

**FRACTAL ONTOLOGY AND ANARCHIC SELFHOOD**

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**FRACTAL ONTOLOGY AND ANARCHIC SELFHOOD:  
MULTIPLICITOUS BECOMINGS**

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**A Thesis**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis explores the notion of selfhood and its relationship to larger philosophical frameworks. In Chapter One the author traces various understandings of the self as they have appeared historically in Western philosophy. This understanding of the self posits it as something static and unchanging. The author argues that this was largely the result of certain ontological or metaphysical commitments of the broader philosophical frameworks in which the self was situated. In Chapter Two Deleuze's ontology is explored as an alternative to what the author takes to be typical Western ontologies. It is argued that Deleuze's 'fractal ontology' is radically different because it begins and ends with multiplicity and becoming. This new understanding of ontology provides the basis for understanding the self as multiplicitous and anarchic rather than static and essentialist. In the final chapter, the author seeks to explore the resulting understanding of selfhood as decentralized and multiplicitous. It is asserted that such an understanding of the self is philosophically compelling given the new Deleuzian ontology. It is further argued that this understanding of the self is practically superior to traditional static understandings of the self because it more fully accommodates personal and societal growth.

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## **Introduction**

The concepts of personal identity and selfhood are deceptive in their apparent simplicity. Immediate reflection and common language both seem to point to the notion that there is an 'I' which is somehow an enduring, singular individual. This 'I' is thought to somewhat statically pass through the flux that is space-time. It seems that while circumstances and relations pertaining to the particular components of a given person's body and or abstract 'identity' (personality, temperament etc.) might change, there is a *something* which somehow remains the same, a core *me-ness* which binds together the otherwise chaotic flows of a life in a material universe of change. Furthermore, this notion is enshrined in law as the cornerstone of liability, ownership and responsibility. This 'something' or 'me-ness' has been called by many names. There is the soul, the self, the Cartesian I or cogito, the noumenal self, the particular consciousness, the ego and the owned agency, to name a few of the versions of this idea. It is important to note that this common sense concept, like many cultural artifacts, is the culmination of thousands of years of philosophical enquiry. However, over the past three hundred years or so philosophers have gradually come to terms with the reality that human identity and selfhood are much more complicated than this and that perhaps there never was a static or enduring self to begin with. In other words, it is becoming more and more obvious to some thinkers that static and



enduring selfhood is nothing more than a “useful fiction”.<sup>1</sup> In short, the static self is a narrative used to facilitate social relations. The reality is that behind this narrative we find dynamic individuals who are vectors of flux both internally (as their 'components' alter) and externally (as their relations alter). As Deleuze and Guattari put it, “each of us [is] several,...mak[ing] use of everything that [comes] within range, what is closest as well as what is farthest away.”<sup>2</sup> Each human animal is multiplicitous and yet she keeps her “own name...out of habit, purely out of habit. To make [herself] recognizable in turn...[and] because it's nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking.”<sup>3</sup> Which is to say that although we are all multiplicitous, we sometimes act *as if* we are the same to facilitate social interactions. Although the earth actually revolves around the sun, in our culture we know the meaning(s) of the statement “the sun always rises”, just as I continue to direct my attention to a voice that calls out “Will” even though the being which associates with this name is a changing composite and not a stable or enduring structure.

Furthermore, the reification of the concept of an enduring and static self seems to have some unwelcome consequences. It is apparent that overstretching the concept beyond its useful applications might be responsible for barriers to self

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1 This is the conclusion of Raymond Martin and John Berresi. See *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006).

2 *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari. p.3

3 *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari. p.3

actualization and personal as well as societal development. Treating the socially useful but abstract notion of static selfhood as something concrete compels individuals and institutions alike to forcibly re-instantiate identities or 'selves' which could not possibly mesh with the multifarious and novel situations constantly arising from the transient material universe. It is to “over-code” one's life by engaging with a “segregative” rather than “nomadic” mode of life, as Deleuze and Guattari might say.<sup>4</sup> In other words, to be the 'same' self is to actively constrain one's dynamism and is not a mere fact of reality which must be passively accepted as a 'law of nature'. A quick but slightly deeper reflection upon the matter reveals the merit of not forcing the re-actualization of a static self and further demonstrates that, although it is convenient to act as *if* something is the same, the 'truth' is that a given entity is never more than a semblance of what it has been. For instance, I am about to graduate from McMaster University. One might ask: Is it the same university as it was when it was founded in 1890? If by same we mean any of the following I should certainly hope the answer is no: do we mean the same curriculum, buildings, professors or students? What about me, the person about to graduate? Again, I certainly hope that I am not exactly the same as I was when I first stepped through the doors of University Hall, for that would mean that I have failed to cultivate any new skills or understandings. I

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983) Deleuze and Guattari, page 276f.

know for a fact that the academic writing these words is nowhere to be found in the child sitting in front of the principal's office many years ago. What is perhaps most striking about these examples is that, while the initial reaction might be to want the two moments (of my life or McMaster's history) to possess a fundamental identity connection, there are good reasons why something remaining the same would be understandable. Would I have made it through the doors of University Hall had I not fundamentally changed since childhood? More importantly would I ever make it back out through those doors without changing by deepening my philosophical knowledge and thus altering my perspective on life in general and my life in particular? Would McMaster's science and engineering programs be as prominent as they are today if the school's focus had remained tied to a literal reading of its founding motto "*ΤΑ ΠΑΝΤΑ ΕΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΩΙ ΣΥΝΕΣΤΗΚΕΝ*"?<sup>5</sup>

These are highly debatable questions with no clear answers, which is precisely why this topic deserves deeper philosophical treatment. There are two important points to take from these rather banal examples. First, it is not clear, even at a very shallow level, that people (or institutions for that matter) actually ever remain the same. This first point can be more substantially understood by an exploration of Deleuze's ontology. Resulting from this, and perhaps more importantly is the fact that, if this is true then individuals and institutions ought to

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5 "All things cohere in Christ"

be encouraged to embrace (in the case of individuals) and developed to accommodate (with regard to institutions), change and impermanence. This point is substantiated in Chapter Three. It should be noted that while there is a certain semblance of the two 'I' moments discussed above (either of my past and present or McMaster's), the semblance is more of a spectral presence which creates a field for further 'actualization' in a given present moment. Again, this is best understood through Deleuze's ontology using his language surrounding immanence as discussed in Chapter Two.

The point of these examples and general discussion is to suggest that the static conception of selfhood seems to force a mode of self understanding which is mostly conducive to what Merleau-Ponty calls “psychological rigidity”, a mode of being which limits the individual's ability to embrace ambiguity and creatively interact with their milieu in the actualization of a multiplicitous self-in-worlds. The static understanding of the self prohibits the degree to which one may creatively invent and re-invent their self and places unnecessary limits on the possibility for ongoing personal development. In light of recent developments in theory, I propose that identity and selfhood are better understood as dynamic and anarchic in nature. That is to say, each human individual is more like a collection of interacting and interpenetrating selves which perpetually change as these 'selves' are actualized and de-actualized, utilized, come to the fore, cooperate, compete,

fade away, and are created, re-created and de-created within given situations and relations. To put it another way, each human being is a multiplicitous or anarchic self, constantly becoming in situation and is not limited by an essential or static core self. As previously suggested, this conception of selfhood is compelling both philosophically and practically. First, it is a more accurate way to understand personal identity given the status of selfhood in philosophical discussions and shifts in ontology in recent philosophical literature. Furthermore, the multiplicitous or anarchic understanding of selfhood is a way to better accommodate personal and social development. A very unique aspect of this understanding of selfhood is that it does not preclude acting *as if* there is a static self in particular social situations, an assertion which would certainly make social interactions and cooperation difficult, if not impossible. On the contrary, the anarchic conception of selfhood simply suggests that the static or enduring conception of the self is but one, most likely synthetic, aspect of an otherwise largely heterogenous and changing collection of dynamic identities and relations belonging to human agents. Anarchic selfhood, as the name suggests, allows for many selves to coexist without one, whether conceptual or actual, 'ruling' over the others.

To this end, the following work seeks to outline what anarchic selfhood is and how it is a better way to understand selfhood both philosophically and

practically. It is more adequate philosophically because postmodern developments in ontology, specifically through the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, suggest that longstanding beliefs regarding essence and being are mistaken, or perhaps simply overbearing, and ought to be replaced with or make room for multiplicity and becoming. With regard to practicality, the understanding of the self as anarchic or multiplicitous allows for a higher degree of self-actualization without any significant loss to the social institutions of responsibility and obligation. This way of understanding the self provides interesting insights into how freedom from a static identity results in a type of 'redemptive responsibility' compatible with personal and social development rather than the more limited retributive responsibility which might be associated with static selfhood.

### **Chapter Outlines**

To gain a grasp of what anarchic selfhood entails and why it is a better way to understand selfhood it will be useful to explore how the static conception of the self came to be prominent in Western philosophy. As such, the first chapter explores the origins of the notion of an enduring self in the Western philosophical tradition as well as the challenges issued to it in more recent philosophy. This chapter highlights the fact that the notion of a static or unchanging self in Western philosophy has most often been the byproduct of larger philosophical frameworks. That is to say, it was conceived as an often unexplained aid which might rescue

otherwise problematic philosophies which seemed to their authors to be necessary for one reason or another. In many cases these larger philosophical systems were attempts to establish a synthetic stability or stasis in the face of the otherwise transient human universe, usually for ethical purposes. In this way it has been a mere convenient 'unexplained explainer' which eventually fell out of fashion as these larger philosophical frameworks were more substantially challenged, although not before the static self was reified and culturally institutionalized.

In Chapter One special attention will be given to Plato's notion of the self (or the soul as he called it, the usual translation of *psyche*) for three reasons. First, it seems to be the most substantial early account of an enduring self because it revolutionized the ancient Greek notion of the soul. The second reason Plato is given special attention, a point related to the first, is that his invention of the enduring soul seems to bear heavily on most if not all of the subsequent Western philosophy that posits such a self. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is clear that this concept is in fact little more than a byproduct of Plato's attempt to formulate a universalist ethics (and metaphysics). It is likely that Plato was responding to what might be called a proto-relativism that he seems to have foreseen in the works of his contemporaries who were reflecting on the transient world.<sup>6</sup> As an aside, the process by which Plato's invented enduring selfhood

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<sup>6</sup> This is suggested by C.D.C. Reeve in his "Introduction" to Plato's *Republic*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) See p.xv

became embedded in philosophy, culture, and eventually social institutions, reveals something very interesting about the relationship among these three things: the fact that they co-emerge and deeply affect each other. The story of the evolution of the self in Western philosophy showcases what Deleuze refers to as the deep interconnection of 'modes of thought and modes of life' where ways of thinking influence and determine ways of living which further determine ways of thinking and so on in a mutual transfer.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this particular example of co-emergence, where selfhood is understood as static, is one where 'thought', by positing something which is taken to be ultimately enduring and largely unchanging, substitutes the dialogical progression of life with a dialectical nihilation. That is to say, the initial dialogue between life and thought becomes entirely one sided in favour of thought, which favours rigid order and forced consistency.

Because selfhood is deeply connected to broader philosophical frameworks, and because most of these frameworks have been based in some attempt to explain being in terms of permanence, Chapter Two focuses on an alternate ontology: Deleuze's fractal ontology. In this chapter, it is argued that Deleuze makes becoming and multiplicity primary facets of the processes of the universe on every level. This alternate ontology provides a basis for why the

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<sup>7</sup> See *Pure Immanence: A Life*. Deleuze, (New York: Zone, 2001) p.66



anarchic understanding of selfhood is compelling philosophically. This contemporary ontological development opens the way, conceptually, for a re-examination of selfhood. Deleuze's notions of immanence, multiplicity, and becoming, insofar as they are primary to the processes of the universe, provide a way to understand the processes of selfhood without reliance on permanence. Because Deleuze's ontology is compelling, a shift in the concept of selfhood becomes philosophically compelling and viable.

The final chapter turns more explicitly to a discussion of anarchic selfhood. Using the concepts developed by Deleuze and building from contemporary understandings of selfhood, this chapter begins with an outline of what exactly anarchic selfhood entails. It is further argued that this multiplicitous understanding of the self, which in turn encourages personal and institutional fluidity, better accommodates a developmental mode of living. Insofar as the anarchic understanding of the self is actively engaged, individual human agents become less compelled to replicate particular self-states or self-state series. In this sense, to embrace the self as multiplicitous is to remove unnecessary barriers to self exploration. However, an immediately apparent problem with such a position is that, while personal freedom is maximized, personal responsibility might be shirked as a 'failed experiment'. However, an understanding of responsibility as a personal redemptive responsibility is put forward as a possible way to avoid this

pitfall. Personal redemptive responsibility gives preference to present actualized situations rather than present punishments directed at decontextualized pasts. In this way the emphasis is shifted towards development and forgiveness rather than 'correction' and punishment. Although there is much work to be done in unfolding Deleuze's fractal ontology, Chapter Three provides some compelling reasons why the anarchic or multiplicitous understanding of the self is desirable for practical reasons.

#### **A Note on the Pragmatism of Terms**

Before progressing it is important to make one thing clear from the outset. It is, in fact, very possible to point to a particular human agent and utter the words “that human animal right there is the one I know as Alice Murdoch” with some degree of accuracy. However, saying such things can be very misleading with regard to selfhood. An analogy might help to clarify why this is so. There is a river in Toronto known as the Humber River. It is convenient to call it by one name but what exactly are we referring to when we do so? It cannot be the water, for that is always changing as it flows from its source to Lake Ontario before traveling to the St. Lawrence River and eventually to the Atlantic Ocean. It cannot be the river banks for these are always changing as well, albeit at a slower rate. Perhaps one might say it is the same river over time because it has the same source and feeds into the same place. But what if the source feeds more than one

river and each one leads to the same place eventually? We would then have to say that it is the same river because it has a particular source and a particular destination and is in a particular location. However, on closer inspection and depending on what we use as a reference point, the location too seems to be in flux. If we were hovering above the earth and not moving relative to it, the river would not remain in the same place. It is not even necessary to go to this extreme. It has already been noted that the riverbanks change and thus the location of the river is slowly changing relative to the features directly around it. Perhaps some might settle and say that it is the same river because it has a particular source, flows to a particular place, and is in roughly the same location relative to that which is around it (say the cities of Toronto and Mississauga).

What we are left with now is that the Humber River is something made up of parts and relations which are constantly changing, rapidly as is the case with the water, and slowly as is the case with the banks and its location relative to features in its direct vicinity. Even with all of these qualifiers, it is difficult to tell exactly what it is about it that merits calling it the same river beyond the fact that it is convenient to do so. In this sense, what is meant by 'same' is not 'self-same' in the strict sense which seems to often be assumed. Rather, often if not always, when it comes to the identification of dynamic things, of which human animals are certainly not the least complex, 'same' means something like “changing in both

constitution and relations but similar enough to be treated as though it is self same when it is either convenient, productive or useful to do so”. In this way it is not necessary to take what is being said here about selfhood and identity to mean that we should not refer to particular human animals, or particular rivers, by the names given to them or not act as though they are loosely the 'same' human animal (or river). It is sometimes useful and other times necessary to do such things, which is why the term “useful fiction” is preferable. By useful fiction it is meant that the treatment of people or dynamic things as 'the same' is really just a part of a narrative of familiarity which enables certain activities. The 'real' aspect of the narrative is that there actually is a particular human animal or person or river. The fictive component is that these particular things are singular, static, or unchanging in their constitutions and relationships. The problem occurs when this narrative is taken to be wholly factual because, as will become evident, such an attitude can become a rather large impediment to human creativity, self actualization and personal, as well as societal, development. In other words, when all is said and done we may still call each other by name for particular purposes, “just as we are accustomed to say that rivers and springs remain the same, even though all the time [they are changing]”,<sup>8</sup> as Aristotle would say. The only real provision to such utterances, one which Aristotle certainly would not have allowed for, is that we

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8 *Politics*. Aristotle. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1998) p.70

recognize that they are really little more than *customary* utterances which facilitate certain actions. Such utterances indicate only the possibility for a relative sameness and not self-sameness in the strict sense. In this regard we should not be surprised when an old friend is no longer the same person once known or when two lovers 'grow apart' or when a decent person becomes a criminal or a criminal a decent person.

## **Chapter 1**

### **A Brief Overview of Selfhood In Western Philosophy**

As with many concepts in Western philosophy, the concept of the self as something which endures appears to begin in ancient Greece, is eventually filtered through theological philosophy, and is re-examined and altered by Enlightenment philosophers before eventually being unmasked and dethroned by modern science and postmodern philosophy as a mere conceptual construct. In their recent book *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: an Intellectual History of Personal Identity*, Raymond Martin and John Barresi provide a well rounded and in-depth survey of the philosophy of the self in Western thought. Unfortunately this is not the place to construct as thorough an investigation as these authors provide. It will be enough here to outline what appears to me to be the most important developments

in static or enduring selfhood.<sup>9</sup> The main conclusion of Martin and Barresi is that the idea of a static, unified or enduring self is in fact nothing more than a “useful fiction”. A less emphasized though certainly acknowledged point in this work is that the concept itself was initially taken as 'something used to explain' and that it took centuries for it to become 'something which needed to be explained',<sup>10</sup> an endeavor which would ultimately prove to be nonviable unless the static or enduring aspect was abandoned. This point requires deeper consideration because it highlights how a 'useful fiction' or conventional narrative can become reified and institutionalized. In other words, the static self is an example of a pragmatic but theoretically unjustifiable concept which nonetheless deeply altered human self perception, social interaction and the nature of social institutions. To get a clear understanding of how this concept became prominent, it will be useful to trace some of the key moments in the history of Western philosophy regarding static selfhood and consider why exactly the concept was introduced in the first place.

### **Platonism: an Origins Tale**

With some notable exceptions, the history of the self is dominated by a static or enduring conception of the self. In many if not all of these cases it acts as

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9 For a more detailed look into the history of selfhood in Western Philosophy the reader should consult the aforementioned work and *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011) edited by Shaun Gallagher.

10 *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.296

a justification or explanation of a larger, usually ethical or political, philosophical framework. The theoretical roots of static selfhood and its use as an unexplained explainer stretch from ancient Greek philosophy. Martin and Barresi note that while some pre-Socratic accounts of an enduring soul (roughly equivalent to what today is called the self) do exist, it was Plato who gave the first substantial and most influential philosophical account of the notion. It is true that many of the pre-Socratic expressions of the self posited the existence of a soul which survives or endures bodily death. However, the afterlife in Hades was simply taken as a given, a natural end to the somewhat capricious toils of human life.<sup>11</sup> The pre-Socratic idea of surviving bodily death is likely related to the larger ancient Greek proto-philosophy or cultural framework which relied on the gods and heroes to explain events and convey meaning, as is evident in the work of Homer. The gods provided a metaphysical explanation of the otherwise chaotic world and an immortal soul seemed like a natural extension of this. However, there is an important difference between the pre-Socratic soul and Plato's understanding of the concept. In the former the soul, while loosely immortal, was not really the same as the living person. It was thought that after death the 'soul leaves the body to exist in Hades as a shadow largely dissociated from the organism it was once tied to'.<sup>12</sup> The soul was thought to be immortal but not necessarily associated with

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11 Ibid. p 10f

12 Ibid. p.9

an enduring self. If the soul in the afterlife was to be approached by a living person familiar to the organism with which the soul was once associated, it would be indifferent towards and perhaps unrecognizable to the person because it is a mere “shadow” or “phantom...with its wits completely gone...[having] left manhood...behind.”<sup>13</sup> Plato seems to have been well aware of the common notion that after death the soul, a shadow largely unrelated to and distinct from the once living organism, travelled to the wretched Hades where it inevitably spent eternity. As we shall see this was a problem because if all lives have such a macabre fate, then there seems to be no reason why living humans should be concerned about how they live (it would suffice to seek worldly pleasures by any means).<sup>14</sup> In particular, why should anyone be concerned with living an ethical life? In any case, Plato suggests that in an ideal education, the parts of the great poems which suggest such things should be edited out,<sup>15</sup> which would essentially eradicate them from Greek culture.

Although the life of the organism bears on the afterlife in some ancient Greek accounts (heroes, for example could join the gods), there seems to be an understanding that the soul in the afterlife is distinct from the organism in life. This is roughly the position Heraclitus and his follower Cratylus took. What is

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13 A quote from Homer in *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.66-67

14 See, for example, *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Book II. Plato. Here and in the previous book Socrates' interlocutors point out the many reasons why it seems that it is better to be unjust and thought just than to be just and thought unjust.

15 See, for example, *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Book III. Plato



fascinating about these two thinkers is that they were also captivated by the impermanence of the physical world in which they lived. Heraclitus is credited with having noted that one “cannot step into the same river twice” while his disciple took it one step further by turning the phrase to be “one cannot step into the same river once.”<sup>16</sup> The realization that the human universe is fundamentally one of change and impermanence is not one to be taken lightly. In a sense it is the ancient equivalent to Nietzsche’s famous proclamation that “God is dead”.<sup>17</sup> Both sentiments indicate the possibility that there might not be a transcendent meaning beyond the particular life and culture of individuals and groups. That which had been taken as sacred, right, wrong etc. becomes simple amoral occurrences in an ocean of mere occurrence in a universe of flux. While this reading may be a bit strong and it is unclear if this sentiment was very common amongst the ancient Greeks, there is evidence in Plato’s work that he was, in fact, concerned with the type of (a)moral relativism which seems to have been emerging in the philosophies of his contemporaries.<sup>18</sup> For example, in *Republic* the serious discussion of what justice might be and why it is desirable begins when his interlocutors point out that whether the gods exist or not there seems to be no good reason to suppose that something can be good in its own right. Adeimantus,

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16 Quoted in *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) p.11. Martin and Barresi

17 See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New York: Penguin, 1976) Nietzsche.

18 Reeve suggests Plato’s concerns surrounding relativism and Heraclitus in his “Introduction” to *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004). See p.xv

for example, having argued that it seems possible to live a rewarding or good life of injustice without reprisal, demands that Socrates demonstrate why something like justice should be taken to be intrinsically good.<sup>19</sup> This is a particular expression of relativistic value systems where what is good and the good life itself are relative to circumstances which are changing and multifarious and therefore uncertain and morally ambiguous. If everything in the human universe is constantly changing how can one hold values in esteem; ought they not change with circumstances? If the appearance of being just, for example, is enough to reap the same benefits in life and the afterlife is the same for everyone (excluding heroes), why should we be concerned with actually being just or with any ethical actions whatsoever? The upshot is that even if one attempts to live a 'just' life how are they to know that what they take to be just is in fact 'right'? It is questions such as these which caused Plato to formulate his doctrine of the forms and by extension the enduring the soul (self). Both of these ideas, in one way or another, would come to dominate the discourse surrounding selfhood in the West for millennia to come.

One of Plato's most famous, and no less controversial, ideas was the realm of the forms. Where others relied on the myths of the gods or the cruelty of fate to explain the meaning (or lack thereof) of existence, Plato posited a great quest for

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<sup>19</sup> *Republic*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.45

knowledge which leads to a genuine and universally good life.<sup>20</sup> Again, he was not satisfied with relying on the mythology of the gods because it had proven insufficient to explain why something might be good in itself.<sup>21</sup> For Plato the saving grace of a world of transience and fleeting meaning, the world he likely discovered in the work of Heraclitus, is the realm of forms which is permanent, unmoving, and somehow transcends such a world.<sup>22</sup> It is not necessary here to discuss Plato's forms at length. It should suffice to say that his metaphysics includes a type of idealism such that what exists in the ever changing phenomenal world of embodied human existence can partake in something greater: the ideal, unchanging and perfect form of that transient thing. This opens up the possibility of a standard of evaluation which is not subject to the flux of existence. The degree to which something participates in its form is the degree to which it can be said to be better or worse based on how much it participates in said form. It is apparent that this is a fact applicable to everything in the changing physical world. There is a form for tables and the experienced and learned craftsman looks towards it when constructing her imperfect worldly version of it. A superior table will be one which approximates the form to a greater degree. In stark contrast to

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20 See *Republic*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Book VII and *Symposium*. Plato. p.48f

21 For Plato's argument on why the gods are not enough to sustain why something, such as justice, can be good in itself see Adeimantus' speech beginning on p.40 of *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004). His argument hints towards agnosticism and atheism on the one hand and absolutism and the inevitable cruelty of the afterlife on the other.

22 Translator's Introduction. C.D.C. Reeve in *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato p.xvi

this, a painter who paints a table looks toward the imperfect worldly constructions of the craftsman for guidance on how to create a slightly less perfect representation of the table. Because this representation is based on a worldly reflection of a form and is thus a reflection of a reflection it is necessarily worse because it is necessarily farther from the form.<sup>23</sup> In addition to this, the realm of the forms also contains the forms of abstract concepts such as justice and the good which are assented to via the virtue of wisdom.<sup>24</sup> This can be seen as problematic for Plato's work in general. For example, *Republic* is an attempt, among other things, to understand justice. He tries to do this by looking at the just city and the just person. Presumably these units would be like the table to the carpenter who looks to the form and instantiates it in the material realm. Plato, by describing the life of the just person and constitution of the just city is first the carpenter (trying to realize the just city and person) and then becomes more like a painter in that he is reflecting upon what these constructions are as representations of justice. That is to say, the perfect city is one which partakes in the formal city. He builds it (like a carpenter) in words and then uses it to represent justice (in words) like a painter. Is he not thus twice removed, like the artist? The distinction between the carpenter and the painter is important because it is the first indication of Platonic hierarchy. The real table partakes slightly more in the pure form of table because it

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<sup>23</sup> See *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato . p. 298f

<sup>24</sup> See *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Book VII. Plato

seeks out the form directly for its imperfect recreation. The painter only looks to this imperfect manifestations of the form and is thus twice removed from it and as such the painting is inferior to the constructed table. The doctrine of the forms, taken on its own, while very odd from a contemporary perspective seems rather harmless. Perhaps it could even be modernized by taking up a Hegelian conception of the universe as reason's realization of itself where the 'end' of the long dialectic, pure knowledge, would be the realization of the forms. One might even be able to say that insofar as we are constantly making better tables by improving upon old designs, we are coming ever closer to realizing the formal (most rational) table. In any case, Plato takes his doctrine one step further and implies that among the forms there might be a sort of hierarchy<sup>25</sup> as well and it is this that begins to create the necessity of an enduring self. To understand why this is the case it is now necessary to turn to his understanding of the soul itself.

It is important to first note that Plato's version of the soul, though it seems quite similar to the enduring self of contemporary common sense, is actually different in a very crucial way. For Plato, the soul (or self) is actually a composite of “three fundamentally different kinds of desires: appetitive... spirited... and rational ones...”<sup>26</sup> This is a particularly interesting point considering that for Plato

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25 In book VII of *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato asserts that the form of the good is itself at the top of all other forms.

26 Translator's Introduction. C.D.C. Reeve in *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.xiv

the soul is both what is permanent about human beings and something which is divided into competing desires. Any one of the three desires may be altered and honed depending on which is naturally stronger within the individual and Plato believes that developing one's dominant desire leads to the good life best suited for the individual.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, for Plato the good life best suited for each individual is largely dependent upon the proper ordering of society. His constitution of the Kallipolis (beautiful city) is organized such that all, including those who are driven mostly by their appetitive or spirited desires, are eventually subject to the ultimate dictates of reason via the rule of the philosopher kings.<sup>28</sup> In the *Republic* Plato notes that any one of the three types of desires may “rule” the others to produce a particular type of person.<sup>29</sup> Each person, depending on which desire is strongest in them, has specific tasks in life which will lead them to their version of the good life, of which there are three: “money lovers”, “honour lovers” and “wisdom lovers”.<sup>30</sup> Plato arranges these three types of people into a hierarchy with the individuals whose rational desires (and the virtue of wisdom) rule over the others at the top and those whose appetitive desires rule at the bottom. It is here, in coordination with the forms, that the necessity for an enduring self begins to become necessary. First and foremost this understanding

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27 See *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Book III. Plato

28 See *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. Especially Books III-VII

29 Translator's Introduction. C.D.C. Reeve in *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.xiv

30 See, for example, Book III of *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato

of human beings and human nature suggests that there is an ideal way for each type of person to live. Each must allow the desire best suited for them to rule over their soul. Now, it is evident that the hierarchy of 'types' of people corresponds to the hierarchy of the forms. The form of the good, the supreme form, and other abstract forms such as justice, right, wrong, beauty etc. are only discernible to those who are capable of being ruled by reason and wisdom. For the other types of people to be able to partake in these more abstract forms the wisdom lovers must rule and organize the others.<sup>31</sup> Plato takes the hierarchical realm of the forms in combination with the hierarchical nature of types of people to be an incentive to live in accord with particular values (a response to relativism). In other words, the idea that there is an unchanging perfect realm above the flux that is the lived material realm, which is directly tied to the formal realm, explains in part how something can be good in itself (i.e. because it is closer to the formal realm). But what about the enduring soul or self? Surely Plato might have stopped here and been satisfied that the proto-relativism would not rule the day.

For money lovers life is fairly simple. There is not really a way for them to deceive others about how close their tables, for example, approximate the form of table. To the extent that it serves its purpose it can be said to correspond to its approximation of its form. Something similar can be said of honour lovers.

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, *The Allegory of the Cave in Book VII of Plato's Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004)

Although it could be argued that one might feign courageousness, their actions on the battlefield would certainly betray them and show that they have failed to approximate its form. For wisdom lovers things are much more complicated. As noted, it is not all that difficult to appear to be just while actually being unjust.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, there are all sorts of ways the clever but corrupt wisdom lover might deceive others into thinking they have knowledge of the greatest forms and they might even be deceived themselves.<sup>33</sup> Now, this is a problem for two reasons. First the wisdom lovers have no real reason to not deceive others, given the common conception of the afterlife. Perhaps more substantially it is the wisdom lovers who can understand the form of 'the good' which is the supreme form in which all other forms partake.<sup>34</sup> It is worth also noting again that for Plato the wisdom lovers are responsible for ensuring that the good is in fact realized by those of a weaker constitution, money lovers and honour lovers, in their work. In this way, Plato's entire system of creating good lives for all rests on having wisdom lovers who are not deceptive or deceived. They must genuinely strive to achieve knowledge of the forms, especially the good, which is in fact difficult and often thankless work.<sup>35</sup> The difficulty of the task and the possibility of ridicule seem to be factors which might dissuade those capable of being wisdom lovers from truly being

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32 See Book II of *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato

33 See Book VI and Book VII, respectively, of *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato

34 *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.199

35 Again see The Allegory of the Cave in Book VII of Plato's *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004)



such. To ensure that they will take up their task of striving for the abstract forms Plato does two things. First he tries to prove that the real good life is one where people seek out knowledge of the forms, arguing that this leads to the best constitution of both individuals and societies and thus the best possible life for all in the physical world of flux. Perhaps because this lofty ideal seems a rather impotent motivator for those facing the temptation of bodily pleasures, worldly goods, and an inconsequential afterlife, Plato then does something quite curious. He alters the perception of the afterlife and through this introduces the concept of an enduring soul deeply analogous to the contemporary enduring and static self. In Book X of *Republic* he argues for the immortality of the soul not as a shade or shadow but as an enduring entity which survives death and takes with it that which it has gained (or not) in life. He notes that 'nothing truly great can occur within a short period' and for that reason the soul, which is connected to the forms in various ways in all three constitutions, 'must be immortal'.<sup>36</sup> He illustrates this with his myth regarding reincarnation and the process by which those who have lived a good life (connected to the forms) go to a 'heaven' and those who have lived a bad life go to a 'hell' before both groups return to earth. For the reward or punishment to be meaningful it must be the result of the life lived and occur to something which remembers this life and is capable of relating its present

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<sup>36</sup> *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.313

situation in the afterlife to the past life. Furthermore, to be motivated to truly live the good life, the living organism must understand that it is the same being that will pay the tolls in the future. Interestingly enough in the early eighteenth century this idea would be reconsidered by theorists, some of whom argued that the 'present self has no self-interested reason to value the future self because that future self is not a real entity and is distinct from the present self'.<sup>37</sup> At most the future self is like a close friend who one cares about. However, if self-interest rules the day the future self will always be only a close second to the present self. In any case, it is clear that if there is nothing in the afterlife there is no real reason to pursue the forms given that one can live a life of riches and bodily pleasures without them. It is worth noting that Plato also often condemned<sup>38</sup> such 'vulgar' practices as bad in themselves.

By way of summary then, Plato was perhaps the first to express an interest in the soul or self as an enduring entity. He was concerned with this not because it seemed to be an accurate depiction of a genuine selfhood. On the contrary, he was concerned with what appears to be a type of moral relativism rising in ancient Greek philosophy as a result of the realization that the physical (human) world is one of constant change, that the afterlife, if real, was the same no matter what, and that it is possible to live a type of satisfying life without ever acting ethically. To

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<sup>37</sup> See *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.169

<sup>38</sup> See *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.178

alleviate these concerns Plato invented an unchanging realm of forms which contained the truth of all things including the truth of the good itself. This realm of forms is hierarchical and corresponding to it is a hierarchy of types of people. Each type of individual should strive for the forms accessible to them in order to live the truly good life. The role of the wisdom lover is a special one because they have potential access to the highest forms including the good itself. Knowledge of this form is needed to ensure that all others are, in fact, doing what they ought to do. To ensure that wisdom lovers are not deceived and that they never rest, lest they be deceived, Plato attempts to show that the genuinely good life is one which seeks knowledge of the forms. As a sort of fail safe, he further argues that souls are immortal and enduring, ensuring they are able to spend as much time as needed to really get to the forms. They are furthermore rewarded or punished depending on how they live. It is now clear that Plato's understanding of the enduring self is, in fact, introduced as an afterthought to save his objectivist ethics. One thing is quite puzzling about all of this: why did Plato deem it necessary to reshape the understanding of the soul and the afterlife? Presumably his long discourses in *Republic* and *Symposium* would be enough to establish why one should seek the forms and the good life. One plausible explanation is very relevant to the present work. Despite arguing that true wisdom lovers “never

willingly tolerate falsehood in any form”<sup>39</sup> he also suggests, according to one commentator, that sometimes it is necessary to tell what we might call a 'white lie' to “prevent people from doing something bad out of ignorance or insanity.”<sup>40</sup> It is very possible that Book X of Plato's *Republic* is one such lie. His argument for the immortality of an enduring soul and its deep connection to a deserved afterlife with eventual reincarnation might be meant as a story for those who are incapable of or unwilling to be persuaded by his arguments for why good and bad, justice, etc. exist in our world of flux. If this is the case then it is obvious that Plato explicitly invented the enduring soul as a fiction to justify his essentialist ethics where rational explanation failed. Unfortunately there is simply not enough evidence to conclude this. However, based on the above reading of his work, it is possible to conclude that he did, at least implicitly, need the enduring soul to help justify his larger philosophical framework which was, among other things, a response to the relativism which was emerging during his time. Whether Plato fabricated the enduring self as an intentional white lie or simply thought it was a necessary component of his philosophy, it is clear that the origins of the static self are shaky at best.

### **Aristotle's Constancy of Form: Measure and Measured**

The Aristotelian scholars are divided when it comes to whether or not

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39 Ibid. p.177

40 Translator's Introduction. C.D.C. Reeve in *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.xx

Aristotle believed that there was something personal which was enduring when it came to selfhood and material bodies. Some argue that Aristotle held that “the soul's rational part – *nous* – is separable”<sup>41</sup> from the rest of it and is thus a possible vessel for an enduring aspect of selfhood. Others point to passages where Aristotle suggests that any *personal* survival of death is not possible.<sup>42</sup> In short, Aristotle's position on the matter of enduring selfhood is unclear and as such cannot contribute much to the work at hand.

Having said that, his teleological and developmental conception of human being is interesting enough to note, though it too does not offer any solid conclusions one way or the other. First and foremost it should be noted that his conception of ethics as a type of developmental process whereby the individual learns to be a good judge of what is right in the ever-changing uniqueness of situations<sup>43</sup> reveals two things. First it indicates both a break with and affinity towards Plato because it suggests that for Aristotle right action is the result of a developed potential; the ability to judge the unique situation and do what is uniquely right within that situation.<sup>44</sup> In other words, there is an *objectively* right thing to do in a given situation, but that right thing is unique or *relative* to the situation and only a developed human being can know what it is. The second

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41 *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.21

42 *Ibid.* p.23

43 See *Nicomachean Ethics*. Especially Book II (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1999) Aristotle

44 See, for example, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1999) Aristotle. p.61

thing which is revealed is that for Aristotle there is a *something* which can be developed. For Aristotle, this something is a 'single' enduring entity. The entity is the material body combined with its form (the soul) and together they work to fulfill a certain function, though the form is more important in this regard than is the matter. A change in the matter (i.e. the riverbed/water or the cells of a human being) does not necessarily alter its ability to fulfil its function but a change in the form does.<sup>45</sup> The consequences of this with regard to selfhood are curious to say the least. On the one hand, everything has an essence (a function) which is to be the best possible thing of its kind. A human being strives towards being an excellent human being which is to be one who has developed its capacities, of which reason seems to be the most important.<sup>46</sup> In this sense we might take the essence/form to be the enduring self. On the other hand, the notion of development suggests that the individual is a changing thing. Of course, Aristotle would say that while the individual develops her essence remains the same and that she is merely developing towards a function. The question which this begs is whether there is in fact an essence which develops or whether said development changes the essential 'nature' of that which is developed. Aristotle is quite clear on this. As mentioned above, if the essence changes the thing in question is not the same thing it was before the change. However, Aristotle seems to conflate two

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45 See p.xxviii of C.D.C. Reeve's introduction to Aristotle's *Politics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1998)

46 See *Nicomachean Ethics*. Book VI (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1999) Aristotle

distinct things. His arguments about the endurance of both a river and a person through material change are arguments about the personal identity of individual things. His arguments about essences (form) are arguments about types of things. If a river or person changes its form it is no longer a river or a person, it has legitimately changed its type. If we take for granted that there are types and that they do have an essence and further accept Aristotle's teleology as development relative to or directed towards that essence and function, the difficulties of sustained identity do not go away. If Alice Murdoch becomes a 'better' person measured relative to the purpose and potentiality achievable by the essence of human being, she remains the same type of thing but not necessarily the same person because her relation to that which makes her the same type of thing has in fact changed. In other words, what has remained the same is not *the* person but the thing as a particular type of thing: *a* human being. Thus it would seem that for Aristotle it is the measure which remains the same and not that which is measured. In fact, it might be assumed that insofar as the person develops or regresses their selfhood, if it might be equated to essence, is something which fluctuates and is as diverse as the situations in which it finds itself. The saving grace for Aristotle might be his dedication towards teleology. The idea that there is a rigid standard (the degree to which the particular function is fulfilled) can be thought of as a demarcation of particular selves. Knife x is better than knife y and

Alice is better than Socrates and we can locate these particular things along the continuum of the types they are. But what if Socrates works really hard and becomes exactly as good as Alice, are they then the same person? In any case, it is clear to see why scholars would be divided as to what Aristotle's views on selfhood might have really been.

Although there is debate around what Aristotle's views on selfhood really were, his understanding of the order of beings did give force to the theological appropriation of enduring selfhood, which will be turned to next. It might be possible to make the case that the 'great chain of being', derived from the work of Aristotle and Plato, was instrumental in maintaining the alleged superiority of human beings by virtue of their having enduring souls.

### **Monotheism to Modernity: The Platonic Legacy**

As noted in the introduction, the idea of an enduring self began as a convenient concept in the face of potential relativism and became institutionalized and embedded in Western culture as a general fact. The institutionalization of the enduring self in philosophy and culture was accelerated first by monotheism and the church and later in a slightly altered form through liberal thought and the institutions it brought with it. This section briefly tracks this process through theology and into modernity and further illustrates how the notion itself is often



used as an explanation for larger philosophical systems rather than something which needs to be explained and perhaps amended.

While there were others who spoke of the enduring self, the next major development with regard to this concept seems to have been tied to the invention of monotheism through Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is interesting to note that some Eastern theologies did not attempt to adopt an enduring or static view of the self.<sup>47</sup> In any case, as Martin and Barresi note, the appropriation of an enduring self by Western monotheistic theologians was first invoked to explain how resurrection could occur in early Judaism. Resurrection was a way for human beings to recapture the immortality they lost during their fall from grace and this presupposes something which has remained the same over time (the thing which is to recapture).<sup>48</sup> It is self evident here that again the concept of an enduring self is being used to explain an ethical system, this time one tied to religious dogma. This was also taken up by early Christians. A major development here was that the 'body' one receives in heaven is distinct from the earthly body but possesses the same soul which suggests that these theologians believed, like Plato, that the soul and body were distinct entities.<sup>49</sup> There are also hints of Platonism to be found in Islam. One emphasis in this religion is the quest for (objective) knowledge. Since

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47 See, for example “Buddhist Non-Self: The No-Owners Manual” by Mark Siderits in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011) ed. Shaun Gallagher

48 *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.40

49 Ibid. p.48-52

“Allah is all knowing, humans, in acquiring knowledge become more godlike.”<sup>50</sup>

Again, for this to be possible there must be an eternal enduring soul which somehow survives bodily death. All of these religious interpretations of the enduring self, like Platonism, require the concept of enduring selfhood to make living by the standards dictated by dogma somehow worthwhile. In the end it always seems to boil down to the rewards or punishments of the afterlife. It is evident that whether influenced by Plato or not, the monotheistic religions of Western theology needed an enduring self to make sense otherwise they would fall to the criticisms like the ones leveled by Glaucon and Adeimantus mentioned earlier. Once again the enduring self was a product of these philosophies rather than a subject up for philosophical investigation. An interesting side note is that religions which allow for absolution run into the same problem, from a practical standpoint, as is pointed out by Adeimantus in *Republic*. Namely that 'if it is profitable or enjoyable to commit evils in life there is no reason not to because the would-be punisher (in the afterlife) can be pacified through ritual or other means.'<sup>51</sup> In any case, it is by no means a coincidence that the three major religions of the contemporary Western world advocated for the same view of enduring selfhood which is today so prominent in common language and social institutions (such as legal frameworks). Their prominence in Western culture

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p.53

<sup>51</sup> See *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2004) Plato. p.43

meant that their legacy would no doubt be passed through the subsequent institutions of the West even after secularism came to the fore. More importantly from a philosophical perspective is the fact that they needed the concept for the same reasons Plato did: to support their objectivist ethics. Furthermore they institutionalized it in the very same way that Plato suggested – by telling stories or 'white lies', although this characterization underplays the copious amounts of blood which would be shed over which stories were better or how the stories should be read. In this way, the fiction of the enduring self, much as it was for Plato, was a convenient explainer. The difference is that in this incarnation it was being utilized by the powerful institution of the church which disseminated this viewpoint to the corners of the known world.

Subsequent to the rise of the major monotheistic religious doctrines and their appropriation of the enduring soul or self, most of the discussion was centered around debates regarding the nature of the enduring soul rather than why there should be one.<sup>52</sup> In this regard, the enduring self was once again taken for granted as a component of larger philosophical frameworks. One example of the discussions about the soul is the problem of how to explain how the same soul can remain in human bodies which are always changing.<sup>53</sup> Another example, related to the first and perhaps more important for later philosophy, is the debate regarding

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<sup>52</sup> See *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. Ch. IV-VI

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.119

whether the soul and body are united as one so that resurrection involved literally raising the same body from the grave in heaven or hell or whether there is a dichotomy where the soul and body can be separated in the afterlife. The problem with the former view is that it says nothing about how the soul and self can remain static in a changing body. If they are one and the same then any change is a change for 'both'. The latter view ultimately seems to have won out and eventually found a home in Descartes' dualistic philosophy of mind.

Although Descartes is heralded as a major philosophical innovator in Western philosophy, it is not necessary to delve too deeply into his work here. It is enough to note that he argued for a substance dualism between mind (self/soul) and the material world (bodies and other material objects). That is to say the mind is a different type of substance than the material body. It is evident that he was struggling with a similar problem as Plato regarding the possibility of genuine value or meaning in the material world. There are some interesting and important distinctions between the worries of Plato and Descartes. Where Plato was bothered by a world of flux and impermanence, Descartes was concerned with the mechanistic worldview emerging from the works of thinkers like Galileo.<sup>54</sup> Plato wanted to bring stability and permanence to a world he saw as unstable and changing to avoid moral relativism. Descartes wanted to inject indeterminacy into

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<sup>54</sup> *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.125

a world he took to be completely determined by mechanistic and immutable laws. The strange thing about Descartes' attempt to deny that the mind was a part of the mechanistic world is that he achieved his goal by reverting back to that which bothered Plato: uncertainty. He began by doubting all things in the empirical (material) world since they can be deceptive (which seems to be analogous to Plato's concern about the imperfect physical world). He concludes that since he cannot doubt the act of doubting then that which doubts cannot be a material thing and hence there are two substances, matter and mind. Since the mind is not material it is not necessary to deal with the notion that it might radically change, cease to exist at some point, or more pertinently be just another cog in the machinery that the universe was thought to be. It should once again be obvious that the notion of an enduring self (here called mind) is once again used to explain rather than being something which ought to be explained and that this is done to support a larger philosophical framework.

For Descartes the point of bringing in an enduring self was the salvaging of freewill from the mechanistic world, which he oddly 'achieved' by doubting that the world even exists let alone is mechanistic and ordered. One thing Descartes did achieve was to provoke a response that would be the seed of finally understanding that the enduring self is at best a fiction and at worst an empty concept. That response came from thinkers like John Locke and Immanuel Kant.

### **Liberal Selfhood: Platonism Unveiled**

Whereas the enduring self was a somewhat subterranean concept presumed to be real but never really satisfactorily explained in its own right by Plato, the theologians and perhaps even philosophers like Descartes, the liberal philosophers from the seventeenth century onward were much more forthcoming about the both the usefulness and the obscurity of the concept. Philosophers like John Locke and Immanuel Kant both proposed altered versions of the so-called enduring self. The main difference was that to varying degrees such thinkers did not assume that the enduring self was something which actually existed. They did, however, recognize that the concept might be useful for particular reasons. Locke suggests that the self as something which endures is a function of consciousness closely associating with particular events. He arguably did this to allow for personal responsibility and ownership within liberal social and political institutions. Kant, in a similar fashion, noted that while the enduring (immortal) self cannot be known by human agents, it is nonetheless necessary to act as though it is known to be true to accommodate moral actions. This final section of this chapter briefly explores these two versions of the enduring self and shows that these thinkers represent a new wave of thought surrounding selfhood. In their own ways both explicitly acknowledge that the enduring self is little more than a useful fiction. This philosophical shift was the beginning of the 'downfall' of the

enduring conception of selfhood and paved the way for the postmodern exploration of selfhood.

John Locke, while not the first to actually attempt to analyze the self in its own right rather than merely using it as an explainer, according to some readings argued that the self was fictitious<sup>55</sup> although his ideas in this respect were not taken very seriously. For Locke, identity, which is for him selfhood over time, amounts to nothing more than *consciousness of* being that particular self of the particular past.<sup>56</sup> In other words, for Locke personal identity or selfhood is nothing more than the action of one's consciousness 'distinguishing one's self from others by intimately remembering and projecting one's self in the present moment into the moments of the past and future.'<sup>57</sup> This notion is not too far from the role of memory in the anarchic conception of selfhood which will be touched on in chapter three. The radical aspect of Locke's understanding of selfhood is that it is relatively fluid in that it is just an act of consciousness and therefore need not necessarily be something which endures. He would be fully willing to accept that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are in fact two different people because there is no conscious connection between one's conscious states and the other's.<sup>58</sup> As often seems to be the case with Locke the discussion boils down to a type of ownership

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55 Ibid. p.131

56 See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996)Locke. p.145

57 Ibid. p.138

58 Ibid. p145f. Locke uses the examples of a madman, a sober man and sleeping Socrates vs. awake Socrates.

(called appropriation by Martin and Barresi<sup>59</sup>). His concern with identity was not so much with responsibility in the afterlife but with accountability during life.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, he was not really concerned with right action because he believed that humans will usually do what is right, which for him is what is in accord with the laws of nature as discernible through reason.<sup>61</sup> There is a sense in which this type of reasoning is a watered down version of Plato's objectivism heavily influenced by Aristotelian virtue ethics.

For Locke the larger concern seems to be the rightful claim of ownership (both of physical property and actions). While not discussed directly in relation to his concept of identity, it does seem that his arguments about private property rest on the existence of a self. It is important to note that, as mentioned, for Locke the self is just a function of the continuity of consciousness. This, however, was enough to fulfil his purposes. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke legitimates private property by arguing that a person can appropriate things by 'mixing their labour with it'.<sup>62</sup> The reason he takes this to be legitimate is that for him, by nature, each person has a monopoly over their body, which is the first property.<sup>63</sup> In the *Second Treatise* Locke takes this for granted as something which

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59 See *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.145.

60 Ibid. p.145

61 See *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980) Locke. p.9

62 See *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980) Locke. Especially Chapter V "On Property"

63 Ibid. Especially Chapter 2 "On the State of Nature"



does not need to be explained. This is arguably because he thought he had already done so in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* where he spoke of identity. The monopoly of ownership over a particular body belongs to whichever consciousness is associated with it and is able to string together (to be conscious of) itself as the particular consciousness which had X, Y and Z states yesterday. So long as the particular consciousness is continuous and conscious of that continuity, it owns the body (and that which the body “mixes” with). The consequences of this are that Mr. Hyde, while conscious, comes to own the body which once belonged to Dr. Jekyll. In this regard it is clear that Locke's understanding is not necessarily enduring but sufficiently enduring enough to allow for property acquisition (both physical and abstract property – ownership of things and ownership of pasts, actions etc.). In this sense it is possible to see that for Locke the self was a fiction which reflects the legitimate ownership of a body by its continued conscious activity. This ownership is not absolute because there is always the possibility of a radical break in the consciousness's continuity (madness, or complete amnesia for example). People, as selves do change over time but so long as there is continuity that is enough to facilitate ownership, which makes it useful to act as though we are the same selves. It is worth noting that as an influential political philosopher, Locke's theories heavily influenced Western social and political institutions. Insofar as his conception of selfhood was

connected to his broader theories (i.e. of property rights), it can be said that his selfhood has been mixed in with many of the concrete institutions existing today.

Again, Locke's philosophy is a move away from the Platonic enduring self but there is still an enduring self, albeit a much more fluid and potentially impermanent one. Dr. Jekyll can become Mr. Hyde and they are two different selves but only because neither has an intimate connection to the conscious states of the other. If they had, for Locke, this would sufficiently make them the same over time, a notion which the anarchic conception of selfhood does not admit to. Furthermore, through his attempt to locate the self in one 'thing', his consciousness, he was also forced into all sorts of problems. Not the least of which would be twin paradoxes. Let's say that a single conscious agent with her memories and expected futures suffers an accident which destroys her body. Luckily technology has progressed to the point that her consciousness can be downloaded to a computer to be later transferred to a mechanical body. During the transfer there is a computer error and half of the memories and projected futures are downloaded to one computer and the other half to another computer. Given that each will have two distinct sets of memories and projected futures unified by two unique consciousnesses, do we now have two distinct selves and did the other self disappear? Or what if the downloading occurred twice on two drives? Has the same person now been exactly duplicated? Which one is accountable for past

actions? Which one owns the house belonging to the initial patient, who is responsible for the children and debts? Of course, these 'thought experiments' are often a bit far fetched, but this case seems to suggest that attempting to use particular conscious continuity to unify the self as something which might endure is slightly problematic. This is not a problem for anarchic selfhood because, as will be argued, each self is a multiplicity of selves and given such technology it would be possible for a number of distinct selves to emerge in parallel to each other. But for Locke this is especially problematic considering that he was mostly concerned with establishing a unifying factor for the sake of personal responsibility and ownership. Does Mr. Hyde own Dr. Jekyll's laboratory? Locke would have to say no. But then what of the elderly person suffering Alzheimer's or the middle aged person suffering from permanent partial amnesia from an accident? If the latter had forgotten she was previously the CEO of Mooby's Burgers but has retained her knowledge of how to run such a business, does she lose ownership or not?

While Locke does construct a conception of identity which reveals it as largely fictitious (or at least not enduring by necessity as earlier philosophy and theology posited), his understanding of selfhood is still very far from the anarchic conception to be discussed later. This is because while there could be potentially numerous 'selves' which come to own a particular body, for Locke the ownership

is always a monopoly by the particular continuous consciousness. As we shall see, the anarchic conception of selfhood would agree that one 'body' has many selves but none of these selves rule or own absolutely simply by virtue of continuity. Having said that, his looser conception of selfhood can be taken as the beginning of the challenges which would be issued to those attempting to defend a necessarily static and enduring selfhood. It was Kant, however, who more substantially and overtly noted that the self is probably a fiction but that it can and should be used pragmatically for ethical reasons, which is arguably how it had been used since it was conceived, though under the guise of absolute reality.

Immanuel Kant was perhaps the first philosopher to really drive home the notion that enduring selfhood is, for all we know as human beings, a useful fiction. It is interesting to first note that Kant, much like Plato, the theologians, and to a lesser extent Descartes and Locke, understands the notion of selfhood to be deeply tied to morality. Kant argued that human beings, by virtue of their constitution, can only access the 'world as it is' via their particular faculties which force them to see it as 'the world as presented'. Kant called the 'world as it is' the noumenal and the world as it is understood by human beings the phenomenal.<sup>64</sup> One way to understand this is as follows. Suppose that there are two types of living beings in the world. Both are exact replicas but one is the size of an

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<sup>64</sup> *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p171f.

electron and one is the size of human beings today. Both would be viewing the same noumenal world but their experience of it, the phenomenal world as they understand it, is radically different. Where one sees tables and chairs the other sees swirling electrons and protons. Another way to illustrate this would be to suppose that there are two types of human beings. One can see only light of a very short wavelength while the other can see only light of a very long wavelength. Again, both would be viewing the same noumenal world but their phenomenal understanding of it would be radically different. It is important to note that this is a gross simplification of Kant's understanding of reality and the human relation to it. To begin with Kant seems to have been more concerned with our rational abilities than with our sense perception. Having said that, the point is illustrated well by these examples because they show that there is a 'real world' (noumenal world) but our understanding of it is always directly limited and shaped by the possible modes we have as human beings to interact with it (the phenomenal world, the world as filtered through human capacities). One more thing is important to note before delving into Kant's understanding of the self. He is not a perspectivist or a relativist. One of his primary concerns was with the universal nature of the human phenomenal world based on the universal nature of human capacities and the universality of the noumenal world. He supposed, like many in his time, that there is such a thing as human nature and universal human capacities

(such as reason). Insofar as we are all human and possess the same nature and capacities and are interacting with the same noumenal world, we will all experience the same phenomenal world and arrive at the same rational conclusions about it.

One of the things Kant concluded from all of this is that there are certain things which might be 'real' in the noumenal realm which cannot be confirmed phenomenally, by virtue of the limitations of human capacities, to be true or false. Two such things are freedom and immortality which “directly implicate the self... [which along with] morality...[make] the noumenal self...useful [as a] *regulative idea*.”<sup>65</sup> What this means is that for Kant, in a way similar to Plato except acknowledged explicitly and directly (at least as directly as Kant gets), an enduring self which cannot be explained phenomenally and may or may not be real noumenally is nonetheless necessary to ensure ethical actions. In short, we must act as though there is such a thing as the enduring self, even though it is not possible to prove, for the sake of morality. It must be said that to equate Kant's noumenal-phenomenal distinction with Plato's visible (material)-intelligible (formal) realms is a mistake. For Plato the universality of existence stems from the formal realm and things in the visible realm can partake in it more or less to near perfection. For Kant, on the other hand, the noumenal world is much like

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65 Ibid. p.172

Deleuze's plane of immanence (to be explored later). It is the world as it is and can be accessed in various ways depending on the capacities of that which is doing the interacting. Human beings can interact with the noumenal world in particular ways and once these ways are exhausted there is no further progress because that would be the limit of human phenomenal capacities (again for Kant the emphasis was on reason and cognition). This is not the realization of the forms in the visible world, it is more akin to the full realization of *human* potentials by embracing and utilizing capacities. Again, it might be prudent to note the possible influence of Aristotle here – though the resulting ethics of each thinker are quite different they both seem to be interested in a human nature or human capacities which one may meet, or push to their limits, through effort.

What is most important for the current work is the fact that Kant overtly embraced the idea that the immortally enduring and free self is a fiction which must be used to facilitate moral action. There is a sense then, in which the soul or self as something which endures (perhaps indefinitely) has come full circle from Plato to Kant. Whereas it is unclear whether Plato overtly knew that his understanding of the immortal soul was merely a useful fiction that facilitates ethical action, for Kant there is no question. For Kant it is simply not possible, given human capacities, to say that there is an immortal and free self, though we ought to act as though there is one for the sake of morality. The only apparent

distinction between Plato's self and Kant's, under this reading, is that the latter did not bother with the pretense that the soul thus described is a real thing.

It is worthwhile to briefly explore the concept Kant calls the transcendental unity apperception. In short, Kant's transcendental unity of apperception is the process by which consciousness unifies its manifold experience(s). This process involves a subject who perceives and thinks and the 'objects' about which she thinks/perceives.<sup>66</sup> As the human being experiences the multitude of objects of experience there is also necessarily an experience of their selves as subjects.<sup>67</sup> Martin and Barresi explain this further by adopting the language of intentionality – which is to say thought's *aboutness*. The basic idea of intentionality is that all conscious thought is directed towards, or is about, something: its intentional object. Martin and Barresi argue that when it comes to intentionality our thoughts can actually be about something which does not exist, an imaginary friend's birthday party, for example.<sup>68</sup> The authors then liken Kant's transcendental ego (the thing which performs the transcendental unity of apperception) to an “intentional subject”. For Kant the transcendental unity of apperception is the transcendental ego's directness towards both the intentional object and the intentional subject, neither of which must necessarily be real.<sup>69</sup>

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66 See *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1996) Kant. B135 (p.179)

67 *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) p.174

68 Ibid. p.174

69 Ibid. p.175



Kant explains how the perception of self unity seems to arise from (or be necessitated by) the act of presentation (perception and thought). He notes that our “presentations” are manifold but rendered intelligible by thought's unifying them into one coherent block.<sup>70</sup> An example might help to make this intelligible. It seems easier to grasp perceptually: Imagine riding on a busy subway car. There is a copious amount of perceptual 'data' available, all rushing at you simultaneously. Now imagine that you had to meticulously process each individual piece of data on its own. The countless conversations and each miniscule fluctuation of sound wave, the subtle music from various people's devices, the ring tones, all of the individual beams of light reflecting from countless surfaces, the pressure of the seat on your behind and the feel of your clothes on your skin and so on. The drop of a pin would be enough to induce madness. Another example would be experiencing a rain storm. Imagine that every drop of rain and all of its constituent parts, every shift in wind, every clap of thunder and flash of lightning all had to be meticulously 'registered' one by one. Again, madness would be unavoidable. Fortunately this is not how we experience the subway or a storm. As humans such events are experienced as unities. We see, hear, feel (and think) etc. of things as a type of whole, as a synthetic unity. For Kant this unifying function is done automatically by thought and this function presupposes a one or an I which does

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70 *Critique of Pure Reason* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1996) Kant. B135 (p.179)

the unifying. Furthermore this I is subtly included in the presentation itself as something which is unified (because it is capable of unifying).<sup>71</sup> In other words, the “synthetic unity of the manifold of intuitions, as given a priori, is the basis of the identity of apperception, which precedes a priori all *my* determinate thought.”<sup>72</sup> In this sense, the unity of the self seems to be the result of a function performed by 'understanding' which seems to be a quasi-psychological necessity. It is interesting to note that in this very same passage Kant states that we simply must have the apperception of the unified intentional subject (regardless of whether or not there really is one) “otherwise I would have a self as many-coloured and varied as I have presentations that I am conscious of.”<sup>73</sup> Kant takes this to be a bad thing and surely if it was the result of dis-unified 'presentations' in the understanding as illustrated in the examples above it would be a terrible thing. What he is neglecting here is that while it helps to unify presentation within given situations, there need not be an enduring unity which traverses all situations.

By way of summary, Kant's philosophy, unlike Plato's, supposes that the unified or enduring self is most likely a useful fiction which enables moral action. Metaphysically he goes one step further than this by suggesting that there must be an ego which performs the transcendental unity of apperception. That is to say we must, by virtue of being human in a manifold world, unify our 'presentations' and

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71 Ibid. B133f (p178f)

72 Ibid. B135 (p.179)

73 Ibid. B135 (p.179)

by extension understand our selves as unities. Much like Locke, Kant seems to take a step forward by recognizing selfhood as fiction. However, he also seems to maintain that it is an *absolutely* necessary fiction which must be at play in all situations.

As has been shown in this chapter the notion of a self which is enduring and static had a long journey in Western philosophy. It began with Plato who, in the face of (a)moral relativism attempted to construct an objectivist metaphysics to accommodate his essentialist ethics. To really make it all work or to convince those who are less rational, he seems to have thought it necessary to invent an immortal soul which could accumulate the good or the bad and be better or worse for it in the long run. These ideas and the presupposition of an enduring soul were picked up quite readily and uncritically by monotheistic religions. Some of the religious discourses seem to influence thinkers like Descartes who transplanted the immaterial soul into his philosophy as 'mind' in order to escape the problem of determinism in the mechanistic world. Again the enduring self was used to explain without actually ever being explained. The rise of liberalism saw the concept of selfhood, perhaps for the first time, examined in its own right. As soon as this occurred those exploring it seemed to have realized that there really is no good reason to assume that the self is something which necessarily endures. Locke provided a theory which established that the self was largely a fiction and

that it could change if the continuity of consciousness ceased or was interrupted. However, he still tried to maintain that so long as the stream of conscious states continued we could be sure that the person was the same person. This was a convenient way to establish and defend property rights, but it neglected the real dynamism of selfhood. Kant too realized that there is no way to truly know that there is a unified enduring self which is a real thing in the world. As noted previously, his understanding of human beings as creatures with particular capacities used to interact with the noumenal world led him to believe that we must always know ourselves as a unified enduring self in much the same way we must unify our perceptions.<sup>74</sup> This is a brief outline of the journey of the static or enduring self in Western philosophy. Although there were others, and still are some today,<sup>75</sup> who try to defend the notion of a static or enduring self, given contemporary shifts in ontology and perhaps a growing acquaintance with transience and difference it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain such a view, at least philosophically. In the next chapter we shall see why.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Deleuze's Fractal Ontology**

As has been noted, the enduring conception of selfhood is often, if not always, a result of the attempt to inject a transcendent permanence into what is

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<sup>74</sup> *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. P172, for example.

<sup>75</sup> See *What is a Person* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010) Christian Smith, for example

otherwise the transient world human beings live in. Descartes and other mechanists were, of course, an exception to this although as we have seen he seems to have reverted to a skepticism which indirectly harkens back to Plato's dilemma about the changing or uncertain world. It is fairly safe to conclude that our understanding of selfhood is largely tied to our ontological and metaphysical understanding of the world around us. I argue that the notion that there is an enduring and somewhat static self is a barrier to personal freedom, growth and responsibility for one's present self. However, before exploring this more thoroughly by discussing the anarchic conception of selfhood, it is worthwhile to look at more recent philosophical theories of ontology and the self. In particular, the work of Deleuze, both individually and in collaboration with Guattari,<sup>76</sup> sets out an alternative ontology. This ontology, which I call fractal ontology, is a more accurate depiction of the world in which we live (the phenomenal world) and suggests that an anarchic conception of selfhood might be more apt. In other words, before discussing exactly what anarchic selfhood is and why it is practically superior to the enduring conception of self, it will be useful to first explore why it is more compelling philosophically. This chapter explains Deleuze's fractal ontology. This ontology suggests that the primacy of becoming, multiplicity, and change, is an alternative to the more traditional Western

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<sup>76</sup> NB: when I am citing collaborative works by Deleuze and Guattari the ideas are to be attributed to both authors as noted in the citation. In the body text I use only Deleuze to avoid confusion and because he also develops the ideas more fully elsewhere on his own.

ontologies which seek to posit being, unity, and endurance, as facts which genuinely transcend transient human realities. In short, Deleuze's ontology has no need for positing a real enduring self because it does not attempt to establish a reality which transcends the change and multiplicity which are so immediately apparent in human experience. Furthermore, Deleuze's ontology does not privilege either freedom or determinacy. As we shall see determinacy and freedom are conditions of and conditioned by each other in the process of “territorialization”, “articulation”, or “folding”.

The major shift and the one most important for our purposes, is that like Nietzsche and perhaps Schopenhauer before him, Deleuze embraces the change which Heraclitus discovered and which Plato seems to have feared. Where many others sought to explain how something, usually the self and or soul, could be permanent, Deleuze realizes the frivolousness of such an endeavor and thus opts to focus on actually explaining that which can be and is experienced: change, multiplicity and the transience of human existence in space-time. In other words, constant becoming and multiplicity are primary while being and unity are afterthoughts, at worst mere specters and at best temporary conditions for further becoming and multiplicity. As will become apparent, the latter is more likely if we agree with the work of Deleuze. Whereas much of traditional ontology (and metaphysics) is concerned with establishing the absolute reality of something

which genuinely “transcends” the positionality and transience of human becoming, what I am calling fractal ontology begins by noting that everything is immanent. As Deleuze states, “[a]lthough it is always possible to invoke a transcendent that falls outside the plane of immanence...all transcendence is constituted solely in the flow of immanent consciousness...”<sup>77</sup> In other words, it is fully possible to posit or act *as if* there is a something (static identity, for example) transcending the human reality of immanence and transience, but it always occurs from that which is embedded within reality and thus transcendence can never be *as such*. Even before substantial analysis it should be immediately apparent here how this ontology relates to what was said regarding rivers and individual human animals in the introduction. Although both are constantly changing, they are treated as if they are the same. When speaking of the Humber River we invoke an enduring identity, a name in this case, to transcend the transient nature of the thing in question but this invocation does not create or refer to anything actually suprapositional or absolutely enduring. To invoke a transcendence is either a matter of convenience or is directed at facilitating some other immanent action or activity.

### **Deleuze's Special Multiplicity and Becoming**

Before attempting a more substantial explanation of fractal ontology and what it means for selfhood and by extension personal freedom and responsibility,

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<sup>77</sup> *Pure Immanence* (New York: Zone, 2001) Deleuze. p.31

it is important to note that Deleuze's conception of multiplicity and becoming are much more nuanced than the typical meanings of these words. He notes that there is a tendency to see these notions as oppositional concepts with a necessarily negative relationship: the One *or* the multiple, that which is becoming and lacks being *or* that which has finished becoming and now is.<sup>78</sup> In other words, under traditional modes of understanding, the human universe appears as a series of exclusive disjunctions where a given phenomenon progresses through something which is then subsumed or overcome by something fundamentally different: the many collapse to become a one, that which no longer becomes. Contrary to this, Deleuze notes that

we no longer believe in a primal totality...[or] a final totality...We no longer believe in the dull grey outlines of a dreary, colorless dialectic of evolution aimed at forming a harmonious whole...We believe only in totalities that are peripheral...along side various separate parts...a whole *of* these particular parts but [which] does not totalize them; it is the unity *of* these particular parts but does not unify them...it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately.<sup>79</sup>

To illustrate why exactly this understanding is one where multiplicity is both primal and cannot genuinely be eliminated, it is helpful to think in terms of numbers and sets. Say there is a multiplicity in the form of the series 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9 and we wish to unify them. We might use the next symbol in the base ten numerical system, 10, to unify the series. What is interesting here is that 10 does

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78 See *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone, 1988) Deleuze. p.43f

79 See *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983) Deleuze and Guattari. p.42



unify the series 1 to 9 but it does not overcome multiplicity. At best it reduces a multiplicity of difference to a duality by denoting [(1 to 9) and (10)]. In this case 10 as a unification of 1 to 9 generates the peripheral unity of 10 alongside the initial series. At worst it simply adds a new and distinct unit to the series. Numbers are particularly interesting because they are actually representations of infinite multiplicity. The number 1, for example, can be represented as  $.05+.05$  or  $.25 \times 4$  or  $0.00001789036 \times 55896$  and so on. In this sense every real number contains every series of numbers in relation to some function or other. In our terms, the number 1, for instance, runs alongside an infinitely long series of multiplicity. It is a unity and totality of  $0.00001789036 \times 55896$  but does not unify or totalize it. It runs alongside it as  $0.00001789036 \times 55896 = 1$ . One finds a similar notion in the work of Merleau-Ponty who, from a phenomenological perspective, notes that “We have the experience of a world, not understood as a system of relations which wholly determine each event, but as an open totality the synthesis of which is inexhaustible.”<sup>80</sup> Something similar might be said of being and becoming. It might be said that being brings an end to becoming. Under the present conception, being is something which runs alongside becoming. As we shall soon see, being and unity are to becoming and multiplicity as determinacy is to freedom: each of the former facilitate further instances of the latter. This is

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80 *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962) Merleau-Ponty. p.219

important for Deleuze because insofar as he considered himself to be Bergsonian, and perhaps Nietzschean, he rejects “negative limitation [and] the negative opposition of general ideas.”<sup>81</sup> That is to say, unity does not destroy or end multiplicity by creating a totality and being does not end or destroy becoming by bringing some immutable finitude to that which is being. In our terms, acting as if a self exists does not genuinely subsume or flatten the multiplicitous or anarchic self.

We owe it to Deleuze to recognize this unique aspect of his work so as to not misrepresent him, though I doubt he would concede that this is possible. These notions will also be crucial in the formulation of anarchic selfhood, which seeks to demystify the limits placed on the individual by static or enduring conceptions of the self. The notions of becoming and multiplicity are useful when it comes to understanding Deleuze's ontology and so they will be utilized in what follows with the proviso that neither concept is meant to be opposed to its so-called opposite (being, unity, and totality) in a negative relationship by virtue of disjunction or necessary exclusion. A unity is not the totality of the parts which disposes of multiplicity. It is the parts *and* their unity in a mutually affirmative relationship (or series) which itself is a type of multiplicity. There is the multiplicity of the given parts and the parts as a unity alongside them, a sort of

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81 *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone, 1988) Deleuze. p.47

duality.<sup>82</sup> What we have in any given instance of apparent unity is not an act of unification which bundles a given multiplicity into a totalizing One thus negating the multiplicity. Rather, any given apparent unity is in fact the conjunction of a unity *and* a multiplicity. In this sense a unity is actually a pairing, itself a kind of primal multiplicity which includes a more primal multiplicity. In the same way being is never being *as such*. Rather being is much like a “plateau” through which becoming may be further facilitated. In other words, being is not an end at which things point nor a state of termination, it is a beginning and re-beginning of becoming as multiplicity and double-articulation along the plane of immanence. With this in mind it is possible to explore Deleuze's ontology. To do this we must first look at his conception of immanence and what he calls the plane of immanence.

### **The Plane of Immanence: An Introduction to Fractal Ontology**

Immanence is a complex notion that cuts across the work of Deleuze and is described in various ways in numerous places. In a somewhat superficial way immanence is akin to the notion of embeddedness. The question then is what exactly is embedded and in what is it embedded? The short answer to these

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82 It is interesting to note here the possible connection this ontology has with complex systems theory. In particular complex systems theory and emergence as it pertains to philosophy of mind. See, for example, Evan Thompson's *Mind in Life* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007), where he suggests that mind co-emerges with body not as a strict unity of the parts of the body but as something *distinct* which emerges with the body as an organization of various parts: a certain unity *alongside* a multiplicity.

questions is, for both, everything; everything is embedded in everything. To better understand this a good place to begin is with what Deleuze calls the plane of immanence, also termed the body without organs or the plane of consistency, which loosely corresponds to the everything in which everything else is embedded. He describes the plane of immanence as “...the unformed, unorganized, nonstratified, or destratified body and all its flows: subatomic and submolecular particles, pure intensities, prevital and prephysical free singularities.”<sup>83</sup> In a sense we might think of the plane of immanence as the entirety of the 'fabric' of the universe or all possible universes in superposition of potentiality.<sup>84</sup> One observer has likened the plane of immanence to “phase space” in mathematics and systems theory.<sup>85</sup> Phase space is typically understood as a representation of all the possible 'states' of a given system, though for Deleuze the plane of immanence is real and not merely a representation. In any case, phase space would be the plane of immanence, the pure unformed potential states (or “virtualities”) which the universe or any 'part' thereof may exist in or realize. This broad characterization of the plane may be slightly misleading because for Deleuze particular sets of virtuals seem to be connected to particular modes of

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83 *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari. p. 43

84 Perhaps 'multiverse' would be a better term. As we shall see in what follows, as the plane folds and actualizes potentials as events it also creates what might be considered planes of immanence within the plane.

85 See “The Autonomy of Affect” (in *Cultural Critique* Autumn 31 (1995): 83-109 ) Brian Massumi. p.94

actuals. For example, while an earth with no gravity may or may not be a virtuality, it is not immediately a virtuality of our earth. Again, it is worth noting that the plane is not a totality as *opposed* to the parts or a One *subsuming* the multiple. In the sense noted above, it runs alongside its actualized modes at any given instant or juncture. In speaking of the plane we are speaking of a peripheral totality alongside the multiplicity of 'parts'. To say that these virtual 'states' in phase space (or the plane of immanence) are not real at any given moment is a mistake.<sup>86</sup> They are “real” in the plane of immanence insofar as they may be actualized through a dialogical process of organ-ization, though insofar as they are virtual they are not currently actualized and thus may not be plainly apparent (leading to the false belief that they are, strictly speaking, not real). In other words, the opposition, if there is one, should be between that which is actualized and that which is not currently actualized (virtual), both of which are real within the plane. We might speak of different degrees of separation between certain virtualities and actualities so that an earth or celestial body with no gravity is barely even conceivable because it is at the extreme peripheries of the present actualization of the material universe along the plane of immanence while something like interplanetary travel, perhaps even intergalactic travel, as virtualities, are 'located' nearer to that present actualization. Something which is

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<sup>86</sup> Deleuze protests the opposition between virtual and real on p.96-97 of *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone, 1988), for example.

not, strictly speaking, real would have to be something which exists neither as virtual nor actualized.

On the whole it seems that anything could potentially be virtual. For example, an Earth sized planet with zero gravity might be a virtuality. However, insofar as all planets currently existing are part of a more primal actualization where gravity is a conditional substrata, such a planet is not immediately a virtual potential of our particular universe. Although it is a virtual potential of *the* plane of immanence, it is not of the plane as we find it at the vector in which we exist.<sup>87</sup> At any given juncture only particular virtualities are actualized at various 'points' or vectors long the plane of immanence<sup>88</sup> as “transverse unities between [actualized] elements that retain all their difference within their own particular boundaries.”<sup>89</sup> I am fond of the terms juncture and vector in this context because I believe they capture how this process unfolds (or continually folds) according to Deleuze. He notes elsewhere that a given body on the plane of immanence, a particular human agent for example, is only defined by “a longitude and latitude”. By these terms he means the “total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude)...[and the] total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential

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87 See the section “Becoming and Multiplicity: Plane(s) of Immanence” below

88 See p. 31 of *Pure Immanence* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007) Deleuze

89 *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1983) Deleuze and Guattari. p.43

(latitude).”<sup>90</sup> In a sense this signifies the 'where' and 'how' a given body exists on the plane of immanence in the midst of its actualized potentials and the virtual potentials related to those actualities. In other words, this is a way of describing the pool of virtualities (the plane of immanence) and how they actualize through 'localized' flows which ripple across the plane thereby simultaneously creating the means for the actualization of and the conditions limiting further actualizations. Like forks of lightning in a dark sky these flows of actualization flash through the plane of immanence, populating it with passing events which are its actualized virtual 'states'. It is in this sense that becoming is a primal aspect of Deleuze's ontology. The plane of immanence is a sea or multiplicity of wild singularities perpetually actualizing virtualities which facilitates the actualization of ever more virtualities. When something becomes actual on the plane can be said to 'be'. But this being really just facilitates further actualization or 'becoming'. To get a better grasp on this it is useful to turn to some visual examples and discussion of the notions of 'levels' and stratification.

Figure one provides a helpful way to 'visualize' the plane of immanence and the events which occur on it. To be clear this figure is a 'map' of the Internet but I believe it is somewhat analogous to events on the plane. Picture it in three dimensions as a somewhat spherical 'object' situated in a black three dimensional

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90 *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari p.260

cube (though there is no reason to believe the plane has edges or is in any way geometrical).<sup>91</sup> The black space is the plane of immanence, every 'point' of which indicates a real virtual or potential state. The interwoven, interconnected, sprawling lines are actualized potentials (actualized virtualities) following flows and creating the means for the actualization of further possibilities. The black space directly around each point of each line can be thought of as the immediate virtualities of that point.

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91 It is important to note that this, as well as the description of 'levels' which follows are simply meant to bring to light the idea of the plane of immanence. Deleuze notes that the plane is 'flat' because all of its 'dimensions' are full, even as they multiply. See *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) p.9, for example.



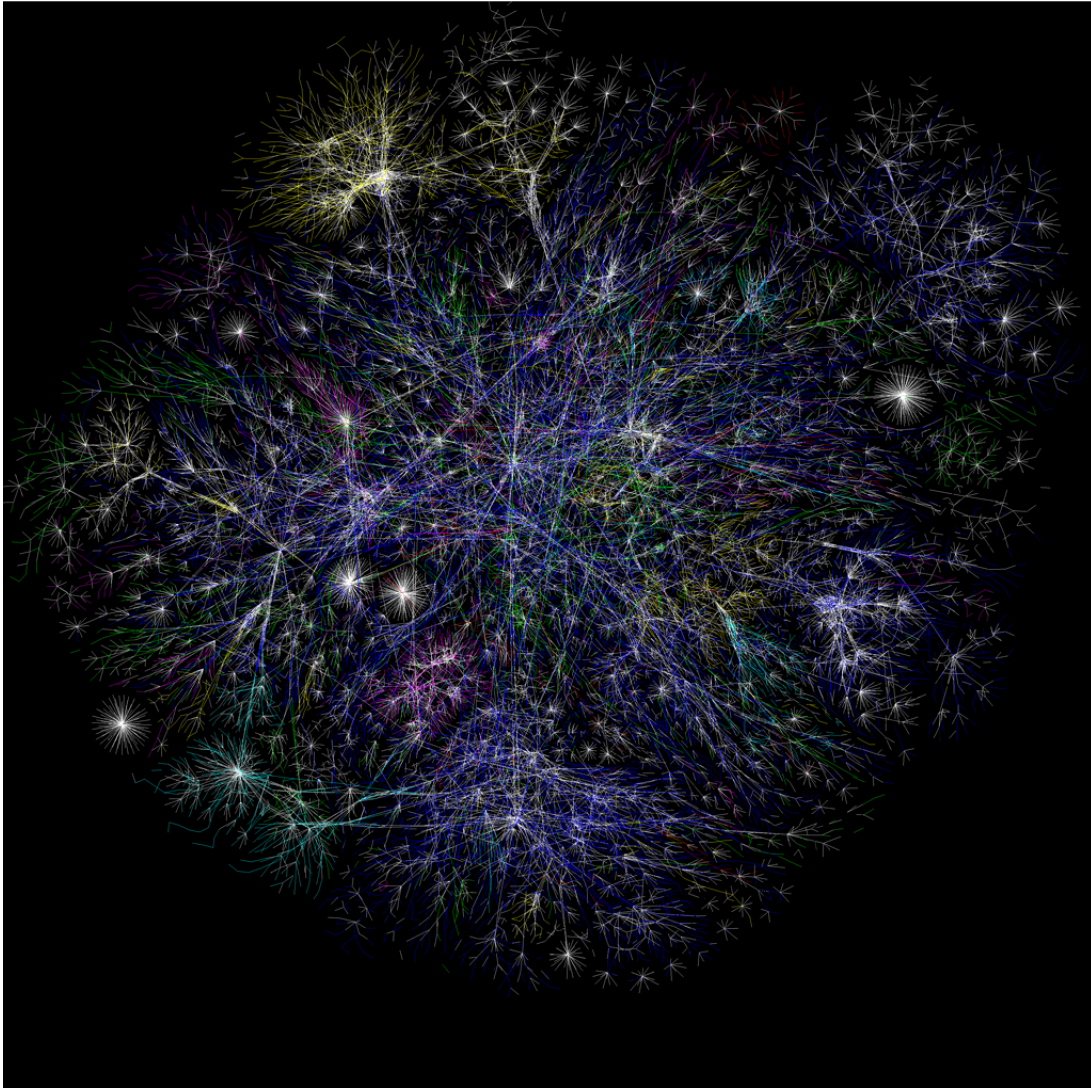


Fig. 1: a map of the Internet provides a visual representation of the plane of immanence (black 'space') and actualized events  
SOURCE: Barrett Lyon - OPTe Project (<http://www.opte.org/maps/>)

If this was a better model, one which was interactive, we would see some of the lines and coloured points fade to black as new ones spring forth. Furthermore this ongoing process would be constantly shifting and reconfiguring in various

directions and at various speeds. As actualities occur they create the strata or means for the further actualization of potentialities which were freely flowing in the obscurity that is the black space. As the forks of colour move towards the particular location of a section of black space, the likeliness or possibility of the actualization of the potentials freely roaming in that space becomes more immediate or more possible. One flaw of trying to represent the plane visually is that it unnecessarily gives the impression that the plane is geometrical and that virtual states exist in particular localities. This is not the case if we take locality to be only space-like. It is somewhat less flawed if we take figure one to be spacio-temporal but only in the fullest sense of that term where there is a multitude of space-like and perhaps a multitude of time-like dimensions. In this way the virtualities would exist overlapped and potentially in different spaces depending on the value assigned to the time dimension(s). It is also important to note that various lines can cross through the same point (actualize the same virtualities) via different routes.

The plane of immanence can be thought of as events fluctuating, reverberating and actualizing phenomena on various 'levels'. The entity in figure one might be the 'observable universe' of galaxies and planetary systems taking shape through the convergence and “sedimentations” of large vectors. This would be the plane of immanence 'articulating' its virtual potentialities through celestial

bodies. Or we might think of figure one as the earth which is a part of the celestial flow or actualization. The Earth is a vector which is 'part' of a celestial vector, and the Earth itself consists of vectors. Each 'thing' or 'part' of the earth and its relations are vectors and can be thought of as being represented by figure one. Each person is a vector emerging from/with the Earth and all of this emergence occurs on, from and with the plane of immanence. Turning to the level of the individual human being we could further note that the different colours of the lines in figure one indicate different 'aspects' of that being, each of which might have its own particular duration and relative freedom with regard to further actualization or de-actualization. One colour, for instance, might represent their organic body and its shape would shift relatively quickly at first, slowing for a number of years before again shifting relatively quickly corresponding to the different stages of life. Another colour might indicate the person's belief system and might shift at a different rate and in different directions depending on the openness of the individual or their willingness to reterritorialize their beliefs. What is more important to note here is that this process occurs at various imaginable 'levels'. This is what makes Deleuze's ontology fractal; the same process, though not the same realization of actual form, occurs at every level.

In mathematics, fractal geometry is a system which purports to provide a way to understand the complexity of 'objects' and phenomena by recognizing an

“underlying symmetry”.<sup>92</sup> The basic idea seems to be that certain patterns are repeated at every scaling level. One begins with a very complex shape and 'zooms' in on it revealing that the shape is repeated in its constitution by the same shape or a certain pattern. Further 'zooming' reveals further repeating or patterning. These “fractal symmetries” can be 'self similar' (displaying “isotropic invariance”), “self-affinity” (invariance within sets of transformations) or “non-linear”.<sup>93</sup> I say that Deleuze's ontology is fractal not because the same pattern occurs at various levels but because the same process, as described above, does. It is helpful to think of figure one as what the universe would look like if we had a tool which reveals its processes. Something like a magnifying glass that amplifies process and flow rather than structure and form. Let us suppose that we use the tool to take a snapshot of the entire spatio-temporal universe of celestial bodies actualizing along the plane of immanence and that we 'zoom' in on the area 'containing' our solar system. We would see that it is but a smaller version of this type of pattern, indicating the repetition of the process at a micro-level. Now imagine zooming in to the earth and beyond to your self. You would see that through this lens you too are a pattern much like figure one. It is a bit misleading because in geometry we are dealing with structures and Deleuze's ontology is one of emergent phenomena which do not necessarily replicate the exact same

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92 See *Nature Inspired Chemical Engineering, Learning from the Fractal Geometry of Nature* ( Delft: DUP Satellite, 2003) Marc-Oliver Coppins. p.507

93 Ibid. p.508

structural pattern. Viewed in this way each 'level' is not like a microcosm of the structure above it. Rather, for Deleuze the repetition is of the process itself; the actualization of virtualities (possibilities) as “lines of flight” along the plane of immanence occurs at every 'level' imaginable. Each scaling level is a microcosm of the process of actualization as flows. As noted, figure one could be a visual rendering of a snapshot of the universe, a planetary system, a planet, an ecosystem, a civilization, a human being, a cell or particles. The process is the 'same' because everything is an occurrence or event along the plane of immanence, a participant in the actualization of possibilities within actualized possibilities as flows and trajectories. Central to this ontology, and what makes it so appealing in conjunction with non-static or dynamic identity, is that it necessarily consists of becoming, transience and multiplicity. First and foremost, the individual is a dynamic process of constant and multiple actualization. In this sense the individual is perpetual becomings. Furthermore, each individual is a localized version of the process of actualizations at greater and greater, and smaller and smaller, levels. In this sense, everyone and everything is embedded in and part of a massively dynamic process of multiplicitous becoming.

By recognizing that a fundamental process of the universe is change and alteration via the actualization of virtual potentials as flows on multiple levels, Deleuze's ontology is one where change, impermanence, and flow or flux are

primal. Insofar as this characterization of 'being' has such qualities as its base process, this ontology is one of fundamental becoming. Actualization is never finalized. Rather, within the plane of immanence it is an ongoing operation or process. Furthermore, as we shall see through further discussion of Deleuze's notion of multiplicity, each actualization of *the* plane is simultaneously the actualization of *a* plane. If Deleuze is correct about this, it is difficult to imagine any place for a static or enduring identity for human beings beyond a mere pragmatic one.

### **Becoming and Multiplicity: Plane(s) of Immanence**

The previous section provides a starting point to understanding Deleuze's ontology as one which embraces change, in the form of actualization, as a fundamental process. The notion of multiplicity is implicit in the above discourse surrounding 'levels' of analysis. Deleuze, however, goes much further than merely implying multiplicity. For him, each actualization along *the* plane can also be understood as the actualization of *a* plane of immanence within or on *the* plane of immanence. That is to say, the plane of immanence is a multiplicity of virtuals which constantly produces a multiplicity of actuals which are themselves 'made up' of a multiplicity of actualized virtuals and simultaneously produce the means for further actualization of multiple virtuals. Put another way, each act of actualization creates a new field, a new plane, for the actualization of states not

available until the first act of actualization. Unfortunately any attempt to express this altogether will be necessarily as convoluted as the preceding sentences. Nonetheless, this notion makes complete sense if we explore Deleuze's concept of “double articulation”, which itself gets to the 'core' of his multiplicity (multiplicity might be a better phrase).

For Deleuze, each particular vector or body is “doubly-articulated” in that it is the result of organ-izing the body without organs (plane of immanence) and at the same time the vector becomes a plane of immanence (or field of virtualities).<sup>94</sup> This process of multileveled double-articulation is what Deleuze calls “stratification”. A process which consists in the following:

giving form to matters, of imprisoning intensities or locking singularities into systems of resonance and redundancy, of producing upon the body of the earth [the plane of immanence] molecules large and small and organizing them into molar aggregates. Strata are acts of capture, they are like “black holes” or occlusions striving to seize whatever comes within their reach.<sup>95</sup>

For Deleuze everything which occurs does so within the plane of immanence through multiple (and multilevel) double-articulations which is the process of stratification. For him the plane, which “...is permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by

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94 See for example p. 40 of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) p.40 “A surface of stratification is a more compact plane of consistency between two [strata or formed matters: vectors]”

95 *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari. p.40

mad or transitory particles”<sup>96</sup>, contracts or folds upon itself thus actualizing certain possibilities of the 'phase space'. Every stratification consists of a substrata or the first articulation which “...chooses or deducts, from unstable particle flows, metastable molecular or quasi-molecular units...upon which it imposes a statistical order of connections and successions...”<sup>97</sup> The second articulation builds from this substrata by “...establish[ing] functional, compact, stable structures...and constructs the molar compounds in which these structures are simultaneously actualized...”<sup>98</sup> He further notes that while the first articulation of the plane does have some “systematic interactions”, it is the second articulation that produces an “...overcoding...[or is the] phenomena of centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, and finalization.”<sup>99</sup> This process of double-articulation occurs at every 'level'. We can imagine the sub-atomic universe as a primal stratification of the plane where actualities collapse or fold into loose but somewhat systematic relations. This fold creates a substrata for particles which collapse or fold to form bodies which give rise to another fold and another. Again, this is not necessarily a linear process in terms of magnitude. We might think of the position of organic life within this process. It might be something like this: sub-atomic → atomic → chemical → compound (celestial bodies) → organic...

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96 Ibid. p.40

97 Ibid. p.40

98 Ibid. p.41

99 Ibid. p.41



What matters is that each fold captures and actualizes potentialities of the plane but this actualization renders other potentialities more immediately viable. In this sense the 'strata' can be said to stack on top of each other with the first articulation providing the basis for a more 'concrete' second articulation which provides the base for another 'first' articulation and so on. It is important to note the limitation of this image as it seems to suggest that actualization is linear so that the 'top' strata are in some way reducible to the 'bottom' strata. As we shall see in what follows this is not *always* the case, particularly with regard to organic and social strata. This should also be evident by referral to the visualization of actualization and the plane in figure one. Actualization is not linear or necessarily hierarchical, it is a process of flows. It is in this sense that Deleuze's ontology of the plane is one of radical multiplicity. *The* plane, with its “de-stratified flows” and “free singularities” (as pure multiplicity of virtuals) contracts, capturing and stratifying the otherwise free flows into particular actualities. This act of capture renders other virtuals more immediately viable for capture. In other words, each coding (substrata) and over-coding (strata), each act of territorialization, brings with it a surface or zone of deterritorialization (*a* plane of immanence) which may subsequently be further territorialized.

A somewhat mundane example might make this conception of multiplicity and actualization on the plane of immanence more intelligible. Take a piece of

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paper and mark two points A and B, one on the top on and one at the bottom, further mark C and D and E one third of the distance between C and A on either side of the paper (see figure 2). Suppose the piece of paper represents the plane and the points are free singularities marked out among a sea of others. Now fold the paper so that A and B are touching. You have now actualized AB, a potential event (see figure 2). Further folding will create ABC, ABCD, and ABCDE (see figure2).

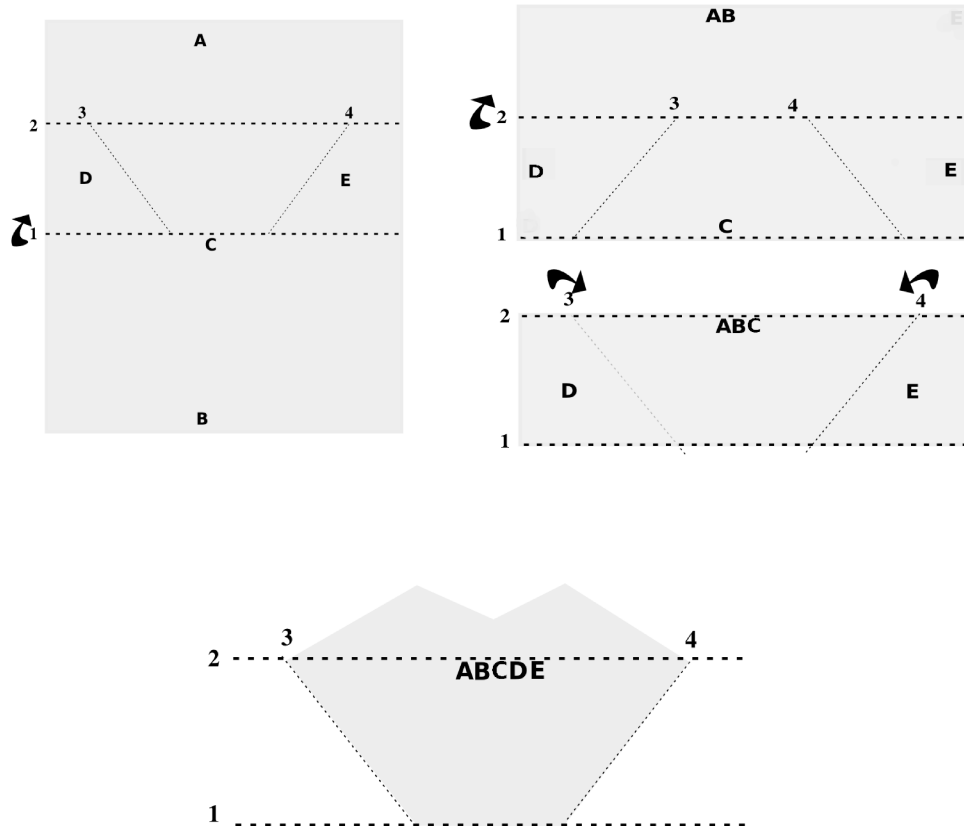


Figure 2: Folding paper brings together “distant” points to “actualize” unique occurrences. Numbers indicate the sequence of folds, dotted lines indicate the location of folds and arrows indicate the direction of the fold.

The first fold (stratification) was a capturing or actualization of the virtual possibility AB but also made the virtual possibility of ABC more viable, though not necessary. In one sense, AB and ABC both exist as virtualities on *the* plane of immanence and in another sense ABC exists more immediately as a virtual potential of AB's zone of deterritorialization as *a* plane actualized on or in *the* plane. *The* plane is all multiplicity, *a* plane is the particular actualization of certain

multiplicities 'regionally' within the plane. To put this another way, folding or actualization is a form of determination but insofar as it makes other actualities more viable it is also the creation of a freedom. It could be said that while the actualization of AB renders it more difficult or perhaps impossible to actualize AC, without it ABC or ABCDE or ABD or ABDEC would be nearly unfathomable. An actualization, insofar as it captures, is an act of determination but insofar as it generates a plane within the plane, is also the grounds for a freedom of further actualization.

To summarize and simplify this, Deleuze's notion of immanence might be described as follows. The universe (or multiverse) is a phase space or plane of immanence consisting of nomadic 'particles' or singularities in flows surrounded by real unactualized potentials (immanent virtualities). Within this consistent multiplicity of singularities exists all of the possible states or configurations the universe may exist in. These possible states exist as real virtualities that may be actualized through double-articulations (sedimentation and systemic rendering or folding) along the flows of vectors.<sup>100</sup> The ontology described above might be taken to produce a relative freedom. There is freedom because insofar as ABC is an immanent possibility of AB, it is not *necessitated by* the actualization of AB, it is simply a *possibility of* this actualization. The freedom is relative because the

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<sup>100</sup> As strange as this ontology seems at first, from my very basic understanding it is actually quite compatible with the basic theoretical concepts of quantum mechanics.

actualization of ABC 'relies' on the articulation of AB. For Deleuze we might say that this is somewhat accurate, though he rejects the hierarchization of the process as an evolution or teleology and he also rejects the primacy of any given strata or actualization.<sup>101</sup>

Under this ontology we do not need to bother so much with the freedom/determinism dichotomy. Instead we have varying degrees of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. He notes, for example that a crystal, which can grow outward in any and every direction, is always limited by or reliant upon the current strata and future substrata which is its outward surface. In other words, only the outer surface of the crystal is a zone of “deterritorialization” which can be actualized in different ways (it is *a* plane on *the* plane). Once the territorialization occurs, the original outward surface becomes a relatively static substrata for the new outward surface and must remain “coded” in that way until the crystal is no more.<sup>102</sup> In this sense the crystal is both determined and free. The crystal is much like a brick house being built. Each layer of brick cements the layers below it into place while presenting a top surface which may be built upon in various ways. However, once this layer is built on, it too gets locked into place (it becomes over-coded and loses most of its zones of deterritorialization). Could it then be said that selfhood is something which is

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101 See *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari. p.69, for example

102 Ibid. p.60

subject to over-coding? Could this be the stasis which Plato and most others since him were attempting to describe? The answer is a complicated yes and no. Selfhood is largely a cultural phenomenon, something imposed by social groupings. For a social grouping to occur there must be at least two folds in addition to the folds which create an object like a crystal: an organ-ization (an organic fold) and a cultural fold. While a crystal's plane of immanence (deterritorialized zone) within the plane of immanence is limited to its surface, organic structures are much less limited. Organic structures (or “organic stratum”), according to Deleuze, possess a “detachment of a pure line of expression...[which] makes it possible for the organism to attain a much higher level of deterritorialization...”<sup>103</sup> In other words, it can deterritorialize and reterritorialize 'inward' and 'outward'. It can re-organ-ize its surface and components. Here, at this 'level' the demarcation between substrata and strata is not so clear as each possesses zones of deterritorialization. A cell, for example, with a “living membrane” develops through “transduction” or through an “...amplification of the resonance between the molecular and the molar, independently of the order of magnitude...”<sup>104</sup> Unlike the crystal, the cell can re-organ-ize (reterritorialize) its substrata (its organelle for example) through interaction with its milieu.<sup>105</sup> In this

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103 Ibid. p.60

104 Ibid.p.60

105 See “Origin of mitochondria in relation to evolutionary history of eukaryotic alanyl-tRNA synthetase” (PNSA 97.22 (2000)) Schimmel et.al.

sense the organic strata possesses 'more' zones or avenues of deterritorialization. Continuing to complex organisms such as humans reveals even greater zones of deterritorialization: the organism can *actively* modify its milieu, which modifies the organism in genuine dynamic co-emergence.<sup>106</sup> Deleuze focuses on the development of tools and language but the basic idea seems to be that our particular organization (embodiment with tactile hands and high capacity for cognition and communication, for example) allow for accelerated de- and re-territorialization of self and milieu.<sup>107</sup> This capacity for accelerated de- and re-territorialization is analogous to Merleau-Ponty's conception of human ambiguity and the dynamism between agent and environment. Human beings are never pure planes of immanence, but are always attaining planes by 'scurrying along it' and by re-organizing their selves and their milieu.<sup>108</sup> This means that there is no real reason, ontologically to force upon one's self a static or enduring identity. To do so would be to deny the 'freedom' we have to reterritorialize ourselves or to actualize our virtualities and to create the means for new 'freedoms'. Adhering to an ontology of static selfhood is to limit the 'scurrying' a given person may partake in.

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106 It is interesting to note that Evan Thompson also explores this in *Mind in Life* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007 ). See especially Chapter 7: *Laying Down a Path in Walking: Development and Evolution* where he proposes “enactive evolution” as a better way to understand how conscious agents change dynamically with their environment.

107 See *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari. p.60f

108 *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988) Deleuze and Guattari. p.150

To deny this ability to de- and re-territorialize is to attempt to become a crystal, or worse it is an attempt to become a substrata buried deep within the crystal. We ought to forever actualize new virtualities by embracing new ways of thinking and interacting with the world and others, if for no other reason than that we have the capacity to do so. As will be demonstrated in chapter three, such perpetual reterritorialization is a type of liberty which complex organic strata can achieve and embracing this liberty enriches the lived experience as a developmental one. Deleuze refers to this as “rhizomatics” which is a mode of living with perpetual deterritorialization and reterritorialization in every direction. To live this way is to treat our selves as transitory modes of being becoming, as transitory actualizations embracing the processes of existence. In other words, it is to break free from the rigidity imposed by the over-coding of a particular juncture.<sup>109</sup> To live this way is to live as a creator, rather than a passive re-actor submitting to current values, norms, modes of life or the contingent selves a given agent has been in the past. Deleuze notes that philosophy, and I would extend this to the general mode of living today, has become “nothing more than taking the census of all the reasons man gives himself to obey” that which has been actualized.<sup>110</sup> This is tantamount to denying that further actualization, with regard to a given self or otherwise, is possible. If Deleuze's ontology is correct, and I take

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109 See Chapter 1 of *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988).

Especially p.5, 7, 12 and 15

110 *Pure Immanence* ( New York: Zone, 2001) Deleuze. p.69



it to be, then further actualization is always not only possible but inevitable. When we treat our selves as static realities we partake in self oppression by succumbing to the modes of being handed to us by history and our pasts; we crystallize and negate the dialogical flow which we are highly capable of facilitating and accelerating. In the words of Merleau-Ponty, to live this way might be akin to becoming 'psychologically rigid' which is to force onto the world a synthetic 'categorical black and white' framework with no ambiguity and to live with a rigid and unwavering aversion to contradiction.<sup>111</sup> If Deleuze's ontology holds any meaning then this mode of life is a denial of the process of being becoming and an unnecessary, self-imposed limiting of new modes of living, unless of course human beings are nothing more than crystals or brick houses.

In this chapter, Deleuze's ontology has been sketched out. This ontology is one where becoming, change and multiplicity are primal. Insofar as each human being partakes in the process of actualization within the plane of immanence by generating planes of immanence and insofar as each human is one composed of multiplicities and zones of deterritorialization, any given identity is one of multiplicity and change. Deleuze's ontology, which I take to be a compelling description of being and reality, is one which suggests that identity could never really be static. Even something as simple as a crystal reterritorializes, albeit to a

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111 See *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1964) Especially p. 100f

lesser degree than a complex organism is capable of. If this ontology is at all correct then the notion of a non-static identity and a dynamic conception of human individuals is certainly philosophically compelling. In the following and final chapter, the notion of anarchic selfhood is developed more explicitly. Furthermore, through this discussion it will become evident why exactly this conception of selfhood is compelling from a practical point of view.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Anarchic Selfhood: Life as Dialogue**

In chapter one it was established that the idea of a static or enduring self is at best a useful fiction and at worst an institutionalized by-product of ontological conjecture. In the philosophy of Plato it was used to help solidify his metaphysical, and more importantly ethical, essentialism. The concept was appropriated by monotheistic theologies to support their dogmas surrounding the afterlife before finding expression in the work of philosophers like Descartes who thought it to be the saviour of freedom. None of these philosophers ever bothered attempting to explain the self in its own right. When thinkers began to do just that it immediately became apparent that there was not much behind the concept aside from its usefulness in ethical activities and for ownership or the accommodation of other social activities as is evident in the work of Kant and Locke. In short, the

idea of an enduring or static self, the *me-ness* or *something* which makes a human animal the same through space and time seems to be conceptually ill-founded. With this in mind chapter two set out to explain an alternative ontology developed through the work of Deleuze. As demonstrated, this fractal ontology is one where change, multiplicity and becoming are both indispensable and primal. Within such an ontology there is no need for a static or enduring self. In fact, as suggested, insofar as human animals are capable of reterritorialization there seems to be an obligation to do just that – to constantly become and embrace a multiplicity of selves and relations through space and time. As an individual 'becomes' by folding or territorializing. The apparent determinacy created unleashes the possibility for new and unique folds which are not immediately possible without the first movement of determination. In short, every act of capture brings to the fore new possibilities for the actualization of different virtualities. In other words, every incarnation of being is at best an 'intermediate' phase of becoming and this process is immersed in a necessary multiplicity. In this respect, Deleuze's ontology provides a framework which makes an enduring self seem philosophically trivial and compels us to revisit the notion of selfhood altogether.

In this chapter an alternative understanding of selfhood is put forth: anarchic selfhood. This understanding of the self rejects the notion that there is or ever could be a static or enduring self. This is not to say that one may never act as

if there is such a thing, though as we shall see this is always only to actualize certain, usually social, possibilities. The problem arises when treating people *as if* they are the same becomes reified thereby locking the dynamic self in a conceptual prison which attempts to synthetically halt the process of becoming. This creates the possibility for responsibility as retribution whereas the anarchic conception of selfhood facilitates a more robust process of responsibility as redemptive affirmation while also placing more emphasis on personal and social development. This is why, practically speaking, the anarchic understanding of selfhood is more desirable than a static conception of the self. This will be explored in what follows. First, however, it is necessary to describe what exactly anarchic selfhood is and how it fits together with Deleuze's ontology as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Anarchic Selfhood: An Outline**

The anarchic conception of selfhood begins and ends with the notion which arguably provoked Plato's creation of the forms and the enduring self: that becoming and multiplicity are absolutely primary within the processes of the universe. Where Plato thought this to be an obstacle to overcome for the sake of a concrete morality, I follow Deleuze and Guattari as well as Nietzsche, among others, and embrace the primacy of becoming and multiplicity as understood in Deleuze's fractal ontology. In brief the anarchic conception of self is that there is

no one self, no enduring or static *me-ness*, in the universe. This understanding of the self sees each human individual as a composite of dynamic relationships and becomings in situation. It is in this sense that the self is multiplicitous. As noted, any reference to an enduring self is merely a convenience. At the very most we might say that there are particular “cradle to grave time-worms”<sup>112</sup> where each “slice” is a distinct entity. By cradle to grave time-worms it should be understood that under the perdurantist framework human beings are understood as unique spacetime chains made up of distinct units or “slices” as time passes. Of course due to the nature of human perception each individual only observes a single time slice at any given instant and past and future time slices are not directly observable.

To illustrate this difficult concept it is helpful to draw a heuristic distinction between space and time. The truth is that they are not distinct as it is widely agreed that space-time as a system is constituted by three “space-like” dimensions and one “time-like” dimension. It is likely the case that human perception is biased towards noticing changes in space-like dimensions rather than changes in time-like dimensions. It is conceivable that while we perceive space with our senses we are incapable of directly perceiving time in this way.

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112 Branching and Uncertainty (*The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 59.3 (2008): 293-305) Saunders and Wallace. p.294. NB: the authors are utilizing the famous articulation of perdurantism articulated by David Lewis. This theory supposes that individuals are temporal parts which vary and are distinct depending upon the time slice looked at. See *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001) for example.

Nonetheless, supposing space and time were distinct and that we could visually perceive time, we might have the following experience: Imagine sitting in an empty room and a man walks in and crosses the. Spatially this is a familiar scene. He crosses your field of vision and changes position in relation to yourself and the four walls. If you were able to perceive this event temporally it would be very different. Rather than one man you would see a chain of men, very similar to each other and wearing the same clothes, melding into each other and forming a snake or worm of overlapping figures across the room much like a photograph taken with a long exposure time. Each segment represents a temporal instant. The 'smaller' the instant you are able to perceive the more the figures will be overlapped. To make this more clear it might be helpful to think of the room as being lit by a strobe light. Normally the spacial perception would then be of a man frozen in position each time the light goes on and he would appear to be disappearing and reappearing slightly further ahead as the light flickers on and off. Perceived temporally the previous positions would remain where they are so that there would be a series of frozen forms stretching across the room. This is precisely what is meant by “time-worm” – the 'totality' of distinct units making up a given thing or person's journey through time (which is of course a journey through space-time). It is this time worm and its slices which contribute to the multiplicitous and anarchic self. Each time slice-self possesses a distinct

perspective on a life and exists in different relations, however slight the variation might be. Through what Merleau-Ponty understands as a type of reflection upon the past and projection into the future, the present self (or time-slice) exists in a “field of presence” where time appears “not [as] a line, but [as] a network of intentionalities.”<sup>113</sup> The present time-slice self opens up onto a projected future of potential self-states and a retained pool of past self-states. Interaction with these through Deleuzian actualization, re-actualization and de-actualization is what makes the self fundamentally multiplicitous. In any case, if it were possible to view *a* self as the anarchic self it might be thought of as all of the possible selves a given individual might become or has been in a sort of superposition – a field of virtual self-states which may become actual in situation. Such a view would be not unlike the view of the plane of immanence provided in figure one, both in its limitations and in that it indicates flows or folds actualizing and de-actualizing dynamically. In any given situation the human being may actualize or become a self roughly equivalent to a snapshot of the plane of immanence. Much like Deleuze's fold this is not a mere act of determinacy which terminates becoming. Rather, it is an actualization which facilitates further actualization. To view the self as static, it is worth remembering, would be to truncate or stunt this process by holding a given person to what they have been. In this way a given actualized

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113 *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962) Merleau-Ponty. p.417. See also p.410f

self becomes burdensome as a determination which does not partake in further actualization.

Under the anarchic conception of selfhood the agent, on becoming a new self in a particular situation, does not preclude the re-actualization of a self somewhat similar to one of their past selves nor does he commit completely to the present actualized self. For example, when I am in my room with my love interest a particular romantic self, one actualized and formed within that particular relationship among others, is engaged and comes to the fore. When later that day I go to work I actualize a different self forged in different pools of my becoming. Upon returning home to my love I re-actualize a version of that particular romantic self once again. The self that has returned to the loving activity is different because it is a new time slice with new and unique experiences bearing upon it. It is important to note that the “two” selves discussed, though they are distinct, are not entirely discrete. That is to say, they bear upon each other and bleed into one another. They are two distinct entities mingling to form a new, though non-totalized, multiplicitous, entity in each instant. These notions are echoed in the works of Merleau-Ponty who notes that “We have the experience of an *I* not in the sense of an absolute subjectivity, but indivisibly demolished and remade by the course of time...the unity...is not a real unity, but a presumptive



unity on the horizon of experience.”<sup>114</sup> It is for precisely these reasons that a given agent never really is the “same self” and why each human animal is a multiplicity of selves. Our selves are multiple given the multiplicity of our situations as well as our movement through space-time and they are constantly changing both as situations change and as the multiplicitous self in situation bleeds into and reterritorializes itself. In this sense the becoming of selves is at least a double articulation at any given instant; the articulation of the immediate past self as a substrata for the articulation of the present self, both of which are altered through their interaction.

In some ways, the anarchic conception of selfhood has much in common with what Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon have termed the “dialogical self”, which combines elements of William James' distinction between an I and a me with Bakhtin's dialogical understanding of literature.<sup>115</sup> Like the anarchic conception of selfhood, these authors reject the notion of a “Cartesian I”.<sup>116</sup>

Instead the self is understood as

a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous I-positions. In this conception, the I has the possibility to move from one spatial position to another in accordance with changes in situation and time. The I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions, and has the capacity imaginatively to endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established.<sup>117</sup>

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114 *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962) Merleau-Ponty. p.219

115 See “The Dialogical Self” (*Culture & Psychology* 7.3 (2001): 243-81) Herman. p.243-246

116 *Ibid.* p.249f

117 *Ibid.* p.248

This should seem relatively familiar given what has been outlined above. However, given that these authors are largely concerned with basing their understanding of selfhood on a psychological perspective, their focus seems to be based on self understanding as a personal narrative. While this narrative description of selfhood is quite useful, it does not fully capture the ontological basis for an anarchic conception of selfhood. Hermans, building from his work with Kempen and Van Loon, treats the self as a sort of “decentralized multiplicity” of *narrators* (“*I*-positions”) telling “a variety of stories”.<sup>118</sup> The anarchic conception of selfhood takes this understanding one step further. The self is, in fact, a multiplicity of actual selves dynamically interacting to create ever new selves in varying situations rather than a collection of distinct narrators telling interconnected stories.

Under the anarchic conception of self, a particular human animal does have a privileged relationship with the past selves they have been and this makes it easier to emulate those past selves in current situations. But this sort of continuity is not really sufficient to maintain the claim that a self *is* its past selves, as Locke would have it. For example, a parent may have a more privileged relationship with the first two years of their child’s life than anyone else, including the selves the child becomes, but this does not make them the same as that past

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118 Ibid. p.252

child. It does, however, mean that the child's first two years have a greater capacity to combine with the present selves of the parents in the formation of their future selves. This is because only the parent has direct access to memories of the infant's first years and in this sense the parent is closer to the selves the infant was as an infant because they may affect them more immediately as memories to be interacted with in the present. Admittedly this is a somewhat odd notion; that a self from one particular time worm might have a more privileged relationship with a self from a different time worm. Having said that, there are many examples of such occurrences and if correct they seem to support the anarchic conception of selfhood. Another example would be a person with an extreme case of Alzheimers disease or complete amnesia. Such cases indicate a severance between previous time slices from the present human animal in their cradle to death time worm. From their perspective it is as though a new time worm has formed. For people with severe Alzheimers, it might even be that a new time worm forms each instant<sup>119</sup> which is to say that they have little or no relatively stable personality substrata to build from. Whatever the case, only those who knew the person before the onset of the disorder can be robustly psychologically or existentially impacted by the selves of the individual before the severing of their time worm. In this sense, the pre-disorder selves of the ill person act as more of a substrata for

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119 NB: "instant" here is used not as an exact measure of time, as in a second, but to indicate a duration of existential experience which may vary.

those who remember the previous time worm than for the ill human being. Granted the ill person might have, say, broken a hip before they lost their past selves completely and this will certainly affect them in their new time worm. But this is simply a more primal and rigid substrata from which their new selves will all begin rather than an indication of self-sameness. Any given substrata may give rise to countless folds which is to say countless selves.

If we think back to Deleuze's ontology, substrata are made at every articulation within the universe, including the articulation of matter. Such substrata, like the internal structures of a crystal, are difficult or impossible to alter without destroying the entirety of the articulation.<sup>120</sup> Having said that, the 'hard' sciences are largely concerned with gaining control over such substrata and much progress has been made in chemistry, medicine, and physics, for example. Furthermore, there is a growing body of "transhumanist" literature which argues that human beings, through the development of technology which augments human physical conditions, are becoming less and less constrained by their biological substrata.<sup>121</sup> Transhumanists cite examples as basic as the invention of

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120 NB: this does not require dualism where psychological phenomena are something distinct from physical phenomena. Both are actualized and related within the 'region' of the plane in which we have found ourselves.

121 See, for example, "Transhumanism" (*Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 8.1 (1968): 73-76) Huxley, "Transhumanism, Progress and the Future" (*Journal of Evolution and Technology* 20.2 (2009)) Verdoux and "Transhumanism" (*Foreign Policy* 1 Sept. 2001) Fukuyama. The last article warns of some of the dangers of the transhumanist project with regard to politics and foreign policy.

pace-makers, replacement hips, elimination of certain diseases and the use of behaviour altering drugs as examples of human progress towards reterritorializing our otherwise relatively rigid 'basic' substrata. The point remains: it is largely perspective or memory of the past which makes it something that can be used in the creation of present and future selves. Again, contrary to Locke this is not an indication of sameness. Rather, it is a matter of the robustness of the tool kit available for forging new selves in situation. We do not totalize the multiplicity of past selves with their multiplicity of experiences and substrata, we utilize them in reterritorialization of present selves and relations. This holds for not only the past selves of a particular human animal's time worm but for others' as well. It is perhaps the use of memory in the forging of new selves, along with the usefulness of acting *as if* someone is the same, which is partially responsible for the illusion that a person is the same self over time. In this way, it is not a self which endures but a perspective of selves past and a certain affinity to them, though that perspective necessarily changes in relation to a given time slice due to the dynamic process of becoming new selves. For example, in one situation I may view my past 'self as anguish before my amnesiac brother' as something which bears negatively upon my present self. In another situation, while relating to a person presently in a similar situation I may view that past self as something special, something which creates the substrata for a mutual fold. The point in all

of this is that although some substrata may remain relatively stable each fold indicates the creation of something new. The localized plane of immanence which is normally referred to as a particular being or self is actually a nexus of constant becoming. At most, sedimented substrata simply facilitate new modes of being and becoming. They are acts of determinacy which facilitate further creation of new selves. This is quite different than saying that any stable substrata or characteristic(s) indicate self-sameness.

The reader might be wondering why 'anarchic' was chosen as a word to describe the non-enduring or decentralized self. The word is used here in its literal sense to mean “without ruler”. When speaking of an anarchic selfhood then, we are speaking of a self without a ruler or agent who controls the selves of a given time stream. Recalling Deleuze's ontology, the individual human is free to engage in constant actualization of their planes of immanence. This is particularly important for two reasons. First because this conception of selfhood does not lead to a doctrine of absolute freedom (nor absolute determinism). The genesis of selves is always a folding of that which is. Insofar as it involves that which is, it is determined. However, insofar as the folding could realize any number of virtualities it is free. The second reason this term is important is that it might first appear that this conception of the self is a sort of presentism. This is the idea that

only the present *really* exists<sup>122</sup> and taken with the articulation of selfhood drawn out here, would seem to suggest that the present self is the ruler. In many ways the present self is not in control. It is not so much about controlling the past or the present absolutely. It is about affording our present selves the freedom we have to play an active role in the selves of each moment just as it is about allowing our past and future selves to play an active role in the process. That is to say, we must interact with the selves we have been and wish to become in a formative process of becoming selves. Furthermore, this terminology differentiates the anarchic conception of selfhood from the narrative or dialogical self developed by Herman. Because Herman's dialogical self relies partially on Bakhtin's literary theory there is a strange sense in which the individual appears to be similar to a meta-reader interpreting the different narrative voices involved in the story that is their life. It is the meta-reader who then takes up the "I-positions" and breathes life into each character. For Herman the multiplicitous self is equivalent to the numerous characters in a book. Like characters in a book under Bakhtin's dialogical understanding of literature, the characters (or selves) are narrated and partially authored by the reader, which in Herman's conception of self appears to be a sort of supra-self. The anarchic conception of the self does not imply any such 'reader'. At each present moment the human individual, consciously or otherwise, is

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122 See *A Future for Presentism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006 ) Craig Bourne, for example.

partaking in the process of folding onto and over their past selves in the creation of new and unique selves. It is worth pausing to note that we do, as a matter of convenience, punish and reward past deeds done by particular human animals in present moments, which is why it is important for past, present and future selves to work together in a type of anarcho-syndicalist selfhood. Reflection upon past selves and the projection of future selves meet in the present each moment, within situation, to actualize a unique self-in-situation. The multiplicitous self is a loose collection of freely associated time slices at work to birth a distinct self in the present situation. Although this will be treated in more detail below it is worth mentioning here that present rewards and punishments for past events are only effective when the particular human animal in question has continued to regenerate a version of the past self which did the deed in question. As early as the eighteenth century, William Hazlitt was concerned with the problem of present rewards and punishments due to the changing nature of the self. As noted in chapter one, Locke shared similar concerns but more with regard to ownership.

In essence, the process of becoming selves is one of perpetual developmental and might at first appear to be no different from certain understandings of existential psychology. Foucault's project, for example, was one which sought to "cultivate our freedom to re-create the self by disassembling the habitual selves that we find ourselves to be as we are constituted in social and



power relations with one another.”<sup>123</sup> As demonstrated in works like Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, it is true that much of what a given person believes about their self and their roles does seem to be the product of institutionalized power and there is a legitimate philosophical project in uncovering such power. However, there is a sense in which the complete removal of all such sedimentations would be the removal of all of the folds at the disposal of the region of the folded plane of immanence that is the individual. This is not to say that a male or female living in North America, for example, must simply deal with the stereotypes or roles ascribed through gendering. Rather, the cultural fold of gender may provide the basis for the generation of new modes and new identities to be created by individuals in various situations. If there is not a core self, as suggested by my understanding Deleuze's ontology, something like gender stereotypes lose much of their force.

It should be noted, however, that many institutions are highly rigid and take identities to be equally as rigid. As such it often requires great effort by many individuals and generations to loosen the tight grip of culturally enshrined substrata pertaining to identity ascription. In cases where such substrata are challenged and loosened, progress towards a more free association is often made. Instead of being a dichotomy indicating real differences between types of

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<sup>123</sup> See *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* ( New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.262

individuals, identity traits currently entombed in gender stereotypes can be thought of as a continuum along which one might exist in various positions depending on the situation. I am free to frolic along the continuum in situation and there is little beyond rigid social institutions which chains me to one spot because there is no me to chain.<sup>124</sup> There should be no reason for surprise if I engage with 'emotion' in one moment and 'reason' the next, two traits which have often been arbitrarily ascribed to gender stereotypes. It is true that my body is a relatively stable fold. But if the female body is fold AB and the male body is fold AC, there is no reason to suppose that this in any way precludes the realization of ABR or ACR and ADE or ACE at any given time. Again, such arguments would be greatly strengthened by a transhumanist position. In fact the stability of the sexual-bodily human substrata is already being greatly reduced due to modern reproductive medicine and surgery.

Perhaps the larger problem is the powerful institutionalization of rigid substrata at the social or cultural level. Such institutions impose a rigid substrata consisting of well defined roles with few zones of deterritorialization upon individuals. Unfortunately detailed description of the creation of institutions which are more open to reterritorialization is far beyond the scope of the current

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<sup>124</sup> NB: the problem of rigid social institutions is an extremely large one. The first step to facilitating anarchic selfhood would have to be moving away from such institutions. Although institutional change is difficult, it is by no means impossible and I would argue that recent developments in feminist, post-colonial and post-modern philosophy are working towards this end as are social and civil rights movements.

work. As such discussion of institutions will be limited to what is immediately relevant. It should suffice to say that this was one of the goals of the Situationist International, a group of avant-garde academics, philosophers and artists who played a role in the May 1968 social movement in France. It is worth quoting Guy Debord at length on this matter as he speaks both to rigid institutionalizations, non-rigid play with institutions, and his project is generally in line with the activity of an engaged anarchic self. In his first *Thesis on Cultural Revolution* (no relation to the use of the phrase associated with Mao) Debord writes of the rigid institutionalization of art, and this may be extended to rigid institutionalization of anything (academics, philosophy, selfhood etc.):

The traditional goal of aesthetics [as it is institutionalized] is to produce...impressions of certain past elements of life in circumstances where those elements are lacking or absent, in such a way that those elements escape the disorder of appearances subject to the ravages of time...success is thus measured by a beauty that is inseparable from duration, and that even goes so far as pretension of eternity. The goal of the situationists is immediate participation in a passionate abundance of life by means of deliberately arranged variations of ephemeral moments. The success of these moments can reside in nothing but their fleeting effect. The situationists consider cultural activity...as an experimental method for constructing everyday life, a method that can and should be continually developed...<sup>125</sup>

The most important thing to note here is that such rigid institutionalization and the forced reproduction of the past extends beyond art and is generally antithetical to

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125 "Theses on Cultural Revolution." (*Situationist International Anthology* Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006 )Debord. p.53

multiplicity and transience as explained through Deleuze's ontology. Debord's position on the 'rigid institutionalization' and project of 'immediate and passionate participation in fleeting moments' is equivalent to the task of the reformulation of the self as multiplicitous or anarchic. The Situationists wanted to incorporate a 'free play' with cultural artifacts and institutions, a deterritorialized cultural substrata rather than a rigidly structured one. The point of mentioning all of this is simply to illustrate that while the anarchic conception of selfhood bears many affinities to existential psychologies, such as the notion that powerful institutions force identity roles on individuals, the key differences are that Deleuze's ontology and the resulting understanding of selfhood emphasized playful interaction with substrata where possible rather than immediate destruction of them. This is partially due to implicit rejection of the notion that there is a genuine self or even genuine desire somehow divorced from situation and lurking beneath the suppression issued from social, cultural, or perhaps even physical configurations.

Foucault notes that the power institutions he deals with tend to be ones which seek to limit novel folds because they tend to stress negative relations such as “rejection, exclusion, refusal, blockage, concealment, or mask.”<sup>126</sup> In a sense the anarchic conception of selfhood is comparable with this understanding of institutions and the individual because it supposes that the latter should be

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<sup>126</sup> *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage, 1990) Foucault. p.83

constructed to incite novel expressions of individuals rather than limit them. The difference is that philosophies like Foucault's sometimes seem to suggest that the historically generated identity roles, which are imposed culturally and institutionally, ought to be outright rejected in lieu of what the individual genuinely wants from their own life. Again, there is no real problem with this except that it implies that a person exists outside of folds; it implies the existence of a somewhat transcendental being or pre-institutionalized genuine self. The anarchic conception of selfhood, since it understands being in terms of the plane of immanence, suggests not the negation of negation (the outright rejection of institutions which limit). Instead, as noted, the suggestion is for a playful and non-binding interaction with institutions and the multiplicitous selves which engage with those institutions. It is not so much that institutions must be torn down, if that is even possible, it is that interactions with them must be taken less seriously, as it were. It is worth emphasizing again that rigid social and cultural institutions do in fact seek to chain an individual to a particular identity or set of identities based largely on arbitrary factors. It has been the project of social and civil rights movements to free people from such oppression and the battle rages on. Insofar as Deleuze's ontology and the anarchic conception of selfhood discount the possibility of a core to any given self because each human animal is constantly becoming in the world, such philosophies fully reject that there is a necessary or

non-synthetic core set of traits which might belong to any particular group of individuals and thus that such traits should be rigidly institutionalized.

As is evident from Deleuze's ontology, everything in the material universe, especially organisms, exist within the flux that is the constant motion of space-time. As such any talk of something completely stable, unchanging or absolutely enduring (self-same as discussed in the introduction) is purely metaphorical as no such thing could possibly exist, though substrata and strata may be more or less rigid and their rigidity varies through time. In speaking of coming to know something as an “in-itself”, Nietzsche points out that this merely means “to place one's self in a conditional relation to something.”<sup>127</sup> It is important to note here that for Nietzsche this is not a mere matter of epistemology. Rather, it is a result of the transience of being and the world. He notes that identity and being “are inherent neither in that which is called subject nor in that which is called object: they are complexes of events apparently durable in comparison with other complexes [and] express only variations in degree from a certain perspective...”<sup>128</sup> In other words, when we take something to *be* we ignore the fact that it is actually a *becoming*. The apparent durability of selfhood when institutionalized is little more than a relatively smaller amount of change or perhaps the apparent stability and conformity to memory and relations as noted above. If one were to spend an

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127 *The Will To Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968) Nietzsche. p.301

128 *Ibid.* p.298

hour watching the flow of water from a river's bank one would note how great the change in the water is and how the bank and bed of the river seem to change very little, if at all. However, a time-lapse video of the river over the course of a day or month or ten years would reveal how much the bed and bank actually do change. The change is simply more or less apparent depending on the perspective and speed of a given movement in relation to other motions. The bank, bed and location of the river appear stable but are in fact constantly changing. They are simply stable relative to the water and perhaps with an eye to the surrounding features of the land.

This example is a bit misleading since it is perhaps more to do with quantitative change whereas selfhood, as outlined in the previous sections, might be said to be in motion both quantitative and qualitative. The anarchic conception of selfhood admits outright that all which has been called 'being' is really 'becoming' and does not necessarily attempt to mitigate or limit the degree of variation. In fact, under the anarchic conception of selfhood, each 'individual' is a multiplicity of different 'forces'<sup>129</sup> within a multiplicity of 'sensations'<sup>130</sup> partaking in a dynamic 'world of multiplicity'.<sup>131</sup> For Nietzsche the question “what is that?”, whether asked of a self or an object, is always actually “what is that for *me?*”<sup>132</sup>

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129 Ibid. p.341

130 Ibid. p.280

131 Ibid. p.270

132 Ibid. p.301

here and now. Much like Kant's synthetic unity of apperception, the appearance of unity, uniformity, and sameness is a practical function of human becoming rather than a necessary mark of any noumenal reality. By recognizing the primacy of becoming and transience as well as the necessity of spacial-temporal perspective, which always must change, the anarchic conception does not attempt to reduce the life of an individual (or species for that matter) to a unified and uniform state or essence beyond what is practical.

By way of summation then, the anarchic conception of selfhood embraces what Deleuze takes to be fundamental to the processes of the universe: becoming and multiplicity. Each human being is a multiplicity of selves, interacting with each other and their environments which always makes them a human becoming differentiated multiplicitous selves. The process is intertwined with memory where individual human agents generally have a more direct perspective of the time worms they have participated in and thus are more capable of utilizing past slices of them in the creation of their present selves. With this description it is now possible to turn to some of the practical implications of the anarchic conception of selfhood. This is accomplished first by looking more into how this understanding better facilitates a type of self-actualization (or selves-actualization) before turning to the surprisingly robust form of responsibility which arises.



### **Anarchic Selfhood as Selves-Actualized**

In the preceding section, during the description of anarchic selfhood, it was impossible to avoid the ways in which anarchic selfhood facilitates a type of actualization of selves. It was asserted that understanding the self as multiple and constantly becoming leads to a sort of playful engagement with institutions and situations. Such playful engagement, and in ideal circumstances institutions open to it, facilitate the free-flowing reterritorialization of self in situation. Such an act is by its nature both an actualization of selves and through this an affirmation of the creative impulse of life as it partakes in the process of becoming outlined in Deleuze's fractal ontology. Unlike an enduring or static conception of self, this understanding does not suppose that an individual ought to always be consistent with their past choices and past selves. This permits much more room for individual freedom from the burdens of past selves, though it does not necessarily do away with responsibility. This section briefly explores this more explicitly while contrasting it with the limitations and barriers to actualization and affirmation which arise as a result of too rigidly clinging to static and enduring identities.

It is a good idea here to briefly outline what an extreme adherence to a static or enduring conception of selfhood might look like. First and foremost the discussion of the static self must be somewhat of a thought experiment because,

contrary to what is suggested by the ontology of Plato and the theologians, there never was a static self to begin with. It should be noted that synthetic static selfhood occurs to various degrees and is, in my opinion, deeply connected to particularly rigid institutions which focus on hierarchy, obedience, and static roles. What is said here is not necessarily meant to show that absolutely static selves, as such, absolutely exist. The degree of synthetic rigidity is likely the outcome of an attempt to forcefully, though not necessarily consciously, adhere to the static or enduring selves proposed by thinkers like Plato and the theologians. In any case, perhaps one of the best examples of what might occur due to the enforcement of static selfhood, though perhaps to various degrees, would be Merleau-Ponty's "psychological rigidity". He notes that people who are psychologically rigid tend to "reply to questions with black-and-white answers...give replies that are curt and lacking in shading...[are] generally ill disposed, when examining an object or a person, to recognize in them any clashing traits...[and] continually try...to arrive at a simple, categorical, and summary view."<sup>133</sup> He connects this condition to a lack of engagement with ambiguity in perception. In essence, such an attitude is an attempt to force a static and rigid order on the world of objects and people; it is a denial of Deleuze's fractal ontology. Merleau-Ponty further notes that the children displaying such

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133 "The Child's Relations With Others." in *The Primacy of Perception*. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1964) Merleau-Ponty. p.101

traits tend to come from homes where coercion and punishment seem to be emphasized.<sup>134</sup> Such mechanisms are closely connected to rigid role ascription through rigid social substrata. Those who are supposed to be categorically the authority lead and all others follow. Refusal to comply with such roles, to take up the identity of the follower/obeyer leads to punishment and or coercion. Such mechanisms and attitudes can be found within larger social institutions. Whether it is the cultural institution of gender roles or something more apparent like the labeling of criminals in the justice system, rigid role ascription is currently a large part of most societies.

The issue with such rigidity is that it leads to a reactive or passive lifestyle where the selves we become are severely, and perhaps synthetically, limited by their social or cultural substrata rather than an active life process where each makes ever new selves from said substrata through reterritorialization. Under the static conception of selfhood, even if we do away with oppressive institutions such as gender stereotypes, the individual may still remain trapped. One may be branded overly emotional or callous and overly rational and then, perhaps through an internalization process similar to Cooley's "looking glass self", become committed to actualize that trait.<sup>135</sup> Nietzsche knew of the rigid limits placed on people well and called it the sickness of modern society. For him the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p.102

<sup>135</sup> See *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Schocken, 1964) Cooley

institutionalization of rigid thought and rigid or narrow modes of living “is the triumph of “reaction” over active life and of negation over affirmative thought.”<sup>136</sup>

Such a mode of living might appear to be convenient or perhaps necessary when it comes to punishing transgressors of necessary social rules.

Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that psychological rigidity is merely a psychological force which is naturally stronger in some than others. It was noted that he connects this attitude with coercive and punitive institutions (i.e. an authoritarian type of household). He argues that “beneath this rigidity one could easily find real chaos or at least a deeply divided personality.”<sup>137</sup> This is because for Merleau-Ponty, much like for Deleuze, “ambiguity is of the essence of human existence, and everything we live or think always has several meanings.”<sup>138</sup> The question remains: how does embracing the ambiguity of life or engaging an anarchic self lead to affirmation and actualization? With regard to the latter the discussion will be limited as it is somewhat obvious that if one is free to choose how they engage with the process of reterritorialization they will be more actively participating in actualizing more of their virtualities, in Deleuze's terms, because they will not be forced to merely replicate the selves they have been or the selves which their social relations and positions impose on them as passive subjects.

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136 *Pure Immanence* (New York: Zone, 2001) Deleuze. p.68. Emphasis dropped

137 "The Child's Relations With Others." in *The Primacy of Perception*. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1964) Merleau-Ponty. p.101

138 *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, 1962) Merleau-Ponty. p.169

However, two points must be made about constant actualization and re-actualization (reterritorialization) of the self. The first, as Nietzsche notes, is that when 'willing' a new self or changing willfully it is often very painful for close acquaintances. In "On the Tomb Song", which deals with sentimentality, transitions from youth, and circumstantial barriers, he notes that "when I did what was hardest for me and celebrated the triumph of my overcomings [read: reterritorializations\*], you [apparitions of my youth] made those who loved me scream that I was hurting them most."<sup>139</sup> By this he means that attempts to reforge oneself will always cause pain for those who knew the past multiplicitous self, which will likely cause pain for the present changing multiplicitous self. For such pains, the pains of falling out of love, of becoming something other than what you were, and something different than what people have expected of you, there seems to be no remedy. However, the second point I want to mention concerning actualization and re-actualization does seem to counter-balance this sorrow. In his "patient oriented therapy", Carl Rogers focuses on the "actualizing tendency" of life which seeks out a 'real self' (though I would not agree that this is a real enduring self hidden deep in each individual) that "is not a static condition but a fluid process of becoming."<sup>140</sup> Once realized, the individual becomes "fully

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\* Reterritorialization can be understood as overcoming the apparent limitations imposed through the process of territorialization. This must be understood through Deleuze's ontology where every territorialization also creates new zones of deterritorialization.

139 "On the Tomb Song." (*The Portable Nietzsche* New York: Penguin, 1976) Nietzsche. p.224

140 *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006) Martin and Barresi. p.248

functional” in that they are “open to experience, live existentially...[are] self trusting, experience freedom, and act and think creatively.”<sup>141</sup> Although actualization and re-actualization necessarily involve pain and sorrow in relation to the sentimentality pertaining to the past selves and their relations to others, the experience of freedom and living creatively will make it a worthwhile endeavor. Having said that, to really appreciate what is gained by embracing an anarchic selfhood requires a somewhat closer look at the concept of affirmation.

Nietzsche is perhaps the most well known advocate of affirmation. He often contrasted it with passivity and negation. However, his understanding of affirmation is deeply connected to his notion of redemption, which will be treated in more detail below. For now it is worth turning towards a less well known articulation of affirmation. Perhaps one of the most underrated understandings of affirmation, and the one nearest to what I have in mind, is the understanding developed by the Situationists. Their understanding of affirmation emphasizes the active creation of situation over the passive acceptance of circumstance. In an unattributed work appearing in the ninth edition of the journal “Internationale Situationniste” titled “Questionnaire”, the author defines situationism with regard to the concept of affirmation as it pertains here:

[Situationist] denotes an activity aimed at *creating* situations, as opposed to passively recognizing them in academic or other separate terms. At all levels

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141 Ibid. p.248

of social practice...we replace existential passivity\* with playful affirmation. Up till now philosophers and artists have only interpreted situations; the point is to transform them. Since human beings are molded by the situations they go through, it is essential to create human situations. Since individuals are defined by their situation, they need the power to create situations worthy of their desires....Our era [must] replace the fixed frontier of the extreme situations that phenomenology has limited itself to describing with the practical creation of situations; [we must] continually shift this frontier with the development of our realization. We want a phenomeno-praxis...<sup>142</sup>

This passage is interesting for two reasons. First, it seems quite compatible with Deleuze's fractal ontology where strata and substrata co-emerge through double articulation. More immediately though, it highlights creation as an inherently life affirming activity. The creation of situations is also a creation of a self and the creation of a self is the creation of situations. This is analogous to what Deleuze calls the deep connection between thought and life where “modes of life inspire ways of thinking; modes of thinking create ways of living. Life *activates* thought, and thought in turn *affirms* life.”<sup>143</sup> To simply passively receive the situation and the self which it works to generate is, in a sense, to deny the creative and generative processes of the universe, or at the very least to become alienated from what might be our species being, to appropriate a Marxian term. Furthermore, in response to the question of whether situationism is related to an “actual way of life” the answer is that “It goes without question that we support all forms of

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\* NB: probably not “the passivity of existentialists”. Read instead: “a passivity related to or at the core of one's existence.”

142 "Questionnaire." (*Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006) Unattributed. p.178

143 *Pure Immanence* (New York: Zone, 2001 ) Deleuze. p.66

liberated behavior, everything that the bourgeois and bureaucratic scum [sic. Read: rigid institutions or established order] call debauchery. It is obviously out of the question that we pave the way for the revolution of everyday life with asceticism.”<sup>144</sup> Again, the emphasis here is on an active life process where one partakes in the ongoing creation of selves rather than simply accepting what is made for and of them. This type of self creation and active participation in one's own becoming is, perhaps, the highest and most ecstatic form of life affirmation, though as noted it is difficult and often sorrowful. Through such activities the main end, if it must be called that, is “neither our individual psychological structures nor the explanation of their formation, but their possible application in the construction of situations.”<sup>145</sup> Everyone's project then becomes selves creation. The ongoing origami of self and situation which, as difficult as it may be, is an active process of creative life affirmation.

### **Responsibility as Existential Redemption**

It has been noted that one immediate concern with an anarchic selfhood might be that it causes issues for personal responsibility both with regard to rewards and punishments. First and foremost, if we accept Deleuze's ontology, and I argue that we should, then the anarchic conception of selfhood is a

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p.183

<sup>145</sup> "Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation." (*Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006) Debord. p.49



necessary way to really understand selfhood. The mitigation of change is, in many ways, counter to our being as becoming. Aside from that, as it does verge on naturalization which I should like to avoid, upon closer analysis this apparent weakness can actually be taken as one of the primary practical reasons for adopting this understanding. In this section it is argued that the anarchic conception of selfhood actually allows for a better understanding of responsibility, both as bestowed by others and as taken up by particular individuals in situation. In this way the reification and rigid institutionalization of static selfhood can be seen as less practical. In addition to this, the anarchic conception of selfhood also affords individuals more space to 'grow' as they are no longer chained to who they have been.

Let us return here to what was supposed to be Plato's concern regarding the transient universe. As noted in chapter one, he is quick to have Glaucon and Adeimantus challenge Socrates for an explanation of how it might be that it is better to live a just life and be thought unjust than to live an unjust life and be thought to be just. We might extend this now, given the transience supposed in Deleuze's fractal ontology to be something like this: why should anyone be held accountable, both in punishment and reward, for what they have done given that they are new 'selves' each instant? If a criminal proclaims that his instant of digression has passed and he is a new self should he be absolved of the crimes of

the past self? The answer again is an unsatisfying yes and no. To understand this answer it is again worth comparing what might be said from the enduring self perspective before considering the view with regard to anarchic selfhood. The former seems to suggest that a retributive model of responsibility is best while the latter is more compatible with a redemptive model.

Admittedly, the case immediately appears to be in favour of the enduring self. Say Alice Murdoch killed her lover in a fit of jealous rage in front of a witness. It would simply be a matter of the witness identifying Alice at which point she could be punished by spending her life in jail for the crimes she herself committed. This punishment is morally justified because it was she who committed the crimes. If anarchic selfhood is true then there seems to be no way that she might be considered genuinely responsible for the crime. At the time the crime was committed she was a particular jealous self and as she sits weeping in her cell, perhaps even for the loss of her love, she is no longer that self. Just as we would not want to lock away Vernon Crabtree for the crimes of Alice Murdoch, it would be difficult to justify locking up Alice-self-as-sorrowful for the crimes of Alice-self-as-jealous-murderer. It seems then, that there can be no responsibility under the anarchic understanding of selfhood. But in turning to how criminal law often actually operates there is an indication of how responsibility might be accommodated. When a person is tried for a crime there are both circumstances

and factors which are considered that may mitigate the seriousness of the crime. Such things might include mental illness, provocation, an attempt to rectify the wrong or even a genuine display of remorse and recognition of the wrongness of the past act. There are also aggravating factors such as a history of similar wrongdoing, no remorse and a refusal to acknowledge the wrongness or impact of the action. Such practices are in place because when it is a matter of severe punishment, at least in recent decades and in the judicial system, there seems to be an implicit acknowledgement that people can and do change.

To gain a more robust understanding of the type of responsibility which emerges from the anarchic conception of selfhood we must again turn to Nietzsche. In “On Redemption” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche speaks of how unendurable the past and its relation to the present often are, noting that he could not bear it were he not also “A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future...”<sup>146</sup> He further notes that to endure the circumstantial nature of existence and the blunders of the past he must also be “a creator and a guesser of riddles [interpreter] and a redeemer of accidents...to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'...” which is the only route to redemption. Furthermore “All 'it was' is a fragment, a riddle, a dreadful accident [a meaningless occurrence among others] – until the creative will says to it 'But thus I willed it...But thus I

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<sup>146</sup> "On Redemption." (*The Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin, 1976) Nietzsche. p.251

will it; thus I shall will it”<sup>147</sup> Nietzsche is saying that the past, who we were, what we have done and what has been done to us are all essentially intrinsically meaningless. Its value stems from the individuals and the groups who interpret and interact with those past events. To simply wallow in the 'it was', the past event, is to passively accept its effects and allow them to bear unmediated upon our present selves. The act of creation, the redemption, or willing backwards is taking those pasts up in the present and using them in an affirmative act of creation. It is to take a past self's mistake or accident and build from it or reterritorialize it. It is to choose the formulation of the multiplicitous self in the present moment or situation. It is precisely this type of activity which allows for forgiveness and it is this which I call redemptive responsibility. The present self has an obligation, insofar as it is the present self most intimately related to the past self involved in the situation, to utilize that past self in an act of creative affirmation. Through appropriating pasts by using them to create a desired present the individual learns the Nietzschean yes, the yes which allows actualization. Living a life of this creative yes would be the equivalent to living as the antithesis of Sartre's individual who lives in bad faith by shirking his obligation to take responsibility for who he is, which for him is their actions in situation.<sup>148</sup> If a present self is genuinely affirming a different present self through the creative use

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147 Ibid. p.253

148 See, for example, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007) Sartre. p.40

of their past selves they can be said to be taking redemptive responsibility for the past selves' actions and punishment may not be necessary. Prudentially speaking it would be wise to ensure that they are in a community which might help them to continue to develop their new selves in a constructive and affirmative way, although it might be the case that this is true for everyone since we are, under this view, each of us a community of selves among communities of selves.

To be sure, there are cases where individuals do not redeem their past selves and in such cases something like punishment might be necessary, though it should always be with an eye to development and not simply a labeling of the person as a rigid and crystallized self incapable of progressing affirmatively through space-time. In any event, the anarchic conception of selfhood does allow for a type of responsibility: redemptive responsibility. Furthermore, insofar as our justice systems consider themselves, however superficially, to be “corrective” institutions, they already admit that selves change and in this sense each individual is not presumed to be self-same in the strict sense.

### **Final Remarks**

In the above work the concepts of selfhood and ontology have been explored. The first chapter set out to trace some of the more notable articulations of a static or enduring formulation of selfhood. This understanding of the self, while not necessarily subscribed to by many recent philosophers, with some

exceptions,<sup>149</sup> it does seem that in common sense philosophies or upon brief reflection, as well as in rigid social and cultural institutions, this view is often implied. Chapter one further noted that the use of a static conception of selfhood was almost always the result rather than the subject of philosophical inquiry. Plato and to a lesser extent Aristotle needed it to support their ethics. It was conveniently appropriated by the theologians for similar reasons and to deal with the difficulties surrounding a meaningful afterlife. Descartes tried to use it to save freedom and it finally found a home, though after becoming somewhat unravelled, in liberal philosophies. In chapter two it was necessary to take a detour to explore an alternative ontology articulated from the work of Deleuze. This fractal ontology is one where becoming and multiplicity are absolutely primal and provides some philosophically compelling reasons why the anarchic conception of selfhood is more accurate. From the concepts introduced in this chapter, the final chapter articulated the anarchic conception of selfhood. This understanding of the self, by embracing the multiplicity and becoming which we are and find ourselves in, asserts that there is no such thing as a core self and that we are perpetually generating new present selves. It was demonstrated that this process, when embraced, can be deeply affirmative and furthermore leads to a redemptive notion of responsibility which seems to be more in line, at least ideologically, with

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149 See *What is a Person* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010 ) by Christian Smith, for example.

contemporary justice systems.

In the last analysis what does this actually mean for our lives? In some ways it means little. As noted, this understanding of the self does not preclude acting *as if* someone is the same person for the sake of friendship or employment etc. Furthermore, insofar as it has its basis in ontological fact, we are all already anarchic selves to various degrees. However, the implication is that institutions ought to be made not based on stability per se, but should seek to accommodate personal and social change. In addition, we should not be surprised when we find a different person in bed next to us, or at work, nor should we try to stop them from becoming new people. If our new persons fit nicely we can continue to share the bed or work together, just as if in a hundred years when the Humber river has shifted to a new location if it still has a good yield of fish we will continue to fish there. It makes little sense to fish the river that has become one with no fish just as it makes little sense to sleep with someone you cannot connect with.

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