
Review

Deleuze's political vision

Nicholas Tampio

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The influence of Gilles Deleuze on Anglophone academia may have been late in arriving, when compared to that of his younger contemporaries Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, but publication rates over the past decade would suggest that scholars across the humanities and social sciences are doing their best to make up for lost time. One such field that has pulled its weight in this regard since the new millennium is Political Philosophy/Theory. Amongst the many texts published, Nicholas Tampio's *Deleuze's Political Vision* is distinct insofar as it explicitly aims to place Deleuze's political thought vis-à-vis the existing landscape of Political Theory, as the subject of that name is taught and researched within the academic discipline of Politics in the English-speaking world.

Tampio's book can be roughly divided into three sections: chapters 1–2 establish the context for his reading and placement of Deleuze and Guattari's political theory; chapters 3–5 spell out Tampio's reading in detail; and chapter 6 provides an illustrative demonstration of how he sees this political theory operating. Readers new to Deleuze and Guattari can often be put off by their penchant for neologisms and dense passages of analysis. The key aim of Tampio's first chapter, 'Entering Deleuze's Political Vision', is to provide such newcomers with a handy 'how to read' guide. Some of the techniques suggested by Tampio are drawn from Deleuze and Guattari themselves, such as 'Diagram Schemata', but not all of them are. It could be further noted that none of them has an intrinsic relation to political analysis or analysis of the political (as opposed to social, historical, etc.), which is to say that there is no special relation between Tampio's 'how to' guide and the *political* vision of Deleuze and Guattari. Other sections of the opening chapter deal more explicitly with the political register of Deleuze's work, such as 'The Political Vision of *A Thousand Plateaus*' and 'Deleuze and the Political Theory Canon', but a proper examination of such issues will be the task of later chapters (as the brevity of these sections indicate).

It is in chapter 2 that Tampio addresses most fully the relation of Deleuze and Guattari's political thought and the academic discipline of Political Theory. This analysis is split into roughly two halves, the first of which focuses on how Deleuze



departs from dominant thinkers/trends in the discipline, after which Tampio shows how a Deleuzian political theory could be compatible with various thinkers/trends (thinkers discussed include Alasdair MacIntyre, Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, William E. Connolly, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri). Running through all of these analyses is Deleuze and Guattari's infamous image of the 'rhizome' and its 'arborescent' alternate – a motif that Tampio associates with political pluralism. As an exercise in 'reterritorialising' Deleuze and Guattari onto the academic discipline of political theory, the chapter is most certainly a success. In saying this, however, its effectiveness could have been increased if the chapter occurred later in the book, for at this early stage Tampio has yet to properly explain the 'what is' of Deleuze and Guattari's political theory. The format of this chapter also necessitates cursory summations, since Tampio tries to explain both the crux of a major thinker/tradition and his Deleuzian response within a few pages for each case. This is not to say that Tampio's characterisations are inaccurate, but it is difficult to make such judgments with any certainty due to the small amount of analysis provided. Ultimately, though, the virtue of this chapter lies in its commencement of new conversations between Deleuze and Political Theory, rather than its ability to provide conclusive statements on each relation – an outcome that entirely chimes with Tampio's reading of Deleuze and his motivations for writing the book.

Chapters 3–5 set out Tampio's reading of Deleuze's political theory. Tampio begins this by attempting to ascertain the philosophy of nature advanced in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The suggestion is that Deleuze's political thought, as with many of the great canonical political thinkers, is based on his broader metaphysics and understanding of nature (including 'human' nature). As a technique for interpretation, this approach is straightforward. What is provocative about this chapter, however, is the description of Deleuze's natural philosophy as a 'soul hypothesis'. Tampio may be right in this reading (though I for one am not entirely convinced), but either way it remains the case that Deleuze never explicitly advanced a 'soul hypothesis' in that terminology.

Similar observations apply to Tampio's reading of Deleuze as a social contract theorist – the objective of chapter 4. As Tampio demonstrates, it is possible to construe Deleuze as a political thinker in the social contract tradition. Doing so, however, requires a decent amount of lateral thinking, since there is not much clear evidence that Deleuze saw himself this way. This is not to deny that Deleuze engages with and draws from thinkers that are commonly placed in the social contract tradition, Rousseau being a most obvious example, but the presentation of Deleuze's political thought in the genre of social contract theory – the rhizomatic contract as Tampio calls it – must be regarded as an innovative reading of his political philosophy rather than a straight exposition of his overtly political writings.

The aim of chapter 5 is to frame Deleuze as a liberal and democratic thinker. In so doing, Tampio places himself in the company of Paul Patton, who has done much to



focus attention on the manner in which Deleuze's work is compatible with Rawls' project and democratic theory more broadly. Tampio's efforts concern the connections between Deleuze and J.S. Mill. In these pages, we find what I take to be Tampio's most important contribution to the field. Unlike his hitherto staged conversations between Deleuze and the discipline of Political Theory, Tampio's exploration of the relations between Deleuze and Mill is given an extended run. The encounter that Tampio effectuates also comes across as what Deleuze and Guattari might describe as a genuine 'double-becoming', whereby Mill moves towards Deleuze no less than the converse, giving rise to a Mill-Deleuze assemblage.

The final chapter of the book can be equally viewed as a success. Its purpose is to set out principles for a Deleuzian comparative political theory and to provide a demonstration of how it works. The case study chosen involves a novel engagement between Deleuzian thought and various Islamic thinkers. The beauty of this chapter is that it demonstrates how Deleuze's thought can be put to productive use for not only the diagnosis of political situations but also active collaborations and interventions. Seasoned Deleuzians may disagree with Tampio's prior interpretation and construal of *A Thousand Plateaus*, but by shifting the conversation to the level of practice and comparative political analysis Tampio challenges the reader to confront a question that is notoriously tricky for anyone interested in Deleuze and Guattari: what can their political theory do, and how?

In pursuing the above aims, however, it must be said that the success of Tampio's project is dependent upon some self-imposed constrictions. To begin with, the book effectively limits itself to examining Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. Other texts written by Deleuze are most certainly drawn on by Tampio, but such references are invariably rendered onto the framework given by *A Thousand Plateaus*. To justify this Tampio suggests that *A Thousand Plateaus* is Deleuze's *magnum opus* and a thoroughly political book. But while I would personally agree with these two opinions, there are no shortage of Deleuzo-Guattarians who prefer their first book, *Anti-Oedipus*, and it is hard to deny that *Anti-Oedipus* is a supremely political book – a book that was in part written as a reaction to events of May '68, and which caused a sensation in France due to its radical socio-political diagnosis of contemporary society. Tampio's disregard for *Anti-Oedipus* is therefore contentious, not least because it precludes proper exploration of what is one of Deleuze and Guattari's most important and political questions: why is it that we desire our own repression?

A slight adjustment of the book's title to *The Political Vision of Deleuze's A Thousand Plateaus* would have rectified this situation. Doing so, however, would have highlighted a different constraint of the book, Guattari has been effaced. Tampio very briefly lists two reasons for this (p. 18). Taking the second reason first, Tampio notes that it was Deleuze who 'wrote the final drafts' of the book and systematised Guattari's thinking. But while this is true, it is unclear why it justifies the erasure of Guattari, since it could just as easily support the removal of



Deleuze's name, on the grounds that he was merely the editor of Guattari's ideas. The other reason provided by Tampio is that Deleuze expressed his political vision before meeting Guattari. It is obviously true that Deleuze had a politics prior to his collaboration with Guattari, and that it plays a role in shaping the political philosophy of *A Thousand Plateaus*. But the same is no less true of Guattari – indeed, most experts on Deleuze and Guattari would agree that Guattari was far more politically minded than Deleuze. Many of the book's most important concepts, furthermore, originally come from Guattari (such as 'the machine'). But more significantly, eliminating Guattari from the picture means that the collaborative dimension of their work is also overlooked. Given that collaborative engagement (which Guattari was well known for) is a feature of the 'political vision' that Tampio is aiming to describe in his book, it is therefore surprising that he ignores the role this played in the production of *A Thousand Plateaus*, especially since it is the first (and arguably most important) political lesson of their work.

There are some other curious gaps in Tampio's coverage. Many of the most overtly political analyses in *A Thousand Plateaus* have received little or no attention, including the 'three lines' and 'four dangers' of Deleuze and Guattari's 'micropolitics', the relation of the nomad and state, the 'apparatus of capture', capitalism and Marx. Tampio's brisk treatment of capitalism and Marx (one page) is particularly problematic, seeing as Deleuze and Guattari self-identified as Marxists and were concerned enough about capitalism to put the word in the subtitle of *A Thousand Plateaus* (and *Anti-Oedipus*). As Deleuze says in response to a question from Antonio Negri about the political philosophy of *A Thousand Plateaus*, 'I think Félix Guattari and I have remained Marxists, in our two different ways, perhaps, but both of us. You see, we think any political philosophy must turn on the analysis of capitalism and the ways it has developed' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 171).

The gains made by Tampio's book have therefore not come without costs. Tampio has convincingly shown how there are pluralist, liberal and democratic facets to Deleuze's political thought. He has also provided a great service to the field of political theory by bringing Deleuze's work into direct conversation with numerous classical and contemporary figures in that academic discipline. But in achieving these aims, Tampio has excised key features of Deleuze and Guattari's political thought, some of which would complicate the cohesion of his portrait. This may diminish the suitability of the book as an introduction to Deleuze's political philosophy, but Tampio must nevertheless be commended for making new connections (for instance, between Deleuze and Mill) and proving the usefulness of Deleuzian thought for political analysis.



Reference

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