

Evil spirit: Deleuze, Klossowski, Derrida

Deleuze, in a short essay on Pierre Klossowski's novel *Le Souffleur*¹, speaks of his "system of pure breaths" which, mythical, becomes at a certain point "a philosophy":

It seems that breaths, in themselves and in ourselves, must be conceived of as pure intensities.²

These breaths of pure intensity have the same character as the Nietzschean "relations of force"³ playing within and against one another which Deleuze had earlier invoked in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*⁴ and *Difference and Repetition*⁵; and it is indeed Klossowski's interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal return, from his 1957 lecture⁶ through to his book *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*⁷ (dedicated in the exergue "to Gilles Deleuze"), which drives the movement within this nexus of texts.

These are evil spirits or evil breaths – that is, evil to the prevailing philosophical/political order⁸. Avoiding reference to that perhaps more conventional thread of breath which leads through the Hebrew *ruah* (as in *ruah haqqodech* – holy spirit), Greek *pneuma*, Latin *spiritus*, German *Geist*⁹....etc, these evil breaths have of themselves no *being*, no *existence*, but are instead pure intensities defined only in their difference to one another. But this not in a privative sense, not in the sense that they somehow *lack* being; but rather in the sense that they "are" prior to any

¹ and the other parts of his trilogy, *Roberte* and *Le Baphomet*. The essay dates from 1965, and is reprinted in *Logic of Sense* in slightly amended form

² p297, Deleuze, G 'Klossowski or bodies-language' pp280-301 in *Logic of Sense (Logique du sens* 1969, trans M Lester & C Stivale), NY, Columbia University Press 1990

³ *ibid*

⁴ pp47-49, Deleuze, G *Nietzsche and Philosophy (Nietzsche et la philosophie* 1962, trans H Tomlinson) London, The Athlone Press 1983. These originary differential relations of force in Deleuze's first book are further cited by Derrida in his 1967 essay *Différance*

⁵ see the pages on energy pp240-241, Deleuze, G *Difference and Repetition (Différence et répétition* 1968, trans Paul Patton) London, The Athlone Press 1994

⁶ 'Nietzsche, polytheism, and parody', given at the *Collège de Philosophie*. See the brief account in the translator's preface to *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (ppvii–viii), which also gives the provenance back to Bataille's Nietzsche book

⁷ Klossowski, P *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle (Nietzsche et le Cercle Vicieux* 1969, trans DW Smith) Chicago, UCP 1997

⁸ not however - to make an immediate clarification – evil in the sense which Nancy defines it as the hatred of "singularity as such" (p128 in Nancy, J-L, *The Experience of Freedom [L'Experience de la Liberté* 1988, trans B McDonald] Stanford, SUP 1993); a singularity which Nancy explicitly aligns with that of Deleuze in *Logic of Sense* (see Nancy's note 12 on *ibid*, p190)

⁹ see Derrida, J *Of Spirit Heidegger and the Question (De l'esprit* 1987,trans G Bennington & R Bowlby) Chicago UCP, 1989, esp p101

notion of being, fixity or origin. And further; these pure intensities or differences are that *from which* being can be distilled, if the wager or decision is made to do so.

In the same way, these breaths/spirits have no identity; they have no "self", and as such, they are – says Deleuze – "of the order of the Antichrist" in that they are the destruction and death of God. Deleuze questions the great historic division of philosophy between on the one hand the pre-enlightenment centring of the infinite divine being and, on the other, the Kantian substitution of it by the finite self. For the self can only exist by virtue of God, and in this respect the enlightenment fools itself as to its own true footing¹⁰:

As long as we maintain the *formal* identity of the self, doesn't the self remain subject to a divine order, and to a unique God who is its foundation? Klossowski insists that God is the *sole* guarantor of the identity of the self and of its substantive base... One cannot conserve the self without also holding onto God (my emphasis)¹¹

In other words, the footing of the enlightenment is not true. It is not true in the sense that it is not what the enlightenment thinks it to be. It is not true in the sense that the footing is nothing other than non-footing, nothing other than intensities, movements, rhythms from the beginning, breaths from the beginning, heterogeneous origin, that which differs in itself, difference or counter-turn at the beginning.

The urgent need for these evil breaths, for this destruction of God as guarantor and, at the same time, the destruction of the self as a formal identity, is now more keenly felt than ever. We must call on the Antichrist. The naïve projects, on the one hand, of the destruction of God in the name of the enlightenment, science and rationality¹² or, on the other, of the questioning of the liberal left and its relation to the "war on terror"¹³, flounder inevitably and *precisely* at the moment predicable and "soluble" in Klossowski's philosophy of breath. These two projects, in all their naivety, their wilful Anglo-Saxon anti-intellectualism - and whatever our doubts (or not) about them - cannot be allowed *simply* to fail.

¹⁰ as noted also by others of very different tradition. See, for instance - from a more conservative point of view - Eric Voeglin's notion of "intramundane eschatology"

¹¹ Deleuze, 'Klossowski or bodies-language', op cit p294

¹² of which Dawkins, R *The God Delusion* London, Bantam Press 2006 can be given as exemplary

¹³ of which Anthony, A *The Fall-out: How a guilty Liberal Lost His Innocence* London, Jonathan Cape, 2007 is the latest example. See also especially Cohen, N *What's Left* and Hitchens, C *passim*

What is this moment of failure? It is:

1. the delusion that God can be destroyed, decentred or inoculated on the basis of an enlightenment and scientific project which, itself *as a self, as a project*, maintains the integrity of the self and associated concepts of foundational being, all of which continue to presuppose God
2. at the same time, the delusion that a currently effective politics, aiming to act in *our* world, at *this* time, can operate on the basis of the sanctity of the identity of this thing called the "self", the "human being", the "subject", one and naked in its being and intentionality

This failure is displayed by means of the philosophy of breath, since it reveals these positions as delusions and shows the manner in which they are delusions:

The order of God includes the following elements: the identity of God as the ultimate foundation; the identity of the world as the ambient environment; the identity of the person as a well-founded agency....; and finally the identity of language as the power of *denoting* everything else. But this order of God is constructed against another order [- "the order of the Antichrist"-], and this order subsists in God and weakens him little by little.¹⁴

The order of Antichrist subsists in God by means of the structure of the eternal return, to which Deleuze here gives the locution "which is said of". The eternal return is that which differs in itself. Hence, the eternal return is not said of the Same. It is *not* that the Same returns (in that case, we would be referring to the order of God):

On the contrary, it is the only Same, *which is said of* that which differs in itself – the intense, the unequal, or the disjoint¹⁵

Likewise:

It is indeed the Whole *which is said of* that which remains unequal¹⁶

And:

univocal Being [God, self] *is said of* beings which are not univocal¹⁷

¹⁴ Deleuze, op cit p292

¹⁵ op cit p300

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ ibid

In short, enlightenment positions which maintain the integrity of foundational Being and the self are shown to being sayings of and within a broader, more general economy. They and their effectiveness are not necessarily ruled out; but they are given their place, and their absolutist fantasies are deconstructed. They are deconstructed because it is said and revealed that the order of God is “constructed against... the order of the Antichrist”. In this case, to state construction is, perforce, to deconstruct, since the illusion of (the order of) God is the illusion of non-construction.

The philosophy of breaths is not more *radical* than these enlightenment positions. This “solution” to the failure of the attempt to show God as delusion whilst at the same time maintaining the security of identity and the self does not go *deeper* to a more profound level or a more destructive destruction. On the contrary, it reverts to the surface of which Deleuze speaks throughout *The Logic of Sense*¹⁸. Its strategy is *otherwise*, and thus potentially effective.

In turn, a potentially effective politics, at *this* time (now) and for *us*, must at least begin to make a similar counter-turn away from an ultimate reliance on the authority of univocal Being and the unequivocal self. In one sense this is a destruction of (the) enlightenment, and this reveals its danger and points to the sense of the evil of these spirits. It is a destruction of (the) enlightenment in that it *locates* it, *places* it; whereas what enlightenment positions wish to be, what they are defined as, is the unplaced – that is, the unquestionable ultimate location.

This is now, we posit, untenable. Revealing the delusion of God must, if it is to work, be true to its necessary implications.

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¹⁸ cf in particular the fragment ‘Second Series of Paradoxes of Surface Effects’, op cit pp4-11