

Solipsism and the Possibility of Community in Deleuze's Ethics

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Deleuze's philosophy, as has been well documented, pursues a radical anti-Hegelianism.¹ In this essay I want to focus on one aspect of that activity, which concerns what we might call a 'critique of the universal'; "The first principle of philosophy is that Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained."² Specifically, Deleuze rejects any and all notions of a universal subject. This, as we shall see, seems to leave him vulnerable to a Hegelian immanent critique. To demonstrate this, I shall begin by examining an important text by the great French Hegel scholar, Jean Hyppolite. The text in question, which has only recently appeared for the first time in English translation, is entitled *Logic and Existence*.³ Of particular relevance to the question which concerns us here is the first chapter, "The Ineffable," in which Hyppolite presents a typology of subjective perspectives all of which, he argues, fail to appreciate the nature of the universal and which thus, according to his argument, descend into an unremitting solipsism. The contention is that any subjective 'type' which neglects the universal in favour of pure singularity is bound to unproductive, indeed counterproductive, self-reflection, or obsession with the Self, to the detriment of relations with others, who become at best a mere distraction or at worst an intolerable obstacle to the individual's solipsistic practice. An important question will be: Can we entertain a concept of subjectivity which is not explained in terms of a universal self-consciousness and its dialectical relation with the singular without doing harm to any notion of possible community or society of such individuals? Can there be a community of singular subjects without a universal or transcendental subjectivity in common to unite them? My purpose will not be to argue that Deleuze has succeeded where others have failed, that he formulates a concept of subjectivity which rests on the individual or the particular only, but rather I shall show that Deleuze situates subjectivity in an altogether different way, where the traditional dichotomies of universal/singular, general/particular, collective/private and even self/other no longer retain the relevance or meaning they once had. In his terms, the concept of subjectivity finds itself on a plane of immanence

(meaning, roughly, philosophical context) which bears little in common with that presupposed by a Hegelian, for example.

The beautiful soul is the Hegelian image of the subject trapped by its own singularity. It is with this image that we define here the traditional understanding of the solipsist—the subject who cannot escape or transcend her own self. The solipsist is he who cannot even believe in anything but his own self, his own consciousness, his own inner world. Any conception of subjectivity which ignores the dialectical relation between the universal and the singular can conceive only a solipsist subject. The first such type considered by Hyppolite is the person of faith, the one who calls forth the ineffable and unknowable to make room for faith, for that which by its nature falls outside the limits of knowledge but in which we can and, for the sake of our moral completeness, should believe. This is one aspect, one possible path, for the so-called beautiful soul. At first glance, this type seems to have little connection with Deleuze's philosophy, in which faith has no role to play. On the other hand, Deleuze makes much of Spinoza's claim that our knowledge of the body, and therefore of the mind, is far from complete. This conviction becomes the first step on the path to ethical knowledge, the recognition that there persists an unknown of the body which perpetually surpasses our knowledge of it, and an unknown of thought which outstrips our consciousness of it. Deleuze-Spinoza, then, has at least this much in common with the faithful beautiful soul: he is concerned to make room for unknown elements which expose the limits of our knowledge. The step he clearly does not take is the one that insists that these elements are in fact unknowable, and therefore find their proper place only in the faithful disposition and can never give themselves up to knowledge. Hyppolite argues that the beautiful soul of the faithful is characterized by a nostalgia for a mode of experience which has been lost, an untainted, pure experience which has been corrupted by the primacy of knowledge, discourse and its concepts. The only hope of recovery becomes the refusal to engage in discourse, to reject knowledge in favour of a non-knowledge intuited through faith. The position of Deleuze-Spinoza, on the other hand, is not in the least nostalgic, being directed towards the future rather than looking back on the past. It is never that ethical knowledge is recovered, but only that it is constituted on the basis of the recognition of the limits of knowledge and the attempt to go beyond them.

The second type discussed by Hyppolite is the sceptic, defined as the one who remains in contact with the unknown through simple abdication, by refusing to take a position or give countenance to any positive, active mode of life. Such a type lives or rather perceives itself to live "in pure singularity, without thinking it or signifying it." In other words, it lives in simple negativity, and so for Hyppolite, "can only in fact be dissolved."⁴ Although Nietzsche, in *The Antichrist*, labels himself as a sceptic, and goes so far as to say that the only healthy intellect is the sceptical one, Nietzschean scepticism has little in common with the type Hyppolite describes here. What replaces faith in the first type is a rampant sceptical disposition which puts nothing in its place. The ineffable, for the sceptic, is empty, and so reduces to nothingness, taking the soul with it. For Nietzsche, scepticism certainly performs the function of guarding against

faith, against simple dogma, but it is never an end in itself, but is rather the means to an affirmative, joyful disposition. Deleuze, too, embraces a certain healthy scepticism, but this is never permitted to take the place of an active mode of life, which has creativity, originality, and positivity as its principal traits.

The third and final incarnation of the beautiful soul is the only one of Hyppolite's types in which we might detect the Spinozist-Nietzschean-Deleuzian zest for life, and we might best label this type as the vitalist or vital soul. In Hyppolite's analysis, the vitalist is the one "that tries to take refuge in what it believes to be a pure experience, in order to taste there the unique pleasure of its own singularity. It would like to live instead of think."⁵ Despite its turn to life, instead of to faith or to the emptiness of scepticism, this type fares no better for Hyppolite than the preceding two, because, like these, it retreats into its own singularity and thus alienates itself from the very source or cause of that singularity—that being the discourse of a community and the universal self-consciousness which makes all community possible. In this way, it turns with expectation to a life which cannot sustain it, and leaves behind its proper nourishment—the community which fashioned it and functioned as its necessary and *a priori* possibility. In Hyppolite's words: "it desires only to take life, 'much as a ripe fruit is plucked, which readily offers itself to the hand which takes it'. But, instead of being thrown from dead theory into life itself, it rather rushes into death, into the dissolution of its own singularity."⁶ Deleuze would agree that this turn to life, this affirmation of life, inevitably leads to a rupture in the subject, a crisis in which its *habitus* loses its force and meaning, but he would insist that this does not entail the dissolution of singularity, but opens the subject to an array of preindividual or non-subjective singularities from which it had been separated in its discourse and knowledge dominated environment. For Deleuze the collapse or failure of the present community, of the social, does not lead to the dissolution of singularity as such, but rather inaugurates the collapse of a mode of subjectivation in favour, perhaps, of another mode and a new community.

This, for Hyppolite and Hegel alike, is simply unthinkable and amounts to nothing more than self-negation. Although we can readily distinguish between different types of beautiful soul, such distinction is in the end only academic; all are engaged, in their own way, in a self-defeating activity which must only end in despair and futility. "To renounce discourse, to renounce the instituted community of consciousnesses, or to give oneself up to feelings that are below language are all the same."⁷ We will not deny that Deleuze's philosophy contains all of these elements, that he announces deep concerns about the role of communication, the negative effect of instituted community, and with Spinoza denounces the devaluation of affections and affects. What we can deny, though, is that these seemingly solipsistic convictions necessarily lead to the renunciation of subjectivity *tout court* and the dissolution of singularity.

What are the factors which prevent Hyppolite from perceiving any positivity in the solipsist position? There are two which in the end express the same conviction. The first is that beyond language, outside language, there is nothing human, and to the extent that we renounce language or refuse to engage in discourse, we regress to the non-human,

or worse, inhuman. “Human life is always language, sense, without which human life loses its character and returns to animal life, and the singularity with which it thinks it has merged gets lost immediately in universality, but this is abstract universality.”⁸ It is useful to bear in mind here that Deleuze himself attaches much significance to the function of language and how it operates as the structure which both defines and limits humanity. As the title suggests, in the *Logic of Sense* Deleuze sets out to reveal the distinctive characteristics of sense and how it relates to the linguistic propositions which express it and the corporeality which it presupposes and which produces it. For Deleuze, sense is fundamentally incorporeal. He explains: “Although sense results from the actions and passions of the body, it is a result which differs in nature, since it is neither action nor passion. It is a result which shelters sonorous language from any confusion with the physical body.”⁹ Sense is that which permits us to distinguish language from sounds which may be produced through the mouth but which do not convey sense. So language, for Deleuze, consists of three orders—tertiary arrangement, that is its propositional forms and expressions; secondary organization, its incorporeal nature or sense, which Deleuze often refers to as its surface organization and which he defines as “the problem to which propositions correspond...”; and primary order, often labeled as nonsense, which refers to the unformed and ineffable realm of singularities and pure intensities. It is this primary order which the idealist Hegel and Hyppolite cannot accept or even imagine, but it is this order which inspires and also fascinates artists such as Artaud and Tournier.

This leads us to the second factor: according to the Hegelian sensibility, in embracing or becoming lost in abstract universality, the singular consciousness loses touch with concrete universality, the universal self-consciousness of which it is a singular instance and without which this singularity is denied context and must therefore perish, reduced to the non-human. In other words, the conditions for genuine singularity have been lost and without them singularity is nothing. The onus is on singularity to preserve in itself and for itself the concrete universality which determines and singularizes it. The beautiful soul is the solipsist who fails to realize that its truth is only established as the result of a community and a linguistic communication which finds its condition in the community of consciousnesses, or concrete and immanent universal self-consciousness. Hyppolite is insistent: “One has to confess one’s own actions, one’s particular way of being in the world, in order to conquer one’s universality, in order to make it recognizable. One also really has to welcome into oneself the particular determination of the other in order to raise it to universality, in order to promote this concrete universality which is the genuine unity of the singular and the universal.”¹⁰ In opposition to Sartre, hell for Hyppolite is to turn away from the other, to refuse to engage in discourse with the other, to refuse to see in the other the actualization of a universality of which you too are but another, albeit different, actualization: “hell is to be always self-aware, to reflect constantly on one’s own action.”¹¹ This position, at least on the surface, appears profoundly conservative. Not only are we trapped in the prison-house of language, but even to contemplate escaping is simple madness as it can only lead to a general

collapse or regression. We are required to accept the community or social environment in which we find ourselves.

We have perhaps given the impression that Deleuze views the beautiful soul as the site of possible escape, as a line of flight from this affirmed conservatism. Deleuze himself, in *Difference and Repetition*, considers to what extent the path he has chosen leaves him open to critiques which might view his philosophy as simply a reenactment of that embraced by the beautiful soul. He admits that he shares two sentiments commonly associated with the beautiful soul which would lead to such a critique: the first is his invocation of pure difference which is irreducible to negativity or contradiction: “The beautiful soul says: we are different but not opposed”; and second he notes that he shares the conviction that “only problems and questions matter.”¹² So where does Deleuze locate the important point of difference between the beautiful soul’s disposition and his own as philosopher of difference? The key to understanding this is found within the notion of subjectivity, broadly speaking. While the beautiful soul imagines a personal identity and good will as the essential features of the self, Deleuze instead explicitly rejects these notions as being vestiges of the universality he is at pains to reject. Rather than difference and its problematic element being the discovery or intuition of a particular subject, a beautiful soul, each is affirmed in and for itself, the affirmation of difference and the positivity of problems are no longer related to some subjective disposition. In Deleuze’s words: “they release a power of aggression and selection which destroys the beautiful soul by depriving it of its very identity and breaking its good will.”¹³ Here we begin to see the difference between the solipsistic stance of the beautiful soul as conceived by Hyppolite via Hegel, and a solipsism of a Deleuzian type which has little to do with the subjective unity characterizing the former.

Should we then speak of a solipsism at all, when the concept of Self, of a unitary and transcendental Self, is brought into question? Deleuze, in fact, insists that we do, saying: “it is indeed true that the thinker is necessarily solitary and solipsistic.”¹⁴ There is, however, a new and original sense in which this is the case, and while there might be points of comparison with Hyppolite’s solipsist types, there are at the same time essential points of difference. With this in mind, we shall proceed to examine the precise sense in which Deleuze’s thought demands a special type of solipsism, and discover the effects of this demand on the ethical praxis which Deleuze envisages. Two of Deleuze’s texts are crucial in this regard, both of which focus on literary works which they employ as hypothetical philosophical examples. The first, “Michel Tournier and the World without Others,” is found in an appendix to *The Logic of Sense*. It focuses on Tournier’s novel, *Friday*, which is itself inspired by Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. The second, “Bartleby; or, The Formula,” which appears in the late collection *Essays Critical and Clinical*,¹⁵ is an analysis of the works of Herman Melville, taking as its point of departure Melville’s short story, “Bartleby, the Scrivener.” As we shall discover these essays are closely connected, and read together give us a far-reaching insight into Deleuze’s position with regards to his conception of solipsism and its ethical importance and the corresponding problem of community.

Prior to the essay on Tournier, Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, had elaborated what we must call his 'structuralist' conception of the Other. He expresses his dissatisfaction with traditional philosophical accounts which associate the Other either primarily with other objects or else with other subjects, maintaining thereby a tedious and eternally repeated dualism, albeit with nuances. Even in the case of Sartre, who seems to take a step in the right direction by reconceiving the Other in terms of the implication of both subject and object, the Other being object for me, even if at the same time I become object for the Other, the dualism remains affirmed if complicated.¹⁶ Deleuze, on the other hand, diagnoses the Other as neither subject nor object, but as structure, as the transcendental condition of each: "Everything happens as though the Other integrated the individuating factors and pre-individual singularities within the limits of objects and subjects, which are then offered to representation as perceivers or perceived."¹⁷ This Other-structure is viewed as 'the category of the possible', and its incorporations, individual others, are constituted on the basis of the limits which it imposes. Deleuze here announces a project, one which he will only take up in earnest in the essay on Tournier, which seeks to rob the Other-structure of its power and its influence. It is his conviction that that which the Other-structure organizes in particular ways, singularities and individuating factors populating the plane of immanence of the earth and the cosmos, may be disorganized and thus made free to take up new forms of organization, or to use his terminology, new modes or modulations of consistency. Once we have realized that the Other-structure functions as an *a priori* nobody and nothing, not object, not subject, perhaps we can seek to pursue a regression, from the constituted world of objects and subjects in dichotomy, back to the Other-structure as a priori condition, and back still further to the elements which have been delimited by the category of the possible as the mode of functioning of the Other. Deleuze describes the essence of his 'world without others' project in this way:

...in order to rediscover individuating factors as they are in intensive series [difference] along with the pre-individual singularities as they are in the Idea [the problematic], this path must be followed in reverse so that, departing from the subjects which give effect to the Other-structure, we return as far as this structure in itself, thus apprehending the Other as No-one, then continue further, following the bend in sufficient reason until we reach those regions where the Other-structure no longer functions, far from the objects and the subjects that it conditions, where singularities are free to be deployed or distributed within the pure Idea, and individuating factors to be distributed in pure intensity.¹⁸

Thus Deleuze sets out the solipsist activity or journey which will preoccupy him in the texts on Tournier and Melville.

Let us be clear then about the essential difference which separates Deleuze and Hyppolite in this regard. Deleuze does not dispute Hyppolite's requirement that philosophy be an ontology of sense. In other words, he is not concerned to restore a

traditional metaphysics which takes the essential as its object of knowledge. Sense is as crucial for Deleuze as it is for Hyppolite. What separates their accounts is that Deleuze will not acknowledge that sense is constituted on the basis of a necessary *a priori* beyond which we cannot go without descending into nothingness, but on the contrary insists that such transcendental conditioning is always contingent and is never exhausted by that which it organizes in specific ways. To refer again to the conception of language (or ontology of sense) we read in *The Logic of Sense* that the primary order is never exhausted by its secondary organization and tertiary arrangement. Deleuze's engagement with Tournier's novel *Friday* may be best viewed as an experiment in thought which makes room for what is perhaps only a speculative account of the effects that might be expected to occur in the absence of the *a priori* Other-structure as Deleuze has conceived it. This, as we should note, is not the only possible approach, but it proves to be a productive and affecting one.

We should take a brief moment to mention here Deleuze's enduring interest in the possible paths to artistic creativity and the methods of escape from the norms and prescriptions of social life that the revolutionary can employ. In his 1988 interview with Claire Parnet, Deleuze expresses regret that so many understood *The Anti-Oedipus* as a call for social irresponsibility, for self-destruction and for a general rejection and hatred of all institutions and authorities. As early as *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze had dreamed of a creative life realized without the use of drugs and alcohol and without descent into madness. At the end of his remarkable study of the alcoholism of Lowry and Fitzgerald, Deleuze quotes the optimistic words of that old junky William S. Burroughs: "Imagine that everything that can be attained by chemical means is accessible by other paths."¹⁹ The sixth plateau of the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, "November 28, 1947: How do you make yourself a Body without Organs?" became in part an attempt to explore this possibility imagined by Burroughs. Deleuze and Guattari go so far as to insist that the drugged body is a botched attempt at creation. In other words it is destructive without being at the same time constructive or creative. Undoing the structured self requires total vigilance and caution. In turning away from the security and comfort of the organized, institutionalized and socialized world, one creates an opening not only for the new, the remarkable, the admirable etc, but also for destructive forces which without the security of the Other-structure one has no means to combat. Deleuze and Guattari advise: "...you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality... You don't reach the BwO, and its plane of consistency, by wildly destratifying."²⁰ This could not be more serious—it is a matter of life and death.

The world of Tournier's Robinson is without others in a more profound sense than the one Defoe has his character inhabit. It is true that both are stranded on a seemingly uninhabited island, and each is therefore faced with the ordeal of surviving without the aid of other people and the security and safety which the social environment brings. Tournier's Robinson, however, unlike Defoe's, undergoes a transmutation whereby the Other-structure begins to collapse irreversibly, and it is this transmutation which makes

Tournier's novel interesting from a philosophical point of view, an aspect lacking in the original narrative. Within the context of his analysis of *Friday*, Deleuze finds himself able to ask several philosophical questions relevant to the project he had announced in *Difference and Repetition*. He spells out the discoveries he expects his journey to yield in the following terms:

We will initially try to find out what the term 'Others' means on the basis of the *effects* of the others: we will seek the effects on the island of the absence of Others, we will infer the effects of the presence of Others in our habitual world, and we will conclude what the Other is, and what it means for the Other to be absent.²¹

The fact that we need to employ a fictional narrative in order to make these discoveries, while perhaps problematic if it were exhaustive of our potential resources, should nonetheless not be surprising. In order to see and to conceptualize that which is to some extent, though not completely, *outside* the habitual limits of our experience, we are required to exercise our capacity for imagination. Tournier's novel will not supply us with definitive answers, but this should not detract from its potential to lead us in directions which are unexpected and strange, but nevertheless illuminating. We might best perceive Tournier's novel as a hypothetical or fictional set of circumstances which provide a context which raises certain problems with regard to the philosophical conception of the Other and which enables us to ask questions about the nature of our world and the *habitus* on the basis of which it is constituted. In other words, it sets up a situation by means of which we can detect through experimentation the forces which operate to create and maintain the world and the ways in which we experience it according to the field of possibility which it presupposes. What we attempt to discover, or perhaps hypothesize, is what happens when that structure collapses. What remains? The fictitious experiences of Robinson permit us to conjecture that something remains, and not nothing as the Hegelian would have us believe.

What precisely is it, then, which defines Robinson's transmutation? He begins, in the same way as Defoe's character, by actively seeking to preserve the Other-structure—adhering to a certain discipline, keeping track of time through the construction of an elementary water clock, in short carrying on *as if* the Other-structure was still in place even though all actual Others are absent. Robinson seeks to fill the empty space normally occupied by Others with objects and activities which provide alternative actualizations of the structure itself. We can say that a transmutation truly occurs only when Robinson finally gives up all attempts to preserve the structure and finds his body cast adrift amidst an initially frightening and seemingly chaotic world of elements. In order to diagnose the stages of this transmutation, Deleuze detects a number of effects associated with the Other-structure, then finding an equal number of counter-effects once the structure starts to break down.

The first effect characteristic of the structure to be compromised we can call the effect

of security. The world of objects is constituted on the basis, in part, of how others see it and experience it. We partake of a shared experience by means of which objects we do not see or directly experience are experienced by others. The Other in this sense casts a light on objects, and there is nothing, or little, which is hidden or unexpected, and most of the time we can expect to be warned by others of potential dangers which might threaten us. The Other “relativizes the not-known and the non-perceived, because Others, from my point of view, introduce the sign of the unseen into what I do see, making me grasp what I do not perceive as what is perceptible to an Other.”²² In other words, we anticipate that the path we tread has been previously trodden by another, and thus we will be well prepared for any dangers present there. For Robinson, the effect of the absence of particular Others which fulfil this function is almost immediate. His island world presents itself as a fearful place, as a haven for the unexpected and the unpredictable. He is faced with the reality of a world in which he suffers without the security ensured by those in the midst of whom he normally finds himself. We might call this the neurotic or paranoid stage. It is the stage when the negative effects of the absence of Others are most keenly felt, and where the only compensation comes in the effort to preserve the Other-structure through the invention of alternative actualizations.

The second effect of the structure concerns the nature of subjectivity itself, or its constitution—the Ego. Deleuze argues that the structure formulates the conditions under which subject and object are distinguished and separated. We all arrive without the ability to distinguish ourselves from the objects, whether they be things or persons, which we encounter. As the structure begins to envelop us through the operation of language, that object that I was in the midst of my encounters becomes a past object to be replaced by the subject that I am becoming. It is not then that the simultaneity of subject and object is preserved or actualized, but rather that the object, the world of objects gives way to a society of subjects: “The mistake of theories of knowledge is that they postulate the contemporaneity of subject and object, whereas one is constituted only through the annihilation of the other.”²³ My consciousness, which once coincided with the object, is subjectified and the object is distanced from it. With the collapse of the Other-structure, the *a priori* conditions of subjectivation disappear, the subject that was disappears to be replaced by the object which it becomes. The point of transmutation, or the psychotic stage, is inaugurated when Robinson’s conditioned subjectivity begins to fade, when he ceases to distinguish himself from the island and his consciousness becomes nothing other than the consciousness of the island itself. It is the irreversible realization that it is not the collapse of the Other-structure which disturbs and disorganizes the world, but that on the contrary it is the structure itself which functions to conceal the world. In the end, it is only through the disappearance of the structure, and with it the Ego which it conditions, that the Hegelian resolution of thought with its object is finally achieved: “Robinson is but the consciousness of the island, but the consciousness of the island is the consciousness the island has of itself—it is the island in itself,”²⁴ and for itself. Notice that this resolution does not take place by way of any dialectical mediation or universalization, but rather by way of a regression, of a discovery of what comes before.

It turns out that here we do not find simply a void without content, as Hyppolite had imagined, but a rich resource whose potentiality had been covered over or blocked by the limits of the possible enacted by the Other-structure.

We can see Deleuze's essay on Tournier's novel as an attempt to demonstrate that Hyppolite's negative conception of the ineffable and the unknowable misses the mark, as it remains so entrenched in the Other-structure itself that it can see no possibilities outside it. This is why it becomes necessary to imagine or even undergo catastrophic events which cause this structure to collapse. There is no possibility of willing such a collapse, for the will presupposes the structure also. Desire in its subjective sense has meaning only when linked to an object which can fulfil it, an object of shared experience which may in principle be possessed by an other. We desire it only to the extent that we can conceive of the possibility of others desiring it. To will the collapse of the structure, in Hyppolite's terms, would be to will nothingness, whereas Deleuze asserts the obverse, not a will to nothingness, but a nothingness of the will. As to what role desire can play once it is separated from its object, this will make up the bulk of the positive theses of Deleuze's next project, the *Anti-Oedipus*. If the experience of what we have called transmutation is irreversible for Tournier's Robinson, it is because the structure is finally seen in its true light, as corrupt and corrupting, as a false image which has become transparent. Others appear no longer as the guarantee of security or sanity, but simply as actualizations of a structure that imposes limits which are not necessary and which are narrow and restrictive: "That was what other people were: the possible obstinately passing for the real."²⁵

However, if this is supposed to be a positive statement about the potentiality which could be opened up to us, its positivity seems far from apparent. The positive elements of Robinson's experience (such as a profound identification with the island, with the elements and the objects which now emit a natural light to which he has previously been blind) only emerge in the wake of profound and desperate suffering, suffering which leads to madness, to both neurotic and psychotic episodes, even if these are redressed without the need for an analyst. It is as if the shock that the collapse of the Other-structure brings about is so intense that few of us would survive it. If this is what it entails, then no one could blame us if we would prefer things to continue the way they are, remaining in blissful ignorance. In this sense, the positions of Hyppolite and Hegel carry some force. While we might not find simple nothingness, we have found that the dissolution of the self is a necessary aspect of the regression. In a recent article, entitled "Deleuze and the World without Others,"²⁶ Peter Hallward has given voice to such concerns and others like them. If we do see problems with humanity, if we see unsustainable environmental devastation, continued conflict and loss of life due to ethnic and racial differences, and so on, while Deleuze's position would seem to address these issues, in that they would not survive where that which conditions them has disappeared, it asks too much of us, it is itself conditional upon catastrophe and suffering, and thus its price is too high, so we must look elsewhere. Hallward, we should note, shares Hyppolite's conviction that the evocation of a world beyond or behind representation amounts to nothing and is the

failure of thought: “Deleuze’s project undermines itself precisely to the degree that he succeeds in evoking a singular world beyond the specific—a world without others.”²⁷ Statements such as these seem to miss the point, and place too much emphasis on Deleuze’s analysis of Tournier’s novel, as if here we expect to find some utopian vision of what the world could be like, if only we could rid it of others. As we have said, it is simply an attempt to try to understand what the Other is, what it means, and how it functions as structure. The question of whether we would be better off without it, whether it is even realistic to expect or even somehow orchestrate its collapse, is not what interests Deleuze. It is the wrong question. What we might perhaps more fruitfully ask is where and when this structure is at its strongest and most opaque, and when on the contrary it becomes weak or transparent. It seems to me that it can never be a matter of expecting or hoping that this structure will collapse all of a sudden, in an instant, but rather the important activity consists in identifying instances in which the structure has weakened, when those that seem to compromise it have an effect on those around them, a problematic effect which more often than not leads the structure, through those that actualize it, to react and to neutralize the threat.

In this regard, it seems to me that the essay on Melville has much to tell us, nothing to be sure that we could not find in *Anti-Oedipus* or *A Thousand Plateaus*, but expressed in such a striking way, perhaps due to the author’s boundless enthusiasm for Melville, that it stands on its own as one of the most remarkable of Deleuze’s essays. It seems to me that here everything comes together, the works on Nietzsche and Spinoza, the becoming-philosopher of *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense*, the adventures with Guattari, so many elements brought to bear to elucidate the revolutionary force of a text which might otherwise seem impenetrably enigmatic. For Deleuze, things always take place in the middle. It is never a question of occupying a world without others, of retreating to some solipsist’s paradise outside the habitual world. Rather, it is always a matter of making some change, some difference felt within, in the midst of things and their habitual constitution. This may be achieved in a number of ways, but Deleuze continues to accord a certain privilege in this regard to the activity of the artist. Language, for example, far from being exhausted by its common and accepted usage, offers the potential not only for imagining but for inaugurating new modes of existence, new modalities of expression. The great writer is the one who invents her own language, never *ex nihilo*, but always in the middle, within the context of a dominant language in which the relations of power (*pouvoir*) find their most effective ally. Melville, for Deleuze, is one such writer, and his *Bartleby* represents the author’s exploration of the power (*puissance*) of language in its minoritarian actualization.

The formula to which Deleuze draws attention in the title of his essay on Melville refers to the character Bartleby’s oft repeated phrase ‘I would prefer not to’. This formula manifests what Deleuze calls a fundamental agrammaticality, for although it conforms to the normal grammatical rules, it remains incomplete, and functions as a general statement to which no particularity is permitted to attach itself: not, ‘I would prefer not to’ do this or that, but an ever open-ended ‘I would prefer not to’ which will apply to all requests

and demands, a general abdication from the requirements of the Other. The effect of this formula is to open a rent in the fabric of the social, in its midst, and confront it with that to which it knows not how to react: “If Bartleby had [simply] refused [to undertake certain tasks], he could still be seen as a rebel or insurrectionary, and as such would still have a social role. But the formula stymies all speech acts, and at the same time, it makes Bartleby a pure outsider [*exclu*] to whom no social position can be attached.”²⁸ Bartleby “is too smooth for anyone to be able to hang any particularity on him.”²⁹

The interest of Bartleby lies not in his persona as an ethical type, exhibiting an exemplary attitude and practice, but rather in the effects he has on those around him. The attorney in the story (the boss), like Tournier’s Robinson, undergoes a transmutation as a result of Bartleby’s unusual behaviour. At first, he wants to restore to Bartleby his reason, to return his social status and thus to bring him under the auspices of the Other-structure. Once he realizes that this is impossible, he finds himself in the midst of a strange identification with Bartleby, ceasing to try to resocialize him, but instead seeing in Bartleby an alternative, different nature—but in the end his fear gets the better of him and he turns to the law, the structure’s advocate, for protection from Bartleby. Nonetheless we imagine that the effect of his encounter with Bartleby leaves him a changed man. Like Tournier, Melville is concerned to reveal a dualism between two types of nature, and to counterpose it to the more usual subject/object dualism. Deleuze finds in the latter’s protagonists, in his ‘Originals’ as Melville himself calls them, examples or incarnations of a Primary Nature which is everywhere distinct from secondary or sensible nature. We have said that the effect these ‘primary’ types have on those with whom they come into contact is important, as because of their strangeness, their ‘outlandishness’, they problematize the normal activities and confound the expectations of those who remain enclosed by secondary nature. Nonetheless they seem singularly susceptible to the demands of authority—Bartleby is imprisoned after all. This is because what such types manifest is an abdication from the paternalism and hierarchy by means of which society functions. They can never serve an authority and likewise they can never serve as an authority. They can come together only as brothers and sisters, never as father-figures, or managers or supervisors. The paternal function itself is totally absent from their disposition. This makes them all the more vulnerable, in one sense, to the demands of the Other, for they have no means of effective resistance. But in another sense, they attain a certain immunity, failing to conform to any social status, and exhibiting a mode of existing altogether different, one which will have its effects: the possibility of a new community within the midst of the old, and which can perhaps increasingly infect the old with new values, displacing those that perpetuate the antagonism between humans.

What then is the special sense of solipsism which is given meaning in Deleuze’s philosophy? I would suggest that solipsism is a methodology, a means to knowledge, creativity, and ethical awareness, an activity which is at the same time more positive and productive, but less risky and destructive than other methods such as reliance upon drugs and alcohol. Make no mistake, the purpose is never anything other than to undo or unravel the self, but no longer in a brazen fashion, without consideration of the dangers

such an undertaking can present. Solipsism is a methodology for increasing knowledge of the self, how and why it forms, and on what it depends for its continued survival. Solipsism is an overcoming of the self achieved through intimate and intense attention to its characteristics and habits, its strengths and its weaknesses. There is no longer the sense that one's own self is all that one can ever know, but rather that until one does know one's self, one can know nothing else. It is not then a Socratic 'know thyself' in order to accept oneself, but rather a Nietzschean overcoming of self through comprehensive knowledge and understanding of that self, what made it possible and what can unmake it.

Where does this leave us with regard to community and the possibility of a shared humanity, notions so important to Hegel and Hyppolite and which, for them, are lost to all philosophy which refuses to accept the primacy of the universal? Deleuze is not satisfied simply to develop the benefits and achievements of a certain solipsistic activity, he wonders also whether from such a context a sense of community and friendship can emerge. It is, without doubt, a difficult idea to come to terms with, but let us be clear that Deleuze is not a utopian thinker. He has no clear idea about what such a community could be like, and has no formulas for its organization. Such ideas are precisely against his nature. I have suggested elsewhere that the work and terminology of anthropologist Victor Turner might be explored to elucidate something of what Deleuze may have in mind.³⁰ Turner postulates a dialectical relationship between liminality (marginalized, minoritarian subjectivity) and *communitas* (spontaneous, unplanned, intense community). This should in no way be read as a return to a Hegelian phenomenology, and I will not read Deleuze as a dialectician. The relation between solipsism and community, between liminality and *communitas*, is a purely negative dialectic. As terms, they persist in a relation of reciprocal presupposition such that neither is ever reduced to nor overcomes the other, nor is the tension between them ever resolved, as it is this tension which gives them life and direction (meaning and sense).

If all this seems somewhat vague, it is perhaps necessarily so. Maybe it is easier to say what such a community would be against than what it would be for. Identifying what it would be against, however, at least in part clears the way for what it might be for. We have said that it would be against paternalism and hierarchy, in favour of a fraternity or sorority. We have seen too that it would be against anything which perpetuates the subject/object duality, and would pursue instead an immanent materialism. Deleuze identifies two other important 'against': "against the particularities that pit man against man and nourish an immediate mistrust; but also against the Universal or the Whole, the fusion of souls in the name of great love or charity."³¹ Against, then, the Hegelian model of society, which seeks to find dialectical resolution between these two opposites. Community is not to be built on the basis of some universality, even a concrete one, but instead may be built only upon an affirmed pluralism which provides the context for the greatest possible originality, uniqueness and singularity. Such a community will be characterized above all by an unashamed affirmation of life. Towards the end of the *Bartleby* essay Deleuze reveals, briefly, his vision: "against the European morality of

salvation and charity, a morality of life in which the soul is fulfilled only by taking to the road, with no other aim, open to all contacts, never trying to save other souls, turning away from those that produce an overly authoritarian or groaning sound, forming even fleeting and unresolved chords and accords with its equals, with freedom as its sole accomplishment, always ready to free itself so as to complete itself.”³² Solipsism, in the end, is never the overriding factor, but functions as one possible basis upon which a new community might be built. One is a solipsist only to the extent that one identifies the conditions which structure the self and its present gloomy social environment, and one finds oneself unable to continue to live in accord with these expectations and requirements. One does not thereby give up on the possibility of community altogether, but rather one acts in such a way that a community might be inaugurated according to altogether different conditions, “a new community, whose members are capable of trust or ‘confidence’, that is, of a belief in themselves, in the world, and in becoming.”³³ Perhaps this is the most important achievement of the solipsistic activity as I have outlined it here—a belief in a self that one knows and overcomes, rather than a despondency towards a self that one ends up with, and a belief in a world that is real and proximate, rather than imagined and distant.

Notes

1. See for example Michael Hardt’s *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993).
2. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 7. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Périckès et Verdi: La Philosophie de François Châtelet* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988) 19: <<l’abstrait n’explique rien, c’est lui qui doit être expliqué; l’universel n’existe pas, seul existe le singulier, la singularité.>>
3. Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (New York: State U of New York P, 1997).
4. Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* 12.
5. Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* 16.
6. Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* 17.
7. Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* 8.
8. Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* 11.
9. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia UP, 1990) 91.
10. Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* 19.
11. Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence* 10.
12. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) xx.
13. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* xx.
14. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 282.
15. Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco

(Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998).

16. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Sartre and Deleuze in the context of the latter's essay on Tournier, see Constantin V. Boundas, "Foreclosure of the Other: From Sartre to Deleuze," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 24.1 (1993): 32-43.

17. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 281.

18. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 281-2.

19. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 61.

20. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 160.

21. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 304.

22. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 306.

23. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 310.

24. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 311.

25. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 308.

26. Peter Hallward, "Deleuze and the World without Others," *Philosophy Today*, 41 (1997): 530-544.

27. Hallward, "Deleuze and the World without Others" 531.

28. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* 73.

29. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* 74.

30. See Stephen J. Arnott, "Liminal Subjectivity and the Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm of Félix Guattari," *Limen* 1 (2001) <http://www.mi2.hr/limen/limen1-2001/stephen_arnott.html>.

31. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* 87.

32. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* 87.

33. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* 88.

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