

POLITICS AND ITS DOUBLE: DELEUZE AND POLITICAL ONTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT:

The objective of this thesis is to intervene into the ongoing dispute surrounding the political import of Gilles Deleuze's single-authored work, specifically *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. This thesis presents an alternative explanation to the question of whether or not Deleuze's philosophy is political. By situating the debate surrounding Deleuze's political implications in the contemporary ontological turn in political theory, this thesis argues that Deleuze's works can be considered to be political in the non-conventional sense of the term, that is, insofar as a conceptual distinction is made between *politics* and *the political*. I further argue that Deleuze's univocal ontology influences a concept of *the political* that is immanent to his thought, and in this respect he can be said to present a *political ontology*. The reading of Deleuze's political ontology addresses not only the common critiques of his philosophy as posed by thinkers such as Alain Badiou, Peter Hallward, and Slavoj Žižek, but also sheds light on the problematic relationship between philosophy and politics.

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INTRODUCTION

Is the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze directly political? There are essentially three possible answers to such a question. First, if the answer to the question is yes, then it is expected that the philosophy either deals explicitly with political concepts, or expresses a certain view regarding the social and political order of society. Second, if the answer is no—that is, the philosophy in question is in no way *directly* political—then it could be the case that the philosophy is *indirectly* political. That is to say, although Deleuze’s work does not explicitly engage with political concepts or ideas, it can nevertheless indirectly be used in political thinking or activism. Third, Deleuze may be outright indifferent to politics and therefore considered apolitical.

Yet, what does it mean for a philosophy or theory to be directly political rather than indirectly? An example of something that is directly political, is the famous opening to Marx and Engels’ *The Communist Manifesto*:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations. The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones. Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms.

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Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.¹

We can consider this passage to be directly political because it explicitly deals with the historical circumstances that have generated social antagonisms that have caused human societies to change over time. That is to say, it is precisely because the discussion of the oppressor and the oppressed is the main theme running through the entire *Manifesto* that the work itself is directly political rather than indirectly. So we can assert that something is *directly* political when it engages with politically charged issues, ideas or concepts such as class struggle, inequality, economic exploitation and so on. Conversely, something can be indirectly political when it does not explicitly deal with political issues yet nevertheless can be used to think through problems such as racism, economic inequality, human rights, and sexism.

The question of Deleuze's political import has been the subject of much debate not only in Deleuze Studies but also in recent political theory (for example, the work of Toni Negri and Micheal Hardt). There are some scholars of Deleuze who maintain that there is a continuous political thread running from Deleuze's solo works right through to his co-authored books with Felix Guattari.² Paul Patton, in his book *Deleuze and the Political*, is of this view, asserting: "Despite his lack of engagement with issues of

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engles, "The Communist Manifesto," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence Hugh Simon (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 158-59.

² Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze and Politics*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 1.

normative political theory, Deleuze is a profoundly political philosopher.”³ Yet critics of Deleuze have argued that there is a decisive break or split between on the one hand Deleuze’s early historical monographs on Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Kant as well as *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* and on the other hand the works with Guattari.⁴ Slavoj Žižek claims that this break defines a ‘before and after’ of Deleuze’s political engagement. According to Žižek, Deleuze only became political when he met Guattari, and as such Deleuze’s early works such as *Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*, are considered to be unabashedly apolitical. As Žižek puts it: “It is crucial to note that *not a single one of Deleuze’s own texts is in any way directly political*; Deleuze ‘in himself’ is a highly elitist author, indifferent towards politics.”⁵ The main concern of this study is to address the contentious issue surrounding the political import of Deleuze’s univocal ontology of difference as established in *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*.

Is there a break or not in the work before and after the collaboration with Guattari? The debate has not ended and it is my view that both sides have failed to take into account a fundamental aspect surrounding the whole dispute, namely, what is meant by the term ‘political’. To the best of my knowledge, neither the proponents of Deleuze’s

³ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and The Political* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.

⁵ Ibid.

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supposed political philosophy nor his critics rightly define what they mean by ‘political’. The definition of what makes something political remains somewhat of a presupposition on both sides of the argument, which renders their respective answers to the problem ambiguous. So a clarification of the term political is needed if we are to adequately address the problem of Deleuze’s political import. Such clarification can be found in the recent ontological turn in political theory, specifically their distinction between *politics* and *the political*.

The central argument of this thesis is that Deleuze’s single-authored works, primarily *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, can be considered to have political purchase provided that we make a distinction between politics and the political. Deleuze’s texts may not engage in politics, but insofar as they constitute an ontology of univocal difference, this ontology can influence a concept of the political. This argument is one concerned with political ontology, and by ‘political ontology’, I mean *the influence upon principles of human relations by principles that constitute the being of the human*.

In Chapter 1, I unfold details of the political/politics distinction by contextualizing the debating surrounding Deleuze’s political purchase within the ontological turn in political theory. In the first section I provide a synopsis of this ‘turn’, and in the second section I elaborate on the conceptual difference between politics and the political. The difference between *politics* and *the political*, or in German between *die*

Politik and *das Politische*, or yet again in French between *la politique* and *le politique*, while a linguistic difference, is equally an ontological one as well.⁶ *Politics* refers to the conventional notion of politics (i.e., governments, bureaucratic policies, elections, parties, protest demonstrations and so on), while *the political* refers to the essential human characteristic that defines politics, it concerns fundamental ontological claims about what politics actually *is*. That is, the political refers to the constitutive characteristic of politics. While Deleuze's single-authored works are not directly political in the conventional sense of the term, they can be said to influence a concept of the political provided that Deleuze advances an ontology that can be expanded in the direction of a political ontology.

Chapter 2 focuses on *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, specifically on Deleuze's assertion that becoming is prior to being, and difference is ontologically privileged over the concept of identity. I explain Deleuze's critique of the dogmatic Image of Thought as found in classical Western metaphysics, and outline the difference between Aristotle's analogy of being thesis and Duns Scotus' univocity of being (which Deleuze appropriates). I examine how Deleuze reads the univocity of being thesis into Spinoza's immanent ontology and Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return to produce an original ontology of difference.

⁶ Oliver Marchart has pointed out that although the conceptual difference was first theorized in the German speaking world by Carl Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political*, the difference did not become habitual until the late 1950s in France. See Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 4.

In Chapter 3, I elaborate on Deleuze's concept of the political as influenced by his ontology of difference. I show that his concept of the political advocates the co-existence and the plurality of different political identities within any social order, as well as one that affirms individuals' ability to transform and become more than they are. I also consider some of the criticisms of Deleuze as being non-political. What the three most effective critics of Deleuze all have in common is their dismissal of Deleuze as a thinker not interested in politics. Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek and Peter Hallward all contend that Deleuzian philosophy is necessarily unhelpful to any politics of emancipation. Deleuze's philosophy is either too ascetic,⁷ apolitical,⁸ or outright unconcerned with the plight of people brought on by materialist social conditions.⁹ Against such criticism, I argue that Deleuze's single-authored texts, specifically *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, have political purchase provided that Deleuze's ontology influences a concept of the political that is distinct from the conventional understanding of politics.

It may be helpful to ask a seemingly simple but nevertheless important question: does Deleuze's philosophy need to be political at all? As mentioned above, the dispute over the consistency of Deleuze's political engagement—whether it is limited to his co-

⁷ Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), 13.

⁸ Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 20.

⁹ Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and The Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 164.

authored books with Guattari or extends to his solo writings—rests on a preconceived notion of politics. Is it fair to judge Deleuze’s thought by evaluating it in terms of a pre-established definition of politics? Deleuze himself reminds us that any critique should be first and foremost positive, meaning that, any serious criticism of a particular philosophy should first be an affirmation of it. Only by evaluating a philosophical argument, concept or position on its own terms can we then properly critique it. As Deleuze points out, it “is through admiration that you will come to genuine critique.”¹⁰ As such, any conception of a Deleuzian-inspired understanding of the political must be immanent to Deleuze’s own philosophy.

¹⁰ From the same passage: “The mania of people today is not knowing how to admire anything: either they are ‘against,’ or they situate everything at their own level while they chit-chat and scrutinize. That’s no way to go about it. You have to work your way back to those problems which an author of genius has posed, all the way back to that which he does not say *in* what he says, in order to extract something that still belongs to him, though you also turn it against him. You have to be inspired, visited by the geniuses you denounce.” It is this affirmative gesture which is central to properly criticizing Deleuze’s philosophy. In a sense, any genuine critique must be immanent to that which is being criticized. See Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, trans. Michael Taormina, ed. David Lapoujade (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 139.

CHAPTER 1: ONTOLOGY AND POLITICS

Political philosophy forces us to enter the terrain of ontology.

—Hardt And Negri, *Empire*

Which imbecile spoke of an ontology of the revolt? The revolt is less in need of a metaphysics than metaphysicians are in need of a revolt.

—Raoul Vaneigem,
The Revolution of Everyday Life

Introduction

In order to intervene in the controversial debate surrounding the political relevance of Deleuze's thought, I will situate the debate in the ongoing contemporary 'ontological turn' in political theory. This allows us to establish and differentiate between two senses of politics, namely, *politics* and *the political*.¹ By locating the debate surrounding the political import of Deleuze's solo works—particularly *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*—within the ongoing 'ontological turn' in political theory, this thesis argues that insofar as Deleuze develops an ontology, this ontology is political in a very particular sense of the term. Rather than defining politics in a conventional way, this chapter seeks to elaborate on the concept of the political, a novel notion of politics that has greater scope than what we would traditionally associate with

¹ Oliver Marchart, *Post-foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 8.

the term politics. The political refers to the ‘ontological’ dimension of society; that is, it seeks to account for the various ways in which society is established or instituted.² The political, as established in the ontological turn, is meant to highlight a more pervasive, and fundamental conception of politics than the all-too readily accepted, conventional definition of politics associated with mere governance.

This thesis argues that although Deleuze’s ontology of difference exhibits traits analogous to Stephen K. White’s ‘weak’ ontological model, one can nevertheless derive a conception of the political inspired by Deleuze’s ontology. Given that Deleuze’s ontology is an ontology that privileges difference rather identity, any political implications inferred from a concept of difference cannot be necessarily determined by difference as a concept, but, as we shall see, must rather be influenced or contoured (i.e., outlined) by it.³ The similarities between Deleuze’s criticism of traditional metaphysics and the post-foundationalist (or ‘weak’ ontological) criticism of foundationalism are dealt with in Chapter 2. Terms such as ‘foundational’ and ‘post-foundational’ will be clarified below.

In order to determine whether or not Deleuze’s works have any political implications, we must first elaborate on the concept of ‘the political’ and how it differs from our common understanding of politics. Although his single-authored works are not

² Oliver Marchart, *Post-foundational Political Thought*, 5.

³ Nathan Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze* (London: Continuum, 2012), 10.

concerned with politics, his early writings do establish the possibility of developing a notion of the political based upon his ontology. However, in order to grasp the novelty of this idea, we need first to address the way in which the ‘ontological turn’ in political theory has sought to employ ontology for political purposes. Secondly, we need to provide a definition of the political in contradistinction from politics.

The precise definition of ‘political ontology’ is varied and contestable within the ‘ontological turn’ itself. However, for our purposes we can nevertheless define political ontology as: *the influence of principles of human relations from principles that constitute the being of the human*. This is not to claim that ontology *determines* a particular form of politics, but rather that it influences it. If by ontology we mean an account of reality and human existence, a ‘political ontology’ would explain the relations between people, power, and various other political aspects pertaining to human life. Or to put it another way, what makes ontology specifically *political* is if it describes the dimensions of human society that can undergo a process of politicization.

Before we can elaborate on the supposed relationship between politics and ontology any further, it is necessary to clarify what we mean by the term ‘politics,’ ‘the political,’ and ‘ontology’. The contention over the political import of Deleuze’s early works essentially rests on how one defines politics (i.e., as ‘politics’ or ‘the political’). Is

it possible to construct an ontology that serves as a justification for a conception of politics? The relationship between politics and ontology has been the topic of research within the recent ‘ontological turn’ in political theory. The first section of this chapter will explore the recent ‘ontological turn’ in political thought. The second section of this chapter focuses the distinction between *politics* and *the political*. These discussions will provide the necessary background for us to finally explain what is meant by ‘political ontology.’

The Ontological Turn in Political Theory

Traditionally, ontology has concerned itself with the study of being (i.e., what does it mean for something to be, or exist?). Although ontologies differ from thinker to thinker in their attempt to explain being, the traditional approach to ontology employs categories to explain reality, such as subject and object, necessity and contingency, quantity, quality, space and time, appearance and essence, identity and difference.⁴ The recent and ongoing turn towards ontology in political theory diverges from traditional metaphysics in that it is primarily concerned with the human being.⁵ The ‘ontological turn’ emphasizes the various aspects pertaining to human life and existence, such as

⁴ Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 1.

⁵ While some maintain that there is a distinction between what has traditionally been referred to as ‘metaphysics’ and ‘ontology’, I will not go into the reasons for upholding this terminological difference. For our purposes, it is sufficient to use the term ‘ontology’ to talk about being *qua* being.

relations to others, the self, the unconscious, culture, language, art, and so on.⁶

Political theory's turn to ontology has its origins in the early 1980s, within the Anglo-Saxon tradition, when theorists first began to discuss the uses and abuses of ontological categories for thinking through political problems.⁷ More recently, efforts have been made to question the very need for ontological considerations.⁸ But why turn to ontology? One reason has been the limitations of political theory after the Second World War. As Nathan Widder points out, proponents of contemporary political thought have generally avoided any engagement with ontology: "Dominant forms of postwar liberal political thought have frequently conceived the human self in minimalist terms, often justifying this move on grounds that is avoids controversial, baseless and ultimately metaphysical speculations about human nature or the good life."⁹ Widder discusses John Rawls and Isaiah Berlin as two examples of 'liberal political thought' that have sought to think about justice and politics while dismissing any ontological claims. While these forms of political theory do have their uses, theirs is a very narrow definition of thinking about politics and does not begin to take into account the numerous power relations and

⁶ Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 1.

⁷ See Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3n. 3.

⁸ See the essays that comprise *A Leftist Ontology*, ed. Carsten Strathausen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2009).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

difference which proliferate within human societies.¹⁰

Another reason for the ‘ontological turn’ is that the rise and fall of twentieth-century communism (whether its Soviet or Chinese variant) and the triumph of consumer capitalist culture in the West (and beyond) has left many political theorists wondering if we have truly arrived at what Francis Fukuyama famously refers to as the ‘end of history,’ the idea that liberal-democratic capitalism is *the* last social order of human history.¹¹ Has human society entered its final historical and logical conclusion in the contemporary incarnation of the capitalist economic system, or is it still possible to claim to have what Habermas calls utopian energies directed toward a new form of society?¹² A possible answer to this apparent deadlock is the ‘ontological turn’ in political theory.¹³ This kind of ontology has found its theoretical inspiration in what has become known as *Left Heideggerianism*, after Martin Heidegger.¹⁴

¹⁰ Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 7.

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002).

¹² Jürgen Habermas, *New Conservatism*, trans. Mark Hohegarten (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 50-51.

¹³ Contemporary philosophers and political theorists such as Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, Bruno Bosteels, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Slavoj Žižek, and Giorgio Agamben. These thinkers have influenced the debate surrounding the question of an ontology for politics—a politics specifically aimed at opening up the space to rethink anew the problem(s) of emancipation rather than succumbing to the declaration that humanity has reached the end of history.

¹⁴ The term ‘Left Heideggerianism’ was coined by the French philosopher Dominique Janicaud. See Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger en France*, 2 vol. (Paris: Bibliothèque Albin Michel, 2001), 291-300. For a succinct discussion of Left Heideggerianism in relation to the ontological turn, see Marchart, *Post-foundational Political Thought*.

It must be noted that the debate surrounding political theory's need for ontology is still ongoing, as is evident, for instance, in the collection of essays that make up *A Leftist Ontology*, which is partly influenced by Deleuze's philosophy.¹⁵ The inquiry into an ontological justification for certain political aspirations has been the subject of interrogation for a number of political thinkers, including William Connolly, Stephen K. White, Oliver Marchart, among others. We briefly gave the definition of political ontology as the influence of political principles from ontological ones. Although the thinkers working in the 'ontological turn' all seek, albeit in their own specific way, to articulate the ontological dimension in political thought and practice, there has not been a consistent, standard definition of 'political ontology'. Despite this inconsistency, our definition of political ontology is justified because this process remains implicit in the thinkers who contribute to the 'ontological turn'. To demonstrate this, let's consider two examples.

Our first example is what William Connolly's calls 'ontopolitical interpretation.' Connolly says "every political interpretation invokes a set of fundamentals about necessities and possibilities of human being," and that "every interpretation of political events, no matter how deeply it is sunk in a specific historical context or how high the

¹⁵ Carsten Strathausen, *A Leftist Ontology*, xlii.

pile of data upon which it sits, contains an ontopolitical dimension.”¹⁶ On Connolly’s model, the ‘ontopolitical’ is meant to address this ‘dimension’ of human life that traditional political science (the science of forms of governance) cannot account for, that is, the ‘set of fundamentals’ about what it means to be a human being. It is in this respect that Connolly turns to ontology, and by extension implies that his ontological considerations filter into politics “so that it would be a mistake to say that ontology has no influence on politics.”¹⁷ Although Connolly does not elaborate on this point, it remains an implication that ontology affects politics and it is this relationship that we define as ‘political ontology’.

Another example is the position of Stephen White. White distinguishes between what he calls ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ ontologies that influence politics. According to White, a ‘strong’ ontology is one that describes the world either by evoking God, or referring to human nature. ‘Strong’ ontologies maintain a degree of certainty about their principles, which they treat as necessary for an adequate description of reality. For White, ‘strong’ ontologies “carry an underlying assumption of certainty that guides the whole problem of moving from the ontological level to the moral-political.”¹⁸ By contrast, ‘weak’ ontologies maintain the contestability of any claim or principle about the self, the world,

¹⁶ William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 1.

¹⁷ William E. Connolly, “The Left and Ontopolitics” in *A Leftist Ontology*, x.

¹⁸ White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 7.

and so on. ‘Weak’ ontologies, on White’s account, seek to problematize foundational principles, and hold that these principles are subject to revision.¹⁹ Both ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ models, for White, assert the importance of ontology’s role in affecting political considerations. On White’s model, then, what we call political ontology is clearly present.

The proposed definition of political ontology is something which is simply implied by Connolly, but asserted more explicitly in White’s work. It is this conception that we will use to derive a notion of the political from Deleuze’s ontology. Another crucial element to keep mind is that within the ‘ontological turn’, various thinkers have formulated the problem of an ontological foundation for a new concept of politics (i.e., ‘the political’) in different ways, drawing upon various philosophies. Setting aside the intricate details of the debate, it is more productive for us to take a closer look at political ontology. We will consider White’s formulation of the ‘strong/weak’ distinction as a heuristic tool to better understand how Deleuze’s ontology fits into the ‘ontological turn’.

As we saw, for White a ‘strong’ ontology is one that maintains a degree of certainty about its principles. In this sense, a ‘strong’ ontology can be said to provide sufficient reasons to justify its assertions. The principle of sufficient reason states that nothing can be what it is without there being an explanation or reason for it. Or to put it

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

more formally: if x exists, then there is a sufficient explanation (or cause) for why x exists. Insofar as the explanation of x is said to justify its existence, that explanation ‘grounds’ or provides a foundation for x . ‘Strong’ ontologies are those that subscribe to foundations, and in this sense are *foundational*.²⁰ If ‘strong’ ontologies are foundational, then ‘weak’ ontologies, on White’s account, are *post-foundational*, insofar as they contest foundational principles.²¹ But what is the difference between foundationalism, post-foundationalism, and anti-foundationalism?

Foundationalist ontologies (or what White refers to as ‘strong’ ontologies) affirm ontological principles that are deemed to be uncontestable and immune to revision. On the foundationalist model, the primary ontological principles are necessary. On a foundational model, the necessary ontological principles determine and produce political prescriptions. Post-foundationalism (‘weak’ in White’s terms), does not reject foundational ontological principles, but rather deems them to be problematic if taken to be uncontestable and therefore claims they are subject to revision. Rather than being necessary, post-foundationalism claims ontological principles to be contingent; this means that the principles are open to alteration. On a post-foundational model, the ontological principles influence political prescriptions. Anti-foundationalism is an outright rejection of any foundational ontological principles, and therefore the immediate difference

²⁰ White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 6-7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

between the three positions is that anti-foundationalism is completely unproductive for those seeking to justify a form of politics by turning towards ontology, as it does not affirm any ontological foundational principles.

For Marchart the anti-foundationalist model is not a position that is commonly held in the ontological turn in political theory.²² Nevertheless considering ‘anti-foundationalism’ is useful to understand the differences between foundationalism and post-foundationalism. This leaves foundationalism and post-foundationalism. What White calls ‘strong’ ontologies are foundational insofar as they subscribe to secured ontological claims. White’s ‘weak’ ontologies are post-foundational insofar as they aim to contest or problematize foundational principles. We will see below that although Deleuze’s ontology defies White’s strong/weak categorization, it nevertheless exhibits traits of both. On the one hand, Deleuze critiques the dominant foundational assumptions of Western metaphysics, which is analogous to the post-foundational model; on the other hand, he advances an ontology of difference and becoming that affirms uncertainty and indeterminacy. This will be explored in more details in Chapter 2.

To better illustrate the differences between foundationalism and post-foundationalism let us use an analogy. Any architectural structure constructed on the

²² Marchart, *Post-foundational Political Thought*, 12.

surface of the Earth (i.e., literally on the ground, such as a house) is supported by a foundation built directly upon the earth. This foundation is necessary for the structure to stand; without it, the house will collapse. The house is analogous to foundational ontologies that ‘base’ or justify their ontological claims by reference to an infallible foundation (e.g., God). By contrast, a space station floating in deep outer space literally has no structural foundation in the same way a house does. So, a free-floating structure in outer space such as the International Space Station is analogous to the post-foundational model if we consider that the space station *may* require foundational support in certain situations (e.g., if by chance it were to land on the surface of the earth), but that the foundation is not *necessary*.

The core element in the relationship between ontological description and political prescription is one of causality. That is, given the manner in which an ontology describes the world, that description, in turn, is what determines political principles or political action(s). But as we shall see in regards to Deleuze’s ontology, things are not as simple as declaring a direct causality between ontology and political prescriptions. On the ‘strong’ model, the ‘truth’ of the ontological claims is justified by sufficient reason(s). This justification serves as the guarantor of the ontology, or its *foundation*. For example, a strong ontology that describes the way the world is by reference to God as the creator justifies its description of the world by evoking God and nothing more. God is a sufficient

reason for the being of the world. Developing our example a little further, a hypothetical political ontology that seeks to derive political principles or demands from an ontology that has God as its basis would, by extension, justify those political principles through God. ‘Strong’ ontologies all assume the truth, validity, and certainty of that which provides adequate justification or sufficient reason. ‘Weak’ ontologies, by contrast, maintain that any foundational claim is contestable, fallible, and ultimately problematic. Despite the acknowledgement that foundations are problematic, weak ontologies, according to White, still claim that for any political principles to be derived from an ontology, the ontology’s assertions need some sort of basis. While weak ontologies contest the infallibility of ontological foundations, they nevertheless assert their unavoidability in drawing political and ethical implications. If strong ontologies claim that foundations are unerring and therefore logically necessary, then weak ontologies problematize this infallibility and hold that foundations are logically contingent.²³ That is to say, the post-foundationalist position does not reject foundations (this would be anti-foundationalism), rather it claims that foundational ontological principles are subject to revision and reconsideration. Post-foundationalism acknowledges foundational principles, but is quick to revise them if need be. In this sense, if strong ontologies are said to be foundational, then weak ontologies are post-foundational.²⁴

²³ White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 8.

²⁴ In Chapter 2, we will see that Deleuze’s ontology is analogous to the post-foundational model.

White's strong/weak distinction and the foundational/post-foundational ontological models seem ambiguous when it comes to their implications for politics. If a strong model purports to base ethical and political principles on a foundation, then this process seems to lead to a form of dogmatism where what constitutes 'the political' is wholly determined by an ontological foundation. White does mention that within the 'ontological turn', thinkers are more interested in the 'weak' model, whereby the ontological foundation does not absolutely determine ethical and political principles, but influence them.²⁵ There exists a direct causal link between the foundational principles inherent in a 'strong' ontology and its political implications. The foundational principles guarantee and determine the conception of politics one derives from it. For example, if an ontology asserts that a transcendent divine God created the world—thereby causing it to be and exist the way it does—then the political implications are also determined by God's will. By contrast, a 'weak' ontology that maintains the contingency of foundational ontological principles in order to acknowledge their changeability cannot determine political principles in the same manner that a 'strong' model does. It is precisely because the 'weak' model's foundational principles are always subject to alteration that it cannot maintain a direct causal link between the ontology and its political implications. This does not mean that 'weak' ontological models have nothing to contribute to politics, but rather that it is their ever-changing nature, their contingency, that allows those interested in

²⁵ White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 7-8.

political ontology to constantly construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct ontological principles which affirms political aspirations. In this sense, if ‘strong’ ontologies directly determine political prescriptions, then ‘weak’ ontologies ‘influence’, rather than directly determine.

White’s distinction between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ ontologies, while helpful for our investigation into Deleuze’s political ontology, is not sufficient. Nathan Widder has pointed out that White’s strong/weak division is a somewhat strained, reductive framework that does not clearly differentiate between an ontology’s content and the way that content is presented. Widder articulates the ambiguity of White’s thesis by pointing out that,

The history of Western thought is full of metaphysical ontologies that refuse to derive political and ethical certainties in this [White’s ‘strong’ model] way, just as anti-metaphysical and anti-foundationalist political philosophies can be extremely dogmatic. Moreover, it seems perfectly possible for a political ontology to make strong claims that reject metaphysical or transcendent foundations, or to articulate ‘foundations’ that make it impossible to derive clear-cut moral and political principles. Such an ontology would differ from those ‘weak’ ones that affirm but also constantly problematize their claims and signal their limits.²⁶

The type of ontology that Widder has in mind here is the type that manages to make strong ontological claims without descending into a dogmatic, foundational paradigm, Widder’s prime example of this is Deleuze’s ontology. This kind of ontology, according to Widder, does not readily fit into White’s weak/strong distinction, since “it would be a

²⁶ Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 10.

strong ontology *of* uncertainty and indeterminacy, one that, in exploring rich ontological depths, demonstrates how political and ethical principles can only be contoured but never determined by considerations of human (and extra-human) being [...] It is the kind Deleuze offers.”²⁷ Widder further maintains that Deleuze’s ontology presents an alternative to the recent ‘ontological turn’ in political theory because it resists traditional ontological commitments, which we shall explore in Chapter 2.

Politics and the Political

There is nothing ‘political’ about ontology if by ‘ontology’ we simply mean the science of being *qua* being. It may seem presumptuous to declare that ontology has anything to offer political theory, but as was shown, the turn towards ontology in political theory conceives of ontology differently than the traditional Western conception. Rather than placing emphasis on the question of being as such the thinkers concerned with political ontology focus their attention on the human being. The various aspects of human experience and existence, such as the self, death, the unconscious mind, relations with others whether human or nonhuman, and so on, constitute the concerns of the ‘ontological turn.’²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 1.

Any reader of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* will appreciate that these works are not primarily concerned with political issues. That is, if by ‘political issues’ we mean issues ranging from the nature of the state and governance, organization of social institutions, negative and positive liberties, and theories of justice, then Deleuze’s work is not concerned with these questions, at least not explicitly. Two canonical examples of works in the Western philosophical tradition that *do* explicitly deal with these topics are Plato’s *Republic* and Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*.²⁹ If one were to compare these classical works of political philosophy with Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*, for example, it becomes clear that the former works are concerned with political issues and ideas, while the latter is a metaphysical exploration of the concepts of repetition and difference. Political issues, as we have defined them, do not enter into Deleuze’s investigation.³⁰ One could conclude from this that insofar as Deleuze does not explicitly deal with normative political issues, his ontology has no bearing on politics whatsoever. Implicit in this conclusion, however, is the presupposition that ontology and politics do not converge. That is, unless a work of ontology explicitly discusses political ideas (e.g., justice, liberty, equality, etc.), then it is *de facto* not political. It is this

²⁹ The reader may recall that for Plato, philosophical training is required to ensure the functioning of the ideal city-state. See Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 540a-b. Rousseau’s work is a meditation on laws, liberty, justice, government, and citizen rights. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968).

³⁰ Although *Difference and Repetition* is notorious for its dense writing and conceptual complexity, nowhere does Deleuze indicate that the work is ‘political’. He does indicate, however, that the study concerns the concepts of difference and repetition (not to point out the obvious). See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 27.

presupposition that is undermined in the recent ontological turn in political theory. As we saw above, the ontological turn concerns itself with the notion of ‘political ontology’ and its relevance for political theory. Given that the contention around Deleuze’s political import with respect to his single authored texts mainly concerns whether or not his ontology ought to be considered ‘political’, it is crucial to clarify what we mean by the terms ‘politics’ and ‘the political’.

There is a difficulty when trying to define ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ in that the thinkers who champion the difference between the two terms rarely agree on their meaning. Nevertheless, we can think of the difference between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ as a difference in approach. It was mentioned earlier that within the ontological turn in political theory the kind of ontology that interests the theorists concerns the existence and experience of being human, rather than being *qua* being. Implicit in the discussion about the distinction between politics and the political is the idea that human society is the product of human beings, our relations, institutions, and so on. That is to say, we humans create society and its institutions. Far from being a mere triviality, this point is crucial to understand the conceptual difference between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’.

‘Politics’ refers to the conventional, mainstream understanding of the term, one that is generally associated with empirical phenomena such as governance, state affairs, institutional policies, elections, human rights, and so on. These can be generally understood to be facts about society. ‘Politics’ in this sense, can be said to reflect the empirical facts about human beings in society, their activities, practices, and so on. This approach to ‘politics’ is what concerns political science. The concept of ‘the political’ refers to something entirely different. If political science has traditionally concerned itself with the empirical field of politics, political theory in general investigates the *essence* of the political. To ask what the essence of something is, is to seek to define that necessary kernel or characteristic which makes something what it is. So when we seek to define the essence of the political, we are seeking to determine its definitive element. For example, as we shall see below in greater detail, Mouffe’s conception of the political refers to antagonisms between human beings which she maintains are essential and constitutive to any society whatsoever.³¹ This antagonism is certainly empirically illustrated in society as facts about society, but its root lies in intrinsic claims about what it means to be human. For example, it is a known empirical fact that there are specific kinds of antagonisms present in our contemporary society: antagonisms of between classes, ethnicities, religions, genders, and so on. Insofar as we consider these antagonisms only through empirical means (e.g., statistical data), all we ascertain about these antagonisms are a

³¹ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 8-9.

confirmation of their occurrence, and a breakdown of its components (e.g., x many people turned out to vote during the elections, there were y number of protestors at the rally, and so on). It is an empirically known fact that in 2011, when hundreds of thousands gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square to protest Hosni Mubarak's government, but this fact does not tell us anything more about the event. Empirical facts may reflect the essence of the political (e.g., antagonism), but in order to explain what that essence is and justify it, we need to enter the domain of the political.

The crucial point is that whether or not human beings are innately antagonistic is a disputable claim. It is an ontological claim that human beings are antagonistic, one which depends on the type of ontology one adopts and commits to. If the ontology I subscribe to does not hold that antagonism is an inherent property of what it means to be human, then my definition of the essence of the political will necessarily be different than Mouffe's. It will no longer depend on the idea of human antagonism. It is ontologically contestable that antagonism is an implicit trait of human beings, and so ontological claims about being human, inevitably end up influencing one's conception of the political. Furthermore, given that the theorists within the ontological turn in political theory disagree over the exact meaning of 'the political', their disagreement in fact revolves around what constitutes the essence of the political (e.g., antagonism, etc.). However, the essence of the political (whatever it may be) does not exist in some vacuum independent

of human beings. On the contrary, politics is of course a human phenomenon and it arises out of human activity within a social context. Thus, when we seek to define the essence of the political, its definition inevitably ends up being influenced by ontological claims about human beings. The discourse of human characteristics is the discourse of the ontology of being human. It is this kind of ontology that concerns the ontological turn in political theory.

So, while the term ‘politics’ refers to factual human practices and activities in society, ‘the political’ refers to the constitutive dimensions of human societies, which are influenced by ontological claims of what it means to be human. To help better clarify the difference, let’s briefly consider Mouffe’s account of the distinction: “by ‘the political’ I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by ‘politics’ I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.”³² So for Mouffe while human antagonism is an essential ingredient of any human society, what ultimately gives shape to the social order are human activities and social institutions within the context of this antagonism. For example, the institution of the prison system can be explained by Mouffe’s concept of the political, insofar as dividing up a society’s populace on the basis of those who uphold the law and those who

³² Ibid., 9.

break it is seen as an antagonistic relation. Prisoners and non-prisoners are antagonistic insofar as they are interpreted on the basis of a ‘we’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. The point is that identifying the prisoners *as* prisoners can only be achieved relative to the identification of non-prisoners *as* non-prisoners. If you break the law and are accordingly punished for it, you are judged in relation to the rest of the population that did not break this law and has maintained the peace. This is all to say that the concept of the political, as antagonism for example, describes an integral, constitutive part of human society, which finds its origin in the human being.

The explanation of society’s formation will depend on how the ontology in question seeks to account for human existence and experience. Thus, at the core of ‘the political’ are ontological claims about being human.³³ While ‘politics’ only refers to the empirical practices of human beings in society, ‘the political’ encompasses a more fundamental and essential level of what constitutes politics because it aims to explain the essential human characteristics that inform the formation of societies. This does *not* mean that the formation of human societies can be reduced to essential ontological claims about being human, but rather that what it means to be human certainly plays an important role in society’s foundation. To put it rather crudely using Mouffe’s conception as an example:

³³ Or to put it another way: ‘politics’ concerns the empirical activity of human beings within society, while ‘the political’ attempts to conceptualize the formation of society by turning towards the intrinsic ontological traits of human beings. See *Ibid.*

empirical facts tell us that there are antagonisms among human beings in society, while ontological claims about being human tells us why those antagonisms exist.

How did this conceptual distinction arise? We will briefly look at Carl Schmitt's definition of 'the political', and then consider the appropriation of the term by Chantal Mouffe. The conception of 'the political' that interests us in relation to Deleuze's ontology is similar to both Schmitt and Mouffe insofar as it concerns the formation of society. Both Schmitt and Mouffe conceive of 'the political' as essentially being a matter of antagonisms. It is this antagonism that constitutes the 'ontological' dimension of human societies because it is an inherent characteristic of being human, one that influences how we relate to one another in society. As we shall see, this emphasis on antagonism presupposes certain ontological commitments, namely the law of identity. Thus, 'the political' is the name given to a dimension of society that is justified by ontology. Given the approach to ontology one takes, the conception of 'the political' will differ. This will become clear below.

The importance of Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* and its contribution to understanding the political/politics difference should not be underestimated. As Oliver Marchart notes, Schmitt has been credited with the invention of the term 'the political' in

political theory.³⁴ For Schmitt, the concept of the political is to be understood in terms of the friend/enemy distinction. It is through the ability to distinguish between friends (or allies) and enemies that a state functions in relation to other states.³⁵ This is in contrast to ‘politics’, which for Schmitt is simply another word for the state.³⁶ The problem with this conception of politics is that it loses validity when state and society no longer stand as opposing forces, but become wholly integrated, so that affairs of state and social relations become two aspects of one and the same concrete, integrated reality. Schmitt attributes this change in the state to the twentieth century, and argues that otherwise neutral domains such as education, economy, law or religion are now in danger of becoming politicized insofar as the state holds dominion over them. Under this equation of the State with politics, every domain of human life and interaction can potentially be considered to belong to the political.³⁷ Friend-enemy relations are not limited to relations between states but now divide whole societies internally.

Schmitt stresses the importance of thinking about the political as a concept based on the distinction of friend and enemy. For Schmitt, this difference between friend and enemy is one that is independent insofar as it does not rest upon other antagonisms (e.g.

³⁴ Marchart, *Post-foundational Political Thought*, 1.

³⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

good and evil, or right and wrong). It is a distinction which “denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation.”³⁸ According to Schmitt, the enemy is a person or collective for which there is a possibility of combat, which may ultimately lead to killing the enemy whoever it may be.³⁹ It is key to note that for Schmitt, any human grouping (social, religious, cultural, economic, etc.), has the potential to turn ‘political’ once the friend-enemy antagonism becomes strong enough.⁴⁰ The possibility of otherwise ‘non-political’ human groups to turn into political ones makes the friend-enemy antagonism the most fundamental because it subordinates all other distinctions. For example, I may recognize other people as being alien to me based on their religion, however if those same individuals are seen as a threat, as an enemy, then the terms by which I distinguish them become political as opposed to remaining religious. It is this Schmittian ability to draw the friend-enemy distinction that allows us to qualify an otherwise seemingly ‘neutral’ human activity as political.

Even though Carl Schmitt joined the Nazi Party in 1933, his contributions to political theory have witnessed something of a revival within Leftist social and political thought in the recent years, including the ‘ontological turn.’⁴¹ One such example is Chantal Mouffe. Mouffe’s project is to “think with Schmitt, against Schmitt, and to use

³⁸ Ibid., 26.

³⁹ Ibid., 32-33.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁴¹ Ibid., ix.

his insights to strengthen liberal democracy against his critiques.”⁴² Like Schmitt, who maintains the antagonism between friend and enemy, Mouffe’s conception of ‘the political’ refers to the “dimension of antagonism that [she] take[s] to be constitutive to human societies.”⁴³

Rather than directly adopting Schmitt’s friend/enemy distinction as defining ‘the political’, Mouffe broadens the scope of ‘the political’ and holds that Schmitt’s conception is merely one of many forms of conceiving the antagonism. For Mouffe, any ‘we/they’ distinction, whether it be conceived in terms of friend/enemy, proletariat/bourgeois, black/white, male/female, and so on, is a fundamental condition necessary for the formation of political identities (e.g., I am identified as working class and therefore am excluded from the privileges associated with the capitalist). Political identities emerge from social relations between human beings, and these identities inevitably enter into an antagonistic relationship akin to Mouffe’s ‘we/they’ distinction. Following Schmitt, Mouffe holds that one of the central characteristics of being human is to make a ‘we/they’ distinction, when pushed to the extreme, becomes a political antagonism. This distinction has the potential to become antagonistic, and when it does, the ‘we/they’ distinction becomes *political*. ‘The political’, for Mouffe, functions on a

⁴² Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), 2.

⁴³ Mouffe, *On the Political*, 9.

inclusion/exclusion basis.⁴⁴ Mouffe's overall concern is to reconcile the 'we/they' antagonism she maintains is essential to all political considerations with the pluralism of liberal democracy. Mouffe's argument about how this reconciliation is supposed to work does not concern us here; rather what interests us is her emphasis on human antagonism.

Both Schmitt and Mouffe rely on the logic of antagonism to define 'the political'. For Schmitt, it is the ability to distinguish between friends and enemies, for Mouffe it is any 'we' and 'they' distinction that eventually transforms into a political antagonism. However, before we can distinguish between friends and enemies, or a 'we' and a 'they,' we need to have a political identity that can be contrasted to some other identity. For example let's consider class antagonism (e.g., proletariat and bourgeoisie). In order for class antagonism, or class struggle to exist, the two opposing classes must first be identified. I can only be said to be in a class struggle or antagonism if I am *first* identified as a member of the working class (i.e., proletariat), and *then* opposed to the capitalist class. According to Mouffe, Schmitt's conception of the political illustrates the antagonistic dimension inherent in human existence, and thus highlights the ontological dimension of 'the political.' Mouffe explains the role ontology plays in her concept of the political by pointing out that "when we accept that every identity is relational and that the condition of existence of every identity is the affirmation of a difference, the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16.

determination of an ‘other’ is going to play the role of a ‘constitutive outside,’ it is possible to understand how antagonisms arise.”⁴⁵ The crucial point here is that Mouffe conceives of identity as relational and that this claim about identity is an ontological claim. The concept of ‘the political’ as antagonism rests on a certain ontological understanding of how the categories of identity and difference work in relation to the human being. This is not to say that *all* political theory relies on ontological categories or presuppositions, but rather only that of those theorists who work in the ontological turn.

Earlier in this chapter, I defined political ontology as the influence of principles concerning human relations in society from principles that constitute the human being. Traditionally, ontology has concerned itself with the question of being *qua* being. The approach to ontology one adopts will determine how human beings are described and accounted for. Within the ‘ontological turn’ in political theory, the category of identity has played an important role in informing political thought.⁴⁶ The construction of political identity has been a central theme within the ontological turn as well. For example, Mouffe holds that a constitutive component of what it means to be human is to identify and oppose other human beings. Mouffe defines ‘the political’ as an antagonism that highlights society’s ‘ontological’ dimension because it captures an essential ontological condition of what it means to be human. For Mouffe, this dimension is that human beings

⁴⁵ Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 2.

⁴⁶ Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 2.

inevitably group themselves according to the logic of inclusion/exclusion which functions as an institutional factor in human societies.⁴⁷ That is to say, the fact that we assume certain identities while simultaneously contrasting and excluding others is part of the ontological condition of what it means to be a human being. While Mouffe does not explicitly state that she subscribes to a specific ontology, it is fair to claim that her emphasis on ‘the political’ as antagonism relies on an ontology that accounts for how we form our political identities. Or to put it differently, in order to define ‘the political’ as essentially antagonistic, it relies on the ontological category of identity. As Widder notes

The centrality of identity in political theory’s ontological turn has meant that many theorists treat it as a problematic but still indispensable category. While the displacement of identity—and with it the political subject—is considered crucial for the development of pluralist and democratic politics, it is still a *sine qua non* for politics, ethics, meaning and even thinking as such. In so far as identity holds this status, so too do the categories associated with it, including opposition, negation and, in the case of theories of identity associated with dialectics or theories of lack, some form of constitutive exclusion.⁴⁸

But what if one subscribes to an ontology that favours a concept of difference, rather than identity? The political implications of an ontology of difference is one that is offered by Deleuze’s work.

As we shall see in Chapter 2, Deleuze’s ontology privileges the category of

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 149-150.

difference rather than the traditional emphasis of identity. As a result, Deleuze's approach to 'the political' will differ than those of Schmitt or Mouffe, who both assume and rely on identity. For our purposes, 'the political' is to be understood as a broader concept than the empirically based 'politics,' that seeks to justify and explain certain ontological conditions about human beings that inform the formation of society. If political ontology is the process of inferring political prescriptions from ontological descriptions, then the concept of 'the political' is the end product, or the result of this very process. That is to say, 'the political' is a concept of politics that is informed by ontology, yet as we've seen this does not imply a strong determination, but rather an influence.

Conclusion

Our initial thesis is that Deleuze's metaphysics as found in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* is 'political' insofar as a conception of 'the political' can be derived from his ontology. However, as we have seen with the 'ontological turn' in political theory, any attempt to justify a notion of politics on a particular ontology must be post-foundational, whereby the justification of ethical and political principles cannot be guaranteed or determined by an ontological foundation. Rather, following Nathan Widder, we will see that Deleuze's ontology is 'strong' in White's sense, but one which affirms indeterminacy. Having now given a sketch of the ontological turn in political theory, we move onto Deleuze's ontology. We shall see that the ontology Deleuze presents in

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Difference and Repetition and *The Logic of Sense* is analogous to post-foundationalism, and advances a conception of difference and univocity of being.

CHAPTER 2: DELEUZE’S ONTOLOGY

Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

I feel I am a pure metaphysician.¹

—Gilles Deleuze, *Responses to a Series of Questions*

Philosophy must constitute itself as a theory of what we are doing, not as a theory of what there is. What we do has its principles; and being can only be grasped as the object of a synthetic relation with the very principles of what we do.

—Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*

Introduction

One could spend entire books unearthing various aspects and nuances in Deleuze’s philosophy, and indeed there have been many examples of such work as Deleuze scholarship continues to grow and evolve. There are enough ideas and material in *Difference and Repetition* alone to fill several books worth of study and analysis, never mind a thesis committed to investigating Deleuze’s ontology as outlined in *The Logic of*

¹ This was a response Deleuze gave to a question asked of him by Arnaud Villani in 1981. See Gilles Deleuze, “Responses to a Series of Questions,” in *Collapse Volume III*, trans. and ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007), 42.

Sense and Difference and Repetition. Suffice it to say, we need to be selective when it comes to exploring Deleuze's ontology. For the purposes of our study, I will only concern myself with the manner in which this ontology is analogous to the post-foundational paradigm discussed in the previous chapter. While I cannot go into a detailed treatment of Deleuze's ontology here, there nevertheless have been excellent scholarly works that have done so.² Does Deleuze have an ontology?³ The third epigraph of this chapter seems to contradict the idea that Deleuze has an ontology of being. Deleuze argues that what philosophy ought to be concerned with is not 'what there is' (i.e., being *qua* being), but rather is must concern itself with what 'we are doing' (i.e., becoming). If Deleuze indeed does have an ontology, and I maintain that he does, then Deleuze's ontology is one that privileges the process of becoming over the immobility of being. Or to say the same thing rather crudely, Deleuze's approach to the question of being is to claim—following Duns Scotus—that being is univocally expressed, and the manner of its expression is difference. It is Deleuze's conception of difference as a difference 'in itself' that acts as

² For an extensive analysis of Deleuze's 'transcendental empiricism' and how it relates to the history of philosophy, see Levi R. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008). For a contextualization of Deleuze's philosophy of difference within biophilosophy, see Keith Ansell Pearson, *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 1999). A treatment of a Deleuzian philosophy of history as found in *Difference and Repetition* amongst other works by Deleuze is Jay Lampert's *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History* (New York: Continuum, 2006). For a study of the Deleuzian event in *The Logic of Sense*, see Sean Bowden, *The Priority of Events: Deleuze's Logic of Sense* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). For an overall treatment of the concept of the event in Deleuze's corpus, see Miguel de Beistegui, *Immanence: Deleuze and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). Gregg Lambert's *Who's Afraid of Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Continuum, 2006) is an interesting evaluation of Deleuze and Guattari's co-authored works and its reception since the 1980s.

³ There is certainly contention over this question. Some Deleuze scholars maintain that Deleuze does *not* have an ontology. For example, see François Zourabichvili, *Deleuze: A Philosophy of the Event*, trans. Kieran Aarons (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 36.

the generator or a process that produces individual beings. In this sense Deleuze emphasizes the activity of becoming over being.

The overall argument of this thesis is that Deleuze's early philosophical works—*Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*—can be considered to be political provided that a new concept of the political is established and influenced by Deleuze's ontology. In order to demonstrate how a concept of the political can be influenced by Deleuze's ontology, I first looked at Stephen White's distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' ontologies in the previous chapter, and examined their relevance for the ontological turn in political theory. It was pointed out by Nathan Widder that not only is White's distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' ontologies too reductive and often forced, but that there are numerous ontologies that exhibit traits of both models. Deleuze's ontology, while not reducible to either category, can nevertheless influence an original concept of the political.⁴

In this chapter, I turn to Deleuze's ontology in order to further contextualize the debate surrounding Deleuze's political import within the ontological turn by demonstrating how Deleuze's immanent ontology maintains difference as ontologically foundational. If something is immanent, then there is nothing 'superior', 'beyond' or 'higher than' it. If something is said to be transcendent, then it is something that is

⁴ Nathan Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze* (London: Continuum, 2012), 9-10.

‘external’, ‘beyond’, or ‘superior’ to something else. An ontology of transcendence would claim that something like the Christian God, or Plato’s notion of the ‘Good’ is ‘above’ or ‘beyond’ the existence of phenomena and material objects, and that this transcendent entity guarantees their existence.⁵ ‘Strong’ ontologies are generally said to be transcendent because they “make metaphysical appeals to an external ground,”⁶ yet even though Deleuze maintains that the concept of difference is ontologically primary, this does not mean that Deleuze’s ontology is ‘strong’ because, following Spinoza, Deleuze’s ontology is immanent rather than transcendent. The type of ontology one commits to (e.g., transcendent or immanent, foundational or non-foundational, etc.) will inevitably influence the particular concept of the political one arrives at.⁷ For this reason it is productive for us to examine what type of ontology Deleuze commits to in order to further develop the argument that a concept of the political emerges from these commitments. The reason that Deleuze cannot be neatly categorized into the ‘foundational’ or ‘post-foundational’ models is because his philosophy is immanent and maintains an ontological foundational principle, difference, while at the same time is highly critical of traditional foundational philosophies of transcendence that have privileged the concepts of identity and representation. Deleuze is critical of the Image of

⁵ Daniel W. Smith, “Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought,” in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 272-273.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷ To use a generalized example, if an ontology relies on a transcendent concept (God, Unmoved Mover) that provides sufficient justification for its explanation of the world, then this transcendent concept will also influence the concept of the political. However, if an ontology rejects such a foundational ontological principle, then its concept of the political will differ.

Thought for implicitly presupposing the truth of concepts that have historically privileged identity and representation in Western philosophy. The main difference between a post-foundational criticism of foundationalism and Deleuze's criticism is that while the post-foundationalist seeks to problematize foundational ontological principles, Deleuze nonetheless maintains that difference is ontologically fundamental and primary. Unlike traditional foundational philosophies that have taken the concepts of identity and representation for granted, Deleuze's emphasis on the concept of difference allows him to avoid the presuppositions of the Image of Thought that privilege the concepts of Identity and Representation.

The first section of this chapter briefly reconstructs Deleuze's criticism of the traditional Image of Thought in order to illustrate what Deleuze finds problematic with this mode of thinking, and then explores how his criticisms differs from the post-foundationalist critique of foundationalism. The second section gives a brief history of the concept of univocal being by first considering Aristotle's analogy of being and then Dun Scotus' thesis of univocity. The final section reconstructs Deleuze's take on the univocity of being through Spinoza and Nietzsche to arrive at a conception of difference that is no longer subordinate to identity. In short, Deleuze establishes a foundational ontology that is immanent, rather than transcendent. It is Deleuze's concept of difference that is foundational and vital for Deleuze's immanent ontology.

The Image of Thought and its Postulates

Since our purpose is to see how Deleuze argues for a concept of difference that is ontologically foundational, while simultaneously criticizing traditional, foundational transcendent philosophies, we will first reconstruct Deleuze's criticism of the Image of Thought. Second, we will see that Deleuze's critique differs from the post-foundational criticism because while the latter seeks to problematize ontological principles, Deleuze is only interested in showing how certain assumptions in thought lead to the domination of identity and representation in Western philosophy. Deleuze only finds fault with foundational ontologies insofar as they are also philosophies of transcendence. Deleuze's contention with transcendent philosophy is that historically an emphasis on transcendence has established a hierarchical model of thinking that privileges representation and identity. Deleuze faults the traditional Image of Thought for implicit, pre-philosophical presuppositions that inevitably champion the concepts of identity and representation at the cost of subordinating the concept of difference. Deleuze exposes these presuppositions in order to show how they emphasize representation and identity while denigrating difference.

In the English edition of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze remarks that it is the third chapter of the text, titled *The Image of Thought*, which he sees as being the most

important.⁸ No doubt this is because it is there that we find his criticism of identity and representation; concepts that have dominated the Western philosophical tradition since Plato. In a certain sense, then, the image of thought is meant to be a precursor to what it means to think and how thought functions. However, as Levi Bryant points out, what it means to think comes with certain preconceived assumptions and it is these assumptions that Deleuze takes issue with.⁹

According to Deleuze's diagnosis of the history of philosophy, deciding where to begin has always been a genuine problem for philosophy. Even when a philosopher attempts to truly begin free from any and all presuppositions, there are nevertheless certain implicit, or subjective, pre-philosophical presuppositions at work. These presuppositions are called 'pre-philosophical' because they are not concepts that have been established by a certain philosophical method or system. As Deleuze remarks, the "image of thought is what philosophy as it were presupposes; it precedes philosophy, not a nonphilosophical understanding this time but a prephilosophical understanding."¹⁰ For Deleuze, these implicit presuppositions have been repeated throughout the Western tradition, from Plato to Hegel.¹¹ Deleuze asserts that

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xvii

⁹ Levi R. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 81.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 148.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 131.

Postulates in philosophy are not propositions the acceptance of which the philosopher demands; but, on the contrary, propositional themes which remain implicit and are understood in a pre-philosophical manner. In this sense, conceptual philosophical thought has as its implicit presupposition a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense. According to this image, thought has an affinity with the true; it formally possesses the true and materially wants the true. It is *in terms of* this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think. Thereafter it matters little whether philosophy begins with the object or the subject, with Being or with beings, as long as thought remains subject to this Image which already prejudices everything: the distribution of the object and the subject as well as that of Being and beings. We may call this image of thought a dogmatic, orthodox or moral image.¹²

The postulates of the image of thought are presupposed prior to philosophy itself (pre-philosophical), meaning that it is assumed that anyone who wants to engage with or in philosophical discourse will undoubtedly understand the postulates in question.

Therefore, Deleuze equates the postulates of the image of thought with common sense.

Thus, the reason why Deleuze maintains that it “is *in terms of* this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think,” is because the Image of Thought is associated with common sense. Bryant is right to comment that the image of thought for Deleuze is not something that is imposed, or applied *to* thought from an outside, but rather that it is internal (or immanent) to thought itself.¹³ The image of thought itself has its postulates (eight to be exact) which explain the orientation of thought towards thinking in terms of identity and the same rather than difference.¹⁴ Deleuze gives two names for each postulate: (i) good will of the thinker and the good nature of thought (the postulate of the principle); (ii) common sense and good sense (the postulate of the ideal); (iii)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 83

¹⁴ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 111.

recognition (the postulate of the model); (iv) representation (the postulate of the element); (v) error (the postulate of the negative); (vi) the proposition (the postulate of logical function); (vii) solutions (the postulate of modality); (viii) result (the postulate of knowledge).¹⁵ These eight postulates together comprise the image of thought. It is these eight postulates which Deleuze exposes and makes explicit in the image of thought chapter. One thing to keep in mind is that for Deleuze, the postulates of the image of thought are all intertwined, and work together to inform or support the model of metaphysics that prizes identity and representation. All eight taken at once are what constitutes the image of thought, and while we will try to explore each in turn, we will soon see that they feed off of and determine one another.

The first postulate is concerned with principles. What is presupposed according to Deleuze is the definition of what it means to think, or thinking in general. It is assumed that every person knows, *in principle*, what it means to think. It is the philosopher, for Deleuze, who maintains that what is universally recognized by everyone is the form of thinking, or what it means to think. People are able to recognize thinking without any explanation or further expansion necessary. This postulate has a double aspect, the two aspects are considered to be true *in principle*, since they assume that a) every individual person naturally thinks; and b) every individual person ought to know what it means to think. That is, it is precisely because it is presupposed that every one is naturally endowed

¹⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 167.

with the ability to think that everyone is thereby supposed to know what it means to think. The criteria for thought is never questioned, and thus it is taken to be true in principle. Deleuze calls this postulate *Cogitatio natura universalis*, which loosely translates from the Latin into “the thought of universal nature” and can be seen as a form of common sense.¹⁶

The second postulate of the image of thought is that of the ideal or common sense. What is considered to be determinations for pure thought are presuppositions that are a matter of common sense and are thus readily accepted. For example, when Descartes sets out to discover the set of true principles that cannot be doubted, he presupposed that thought has an affinity for truth. Descartes takes for granted, in principle that truth belongs to thought. It goes unexamined, and is merely presupposed. What does Deleuze mean by common sense? In one respect, Deleuze uses the term in its colloquial sense to refer to statements that are recognizable by all. This is evident in the statement ‘everyone knows what it means to think’. This presupposes a certain model of thinking that every person is aware of, and can immediately acknowledge this model because it is literally assumed to be common amongst all (i.e., it is justified by an appeal to common sense). However, common sense can also be understood as the collective use of all one’s faculties towards identifying an object. It is meant to convey a certain degree of harmony amongst the faculties. As Deleuze puts it, this postulate “is able to adjudicate with regard

¹⁶ Ibid., 131.

to its own universality, and to suppose itself universal and communicable in principle.”¹⁷ In order for common sense to render itself universal, it needs a method of distribution and that is what Deleuze identifies as the postulate of recognition. Recognition is the means by which the mind’s faculties are in harmony in relation to the same object. Any object whatsoever (e.g., this chair I am sitting on) is only recognized as being what it is either when one of my faculties is able discern it as such and determine that it is identical to how another faculty grasps it, or when all the faculties are able to come together and focus on the object. There is an operation of identity at work in thought, which comes about through the method of recognition as a postulate of the image of thought.¹⁸ This process of recognition rests on or presupposes a collaboration of the faculties of thought for every thinking person. That is, it is a matter of common sense that every rational, finite, thinking being’s faculties operate in this manner and are able to recognize or re-identify objects.¹⁹

Deleuze’s contention is that this image of thought orients philosophy to a pre-established (pre-philosophical) way of thinking, a model as it were. It is the emergence of the new, that is to say pure difference in itself (and not difference as a category or

¹⁷ Ibid., 132-33.

¹⁸ Ibid., 133.

¹⁹ In the history of philosophy, both Descartes and Kant’s systems exemplify this method of recognition. In Descartes, for example, what guarantees this harmony of the faculties is the function of the *I think*. While for Kant, recognition is not one of the twelve categories of the mind, the categories nevertheless aid in ensuring that the subject recognizes the object of phenomena.

concept) that is obfuscated in the image of thought. The fourth postulate of the image of thought is representation, which can be thought of as a further extension of the model of recognition discussed above. For us to be able to recognize the object for what it is (using our faculties) we depend on representation (i.e., objects are presented to us in our phenomenal experience and we re-present them to ourselves). According to Deleuze, representation is based upon identity in terms of the concept ($A = A$); opposition with regard to the determination of concepts (e.g., this object is a table, not a panda); analogy in terms of judgment (e.g., I judge this piece of music to be of poor quality given that its rhythm is analogous to a different song which I also find problematic); and resemblance in terms of objects (e.g., this particular object x is similar to that object y). Each of these elements of representation rely on and use a different faculty, but all come into a harmonious unity under common sense.²⁰ Representation operates by virtue of these methods, thus further subordinating pure difference and repetition. Difference can only emerge through either analogy, identity, opposition, or resemblance; ‘pure difference’, or difference which differs even from itself, vanishes. On this model, difference is treated as an object that can be represented using the four elements mentioned.²¹

²⁰ The Cartesian *I think* remains the principle *par excellence* of representation, adhering to each element (i.e. identity, analogy, opposition, and similarity) and unifying them under the Self, or the ‘I’. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 137-138.

²¹ Bryant has pointed out that the main problem with the image of thought with regards to recognition is that the “recognized does not provoke thought because it recognizes only itself; it recognizes only what it expects. As a result, a model of thought based on recognition is doomed only to rediscover itself.” See Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 91.

Fifth is the postulate of error. Deleuze points out that when it comes to the image of thought, error is considered to be the only negative feature of thought. Error emerges as false recognition, that is, when some object is misconstrued or confused by the faculties.²² For example, I may confuse the pencil in front of me, using my faculty of vision to recognize it as the same pencil I used a few days ago by comparing it to a memory, oblivious to the fact that the present pencil is an entirely different pencil altogether. Thought commits an error when it mistakes what is false for truth. This ‘truth’ can be the truth of recognition (another postulate of the image of thought), but it is the same presupposed ‘truth’ that Deleuze maintains is evident in the postulate of principles. Deleuze argues that it is because the image of thought presupposes that thought has a natural affinity with the true that its only “misadventure” is to falsely mistake the false for truth. In this way, the conception of error present in the image of thought depends upon the presumptive priority of identity, recognition, and representation. Error is still contained within the framework of common sense. That is to say, error conceived of in this way is still under the yoke of the orthodox image of thought.²³ Instead of dismissing or refusing the other postulates, this form of error merely supports their validity. Error arises when thought and thinking divert from what is considered to be ‘true’ based upon how the truth is ascertained using the other postulates. Any form of thought that strays

²² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 148.

²³ *Ibid.*, 149.

away from truth (whatever that may be) has erred.²⁴

Sixth, we have the postulate of logical function, or of propositions. It concerns sense, or meaning, in language. There are two aspects to any proposition whatsoever, designation (i.e., what object the propositions indicates or denotes) and expression (i.e., what idea is being said or conveyed in the proposition). The latter is the domain of sense (i.e., whether or not the proposition conveys any intelligible meaning), while the former determines whether or not the proposition is true or false.²⁵ So in the proposition '*The Prime Minister of Canada is Stephen Harper*', what is being designated is an individual object, or entity (Stephen Harper); the idea that is expressed is the meaning attributed to the sentence taken as a whole (that the denoted entity has a certain property). Deleuze's contention is that within the image of thought, designation is assumed to be the means of determining whether or not a given proposition is true or false. Sense is reduced to this role in the image of thought, and thereby constrained by the postulate of the proposition that favours designation.²⁶

The seventh postulate concerns solutions and responses to problems. For Deleuze,

²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 105.

²⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 153.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-159.

within the image of thought, problems are defined by the possibility of solvability.²⁷ The mistake, according to Deleuze, is to treat the problem as something given, or already made, which ceases to be problematic once it has been solved. It is because problems are considered to be ‘givens’, under the image of thought, that truth and falsehood only concern solutions or responses, and not the problems themselves. A problem is false only if it has no true solution, and a true problem is one solved by a true proposition.²⁸ We see that this postulate presupposes problems as given, whereby their validity is conditional upon their solvability. What the image of thought excludes is the internal or immanent characteristic of the problem in it self. That is to say, what is excluded is the crucial element that constitutes problems *as* problems in the first place. In other words, for Deleuze a problem can be true or false independently of our knowledge of a true or false proposition that solves it because problems are no longer merely ‘given’, but their validity is determined by understanding what constitutes a problem as a true problem.

The eighth and final postulate of the image of thought is that of knowledge, or the result of knowledge. Deleuze differentiates the process of learning from that of knowledge. Learning is a process of trial and error, one that does not rely on an already given method. The process of learning concerns the actions carried out when one is faced with a problem (e.g., the movement of body parts needed to learn a style of swimming).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 163.

Whereas knowledge relies on pre-established methods, concepts, and formulas to reach a particular end or solve a specific problem (e.g., using the Pythagorean Theorem to calculate the exact area of the square on the hypotenuse of a right triangle).²⁹ The methods employed presuppose the possession of a correct way to solve problems, and are therefore another manifestation of the good will of the thinker, and a form of common sense insofar as knowledge lays claim to the means of solving problems.³⁰ The history of Western metaphysics has been a history which privileges knowledge rather than the process of learning, and only sees learning as a passage from the lack of knowledge to knowledge, thus subordinating learning to knowledge.

These eight postulates taken together constitute the dogmatic image of thought. For Deleuze, these postulates erect a mode of thinking that privileges the Same and Identical when it comes to representation, all the while marginalizing difference and repetition and their role in thought. More importantly, however, Deleuze asserts that thinking itself – the act of thought – operates by repetition and difference, and the dogmatic image of thought outright goes against what it means to think.³¹

Now that we have reconstructed the eight postulates found in the image of thought, we can illustrate how Deleuze's criticism of the image of thought differs from

²⁹ Ibid., 164-165.

³⁰ Ibid., 165-166.

³¹ Ibid., 167.

the post-foundationalist critique of foundationalism. First, let us recall that foundationalism or ‘strong’ ontologies, refers to any theory that grounds its claims on unalterable principles or axioms, thus presupposing their necessity. By contrast, ‘weak’ or post-foundational ontologies, would be any theory that emphasizes that this ground, or foundation, is subject to alteration and therefore it is not necessary that the principles remain static, but that they are contingent and thus revisable.³² Second, let us also remind ourselves that for Deleuze, the eight postulates he attributes to the image of thought are implicit presuppositions that seem “natural” (just as common sense is thought to be natural). While both Deleuze and the post-foundationalist seek to problematize and undermine their respective targets. This is not to say that their criticisms are identical, but rather that they are merely analogous to one another. The parallels between the post-foundationalist critique of foundationalism and Deleuze’s critique of the Image of Thought can be rendered schematically as shown in table 1 below.

³² Oliver Marchart, *Post-foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 11-12.

	Presupposes	Function of Presuppositions	Critique
Foundational Ontology	Principles and axioms which are treated as being undeniable and immune to revision	Serve as necessary cornerstones that ground and solidify metaphysics	The premises of foundationalist metaphysics are subverted and contingent
The Image of Thought	Pre-philosophical postulates derived from common sense	Determine epistemology and metaphysics, and equate it with the Same, the Similar, and the Identical thereby betraying the activity of thought	Postulates are subverted in order to affirm the activity of thought free from the traditional model of Western metaphysics

Table 1: Schematic representation of the similarities between Foundational Metaphysics and the Image of Thought

This table helps to visually demonstrate that the function of the presuppositions in both the Image of Thought and foundationalist ontology is to maintain and condition a certain model, or form of metaphysics. On the one hand, the eight postulates within the Image of Thought are implicit assumptions that reinforce assumptions that have been privileged throughout Western philosophy. These implicit assumptions are assumption of thought arise *before* any philosophical endeavour is even started, in this sense they are rightly said to be ‘pre-philosophical’. On the other hand, the axioms in foundational metaphysics are what necessarily ground the basis for the philosophy in question, and as such remain unchangeable. For example, Plato’s metaphysics is founded upon the distinction between the material world of perceptible phenomena, which is in a constant state of change, and

the unchangeable world or realm of Forms. The presuppositions maintain and stabilize the existing model of the Image of Thought on the one hand, and foundational metaphysics on the other. It is in this sense that we can equate the function or role of the presuppositions in foundational ontology to that of the postulates of the Image of Thought.

It is important to clarify that my argument is *not* that Deleuze's philosophy is post-foundational. It was previously mentioned that Deleuze's ontology exhibits traits of both the 'weak' and 'strong' ontological models while not being reducible to either category. To this extent, the fact that all we have shown here is that there is an analogy between the post-foundationalist criticism and Deleuze's criticism. The difference between Deleuze's critique and a post-foundationalist's critique is that the latter aims to question and problematize first principles in foundational ontologies, while Deleuze exposes the presuppositions that have dominated the traditional Image of Thought which inevitably lead to the precedence of identity and representation.

An example from the history of philosophy is Descartes' infamous first principle *Cogito ergo sum*, 'I think, therefore I am'. This principle is the foundation of Descartes' entire philosophical system, but as Deleuze points out, even though Descartes claims to have arrived at this principle by avoiding all explicit, conceptual presuppositions (e.g., sensory experience, dreams, memory, and so on), there still remains *implicit*

presuppositions contained in opinions rather than philosophical concepts. What Descartes assumes in declaring ‘I think, therefore I am’ is the meaning one subscribes to Self (‘I’), thinking, and being. Descartes presumes that everyone knows and understands what the self is, or what thinking means, or what existence entails.³³ In this sense, these presuppositions favour the concept of identity because they assume that what it means to be a self, to think, and to be is the same or similar for everyone. These are the type of presuppositions that Deleuze unearths in his criticism of the Image of Thought and it is crucial to note that they are all ‘*pre-philosophical*’ presuppositions, implicit in a mode of thought that is unquestioned and considered to be innate. Deleuze challenges these assumptions in order to free the concept of difference from the constraints it has suffered under the traditional Image of Thought. As Deleuze concludes of the eight postulates: “together they form the dogmatic image of thought. They crush thought under an image which is that of the Same and Similar in representation, but profoundly betrays what it means to think and alienates the two powers of difference and repetition.”³⁴

If we stick to the Cartesian example, the post-foundationalist, by contrast, will certainly problematize the foundational first principle, the ‘I think, therefore I am’, but will not endeavour to erect a new foundational principle as Deleuze’s aspires to do in *Difference and Repetition*. The post-foundationalist is happy to merely problematize

³³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 129, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

foundational ontological principles without necessarily needing to replace it. This difference between the two criticisms is minor, but it is important not to conflate Deleuze's critique with post-foundationalism's criticism of foundational ontologies because Deleuze does propose an ontology that maintains the concept of difference as foundational without being an ontology of transcendence.

We have seen how Deleuze criticizes the eight postulates of the Image of Thought for its implicit presuppositions that give sway to the primacy of identity and representation in Western philosophy. We have also seen how Deleuze's criticism differs from the post-foundational critique of foundationalism. The main difference between the two is that while the post-foundationalist merely seeks to problematize foundational principles, Deleuze retains difference as ontologically fundamental. To properly examine how Deleuze's univocal ontology maintains difference as foundational, we will first briefly look at Aristotle's analogical approach to being followed by Duns Scotus' thesis of univocity before we finally move on to Deleuze's own ontology.

Analogy versus Univocity: The Conception of Being in Aristotle and Duns Scotus

Ontology is the study of being *qua* being, that is to say being divorced from all qualifications (e.g., colour, intensity) and quantifications (e.g., weight, length, division, multiplication) and it has traditionally concerned itself with questions such as the nature of existence, the sort of entities that exist in the world, and how these entities can persist

despite the passage of time. As we shall see in Chapter 3, Deleuze's approach to the question of being will be crucial for outlining a political ontology based on Deleuze's thought. It was mentioned earlier that what is of interest in this investigation is Deleuze's adaptation of Duns Scotus' thesis of the univocity of being and the role it plays in Deleuze's ontology. In this section I demonstrate that Deleuze's adaptation of Duns Scotus' thesis amounts to an ontology which claims that becoming is prior to being. Deleuze gravitates towards Duns Scotus because it is there that he finds the conceptual tools necessary to create an ontology that focuses on difference rather than identity, becoming rather than being, immanence rather than transcendence, and an insistence on multiplicity rather than the One.³⁵ Duns Scotus' assertion that being is univocal ontologically guarantees immanence, which is important for Deleuze's project, rather than transcendence. This point will be elaborated below, but before we can properly appreciate this and its consequences for political ontology, we need to consider Duns Scotus' emphasis on the univocity of being as a response to Aristotle's analogical thesis of being.

For the medieval Scholastic philosophers, including John Duns Scotus, philosophy was preoccupied with the question of being *qua* being. Things are said to have being, but in what sense? The Scholastics proposed three different approaches to this problem: analogy, univocity, and equivocity. When we say that being is *equivocal*, we mean that

³⁵ This point is made by Keith Ansell Pearson. See Pearson, *Germinal Life*, 16.

things have *being* in various senses of the term ‘being’, but that these various senses do not have a common denominator, or meaning (e.g., God’s being is different than a human’s being). To say that being is *univocal*, by contrast, means that the term ‘being’ has only one sense in which it is said, and that this sense is said in one and the same sense (or way) of everything that can be said to have being. By contrast, to say that being is *analogical* is to say that the term ‘being’ is used in various senses, but that all these senses do refer to a common meaning, but all these various meanings are analogically related to one another.³⁶ The analogical approach to the question of being, famously taken up by Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages, was first put forward by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*. Therefore, in order to appreciate Deleuze’s appropriation of the concept of univocity, we must first turn to Aristotle and then Duns Scotus.

When we seek to understand the nature of something, for example Socrates, we attempt to grasp its *essence* (i.e., its indispensable characteristic trait that determines something to be what it is). Essentially, we can say that Socrates is a man, but this definition depends on the meaning of ‘man’. Aristotle defines ‘man’ as ‘a rational animal’. In Aristotle’s definition, man is said to be an animal with a specific type of property, namely, rationality. Socrates is a specific individual of the species ‘man’, and in turn, ‘man’ is a species of the genus ‘animal’. In order to determine the species man

³⁶ Daniel W. Smith, “The Doctrine of Univocity: Deleuze’s Ontology of Immanence” in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 28-29.

belongs to, we must be able to distinguish it from other species that also belong to the genus ‘animal’ (e.g., cats, birds, and so on). The property that is essential to man (i.e., rational) is what distinguishes it from other species within the same genus (i.e., rational and non-rational). The distinction between rational and non-rational animals is a difference within the genus ‘animal’ itself, dividing the genus into two parts or subsections. The difference between rational and non-rational animals is a difference in kind. That is, there are effectively two *kinds* of animals, rational and non-rational. The difference in kind is an opposition between two things (e.g., rational and non-rational) that have an underlying identity in common (e.g., animal).³⁷ So while both humans and cats share the genus ‘animal’, what separates us from cats is that we are further defined as ‘rational’, while cats are ‘non-rational’. For Aristotle, things differentiate themselves only by what they have in common. Both human beings and cats are identified as species of animals, but with essential differences between them. The dividing difference in the genus ‘animal’ splits the genus into two kinds of species that are maintained as a ‘difference-between-species’ by virtue of sharing a common genus. In this way, Aristotle subordinates the concept of difference to identity, where things are said to differ by virtue of belonging to a higher genus which is divided into specific differences.

Aristotle’s model is hierarchical, organizing things by defining and identifying

³⁷ Henry Somers-Hall, “Deleuze’s philosophical heritage: unity, difference, and onto-theology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, ed. Daniel W. Smith and Henry Somers-Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 338.

them by reference to a higher genus, from the very specific (e.g., Socrates), to the most general (i.e., Being).³⁸ Above the genera are the ten categories, which include quantity, quality, substance, and so on. For Aristotle, these are categories of being, and the categories differ from one another (e.g., substances are different from quantities).

However ‘being’ as a term does not act as a unifying identity for the categories. That is to say, while Aristotle’s categories are all different *ways* in which things exist, ‘being’ is not the ‘highest genus’ unifying them. This is a problem for Aristotle because if everything is identified by a higher genus, then how can we define ‘being’ as the ‘highest genus’ without positing some other genera ‘above’ ‘being’? This would lead us to only reiterate the problem of the ‘highest genus’ and to further repeat it in an infinite regress. Aristotle’s solution is to claim that the concept of difference and that which it is a difference of (i.e., the thing it differentiates) are not the same type of thing:

But it is not possible that either unity or being should be a genus of things; for the differentiae of any genus must each of them have both being and be one, but it is not possible for the genus to be predicated of the differentiae taken apart from species (any more than for the species of the genus to be predicated of the proper differentiae of the genus); so that if unity or being is a genus, no differentia will either be one or have being.³⁹

Differences cannot be the same kind of thing as the genera they divide. If difference was the same as the thing it differentiates, then we would not be able to tell difference itself

³⁸ For a more extensive analysis of Aristotle’s ontology, difference, and its relation to Deleuze, see Smith, “The Doctrine of Univocity”, 26-42.

³⁹ Aristotle, “Metaphysics” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 998b21-27.

apart from the genus it divides. Yet differences among species exist, that is, they have being. So for example, we say that ‘man is a rational animal’, ‘rationality’ as a property exists, has being, but we do not say ‘rational is an animal’ (‘rational/non-rational’ being a differentia in the genus ‘animal’). The main point is that being is said of all genera and differences: the genus ‘animal’, one of its differentiae ‘rational/non-rational’ and its different species (e.g., ‘man’, ‘cat’, etc.) all have being, but in what sense? Aristotle’s solution is to claim that at the level of the categories, being is *analogical*. ‘Being’ as a term is used in many senses “but [they] are related to one central point, one definite kind of thing, and are not homonymous.”⁴⁰ This ‘definite kind of being’ is the category of substance. To clarify this point, Aristotle draws an analogy between being and health:

Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it... So, too, there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point.⁴¹

The word ‘healthy’ has many uses in which it refers to a number of different things. Medicine can be said to be healthy insofar as it restores health, a diet can be said to be healthy insofar as it maintains health, and we even speak of ‘healthy’ emotional relationships with other people in our lives. In all these cases, the use of the word ‘healthy’ differs, yet all refer to a central or focal meaning. It is not that all these cases are different species of a genus called ‘healthy’, but rather these various meanings of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1003a33.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1003a34-1003b6.

‘healthy’ all relate to a focal sense. This focal meaning is the primary sense of ‘health’ because all the other uses of the word refer to it. A similar structure applies to Aristotle’s conception of being. The ‘starting-point’ of being is the category of substance, which Aristotle holds is primary amongst the other categories. There are several senses in which a thing can be said ‘to be’ (e.g., a quantity, a quality, etc.), but the category that is primary for Aristotle is the one that seeks to determine ‘what’ a thing is, namely, substance.⁴² The other nine categories have being only insofar as they relate to the category of substance in some way. Substance is the primary sense of being, while the others are secondary because they all relate to substance. To use the healthy analogy, when we say, for example, that the dog and the dog food are both healthy, the former (i.e., the dog) is healthy in the primary sense while the dog food is healthy in the secondary sense because the food is not healthy ‘in-itself’, but is rather considered to be healthy insofar as it aids in maintaining the health of the dog. Likewise, when we determine that something, say the flames of a fire, has the quality of heat, the sensation of heat does not tell us *what* fire is. The quality of heat or ‘hotness’ must be the heat of some thing, it cannot exist independently of a substance (e.g., fire). It is because all the other categories of being presuppose substantial being, and are predicated on substance, that substance emerges as the primary category of being, the ‘starting-point’.⁴³ Just as the word ‘healthy’ has several different uses all of which refer to a focal meaning, ‘being’ has several different senses all

⁴² Ibid., 1028a10-15.

⁴³ Ibid.

of which refer to the category of substance as their focal meaning. The other categories of being are all analogous to one another insofar as they each refer to the primacy sense of being, that is, insofar as they all refer to substance. Treating the category of substance as primary is Aristotle's solution to the problem of the 'highest genus' of being we discussed previously.

We saw that for Aristotle the categories of being are analogous to one another, all referring to a central conception of being, namely, the being of substance. If Aristotle's solution to relating the categories of being to each other is analogical, then Duns Scotus' solution is *univocal*. To say that being is univocal is to say that being only has one meaning, or sense, and is said in one and the same sense of everything that exists.⁴⁴ This same sense does not mean that being has a universal meaning. To affirm a univocal ontology does not amount to advancing a philosophy of the 'Whole', or the 'One'. As Daniel W. Smith points out "we must not be led astray by the prefix 'uni-' in the term 'univocity'; a univocal ontology is by definition irreconcilable with a philosophy of the One, which necessary entails an equivocal concept of Being."⁴⁵ For the Scholastics, the question of being mainly concerns the problem of how to account for an infinite divine entity, God, and finite beings (e.g., human beings, plants, animals, etc.). Duns Scotus asserts that the relation between the finite world and God is univocal, rather than

⁴⁴ Smith, "The Doctrine of Univocity", 29.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

analogical. Duns Scotus maintains that before ‘being’ is divided up into the ten Aristotelian categories, it is first divided into finite and infinite. Finite being is common to the ten categories, while infinite being is said of God. But the predicate ‘being’ is common to both.⁴⁶ The univocity of being is ‘transcendental’, which means that the term ‘being’ is “defined by its indifference to the difference between finite and infinite being. It applies to both without invoking a common identity.”⁴⁷ Transcendental predicates can be attributed to God alone or to God and some or all finite beings without appealing to a unity or affirming an analogical relation between them. As Dun Scotus explains:

Whatever pertains to ‘being’, then, in so far as it remains indifference to finite and infinite or as proper to the Infinite being, does not belong to it as determined to a genus, but prior to any such determination, and therefore as transcendental outside any genus. Whatever [predicates] are common to God and creatures are such kind, pertaining as they do to being in its indifference to what is infinite and finite. For in so far as they pertain to God they are infinite, whereas in so far as they belong to creatures they are finite. They belong to ‘being’, then, prior to the division into the ten genera. Anything of this kind, consequently, is transcendental.⁴⁸

For example, on Duns Scotus’ ontological model, the statements ‘God exists’ and ‘Plato exists’ both express the same sense of being without invoking an identity between them. That is, even though one is an infinite being, and the other is a finite being, both are said ‘to be’ in the same sense. The univocity of being “traverses all forms of being without eliminating their heterogeneity.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Allan Wolter (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 2.

⁴⁷ Nathan Widder, “John Duns Scotus,” in *Deleuze’s Philosophical Lineage*, ed. Graham Jones and Jon Roffe (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 35-36.

⁴⁸ Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, 2.

⁴⁹ Widder, “John Duns Scotus”, 35.

Duns Scotus maintains that the principle of indifference attributed to transcendental predicates extends univocity to forms of differentiation, namely to what he calls ‘pure perfections’. Like the univocity of being that cuts across the infinite/finite divide, ‘pure perfections’ are predicates that are also univocal. These predicates include but are not limited to: knowledge, wisdom, existence, and so on.⁵⁰ These ‘perfections’ overcome the finite/infinite division by modal distinction. That is to say, “in their different modes, pure perfections can vary qualitatively and even heterogeneously, but they are nevertheless said univocally of different beings to which they are attributed.”⁵¹ For example, we can say that ‘God is wise’ and ‘Socrates is wise’ without appealing to an identity between God and Socrates. God’s wisdom and Socrates’ wisdom is the same wisdom, despite that God’s wisdom is infinite and therefore shares no identity with Socrates’. Being is said univocally of the categories, but what about individuals among species? Duns Scotus limits univocity, and does not extend it to individuals amongst species. As we shall see, Deleuze brings Scotus’ univocity and his theory of individuation together. Before we can unpack Deleuze’s appropriation of the concept of univocity, we must first consider Scotus’ complex theory of individuation which will help us understand Deleuze’s univocal ontology.

⁵⁰ Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, 24, 172n. 14.

⁵¹ Widder, “John Duns Scotus”, 36.

Individuals of any given species are numerous and heterogeneous. If ‘man’ is a species of the genus ‘animal’, then ‘Socrates’ would be an individual of the species ‘man’. Duns Scotus maintains that a theory of individuation must put forward a positive account of individuals, as opposed to a negative account. A negative approach to individuation would claim that a thing is an individual by virtue of not being another thing (e.g., Socrates is *this* man because he is *not* Plato). Rejecting the negative approach, Duns Scotus claims that individual difference, or what he calls *haecceity*, is a positive difference that contracts a species into the singular individuals that belong to it. Haecceity is “neither matter, form, nor a combination of the two and so it cannot be expressed by general predicates such as those that define a species or those that qualify an individual while remaining common to many individuals.”⁵² Scotus further holds that haecceity is undefinable because its intelligibility escapes the human intellect. Despite its human unintelligibility, haecceity is a real, positive excess that ‘goes beyond’ the mere essences of individuals but is also what makes an individual what it is. Haecceity gives individuals their singularity.⁵³ It is key to note that for Duns Scotus, the concept of haecceity only applies to finite beings and cannot be said to be a transcendental predicate, thus it does not share the univocity of being with transcendental predicates such as wisdom.

⁵² Widder, “John Duns Scotus”, 37. Duns Scotus presents his theory of individuation in his ‘Six Questions’, see John Duns Scotus “Six Questions in Individuation from His *Ordinatio*, II. d. 3., part 1-6,’ in *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals* trans. V. Spade (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishers, 1994).

⁵³ Widder, “John Duns Scotus”, 38.

Duns Scotus keeps his univocity thesis and his theory of individuation completely separate in order to preserve the divine transcendence of the Christian God. That is, “if every predicate were considered univocal, it would be impossible to distinguish those concepts that can be affirmed of God from those that cannot.”⁵⁴ If Scotus limits univocity to transcendental predicates, then it is Deleuze who proposes to wrestle univocity from its theological constraints and extend it to individual difference. To do this, Deleuze traces the concept of univocity through Spinoza to Nietzsche.

Deleuze and the three moments of Univocity: Duns Scotus, Spinoza, and Nietzsche

Deleuze’s primary project in *Difference and Repetition* is to present a concept of difference that is not subordinate to and determined by identity. Deleuze calls this conception of difference ‘difference in itself’, rather than a “merely conceptual difference.”⁵⁵ A confusion of this sort would be Aristotle’s concept of difference, where for example, specific differences (i.e., differences that divide up a genus) are accounted for by virtue of a common, binding identity (i.e., a higher genus). An ontology that can account for the concept of difference in itself needs to be univocal because to posit an analogical account would only reintroduce the priority of identity, and so Deleuze turns to Dun Scotus and the theory of univocity. Deleuze goes further and identifies two more ‘moments’ in the historical progression of the concept of univocity: Spinoza, and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 27.

Nietzsche. Deleuze's ontology follows in the footsteps of Duns Scotus and declares that "there has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal."⁵⁶ Although Deleuze praises Duns Scotus as a 'subtle doctor' for inaugurating the univocity of being thesis, Scotus limits univocity to the transcendental predicates only, thereby leaving behind individual differences, or haecceities. Deleuze contends that Duns Scotus only 'thought' univocity in an abstract manner, rather than giving the concept its full, affirmative and expressive force. In order to extend the concept of univocity to individual differences, and affirm a concept of difference 'in itself', Deleuze turns to Spinoza's immanent ontology and Nietzsche's eternal return. The result of which, as Deleuze puts it, must:

Show not only how individuating difference differs in kind from specific difference, but primarily and above all how individuation properly *precedes* matter and form, species and parts, and every other element of the constituted individual. Univocity of being, in so far as it is immediately related to difference, demands that we show how individuating difference precedes generic, specific and even individual differences within being; how a prior field of individuation within being conditions at once the determination of species of forms, the determination of parts and their individual variations.⁵⁷

It is this process of individuation that produces, creates, or determines the individual beings. Before I identify the oak tree as *this* individual tree, as distinct from other trees, grass, rocks, and so on—in short, before I identify a particular individual thing as being identical to itself, the individual thing (whatever it may be) must have already undergone a process of individuation for it to be the particular individual that it is. This individuating

⁵⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 38.

process is what determines individuals, or to put it in more ontological terms that amount to the same thing, the process of becoming is prior to being. The ontology of difference that Deleuze wants to advance needs to link individual beings *through* their differences rather than their commonalities, amounting to a sort of ‘disjunctive synthesis’. To accomplish this, Deleuze appropriates Duns Scotus’ theory of univocity and extends it to Spinoza’s attributes and Nietzsche’s eternal return to advance a theory of univocal being that is related, by itself (i.e., with no mediator) to the concept of difference in itself.⁵⁸

Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza is extremely complex, the intricate details of which go well beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will limit my discussion to how Deleuze takes up Spinoza in relation to the univocity of being.⁵⁹ Before we can see how Deleuze uses Spinoza, we need to clarify some of Spinoza’s concepts that constitute his ontology. Spinoza famously opens the *Ethics* with the definitions of three key concepts that constitute his ontological system: substance, attributes, and modes. Spinoza defines ‘substance’ as “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.”⁶⁰ By attribute, Spinoza means “that

⁵⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁹ Deleuze wrote two books on the philosophy of Spinoza: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* and *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*.

⁶⁰ Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), I.D3.

which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.”⁶¹ And finally, modes are “the affections of substance; that is, that which is in something else and is conceived through something else.”⁶² According to Spinoza, there is only *one* infinite substance, which is self-caused or *causa sui*. What Spinoza calls ‘substance’ is also identified with God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*).⁶³ That is to say, this single, infinite substance basically goes by three different names (God, Substance, Nature). Substance has infinite attributes, each of which express the essence of substance.⁶⁴ Although Spinoza maintains that God has infinite attributes, the only two that the human intellect perceives are thought and extension.⁶⁵ Attributes are conceived through themselves, meaning that from the perspective of the human intellect, we only know of *extension* through encountering extended things such as tables and chairs and *thought* through the activity of thinking.⁶⁶ Modes are modifications of substance, or the ‘ways’ in which substance expresses itself. For Spinoza, the modes of substance inhere *in* attributes and are modifications of those attributes.⁶⁷ For example, we only know two attributes of substance, thought and extension, and so on a Spinozist model whatever exists, or has being, is going to be either an extended thing, or thoughts or thinking, or a variation (or mode) of these two attributes. That is, it would be impossible for us to encounter a mode

⁶¹ Ibid., I.D4.

⁶² Ibid., I.D5.

⁶³ Ibid., I.P.7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., I.P.11.

⁶⁵ Ibid., II.P.1, 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., I.P10.Sch.

⁶⁷ Ibid., II.P.6.

of substance that is not either an extended thing or a thought. For example, the laptop I am typing on is sitting on a wooden desk, and beside the laptop there is a cup of coffee. The laptop, desk, and cup are all modes or modifications of the attribute of extension. The way I perceive these distinct things is by virtue of them all being modifications of the attribute of extension. The laptop, cup, and desk are all extended things, but each is a particular kind, 'type', or to use Spinoza's term, *mode* of extension. The desk, cup, and laptop are therefore all different articulations of the same single substance. This articulation is expressed through the attribute of extension *as* different modes *of* this attribute.

Spinoza's substance is 'self-caused', which means that it does not depend upon an external thing for its existence. Spinoza's ontology is *immanent* rather than *transcendent*. Recall that for something to be immanent, there is nothing 'superior', 'beyond' or 'higher than' it. If something is said to be transcendent, then it is something that is 'external', 'beyond', or 'superior' to something else. Spinoza's substance is immanent because it is self-caused and therefore nothing can exist outside of it, much less 'beyond' or 'above it'. Immanence is key for Deleuze, because unlike Duns Scotus who reserves univocity for the transcendental predicates in order to guarantee a transcendent God, Spinoza's God is synonymous with Nature and Substance, which allows the concept of univocity to be applied to individual differences through its attributes and modes. In this sense, for Spinoza, all that exists is God and his modes, nothing else.

Deleuze argues that with Spinoza, the univocity of being becomes identical with Spinoza's assertion of an infinite, immanent substance. If Duns Scotus neutralized the concept of univocity by making it indifferent to the finite/infinite divide, then with Spinoza "univocal being ceases to be neutralized and becomes expressive; it becomes a truly expressive and affirmative proposition."⁶⁸ Deleuze thinks that it is Spinoza's concept of the attributes that are univocal because while infinite, they all refer back to the same single substance. Or as Deleuze puts it,

Univocity is the keystone of Spinoza's entire philosophy. Precisely because the attributes exist in the same form in God, of whose existence they constitute the essence, and in the modes that involve them in *their* essence, there is nothing common between the essence of God and the essence of the modes, yet there are forms that are absolutely identical, notions that are absolutely common to God and the modes. The univocity of attributes is the only means of radically distinguishing the essence and existence of substance from the essence and existence of the modes, while preserving the absolute unity of Being.⁶⁹

Deleuze's point is that while there is nothing common between the essence of substance and the essence of the modes, their forms are identical to both substance *and* the modes. These forms are the attributes, which constitute the essence of substance on the one hand, and are 'involved' in the essence of the modes (i.e., a modification of always a modification of an attribute of substance). A thing's essence is that particular characteristic that makes it what it is. The essence of the modes is not identical with the

⁶⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 40. Deleuze in fact identifies three figures of univocity in Spinoza. See Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books); and for commentary see Daniel W. Smith, "The Doctrine of Univocity: Deleuze's Ontology of Immanence" in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 29-42.

⁶⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 63-64.

essence of substance, this is because any modification is already an alternation, and in this way produces a difference in what it modifies. For example, the laptop I am typing on is a mode of the attribute of extension, but its essence, that which makes it a laptop, is not the same, exact ‘thing’ as the essence of the infinite substance. While it is true to say that the laptop is a modification *of* substance in the attribute of extension, this modification itself is a difference *in* substance. That is to say, when we modify something, we immediately produce a difference because when something undergoes a modification or alteration, it is no longer identifiable with what it was before. Deleuze argues that it is the univocity of the attributes which enables Spinoza to discern the essence of substance from the essence of modes all the while maintaining the web of being. To further explain the attributes and modes, we need to define the concept of *formal distinction* and *numerical distinction* because as Deleuze maintains, Spinoza’s attributes are formally distinct from each other, while the modes are numerically distinct.

A formal distinction is a qualitative distinction, rather than a difference in quantity (e.g., the colour red has numerous hues and shades, these are difference in intensity or quality rather than quantity). *A numerical distinction* is when a division is made between two or more things; when things are divided into parts, it is a quantitative distinction. If I have a pocket full of quarters, these quarters are said to differ from one another numerically, that is, I can count how many quarters I have and distinguish them from each other. This is an example of a *numerical distinction*. Deleuze argues that Spinoza’s

infinite attributes differ from one another formally, rather than numerically; and that the modes differ numerically rather than formally. Anything that has extension, my laptop, a cat, piece of paper, and so on, are all different modes of extension. They are different modes, but all imply extension, which is an attribute of substance. That is, it is in the *same univocal sense* that paper, a cat, and my laptop exist as extended bodies, even though they differ in *how* they are extended, they differ in their respective modes.⁷⁰ The attributes of substance are *qualitatively* distinct from one another rather than being *quantitatively* distinct. If the attributes were quantitatively different, then this would imply quantitatively different substance and thus they would no longer be a part of a single, ontologically one, substance which Spinoza is so adamant to maintain. Spinoza's substance is indivisible, and so while there are infinite attributes, these attributes differ from one another qualitatively rather than quantitatively.⁷¹ Deleuze holds that because the attributes are univocal and are formally distinct, the individual differences are that of the modes, which are numerically distinct from one another. Or as he puts it in *Difference and Repetition*: "The attributes behave like real qualitatively different senses which relate to substance as if to a single and same designated; and substance in turn behaves like an ontologically unique sense in relation to the modes which express it, and inhabit it like individuating factors or intrinsic and intense degrees."⁷² The modes in Spinoza constitute individual difference, and the thesis of univocity extends to the modes by way of, or

⁷⁰ Smith, "The Doctrine of Univocity", 31.

⁷¹ Spinoza, *The Ethics*, I.P.13.

⁷² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 40.

through, the attributes.

Deleuze notes that in Spinoza's ontology, there remains a difference between the modes and substance. Substance is independent because it is self-caused and does not rely on anything else for its existence. The modes of substance, by contrast, are dependent on substance because they are expressions of substance itself. Spinoza's modes cannot exist independently of substance. Deleuze's aim is to affirm a substance *of* the modes and only of the modes, rather than conceiving of the modes as being variations *on* a substance that is independent.⁷³ Or to put it in slightly different terms, Deleuze seeks to ontologically affirm individual differences themselves without recourse to an all-encompassing, unifying, single substance. To accomplish this, Deleuze needs to show how individual beings are created without explaining their existence by referring to something like Spinoza's concept of 'substance'. This requires a categorical shift, where the process of becoming is affirmed prior to being, that is, the process through which individual beings come to be is privileged over the existence of individual entities. This shift needs to maintain, according to Deleuze "that identity not be first, that it exist as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle *become*; that it revolve around the Different: such would be the nature of a Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under domination of a concept in

⁷³ Ibid.

general already understood as identical.”⁷⁴ This is where Deleuze transitions from Spinoza, while still maintaining the univocity of attributes, and turns to Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal return in order to extend the thesis of univocity beyond Spinoza. It is with Nietzsche that the univocity of being thesis will be able to determine the principle of identity as secondary to the ‘principle’ of difference.

As with his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche is complex and is mostly dealt with in the 1962 text *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. With regards to Deleuze’s conception of univocal being, it is Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal return that effectively realizes the univocity of being by extending it to individual differences without the need to make them dependant on an infinite, single substance as in Spinoza’s conception. For Nietzsche, the eternal return is the endless recurrence of identical individuals and events in a chronological order where all experiences and events, past, present, and future, will infinitely repeat themselves *ad nauseam*.⁷⁵ Generally, the eternal return is understood as the affirmation and infinite repetition of the same identical occurrences that have already taken place, however Deleuze reads the concept of eternal recurrence as being the affirmation of difference rather than the same. On Deleuze’s reading of the eternal return, what returns is not the ‘same’ or identical, but it is rather the return of difference itself. In order to affirm a process of becoming, rather than being,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 40-41.

⁷⁵ For the clearest outline of Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), § 341.

Deleuze's univocity of being must be said of the different, and Nietzsche's eternal return is the returning of this 'becoming'.⁷⁶ As Deleuze explains:

We misinterpret the expression "eternal return" if we understand it as "return of the same". It is not being that returns but rather the returning itself that constitutes being insofar as it is affirmed of becoming and of that which passes. It is not some one thing that returns but rather returning itself is the one thing which is affirmed of diversity or multiplicity. In other words, identity in the eternal return does not describe the nature of that which returns but, on the contrary, the fact of returning for that which differs. This is why eternal return must be thought of as a synthesis; a synthesis of time and its dimensions, a synthesis of diversity and its reproduction, a synthesis of becoming and the being of which is affirmed in becoming, a synthesis of a double affirmation. Thus the eternal return itself does not depend on a principle of identity but on one which must, in all respects, fulfill the requirements of a truly sufficient reason.⁷⁷

In order to affirm individuation, or the process of becoming as something which precedes the individual, or beings, Deleuze interprets Nietzsche's eternal return as the generative (re)production of individuating differences, rather than the recurrence of the identical. If the standard reading of the Nietzsche's eternal return is the return of the identical, then Deleuze interprets the return in 'reverse', claiming that 'being' does not return, but that it is rather the 'returning itself', as process, which affirms being in the act of returning. 'Being', or what exists, is only affirmed *after* the process of becoming unfolds by repetition. This is why the principle of identity is a principle 'become' because it has to be produced by difference repeating itself. The concept of identity, on Deleuze's reading, becomes an *effect*, a product, of an original, generative difference.⁷⁸ For Deleuze, the only

⁷⁶ Deleuze says "Returning is the becoming-identical of becoming itself." See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 41.

⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 48.

⁷⁸ Levi Bryant points this out in his book on Deleuze. See Bryant, *Difference and Givenness*, 182.

identity to be found is produced by difference and is designated as repetition.⁷⁹ This emphasis on production, or creation, is key because it indicates that Deleuze's approach to explaining the existence of individual beings is to affirm an on-going, active process, a becoming, rather than static, already realized conception of being. But what makes Deleuze argue that the eternal return is the return of the different as opposed to the same? The answer lies in how Deleuze understands Nietzsche's theory of constitutive forces in relation to the doctrine of the eternal return.

For Nietzsche, all phenomena, things, objects, and individuals are made up of heterogeneous, irreducible forces that struggle, and relate to one another within this struggle.⁸⁰ These forces struggle amongst one another and have the ability to take hold, possess, exploit or appropriate things. On Deleuze's reading, we need to know what force appropriates a specific thing or object if we ever want to make sense of it, whether this thing is a human being, or a something else. As Deleuze says, "the history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces which struggle for possession. The same object, the same phenomenon, changes

⁷⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 41. Deleuze devotes the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition* to the concept of 'Repetition', which constitutes his highly complicated theory of time.

⁸⁰ Nietzsche's theory of force is outlined in the collection of notebooks that make up his *The Will to Power*, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), § 619. But also certain sections of his *Genealogy of Morals*, see Friedrich Nietzsche, "Genealogy of Morals" in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House Inc., 2000), I.13, II.12.

sense depending on the force which appropriates it.”⁸¹ There are two types of forces, namely, reactive and active. Forces relate to one another, and no force is equal to another. Some forces are more dominant, or superior than others. The dominant forces are *active*, while the dominated and inferior forces are *reactive*. Reactive forces are a hindrance because they constrain a thing from actively reaching its full potential, whereas active forces strive towards a thing’s realization, that is to its limit and beyond.⁸² For example, when I become sick with a nasty fever, the illness ‘takes over’ my body and limits the activities I can do. In this sense, the fever is a reactive force hindering my activity. Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power is a creative drive that generates the plurality of forces, it is a willing power, or as Deleuze points out, the will to power is the synthesis of forces and it is always through the will to power that one force comes to dominate over others.⁸³ The will to power is a ‘drive’ that is internal or immanent to forces, that is to say, it does not affect forces from some place external to the forces, in this sense, it can be said to be immanent rather than transcendent.⁸⁴ This immanent ‘forceful’ drive is key for

⁸¹ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 3. Deleuze is in fact evoking Nietzsche’s concept of ‘genealogy’ here. For Nietzsche, a phenomena have their own specific history, or what he calls a ‘genealogy’. This means that they have been appropriated by various forces at different times throughout the course of their history, resulting in multiple senses on the phenomena in question. After such a history, the multiple meanings can be evaluated so as to decide which sense to affirm and prefer over others. Nietzsche’s famous example is that of the concept of ‘punishment’, where he illustrates the multiple meanings this concept has played throughout the history of Western cultures. See Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II.13.

⁸² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, § 657.

⁸³ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 50, 51. For a more extensive analysis of Deleuze’s use of Nietzsche’s theory of forces and its relation to the Eternal Return, see Joseph Ward, “Revisiting *Nietzsche et la Philosophie*: Gilles Deleuze on Force and Eternal Return,” in *Angelaki* 15, no.2 (Summer 2010): 101-114.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

Deleuze because it allows him to establish an ontology of difference that differentiates on its own accord rather than differences differing by mediation or some recourse to identity, that is to say, through something else other than itself (e.g., a higher genus that divides species). There is a lot more that could be said about Nietzsche's theory of forces and the will to power, however we are primarily interested in the doctrine of the eternal return and its addition to the theory of univocity.

Deleuze's claim that the Nietzschean eternal return is the return of difference rather than the identical has to do with the fact that Deleuze thinks of the eternal return as being selective. It is selective in two fundamental ways: selective in thought, and selective in being.⁸⁵ First, Nietzsche's eternal return is selective as a *thought* one may have in that it gives the person an ethical principle, or a rule of deciding how to *think* about the eternal return. The very idea of reliving the same life, down to the tiniest detail may be thought to be a horrific curse, *or* it may be considered to be a positive experience where whatever one wills, one also wills its return and its affirmation.⁸⁶ To take an example in order to better illustrate this, let's turn to Hollywood. In the 1993 comedy *Groundhog Day*, the self-centered TV news meteorologist Phil Connors (played by Bill Murray) travels to a small U.S. town to observe the Groundhog Day festival. Hating the

⁸⁵ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 68.

⁸⁶ As Deleuze puts it: "whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return." See *Ibid.* This 'selection' of the preferred perspective one can take on the eternal return is in fact found in Nietzsche, when he asks the reader how he or she would react to a demon evoking the doctrine of the eternal return, see Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, § 341.

festival and being completely rude to everyone around him, Connors cannot wait to end his stay in town. Out of some unexplained power, Connors ends up repeating Groundhog Day, that is, he finds himself, much to his dismay, waking up and reliving February 2nd over and over again. Only Connors is aware of this phenomenon, everyone else in the town is oblivious to it. At first, Connors is horrified at this prospect and curses it and his life (even attempting suicide), however he still ends up reliving the same day—until, that is—he starts making ‘the most of it’, transforming his perspective, the way he thinks about the reliving experience, and he begins to affirm his life. This example is by no means meant to be an accurate, direct application of Nietzsche’s doctrine but it helps illustrate the different perspectives one can take on the very idea of reliving the events of life indefinitely.

The second mode of selection the eternal return exhibits is a selection in being, where what returns is affirmation rather than negation. Or to put it in Nietzschean terms, what returns are the forces as *active* forces, their ‘becoming-active’ rather than reactive, or ‘becoming-reactive’. For Deleuze, this is the eternal return’s affirmative power, by selecting forces that become active, the eternal return creates or wills something into being by changing its nature, that is to say, by selecting active forces which transform themselves. This idea of self-transformation, or self-overcoming of forces, constitutes all beings (because heterogeneous forces make up beings). As Deleuze says of the eternal return “as selective ontology, it affirms this being of becoming as the ‘self-affirming’ of

becoming-active.”⁸⁷ The being of becoming is ‘self-affirming’ because it is the will to power that is internal or immanent to the forces that compel their own becoming-active. As Deleuze puts it, “the eternal return is indeed the consequence of a difference which is originary, pure, synthetic and in-itself (which Nietzsche called will to power).”⁸⁸ It is this second selection in being that changes the nature of that which it selects that allows Deleuze to assert that what effectively returns is difference, rather than anything that is the same or identical. By selecting the affirmative, active forces, the eternal return introduces difference because it is the active forces that are able to push against their own limitations and go beyond ‘what they can do’. The active forces make affirmation the object of their activity because they are able to overcome their otherwise reactive tendencies and become affirmative.⁸⁹ On Deleuze’s interpretation, the eternal return is repetition as a process of becoming, an activity.

How does all of this supplement the univocity of being? For Deleuze, Nietzsche’s eternal return serves as the motor, or ‘wheel’ of univocal being, that is, it is the process of repetition, or its becoming, that produces or creates individual, different beings. As we have seen, the will to power is what drives these forces to become active, pushing them to their limit, thereby changing and transforming them like “mobile individuating factors unwilling to allow themselves to be contained within the factitious limits of this or that

⁸⁷ Ibid., 71-72.

⁸⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 125.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 68.

individual, this or that Self'.⁹⁰ There is a crucial distinction within Deleuze's take on univocal being, namely between the process, or activity, of becoming, and the result of this activity, beings. Or what amounts to the same thing, a distinction between individuation and the individuated, the determining and the determined, the conditioning and the conditioned, the creating and the created. The distinction is what Deleuze calls the virtual and actual. The virtual and actual are concepts that appear in nearly all of Deleuze's work, even the co-authored texts with Guattari. For something to be actual basically just means that it exists, or has being, in the conventional sense of the term (i.e., it can be a object of our experience, it can be quantified, and so on). The virtual remains perhaps as one of, if not *the*, most enigmatic concept in Deleuze's entire philosophy. The virtual is *not* to be confused with the common sense usage of the term that equates it with 'virtual' or 'digital reality'. The virtual is *not* artificial, but as real as the actual.⁹¹ The actual is that which is given, that is, it comprises the 'stuff' of our experience, the material world, and so on, whereas the virtual is the 'means' by which the given is given. Or to put it ontologically, virtual forces are what 'realize themselves' through a process of becoming actual, that is they undergo a process that Deleuze often refers to as the 'process of actualization'. This process is the activity of becoming that enables individual, particular beings to emerge. In this sense, every actual 'object' has its corresponding

⁹⁰ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 41.

⁹¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 208.

virtual components that co-exist.⁹² The forces that were discussed earlier are heterogeneous, *virtual* multiplicities that become actualities. In terms of the univocity of being, these virtual forces undergo a process of actualization, or becoming, that determines and conditions the actual, individual beings. The virtual for Deleuze is *transcendental* in this respect, precisely because it is what conditions beings. The virtual is transcendental, but *not* a transcendent ‘thing’. Recall that for something to be transcendent is for it to ‘go beyond’ another thing, or is ‘superior to’ another thing. Deleuze’s Spinozism allows him to maintain the transcendental quality of the virtual as something that is ontologically immanent as opposed to transcendent. The virtual and actual constitute, or inhabit the same ‘domain’ or ‘realm’ of being, as opposed to maintaining a division between the two, as is the case in transcendent ontologies. Thus, the process or activity of individuation, and its product, the individuated, both comprise and subsist within the same, univocal ontological field, or ‘plane’.

Deleuze maintains that it is with Nietzsche’s eternal return that the theory of univocity becomes effectively realized. What this means is that it is the process of individuation that gives rise to individual, actual beings that are created or ‘actualized’ by virtual forces. The turn to Nietzsche allows the univocity of being thesis to no longer depend upon a single, Spinozist substance, and is finally said *of* the individual differences in all their variations. The turn to Nietzsche allows Deleuze to extend the theory of

⁹² Gilles Deleuze, “The Actual and the Virtual,” in *Dialogues II*, trans. Eliot Ross Albert (London: Continuum, 2006), 112.

univocal being to the individuating differences themselves, thereby completing the “Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept.”⁹³ That is, if on Spinoza’s ontology, univocal being still makes reference to a single substance that necessarily guarantees the different modes, the eternal return enables Deleuze to argue that univocal being is finally said *only* of the individuating differences without any reference to a unifying substance. Individuation is primary, it precedes the individuated. Being is univocal, it is said in the same sense of everything that is, but this ‘everything’ is difference itself. Deleuze summarizes the three moments of univocity by stating that:

In the eternal return, univocal being is not only thought and even affirmed, but effectively realised. Being is said in a single and same sense, but this sense is that of the eternal return as the return or repetition of that which it is said. The wheel in the eternal return is at once both production of repetition on the basis of difference and the selection of difference on the basis of repetition.⁹⁴

In the first moment, we saw that univocal being was merely thought in Duns Scotus. With Spinoza, the univocity of being became expressive and affirmative, but still retained a single substance that constituted all the varying, individual modes. Finally, it is with Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal return as the activity, or repetition of different virtual forces that produce different individual beings, that univocal being is realized. It is crucial to note that for Deleuze, the Same, the Identical, the Similar do not disappear from ontology. The concept of difference certainly plays a privileged role, but one which

⁹³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 40.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

precedes identity. Individual beings (i.e., phenomena, objects, things that are identified to be what they are) are *products* of the process (or activity) or individuation (or becoming), and as such are secondary, while the process itself is primary. Or to put it in more ontological terms, becoming is prior to being.

What of the different beings, then? To say that being is univocal insofar as it is said *of* that which differs means that all beings ‘are’ in the same univocal so long as this sense is difference. This amounts to claiming that the individuating, different beings are equivocal in relation to one another while their collective sense is univocal.⁹⁵ Recall that to say that being is equivocal means that ‘being’ is said in several senses with no common denominator. As Deleuze explains “the univocity of Being does not mean that there is one and the same Being; on the contrary, beings are multiple and different, they are always produced by a disjunctive synthesis.”⁹⁶ In other words, individual beings are all connected through what they all share: difference. The concept of difference is univocal to all individual beings that differ from one another. Individual beings all differ, but insofar as they do differ, they are ‘equal’ in their difference. Deleuze conceives of ontology as univocal, but this univocity is said of equivocal beings.⁹⁷ It is crucial to keep in mind that

⁹⁵ Ibid., 304. As Deleuze puts it, “univocity signifies that being itself is univocal, while that of which it is said is equivocal.”

⁹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Continuum, 2004), 205.

⁹⁷ This same approach is echoed in *A Thousand Plateaus* when the authors declare “PLURALISM = MONISM”, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 20.

the univocal is not reducible to the equivocal or vice versa. The multiple and different beings do not subsume or collapse into an overarching unity, or a ‘one’, for this would again subordinate the concept of difference to identity. If an ontology that is pluralistic is not also at the same time a monism, then its individual beings would be indifferent and transcendent to one another, thereby destroying the immanence that Deleuze wishes to maintain.⁹⁸ Deleuze makes this conclusion when he says “univocal being is at one and the same time nomadic distribution and crowned anarchy.”⁹⁹ ‘Nomadic distribution’ because beings are not ‘distributed’ in a pre-arranged, or pre-determined manner that is determined by an external, transcendent thing (e.g., God) but they distribute themselves (i.e., by virtue of the will to power) and are in this sense said to be ‘nomadic’ and immanent. ‘Crowned anarchy’¹⁰⁰ because individual beings are equivocal, that is they are said to exist with *no common denominator*, insofar as they are all ‘united’ by difference, that is, *through* their differences. Deleuze points out that the phrase ‘everything is equal’ can be said only on the condition that it is said of that which is unequal, or different.¹⁰¹ For example, my being, as a human, can only be said to be ‘equal’ to the being of the moon insofar as the moon and I differ in the manner in which we exist. That is to say, a human’s being and the moon’s being are equivocal. Yet, the equivocality of beings is not

⁹⁸ This is pointed out by François Zourabichvili, see Zourabichvili, *Deleuze: A Philosophy of the Event*, 213.

⁹⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ This term is actually a reference to a book by the French dramatist Antonin Artaud. See Antonin Artaud, *Heliogabalus; or the Crowned Anarchist*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (Los Angeles: Solar Books, 2006).

¹⁰¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 37.

imposed on them from ‘above’ (e.g., a ‘highest genus’, or a divine entity), nor is this equivocality attained by resembling some original model that it may copy or reproduce, rather beings affirm it themselves, by actualizing their virtual forces. There is a difference between the moons being and my being; this difference is a difference between two individual things (i.e., individual difference) that is actualized by the activity of virtual forces that precede individuals. The ‘anarchy’ of individual beings is ‘crowned’ because Deleuze wants to retain a form of ontological monism that is synthesized by the concept of difference; the distributions are ‘nomadic’ because it is the individual beings themselves that distribute themselves, and as such affirm pluralism. To illustrate this point, imagine the correlation between an ocean and its individual drops of water. All the individual drops of water can ‘exist’ on their own, when isolated, and all differ from one another; yet at the same time, each drop of water is ‘united’ by virtue of composing an ocean when taken as a ‘whole’.¹⁰²

Earlier it was mentioned that while Deleuze’s ontology cannot be entirely categorized as ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ in White’s terminology, it nevertheless pinpoints the concept of difference to be ontologically foundational without being transcendent and falling into the presuppositions of the Image of Thought. We saw that Deleuze’s critique

¹⁰² As Deleuze so famously concludes *Difference and Repetition*: “A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single and same clamour of Being for all beings: on condition that each being, each drop and each voice has reached the state of excess – in other words, the difference which displaces and disguises them and, in turning upon its mobile cusp, causes them to return.” See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 304.

of traditional Western metaphysics centers around ‘pre-philosophical’ presuppositions within an Image of Thought that upholds identity and representation. Deleuze’s univocal ontology is not entirely ‘weak’ because although he is certainly critical of metaphysical presuppositions, he nevertheless presents us with a vision of univocal ontology that revolves around the concept of difference divorced from any recourse to identity. Deleuze champions a conception of difference that fundamentally shapes his account of the diversity of being. Deleuze’s conception of difference is foundational without resulting in a transcendent ontology. The virtual forces are immanent, not transcendent, and just as real as actual beings. Individuating differences ontologically precede individual beings; the activity, or process of becoming, precedes beings themselves. Deleuze’s conception of being *is* this differing activity itself, that is to say, difference *is* being. To the question: ‘what exists?’ Deleuze replies: ‘the process that produces difference’.

A ‘strong’, or foundationalist ontology holds certain ontological principles are necessary and essentially non-revisable. As we have seen, Deleuze argues that being is univocal, that is, everything that has being is said to ‘be’ in the same sense insofar as this sense is said only of difference. The concept of difference that Deleuze establishes in his ontology is necessary insofar as it provides a justification, a sufficient reason, for the account of individual beings. That is to say, without this original concept of difference, individual beings would not be accounted for in Deleuze’s univocal ontology. It is in this sense that Deleuze’s conception of difference as a difference ‘in itself’ is fundamental to

his overall ontology. While the concept of difference is fundamental to Deleuze, his ontology is not transcendent, rather, following Spinoza, it is immanent. Recall that for something to be transcendent means that it is ‘above’ or ‘superior’ to something else, while immanence denies the possibility of such a hierarchy. So while Deleuze’s concept of difference is not a transcendent concept, it is certainly transcendental, that is, the concept of difference conditions or determines individual beings. For Stephen White an ontology is ‘strong’ when it maintains certain ontological principles to be necessary, and derives political consequences by justifying those consequences with an appeal to something ontologically ‘external’, or transcendent. Yet as Nathan Widder has mentioned, “it seems perfectly possible for a political ontology to make strong claims that reject metaphysical or transcendent foundations.”¹⁰³ Deleuze’s ontology is one that while makes strong ontological claims (i.e., difference, or becoming as ontologically prior to being); it nevertheless remains an immanent ontology and does not subscribe to a transcendent foundation. In this sense, Deleuze’s univocal ontology, while not being entirely reducible to the strong model, nevertheless exhibits traits similar to the ‘strong’ model by arguing that difference ‘in it self’ is ontologically prior to any and all identifiable, actual beings.

Conclusion

¹⁰³ Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 10.

This chapter sought to demonstrate that Deleuze's ontology cannot be entirely reduced to the 'strong' ontological model, but nonetheless expresses difference as playing a fundamental role in his ontology. We also saw that Deleuze is critical of the eight postulates of the Image of Thought for holding certain 'pre-philosophical' assumptions that have historically lead to favour the concepts of representation and identity in Western philosophy. It was further demonstrated that Deleuze's own ontology resembles the 'strong' models insofar as it claims that becoming is prior to being by appealing to a concept of difference that conditions actual, individual beings. This concept of difference 'it it self' is fundamental to Deleuze's univocal ontology. This was illustrated by charting Deleuze's embrace of the thesis of univocal being as inaugurated by Dun Scotus, extended to Spinoza's immanent substance, and finally realized in Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return.

In the previous Chapter, I defined political ontology as determining a concept of the political that is influenced by ontological commitments or principles. Given that the overall aim of this thesis is to serve as an intervention into the debate about the political import of Deleuze's early works, I put forward the argument that a new concept of the political can be inferred from Deleuze's univocal ontology. Now that we have examined Deleuze's univocal ontology as privileging becoming over being, and difference over identity, we can finally draw out a concept of the political that is influenced by these ontological commitments. In the following chapter, I will give a detailed account of

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Deleuze's political ontology that is influenced by his thesis that being is fundamentally univocal insofar as what is said univocally is difference itself.

CHAPTER 3: DELEUZE’S POLITICAL ONTOLOGY: CONSEQUENCES AND CRITICISMS

A Maoist told me: “I can see why Sartre is on our side, for what and why he is involved in politics; and you, I can see why you do it, since you’ve always considered imprisonment a problem. But Deleuze, really, I don’t see it.”

—Michel Foucault, *Intellectuals and Power*

Philosophy remains tied to a revolutionary becoming that has nothing to do with the history of revolutions. —Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness*

Introduction

The complaint of the unnamed Maoist in the epigraph above is not difficult to understand. While both Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault wrote extensively and explicitly on political issues, Gilles Deleuze—at least at the time of this interview with Foucault in 1972—had not been so vocal on political matters.¹ While the two volumes that make up *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which Deleuze co-wrote with Guattari, have been thought of as cultural critiques of capitalism, the political purchase of Deleuze’s solo works are not immediately intelligible. Deleuze himself has remarked that he only became interested in politics around the student-worker uprisings of May 1968, which

¹ The interview was conducted in 1972, the same year that Deleuze and Guattari published *Anti-Oedipus*. See Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, “Intellectuals and Power,” in *Desert Islands and Other Texts*, trans. Michael Taormina. Ed. David Lapoujade (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 206.

implies that most of his philosophical work up until that point was perhaps not interested in politics.² The recent controversy in Deleuze studies concerns the political worth of Deleuze's solo works. Certain Deleuzians, such as Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn, maintain that Deleuze's entire body of work *is* political, that there is a consistent political thread running from Deleuze's early work on Hume to *What is Philosophy?*, this of course includes *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*.³ The opposite view, articulated by Slavoj Žižek, is that Deleuze's single-authored works have no political import whatsoever, that Deleuze is ultimately a non-political thinker who only become 'politicized' after meeting Guattari.⁴

The main argument of this thesis is that Deleuze's solo works, principally *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, can be considered to be political provided that a new conception of 'the political', as opposed to 'politics', is defined and influenced by Deleuze's ontology. In Chapter 1, I contextualized the debate surrounding Deleuze's political worth within the recent and ongoing ontological turn in political theory because this ontological turn investigates the conceptual uses of ontology for political theory, and differentiates the concept of 'politics' from 'the political'. Insofar as Deleuze establishes an ontology in his solo works, then a concept of the political can

² Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 170.

³ Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze and Politics*, ed. Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 1.

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20-21.

emerge from his ontology, one that is influenced by the concept of difference in itself. It is in this sense that Deleuze's single authored works can be considered to have any political purchase. Furthermore, Deleuze advances a political ontology provided that an original concept of the political is influenced by his ontological commitments. By 'political ontology', I mean *the influence of principles of human relations from principles that constitute the being of the human*. It can be argued that as human beings, there are certain ontological characteristics that are essential (e.g., self-consciousness, antagonism, and so on). Insofar as these characteristics are said to be definitive of what it means to be human, they will factor into how human beings relate to one another. For example, Mouffe argues that antagonism is an essential principle in what it means to be human, and therefore human relations ought to be understood as antagonistic. While Deleuze's univocal ontology is not solely concerned with the being of the human, we can nevertheless see how his emphasis on difference influences a conception of the political. As we saw in Chapter 2, Deleuze's ontology holds that becoming is prior to being, and that difference in itself is privileged over the category of identity. This allows Deleuze to advance an ontology that maintains difference as fundamental, without regressing into a transcendent philosophical framework. It is because Deleuze's concept of difference is ontologically fundamental, but not transcendent, that this thesis argues his political ontology influences, rather than determines, a concept of the political. To argue that Deleuze's ontology determines a concept of the political is to incorrectly treat his

ontology as something transcendent that grounds the political, rather than something immanent, which Deleuze wishes to maintain.

The first section of this chapter will explore how a new conception of ‘the political’ is influenced by Deleuze’s univocal ontology. I will compare Deleuze’s concept of ‘the political’ to that of Chantal Mouffe’s, which is founded on the ontological concept of identity and human antagonism, in order to explore the differences between the two concepts of the political. In the second section I reconstruct the criticisms of Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Peter Hallward that aim to charge Deleuze of essentially being apolitical, and consider some responses.

Difference and Repetition and *The Logic of Sense* are usually only brought up in commentaries on Deleuze and politics insofar as they are used to explicate details in the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes.⁵ While there certainly exist degrees of continuity between Deleuze’s single-authored work and those he co-wrote with Guattari, this equation of “Deleuze” with “Deleuze and Guattari” is problematic for our purposes if our aim is to determine whether or not Deleuze’s earlier works are political.⁶ Of course, this

⁵ Ian Buchanan and Nicholas Thoburn do this. See Buchanan and Thoburn, *Deleuze and Politics*, 1.

⁶ Here I agree with Levi Bryant’s remark that: “Too often it is assumed that the names ‘Deleuze’ and ‘Deleuze and Guattari’ are identical and can be used interchangeably. The question of whether or not significant transformations take place in the encounter of these two individuals is not even raised. This constitutes a betrayal of the singularity of Deleuze’s thought as well as that of Deleuze and Guattari. Moreover, Deleuze insists that continuous multiplicities change in kind when new dimensions are added to them. To simply equate ‘Deleuze’ with ‘Deleuze and Guattari’ is to ignore this fundamental principle belonging to a logic of multiplicities.” See Levi R. Bryant, *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze’s*

is not to say that scholarly studies that draw connections and associations between “Deleuze” and “Deleuze and Guattari” are unjustified; in fact there has been excellent work done in this regard.⁷

Deleuze’s Political Ontology

Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* are political insofar as the term ‘political’ is understood within the context of the ontological turn in political theory. Yet as we saw in Chapter 1, it is not a simply matter of drawing political imperatives from Deleuze’s ontology because that would treat Deleuze’s ontology as one of transcendence, which is incorrect because Deleuze advances an immanent ontology. To attempt to derive political principles directly from Deleuze’s ontology is to presuppose that Deleuze’s ontology can determine, or ground, the concept of the political. However, for something to ground or provide a sufficient justification for something else is to guarantee it. Historically, ontologies that have sought to guarantee the claims they make about the world have made appeals to transcendent concepts (e.g., Plato’s ‘Good’, the Christian God, and so on), and so because Deleuze’s ontology is decidedly not transcendent, but rather immanent in that he makes no such appeal to something ‘beyond’

Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008), x.

⁷ Keith Ansell Pearson’s book on Deleuze is an example of this. See Keith Ansell Pearson, *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

or ‘above’, it is inaccurate to argue that his ontology can strictly determine the concept of the political. If a strict determination requires a transcendent ontology, an immanent ontology can be said to influence, or outline a concept of the political, that is, it does not guarantee or ground the concept of the political, but affect the manner in which one thinks about the concept. As Nathan Widder points out, “Deleuze’s thought does not derive political imperatives from an ontological base, and indeed proposes an ontology of uncertainty that rules out such a direct connection to politics.”⁸ Rather than arguing that Deleuze’s ontology *determines* a concept of the political, this thesis argues that his ontology influences it.

As we saw in Chapter 1, there is a conceptual difference between politics and the political established within the recent and ongoing ontological turn in political theory. To briefly reiterate the distinction between the two, by the term ‘politics’ I understand the mainstream, conventional sense of the term that has been generally associated with political science, human rights, ways of governance, and institutional matters. Politics in this sense of the word tends to illustrate the activities of humans in various social orders (e.g., Feudal societies, Liberal-Democratic societies, and so on). The concept of ‘the political’ refers to the domain of political theory that seeks to account for the essence of politics, that is to say, it attempts to define what inherent human characteristics, if any, go into influencing human practices and institutions. While politics is generally concerned

⁸ Nathan Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze* (London: Continuum, 2012), 51.

with empirical facts about human activity in society, the political is concerned how ontological claims about human beings affect the social order. In this sense, the political is necessarily linked to ontology because it articulates and draws upon ontological accounts of being human. Of course *what* these ontological accounts are differs from one ontological approach to another. For example, an ontology that emphasizes that antagonism (e.g., Mouffe's position), will be different than an ontology that rejects antagonisms altogether.

So, if Deleuze does have a political ontology that advances a concept of the political, it is one that is influenced by his ontological concept of a difference in itself, rather than one mediated through identity. The justification for this is that Deleuze's ontology, as we saw in Chapter 2, considers the category of difference as being primary and fundamental. Deleuze argues that being itself is univocal, that being is said in one and the same sense provided that this same sense is only said of difference itself. If being is univocally expressed, individual beings with all their individuated differences are equivocal, meaning that they exist with no common denominator *because* all they share is the activity of difference. To say that beings only share difference means that no individuated being is equal to, or identical with, any other individuated being. Each singular being is inherently different insofar as it is constituted through the activity of difference in itself. This activity is the process of individuation; the becoming that Deleuze argues is not only ontologically prior to any individual being, but effectively

generates actual beings, and their identities through actualizing virtual, vital forces. There are essentially two aspects or components to the definition of political ontology as outlined in Chapter 1: i) any political ontology must draw upon principles that constitute the being of the human; and ii) any political ontology must account for how these constitutive principles influence human relations. If political ontology examines the influence ontological principles have on principles of human relations, and the political establishes the essence of politics by reference to ontological claims about human beings, then we need to ask how Deleuze's ontology can be said to have any political significance if it is not explicitly centered around the being of the human. Human beings are of course only one specific kind of being, and while Deleuze does not say much if anything specifically about being human, it is safe to assume that given his univocal ontology, human beings are—like any other individuated being—just one particular being, stamped with their own individual differences.

In Chapter 2, we saw that Deleuze thinks becoming is ontologically prior to, and constitutive of, being. Becoming is an activity of differential, vital, virtual forces that produce, or actualize beings. If Deleuze holds anything to be ontologically essential, it is this differing activity that individuates beings and creates the category of identity. As Deleuze says of the activity of becoming, “every object, every thing, must see its own identity swallowed up by difference, each being no more than a difference between

differences. Difference must be shown *differing*.”⁹ This is not to say that actual, constituted beings are not important, but that the ontological concept of difference, through repetition, is what generates identifiable, individual beings, and conditions them to be what they are. So, Deleuze’s concept of difference in itself is a process or activity, prior to it being a static category. It is important to remember that for Deleuze, it is the active virtual forces that are actualized, the forces that can overcome their own constraints and limitations by transforming themselves. This process applies to all types of beings, including the human being. That is to say, Deleuze’s ontological emphasis on the virtual forces that actualize themselves through the process of difference and repetition extends to humans, transforming “this or that individual, this or that Self.”¹⁰ The concept of the ‘self’, that is, the human ‘self’, is included in the list of beings that are identified because they are produced by this generative, virtual process. This implies that what constitutes the essence of being human for Deleuze is our ability to be transformative and push past our limitations. This follows the Nietzschean idea of affirming the active forces, or becoming-active rather than becoming-reactive. There is a certain level of freedom that comes with this transformative element. Paul Patton elucidates how Deleuze’s notion of becoming expresses a particular form of freedom that “transgresses the limits of what one is presently capable of being or doing, rather than just the freedom to be or do those

⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

things.”¹¹ This emphasis on becoming “may have the effect of opening up certain paths and closing off others, and to the extent that the individual’s capacities to affect and be affected will change as a result.”¹² If anything can be said to be ontologically essential to individuated beings, is it the process of actualizing and at the same time affirming these virtual forces. Remember that for Deleuze, these virtual forces are all irreducible to one another, and each gets actualized to form a different, individuated being. So, there is no stable, single essential element for individuated beings because they are already always in the process of overcoming themselves and transforming themselves. If individual beings can only be identified to be what they are (i.e., by their essence) due to their having been actualized by virtual forces, the essence of being human is necessarily transient and transformative. Allowing this sort of freedom in a society requires that the social order be institutionalized in such a way as to better facilitate, or cultivate an individual’s capacity to engage in this transformation. This could be as simple as recognizing and including the various gender identities, and alternative sexual lifestyles that diverge from what is considered to be the mainstream convention.¹³ Of course this is not to say that every individual living in society must necessarily overcome his or her boundaries and limitations, but rather that this freedom be accommodated and available if people choose

¹¹ Paul Patton, *Deleuze and The Political* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 85. It not only Nietzsche that has influenced Deleuze with respect to the concept of becoming, but also Spinoza’s dictum that we do not know what a body can do.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari explore this line of thinking in their concept of ‘becoming’ in *A Thousand Plateaus*. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 105, 291.

to do so.

If what is essential to the human being on Deleuze's ontological model is the affirmation of individual transformation and change, the influence and implication of this for human relations is that what ultimately connects human beings, apart from this capacity to transform, are our differences, not our similarities. While Deleuze maintains that Being is univocal, beings, on the other hand, are said to be equivocal, as Deleuze says, "Univocity signifies that being itself is univocal, while that of which it is said is equivocal...that of which it is said, however, differs; it is said of difference itself."¹⁴ Remember that to say that 'being' is equivocal, is to say that the term 'being' is said in various different senses, and that these senses do not have a common, unifying sense.¹⁵ It is because being is said of difference itself that Deleuze maintains the equivocality of individual beings. Equivocal beings are connected *through* the activity of difference, and so all individuated beings 'share' this difference, it is what they all have in common. So, rather than appealing to some form of universal humanism (e.g., we are all human because we have certain traits in common), Deleuze's ontology conceives of human relations as a relation or association between different beings. Difference is emphasized over what is perceived to be the same or similar. The point is that under Deleuze's ontology, essence of what it means to be human is to be transformative, embracing

¹⁴ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 304.

¹⁵ Daniel W. Smith, "The Doctrine of Univocity: Deleuze's Ontology of Immanence," in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 29.

multiple ways of being human, all of which are non-reducible, and equal (in the sense that they are all different) to one another, each singular, and individuated. It is this aspect of Deleuze's ontology that can be said to have influenced identity politics, or politics of difference.

Patton points out that Deleuze has been associated with what has become known as the 'politics of difference'. The work of philosophers who have championed the concept of difference over identity have contributed to a certain understanding of politics that in turn emphasizes the differences amongst social groups rather than similarities or other elements of sameness. Examples of this type of politics are 'minority' social groups such as feminist critique, gay and lesbian groups, and racial minorities that have all sought recognition from the political status quo.¹⁶ These minority groups emphasize that it is their being different from the majority that has marginalized them and they have historically fought for recognition from social institutions and for equal human rights. While Deleuze's philosophy of difference has historically influenced the shift towards an emphasis on a politics of difference within political theory, the former cannot be reduced to the latter. It is the differing process that factors into the concept of the political by displacing the emphasis political theory has placed on the category of identity.

Political theory has had a long tradition of formulating accounts of how political

¹⁶ Patton, *Deleuze and The Political*, 29.

identities and subjectivities are constructed. It does not matter what kind of identity we are assigned to, or self-identify as, whether it be political (e.g., Left, Right, Centre, as liberal or conservative, etc.), or religious (e.g., Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Atheist, etc.), national (e.g., Canadian, American, German, Japanese, etc.), or economic (e.g., Bourgeois, Proletariat, etc.), the concept of identity has played a very central and important role in political theory. However, the primacy of identity brings with it other categories traditionally associated with it such as negation, opposition, exclusion, and of course difference insofar as it is mediated through identity.¹⁷ Any concept of the political that relies on identity, such as Schmitt's or Mouffe's, will necessarily explain human relations in terms of inclusion/exclusion and antagonism. But because Deleuze overturns the ontological hierarchy that has historically privileged the category of identity over difference, his notion of the political embraces the multiplicity of different human experiences. If being is becoming, then even the human being, or subjectivity, is something that emerges from the process of actualization. Following Hume, Deleuze maintains that the subject is a product, a result of a productive activity, declaring "the mind is not subject; it is subjected."¹⁸ Our human subjectivity is not something that is simply given, but like all other actual beings, it is something that is constituted or created within what is given. The essential point here is that if our subjectivity and identity are

¹⁷ Nathan Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze* (London: Continuum, 2012), 149-150.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, trans. Constantin Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 31.

both emergent products, they are not confined or limited to a particular way of being, but rather can be overcome or transformed by affirming the Nietzschean active forces. To go back to our example of *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray's character overcame the reactive forces that plagued him and was able to affirm active ones, thereby opening up new aspects and ways of development. In short, the political ontology of Deleuze is one that attempts to affirm the active forces that overcome human limitations by transforming what it means to be human, while simultaneously accounting for human relations through their differences.

If Deleuze's ontology is one that seeks to maintain the differing and individuating activity of virtual forces without recourse to or mediation through the concept of identity, or a collapse back into some form of philosophical transcendence, this immanent differing activity is one that guarantees the existence of individual differences, and it is this aspect of this ontology that must influence Deleuze's notion of the political. Deleuze's concept of the political, one that is influenced by his ontological commitment to establish and uphold this immanent difference, also guarantees the co-existence of diverse political groups and identities without any reference to some form of universalism, as mentioned before. Deleuze's concept of the political is one that is committed to advancing the plurality of human differences, whatever they may be (e.g., ethnic, religious, sexual, etc.). So for example, rather than attempt to subsume human differences into an over-arching political identity (e.g., we are all Canadian, despite our

particular cultural differences), the idea is to maintain these differences *as* the individual differences that they are.

This is of course not to say that political identities disappear from Deleuze's concept of the political (remember that Deleuze still maintains the concept of identity in his ontology, the identities of beings is established through the activity of difference and repetition), but that they do not hold the same priority as in other political theories. Individuated beings, for Deleuze, are bound together by the ontological concept of difference, or through a disjunctive synthesis, rather than united through the concept of identity. To articulate the same thing in political terms, various identities do exist within society, but do *not* relate to one another through antagonism or opposition, but they all co-exist as a plurality. It is not an accident that all this emphasis on maintaining different political identities and plurality resembles the liberal-democratic political model. Indeed there has been excellent work done in Deleuze studies to read his philosophy as advocating a certain form of radical democratic politics, one that associates Deleuze's thought with certain tendencies of multicultural and identity politics.¹⁹ The type of society that Deleuze's concept of the political might endorse is one that emphasizes the need for a plurality of diverging political groupings and differences which co-exist, while also allowing human beings to freely overcome their limitations and transform themselves. So

¹⁹ Paul Patton argues for such a political reading of Deleuze's work. But it is a point of contention, given that Deleuze himself was critical of the existing forms of democracy under capitalism, particularly in *What is Philosophy?* See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomilson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 104, 108, 146.

to use a contemporary politically contentious example, same sex marriage is a political issue that goes against the traditional, heterosexual conception of marriage. Yet the traditional view of marriage is only one particular incarnation of the concept of marriage, while also being a small aspect of what it means to be human. The traditional definition of marriage sets limitations and boundaries on who is allowed to marry (i.e., age, sexual orientation, etc.). Of course not everyone must marry to be considered human (such an idea is clearly absurd), however the very definition of marriage as merely being a union between a man and woman can be transformed and altered to accommodate same sex marriage. Such a transformation can be considered to be a way of overcoming the established parameters of the institution of marriage. This is not to say that Deleuze's ontology necessarily advocates same-sex marriage, but that its emphasis on overcoming what it means to be human, and its affirmation of active forces resonate with the contemporary example of same sex-marriage.²⁰

Deleuze does not uphold identity as an essential factor in thinking about our social order. Identity is important, but not essential. This is in contrast to other concepts of the political that have placed strong significance on the category of identity. A concept of the political that favours plurality and difference is unlike Chantal Mouffe's concept, which relies on identity. Recall that for Mouffe, following Carl Schmitt, the essence of the

²⁰ Deleuze was actually involved in the gay movements in France. See Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 169.

political is human antagonism, where human relations are conditioned by a ‘we’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. As we saw in Chapter 1, Mouffe’s concept of the political relies on the ontological concept of identity to inform the antagonistic relationship she sees as being integral to our social and political lives. Antagonism is considered to be a constitutive, ontological property of what it means to be human, and as such it plays a role in forming how we think about human relations. What is implicitly taken for granted in Mouffe’s concept of the political is the ontological category of identity. For Mouffe, antagonism exists as the essential way in which we relate to each other, but it assumes that the participants of this antagonistic relationship have stable, fixed political identities that oppose one another. While it is certainly true that these political identities play an important role in our social order in so far as they help define boundaries and organize institutions and communities, on a fundamental theoretical level they are treated as merely given, which is problematic. For Deleuze, the friend/enemy antagonism does not factor into the concept of the political because he maintains the ontological priority of difference in itself, which does not emerge through the conceptual mediation of identity. As Widder points out, “in so far as the subject and its identity must be constituted through some ultimate friend/enemy binary, its pluralism remains quite limited, and arguably not very useful in a world where collective solutions remain temporary, never exhaust the problems to which they respond and always generate new and quite different problems to

negotiate.”²¹

Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense* are said to have political purchase insofar as their ontology influences a concept of the political. Deleuze’s concept of the political, then, is one that affirms the co-existence of different and diverging identities (whether political, religious, ethnic, etc.), while at the same time ensuring that individuals’ capacity to transform, and become more than what they already are, is not thwarted or stifled by the social order. Deleuze’s conception presents an alternative to the existing political theories that rely on the ontological category of identity because his philosophy prioritizes difference.

Badiou, Žižek, and Hallward: Criticisms and Responses

The three main critics of Deleuze’s political relevance, Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, and Peter Hallward, all charge Deleuze with some form of abstraction, claiming that Deleuze privileges a life of contemplation rather than any genuine attempt to implement social change. We will briefly go over the arguments against a political Deleuze by these three thinkers, and entertain possible responses.

In his highly controversial book *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, Alain Badiou

²¹ Ibid., 153.

charges Deleuze's philosophy with asceticism.²² Badiou reads Deleuze's philosophy as a monism, claiming that Deleuze presents a metaphysics of the One, as opposed to a metaphysics of the Many.²³ Badiou's reading emphasizes the importance of the virtual in Deleuze's philosophy, to the point that any actual, individuated beings are made out to be mere secondary concerns. While Badiou's claim that Deleuze's use of univocity is such that it renders the multiplicity of actual beings a simulacrum has some truth to it, Badiou nevertheless repeats that Deleuze privileges the virtual to the actual to such an extent that Deleuze is perhaps more of a Neo-Platonist than he'd purport to be.²⁴ According to Badiou, Deleuze's philosophy is one that withdraws into the contemplation of the virtual and favours the unfolding of its concepts rather than concerning itself with actual beings. Badiou concludes that Deleuze's philosophy is ultimately ascetic because it privileges the virtual activity over the reality of actual beings.²⁵

It should be noted that Badiou does not attempt to draw any political implications from his treatment of Deleuze's ontology. Nevertheless, we can infer that this charge of asceticism means that, for Badiou, Deleuze's ontology as outlined in *Difference and*

²² Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 13. Badiou's work has reached such notoriety and controversy in Deleuze Studies, that two entire books have been devoted to refuting it, defending Deleuze against Badiou's interpretation. See Jon Roffe, *Badiou's Deleuze* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), and Clayton Crockett, *Deleuze Beyond Badiou: Ontology, Multiplicity, and Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

²³ Badiou, *Deleuze*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

Repetition and *The Logic of Sense* is politically empty. Badiou's charge against Deleuze stems from a provocative misreading of Deleuze's ontology, a misreading that inappropriately forces the categories of the 'One' and 'Many' onto Deleuze's philosophy. As we saw in Chapter 2, Deleuze wants to maintain the univocity of Being, Being is said in one and the same sense of all beings, *in so far as it is said of difference itself*, that is, individuated beings.²⁶ Badiou completely ignores Deleuze's emphasis of difference in his univocity thesis, and treats the univocity of being as a One, rather than a multiplicity of differences. When Deleuze asserts that being is univocal, the term 'Being' should not be taken to mean an ontological unity, or that it itself is a One, but rather what is univocally expressed is the activity of difference.²⁷ Badiou's criticism of Deleuze as being an ascetic thinker is dependent upon his characterization of Deleuze's ontology as a monism, rather than an expression of difference itself. That is to say, Badiou can only call Deleuze an ascetic thinker insofar as he reads Deleuze as someone who elevates the virtual over the actual, as someone who denigrates actualized beings. It is this supposed privileging of the virtual that is considered to be ascetic because it renounces the various lived and embodied experiences that occur within the actual. As we saw in Chapter 2, the virtual and actual are two components of an ontology that prioritizes becoming over being. The virtual is actualized and individuating; virtual forces *become* actual,

²⁶ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 36.

²⁷ Jon Roffe spends a lot of time examining Badiou's reading of Deleuze and illustrates how Deleuze not only rejects the One/Many dyad in favour of the multiple, but also emphasizes that univocal being is expressed as difference. *Badiou's Deleuze*, 11-14.

individuated beings. It is a mistake to reduce the relationship between the virtual activity and its actualized products to an ontological unity, or a One. To do so misses Deleuze's point of maintaining the thesis: monism = pluralism.

Badiou's criticism only holds, however, if we opt for a particular definition of politics, namely, one that is not grounded, or even influenced by philosophy or philosophical categories but rather are a condition of philosophy.²⁸ However, as I have argued, it is by situating Deleuze's early works in the ongoing ontological turn in political theory that texts such as *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* can be considered to have import by influencing a concept of the political. Since I have argued that Deleuze's early works can be considered to be political by advancing a concept of *the political*, Badiou's objection only holds insofar as we accept his definition of politics as the only acceptable one. Thus, to simply dismiss Deleuze's philosophy as ascetic arises out of a misconstrued reading of Deleuze's univocal ontology that places too much importance on the virtual while downplaying the actual.

Slavoj Žižek, in *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, holds that the early Deleuze (i.e., the Deleuze of *The Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*) is an extremely apolitical thinker whose writings in no way, shape or form exhibit any political relevance. For Žižek, it is only by way of Guattari's 'bad' influence

²⁸ Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Baker (New York: Verso, 2006), 141.

over the apolitical Deleuze which finally turns Deleuze into a properly political thinker. The ‘Deleuze’ of *Difference and Repetition*, for example, is *not* political according to Žižek.²⁹ On Žižek’s reading, it is only with the ‘Deleuze’ of ‘Deleuze and Guattari’, of the volumes that make up *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, that a politicized Deleuze emerges. Žižek maintains that there are essentially two different ‘logics’, or ontologies at work in Deleuze’s philosophy: the ‘bad’ logic of sense as production (influenced by Guattari and best exemplified by *Anti-Oedipus* according to Žižek); and the good logic of sense as effect.³⁰ Daniel W. Smith summarizes Žižek’s distinction, pointing out that “sense as ‘effect’ is good because it is Lacanian: the event is the irruption of the Real within the domain of causality.”³¹ As a trained psychoanalyst and follower of Jacques Lacan, it is no surprise that Žižek prefers the Deleuze of *The Logic of Sense* rather than *Anti-Oedipus*, because the former work is closer to Lacan whereas the latter strays from the Freud-Lacan model.³² For Žižek, the reason Deleuze made the move from the more Lacanian-driven *Logic of Sense* to the ‘bad’ *Anti-Oedipus* was because Deleuze himself had reached an impasse in his ontology (i.e., sense as effect vs. sense as production). Along with this ‘escape’ to Guattari and away from *The Logic of Sense*, Žižek also claims that Deleuze’s

²⁹ Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 20-21. For a more engaging treatment of Žižek’s book on Deleuze, see Gregg Lambert’s *Who’s Afraid of Deleuze and Guattari?* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 81-101, and Smith, “The Inverse Side of Structure: Žižek on Deleuze on Lacan,” in *Essays on Deleuze* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 312-324.

³⁰ Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 20-21.

³¹ Smith, “Žižek on Deleuze on Lacan,” *Essays on Deleuze*, 314. Smith goes on to explicate what this means in the rest of the essay.

³² *Ibid.*, 315.

political import follows in an analogous manner. That is to say, the solo works of Deleuze are apolitical, and when Deleuze finally *does* engage with political concepts, it is only under the ‘bad’ influence of Guattari.³³

It is interesting to note that while Žižek’s remarks seem to be motivated by his Lacanianism, what he says is not outright false or erroneous. Žižek is not entirely wrong in claiming that Deleuze’s solo works are apolitical, and are in no way ‘directly political’. This is true insofar as ‘directly political’ means explicitly engaging in political concepts and issues. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the ‘Deleuze’ of *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* does not explicitly deal with political issues (e.g., science of governance, State, Justice, liberty, etc.), or pledge allegiance to any political movement, but as I have argued, insofar as those texts present an ontology, it can be seen to influence a concept of the political, as opposed to the everyday sense of politics. Deleuze’s concept of the political is one that advocates the co-existence of difference political identities and groupings, without any recourse to antagonism.

Peter Hallward’s critique of Deleuze, in *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* is perhaps more succinct and nuanced in terms of how it tries to deal with Deleuze’s philosophy and its political implications than Badiou’s or Žižek’s. Like Badiou, Hallward acknowledges the fact that Deleuze’s philosophy is primarily

³³ Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 20.

concerned with concepts, and that this renders Deleuze's project 'other-worldly' and therefore alien to *our* world. As Hallward puts it:

The Deleuze that has long fascinated and troubled me is neither a worldly nor even a 'relational' thinker. If (after Marx and Darwin) materialism involves acceptance of the fact that actual or worldly processes inflect the course of both natural and human history, then Deleuze may not be a materialist thinker either. As Deleuze presents it, the destiny of thought will not be fundamentally affected by the mediation of society, history or the world; although Deleuze equates being with the activity of creation, he orients this activity towards a contemplative and immaterial abstraction. More than a hundred and fifty years after Marx urged us to change rather than contemplate the world, Deleuze like so many of his philosophical contemporaries, effectively recommends instead that we settle for the alternative choice.³⁴

Hallward's contention is similar to Badiou's in that he reads Deleuze as a thinker who favours the activity of thinking, virtual creating, rather than actual, existing, material things of this world. Hallward concludes that because Deleuze can be read as an "other-worldly" thinker—though fascinating and brilliant—he is effectively indifferent to a politics that seeks to change the material conditions of the world.³⁵ Hallward gives Deleuze his due, attempting to critique Deleuze immanently by evaluating his philosophy on its own terms rather than seeking to judge Deleuze's political worth based upon a previously given definition of politics. But Hallward is not satisfied with what Deleuze supposedly has to offer. While he does note that Deleuze is not a materialist thinker aligned with Marx or Darwin, Hallward makes no attempt to try to read Deleuze's philosophy in such a way that it obeys or conforms to the kind of materialism that Hallward favours. For Hallward, Deleuze is not preoccupied with material processes, and

³⁴ Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006), 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 162-164.

to expect Deleuze to be otherwise would be dishonest.³⁶

Hallward has carefully considered the problem of how to define politics insofar as it affects and influences the material world, if politics and political theory must in some sense be concerned with the material world following Darwin and Marx, then “Deleuze offers few resources for thinking the consequences of what happens within the actually existing world as such.”³⁷ According to Hallward, Deleuze’s philosophy remains indifferent to the politics of this world, insofar as he remains a thinker more concerned with the virtual realm that is ‘out’ of this world. This leads Hallward to conclude, “Few philosophers have been as inspiring as Deleuze. But those of us who still seek to change our world and to empower its inhabitants will need to look for our inspiration elsewhere.”³⁸

In so far as any meaningful, actual social change can *only* come about by theorizing and actively engaging with the material conditions of society, then even a concept of the political as influenced by Deleuze’s ontology is not going to be sufficient. The argument of this thesis has been that Deleuze’s solo works do have political purchase provided one uses Deleuze’s ontology to influence a notion of the political. Hallward certainly has no qualms about arguing that the only form of politics that is suitable to

³⁶ Ibid., 159.

³⁷ Ibid., 162.

³⁸ Ibid., 164.

change *this* world is the one that engages with its material conditions (e.g., protests, revolutions, etc.), and the concept of the political as influenced by Deleuze’s univocal ontology is not something that is recognized as materialism in the sense that Hallward defines it. Deleuze’s concept of the political may not engage with the material conditions as Hallward wishes, but it can be used as a conceptual tool to better understand human political relations. The opposition between political theory oriented towards changing the material conditions of the world, and political theory geared towards analyzing social groupings, identities, and so on is a much broader and contentious debate. But as Ray Brassier has recently mused, “The failure to change the world may not be unrelated to the failure to understand it.”³⁹

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to examine Deleuze’s political ontology by outlining a concept of the political that is influenced by his univocal ontology as found in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. Within the debate surrounding the political purchase of Deleuze’s solo works, both Deleuzians arguing in favour of its political significance and detractors such as Hallward and Žižek have mainly assumed

³⁹ Ray Brassier, “Concepts and Objects,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Garaham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 54.

what they mean by the term ‘politics’ or ‘political’.⁴⁰ This thesis has argued that by situating this debate within the ontological turn in political theory we can differentiate between politics and *the political*. The former refers to the mainstream, conventional usage of the word, while the latter is influenced by ontological commitments and attempts to grasp the essence of politics. The first section of this chapter examined Deleuze’s concept of the political as one that advocates the co-existence of difference political identities, and emphasizes the value of overcoming and transforming oneself. The second section of this chapter briefly considered some criticisms of Deleuze’s political relevance by Badiou, Žižek, and Hallward.

⁴⁰ For those in favour, see Buchanan and Thoburn, *Deleuze and Politics*, 1. For the critics, see Hallward, *Out of This World*, 162-164, and Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 20.

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CONCLUSION: END OF THE DEBATE OR THE START OF A NEW ONE?

So there's nothing to "admit".

—Gilles Deleuze, *Letter to a Harsh Critic*

The above epitaph comes from a reply Deleuze wrote, responding to a critic who had written an open letter accusing him of various shortcomings and flaws, Deleuze, after having taken care to deal with one of many attacks launched at him by his accuser, simply states he does not have to admit to judgments and criticisms attributed to him. The textual context notwithstanding, this point regarding whether or not Deleuze has to 'admit' to his philosophical failings and shortcomings relates to the topic of this thesis, namely, whether Deleuze's philosophy ought to accord with someone else's definition of politics. To admit to something is essentially to confess to it, to clear the air of any misconceptions, and so forth. Claiming to have nothing to admit, makes Deleuze's answer curious, since it implies that his accuser's judgment (i.e., that Deleuze is somehow guilty of something) is itself a misapprehension of sorts. Does the same hold for those who charge Deleuze with being indifferent to politics? Does Deleuze have to admit to anything?

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the dispute surrounding the political

significance of Deleuze's single-authored works will no doubt continue, with those in favour and against passionately making their respective points. In this thesis, I sought to provide not a solution per se but rather an intervention into the debate. I consider this thesis an intervention because the main problem I have with both the proponents of Deleuze's political purchase and his critics, is that neither provide a sufficient definition of politics.

The overarching argument I put forward is that Deleuze's solo written texts, specifically *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, can be said to have political worth insofar as Deleuze's ontology influences a concept of the political that diverges from the conventional sense of everyday politics. To demonstrate this, I situated the debate within the contemporary ontological turn in political theory in order to conceptually differentiate between *politics* and *the political*. *Politics* refers to the conventional sense of human experience and activity in society (e.g., protests, democratic elections, civil rights and liberties, and so on), whereas *the political* refers to a more fundamental understanding of politics, one that concerns the essence of politics by appealing to ontological claims about what it means to be human. Using the ontological turn in political discourse as the venue for an intervention into the disagreement about Deleuze's political implications, we saw how Deleuze's univocal ontology of difference in itself influences a concept of the political that does not rely on the category of identity. In this regard, Deleuze presents a political ontology. I defined 'political ontology' as *the*

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influence upon principles of human relations by principles that constitute the being of the human.

Deleuze's philosophy, at least how he outlines it in *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, can be said to have political import insofar as we agree to the non-conventional concept of *the political* that is influenced by Deleuze's ontological commitments. The argument is a heuristic one. By this I mean that I do not see this argument as a final, definitive solution to the debate, but rather this is merely a *possible* alternative to the existing perspectives surrounding the discourse about Deleuze and politics.

This thesis is about two distinct yet intimately related things. On the one hand, it is an attempt to intervene into the heated dispute over Deleuze's political importance. On the other hand, in pursuing that thread, I raised some complex and tough questions about the supposed relationship between ontology, philosophy, and politics. Questions such as whether or not ontological concerns affect or factor into how we think about politics, the role of ontological concepts such as identity and difference in political theory, etc. are only some of the questions which concern the present ontological turn in political theory, as well as this thesis. Furthermore, we have only scratched the surface of how Deleuze's rich philosophy may both contribute to the ontological turn, and shed some light on how we are to think the correlation between politics and philosophy.

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So, to return to the initial question I asked above: does Deleuze have anything to admit to when it comes to the political significance of his philosophy? We can answer in the affirmative only if we uphold a pre-established definition of politics and use it to accordingly to evaluate Deleuze's thought. Deleuze's most crucial lesson, in my view, is the emphasis he puts on the need for a positive approach to critique, a form of criticism that is inspired by genuine love and admiration for that which it seeks to criticize. As Deleuze says "It is through admiration that you will come to genuine critique...any genuine critique must be immanent to that which is being criticized."¹ Rather than judge Deleuze's political worth by testing it against a definition of politics that is not his own, a proper evaluation of the political purchase of Deleuze's philosophy must be immanent to his thought. In this fashion, Deleuze has nothing to admit to those who would condemn him for failing to meet their standards, and rightly so.

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts, 1953-1974*, trans. Michael Taormina, ed. David Lapoujade (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 139.

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