



## Deleuze's Bêtise: Dissolution and Genesis in the Properly Human Form of Bestiality

Julián Ferreyra

To cite this article: Julián Ferreyra (2016): Deleuze's Bêtise: Dissolution and Genesis in the Properly Human Form of Bestiality, *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17570638.2016.1141484>



Published online: 14 Apr 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Deleuze's *Bêtise*: Dissolution and Genesis in the Properly Human Form of Bestiality

JULIÁN FERREYRA

*University of Buenos Aires, CONICET, Argentina*

According to Deleuze, stupidity (*bêtise*) is the *properly human form of bestiality*. With this notion, he does not seek the properly *human* aspect of man in a difference vis-a-vis animals (be it of degree or of nature), but in a *community* of living beings. He challenges therefore classical philosophical anthropology, which defines the properly human by a fixed place in the grid of nature. Confronted with stupidity, the human being loses his place at the summit of the *scala naturae*. All determinations, the noble and the vile, the human and the animal, collapse: the human individual is forced to face with terror the *pure ground*. But unlike the satirical vision of humanity, which tolerates and even enjoys human misery as it tumbles down the ladder of being, stupidity cannot stand indifference and homogenization. Stupidity becomes a *royal* faculty that allows us to experience the field of Ideas that is the *transcendental*, genetic condition of all that exists.

KEYWORDS Deleuze, stupidity, *bêtise*, idea, human nature

Who would willingly admit his own stupidity? Even when stupidity emerges, too violent to be denied, too powerful for our understanding to grasp what it is experiencing, our unique goal is to get rid of all this nonsense as soon as possible: either by denying it, or—if we are *clever* enough—by learning from our mistakes. What is science after all, what is the point of philosophy, if not a quest to rid ourselves of human stupidity? And then we find a philosopher who not only admits his own stupidity, who not only insists on his own stupidity, but who also affirms that stupidity is *the proper quality of man*—and posits stupidity at the very heart of thought; a philosopher who affirms that we should *think stupidity (bêtise)* if we want to grasp what it is to be human, what distinguishes us as creatures from the other beings in this world. This is one of the most fascinating lessons of Gilles Deleuze's philosophical work.

Our human experience is neither clever nor intelligent. It is not clear and distinct. It is stupid. This consideration of the human condition seems very misanthropic. And it is so, but only to a certain degree. There is in fact a *slum naturalism*<sup>1</sup> in the Deleuzian perspective, and stupidity is a way for Deleuze to expose the misery of the human condition: we are craven, we are base, we are cruel. We are not the center of the cosmos; we are not the kings of creation; we are no better than animals, plants or even minerals. Every point of reference becomes uncertain. All determinations crumble before our eyes. But that dissolutive perspective is only half the truth because stupidity is also “the object of a properly transcendental question” (Deleuze 1994, 151). That means that stupidity is transcendental from a Deleuzian perspective: it is constitutive of our experience, not only as its *condition of possibility*, but also as its genetic principle. And if stupidity were only a *negative* concept, it could not be properly transcendental. It could not offer the experience of the *genesis* of existence but only lead to its annihilation. There are therefore two facets to stupidity. Accordingly, Deleuze develops the notion of stupidity through two phases: one that is misanthropic, nihilistic, chaotic, and abysmal (in which stupidity appears as a flaw of human nature, in which we witness the meltdown of the categories of modern thought—and everything seems to end up being the same); and one that is productive, positive, optimistic (the genesis of the Deleuzian Idea). The confusion between these different layers leads unavoidably to terrible misunderstandings, such as taking the philosophy of Deleuze as one of indifference and moral equivalence.

### Stupidity as a specifically human form of bestiality

Stupidity is “a properly human form of bestiality [*bestialité proprement humaine*]” (Deleuze 1994, 150). With this statement, Deleuze addresses the question that structures the tradition of philosophical anthropology: What *essentially* separates humans from beasts? What is the *properly* human? According to orthodox philosophical anthropology, the essential human properties would be intelligence, reason, speech, consciousness, natural light, even laughter. Deleuze, on the contrary, chooses an obscure, irrational, silent, subconscious, dull, and stupid feature: *bêtise*. Nonetheless, stupidity is characteristic (*propre*) of human beings. Therefore, on one hand, Deleuze *blurs* the difference between men and animals (making philosophical *anthropology* impossible), while on the other hand he aims to fix a criterion for this distinction. Derrida reads this oscillation as hesitation, and accuses Deleuze of having the most orthodox philosophical anthropology as an implicit presupposition:

Deleuze distinguishes what is proper to man, *bêtise* as proper to man. The animal cannot be *bête*. Deleuze had written earlier: “*Bêtise* is not animality. The animal is guaranteed

<sup>1</sup> We take this term from Bakhtin’s reflections on the Menippean satire: “A very important characteristic of the menippea is the organic combination within it of the free fantastic, the symbolic, at times even a mystical-religious element with an extreme and (from our point of view) crude *slum naturalism*. The adventures of truth on earth take place on the high road, in brothels, in the dens of thieves, in taverns, marketplaces, prisons, in the erotic orgies of secret cults, and so forth. The idea here fears no slum, is not afraid of any of life’s filth. The man of the idea—the wise man—collides with worldly evil, depravity, baseness, and vulgarity in their most extreme expression” (1984, 115).

by specific forms which prevent it from being *bête*." In other words, the animal cannot be *bête* because it is not free and has no will . . . "Now the animals are as it were forearmed against this ground by their explicit forms." This is why they cannot be *bêtes*. The formulation, it cannot be denied, is vague and highly empirical, and the expression "as it were" [*en quelque sorte*] introduces a blur into it. ("Now animals are *as it were* forearmed against this ground by their explicit forms") and, as for the explicitness of a form ("Now animals are as it were forearmed against this ground by their *explicit* forms"), that is a question of degrees the criteria of which will always remain difficult to fix. From what moment is a form *as it were, explicit*, and at bottom [*au fond*] what forms is Deleuze thinking about when he designates here in such a general and indeterminate fashion "animals". . . ? Do humans not also have *explicit* forms that forearm them, *as it were*, against *bêtise*? (Derrida 2009, 153–154)

According to Derrida, Deleuze's formulation is "vague and highly empirical" and characterizes animality in a "general and indeterminate fashion." Derrida believes that Deleuze is incapable of going beyond the classical distinctions between man and beast, even if he claims to achieve this. I hold, on the contrary, that Derrida's take on Deleuze is too empirical. He does not take the *transcendental* quality of stupidity to its full extent. The father of deconstruction seems to believe that Deleuze, when he states that "the animal is protected by specific forms which prevent it from being 'stupid'" (Deleuze 1994, 150) or that "animals are in a sense forewarned against this ground, protected by their explicit forms" (1994, 152), is talking about some sort of *empirical* protection that forearms animals against stupidity (like a shield or a magic dome), while keeping an essential (idealist) difference between animals and men: freedom and will ("the animal cannot be *bête* because it is not free and has no will"). Deleuze specifies that man's properly *human* aspect is his stupidity, but Derrida decides that he means "freedom," on the mere basis of a reference to Schelling (2006, 153).

Deleuze is not thinking of an empirical, generic, protection that would forearm empirical *animals* and not empirical *humans*. The oscillation, the blur that he introduces in the distinction between man and beast aims to challenge the clear differentiations of the classical image of thought. Genders and species belong, according to Deleuze, to classical representation, an assessment that is at the center of the criticism in the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition* ("The Image of Thought"), in which the notion of stupidity appears. The explicit forms cease to be either empirical or vague (as Derrida believes) once we consider Foucault's conception of the Classical age: "What I saw was the appearance of figures peculiar to the Classical age: a 'taxonomy' or 'natural history' that were relatively unaffected by the knowledge that then existed in animal or plant physiology" (Foucault 1989, xi). According to Foucault, "Animals" are not an empirical object, but the product of the form of *episteme* that once conceived the world as an ordered grid of classification or taxonomy of living beings (Foucault 1989, 136–206). This is the conceptual framework of Deleuze's developments, and he makes this, *as it were*, explicit in the beginning of this third chapter of *Difference and Repetition*: "In science one is confronted by objective presuppositions. . . . By objective presuppositions we mean concepts

explicitly presupposed by a given concept” (1994, 129). The classical way of representation supposes its classificatory categories. And that is what protects and forewarns against *stupidity*. In this sense, Foucault writes in *Theatrum philosophicum*: “[The categories] instruct us in the ways of knowledge and solemnly alert us to the possibilities of error, while in a whisper they guarantee our intelligence and form the a priori of excluded stupidity” (Foucault 1998, 361). As we can see, the notion of specific or explicit form is thus neither vague nor empirical, as Derrida asserts.

This lack of vagueness is reinforced by the reference to the concept of individuation in the second paragraph on *bêtise*. “Individuation” is *the* concept of one of the great sources of inspiration for the Deleuzian ontology: Gilbert Simondon. We will later come back to the positive meaning of individuation, but what is at stake for the moment is what Simondon contests: the orthodox conception of individuation, what he calls the *hylomorphic* model, which “makes the individual the result of an encounter between form (*morphé*) and matter (*hyle*) that are always already individuated,” and which “assumes the existence of the individual they seek to account for” (Simondon 2005, 23–24). The simplest example of this model is a brick: clay that is shaped by a steel mold. The mold is the form, the clay is the matter; and their encounter “produces” the brick. The grid of representation, the taxonomy that classifies living beings through genders and species relies on the *hylomorphic* model. It provides the specific or explicit *morphé* that this model requires.

But the *hylomorphic* model goes well beyond the field of natural history. It also shapes the history of modern philosophy. The Cartesian Cogito (“I think, therefore I am”) aims to establish a link between thought and individuation that avoids the explicit presuppositions or forms of classical representation. He does not therefore want to define man as a “rational animal,” which would explicitly presuppose the concepts of rationality and animality. But, according to Deleuze, he does not escape subjective or implicit presuppositions: namely, the meanings of “self,” “thinking,” and “being” (1994, 129). By doing so, he remains *in a sense* in the field of *hylomorphism*, the “I” being the form, the “am” the matter; the form *I think* (*Je*) bears upon the indeterminate matter *I am* (*moi*). But they contain *implicitly* what species and kinds *explicitly* develop (1994, 129). The Cogito contains, then, the classical representation that it aims to surpass. “They have a common fate, *Eudoxus* and *Epistemon*” (1994, 151–152): the man of science develops explicitly what the Cartesian philosopher contains implicitly. They both suppose a dogmatic, classical, image of thought, according to which there is an order of things. The only difference is the method according to which we have to avoid straying off the right path.

There is, therefore, no vagueness or empiricism in Deleuze’s formulation of the explicit or specific forms that would forearm or guarantee animals against stupidity. There is no implicit, orthodox, philosophical anthropology in Deleuze. However, it is still quite vague *how* a heterodox philosophical anthropology is possible, what kind of “*properly human form of bestiality*” stupidity can be. Is it not only a *blur*, a *chaos*, a realm of *indifference*?

## Skin disease of earth

*Everything is the same! Nothing is better!*

*You can see the Bible crying next to the water-heater*

(Enrique Santos Discepolo, from the Argentine Tango “Cambalache”)

Categories, grids, molds: those are the explicit or specific forms, neither vague nor empirical, that protect “animals” from stupidity. Animals are *forewarned* against stupidity, simply because the concept of “animal” belongs to an *episteme* in which everything is classified: there is no way for the species to mix, for the categories to crumble, because they are objective presuppositions of this *episteme*. It is not the same with *man*. The emergence of this obscure figure, said Foucault, overthrew the classical *episteme*—and menaces man himself (thus, the famous closure to *Order of Things*: “man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” [Foucault 1989, 422]). Once *man* appeared, there was no more order and classification: no more natural history. No more forewarning. Foucault himself draws the bridge between that aspect of the figure of *man* and stupidity: “To think in the form of the categories is to know the truth so that it can be distinguished from the false; to think ‘acategorically’ is to confront a black stupidity” (Foucault 1998, 361).

Such is the tragic fate of man: to be a creature that strives to climb to the top of the *scala naturae*, but whose stupid nature condemns him to fall abruptly to the ground. “It is as if, as Schelling tells us, we were to stand at a great height and suddenly, as if from nowhere, we felt tempted to jump” (Wirth 2015, 108). How is this fall possible? Because a portrait of human cowardice, cruelty, and baseness is the necessary counterpart of the chimera of a flawless human being: As Robert C. Elliott has remarked in his *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (1970): “[Satiric verse is] usually characterized by two main elements: the predominating negative part, which attacks folly or vice, and the understated positive part, which establishes a norm, a standard of excellence, against which folly and vice are judged” (quoted in Hyatt 2006, 148).

The more we separate ourselves from the animals, the more we lose the protection against stupidity that “specific forms” provide, and we enter a process of becoming in which all the forms of identity fail—we *become animals*, animals that do not have any reference left to a *specific animal form*. The literary genre of *satire* portrays this odd becoming:

When satirical poets proceed through the various degrees of insult, they do not stop with animal forms but continue on to more profound regressions, passing from carnivores to herbivores and ending with cloaca as though with a universal leguminous and digestive ground. The internal process of digestion is more profound than the external gesture of attack or voracious movement: stupidity with peristaltic movements. This is why tyrants have the heads not only of beasts but also of pears, cauliflowers or potatoes. (Deleuze 1994, 150)

From man to animal, to plants, to cloaca and a digestive ground: we assist the collapse of the forms that instructed us in the way of knowledge (empirical as well as transcendental categories). There is a *slum naturalism* inherent in reality, which

the satirical poets are able to grasp: “The adventures of truth on earth take place on the high road, in brothels, in the dens of thieves, in taverns, marketplaces, prisons, in the erotic orgies of secret cults, and so forth. The idea here fears no slum, is not afraid of any of life’s filth” (Bakhtin 1984, 115). Cowardice, cruelty, baseness, and stupidity are the only structures of thought as such “from the point of view of a philosophy of *nature*” (Deleuze 1994, 152). The narcissistic relation of man with himself becomes thereafter a form of self-hatred, a particular manner of misanthropy. Man is nothing but a skin-disease of the earth, as Nietzsche wrote and Deleuze quotes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, his most misanthropic book: maybe man is essentially miserable; maybe resentment, bad conscience, and nihilism are “the principle of human being as such.”

This satirical, cynical vision of humanity seems terrible, but is actually quite comfortable. While stumbling down the ladder of being, we got rid of the Ideal of a flawless human being, of the imperative to be the kings of creation at the top of the *scala naturae*. As Nietzsche shows in his “History of an Error,” there is only one step from the *unattainable* Ideal to its removal: “An idea that is of no further use, not even as an obligation,—now an obsolete, superfluous idea, consequently a refuted idea: let’s get rid of it!” (Nietzsche 2005 171). The Ideal of a privileged place in the cosmos for the human does not burden us anymore. We can lie here, in this pool of self-hatred, for an indefinite time—just forget that it is actually a *cloaca*. There is wicked enjoyment in human misery: “The satire is another way of saying that human nature is miserable. Look, what misery, human nature! . . . The slave is the one who feels better the more things go badly. The worse it goes, the happier he is” (Deleuze 1980). Each human flaw is the confirmation of the uselessness of striving for any improvement. All we do, all we *humans* are, is so despicable, that it’s the same either way. We are just *slaves*, we are not to be held responsible for our actions. In this terrible equivalence, any action is validated. All concrete moral dilemmas vanish in the face of the unattainable Ideal. In this terrible equivalence, it’s the law of the strongest. *Tout se vaut! Todo es igual!*

This is the greatness of Warhol with his canned foods, senseless accidents, and his series of advertising smiles: the oral and nutritional equivalence of those half-open lips, teeth, tomato sauce, that hygiene based on detergents; the equivalence of death in the cavity of an eviscerated car, at the top of a telephone pole and at the end of a wire, and between the glistening, steel blue arms of the electric chair. “It’s the same either way (*tout se vaut*),” stupidity says, while sinking into itself and infinitely extending its nature with the things it says of itself; “Here or there, it’s always the same thing; what difference if the colours vary, if they’re darker or lighter. It’s all so senseless—life, women, death! How stupid this stupidity!” (Foucault 1998, 362)

This is the triumph of chaos and indifference. But the problem is that this outcome is not the result of a *decadent* choice, of a wicked individual or group of individuals that *prefer* to conceive human nature as miserable, as a way out of moral obligations. Stupidity is not an option, a possibility, but a *structure of thought*: “Cowardice, cruelty, baseness and stupidity are not simply corporeal capacities or traits of character of society: they are structures of thought as such” (Deleuze 1994, 151).

What is at stake goes nonetheless well beyond human nature. What stupidity reveals is not only the obsolescence of the human ideal, but the ideal nature of every determination: “All determinations become bad and cruel . . . , flayed and separated from their living form, adrift upon this barren ground” (Deleuze 1994, 152). The encounter with stupidity in its full dimension is a generalized awe and terror. We face the cruel movement of the pure ground and therefore the dissolution of all that exists. The movement of stupidity is not restricted to *human determinations*. It affects *all* that exists. It seems almost better to remain in the previous stage of stupidity: cynical, low, and miserable. However, there is no way out, because stupidity, and the barren ground that it brings to the surface, are transcendental; that is, as we shall see, inseparable from existence because they are its genetic condition. There is no escaping this pure ground: “[The pure ground] is the indeterminate, but the indeterminate in so far as it continues to embrace determination, as the soil does the shoe” (1994, 152). The supposed relation between the determination and what it ought to determine (according to the *hylomorphic* scheme) appears for an instant inverted: the determination becomes powerless in respect to the indeterminate, which appears as a dissolving force.

However, how can stupidity be the *properly human* form if it carries us down the ladder of nature to the dissolution of all categories and forms? And, in general, how can the Deleuzian ontology account for any form, any determination, if it is linked to this terrible ground that dissolves *all determinations*? Ultimately, the ground not only menaces determinations and individuations, not only threatens the fixed formations and identities, but also endangers the *philosophy of difference itself*. Has the night where all cows are black fallen upon us? Deleuze seems to have brought on himself the famous accusation of Hegel against Schelling: “Absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black” (Hegel 1977, 9).

## Beyond the anxiety of indifference

Such is the trap laid by representation, of which Deleuze was well aware: “[Representation] represents groundlessness as a completely undifferentiated abyss, a universal lack of difference, an indifferent black nothingness” (1994, 276). That is the *double bind* of the dogmatic image of thought that must be dismantled: either me or the abyss. We fall into the trap by rashness. “This is the anxiety at the heart of stupidity,” as Jason Wirth states in his essay on Deleuze’s concept of stupidity, written in the footsteps of Schelling’s *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (Wirth 2015, 108). If our thought was able to escape the snare of representation, we could see that the ground is full of difference, and that this difference is the source of all determination.

Wirth’s Schellingian approach to the concept of *bêtise* allows us indeed to achieve a better comprehension of how the disaggregative face of this transcendental problem is part of a process of genesis and determination, even though it may seem paradoxical and even unthinkable from the point of view of dogmatic thought. But in order to achieve this, we must read Schelling—as Wirth does—outside of the great shadow projected by Hegel. When Deleuze defends Schelling



from Hegel's accusation regarding the absolute night that would be the necessary outcome of his transcendental philosophy, he is in fact defending himself:

How unjust, in this respect, is Hegel's critical remark about the black cows! Of these two philosophers, it is Schelling who brings difference out of the night of the Identical, and with finer, more varied and more terrifying flashes of lightning . . . Hegel criticized Schelling for having surrounded himself with an indifferent night in which all cows are black. What a presentiment of the differences swarming behind us, however, when in the weariness and despair of our thought without image we murmur "the cows," "they exaggerate," etc.; how differentiated and differentiating is this blackness. (1994, 190–191, 277)

According to Deleuze, then, what Schelling portrays is not a *black nothingness*, but the ocean of differences. Schelling brings the difference out of the night of the Identical by exploring the differences that lie in that ground that swarms below the limits of human consciousness. But "turning over the ground is the most dangerous occupation" (1994, 152), and therefore this exploration can only be accomplished with care—and love. It is love, according to Schelling, that not only prevents the ground and existence from contradicting themselves, but compels us to think them together:

The being of the ground, as of that which exists, can only be that which comes before all ground, thus, the absolute considered merely in itself, the non-ground . . . But the non-ground divides itself into the two exactly equal beginnings, only so that the two, which could not exist simultaneously or be one in it as the non-ground, become one through love, that is, it divides itself only so that there may be life and love and personal existence. For love is neither in indifference nor where opposites are linked which require linkage for [their] Being, but rather (to repeat a phrase which has already been said) this is the secret of love, that it links such things of which each could exist for itself, yet does not and cannot exist without the other. (Schelling 2006, 69–70)

By linking "that which exists" (that which we are used to thinking through the filter of classical representation) and "the ground," love allows us to think beyond representation, without dissolving the forms of existence (including our own), and at the same time forces us to think our existence as something that exceeds actuality. Love thus gives us the necessary courage to face the ground that "is there, staring at us, but without eyes" (Deleuze 1994, 152). We will find out, step by step, that the "dangerous occupation" of turning over the ground is the condition for a new individuation—an individuation that does not come from a direct transition from the absolutely undetermined to the determined, as the *hylomorphic* model makes us believe: "There is, however, no transition from the absolutely undetermined to the determined. That, for instance, the intelligible being should determine itself out of pure, utter indeterminacy without any reason leads back to the system of the indifference [*Gleichgültigkeit*]" (Schelling 2006, 49, translation modified).

There is no *immediate transition* from the absolutely undetermined to the determined. The determination cannot determine for itself the indeterminate, as the *hylomorphic* model supposes. The *hylomorphic* model does not forewarn us of indifference, but constitutes the system of the *Gleichgültigkeit*. But neither holds that the indeterminate *ground* is the key to *determination* (as in the romantic view). Both determination *and* the indeterminate are the poles of *indifference* that

Deleuze signals at the very beginning of *Difference and Repetition*: the black and the white nothingness, the undifferentiated abyss “in which everything is dissolved” and “the calm surface upon which float unconnected determinations” (1994, 28). The trap of representation—to which our anxiety contributes—consists in taking us from one aspect of indifference to the other.

### Stupidity as royal faculty: The field of ideas comes to the surface

Indifference is related to the satirical view, and not to that of *stupidity*. The satirical view is restricted to good sense, that is, “sense which is called good. Good sense is by nature eschatological, the prophet of a final compensation and homogenization” (Deleuze 1994, 224). The satirical view is captured by the dogmatic image of thought, which believes that the conditions of experience resemble the experience itself (1994, 212): the virtual realm is thus from that perspective essentially unrecognizable. On the contrary, stupidity is “the object of a properly transcendental question: how is stupidity (and not error) possible?” (1994, 151). If it is the object of a *transcendental* question, stupidity must account for the *genesis* of all determinations, not for their dissolution. It does not reproduce the logic of the experience, nor does it follow the good sense of the actual (the conditioned), and it does not lead to the final homogenization of the indifference. And this is because the Deleuzian transcendental is not the same as the Kantian. Deleuze goes beyond Kant (and in this sense Deleuze can be considered a *post-Kantian*) by looking for the conditions, “not of possible experience, but of real experience” (1994, 69, 154). The “possible experience” supposes that experience can be founded in something *outside* the experience, transcendent (and not immanent) to it, while in the *real* experience the condition “forms an intrinsic genesis, not an extrinsic conditioning” (1994, 154). It is a question of production and generality (1994, 154). The conditions of real experience are the ultimate stage of stupidity, and they are what make it a *properly* transcendental faculty. This is the reason Deleuze can call stupidity “the generality of thought” (1994, 275).

Therefore, in order to be a *properly transcendental question*, stupidity must account for the genesis, and not only for the dissolution, of determinations. Thanks to stupidity, *all determinations* must not only become “bad and cruel,” but also, *living*. How is this possible? How is stupidity, as a properly transcendental question, possible? To this question, Deleuze responds: “It is possible by virtue of the link between thought and individuation” (1994, 151). That is, by virtue of “individuation,” stupidity, and the ground that it brings to the surface, should make experience real. Deleuze is referring to Gilbert Simondon’s conception of individuation: the individual is not the stable outcome of the encounter of a determination with the indeterminate, is not the taming of the matter by form, but a metastable (in Simondon’s terms), fragile, and temporary stage in the *process* of individuation. What accounts for the genesis of individuals is a *field of preindividual potential*. This field does not exhaust itself in the individual that is constituted, but continues to haunt determinations (Simondon 2005, 303). It does not transcend the individuals that it produces, but is *transcendental*. The ground that the human individual

unavoidably faces in his stupidity is this field of potential; not indifference, but the difference in itself.

In the Deleuzian ontology, this field of preindividual potential takes the shape of a field of Ideas. As with love in Schelling, the Ideas link what they divide, that is, they engender differences “which each could exist by itself, yet does not and cannot exist without the other” and in doing so make “life and love and personal existence” possible. Also like Schelling, Deleuze does not think that there can be an immediate transition from undetermined ground to the determination. For this reason, in his original theory of the Idea, Deleuze adds a third logical value: “the determinable.” Through the virtual Determination, indeterminate, determinable: together, they form the three-part structure of the Deleuzian Idea (cf. 1994, 171). The field of Ideas constitutes the Deleuzian realm of the *transcendental*: genetic and productive conditions of our *real* experience. This genitivity must be taken literally: the movement of the Ideas engenders the individuals that populate our actual world through the endless process of actualization. This genesis is neither external nor contingent, but derives from the very nature of the Idea—there is not an Idea that does not actualize itself, there is no *actual* that does not have its roots in the ideal (virtual) element that accounts for its coming into existence (1994, 209).

## Conclusion

From the point of view of the actual (“the point of view of a philosophy of nature”, Deleuze 1994, 152), stupidity can be an abyss of madness, misanthropy, and indifference. It can be the point where all determinations dissolve, become bad and cruel, and *tout se vau*—the principle of a *slum naturalism*. But stupidity can also be the “royal faculty” that allows us humans to experience the field of Ideas where “the transcendental landscape comes to life” (1994, 151). Because, unlike satirical poetry, stupidity does not remain in the *cloaca*. There is no enjoyment in the baseness, no *esprit de la décadence*. There comes a point at which stupidity contemplates itself in stupidity “and can no longer stand itself” (1994, 152). At this very point, philosophy of nature becomes philosophy of spirit (1994, 152). As a transcendental faculty (and not a merely empiric, naturalistic faculty, as the one behind satire), *bêtise* envelops a “profound complicity between nature and spirit” (1994, 165), between the virtual and the actual, between Ideas and the determinations that they engender. Nature, in the filth as well as in the supposed glory of the human *species*, is bonded with spirit. Ideas and nature are not extrinsic to each other, but “Ideas are the ultimate elements of nature” (1994, 165). Ideas are always *in this world* (against Hallward’s thesis that they would be necessarily *out of this world* [2006]) shaping our social, physical, cognitive, and ethical existence, which corresponds to different varieties of Ideas (1994, 184).

The transcendental is not properly human, but the condition of any real, actual existence. We humans are a fragile and temporary stage in the *process* of individuation. We are not a fixed region of being, but part of a process of becoming—and thus no longer in the realm of the dogmatic image of thought. Against the tradition of philosophical anthropology, Deleuze does not seek the properly *human* aspect of

man in a difference vis-a-vis animals (be it of degree or of nature), but in a *community* of living beings (that would be later developed in collaboration with Felix Guattari under the concept of *becoming-animal*). What is *properly* human is the *transcendental* faculty of *bêtise*, and accordingly the properly human is to experience (consciously or unconsciously) the stupor and obscurity that are the sign of the genetic forces that both *determine* and *develop* what we are in an endless becoming: just a fragile and temporary stage in the *process* of individuation. Far from being a pitiful, misanthropic trait, it is the most dignified characteristic of our humanity. We *express and experience* these genetic forces, which are not external and do not transcend us. They are immanent to our experience. They are the structure of our thought as such. They are the transcendental condition of our real experience. In other words, they are the unavoidable and glorious *stupidity* of human existence.

## References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1980. Lecture on Spinoza, December 9, 1980. <<http://www.webdeleuze.com/php/texte.php?cle=20&groupe=Spinoza&langue=2>>
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. London: Continuum.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2009. *The Beast and the Sovereign*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Elliott, Robert C. 1970. *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1989. *The Order of Things*, London: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1998. "Theatrum Philosophicum." In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, translated by Robert Hurley, 343–368. New York: The New York Press.
- Hallward, Peter. 2006. *Out of This World*. New York: Verso.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1977. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hyatt, Millay Christine. 2006. *No-where and Now-here: Utopia and Politics from Hegel to Deleuze*. Los Angeles: University of Southern California.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2005. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*. Translated by Judith Norman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schelling, F. W. J. 2006. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. Translated by Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt. Albany, NY: SUNY.
- Simondon, Gilbert. 2005. *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*. Paris: Millon.
- Wirth, Jason. 2015. *Schelling's Practice of the Wild, Time, Art, Imagination*. Albany, NY: SUNY.

## Notes on contributor

Correspondence to: Julián Ferreyra. Email: [djulianferreyra@gmail.com](mailto:djulianferreyra@gmail.com)