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Winner of a **GOLD MEDAL** (essay by [PIETARI KAARO](#), from Finland)

## ESSAY

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### On resisting the regimes of truth

The quote in question gives praise to the value of truth, whose value is inherent to it, and those who seek the truth, who value it over anything else. The seekers of truth are, then, juxtaposed against those who see truth as a tool and as a means to an end. Truth need not bring justice or the betterment of humankind through scientific advances in technology. It is valuable regardless, and its seekers noble. But can this truly be so? Does the notion of a truth that is, at its purest, completely independent of humans not imply an ontology that requires conformity to its categories and modalities of existence? Or rather, does it not presuppose such an ontology, which might be classified as totalitarian? After all, if a nation state would assert a similar social ontology, in which all subjects of the state must find their place and conform to their strict categories and roles, in which state control extends to all areas of life, it would surely be immediately denounced as a totalitarian state.

Why should we, then, accept a similar general ontology, which would govern all categories and modalities of existence – categories which the ontology would itself assert and regulate while also presenting them as natural and necessary? This kind of ontology would assert as “causes” those which are only the “effects” of its “regime of truth”. This regime would govern through socialization, education and discipline. As my questions posed might so far imply, I am approaching this question from a poststructuralist perspective. I am therefore inspired by thinkers such as Michel Foucault, who criticized the historical genealogies of many categories of life and revealed the “necessary” as contingent, and Gilles Deleuze, who, on the other hand, developed an alternative ontology that would not lead to conformism into identity categories, and would subordinate identity to difference and multiplicity.

Having established this, I shall develop my critique of the primacy of truth. I am not, however, denying the existence of truth in its entirety; rather, I am simply skeptical of truth’s inherent value. Certainly, there are identities assigned to things by the use of nouns, which people usually assume to reflect a prelinguistic reality of substances. But this sort of assumption is largely unfounded, since we structure reality through language. Language affords us the capability of thought, and to differentiate substances from each other. Because words gain their meaning negatively, by their difference from other words, which do not pre-exist language, our perception of substances are an effect of language. This is why there can be found different mechanism of differentiation and identities in different languages: they have a different structure. Although he was no structuralist, Heidegger expressed a similar idea when he asserted that Dasein can differentiate and articulate beings in many different ways, that the way we



phenomenologically perceive things and their difference from other things is not necessarily the only one.

There is, however, something called “truth”. It is conformity to an ontological system of identities, which are articulated and constructed through language, with the presupposition that our representations of these identities through language are stable and correct. There are simple examples why this presupposition is mistaken. One of these is the identity categories of sex and gender. Judith Butler has argued extensively how the intelligibility of a binary sex and gender are deeply connected to a regime of compulsory heterosexuality. This regime asserts the “naturalness” of heterosexuality, and is consequently undermined by categories of sex, gender and desire, which are not intelligible in its regime. As a consequence, they are seen as impossibilities or developmental failures. This shows us that a regime that assumes a stable binary of gender and sex, from which follow heterosexual desire, is constantly undermined by forms of gender and desire that don’t conform to any category or substance. After all, Butler critiques the metaphysics of substance, since the idea of gender and sex having a coherent substance are the effect of a regulatory regime, which presupposes and consequently asserts them as existing and natural.

This, then, brings us back to the question of the seekers of truth. Is there a truth to gender that can be found? This might seem like the obvious question here, but it is not the one I will ask. There is no truth to be found, that does not simultaneously establish and maintain an ontology which establishes the truth. The question is rather this: What would a search of a truth of gender mean? It would mean the establishment of a regulatory ontology, which would regulate and construct the identities and practices of individuals and which would by nature exclude and make impossible certain forms of identity and types of practice. While most people might be fine with some forms of regulation, this form of regulation would certainly be unendurable to most feminists. This is not a regulation similar to the making of common laws, this is a regulation of subjectivities, the narrowing of possibilities of living and thinking. It is, after all, one of the greatest insights of Foucault’s philosophy, that the main function of the “regimes of truth” is to make some ideas impossible to think, while making others “common sense”.

Is there, then, no disparagement of “the truth”, as the quote states, nor of those who speak of it and convey it? From my perspective, there is nothing but disparagement. While the quote praises truth, and likely sees gaining it as enlightenment of the true nature of things, its seekers as indifferent and completely apolitical, I view truth and the ontology which supports it as fundamentally political. It is asserted, accepted, and consequently it subjects and regulates. The means of this assertion is through institutions, who claim expert knowledge and the right to classify and educate. Medical institutions and their manuals of diagnosis classify certain people as ill and assert the need of adjustment and healing. This prevents some forms of live from being seen as valid and categorizes them as “abnormal”. While most people think nothing of this, asserting that it is for the better of the people who suffer, it must be asked: Can we forget that the classification of homosexuality, gender dysphoria and other forms of sexual and gender deviance as “mental illnesses” were only recently pulled back? Is it not possible, that there are other forms of psychological existence which are classified as illnesses, that in truth are nothing of the sort, that they only cause suffering because of their poor accommodation in modern society? This might be the case with, for example, ADHD.



But what about ignorance? It could easily be asserted that these examples of mine were only examples of ignorance. While this might very well be the case, since nowadays sexual and gender deviancy aren't anymore regarded as mental illnesses, this does not counter the main point of my argument: if there is a regime of truth, it necessarily asserts norms about conformity. We might well expand our ontology to accommodate the LGBTQ+ community, but this does not mean that the problem of normativity is dealt with. As long as there is some notion of truth, there are notions of untruth, of wrongness, of abnormality, and of being faulty. Thus while new identities are accommodated in the realm of the normal, others by default remain as wrong, abnormal and faulty and in need of fixing. Can this conflation of an ontological and ethical authority be justified? And here I am talking of justice, not truth. It is quite clear that a regime of truth cannot accommodate everything, every form of existence and life, since it would end up at some point contradicting itself. If it tried to, it would need to abandon the notion of truth.

Even though it should be quite clear by now, I shall clarify my position: I consider ethics far more important than truth, stability and predictability. The histories of Foucault clearly show the totalitarian character of regimes of truth, who regulate human and nonhuman life and existence. But can truth be so easily discarded in favor of an ontology that isn't concerned with truth, and instead with the proliferation of the possibilities of life. While normally we might ask "what possibilities of life does one have" or "how should one live", disregarding truth allows us to ask "how might one live". This is the question central to Deleuze's philosophy, which doesn't consider truth, nor the possibilities and limits inherent to substantive beings, such as humans. But this is a difficult question, one that requires the one who asks it to surrender themselves to uncertainty. And Deleuze's philosophy is a difficult one, with complex ontological concepts appropriated and reconfigured from the likes of Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche. For this reason, it is not possible to give a sufficient account of his ontological background in this essay, and I will instead focus on his political ontology developed alongside Felix Guattari.

In thinking of the possibilities an entity might have, Deleuze and Guattari disregard any analysis of the physical structure of the entity in question. Instead, they describe entities as "machines", which are not defined by their physical structure, but their capabilities to connect and form couplings with other machines, and the products of these couplings. This disregards truth, since there is no point in analyzing the identity of a machine, what sort of attributes it has, how it might be described by facts whose truth values could be analyzed. In other words, they say "we have no idea what a body is capable". This is because we cannot have a list of all the connections a body can make, when it is considered to be a machine. Such a list might never end. Consider a bike. It is itself a machine, which can form connections with other machines, such as humans. But it is itself composed of more machines, such as its wheels. A bike wheel connecting with other machines might produce a bike-machine, but connecting it with a gallery-machine, for instance, might produce an artwork by Marcel Duchamp. Depending of the connections a machine makes, it can produce new entities the number of which is immense.

The importance here is that there is no notion of truth inherent in machines as described by Deleuze and Guattari. The truth of a machine, what it is and how it should be used, is irrelevant. I propose then a notion of seekers of connections to stand alongside those seekers of truth so praised in the quote. While seekers of truth are loyal to truth, confining themselves to the identities which govern our thought, seekers of connections, on the other hand, disregard truth and identity. Again, this doesn't mean that they deny the existence of truths and identities, which certainly exist in language and regimes of truth, but that they don't let them govern their



ontology and thinking. They would rather consider themselves as machines composed of machines instead of stable beings with specific substances and those possibilities and attributes in virtue of their substance. Seekers of truth see entities as composed of mechanisms, which, contrary to machines, have distinct and predetermined functions. Mechanisms, in the ontology of the seekers of truth, have certain uses. Using them sporadically to form new connections with other machines outside of their purposed use would be “using them wrong”. Here is again we can see a connection between, on the one hand, the ontology of stable identities which make truth and certainty possible, and, on the other hand, normativity.

Despite it being very unorthodox in the tradition of philosophy, it would do no good to argue in favor of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ontology or to present counterarguments against it. This is because such a task would go nowhere. Because counterarguments, in virtue of their attempt to argue, would presuppose the importance of truth in ontological systems, and because Deleuze’s system precisely disregards truth, it would be no different from two language games comparing each other and trying to decide which one of “better” or “more correct”. Since the two ontologies, or language games, don’t even share the notion of truth between them, there is no way to compare the two. Deleuze’s philosophy is mainly interested in the creation of concepts, with the goal being the opening up of new vistas of living and different ways of viewing the world, of structuring thought. This is why he was never interested in providing arguments in favor of his ontology. This does not, however and in my view, diminish the rigidity of his ontological treatises on Spinoza, Nietzsche and difference.

The quote ends by saying “the status of no one is diminished by the truth...” The essay and my arguments above should reveal how this statement is mistaken, although this notion of mistakenness requires that we temporarily abandon Deleuze’s language game for another, which criticizes the notion of truth while maintaining it within its discourse. The irony of this is clear. Once having established Deleuze’s ontology as that which better suits our needs of resisting regimes of truth, it would be pointless to return. Nevertheless, for the sake of this essay, a return is made.

Contrary to the quote’s statement, truth diminishes one’s status in a totalitarian manner: the loss in status is a loss of possibilities and freedom. As we have established in a relatively satisfactory manner, the notion of truth regulates. Truth’s about one’s identities regulate the manner in which one’s possibilities in life and existence are viewed. Saying “one” instead of “a person” is an important distinction, since this does not have to concern only people and humans, but also nonhuman entities. This is all, of course, similar to a totalitarian state, in which state regulation and control is extended to all areas of life. This regulation usually becomes totally automatic, because the regime of truth, or alternatively power, is internalized. Most people accept the stable identities, their substances and necessary attributes that the regimes of truth assert. Consequently, most people think mechanistically, that entities have certain predetermined uses and possibilities, and that they can be used wrong, completely internalizing the normative aspects of this ontology. They take for granted the stable identities of truth, never to consider the possibilities that might come about from the disregarding of truth. They never become seekers of connections.