# MA Thesis Final Evaluation

**Martin Tůma, *Deleuze: Virtual Differential Fields and their Actualization***

**ÚFAR, FFUK, Summer Semester 2022**

**General Description of the Work**

Martin Tůma's thesis revolves around some of the basic tenets of Gilles Deleuze's ontology, with a special focus on the concepts of difference, virtual (virtual field) and individuation. Structurally, the work is perfectly divided into two parts, to which a final appendix has been added. The first part, the title of which is *Deleuze and Philosophy* could be regarded as a general, yet systematic introduction to Deleuze from the angle of his relation to (some of the crucial figures of) the history of philosophy (with a special attention given to Plato, Nietzsche and Kant). Also the question about how to read and understand Deleuze's relation to mathematics is here addressed. The second part has a different tone, as it tackles the foundations of Deleuze's ontology – and is in turn divided into three parts: *Virtual Fields and their Actualization*; *Ideas and Multiplicities*; *Morphogenesis*.

According to the way in which the candidate himself frames the main question addressed during the second part: *What is the Deleuzian world like?* The appendix to the second part aims at also drawing (or making explicit) some of the "ethical" implications of Deleuze's own ontological discourse.

The "Deleuzian world" – to employ the candidate's own expression – can be characterized on the basis of §2.3.5 (*The Global Picture of Deleuze's Ontology*) with which the work comes to conclusion. As is explained, DW "comprise[s] of three registers":

The actual which consists of extensities and qualities which fill them, understood not in terms of stable selfsame entities but rather as processes of becoming, the virtual which contains within itself all the ways in which the system in question might develop, either from its own inner resources or as a result of a coming into contact with other systems, and the intensive spatium, which serves as the intermediary through which the virtual actualizes itself, incarnates itself into parts and spatial relations (p. 48).

The three elements are then, in the order: (1) the *actual* that consists of *extensities* and *qualities* filling them in the mode of constant becoming; (2) the *virtual* understood as the "inner resources" proper to *I*; (3), finally, the so-called "intensive spatium" as the "intermediary" "through which the virtual actualizes itself." It is a three-dimensional ontology, very remindful of the ontology of the Plato from *Timaeus*: just like the *khora* from the Platonic dialogue, the *spatium* is the very "place" that realizes itself *via* the virtual's own self-actualization. Within the actual, the candidate makes a further, crucial distinction: the one between a "lower layer" – that of a pre-individual dynamism – and what could be labeled the "higher layer" of the "fully differentiated systems with parts or organs which can be identified, isolated and talked about in terms of their function" (p. 48). Now, since a multiplicity – any multiplicity – is always the "incarnation of a virtual idea," the very concept of multiplicity, thus the unity-multiplicity dynamism (which is the Deleuzian manner of recasting and transforming the classical ontological problem of the one-and-the-many) needs be ascribed a functional-relative nature: what is regarded as a multiplicity at one level can be seen as a unity within a higher multiplicity.

In such an ontology, every individual is a *meta-stable* synthesis of pre-individual flows and its own individuality depends on how these flows interact with one another and enter into mutual relations. The interactions determine a "differential field" and the individuality of each and every individual is nothing else but the result of a series of disjunctive syntheses in the field.

What we are here confronted with is an ontology in which the concept of *difference* is no longer taken as the counter-part of that of *identity*: rather, it is an ontology that builds upon the concept of *difference in itself* (p. 10). The difference is no longer something secondary, but rather a positive phenomenon of its own: "Rather than a relation between identities, difference is primarily a principle of genesis and generation, a continuous variation of relations, always in the process of becoming and therefore resistant to identification and representation" (p. 11). More emphatically: "Difference is the being of everything that exists – this is the meaning of Deleuze's univocity."

This passage is crucial because it shows how lucidly the candidate understands Deleuze's ontology (= theory of being) and its univocity (= being is predicated of whatever there is in just one mode or way – according to Scotus' formulation borrowed from Deleuze). It is a *differential ontology*, rather than an ontology of difference, because here we are not talking of *different beings* (or the mode of being of difference) – but of *being* as *difference* or as the result of a differential process. *Difference*, as one could also put it, is the *mode of being of what there is*.

It is against such a backdrop that one can also understand §2.2.1, dedicated to the emergence of those "differential elements" called "singularities" (p. 29). A distinction is here made *differentiation*

and *differenciation*: while the former designates "the process by which the content of a virtual Idea becomes determined," the latter on the contrary means a "a parallel process" which "incarnates the virtual differential elements into actual forms and the differential relations into concrete spatio-temporal relationships these forms occupy with respect to one another" (p. 29). The former process determines elements and relations; the latter their incarnation into qualities and extensities. The Idea differentiates itself, and yet remains at the level of what is virtual; then, such differentiations get into actual forms, actual qualities and extensities: "The Idea becomes differentiated at the same time and by the same process it becomes differenciated. There is no differentiation without differenciation and vice versa and they must be understood as two movements within a single complex process which Deleuze terms different/ciation (*la différent/ciation*)" (p. 30).

These can be considered the basics of Deleuze's ontology; and it is on their basis that the candidate closes the work with a few remarks on ethics worth being recalled in this context. For, as he himself recognizes, "ethics is the place where Deleuze's ontology is, so to speak, cashed out. For Deleuze, ethics is nothing else than the putting of ontology into practice" (p. 50). It has to do with the question "how should I live?" or "how should I act and think in my day-to-day life?" Here is how the ethical counter-part of Deleuze's ontology is described:

We saw that one of the basic facts of Deleuze's world is it's interconnectedness or ontological continuity. Everything is capable of entering into communication with everything else, any form arises out of and is inseparable from a field of individuation which overflows into its environment. A person then cannot be regarded simply as a self-sufficient unity acting on its environment. Any such separation covers over his fundamental nature as a process which interweaves outer and inner to the point where it doesn't really make sense to distinguish the two. Clearly, discourses based around categories of freedom, autonomy, etc. like classical liberalism or existentialism are hopelessly insufficient for the job of describing a person and his relation to the world. We must substitute affectivity and interconnectedness for separation, becomings and differences for identities, multiplicities and fluid assemblages for stable unities. Our starting point must be a complex of mutually dependent co-realities, a multi-layered structure of relationality. In this regard, Deleuze is a quintessential post-humanistic thinker (p. 51).

The ethical, double imperative that follows from this sounds: "*connect* yourself as best as you can, express the conditions which give rise to you with maximal intensity, and *forget* whatever hinders you from doing so" (p. 52)

**Formal Remarks and Questions**

The candidate's decision to focus on – and use – only a few numbers of texts is to be highly praised. This gives him the possibility of also circumscribing quite effectively the topic(s) of his study – which in fact unfolds quite systematically and linearly, with each section building upon the previous ones.

The arguments are presented rigorously, and the terms always carefully explained. The candidate shows great maturity also in the way he resorts to secondary literature: secondary texts are always cited in order to better and more strongly support the interpretation, or to clarify to the reader some of Deleuze's most difficult notions and expressions.

I have only two *critical questions* – one bearing on Deleuze's own ontology (according to the way in which it is presented by the candidate himself), another concerning the ethical implications drawn at the very end of the thesis (see the long quotation at end of the previous section).

- *Deleuze's differential ontology.* Although I understand fully the idea of *difference* as a positive phenomenon, which derives from the desire to also free the notion from the tyranny of *identity* (if we can call it this way), I would like to raise a general doubt about it. Does not the candidate have the impression that once we recognize the fundamental phenomenon of differentiation (= difference as a positive and most basic phenomenon), in such a way that anything that "there is" is a differential element within a system, then what we obtain is the exact opposite of what we were hoping for? In Deleuze's system, in which there seems to be room only for "differences," and in which everything is a qualitative differentiation – every element becomes *in-different* to the others. There are only differences – which is like saying that there no more any differences. The univocity of being seems to turn into a homogeneity and anonymity of differences.

- *The ethical imperative.* I am not sure I understand correctly the relation between Deleuze's own ontology and the ethical imperatives presented by the candidate. More in general, I am not sure on how ethical imperatives can or could be derived from an ontology (any ontology, not only Deleuze's). Ethics, especially if we speak of ethical imperatives, presupposes that *I can do X* but also its opposite (*I can do non-X* or *I can do something other than X*) – with the former being what the imperative dictates and the latter what it wants to rule out. By contrast, ontology is a theory of being – which accounts for how things are (not how they can or should be). If *ethics* (any ethics) presupposes a disjunction between two possible conducts (*X* or *non-X*), for *ontology* it is impossible that things are not the way they are. As a consequence, if according to Deleuze's ontology, difference is a positive phenomenon and everything is the

result of a differentiation-process, how is it possible that *I can behave in a way that runs against what I am*? If Deleuze's ontology is right, then it should not be possible for me not to be maximally connected – but in this case there would be no need for any ethics. Or we need an actual ethics – but this is because differentiation is not a phenomenon of being but rather a consequence of our actions.

Depending upon how the defense goes, the proposed final grade could be *excellent*.

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Daniele De Santis

ÚSTAV FILOSOFIE
A RELIGIONISTIKY FFUK

ÚFAR