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# Reconsidering Post-Structuralism and Anarchism

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## I

The concept of representation looms large in post-structuralist philosophy. For Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze representation is arguably the principal vehicle by which relational concepts are subordinated to totalizing concepts: difference to identity, play to presence, multiplicity to singularity, immanence to transcendence, discourse to knowledge, power to sovereignty, subjectivation to subjectivity, and so on. Representation plays a similar role in anarchist critique, which is one reason that Lewis Call (2003) counts 'classical anarchism' among the historical precursors of post-structuralism. Call was not, however, the first scholar to make this association. Gayatry Spivak and Michael Ryan (1978), 24 years earlier, published a groundbreaking analysis of the connections between post-structuralist philosophy (including that of Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari) and the *nouvel anarchisme* of 1968. This was followed 14 years later by Todd May's seminal work *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (1994), which presented the first book-length argument that the political philosophy of Deleuze, Foucault and Lyotard represents a new kind of anarchism.[1] May was followed by Saul Newman (2001) (who refers to 'post-anarchism') as well as Lewis Call (who refers to 'postmodern anarchism'). The common theme of these and related works is that post-structuralist political philosophy is an anarchism, one that consciously or unconsciously borrows several key ideas from 'classical anarchism' and proceeds to reaffirm, elaborate and ultimately 'improve' these ideas.

My own position is that (a) the so-called 'classical anarchists' had already discovered several of the insights attributed to post-structuralists more than a century before the latter appeared on the scene; (b) that anarchism, consequently, is a postmodern political philosophy and not (or not *just*) the other way around; (c) that post-structuralist political philosophy, particularly as developed by Deleuze and Foucault, indeed elaborates, expands, and even (to a certain extent) 'improves' upon 'classical' anarchist ideas, but not in the way, or for the reasons, that May and others suggest; and (d) that rather than regard post-structuralist political philosophy as a totally new and ready-made form of anarchism, it is better to view post-structuralist ideas as potential ingredients for the development of new anarchist recipes. As I have already offered considerable support for (a) and (b) elsewhere, I will

mostly focus in what follows on defending the other claims. In order to do so, however, we ought briefly to consider the political context within which post-structuralism emerged.

## II

Although the revolutionary events of May 1968 were short-lived, the major uprisings having been quelled after only six weeks, they nonetheless had far-reaching and lasting effects. Among other things, they marked the end of the Stalinist PCF's long-standing dominance over the French left (cf. Hamon, 1989: 10–22, 17), laid the foundation for the German and Italian *Autonomia* movements of the 1970s and 1980s, and would eventually exert a profound influence on various anti-globalization movements of the 1990s. They also radicalized a whole new generation of intellectuals, including Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Unlike his long-time friend and collaborator Félix Guattari, who had been involved in radical activism since the early 1960s, Deleuze did not become politically active until after 1968 (Patton, 2000: 4; cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1972: 15; cf. Feenberg and Freedman, 2001: xviii). 'From this period onward', writes Paul Patton, 'he became involved with a variety of groups and causes, including the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* (GIP) begun by Foucault and others in 1972' (ibid.: 4). More importantly, Deleuze's prior commitment to speculative metaphysics gave way to a deep interest in political philosophy as he attempted to make sense of the political practices he encountered in 1968. Four years later, in 1972, Deleuze and Guattari published *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1977), the first of a two-volume work on political philosophy.[2] The second volume, entitled *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), followed ten years later.

As mentioned above, Todd May has argued at great length that the political theories of Foucault, Deleuze and Lyotard were deeply influenced by the Paris Spring and the anarchists and anti-authoritarians who helped foment it. May thinks this explains, at least in part, why the political philosophy of post-structuralism developed into a kind of anarchism. At the same time, he acknowledges that Foucault and Deleuze were in all likelihood completely unfamiliar with the so-called 'classical anarchists', which suggests that anarchism came to them second hand, by way of the *Enragés* and the Situationists. This strikes me as plausible enough, but it is not the only possible explanation. Many of Nietzsche's ideas are remarkably similar to those of Proudhon, Bakunin and other anarchists even though it is certain that Nietzsche was unfamiliar with their writings (and vice versa, at least until after Nieztsche's death). Given the enormous influence of Nietzsche upon both Foucault and Deleuze, it is also possible that they inherited a portion of Nietzsche's unconscious anarchism (or the anarchists' unconscious Nietzscheanism, depending upon how one looks at it).

Either way, May successfully demonstrates that Deleuze has considerable philosophical affinity with the classical anarchists. To begin with, he rejects the so-called repressive thesis – the idea that power is by definition repressive

and for this reason ought to be abolished. For Deleuze, as May notes, 'power does not suppress desire; rather it is implicated in every assemblage of desire' (1994: 71). Given the ubiquitous and ontologically constitutive nature of power, it goes without saying that power *simpliciter* cannot be 'abolished' or even 'resisted'. This does not mean that repressive social forces cannot be opposed. It does imply, however, that for Deleuze, as for Spinoza, the crucial question is not whether and how resistance is possible, but how and why desire comes to repress and ultimately destroy itself in the first place (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977: xiii). Answering this question requires, among other things, theoretical analyses of the various assemblages that come into being over time (*vis-à-vis* their affects, their lines of flight, etc.) as well as experimentation at the level of praxis. We shall say more about this below, but for the time being it is enough to note that Deleuze, like Bakunin, Kropotkin and other classical anarchists, agrees that power can be active or reactive, creative or destructive, repressive or liberatory.[3] More importantly, both are agreed that power is ontologically constitutive (i.e. that it produces reality) and that it is immanent to individuals and society as opposed to an external or transcendent entity (Kropotkin, 1970: 104–6; Lunn, 1973: 220–7).

Like the anarchists, Deleuze also rejects the concentration thesis – that is, the idea that repressive forces emanate from a unitary source rather than multiple sites (see Marx and Engels, 1974: 544; Bakunin, 1972: 89; Bakunin, 1953: 224). In Deleuze's philosophy, the interplay of multiple forces within and among multiple nodes, which are themselves interconnected via complex networks, is precisely what gives rise to the social world (this is what he means when he suggests that power is 'rhizomatic' as opposed to 'arboreal'). This is not to say that power does not become concentrated within certain sites; indeed, much of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is given over to an analysis of how such concentrations express themselves in particular political and economic forms, how these forms operate, and so forth. These analyses are similar to Foucault's genealogies insofar as they seek to unearth how power (or force or desire) as manifested in concrete assemblages *works*. For Foucault, a genealogy of actuality is simultaneously a cartography of possibility: forms of power always produce forms of resistance; thus in analysing how power operates one also analyses how power is or can be resisted. Similarly, for Deleuze, 'to analyze a social formation is to unravel the variable lines and singular *processes* that constitute it as a multiplicity: their connections and disjunctions, their circuits and short-circuits and, above all, their possible transformations' (Smith, 2003: 307). A social formation is not just defined by its actual operation, but also by its 'lines of flight', the internal conditions of possibility for movement, transformation, 'deterritorialization' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 216; cf. Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 135). Although the rejection of the concentration thesis entails a greater number of *explananda*, which in turn require a greater number of *explanantia*, different and multiple forms of domination ensure that different and multiple forms of resistance are possible.

Even a cursory summary of the complicated political ontology outlined in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* would well exceed the scope of this work. Fortunately, such a summary is unnecessary. For our purposes, it is enough to note that Deleuze ontologizes politics much more vividly than the classical anarchists even though both deny the existence of Kantian pure reason or any other model of universal, transcendent rationality (Deleuze, 1995: 145–6) as well as the existence of a universal, transcendent subject (Deleuze, 1992: 162). As Smith writes:

> What one finds in any given socio-political assemblage is not a universal 'Reason', but variable processes of rationalization; not universalizable 'subjects', but variable processes of subjectivation; not the 'whole', the 'one' or 'objects', but rather knots of totalization, focuses of unification, and processes of objectification. (2003: 307)

Generally speaking, Deleuze takes the idea of social physics in a radically literal direction by shifting political analysis to the level of pre-social, pre-subjective processes, operations and relations of force. This shift requires, among other things, the invention of new concepts as well as the redefinition of extant concepts using complex, technical and highly idiosyncratic terminology.

We need not go into exhaustive detail about 'machines', 'becomings', 'molar lines', and the like to note (a) that Deleuze disdains 'abstractions', which he typically regards as 'anti-life' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 47; Deleuze, 1995: 85; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 23); (b) that the most objectionable form of abstraction for Deleuze, as for the anarchists, is representation (Deleuze, n.d.: 206–7; cf. Patton, 2000: 47–8; May, 2005: 127); and (c) that Deleuze believes that representation at the macropolitical level arises from representation at the micropolitical level (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 146; cf. May, 2005 :142). As Todd May notes regarding (b):

> The power to represent people to themselves is oppressive in itself: practices of telling people who they are and what they want erect a barrier between them and who (or what) they can create themselves to be. *Anti-Oedipus* can be read in this light as a work whose project is to demolish current representational barriers between people and who they can become, and in that sense Foucault states its point exactly when he calls it a 'book of ethics'. (1994: 131)

As for (c), Deleuze locates the origin of representational practices in micropolitical orders, identities and regulatory practices (what he calls 'molar lines') and in the 'overcoding' of these 'molar lines' by more complicated power mechanisms (what he calls 'abstract machines'). A particular society may represent individuals in terms of a variety of constructed identities – for example, familial identities ('son'), educational identities ('school child'), occupational identities ('professional') racial identities ('Caucasian') and so on.

That same society may also represent individuals via a system of normalized ordering – for example, from 'son' to 'school child' to 'professional', etc.

Alongside systems of ordering and identifying, there may be other distinct regulatory practices such as 'the minute observation and intervention into the behavior of bodies, a distinction between the abnormal and the normal in regard to human desire and behavior, and a constant surveillance of individuals' (May, 2005: 140). For Foucault, discipline is nothing more than the collocation of these practices, the concrete manifestation of which is the prison (Foucault, 1978: 184). Discipline itself 'does not exist as a concrete reality one could point to or isolate from the various forms it takes' (May, 2005: 141). Instead, Deleuze describes discipline as an 'abstract machine' that collocates diverse representational practices (i.e. 'overcodes molar lines') into a single regime of power.

For Deleuze, the state does not create representations of its own. Rather, 'it makes points *resonate* together, points that are not necessarily already town-poles but very diverse points of order, geographic, ethnic, linguistic, moral, economic, technological particularities' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 433). More specifically, the state helps to actualize a variety of abstract machines (e.g. discipline), to bring them into a relationship of interdependence with itself and with each other, to expand and maintain them (ibid.: 223–4; Deleuze and Parnet, 1987: 130). At the same time, the state 'territorializes' – that is, it marshals these machines against the various micropolitical forces, identities, multiplicities, relations, etc. that threaten or oppose it ('molecular lines' or 'lines of flight', as well as the various abstract machines which could bring these lines together – e.g. radical political movements). Capitalism, on the other hand, is an axiomatic 'defined not solely by decoded flows, but by the generalized decoding of flows, the new massive deterritorialization, the conjunction of deterritorialized flows' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977: 224).

A given social formation is a dynamic system comprised of various 'flows' – of matter, people, commodities, money, labour, and so on. Whereas the medieval state, for example, 'overcoded' flows of people, land, labour, etc. by subordinating them to the abstract machine of serfdom, capitalism liberated ('decoded') these flows by wresting control of labour and property from the state ('deterritorialization'). The decoded flows initially escape along a line of flight – workers are free to sell their labour, inventors can create and sell products, entrepreneurs can buy patent rights to these products and invest in their manufacture, etc. Capitalism does not establish codes – i.e. rules that govern relationships among specific people or between specific people and things – but establishes a generic ('axiomatic') framework for governing relationships among diverse people and things. It accomplishes the latter by reterritorializing the lines of flight it frees from codes, subordinating decoded flows to exchange value, and bounding the circulation of flows within the orbit of the capitalist axiomatic. This is what the anarchists referred to as 'appropriation' – the seemingly magic ability of capitalism to transform the fruits of freedom and creativity ('decoded flows') into commodities to be bought and sold (Kropotkin, 2002: 137–9). (Early capitalism transformed

labour into a commodity; late capitalism does the same thing with lifestyles, modes of subjectivity and even 'radical' ideologies.)

The latter point underscores an important feature of social formations more generally, one that was recognized as well by the anarchists. Social existence writ large, no less than the macropolitical institutions or micropolitical practices that comprise it, is a battlefield of forces, none of which has an 'intrinsic' or 'essential' nature (Kropotkin, 2002: 109–11; Kropotkin, 1970: 117–18). As the classical anarchists and post-structuralists both realize, one and the same force can be at odds with itself – for example, within a single human being, or a group, or a federation of groups. The tension produced by a force simultaneously seeking to escape and re-conquer itself is precisely what allows ostensibly 'revolutionary' or 'liberatory' movements (e.g. Bolshevism) to occasionally metamorphose into totalitarian regimes (e.g. Stalinist Russia). For the anarchists, the prefigurative ethic is intended in part to maintain, as much as possible, a balance or equilibrium among forces or within a single force.

## III

Such are the various parallels and points of intersection that have led Todd May and others to conclude that there is a strong affinity between classical anarchism and the post-structuralist philosophies of Foucault and Deleuze. As I noted earlier, however, much of *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* is devoted to showing that there are irreconcilable differences between the two. For example, May repeatedly alleges that classical anarchism depends upon an essentialistic conception of human nature (1994: 63–4), that the classical anarchists endorse the repressive thesis (ibid.: 61), etc. Although I do not address these charges here, I mention them because they constitute a major weakness of *Poststructuralist Anarchism* and related texts. In my view, the works of many self-identified 'post-anarchists' have been characterized by insufficient scholarly engagement with – and, by extension, inaccurate interpretation of – classical anarchist texts. (In fact, the very idea of 'classical anarchism' or a 'classical anarchist tradition' is deeply problematic, but I shall not discuss this here.)

There can be no doubt that post-structuralist political philosophy elaborates, expands and even improves upon 'classical' anarchist ideas. Deleuze cuts a much wider and more incisive swathe, which makes sense given the mid-twentieth-century context in which he thought and wrote. Nor can anyone reasonably deny that his political critique is much more sophisticated than that of Proudhon or Kropotkin, even if it is not quite as novel as some have claimed. Indeed, it is simply wrong to assert that post-structuralist political philosophy represents a totally 'new' form of anarchism that was 'discovered', complete and intact, by otherwise admirable scholars like Todd May and Saul Newman. This has to do not only with the foregoing evidence, nor with some post-anarchists' tendency to misinterpret that evidence, but also with their habit of misconstruing important aspects of post-structuralist philosophy, chief among them the status of normativity.

In the final chapter of *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, for example, May rehearses the oft-repeated accusation that post-structuralism engenders a kind of moral nihilism (1994: 121–7). Such an accusation is a product, he thinks, of the post-structuralists' general unwillingness to 'refer existence to transcendent values' (ibid.: 127), which is surely the dominant strategy of much traditional moral philosophy in the West. Strangely, May goes to great lengths to explain why Deleuze rejects classical 'ethics', only to argue that certain of Deleuze's other commitments implicitly contradict this rejection. As he notes:

> [Deleuze] praises Spinoza's *Ethics*, for instance, because it 'replaces Morality ...' For Deleuze, as for Nietzsche, the project of measuring life against external standards constitutes a betrayal rather than an affirmation of life. Alternatively, an ethics of the kind Spinoza has offered ... seeks out the possibilities life offers rather than denigrating life by appeal to 'transcendent values.' Casting the matter in more purely Nietzschean terms, the project of evaluating a life by reference to external standards is one of allowing reactive forces to dominate active ones, where reactive forces are those which 'separate active force from what it can do'. (Ibid.)

In the same breath, however, May argues that Deleuze provides no explicit means by which to distinguish active forces from reactive ones beyond a vague appeal to 'experimentation' (ibid.: 128). Such a means, he thinks, can only be discovered by extracting 'several intertwined and not very controversial ethical principles' from the hidden nooks of the Deleuzean corpus.

The first such principle, which May terms the 'anti-representationalist principle', holds that 'practices of representing others to themselves – either in who they are or in what they want – ought, as much as possible to be avoided' (ibid.: 130). The second, which he calls the 'principle of difference', holds that 'alternative practices, all things being equal, ought to be allowed to flourish and even to be promoted' (ibid.: 133). In both cases, May provides ample textual evidence to demonstrate that Deleuze (*inter alia*) is implicitly committed to the values underlying these principles. This claim, which we ourselves have already made, is surely correct. It is very clear from the foregoing that 'Gilles Deleuze's commitment to promoting different ways of thinking and acting is a central aspect of his thought' (ibid.: 134). What I take issue with is the idea that the avowal of such values, implicit or otherwise, is *a fortiori* an avowal of *specific normative principles*.

As May himself notes, the defining characteristics of traditional normativity are precisely abstraction, universality and exteriority to life, all of which, as we have seen, Deleuze rejects. Incredibly, May goes on to argue that Deleuze's unwillingness to prescribe universalizable norms is itself motivated by a commitment to the aforesaid principles. Such an argument, however, amounts to claiming that Deleuze is self-referentially inconsistent; it does not lead, as May thinks, to a general acquittal on the charge of moral nihilism. If it is true that Deleuze scorns representation and affirms difference – and I

think that it is – then surely the operative values cannot be articulated and justified by means of representation or the suppression of difference except on pain of dire contradiction. Of course this is precisely the opposite of what May wishes to argue.

The normative principles which May attributes to Deleuze are problematic not because they are categorical but because they are transcendent; they stand outside of any and all particular assemblages and so cannot be self-reflexive. It is easy to see how such principles, however radical they may seem on the surface, can become totalitarian. To take a somewhat far-fetched but relevant example, the principle of anti-representationalism would effectively outlaw *any* processes of majoritarian representation, even in banal contexts such as homecoming competitions or bowling leagues. Likewise, the principle of difference permits, or at least does not obviously prohibit, morally suspect 'alternative practices' such as thrill-killing or rape. A year after the publication of *Postructuralist Anarchism*, May (1995) amended his views somewhat, expanding them into a comprehensive moral theory. The foundation of this theory is a revised version of the anti-representationalist principle, according to which 'people ought not, other things being equal, to engage in practices whose effect, among others, is the representation of certain intentional lives as either intrinsically superior or intrinsically inferior to others' (ibid.: 48). The principle of difference drops out of the picture altogether.

May buttresses the revised anti-representationalist principle with what he calls a 'multi-value consequentialism' (ibid.). After suggesting that 'moral values' are 'goods to which people ought to have access' (ibid.: 87), he proceeds to argue that the 'values' entailed by the anti-representationalist principle include 'rights, just distributions, and other goods' (ibid.: 88). May's theory judges actions as 'right' to the extent that (a) they do not violate the anti-representationalist principle nor (b) result in denying people goods to which they ought to have access. Whatever substantive objections one might raise against this theory would be quite beside the point. The problem, as we have already noted, is that the very idea of a 'moral theory of poststructuralism' based on universalizable normative principles is oxymoronic. What distinguishes normativity from conventional modes of practical reasoning is the universalizable or categorical nature of the rational reason in question – i.e. the fact that in all relevantly similar circumstances it applies equally to all moral agents at all times. Typically this rational reason has taken the form of a universal moral principle, and to this extent, May's 'principle of anti-representationalism' is no different from Kant's categorical imperative or Bentham's principle of utility. It is precisely this universal and abstract character that makes normativity 'transcendent' in the sense outlined earlier, and post-structuralism is nothing if not a systematic repudiation of transcendence.

Some would suggest that normativity is attractive precisely because it provides us with a clear and unambiguous methodology by which to guide our actions. It is not at all obvious, however, that this requires *transcendent moral principles*, especially if ordinary practical reasoning will suffice. The prefigurative principle, which demands that the means employed be consistent

with the desired ends, is a practical principle or hypothetical imperative of the form 'if you want *X* you ought to do *Y*'. Anarchists have long argued that incongruity between the means and the end is not pragmatically conducive to the achievement of the end. As such, it is not the case that one ought to do *Y* because it is the 'morally right' thing to do, but because it is the most sensible course of action given one's desire to achieve *X*. A principle of this sort can be regarded as categorical or even universalizable, but it is scarcely 'transcendent'. Its justification is immanent to its purpose, just as the means are immanent to the desired end. It provides us with a viable categorical norm without any concept of transcendence.

It may be possible to preserve some semblance of normativity in Deleuze. Paul Patton, for example, has suggested that the 'the overriding norm [for Deleuze] is that of deterritorialization' (2000: 9). In shifting the focus of political philosophy from static, transcendent concepts like 'the subject' and 'rationality' to dynamic, immanent concepts such as 'machinic processes', 'processes of subjectivication', etc., Deleuze also shifts the focus of normativity from extensive to intensive criteria of normative judgment. As Patton notes, 'What a given assemblage is capable of doing or becoming is determined by the lines of flight or deterritorialization it can sustain' (ibid.: 106). Thus normative criteria will not only demarcate the application of power by a given assemblage but 'will also find the means for the critique and modification of those norms' (Smith, 2003: 308). Put another way, political normativity must be capable not only of judging the activity of assemblages, but also of judging the norms to which said assemblages gives rise. Such normativity is precisely what prevents the latent 'micro-fascism of the avant-garde' from blossoming into full-blown totalitarianism.

Transcendent normativity generates norms that do not and cannot take account of their own deterritorialization or lines of flight. Because the norms follow from, and so are justified by, the transcendent ground, they cannot provide self-reflexive criteria by which to question, critique, or otherwise act upon themselves. The concept of normativity as deterritorialization, on the contrary, does not generate norms. Rather, it stipulates that

> what 'must' always remain normative is the ability to critique and transform existing norms, that is, to create something new […] One cannot have preexisting norms or criteria for the new; otherwise it would not be new, but already foreseen. (Smith, 2003)

Absolute deterritorialization is therefore categorical, insofar as it applies to every possible norm as such, but it is not transcendent; rather, it is immanent to whatever norms (and, by extension, assemblages) constitute it. (There can be no deterritorialization without a specific assemblage; thus normativity of deterritorialization both constitutes and is constituted by the particular norms/assemblages to which it applies.)

Considered as such, normativity as deterritorialization is ultimately a kind of 'pragmatic' normativity. It determines what norms ought or ought not to be

adopted in concrete social formations according to a pragmatic consideration – namely, whether the norm adopted is capable of being critiqued and transformed. This further entails that a norm cannot be adopted if it prevents other norms from being critiqued and transformed. We might say, then, that a norm must (a) be self-reflexive and (b) its adoption must not inhibit the self-reflexivity of norms. Because normativity is a process that constitutes and is constituted by other processes, it is dynamic, and to this extent we should occasionally expect norms to become perverted or otherwise outlive their usefulness. Pragmatic normativity provides a meta-norm that is produced by the adoption of contingent norms but stands above them as a kind of sentinel; to this extent it is categorical without being transcendent.

Such a view of normativity, while interesting and promising, is not without its problems. Among other things, it does not specify when it is advisable or acceptable to critique or transform particular norms; rather, it only stipulates that any norm must in principle be open to critique and transformation. For example, suppose I belong to a society that adopts vegetarianism as a norm. The adoption of this norm obviously precludes other norms, such as carnophagy. Is this a reason to reject it? Not necessarily. As long as we remain open to other possibilities, the norm is at least *prima facie* justified. But this by itself does not explain (a) what reasons we may have to adopt a vegetarian rather than a carnivorous norm in the first place; and (b) what reasons we may have to ultimately reject a vegetarian norm in favour of some other norm. Such an explanation would require a theory of value – that is, an axiological criterion that determines what things are worth promoting/discouraging *vis-à-vis* the adoption of normative principles.

Whether or not we ought to have done with normativity, we cannot simply ignore the charge of moral nihilism. The problem with May is that he cannot see a way around this charge without normativity – that is, without some reference to laws, norms, imperatives, duties, obligations, permissions and principles that determine how human beings ought and ought not to act (May, 1994); that do not just describe the way the world is, but rather prescribe the way it ought to be (Korsgaard, 1996: 8–9).[4] As we have already had occasion to mention, however, ethics is not concerned merely with expressing what is *right* (i.e. what ought to be done); it is also concerned with determining what is *good* (i.e. what is worth being valued, promoted, protected, pursued, etc.). The latter is the purview of *axiology*, the study of what is good or valuable for human beings and, by extension, what constitutes a good life (ibid.: 1–4).[5]

The *ethical* question of 'how one should live' (i.e. what constitutes a good life) is of primary importance and 'involves a particular way of approaching life […] It views life as having a shape: a life – a human life – is a whole that might be approached by way of asking how it should unfold' (May, 2005: 4). For the ancients, a life is judged *vis-à-vis* its relationship to the cosmological order – the 'great chain of being' – in which it is situated. At the summit of this order is the Form of the Good (for Plato) or the specifically human *telos* known as *eudaimonia* (for Aristotle) 'which ought to be mirrored or conformed to by the lives of human beings' (ibid.). The good or the valuable

is 'above' the realm of human experience because it is, in some sense, *more real*. Consequently, the things of this world not only strive to become *better* but to *be* – that is, to exist in the fullest and most real sense (Korsgaard, 1996: 2). In the case of human beings, success in this striving is manifested in *arete* – that is, excellence or virtue. The question *How should one live?* was gradually replaced by another one – viz. *How should one act?* (May, 2005: 4). Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Bentham were no longer concerned with what constitutes a good life (the ethical question) but with how one ought or ought not to act (the normative or moral question). In rejecting the idea of a 'great chain of being' – i.e. a qualitative ontological hierarchy with God (or the Forms) at the top and brute matter at the bottom (ibid.: 5)[6] – modern moral philosophy shifted the focus of moral judgment to individual subjects, as opposed to the relation of human life in general to a larger cosmological whole. Consequently, morality is no longer concerned with the shape lives take; rather, it establishes the moral boundaries or limits of human action. As long as one acts within said boundaries, the direction one's life as a whole takes is entirely up to oneself; it is, in a word, a 'private concern' (ibid.).

Morality, as opposed to ethics, is not 'integrated into our lives'; rather, it exists outside of and exterior to human beings (ibid.). Whether the ultimate foundation of said morality is the divine commandments of God or the dictates of an abstract moral law (e.g. Kant's categorical imperative or Bentham's principle of utility), it is no longer situated in our world or woven into the fabric of our experiences. It is exterior, transcendent, *other*. All of this changes in the nineteenth century with Nietzsche, whose most radical moves are without question his announcement of the death of God[7] and his systematic critique of traditional morality.[8] In one fell swoop, Nietzsche not only destroys the idea of 'theological existence', but with it 'the transcendence in which our morality is grounded' (May, 2005: 6–7). This gives rise to a new question: not *How should one live?* or *How should one act?* but rather *How might one live?* In lieu of any transcendent 'outside' to constrain our actions or establish what sorts of lives are worthwhile for us to pursue, we are free to pursue new ambitions and projects, to explore new ways of being – in short, to discover with Spinoza 'what a body is capable of' (Deleuze, 1990: 226).

As with Nietzsche, the question of *How might one live?* is the cornerstone of both classical and post-structuralist anarchism (May, 2005: 3). Rather than attempting to refine either so as to make them conform to the commonplaces of post-Kantian moral philosophy, critics should instead recognize and celebrate the radical alternative that they propose. That alternative is precisely a turn to *ethics* of the sort Deleuze associates with Nietzsche and Spinoza. It is the ethical, after all, which underlies the anarchist concept of self-creation, the Deleuzean concept of experimentation, and Foucault's 'care of the self'. The question, of course, is what such an ethics would entail.

Ever since Kant, moral philosophers have tended to regard rationality as the foundation of normativity. As Christine Korsgaard puts it:

> Strictly speaking, we do not disapprove the action because it is vicious; instead, it is vicious because we disapprove it. Since morality is grounded in human sentiments, the normative question cannot be whether its dictates are true. Instead, it is whether we have reason to be glad that we have such sentiments, and to allow ourselves to be governed by them. (1996: 50)

The point here is that an immoral action – one which we *ought not* to perform – is one which we have a *rational reason* not to perform. We already know that ethics is to be distinguished from morality on the basis of its concreteness, particularity and interiority to life itself. Rather than posing universal codes of conduct grounded in abstract concepts like 'rationality', ethics is instead concerned with the myriad ways in which lives can be led. To this extent, the traditional notion that ethics is concerned with *values* rather than *norms* is not entirely unfitting. Clearly values can be and often are universalized and rendered transcendent, as in the case of natural law theory. Even the Greeks, for whom value was a function of particular standards of excellence proper to particular things, believed that such standards were uniform for all human beings.

For the classical anarchists, every human being is the product of a unique and complicated multiplicity of forces, including the inward-directed forces of self-creation (Bakunin, 1972: 89, 239–41; Goldman, 1998: 67–8, 439; Kropotkin, 1924: 16–26; Kropotkin, 2002: 119–29; Kropotkin, 1970: 136–7, 203). Thus their highest value is life – the capacity of the social individual (and the society of freely associated individuals) to be *different*, to change, move, transform and create (Proudhon, 1989; Goldman, 1998: 118); Malatesta, 2001: 29–36; Malatesta, 1995: 90–100). To value something, to treat it as good, is to treat it as something

> we ought to welcome, [to] rejoice in if it exists, [to] seek to produce if does not exist […] to approve its attainment, count its loss a deprivation, hope for and not dread its coming if this is likely, [and] avoid what hinders its production. (Ewing, 1947: 149)

There is no doubt that the anarchists value life in this way. On the other hand, I am not sure whether they would regard it as 'intrinsically valuable', if by this is meant that the value of life obtains independently of its relations to other things, or that life is somehow worthy of being valued on its own account. For the anarchists, it makes no sense to speak of life in this way, since by its very nature life is relational and dynamic (Malatesta, 1965: 21–2). There is no doubt, however, that anarchists believe that life is *worthy* of being protected, pursued, promoted. As for the question of *why* this is so, Bakunin's response is that 'only an academician would be so dull as to ask it' (Bakunin, 1953: 265; cf. Proudhon, 1989: 115–16). At the risk of being dull, and in the interest of being brief, I shall leave it to one side for now.

## IV

Near the end of his life, Foucault sought to address the following problem: given that power is pervasive, and given that power shapes, moulds and constitutes both knowledge and subjects, how is it possible to resist power? More importantly, when and why is it appropriate to resist power?[9] Though recast in Foucaldian parlance, this is the traditional problematic of classical anarchism and, indeed, of all radical philosophy. (That Foucault raises this question, that he calls it an *ethical* question, is perhaps evidence enough that he was neither a nihilist nor a quietist, but rather a new and very different sort of radical.) For Foucault, power is pervasive; it is neither concentrated in a single juridical entity (such as the state) nor exerted upon subjects from somewhere outside themselves:

> If it is true that the juridical system was useful for representing, albeit in a nonexhaustive way, a power that was centred primarily around deduction and death, it is utterly incongruous with the new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed at all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus. (Foucault, 1978: 89)

Thus resistance necessarily emerges *within* power relations and is primary to them. To resist power as though it were somehow *elsewhere* or *outside* is merely to react against power. And as radicals of all stripes have witnessed time and again, such reactive resistance is either quickly defeated by extant power structures or else ends up replicating these power structures at the micropolitical level. In the place of reactive resistance, Foucault recommends an active form of resistance in which power is directed against itself rather than against another form of power (such as the state). To actively resist is to enter into a relation with oneself, to reconstitute oneself, to create oneself anew. Through this process, extant power relations are challenged and new forms of knowledge emerge. Bakunin and Kropotkin could not possibly have put the point better.

For Foucault, the relation of the self to itself forms the basis of ethics or 'modes of subjectivation'. In 'Technologies of the Self' (2003: 145–69), he formulates a history of the various ways that human beings 'develop knowledge about themselves' *vis-à-vis* a host of 'specific techniques'. These techniques, which Foucault calls *technologies of the self*,

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Ibid.: 146)

Technologies of the self are to be distinguished as such from three other types of technology (or 'matrices of practical reason'): (1) technologies of production (labour power), by which we 'produce, transform, or manipulate' objects in the world; (2) technologies of signs systems, which includes human languages specifically as well as the use of 'signs, meanings, symbols, or signification' more generally; and (3) technologies of power, by which human behaviour is directed, coordinated, compelled, engineered, etc., in 'an objectivizing of the subject' (ibid.).

In Greco-Roman civilization, Foucault claims, there were initially two major ethical principles – 'know yourself' (the Delphic or Socratic principle) and 'take care of yourself'. To illustrate the idea of care for the self, Foucault examines the 'first' Platonic dialogue, *Alcibiades I*, and extracts from it four conflicts, viz. (1) between political activity and self-care; (2) between pedagogy and self-care; (3) between self-knowledge and self-care; and (4) between philosophical love and self-care. The principle of self-knowledge (or self-examination) emerges as victor in the third conflict and gives way both to the Stoicism of the Hellenistic/imperial periods as well as Christian penitential practices in the early Middle Ages. For the Stoics, the importance of self-knowledge is manifested in the practices of quotidinal examinations of conscience; the writing of epistles, treatises and journals; meditations on the future; and the interpretation of dreams. Foucault summarizes:

> In the philosophical tradition dominated by Stoicism, *askesis* means not renunciation but the progressive consideration of self, or mastery over oneself, obtained not through the renunciation of reality but through the acquisition and assimilation of truth. It has as its final aim not preparation for another reality but access to the reality of this world. The Greek word for this is *paraskeuazõ* ('to get prepared'). It is a set of practices by which one can acquire, assimilate, and transform truth into a permanent principle of action. *Alethia* becomes *ethos*. It is a process of becoming more subjective. (Ibid.: 158)

For the early Christians, in contrast, self-examination involves not self-mastery but rather self-denial: the repudiation of the flesh, the renunciation of *mundum*, the purification of the soul as a way of preparing for death. This emphasis on self-denial, in turn, gives rise to the absolute obedience of monasticism as well as the entire *dispositif* of the confessional (both in early, public forms (*exomologesis*) and later, private forms (*exagouresis*)). Whereas the Stoic seeks to know himself in order to become a vehicle for the 'acquisition and assimilation [read: mastery] of truth', the Christian seeks to know himself in order to become a vehicle for transcendence. Self-knowledge and disclosure involve a renunciation of the body – the locus of sin and fallen-ness – and a purification of the soul.

In the modern era, the principal technology of self is *self-expression* – that is, the process of expressing those thoughts, beliefs, feelings and desires that are constitutive of one's 'true self'. On my reading, the 'true self' here is neither

an immortal soul nor a transcendental subject but rather that aspect of one's subjectivity which one has affected oneself. Modern consciousness takes for granted that there is an inner life that we are constantly forced to suppress in our myriad roles within the capitalist machine. Underneath one's roles as student, son, tax-paying American, etc. – all of which are constructed from without by power relations – there is a self that one does not discover but rather *fashions*. The potential for such self-construction is not necessarily radical in and of itself, since self-construction can and often does merely replicate extant power relations that lie 'outside' or 'on top of' the self. But it is precisely through self-construction that radical political resistance becomes possible.

It is clear that for Foucault, as for the anarchists, power is or ought to be directed toward the creation of *possibilities* – the possibility of new forms of knowledge, new ways of experiencing the world, new ways for individuals to relate to themselves and others – whereas under our present circumstances power is directed toward crystallizing and maintaining institutions of repression, circumscribing knowledge, severely delimiting modes of subjectivity and representing individuals to themselves through various mechanisms of totalization (e.g. religion, patriotism, psychology, etc.) (Malatesta, 1965: 49; cf. Bakunin, 1974: 172). I do not think it is outlandish to claim that the later Foucault, the *ethical* Foucault, cherished life in the same way the anarchists did. Life, after all, is not only a condition of possibility for the 'care of the self' but also *is* the 'care of the self'.

Much of what we have said here about Deleuze applies to Foucault. Deleuze's valorization of 'difference' and scorn of 'representation' surely hint at, if they do not reveal, a similarly vitalistic theory of value. Time and again Deleuze, like Nietzsche, like the anarchists, emphasizes the importance of *Leben-liebe* – the love and affirmation of life. Likewise it is clear that *Leben-liebe* is both a condition and a consequence of creativity, experimentation, the pursuit of the new and the different. To the extent that representation and its social incarnations are opposed to life, they are condemnable, marked by 'indignity'. This strongly suggests that for Deleuze, life is loveable, valuable and good; that it is worthy of being protected and promoted; that whatever is contrary to it is worthy of disapprobation and opposition. At the same time, however, we must recall that the life of which the anarchists speak is something virtual, and there is no guarantee that its actualizations will be affirmative and active. Of course, this is simply one more reason why Deleuze, like Foucault, like the anarchists, emphasizes experimentation on the one hand and eternal vigilance on the other (Malatesta, 1995: 121). 'We do not know of what a body is capable.' Our experiments may lead to positive transformations, they may lead to madness, they may lead to death. What starts out as a reckless and beautiful affirmation of life can become a death camp. It is not enough, therefore, to experiment and create; one must be mindful of, and responsible for, one's creations. The process requires an eternal revolution against domination wherever and however it arises – eternal because *atelos* (without *telos*), and *atelos* because domination cannot be killed. It can only be contained or, better, outrun. Whatever goodness is created along the way

will always be provisional, tentative and contingent, but this is hardly a reason not to create it. Anarchism is nothing if not the demand that we keep living.

Political postmodernity, then, is coextensive with anarchy, an eternal revolution against representation which is itself an eternal process of creation and transformation, an eternal practice of freedom. Anarchy is both the goal of political postmodernity as well as the infinite network of possibilities we travel in its pursuit. In other words, political postmodernity just is the blurring or overlapping or intersection of means and ends, the multiple sites at which our desires become immanent to their concrete actualization, the multiple spaces within which the concrete realizations of our desire become immanent to those desires. Such sites and spaces are constantly shifting into and out of focus, moving into and out of existence like rooms in a fun house. In producing them we occupy them; in occupying them we produce them. The freedom we seek as an end is created by our seeking. It is a process of eternal movement, change, becoming, possibility and novelty which simultaneously demands eternal vigilance, eternal endurance, an eternal commitment to keeping going, whatever the dangers or costs. To stop, even for a moment, is to court domination and representation – in short, death. The forces of death and reaction, no less than the forces of life and revolution, are always and already with us awaiting actualization. There is neither certainty nor respite at any point. There are no stable identities, no transcendent truths, no representations or images. There are only the variable and reciprocal and immanent processes of creation and possibility themselves.

Like Bakunin (1974), all anarchists are 'true seekers'. They seek nothing in particular save greater and more expansive frontiers to explore. Such frontiers, moreover, promise nothing save the possibility of further exploration. Freedom is the practice of opening up new spaces for the practice of freedom. We might call these practices 'life-possibilities' and say that political postmodernity, that *anarchy*, is nothing more than a 'life-creation process'. However, if all life is an indeterminate flow, we can never know in advance what forms lives can or will take. 'There is a bit of death in everything', wrote Rilke. Thus to be revolutionary is to be on guard against death, to prepare oneself not to flee death, nor even to fight it, but simply to change the subject, to do and think otherwise, to seek what is new and vital – all in the hope that some life can and will come from that death, that there is a 'bit of life' in everything, too.

There is a book that will demonstrate that all of this is already happening, that it has been happening for a long time, and that it will continue to happen. When France erupted in revolution, 30 years ago, a small window of anarchy, of postmodernity, opened up and quickly closed. Within the space of that window, paradoxical slogans such as '*soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible!*' ('be realistic, demand the impossible!') became logical and real. For what were the *Enragés* doing if not making possible what was represented to them as impossible? Nearly ten years ago, when Seattle was shrouded in tear gas and tens of thousands of labourers, students, environmentalists, peace activists and anarchists successfully shut down the World Trade Organization ministerial, I watched another window open up. Just as before, it was quickly closed.

Still, there was a space within that brief aperture within which the cry of the Zapatistas – '*otro mundo es posible!*' ('another world is possible!') – took on the appearance of an axiom, of a self-evident and unquestionable truth. For what were we doing in Seattle if not showing an alternative to a world that has been represented to us as lacking alternatives? There are many other examples, but each would belie a common theme: that the unjust, inequitable and violent limitations that are placed upon the many for the benefit of the few – the forces that separate us from our active power, from what we can do – are not unshakeable, immutable realities, but representations. When people begin to think and act otherwise, these representations begin to crack and splinter; when and if people ever grow tired of death, when and if they refuse death and come together as a massive tidal wave of *life*, these representations will be obliterated. Everything we have been told is real and unchangeable will be revealed as lies, and in refusing them we will make them change. Into what? No one knows, but that is not important. What is important is the change itself.

Politics is about power and political philosophy is a negotiation between power and images of power, between actual power relations and their capacity to become otherwise. So, too, political modernity, in both its liberal and socialist forms, is predicated precisely on the theoretical denial and practical suppression of possibilities. What it offers instead is a series of representations – of who we are as individuals and groups, of what we should and should not want, of what we can and cannot do or think or become. The anarchists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the first to launch a systematic attack on political modernity – not only by challenging its system of representational thoughts, practices and institutions, but by offering alternative ways of thinking and acting. In this they were followed by Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze, and countless others, all of whom, in his or her own way, have contributed to an ongoing struggle to move beyond modernity into postmodernity and anarchy, the process of thinking, acting and being otherwise. Much, much more needs to be said and written and *done* on this subject, but for the time being, I hope I have given us some sense of where we have been, where we are now, and where – with sufficient resolve and creativity and above all, *lebens-lieben* – we might go.

## NOTES

1. May's book is based on an earlier piece entitled 'Is Post-Structuralist Political Theory Anarchist?' (1989). Similar works include Amster (1998), Carter and Morland (2004), Dempsey and Rowe (2004) and Sheehan (2003).
2. Though we ought not to underestimate Guattari's contributions to this and later works in political philosophy, I will only refer to Deleuze in the present chapter for purposes of clarity and convenience.
3. Consider Bakunin's famous aphorism, 'The destructive passion is also a creative passion.'
4. For further reading on normativity in general see Sosa and Villanueva (2005); Gert (2004); Dancy (2000); Kagan (1997).
5. For more on this distinction see especially Hursthouse (2002); McIntyre (1984); Slote and Crisp (1997).

6. As May notes, both developments pave the way for modern liberal democratic theory.
7. Cf. Nietzsche (1988; prologue, s.2); Nietzsche (1974: s.125).
8. See for example Nietzsche (1991; esp. s.3); Nietzsche (1988; esp. 'On the Old and New Tablets' and 'On Self Overcoming'); Nietzsche, 1969; esp. essay 2, ss.11–20).
9. See Foucault (1985; 1986).

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