

DANIEL COLUCCIELLO BARBER, *DELEUZE AND THE NAMING OF GOD: POST-SECULARISM AND THE FUTURE OF IMMANENCE* (EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014)

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It is all too easy to associate immanence with the perspective of secularism. After all, Gilles Deleuze repeatedly asserted in works like *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* or his late co-authored *What is Philosophy?* that the articulation of immanence stands in direct contrast to the operations of religion and theology, which defend the eminence of transcendence and analogical modes of thought. One of the central accomplishments of Daniel Colucciello Barber's *Deleuze and the Naming of God: Post-Secularism and the Future of Immanence* is to decisively decouple any such association between immanence and secularism. As he writes, "It is precisely such an equation that needs to be made not just difficult, but impermissible." (11) The aim of such a decoupling is to confound and subvert the dominant oppositions guiding the recent religious turn: between secularism and religion, between philosophy and theology. It does this precisely by articulating immanence as a third and occluded possibility that troubles the very coordinates around which such debates are constructed. Indeed, by insisting that immanence is not simply something that supersedes the religious and delineates the secular, but constitutes a break with a dominant form of secularism itself, Barber forces us to rethink some of the basic concepts operative in contemporary theology, religious studies, and philosophy of religion.

If one task of the book is to sever the seemingly unthought association between secularism and immanence, another is to articulate the nature of immanence as a way to critiquing reigning paradigms of theology. This critique is set out in the first half of the book. The first chapter offers a short prehistory of the concept of differential immanence in the thought of Heidegger and Derrida, while the second reconstructs the logic of immanence in Deleuze. The third, in turn, builds on this to show how the logic of immanence can act as a critique of dominant theological paradigms embodied in the work of John Milbank and David Bentley Hart. Given the repeated misreadings of Deleuze and mischaracterizations of the operations of immanence by contemporary Christian theologians, Barber's retort is much welcome. To see exactly how it works, let us turn directly to Barber's lucid explication of Deleuze's theory of immanence.

As is known to readers of his work, Deleuze's conception of immanence stems from his re-reading of Spinoza's philosophy, which offers a theory of modal differentiation within a single substance. Rather than taking individuals as self-standing substances, they are interpreted as modal differentiation of a single substance, a conception in which the differentiation of modes is a differentiation of substance itself. But immanence is fundamentally also a question of causality, specifically of a causality in which the cause remains in the effect, but (in contrast to Neoplatonic hierarchical and emanational theories) in which the effect also remains in the cause. This means that while the cause effects the effect, it is, in turn, affected by it. God "produces an infinity of things which affect him in an infinity of ways". Another way of putting this would be to say that the (divine) power of expression is present within all that it expresses, while those expressions also affect that power itself. It is this recursive loop at the heart of immanence that Barber argues produces the need for a constant re-expression of immanence. What this means is that the process of change is intrinsic to immanence: As immanence folds what is expressed back into the active power of expression, it generates ever-new articulations of expressions. Precisely because what is, what is expressed, is never severed from the power of expression but affects it internally, it offers a model of change and the production of the new in excess of the given without any appeal to transcendence.

Conceptually underwriting this framework is the fact that modes are taken to be both internal and external to the attributes of the single substance (since of course the architecture of Spinoza's philosophy is triadic, including substance, attributes and modes). As intensive, they implicate the attribute; as extensive, they explicate it. Importantly, as Barber points out, whereas the relation between the intrinsic and extrinsic modes in Spinoza's philosophy is a one-to-one correlation, Deleuze "evades correlation by articulating intensive modal expression in terms of a field of singularities, which collectively form an intense infinity" (52) In other words, as intensive, modes construct a field of differential and preindividual singularities, which allows the transformation of the actual, of what has already been expressed and actualized, or the modes as extensive. This virtual field produces concrete actualizations, but does not act as an outside source; instead, it is the difference of the actual itself, necessitating the re-expression and re-actualization of the actual. Conceiving immanence in this way entails not seeing the actual as something self-standing or separate, but as always part of the process of actualization. The relation between the actual and the virtual is not that of internality and transcendence, but of reciprocal immanence. "The virtual is neither identical (correlational) with nor transcendent to the actual; the relation between the virtual and the actual is neither analogical nor equivocal." (54) What such a reading of creativity and expression of immanence accomplishes, is a push back against the tendentious attempts (such as those offered by Peter Hallward and Alain Badiou) to read Deleuze not as a thinker of this world, but as a secretly transcendent thinker.

The final element in Barber's account of the logic of immanent re-expression and the production of the new—of going beyond the given and doing so immanently, that is, without relying on or appealing to an external source or agent—is its temporal structure. For this, Barber revisits the difference between the two "ways of imagining temporal existence or of inhabiting time" (61) found in Deleuze: *Chronos* and *Aion*. For if Chronos is an infinite present, a succession that encloses time into an all-encompassing present, it offers a conception of time that renders immanent reproduction impossible. Chronos is the time of the stable succession of the actual. Only a different theory and practice of time can be adequate to the process of immanent re-expression. Aion names this alternative temporality that takes the present as a crack which is at once a becoming-future and a becoming-past. It is a moment of pure time, which interrupts time's enclosure within homogeneity. In other words, Aion does not allow the actual to dominate the conception of time. Instead, it makes time break up the completion of the actual.

This conceptual reconstruction of Deleuze's immanence allows Barber to accomplish three central tasks. The first, in chapter three, is to offer a robust defense of immanence against those mischaracterizations of it that are repeatedly trotted out by theologians who exalt analogy and transcendence. Precisely by showing how immanence entails within itself the possibility and even necessity of radical re-expression, Barber belies its polemical conflation with any kind of closure, totality, and holism. Indeed, Barber argues that the possibility of

a new, as genuinely new, is only possible within the conceptuality of immanence, and not within a framework of divine transcendence: “Analogy’s discourse of transcendence, far from supplying a basis for the production of new possibilities of existence, actually ends up supporting the present. In fact, the challenge posed by transcendence appears ultimately to be a conservative, even a reactionary one.” (104) The task here is twofold, and consists just as much in providing a systematic response to the aspersion casts on immanent thought as in showing the dominant theological regime’s own troubling aspects.

Let me briefly highlight one particularly significant point of contestation. Milbank argues that the position of immanence (pagan, philosophical) is one that ontologizes evil and conflict, and that only a (Christian) thought that affirms the ontological priority of the Good can socially and politically provide peace. In other words, he asserts an ontologico-political correlation that provides the meta-discursive criteria for judgment: (theological) ontologies of peace are taken to be preferable, because they are taken to be the very condition of a politics of peace. Barber treats this all too easy configuration with the skeptical eye of an outsider, reminding us that an ontological organization of peace is inevitably a normative one (and, all too often, hierarchical to boot)—one that translates just as frequently into the normalization of peace as into the production of suffering and violence for those who don’t agree with that pre-established order (or with whom that order does not see it fit to agree). Perhaps, Barber suggests, we should not begin with a desire for ontological guarantee, but from the very material existence of suffering. The resulting choice can be read as follows: peace through a guarantee (and inevitable enforcement) of theodicy, or the careful labor of re-expression that attempts to deal with the violence and suffering that exists and reproduces accords of difference anew in response to those experiences. “With immanence, however, one can speak of an ontology of difference and a politics of peace.” (100) There might be no ultimate ontological grounding, but as such we can become more attuned to suffering, to minoritarian cracks of identity, and to the tentative nature of ethics and politics, thereby inhabiting a position that is less imperializing and self-confident.

However, the argument is not that immanence stands in polemical opposition to all theological discourses. Quite on the contrary, the book’s second task is to show how immanence can be articulated within theology itself. This is possible because, despite what some contemporary currents of theology might say, neither analogical predication mediating the infinite and the finite, nor the eminent transcendence of the divine, is determinative for theological discourse as such. Barber’s fourth chapter shows how the work of the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder is precisely an example of such articulation of immanence within theological discourse, one that in its own lexicon takes up a number of Deleuzian concerns and positions. The chapter is multilayered, but it recovers Yoder’s emphasis on a Christianity resolutely committed to a minoritarian ethics, less in a numerical sense than in the sense of abdicating the position of prescription, standard measure and norms in order to put into question the overdetermination of existence by all frameworks and powers that constitute the ontological and epistemological limits on what counts as the actual. Moreover it reminds us that, even within theological discourse, a critique of totality does not necessarily lead to the affirmation of a transcendent infinite (this in contrast, say, to a critique of the world that would affirm the God beyond). It can also render visible the immanent necessity for a continual process of re-expression and the production of the new. For example, in this light, the significance of the Crucifixion becomes not simply the undermining the self-sufficiency of the worldly “Powers”, but the disclosure of the diachronic and socio-political movement of transformation. Of course, the claim is not that Christianity has successfully embodied a minoritarian position that undermines the worldly from below—clearly, the history of Christianity has largely ignored and often directly opposed this option, a failure that can be dated back to Constantine, or even perhaps to the Pauline discourse of universality as the supersession of real, material difference. Rather, it is that such a position can and has been articulated within theological discourse itself, thereby suggesting that there is nothing necessarily mutually exclusive between immanence and theology.

If critiquing paradigms of theology centered on transcendence and analogy is the first task, and demonstrating the possibility of immanence within theological discourse is the second, the third is to critique philosophy’s self-satisfied relation to immanence. Barber argues that Deleuze’s attempt to overcome philosophy’s blockage

by a fiat, by an encouraging imperative “Create!” as it is offered in *What is Philosophy?* is insufficient because it does not take into consideration the very fact of philosophy’s failure. What is necessary, besides such an injunction, or prior to it, is an element of resistance or critique of the present state of things. In other words, there is a necessary interrelation, often left unacknowledged, between resistance against the present and the creation of the new. This position leads Barber to elaborate a concept of metaphilosophy, which “emerges through shame: philosophy’s collusion with the present state of affairs gives rise to shame, and any exodus from this collusion requires that we conceive and display critically this collusion.” (163-4) Metaphilosophy registers the need for a break, a way of affirming the disjuncture between immanence and the actuality of what is, one that is frequently occluded by philosophical thought itself. Drawing heavily on Adorno, Barber suggests that the option we have is either to affirm the collusion with the present, which is something that philosophy does all too often, or to affirm the reality of the experience of suffering. Choosing the latter is significant “because it is in suffering that experience exceeds the standard domain of sense. We enter suffering not because it is good but because it is there, in our condition.” (169) It is this commitment to suffering as the destitution of sense, as the materiality that underdetermines the actual and allows one to resist colluding with it, that Barber delineates as metaphilosophical. Suffering displays senselessness, and thus reveals sheer existence in (immanent) excess of all powers of philosophy and the world: it “eviscerates the present state.” (188) The encounter with the senselessness of suffering, by undermining the accreted structures of sense, becomes the condition of possibility of immanently remaking the world and creating new sense.

Once more, it is worth emphasizing that this production of the new comes not from an elsewhere, but from a certain destitution of the present, its scattering, and the opening onto an immanent virtuality. Below all powers of philosophy and sense lies the immanent power of expression, which the present has actualized in a concrete form and has rendered, *qua* power, invisible. The task is precisely not to confuse immanence with totality, enclosure, the actual, but to understand it as a process of differential production of the new without any recourse to transcendence. And for those rightfully skeptical of any discourses of “the new” as salvific, Barber insists that what he is proposing must be conceptually divorced from the dominant logic of communication. As such, newness cannot be simply exhausted by the preformation of the possible, because “the language of possibility itself is schematically overdetermined, such that the possibilities to be affirmed are possibilities conditioned by the present”. (195) In opposition to this, the question of the new emerges from the break of communicative fluidity, a crack that opens onto the possibility of articulation of a radical newness: “Utopia’s break with the present gives way to fabulation’s creation of the future.” (205)

The refocusing of philosophy’s task on suffering presents a critical, Adornian emendation to Deleuze’s theory of immanence— one that is much needed, especially as it allows for a deflation of philosophical imperiousness. In light of such a reading, however, one is left wondering how to read Deleuze’s praise for the genealogy of joy (from Lucretius to Spinoza to Nietzsche)? Are we forced to read it as a form of disavowal, or as a practice of looking away from suffering? This seems unsatisfying precisely because the reactivation of joy as an affect or state in Deleuze, is connected with immanence itself, one that is immeasurable, in excess of the actual state of things and the subjects formed in it. One could say that joy (perhaps as opposed to contentment) is just as senseless as suffering itself, and can likewise underdetermine the dominant forms of thought and the world, and bring into question the ontological, epistemology and political restrictions on what is legitimated as the actual. In other words, I am suggesting that there are perhaps multiple paths of displaying the actual’s violent attempt at self-identity and self-enclosure, and thus of displaying the actual’s opening onto the need for immanent re-expression.

The last and most constructive chapter of the book offers a theory of what Barber calls immanent belief, the cultivation of the capacity of being affected by the world as it is, in contrast to being interpellated by the world as it is made legible and legitimate by the dominant structures of sense. “Immanent belief thus insists on the need to think from within suffering, instead of moderating it in virtue of pre-existing sense.” (181) Barber suggestively proposes rethinking secularity as tied to this immanent belief in the world in stark opposition to dominant discourses of secularism. Summarily put, “Immanent belief, with its demand to be affected by this world and

consequently to refuse discourses about the world, thus stands not only against the sort of belief found in analogical theology, but also against the sort of belief found in secularising discourses. In other words, immanent belief is irreducible to the opposition of secular and religious by being opposed to the transcendence involved in both.” (179) This secularity, articulated through the theoretical resources of Deleuze, Yoder and Adorno, is tied to what is left unconceptualized, unnamed and excluded by the actual order of the world, presenting the immanent limits of the world needing to be re-expressed. Such a secularity would no longer defend the world by opposing it to the transcendent divine (or, one could say, it would cease drawing the central line of divide between secularist discourses of the State and theologies of transcendence), but instead show how both poles of that binary are complicit in transcendence. For to affirm immanence is at once to be affected by the world in its material suffering below and beyond the realms of sense and to be committed to the re-expression of the sense that regulates and upholds the actual order of things. As a way of theorizing this movement, Barber proposes fabulation as the creative function that draws on unconditional power of immanence, and develops the concept of “the icons of immanence” as precisely what enacts this power by constructing, and thereby rendering visible immanence, each time anew. As he explains: “The immanence that belongs to the icon does not pre-exist the icon, it is instead produced by the icon; the icon expresses the power of the unconditioned in and as a particular thought-product.” (206) Icons of immanence occupy only the very final pages of the book, and offer a vector for further theoretical exploration that is promising not only for ethics and politics, but also for any attempt to disseminate the thinking of immanence into new domains, genres and media.

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