

Whose Hume Is This?

Emilian Margarit
Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi

Jeffrey A. Bell, *Deleuze's Hume. Philosophy, Culture and Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009

Keywords: Deleuze, Hume, exegesis, historical ontology, dualism

For the one seeking to understand the silent thought of Gilles Deleuze, an exegesis about his first book published, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, is surely a remarkable undertaking, not because Deleuze embarking on Hume is an odd thing for a French philosopher, but for being his first attempt to imprint a direction of thought in philosophy; hopefully, some of his “idiosyncrasies” are better lightened in his early work. This is only natural if we assume that his genuine concepts owe to the manner of his reactions concerning philosophical heritage. I make this assumption for at least two reasons, the former being reflected by one of the main consequences of the book mentioned above, the critic of representation (Deleuze 1991, 29-30), and the latter, a general conclusion of the first one, that his philosophy is not an unknown fruit sprung from the old tree of Western philosophy. The following discussion dwells upon the issue of a pleasing book: the exegesis on Deleuze’s first published work by Jeffrey A. Bell in 2009: *Deleuze's Hume. Philosophy, Culture and Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. This is not Bell’s first book on Deleuze; he published an exegesis on Deleuze’s philosophy of difference three years ago (Bell, 2006).

Returning to the problems of *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, we see that Bell’s book on how Deleuze reads Hume is not as his first title announces, mainly because five of his six chapters use Hume and some of the lines of argumentation

Deleuze has forged in Hume; to be more precise, his intention can be set in the devious experimentations he makes in an attempt to clarify the coil of political consequences of Deleuze and Guattari with *Anti-Oedipus*. But let us not be hasty, considering that an exegesis on Deleuze's Hume has not been the main subject of any interpretation until now and perhaps Bell is concerned with the locus of this book, i.e a minor one, in respect to the line of thought suggested by many of Deleuze's interpreters. The last two chapters of Bell's work are exploring an issue that is just an application of Deleuze's and Guattari's political philosophy, the name of Hume and the socius of the 18th century are just circumstances for an explanatory compounds skillfully mastered by using concepts like territorialization, deterritorialization, and counter-actualization. The middle of the book is a nexus joining together what is to be used as an explanatory machine for the aforementioned application. For Bell, Historical Ontology is the name of the process that expresses the manner in which Deleuze's philosophy is neither on the side of the subject, nor on the side of the object; it is a process involving "the drawing of a number of associations and links between human and nonhuman elements [that] enables the actualization of the autonomous factual reality that is then taken to be the cause of these relationships." (Bell 2009, 71-2). When I spoke of devious experimentation, I had in mind only this rhizomatic concept of historical ontology. It is a concept that has as many fathers as mothers: a scientific dimension given by authors as Ian Hacking, Manuel Delanda; another scientific perspective with implications of social ontology brought by interpreters highlighting the importance of mathematics and physics for Deleuze's ontology such as Brian Massumi, John Protevi; last but not least, the works of Bruno Latour who on his own terms, mingles a Deleuzian political flavor with elements of the philosophy of science. A fog rises in the depths of the text where only shades of strange languages mix, making a naive reader believe that Deleuze is the last frightening alchemist of the old world (even Heidegger appears here with a mere role of one line) (Bell 2009, 64-80).

What I am trying to say is that the concepts developed by Deleuze starting with *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense* as ‘pre-individual’ and ‘event’ need clarifying with respect to their function and status, or their modification in the works started with Guattari, for the sake of clarity, and not for giving an explanation to the manner in which Bruno Latour manages to deal with some similar topics in a Deleuzian way. Although this could mean that Bell’s book is addressed to those that are already familiar with Deleuze’s work and with his secondary bibliography, one can still ask oneself why the concepts developed in his later works are not faced to his work on Hume; isn’t this exegesis concerned with the way Deleuze is reading Hume? And being so, we practically assume that we are dealing with the same issue in all of his works and we are confronted with the same problems, or maybe we are to guess that he had all his thoughts laid down in his first published book. If we just presume that some lines of thought which are particular to his entire philosophy are given there, we must assume this only in respect to the arguments that need to be laid on the table. Let us say that we are dealing with the same problems, only answers differ from book to book, but is not this a dangerous road, taking into account that in his first (Deleuze 1991, 106-110) and last book, *What is philosophy?* – the first half of it, to be more precise – contains a warning: we must read an author for the problematic that he or she envisages or for a concept developed only in a plan of immanence drawn by the author. With Hume, he discusses political issues (that are in need or lack in respect to their institutional solutions), but it is not the same as that of *Anti-Oedipus* (desire exhausted by capitalism). The arguments for this are the following: firstly, the *Anti-Oedipus* is written with Guattari and a Lacanian field is implied; secondly, between 1953 and 1970 Deleuze wrote several books, and each one implied a new problematic or a re-experimentation, a new set of concepts, etc.

A positive aspect is given by the confrontation of Bell with Alain Badiou, throughout his book, on to the general project of Deleuze’s philosophy given that Badiou is a harsh and acknowledged reader of Deleuze. Even from the start, Bell

raises the problem of Deleuze's empiricism in the terms elected by Badiou claiming that his philosophy "fails in his effort to reconcile the dualism of empiricism with his assertion that being is univocal" (Bell 2009, 2). The dualism he is talking about in Hume refers to the relation between the causes of perceptions and those of the relations among them. The relation amid those two should be seen as resolved on the line described by Bergson as the relation between virtual and actual as we can see in the second chapter, including the problem of the self that has in Deleuze's Hume a particular and quite different aspect in respect to the concept of historical ontology (Deleuze 1991, 64). As Bell rightfully shows, the author fails to illustrate the difficulties encountered by Deleuze and what was the intent of Deleuze's book per se - the first chapter discusses the issue of Deleuze's Hume in terms of empirical transcendentalism. The dualism encountered in Hume is not the same as that of Badiou's terms of critique who is clearly speaking of Deleuze's Spinoza and mostly of the *Logic of Sense* and *Difference and Repetition*. We notice that when it comes to Deleuze's Hume, we are dealing with a dualism of "the whole of nature which includes the artifice and the mind affected and determined by this whole" (Deleuze 1991, 44). For a better understanding of his part of dualism in Hume's reading, it is perhaps necessary to refer to the problematic of the texts in that period and not to accept the political implications of similar issues sometimes reduced to a draft given by Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*.

Another positive aspect is specified by his insertion of Deleuze's arguments on specific problems encountered by interpreters of Hume in analytic philosophy, an approach that could stimulate the "other side" of philosophy so as to have the need for a different perspective on Hume's debate.

If we take Bell's quest in his own terms "We shall seek to think Deleuze's Hume" (Bell 2009, 7), i.e. as an immanent reading of the concepts built by Deleuze with Hume's material, we are reading the wrong book. The readers of this book are those that feel political desires when they read Deleuze, those that endure knowing that the logic of "and" is opposed to the logic of "is"; so this book is not about Deleuze's Hume, but

rather about the “ands”, the connections that Bell finds fit for the subject of Deleuze and politics, and etc.

REFERENCES

Bell, Jeffrey A. 2006. *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos: Gilles Deleuze and the Philosophy of Difference*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Bell, Jeffrey A. 2009. *Deleuze's Hume. Philosophy, Culture and Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1991. *Empiricism and Subjectivity*. Translated by C. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press.

Address:
Emilian Margarit
Al.I. Cuza University of Iasi
Department of Philosophy
Bd. Carol I, 11
700506 Iasi, Romania
Email: emi_margarit@yahoo.co.uk