Misreading the Unparticipated Source of Difference in Deleuze's Reversal of Platonism

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I argue that in his "reversal of Platonism" in The Logic of Sense, Gilles Deleuze does not adequately consider in what sense Plotinus identifies The One as "unparticipated." I further claim that when The One is understood in the sense I consider Plotinus to have presented it, it shows itself to have attributes similar to Deleuze's "dark precursor," insofar as both The One and the dark precursor are ineffable, are inexhaustible, and contain absolute generative power. I propose that examining conceptual similarities between the works of such figures—about whose concepts similarity is undoubtedly counter-intuitive—sheds interesting light on important characteristics of Platonism, and in particular about the underappreciated sense in which the concept of difference is richly developed in the Platonic tradition.

"And all things that exist, so long as they continue to exist, necessarily, in virtue of their present power, produce from their own essence a dependent reality around them at their exterior. . . . Further, all things as soon as they are perfected, generate."—Plotinus, Ennead V.1.6.30-35[1]

"There must be Difference, so that there can be both thinking and being thought; if you were to remove Difference, it would be made silent, having become one."—Ibid., V.1.4.37-40

INTRODUCTION

Gilles Deleuze makes a strong, unqualified claim in *Difference and Repetition*: "The task of modern philosophy has been defined: to overturn Platonism."[2]

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In *The Logic of Sense*, invoking Nietzsche, he calls for a reversal of Platonism,[3] and later, for the "destruction of Platonism."[4] Deleuze does not, however, conceive of this reversal or destruction as a simple rejection of Platonism; rather, his reversal is a selective exploitation of conceptual resources. On the one hand, he seeks to undermine (what he takes to be) the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy of ideas. For Deleuze, Platonism posits "true Ideas" as the primary source—i.e., the ground, that which conditions the possibility—of all meaning that we encounter in our experience. On the other hand, Deleuze seeks to retain what he considers to be a useful Platonic insight, namely that ideas as they are made manifest in human experience are themselves productive of meaning, thereby participating in an unfixed—which is to say essentially uncontrolled and ungrounded—manifold of signification, called by Deleuze the simulacrum. In other words, Deleuze's "reversal" seeks to endorse what he takes to be Plato's observation that intelligibility in the realm of human experience drifts unpredictably, while rejecting Plato's presumption that this attribute of intelligibility justifies us to treat the immanent human domain as merely derivative of something more permanent and more reliable. The reversal *ostensibly* involves the rejection of any kind of higher reality which conditions the simulacrum. Indeed, for Deleuze, what we mistake for Ideas are merely simulacra that have recurred or repeated themselves—in Deleuze's language, "contracted" to produce "events"—such that we become disposed to take them up *as* Ideas. Deleuze thus retains (what he takes to be) Plato's conception of the structure of meaning, while rejecting its pretensions to truth, which is to say, rejecting Plato's hierarchy of values.

In this paper, I will argue that, in the process of Deleuze's "reversal," he is ultimately reliant upon a fixed source of meaning of his own, and one which actually resembles the Platonic source he sought to reverse. As a result, I hope to demonstrate what is conceptually powerful about this source, whether it be clad in Deleuzian or Neoplatonic language. Specifically, I ultimately argue that what in Deleuze's language is the relationship of the "dark precursor" to the production of "events" which give rise to the simulacrum, is to be found in Plotinus in the relationship of the primary activity of the One to the secondary or derivative activity of its emanations.[5] A further virtue to which this paper aspires is to clarify the relationship dependent reality has to its source, namely, that the primary activity of the source *indifferently* produces the dependent reality as a secondary activity, rather than normatively governing that secondary reality.

My argument will be guided by Deleuze's selection of Platonic sources in *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. Thus, while we begin with Plato's *Sophist*, we then shift to the work of Plotinus, from whom Deleuze derives the central terminology with which he performs his reversal. I will proceed through four stages: First, in section I, I present the account of Platonism that Deleuze takes himself to be reversing. That is, I examine the relationship between two kinds of

image—i.e., copies and simulacra—presented in Plato's *Sophist*. It is in contrast to this account that Deleuze's alternative vision—in which there are no 'true' ideas, and the distinction between copies and simulacra is rendered irrelevant—can be presented with greater clarity in the second section. Note here that the version of Platonism I present is explicitly Deleuze's. I attempt to be faithful to Deleuze's reading of Plato, rather than to Plato. In the process of presenting his version of Platonism, I will, however, briefly offer what I hope will be a convincing defense of (Deleuze's) Plato's normative decision to hold the simulacrum in suspicion. Section II will present Deleuze's alternative vision; specifically, it will present the implication of Deleuze's radical claims regarding the production of 'truth' through contraction and repetition. It will characterize Deleuze as championing greater liberty of expression by undermining what he considers to be the unwarranted presumption of fixity of meaning in Platonism. In section III, I will contrast Deleuze's account with Plotinus's metaphysics. I use here Plotinus and not Plato, first, because Deleuze himself explicitly invokes Plotinus as having succinctly represented the Platonic tendency to reduce Difference to Identity, in his account of the primacy of 'The One.' Perhaps more importantly, though, I use Plotinus because, I argue, Deleuze pays too little attention to Plotinus's claim that the One is 'unparticipated.'[6] Indeed, Plotinus's One, understood as unparticipated, bears considerable resemblance to Deleuze's own conception of the "Dark Precursor."[7] Thus, in section IV, I will conclude by considering the deeper connection between Deleuze and Plotinus. I claim Deleuze's 'dark precursor' shares with Plotinus's 'One' ineffability, absolute generative power and inexhaustibility. I finally claim that Deleuze therefore rather counter-intuitively shows himself to be an interesting species of Platonist.

I. Deleuze's Platonism: Ideas, Copies and Simulacra

i. Two Kinds of Image

In endeavouring to achieve the reversal of Platonism in the appendix to *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze takes as the centerpiece of his conceptual critique the notion that "[t]o participate is, at best, to rank second."[8] He takes Platonism to be advocating roughly the following metaphysical structure: Primarily, there are Ideas; in corporeal intellection we can participate in those Ideas. That is, we conceptualize them for ourselves in engaging with the world, in perceiving it and understanding it such as we are able to. But this participation occurs only in a derivative, secondary, and consequently imperfect fashion. We are unable to adequately—i.e., exhaustively and accurately—take up the Ideas in our perceiving and understanding the world. Insofar as the Ideas are that in which corporeal intelligence participates, and insofar as participation in something upon which one is utterly dependent for the activity of one's intellect constitutes the essence

of corporeal existence, the Ideas *give us* our existence, however secondary or imperfect it might be. This means, on the one hand, that we owe everything to the Ideas, and on the other hand, that no achievement we accomplish will sufficiently measure up to them. To 'at best, rank second' thus implies that we are constantly governed by something to which we have permanently inadequate access, but to which we owe a permanent debt of epistemic and metaphysical gratitude.

Our inadequacy in relation to the Ideas has normatively charged—indeed, potentially and perhaps inevitably, evil—consequences. If we are unable to sufficiently participate in the Ideas that make possible our imperfect existence, then we are capable of error. Insofar as error is essentially defined by deviation from the Ideas—i.e., deviation from what is real and true, from what *is*—error introduces into our existence the element of non-being. Non-being becomes, like the Ideas themselves, a productive power. That is, in erring in relations to the ideas, we are able (or are compelled) to distort them, and thus to present, as true, *phantasms*, called by Deleuze simulacra. These simulacra can themselves be taken up, erroneously, as a measure against which to judge the value of our own ideas. Again, untruth and non-being, in the form of simulacra, are made possible by the fact that we are inadequately situated to fully participate in the true Ideas. This phenomenon becomes a productive force due to the fact that false ideas can be taken up in much the same way as true Ideas. Deleuze characterizes Plato as being deeply concerned with suppressing this productive capacity, due to his conviction that it essentially constitutes the production of evil.[9]

To illustrate this, Deleuze refers to a discussion in Plato's *Sophist*, a dialogue explicitly concerned with the question of how to distinguish between a philosopher and a sophist. While endeavouring to define the sophist, an Eleatic Stranger—who takes the place of Socrates as primary and guiding interlocutor—draws a distinction between two kinds of image-making, or two ways in which we take up the Ideas. The Stranger does so by way of analogy to the visual arts. Of these, first, there is what is called eikastics, from which we derive our term 'icon.' The eikastic art is that in which "in conformity with the proportions of the paradigm in length, width, and depth, and besides this, in giving back the colors appropriate to each, one produces the *genesis* of the imitation."[10] In this case, the object is an icon, standing in for, or representing, the original of which it is an image. It points beyond itself to something that is in a certain sense truer; specifically, it is truer because it is something upon whose very being the icon is dependent. The icon still participates in non-being, to the extent that it inevitably fails to live up to the original that gives it definition.[11] The second kind of image-making is called phantastics, from which we derive 'fantasy.' The phantastic, in contrast to the eikastic artists, "dismiss what's true and work at producing in their images not the proportions that are but those that seem beautiful."[12] The phantastic artist orients the work of art to cater to the inadequate perspective of his audience,

rather than to have it reflect the reality of what it represents. The phantastic artist disregards the true beauty of the original, seeking to create an object whose beauty is to be dictated by its audience. Due to the fact that the phantasm aims at *creating* the beautiful—as it would be construed from the impoverished human perspective—rather than conveying what is *actually* beautiful—as it would be in itself—the phantasm, unlike the icon, *replaces* the true Idea which it ostensibly sought to represent; rather than gesturing to the Idea from an explicitly subordinate position, it presents itself as an original object of beauty directing its audience's attention to itself alone. The phantasm participates in non-being both to the extent that it fails to adequately acknowledge its indebtedness, and to the extent that it itself masquerades as *not* failing to do so, by presenting itself as though it were original. Due to the fact that, unlike the icon, the phantasm is indifferent to the standards of mimesis, it has no reason to regard its inadequacy as a failure.[13]

As we shall soon see, Deleuze is going to criticize the moral stance that underlies this structure, although he will do so while simultaneously preserving the structure itself.[14] His criticism will first of all rest on calling into question the ontological status of the Ideas, rejecting the notion that they are primary and permanent. Second, it will rest on rejecting the normative characterization of phantasms: In other words, if there are no primary ideas, there are *only* phantasms, some of which are erroneously taken up as "true Ideas." If this is the case, we have no justification for suspicion of phantasms; they are all that is available to us to think with. Before presenting his criticism, however, we should carefully consider what is actually at stake in the example presented by the Eleatic Stranger, rather than too hastily getting lost in the analogy. This way we will hopefully be truer, if not to Plato's own views—to which we the readers were consciously denied direct access by the author himself—then at least to the arguments that have been presented to us in the dialogues.

ii. The Context of Platonic Normative Claims about Phantasms

What is at stake in the context of the Stranger's speech is primarily to offer an accurate account of the sophist, in order for him to be differentiated from the philosopher. It had been claimed near the beginning of the text that the sophist and the philosopher were commonly confused with one another, and that they were among the most difficult kinds to differentiate.[15] The timing of this observation is relevant; the dialogue is set the day after Socrates has been charged with corrupting the youth of Athens.[16] Socrates is present for this dialogue having just been charged, and thus having to give a speech a few days hence—as dramatised in the *Apology*—to distinguish his work from that of the sophist. Socrates sits quietly and listens as the Stranger and Theaetetus struggle to draw the difficult distinction that he himself will strive (but ultimately fail, in the eyes of the Athe-

nians) to draw to save his own life. The distinction is roughly between one who endeavours to best convey truth by way of *logos*, and one who teaches how best to manipulate *logos* such that it can appear as truth. It is to distinguish between eikastics (philosophy) and phantastics (sophistry). Many Athenians, Socrates included—as is demonstrated in many places, in particular in the *Gorgias*[17]—are suspicious of sophists because they are able to compel falsehood to masquerade as truth. Put in terms of the analogy that the Stranger uses, they create phantasms that masquerade as icons.

The stance of suspicion is certainly an intuitively plausible one to take. Putting aside for the moment the metaphysical insinuations about true Ideas, what rouses suspicion for Socrates, and perhaps for Plato too, as Deleuze will claim, is the production of lies taken up as truths by the mob. The sophists of Ancient Greece taught young men methods of persuasion which were indifferent to the truth. They taught, in other words, that convincing people to assent to the position that you advocate does not depend on the truth of your position, but rather on the craft of your presentation. People who were (and are) able to master this insight could (and can) make people believe falsehoods to be true, and therefore make people act on the pretext of those falsehoods.

We can construe, in other words, considerable interest in critically engaging the sophists, due to their dangerous knack for exploiting the productive possibilities of falsehood. Sophists can create false opinion, and in so doing bring into being public opinion that is aligned to falsehoods, which is to say that they can make the people believe that falsehoods are in fact true Ideas. Just as the Ideas make possible our imperfect, secondary existence by allowing us to participate (partially and inadequately) in their being, likewise, the non-being of phantasms masquerading as true Ideas make possible a kind of participation. However, the latter are productive, according to Deleuze's Plato, of distortion and evil. What they produce, bearing the semblance of truth, is wild, uncontrollable, and dangerous falsehood.

We find an excellent ancient example of the productive role of phantasms in the trial of Socrates, as documented in the *Apology*. Socrates takes, as the starting point of his defence, the "old charges" that have been levelled against him. The old charges—"making the weaker argument the stronger" and "investigating things in the heavens and under the ground"[18]—unlike the current charges, were not formally levelled against him by an identifiable accuser. Rather, they constitute the collective prejudices that have shaped public opinion of him for years.[19] They consist in rumour, gossip, and pre-reflectively derived impressions, and specify the unexamined interpretive framework of the people of Athens, produced to some degree by those whose aim is to distort public perception of him for their own ends. What makes it so difficult to refute these charges—as compared to the 'new' or official charges—and what constitutes their great danger, is that

Socrates claims that he can neither identify the old accusers nor articulate how and to what extent the people of Athens have been affected by them.[20] In other words, the productive power of the collective prejudice adopted by the Athenians necessarily goes undiagnosed, because it underlies and frames their judgements and actions, rather than being judgements of which they are conscious, and about which there can be deliberation. The difficulty that Socrates identifies is the danger of phantasms masquerading as truth. The masquerade has succeeded to such an extent that people *use* those phantasms—taking them entirely for granted—in order to judge Socrates's character, and therefore to inform their judgment of his guilt or innocence regarding the formal charges. What makes this example useful is that the productive power of non-being (in the form of the 'old charges,' which is to say the manipulation of *logos* so that it appears as the truth against which one's own impressions are to be measured), resulted in the execution of Socrates. He was executed because of impressions that grew out of misrepresentations of him which, over time, became the poisonous semblance of truth. It is hardly difficult to produce examples of this phenomenon in our own time, as well as evidence of its danger. Indeed, the political arena in liberal democracy, insofar as it is open to competing and sometimes mutually hostile interests, is an exemplary site both of modern-day sophism, and, if we are to commit ourselves to the Platonic framework Deleuze will criticize, of the wild productive power of non-being. It is doubtless the case that global affairs, indeed, the very ground of our social and political life, is frequently shifted by actions that are rooted in the productive power of phantasms, and often for the worse. Within this context, the search for the subtle distinction between the sophist and the philosopher proceeds; within this context the Stranger from Elea presents the analogy of the eikastic and the phantastic painter.

My aim thus far has been to demonstrate the following: In Deleuze's account of Platonism, the Ideas are taken to be the primary engine of the production of meaning. The meaning of the Ideas is the standard against which the necessarily imperfect (because corporeal, transient, limited, etc.) copies that we are capable of producing in thought and action are unfavourably measured. While the relationship is unequal, and the meanings that we produce are infinitely inferior to and dependent upon the Ideas, they nonetheless genuinely participate in those Ideas, and therefore have Being. Due to the fact that their Being is essentially dependent, though, *our* ideas are capable of misapprehending *the* Ideas. These distortions take the form of phantasms or simulacra. Simulacra, like the Ideas, have their own productive power; however, the production of simulacra is negative, distortive and evil. The power of the simulacrum is *essential* to the constitution of human knowledge insofar as it is made possible by our being situated at an inadequate perspective in relation to the Ideas. It also bears with it essentially the potential for evil due to the fact that it is both productive of non-being and independent of truth.

What I hoped to show through the trial of Socrates is the way in which we might be compelled to adopt a normative position concerning the structures that generate meaning. I hoped to present the ways in which we might understand the productive power of simulacra as a danger. I hoped to show why one might want to treat simulacra as an enemy that must be combated by insisting on adequation to the true Ideas as the proper arbiter of the legitimacy of our (human, corporeal, transient) ideas. I present this in part in order to demonstrate what is at stake in Deleuze's attempt to counter this effort by 'reversing' Platonism. As we shall see, Deleuze takes himself to be reversing Platonism insofar as he strips simulacra of the negative valuation with which Platonism had designated them. He in fact diagnoses Plato as having found a genuine and powerful attribute of meaning, one that cannot be buried by the conscious realm of rationality, to be suppressed, and treated as belonging to the baser aspects of our humanity when it is, indeed, characteristically human. The simulacrum—i.e., the realm of phantasms—for Deleuze, "implies huge dimensions, depths, and distances that the observer cannot master . . . a becoming-mad, or a becoming unlimited" that cannot be rationally ordered.[21] He argues that to order the simulacrum within a hierarchy of being, and more specifically to identify it with non-being, is to evaluate it according to regulations the nature of the simulacrum itself precisely does not acknowledge: "To impose a limit on this becoming . . . to repress it as deeply as possible, to shut it up in a cavern at the bottom of the Ocean—such is the aim of Platonism in its will to bring about the triumph of icons over simulacra."[22]

Having presented Deleuze's account of the Platonic hierarchy of icons and simulacra, I will now present his reversal of that hierarchy. I will then move on to a discussion of some of the ways in which he misreads Platonism in his presentation of the system of Plotinus. In particular, I will focus on Plotinus's notion that the One is unparticipated, a notion that—when accurately interpreted—is in fact somewhat compatible with Deleuze's thought, while nonetheless throwing into question the possibility of Deleuze's project of fully extricating reality from dependence upon a unitary source.

II. Deleuze's Reversal of Platonism: The Ascent of Simulacra

Deleuze finds Plato useful in part due to the fact that, while he takes him to be *the* figure who initiated the subordination of difference to identity—as is apparently demonstrated by the subordination of the multiplicity of our human ideas to eternal Ideas—he shows evidence, insofar as he is taken to be the *origin* of that subordination, of genuinely grappling with the *problem* of difference. Plato's thinking is, according to Deleuze, "like an animal in the process of being tamed, whose final resistant movements bear witness better than they would in a state of freedom to a nature soon to be lost: the Heraclitan world still growls in

Platonism."[23] As the one who initiates the law of the Same, Plato is the figure in whom we are most able to see the restrictive moves made against the more open and creative way of thinking that preceded him.

What is of further interest to Deleuze is that, whereas the later philosophical tradition would take up the primacy of the Same as an ontological truth, he claims that Plato places it in a position of primacy for primarily moral reasons; Plato *values* the subordination of human concepts to higher Ideas, due to the fact that phantasms, or simulacra, are dangerously unlimited and uncontrollable.[24] For Deleuze, in both *Difference and Repetition*[25] and *The Logic of Sense*,[26] Plato's dialectical method is not one of differentiation of species, but rather of a presentation of rivals, one of which he believes to be superior to the other. When the copy or icon is held to be superior to the phantasm, it is presented as such because Plato takes it to be morally superior. Deleuze appreciates this attitude; he likewise insists that preference ought to, and inevitably does, precede mere description of fact.[27] His point of disagreement with Plato, again, one of value rather than fact, lies in the presumption of the superiority of Being, of the same, of the participant.

Let us now turn to Deleuze's conception of the relationship between simulacra and true Ideas, in order to demonstrate how it is that he takes himself to be reversing, rather than rejecting, Platonism.

To reverse Platonism, according to Deleuze, "means to make the simulacra rise and to affirm their rights among icons and copies." Further, the "simulacrum is not a degraded copy. It harbours positive power which denies *the original and the copy. The model and the reproduction.*"[28] Elsewhere, he defines the reversal as "glorifying the reign of simulacra and reflection."[29] In other words, the Deleuzian reversal consists in recognizing that what had previously been understood to be a structure of originals producing copies that were subsequently erroneously taken up as originals, was in fact a structure of simulacra that, after producing copies, were themselves erroneously taken up as originals that never existed to begin with.[30] He claims that Plato took the establishment of difference to be "the supreme goal of dialectic"; however, where Plato intended to establish the difference between actual things and simulacra, for Deleuze, "[t]hings are simulacra themselves" and "simulacra are the superior forms."[31] Let us consider this notion further before presenting its implications.

For Deleuze, what we take up as Ideas take that form through repetition, which is to say by becoming part of our familiar symbolic landscape. We develop habitual predispositions towards a certain set of presumptions—such as, in the example of Socrates, the collective prejudices implicitly taken up by the Athenians—that then inform our method of selection and differentiation, which is to say that they inform how we evaluate what we call truth. What we call 'Ideas'—which we presume (whether tacitly or explicitly) to be eternal, and upon which we presume ourselves to be reliant—were themselves once mere fabrications. That is, they

are simulacra. They were taken up with sufficient force and recurrence that they began to be taken for granted, and thus to be treated as Ideas. Those ideas, when deployed, are then further transformed through repetition: "Difference ... appears to abandon its first generality and to be distributed in the repeating particular, but in such a way as to give rise to new living generalities."[32] The force is produced in repetition. Repetition transforms our fabrications into "Ideas" in three stages. First, it causes the fabrication to "disappear as it appears," meaning that over time, the fabrication is obscured *as* a fabrication; second, and as a consequence of the first, it is, through passive synthesis, taken up *as* already pre-existing our conscious apprehension of it; and third, it is finally taken up *as* "the reflected representation of a 'for-us' in the active synthesis," which is to say that it becomes a resource, a source, to be used for the purpose of creating new fabrications to be further taken up and transformed.[33] Repetition produces what Deleuze calls a "contraction," making simulacra appear to us as 'Ideas.'[34]

We should note that, on this much, Deleuze is in agreement with Plato as he characterizes him. That is, the structure of the fabrication of what appears as truth and Being out of untruth and non-Being in simulacra was already accounted for in the Platonic dialogues. As I mentioned before, however, Deleuze wants to reject the notion that simulacra are illegitimate, and we can now see why; for Deleuze, all meaning emerges from simulacra. There are no alternative 'real' Ideas to which we are able to escape from the dangers of falsehood and non-being. While he understands Plato to have identified a phenomenon that results from epistemological limitations to finite human life, but which ought to be distinguished from the metaphysical reality of the truth, Deleuze takes this epistemological limitation to render absolutely irrelevant—and for all intents and purposes non-existent—the metaphysically higher reality. What for Plato are falsehood and non-Being (terms whose normative connotations would render them unacceptable to Deleuze) are the *source*, the producers of what we call "Being" and "Truth." To reverse Platonism, for Deleuze, is thus to use Plato's insight into the human capacity to creatively transform non-being into truth, and to strip it of its metaphysical pretensions. It is, for Deleuze, to "institute a chaos which creates,"[35] or to champion our creative possibilities rather than to suppress them. The reversal, it turns out, is intended to liberate us from strict normative and metaphysical shackles that we have imposed upon ourselves without knowing it; it is to identify and overcome our inclination to uncritically take up what were mere *preferences* from the history of thought as our absolute domain of activity.

Having accounted for Deleuze's conception of truth, and the liberation produced by the reconstitution of the productive power of simulacra, let us now spend some time scrutinizing Deleuze's alternative vision. That is, let us consider the implications of this vision of reality: i.e., as an assortment of forces which gather together, through the contractions within the flux of difference, the materials

necessary to create what is taken up as truth, in what Deleuze calls "events."[36] We will do so by asking the following question: What is the engine that causes differences to diverge in such a way as to produce the contractions that constitute Events? More specifically, what is it that subsists and is therefore continually given for us to take up, what is the 'matter' of fabrication that is put through the flux of divergence, contraction and repetition? In order to sharpen this question, we will contrast Deleuze with Plotinus's notion of the Unparticipated One.[37]

III. Source of Difference in Plotinus; Source(s) of Difference in Deleuze

I began my presentation of Deleuze's account of Platonism in section I with his claim that "to participate is, at best, to rank second." We now have a richer conception of what this implies. If we are to conceive of ourselves as participating—in an utterly dependent, transient and inadequate manner—in something that is both greater than, and indifferent to us, then we implicitly subordinate ourselves from the start to what Deleuze would consider to be fabricated states of affairs of human design. In section II, I presented Deleuze's claim that Plato, unlike the tradition that ensued from his work, subordinated human life because he *preferred* that subordination, due to his fear of the wildness of the simulacra produced by human beings. Deleuze therefore—in contrast to Plato's preference, but in the spirit of what he takes to be Plato's method of making decisions based on preference—identifies himself as preferring to value the affirmation of life over its subordination to the intelligible realm. Again, Deleuze takes himself to be combating a *choice* that had, over 2400 years, been obscured as such and erroneously adopted as a description.

One of the figures responsible for systematizing the metaphysics of what Deleuze takes to be Plato's preference is Plotinus. Plotinus accounts for the productive force of our reality through what he calls 'The One.' The definitively unique character of The One requires some careful attention. This attention will be rewarding, I think, because it will allow us to see in what way it is conceived as a productive force to which we are subordinate, and how it nonetheless, surprisingly, finds similarity in Deleuze. Deleuze, I argue, will want to parse the value and meaning of this productive force differently, but in a way that shares salient structural similarities with the One. Let us begin, as Plotinus does, with the 'lower' hypostases that lead up to 'the One.'

i. The Plotinian Hypostases

For Plotinus, when we marvel at the world through our experiences of it—in both our sensible and our intelligible interactions with it—we are implicitly directing ourselves towards "the archetype of this universe and the truer reality."[38] That is,

for Plotinus, when we take an interest in our world, we are directing ourselves to a greater reality that gives us our experience. We find that the objects of our world are transient and ever-changing; "one time there is a Socrates, one time there is a horse—always some particular reality."[39] In identifying this flux, we appeal to the domain in which that flux operates. This domain is the *constancy* of flux as such. This constancy is found in what Plotinus calls 'Soul' (*psuche*). Soul is the totality of lived and living reality. We 'have' souls only insofar as we are expressions of Soul.[40]

Soul correspondingly expresses Intellect (*nous*), which is to say that it has its Being by way of the activity of Intellect. We can perhaps best understand this as the relationship of our sensible-intelligible world—i.e., the domain within which beings come to be for us, but also come to be in general—to the Ideas. In other words, Intellect is the domain of the Ideas, which are timeless and infinite, and whose existence makes possible what we typically understand to be 'reality' or Nature, which is itself a part of Soul. While the world of experience is a part of Intellect insofar as Intellect makes possible all of the transient instances that occur in life, or Soul, Intellect itself is not exhausted by, and is indeed indifferent to, the activity of Soul. Soul is derivative and accidental to Intellect.

This same structure reappears in Plotinus's account of the relationship of Intellect to the One (*to hen*). Just as our wonder at the world compelled us to ask from whence it is derived, we must also ask from whence Intellect is derived. For Plotinus, Intellect is the derivative of the activity of the One. It depends for its being on the One as its 'principle'; "all things come from a principle, whereas the principle itself is not at all the totality nor some one of the totality."[41] In other words, the One is the name given to that origin out of which intelligibility as such (and following from that, life as such) emerges. Just as Intellect makes possible the manifold and derivative plane of diversity that is Soul, the One likewise gives way to the dyad that is Intellect.[42] This, of course, insinuates why the One is given that name.

ii. The One as River's Source, as Dunamis

The principle that makes possible intelligibility as such must be simple. If it were not simple, that which makes possible intelligibility would be intelligible. But the intelligible belongs to Intellect, which obviously cannot be called upon to account for its own source. The intelligible realm, for Plotinus, is the realm of difference and differentiation. Thus, difference, sameness, motion, rest and being, as well as any other foundational principle we might think of—along with the Eleatic Stranger of the *Sophist*—as necessary for intelligibility as such, are all excluded from the first principle.[43] Because the One is that absolute source on which all differences, all life, all activity and all intelligibility is dependent, we can predicate *nothing* of the One. Properly understanding this is crucial. Its nature is utterly opaque to us: "In fact, it is none of these of which it is the principle, but it is of such a sort

that nothing can be predicated of it, neither being nor essence nor life, since it is above all of these. But if you should consider it by removing its being you will be in a state of wonder."[44] The primary underlying principle of all reality, upon which all difference *and all identity*, which is to say intelligibility, is dependent, must be called the One insofar as this best implies its simplicity and lack of predicability, its distinctness from number, from identity, from otherness.

The relationship of the One to reality as such is vividly presented by Plotinus in the allegory of the river and the spring. We are invited to imagine a spring "not having another source, giving itself to all rivers."[45] The spring is not the river, except insofar as it is that which makes the river. The river is not the spring, except insofar as it expresses the existence of the spring. Nonetheless, the spring, in the activity of being a spring, produces emanations that cause a river, a riverbank, a certain kind of dwelling-space for life, etc. In other words, the very activity of being the spring is the diffusion of itself in the form of things that it *is not*. We might say that there is nothing 'springly' about rivers, riverbanks or arable landscapes, yet they are the product of the very activity, the Being, of the spring. It is, for Plotinus, likewise the case with the One; its activity is diffusion or radiation, the results of which are Being, Difference, Sameness, Motion, and Rest, all of which constitute Intellect and (from Intellect) Soul, the lowest form of which is Nature.[46] The One is utterly indifferent to this, and nothing participates in its activity, yet all things are derived from that activity.[47]

Note the curious shared timbre in the relationship between higher and lower hypostases, to Deleuze's conception of the simulacrum. Both thinkers construe a source of productive power, a source of novelty which is indifferent in relation to what it creates. The activity of the given source is generative of more sources—i.e., more powers, each of whose activity is subsequently likewise generative. That is, the activity of Being, in either a Plotinian or a Deleuzian sense, is by its nature diffusive, productive and creative.[48] This creativity has at least two interesting characteristics: (1) The activity creates a *dependent* being; that is, the created is never fully self-sufficient, owing what it is to something else. In Deleuzian terms, participating in the Event that produces simulacra—which is equivalent to the activity or the diffusion of the One—depends on the accidental divergences that produced contraction, but nonetheless participants in the event are not self-sufficient—are, in other words, dependent—insofar as the domain of significance of their operations only occurs within that given Event. (2) The subsequent activity of the created being is of a *fundamentally different* sort from the creator; thus, the created is estranged from the creator. The created is dependent upon something that is utterly indifferent to it. Correspondingly, in Deleuze's thinking, participating in the Event is already to repeat it, to take it up anew, to transform it.[49]

iii. Deleuze's Alternate River

In response to these surprising similarities, one can imagine a way in which Deleuze might appropriate the river analogy to criticize Plotinus's Platonism. While Plotinus used the notion of a spring that has no other source, Deleuze would perhaps respond by claiming that all springs derive their "Being" from other sources. Indeed, it is telling that Plotinus immediately shifts from the river/spring analogy to a plant/root analogy.[50] If we were to perform a topological analysis of actual rivers, we would find that rivers flow into tributaries, and those tributaries themselves feed other sources, which produce more rivers, etc. In other words, Deleuze might want to point out that real rivers resemble much more the structure of the rhizome than the structure of the tree.[51]

The significance of this distinction lies in the fact that Deleuze would simply want to reject the pretence of a linear backwards movement to an absolute One. He would want, rather, to claim that the One must be itself constituted. That is, the source of our intelligible relation to the world itself has an origin, is itself an Event, one which has a prehistory, from which it emerges through a series of accidental contractions. For Deleuze, difference ought not to be made derivative to an absolute principle. Indeed, as we have seen, he insists that the metaphysical constructions of Plotinus follow from and grow out of a *moral* justification on Plato's part, and are therefore a misapprehension of Plato's (comprehensible, openly articulated and perhaps justified) fear of human freedom.

But let us press Deleuze's alternate vision. If he wishes to advocate a topological, rather than a metaphysical analysis, does he not presume the existence of the plane on which that topology is presented? Does the rhizome not require something out of which it produces its divergences, contractions, Events, and so on? From out of what does the comprehensive context in which differences generate Events emerge? These questions imply that perhaps Deleuze's simulacrum resembles, not the One, but Intellect, i.e., the domain of intelligibility that tacitly implies a plane within which it occurs. When he seeks to reject the appeal to a unitary source, he conceives of that unitary source as subsisting in the same ontological reality as its derivatives, when this is precisely *not* what Plotinus envisions. In the final section, I will consider these issues, particularly in relation to his inconsistent consideration of the notion of the unparticipated in Plotinus, and his own positing of an unparticipated "dark precursor."

IV. The Power (*Dunamis*) of the Unparticipated

I have twice now made reference to Deleuze's claim that "to participate is, at best, to rank second." This passage is followed by a reference to Plotinus's "triad of the "Unparticipated," the participated, and the participant."[52] We now know this to be a reference to the One, the Intellect, and the Soul, respectively. Shortly thereafter,

Deleuze defines the One: "The foundation is that which *possesses* something in a primary way."[53] This passage, and the repetition of its conception of possession throughout the analysis that follows, betrays a misunderstanding or unwillingness to accept the fullness of Plotinus's notion of the 'Unparticipated.' The One does not 'possess' *itself* first and then give itself away to the unworthy beings that follow from it. The One has *no* self-possession. Self-possession is a kind of dyad, and is dependent upon both sameness and difference, which, as we have seen, are derivative to and dependent upon the One, occurring within Intellect. Deleuze presents the neo-Platonic structure as one in which the same thing—the original—is passed down, and in the passing, degrades. This account presumes participation.[54] For Plotinus, what is passed down is the derivatively created domain of existence of the dependent being. As noted above, the domain produced in the activity of the One is *disassociated* from the One. Consider a paradigmatically Platonic example: The One does not possess the 'truest' justice, or participate fully in justice. Rather, the One creates the domain of Intelligibility in which justice as such can occur, which then makes possible the domain of *instances* of justice in Soul. Instances of justice are not deficient in the sense of being bad copies of intelligible justice, but are rather deficient in the sense of owing their existence to something beyond them, something that made them possible, and something which no specific instance of justice will ever fully capture.[55] They express justice, but necessarily leave open the possibility of continued, perhaps superior, expressions in future instances which themselves will fail to exhaustively express justice.

We are now, finally, able to consider what it is precisely that might be lacking in Deleuze's 'reversal of Platonism.' What is unaccounted for is the engine, the power, the *dunamis* that drives expression. This is lacking because Deleuze interprets Plotinus's metaphysical hierarchy as consisting primarily in participation in, rather than expression of, the manifestation of the more primary in its derivative.[56] We may well be entirely persuaded by the liberating element of Deleuze's vision of Pure Difference as the source of what we take up as Ideas governing our perception of the world. But there is, nonetheless, something powerful and, it seems, conceptually necessary, about Plotinus's vision of that of which we can predicate nothing at all, yet which is necessary for all activity and intelligibility to emerge. Indeed, we find a curious passage in Deleuze that perhaps demonstrates the need for such a principle in his own account of Pure Difference: "These differential systems [i.e., the contractions gathered together in the form of Events] with their disparate and resonating series, their dark precursor and forced movements, are what we call simulacra or phantasms."[57] What is this dark precursor, if not that which gives the possibility, the *dunamis*, of difference to be taken up?

Deleuze is well aware of the need to account for a source or a context of the simulacrum. However, his account, in *Difference and Repetition*, reads as though aiming to carefully evade the metaphysical traps he conceives in his misappre-

hended version of Plotinian Neoplatonism. That is, it disputes a notion of the primary—as self-same, self-identical and dominating of all difference—that is neither present in Plotinus, nor in any unproblematic way attributable to Plato. Consider a few passages. In reference to the dark precursor, Deleuze says that there "is no doubt that *there is* an identity belonging to the precursor ... [t]his 'there is,' however, remains perfectly indeterminate."[58] It, in other words, can by no means take a form that can be straight-forwardly or completely articulated, presumably because it is its nature to give (perhaps among other things) participation. Further, he says of the dark precursor that "it has no place other than that from which it is 'missing,' no identity other than that which it lacks: it is precisely the object = *x*, the one which 'is lacking in its place' as it lacks its own identity."[59] Nothing can be predicated of it. Compare this account of the dark precursor to Plotinus's One, as we have already seen: "[I]t is none of these of which it is the principle, but it is of such a sort that nothing can be predicated of it, neither being nor essence nor life, since it is above all of these. But if you should consider it by removing its being you will be in a state of wonder." Each constitutes an underlying engine of difference, activity, meaning and the generation of meaning, albeit an engine to which we can never, *in principle*, point, because the pointing itself emerges from it.

What is the significance of this surprising connection between Plotinus and Deleuze? It allows us to imagine a kind of normative ground to expressions of meaning that would otherwise seem to be lacking in Deleuze's reversal of Platonism. The power by which Events are made possible, and by which we are able to act creatively in the world is, it seems, something already predisposed to be taken up, given to us, *prior* to us. Of course, to call it some 'thing' would be to fail to do it justice; indeed, it would be to miss the mark completely. Whatever 'it' 'is,' it appears that we, and our activities, are its expressions. Is it possible that Deleuze would be forced to consent that we are the expressions, the affirmations, and not merely the phantasms, of the dark precursor? Would this make him a secret Platonist? If this were so, would it threaten perhaps the most powerful insight of his 'reversal of Platonism'—its subtlety disguised in its simplicity—that *things need never be as they are*, which is to say, that what we take to be identity and truth are illusions that appear, in Deleuze's words, "once the agent arrogates to itself an identity that it lacked"?[60] On the contrary, it would seem, rather, that this most powerful insight of Deleuze is the inevitable implication of Platonism.

Notes

1. Plotinus, "Enneads," in *Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, trans. and ed. John Dillon and Lloyd P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 1–177.

2. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 59.
3. Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," Appendix to *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 253–66.
4. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 266.
5. I take the language of primary and secondary activity from Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 63.
6. It is true that elsewhere, Deleuze offers an account of the unparticipated that more accurately reflects Plotinus's metaphysics, however, it is not in that text, but in these earlier texts that he explicitly and directly attacks what he takes to be Platonism, and it is therefore these texts to which I direct my attention. See *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 169–79.
7. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 119–26.
8. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 255.
9. Ibid., 258–9. There are several examples of *characters* throughout the Platonic dialogues who give voice to deep suspicions about sophists on these very grounds. This does not, however, unambiguously provide evidence of Plato's suspicions. Deleuze pays insufficient attention to this detail.
10. Plato, "Sophist," in *The Being of the Beautiful*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 235d8–e2.
11. See Martin Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 276: The eikos brings into being "that which only looks like something but properly is not."
12. Plato, *Sophist*, 236a6–8.
13. See John Sallis, *Being and Logos: Reading the Platonic Dialogues*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 483: "[I]n the case of a semblance [i.e., a phantasm] the negativity is more radical, less simply a lack and more a matter of distortion, dissimulation, concealment." See also Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, 278: "The mode of Being of the image in *phantastike* possesses still less of that which it is designed to present and render."
14. See James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 80: "The structure is right, as is the dialectical method, but they depend on the wrong kind of foundation, one based on identity, when it should be based on pure difference."
15. For example: "This genus [of the philosopher] is . . . scarcely much easier to discern than that of the god" (Plato, *Sophist*, 216c2–3); philosophers are said to "show up in all sorts of apparitions" (ibid., 216c6); and "it's no small and easy work . . . to distinguish with clarity what they [i.e., sophist, philosopher, statesman] severally are" (ibid., 217b3–4).
16. This is announced the previous day by Socrates at the end of the *Theaetetus*: "I have to go to the porch of the king and meet the indictment of Meletus which he's drawn up against me. But at dawn, Theaetetus, let's come back here to meet [i.e., for what

becomes the *Sophist*]," Plato, "Theaetetus," in *The Being of the Beautiful*, trans. Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), I.1–84, 210d1–4).

17. Among other things, Socrates says the oratory practiced by the sophist Gorgias is "a part of some business that isn't admirable at all ... in my account of it it isn't a craft but a knack and a routine." Plato, "Gorgias," trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 791–869; 463a2–b5.
18. Plato, "Apology," in *Four Texts on Socrates*, trans. Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 63–98, 18b.
19. For an excellent account of the nature of the old charges in the *Apology*, see John Russon, "The (Childish) Nature of the Soul in Plato's *Apology*," in *Reexamining Socrates in the Apology*, ed. John Russon and Patricia Fagan (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 191–205, especially 191–4.
20. Plato, *Apology*, 17a.
21. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 258.
22. Ibid., 259.
23. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 59.
24. Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition*, 80.
25. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 60.
26. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 254.
27. See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 59–61, for the discussion of Plato's distinction between 'claimants' and 'rivals.' It is in this sense that Plato offers "the means to overturn" the theory of forms. See Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2000), 34.
28. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 262 (italics in original).
29. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 66.
30. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 262.
31. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 67.
32. Ibid., 72.
33. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 71.
34. This is merely one aspect of contraction. Nonetheless, see the above passage from Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 72n34, which accounts for the production of 'living generalities' through contraction.
35. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 266.
36. Ibid., 53: "Events are the only idealities. To reverse Platonism is first and foremost to remove essences and to substitute event in their place, as jets of singularities."
37. Ibid., 255, where Deleuze makes reference to Plotinus's "Celebrated Neoplatonic triad."
38. Plotinus, *Ennead* V.1.4.6.
39. Ibid., V.1.4.20–22.
40. Ibid. V.1.2.35–40: Soul "does not make something alive by a part of it being broken up and put in each one, but all things live by the whole of it, and all soul is present

everywhere by its being like the father who begat it, according to its unity and its universality."

41. Ibid., III. 8.9.26–27.
42. Intellect is a dyad in the sense that it of necessity consists of both the activity of intelligence, and the object of that activity. For a good discussion of this structure, see O'Meara, *Plotinus*, 49.
43. The principles of intelligibility that I have named here are derived from the 'five kinds' in Plato's *Sophist* (254b–255d), and indeed are referenced by Plotinus himself as being essential participants in the realm of Intellect. See *Ennead* V.1.4.37–40, especially: "There must be Difference [for Intellect], so that there can be both thinking and being thought; if you were to remove Difference, it would be made silent, having become one."
44. Plotinus, *Ennead* III. 8.10.29–31.
45. Ibid. III.8.10.4
46. It is controversial in Plotinus scholarship whether or not nature (*phusis*) constitutes a fourth hypostasis, albeit one never explicitly recognized as such in the *Enneads*. See H. J. Blumenthal, "Nous and Soul in Plotinus: Some Problems of Demarcation," in *Soul and Intellect: Studies in Plotinus and Later Platonism* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 204.
47. This "principle of undiminished giving" has been concisely summarized by John Bussanich, "Plotinus' Metaphysics of the One," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38–65, 49: "the One (a) produces eternally, (b) from an inexhaustible reality (VI.9.9.3–4), (c) without undergoing any change or alteration (III.8.8.46–8), and (d) without deliberation or inclination to produce (V.i.6.25–7, V.3.12.28–33; cf. V.5.12.43–9) and without knowledge of its products (VI.7.39.19–33)."
48. See Plotinus, *Ennead* V.1.6.30–35.
49. See Deleuze's account of Eternal Return in *Difference and Repetition*, 264–5. See also Jeffrey A. Bell, *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 87: "An event is not separable from the 'present' of some body or state of affairs ... and an event eludes this present, being simultaneously past and future."
50. Plotinus, *Ennead* III.8.10.6–7: "Or think of the life of a great plant that courses through the whole of it while its principle remains undispersed in all of it, since it is in a way seated in its root."
51. See Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7: "[A]ny point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order."
52. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 255.
53. Ibid. (my italics).
54. Again, this structure is more accurately presented by Deleuze elsewhere in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 171: "Everything emanates from this principle [i.e., the One], it gives forth everything. But it is not itself participated, for participation occurs only through what it gives, and in what it gives."

55. Compare to Deleuze's characterization of Platonic justice, *Difference and Repetition*, 62.
56. It is worth noting that the term "hierarchy," so readily associated with Plotinus, was never used in his writings. Indeed, see O'Meara ("The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, 66–81, 66–67, 78n1), who compellingly argues that "priority" would more accurately reflect Plotinus's position, insofar as the latter term indicates primarily an ordering of reality, rather than a mere valuing of reality.
57. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 126.
58. Ibid., 119.
59. Ibid., 120. Compare Jacques Derrida, "Khora," in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. Ian Mcleod (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 89–150, 95–6. Derrida makes an identical point in his description of the account of the khora in Plato's *Timaeus* as that which gives place to that which is, and therefore that which must be presumed, but which cannot appear except as that which it makes appear, which is to say that it cannot appear. As does Deleuze, Derrida presents a very contemporary notion (i.e., one that provides a metaphysical foundation for the radical critical analysis of the metaphysics of presence) that is derived from Plato. See Plato, "Timaeus," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Ltd., 1997), 1224–91, 51a8: "If we speak of [the khora] as an invisible and characterless sort of thing, one that receives all things and shares in a most perplexing way in what is intelligible, a thing extremely difficult to comprehend, we shall not be misled."
60. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 120.

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