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Chaosmos Against the Metaphysics of One, or a Defence Against Badiou's Criticism on Deleuze

Introduction

Deleuze's understanding of Stoicism has a crucial role in his project, *The Logic of Sense*.¹ He gives a privileged place to Stoicism and conceives it as embodying a new image of philosophy which overcomes the opposition between the Presocratics and Platonism. For Deleuze, Stoicism is linked to a new *logos* animated with paradox and new philosophical values, according to which all elements are contained in all things, i.e., in the *depth* of bodies everything is mixture, and there are incorporeals lying at the *surface*. In contrast to Platonism, there is no rule according to which one mixture rather than another might be considered bad and, in contrast to the Presocratics, there is no immanent thought capable of fixing the order in the depth of *phusis*.² The Stoics reinterpreted the Presocratics and Plato, and introduced a new philosophy, according to which there are local disorders in the world which can be reconciled in the Great mixture, so that it is a world of terror, and there is the autonomy of the surface independent of depth and height, so that the distinction no longer passes between the universal and the particular or between substance and accidents.³ Beside these positive aspects of Stoicism, as John Sellars states, the Stoic understanding of incorporeals is vital for Deleuze in order to give an account of linguistic meaning or sense as a non-existing entity.⁴ As Deleuze quotes Bréhier, for the Stoics, "there are two planes of being, something that no one had done before them: on the one hand, real profound being, force; on the other, the plane of facts, which frolic on the surface of being, and constitute an endless multiplicity of incorporeal beings."⁵ Since these incorporeal events spread out along the border of corporeals, there is no simple ontological separation between these two planes. Deleuze claims that his reinterpretation of Stoic philosophy is thus a way to overcome or to reverse Platonism that is deeply rooted in Western metaphysics.

1 Deleuze 1990.

2 Deleuze 1990, 130.

3 Deleuze 1990, 132.

4 Sellars 2006, 157.

5 Deleuze 2006, 5.

1. Badiou's criticism of Deleuze's philosophy as a metaphysics of One

Badiou, contrary to mainstream approaches, claims that Deleuze's philosophy is fundamentally based on his conception of Stoicism, is neither a doctrine of the heterogeneous multiplicity of desires, nor a conceptual critique of totalitarianism, nor a post-metaphysical modernity. Instead of being a philosophy that reverses Platonism, it is rather a philosophy that submits thinking to a renewed concept of the One.⁶ Badiou criticizes Deleuze's notion of Being harshly by focusing on Deleuze's affiliation with Stoicism; for him, Deleuze follows Stoic doctrines throughout all his works, regarding his ontological pre-comprehension of Being as One. In this vein, I will first explicate Badiou's criticism of Deleuze's philosophy. And then, by addressing the points where Deleuze diverges from the Stoic model he depicts, I will endeavour to defend Deleuze's position regarding the relation of Deleuze's philosophy and Nietzsche's understanding, which Deleuze explicitly turns to when diverging from the Stoic doctrine of *cosmos*. Rather than the Stoic conception of *cosmos*, Deleuze introduces the notion of *chaos-cosmos* or *chaosmos*, which he inherits from James Joyce and links to the Nietzschean understanding of divergence and its affirmation.

Badiou claims that although Deleuze is the first one who is against the metaphysical couple of one/multiple, the occurrence and the qualitative rising up of the One in his philosophy entails the submission of multiplicity to this concept of the One.⁷ By introducing the concept of disjunctive synthesis, Deleuze endeavours to ruin traditional metaphysical approaches, for instance the vulgar understanding of phenomenological intentionality, but "keeping with his supposition of the One, Deleuze cannot but approve of the fact that dissymmetrical couple composed of the reflexive subject and the object... is replaced by the unity of unveiling-veiling."⁸ In detail, Badiou conceives Deleuze's idea of the univocity of Being as the sign of the contingent coherence of the One-All, so that beings which are multiple, different, engendered by a disjunctive synthesis, disjointed and divergent, are actually multiple forms of Being. From a similar perspective, Badiou puts forth that according to Deleuze's concept of the One, the differences in Deleuze's narration can be considered as named beings which can only be viewed under a species or a type. In this sense, beings are nothing but local degrees of intensity or, in the Deleuzian terminology, inflections of power that is another name of Being and beings which are only modalities of the One. Moreover, since all beings are bodies and incorporeals are not beings, the multiplicity of senses has no real status. Although it seems that there are unity of the power and quality and the multiplicity of

6 Badiou 1999, 10.

7 Badiou 1999, 10.

8 Badiou 1999, 22.

divergent simulacra or events, they denote exactly the same thing, i.e., the univocity of Being.

Badiou also emphasizes that in order to say that there is a single sense, two names are necessary.⁹ He claims that Deleuze axiomatically introduces the One as the infinite power of life and its intensification as becomings, which are expressions of the One.¹⁰ In this sense, a seemingly duality in Deleuze's works represents only two aspects of the same thing. For instance, the active aspect of things, which consists of singular differentiation or divergent simulacra of univocal Being, and the passive aspect, which is comprised of actual beings or numerically distinct states of affairs as equivocal significations, dissolve in and cause what Deleuze calls "extra-being".¹¹

2. Deleuze's philosophy as a philosophy of death

Badiou furthers his criticism by examining the notion of the power of inorganic life operating in us, according to which we are traversed by an actualization of the One-All. "[I]n reality, we are ourselves chosen, far from being, as the philosophy of representation would have it, the center, or seat, of a decision."¹² Besides, for Badiou, the figure of automaton, which can be linked to the notion of the "machinery" that yields sense, represents a subjective ideal. According to this reading, the outside is an agency of active forces, i.e., the inorganic life, which selects the individual, and submits it to the choice of choosing. "It is in precisely the automaton, purified in this way, that thought seizes for the outside, as the unthinkable thought."¹³ The conditions of thought are a matter of purification and exposure to the sovereignty of the power, i.e., the One, so that thinking is not conceived as the effusion of a personal capacity, it is rather pre-individual and non-personal. Therefore, thinking hereafter can only be conceived as an act which occurs according to a hierarchy that counts things and beings from the point of the view of power. Additionally, since everything, every individuality or every identity evaporates or dissipates in this inorganic power of life, Badiou claims that Deleuze holds a philosophy of death.

For, if the event of thought is the ascetic power of letting myself be chosen (the Deleuzian form of destiny) and being borne, qua purified automaton, wherever hubris carries me; if, therefore, thought exists as the fracturing of my actuality and the dissipation of my

9 Badiou 1999, 27.

10 Badiou 2009.

11 Badiou 1999, 32–33 .

12 Badiou 1999, 11.

13 Badiou 1999, 11.

limit; but if, at the same time, this actuality and this limit are, in their being, of the same “stuff” as that which fractures and transcends them (given that there is, definitively, only the One-All); and if, therefore, powerful inorganic life is the ground both of what arrays me in my limit and of what incites me, insofar as I have conquered the power to do so, to transcend this limit: then it follows that the metaphor for the event of thought is dying, understood as an immanent moment of life.¹⁴

For Badiou, Deleuze’s notion of the event as the powerful inorganic life or as the eternal return of the identical is something composing life. The event is like a theme of the musical component that is organized by it. “The event is not what happens to a life, but that which is in that which happens, or that which happens in that which happens”.¹⁵ The Event is the undifferentiated power of the Same or powerful inorganic life which thus composes multiplicities as the One or which is the composition in different variations.

So far, Badiou’s criticism on Deleuze’s philosophy, which is based on two major points, is explicated. The first and general point of criticism is that Deleuze’s understanding submits multiplicity to the One or the Being under the concept of the univocity of Being. Thus, Deleuze preserves the metaphysics of the One that is inherited from traditional Western philosophy, which Deleuze tries to overcome or reverse. Beings are nothing but local differentiations of the same Being. Moreover, Badiou reads the notion of the eternal return as something synonymous with Being and its emanative power regulates or organizes *chaos* or the *cosmos*. In this regard, Deleuze only affirms the subordinate status of multiplicity or simulacra. The second point, which is also associated with the first one is that by conceiving life as the inorganic flow of which everything is part of or in which every individuality is dissolved, entails that individuals or identities are only modalities of an infinite super-existence and the comprehension of death as the paradigm of all events as decomposition in the inorganic flow.

3. Deleuze’s reinterpretation of Stoicism for a new philosophy

In response to the first criticism, Badiou’s incessant efforts to pair up Deleuze’s whole philosophy with Stoicism leads him to conceive Deleuze’s understanding of the univocity of Being as a unity underlying multiplicity and/or multiplicity as the self-differentiation of the One.

¹⁴ Badiou 1999, 12.

¹⁵ Badiou 2009, 383.

What radically explains the kinship of Deleuze and the Stoics ... [is] that they also thought of Being directly as totality. One should not be misled by the use of the word “anarchy” to designate the nomadism of singularities, for Deleuze specifies “crowned anarchy”.¹⁶

Deleuze’s notion of the unification of all events is taken into consideration as the unity-totality of Being similar to the philosophy of “the Stoics, who referred their doctrine of the proposition to the contingent coherence of the One-All; Spinoza, obviously, for whom the unity of Substance barred the way to any and all ontological equivocality; Nietzsche, who was to “realize univocity in the form of repetition in the eternal return”.¹⁷ Thus, without ever mentioning differences between philosophies of Deleuze, the Stoics, Spinoza and Nietzsche in this context; Badiou groups them together and criticizes Deleuze according to the affiliation of his philosophy with these philosophies. The junction that brings all these philosophies together into one group is their understanding of *cosmos* which, Badiou insists, preserves a Stoic core. However, although Deleuze reinterprets Stoicism and considers it as an inspiration of a new philosophy, his philosophy diverges from Stoicism *vis-à-vis* their understanding of *cosmos*, as he depicts in *The Logic of Sense*.

As stated earlier, according to Deleuze, on one hand, Stoicism is a reinterpretation of the Presocratics, according to whom there is a world of terrors, i.e., there are local disorders. On the other hand, it is also a re-interpretation of Platonism from the perspective of autonomous surface on which there are incorporeal events.¹⁸ In this sense, in Stoicism, there are causes referred in depth to a unity and effects maintaining another sort of relation at the surface. Destiny is described as the unity and chain between physical causes among themselves.¹⁹ Incorporeal effects are either the effects of these causes or enter into another type of relation called quasi-causality, which is incorporeal and independent of any notion of necessity. Here, the Stoic paradox arises when we consider the destiny or necessity in relation to the notions of affirmation and denial. Following Deleuze, the Stoic sage is free in two manners despite the notions of destiny and necessity. First, one is free because one’s soul can attain the interiority of perfect physical causes, i.e., conforming to destiny. Second, one’s mind may enjoy very special relations established between the effects in a situation of pure exteriority, i.e., conforming to exterior effects and their relations. Deleuze calls these affects as events-effects. Here, we need to open a parenthesis about *lekta* (sayables), i.e., events-effects. They are incorporeal events produced when a physical body acts upon another one,²⁰ or in the relation between or within themselves. For instance, “the scalpel, a body, becomes the cause to the flesh, a body, of

16 Badiou 1999, 12.

17 Badiou 1999, 24.

18 Deleuze 2009, 157–158.

19 Deleuze 2009, 198.

20 Deleuze 2009, 4–5.

the incorporeal predicate 'being cut'. And again, the fire, a body, becomes the cause to the wood, a body, of the incorporeal predicate 'being burnt'.²¹ The relation between these incorporeal events or events-effects also produces another sort of events-effects. The relation between events forms the extrinsic relations of compatibility and incompatibility. In other words, events are not like concepts; events alleged to be contradictions result from their incompatibility. In this regard, as Deleuze states, events-effects are relations of expression between physical causes or between their ideational quasi-cause(s).

After the necessary explanation of events-effects, we are at the point where Deleuze interrogates the nature of these events-effects or expressive relations. As Deleuze imposes, since we are dealing with a relation of effects, we cannot claim that this relation is causal. And since the levels of destiny (the chain between bodies) and of events-effects are different, the same causal relation that applies on the level of bodies does not apply here. Following Deleuze, the relation that brings destiny on the level of events and the relation between events must not be brute causality, these are rather "aggregate of non-causal correspondences which form a system of echoes, of resummptions and resonances, a system of signs – in short, an expressive quasi-causality."²² As in the example of butterflies, we see that the butterflies of one species are either grey and weak, or vigorous and black. On the level of events, there is only an incompatibility observed and then we assign a physical causality to this incompatibility. Thus, the relations of events among themselves, express primarily non-causal correspondence or compatibilities or incompatibilities and then physical causality is inscribed secondarily in the depth of the body.²³

4. Deleuze's divergence from Stoicism and his reading of Nietzsche

The point where Deleuze diverges from the Stoics is the following. For Deleuze, the Stoics returned to the simple physical causality or to the logical contradiction, instead of a-logical compatibilities or incompatibilities. Although Deleuze does not provide textual proof of this, the Stoics ultimately determine the unique event as Zeus, a substantial, totalizing instance which creates a unity on both sides of the ontological divide, i.e., corporeal and incorporeal event-effects.

On the one hand, then, eventual quasi-causality was replaced by pure physical causality founded on Zeus as *causa sui*; and on the other hand, Zeus, as the "set of all sets" or "name of names", brought the ongoing determination of the event to an end by anchoring the "determinations of signification", and thereby also engendering a strong principle of

21 *Adv. Math.* 9. 211, quoted by Bowden 2011, 23.

22 Deleuze 1990, 170.

23 Deleuze 1990, 171.

logical contradiction (at the expense of the much looser, experimental relations of eventual compatibility and incompatibility). Deleuze must therefore look for a way of determining the event in its “ideal play” only, in accordance with the above stated problematic.²⁴

As Deleuze states, “[events] are not like concepts; it is their alleged contradiction which results always from a process of a different nature.”²⁵ This is the point where Deleuze turns to Leibniz.²⁶ For him, Leibniz is the first theoretician of a-logical incompatibilities and thus the first important theoretician of the event, for whom events cannot only be considered in terms of identity and contradiction. Leibniz, by offering the terms “compossibility” and “impossibility” which are defined in an original and pre-individual manner and cannot be reduced to identity and contradiction, claims the anteriority and originality of the event in relation to the predicate. Following Deleuze, compossibility is the convergence of series which singularities of events form and impossibility is the divergence of such series. In this sense, “convergence and divergence are entirely original relations which cover the rich domain of a-logical compatibilities and incompatibilities, and therefore form an essential component of the theory of sense.”²⁷

According to Deleuze, Leibniz makes a negative use of disjunction as one of exclusions, and he accounts for this position by imposing the hypothesis of a God that grasps all events.²⁸ By distributing divergence into impossibilities, divergence is excluded and by retaining maximum convergence as the criterion of the best possible world, the similar is preserved or the divergent is excluded in the name of a superior finality.²⁹ However, on the level of events, disjunction and divergence cease to be negative. The distance between events permits the measuring of contraries, or contrary events, so that the distance on the level of surface is a positive distance and through this difference two things or two determinations are affirmed. This notion, according to Deleuze, is very important, because it excludes depth and all elevations that restore the negative and the identity.³⁰ On this point, Deleuze gives Nietzsche’s case as an example in which the affirmation of the positive distance between being sick and being healthy is accomplished. In this way, Nietzsche experiences a superior health even when he is sick.

For Deleuze, Nietzschean divergence is neither the connective synthesis (if... then), nor the conjunctive series (and), nor the disjunctive series (or). Rather than

24 Bowden 2011, 47.

25 Deleuze 1990, 170.

26 “[Pour] il ne s’agit ni de découvrir une tradition ni d’établir des influences, ni d’abandonner ni de réformer le stoïcisme, mais d’organiser un relais philosophique en spécifiant pour chaque auteur le passage de témoin conceptuel qui s’effectue.” Cf. Bénatouïl 2003, 19.

27 Deleuze 1990, 172.

28 Deleuze 1990, 172.

29 Deleuze 1990, 260.

30 Deleuze 1990, 173.

those excluding relations, Nietzschean divergence can be observed in the “either... or” relation which is open to the infinite number of predicates, so that the centre, its identity as concept or self is lost.³¹ It is important to note that the disjunctive synthesis negates neither the connective synthesis nor the conjunctive synthesis. It is *either* positive, unlimited, and inclusive, which affirms the divergence of the series in a world *or* it allows convergences to emerge.³² Here, the communication of events replaces the exclusion of events. One can realize that s/he is a process or series of events.³³

[A]t the surface each event communicates with the other through the positive character of its distance and by the affirmative character of the disjunction. The self merges with the very disjunction which it liberates and places outside of itself the divergent series as so many impersonal and pre-individual singularities. Counter-actualization is already infinitive distance instead of infinite identity.³⁴

5. Deleuze’s notion of *chaosmos* beyond the “One-multiple” duality

Here there is a unity of divergent series, insofar as they are divergent or, infinitive distance means that there is *chaos*, the centre of which is perpetually thrown off. This *chaos*, which can only be conceived as the power of affirmation or the power to affirm all heterogeneous series, is an unformed one and “it ‘complicates’ within itself all the series”³⁵ – in other words, the differential or the difference itself is primarily affirmed. The constitution of *chaos* that Deleuze depicts is the divergence of *chaos*, decentering of circles. The divergence of these series without a centre constitutes a *chaosmos*, which complicates within itself. In this sense, the *chaos* cannot be considered as a unity that underlies multiplicity or a self-differentiation of the One. Here, Deleuze’s notion of *chaosmos*, which is different from the notion of the Stoic *cosmos* as a coherent unity/entity, is beyond the one/multiple duality contrary to Badiou’s criticism. Besides, Deleuze represents the univocal being as an extra-Being, “[a] position in the *void* of all events in one, an expression in the nonsense of all senses in one [italics added].”³⁶ Univocity is uniqueness at the level of sense on the surface of being, because it is not the identity of beings or what is (said to be); but a feature of being as sense.

31 Deleuze 1990, 174.

32 I would like to thank the referee for the clarification of this point.

33 Sellars 2006, 166.

34 Sellars 2006, 166.

35 Deleuze 1990, 260.

36 Deleuze 1990, 180.

In connection with this, the notion of difference in Deleuze's understanding is not an inscription of difference or a difference in the identity of a concept. As Nathan Widder shows in an example: Socrates and Plato are both human beings but they are distinguished by the irreducible "thisness" of each of them so that a difference makes an individual unique and prevents it from being subsumed under an identity; in this case the identity of its species and cannot be conceived by giving reference to or in connection with higher categories.³⁷ With the notion of the univocity of being, there is a possibility of a connection between diverging series and/or irreducible heterogeneous differences through these divergences and/or differences which are again incompatible with identity.

[V]ariations, like degrees of whiteness, are individuating modalities of which the finite and the infinite constitute precisely singular intensities. From the point of view of its own neutrality, univocal being therefore does not only implicate distinct attributes or qualitative forms which are themselves univocal, it also relates these and itself to intensive factors or individuating degrees which vary the mode of these attributes or forms without modifying their essence in so far as this is being.³⁸

In this sense, difference is no longer tied to transcendental One and without invoking an identity, difference establishes a common sense among heterogeneous beings and individual differentiations. For instance, one can put forth "God is wise" and "Socrates is wise". In other words, one can establish a common sense between heterogeneous beings without invoking any identity between God and Socrates, human comprehension and God's wisdom.³⁹

6. Deleuze's eternal recurrence and Being beyond the duality of personal and impersonal

Deleuze endeavours to explicate the notion of the eternal return in order to show these differences which cannot be mediated. In contrast to Badiou's understanding of the eternal recurrence that regulates and organizes *chaos* as the informal law which can be considered to be subordinated to the Same,⁴⁰ the eternal return is a plastic principle which is differential in nature – i.e., the return of the difference itself.

37 Widder 2001, 441.

38 Deleuze 1994, 39–40.

39 Widder 2001, 444.

40 Badiou 1999, 69.

The eternal return does not cause the same and the similar to return, but is itself derived from a world of pure difference. Each series returns, not only in the others which imply it, but for itself, since it is not implied by the others without being in turn fully restored as that which implies them. The eternal return has no other sense but this: the absence of any assignable origin – in other words, the assignation of difference as the origin, which then relates different to different in order to make it (or them) return as such. In this sense, the eternal return is indeed the consequence of a difference which is originary pure, synthetic and in-itself (which Nietzsche called will to power).⁴¹

In this context, with the doctrine of the eternal recurrence, as in Jon Roffe's conception, the thought and the production of the "absolute different", difference precedes the notion of the One.⁴² Contrary to Badiou's understanding, according to which the eternal return is a principle that is the guarantor of difference and of chance, it is the affirmation of all chances in a single gesture.

The eternal return is a force of affirmation, but it affirms everything of the multiple, everything of the different, everything of chance except what subordinates them to the One, to the Same, to necessity, everything except the One, the Same and the Necessary.⁴³

In response to the second criticism according to which individuals, identities or finite existences, like death or being dead are decomposed in the inorganic and/impersonal flow, although Deleuze depicts life as an impersonal and singular life, it is not enclosed by the moment of death but it is an immanent life that carries with it the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects so that a life is everywhere.⁴⁴ Here, Deleuze makes the difference between personal and impersonal or individual and pre-individual singularities transparent. In other words, death, rather than something related to finiteness, is a sign of our being composed of impersonal or pre-individual singularities. In this way, being is conceived as something beyond the duality of personal and impersonal, or more generally finite existence (as a modality) and an infinite super-existence (as the power of the One).

The singularities and the events that constitute a life coexist with the accidents of the life that corresponds to it, but they are neither grouped nor divided in the same way.⁴⁵

41 Deleuze 1994, 125.

42 Roffe 2012, 126.

43 Deleuze 1994, 151.

44 Deleuze 2001, 29.

45 Deleuze 2001, 29–30.

Conclusion

In conclusion, contrary to the claim that Deleuze submits multiplicities to the One, by focusing on concepts such as the positive difference, *chaosmos* and the eternal return, he distinguishes his understanding from the traditional philosophies and puts forth an understanding according to which phenomena find their ground in a constitutive difference which cannot be mediated. Resemblance and, as Badiou's conception, local multiplicities are the products of this internal difference that is related to the "same" excessiveness of all beings, so that they cannot be reduced to an identity and are always in relation to disjunction through which they can be linked. In this regard, the doctrine of eternal return of the "same" rather than a static principle that governs the universe or *cosmos*, is a nomadic, plastic doctrine, according to which *chaos* itself or the *chaosmos* substitutes something else entirely, its own *chaodysey* (chao-errance), so that only divergent series can return.

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