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BOOK REVIEW

Introducing Deleuzian Politics

Nathan Widder, *Political Theory after Deleuze*, London: Continuum, 2012.

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Nathan Widder's Political Theory after Deleuze offers a coolly considered introduction to the politics of Gilles Deleuze. The book engages with a number of the most significant aspects of Deleuzian thinking, including his conceptualisation of micropolitics, which is posited by Widder as Deleuze's most important contribution to contemporary political theory. Not only is the text an invaluable introductory resource for the study of Deleuzian politics, it is also a significant text for the introduction of political theory more generally.

As part of the *Deleuze Encounters* series, edited by Ian Buchanan, Nathan Widder is tasked with introducing students of philosophy to Deleuzian political theory. This task is undertaken with precision and care, resulting in an introduction that is both comprehensive and engaging.

Starting out with an examination of the ontological turn in the political theory, Widder goes on to introduce a number of the most important aspects of Deleuze's political thought. At every point Widder considers the thought of other thinkers, including Freud, Foucault, Hegel, Lacan and Nietzsche, among others, whose work influences and interacts with that of Deleuze. While this is, of course, vital in order to contextualize Deleuze's work, at times it seems to detract from the focus on Deleuzian theory. It is where Deleuzian thought is put at the forefront that Widder's text excels. When Widder spotlights Deleuze's perspective it is possible to understand the distinctiveness of the challenge that his work poses to the accepted ideas of identity

and the subject that continue to dominate both political theory and practice. This is especially so in regards to: firstly, Deleuze's particular conception of ontology; secondly, the Deleuzian perspective concerning desire and desiring-machines; and, thirdly, Deleuze's ideas concerning micropolitics.

Following his exploration of the greater ontological turn, Widder lucidly introduces Deleuze's ontology of difference; otherwise known as an 'ontology of sense'. Like the majority of Deleuze's thought, his ontological perspective is a positive one. Rather than conceiving difference as negative, as a *not-*, Deleuzian philosophy considers difference in terms of pure, constitutive *relation*. As such, instead of understanding identity as made up of essential properties, Deleuzian thinking turns identity on its head, understanding it in terms of the constitutive relations within which it is comprised. Difference is understood in and of itself, rather than as a concept through which to apply contrast. Widder goes on to expand upon this, exploring the various aspects of Deleuzian ontology including the virtual and the actual, repetition and the event, and the simulacrum and the simulation of identity. This exploration of complex theoretical concepts is put forward dynamically, in such a way that the truly unique Deleuzian perspective on political theory is not only contextualised but also made appealing and accessible.

One of the most dynamic elements of Deleuzian theory is that concerning the concept of desire. Widder introduces this in relation to Foucault, particularly examining the placement of desire with regards to power. Where Deleuze's perspective differs from that of Foucault is in his focus on the revolutionary capacity and production value of desire. Rather than understanding desire as founded upon lack, Deleuzian theory considers lack to be an effect, a construction, of necessary social and desire-driven production. Widder clearly states the real productive capacity of desire, as perceived by Deleuze (and Guattari). He makes patent the functioning of desire as a machine, as a principle of production and as an industrious assemblage. This clarification is concise and precise, a further testament to Widder's careful reflection on the work at hand.

In his preface, Widder identifies what he takes to be the primary contribution that Deleuze's work makes to contemporary political theory debates, namely: *we are micropolitical before we are political*. Interestingly, Widder does not return directly to this central tenet of Deleuzian philosophy until the final section of the text. Regardless of its position in the chronology of the book however, Widder illuminates the subject with his, now familiar, cool assurance. It is this layer of politics—micropolitics, what Widder calls the 'third kind' (p. 134), which focuses upon creative becoming, based on a Nietzschean perspective that seeks to move '*beyond good and evil*'. This element of Deleuzian thought is crucial as it is this which designates that individuals and collectives must move beyond the categories of identity and opposition that exhaust them. Only through opening

themselves to this creative understanding are individuals and collectives able to also understand the layers and networks of multiplicity within which they live. As Widder notes, Deleuze and Guattari refer to this as a project of 'turning oneself into a body without organs or BoW' (p. 135). This reimagining of the individual and the subject is central to Deleuzian philosophy. Widder paints the picture clearly for the reader, in a way that allows us to understand how the various tenets—the *multiplicities*, let us say—of Deleuze's work are intertwined and connected within his overarching ontology.

Of course, as an enamoured reader of the original Deleuzian texts, as a reader won over by the lyricism and humour of Deleuze's (and Guattari's) own words, it is often jarring to read his work presented in such a condensed and stream-lined manner. However, upon final reflection I am compelled to commend Widder on this text. Not only does he introduce the reader, in a straightforward way, to Deleuze's distinctive political theory, but he also provides a more general introduction to the field. As such, this text is not only one that I would surely have appreciated as an undergraduate student uninitiated in the subject of political theory and the vibrant work of Gilles Deleuze, but also one that I appreciate now, as a postgraduate scholar.

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