What is Deleuzean Political Philosophy?∗

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Was Deleuze a political philosopher or does his work, including the books co-authored with Guattari, offer a Deleuzian political philosophy? Deleuze himself clearly thought so. In a 1990 interview with Antonio Negri, “Control and Becoming,” he commented that “Anti-Oedipus was from beginning to end a work of political philosophy” (Deleuze 1990, 230; 1994, 170). Others disagree. A recent survey of the secondary literature by Jeremy Gilbert identifies two recent books which answer these questions with a resounding “No”: Philippe Mengue’s Deleuze et la question de la democratie (2003) and Peter Hallward’s Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation (2006). In fact, both Mengue and Hallward waver between denying that Deleuze is a political philosopher and asserting that he is the wrong kind of political philosopher. Gilbert summarises their respective conclusions in the following terms: “Deleuze is a mystic, a nostalgist for elitist modes of avant-gardism which have no purchase on the present, at best an implicit conservative whose romanticism leaves no scope for rational calculation or collective action” (Gilbert 2010, 10).

Alain Badiou, in a talk presented in English in 2001 and recently published in French, provides a more rigorous and consistent outline of the difficulties involved in identifying a Deleuzian political philosophy (Badiou 2009, 15-20). The first difficulty is that Deleuze never identified the political as a specific object or domain of thought, in the same way that, in What is Philosophy?, he singled out art, science and philosophy.1 The second, more subjective difficulty is that Deleuze was never very interested in politics. Unlike contemporaries such as Althusser, Derrida or Nancy he never argued that philosophy had a political destination. While this is accurate in relation to Deleuze’s solo writings, it is not true of his collaborative work with Guattari. He acknowledges in his interview with Negri that May ’68 and his encounters with people such as Guattari, Foucault and Elie Sambar led him to politics and to thinking about political problems (Deleuze 1990, 230; 1994, 170).

The third difficulty concerns the content of Deleuze and Guattari’s political writings. In Anti-Oedipus (Deleuze and Guattari 2004) and again in A Thousand Plateaus outline a theory of universal history involving at least three stages (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 1987). In the short essay, “Postscript on Control Societies,” Deleuze outlines another historical series of types of society modelled on Foucault’s analysis of the “diagram” of disciplinary society (Deleuze 1995, 177-182). However, Badiou points out, none of this is really the work of a historian. On the contrary, Deleuze subscribes to a

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1Philippe Mengue also points out the absence of any place for specifically political thought in the tripartite division of thought described in What is Philosophy? (Mengue 2003, 52).
violent anti-historicism that leads him to insist more and more on the distinction between history and becoming. For Deleuze, it is becoming that is the real object of philosophy. Philosophy as it is defined in What is Philosophy? creates concepts that express particular kinds of becoming or ‘pure events.’

Nonetheless, Badiou admits, Deleuze does come to write about politics and, in What is Philosophy?, he does claim a political vocation for philosophy. This raises two questions: What kind of politics does he advocate? What kind of political philosophy does he undertake? In answer to the first question, we can begin by noting that, like many of their compatriots mobilized by the events of 1968, Deleuze and Guattari were heavily influenced by Marxist approaches to politics. They focused on the conditions of revolutionary social change rather than the conditions of maintaining society as a fair system of cooperation among its members. In contrast to traditional Marxist politics, however, they were less interested in the capture of state power than in the qualitative changes in individual and collective identities that occur alongside or beneath the public political domain. In their view, all politics is simultaneously a macro-politics that involves social classes and the institutions of political government and a micro-politics that involves subterranean movements of sensibility, affect, and allegiance. However much they borrowed from Marx's analysis of capitalism, their own work focused on the individual and collective forms of desire that constitute the micropolitical dimension of social change. This focus on the politics of desire led them to abandon key tenets of Marxist social and political theory such as the concept of the party as a revolutionary vanguard and the philosophy of history that sustained Marxist class politics. They proposed a nonteleological conception of history along with a more nuanced appreciation of the deterritorializing as well as the reterritorializing aspects of capitalism. They insisted that the impetus for social change was provided by movements of deterritorialization and lines of flight rather than by class contradictions. Their rejection of the organizational and tactical forms of traditional Marxist politics is definitively expressed at the end of Dialogues when Deleuze and Parnet abandon the goal of revolutionary capture of State power in favor of revolutionary-becoming (Deleuze and Parnet 1996, 176; 2002, 147). This new concept sought to encompass the multitude of ways in which individuals and groups deviate from the majoritarian norms that ultimately determine the rights and duties of citizens.

In answer to the question what kind of political philosophy do Deleuze and Guattari undertake, we can begin by noting that their work is not normative political philosophy. For the most part, the concepts developed in Anti-Oedipus and A Thousand Plateaus do not directly address the macropolitical public domain, much less the normative principles on which this should be based. They consider the different forms of modern government only from the Marxist perspective of their subordination to the axioms of capitalist production. From this point of view, authoritarian, socialist, and liberal democratic states are considered equivalent to one another insofar as they function as models of realization of the global axiomatic of capital. They allow that there are important differences among the various modern forms of state but provide little discussion of these differences. They affirm the importance of changes to regimes of public right that come about through struggles for civil and political rights, for equality of economic condition and opportunity as well as for regional and national autonomy.
However, they offer no normative theory of the basis of such rights nor of the kinds and degrees of equality or regional autonomy that should prevail (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 586–588; 1987, 470–471). They offer no justification for the establishment of basic civil and political rights, for the kinds of differential rights that might apply to cultural or national minorities, or for particular ways of distributing wealth and other goods produced by social cooperation.

Instead, they focus on the micropolitical sources of political change such as the minoritarian becomings that provide the affective impetus for such struggles. On their view, the sources of political creativity must always be traced back to shifts in the formations of individual and group desire that in turn lead to changes in sensibility, allegiance and belief. To the extent that such micropolitical movements bring about changes in the majoritarian standards themselves, along with new forms of right or different status for particular groups, they effectively bring about what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “new earths and new peoples” (Deleuze and Guattari 1990, 95, 97; 1994, 99, 101). At the same time, the significance of such minoritarian becomings for public political right depends on their being translated into new forms of right and different statuses for individuals and groups: “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 1980, 264; 1987, 216–217). In this manner, even though they offer neither descriptive nor normative accounts of macropolitical institutions and procedures, Deleuze and Guattari do provide a language in which to describe micropolitical movements and infrapolitical processes that give rise to new forms of constitutional and legal order. They outline a social ontology of assemblages and processes that bears indirectly on the forms of public right. They invent concepts such as becoming-minor, nomadism, smooth space, and lines of flight or deterritorialization that are not meant as substitutes for existing concepts of freedom, equality, or justice but that are intended to assist the emergence of another justice, new kinds of equality and freedom, as well as new kinds of political differentiation and constraint.

Although this political ontology does not include normative political concepts of equality, freedom and justice, it does include a kind of formal normativity. Moreover, there is a progression in Deleuze and Guattari’s work from a focus on this formal normativity in the earlier work towards increasing engagement with explicitly political normativity in their later work. By “formal normativity” I mean the way in which Anti-Oedipus, which Deleuze considers a work of political philosophy, discusses political institutions only from the perspective of a universal theory of society and history. The specifically political organization of society plays no independent role in this theory. Rather, it is treated as continuous with the coordination and control of flows of matter and desire in non-state societies governed by the Territorial machine with its systems of alliance and filiation. Deleuze and Guattari present the state as a new mechanism of alliance rather than as the embodiment of any ideal treaty or contract on the part of its subjects (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 231; 2004, 213). They argue that the state form appeared in human history in the guise of the different kinds of Despotic machine, each with its own mechanisms of overcoding the flows of desire, before becoming subordinate to the “civilized machine” that is global capitalism. What they call the
Territorial, Despotic, and Civilized social machines are treated only as different regimes of coordination and control of the local desiring 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 paranoiac, reactionary, and fascistic pole of desire or the schizoid and revolutionary pole (Deleuze and Guattari 1972, 407; 2004, 373). For this reason, their “schizoanalytic” theory and practice of desire proposes neither a political program nor a project for a future form of society.

A Thousand Plateaus 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 last vestiges of Marxist teleology are removed from their universal history such that social formations are defined by processes or becomings and “all history does is to translate a coexistence of becomings into a succession” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 537; 1987, 430). The successive plateaus provide a series of new concepts and associated terminology with which to describe different kinds of assemblages. These include concepts designed to express social, linguistic, and affective assemblages, such as strata, content and expression, territories, lines of flight, or deterritorialization. They include the terminology employed to outline a micro- as opposed to macro-politics, along with concepts such as body without organs, intensities, molar and molecular segmentarities, and the different kinds of line of which we are composed. They include the terminology employed to describe capitalism as a nonterritorially based axiomatic of flows of materials, labor, and information as opposed to a territorial system of overcoding. They include a concept of the state as an apparatus of capture that, in the forms of its present actualization, is increasingly subordinated to the requirements of the capitalist axiomatic, and a concept of abstract machines of metamorphosis, or nomadic war machines, that are the agents of social and political transformation.

This machinic theory of society is normative in a specific and formal sense, namely that the different kinds of assemblage amount to a world in which systematic priority is accorded to minoritarian becomings over majoritarian being, to planes of consistency over planes of organization, to nomadic machines of metamorphosis over apparatuses of capture, to smooth rather than striated space, and so on. Deleuze and Guattari's political ontology presents certain kinds of movement as primary: becoming-minor as a process of deviation from a majoritarian standard, lines of flight or deterritorialization rather than processes of reterritorialization or capture, and so on. In this sense, their ontology of assemblages is also an ethics or an ethology. This ethics might be characterized in the language of one or other of the plateaus as an ethics of becoming, of flows or lines of flight or, as I argued in Deleuze and the Political, as an ethics and a politics of deterritorialization (Patton 2000). It is “political” only in the very broad sense that it enables us to conceptualize and describe transformative forces and movements as well as the forms of “capture” or blockage to which these are subject.

In order to appreciate the complexity of this ontology and the kind of description that it allows, consider Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In the concluding statement of rules governing some of their most important concepts 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, where a territory can be a system of any kind: conceptual, linguistic, social, or affective (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 634; 1987, 508). 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. Systems of any kind always include “vectors of deterritorialization,” while deterritorialization is always “inseparable from correlative reterritorializations” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980 635; 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. As well as distinguishing negative and positive deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari further distinguish between an absolute and a relative form of each of these processes. Absolute deterritorialization refers to the virtual realm of becoming and pure events, while relative deterritorialization concerns only movements within the actual realm of embodied, historical events and processes. In the terms of their ontology of assemblages, it is the virtual order of becoming that governs the fate of any actual assemblage.

Finally, in accordance with their method of specification of concepts by proliferating distinctions, they distinguish between the connection and conjugation of deterritorialized elements in the construction of a new assemblage. The effective transformation of a given element of social or political life requires the recombination of deterritorialized elements in mutually supportive and productive ways to form assemblages of connection rather than conjugation. Absolute and relative deterritorialization will both be positive when they involve the construction of “revolutionary connections in opposition to the conjugations of the axiomatic” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 591; 1987, 473). Under these conditions, absolute deterritorialization “connects lines of flight, raises them to the power of an abstract vital line or draws a plane of consistency” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 636; 1987, 510).

Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts are normative in the sense that they provide a descriptive language within which to judge the character of particular events and processes. They enable us to pose question 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 1996, 172–173; 2002, 143–144)? In this sense, the judgments enabled by Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology of assemblages and processes are entirely practical and pragmatic. They enable a form of reflective judgment, although one that is closer to Kant’s aesthetic judgment than to his determinative judgments of practical or theoretical reason. Philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, “is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable or Important that determine success or failure” (Deleuze and Guattari 1990, 80; 1994, 82).
1 Deleuze’s Turn toward Political Normativity

Deleuze and Guattari’s machinic social and political ontology has a normative dimension in so far as it presents a world of interconnected machinic assemblages, the innermost tendency of which is toward the “detrerritorialization” of existing assemblages and their “reterritorialization” in new forms. Nevertheless, their ontology remains formal in relation to actual societies and forms of political organization. Disagreements with Marxism aside, all of their political theoretical innovations were carried out within a broadly Marxist perspective that envisaged the emergence of new and better forms of social and political life. However, at no point did they 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. Nowhere did they engage directly with the political norms embedded in liberal democratic political institutions and ways of life, 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 were mentioned only in passing in the course of their analysis of capitalism and present-day politics as a process of axiomatization of the social and economic field.

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 predates 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, there have been 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 in France, there was a similar rediscovery of ethical and political normativity in French political thought during this period. This was expressed, for example, in a renewed interest in human rights, subjectivity, justice, equality, and freedom in the work of contemporaries such as Foucault and Derrida. Guattari became involved in electoral politics during the latter part of the 1980s, standing as as Green candidate in 1992 regional elections.

Deleuze’s writings and comments in interviews from the 1980s mark a significant shift in his thinking about such normative issues. For example, he responds to the renewed interest in human rights during this period by insisting on the importance of jurisprudence as the means to create new rights. While he criticizes the manner in which human rights are represented as “eternal values” and “new forms of transcendence,” he makes it clear that he is not opposed to rights as such but only to the idea that there is a definitive and ahistorical 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

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2See, for example, Peffer (1990). For discussions of these efforts and so-called “analytic marxism” more generally, see Kymlicka 2002, 166-207 and Levine 2003.
1990, 210; 1995, 153). He returns to the question of rights and jurisprudence in his Abécédaire interviews with Claire Parnet, recorded in 1988–1989, where he affirms the importance of jurisprudence understood as the invention of new rights, along with his own fascination for the law. In his 1990 interview with Negri, he reaffirms the importance of jurisprudence as a source of law with reference to the question of what rights should be established in relation to new forms of biotechnology (Deleuze 1990, 230; 1995, 169). Deleuze’s endorsement of rights and jurisprudence clearly commits him to the existence of a rule of law and the kind of constitutional state that this implies. In the case of societies that seek to govern themselves in this manner, the concept of a right 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.

Deleuze’s political writings from the 1980s onward provide evidence not only of his commitment to the rule of law but also to democracy. His 1979 “Open Letter to Negri’s Judges” already adopted the speaking position of a democrat committed to certain principles in relation to due process and the rule of law (Deleuze 2003, 156; 2007, 169). His concern with democracy becomes more pronounced in What Is Philosophy? where there are a series of highly critical remarks about actually existing democracies. Far from dismissing the democratic ideal, these comments imply that other actualizations of the concept or “pure event” of democracy are possible. What Is Philosophy? offers no more direct account of principles that are supposed to govern modern democratic societies than A Thousand Plateaus. In this sense, it offers no theory of public right. Many of the elements of Deleuze and Guattari’s prior commitment to Marxism remain in the diagnosis of the present outlined in What Is Philosophy? For example, the analysis of the isomorphic but heterogeneous character of all states with regard to the global capitalist axiomatic is reproduced in identical terms. From this perspective, there are political differences between different kinds of state but also complicity with an increasingly global system of exploitation. They suggest that even the most democratic states are compromised by their role in the production of human misery alongside great wealth (Deleuze and Guattari 1990, 103; 1994, 107; Deleuze 1990, 234; 1995, 173). They maintain their commitment to the revolutionary-becoming of people rather than the traditional Marxist concept of revolution, even as they point out that the concept of revolution is itself a philosophical concept par excellence, one that expresses “absolute deterritorialization even to the point where this calls for a new earth, a new people” (Deleuze and Guattari 1990, 97; 1994, 101).

What Is Philosophy? argues for the inherently political vocation of philosophy. Philosophy is defined as the creation of concepts where these serve an overtly utopian function: “We lack resistance to the present. 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 1990, 104; 1994, 108). In the present, the task of philosophy is aligned with the struggle against capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari 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 1990, 96; 1884, 100). At this point, the outline of a new concept appears in Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy.

What Is Philosophy? contrasts the actual universality of the market with the virtual universality of a global democratic state and describes philosophy as it is envisaged here as reterritorialized on a new Earth and a people to come quite unlike those found in actually existing democracies. In this sense, we can say that in What Is Philosophy? Deleuze and Guattari’s neo-Marxist support for becoming-revolutionary as the path toward a new Earth and a people to come is combined with a 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 1990, 108; 1994, 113). In contrast to the formal normativity of their earlier work, the normativity of Deleuze’s later political philosophy is defined by this relation between becoming-revolutionary and becoming-democratic. On this basis, in full recognition of his differences from liberal normative political philosophy, it nevertheless becomes possible to compare Deleuze with a left-liberal political philosopher such as John Rawls.

2 Immanent Utopianism and Becoming-Democratic

In Justice as Fairness: A Restatement, Rawls identifies four purposes served by his kind of reconstructive political philosophy: First, it can help to resolve deeply disputed questions by searching for common philosophical and moral ground between the protagonists. Second, it can serve the task of orientation that seeks to identify reasonable and rational ends, both individual and collective, and to show “how those ends can cohere within a well-articulated conception of a just and reasonable society” (Rawls 2001, 3). Third, it can address the task of reconciliation by showing the limits of what can be achieved within a democratic society characterized by the existence of “profound and irreconcilable differences in citizen’s reasonable comprehensive religious and philosophical conceptions of the world” (Rawls 2001, 3). Finally, it serves the “realistically utopian” task of “probing the limits of practicable political possibility.” It asks what a just and democratic society would be like, given the “circumstances of justice” that obtain in the actual historical world in which we live, but also what it would be like “under reasonably favourable but still possible historical conditions” (Rawls 2001, 4). Rawls notes that the limits of the practicable are not simply given by the actual because we can and do change existing social and political institutions. However, he does not pursue any further the question of what determines the limits of the practicable or how we might ascertain what these are (Rawls 2001, 5).

Deleuze’s conception of philosophy is concerned above all to challenge the limits of our present social world. What Is Philosophy? presents a conception of the political vocation of philosophy with far more radical ambitions than those acknowledged in Rawls’s realistic utopianism. Of the four functions of political philosophy identified by Rawls, Deleuze’s philosophy does not address those of resolution, orientation, or reconciliation. It does address the utopian function, although not by setting out normative principles against which we might evaluate the justice or fairness of social institutions. The sense in which Deleuze and Guattari’s political philosophy is utopian must be understood in terms of the connection between the absolute deterritorialization pursued in philosophy and the relative deterritorializations at work in its social milieu: “There is always a way in which absolute deterritorialization takes over from a relative
deterritorialization in a given field” (Deleuze and Guattari 1990, 85; 1994, 88). The utopian vocation of philosophy can be achieved only when the concepts that it invents engage with existing forms of relative deterritorialization. This conception of philosophy therefore implies an immanent utopianism in the sense that it does not simply posit an ideal future but rather aims to connect with processes of relative deterritorialization that are present in but stifled by the present milieu, extending these and taking them to extremes. To the extent that these processes or “lines of flight” encompass resistant political forces along with the ideals or opinions that motivate them, this immanent utopianism cannot avoid drawing on elements of present political normativity to suggest ways in which the injustice or intolerability of existing institutional forms of social life might be removed. In this manner, because the concept of democracy ties together a number of the values at the heart of contemporary political thought, elements of that concept may be used to counteractualize certain forms of resistance to the present in public political culture. These elements in turn provide the components of the concept of “becoming-democratic,” which serves the utopian task of political philosophy by probing the limits of democratic processes in contemporary society.

Deleuze offers no detailed account of “becoming-democratic.” However, it is possible to fill out the concept with elements of his prior work with Guattari as well as occasional comments in interviews. For example, in his interview with Negri, he invokes the principle that decisions ought to be taken in consultation with those most affected by them. This suggests that the opening-up of decision-making procedures throughout society might constitute a vector of “becoming-democratic” (Deleuze 1990, 230; 1995, 169–170). This is one of the founding principles of modern democratic governance, and Deleuze is not the only theorist to recommend its extension and application to new contexts.

Minoritarian becomings provide another vector of “becoming-democratic.” These are defined as the variety of ways in which individuals and groups fail to conform to the majoritarian standard (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 133-134; 1987, 105-106). They have given rise to a succession of measures to extend the scope of the standard and thereby broaden the subject of democracy: first, in purely quantitative terms by extending the vote to women and other minorities; second, in qualitative terms 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, for example in relation to sexual preference and physical and mental abilities, as well as cultural and religious backgrounds. Deleuze and Guattari’s support for minoritarian becomings affirms the importance of efforts to enlarge the character of the majority. By their nature, processes of minoritarian-becoming will always exceed or escape from the confines of any given majority. Nevertheless, they embody the potential to transform the affects, beliefs, and political sensibilities of a population in ways that can lead to the advent of a new people. 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. In turn, these will affect the distribution of rights and duties as well as the presence of minority citizens in the public institutions and political functions of the society.
A third vector of “becoming-democratic” involves efforts to achieve a more just distribution of material social goods. Deleuze is often critical of the way that modern democratic states fail to live up to this aspect of their egalitarian promise (Deleuze and Guattari 1990, 102-103; 1994, 106-107). However, his 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 advocate radically egalitarian principles that would treat any undeserved inequality of condition as unjust, or should we be satisfied with Rawls’s difference principle according to which social and economic inequalities are allowed but 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 democratic 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.

3 Conclusion

Deleuzean philosophy as it is presented in What is Philosophy? is clearly political in the sense that it has an inherently political vocation. The creation of concepts serves the larger project of bringing about new earths and new peoples. Deleuze and Guattari propose a novel kind of utopian political thought that is neither Marxist nor liberal. They rely upon a political ontology of assemblages rather than individual subjects of interest and right. Their goal is the transformation of existing political norms and institutions rather than their reconstruction into a coherent political theory. Despite the substantive differences that separate their approach from that of liberal normative political philosophy, I have tried to show there is at least a degree of convergence between them. The concept of a “becoming-democratic” points to the role of elements of existing concepts of democracy in historical struggles to implement or expand democratic government. In this manner, Deleuze and Guattari’s collaborative work moves from a formal to a more substantive engagement with the explicitly political concepts and norms that make up the public political culture of liberal constitutional states.

Bibliography


