

Twitter Thread by Marcus Cunningham



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Thread: on Deleuze and Scotus Vs Aristotle and Aquinas.

In an earlier thread here: <https://t.co/wfr5uu6s23> I discussed how Deleuze got rid of the concept of species in Aristotle's system by using the category of the individual singularity to encompass all actual ontological entities.

When it comes to heritage within the western tradition the way I assess it is not correctness but based on how interesting, remarkable and important the thinker is. This is important because whilst I embrace the entire western philosophical tradition as all having important

— Marcus Cunningham (@MarcusC31391111) November 17, 2020

But here we'll look at difference and repetition to take a stab at the broader category of genera.

From Somers-Hall's Book on Difference and Repetition.

"Second, Deleuze argues that while Aristotle provides an account of the determination of objects, he cannot provide an account of the constitution of objects. As we saw, properties are understood as properties of something, and the same could be said of differences.

When we ask the question, 'what is it?', we have already presupposed the existence of a logical subject to which predicates will be attributed by means of an answer. This rules out in advance any possible account of the genesis of the subject."

Deleuze says that the fourfold structure of representationalism consists of analogy, resemblance, identity and opposition.

To quote from Joel Davis' summary of the first chapter of difference and repetition which covers the main themes of the text:

"Representation begins with Resemblance in perception, a connection is established between a property in presence and an image in memory.

Resemblance becomes Analogy through moving simply from cognizing this connection to recognizing the present property as the memory-image, and the memory-image requisitely therefore as this present property.

In this way memory has synthesized itself to perception by way of the recognized image-form. Once this taking of the perceived image as the memory image is given a name, it becomes abstractable as an Identity.

Identity then is located in the name rather than the thing, and so once the sign is distinguished from the thing the Identity has two ontological positions it could take; Identity must either come before or after the thing.

If Identity comes prior to the thing, if it confers upon the thing its thingness, this is representationalism. And as Deleuze describes, this means Identities can only be understood in terms of their Oppositions to one another, in terms of their negations of another.

This is the central failure of all the great metaphysicians of history for Deleuze, they place Identities prior to the things they identify and therefore we can only know Identities by what they are not.

Of course, there was another option we could have chosen, instead of being representationalists we could have placed Identities after things.

This then suggests that that which generates the thing is not Identities or Oppositions between Identities, and therefore not Resemblances and Analogies between Resemblances. What is none of these things? For Deleuze it is Difference.

Difference for Deleuze is not mere Oppositions between Identities, but is that which makes a difference within the thing.

We create Identities to name things that resemble things we've already seen or known.

Difference creates things that we haven't got Identities for yet, Difference is the singularity which generates/originates a thing, Identity is the name we give to that thing repeating.

Difference then, is a new thing. Identity is the name we give to those things repeating.

Difference is presence, Difference is immanence. Identity is the second presence and a mediation of immanence.

Difference affirms the difference it makes for itself, it does not refer back to anything prior but refers only to the presence it has actualized.

So, Identities and their Oppositions can't tell us anything about how things come to presence, about how things become. They can only tell us about how things already were."

So from here we can fully appreciate the critique of Aristotle's paronymous conception of Being and in place Deleuze invokes Duns Scotus' Univocal conception of being.

to sum up the development from Aquinas to Scotus, as we saw with Deleuze's critique of Aristotle, it privileges Identity over Difference and subjects our ostensive experiences of the world to externally imposed artificial categories which split being into a hierarchy.

which he pulls apart by pointing out the the importance of the individual singularity as an ultimate ontological idea, by contrast he invokes Scotus' univocity of being which basically says that being is univocal, there is no degrees of being, something either is, or it ain't.

This is in contrast to the paronymous idea of being essential to Aquinas and Aristotle.

The Analogia Entis, or apophatic theology was what was being developed in Scholastic theology in the 12-13th centuries, basically the idea that because God is truly Transcendent we can't use our human reason and language to make positive statements about him.

But we can reach at him through analogy. i.e. the idea of the infinite goodness of god is different in kind with the finite goodness on earth.

Problem for Scotus is that as god is transcendent we can presuppose nothing about him, including the distinctions made from inferences of transcendence such as infinitude or finitude, and hence that using analogy fails because you are still presupposing knowledge of god's nature.

Sorry for the sidenote but in arguments with E-Christians they always fail to understand this, that negative and positive aren't meaningful terms when discussing our relationship to divinity and that supposedly negative theology still presupposes positive truth claims.

In any case this puts Scotus in a tricky spot because he seems to be privileging our knowledge about Being above our knowledge about God, which to us is of course totally reasonable as ontology is the mother of all disciplines.

As disciplines require ontological presuppositions and as people who affirm immanence you can't think of a transcendent god separate from our understanding of being.

So to get into Scotus Proper, quoting from Somers-Hall again who got this from Scotus Scholar Richard Cross:

"Scotus firsts asks us to imagine an infinitely large magnitude. He then asks us to apply this model of extensive infinity to a qualitative perfection, such as goodness.

The central claim is that much as we can determine spatial magnitudes, we are also capable of ranking perfections in such a way that we can conceive of an infinite perfection.

In the case of a perfection, however, it cannot be constituted of parts in the way that the extensive magnitude is.

An infinite extensive magnitude is constituted from an infinite number of finite extensive parts, but a perfection would not be infinitely perfect if it were composed of finite (and hence imperfect) qualities.

The notion of infinity that Scotus is developing is therefore of an intensive, indivisible form of infinity, rather than the extensive, divisible form that Aquinas favours."

Now to quote Deleuze Directly:

"In effect, the essential in univocity is not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said, in a single and same sense, of all its individuating differences or intrinsic modalities.

Being is the same for all these modalities, but these modalities are not the same. It is 'equal' for all, but they themselves are not equal. It is said of all in a single sense, but they themselves do not have the same sense.

The essence of univocal being is to include individuating differences, while these differences do not have the same essence and do not change the essence of being - just as white includes various intensities, while remaining essentially the same white."

"There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal. There has only ever been one ontology, that of Duns Scotus, which gave being a single voice."

"Thus it is not at all in the same manner that in the analogy of being, generic and specific differences are in general mediated in relation to individuating differences, and that in univocity, univocal being is said immediately of individual differences or the universal is said

of the most singular independently of any mediation. If it is true that analogy denies being the status of a common genus because the (specific) differences 'are', then conversely, univocal being is indeed common in so far as the (individuating) differences 'are not' and must not

be. No doubt we shall see that they are not, in a very particular sense: if in univocal being they are not, it is because they depend upon a non- being without negation. With univocity, however, it is not the differences which are and must be: it is being which is Difference,

in the sense that it is said of difference. Moreover, it is not we who are univocal in a Being which is not; it is we and our individuality which remains equivocal in and for a univocal Being."

However, whilst Scotus does affirm Univocity, it is only as a formal logical distinction, a theory of religious language:

"As said of the ten categories, neither metaphysically nor naturally does the term 'being' signify one concept; and being is not a genus of these, neither naturally nor metaphysically. However, logically speaking, being is univocal." From the Subtle doctor himself.

" Moreover, we can see the enemy he tried to escape in accordance with the requirements of Christianity: pantheism, into which he would have fallen if the common being were not neutral.

Nevertheless, he was able to define two types of distinction which relate that indifferent, neutral being to difference.

the subject to which they are attributed. In this manner, not only is the univocity of being (in relation to God and to creatures) extended in the univocity of its 'attributes', but, given his infinity, God can possess his formally distinct univocal attributes without losing

anything of his unity. The other type of distinction, modal distinction, is established between being or the attributes on the one hand, and the intensive variations of which these are capable on the other.

These variations, like degrees of whiteness, are individuating modalities of which the finite and the infinite constitute precisely singular intensities. From the point of view of its own neutrality, univocal being therefore does not only implicate distinct attributes or

qualitative forms which are themselves univocal, it also relates these and itself to intensive factors or individuating degrees which vary the mode of these attributes or forms without modifying their essence in so far as this is being."

This is how Scotus saved his ass from Pantheism and not being a Based Trad Cath.

In terms of where I'd go, I'd agree that we need to go further than Scotus in terms of affirming immanence to have a coherent worldview but he is part of our heritage and squarely within the empiricist tradition foreshadowing Hume, Bergson and Deleuze.

Also Jesus this thread became a monster, should probably make more coherent and write as a post.