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Leonard Harris, *A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader*. Edited by Lee A. McBride III (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

A Philosophy of Struggle: The Leonard Harris Reader is a collection of essays (cultivated from 1992-2018 and edited by Lee McBride III) that presents a diverse oeuvre of Harrisian philosophy, ranging from heretical discussions of ethics and honor to prescient reflections on the situation of philosophy and the future. The book is divided into five unequal parts: an orientating prolegomenon is followed by sections on racism and immiseration, honor and dignity, insurrectionist ethics, and the future of tradition. The following review will engage a handful of views borne by this unique philosophical conception from a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, focusing on a few of the strategic merits and challenges faced by an alliance between these thinkers.

As the title suggests, Harris' essays fall under a conceptualization of philosophy uniquely articulated (though not uniquely practiced) as *born of struggle* (32-33). Such a philosophy abandons a search for pristine, totalizing knowledge of the world; no longer concerned with the absolute formulation of a grand unifying theory, it fundamentally rejects all attempts at universal *explanation*: "Philosophy is not an algorithm but a walkway," and it is "most valuable when its authors and texts are decidedly dedicated to liberation" (33, 277). The task of philosophy, as Harris envisions it, opposes any scientific conception of philosophy conceived as the pursuit of primordial reasons, justifications, or causes of the universe or the phenomena we find ourselves entangled within. Its task is rather to prompt an engagement with the real struggle of immanent corporeal existence by showing and speaking out of that very struggle; it begins from and out of a norm motivated by descriptive accounts of existence: *corporeality matters!* Moreover, since philosophies of struggle deal with the power of description rather than explanation in order to render an image of a situation rather than unearth its cause, they embrace the singularity of their position: a Harrisian approach in no way claims to exhaust or delimit the possibilities of such philosophies, which may be as variegated and diverse as the struggles that incite them (75).

The priority of immanence and the movement away from universals in this conception of philosophy *prima facie* finds sympathy with Deleuze's philosophy of difference. Indeed, it is for these reasons that Harris himself

acknowledges a certain kinship with the model of philosophy that Deleuze and Guattari offer in *What is Philosophy?*, but he stops short of condoning this “continuous creation of concepts” on the grounds that their approach amounts to “navel gazing” and “transforms philosophy into a game” (25-27). The problem with this conception, for Harris, is that a philosophy that avows only its ability to create concepts departs the universal to dive into an abyss that can offer no concrete imperatives directing us to take liberatory action, whereas a philosophy of struggle explicitly seeks descriptions that would motivate a communication between theory and action.

There are at least three brief gestures to be made with respect to these criticisms. First, it’s not entirely clear that Deleuze and Guattari’s grasp of philosophy is as impotently abstract as Harris contends. For example, while it is advisable to debate the efficacy of their project and especially its relation to liberation, the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* are intended, not as inert speculative interpretive lenses or framing devices, but rather as machines whose apparatuses are affective, producing concrete flights of desire in its readers’ real corporeal existence. Second, there are arguably multiple incarnations of Deleuze from which to draw a conception of philosophy. In an early essay on Nietzsche, for example, Deleuze writes that the philosopher of the future is a legislator who functions as both artist and doctor. They make use of the tools of both the physician and poet: an interpretive diagnosis (that must be interpreted) and an evaluating perspective (that must be evaluated). Harris’ work embodies both of these aspects, utilizing poetic story-telling and aphoristic style to launch his descriptive accounts and legislate an imperative of liberation: chapters 5, 9, 11, and 15 are all shining examples of this method. (Again the refrain: corporeality matters!) The distance between Deleuze’s Nietzschean “philosopher of the future” and Harris’ philosophy of struggle may not be so great. This theme is, moreover, recapitulated in *What is Philosophy?* under the heading of conceptual personae: the creation of concepts is not without an accompanying subject of composition, a voice of authorship that evaluates and interprets just as it is evaluated and interpreted in turn. Harris’ philosophy born of struggle explicitly avows a persona that demands liberation, dignity, and tenacity.

Finally, while differences in approach almost certainly bear on a practical or theoretical exchange between these thinkers, such encounters need not depend on a homogeneous conception of philosophy in order to be productive; even if readers and writers who deploy a Deleuzian conception of philosophy admit a certain abys(s/m)al abstraction to their practice, the critical apparatuses and concepts to be found in their works may yet be useful under another aegis (that of struggle, for example). Such will be the modest goal of the remainder of this review: to demonstrate the fecundity of supplementing Harrisian excursions with a Deleuzo-Guattarian cartography (and vice versa).

To suggest the beneficial import of such models, we must first take an abridged tour through a few of Harris' particular views, each of which is shaped by his rejection of exhaustive explanatory models and subsequent emphasis on description. I will offer a detailed sketch of just one: racism, a phenomenon Harris describes as a "polymorphous agent of death" (55). Racism is a vast and heterogeneous accumulation of abject misery and irredeemable tragedy, a tentacled "array of forces" whose slippery and diffuse nature makes it particularly difficult to subject to explanation (or otherwise lends it a salience in demonstrating its refusal to submit to the weak grip of reason) (74). It is slippery because of the wide display of conditions and contexts in which racism may appear, and it is irredeemable because its consequences are death and the prevention of new lives – its victims will never be able to experience justice, a situation Harris dubs *necro-tragedy*. As an example, consider just two separate events permeated by racism: even if a precise and complete explanation of the mechanisms of racism involved in the murder of Breonna Taylor by home invaders acting on behalf of the state could be devised or procured, the same explanation would be hard-pressed to sufficiently explain the racist terror the Tutsis suffered during the 1994 Rwandan holocaust. Any theory that suffices to account for the former phenomenon but fails in the case of the latter (or vice versa) presents that exceptional case as an anomaly, an outlier. What's more, an attempt that successfully explains both cases would have to attribute to that explanation a single logical form, and forcing a unification of these disparate, irredeemable situations arguably does ill justice to either's particular conditions. And these are just two cases. Explanations always fall short, for Harris, because they are consistently accompanied by and confronted with anomalies – they cannot avoid the instantiation of a limit, beyond which lies a constitutive outside. Attempts to ground a *general* causal explanation of racism, whether in a logic of rational intentions or psychological motivations (as in, for example, Jorge Garcia or Kwame Appiah's account) or likewise a logic of collective or structural mechanisms be they agential or material (as in institutionalist accounts like Charles Mills'), fail because of their commitments to generality as such (77-79). There can be no best explanation that would completely account for racism; this renders it "an essentially contested concept" (47).

Such contestation, however, need not move us to view racism as ultimately indeterminate or opaque. Harris contends that a strategy of description can address racism without falling into the same pitfalls as universal explanation; the shift to depicting, showing, and indicating changes the role played by the anomaly. Crafting an image rather than seeking an underlying source is a way to deploy and defer to anomalous cases as definitive for a description of racism rather than hiccups for its logical analysis. The explanatory theorist might be described as a builder digging for absolute bedrock to ground their heavenly kingdom above. But any decent geologist laughs at a rigid distinction between sinking sand and solid ground; grounds shift and sand sinks into stone. Descriptions give not reasons but a

basis to accumulate and propagate reasons. To description, reasons accrue, drawn by flights of poetic or symbolic affect rather than imposed by algorithmic logic: Harris' actuarial account seeks to descriptively create a means to motivate liberatory action. Thus, Harris does not reject explanation outright, but he does seek to foreground its implementation through the use of description while maintaining an appropriate distance between the two. After all, it is through their conflation that a damaging and false description may pose as explanatory justification for the oppression of a given group (231). A Harrisian conception of racism adopts a descriptive form that assumes two working components: *necro-being* as a descriptive condition of the harms perpetuated by racism and the *actuarial theory* that descriptively addresses this condition. Each will be discussed in turn.

Necro-being is a condition that describes living death as the real corporeal harm of racism. It is neither identical to nor explanatory of racism, which, for Harris, can be described as a form of necro-being mediated by racializing structures and kinds. Necro-being as a condition is characterized by structural imbalances among populations in shouldering the burden of life and death. Health is siphoned from one group to another. Necro-being "kills and prevents persons from being born;" in conditions of necro-being, "dominant groups acquire longer lives, assets, and high senses of self-worth at the cost of the extinction or sustained subordination of the subjugated" (69). Slavery in the Americas, for example, saw a mediated transfer of health from slaves to their mistresses, who gained status, wealth, and healthcare off of their misery (71). No compensation for this loss, no redemption for this suffering – that is necro-being and the necro-tragedy it brings on its tide.

Harris' actuarial theory is designed to give us the tools to confront this irreconcilable condition of undue death. Not to explain away its existence by searching for its ultimate cause, nor to redeem it by locating its logical-ordinal point of reference in our history, actuarial theory indicates conditions of necro-being using correlations and probabilities that track the very real phenomenon of death: racism "is the living social science of assuring poor health and premature death" whose spreadsheets tally the dead (86). Actuarial theory uses mathematical tools to bring those spreadsheets to light or write them up themselves, depicting through statistical data "undue death and its accompanying conditions" (87). The actuarial account's commitment to description makes it flexible in both qualitative and quantitative scope. It may depict racist "institutions and forms of production" spawning individual racist wills and acts, or just as well individual sites of racism coalescing into heinous institutions (86). Harris is clear that he holds an ungrounded commitment to the view that undue death, depicted as both dead bodies and disparate trends in health, be viewed as a moral wrong; such is the gambit of a philosophy born of struggle that begins with an image as such, one that smuggles with it, implicitly or explicitly, commitments of desire – "unspeakable and unseen norms" (90). A philosophy of struggle risks taking

a moral stance in an amoral universe. For Harris, we cannot offer a description or explanation without ushering in these subtle valuations. Our human condition seems to require the use of representative heuristics that are characteristically quick and necessarily imperfect; these heuristics shape the structure of our episteme, and Harris' general point is that we need not let hard-nosed explanations lead them along. Ideology or intuition may instead take the primary role, guiding the language we use to frame a situation (e.g., deciding which data to look at and how). This need not give us cause to recoil. Description that precedes explanation foregrounds intuition in a valuation (in this case, the immorality of undue death), but conversely, explanation that preordains description would subdue it, opting to bend intuition dogmatically for the sake of an underlying cause or algorithm. Said otherwise, description frees intuition for its flight to seek grounds where consistent foundations might be laid, whereas explanation gives the intuition an obsessive mechanism with which to dig (for grounds or the source of ground).

The pragmatic use of representative heuristics is a recurring theme throughout *A Philosophy of Struggle*. Dignity and honor, as Harris conceives them, are productively viewed as heuristic sortals. He rejects accounts of dignity that rely on the recognition of some intrinsic property of agents. The inability to escape cognitive heuristics places us in a paradoxical position: on the one hand, oppressive regimes make use of sortals in order to exclude or immiserate social kinds, while on the other, the preconditions of dignity require "substantive relations between persons in community;" that is, some notion of quiddity or haecceity that unites a social kind and allows a reciprocal exchange of honor and personhood: representative heuristics make possible the conditions of agents due dignity (156). By advocating a descriptive account, Harris brings this paradox to the foreground. The fundamentally treacherous role that heuristics play in subjection cannot be circumvented, but it can be acknowledged, and we need not confine ourselves to the view that such heuristics are inherently or inevitably damaging. Instead of treating these categories as essentially stable formations, they can be seen as "tools to help us think about problems" (180). We can make headway towards a project of universal human liberation, Harris contends, by making use of an inalienable notion of dignity whose basis is a complex of common-denominator values that aim to describe the structural preconditions of a global form of quiddity (151-156). The goal of such heuristics in the hands of a philosophy of struggle is to produce action, and in keeping with his rejection of absolutes, Harris cautions against turning these descriptions into generalized explanations. Although we cannot pursue a project of universal human liberation without dealing with social entities and deploying sortals, we need not assign them a stability that would save them from destruction or risk transforming them into oppressive formations (185, 220). This brings us to a number of common points shared by Harris, Deleuze, and Guattari. Throughout his essays Harris develops and deploys the notion of *anabsolutes*: identities that are fluid, heterogenous, complex, and transitory - never

absolute, never entirely fixed or universal. This consistent insistence on the ephemerality of social groups and cautious navigation of the representative heuristics that would capture their flow brings us well within the territory of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in which the social production of molar representation is put into conflict with the desiring production of molecular flows or swarms. At the heart of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is a claim that a contemporary analysis of socio-politics must reckon with a theory of flows and the breaks that mold them.

In chapter fourteen Harris argues that the spring-loaded barricado used to separate slaves from the crew on slave ships is a suitable paradigm of modernity, a literal break-flow punctured by holes that allow violence to pass asymmetrically and indiscriminately from one stable side to the other in the form of bullets and pikes (236-239). Not unlike Deleuze and Guattari, whose texts grapple with the means of freeing smooth spaces from their capture and reorganization into a striated one, Harris' vision of liberation imagines a "communal society" where the barricado as break-flow has been destroyed, one "that flows openly to other spaces, which in turn makes reciprocity, tradition, and exchanges between populations possible" (245). The resonance between these projects offers a multitude of opportunities for mutual exchange (e.g., Harris' admittance that some of his views on social entities as anabsolutes are speculative could be flushed out with the help of Deleuzo-Guattarian devices), and while there are certainly enough disparities to warrant disagreement (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari's self-proclaimed schizoanalytic orientation against Harris' liberatory one), those theoretical gaps also create the space necessary to weave together new directions for socio-political thought (217, 232).

There might be one point where these projects can productively come together, beyond the general resonances that exist between their themes. Recall that Harris' actuarial theory responds to conditions of necro-being by directly turning to confront the anomalies that lie in the zone of living death instead of committing to an overarching explanatory model. A similar strategy unfolds in part four, "An Ethics of Insurrection; Or, Leaving the Asylum (Virtues of Tenacity)," where Harris extends his discussion of dignity to argue for an ethics that motivates direct action against oppressive structural regimes, one that promotes "irreverence, aggressiveness, self-assurance, self-confidence, tenacity, enmity, and passion" rather than "benevolence, piety, temperance, restraint, serenity, and compassion" (172, 186). The use of representative heuristics once again plays a key role. In this case, insurrectionists and maroons make pragmatic use of such categories to bestow dignity to an oppressed group ("such as slaves, women, and natives") and motivate a tenacious, dignified rejection of harmful conditions and structures (180). Descriptively addressing anomalies directly (i.e., those minor groups who occupy liminal positions with respect to an oppressive structure or category) gives the means by which to empower them to break down, break

out, or break into the borders that would otherwise hold them at bay. These adversarial social entities are “voices that often perceive community as becoming,” and the struggle for liberation they pursue is “intended to create new traditions and alternative communities. That is, *new bonds*” (221, emphasis added).

The positive accounts of nomad thought that Deleuze and Guattari develop in *A Thousand Plateaus*, in particular their discussions of becoming (chapter ten) offer apparatuses to think through this process. According to their analysis (which here will only be sketched), becoming is not evolutionary but involutory, proceeding not through filial reproduction but through transversal contagious *alliance*. It is, moreover, the anomalous outsider (that which lies beyond or at the limit of the community) which forms the basis of the alliance that defines and ensures the becoming of a given assemblage. By conceptualizing these communities of becoming as assemblages, Harris’ adversarial social entities are ripe to be modeled after the anomalous power of the warrior: that is, an affective power, a spirit of passion, irreverence, and fury; war machines that disrupt stable regimes by allying with marginal communities (247). This is the insurrectionist spirit, the spirit of David Walker, that Harris describes in chapter nine as living in and through those maroons and insurrectionists that allied themselves with minor, outsider groups in order to “destroy boundaries” and create new, absolute ones (171-172). There is much more to be explored and discussed here. Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual devices provide the means to carry Harris’ new philosophical movement in novel directions, and likewise Harris’ project of liberation brings to a Deleuzian milieu an aegis of urgency and a concrete instantiation of a possible form an immanent ethics and pragmatics might take.

A Philosophy of Struggle is recommended to philosophers and non-philosophers alike interested in socio-political theories that place the mutual exchange of flow and representation at the center of their project. More than that, this book is of interest to anyone who values new directions for philosophy generally, paths that lead us, not off into the heavens of abstraction and the theoretical monsters that dwell there, but rather into the concrete, murky heart of darkness occupied by the down-trodden and oppressed. Harris brings philosophy to task and sets it about a fresh one, ever renewing that refrain which flows from a position of pain and strife: *corporeality matters!*

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