

## NEW HORIZONS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY 2009

### KEYNOTE

#### Deleuze, Rawls and Poststructuralist Political Liberalism

Prof. Paul Patton, The University of New South Wales

It is well known what normative political philosophy has to offer to poststructuralist political thought, namely a more adequate account of the normative bases of its critique of current social and political institutions. While the criticisms of poststructuralism's normative inadequacy are often overstated, they are broadly correct in pointing to the need to identify more precisely the normative principles implicit in the poststructuralist's critical stance toward liberal capitalist democracies.

It is less known what poststructuralism has to offer normative political philosophy. In this paper, I propose to compare the different kinds of 'constructivism' found in Deleuze and Rawls, in order to suggest some underlying affinities. This will allow me to suggest one relatively specific answer to the question posed above. Given that Rawls's conception of the purposes of political philosophy includes criticism of present basic institutions of society, and that he shares this 'utopian' goal with Deleuze, then Deleuze's conception of the nature of philosophical concepts has something useful to contribute to political liberalism. Deleuze's insistence on the 'mobility' of philosophical concepts and on political philosophy's role in the creation of new forms of life suggests a way of understanding Rawls's principles of justice as open to the ever-present possibility of new forms of democratic society.

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*This keynote was similar to a paper Paul Patton submitted to the journal Deleuze Studies, called [Utopian Political Philosophy: Deleuze and Rawls](#) (Volume 1, Page 41-59 DOI 10.3366/dls.2007.1.1.41, ISSN 1750-2241, Available Online June 2007.) This paper begins:*

*"One of the remarkable and appealing features of Deleuze's way of doing philosophy is its commitment to movement in thought. [...] Deleuze and Guattari define philosophical concepts as open-ended multiplicities [...susceptible] to variation as components are modified in the passage from one plateau to the next, forming a 'rhizome-book' as an assemblage of open concepts that has no argumentative or narrative conclusion."*

*It also follows another of his papers titled Political Normativity and Poststructuralism: The Case of Gilles Deleuze, [available online \(no subscription needed\)](#).*

*Hence, these notes will be brief.*

#### **Utopianism**

*Patton describes both Rawls's and Deleuze's philosophy as Utopian.*

*Rawls offers an immanent political utopianism through "realistic utopianism"; 'probing the limits of practicable political possibility' by enabling us to ask what a just and democratic society would be like 'under reasonably favourable but still possible historical conditions'.*

*Deleuze talks of two types of territorialization; relative and absolute. Relative is historical (lines of flight), while the absolute exists in the creation of concepts; philosophy. For Deleuze, with utopian*

*politics relative deterritorialization is extended/picked out in the absolute. It is immanent in historical deterritorialization.*

### **Constructivism**

*Deleuze's is constructivist via creation of concepts. Laying out of the plane of immanence and conceptual persona. These concepts are open-ended. Deleuze and Guattari speak of "Becoming Democratic", as a continual movement.*

*This is in contrast to Rawls's stable construct, immobile for political debate regarding well ordered society. Rawls does give room for concepts changing, but not a detailed account.*

*For Patton, Deleuze offers a helpful account of "normative correction", and a better understanding of political concepts. This account is closely tied to Deleuze's understanding of the creation of concepts.*

### **Creation of Concepts**

*For Rawls: Indeterminate "ideas" (such as the rights of individual) inform the creation of "concepts" (such as Justice and Original Position), which allow for systematic "conceptions"; principles for deciding which concepts are arbitrary. With Rawl's constructivism, the content of the concept (for example Justice) is procedurally constructed not from historically loaded ideas, but as the outcome of a dialogue between ideas. This is definitely not the same as Deleuze.*

*Deleuze does not see the creation of concepts (i.e. Philosophy) as the result of a conversation. In "What is Philosophy" Deleuze describes a "horror" of discussions within Philosophy. This is his account of a 'rhizome-book' of movement in concepts (in Patton's paper above).*

*Deleuze sees distinct concepts, but something "passes between them". So internal consistency, but "exo-consistency" between changes. Source of mobility through these connections. "Relations to concepts provide pathways to others". This is linked to the plane of immanence, and the (changing) image of thought; searching for different image of thought. An account of "Becoming Just" contour configuration, constellation.*

*Patton sees the mobility provided by Deleuze as a useful awareness, thinks it is apparent that the creation of Justice is exemplary of Deleuze's concept creation: Justice (Rawls) is a mobile concept (Deleuze). Conception of Justice becomes historical as "incremental conceptions". "Subject to assumption that firmly held convictions change". Patton examines how Rawls was Looking at Justice as primary social concept, but focussed on Stability, as he wanted to say the Just was more stable. Through the forces between concepts, the one effected the other.*

### **Conceptual personae**

*From What is Philosophy, by Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari:*

*"The conceptual persona is not the philosopher's representative but, rather, the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal conceptual persona and of all the other personae who are the intercessors, the real subjects of his philosophy. Conceptual personae are the philosopher's "heteronyms," and the philosopher's name is the simple pseudonym of his personae."*

*For Rawls; Rational, Citizens, and Reasonable.*

*For Deleuze: "Friend of concept" (Nietzsche, Blanchot), set up to measure forces outside of philosophy. Future transformations. Becoming.*

**Questions:**

*Q: How to create concepts and judge them?*

*A: You can't have a system for judging. Deleuze would say Philosophers just create concepts, they are not qualified to say if they're good or not.*

*Q: Aren't there significant issues with difference in Subject between Rawls and Deleuze and Guattari?*

*A: Yes. Problems with rationality. Configurations of Desire (Deleuze) vs Rationality (Rawls). For Deleuze and Guattari, rationality is historicised.*