriates and possesses Being; on the contrary, it is Being that possesses thought, so Deleuze argues (with Hyppolite). If there is “absolute

¹³ A. Kojève (1947), *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, Paris : Gallimard, p. 163-4, 441, 467.

¹⁴ Kojève does not talk about Stalin in the *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, but he revealed the idea that not Napoleon, but Stalin was the individual representing the end of history orally, in 1937, in a session of the *Collège de Sociologie* (created by Georges Bataille and others). See Denis Hollier (ed.) (1979), *Collège de sociologie 1936-1939*, Paris: Gallimard, p. 165.

knowledge”, it is knowledge in which Being itself is speaking. For this precise reason, real knowledge and thought cannot be representational: it can not contain, within the limits of its representations, the limitless realm of “difference and repetition” named Being.

Now we better understand why, for Deleuze, philosophy is ontology. It is not because a reference to Being gives human thought a strong foundation, a foundation in the substantiality of Being itself. On the contrary, ontology guarantees philosophy’s *critical* and even *subversive* dimension. Since Being itself is not at all a substantial ground remaining identical to itself but a infinite surface of differences and repetitions, ontology ‘deconstructs’ or subverts the normal – representational – way in which we talk and think about reality. It is philosophy’s task to criticize the false certainties and misleading representations we are living in. This is why it has to break through the closed character of common ‘representational’ logic. Therefore, it has to be ontology, since only Being as such – or, more exactly, Being insofar as it is never ‘as such’ and always different – can provide the point of reference outside the closed realm of classical, representational thought.

Or, what is more, only ontology can give thought back its real ‘power’: not its “power of the negative”, as Hegel states, but its ‘power of difference’. This is to say that now, in thought, no longer representations are speaking, but Being as such. Only a thoroughly ontological thought is able to criticize and to subvert so-called ‘normal’ (i.e. representational) thinking. For, indeed, according to Deleuze, philosophy is inherently subversive. Already since Plato, it’s *raison d’être* is to undermine all our thoughts we too easily take for real; but, for Deleuze philosophy does not lead to the realm of deeply founded, stable and immovable Being as Plato’s Idea’s (read: Representations) claim, but to Being as a surface of causes and events, producing limitlessly differences and repetitions. At that level, thought ceases to represent Being and becomes productive, creative. It is in that quality, it deals with the productive and creative nature of Being. Or of “life”, which in the later work of Deleuze replaces Being. “Life” not as ‘the’ life, but as ‘a’ live – so he stresses in his last text: “L’immanence: une vie ...”: life, not as a unified substance, but as an open “multiplicity”, a pure and unlimited “virtuality”.¹⁵

3. ... absolutely

Philosophy can only activate its subversion as ontology, as a logos in which ‘to on’ or ‘einai’, i.e. Being, is itself speaking. Yet, remember that, in the early review of Hyppolite’s book on Hegel, this

¹⁵ G. Deleuze (2003), *Deux régimes de fous : textes et entretiens 1975-1995*, édition préparée par David Lapoujade, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, p. 359-63.

was the definition of “absolute knowledge”, the “conditions of a absolute discourse”¹⁶: a discourse not proceeding from the ‘anthropos’, i.e. from the position of the one who supposes to know, but from Being itself. And, in the reading of Hyppolite, this “absolute discourse” was not the speaking of Being’s deep kernel or some hidden mystery hidden behind the phenomenal veils. Paraphrasing and citing Hyppolite, Deleuze writes:

[...] parce que l’Être est le sens, le vrai savoir n’est pas le savoir d’un Autre, ni d’autre chose. D’une certaine façon, le savoir absolu est le plus proche, le plus simple, il *est là*. « Derrière le rideau il n’y a rien à voir », ou, comme dit M. Hyppolite, « le secret, c’est qu’il n’y a pas de secret ».¹⁷

Of course, the way Deleuze will define that “absolute discourse” in the development of his oeuvre thoroughly differs from what Hegel means by absolute knowledge. With Hegel, it is a representational knowledge *negating* – because sublating – in the end all difference in the apotheosis of an absolute representation, of a ‘veil’ pretending to replace reality itself. For Deleuze, the “absolute discourse” in which Being as such speaks, explicitly *affirms* the differences in Being, the fact that Being is not a question of things but of relation. In an absolute way, it acknowledges the sense of Being as a production of differences, as a flux of relations, as a subversive anarchy of power and forces that cannot be reduced to its representations. In that perspective, “the Absolute as sense is becoming”, so he paraphrases Hyppolyte in this early article, all the same announcing unintentionally his later concept of the becoming.¹⁸ Because he reads the absolute as the becoming, a few lines further, he can affirm the typically Hegelian idea. There he writes that the:

difference between thought and Being is exceeded [dépassée] in the absolute by the position of Being identical to difference and which is thought and reflected in man. This absolute identity of Being and difference is called the sense.¹⁹

“Exceeded”, Deleuze writes, and not “sublated”, “*aufgehoben*” as Hegel does in that context. As already shown, this makes the whole difference, which is to say that, for Deleuze, the difference cannot be sublated; it can and it must be acknowledged as such. Difference as such is the sense of Being as well as the one of thought. It is that which reflects itself in human thought. This is thought’s “absolute” side, so Deleuze clearly suggests here: a thinking where we are not thinking *ourselves*, but

¹⁶ Deleuze 2002 : 20.

¹⁷ Deleuze 2002 : 20.

¹⁸ “M. Hyppolite le dit : L’Absolu comme sens est devenir” (Deleuze 2002 : 22).

¹⁹ “[...] la différence de la pensée et de l’être est dépassée dans l’absolu par la position de l’Être identique à la différence et qui, comme tel, se pense et se réfléchit dans l’homme. Cette identité absolue de l’être et de la différence s’appelle le sens.” (Deleuze 2002 : 21).

where Being as such (or, more exactly, Being without any kind of ‘as such’) thinks in us. The “absolute discourse” Deleuze defends, is not of the “anthropological” kind supposing thinking to be a representational procedure. It is a discourse without the interference of a ‘anthropos’ of a ‘subject’ supposing himself to dominate the Being he is talking about.

However, it is “knowledge”, even “absolute knowledge”, and one can raise the question how such knowledge can ever be possible. Of course, it is possible that, in my thinking, being as such – Being in its productive multiplicity that never stops becoming and/or creating – is expressed and expresses itself. But even if this is the case, can *I* claim this? Can *I* speak in the name of what ontologically happens in my thought? Can *I* speak in the name of Being that expresses itself in my thought? How such an *I* is possible without talking in the name of Being and, so, sublating the difference between myself speaking and Being speaking? How can *I* claim the ‘claim’ or “clamor of Being” (“*La clameur de l’être*”, to use the subtitle of Badiou’s book on Deleuze²⁰) without replacing Being by myself, by my own voice? How to speak in the name of Being without appropriating it, without using the reference to Being as a reinforcement of my own position, my own I, i.e. the subject that I claim to overcome or to ‘deterritorialize’.

All this is possible, Deleuze claims, by thinking ‘myself’ away, thus liberating my thinking from the hegemony of an author. Remember, for instance, what he writes about writing. In the act of writing, as so many modern literature has experienced, the I is hollowed out and becomes a third – or even a forth – person singular, a he/she becoming impersonal – i.e., so to say, becoming ‘becoming’. It is not a matter of “writing for the sake of writing”, he states for instance in *Dialogues*, but “because *life* is not something personal”.²¹ Thinking should be writing, impersonal writing, not “for its own sake” (for there is no ‘own’ in writing or in Being), but to “relate” to something else, to an object, in order to “become that object”, i.e. to coincide with the relation constituting the Being of that writing, of the writer and of his object. Thinking should be writing in the sense it expresses the impersonal and non-substantial relation that *Being* is. Such writing does not so much describe the becoming: *it is* becoming. It actually deterritorializes any I, any subject, object or substance. It expresses impersonal Being, Being beyond the ‘is’, Being as relation, as difference. It proceeds the way Being proceeds, the way relation, difference, multitude express themselves. In other words, writing is the real way of thinking: it is a thoroughly ontological, philosophical procedure.

But does the question raised a few lines above not remain? Of course, my thinking can proceed in the way of writing and I can write the way there is no longer any I that writes and thinks. But can I present that writing as an argument, without denying the very thing writing is about? Can I

²⁰ Alain Badiou (1997), *Deleuze*. « *La clameur de l’être* », Paris: Hachette ; (1999), *Deleuze : The Clamor of being*, translated by L. Burchill, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

²¹ Deleuze 1977 : *** ; 1987 : *** →Ned vert 83.

claim this writing (and, thus, ontological) thought, without using it as a weapon, not so much to deterritorialize my Ego, but to give a stronger ground beneath its feet, i.e. to give it the guarantee that it is not my poor I that is speaking, but the flux of Being itself? Is speaking in the name of Being ever possible without giving the speaker Being's very authority, i.e. without re-establishing him as a genuine authority? Can I speak in the name of Being, without taking the position of an "absolute knowledge"?

And even if one reads this expression in the way Deleuze does in his early article on Hyppolite's Hegel book, the question remains. Even if the absoluteness of knowledge deterritorializes any subject or object, how can I claim that knowledge without supposing that, indeed, *I* am the one knowing that? Even if I say there is no I to know that absolute knowledge, how can I claim that saying without taking the position of an I knowing at least that – i.e. that which is the "absolute" to know? I can admit that my thinking is affected by deterritorializing Being, but can I speak in the name of that affect – can I argue referring to that affect, without making it mine, without sublating the difference with my thought and changing it into a support for my obviously "anthropological" discourse?

Hegel might be Deleuze's greatest enemy in philosophy, the latter seems to have taken over the former's biggest problem. The arguments that forces Hegel to admit that there is an "absolute knowledge" might be logical with respect to the paradigms of *his* thought, but even then it is still difficult to conceive one being the bearer, the subject of this idea. It is, as we saw, the difficulty at stake in the discussion between the "anthropological" reading of Hegel (Kojève) and the "ontological" one (Hyppolite). The former reading supposes an individual to be able to talk in the name of Being as such, which ends up in the conclusion that Napoleon (or Stalin) represents the absolute knowledge as well as the absolute Being, i.e. Being as difference as such. The latter, ontological reading cannot really avoid that problem. Of course, in this interpretation, the absolute knowledge criticizes or deterritorializes man's pretension to be the bearer (the subject) of that knowledge, for it is Being itself who bears the knowledge in which it expresses itself. But what about the one who claims that Being is its own bearer? How can he say this without taking this for granted, without believing this, without being sure – or pretending to be sure – that through him Being itself is speaking? How can he avoid pretending to appropriate Being as such. And even if one knows how wrong that pretension is, the question remains if it can ever be avoided.

Is "absolute knowledge" in which Being speaks itself (thus 'deteritorializing' human pretensions in this) ever possible without a voice claiming it? Can this claim ever be said or heard without "absolutely knowing" what it is about, i.e. without a subject supposing to know that what is said to be only Being's "absolute knowledge"? How Being's noise – which is in itself the "absolute knowledge" – is possible without a voice supposing to know absolutely what it is about?

What if this supposition – even in its quality of pure supposition, of unfounded fiction – is unavoidable? How, then, to deal with that supposition? How thinking it? Should we think it as unreal and, thus, drop it as the chimera of representational logic? Or should we take that supposition for granted in its very quality of supposition, of unreal representation?

4. Supposition

The “supposition” mentioned here is exactly the definition Lacan gave to the notion of ‘subject’ – ‘subject’ both taken in the literal sense of ‘what is laying underneath’ (from the Latin *subicere*: to be thrown [icere] underneath [sub-]) and taken in the common sense of the word as ‘only supposed, not real’. Unlike Deleuze suggests, the subject Lacan talks about is not the fixed entity or substance underlying the attributes we describe reality with. The question to which this concept responds is not what is lying underneath *reality* (what is reality’s base), but what is lying underneath our *speaking* about reality, or, more exactly: what we *suppose* to support that speaking or ‘logos’. From which supposed, hypothetical point do we speak and think? Which is the ‘point’ where we think/suppose we stand when we talk about reality? What is the supposition underlying our speaking/thinking?

In a way, this question as well as the concept it generates (i.e. the subject) aims at a criticism of the “anthropological discourse” which is similar to the one we saw in both Hyppolite and Deleuze. The idea that knowledge about Being as an infinite game of differences and relations can be collected by – and subjected to – the knowledge of one ‘*anthropos*’ is a false idea, a mere supposition. Lacan agrees that this “anthropological” supposition is false, just as its pretension to be the subject of an “absolute discourse” is false. However, unlike Deleuze who is looking for the real state of affairs behind this supposition and pretension, Lacan starts from the acknowledgment that this false “anthropological” idea exists, and that, in this very quality, it has to be taken seriously.

Only, instead of taking the ‘being’ of this supposition seriously in an ontological way, Lacan does this so to say in an ‘existential’ way. That supposition – that representation, that false (because mere) idea – has nothing in common with Being in the ontological sense of the word. In this respect, Deleuze is right, so also a Lacanian perspective must admit. Lacan’s point however is that, even if such supposition is not (ontological) Being, it ‘is’, it exists. The supposition that we are the subject of what we say or think happens to be there and to function even when it is wrong, misleading and untenable, even it cannot be traced back to real Being. Deleuze might severely criticize the reduction of thinking to judging (for, in his eyes, the format of judgment limits necessarily proliferous and

differential Being)²², in this particular case, he nonetheless ‘judges’ this supposition to be non-existent. It is not even a simulacrum (which is how he re-thinks ‘representation’ in *The Logic of the Sense*²³). It is supposed to be simply non-being – the kind of non-being any real, i.e. ontological thought has to leave behind. Here, Lacan is *not* judging: he notices that this false supposition is there and is to be taken seriously in that very quality.

It is, more precisely, the “anthropological” supposition of “absolute knowledge” which is to be taken seriously, for it is structurally involved in all knowledge, thus Lacan has learned from Hegel. But, unlike in Hegel’s system, in Lacanian theory this position never overcomes its false character; which is to say that there simply is not such a thing as “absolute knowledge”. Yet, however false and untenable as it is, the *supposition* of absolute knowledge accompanies all knowledge: including the one (the Lacanian one, for instance) declaring that such a knowledge is impossible and that no voice can colonize or appropriate the noise of Being. The mere fact that, in order to have this said, some voice is needed implies that the ontological noise – however powerful it might be – does not speak simply by itself; that it always is supplemented by some voice, a voice performing itself as the platform, the place, the locus for Being’s noise speaking.

Being’s noise is supposed by a voice, however fictitious that voice may be. The voice as the noise’s ‘supposition’ in the precise, but double sense of the word. First of all in the common sense: a voice acting as if it is solely a supposition or supplement, something that exists only to disappear once the job is done. But this, secondly, means that the supposition has always already denied its literal reality or ‘facticity’: it has denied that the supplement it is, is not simply nothing but something necessary, unavoidable, ‘unsublatable’. It is literally what is ‘sup-posed’ (‘posited underneath’), and makes Being’s enunciation (its noise) possible. Fictitious as it is, that ‘supposition’ or ‘subject’ is the unsublatable supplement of Being’s noise, a supplement that gives that noise a platform, a ‘hypokeymenon’ or – in the Latin translation of this Aristotelian word – a ‘subjectum’.

Here we meet the crucial point in Lacan’s theory of the subject as marked by a structural split between the “subject of the enunciated” and the “subject of the enunciation”. The ‘I’ I am talking about when I speak about myself, is never the ‘I’ that is speaking. Or, in terms of knowledge and science: the ones whom we know in social sciences are never the ones who know by means of that science. In Lacan, human speaking about reality (‘logos’, knowledge) is not deconstructed or deterritorialized by reference to the ontological sense of Being, but to the split condition of its subject. This is the Lacanian way to criticize/deconstruct/deterritorialize the classical subject of the logos. It

²² WAAR?

²³ See, especially, the Appendix 1 and 2 (Deleuze 1969: 292-372; 1990: ***-***).

says that the *logos* talking about reality can never make full circle: the ‘ground’ it talks about is never the ‘ground’ it talks from.

For Lacan, classical *logos* basing itself on being – an ontology in the classical sense of the word: a *logos* anchored in the substantiality of being – is not really deterritorialized by referring to a new conception of being. Of course, the reference to the anarchic realm of non-sublatable differences forming the real status of being, is not without deterritorializing effect. But in that case, does thought not remain on its reliable territory after all? Is it really nomadic when its nomadism establishes an alliance with the (ontological) ground or surface it dwells upon? Does that alliance not give the nomadic subject – the ‘subject beyond the subject’ – the authority of that surface, i.e. of the ontological domain which is beyond good and evil, right and false, which is beyond judgment and thus, in a sense, always ‘positive, always ‘right’. In that case, its nomadism supposes an absolute knowledge, not simply in the sense of a knowledge in which being itself is speaking, but in the “anthropological” sense of the word: of a human nomad pretending his way of thinking, acting and creating to be based on being itself.

To fight this kind of “anthropological” pretension is one of the purposes of Lacanian theory. That is why it keeps focussing the question of the subject: not to defend that subject itself, but to defend the attention for its ‘topos’, its place, for there, the core problem lies, i.e. the problem of the point someone occupies when he talks about reality (including him/herself). At that point, one imagines spontaneously to be the one who knows and ‘closes’ the question reality puts towards him. Lacan’s concept of decentering the subject tries to keep open this question by referring, not to the openness of being (for this risks to be a way to close it again), but to the open split within the subject. The openness of being is only guaranteed by the openness of my question, by the way my question already deconstructs, deterritorializes its answer. It is the subject of the question that has to be kept split.

The sense of being and *logos* lays where being and *logos* make difference. Unlike Deleuze’s, Lacan’s intuition is that this prevents talking in the name of being’s openness, a talking which cannot but pretend to perform the absolute knowledge. Which is a fiction.

The question put from a Lacanian perspective to Deleuze’s philosophy is the question of that fiction. Does Deleuzian ontology at the end not fall into the trap of absolute knowledge, precisely because he too easily thinks he has overcome the problem of the subject, not so much the subject of being as the subject of his own enunciation, making a structural difference with the subject of the enunciated.

The question Deleuze puts to Lacanian thought is the philosophical question of being. What is representation if it is not being, and what is the subject if that subject is the fictitious effect of those

fictitious representations? What is ontological status of representation as well as of their effect: the subject? Lacan's fight with/against philosophy is an elaboration of that question.