The Survival of the Narrative: Nietzsche, Truth, and Self-Preservation

Abstract with Contextual Note

This essay takes Nietzsche's "thesis"—that truth is sought only when it serves life—as its starting point to explore the mechanisms of symbolic stabilization that sustain the narrative cohesion of individuals and societies. Rather than opposing Nietzsche to the Ontology of Emerging Complexity (OEC), the text reveals how certain Nietzschean diagnoses anticipate, in psychological and cultural language, dynamics that the OEC interprets on an ontological level. Narrative stabilization, far from being a cognitive error, is presented as a normal and necessary function in the process of matter's complexification. From this convergence, the text proposes that truth is not an absolute value, but a functional operator acting within cycles of stabilization and reorganization. The survival of the narrative is thus understood as part of a structural interplay between form and excess, where ethics emerges as a situated response to the tension between what is preserved and what is transformed. This reading allows us to reconfigure the role of truth, not as an end in itself, but as a transitory element within a system in constant variation.

According to Nietzsche, most people are not genuinely interested in truth or in facts. The dominant concern is to "look good" and "feel good," rather than to understand reality as it is. The focus is not on the real, but on image, comfort, security, control, and status—everything that, even today, guides much of human behaviour. When truth hurts or threatens stability, it tends to be swiftly set aside.

This view, which we might call Nietzsche's "thesis," emerges from his critique of the Western philosophical tradition and of the very notion of a "will to truth." For Nietzsche, the idea that we seek truth as a supreme value is an illusion inherited from moral and religious systems that sought to ground life in a stable and absolute order. In its place, he proposed that life is not oriented toward truth itself, but toward what strengthens, preserves, and intensifies existence. As he writes in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, truth matters only when it "serves life." Outside this framework, it is ignored, rejected, or replaced by more convenient narratives.

What Nietzsche denounces is that, in practice, people do not assess whether something is true, but whether it is useful to maintain their own narrative, whether it is convenient, whether it protects them. We seek truth only when it reinforces our position, confirms our beliefs, or offers consolation. When truth threatens our emotional, social, or cognitive structures, the tendency is to reject it.

This diagnosis fits seamlessly with contemporary dynamics. We live in an era marked by the proliferation of conspiracy theories, ideological bubbles, and ready-made discourses. The dominant logic is not rigorous verification but identity confirmation. If people truly wanted to know what is true, they would be fact-checking, questioning claims, and

confronting evidence. Yet the most common behaviour is to repeat and share only what confirms what they already believe.

The mechanism is simple: if a charismatic speaker presents an idea that resonates with a group's identity, and if that idea reinforces the status and internal cohesion of that "tribe," it is readily accepted. The more the idea confirms the group's central narrative, the stronger the adherence—regardless of its relationship to objective reality.

Nietzsche saw this phenomenon as part of an unconscious strategy of self-preservation: truth becomes secondary when compared to the need to keep coherent the worldview that sustains one's sense of belonging and security. It is a harsh and timely reminder: much of what circulates on social networks, in private conversations, in the backrooms of politics, and in everyday life has little to do with truth and everything to do with maintaining identity-based narratives.

The central issue, therefore, is not that people deliberately distort facts, but that they attribute no relevance to them outside their immediate utility. At its core, it is not about truth—it is about the survival of the narrative.

Nietzsche's "thesis"—that truth is sought only when it serves life—finds partial convergence with the Ontology of Emerging Complexity, but also a decisive divergence.

In the OEC, all material organization—including human societies—is conceived as the result of transient equilibria. These points of stability arise when so-called "tutoring waves" manage, for a limited time, to maintain coherence among interacting elements, delaying the dissipation of their local compatibilities. On the social level, this stabilizing function manifests in the fixation of narratives, beliefs, and values that enable predictability and internal cohesion. It is precisely here that Nietzsche's critique resonates: by identifying that most individuals do not seek truth in itself, but rather the preservation of structures that ensure comfort, security, and identity, the philosopher describes a mechanism that the OEC recognizes as a form of functional stabilization.

However, in the OEC, stability is neither the final state nor an absolute goal; it is only a provisional stage in the broader flow of matter and the symbolic. Against the tendency to eternalize form—whether through immutable moral codes or impermeable social consensuses—operates the force of operative excess: the proliferation of possibilities, connections, and combinations that exceed the prevailing structure. It is in the confrontation between stabilization and excess that reorganization is triggered. From this tension, new equilibria emerge, different from the previous ones yet equally transient, inaugurating a continuous cycle of variation and recomposition.

Thus, while Nietzsche emphasizes the psychological and cultural dimension of the attachment to convenient truths, the OEC expands this diagnosis to an ontological plane, interpreting such attachment as part of a broader structural interplay: the oscillation between forces that seek to preserve form and forces that exceed it. In this perspective, such alternation is neither controllable nor subject to human will—it is an inevitable expression of the very development of material complexity. What falls to us is not to direct or correct the process, but to understand it in its internal logic, recognizing that stability and excess succeed one another, and that from this alternation new forms emerge, and with them, new possibilities of life.

References

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