

SUBJEKTILE

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The Thought of Becoming
Gilles Deleuze's Poetics of Life

diaphanes

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I.

Introduction: On Ethics and Poetics

Nothing to be done.
(Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*)

One single question marked the beginning of this project and it pointed out the direction for everything to follow: ›What is wrong with Ethics?‹ This was our first and foremost concern, which, however, in itself is already a double concern. But in saying that much we, before we even have started, announce already a different beginning. We must remain patient for a little while until we can raise the issue of doubling again. First we have to explain how since then, since uttering this statement, we have moved further, maybe even to *somewhere else*. These things happen on a journey, as we all know. And yet, now, after all this time, as we look to adequately introduce what will actually follow here, the issues expressing themselves in this question must still stand at the very beginning. Whatever has *become* must again start with this assertion and we must introduce our undertaking by it. Thus, again — and this first repetition just heralds the many reappearances, reiterations, and returns that will confront us frequently on our itinerary throughout this book: ›What is wrong with Ethics?‹

Here is the alternate beginning, the one that just a moment ago was silenced: the statement at issue, question or claim, harbors in itself a double concern. On the one hand, the expression clearly serves a critical gesture. It takes up the gist of sincere critiques of Ethics that developed over the course of its long history, a history so closely linked to the history of philosophy itself that it, therefore, implicates a critique of ›what philosophy is‹, too. Today this means that the investigation into what is wrong with Ethics speaks the demand to explore the problems and to explicate the shortcomings lying in the presumption of Ethics (and philosophy) to claim for itself the sphere of the Universal, Truth, and Reason — concepts standing for the conditions of philosophical thought as such.

But we move too quickly here. Before we lose the possibility of hearing something else in the statement ›What is wrong with Ethics‹,

because too quickly we assure ourselves to know already what it is all about, we must pay closer attention to what happens when we let the statement echo further. Before we slide too easily into a critical dispute over the canon of philosophy, we must ponder the statement so that something else becomes hearable: What is (actually) wrong with Ethics?

All of a sudden the critical claim becomes a question of curiosity, a persisting interest in the ethical that does not disappear no matter which critique of Ethics is articulated. On the other hand, therefore, the expression implicitly also speaks the concern that by unraveling the impasses of canonical ethical thinking, we must not forget about the specificity of the ethical dimension altogether. Thus, the movement that we try to bring across here in the most linear way possible is complicated. And the double—and thus already more than uni-directional—sense is not even the whole story. For as soon as we are about to grasp the doubling further concerns are generated, which can no longer be sufficiently grappled with in a *pro* and *contra* argument. The story to be told in order to prepare the grounds for the book ahead is multifaceted.

And yet the concern that truly stands at the beginning is a critique of what is known as Ethics—as capital ›E‹ Ethics. In considering what is wrong with this kind of Ethics—the Ethics of universal principles, of the Good and the Right, whether in its idealist, utilitarian, communitarian, or liberal version—we can count today on strong allies for interrogating the ›natural‹ equations of the Good with Reason, the Ethical with the Universal, and all of them with the—again capital ›T‹—Truth. In the continental philosophical tradition there is, at least since Søren Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's philosophy and his thought of Ethics (Kierkegaard 1983), an audible, even if ›minoritarian‹ discourse of a ›decapitated‹ ethics, and thus in the broader sense also of a different kind of philosophy.¹ Jacques Derrida's notion of

1 Switching from the capital ›E‹ to the small ›e‹ can be read as a first lesson learned from the critiques of Ethics. In what follows it will be mainly the notion of ›the ethical‹ and at the utmost the minor ›ethics‹, which is of concern to us, both of which precisely do not address an applicable normative system but rather the broadest philosophical approach to ethics, an approach that is expressed in the question of thinking itself as what it is ›to do philosophy‹. And

phallogocentrism (Derrida 1997) maybe expresses best for us how far this critique has penetrated the supposed neutrality and universality of the philosophical tradition up to today. It permeates everything and of course does not stop before the thought of Ethics.²

All this immediately comes to mind when we start thinking of Ethics and what *is* wrong with it. In our post-modern times it seems as if it has become our second nature that any conviction in what once was called Enlightenment—the columns of equality, freedom, and fraternity as re-inscriptions of the philosophical concepts of Universalism, Subjectivity, and Reason—is not only lost, but, as if everything needs to be doubled, it is ›lost‹ lost. It is so lost that no further search for any better articulation would be of help. Ethics, once counted as the highest reach for philosophical thought, either becomes a purely academic exercise or it is watered down by too many appropriations into ›applicable‹ approaches. Between total abstraction from daily life and complete immersion of Ethics into every imaginable little niche of society, there seems to be little in-between.³ And it is this picture

since, as the latter part of this introduction will make explicit, our argument strives for a becoming-imperceptible of Ethics to itself, so that a new line of flight for the ethical dimension is opened, we will have to cross over different philosophical registers: from ethics to poetics.

2 To name just one exponent of a whole ›pack‹ of thinkers, in an attempt to give conceptual exactness to the always already directed or biased neutrality and universality of every thought, is of course more than problematic. However, flipping on the other side and pretending to be able to enumerate supposedly all voices is doubtful, too. Acknowledging that one will always remain guilty of having made an (il)legitimate choice, and yet wishing to supplement this selection at least to some degree, let me give some other names that must be thought of when we speak of the critical re-inscription of the Western tradition of Universalism, Reason, and Truth—apart from Gilles Deleuze of course, who will be the singular focus of this book: Michel Foucault's foundational work on *Power and Discourse* (c.f. e.g. Foucault 1990), Jacques Lacan's *practice of Psychoanalysis* (cf. e.g. Lacan 1997), Emmanuel Levinas' thought of *Otherwise than Being* (cf. Levinas 1998) and Jean-François Lyotard's *differend* (cf. Lyotard 1999) must be named, as much as Luce Irigaray's work on *Sexual Difference* (cf. e.g. Irigaray 1993), Laclau and Mouffe's thought of *hegemony* (cf. Laclau/Mouffe 1996), and Jacques Rancière's ›*mésentente*‹ (cf. Rancière 1998), all of which are groundbreakers for but also effectuated by feminist, post-colonial, gay & lesbian, and other socio-political movements our societies have witnessed in the decades since WWII.

3 Without being able to elaborate on the diversity of research on Ethics (capital E) undertaken in either academic or other professional contexts, let me at

that makes an engagement with the ethical a somewhat preposterous undertaking, exposed to the cynicism of all those who, from the very constitutive problems of *every* Ethics, maybe even of the mere thought of the ethical as such, draw the conclusion that we must have done with ethics altogether, that because so much hubris goes on under this name, any further investigation into the question of ethics as such is perpetuating at its best a melancholic, at its worst a utopian, but in any case a human-all-too-human endeavor.

It is from this double or even triple dissatisfaction of what seems to be the last word on the ethical today that this project takes its inspiration and asks one more time: but what actually is wrong with ethics? Reading the question in this more curious way admits to the conviction that the ethical is too essential to us, that even when looking outdated it can never be done with. And having begun above to count out allies in regard to an awareness of the ethical, we could also speak of a kind of renaissance of engagement with the ethical. This time reversing the ordinary direction and thus counting from contemporary ›continental‹ thought back to Kierkegaard's caesura with Hegelianism, there are numerous attempts to re-conceptualize ethics in order to inspire philosophy again with a practical dimension, without at the same time falling into the traps of either heightened idealism or mere pedagogical life guidance. In such re-thinking of the question of the ethical the prospect of moving somewhere else with ethics is, however, essential and it is this prospect that the project ahead of us also tries to tackle. In re-investigating the question of the

least name the range of it by merely enumerating the most important schools or thought-trains that are generally found as leading in the discussion of this topic. The variety reaches from Neo-Aristotelian and Wittgensteinian analytical philosophy working on a universally valid and applicable (Meta-)Ethics based on Aristotle's life-forms, via the more politically inspired philosophical discussions of Ethics from either a liberal or a communitarian perspective, privileging either the freedom of the Subject or the Good of the community as that which must give measure to such an Ethics, to the newly celebrated Bioethical research whose representatives hope to have found a non-anthropomorphic perspective on the question of what life is, and thus also of what it is all about, perhaps forgetting, however, the anthropocentric baggage they carry along in trusting their ›objective scientific‹ perspective, in as much as it includes all those adjectival Ethics that develop from the most distant societal angles, be it Eco-, Medical or Business Ethics.

ethical I hope not only to show a way out of certain deadlocks every Ethics necessarily experiences, but also to carefully circumnavigate any simplistic appropriation of ›this world‹, the reference of which must, however, not be avoided in a discussion of the ethical.

But in saying this, yet another beginning suggests itself, and one more issue must be addressed at this beginning because it instigated this project in its specific orientation. Why ethics at all? one might ask. Why not finally leave behind this philosophically abstract realm of prescriptions, principles, and rules, and move on — especially since there is it seems another notion much better suited to do the job in these ultimately secularized times? We are of course alluding to the notion of politics, or to say it in a less substantive way, the dimension of the political, both of which are today the much more common references when it comes to an engagement with *this* world. A thorough elaboration of the point in question, that is the relation between ethics and politics, their interrelation as the ethico-political dimension but also their differentiation in regard to how each of them addresses and intervenes into this world, would be most desirable. However, precisely out of the *structural* interrelatedness of the two dimensions, such categorical analysis is most difficult to achieve. And at this point this question must remain insufficiently answered and has to be postponed to another time. But what I can say and hope to raise at least through my investigation into the specific question of ethics — and this precisely out of concern for the political — is an awareness in regard to all too unproblematic deployments and substitutive usages of these two terms in too many of our contemporary discussions. While the progressive substitution of politics for ethics in the last century might have been an emancipatory move away from all *a priori* fixation of the world and thus a tool for the multiplication of lives we live, our contemporary political conditions also make us feel the political ambivalences of both a proceeding moralization of politics and a politicization of nearly every single aspect of our lives. This investigation purposefully chose the dimension of the ethical, and although it remains focused on this element alone, in what follows I do hope to address today's *Zeitgeist* effectively when claiming that for the sake of both areas — ethics *and* politics — we must re-learn to a certain degree to differentiate between the two.

After these extended beginnings, it does not come as a great surprise that the project at stake here is not interested in a controversy between specific aspects of an already established frame for Ethics. Rather, my thought is still caught up in the question of the ethical itself, of how to approach and where to locate it philosophically, and thus this book pursues first and foremost the demanding question of *how to think the ethical*. In choosing such an approach to the question of ethics we must leave aside all actual discussions of Ethics, which are always already concerned with the ›best‹ way to articulate the ethical, arguing about the one principle on which to found it. It is as Nietzsche once formulated:

As strange as it may sound, the problem of morality itself has been *missing* from every ›science of morals‹ so far: there was no suspicion that anything was really a problem. Viewed properly, the ›grounding of morals‹ (as philosophers called it, as they demanded it of themselves) was only an erudite form of good *faith* in the dominant morality, a new way of *expressing* it; as such, it was itself already situated within the terms of a certain morality. (BGE #186)

In appreciation of Nietzsche's unsurpassed rigor in thought, the distinction between different possible Ethics or moralities on the one side, and re-thinking the *question of the ethical* as such on the other side, i.e. the *problem of morality* that gives orientation to my discussion here, goes back to his critique. In order to truly move somewhere else with the ethical, a move that will have effects on and be already effectuated by a different philosophical thought, we must un-ground the grounding itself. It is as easy (or difficult — depending on the perspective —) as that: we have to think differently!

To start with the question of thinking, of how to think the ethical, is then also the reason why the project will enter what seem to be the remotest and most outdated areas of philosophy: metaphysics and ontology, and the debate between transcendence and immanence placed at the heart of these philosophical regions. Only here, however, does the question of thinking become the question of philosophy proper, of what it means ›to do philosophy‹. And it is thus that the question of ethics is related to, if not transformed into, the controversy of how we think the world, which is also the question of how we approach ›this world, as it is‹. Our first claim is thus that that

which can be read easily as an exaggerated complication of things is, to the contrary, the very condition of any a/effective discussion of the ethical. It is the conflict between a thought of transcendence *versus* one of immanence that determines from the very beginning where to go with the ethical, and it will be one of my major concerns in the following discussion to explicate in adequate detail how and why this is the case. In engaging with the philosophical terminology of transcendence and immanence it may seem as if this project is placed on a level too high to master, especially when claiming at the same time that to engage with *this* world is the reason for raising the question of the ethical at all. However, and this is our second claim, only in treating the issue on this level will we face adequately what the argument presented here — starting with the question of what is wrong with Ethics — sees as the fundamental problem in the tradition of Ethics: *transcendence*. It is this transcendental heritage seemingly glued to every thought of ethics, our post-metaphysical times notwithstanding, which will find problematization in the argument pursued here. And while such claim — to announce transcendence to be blamed for the impasses ethical thought finds itself in — appears as a crude and dangerous assertion of the ultimate reduction of thought to the realm of immanence, known to us only as either brute materialism or utter *Diesseitigkeit*, in such pre-judging we might make the most common and yet fatal mistake: not to move at the right speed and thus to judge too quickly. It might be that in rejecting this claim we simply do not yet know *what immanence is capable of*, because so far we only ever have thought immanence in the name or representation of ›Otherness‹, i.e. as the Other of transcendence and thus never dared to think *immanence in itself*. On a closer look then we will have to acknowledge that we are so caught up in the dualism of transcendence *versus* immanence that we are unable to see that there might be a different thought altogether — preceding this distinction in as much as being prior to any dualistically structured code of thinking itself.

Having said all this, we can propose our thesis: What is wrong with Ethics — this is what the following argument wants to explicate — is the seemingly natural belief that *either* one finds the ultimate principles that govern our way of life — *eternal* values, *universal* scope, and the one *Truth* — giving not only guarantee and meaning to this world but establishing also ›what ought to be‹, *or* one cannot but join into

the victory of a relativism that again divides itself into either mere pseudo-arguments of ›freedom of speech‹ and a discourse of ›political correctness‹ or the elimination of all specificity to the constitutive ethical dimension of thought, both of which lead to cleansing thought of all its ethical potential and to shuffling the whole set of problems surrounding the ethical into the sphere of the political.

The discussion presented here will argue that a thought structured by such an *either/or* is the inescapable consequence of the logic of transcendence or, to say the same in different terms, of the logic of Being, that is ontology in the classical sense. While both of these ›logics‹—as we want to call them—need, of course, to be handled carefully and must not be conflated, since they speak of this world according to different matrices, for our purposes they must be put together for what they fundamentally share: a belief (however concealed) in something ideal—something that is and has to be made present—behind the world such as it is lived and experienced; a belief that generates an image of this world as ›given‹ and is in consequence unable to avoid the common dead end streets of dualism: mind or matter, soul or body, true or false, good or evil. It is such belief in the real not as something to be produced and constructed—which is not at all the same as an ›anything goes‹ mentality—but as a (however complex and intriguing) ready-made out there, to be found and grasped correctly, which in a step further sets forth the ethical conviction that we first of all need the category of the Good in order to give orientation to our lives; and when then the high heavens of the Good fail, it seems that only Evil is left...

If, however, we dare to move somewhere else with the question of ethics, towards an ethics ›beyond Good and Evil‹ (a thought, of course, much more complicated than any simple stepping beyond), if we dare to think otherwise, as my discussion will more than once demand from the reader, we have to approach the ethical in a radically different manner—and the notion of ›radical‹ here is no hyperbolic addition. What the argument will show is that if we want to succeed in this thought we have to approach the ethical from a *radically immanent* perspective, venturing to take away everything that has become so natural to us when we think of Ethics. And to begin right at this moment, at the very start of the book: more than anything else we must rid ourselves from the belief that as a system of

objective norms Ethics tells us ›what ought to be‹ and ›who we are‹. We must reject both Idealism and Subjectivism. Furthermore, what else is needed is that we must strip Ethics of everything that makes it a solution or an applicable conduct rather than a problem awaiting an always precarious response, *whensever* and *wheresoever*. Ultimately, then, this means to make Ethics *imperceptible* as Ethics, and to redirect its discourse towards a more *indirect* way of thinking such as our move from the optical and present-oriented logic of Ethics to the latent proceedings of a poetics will suggest, a move that takes seriously what Michel Foucault once envisioned in his early article on Maurice Blanchot's ›Thought of the Outside‹. There Foucault claims that instead of thinking merely the truth, such a thought — a thought that is urgently needed for the possibility of any real future — rather thinks through ›fiction‹ (Foucault, 1998c: 149). It consists, he concludes, not ›in showing the invisible, but in showing *the extent to which the invisibility of the visible is invisible*‹ (Foucault, 1998c: 153). Thus, when speaking of ›moving somewhere else‹ with ethics, we have to keep in mind such a primary refusal of the demand for presence and visibility in order to adequately understand what is at stake in the ethical claim proposed here.

Such an approach brings us to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze, who never explicitly wrote on ethics, but whose major concern in all of his works was nonetheless to think differently, to produce a new thought — hopefully for a better future, one might add in a Nietzschean manner. His is also the project of reversing and finding a line of flight from what in his own terms is called ›majoritarian‹ philosophy, which from the perspective of modern philosophy — as Giorgio Agamben draws out in one of his articles on Deleuze — is the tradition of transcendental philosophy.⁴

4 See Agamben's two different trajectories of modern philosophy: ›a line of immanence and a line of transcendence‹ (Agamben 1999: 239). According to this map the line of transcendence moves from Kant through Husserl and Heidegger and arrives at Levinas and Derrida, while the line of immanence begins with Spinoza, moves then to Nietzsche, crosses over to Heidegger, and leads into Deleuze and Foucault. While such categorizations always generalize something that is of course more complicated, distinguishing these two lines of philosophy is helpful when approaching the history of philosophy from a point of view that investigates how different ways of thinking end up approaching the same questions in significantly different manners. For very clarifying and

In his work, there are only very few passages in which Deleuze explicitly touches the question of ethics. This absence—an absence so striking that one cannot but pay attention to it—calls for further investigation. And it seems to be even more significant because of the irritating fact that most common criticisms issued against Deleuze point simultaneously to his lack of attention to the question of morality and normativity, and—contradicting this very first charge—to his provocative over-politicization of philosophy, especially, as is said, in his collaborations with Félix Guattari. The lack of any pure ethical concern in his philosophy together with the contamination of the order of thought with the impurity of social and political affairs seem to be the major accusations against Deleuze, which up to now do not make him a very common reference in the field of ethics. Again, however, such judgment comes too hastily. It is the aim of this work not only to demonstrate that one of Deleuze's major concerns in his *œuvre* is an attempt to re-formulate the relation that philosophy carries to ethico-political and other non-philosophical issues, but also to show that Deleuze's response to one of philosophy's main questions, the question of what it means ›to think‹, is a response with *inherent* ethical potential. However implicitly, Deleuze's whole work expresses an ethicality inherently linked to thought, and *vice versa* his whole work expresses a thought inherently linked to practice. And while the notions of practice and ethics cannot and should not be used in an undifferentiated manner, and we do need to acknowledge a certain distance between the practical and the ethical dimension, what we will see is that when it comes to Deleuze both notions become interrelated in such a manner that the one is always already in the vicinity of the other, which thus allows for the suggestion of a kind of reciprocal relation between the two.⁵

helpful discussions of the difference between the two most famous contemporary philosophers of difference, Derrida and Deleuze, especially in regard to the question of transcendence and immanence, cf. also Smith 2003, and Lawlor 2003b.

5 To state it thus implies the refutation of criticisms which claim that Deleuze defies all true ethicality both because of his affirmed Nietzschean heritage (against the much more cautious thought of the negative) and his conviction that in view of the many human and other catastrophes which this world is witnessing, it is only a thought of radical immanence that can lead a way out of a thought without force (*puissance*). Vincent Descombes (cf. Descombes 1980)

But again we have to slow down in order not to lose what is of significance here. Let me therefore explicate in a bit more detail here where such claim in regard to Deleuze's thought comes from.

At a historical moment in the philosophical field when it was rather difficult to touch the so called ›big issues‹, because it was believed that the question of transcendence vs. immanence was either long decided or, if this was not the case, would never find any conclusion, since such tension is constitutive of philosophy itself, Deleuze not only stressed the problem over and over in nearly every work that he completed, but went as far as claiming that a philosophy of radical immanence is both needed and possible. In continuation of a specific tradition in philosophy, a tradition that our discussion will trace in appropriate detail, his claim remained that we must dare a different thought—however impossible and futile it might seem at first. For no other reason did Michel Foucault in »*Theatrum Philosophicum*« speak of Deleuze's work as demanding a new thought, »thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation...« (Foucault 1998b: 358). And Foucault continues:

Far from being the still incomplete and blurred image of an Idea that would, from on high and for all time, hold the answer, the problem lies in the idea itself, or rather the Idea exists only in the form of a problem: a distinctive plurality whose obscurity is nevertheless insistent, and in which the question ceaselessly stirs. (Ibid)

In the very same essay, which is devoted to Deleuze's major philosophical works *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, Foucault concludes that such »new thought is possible« and »thought is again possible« (Foucault 1998b: 367).

This thought does not lie in the future, promised by the most distant of new beginnings. It is present in Deleuze's texts—springing forth, dancing before us, in our midst; genital thought, intensive thought, affirma-

is of course to be named first in judging thus on *French Modern Philosophy* in general and on Deleuze in particular, but for a more recent replication of this claim, cf. Nick Nesbitt's »The Expulsion of the Negative: Deleuze, Adorno, and the Ethics of Internal Difference« (Nesbitt 2005).

tive thought, acategorical thought—each of these an unrecognizable face, a mask we have never seen before. (Ibid)

Taking this considerably enthusiastic statement of one intellectual towards another as yet a further point of departure, it is with Deleuze that I want to approach the ethical in a radically immanent manner. His outspoken project of immanence, an immanence immanent only to itself, or (to say the same in the language of ontology) his thought of becoming that moves further than the ontological difference of Being/being, will be read as a new line of flight for ethics itself. Thus, rather than interpreting the absence of an explicit discussion of the ethical as a shortcoming or lack, the intention of this project is to show that the ethical concern in Deleuze's philosophy is *everywhere*. Reading this Deleuzian ›empirical conversion‹ precisely as a new turn on practical philosophy, this book investigates a strange formula that structures Deleuze's philosophy at its most fundamental level:

ontology = ethics

Ontology as the thought of radical immanence contains always already an *ethical* attitude towards the world *in as much as* ethics ›is‹ always already a *constructive* rather than a prescriptive endeavor—such is the statement. While in a moment we will have to explain the complex character of this equation in order not to be perceived wrongly, let us look at this formula first in the way it presents itself to us, for the far-reaching consequences become identifiable instantaneously. Not only does such an approach strip ethics of everything that normally belongs to it—of all principles, norms, and judgments, which have always distinguished themselves precisely in *not being* (≠) ›what this world is‹ (ontology in the traditional sense)—but in this formula ethics also all of a sudden *becomes* philosophy, that is, it is *becoming-imperceptible* to itself and thus moves somewhere else. If, however, we imagine that positing such an equation affects only one side, we have not yet understood the logic of equation at stake here. The equation overseeing my project must be read as always already moving in at least two directions: ontology ›is‹ ethics in as much as ethics ›is‹ also ontology. Thus, while ethics will change its face so that it no longer represents any closed system of normative claims on top of ›what the world is‹, and rather becomes inherently

linked to the question of thinking, i.e. constructing this world itself, such thought—ontology or metaphysics as the thought to think the world—also undergoes a radical transformation. Instead of being merely an accurate description of what the world is supposed to be, ontology in being related to ethics in this immediate and non-hierarchical way must itself transform into a practice, a creative practice or an active thought as we will call it. Taking up Deleuze’s impetus to think a philosophy of immanence, a philosophy of *Difference and Repetition*, I will follow his grammar of thinking, which is a *grammar of becoming* writing a new ontology as a practical approach to *this* world. The equational sense proposed here leads to a different attitude towards this world, to what it means to live this world. In such understanding, ontology stays no longer as the thought of ›what is‹, but it becomes the thought of what ›*this world is capable of*‹—always already more than what it seems to be, always already a question of attitude, of *how* to create this world, and thus always already an *ethical* approach. That such an approach is, however, no simple utopianism caught up in the progressive logic of thought which it precisely claims to avoid, is exemplified in two most significant statements that Deleuze made on the ethical and that are of singular importance for our undertaking. Both of these statements distinguish Deleuze’s thought from both ineffective extra-worldliness and the all too easy and straightforward appropriation into political activisms, two directions that are frequently chosen in Deleuze’s more recent reception.⁶

Not surprisingly, the statements we are building on come in disguise. The first one we find in a book which rather than having any-thing ethical in mind asks the question *What is Philosophy?*. Here, in

6 For the claim of ›extra-worldliness‹ cf. esp. Alain Badiou’s criticisms of vitalism, empiricism, and a mystical tendency issued against Deleuze at different occasions (e.g. Badiou 2000 and 2007), and Peter Hallward’s *Out of This World. Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (2006), who as a strong Badiouian thinker shares the former’s opinion. For an in my opinion (and here I agree with both Badiou and Hallward) over-activist interpretation of Deleuze’s philosophy, cf. Michael Hardt’s and Antonio Negri’s *Empire* and *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Hardt/Negri 2000 and 2004); for a ›mixed‹ reception into a *messianic politics*, cf. Giorgio Agamben’s work on *bare life*, *form-of-life*, and, more recently, on *Profanations*, which he acknowledges was inspired by Deleuze (cf. Agamben 1998 and 2007).

his last collaboration with Guattari, »late in life« when this question can be spoken of again »concretely« instead of being asked »too indirectly or obliquely« (WPH: 1), they claim the following:

It may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task, or the task of a mode of existence still to be discovered on our plane of immanence today. This is the empiricist conversion (we have so many reasons not to believe in the human world; we have lost this world, worse than a fiancée or a god). The problem has indeed changed. (WPH: 75)⁷

And, at a very different time, right at the very beginning of his philosophical career in *The Logic of Sense*, of which Foucault said that it »could also have as a subtitle: *What Is Thinking?*« (Foucault 1998b: 354), Deleuze quite directly already tells us in the ›Twenty-First Series of the Event‹:

Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us... Nothing more can be said and no more has ever been said: to become worthy of what happens to us, and thus to will and release the event... To become the offspring of one's event and not of one's actions, for the action is itself produced by the offspring of the event. (LS: 149–150)

Like the equation ›ontology = ethics‹, these two statements keep watch over and give structure to the project ahead of us, whose first and foremost aim it is to adequately understand both Deleuze's equational or serial thought, and to draw out comprehensibly what follows from it for the discussion of the ethical. It is our aim to take the exemplary character of these scattered statements on ethics not as

7 As we will see later on in this book, Deleuze speaks again and in yet another mask, this time in his writing on cinema, of the necessity to restore the belief in this world—»the world, as it is«, as he significantly adds there (cf. C2: 171–172). It is no accident that this thinker refers to the ethical twice in the guise of something else, be it cinema or philosophy. We already see that his approach to the ethical always has to speak from somewhere else in order not to reduce it to any applicable morality.

markers of a lack of attention by its author, but precisely as his singular way of approaching the ethical.

At this moment, however, still right at the beginning of this book, such announcement cannot but remain abstract. As is essential to our argument here, the transformative relation between ethics and ontology cannot be explained on the purely conceptual or definitional level but it must be performed in its movement itself. Thus, before we come back to the further description of our project, we should turn our attention to the movement at stake, the singular movement of the equation, which becomes productive for our purpose only when we actually understand how to read it.

Ontology = ethics. This is, as we clarified before, to state that while ontology ›is‹ ethics, ethics also ›is‹ ontology. There is never just one movement but always already a doubling at stake that cannot be brought to a halt. Instead of aiming at an ascending movement of normative claims that are built coherently and will find an endpoint, in my presentation of the equation ›ontology = ethics‹ which follows from Deleuze's thought of becoming I hope to create an encounter that ›flattens‹ and thus equalizes what before was always taken as a hierarchical relation.⁸ In such a serial logic nothing is cancelled out. Rather, as Deleuze says:

The two heterogeneous series converge toward a paradoxical element, which is their ›differentiator‹. This is the principle of the emission of singularities. The element belongs to no series; or rather, it belongs to both series at once and never ceases to circulate throughout them. (LS: 51)

In a serial encounter something will always be generated and produced, opening the series to infinite movement. However, the infinity

8 Instead of putting both on equal levels, ethics has mostly been seen to be second throughout the history of philosophy, after what is supposed to be philosophy proper. Even Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* comes second and is built on his first *Critique of Pure Reason*, although Kant might be seen as one philosopher who gave ›Morality‹ a fundamental position in his thought. It is against the backdrop of this commonly supposed secondary character of ethics, as merely one special field of philosophy, that Emmanuel Levinas' claim that ethics comes first, even before ontology, is still a claim of great significance (cf. Levinas 1998 and 2000).

we speak of here remains on but one plane (this is the difference from all kinds of dialectical thinking). The closest mathematical sign to visualize such a *mapping*, as I would like to call it, is a proliferating $\succ\leftarrow$. It is neither the causal $\succ\rightarrow$, nor the hyphen $\succ\leftarrow$, a sign otherwise well suited to express serial effects of infinite proliferation. The equation as it is suggested in Deleuze's thought, however, does not merely link its elements in a chain that can be extended *ad infinitum*. If read as an *eternally insisting* movement rather than the mere substitution of one element by another, the $\succ\leftarrow$ is not simply equating two things (in the sense of making them the same or the copy of each other, that is, relating them in terms of resemblance). Rather equational thinking becomes a means of cartography, creating in a singular movement a (virtual) n-dimensional map, which never \succ is \leftarrow as presence but always only ever \succ becomes \leftarrow in the expression of something else. It expresses a movement of becoming that never bridges the difference that is its very condition. While causal thinking of course aims at precisely such an overcoming of difference, the hyphen in its one-dimensional quality also misses the movement at stake here: an infinitely immanent movement, moving in both directions at once without ever leaving the plane for a position outside of it, which would produce a movement immanent to something else instead of being immanent only to itself. In such an *affective* equation that can be read and dealt with from either side, the equals sign \succ in the middle \leftarrow stands for the movement itself. It is not merely equalizing ontology to ethics, or *vice versa*. Rather, it is the fold in-between two sides that not only opens the equation to infinite movement (*multiplicity*) but that makes each side also necessarily face the other—even if so only ever in disguise. Precisely with a concern for ethics as an engagement with *this* world, what I hope to show in my argument is that bringing the ethical onto the level of ontology does not equal (\neq) an ultimate elimination of the possibility for something new, such as the statement ethics \succ is \leftarrow nothing but \succ what is \leftarrow at first seems to suggest. In bringing both in relation to each other so that they only ever come to life through each other, I want to show in what sense Deleuze's thought of becoming changes what we think of as ethics, but also what we think thought to be. Both must undergo a major transformation. Therefore, instead of seeing thought as mere theoretical reflection on practice, and thus continuing the theory/praxis divide that is another of philosophy's \succ natural \leftarrow assumptions, Deleuze approaches thought as much as a

practice as any other practice it is supposed to reflect on. Again in an encounter with Foucault in which both discuss the question of »Intellectuals and Power«, Deleuze states very clearly what is essential for an adequate understanding of his thought. Explicating the shortcomings of the theory/practice divide as following from a perspective that understands their relationship in terms of »a process of totalization«, for him »the question is seen in a different light« (Foucault 1996: 74). Rather than understanding theory as complementing practice in a process to reach ultimate truth, for Deleuze,

[t]he relationship which holds in the application of a theory is never one of resemblance. Moreover, from the moment a theory moves into its proper domain, it begins to encounter obstacles, walls, and blockages which require its relay by another type of discourse (ibid).

With such an understanding of the relation between theory and practice, an understanding, in which theory is »a relay from one practice to another« (ibid), Deleuze can conclude his opening statement to the discussion by arguing that because of such a relation of multiplication rather than separation, the theorizing intellectual or the thinker if you want »is no longer a subject, a representing or representative consciousness« (Foucault 1996: 75). To the contrary, Deleuze claims:

Who speaks and acts? It is always a multiplicity, even within the person who speaks and acts... Representation no longer exists; there's only action—theoretical action and practical action which serve as relays and form networks. (ibid)

However, in as much as theory is practice what is called practice is also transformed and becomes »a set of relays from one theoretical point to another« (Foucault 1996: 74). Theory and practice are on but one level, on but one plane, which is the plane of immanence. From its character of application or unreflective behavior, practice, by becoming equal to thought, receives the character of a *task*; a task, however, which no longer finds legitimacy outside its own infinite practices but which has to face up to its inherent demand at any moment. This gives practice a new significance altogether: to be responsible before and for itself with no safety line at hand that al-

ways already predetermines ›what has to be done‹. As Deleuze points out in his essay »Michel Tournier and the World without Others«, there is no ›Other‹ available any longer, such as a safe transcendental structure that »assures the margins and the transitions in the world« (LS: 305). There is only immanence, an immanence that exposes us *radically* to the question of what happens when the Other »is missing from the structure of the world« (LS: 306). That such ›Otherlessness‹ in Deleuze does, however, in no way speak for a self-centered or even more rigid identitarian discourse, but rather claims a thought of ›waiting, following, and carrying‹, all notions inherently expressing the task for relation, will hopefully be brought across by our presentation from the very start.⁹

The equation of ›ontology = ethics‹ has to be seen as a re-formulation of the equational map that Deleuze draws out in his discussion of theory/thought and practice. In giving this equation the weight it deserves, in the course of the book we will develop the following claims: 1) in the affirmation of theory/thought as practice, ontology becomes a practical question, a task ›to create‹, while ethics becomes the affirmation of the world, as it is (radical immanent ethics) instead of the idealist rejection of this world; 2) Deleuze's ontology of becoming is, therefore, always already an active thought, which on the other side of the equation leads to the transformation of Ethics into the *ethos of becoming* that is best understood as a *poet(h)ics of life* as our argument will show; and 3) this leads to nothing but the re-formulation of the ethical question itself, which instead of being concerned with the essence of the world and its subjects—expressed in the imperative ›What ought to be‹—can only ever expose itself to the most difficult task of ›What is to be done next‹.

Bringing to the fore these dimensions in Deleuze's thought is the aim of the discussion ahead. In such a *practical* understanding of the

9 The circumscription of thought as waiting, following, and carrying, I take from Leonard Lawlor's Derridian reference to Paul Celan's »Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen« in his newest book *This is not Sufficient. An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida*. Here, Lawlor states right at the beginning: »[B]ut thought, I am going to claim, amounts to three things: waiting, following, and carrying. I must wait for what arrives—yet in the most desperate urgency; I must follow—yet without any program; I must carry you—yet or because the world has gone away« (Lawlor 2007: 10).

philosophy of becoming I see a new line of flight both for thinking and theorizing and for the conceptualization of the ethical itself. As my concern lies precisely with a different *thought* of the ethical, it is Deleuze's re-writing of ontology that first and foremost has to find appropriate explanation. Only by understanding the transformation that thought undergoes in its reversal from a thought of Being into one of becoming will we also see how the question of the ethical changes, and how both thought and ethics are liberated from their traditional image, such as it stands as Deleuze's project in all of his works but most of all in his discussion of the ›Image of Thought‹ in *Difference and Repetition*.

The main part of the book ahead will focus on what I want to call Deleuze's plane of thought, and it aims at the re-construction (which is never a question of simple reproduction) of the questions of immanence, difference, and repetition, as characterizing his thought of becoming. While in each chapter we approach Deleuze's thought via the thought of someone else, or better via Deleuze's own thinking on someone else's thought, the aim of each of these chapters is no truthful representation of any of these different philosophical influences. By approaching Deleuze by way of *his* Spinoza, *his* Bergson, and *his* Nietzsche, we rather hope to show in what sense these three vectors give force to Deleuze's thought of immanence as a philosophy of difference and repetition. It is only in *following* Deleuze's thought in its movement of thinking, a movement that is always a zigzagging through diverse media and different thinkers, and among them most of all Spinoza, Bergson, and Nietzsche, that I hope to *map* his thought.

While the following chapter draws out a first diagram of the thought of immanence via Deleuze's Spinozism, the subsequent chapters will differentiate this first picture that we get from this plane of immanence in two fundamental ways. Chapter III investigates Deleuze's Bergsonism through which his plane of thought gains its differential and thus dynamic character, a dynamism that alone is fitting a thought of becoming. Chapter IV differentiates this thought of difference in itself as a selective thought, so that it truly is difference and not sameness that the movement of becoming speaks of—a dimension so fundamental to an a/effective ethical thought. It is this movement of an active thought of affirmation that will be exemplified with Deleuze's Nietzscheanism.

Only after having re-constructed Deleuze's plane of thought as a radically immanent philosophy of difference and repetition, a philosophy of becoming, will we be able to return both to our equation of ›ontology = ethics‹ and to the ethical statements cited briefly earlier in this introduction. It is only via the detour of an adequate understanding of the ontology of becoming as Deleuze develops it in his philosophical texts that we can move to the other side of the equation and think about both the location of the ethical in this thought and what to make of the figure of becoming as *ethos*. Once more in the turn of three moves chapter V exemplifies Deleuze's poetical imperative of the creation of a *life*... as the expression of restoring ›a belief in the world, as it is‹ and as the demanding practice ›of becoming worthy of what happens to us‹.¹⁰ However impossible such *ethos* may sound for as long as we force ourselves to approach it *directly*, arguing in a purely theoretical way and looking for principles to guide, I hope that by cautiously following the multi-layered movements drawn out in this book, the reader may find new inspiration on how to approach the ethical question, and thus the subject of how to live this world.

10 However estranging it may seem for some to relate Deleuze's philosophy to a terminology of poetical thinking and to a poetics, in this project I hope to successfully show that it is precisely via the exposition of different thought-registers to each other that we not only best approach the highly demanding thought-universe of Deleuze, but in this encounter of philosophy with literary thinking in its widest sense also develop a new way of thinking the ethical question. For an interpretation of Deleuze's work as always already implicated in and exposed to literature and literary thinking, cf. for example Daniel W. Smith's ›Introduction‹ to the English translation of Deleuze's *Critique et Clinique*, in which Smith begins his introductory remark with the following statement: ›Although *Essays Critical and Clinical* is the only book written by Gilles Deleuze that is devoted primarily to literature, literary references are present everywhere in his work, running almost parallel to the philosophical references‹ (Smith 1997: xi). For further support of this claim for a strong relation between poetical and ethical thinking in Deleuze, we should also think of the first essay in precisely this project of *Essays Critical and Clinical*, that carries no other title but ›Literature and Life‹ (Deleuze 1997b).