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Differential cruelty

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In the first chapter of his major doctoral thesis, *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze draws an intriguing, albeit abstruse, connection between cruelty and difference or determination *as such*. In doing so, he pronounces determination *as such* or difference cruel and even irredeemably monstrous. The main undertaking of this essay is to show how the equation of determination-as-cruelty has a role more consequential than its auxiliary function in reclaiming difference in itself and “rescuing difference from its maledictory state.”¹ We shall argue that, on the one hand, such an equation reveals the vistas of an intricate metaphysics wherein ontology is inherently problematic or cruel and, on the other, it brings about an ethical opportunity in regard to the problematic determination of ontology as an elaborate system of cruelty. It is in drawing such a connection between difference and cruelty that Deleuze assigns himself a critical task which consists of reinvestigating metaphysics not only through a philosophy of difference but also a philosophy of cruelty. Yet the recapitulation of metaphysics in general and ontology in particular through a philosophy of cruelty requires, first of all, an intermediating level of analysis comprising three lines of inquiry. The first line of inquiry includes an investigation in order to learn what constitutes determination as such and where this determination can be found in its most naked and rigorous form. Second, we need to know the definition of such cruelty which is embedded in the constitution of metaphysics in general and ontology in particular. The third line includes a search for a plane of examination or an analytical model capable of intermediating between cruelty and metaphysics/ontology, a model capable of

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*a critique of ontological
reason in light of the
philosophy of cruelty*

recapturing metaphysical necessities and ontological relations in terms of determination qua cruelty. It is the possibility of re-examining ontology in the light of the philosophy of cruelty that this essay attempts to investigate. By pursuing the aforementioned lines of inquiry, we shall ultimately argue that the question of ontology heralds the dawn of the philosophy of cruelty, which assumes a crucial task in regard to bridging that philosophy with a speculative ethics. The task of the philosophy of cruelty, in this sense, is to become the harbinger of enlightenment for the ethics of being and remobilizing ontology in the shadow of its cruelty.

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act i: elements of cruelty

What constitutes the act of determination as such? Is it merely a unidirectional escape from gravity? Or is it a flight from gravity by coming into a collusive stance with it? The act of determination whose line of movement is that of unilateral distinction, Deleuze argues, distinguishes X from its chaotic background to *make a difference*. Yet what is this indeterminable background? Deleuze identifies it in terms of two realms of nothingness, black and white. Whilst the former is the void of absolute indifference, the latter is the domain of unconnected parts, determinate things which are only negatively correlated to each other; they are more than singular yet less than multiple. These two domains characterize two vectors of dissolution into the indeterminable; one is the dissolution into nothing as that to which nothing can belong and by which belongings must be annulled, the other is the vector of dissolution to the unconnected multitude. The junction between black and white realms of nothingness is a zone of dramatic illumination, neither inherent to the dark nor to the light, but to the line of unilateral distinction emerging from the tenebrous background. This emergence from the darkness of *Tenebrum* which generates a luminosity cast upon both realms is the function of determination or the making of difference. A line of illumination of this kind is peculiar to the style of Tenebrism, an accentuated form of *chiaroscuro* or clear-dark painting in which a type of luminosity is created that makes figures look as if they are ascending from the nigrescent background.² Shedding light on everything it traverses, the luminosity arising from the black domain of nothingness or the tenebrous void describes the function of the unilateral distinction that Deleuze ascribes to determination or difference as such, i.e., cruelty. Deleuze defines the unilaterality of distinction as follows:

There is cruelty, even monstrosity, on both sides of this struggle against an elusive adversary, in which the distinguished opposes something which cannot distinguish itself from it but continues to espouse that which divorces it. Difference is this state in which

determination takes the form of unilateral distinction.³

Now that we know what constitutes determination as such, we can move on to the definition of cruelty according to which Deleuze equates determination as such with cruelty, a “precise point” at which a series of implicit and explicit relationships between the determined and the undetermined are established in the form of a chain of nested cruelties.

Cruelty is nothing but determination *as such*, that precise point at which the determined maintains its essential relation with the undetermined, that rigorous abstract line fed by *chiaroscuro*.⁴

Deleuze reveals that he has predicated his concise definition of cruelty on Antonin Artaud’s idea:

[...] cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention and decision, irreversible and absolute determination.⁵

Cruelty is above all lucid, a kind of rigid control and submission to necessity.⁶

A comparison between Deleuze’s definition and Artaud’s germinal idea reveals that determination qua cruelty consists of a transition between a series of necessities in the form of intentions, submissions, decisions and instructions, all rigorous, conscious, irreversible and absolute, which is to say by any means and at all costs. For Artaud, such rigour first and foremost manifests in life in so far as life distinguishes itself from the void whilst the indifferent void does not partake in such vitalistic secession. Life is a strict determination in being distinguished from the void at all costs, even if the cost is submission to the necessity of the void. For this reason, life is cruel in an absolute sense as it relentlessly acts upon that which is radically exterior to it.

For it seems to me that creation and life itself are defined only by a kind of rigor, hence a fundamental cruelty, which leads things to their ineluctable end at whatever cost.⁷

If for Artaud our very existence is cruelty, it is because being is, ontologically speaking,

cruelty – a determined act against the void, a struggle at once monstrous and accursed. Here we witness a philosophy of cruelty proposing that the basic assumption of ontology is cruelty and only through remobilizing such cruelty as creativity we can do justice to ourselves and to the world. If *ex nihilo* is cruelty because it suggests that *something* distinguishes itself against the indeterminable void through relentless determination and at all costs, then the idea of ontology or the science of being is the very philosophy of cruelty. Now if *being something* or *to be* bespeaks of a fundamental determination, then it also bespeaks of a fundamental cruelty. From here we are directed to a radical conclusion which sheds a dramatic light on the ethics of being: ontology is the science of cruelty precisely because it is the science of *being* – a monstrous determination against the indeterminable. The implications of such a thesis signal the advent of an ethical enlightenment wherein being strives for justice by coming to terms with its cruelty, differentiating justice as a unilateral distinction from cruelty as that which refuses to estrange itself from justice. In order to support such a thesis, we should explain the reason as to why the question of ontology is the question of cruelty as such. This can be recapitulated as the possibility of rediscovering ontology as the philosophy of cruelty. In order to develop a speculative ethics of justice, first we need to develop a philosophy of cruelty in the guise of ontology so as to fundamentally support its definition of cruelty, its problems and conditions. For this reason, we proceed to a rudimentary reconstruction of ontology as the philosophy of cruelty. This includes a search for an analytical model which can explain ontological necessities and relationships in terms of determination qua cruelty and a rigorous dynamics of instructions, submissions and decisions (the third line of inquiry outlined at the beginning of this essay).

act ii: ontological reconstruction of an unspeakable torture

Through the history of philosophy, perhaps no one has reached the status of Aristotle as the great philosopher of cruelty. Such an appellation owes

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to Aristotle's peculiar approach to the determination of being as an indispensable binding of cruelty. Aristotle's approach is stated lucidly in his early comment on the torture inflicted by the Etruscan pirates on their captured enemies. Whether or not the comment adverts to a Platonic stage in the philosophic life of Aristotle, it is indisputably a decisive passage in that it exposes the elementary fundaments of Aristotle's system of intelligible ontology as a set of cruel determinations, submissions and instructions:

Aristotle says, that we are punished much as those were who once upon a time, when they had fallen into the hands of Etruscan robbers, were slain with elaborate cruelty; their bodies, the living [*corpora viva*] with the dead, were bound so exactly as possible one against another: so our souls, tied together with our bodies as the living fixed upon the dead [*nekrous*].⁸

It has been stated by historians that the Etruscans had a genuine form of torture whose terror could not be captured by words but only by imagination. Virgil attributes the practice of this torture to King Mezentius, the king of Etruscans, who punished the soldiers of Aeneas with this torture.⁹ Jacques Brunschwig details this torture in his essay "Aristote et les pirates tyrrhéniens."¹⁰ The Etruscans disseminated terror throughout their neighbouring territories by fettering the captured living soldiers to rotting corpses in a way that each member of the living person was chained to its putrefying counterpart belonging to the corpse. Face to face, mouth to mouth, hand to hand and leg to leg, the living person was fastened to the corpse in such an exact way that it could be said the living and the dead literally bound and mirrored each other on all levels.¹¹ The living person was usually nourished for a long time until he perished by the reek of decomposition and the subtle movements of putrefaction from the corpse to the living tissues. The Etruscans unshackled them once the person was fully putrefied by the corpse and turned black as a result. For the Etruscans, the blackening signalled the disappearance of the literally superficial difference – manifested as their

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superficial identities – between the dead and the supposedly living. For if the end of the punishment coincided with the blackening of both parties' skin and the disappearance of their superficial difference or identities, then the difference was not to be found between them but within them as a nigrescent ascension blackening relations between their identities. In the Etruscan torture, the nigrescent ascension of difference which effectuates the erasure of superficial difference (the difference between X and Y, the dead and the living) corresponds with the line of illumination emerging from the black background in the paintings of Tenebrism.

Too slow to be depicted by its graphic details and too elaborate to be taken as a mere physical punishment, the Etruscan torture was a metaphysical staging of being in its putative vitality and in its determination or difference as such. A nigrescent precursor to Tenebrism and a metaphysical prototype for the Theatre of Cruelty, the Etruscan torture became a conceptual resource for philosophers, from Aristotle to Cicero, from Iamblichus to Augustine and from Alciati to Bacon. Both Iamblichus and Augustine quote from Cicero Aristotle's fragment on the Etruscan robbers with minor variations. Their accounts, however, express an emphasis on an onto-theological shift. The soul's bondage or necrosis by the dead body signifies the truth of human life or human condition on earth as a punishment (*timōria*) ensued by great sins committed prior to human existence and pre-individual guilt which genera of beings higher than human have taken upon themselves.¹² Aristotle, however, not only employs the Etruscan torture as a metaphysical model for the first time but he also explicates the composite of body–soul with regard to the Etruscan torture through elaborating the relations and necessities at work within the ontological tribulation. The idea of intelligible ontology is presented through a transition between necessities which is comprised of determinations, intentions, instructions and submissions, a gradient of cruelties each more intense than the previous. The idea of punishment or torture in this case emerges from such a transition between the *nous*, the soul and the body – the Ideal, the problem and

its solution – rather than an extrapolated idea of penance which overshadows the ontological model with an extraneously theological framework. Whereas in the passage Aristotle merely rediscovers the Etruscan torture as a metaphysical model of cruelty for the twofold of body–soul, it is only in his mathematical ideas with regard to ontology that Aristotle unfolds the tremendous consequences of such a model.

For Aristotle the ties of the soul as the force of vitality to the body should be rediscovered in terms of the living tied to the dead. The soul is the act of intellect upon the body; yet it needs an instrument – a body – to perform its special activities in regard to its inner part or Ideal which is the *nous* or the intellect. The task of the soul is to bring the universe into unison with the intellect according to its intensive *ratio* (reason) with the *nous*. The body is an instrument by which the soul can accomplish its mission in regard to the intellect. Accordingly, the soul has two activities which are characterized by their predispositions. The first activity is characterized by its necessity; it is the unitive and inward activity of the soul according to the *nous* or the undying (ideal) inner part. Consequently, the inward or necessary activity of the soul is, in fact, its intensive and enduring correlation with its inner part (the *nous*). The second activity of the soul is its extensive or outward activity, marked by its contingency since it introduces the soul to that which does not belong to it – that is the body qua *cadavera*. Moving in the direction of what is exterior to the soul, the contingent activity of the soul vitalizes matter according to the ratio derived from its intensive relation with the intellect. The contingent activity of the soul – its tie to the body qua dead – is the price of pursuing its internal tie with the intellect and being in thrall to the ambition of the *nous* in acting upon the universe with the intention of rendering it intelligible. If the act of the *nous* upon the universe corresponds with the contingent activity of the soul and also contingent activity of the soul suggests the bondage of the soul to the body qua dead, then the act of intellect is the first instance of cruelty. This brings us to Artaud's dictum: "everything that acts is cruelty."¹³ Yet we will show that cruelty as the

act of intellect – harboured by the idea of vitality and the intelligible ontology – is merely an opening to a maze of an inexhaustible cruelty. Determination of being or the idea of ontology, in this sense, is a labyrinth of cruelty from whose turns and twists no one can escape.

The fact is that every living thing among us suffers the torment of Mezentius – that the living perish in the embrace of the dead: and although the vital nature enjoys itself and runs things for a while, the influence of parts nevertheless gets the upper hand not long afterwards, and does so according to the nature of the substance and not at all to the nature of the living one.¹⁴

The metaphysical model of the Etruscan torture explains determination of being as such in terms of bindings that chain the living to the dead – both qua the undetermined and to an internal vitality qua the determined. The living require both bindings to determine themselves against the dead and in regard to their own vitality. In the Aristotelian model, determination of being as such is also comprised of two bindings or vectors: the positive determination in regard to the *nous* as a vital necessity within the soul and the negative determination of the soul against the body qua dead. The two activities of the soul, correspondingly, stand for the intensive and extensive vectors of determination which respectively determine being in regard to an inner necessity (the Ideal of determination) and against the undetermined.

act iii: determination of being or synthesis of two indeterminable deaths

Being qua being or the idea of intelligible ontology is determined by the ratio of the extensive or contingent activities of the soul to its intensive or necessary activities. We shall now argue that the determination of being does not correspond with the ratio of a necrosis (extension to the body as an ephemeral instrument) to a vital immortality (intension towards the enduring *nous*), or the ratio of the undetermined to the ultimately determinable. Such determination,

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we shall elaborate, corresponds to a synthesis between two necroses, two indeterminable lines of dissolution and two systems of cruelty. In concluding that the determination of being as such can be attributed to the reciprocal relation between two indeterminable realms, we can return to Deleuze's philosophy of difference. In the fourth chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, Ideas and the Synthesis of Difference, Deleuze argues that dx is not determinable in regard to x , nor is dy to y , yet dx and dy as two undifferentiated realms of dissolution are determinable in regard to each other (dy/dx).¹⁵ The unbinding of ontological reason generates a differential domain of cruelty founded on the reciprocal synthesis of two systems of cruelty. In differentiating such a domain, the intensive and extensive investments of ontological reason coalesce into a reason of base cruelty whose site of activity is that of being.

In order to fully absorb its conceptual wealth, Aristotle arithmetically captures the metaphysical cruelty of the Etruscans. The Etruscan torture is thus arithmetically reinvented as a procedure called *aphairesis*, a negation of belongings and attributes or subtraction. Later, neo-Platonists and apophatic theologians utilized this procedure to determine the One or affirm the Ideal through its ineffability or indifference to the conditional qua belonging.¹⁶ *Apharesis* is an arithmetic procedure consisting of two vectors corresponding to the activities of the soul qua living in regard to the *nous* and the body qua dead. These vectors are intensive and extensive; yet despite their directional polarity, they are operationally reciprocal. The negative vector is the vector of removal whereby belongings or attributes are subtracted from a magnitude. The positive vector, on the other hand, emphasizes the possibility of conservation and persistence against subtraction. The vectors of *aphairesis* respectively effectuate the removed and the remainder in subtraction. The debasing coupling of the soul with the body qua dead expresses a temporal correlation with belonging (qua the instrument or mortal body) which is subjected to removal and subtraction. Yet the enduring bond of the soul with the *nous* corresponds with the conservable correlation with the inner part (qua the Ideal or

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necessity) which continues to remain under any subtractive condition – the positive vector of *aphairesis*. Therefore, the vectors of *aphairesis* arithmetically capture the extensive and intensive vectors of determination as such – negative determination against the undetermined and positive determination in regard to an inner Ideal or necessity. Whilst the latter finds difference in affirmation of a necessity or the vital persistence of the inner part against negation, the former negatively binds the undetermined; it is the subtraction of the body qua belonging which is epiphenomenal to the affirmation of the inner necessity or the intensive determination.

Negation results from affirmation: this means that negation arises in the wake of affirmation or beside it, *but only as the shadow of the more profound genetic element* – of that power or “will” which engenders the affirmation and the difference in the affirmation.¹⁷

At this stage, in order to show that being qua being is a site of progressive cruelty, we shall argue that even the enduring and determinable correlation of the soul with the *nous* is a site of necrosis. By unbinding the arithmetical twists implicated within the Etruscan torture as a metaphysical model, we shall argue that the intensive determination of being in terms of an ontological necessity is a source of indefatigable cruelty.

According to the subtractive logic of *aphairesis*, persistence with regard to an ideal inner part (intensive conservation) cannot be maintained other than by the continuation of extensive subtraction or negation of belongings. By the Ideal we mean that which is inherently “fore-closed” to the intensive operation of belonging and integrally withstands the dispossessioning power of subtraction (i.e., being qua *being*, the *nous* or the One). Determination of being in terms of an ontological necessity begins with the negation of belonging. Likewise, determination of genera of being in terms of the *nous* requires the negative binding of the body qua *cadavera*. In other words, ontological discourse begins with the *subtractive* binding of belonging. However, this simultaneous negation of belongings (or removal)

and correlation with an ideal inner part (or remaining) can only take place through the contraction of the remainder. *Contraction is an intensive medium for the making of difference* or determination of being as such; it bespeaks a basic principle of subtraction or *aphairesis* – the more belongings are removed, the less the remainder gets.¹⁸ For this reason, contraction integrates all the determinants required for the intensive determination of being as such: the shedding of belongings (removal); repetition (subsumed within the reiterated subtraction of belonging in *aphairesis*); conserving the correlation with an inner part (continuation of remaining); and the intensification of the correlation with the Ideal. In *aphairesis*, such intensification manifests as shrinkage or diminution of the remainder (remaining less).

Chained to the negative contingency imposed by the body qua *cadavera*, the soul cannot continue its correlation with the *nous* other than through contraction. In medieval sources of natural philosophy as well as esotericism, this contraction manifests as a shrivelling body. It is sometimes a corpse, a tree or a shrivelled-up fruit from which a cosmic array of entities are *individuated* and come forth.¹⁹ In late medieval and early Renaissance alchemy as the science of determining ideas, this contraction is necessary for extracting and revealing the correlation of the substance with its true ideas (ideals), that is to say, determining the substance in terms of its intensive ideas and necessities. In medieval alchemy, the nigrescent slime known as *caput mortuum* characterizes the state of contraction through which the vital ideas of the substance can be determined. *Caput mortuum* is the remaining of the substance after its vital ideas have been determined and extracted, a shrivelled body (residuum) which has lost its attributes or belongings. Without this contraction or the remainder which has undergone intensive diminution and blackening, the attributes qua belongings cannot be shed and true ideas of the substance cannot be determined or distilled.

Through contraction, the soul can contemplate its inner part (the *nous*) and being can contemplate its intensive determination with regard to an ontological necessity. Contraction, here,

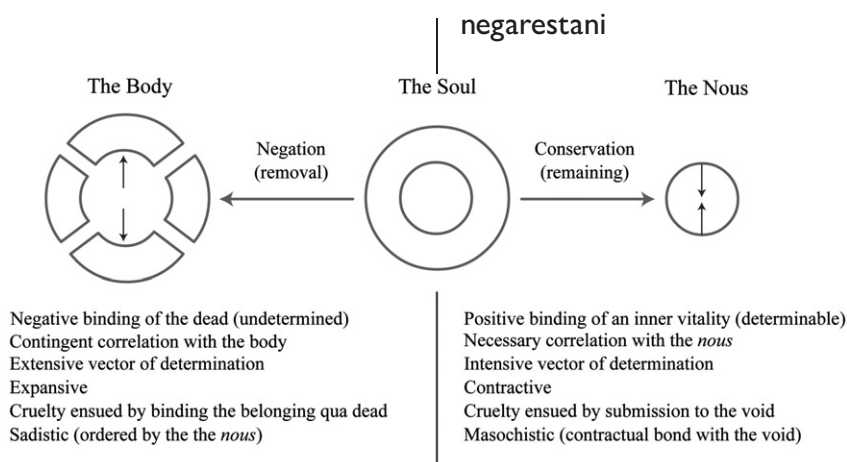


Fig. 1. The vectors of determination and their respective aspects according to the metaphysical model of Etruscan torture and the arithmetic concept of *apheiresis*.

“refers to the fusion of successive tick-tocks in a contemplative soul.”²⁰ These repeating tick-tocks are the vibrations of the subtractive correlation between development and envelopment of the soul, the negation of belonging and the conservation of an inner part (or ontological necessity). As the intensive medium of ontological determination, contraction is the curse of swinging back and forth between the *nomos* of the dead and the *nous* of the living; it imposes the cruelty of drawing difference from repetition which here is a passage “from external differences to singular difference,”²¹ from extensive determination through negation of belongings to the intensive determination of being in regard to its ontological necessity. In the metaphysical model of the Etruscan torture, whilst the necrotic correlation with the body qua dead refers to determination via negation of belongings, the putative vitality inherent to the living suggests the intensive ontological determination via affirmation of an inner necessity qua Ideal. The pendular movement between the outward necrosis and the presumed inner vitality thereby brings about the possibility of contraction as the medium required for the contemplation of ontological necessity.

Contraction is a difference or a modification of the contemplative soul – indeed, the modification of this soul, the only modification which truly belongs to it and after which it dies – it

appears that the most material repetition occurs only by means of and within a soul which draws a difference from repetition.²²

We argued that contraction simultaneously entails the shedding of belongings and the conservation of an inner part qua necessity. To put it succinctly, contraction envelops the requirements for the intensive determination of being as such. But what is the motor of such contraction or what *determines* the intensive medium of determination of being as such? In other words, if in *apheiresis* contraction suggests the state of remaining, or more accurately, remaining less, then what guarantees this lessening or shedding of belongings? Our answer to these questions is that only non-belonging – *that which belongs to nothing and to which nothing belongs* – can extensively guarantee the shedding of belongings and intensively ensures the lessening of the remainder or contraction. The intensive idea of ontology can only distinguish itself by factoring in the primacy of non-belonging qua the void.

In order to shed belongings and contract towards the Ideal, the primacy of non-belonging qua nothing must be affirmed and internalized. Through its absolute indifference and exteriority to belonging, the void qua non-belonging becomes a prime guarantor for the determination of being as such, because the intensive realization of such determination lies in the essential

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debaring of belonging. In this sense, contraction towards the Ideal approximates the void and its exteriority to belonging. However, the void is not only exterior to belonging but also to the ontological necessity of the Ideal. To put it differently, in order to distinguish being in regard to an internal necessity, determination must prioritize the reign of the void qua non-belonging which cannot be conflated with the ontological Ideal under any condition whatsoever. If we consider the intensive determination of being as the problem, the recourse to the void as the prime guarantor constitutes the solution. But it is precisely this solution that cannot be reconciled with the ideal which is an ontological necessity inherent to being. For this reason, solution is indeed a manifest cruelty in that it entails a submission to a problematic necessity: implicit surrendering to the intervention of the void in order to be explicitly distinguished from it.

We argued that the intensive determination of being which tries to correlate being with an ontological necessity is dependent on the intervention of the void. Therefore, the seemingly conclusive correlation of being with its ontological necessity enforces a higher form of bondage which is already there. This is why in the Etruscan torture the victim is released once its body turns black. The negative binding of the belonging qua dead does not lead to the positive determination of the living but to the intensive binding of the void which manifests as a line of blackening emerging from within. In this sense, ontological reason meticulously implements a fully fledged system of bondage from within. Cruelty does not end in wedding the soul to the dead, for it is constantly perpetuated by interiorizing the void within the soul to bring about the possibility of the soul's resistance against the dead and the possibility of its persistence in regard to the *nous*. Determination of being as such is cruelty but such cruelty is not a unified field of cruelty because the sources of such cruelty are more than one. Being as determination against the void is cruelty, for it bridges these separate sources of cruelty, and only by correlating these two sources can it maintain its persistence and proclivity – that is unilateral distinction or the realization of *ex nihilo*. The two

sources of cruelty are characterized as two vectors of necrosis, or two means of humiliating yet necessary bondage to the realm of the dead:

- One is the wedding of the soul to the body qua dead or the contingency of the outside. It is the realm of unconnected or subtracted belongings to which being can only contingently or negatively extend. Although belongings are determinable, there is no determination between them. We call this indeterminate realm the realm of death by negative determinations or dissolution by means of the *undifferentiated many*.
- The other realm, colder than the first, is inherent to the ontological necessity of being. This source of cruelty entails the binding of the soul to the void in order to preserve its vital bond with the *nous*. It is recourse to the void in order to determine the ontological necessity of being, but since nothing can belong to the void, such recourse – namely solution as belonging – is essentially a source of the problematic. Therefore, the second source of cruelty is problematic binding of the void; it is *death by the problematic* or becoming problematic by means of the absolute indeterminate. Such problematicity is neither sponsored by the many nor the One but by the void qua non-belonging.

Determination of being as such is only possible as the ratio between these two indeterminate deaths or forms of cruelty – the negative mobilization of belonging and the binding of the void qua non-belonging. The vitality of the soul qua living can only be determined once it is accurately fixed upon the dead and is firmly fastened to the void. Accordingly, the reciprocal relation of the two indeterminates or systems of cruelty presents a problem that could not be hitherto solved or posed – that is the problem of being *qua being*, the intensive idea of ontology. Determination as cruelty is simultaneously a struggle against and a submission to the synthesis of two indeterminate deaths which reign from within and from without. Determination is cruelty because it is neither generated by the synthesis of determinables nor an indeterminate realm (negative mobilization of contingency)

against a determinable one (the secured necessity of within). Instead, determination of being as such is ensued by submission to the reciprocal synthesis of two indeterminable realms (dy/dx). Constantly in struggle to distinguish itself through such a synthesis, determination as such is reckless; it is bent on securing a ground at all costs even by means of coupling with the dead and being problematically intimate with the void. The tenacity of such a determination is no less cruel than its consequences and the prices it must pay. If determination of being is the idea of ontology and if this determination is cruelty in all directions, then ontology is an elaborate science of cruelty.

act iv: determination as a problematizing correlation between two systems of cruelty, or the possibility of non-dialectical sadomasochism

The impact of Deleuze's philosophy of difference qua cruelty on ontology is – without exaggeration – imbued with inconclusive complications. Such complications equally and inevitably problematize not only traditional ontology but also Deleuze's own seemingly vitalistic philosophy.²³ Perhaps the most critical of such complications – by virtue of acting on both the philosophy of difference and ontology – is the problem of *duplicious determination*: being qua being is determination against the void but such a determination requires, by necessity, an implicit recourse to the void. It is through this implicit return to the void as the problematizing solution that the void determines difference or determination as such. According to the problem of *duplicious determination*, being qua being is both the determining subject and the problematically determined object of the void. By underpinning ontological reason through ratifying the univocity of being, the philosophy of difference remains reticent toward the problem of *duplicious determination*, since it mainly envelopes the problem in favour of the universal idea of being rather than arresting the idea of being in favour of the problem through which determination of being as such is implicitly guaranteed. The philosophy of cruelty, instead, supplants the

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corroborating role of ontological reason for ontology with the problematizing role of its own. This problematizing role determines being through its problematical bondage to that which does not belong to it rather than through its presupposed vital correlation with an internal ontological necessity. To put it differently, for the philosophy of cruelty, the ontological problem bespeaks of cruelty rather than determination, because the problem is essentially a submission to a necessity *at whatever cost*, even if the cost implicitly undermines the presumed necessity and renders it problematic. It is precisely this *embracing of the cost* against the priority of the necessity that the philosophy of cruelty insinuates. Determination of being in terms of an ontological necessity is a problem qua cruelty in so far as it costs a return to the void as that which is exterior to the ontological necessity.

For the philosophy of cruelty, the problem of *duplicious determination* substantiates ontology under the aegis of its bondage to the void; therefore, it speaks of principle (of cruelty) which must be brought to the foreground rather than be dissembled or disavowed in favour of saving the ontological reason. Whereas, in ontology, being cannot be determined other than in terms of itself (univocity as applied to *ens in communi*), in the philosophy of cruelty, being is implicitly determined by the void under the heading of the problematic. Before it can be “said in one and the same sense of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities,”²⁴ being must be said or determined in the sense of itself.²⁵ Yet determination of being as such is dependent upon the intervention of the void; which is to say, being-in-itself cannot be said or determined in the sense of itself. If according to the philosophy of cruelty the univocity of being is ultimately determined by non-belonging of the void as that which is simultaneously outside of being and immanent to it, then univocity of being is determined by the equivocality of its inexistence. Equivocal inexistence is not being-nothing, for it suggests that being cannot be said in the one and the same sense, whether it is in the sense of being or the void. Philosophy of cruelty proposes that the univocity of being is determined by an irreversibly problematic bondage to that which

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does not belong to it, and hence it is equivocally inexistent, which is another way of saying that being is existent and indeed univocal *only problematically* by virtue of the void. Equivocity of inexistence does not suggest any internal division within being or plurality of ontological senses; it still conforms to the univocity of being but only under the heading of problematization of determination of being as such. In short, the philosophy of cruelty stages the univocity of being implicated in the philosophy of difference as a problematical bondage to the void.

Determination emerges through a subtractive synthesis between two forms of cruelty, an explicit form corresponding to the Etruscan torture of binding the living to the dead and an implicit form which mandates reconsummation with the void. Ontology is ultimately a differential between these two forms of cruelty, each with its own mechanisms of torture, atrocious creativities, rules and problems. It is in the light of a philosophy of cruelty that Deleuze's philosophy of difference can be integrated with his investigation of formal systems of cruelty, namely sadism and masochism. In this sense, *Difference and Repetition* can also be understood as a work that continues the study of cruelty from a non-dialectical approach to the formal systems of cruelty in "Coldness and Cruelty" in *Masochism* (1967) to a differential formulation of cruelty in *Difference and Repetition* (1968). This critical shift marks a transition from a particular definition of cruelty to a universal and hence more radical definition.

Determination of being as such or the idea of ontology brings forth two systems of cruelty in the form of metaphysical sadism and masochism. The distinction between the two is not antithetical but rather stems from their exclusive or incommensurable sets of rules and respective problems. According to Deleuze's analysis in "Coldness and Cruelty," such distinction spontaneously emerges from the institutional/imposing relations in sadism and contractual bonds in masochism.²⁶ For determination of being, in the same vein, metaphysical sadism corresponds with the cruelty ensued by the instruction of the Ideal directed at being. The dialectic between problem and

solution or between the soul and the body must be conducted under the heading of the Ideal or the *nous* which posits an institutional network of relations between the soul and the body. The soul must extend to the body qua dead following the instruction of the *nous*. The domain of sadism is thus founded through imposition which is instructed and executed with a certain degree of explicitness that Deleuze associates with the "demonstrative language" of sadism.²⁷ In other words, the explicit dialectic between problem and solution in determination of being as such is ensued by the emphatic instruction of the Ideal and therefore corresponds to a domain of metaphysical sadism. Here the problem is recognized as the soul's mission of bringing beings into unison with the intellect, whilst the solution is constituted of the soul's extension to the instrumental body as that which is contingent to its vitality. It is the *nous* qua the Ideal that poses the problem and inspires the solution through an explicit line of ontological reasoning which leads to the bondage of the soul to the body qua *nekrous*. Therefore, the explicit side of ontological reason which has been imposed by the Ideal upon the correlation between the problem and solution is itself a form of violence. In "Coldness and Cruelty," Deleuze identifies the equation of reason-as-violence with the violence of sadism where the vector of negation overlaps the explicit line of ontological reasoning.²⁸ This is a violence which must be repeated in the form of *reiterative* subtraction and in the manner of sadism's *monotony* so that the Ideal can connect the intensive determination of itself to the extensive determination of that which cannot be counted as the Ideal. Since the *nous* qua the Ideal must simultaneously dispose of matter and bring lower genera of beings into unison with itself, the dialectic between the soul and the body or the extensive determination of being as such has to abide by the laws of the negative. It means that the body qua belonging must be negated as much as it must be instrumentalized to develop the extensive vector of determination, i.e., determination of being against that which cannot be distinguished in terms of being and only being. Therefore, the negative determination of the

body qua belonging which is imposed by the Ideal corresponds with the explicit line of ontological reasoning which principally indulges in negation. It is the Sadean realm of cruelty where, according to Deleuze, universal negation as an idea of pure and emphatic reason is posited.

In the work of Sade, imperatives and descriptions transcend themselves toward the higher function of demonstration: the demonstrative function is based on universal negativity as an active process, and on universal negation as an idea of pure reason [...]²⁹

It is the intensive idea of ontology guaranteed by the intervention of the void that brings forth metaphysical masochism. For metaphysical masochism, the binding of the void pertains to a contractual relation with the void. The void guarantees the shedding of belongings and contraction whilst, in return, being submits to the primacy of the void in order to remain in or conform to its ontological terms. As an explicit form of cruelty corresponding to the fastening of the living to the necrotized other at the order of the Ideal, metaphysical sadism chains *being* to the instrumental contingency of belonging. Therefore, metaphysical sadism takes form by employing a subtractive correlation with belonging so as to convert the negation of belonging (or the *nomos* of the *nekrous*) into the realization of being-in-itself (or the *nous* of the living). Metaphysical masochism, however, is the implicit form of cruelty encompassed by the intensive determination of being as such. In order to posit an ontological necessity for itself, being binds cruelty from within in the form of an unconditional *submission* to the void. Metaphysical masochism is the cruelty of *duplicitous determination*; it conflates the determined struggle against the void with the submission to the resolving intervention of the void. Determination of being as such intensively employs masochistic reason to find an inner locus for the deployment of the ontological necessity of being.

In order to determine being as such, the extensive vector of determination – which is the negative binding of belonging imposed by the Ideal – must be correlated with the intensive vector of determination which entails the

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contractual bondage to the void. Whilst the former corresponds with metaphysical sadism, the latter suggests a metaphysical masochism. In this sense, being as such problematically combines metaphysical sadism with metaphysical masochism. According to Deleuze, sadomasochism is essentially a problematic term,³⁰ yet the sheer problematic nature of such a term or synthetic system of cruelty does not attest to its impossibility. The possibility of ontological sadomasochism is indeed the import of its problematical synthesis according to which the incommensurable (the problem) is solved (rendered commensurable) by and in accordance with that which is exterior to the problem's Ideal and respective conditions, i.e., by the intervention of the void. On an ontological level, metaphysical sadism and masochism are problematically correlated with each other. It is, in fact, determination as such that problematically distinguishes itself through the problematical synthesis of two indeterminable systems of cruelty. In doing so, determination of being as such brings about the possibility of sadomasochism as a field of problematic (cruelty). Accordingly, sadomasochism does not express a complementary and dialectical unity between sadism and masochism. In sadomasochism as a problematical field of cruelty between sadism and masochism, the bond between the two is not complementary but subtractive and it is differential rather than dialectical. In positing its idea, ontology induces a problematic correlation between the two formal systems of cruelty and thereby establishes a problematical entity called sadomasochism. Being qua being is sadomasochism in that it problematically correlates two incommensurable systems of cruelty in order to determine itself in relation to an internal necessity and against the undetermined.

act v: necessity of a philosophy of cruelty in the wake of an interminable cruelty

We argued that once the idea of ontology is stripped to its basic components, what surfaces is a profoundly meshed system of elaborate cruelty. However, in terms of ontology as the science

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of cruelty qua determination of being, one should never anticipate an end to cruelty. Because when it comes to cruelty, one cruelty always rests upon another in a chain which cannot be broken by force. We shall now have the occasion to argue that fundamental cruelty – which is inherent to ontology – is not simply cruelty in so far as it has its foundation in cruelty but also because to such a metaphysical cruelty no end can be imposed. In other words, determination of being is cruelty in so far as it simultaneously resists and submits to the synthesis of two indeterminable deaths; yet what makes such a determination cruel under any condition whatsoever is that it cannot be resolved or concluded. Therefore, what makes determination of being as such ultimately cruel is that in addition to the inexhaustibility of the sources of cruelty, cruelty cannot be terminated. It is this interminable cruelty that makes determination of being, cruelty *as such*. A cruelty that can be concluded or terminated is not a radical cruelty, for it is subjected to the conditional. In regard to a cruelty which is dominated by the conditional, justice is merely the relocation of cruelty. This interminability of cruelty echoes a philosophy of the problematic wherein problems cannot be terminated by their solutions and which Deleuze traces back to Immanuel Kant:

Kant even refers to Ideas as problems “to which there is no solution”. By that he does not mean that Ideas are necessarily false problems and thus insoluble but, on the contrary, that true problems are Ideas, and that these Ideas do not disappear with “their” solutions, since they are the indispensable condition without which no solution would ever exist.³¹

In order to demonstrate that cruelty of ontology is interminable or resistant to correlation with any conclusive state or condition exterior to the field of its problematical determination, we must return once again to the Etruscan torture as a metaphysical model. According to the Etruscan metaphysical cruelty, the coupling of the living to the dead not only expresses the movement of the negative vector of subtraction (namely negative tie to the belonging qua dead) but also its positive vector

which is the conservation of the soul after its descent into the realm of the dead.³² Without such conservation, the soul qua the living is instantly mortified by the dead. In other words, subtraction does not guarantee the persistence of the remainder, nor does it presuppose the possibility of a remainder or an initial conservation. The possibility of the remainder merely points to a *condition* in *aphairesis* because subtraction may totally exhaust the given magnitude and therefore leaves no remainder. If in subtraction or negative mobilization of belongings, remainder – regardless of its persistence – is nothing but a mere possibility, then how is it that determination of being as such or the idea of ontology is assertively constructed upon such a possibility? Only when the possibility of the remainder is taken as an Ideal can the soul contract towards the intellect or being can be intensively determined. The soul can only conserve its correlation with its inner part or the *nous* if it is itself not subtracted by the negative bond with the body qua belonging. For this reason, the possibility of a remainder or the possibility of the soul’s survival after being tethered to the body qua dead is merely an ideal or problematical condition. It is problematical because such possibility is grounded as an emphatic ideality. In other words, the possibility of condition (the remainder) is determined against the impossibility of condition (namely the subtractive mobilization of non-belonging by which all belongings must be shed). We call this emphatic grounding of determination of being on a problematical possibility, anterior ideal; because it precedes the second ideal. The second or posterior ideal is the emphasis on the possibility of remaining or the persistence of what has been conserved. The determination of being can only be effectuated between these two problematical ideals. The anterior ideal is the possibility of being conceived from non-belonging or the void; it posits the possibility of a remainder in subtraction as an emphatic possibility or ideal condition. For this reason, the anterior ideal is a problematical life, for it grounds being on the possibility of escaping the negative power of the void. Accordingly, it is the problematical life (the possibility of the remainder) that brings

about death by the problematic. Recall that death by the problematic suggests the possibility of contraction or persistence of the remainder according to an inner necessity but this possibility is guaranteed by virtue of the problematizing intervention of the void qua non-belonging.

Problematical life is the cruellest of all, for it directly – albeit problematically – sets itself against the void as that which is alien to being. For the idea of ontology, cruelty of the anterior ideal (namely grounding on the void) demands the cruelty of the posterior ideal or death by the problematic, whilst death by the problematic which coexists with the correlation of being with an inner necessity presupposes the cruelty of the problematical life. Bound from both ends by two realms of the problematic, the cruelty associated with determination of being as such cannot be terminated or resolved. In its attempt to terminate this cruelty or the problematic, the solution re-enacts cruelty and reinscribes the problematic, because such a conclusive line of termination cannot confront cruelty unless it passes through its inherent fields of the problematic. Yet we argued that the problematic fields of determination qua cruelty are not uniform and do not exclusively belong to the Ideals and conditions of determination as such. These fields of the problematic are equivocally determined by the void. In a less technical sense, a solution cannot terminate a problem which has already been implicitly determined or ceased by the void. Since determination of being qua cruelty is problematically bound to the void at two ends (anteriorly and posteriorly), its problems cannot be resolved unless the solution factors in the void. In order to claim what has already descended to the underworld, one must dive into the Tartarus. Yet we know that factoring in the void qua non-belonging in order to resolve a problem according to its conditions and Ideals makes an inherently problematizing solution. This is another way of saying that in resolving the problems associated with the determination of being qua cruelty, the solution itself becomes an imposition of the void, i.e., the problematic.

If problems and conditions associated with the Idea of ontology are implicitly shared by the

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void, then the conclusion or extirpation of such conditions from outside is not possible. The interminability of ontological cruelty means that such cruelty cannot be correlated to a reflective meta-level. This meta-level is required for external reflection on cruelty in terms other than those of cruelty itself. Morality insists on correlating cruelty with terms and determinations other than those of cruelty in order to impose an end to it (moral justice) or establish an overseeing level necessary for intervention. Yet, in doing so, morality passively reproduces the tension of the problematic correlation through which cruelty persists. It is the tension within the problematical correlation of *determination as such* with its *indeterminable backgrounds* or sources of cruelty that can neither be fully abandoned nor undone. Deleuze's philosophy of difference is, first of all, a universal ethics in so far as it demonstrates that difference or determination as such qua cruelty creates a field of the problematic for which solutions (correlation with the beyond or a meta-level) remobilize the problem rather than terminate it. For this reason, a ratiocinator capable of grasping the problem through an interminable field of problematical syntheses is required. This ratiocinator must be differential so as to grasp cruelty not as a unitary field of the problematic but as incommensurable fields which are indeterminate by themselves but determinable in regard to each other. The philosophy of cruelty is such a ratiocinator, capable of seeing ontology as a differential or non-unitary field of cruelty pregnant with the problematic and, therefore, capturing ontology through syntheses between sadistic and masochistic reasons, or between being out of the void and being through the void.

act vi: a recapitulation in the name of cruelty, a conclusion in the name of the void

The philosophy of cruelty is a nigrescent underside to the philosophy of difference; although they proceed from the same assumption (i.e., determination as such), the twisted outcomes of the former are at odds with those drawn from the latter. This essay has attempted to

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demonstrate the unbinding role of the philosophy of cruelty for “being as the problematic” of the philosophy of difference. We have argued that it is the philosophy of cruelty and not the philosophy of difference that brings the problem of *duplicitous determination* to the foreground: unilateral distinction of being as such is implicitly determined by the void. This implicit determination is quite different from saying that the void does not distinguish itself from that which breaks from it; rather, it suggests that the principle of determination as such mobilizes the void as an equivocal problem. In a less technical sense, being qua difference-in-itself is a *return* to the void under new problems and conditions. These problems and conditions constitute the very ground of ontology and its respective Ideals and problems. For this reason, an ethical approach to ontological problems should abandon the priority of a univocal ontological necessity for being and confront “being as the problematic” (Deleuze) without factoring in any such privilege.

Whereas for the philosophy of difference “being as difference” is cruelty in so far as it rigorously and irreversibly sets itself against the undetermined, for the philosophy of cruelty “being as difference” can only resolve the intensive course of determination by recourse to the void and bringing about its intervention. Therefore, the philosophy of cruelty not only confirms the explicit cruelty of “being as difference” but also accentuates the implicit cruelty embedded within difference-in-itself – that is the necessity of binding the void as a guarantor for intensive determination. Accordingly, within the ontological domain, the contractual (masochistic) bondage to the void as a constitutional primacy precedes the supposed primacy of the ontological necessity. Hence, in the light of the philosophy of cruelty, “being as difference” is a being whose correlation with its ontological necessity is a twist into and out of the void. Ironically, for this reason, *being as a differential field of cruelty* is not a direct conclusion of the philosophy of difference; rather, it is the index of the philosophy of cruelty where the explicit cruelty of determination (or unilateral distinction) is wedded to the implicit

and contractual bondage to the void. It is this *being as a differential field of cruelty* that calls for a speculative ethics of justice which is disillusioned about the precarious position of an ontological necessity and does not situate itself outside of the problematic.

The underlying ethical assumption of Deleuze’s philosophy of difference is that justice should be internal to the problematic qua cruelty. The philosophy of cruelty, however, takes this one step further in order to unbind the true speculative opportunities of the problematic; it conjoins the essential internality to the problematic with being’s equivocal inexistence (or the inherent problematicity of being as such). The latter is a line of enlightenment drawn by the philosophy of cruelty and entails the toppling of any ontological or noetic priority presumed within and for being. It is through the marriage between problematicity and equivocal inexistence that the true speculative power of ethics is unbound. In the wake of the philosophy of cruelty, ethics can return to the mathesis of the problem once again wherein the problem is not determined by its solution or conditions but by its capacity to generate fields of the problematic. However, for the philosophy of cruelty, this ethical return to the problematic nature of ontological problems consists in binding of the void and breaking apart from the constraints of the priority of an ontological necessity for being. Philosophy of cruelty explains ontological determinations in terms of sadistic (imperative) and masochistic (contractual) bondages to that which does not belong to being, i.e., the problematic chains to the void. In order for the ethics of justice to confront the problems and conditions associated with ontological determinations – ourselves and our world – it must tread through such problematical fields which are equivocally determined by the void and the ontological medium. The philosophy of cruelty, in this sense, inaugurates the opportunities of grounding ethics on a new definition of being unshackled from the priority of its ontological necessity and mobilized by its chains to that which is exterior to it – the universal.



notes

- 1 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 29.
- 2 On Tenebrism and the early Renaissance philosophies of nature and alchemy, see Rzepińska 91–112.
- 3 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 28.
- 4 Ibid. 29.
- 5 Artaud 101.
- 6 Ibid. 102.
- 7 Ibid. 103.
- 8 Cicero (qtg from Aristotle) in *Hortensius* (95M). See also Bos 315–16. Bos argues that the meticulous relationship of the soul – on behalf of the strictly incorporeal *nous* – with the body qua instrument captures the idea of intelligible ontology or human life on earth as a punishment (*timôria*).
- 9 See Virgil, *The Aeneid*, VIII: 483–88. See also Kronenberg 403–31. Kronenberg associates the atrocity of Mezentius with an Epicurean/materialist reinterpretation of Aristotle's idea of intelligible ontology and incarnate life.
- 10 See Brunschwig 171–90.
- 11 The Italian Jurist Andrea Alciati created a series of emblems based on Virgil's depiction of the Etruscan torture for his *Emblemata* (1531), an influential collection of moral sayings. Known as *Nupta Contagioso* or *Nupta Cadavera* (marriage with the diseased or the dead), these emblems depict a naked woman being tied to a male corpse at the order of the king, or a man walking with a female corpse fastened to his body (cf. Francisco Goya's *Disparates*, plate no. 7, *The Matrimonial*).
- 12
For it is an inspired saying of the ancients that the soul pays penalties and that we live for the punishment of great sins. For, indeed, the conjunction of the soul with the body looks very much like this. For as the Etruscans are said often to torture captives by chaining dead bodies face to face with the living, fitting part to part, so the soul seems to be extended throughout and affixed to all the sensitive members of the body. (Iamblichus 48. See also Augustine)

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- 13 Artaud 85.
- 14 Bacon 353.
- 15 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 172.
- 16 On *aphairesis* as a fundamental logico-semantic concept in the works of Aristotle and neo-Platonists regarding the procedure of negation and determination of the Ideal, see Martin.
- 17 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 55; emphasis in original.
- 18 Aside from its interrelations with the concept of intensity, the scholastic notion of contraction is a fundamental ontological and noetic concept which Deleuze resurrects in *Difference and Repetition* by meticulously presenting it in conjunction with Stoic physics and cosmology. On the concept of contraction in scholasticism, see Catana. And for an alternative Bergsonian/Stoic philosophy of subtraction and contraction in relation to Deleuze's philosophy of immanence and becoming, see Meillassoux 63–107.
- 19 There are numerous sources on the cosmology of putrefaction and diminution (decay) in the Middle Ages. See, for example, Ginzburg.
- 20 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 74.
- 21 Ibid. 76.
- 22 Ibid. 286.
- 23 For an elaborately rigorous critique of Deleuze's philosophy of vitalism and an alternative analysis of unilateral determination, see Brassier 140–45, 162–204.
- 24 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 36.
- 25 “[...] but Being is the same for everything about which it is said.” On the univocity of Being, see idem, *The Logic of Sense* 205–06.
- 26 See idem, *Masochism* 20.
- 27 Ibid. 18–19, 25–30.
- 28 Ibid. 18–19.
- 29 Ibid. 35.
- 30 Ibid. 13–14, 132–34.
- 31 Idem, *Difference and Repetition* 168.
- 32 On the soul's mortification and katabasis with regard to the Etruscan torture, see Winston and Dillon.

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