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# Temporality and Truth

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## Abstract

This paper examines the intersecting of the themes of temporality and truth in Deleuze's philosophy. For the ancients, truth was something eternal: what was true was true in all times and in all places. Temporality (coming to be and passing away) was the realm of the mutable, not the eternal. In the seventeenth century, change began to be seen in a positive light (progress, evolution, and so on), but this change was seen to be possible only because of the immutable laws of nature that govern change. It was not until philosophers such as Bergson, James, Whitehead—and then Deleuze—that time began to be taken seriously on its own account. On the one hand, in Deleuze, time, freed from its subordination to movement, now becomes autonomous: it is the pure form of change (continuous variation) that lies at the basis of Deleuze's metaphysics in *Difference and Repetition* (and is explored more thematically in *The Time-Image*). As a result, on the other hand, the false, freed from its subordination to the form of the true, assumes a power of its own (the power of the false), which in turn implies a new 'analytic of the concept' that Deleuze develops in *What Is Philosophy?*

**Keywords:** Deleuze, Kant, time, temporality, truth, falsity

The concept of truth is inextricably linked to the question of time, if only because the traditional concept attempts to keep truth away from time: a proposition is true when it is true universally, eternally, 'in all times and in all places'. Stated in this manner, the link between the concept of truth and theology is evident. In this paper, I would like to make some preliminary explorations of this link between time and truth: when the form of the true is confronted with the form of time, Deleuze argues,

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the concept of truth enters into crisis. To explicate the nature of this crisis, I have organised my presentation around two phrases that appear in Deleuze's work: *the pure and empty form of time*, which will allow us to examine Deleuze's theory of time; and *the power of the false*, which will allow us to examine Deleuze's claim that time necessarily puts the form of the true in crisis.

## I. 'The Pure and Empty Form of Time': Deleuze's Theory of Time

### *The Ancient Conception of Time: Orinary Time*

According to Deleuze, the modern mutation in our conception of time occurred with Kant: in Kant's work, time assumed an independence and autonomy of its own for the first time.<sup>1</sup> Before that, however, from antiquity through the seventeenth century, time had been subordinate to movement. Time, in Aristotle's phrase, is the measure or 'number of movement' (Aristotle 1957: 219b5–8). Since there is a plurality of movements in the world, this definition implied a plurality of times. The ancients were therefore led to ask the question: is there something immobile, outside of movement—or at least a most perfect movement—around which all other movements could be measured, a great celestial schema, or what Leibniz would call a kind of 'metaschematism'? Is there a movement of movements in relation to which all other movements can be coordinated?

This question wound up being answered in two different ways because there existed two fundamental types of movement: the extensive movement of the cosmos and the intensive movement of the soul. In the *Timaeus*, for instance, Plato sought to incorporate the movements of cosmos into a vision of a 'planetarium' comprised of eight globes, with the immobile earth at the centre, surrounded by a sphere of 'the fixed' (the stars) turning on its axis, with seven globes in-between (the planets) turning in a reverse direction. These revolving globes start from an initial position, and eventually return to the same position: a great year or circuit of the 'eternal return' (in the Greek sense) which, by some calculations, was thought to last ten thousand years. It was precisely this movement of movements that provided a reference point by which all other movements were to be measured: an invariant, a permanence. Time, in this manner, was subordinated to eternity, to the non-temporal: in Plato's apt formula, time was 'the moving image of eternity' (Plato 1929: 37d). Similarly, in the *Enneads*, Plotinus

incorporated the intensive movement of the soul into the movement of the One, with its emanative processes of procession and conversion.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the result was a hierarchisation of movements depending on their proximity to (or distance from) the eternal: an *originary time* marked by privileged positions in the cosmos or privileged moments in the soul. The discovery of this invariant was itself the discovery of the true, since truth required a universally commensurable time and space over which it could govern: the form of the true was that which was universal and necessary, *in all times and in all places*. Contemporary modal logic, with its search for what is true ‘in all possible worlds’, attempts to extend, in a theological manner, the universality of truth from the domain of the real to the totality of the possible.

This conception of time as the measure of movement remains ensconced in our common chronological ‘clock’ time. Days, months and years measure terrestrial, lunar and solar movements in the cosmos, while weeks and hours are primarily religious determinations of the soul (God rested on the seventh day); and our watches and clocks remain dependent on movement, whether that of a pendulum or a quartz crystal. Modernity no less than antiquity remains engaged in a vast effort to render both time and movement homogeneous and uniform (time tables, time zones, the global positioning system).

### *Aberrations of Movement: Derived Time*

Nonetheless, the Kantian revolution was prepared for by the fact that both these domains—the cosmos and the soul—were haunted by fundamental *aberrations* of movement, where a *derived time* increasingly tended to free itself from the posited originary time. The closer one came to the earth (the ‘sublunar’), the more the movements of the cosmos tended to become increasingly anomalous: the unpredictability of meteorological movements, for instance, or the movement of everything that comes-to-be and passes-away. As Michel Serres notes, ‘scientists can predict the time of an eclipse [the lunar], but they cannot predict whether they will be able to see it [the sublunar]’ (Serres 2000: 67). It is not by chance that, in French and many Latin languages, the same word is used for time and weather—*le temps*—with its various cognates: *temperature*, *tempest*, *temperate*, *temperament*, *intemperate*, *temper* (see Serres 1994: 100). The question became: does the sublunary world obey the metaschematism, with its proportional rules, or does it enjoy an independence from it, with its own anomalous movements and disharmonies? The Pythagorean discovery of irrational numbers

had already pointed to a fundamental incommensurability between the speed and position of the various cosmic spheres. In short, the invariant provided by the ‘movement of movements’ was threatened by *crises* when movement became increasingly aberrant. Similarly, the intensive movement of the soul became marked by a *fear* that its restless movements in derived time would take on an independence of their own, and would cease to be submitted to the originary time of the One or God (the Fall). The search for ‘universals’ in philosophy is, in a sense, a remnant of this fear: the very term is derived from the Latin word *universus*, meaning ‘turned toward the One’ (*uni-* ‘one’ + *versus* ‘turned’, the past participle of *vertere*).

However, these aberrant or derived movements—marked by meteorological, terrestrial and spiritual contingencies—remained a downward tendency that still depended on the adventures of movement. They too posed a problem, a choice: either one could try to ‘save’ the primacy of movement (saving the appearances), or one could not only accept but *will* the liberation of time with regard to movement. In effect, there were two ways in which movement could be saved. The extensive harmony of the world could be saved by an appeal to the rhythms of *rural time*, with the seasons and harvests as privileged points of reference in the originary time of Nature. The intensive harmony of the soul could be saved by an appeal to *monastic time*, with its privileged moments of prayers and vespers; or more generally, by an appeal to an originary spiritual life of interiority (Luther, Kierkegaard). By contrast, the liberation of time would take place in the city, an ‘enemy’ that was nonetheless engendered by both the rural communities and monasteries themselves. The time of the city is neither a rural life nor a spiritual life, but the time of everyday life: there is no longer either an originary time or a derived time, but only an *ordinary time*.

### *The Liberation of Time: Ordinary Time*

The sources of this liberation of time from movement were multiple, having roots in the Reformation as well as the development of capitalism. Max Weber, for instance, showed that the Reformation became conscious of this liberation of time by joining together the two ideas of a ‘profession’—one’s profession of faith and one’s professional activity—so that mundane professions like that of a cobbler were deemed to be as dignified as any sacred calling. Unlike the monk, whose duty was to be otherworldly, denying the self and the world, the fulfilment of one’s duty in worldly affairs became the highest form that the moral

activity of individuals could take. There was only one time—everyday time—and it is in this time that we would now find our salvation (Weber 2002). Likewise, Marx showed that this vision of *temporal activity* ('What do you do with your time?'), which is no longer grounded in a cosmic rhythm or a spiritual harmony, would eventually find its new model in the 'abstract' time of capitalism, which replaced the privileged moments of agricultural work with the any-instant-whatever (*l'instant quelconque*) of mechanised work. Time became money, the form under which money produces money (usury or credit); and money itself became 'the course of time': the abstract time of capitalism became the concrete time of the city (Deleuze 1984: 7 Feb.). It was Heidegger who would ultimately produce a prodigious philosophical concept of the everyday and its relation to time, though he still maintained the old distinction between an originary and a derived time (an authentic time and an inauthentic time).

This liberation of time resulted in a fundamental change in the relationship of philosophy to the thought of everyday life (opinion). Up until the seventeenth century, one could say that, philosophically, everyday life was suspended in order to accede to something that was not everyday, namely, a meditation on the eternal. By contrast, the ordinary time of urban everydayness would no longer relate to the eternal, but to something very different, namely, *the production of the new*. In other words, given the flow of average everydayness, I can either raise myself vertically toward the transcendent or the eternal, at least on Sundays (or Saturdays, or Fridays), through understanding or faith; or I can remain at the horizontal flow of everydayness, in which temporality moves toward the new rather than the eternal (the priority of the future as the fundamental dimension of time). The production of the new will be the correlate of ordinary time in exactly the same way that the discovery of the true was the correlate of originary time with the ancients. The aim of philosophy will no longer be to *discover* pre-existent truths outside of time, but to *create* non-pre-existing concepts within time (Deleuze 1984: 17 Apr., 4 May).

### *Kant: Time as Independent and Autonomous*

If Kant was the first to give a philosophical expression to this new conception of time, it is because he freed time entirely from its subordination to movement, rendering it independent and autonomous.<sup>3</sup> Kant drew the necessary consequences from the cosmological and psychological anomalies of movement: he freed time entirely from

cosmology and psychology, as well as the eternal. In Kant, the Self (the soul), the World (the cosmos) and God (the eternal) are all shown to be transcendent illusions of reason that are derived from our new position in time. Time ceases to be the number of movement, and no longer depends on anything but itself; time no longer measures movement, but movement itself (whether originary or derived, anomalous or aberrant) now takes place within time. The reversal can be seen in the opening pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Before Kant, time had largely been defined by succession, space by coexistence, and eternity by permanence.<sup>4</sup> In Kant, succession, simultaneity and permanence are all shown to be *modes* or *relations* of time: succession is the rule of what is in different times; simultaneity is the rule of what is at the same time; and permanence is the rule of what is for all times. Put differently, succession (series) is the synthetic relation between the parts of time, simultaneity (set) is the synthetic relation between the contents of time, and what is permanent (duration) is something that endures in time by passing through successive states and possessing simultaneous states. In Kant, the self becomes a temporal entity that endures in time (permanence), that has intensive states (simultaneity) and that passes from one extensive state to another (succession).

This is what Deleuze means, then, when he says that Kant reconceived time as a *pure and empty form*: time is an empty form that is no longer dependent on either the extensive or intensive movements that fill time; instead, time has become the pure and immutable form of everything that moves and changes – not an eternal form, but precisely the form of what is *not* eternal. Yet time itself is neither succession, nor simultaneity, nor permanence, since time cannot be reduced to any of its modes, or to what takes place within time (its content). We cannot even say that the immutable form of time is permanent, since what is permanent – no less than what is successive or simultaneous – appears and is perceived in time, whereas the immutable form of time itself cannot be perceived. As the pure form of change, time itself is defined by its infinite variability, and the definition of *chaos* that Deleuze gives in *What Is Philosophy?* is itself a description of the pure form of time: ‘Chaos is characterized less by the absence of determinations than by the infinite speed with which they take shape and vanish’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 42). In other words, within the manifold of time, chaos is defined by the lack of any synthesis or rhythm between these determinations, ‘which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence (118).

If there is any salvation within this pure and empty form of time – time rendered ordinary – it takes place, in Kant, through the activity of *synthesis*, which is a process brought to bear, not on time itself, but on the modes of time, in order to render both being and knowledge possible.<sup>5</sup> Under the aspect of succession, what appears in time is a multiplicity of parts, which must be synthesised by the subject in an *apprehension* that fixes them in an ever-variable present. Under the aspect of simultaneity, moreover, I must not only apprehend parts in order for knowledge to be possible, but I must also *reproduce* the past parts, that is, I must remember the preceding parts in time and synthesise or ‘contract’ them with the present parts. Under the aspect of permanence, finally, I can synthesise the apprehended present and the previous reproduced presents with the permanence of something that endures in time, which is related to a concept in an act of *recognition* (‘so it’s a table’). Readers of *Difference and Repetition* – notably in the third chapter on repetition – will recognise the ways in which Deleuze modifies the Kantian analysis of synthesis in the direction of a concept of *passive syntheses*.<sup>6</sup> The first synthesis (present) is reformulated into the passive organic and corporeal syntheses (habit) that make any receptivity, in Kant’s sense, possible. The second synthesis (past), following Bergson, posits the need for a concept of the ‘pure’ past, without which the passing of time would be impossible. And the third synthesis (future), rather than appealing to *recognition*, instead is the condition for the production of the *new*.

‘The more we study the nature of time,’ Bergson would later write, ‘the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new’ (Bergson 1911: 13). The production of the new – including the activities of creation found in philosophy, science and art – is the direct consequence of this liberation of time. Though the term rarely appears in the text, *What Is Philosophy?* is a book on time, or more precisely, a study of the determinations of thought that take place within the pure form of time. What Hume called the association of ideas (resemblance, contiguity, causality) links together our ideas in time with a minimum of constant rules, thereby forming a realm of *opinion* that protects us from chaos. But philosophy, science and art do more than this, and Deleuze describes their respective activities using his own (created) vocabulary: from the infinite *variability* of time, philosophers extract *variations* that converge as the components of a consistent concept; scientists extract *variables* that enter into determinable relations in a function, thereby providing

a referent within time; and artists extract *varieties* that enter into the composition of a being of sensation (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 202).

## II. 'The Power of the False': Deleuze's Critique of the Form of the True

There are many consequences that Deleuze derives from his theory of time, including the analytic of concepts presented in *What Is Philosophy?* But the consequence I would like to briefly examine here concerns the problem with which we began. 'The pure and empty form of time', Deleuze says, places the traditional concept of truth in crisis. In saying this, of course, Deleuze is entering into heavily mined territory, since contemporary philosophers tend to speak of the true with a reverence once reserved for the divine, as if its value is and should be unquestioned. What philosopher would ever want to say that they are not interested in getting at the truth? Yet truth is itself a concept, with its own becoming, and Nietzsche was perhaps one of the first see that the concept of truth itself must be seen as a philosophical problem:

Let us thus define our own task—the value of truth must for once be experimentally *called into question*. [...] Suppose we want the truth: Why not rather untruth? Or uncertainty? Or ignorance? [...] Though it scarcely seems credible, it finally almost seems to us as if the problem had never even been put so far—as if we were the first to see it, fix our eyes on it, and *risk* it. For it does involve a risk, and perhaps there is none that is greater. (Nietzsche 2000: 199)

Deleuze's thesis is that the concept of truth enters into crisis when it confronts the form of time: the *form of the true* then gives way to the *power of the false*. But what exactly does Deleuze mean by this? Rather than attempting to resolve this problem, I would simply like to pose five questions that will at least help us lay out the conditions of this problem.

1. Speaking in general terms, the true is not the same thing as the real; it is rather the distinction between the real and the imaginary (or between essence and appearance). The false is not the imaginary; it is rather the confusion of the imaginary with the real (or of the apparent with the essential). What we call error is the act that consists of making this confusion: the false is effectuated in error, which confuses the imaginary and the real. But this leads to the first question: how then do we normally distinguish the false from the true? Response: only the true has a *form* (*eidos*). The false has no form; error consists, precisely, in giving the false the form of the true. Since Aristotle, as we have seen, the form of



the true has had a precise sense: the universal and the necessary. The true is that which is universal and necessary, always and everywhere, in all times and in all places. This is not a universality of *fact* but a universality of *right*. In fact, it may be that people rarely think, and rarely think the true. But to say that only the true has a form is to insist that, in principle, for instance, if you think a triangle, you cannot deny that its three angles are necessarily equal to two right angles. Universality and necessity qualify the *judgements* that are made of the form of the true. Since the false has no form, judgements made about it are by right deprived of all universality and necessity.

2. Who then is the truthful person? In classical philosophy, what corresponds to the real in an idea is its power to *represent*, while what corresponds to the imaginary is the capacity of an idea (or image) to produce a *modification* of my body or soul. The former attains to essences, while the latter leaves one mired in appearances, and the anguish of the passions. The truthful person is thus someone who would allow their body and soul to be modified only by the form of the true. The activity through which this takes place can be called, following Simondon, the *in-formation* of the soul by the form of the true, which takes as its model the Eternal (the universal and the necessary).<sup>7</sup>

3. When does the false take on a power of its own? If time puts the concept of truth in crisis, it does so not at the level of its content ('truth changes with time'), but rather at the level of its form: the form of time takes the place of the form of the true (the universal and the eternal). One must be clear on the nature of Deleuze's critique: he is not making the claim that truth changes over time (for instance, we once thought the sun revolved around the earth, whereas now we think that the earth revolves around the sun), since that does not at all alter the *form* of the true (it was be true 'for all time' that the earth revolves around the sun – or rather, around the centre of gravity constituted by the sun and the earth and the other planets). Nor is he making the claim that truth is, as people like to say, 'relative' (relative to a culture, to an era, to an individual). Neither of these banalities calls into question the *form* of the true, which remains intact. The only thing that can call into question the *form* of the true (which is universal, eternal and necessary, in all times and in all places) is the *form* of time. And when the form of the true is put into question by the form of time, the false is thereby given a *power* of its own: if the false does not have a form, it nonetheless has a power. When, then, does the false take on a power of its own? When it is freed from the model of truth, that is, when the false is no longer presented as being true. What can disengage the concept of the false

from the model of truth? The answer is: time. Just as Deleuze attempts to formulate a concept of difference-in-itself, freed from its subordination to the concept of identity, so he attempts to formulate a concept of the false-in-itself, freed from its subordination to the concept of truth (and error). But this in no way implies the banal conclusion that ‘everything is false’, which would now be presented as a truth: as Nietzsche said, in one of his most profound phrases, in abolishing the true world we have also abolished the false world of appearances (Nietzsche 1954: 486). There is no longer either truth or appearance, and the false is no longer presented as being true; instead, the false assumes a power of its own.

4. What then is the *power* of the false, and how is it to be distinguished from the *form* of the true? Readers of Deleuze will quickly ascertain Deleuze’s response to this question: if the form of the true is derived from the power of *judgement*, the power of the false is a power of metamorphosis, that is, it is a power of *creation*. Creative of what? At this point, there is no reason not to re-employ the word ‘truth’. The power of the false is creative of truth—but this is, precisely, *a new concept of truth*: truth is no longer a timeless universal to be discovered, but rather a singularity to be created (in time). ‘Philosophy creates concepts’, writes Deleuze, ‘which are neither generalities nor even truths; they are rather of the order of the Singular, the Important, the New’ (Deleuze 2007: 238). The power of the false is nothing other than the power of creation, the power of metamorphosis.

5. A final question: when the form of the true gives way to the power of the false, who then takes the place of the truthful person? Deleuze’s response: when the form of time is put into the concept, the *falsifier* [*le faussaire*] takes the place of the truthful person—and the falsifier is more or less equivalent to the artist, the creator. The falsifier is not a liar, since the liar is localisable (the liar ‘owns’ his lies), whereas the falsifier is non-localisable: the power of the false exists only under the form of a *series* of powers. To ask ‘What is a falsifier?’ is to ask a badly posed question, since the falsifier does not exist apart from an irreducible plurality or multiplicity: behind every falsifier there is only another falsifier (a mask behind every mask). The question becomes: where is one placed within the chain of falsifiers? As Nietzsche showed, the truthful person is himself nothing other than the first power of the false: Plato distinguished between the true world and the apparent world, but to do so he first had to *create* the concept of the Idea. If the power of the false is what Nietzsche called the will to power, one can distinguish two extremes or two powers within this will, namely, the

will to *judge* and the will to *create*, and it is the latter that constitutes the higher power.

To illustrate this distinction between the will to judge and the will to create, I would like to conclude with a consideration of Orson Welles's final film, *F for Fake*. Deleuze suggests that in fact there have been three great presentations of the theme of the falsifier: in philosophy, there is the final book of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (the chain of the 'higher' men, each of which corresponds to a power of the false); in literature, there is Hermann Melville's final masterpiece, *The Confidence-Man*; and in cinema, there is Orson Welles's last film, *F for Fake* (see Deleuze 1989: 134, 145; 1984: 12 Jun.). Welles's film is instructive for our purposes because, among many other things, it examines the story of a man named Hans van Meegeren, who in the 1930s famously forged a number of paintings that he claimed had been done by Johannes Vermeer—the great Dutch painter. How did van Meegeren manage to pass off his forgeries as genuine Vermeers? Precisely because he made use of the criteria of experts, and the expert is someone who *judges*: the expert is able to recognise a true Vermeer by means of criteria he himself has established concerning Vermeer's style and periods. All that a forger like van Meegeren has to do is to study these criteria and use them to produce his forgeries—to the point where the expert will declare, 'This is clearly a genuine Vermeer because it corresponds to all the criteria that I have established.' The expert, Deleuze suggests, always has a forger within him, since they are both nourished off the same substance: the system of judgement (Deleuze 1989: 146).

What, then, is the difference between Vermeer and his forger? Both the artist and the forger belong to the chain of falsifiers, but the difference between them lies in this: Vermeer has a power of metamorphosis, whereas the forger and the expert scarcely know how to change: theirs is already an exhausted life that can do little more than judge the creations of others. The expert and the forger are united in their exaggerated taste for *form* (the form of the true), but the artist is able to take the power of the false to a higher degree that is realised, not in form, but in *transformation*.

It is precisely this vision that animates Deleuze's conception of philosophy: philosophy is the enterprise of the creation of concepts (or the creation of truth), that is, the will to power at its highest degree, which has as its necessary correlate the will 'to have done with judgment' (Deleuze 1997: 126). And this power of creation or metamorphosis, for Deleuze, is nothing other than the power of *time*.

## Notes

1. For a comprehensive analysis of Deleuze's concept of time, see Williams 2011.
2. For Deleuze's discussions of the respective conceptions of time in Plato and Plotinus, see Deleuze 1984: 7 Feb.–27 Mar. Descartes's modern solution to the same problem was to conserve something invariant *within* movement, namely, the quantity of movement, *mv*, the product of mass times velocity.
3. One of the themes of Deleuze's two-volume *Cinema* is that the cinema, in its much shorter history, nonetheless recapitulated this philosophical revolution in the movement–time relation. For a useful summary of this revolution in the concept of time, albeit from a slightly different perspective than Deleuze's, see John Dewey's important 1940 article, 'Time and Individuality' (Dewey 1998: 217–26).
4. See Leibniz 1956: 15: 'As for my own opinion, I have said more than once that I hold space to be something purely relative, as time is—that I hold it to be an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions. For space denotes, in terms of possibility, an order of things that exist at the same time, considered as existing together, without entering into their particular manners of existing. And when many things are seen together, one consciously perceives this order of things among themselves.'
5. Deleuze insists that it is important not to confuse the synthesis of time with time itself. In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1962), Martin Heidegger reintroduced an originary time because he wrongly considered the synthesis of time to be an originary time. See Deleuze's critique in Deleuze 1984: 17 Apr.
6. For the *active syntheses* of the transcendental ego found in Kant, Deleuze substitutes a theory of *passive synthesis*, derived in part from Husserl. Joe Hughes provides an insightful analysis of the concept of passive synthesis in Hughes 2008. See also Faulkner 2005.
7. On the concept of information, in this sense, see Simondon 2005.

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