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THE THEATRE OF PRODUCTION: PHILOSOPHY AND INDIVIDUATION BETWEEN KANT AND DELEUZE

A review of Alberto Toscano, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. pp. xiii + 249. \$79.95 (Cloth). ISBN 978-1403997807.

Alberto Toscano first became known as the translator of many books by Alain Badiou and for his work as an editor of the journal *Pli* out of the University of Warwick. For those only familiar with Toscano as a particularly prolific translator and commentator of Badiou's philosophy a book such as *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze* may be unexpected. Indeed, it is not typical of much of secondary literature in Continental philosophy in that Toscano clearly has no allegiance to any particular figure. Thus, even though he has written quite favorably on Badiou and obviously finds his work worthy of wider attention given the time Toscano has given to translation, in this book he sets out on a project that has as one of its two aims a defense of Deleuze against the critical work of Badiou. The other aim is to provide a concise philosophical history of post-Kantian philosophies of individuation that in turn discloses the necessary elements for the ontology of anomalous individuation. In the process Toscano has shown that he himself is a masterful philosopher in his own right.

Before beginning the process of reviewing the content of the book permit us a few words on its style. In one of the discussions concerning the book that may be found on the internet one commentator suggested that the book would have taken a quarter of the time to read if it was four times longer. It is true that the book, the main text which spans to just 201 pages, is incredibly dense. However, this density is tempered by both an elegance of construction and an economy of writing that is refreshingly devoid of an often tiring use of jargon. Toscano appears content to let his argument stand on the basis of his conceptual consistency and the strength of his constructions. Strangely enough I found the book to be difficult to understand on a first read and yet on the second read it was incredibly clear. So, rather than waiting for Toscano to release a second edition four times as large, the reader may find it more rewarding to take the time to read it slowly and more than once as the richness of the text makes it worth a second or third effort.

As stated above the book has two aims: the first aim is an original and neglected philosophical history of individuation since Kant with emphasis on the 'anomalies of the organic' and the elements of post-Kantian philosophy that constitute an ontology of what Toscano calls anomalous individuation and the second aim is to advance a defense of Deleuze's philosophy of the actual and the

virtual against the critique Badiou advanced in his *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* via Deleuze's philosophy of individuation. The clear focus of the book is on the ontology of anomalous individuation, which is to say the book is concerned with an understanding of individuation that is purely immanent. Toscano writes, "'Anomalous' is here taken to signify that what precedes or commands individuation is not to be located in the identity of a principle, be it of a formal or regulative variety, but in a transcendental field of preindividual being whence individuality emerges as a relational resolution of disparation or difference (158)." Stated more simply, Toscano's attempt to conceive of a consistent ontology of individuation gives credence to the empirical weirdness that characterizes the reality of individuals found in nature and that cannot be excluded or explained away under the image of some transcendent form of the individual or its proper end (teleology). It thus is a strong, though unstated, challenge to certain strands of theology, specifically Thomism and its many variants.

The book begins by firmly situating itself in the Scotist tradition of univocity where being and unity are convertible. For Toscano it is in the treatment of individuation, the genetic problem, where the convertibility of being and unity are most apparent. The Scotist move from the individual to individuation is identified by Toscano as an epistemological one rather than a purely ontological one that heralds, but does not complete, a non-Aristotelian ontology of the individual. This is then followed as an inheritance in the Kantian critical philosophy where the non-Aristotelian philosophy is further pursued, but now under austere limits of the intelligibility of the abstract individual. Under that system the self-organizing organism comes to be understood as a paradoxical object in that it clearly exists in nature but there can be no true conceptual understanding of it. Toscano deftly takes the reader, via Whitehead, through Kant's realization of the problem in his *Critique of Judgment* and the attempts to nullify the problem in the *Opus Postumum*, suggesting a Kant beyond Kant, which is to say a Kant struggling to get outside of the critical philosophy. It is in the early Nietzsche's own struggles with the later Kant that the anomalous character of the organic is taken up, not as a problem, but as a datum showing the frivolities of nature rather than any kind of underlying teleology.

Clearly, Toscano disassociates his own metaphysics from any kind of orthodox theological metaphysics. Yet, in the investigation of the post-Kantian elements for the ontology of anomalous individuation, Toscano also remarks on the constant temptation to teleology and thus, one might add, to orthodox theology. The first part of the book, touched on above, is an interesting casting of the problem from within largely neglected works of Kant and Nietzsche that is superseded by the second section on the elements of the ontology of anomalous individuation. In terms of the historical task this section uncovers significant lines of inquiry in Ravaissón, James, and Peirce, all converging on the concept of habit. These systems of habit are ultimately shown to be lacking in that here, most clearly in Ravaissón, the temptation towards teleology is symptomatic of a kind of Kantian puerile, beautiful soul vitalism. In the light of the shortcomings of the Kantian system, shown by Nietzsche, and the failure of the ontologies of

habit to overcome those shortcomings Toscano turns to two figures whose philosophies hold the possibility of thinking individuation without a principle and difference without spontaneity, that is to say, to think individuation beyond mechanism and vitalism: Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze.

Though one of the stated aims of the book is to defend the philosophy of Deleuze it is partly through a detour into the philosophy of Simondon that allows Toscano to do so. Toscano credits Simondon's work with allowing him to isolate the critical aspects of post-Kantian philosophy that turn on the problem of individuation. Simondon is largely unknown in English language scholarship, certainly owing to the unavailability of his major works in English translation (though some underground translations of selections do exist and are easily accessible via the omniscient Google search), but his influence on Deleuze was immense. According to Toscano, Simondon's philosophy marks a significant advance on the ontologies of habit in that it attempts to think the individual through individuation rather than individuation through the individual. Simondon thus develops a truly non-representational ontology of individuation via a method of transduction. Transduction is another name for individuation itself emphasizing its real relationality, and the method of transduction allows Simondon to conceive of relationality outside the bounds of teleology. Said otherwise, it allows Simondon to think individuation without a principle or form to which it must correspond, thus to think individuation itself, and in this way significantly carries forth the Scotist revolution beyond Scotus' own philosophy.

Toscano's two aims combine in the penultimate chapter of the book which focuses on Deleuze's own contributions to the ontology of anomalous individuation and, thereby, a defense of his philosophy against Badiou's critique. Simondon's relational ontology is taken up by Deleuze and adds to it his work on spatiotemporal dynamisms in *Difference and Repetition* and haecceities in *A Thousand Plateaus*. It is from these two points that Toscano locates the thinking of difference without spontaneity. In Deleuze's philosophy difference is no longer spontaneous, that is difference does not merely occur in an individual thing, but differentiation itself is the transcendental field or source of individuation. All of which necessarily concerns Deleuze's philosophy of the virtual and actual. What Toscano is able to bring out, by focusing on the influence of Simondon in Deleuze and largely shorn of his Bergsonism, is a highly *productivist* Deleuze as regards his theory of individuation rather than an actualist or a virtualist Deleuze. In this way Toscano hopes to save Deleuze and the thesis of univocity from Badiou's criticisms thereof by separating the concept of the virtual from the idea of a virtual totality or virtual coexistence (or a separation from Bergson) by instead focusing on the virtual of production in the different/ciation of individuals. Summing up this position Toscano writes, "Echoing Bachelard's verdict on Bergson, we might say of 'Deleuzism' that we accept everything but (virtual) totality" (195).

Toscano admits that this presentation of Deleuze is rather tame and we note that it shares little with certain strands of what may be called political or ethical Deleuzism. Yet, Toscano seems to think that emphasizing this tendency of

Deleuze, rather than his more vitalist tendency, is the only way to save univocity from the shortcomings of a representational philosophy seen in the Scotist and Kantian philosophies: "Univocity should accordingly be recast in terms of a concept of ontogenesis that refuses any transcendence, emancipated from its excessive dependence on the abstract postulate of a virtual totality that both enfolds and neutralizes the production of actualities (194)." It would appear that, for Toscano, the virtual of coexistence remains too transcendent and thus is open to the temptation, not of teleology, but of representation which is anathema to a philosophy of immanence and, thus, to the reality of individuation. However, it remains to be seen whether this jettisoning of the virtual of coexistence or virtual totality rejects other interesting lines of inquiry, as into the philosophy of ecology where the virtual of coexistence also names a philosophical conceptualization of the scientific notion of ecosystem.

Toscano's admission that this presentation of Deleuze is rather tame is countered at the same time by the presentation of an immensely abstract and intricate metaphysics in Deleuze's philosophy and in the history of the ontology of anomalous individuation more generally. This is witnessed to in that Toscano's account opens several interesting paths of inquiry despite the relative brevity of the book. I will highlight two that seem to be of special interest. Toscano's investigation into ontological systems of habit may revive a long derelict line of inquiry into individuation, and the intellectual understanding of nature more generally, and it would be interesting to see if one could develop an account of habit that would avoid the temptation of teleology and yet recover a kind of theological power. Further, and this remains one of the only real disappointments of the book, the question of the political and ethical import of the ontology of anomalous individuation remains an open question and one that must be accounted for if it is to remain a truly Deleuzian philosophy.

Regardless of these remaining questions, and actually in testament to their very opening, I cannot recommend this book highly enough for those interested in the question of individuation, more generally the problem of nature itself, and the continuing debates surrounding the philosophy of Deleuze.

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