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**War on the State: Stirner  
and Deleuze's Anarchism**

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Max Stirner's impact on contemporary political theory is often neglected. However in Stirner's political thinking there can be found a surprising convergence with poststructuralist theory, particularly with regard to the function of power. Andrew Koch, for instance, sees Stirner as a thinker who transcends the Hegelian tradition he is usually placed in, arguing that his work is a precursor poststructuralist ideas about the foundations of knowledge and truth (Koch 1997). Koch argues that Stirner's individualistic challenge to the philosophical bases of the State goes beyond the limits of traditional Western philosophy, presenting a challenge to its transcendentalist epistemology. In light of this connection established by Koch between Stirner and poststructuralist epistemology, I shall look at Stirner's convergence with a certain poststructuralist thinker, Gilles Deleuze, on the question of the State and political power. There are many important parallels between these two thinkers, and they may be viewed, in different ways, as anti-State, anti-authoritarian philosophers. I want to show the way in which Stirner's critique of the State anticipates Deleuze's poststructuralist rejection of State thought, and more importantly, the ways in which their anti-essentialist, post-humanist anarchism transcends and, thus, reflects upon, the limits of classical anarchism. The paper looks at the links between human essence, desire and power that form the bases of State authority. So while Koch focuses on Stirner's rejection of the epistemological foundations of the State, the emphasis of this paper is on Stirner's radical *ontology* – his unmasking of the subtle connections between humanism, desire and power. I will also argue that this critique of humanist power that both Stirner and Deleuze are engaged in can provide us with contemporary strategies of resistance to State domination.

It must be understood, however, that while there are important similarities between Stirner and Deleuze, there are also many differences, and, in many ways, it may seem an unusual approach to bring these two thinkers together. For instance, Stirner was, along with Marx, one of the Young Hegelians, whose work emerged as a supremely individualistic critique of German Idealism, particularly of the Feuerbachian and Hegelian kind. Deleuze, on the other hand, was a twentieth century philosopher who, along with Foucault and Derrida, is regarded as one of the chief "poststructuralist" thinkers. While Deleuze's work can also be seen as an attack on Hegelianism, it follows different and more diverse paths, from politics and psychoanalysis, to literature and film theory. Stirner is not generally regarded as a "poststructuralist", and, apart from Koch's groundbreaking article (Koch 1997) and Derrida's work on Marx (Derrida 1994), he has received virtually no attention in the light of contemporary theory. However, and this is perhaps the problem with labels like "poststructuralism", there are several crucial planes of convergence between these two thinkers – particularly in their critique of political domination and authority – that one can tease out, and which would be

denied if one stuck to such labels. It is precisely in this rejection of the tyranny of “labels”, essential identities, abstractions and “fixed ideas” — this attack on authoritarian concepts which limit thought — that Stirner and Deleuze achieve some sort of common ground. This is not to ignore the differences between them, but on the contrary, to show how these differences to resonate together in unpredictable and contingent ways to form, in Deleuze’s words, ‘planes of consistency’ from which new political concepts can be formed.

## I. Critique of the State

Both Stirner and Deleuze see the State as an abstraction that transcends its different concrete manifestations, yet at the same time operates through them. The State is more than a particular institution existing in a particular historical stage. The State is an abstract principle of power and authority that has always existed in different forms, yet is somehow ‘more than’ these particular these actualisations.

Stirner’s critique of the State demonstrates this crucial point. For Stirner, the State is an essentially oppressive institution. However Stirner’s rejection of the State goes beyond a critique of particular states — like the liberal State or the socialist State. Rather it constitutes an attack on the State itself — the very category of State power, not just the different forms it assumes. What must be overcome, according to Stirner, is the very idea of State power itself — the *ruling principle* (Stirner 1993:226). Stirner is therefore opposed to revolutionary programs such as Marxism, which have as their aim the seizure, rather than the destruction, of State power. The Marxist workers’ State would just be a reaffirmation of the State in a different guise — a “change of masters” (Stirner 1993:229).’ Stirner suggests then that:

. . . war might rather be declared against the establishment itself, the *State*, not a particular State, not any such thing as the mere condition of the State at the time; it is not another State (such as a “people’s State”) that men aim at. . . (Stirner 1993:224)

Revolutionary action has been captured, according to Stirner, by the paradigm of the State. It has remained trapped within the dialectic of power. Revolutions have only succeeded in replacing one form of authority with another. This is because revolutionary theory has never questioned the very condition, the *idea*, of State authority, and therefore remains within its grasp: “little scruple was left about revolting against the existing State or overturning the existing laws, but to

sin against the *idea* of the State, not to submit to the *idea* of law, who would have dared that?" (Stirner 1993:87). The State can never be reformed because it can never be trusted. Stirner rejects Bruno Bauer's notion of a democratic State which grows out of the 'power of the people' and which is always subordinated to the "people's will." For Stirner, the State can never be brought under the control of people. It always has its own logic, its own agenda which it ruthlessly fulfils, and it will soon turn against the will of the people that it was intended to represent (Stirner 1993:228).

Stirner's conception of the State as an independent entity puts him at odds with Marxism, particularly in his view of the State in relation to economic power. Stirner is interested in the *non-economic* forms of domination in society and believes that the State, if it is to be fully understood, must be considered separately from economic arrangements. The power of bureaucracy for instance constitutes a non-economic form of oppression: its operation cannot be reduced to the workings of the economy (Harrison 1983:62). This is contrary to Marxist theory, which generally sees the State as reducible to the workings of the capitalist economy and subject to the interests of the bourgeoisie. Stirner suggests that while the State protects private property and the interests of the bourgeoisie, it also stands above and dominates these forces (Stirner 1993:115). For Stirner the political power enshrined in the State has predominance over economic power and its related class interests. The State is the primary source of domination in society.

This non-economic analysis of the State — the attempt to view State power in its own specificity — may be seen as an extension of the anarchist argument. Anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin argued over a century ago that Marxist economic reductionism neglected the importance of State power. The State, according to the anarchists, has its own oppressive logic of self-perpetuation and this was, to a great extent, autonomous from economic relations and class concerns. Bakunin argued that Marxism pays too much attention to the *forms* of State power, while not taking enough account of the way in which State power operates: "They (Marxists) do not know that despotism resides not so much in the form of the State but in the very principle of the State and political power" (Bakunin 1984:221). Kropotkin, too, argues that one must look beyond the present form of the State: "And there are those who, like us, see in the State, not only its actual form and in all forms of domination that it might assume, but in its very essence, an obstacle to the social revolution. . . ." (Kropotkin 1943:9). Oppression and despotism exist, in other words, in the very structure and symbolism of the State — it is not merely a derivative of class power. To neglect this autonomy and to use the State as a tool of the revolutionary class as Marxists proposed, was therefore perilous. Anarchists believed it would only end up perpetuating State power in infinitely more authoritarian ways. Thus Stirner's analysis of the

State beyond of the State as constituting a priori domination beyond economic and class concerns may be seen as an extension of the anarchist critique of State philosophies like Marxism.

Deleuze also stresses the conceptual autonomy of the State. While Deleuze's notion of the State operates on many different conceptual levels, he nevertheless shares with Stirner and the anarchists the idea that the State is an abstract form of power not wholly identifiable with its particular concrete realisations. Deleuze refers to a 'State-form' – an abstract model of power:

. . . the apparatus of the State is a concrete assemblage which realises the machine of overcoding of a society. . . This machine in its turn is thus not the State itself, it is the abstract machine which organises the dominant utterances and the established order of a society, the dominant languages and knowledge, conformist actions and feelings, the segments which prevail over others. (Deleuze 1987:129)

For Deleuze the State is an *abstract machine* rather than a concrete institution, which essentially "rules" through more minute institutions and practices of domination. The State *overcodes* and regulates these minor dominations, stamping them with its imprint. What is important about this abstract machine is not the form in which it appears, but rather its function, which is the constitution of a field of interiority in which political sovereignty can be exercised. The State may be seen as a process of *capture* (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:436–437).

Similarly to Stirner, Deleuze breaks with the Marxist analysis of the State. The function and origins of the State cannot be wholly explained by an economic analysis. The State is an apparatus which codes economic flows and flows of production, organising them into a mode. This apparatus did not rise as a result of an agrarian mode of production as Marx argued, but in fact predates, and is presupposed by, this mode of production. For Deleuze and indeed Stirner, the State cannot be attributed to the mode of production. Turning this traditional Marxist analysis on its head they suggest that the mode of production may in fact be derived from the State. As Deleuze says: "It is not the State that presupposes a mode of production; quite the opposite, it is the State that makes productions a 'mode'" (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:429). For Deleuze there has always been a State – the *Urstaat*, an eternal State which comes into existence fully formed, at one stroke (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:437). This non-economic analysis of the State opens up a radical philosophical terrain in which power is theorised in its own right.

While Stirner and Deleuze's conception of the State as autonomous from economic arrangements breaks with Marxism, their rejection of social contract theories of the origins of the State is also a departure from liberal theory. Deleuze argues that the dominance of the State is based on philosophies such as the liberal social contract theory. This form of *State thought* legitimises State power by claiming that people voluntarily surrender part of their freedom to an abstract power outside them in return for security, thus constructing the State as necessary and inevitable. Deleuze furthermore eschews the Hegelian "theological" account of the State based on dialectical reconciliation. Stirner also rejects liberal theories of the State. He argues that liberalism is a philosophy which, in the name of granting freedom and autonomy to the individual, actually further subordinates the individual to the State and its laws. So rather than freeing the individual from State, liberalism actually frees the individual from other ties like religion, so that he or she can be more effectively dominated by the State: "Political liberty means that the *polis*, the State, is free. It does not mean my liberty, but the liberty of the power that rules and subjugates me;" (Stirner 1993:107). Stirner attacks the hypocrisy of liberalism; it is a philosophy which grants all sorts of formal freedoms but denies the freedom to challenge this very order itself, its laws, etc (Stirner 1993:108). This repudiation of liberal theories of the State and the social contract has many similarities with anarchism, which also rejects these philosophies of State justification. However, as I shall argue, it is precisely in this critique of State philosophy that Stirner and Deleuze go beyond the conceptual limits of traditional anarchism and develop a post-humanist, anti-essentialist challenge to the State.

## II. State Thought

For Stirner discourses such as morality and rationality are *fixed ideas* or *spooks*. They are apparitions, ideological abstractions that nevertheless have real political effects — they provide the State with a formal justification for its domination. Koch argues that Stirner's attack on fixed ideas represents a decisive break with the transcendentalism of Western thought, exposing the power behind these dominant ideas and "transcendental masks" (Koch 1997:101). This power has become abstracted from the individual and is held over him. The dominance of morality, for instance, is fundamentally linked to political power, preserving the continued existence of the police State (Stirner 1993:241). For Stirner morality is not only a fiction derived from Christian idealism, but also a discourse that oppresses the individual. It is based on the desecration of the individual will — the *ego*. Morality is merely the leftover of Christianity, only in a new humanist garb: "Moral faith

is as fanatical as religious faith!” (Stirner 1993:46). Morality has become the new religion — a secular religion — demanding the same unquestioning obedience. For Stirner, the State is the new Church — the new moral and rational authority wielded over the individual (Stirner 1993:23). Similarly rationality may also be seen as a discourse which perpetuates State power. Rational truths are always held above individual perspectives and this is another way of subordinating the individual ego to an abstract power above him or her. As with morality, rational truth has become sacred, absolute, removed from the grasp of the individual (Stirner 1993:353). So for Stirner, morality and rationality are discourses of the State, and their function, rather than to liberate us from domination, is to further subordinate the individual to State power. Therefore, according to Stirner, in order to wage war on the State one must also wage war on the principles which provide political power with a moral and rational foundation.

Deleuze also unmasks forms and structures of thought that affirm State power. Like Stirner, Deleuze believes that thought has complicity in State domination, providing it with a legitimate ground and consensus: “Only thought is capable of inventing the fiction of a State that it is universal by right, of elevating the State to *de jure* universality” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:375). Rationality is an example of *State thought*. Deleuze goes one step further than Stirner: rather than seeing certain forms of thought as simply lending rational and moral authority to the State, he contends that rational and moral discourses actually form part of the assemblage of the State. The State is not only a series of political institutions and practices, but also comprises a multiplicity of norms, technologies, discourses, practices, forms of thought, and linguistic structures. It is not just that these discourses provide a justification for the State — they are themselves manifestations of the State form in thought. The State is immanent in thought, giving it ground, logos — providing it with a model that defines its “goal, paths, conduits, channels, organs . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:434). The State has penetrated and coded thought, in particular rational thought. It both depends on rational discourses for its legitimisation and functioning while in turn making these discourses possible. Rational thought is State philosophy: “Common sense, the unity of all the faculties at the centre of the Cogito, is the State consensus raised to the absolute” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:376). It is only by freeing thought from this moral and rational authoritarianism that we can free ourselves from the State (Deleuze 1987:23).

For Deleuze the model of State thought is what he calls *aborescent* logic (Deleuze 1987:25). Aborescent logic is a conceptual model or “image” of which predetermines thought on a rational basis. It is based on the root and tree system: there is a central unity, truth or essence — like Rationality — which is the root, and which determines the growth of its “branches”. Deleuze says:



. . . trees are not a metaphor at all but an image of thought, a functioning, a whole apparatus that is planted in thought to make it go in a straight line and produce famous correct ideas. There are all kinds of characteristics in the tree: there is a point of origin, seed or centre; it is a binary machine or principle of dichotomy, which is perpetually divided and reproduced branchings, its points of aborescence;’ (Deleuze 1987:25)

Thought is trapped in binary identities such as black/white, male/female, hetero/homosexual. Thought must always unfold according to a dialectical logic and is thus trapped within binary divisions that deny difference and plurality (Deleuze 1987:128). For Deleuze this model of thought is also the model for political power – the authoritarianism of one is inextricably linked with the authoritarianism of the other: “Power is always arborescent” (Deleuze 1987:25).

So instead of this authoritarian model of thought, Deleuze proposes a *rhizomatic* model which eschews essences, unities and binary logic, and seeks out multiplicities, pluralities and *becomings*. The rhizome is an alternate, non-authoritarian ‘image’ of thought, based on the metaphor of grass, which grows haphazardly and imperceptibly, as opposed to the orderly growth of the aborescent tree system. The purpose of the rhizome is to allow thought “to shake off its model, make its grass grow – even locally at the margins” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:24). The rhizome, in this sense, defies the very idea of a model: it is an endless, haphazard multiplicity of connections, which is not dominated by a single centre or place, but is decentralised and plural. It embraces four characteristics: *connection*, *heterogeneity*, *multiplicity*, and *rupture* (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:7). It rejects binary divisions and hierarchies, and is not governed by an unfolding, dialectical logic. It thus interrogates the abstractions that govern thought, which form the basis of various discourses of knowledge and rationality. In other words, rhizomatic thought is thought which defies Power, refusing to be limited by it – rhizomatics “would not leave it to anyone, to any Power, to ‘pose’ questions or to ‘set’ problems” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:24).

One could argue here that Stirner’s attack on abstractions, essences and *fixed ideas*, is an example of rhizomatic thought. Like Deleuze, Stirner looks for multiplicities and individual differences, rather than abstractions and unities. Abstractions, like truth, rationality, human essence, are images which, for these thinkers, deny plurality and deform difference into sameness. Koch comments on Stirner’s disdain for transcendental fixed ideas. However I would argue that Stirner here invents a new form of thought which emphasises multiplicity, plurality and individuality over universalism and transcendentalism. This anti-essentialist, anti-universal thinking anticipates Deleuze’s approach. Moreover this anti-essentialist, anti-foundationalist style of thinking has radical implications for political

philosophy. The political arena can no longer be drawn up according to the old battle lines of the State and the autonomous, rational subject that resists it. This is because a revolution is capable of forming multiple connections, including connections with the very power it is presumed to oppose: ‘These lines tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy, even in the rudimentary form of the good and the bad’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:9).’ So according to their critique of rational and moral discourses, both Stirner and Deleuze would see political theories based on a rational critique of the State, to be forms of thinking which actually reaffirm, rather than resist, State power. Such theories, because they do not question the essentialist distinction between rationality and irrationality, and because they see the State as fundamentally irrational, neglect the fact that the State has already *captured* rational discourse itself. In other words, to question the rational basis of the State, to say that State power is “irrational” or “immoral”, is not necessarily a subversion of the State, but may instead be an affirmation of its power. It leaves State power intact by subjecting revolutionary action to rational and moral injunctions that channel it into State forms. If the State is to be overcome one must invent new forms of politics which do not allow themselves to be captured by rationality: “politics is active experimentation since we do not know in advance which way a line is going to turn” (Deleuze 1987:137). I shall address this question of resistance later.

So for Deleuze and Stirner a philosophy like anarchism, which posits a critique of State authority based on moral and rational principles, would reaffirm State power. Traditional anarchism sees the State as profoundly immoral and irrational, and constructs a manichean dichotomy between the State and the essentially moral, rational subject which resists this power (Bakunin 1984:212).’ As I have argued, however, Deleuze and Stirner’s anti-State thinking goes beyond the categories of traditional anarchism precisely on this point. For these two thinkers the very ideas of essence, centre, and rational and moral foundations — the principles upon which the anarchist critique of authority is based — are themselves authoritarian structures which lend themselves to political domination. In other words, Stirner and Deleuze, in different ways, have gone beyond the limits of the anarchist critique of authority, turning it back upon itself. They have taken the critique of State authority into an arena in which the anarchists could not go — that of rational thought itself, thus breaking with the categories of Enlightenment humanism that bound anarchism. Unlike the anarchists, Deleuze and Stirner do not allow us the privilege of this strict opposition between the irrational, immoral, corrupt power of the State, and the rational, moral essence of the human subject. They do not allow, in other words, the uncontaminated point of departure of human subjectivity that is at the centre of the anarchist critique of authority.

### III. The Subject of Desire

Stirner and Deleuze's critique of the Enlightenment humanism that informed anarchism can be seen more clearly in their deconstruction of the notion of an essential subject. Stirner's work is a rejection of the idea of an essential human subjectivity, a human essence that is untainted by power. As Koch has argued, Stirner's rupture of Enlightenment humanism constituted a new theoretical terrain beyond classical anarchism — a terrain that anticipated poststructuralism. Stirner's thought developed as a critique of Feuerbachian humanism. Ludwig Feuerbach believed that religion was alienating because it required that Man abdicate his own qualities and powers by projecting them onto an abstract figure of God, thereby displacing his essential self, leaving him alienated and debased (Feuerbach 1957:27–28). Feuerbach sees will, goodness and rational thought as the essential characteristics which have been abstracted from Man; the predicates of God were really only the predicates of Man as a species being. So in claiming that the qualities which we have attributed to God or to the Absolute are really the qualities of Man, Feuerbach has made Man into an almighty being himself. Feuerbach embodies the Enlightenment humanist project of restoring Man to his rightful place at the centre of the universe — to make the “human the divine, the finite the infinite.”

However it is this attempt to replace God with Man that Stirner condemns. According to Stirner, Feuerbach, while claiming to have overthrown religion, merely reversed the order of subject and predicate, without undermining the category of religious authority itself (Stirner 1993:58). The alienating category of God is retained and solidified by entrenching it in Man. Man becomes, in other words, the substitute for the Christian illusion. Feuerbach, Stirner argues, is the high priest of a new religion — humanism: “The HUMAN *religion* is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion” (Stirner 1993:176). By making certain characteristics and qualities essential to Man, Feuerbach has alienated those in whom these qualities are not found. The individual finds himself subjected to a new series of absolutes — Man and Human Essence. For Stirner, Man is just as oppressive as God: “Feuerbach thinks, that if he humanises the divine, he has found truth. No, if God has given us pain, ‘Man’ is capable of pinching us still more torturingly” (Stirner 1993:174). Just as God was a power which oppressed the individual ego, now it is human essence, and ‘the fear of Man is merely an altered form of the fear of God’ (Stirner 1993:185). For Stirner human essence is the new norm which condemns difference. Humanism, is a discourse of domination — it has created, in Stirner's words, “a *new* feudalism under the suzerainty of ‘Man’” (Stirner 1993:341). Man and humanity are constructed in humanist discourse

as essential norms that individuals must conform to, and according to which difference is marginalised:

I set up what “Man” is and what acting in a ‘truly human’ way is, and I demand of every one that this law become norm and ideal to him; otherwise he will expose himself as a “sinner and criminal”. (Stirner 1993:204)

Stirner has defined a new operation of power that eluded classical Enlightenment philosophies like anarchism. He describes a process of *subjectification* in which power functions, not by repressing Man, but by constructing him as a political subject and ruling *through* him. Man is constituted as a site of power, a political unit through which the State dominates the individual (Stirner 1993:180). The State demands that the individual conform to a certain essential identity so that he can be made part of State society and, thus, dominated: “So the State betrays its enmity to me by demanding that I be a Man . . . it imposes being a Man upon me as a *duty*” (Stirner 1993:179). Stirner has broken with traditional humanist ontology in seeing the individual ego and human essence as separate and opposed entities. Humanity is not a transcendental essence created by natural laws which power comes to oppress, as the anarchists believed. Rather it is a fabrication of power or, at least, a discursive construct that can be made to serve the interests of power.

It is this undermining of Enlightenment humanist ontology that allows post-structuralists like Deleuze to see politics in an entirely new way. Like Stirner, Deleuze sees the human subject to be an effect of power rather than an essential and autonomous identity. Subjectivity is constructed in such a way that its desire becomes the desire for the State. According to Deleuze, the State, where it once operated through a massive repressive apparatus, now no longer needs this – it functions through the self-domination of the subject. The subject becomes his own legislator:

. . . the more you obey the statements of dominant reality, the more you command as speaking subject within mental reality, for finally you’ only obey yourself . . . A new form of slavery has been invented, that of being a slave to oneself . . . (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:162)

For Deleuze desire is channelled to the State through our willing submission to Oedipal representation. Oedipus is the State’s defence against untrammelled desire (Deleuze 1987:88). In fact Deleuze sees psychoanalysis as the new church, the new altar upon which we sacrifice ourselves, no longer to God but to Oedipus. Psychoanalysts are “the last priests” (Deleuze 1987:81). So, while for Stirner the

religion of the State is humanism and humanist Man, for Deleuze the religion of the State is Oedipus. Oedipal representation does not repress desire as such, but rather constructs it in such a way that it believes itself to be repressed, to be based on a negativity, guilt and lack (Deleuze and Guattari 1977:116). Thus Oedipal repression is simply the mask for the real domination of desire. Desire is 'repressed' in this way because unfettered it is a threat to the State — it is essentially revolutionary: “. . . there is no desiring machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors” (Deleuze and Guattari 1977:116). Deleuze argues that Oedipus individualises this desire by cutting it off from its possible connections and imprisoning it within the individual subject. This is much in the same way that for Stirner the essential human subject imprisons the ego, trying to capture its pluralities and fluxes within a single concept.

The question of desire plays a crucial role in both Deleuze and Stirner's political thinking, and I would argue that it is impossible to understand their radical approach to politics without a consideration of this concept. For these thinkers we can desire our own domination, just as we can desire freedom. Deleuze says:

To the question 'How can desire desire its own repression, how can it desire its slavery?' we reply that the powers which crush desire, or which subjugate it, themselves already form part of the assemblages of desire: . . . (Deleuze 1987:133)

For Stirner similarly, desire is not repressed or denied — rather it is channelled to the State: “The State exerts itself to tame the desirous Man; in other words, it seeks to direct his desire to it alone, and to content that desire with what it offers” (Stirner 1993:312). So for Stirner desire is constituted in such a way that it becomes desire for the State. In this way State domination is made possible through our complicity — through our *desire* for authority (Stirner 1993:312). Like Deleuze, Stirner is not so much interested in power itself, but in the reasons why we allow ourselves to be dominated by power. He wants to study the ways in which we participate in our own oppression, and to show that power is not only concerned with economic or political questions — it is also rooted in psychological needs. It has embedded itself, in the form of abstract ideas such as the State, human essence and morality, deep within our conscience. The dominance of the State, Stirner argues, depends on our willingness to let it dominate us:

The State is not thinkable without lordship and servitude (subjection); for the State must will to be lord of all that it embraces, and this will is called the 'will of the State'. 'He who, to hold his own, must count on the absence of will in others is a thing made by these others, as a master is a thing made by the servant. If submissiveness ceased, it would be all over with lordship. (Stirner 1993:195–6)

Stirner argues that the State itself is essentially an abstraction: it only exists because we allow it to exist and because we abdicate to it our own authority, in the same way that we create God by abdicating our authority and placing it outside ourselves. What is more important than the institution of the State is the “ruling principle” — it is the *idea* of the State that oppresses us (Stirner 1993:226). The State’s power is really based on *our* power. Would the State be as dominant if one refused to obey it, if one refused to surrender his authority to it? Is it not undeniable that any kind of rule depends on our willingness to let it rule us? Political power cannot rest solely on coercion. It needs our help, our willingness to obey. It is only because the individual has not recognised this power, because he humbles himself before the sacred, before authority, that the State continues to exist (Stirner 1993:284).

So for both Stirner and Deleuze the State must be overcome as an idea before it can be overcome in reality. This is the only way to ensure that a new State does not spring up in the place of the old. This was also the central concern of anarchism. However, according to this argument, classical anarchism failed to adequately account for the problem of power, subjectivity and desire. As Stirner and Deleuze have shown, not only is State power linked to moral and rational discourses, it is also fundamentally linked with the idea of the autonomous humanist subject — the cornerstone of anarchist thought. What the classical anarchists did not foresee was the subtle complicity between the desiring subject and the power that oppresses him/her. This is the spectre that haunts revolutionary theory. So Stirner and Deleuze go beyond the problematic of classical anarchism by unmasking the links between human essence and power, and by recognising the authoritarian possibilities of desire. It is clear then that resistance against State power must work along different lines to those envisaged by classical anarchists.

## IV. Resistance

So for both Stirner and Deleuze, State domination operates through, not only social contract theories and moral and rational discourses, but more fundamentally through humanist desire itself. The question must be *how*, if we are so intricately tied to the State, do we resist its domination? For Stirner and Deleuze, resistance to the State must take place at the level of our thoughts, ideas and most fundamentally our desires. We must learn to think beyond the paradigm of the State. Revolutionary action in the past has failed because it has remained trapped within this paradigm. Even revolutionary philosophies like anarchism, which have as their aim the destruction of State power, have remain trapped within essentialist concepts and manichean structures which, as Stirner and Deleuze have shown,

often end up reaffirming authority. Perhaps the very idea of revolution should be abandoned. Perhaps politics should be about escaping essentialist structures and identities. Stirner argues, for instance, that resistance against the State should take the form, not of revolution, but “insurrection”:

Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or *status*, the State or society, and is accordingly a *political* or *social* act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men’s discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the *arrangements* that spring from it. The Revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to *let* ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on ‘institutions’. It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established. (Stirner 1993:316)

Insurrection, it may be argued, starts with the individual refusing his enforced identity, the ‘I’ through which power operates: it starts ‘from men’s discontent with themselves.’ Moreover Stirner says that insurrection does not aim at overthrowing political institutions themselves. It is aimed at the individual overthrowing his own identity – the outcome of which is, nevertheless, a change in political arrangements. Insurrection is therefore not about becoming what one ‘is’ according to humanism – becoming human, becoming Man – but about becoming what one is *not*. Stirner’s notion of rebellion involves a process of *becoming* – it is about continually reinventing one’s own self. The self is not an essence, a defined set of characteristics, but rather an emptiness, a “creative nothing”, and it is up to the individual to create something out of this and not be limited by essences (Stirner 1993:150).

Deleuze as we have seen also rejects the unity and essentialism of subject, seeing it as a structure that constrains desire. He too sees *becoming* – becoming other than Man, other than human – as a form of resistance. He proposes a notion of subjectivity which privileges multiplicity, plurality and difference over unity, and flux over the stability and essentialism of identity. The unity of the subject is broken down into a series of flows, connections, and assemblages of heterogeneous parts (Bogue 1989:94). One cannot even think of the body as unified: we are composed of different parts that may function quite independently. What is important is not the subject or the various components themselves, but rather what happens between components: *connections*, *flows*, etc (Bogue 1989:91).

So for Deleuze and Stirner, resistance against the State must involve a rejection of unified and essentialist identities – identities which tie desire, language and thought to the State. Their breaking down of unity into plurality, difference and

becoming may be seen as an exercise in anti-authoritarian, anti-State thought. It may be seen as an attempt to go beyond existing political categories and to invent new ones – to expand the field of politics beyond its present limits by unmasking the connections that can be formed between resistance and the power being resisted. As Deleuze says: “You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will restratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:9).

Perhaps one way to think outside this binary, essentialist logic is through the concept of war. Stirner and Deleuze, in different ways, theorise non-essentialist forms of resistance against the State in terms of war. Stirner calls for *war* to be declared on the very institution and principle of the State. Moreover, he sees society in terms of a war of egos, a kind of Hobbesian war of “all against all” in which there is no appeal to any notion of collectivity or unity (Clark 1976:93). For this he has often been accused of advocating a selfish and extreme individualism in which “might is right” and the individual is entitled to all that he has it within his power to attain. However I would argue that Stirner is not talking here about actual war but rather a struggle at the level of representations which creates radical theoretical openings and in which all essential unities and collectivities are ruptured. War for Stirner is not a State of nature or an essential characteristic. Rather it is a mode of thinking that undermines essence.

It is in the same vein that Deleuze talks about the ‘war machine’ as a figure of resistance against the State. The war machine constitutes an outside to the State. While the State is characterised by interiority, the war machine is characterised by absolute *exteriority*. While the State is, as we have seen, a coded conceptual plane confining thought within binary structures, the war machine is sheer nomadic movement, non-striated and uncoded. It is a space characterised by pluralities, multiplicities and difference, which escapes State-coding by eschewing binary structures (Deleuze 1987:141). The war machine is the State’s Outside – whatever escapes the State’s capture: ‘just as Hobbes saw clearly that the State was against war, so war is against the State and makes it impossible’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988:359). It is the conceptual absence of essence and central authority. Again I would argue that Deleuze, as was the case with Stirner, is not talking here about actual war, but rather a theoretical terrain characterised by conceptual openness to plurality and difference, which eschews the stable identities, essences and conceptual unities that form part of the assemblage of the State. The idea of war as a radical dislocation and constitutive emptiness may be developed in this way, as a tool of resistance against State power and authority.

As we have seen, resistance is a dangerous enterprise: it can always be colonised by the power it opposes. It can no longer be seen as the overthrowing of State power by an essential revolutionary subject. Resistance may now be



seen in terms of war: a field of multiple struggles, strategies, localised tactics, temporary setbacks and betrayals — ongoing antagonism without the promise of a final victory. As Deleuze says: “. . . the world and its States are no more masters of their plane than revolutionaries are condemned to a deformation of theirs. Everything is played in uncertain games . . .” (Deleuze 1987:147).

How does this notion of resistance as war, as an uncertain game played between individuals, collectivities and authority differ from the anarchist idea of revolution? For classical anarchists revolution was a grand, dialectical overturning of society, in which structures of power and authority would be overthrown and the last obstacle to the full realisation of the subject’s humanity would be removed. For Deleuze and Stirner, on the other hand, resistance does not have a conclusion or *telos* in this sense. Resistance is seen as an ongoing confrontation, a perpetual war of attrition in which the lines of confrontation are never marked out in advance but are rather constantly renegotiated and fought over. Resistance against the State is an uncertain game precisely because State power can no longer be circumscribed in a single institution but rather is something that pervades the social fabric, constituting, as we have seen, desires, essences and rational principles. The very notion of the moral and rational human subject which is pitted against State power in anarchist discourse, is constructed, or at least infiltrated, by this very power that it purportedly opposes. So resistance is an uncertain game played by individuals and groups engaged in day to day struggles with multiple forms of domination.

## Conclusion

Stirner and Deleuze’s anti-State thinking may allow us to conceptualise and develop forms of resistance which avoid the trap the State has laid for us — that by our absolute adherence to rational structures of thought, and essentialist modes of desire, we end up reaffirming, rather than overcoming, domination. One must be able to think beyond the question of *what institution, what form of domination*, is to replace the one we have overthrown. Deleuze and Stirner’s anti-State thought can maybe provide us with the conceptual armoury to free politics from the blackmail of this eternal question. Here I would also argue that although Stirner and Deleuze’s analysis of State power differs in many ways from traditional anarchism, it is precisely on this point that they are closest to anarchism. They share with anarchism a relentless critique of all forms of authority, and particularly a rejection of the idea that certain forms of authority can be liberating. The difference is that Stirner and Deleuze expose sites of potential domination in places where classical anarchism did not look — in moral and rational discourses,

human essences and desire. In other words they have merely extended the critique of power and authority embarked upon by classical anarchism. In this sense Deleuze and Stirner's critique of the State can be seen as a form of anarchism. But it is an anarchism without essences and the guarantees of moral and rational authority. Perhaps in this way Deleuze and Stirner's anti-State philosophies may be considered as a *post-anarchism* — a series of conceptual strategies which can only advance anarchism by making it more relevant to contemporary struggles against authority.

I have argued, then, that there is a surprising and unexplored convergence between Stirner and Deleuze on the question of the State. Moreover exploring this convergence may allow us to theorise a non-essentialist politics of resistance to State domination. Both thinkers see the State as an abstract principle of power and sovereignty which is not reducible to its concrete forms. They develop a theory of the State which goes beyond Marxism in seeing the State as autonomous from economic arrangements, and beyond anarchism in seeing the State as operating through the very moral and rational discourses that were used to condemn it. In doing this they break with the paradigm of Enlightenment-humanism, unmasking the links between power and human essence and showing that desire can sometimes desire its own repression. Stirner and Deleuze, then, may be seen as occupying a similar anti-authoritarian philosophical and political trajectory — one that declares conceptual war on the State, and whose considerable theoretical implications for anarchism must be reckoned with.

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## Recommended Reading:

For a good supplementary introduction to Deleuze’s political thought, I would also suggest the following:

- Goodchild, Philip 1996. *Deleuze and Guattari: an introduction to the politics of desire*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Massumi, Brian 1992. *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
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- Schrift, Alan 1992. ‘Between Church and State: Nietzsche, Deleuze and the Genealogy of Psychoanalysis’, *International Studies in Philosophy*, 24(2), 41–52.

I would also recommend Deleuze’s own reflection on Foucault’s concept of power and resistance. See Deleuze, Gilles 1988. *Foucault*. (trans.) Se’n Hand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

For an good introduction to Stirner’s political thought, I would suggest:

- Carroll, John 1974. *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace. The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ferguson, Kathy. E 1982. ‘Saint Max Revisited: A Reconsideration of Max Stirner’, *Idealistic Studies*. 12(3), 276–292.

An exploration of the links between anarchism and poststructuralism can be found in:

- May, Todd 1994. *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press.

- May, Todd 1989. 'Is poststructuralist political theory anarchist?' *Philosophy & Social Criticism*. 15(2), 167–181.

For an introduction to post-modern politics, I would recommend:

- Ross, Andrew (ed.) 1988. *Universal Abandon: The Politics of Post-Modernism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

For an interesting look at contemporary anarchism I would suggest:

- Clark, John 1984. *The Anarchist Moment: Reflections on Culture, Nature & Power*. Black Rose Books: Montreal.
- Ehrlich, Howard J. (ed.) 1996. *Reinventing Anarchy, Again*. San Francisco, CA: AK Press.

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