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## BOOK REVIEW

### **A Break Away From the Deleuzian Mainstream? A review of:**

**John Protevi, *Life, War, Earth: Deleuze and the Sciences* (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 2013), Pagination, Price, ISBN: 978-0-8166-8102-0.**

Protevi's most recent work has been mostly a cause for joy, for despite its being loosely stapled from a collection of previous articles, it achieves a degree of seriousness and insight that sets it apart from the rabble of "Deleuzian" secondary literature. The dominant theme running through the entire book is a concern for the development of subjectivities in the context of the cognitive, neurological, and biological sciences. While the first part can be seen as a continuation of the project of *Political Affect* (his previous book), the second part brings the insights of the first to an admirable conclusion that gives the book its unique status. The third part is born of an entirely different line of thought, engaged as it is with *panpsychism* and the philosophy of biology. The two introductions attempt to acquaint the reader with some of the issues that the book will address, while also explaining the relation between Deleuze and certain branches of science, such as Developmental Systems Theory and cognitive science. Despite the effort, the book suffers a lack of any in-depth insight about why these specific sciences fit in with Deleuze's philosophy or the latter's attitude toward science.

The first part, entitled "Geophilosophy: Earth and War," is thematically linked by the analysis of warfare, and methodologically linked by Protevi's characteristic analysis of the sub-, supra, and adjunct-subjective in their various configurations and connections.

The first chapter sets out to study ancient warfare in terms of sub- and adjunct-subjective politics of energy (hydraulic, solar, etc.), preservation, and consumption. It also contains discussions of the works of Margulis, the concept of *Hypersea*, the portable water carrier of nomads that allowed their deterritorialization, among other issues. The main issue, however, is how the supra-subjective geopolitical factors combine with adjunct-subjective factors; i.e. technical substrate in the emergence of States, their politics, and warfare. Examples include the irrigation practices in ancient Egypt (according to Butzer) and the link between Athenian warfare (the hoplite reform

and the democratic rowers of the triremes) and its import of grain and export of olive oil (these are defined as biologically preserved solar-power).

Unlike the previous chapter, in chapter 2 the focus is on modern warfare and practices of de-subjectification, which will provide a way for the direct coupling of the sub-subjective neuro-physiological or the somatic level and the supra-subjective, socio-political level without the awareness or intervention of the subject. The issue is broached in terms of the act of killing at close range, and the rage necessary to do it; rage here acts as a trigger for evacuation of the conscious subject, handing agency over to “affect programs” (63). Thus the perfect soldier is the de-subjectified soldier. The supra-subjective military assemblages (e.g. real-time networked teams of soldiers) are directly linked to the desubjectified soldier’s sub-subjective, somatic level. This chapter proves important to the general focus of the book by demonstrating the ways in which desubjectification can be put to use by the apparatuses of control.

In a relatively lengthy third chapter (“Music and Ancient Warfare”), Protevi engages in a sustained and well-formed exegesis of the notion of affect in the works of Deleuze and Guattari and then proceeds to give an account of the neurological workings of affect (as opposed to “feeling” or “emotion”), focusing specifically on rage. By describing the neuro-biological aspects of rage in reference to the work of Panksepp, Protevi lays the ground for a historical study of rage (as an exemplary affect), set in ca. 1200 B.C.E. when the berserker “hill-runners” destroyed most of Bronze Age civilizations (71). He further reveals how rhythm and dance can *affect* the warrior and trigger a non-cortical rage circuit, throwing the warrior into a frenzy. The use of Developmental Systems Theory, in an effort to avoid reducing the complex interplay of triggers and determining factors of behavior, is another remarkable feature of this chapter.

The heart of *Earth, Life, War*, the second part of this book, comprises some of the most important ideas and analyses of the whole book. While it does not attempt to explain why the cognitive sciences, especially the 4EA or “embodied mind” branch, can be considered a Deleuzian science or rather why there is a strong resonance between the philosophy of the latter with the concepts and workings of the former, “Cognitive Science: Brain and Body” does broach some issues that are ground-breaking in certain aspects, even if their radical nature is not made explicit. Because of the numerous chapters involved in this part and the relative importance of chapter six (one of the only two chapters written specifically for this book), I am going to present only the more important chapters.

In chapter 4, which focuses mostly on Wexler, Protevi introduces his concern for a neglected temporal scale of analysis in the processes of individuation in the cognitive sciences, thus taking the first move towards posing the granularity problem. Between the evolutionary time scale, used to analyze *a people*, and the behavioral time scale of a single person, Protevi places the temporal scale of development of a group subjectivity. A brief remark on his mention of the works of Rodney Brooks in AI is also necessary: I believe that an extended discussion of Brooks’ ideas

about “intelligence without representation” would have been very suitable, seeing how it fits in perfectly with Deleuze’s non-representational, affective philosophy—*affect* being defined as thought without representation.

Forming the core argument of the book, chapters 5 and 6 deal with “the Political Economy of Consciousness,” i.e. the relation between the body politic and (de)subjectification practices. The first chapter investigates acts of desubjectification aimed at rendering the conscious judgment of the subject obsolete so that a direct socio-somatic link can be established. His examples include rational choice theory as well as the positively evaluated events at Occupy Wall Street, especially the “human microphone” technique. In his discussion of rational choice theory, he brings out the “dark side” of desubjectification when he shows how people can be made predictable (of course at least since von Neumann we know that predictable really means efficient), replaced with black boxes of cybernetics. As we shall see, what Protevi refuses to realize is the fact that the cognitive sciences are not merely *studying* “political economy zombies” (113) or other desubjectification practices: they help *produce* the said “zombies.” Protevi’s respect for some branches of cognitive science renders him unable to see the non-innocence of behavioral, neurological, and cognitive sciences which produce the I/O protocol of the human-turned-black-box for the societies of control.

Chapter 6, “the Granularity Problem,” is what sets this book apart from most of secondary literature on Deleuze; the Deleuzian rabble. Here Protevi reaches into the heart of the question he has been broaching slowly throughout the previous chapters (and even in his *Political Affect*) by delimiting a mid-level scale of analysis, corresponding to the developmental time-scale, dealing with group subjectivities wherein “politics” can truly be defined (this is where he comes close to some of Arendt’s notions). By abandoning the sub-subjective as well as the supra-subjective, Protevi chooses to study the development of multiple subjectivities in their individuation processes. It is at this level, at the level of the subject proper, that Protevi places the possibility of a politics, and by doing so he essentially, although quietly, breaks away from some of the tenets of Deleuze’s philosophy. After illustrating the evils of the sub-subjective, Protevi comes to appreciate the subjective in its environmental-social development as a conscious, choice-making, political subject with attributes of race and gender that must be thematized as “politically important categories” (130). He expresses the importance of the judging human subject in the political arena by moving away from sub-subjective occurrences which are in the end nothing but acts of subjective evacuation or the “crowding out” of subjectivity which disempowers and removes human beings from the political sphere.

However, Protevi refuses to acknowledge the implications of his own analyses, for despite proving it clearly through examples, he does not admit the far-from-innocent status of these sciences in relation to the formation of control *dispositifs*; rather, he sees both cognitive science (and

Deleuze's philosophy, by extension) as what allow us to perceive the wrongs inflicted on us by the State.

Be that as it may, Protevi enables a new critique of Deleuze's philosophy, which is in need of a reappraisal given its passion for the desubjectified and its sub-subjective policies. As Badiou says, "[the] 'purified automaton' is certainly much closer to the Deleuzian norm than were the bearded militants of 1968, bearing the standard of their gross desire."<sup>1</sup>

The third part of the book is thematically detached from the preceding parts, sharing neither in their concern nor scope of analysis. Focused on the developmental in biology (the "eco-dev-evo" approach) and the relation between autopoiesis, cognition, and life in general in the context of *panpsychism*, the chapters comprised in this part are more suitable for an expert audience engaged in the philosophy of biology, a fact reinforced by a lack of definitions for key terms, and lack of explication of elaborate or novel concepts. The discussion of notions of subjectivity and cognitive science are abruptly abandoned with the thematic change in this part.

The eighth chapter departs on a study of minimal subjectivity or *mind* in lower life-forms such as the *E. coli* bacteria. While this chapter's look into a Deleuzian panpsychism stays within the limits of the biological, i.e. the living, the next chapter takes things further by considering prebiotic "minds." Introducing the notions of passive and organic synthesis and "larval subjects" from Deleuze's oeuvre, and autopoiesis, adaptability, and sense-making from the enactive branch of cognitive science, Protevi engages in a thoughtful analysis of "organic time" and "organic subjectivity" in cellular organisms, paving the way for the next chapter.

Chapter nine, entitled "Mind in Life, Mind in Process," takes its title from a recent book by Evan Thompson (*Mind in Life*) discussing whether mind, or cognition, is co-extensive with life, defined minimally as autopoietic systems. Taking his cue from some aspects of Deleuze's philosophy, Protevi opts for a panpsychism that goes even beyond living organisms by attributing "mind" or the status of *larval subjects* to all "processes" which in some way or another entail individuation or information-processing—"even rocks." (195) The philosophical grounds of this chapter are laid on Husserl's genetic phenomenology and his notion of passive synthesis, which, applied to the organism at the cellular level, reveals the decisive role of the membrane in the synthesis of a living present as well as differentiating between the inside and the outside. Simondon's works and Deleuze's adaptation of them are also discussed. The chapter ends with reflections on Bateson's concept of "cybernetic mind" and whether it could lay the foundation of a panpsychism embracing prebiotic processes.

Described by Protevi as the "most ambitious" (197) part of the whole book, chapter 10 is the only other chapter beside the sixth that has been explicitly written for this book. It involves bringing Deleuze's ontology to bear on the work of West-Eberhard on *Developmental Plasticity and*

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: the Clamor of Being* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000), 11.

*Evolution* by showing how biology's recent rejection of the genetic as sole determining factor of development in favor of "an interlocking system of genetic and epigenetic factors" opens the way for understanding and accepting Deleuze's concept of a differentiated virtual multiplicity. The chapter also serves to clarify and explain Protevi's interest in the developmental aspect of analysis and his celebration of what he terms the "eco-dev-evo" approach (one that takes evolution and the hereditary determinations to be subservient and secondary to developmental, and perhaps ecological, factors). Protevi also explains how West-Eberhard's "developmental plasticity" can be more or less equated with the "priority of individuation" in Deleuze, further arguing that the former is "a perfect example of the reality of creative countereffectuation" (211).

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