

On the Dialectical Relationship between Primitive Societies and State Societies in Deleuze's Political Philosophy

Yue Pan

College of Philosophy, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
Email: 18811477351@163.com

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Abstract

Deleuze and Guattari's theory of state is a key theme in their political philosophy. By combining "micro-politics" and "macro-politics", this paper summarizes the origins of the state at the macro level in three elements: unique overcoding, explicit boundaries and centralized power resonances, which could be further summarized as the establishment of an abstract symbolic system; at the micro level, primitive societies and state societies are simultaneously coexisting, they are in a dialectical relationship, which interpenetrate each other and are always present in every society.

Keywords

Deleuze, Micro-Politics, Macro-Politics, State Theory

1. Introduction

The study of political philosophy does not appear to be a prominent part of the study on Deleuze, both in terms of the proportion of published papers on political philosophy and in the structures of many introductory works on Deleuze's research. The reason for this is, first of all, that Deleuze's texts on political philosophy are rather limited, and are mainly concentrated in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, which Deleuze co-authored with Guattari. However, this also reflects, to some extent, the limitation of the study on Deleuze's political philosophy, namely the lack of connections of Deleuze's political philosophy with his concepts in other fields such as his ontological theory of multiplicities and his theory of rhizome. The limitation on the length of Deleuze's discussion of political philosophy should not be a limitation on our study of his political philosophy, as the spirit of Deleuze's philosophy conveys—that there is

no clear separation between plateaus, and that points are inextricably linked to each other by rhizomes—Deleuze’s political philosophy is likewise a plateau connected to other plateaus and cannot be studied in isolation. In his interview, Deleuze sees *Anti-Oedipus* as his “transition to politics” and a “thorough work of political philosophy” (Deleuze, 2014), *A Thousand Plateaus* also carries important discussions of “micro-politics” and “macro-politics”, as well as addressing important questions in the tradition of political philosophy, such as the formation of modern states.

In Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theories, macro-politics and micro-politics refer to two different approaches to the study of politics, one at the molar level, with a well-defined, complete structure and a fixed way of thinking, and the other at the molecular level, which is undefined and cannot be fully understood in terms of inherent concepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The history of political philosophy has been marked by the use of terms such as “state of nature”, “class” and “leviathan”, which define the structure of macro-politics, while micro-politics is dedicated to deconstructing these fixed structures. Micro-politics represents a direction that has many aliases in Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual creation: destratification, rhizome, schizo-analyse, nomadologie, potential, etc., but they all share the spirit of a desire to escape from the fixed symbolic systems, to focus on the difference in the repetition and the repetition in the difference (rather than the same), to escape from the macro, and to create a “potential” in relation to the macro.

If micro-politics is a conceptual creation of Deleuze and Guattari, macro-politics has connotations of a fixed structure and analytical approach that political philosophy has long adopted. One of the misunderstandings about Deleuze and Guattari is that they only stood on the side of micro-politics, but abandoned macro-politics, while in fact, there is no priority between macro-politics and micro-politics, and they both exist in all political philosophies, “if we consider the great binary aggregates, such as the sexes or classes, it is evident that they also cross over into molecular assemblages of a different nature, and that there is a double reciprocal dependency between them” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In this reciprocal dependence, the goal is not only to find a microcosm in macro-politics, but also to focus on macrocosm in micro-politics, and even to constantly reconstruct new macro-politics, inventing new concepts and systems of our own.

2. Definitions of Primitive Societies and State Societies

The theory of “state” is the main battleground for Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis of macro-politics and micro-politics. As the most important topic in the history of political philosophy, it has been the subject of almost every political philosopher, and a relatively complete theoretical system and research path has been developed around this topic. Therefore, if we take this historical and traditional conception into the theory of the state, we are also entering into the exist-

ing macro-political framework. In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle explained the emergence of the state in terms of human nature; this was followed by the theological theory of the state and the divine right of kings in medieval ages, which explained the formation of the state in terms of religion; the scholars of the Enlightenment era examined and conceptualized the origins of the state from a relatively objective historical perspective. Hobbes believed that the “state of nature” was a state of war between men and therefore required the powerful intervention and administration of the state (Hobbes, 1996). The state of nature was also envisaged by Rousseau, who argued that private ownership was a prerequisite for the creation of the state (Rousseau, 2004). From the macro framework of state theory, and in the context of anthropological studies of primitive societies, Deleuze and Guattari develop their search for the micro-politics of the state.

These theories of state both use the traditional methods of political philosophy of “ancient-modern contrast” and “genesis”, and both set up the state of nature in primitive societies, primitive societies and state societies are therefore the two successive stages of human history and have become a fixed counterpart in macro-politics. However, unlike traditional political philosophers and anthropologists, Deleuze and Guattari take a concrete approach and bring micro-politics into this macro-political framework, rather than treating the state and its opposite, primitive society, as two fixed historical stages, they are more of a theoretical model, a factor and a tendency, which exist at any stage of history and are coexisting at the same time as two ends of one spectrum.

3. Macro Distinctions between Primitive Societies and State Societies

According to *A Thousand Plateaus*, “primitive societies have no fixed, central State apparatus and no global power mechanisms or specialized political institutions. In these societies, the social segments have a certain leeway” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Primitive societies are like human childhood, with an initial knowledge of everything, but also just crossing the threshold of growth, where everything has not yet been refined and divided, only loosely structured. We can identify and summarize three components of this model of primitive society: polysemous coding, vague boundaries and a decentralized clan genealogy. In contrast, state societies (or modern societies, modern states) have a centralized power mechanism, an overarching regime and specialized political institutions, and if primitive societies are organized in what Deleuze called “body without organs”, state societies are bodies with all the organs. State societies also have three elements that are the opposite of primitive societies: unique overcoding, explicit boundaries and a centralized resonance of power. Understanding these three elements thus becomes the focus of the distinction between primitive societies and state societies.

The first distinction lies between polysemous coding and unique overcoding. Coding refers to the naming and differentiation of things, through which hu-

mans grasp the world of experience and develop the possibility of communication. Primitive societies were not based on a complete and abstract system of symbols, and the conceptual differentiation they possessed was a primary differentiation drawn from real experience, with no higher authority to unify everyone's understanding. The overcoding, on the other hand, is the unification of many codes by a higher level, which standardizes all codes with a unified standard and quantity, making everything quantifiable, the overcoding is thus singular. The unification of the carriages, writings, weights and measures by Qin dynasty is a typical example of the operation of super-coding at the state level. In this sense, primitive societies were nature-based and rhizomatic, as "a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) whereas state societies are quantitative and tree-like, with a single trunk and axis.

Taking one of the easiest distinctions to make—the gender distinction—as an example, we can see the difference between the operation of coding and overcoding. The first human gender distinctions were biological in the sense of reproductive gender distinctions, where humans distinguished between the sexes in terms of both their physical characteristics and their hermaphroditic reproduction. This is true not only in humans, but also in animals that have hermaphroditic differentiation. However, according to our assumptions, this distinction is only achieved on the basis of our life experience without theoretical abstraction, and people only discover the difference between the sexes when they come into contact with specific individuals. In other words, people in the model of primitive societies can distinguish between men and women, but this difference is only a difference in nature among individuals but not among groups; it is a difference arising from the contact with individuals they face, but not a theoretical framework that would exist in their heads before encountering someone. Therefore, there is a polysemous coding in primitive societies. However, in the model of state societies, the state solidifies this difference, raises it to the institutional and theoretical level, and constructs such a differentiation, categories and modes of thinking in people's minds through education and propaganda. People in the state society are then "innately" to have a concept of gender distinction, which is reflected in the fact that our public facilities have separate areas for men and women, and that the first items to be filled in the forms collected by the state would normally include gender (we will find that the first few items that people are required to fill in on government forms are in fact some kind of overcoding). The significance of the above distinction between the polysemous coding of primitive societies and the univocal overcoding of state societies is that, unlike previous political philosophers who have taken private ownership and war, conflict, etc. to be the origins of the state, Deleuze and Guattari argue that one of the origins of the state lies in the abstraction and solidification of concepts, in other words, the origins of the state lies in the becoming fixed of the things in our mind, or to say in the abstraction and solidification of our mind and our opinions.

The second distinction lies between vague boundaries and explicit boundaries.

This is a distinction that is made with regard to territories. The model of primitive societies does not have clear territorial boundaries. The reason for this is that people in primitive societies do not see land as a resource; they may see fruit, vegetables and animal skins as resources, but land is not scarce for them, and primitive tribes that do not cultivate as a means of subsistence do not realize the productive value of land in terms of cultivation. For Deleuze's model of primitive societies, therefore, their so-called territory was simply the small space in which they lived, and the rest of the land was external to them as "nature" or "world". They did not have clear territorial boundaries, or even so-called borders. State societies, on the other hand, have clear territorial boundaries, which are clearly reflected in the maps of the world and of the countries that define the state and discipline its citizens. Shapes, maps and borders are important symbols of state societies, and the state needs them to define its image and to further strengthen its citizens' sense of belonging. From this we can analyse that in Deleuze and Guattari, the second origin of the state lies in a sense of territory and a clear definition of boundaries.

Finally there is a distinction between a non-centralized clan genealogy and a centralized resonance of power. Primitive societies were centred on clan or clan chiefs who are specific people, and numerous clan and clan chiefs formed a constellation with multiple centers. This organizational structure did not have a single centre and certainly no centralized office; they dealt with each other in direct person-to-person contact rather than person-to-office contact, and such relationships were relatively loose. State societies, on the other hand, is not centred on specific individuals. State is characterized by its unity, by the fact that everything operates in the same way that can be grasped. All the institutions and social fields of division of labour are vertically distributed, hierarchically defined and have an absolute centre, they are like circles of unequal radius, varying in scope but sharing the same centre around which they resonate in unity. It can be said that these state institutions are at the centre of the circle of state societies, and that people living in the modern state spend most of their time dealing with state institutions or their subsidiaries: when we want to buy household goods, we need to deal with supermarkets or markets; when we want to receive an education, we need to deal with schools; when we want to build a house, we need to deal with the property administration ... These institutions have offices or shops scattered everywhere, but they are all essentially centred around the administration of the state. This is also the case even in modern states where a king or queen still exists. Therefore, the state also has its third origin in centrality and uniformity.

These are the three origins of the state that we have summarized, which are also the three distinctions between the two models of primitive societies and state societies, but they can once again be reduced to the same distinction—whether they are based on a symbolic system or not. It is this distinction that classifies primitive societies and state societies respectively as a multiplicity of nature and a multiplicity of quantity, since the basis of the symbolic system is

whether things can be reduced to numbers and structures and whether they can be thought of instrumentally. Primitive societies are based on experience and nature, thus on the qualitative induction of objects in the experience, while state societies are based on systems of signs and symbols, on the quantitative induction, abstraction and reproduction of objects in the experience. The state is detached from land, individual, etc., and aligned with the authority of laws, contracts and institutions themselves, creating a rule of images rather than of things. The abstraction of the state appears, in terms of overcoding, as the unification of codes and the building of the entire state on this unity, in terms of boundaries, as the precision of state boundaries and the resulting fixed image of the state, and in terms of the resonance of power, as the unified functioning and macro-visage of the state apparatus.

4. The Micro Coexistence of Primitive Societies and State Societies

After dealing with the distinction Deleuze and Guattari make between primitive societies and state societies at the macro-political level: they represent, respectively, a relatively supple, decentralized, differentiated model of society, and a highly rigid, abstract, centralized model of society. But Deleuze does not wish to move away from state societies and turn to primitive societies; examining from a micro-political perspective, Deleuze and Guattari reveal that the distinction between the two societies is not an unbridgeable one. While they can be broadly distinguished at the macro level, they are simultaneously coexisting in reality at the micro level. These two modes of societies are a relationship among individuals, coexisting in every society, between which we should not and cannot make a clear distinction.

Deleuze and Guattari reject an evolutionary view of the state, arguing that the state is not the evolutionary result of primitive societies, but that they are both two interdependent and coexisting factors in society. "Primitive societies have nuclei of rigidity or arborification that as much anticipate the State as ward it off. Conversely, our societies are still suffused by a supple fabric without which their rigid segments would not hold" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy rejects a pure state of reality, where no element is isolated and any reality and potential should be a mixture of all elements, full of transformations and interpenetration. This idea certainly permeates their political thought: there must be elements of the state societies in primitive societies, and there must also be elements of the primitive societies in modern states and modern societies. Primitive societies and state societies are just two models, but the primitive model is most evident in primitive tribes, while the state model is naturally most evident in modern states.

We have already noted the unclear distinction between the sexes in primitive societies and the binary distinction between male and female in state societies, representing respectively a polysemous coding and a unique overcoding. But is it

possible for the two to communicate with each other or even to transform each other? The answer is affirmative. After the state societies have made a unified distinction between male and female and have educated to popularize this distinction, we find that in today's modern countries the definitions of gender have become more and more diverse. With the development of technology and society, as of today we have six models of gender differentiation: chromosomal gender, genetic gender, gonadal gender, genital gender, psychological gender and social gender. Each of these six distinctions distinguishes at least two genders, and multiplying each of these classifications gives us altogether dozens of gender types, and even when registering on some of today's social medias, we have over 70 categories of gender to choose from. This is certainly an extremely polysemous gender coding today which represents in a certain degree the micro-political features contained within the state societies because the traditional opinions that are for a long time fixed are now starting to deconstruct. From a micro-political point of view, we can sense from this phenomenon the presence in the modern state of the polysemous patterns of primitive societies. But this polysemous code is also undoubtedly lurking in the stream of solidified and rigid overcoding: in March 2021, the US Congress passed "the Equality Act", and as early as 2010, the state of California had already legislated for the recognition of a "third gender". The Equality Act was passed by the US Congress in March 2021, and the existence of a "third gender" was recognized in California in 2010. The emergence of these new provisions in the law, which is one of the most important ways in which the state can unify and homogenize ideas, is another attempt by the overcode to control and capture these codes and create new uniform distinctions. Furthermore, if we look at the dozens of gender categories calculated by way of superposition, we did not develop this set of classification rules by encountering someone who could be classified as one of these dozens of genders; on the contrary, this system of classification was structured by our logical reasoning in the first place, and some of these categories do not even find their real-life counterparts in our world of experience. This innate logical distinction is based on an abstract logical construction, which is the result of rigid and fixed state societies.

It is not only the case of the overcoding of gender distinctions, but also of boundaries, centrality and so on. At the micro-political level, the primitive and the state social models are thus transformed into each other and coexist forever, like a "flux". Flux is constantly forming new political realities as they are captured, solidified and then deconstructed, forming political models in which primitive societies and state societies coexist, but at root, all politics and political science is the constant movement of flux. Primitive societies and state societies are like a double-helical DNA genes, parallel to each other yet connected by tiny bonds, intertwined and encompassing each other. The attitude taken by Deleuze and Guattari's micro-politics is to find the subtle connections in the grand oppositions, an attitude that affirms reality, for although the models in the theory are clearly separated, everything is interconnected in reality.

5. Conclusion

Unlike the origins of the state as envisaged in traditional political philosophy, such as “war” and “private ownership”, states actually originate from three elements: a unique overcode, implicit boundaries and a centralized resonance of power, which can be further summarized as the creation of an abstract symbolic system. Primitive societies and state societies are not just two historical periods insisted by traditional theories, but two coexisting theoretical models in a dialectical relationship, which interpenetrate each other and are always present in every society.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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