

Political Normativity and Poststructuralism: The Case of Gilles Deleuze*

Paul Patton

*Vortrag ins Institutscolloquium des Philosophischen Instituts der Freien
Universität, Berlin, am Donnerstag, den 15. November 2007.

Email: prp@unsw.edu.au

Deleuze often referred to his work with Guattari as philosophy and sometimes even as political philosophy. This is puzzling for many political philosophers, since normative questions about the justification, nature and limits of political power or the principles of a just society are largely absent from their collaborative writings. They only discuss the institutional forms of political power in passing and always from the perspective of a global theory of society founded upon concepts of desire, desiring-machines and the different kinds of assemblage described in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They are less interested in the justification or the capture of State power than in the qualitative changes in individual and collective identity that occur alongside or beneath the public political domain: what they refer to as *micro* as opposed to *macro* politics. Against the background of their machinic social ontology and their preference for minoritarian movements defined in opposition to majoritarian forms of social control, it is surprising to find them referring to ‘becoming-democratic’ as one of the contemporary forms of resistance to the present (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 113). It is surprising, too, that this feature of Deleuze’s later work has attracted so little attention. His analysis of societies of control has attracted considerably more attention than his embrace of some of the political values that inform the institutions and practices of liberal democracy.

In this paper, I argue that, while the appearance of ‘becoming-democratic’ in *What is Philosophy?* represents a new turn in Deleuze’s political thought, it does not imply any fundamental rupture in their approach to philosophy or politics. In retracing the development from the formal normativity of his earlier work with Guattari to the engagement with explicitly political normativity in his later work, I hope to accomplish three things: first, to show how the engagement with political normativity is not only consistent with but draws upon elements of the earlier work; second, to clarify the sense in which Deleuze and Guattari’s work can be considered political philosophy; thirdly, to narrow the distance that appears to separate them from liberal normative political philosophy. To that end, in the final section I will draw some comparisons between Deleuzian political philosophy and Rawls’s political liberalism.¹

Normativity and the political in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*

Despite Deleuze’s suggestion that ‘*Anti-Oedipus* was from beginning to end a work of political philosophy,’ this book considers political institutions only from the perspective of a universal theory of society and history (Deleuze 1995: 170-171). The specifically political organization of society

plays no independent role in this theory. In this sense, their treatment of the political resembles that of Marx, except that it is undertaken from the perspective of desire rather than the social organization of production: ‘The truth of the matter is that social production is purely and simply desiring production itself under determinate conditions ... There is only desire and the social, and nothing else’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1977: 29). What they call the Territorial, Despotic and Civilised social machines are treated only as different regimes of co-ordination and control of the local machines that constitute individual, familial and social life. There is no discussion of the norms that regulate modern political life, only the normativity inherent in the typology of desiring machines as embodying either the paranoid, reactionary and fascistic pole of desire or the schizoid revolutionary pole (Deleuze and Guattari 1977: 366). For this reason, schizoanalysis as a theory and a practice of desire proposes neither a political program nor a project for a future form of society. At most, it offers a conceptual apparatus within which to pose questions about social investments of desire, the ways in which it can become complicit in its own repression and the ways in which it might sustain creative or revolutionary social processes.

A Thousand Plateaus is no more concerned than *Anti-Oedipus* with the nature, justification or critique of specifically political institutions and practices. It broadens and generalizes Deleuze and Guattari’s social ontology so that it becomes a general theory of assemblages and the manner in which these are expressed throughout human history. The successive plateaus provide a series of new concepts and associated terminology with which to describe different kinds of social, political, linguistic and affective assemblages. These include the terminology employed to outline a *micro* as opposed to *macro* politics (body without organs as opposed to organization, molecular as opposed to molar, minoritarian as opposed to majoritarian, lines of flight or deterritorialization etc.); the terminology employed to describe forms of State as apparatuses of capture and Capitalism as a non-territorially based *axiomatic* of flows (of materials, labour and information) as opposed to a territorial system of overcoding; and the terminology employed to describe the abstract machines of metamorphosis (nomadic war-machines) that are the agents of social and political transformation.

This machinic ontology is normative in a specific and formal sense, namely that the different kinds of assemblage amount to a world that accords systematic priority to certain kinds of movement: to becoming-minor as a process of deviation from a majoritarian standard, to lines of flight or deterritorialization, to nomadic machines of metamorphosis rather than apparatuses of capture, to smooth rather than striated space, and so on. In

this sense, their ontology of assemblages is also an ethics or an ethology. This ethics might be characterised in the language of one or other of the plateaus as an ethics of becoming, of flows or lines of flight or, I argued in *Deleuze and the Political*, as an ethics and a politics of deterritorialization (Patton 2000, 9, 136). It is ‘political’ only in the very broad sense that it enables us to conceptualise and describe transformative forces and movements as well as the forms of ‘capture’ or blockage to which these are subject. Consider how this works in the language of *de/reterritorialization*:

At the end of *A Thousand Plateaus*, deterritorialization is defined as the movement or process by which something escapes or departs from a given territory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 508), where a territory can be a system of any kind: conceptual, linguistic, social or affective. By contrast, reterritorialization refers to the ways in which deterritorialized elements recombine and enter into new relations in the constitution of a new assemblage or the modification of the old. On their account, systems of any kind always include ‘vectors of deterritorialization,’ while deterritorialization is always ‘inseparable from correlative reterritorializations’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 509). Deterritorialization can take either a negative or a positive form: it is negative when the deterritorialized element is subjected to reterritorialization that obstructs or limits its line of flight. It is positive when the line of flight prevails over the forms of reterritorialization and manages to connect with other deterritorialized elements in a manner that extends its trajectory or even leads to reterritorialization in an entirely new assemblage. In this sense, they say, the effective transformation of a given field of reality requires the *connection* of deterritorialized elements in mutually supportive and productive ways rather than their *conjugation* within a new system of capture (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 220, .

As well as distinguishing negative and positive deterritorialization, connection and conjugation, Deleuze and Guattari further distinguish between absolute and relative deterritorialization. This corresponds to the ontological distinction they draw between a virtual and an actual order of things: absolute deterritorialization takes place in the virtual realm while relative deterritorialization concerns only movements within the actual. In the terms of their ontology of assemblages, it is the virtual order of becoming that governs the fate of any actual assemblage. Absolute deterritorialization is the underlying condition of all forms of relative deterritorialization. It is the immanent source of transformation or the ‘reserve’ of freedom or movement in reality that is activated whenever relative deterritorialization occurs. As such, it is closer to a Bergsonian

concept of freedom in the world rather than a Kantian concept of freedom of the will. Absolute deterritorialization expresses the normative ideal at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's ethics. It is the concept of an abstract, non-organic and creative life which is expressed in the positive or negative deterritorialization of existing assemblages and their reconfiguration into new assemblages. The sense in which it amounts to an ethical principle embedded within a conception of the world becomes clear when they describe it as 'the deeper movement ... identical to the earth itself' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 143).

The normativity of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts provides a framework within which to evaluate the character of particular events and processes. They enable us to pose questions such as: is this negative or positive reterritorialization? Is this a genuine line of flight? Will it lead to a revolutionary new assemblage in which there is an increase of freedom or will it lead to a new form of capture or worse? (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 143-144). However, there are two important features of this normativity which distinguish it from the kind of normativity more commonly found in political philosophy. First, it only provides criteria of evaluation that are ambivalent and contextual. Consider the lines of flight along which individual or collective assemblages break down or become transformed. On the one hand, in so far as we are interested in bringing about change we cannot avoid experimentation with such lines because 'it is always on a line of flight that we create' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 135). In this sense, lines of flight are potential pathways of mutation in an individual or social fabric and sources of the affect associated with the passage from a lower to a higher state of power, namely joy. On the other hand, lines of flight have their own dangers. Once having broken out of the limits imposed by the molar forms of segmentarity and subjectivity, a line of flight may fail to connect with the necessary conditions of creative development or be incapable of so connecting and turn instead into a line of destruction, death and despair (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 229). In the same manner, none of the deterritorialising processes described in *A Thousand Plateaus* provides grounds for unambiguous practical political orientation. In the evaluative schema outlined, nothing is good or bad in itself: 'it all depends on a careful systematic use ... we're trying to say you can never guarantee a good outcome (its not enough just to have a *smooth space*, for example, to overcome striations and coercion, or a *body without organs* to overcome organizations)' (Deleuze 1995: 32).

Second, while Deleuze and Guattari's political orientation was broadly Marxist in the sense that it was anti-capitalist and envisaged the emergence

of new and better forms of social and political life, they did not engage directly with the political norms embedded in existing political institutions and ways of life. In the course of outlining the inherently political vocation of philosophy, they suggest that philosophical concepts are critical of the present to the extent that they ‘connect up with what is real here and now in the struggle against capitalism’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 100). However, they do not directly address the normative principles that inform their critical perspective on the present, much less the question how these might be articulated with those principles that are supposed to govern political life in late capitalist societies. So, for example, while they insist on the importance of political struggles in relation to welfare and unemployment benefits, they offer no normative theory in support of the redistribution of wealth or any principles of a just distribution. While they point to the importance of struggles for regional and national autonomy, they offer no normative grounds for the establishment of differential rights for cultural or national minorities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 471). In this sense, their political philosophy does not engage with the political values and normative concepts which are supposed to inform the basic institutions of modern liberal democracies, such as the equal moral worth of individuals, freedom of conscience, the rule of law, fairness in the distribution of material goods produced by social cooperation and so on. The principled differences between liberal democratic, totalitarian and fascist States are mentioned only in passing in the course of their analysis of capitalism and present day politics as a process of axiomatisation of the social and economic field (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 454 – 466 ; 1994 : 106). As a consequence, their machinic social ontology remains formal in relation to actual societies and forms of political organisation.

Deleuze’s turn towards Political Normativity

Read in the context of Western Marxism during the 1960s and 1970s, Deleuze and Guattari’s failure to engage directly with the political values and normative concepts that are supposed to inform the basic institutions of modern liberal democracies is not surprising. Their political philosophy pre-dates widespread understanding and acceptance of the ways in which Marx’s critique of capitalist society is bound up with concepts of distributive justice, as it does the efforts to identify the relevant principles of justice that occurred under the impact of so-called analytic Marxism in the course of the 1980s. Since then, the English speaking world has seen numerous attempts to combine Marxist social theory with the normative principles informing

varieties of left-liberal political theory.² While these developments had little impact elsewhere, there was a similar rediscovery of ethical and political normativity in France during this period, expressed in a renewed interest in human rights, subjectivity, justice, equality and freedom. We can see evidence of this, for example, in the shift in Derrida's concerns that led him to engage directly with concepts of democracy, law and justice during the course of the 1980s (Patton 2007b).

In the case of Deleuze, his comments in interviews and other occasional writing during the 1980s and then *What is Philosophy?* amount to a significant step towards positive engagement with the institutions and implicit political values of modern liberal democracy. Two issues in particular signal this turn towards political normativity in his later writings: first, his comments about rights and jurisprudence, and second, in the context of his definition of philosophy, his remarks about democracy and 'becoming-democratic.' Given that the term 'becoming-democratic' occurs only once in *What is Philosophy?* it would be an exaggeration to include it among the list of concepts created by Deleuze and Guattari. Nevertheless, I will try to show that some of the elements of their earlier 'political philosophy' provide the resources needed to develop such a concept.

(1) In a series of interviews during the 1980s, Deleuze responds to the renewed interest in human rights during this period by criticising the manner in which these are represented as 'eternal values' and 'new forms of transcendence.'³ At the same time, he makes it clear that he is not opposed to rights as such but only to the idea that there is a definitive and a-historical list of supposed universal rights. He argues that rights are not the creation of codes or declarations but of jurisprudence, where this implies working with the 'singularities' of a particular situation (Deleuze 1995: 153). He returns to the question of rights and jurisprudence in his *Abécédaire* interviews with Claire Parnet recorded in 1988, where he affirms the importance of jurisprudence understood as the invention of new rights, along with his own fascination for the law.⁴ In his 1990 interview with Negri, 'Control and Becoming,' he reaffirms the importance of jurisprudence as a source of law with reference to the question what rights should be established in relation to new forms of biotechnology (Deleuze 1995: 169). The very concept of rights implies a rule of law. It implies that certain kinds of action on the part of all citizens will be protected by law and, conversely, the enforcement of limits to the degree to which citizens can interfere with the actions of others.⁵

(2) Already in 1979 Deleuze's 'Open Letter to Negri's Judges' adopted the speaking position of one 'committed to democracy' (Deleuze 2006: 169). This theme becomes more pronounced in *What is Philosophy?*

where we find a series of highly critical remarks about actually existing democracies.⁶ Far from dismissing the democratic ideal, these comments imply that other actualisations of the concept or ‘pure event’ of democracy are possible. Throughout this book, Deleuze’s marxian support for becoming-revolutionary as the path towards a new earth and a people to come is modulated by the call for resistance to existing forms of democracy in the name of a ‘becoming-democratic that is not to be confused with present constitutional states’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 113 translation modified).⁷ In these terms, we can say that the normativity of Deleuze (and Guattari’s) later political philosophy is defined by the relation between becoming-revolutionary and becoming-democratic.

In order to reconstruct what Deleuze means by ‘becoming-democratic’ we need to approach this concept by way of the overtly political conception of philosophy outlined in *What is Philosophy?* Philosophy is defined as the creation of concepts, where the creation of concepts ‘in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 108). Clearly, this is a stipulative definition that applies to some but not all historical and existing forms of philosophy. On this account, philosophy is a specific kind of thought, defined in terms of its affinity with absolute as opposed to relative deterritorialization. As we saw earlier, relative deterritorialization concerns the historical relationship of things to the territories into which they are organised, including the manner in which these territories break down and are transformed or reconstituted into new forms. Absolute deterritorialization concerns the a-historical relationship of things and states of affairs to the virtual realm of becoming or pure events that is imperfectly or partially expressed in what happens. It is because it creates concepts that express such pure events - to become, to capture, to deterritorialise, but also to govern democratically, to revolt etc. - that philosophy is inherently critical of the present in which it takes place. To characterise existing bodies and states of affairs in terms of such philosophical concepts is to re-present them in thought as the expression of ‘pure events’ or ‘becomings.’ This is what Deleuze calls the ‘counter-actualization’ of phenomena: such philosophical redescription enables us to see things differently or to see them as they might become rather than as they currently are. In this manner, the invention of new concepts can assist the deterritorialization of existing structures and the emergence of new ones without, however, being tied to any positive political program.

In this respect, Deleuze’s conception of the political task of philosophy is close to that of Foucault, who describes the aim of his genealogical criticism as the identification of limits to present ways of

thinking, acting and speaking in order to find points of difference or exit from the past (Foucault 1997: 315). Deleuze appears to go further than Foucault in suggesting that there is a utopian dimension to philosophy as he understands it. Etymologically, he writes, utopia means ‘absolute deterritorialization but always at the critical point at which it is connected with the present relative milieu’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 100). In other words, when there is a connection between the absolute deterritorialization expressed in concepts and forms of relative deterritorialization already at work in the social field, philosophy becomes utopian and achieves its political vocation, taking the criticism of its own time ‘to its highest point’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 99). Deleuzian philosophy is utopian, not in the sense that it posits an ideal society or sets out principles of justice in the light of which we might identify the shortcomings of existing societies, but in the sense that it creates concepts that can link up with processes of deterritorialization present in a given historical milieu, informing the perceptions and therefore the actions of those involved. This is an immanent utopianism that can be compared in some respects to Rawls’s ‘realistic utopianism’ (see below).⁸

Becoming-democratic

This brief account of Deleuze’s immanent utopianism helps us to see how the concept of ‘becoming-democratic’ might serve the political function of philosophy as he defines it. Different forms of democratic political society amount to determinate actualizations of the concept or ‘pure event’ of democracy. If we suppose that existing processes of deterritorialization or ‘lines of flight’ in modern societies include the ideals or opinions that motivate or inform particular forms of resistance, it follows that this kind of immanent utopianism will draw upon elements of existing political normativity to suggest ways in which the injustice or intolerability of present institutional forms of social life might be removed. ‘Becoming-democratic’ therefore points to ways of criticising the workings of actually existing democracies in the name of the egalitarian principles that are supposed to inform their institutions and political practices. In Deleuzian terms, the philosophical concept of democracy is a means to counter-actualize what passes for democratic society in the present, while becoming-democratic allows us to counter-actualize movements or processes of democratization. Philosophy pursues or supports such processes of becoming-democratic, for example, when it challenges existing opinions about what is acceptable,

right or just with the aim of extending the actualization of democracy within contemporary societies.

The complex concept of democracy ties together a number of the political norms at the heart of modern political thought. In principle, there will be as many ways of becoming-democratic as there are elements of the concept of democracy. In practice, philosophy can only effectively advance the becoming-democratic of a given political society when it engages with deterritorializing movements that rely upon actualized or actualizable elements of democratic political normativity. Deleuze offers no detailed account of just what he understands by 'becoming-democratic' and it is not difficult to imagine forms of populism that go against the grain of his political sensibility. Like all forms of deterritorialization, this one is not without its dangers. The comments on Heidegger in *What is Philosophy?* remind us that it is not enough to put one's faith in the people: it depends on what people and how they are constituted as a political community (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 108-109). At the same time, it is not difficult to find elements in his work with Guattari that enable us to fill out the concept of becoming-democratic. For example:

(1) One of the sources of conflict that has been present ever since the introduction of modern democratic government has been the coexistence of formally equal rights alongside enormous disparities of material condition. The history of modern democracies has been in part a history of struggle to reduce material inequality and to ensure that the basic rights of citizens have at least approximately equal value for all. Deleuze alludes to this ongoing problem when he contrasts the universality of the market with the manner in which it unequally distributes poverty as well as enormous wealth. He is critical of the way in which modern democratic states fail to live up to their egalitarian promise: 'There is no democratic state that is not compromised to the very core by its part in generating human misery' (Deleuze 1995: 173).⁹ Given that the benefits of market economies are not universally shared and inequalities of condition are handed down from generation to generation in direct contravention of the principle that all are born equal, then we can say that achieving a more just distribution of material social goods is one vector of 'becoming-democratic.'

(2) Another constant source of conflict in democratic nation states ever since their inception has been the struggle to broaden the base of those who count as citizens and thus enjoy full access to the entire range of basic legal and political rights. Democracy has always relied upon the principle of majority rule, but the prior question 'majority of whom' has always been settled in advance and usually not by democratic means. This exposes a fault

in one of the key components of the concept of democracy, namely the concept of majority. This can mean either the quantitative majority of those counted or the qualitative majority of those among the population at large who are considered fit to be counted. Deleuze and Guattari rely upon the latter, qualitative sense of majority in *A Thousand Plateaus* when they point to the existence of a majoritarian ‘fact’ in contemporary European derived societies, namely the priority of ‘the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 105). The adult, white *et cetera* male is majoritarian not because he is numerically in the majority but because he forms the standard against which the rights and duties of all citizens are measured. They define minoritarian becomings as the variety of ways in which individuals and groups fail to conform to this standard.

The social movements corresponding to these becomings have given rise to a succession of measures to extend the scope of the standard and thereby broaden the subject of democracy: first, by extending the vote to women and other minorities; second, by changing the nature of political institutions and procedures to enable these newly enfranchised members to participate on equal terms. Efforts to change the nature of public institutions in ways that both acknowledge and accommodate many kinds of difference are ongoing in democratic societies, for example in relation to sexual difference, sexual preference, different physical and mental abilities, cultural and religious affiliations. Deleuze and Guattari affirm the importance of efforts to enlarge the character of the majority, even as they insist that the power of minorities ‘is not measured by their capacity to enter into and make themselves felt within the majority system’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 471). By their nature, processes of minoritarian-becoming will always exceed or escape from the confines of any given majority. They carry the potential to transform the affects, beliefs and political sensibilities of a population in ways that amount to the advent of a new people. In turn, to the extent that a people is constituted as a political community, the transformations it undergoes will affect its conceptions of what is fair and just and therefore the nature of the rights and duties attributed to the new majority.¹⁰ Minoritarian becomings therefore provide another vector of ‘becoming-democratic.’

(3) A third struggle concerns the principle of legitimacy that governs decisions in a democratic polity. In his ‘Control and Becoming’ interview with Negri, Deleuze comments on the importance of jurisprudence as a source of law and new rights with reference to the question of rights in relation to new forms of biotechnology. He goes on to add that we mustn’t

leave decisions on such matters to judges or experts. What is required is not more committees of supposedly well qualified wise men to determine rights but rather ‘user groups’ (Deleuze 1995: 169-170). The implicit principle in this recommendation is the democratic idea that decisions ought to be taken in consultation with those most affected by them. This is one of the founding principles of modern democratic governance and many theorists recommend its extension and application to new contexts such as the workplace (Peffer 1990: 419-420). Ian Shapiro argues that whether or not someone is entitled to a say in a particular decision depends upon whether or not their interests are likely to be affected by the outcome and upon the nature of those interests: the more fundamental the interest the greater their entitlement to a voice in the decision-making process (Shapiro 2003: 52). Deleuze’s proposed application of the principle in the realm of biotechnologies gives reason to think that the opening-up of decision making procedures throughout society constitutes a further vector of ‘becoming-democratic.’

Immanent criticism and considered opinion

Deleuze’s appeal to the concept of ‘becoming-democratic’ as the means to resist the injustices of capitalism provides grounds for comparing certain features of his later political philosophy and Rawls’s political liberalism (Patton 2007a). For example, both subscribe to a form of utopianism based upon normative concepts immanent to the political culture of the society in question. Rawls suggests that one of the functions served by a political conception of justice is to enable the criticism of existing institutions. Moreover, just as ‘becoming-democratic’ implicitly draws upon elements of our existing concept of democracy as well as ongoing struggles to implement or expand democratic principles of government, so political liberalism elaborates a theory of justice on the basis of concepts and convictions already present in the public culture of liberal democracies. Democratic political order requires principles of public reason to set limits to the conduct of public debate and provide the normative framework within which disagreements can be settled, or at least kept within reasonable bounds so as not to threaten stability. Rawls’s answer to the question ‘where do these principles come from?’ is to say that their ultimate foundation lies in the settled convictions and considered opinions of the people concerned. The principles of public reason and the political conception of justice on which they are based must be consistent with the settled convictions of the political culture, such as the toleration of religious diversity or the abhorrence of slavery. The ultimate test of an acceptable political conception

of justice is the achievement of ‘reflective equilibrium’ between the proposed principles of justice and the firmly held convictions embedded in the institutions and traditions of the political culture (Rawls 2001: 31). The sense in which the overlapping consensus which underpins political liberalism’s principles of justice appeals to nothing outside the convictions and discourses which form part of a particular political assemblage justifies the claim that Rawls, like Deleuze, offers an immanent political utopianism.

Second, Deleuze and Rawls both define the task of political philosophy in relation to a certain kind of opinion that must be distinguished from the day-to-day opinions of citizens. The role of reflective equilibrium in Rawls’s theory quite explicitly ties the political conception of justice to the considered opinions of people on fundamental principles of right, fairness and justice insofar as these are expressed in the institutions, the constitutional settlements, legal decisions and traditions of interpretation of the society in question. Political liberalism therefore implies a distinction between considered opinions about right ways of acting and everyday opinions on matters of current concern or public policy. A similar distinction appears in *What is Philosophy?* when Deleuze points out that there is no universal democratic state but only particular democratic states, the contours of which are determined in part by philosophical or ‘nationalitarian’ opinions about what is right, fair and just. He suggests that, to the extent that modern philosophy is reterritorialized on the idea of the democratic state and human rights, this will always be constrained by features of the ‘nationalitarian’ philosophy concerned:

In each case philosophy finds a way of reterritorializing itself in the modern world in conformity with the spirit of a people and its conception of right. The history of philosophy therefore is marked by national characteristics or rather by *nationalitarianisms which are like philosophical opinions* (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 104 emphasis added).

As with Rawls, we can suppose that these philosophical opinions are expressed in the political and legal institutions of a given people, their conceptions of right, justice and equality. As such, they determine the national characteristics of the thought of a people. They will also condition the institutional and constitutional structure of particular national forms of democracy. In this manner, for example, opinions about the natural hierarchies of race, sex and class have long influenced the procedures and distribution of basic political and civil rights in otherwise democratic

societies. The limits that flow from the manner in which democratic ideals are expressed in accordance with the philosophical opinions of particular peoples amount to one kind of constraint on the institutional and legal actualisation of democratic ideals in a given society.

Deleuze points to a second kind of constraint on the implementation of democratic ideals that follows from the requirements of global capitalism. To the extent that modern democratic states function as ‘models of realisation’ of the immanent axiomatic of global capitalism, they will be constrained by their subordination to the requirements of this system. This implies that relations of interdependence compromise even the most democratic nodes of this global economic system insofar as they are direct or indirect beneficiaries of the actions of dictatorial states. It also implies that the extension of the fundamental equality and security of citizens in the form of human rights amounts to adding axioms that coexist in the global axiomatic of capital alongside other axioms, ‘notably those concerning the security of property’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 107). These property rules do not so much contradict the basic rights of individuals as suspend their operation in certain contexts. Thus, when basic political rights co-exist alongside private property in large-scale means of production, and in the absence of publicly financed elections, they do not have the same value for all citizens. Similarly, when private property in means of production exists alongside the absence of mechanisms to provide minimal healthcare, housing or education, the basic welfare rights of the poor are effectively suspended. Considerations such as these lie behind the assertion that ‘Rights can save neither men nor a philosophy that is reterritorialized on the democratic State. Human rights will not make us bless capitalism’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 107).

The first two elements of the concept of becoming-democratic identified above directly confront these two kinds of limitation on the actualisation of democracy in the modern world: the struggle against unjust inequality of condition challenges fundamental elements of the capitalist axiomatic, while the struggle against the arbitrary nature of the qualitative majority challenges the weight of nationalitarian political and philosophical opinion. The different kinds of minoritarian-becoming that give rise to movements to reconfigure the subject of democracy, such as the struggle for equal representation of women or for equal rights for same-sex partners, encounter varying degrees and kinds of resistance depending upon the details of nationalitarian opinion in each case. The third element points to an additional line of flight in contemporary democratic societies that has the potential to connect up with the first two and carry the transformative

process forward, even to the point of breaking down the limits imposed by the separation of a private sphere of property relations and a public sphere of deliberation over the common good. As the ‘contour, the configuration, the constellation of an event to come’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 32-33), the concept of becoming-democratic points toward the deterritorialization of existing democracies and their reconfiguration in new social and political forms.

Describing and evaluating these new political territories and peoples requires that we spell out the normative principles governing their basic institutional (*macro*) structure. Thus, Deleuze’s suggestion that democratic states are morally and politically compromised by their role in the perpetuation of this form of injustice implicitly raises the normative question what principles of distribution should apply in a just democratic society? Should we push for radically egalitarian principles that would treat any undeserved inequality of condition as unjust, or should we be satisfied with something like Rawls’s difference principle according to which social and economic inequalities are allowed only when they are attached to positions open to all and when they are ‘to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society’ (Rawls 2005: 6)? Should the principles of distributive justice apply globally or only within the borders of particular nation states? I am not suggesting that Deleuze provides us with the means to answer these normative questions, but only that they are inevitably raised by his criticisms of the existing state of affairs.

At the same time, while the further development of Deleuzian political philosophy along the paths opened up by the concept of ‘becoming-democratic’ implies a need for further engagement with normative political theory, there is also reason to suppose that liberal normative political philosophy might benefit from the formal normativity that pervades Deleuze and Guattari’s writings. Rawls and Deleuze both distinguish the day to day opinions of citizens from the considered opinions of a given people on fundamental principles of right. Both agree that political philosophy should engage with the opinions of the latter kind within a given social milieu. However, there is a significant difference in the nature of this engagement in each case. Rawls’s political liberalism seeks to reconstruct the considered opinions of an historically specific form of society in order to produce a coherent concept of a fair and just society, subject to the qualification that this might change as the considered opinions of the society change. Political liberalism has little to say about how such change comes about. Rawls says that it serves the ‘realistically utopian’ task of ‘probing the limits of practicable political possibility’ by enabling us to ask what a just and

democratic society would be like ‘under reasonably favourable but still possible historical conditions’ (Rawls 2001: 4). He recognises that there is a question about how we determine the limits of the practicably politically possible and what are in fact the limits of our social world. He notes that these are not simply given by the actual since we can and do change existing social and political institutions. However, he simply does not pursue this question.

By contrast, the ambition to challenge the limits of our present social world is at the forefront of Deleuze’s conception of the political vocation of philosophy. He pursues a more critical engagement with considered opinions, aimed at their transformation rather than their systematic reconstruction. An important part of the reason why ‘our democracies’ do not provide optimum conditions for the constitution of new earths and new peoples stems from the manner in which the consensus of opinions in these societies all too often reflects ‘the cynical perceptions and affections of the capitalist’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 108, 146). Even the ‘values, ideals and opinions of our time’ are affected by ‘the meanness and vulgarity of existence’ that haunts contemporary democracies (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 107-8). That is why, in the brief exergue to *Negotiations*, he presents philosophy as engaged in a ‘guerilla campaign’ against public opinion and other powers that be such as religions and laws (Deleuze 1995). His criticisms of the inequalities produced by capitalism should be understood in this light. They challenge existing opinions about what is acceptable with the aim of extending and developing equality of condition within contemporary societies. Success in this kind of political philosophy is not measured by the test of reflective equilibrium or by the requirements of maintaining a well-ordered society but by the capacity of its concepts to engage productively with real movements of social change and to assist in opening up paths to new forms of individual and collective life. In this sense, the deterritorializing impulse continues to play a central role in Deleuze’s later political philosophy. Political liberalism might learn from Deleuze (and other poststructuralists) to be less cautious and more unrealistically utopian.

Notes

- ¹ I develop this comparison between Deleuze and Rawls in more detail in ‘Utopian Political Philosophy: Deleuze and Rawls,’ *Deleuze Studies*, 1:1, 2007, 41-59.
- ² For example, Peffer 1990 ; 2001. For an introduction to some of the varieties of ‘analytic’ marxism, see Kymlicka 2002: 166-207. For a comprehensive survey of the debate over Marx and justice, see Geras 1985.
- ³ See his conversations with Antonin Dulaure and Claire Parnet, published in *L’Autre Journal*, 8, October 1985, and with Raymond Bellour and François Ewald, published in the *Magazine Littéraire*, 257, September 1988, in Deleuze 1995: 121- 155. For comments on Deleuze’s remarks, see Smith 2003, 314-315 and Patton 2005a, 58 - 60 and 2005b, 404 - 406.
- ⁴ ‘To act for freedom, becoming revolutionary, is to operate in jurisprudence when one turns to the justice system ...that’s what the invention of law is ... its not a question of applying ‘the rights of man’ but rather of inventing new forms of jurisprudence ... I have always been fascinated by jurisprudence, by law ... If I hadn’t studied philosophy, I would have studied law, but precisely not « the rights of man », rather I’d have studied jurisprudence.’ (*L’abécédaire, G comme gauche*).*L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze avec Claire Parnet* is unpublished in literary form but available on video cassette (1996) and CD Rom (2003) from Vidéo Editions Montparnasse. These remarks are from the section entitled ‘G as in Gauche’. I am grateful to Charles J. Stivale for his help in translating them.
- ⁵ Kant’s universal principle of right provides one influential formulation of the underlying idea, namely that ‘any action is right if it can coexist with everyone’s freedom in accordance with a universal law’ (Kant 1996: 387).
- ⁶ These provide part of the basis for Philippe Mengue’s argument (Mengue 2003) that Deleuze is fundamentally antithetical to democracy. For critical responses to this argument, see Patton 2005a, 2005b, 2005c. Disagreements aside, Mengue’s provocative book provided an important stimulus to thinking about Deleuze’s relationship to democratic political norms.
- ⁷ The primary example of becoming-revolutionary is not drawn from Lenin but from Kant. Deleuze refers to the latter’s distinction between the bloody events which took place in Paris in 1789 and the people’s enthusiasm for the idea of a constitutional state in order to suggest that the concept of a revolution in favour of the equal rights of men and citizens expresses ‘absolute deterritorialization even to the point where this calls for a new earth, a new people’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 101).
- ⁸ For another account of Deleuze’s utopianism, see Holland 2006.

-
- ⁹ See also his comments about the ‘absolute injustice’ of the current unequal global distribution of wealth in *L’Abecedaire*, in the section *G comme Gauche*.
- ¹⁰ For this reason, Deleuze and Guattari affirm the importance of the feedback from minoritarian becomings to the character of the majority: ‘molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes and parties’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 216-217). See further comment on the relations between majority and minority in Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy in Patton 2005a, 60-62 and Patton 2005b 406 – 408.

Bibliography

- Deleuze, G. (1995) *Negotiations 1972-1990*, translated by Martin Joughin, Columbia: University of Columbia Press.
- (1996) *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze avec Claire Parnet*, available on video cassette and CD Rom (2003) from Vidéo Editions Montparnasse.
- (2006) *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975 – 1995*, translated by Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1994) *What is Philosophy?*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G. and Parnet, C. (1987) *Dialogues*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, London: Athlone Press.
- Foucault, M (1997) ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in Paul Rabinow ed *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Volume 1, Ethics*, translated by Robert Hurley and others, New York: The New Press, 303-20 (originally published in P.Rabinow ed *The Foucault Reader*, 1984).
- Geras, N. (1985) ‘The Controversy about Marx and Justice’ *New Left Review* 150, 47-85. Reprinted in A. Callinicos ed *Marxist Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Holland, E. (2006) ‘The Utopian Dimension of Thought in Deleuze and Guattari’ in A. Milner, M. Ryan and R. Savage eds *Imagining The Future: Utopia and Dystopia*, (Arena Journal New Series No. 25/26) Melbourne: Arena Publications Association, 217-242.

-
- Kant, I. (1996) *Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mengue, P. (2003) *Deleuze et la question de la démocratie*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Patton, P. (2000) *Deleuze and the Political*, London and New York : Routledge.
- (2005a) 'Deleuze and Democratic Politics' in Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen eds *On radical democracy: politics between abundance and lack*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- (2005b) 'Deleuze and Democracy' *Contemporary Political Theory*, 4: 4, December, 400-413.
- (2006) 'Deleuze et la démocratie' in Manola Antonioli, Pierre-Antoine Chardel and Hervé Regnaud eds *Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari et le politique*, Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 35-50.
- (2007a) 'Utopian Political Philosophy: Deleuze and Rawls,' *Deleuze Studies*, 1:1, 41-59.
- (2007b) 'Derrida, Politics and Democracy to Come,' *Philosophy Compass*, 2.
- Peffer, R. (1990) *Marxism, Morality and Social Justice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- (1993) *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- (2001) *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- (2005) *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shapiro, I. (2003) *The State of Democratic Theory*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, D.W. (2003) 'Deleuze and the liberal tradition: normativity, freedom and judgement,' *Economy and Society*, 32: 2, 312-17.