Disorder as "Pseudo-Idea"

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Abstract
This essay deconstructs the order/disorder binary. Drawing on the work of Henri Bergson, it replaces the idea of disorder with the concept of two positive orders. The essay concludes with a philosophical example of how we might reconceive the biomedical opposition of normality/pathology without relying on the idea of disorder.

Résumé
Cet essai déconstruit le concept binaire de normal/trouble. En se basant sur le travail d'Henri Bergson, il remplace l'idée du trouble avec le concept de deux « normativités » positives. L'essai conclut en offrant un exemple philosophique sur comment re-concevoir l'opposition biomédicale de normalité/ pathologie, sans avoir recours à l'idée du trouble.

In the tradition of Western metaphysics, the concepts of "order" and "disorder" invoke—indeed, are constituted by and constitutive of—sequential and dichotomous logics.[1] Within these logics order functions as the privileged term, the norm, that which is primordial and prior to the differences that go by the name of disorders. Disorders figure not only as secondary, temporary, or erroneous re-iterations of prior orders (biological, psychological, epistemological, or social). Disorders also figure—as the prefix of "dis" suggests—as *negations* of these orders. Disorder acts, in other words, against the "natural" or normative order(s) of life. Where order is naturalized, idealized, and perpetually pursued, disorder is lamented, depreciated, or pathologized as something to be corrected, cured, or transcended, if not in the present tense then in an imaginary future order. But what is this notion of disorder that functions as order's negation? Of what does it consist? And what is its relationship to order?

Questions about the epistemological status of the pairing of order and disorder are anything but abstract and immaterial. Notions of order and disorder are much more than ideational. Ideas and concepts are, as quantum theorist Karen Barad (2007) notes (following Niels Bohr), part of "material-discursive apparatuses" which are themselves "formative of matter and meaning" (146). In other words, ideas of order and disorder are intrinsic to the material structures and practices that produce what come to be known as individuals and populations, just as these ideas assemble, organize, govern, and give meaning and affective depth to human lives. This is nowhere more apparent than in the material-discursive apparatus that is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).* Far from a directory of inconsequential and abstract technical jargon, the *DSM* 4th edition comprises concepts of mental disorder that profoundly shape the embodied realities of human life, happiness, suffering, and even death. Alterations to meanings of disorders correspondingly produce alterations to the substance and liveability of human life.

This essay is an attempt not to map the effects of categories of disorder on individual lives, but to contribute to one such epistemological alteration to the very notion of disorder itself; an alteration that might clear the ground for profound transformations of human life. It is divided into three parts, two of which correspond roughly to two moves of deconstruction—reversal and displacement—and the final section, which considers, via the work of Georges Canguilhem, an example of how we might reconceive the biomedical opposition of normality/pathology without relying on the idea of disorder.

Order and Its Other(s)

It seems obvious, perhaps even necessary, to begin a discussion of disorder by first considering the notion of order.

The concept of order is fundamental to Western thought and to thought itself. It is central to perception, to action, to organization, to categorization, to language, to causality, to the event, to the phenomenon, and to communication. As physicists David Bohm and David Peat (2000) note, the "notion of order extends beyond the confines of a particular theory; permeates the whole infra-structure of concepts, ideas, and values; and enters the very framework in which human thought is understood and action carried out" (104–5). Two of the hegemonic traditions of Western thought, namely metaphysics and rationalist science, are both made possible by, and are centrally concerned with, order: orders of nature and orders of logic, orders of experience and orders of meaning, practical orders and ideal orders, unknown orders and known orders, existent orders and orders longed for. Thought, knowledge, human practice, and life are reflective of both the drive to order and the drive to apprehend order. Thought, knowledge, practice, and life are reflective of order itself.

However, despite, or as philosopher Ruth Lorand suggests, perhaps because of, its centrality to thought, knowledge, experience, and action, order is a concept that has received relatively scant philosophical consideration. Lorand (2000) notes that while discussions of "existence, status, kinds and measure of order in a given system" are commonplace, "the idea of order itself is either briefly sketched, implied, or it is ignored altogether" (8). This is more than a little unsettling, especially given the prevalence of the term *disorder* as a descriptor and definition for innumerable behaviours, identities, conditions, and states of being. So what exactly is order? To be sure, it has multiple meanings. At its simplest, we might think of order, following the OED, as "sequence or succession in space or time," as "the course or method of occurrence or action," or as an "arrangement found in the existing con-stitution of things" (1459–1460). Implicit here are notions of complexity and heterogeneity (i.e., an entity or system having distinct parts). Pure homogeneity is not ordered according to standard logic, it would seem, because there is no differentiation, no arrangement, and no sequence. There is, rather, only uniformity. Usually, some notion of lawfulness or necessity is implicit or added to the definition of order, such that the parts of an entity or system are governed or patterned by some ordering principle. Rudolph Arnheim, for example, defines order as "the degree and kind of lawfulness governing the relations among the parts of an entity" (in Lorand 2000, 9). Similarly, order is usually assumed to be *a condition of logical or comprehensible arrangement among the separate elements of a group*.

What unites (or perhaps "orders") any concept of order, however, is the idea that it can be defined in a single concept. This assumption of only one type of order is endemic to rationalistic science and metaphysics, and it operates as a default or foundational concept of these paradigms. That is, at its simplest, only one kind of order exists, and this is opposed binarily to disorder. Of course, within the metaphysical schema, it is certainly granted that there are multiple sub-orders or types of order. However, all sub-orders and types of order are conceptually derivative of, or secondary to, some prior notion of order as a singular concept. Order resides, it appears, at the origin of all sequence, and sequence is the essence of order. The definition of order is thus circular, tautologous, and self-referential: order is part of its own definition.

The distinction between order and disorder usually operates as a classical binary opposition. The binary functions as a hierarchy: order precedes disorder; order is privileged over disorder; order sets the terms of disorder's meaning; and order requires a contrast with its subordinate to establish its superiority. In this way the order/disorder binary is exemplary of the Derridean "metaphysics of presence." Order becomes what Jacques Derrida (1976) would call the "transcendental signified" (49). Its *presence* is implied by, and figured as, the foundation of, all meaning. Disorder, in contrast, is the *absence* of order (and thus meaning); it is order's negation. Of course, within metaphysics, even though disorder is constituted as the negation of order, like order itself, disorder is assumed to be a reality—even if only an intuited one. Disorder *exists*, so it is assumed, despite the fact that the dualistic logic of its framing constructs it as an absence of order. It is the reality of the *other* to order, even if that is not possible to conceptualize. Epistemologically, therefore, disorder is almost always the projection of absence onto the Other (by other I mean other entities, other conditions, other states of affairs, other people). That certain others or states of affairs come to occupy, or stand in for, the category of disorder does little to undermine this epistemic function. An individual may certainly be diagnosed as having a mental disorder such as psychosis, or a state of affairs may be deemed chaotic, and this gives us the impression that so-called disorders have a presence and a positivity. It gives us the impression that disordered entities and states are *some*thing. And in one sense they are: psychosis, for instance, is the grouping together of particular symptoms. But this is a sociological or practical exercise of selective combination. At root, epistemologically, the definition of disorder that is imputed onto or that underwrites this collection of symptoms—dare I say, that *organizes* them; although I don't want to jump my deconstructive gun—entails an abiding absence and negativity. This is the absence and negation of order. Needless to say, while the term disorder may involve certain epistemological functions, it also produces very real effects for individuals,

groups, and societies that take disorder as an organizing principle. The categorization and treatment of individuals defined by the *DSM IV* is one of the more obvious examples of this.

Throughout the last several decades, a number of social movements have emerged to challenge hegemonic constructions of apparently "disordered" subjectivities, behaviours, conditions, and bodies. Among these prominent movements are, of course, anti-psychiatry, gay liberation (and queer), and disability movements of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. (Feminism is another obvious movement.) As we know, anti-psychiatry led the way by launching an attack on the normative terrain of mental health. R.D. Laing, Thomas Szasz, Michel Foucault, and others fiercely contested notions of mental disorder and illness, normality, and pathology. (Unfortunately, this does not seem to have inhibited the seemingly ever-expanding list of mental disorders in the *DSM IV*.) Drawing on anti-psychiatry, gay liberation applied this critique to dominant notions of homosexuality as a mental disorder and pathology. And disability activists and scholars have rigorously challenged prevailing notions of disability as an individualized and "alien condition" (Snyder et al. 2002, 2). Although there have certainly been spaces of overlap and mutual influence among these movements, each has developed a relatively distinct set of discourses, institutions, interests, practices, and activities. Yet one of the things that unites each of them is a critical orientation to notions of normative orders and ideas of disorder.

To some extent, each of the anti-psychiatry, gay/queer, and disability movements has, in certain incarnations and at certain moments, represented efforts to reverse or overturn the hierarchy of order and disorder, as this hierarchy has been mapped onto the oppositions of normality/pathology, heterosexual/homosexual, and able-bodied/disabled body. Or, at the very least, these movements have sought to valorize, privilege, and normalize the realities and lives of those individuals who have been forcibly labelled as disordered—and this is still something of a strategy of reversal or overturning. It is a deconstructive move which, to use Derrida's words, "brings low what was high" (Derrida 1981, 42). Such a move of reversal is evident in Michel Foucault's

call, in *Madness and Civilization*, to listen to the voices of madness, or, unreason (Foucault 1965). It was evident in gay liberationists' exaltation of homosexuality both through exhortations of "gay pride" and through claims that it offers a privileged vantage point on gender and sexuality, heteronormativity, and oppression.[2] Disability activists and scholars have likewise engaged in a politics of reversal, or, overturning. This is apparent in the re-figuration of able-bodiedness as "a temporary identity at best" (Siebers 2008, 5) and "the universal consequence of living an embodied life" (Snyder et al. 2002, 2).[3] Overturning binary and hierarchical orderings is an inevitable aspect, however temporary, of any attempt at contesting the devaluation and subordination of the other-than-normative.

One of the ways each of these movements has momentarily reversed hierarchical binary orderings is by appropriating the tropes from which they have traditionally been excluded, such as centrality over marginality, visibility and presence over invisibility and absence. The formerly dominant term, in this overturning phase, is itself problematized and devalued. Let me briefly give just a few examples from the three movements already mentioned. Thomas Szasz (1961) famously rejected the categories of mental illness and disorder, arguing they are merely normative judgements that substitute for problems in living. Disability scholars, such as Tobin Siebers (2008), have argued that disability "defines the invisible centre around which our contradictory ideology about human ability revolves" (8–9). For many queer theorists, the aim is not just to challenge normative representations, but to expose the queerness always already residing within the normative. Queer theory's strategies of anti-identification and resistance to "regimes of the normal" (Warner 1991, 16) are precisely attempts at reversing (hetero)normative order. In fact, queer, for some, such as Lee Edelman, is the very movement of disorder, the act of embracing negativity (Edelman 2004, 4). I'm not suggesting, of course, that reversal is the only strategy used, just that it is an important one at particular moments and in particular contexts.

So what of the dichotomy of order/disorder itself? What might a specific reversal of this look like? In some ways we don't have to look too far for examples of this. Many of the great theistic creation stories do this for us. Often in these stories, order is said to be created out of a chaos and disorder. Order is an act of divine intervention over a disorder conceived, in certain ways, as prior and primordial. Even though some god is posited as the sign of ultimate order, the creation of life emerges *out of* and *after* primordial chaos and disorder. And even though creation might be thought to spring from a void, emptiness, absence, or darkness, as in some creation renditions, disorder is figured as meta-physically prior, before order. This disorder is at base akin to a total lack of differentiation; it is homogeneity. Order, in contrast, is only possible with some degree of differentiation and complexity, such that there must be elements in some relationship or arrangement. These are, of course, creation stories, which rely notoriously on origin myths. Yet, perhaps, they are not much different from the tradition of Western metaphysics, which, as I mentioned earlier, holds by default onto a logic of singular order. That is, when logically broken down there is, epistemologically, a single type of order against which disorder is contrasted.[4] However, in being that against which order posits itself, disorder, in one sense, is being instated as prior to order, as the origin. For order does not exist prior to its positing; that is, prior to its having been ordered by what posits order. Metaphysics thus partakes of another creation story. It relies on a projection of a prior disorder, and then disavows this prioritization in order to prioritize order.

Ordering Disorder

A second interlinked deconstructive strategy is, as we know, the displacement of the binary opposition (Derrida 1988, 21). One way of thinking about this is through the idea of exploiting the instability of the binary of order/disorder. Another aspect of the displacement strategy concerns the subversion of claims of priority of either of the terms. It is the performance of an analysis that exposes the mutual interdependence of the two terms, as well as their contingency. The aim is to expose the ways in which each term always

already inhabits and interpenetrates the other, such that each requires its other for its own definition. Not much more needs to be said about this; this move has certainly become stock and trade of poststructuralist-inflected analyses. It does almost seem passé."

But I have wanted to retain an emphasis on these deconstructive strategies for a number of reasons. The first is that the order/disorder binary has in some ways gotten off lightly in terms of explicit deconstructions. Secondly, as Derrida (1981) reminds us, the overturning phase is "structural" and "interminable." It must be engaged over and over again. "Unlike those authors whose death does not await their demise," says Derrida, "the time for overturning is never a dead letter" (41–2). Thirdly, I would like to gesture towards—dare I say—the "beyond" of deconstruction. Now, given what I've just said about the interminable necessity of deconstruction, I *don't* mean by this that deconstruction is "dead" or passé, as some like to claim, and that we need to leave it behind. The double gesture of deconstruction is something we cannot do without. It is also something that those of us working to challenge binary hierarchies usually already do at various moments in our work. And it will continue to be part of our work so long as there are hierarchical oppositions. That said, my third reason for framing part of this essay around the well-worn path of deconstructive strategies is so I can highlight what deconstruction *necessarily* does in order to show what it *doesn't* do and where it doesn't go (or perhaps want to go for that matter). For Derrida, deconstruction is a strategy *within* Western metaphysics; although this is not to say the idea of *différance* is not applicable beyond this terrain.[5] Deconstruction destabilizes oppositions but, as Jack Reynolds (2002) points out, "more often than not it does not concern itself with *positively* framing a new and original way of thinking about oppositions—even if it provides tools that may be useful for doing so" (144, emphasis added). I want to think about this question of framing in order to consider how we might go from hierarchical difference to what Morgan Holmes (2008) describes as "neutral difference" (28). The idea of "beyond" I'm gesturing towards

(but will say much more about in a moment) is the kind of positive framing of the binary of order/disorder for which deconstruction prepares but does not carry out. To begin this (re)framing, I turn to the work of Henri Bergson.

Bergson has been described as "probably the last of the great metaphysicians" (Grosz 2004, 155). However, his was a metaphysics with a difference. Indeed, according to Deleuze, "Bergsonism must bring the greatest contribution to a philosophy of difference" (quoted in Grosz 2000, 155). I want to consider two short sections of two chapters from his (at the time) enormously successful work *Creative Evolution* that bear directly on the question of order and disorder. For Bergson, traditional Western thought about order is based on two assumptions: 1. There is ultimately just one type of order (although many subtypes); and 2. Order "is a triumph over disorder, [which is] a claim that implies the existence of disorder" (Lorand 1992, 580). This single order, that is at the heart of philosophy and science, is what Bergson calls geometrical order. It is the spatial and intellectual order; the mechanical order of atomistic and causal relations between seemingly distinct elements; it is a "logic of solids" that imposes homogenous shape, form, and stasis to entities that are in actuality always in interactive motion (Bergson 1911, xix, 244). Reality is a "perpetual becoming" (1911, 296). Bergson substitutes the two metaphysical assumptions about order with two of his own: 1. There are two types of order; and 2. Disorder does not exist (Lorand 1992, 580). Let me start with the second claim—disorder does not exist—as it is tied to the problem of negation mentioned above (i.e., disorder as the negation of order). Demonstrating the second claim is necessary to get to the first. For Bergson, the idea of disorder is what "Philosophy borrows...from daily life." He goes on: "And it is unquestionable that, when ordinarily we speak of disorder, we are thinking of something. But of what?" Bergson asks (1911, 241). He then uses a number of examples about defining a negative idea such as disorder to illustrate the problems of it as a concept:

Example 1

> If I choose a volume in my library at random, I may put it back on the shelf after glancing at it and say, "This is not verse." Is this what I have really seen in turning over the leaves of the book? Obviously not. I have not seen, I never shall see, an absence of verse. I have seen prose. (1911, 241–2)

Example 2

> When I enter a room and pronounce it to be "in disorder," what do I mean? (1911, 254)

Example 3

> When I say, "This table is black," I am speaking of the table; I have seen it black, and my judgment expresses what I have seen. But if I say, "This table is not white," I surely do not express something I have perceived, for I have seen black, and not an absence of white. (1911, 312–13)

Bergson continues by identifying the problem common to each of these examples: "The very root of all the difficulties and errors with which we are confronted is to be found in the power ascribed here to negation. We represent negation as exactly symmetrical with affirmation...[However] to deny always consists in setting aside a possible affirmation" (1911, 312). Therefore, "while affirmation bears directly on the thing, negation aims at the thing only indirectly, through an interposed affirmation" (313). Negation is but "an attitude taken by the mind toward an eventual affirmation" (312).

Bergson goes further than this, though. He highlights the way that negation, and thus disorder (a negative concept), is connected to a particular form of social, pedagogical, and interpersonal *judgment*. Let me return to the black table example. Bergson says,

> The proposition, "This table is not white," implies that you might believe it white, that you did believe it such, or that I was going to believe it such. I warn you or myself that this judgment is to be replaced by another...When we *deny*, we give a lesson to others, or it may be to ourselves. We take to task an interlocutor, real or possible, whom we find mistaken and whom we put on his guard. He was affirming something: we tell him he ought to affirm something else (though without specifying the affirmation which must be substituted). There is no longer then, simply, a person and an object; there is, in face of the object, a person speaking to a person, opposing him and aiding him at the same time; there is a beginning of society. Negation aims at someone, and not only, like a purely intellectual operation, at something. It is of a pedagogical and social nature. It sets straight or rather warns...(1911, 313-14; emphasis added)

In short, in judging the table as not white, it is "not on the table itself that I bring this judgment to bear, but rather on the judgment that would declare the table white. I judge a judgment and not the table" (313). If negation is second-degree affirmation—but an undisclosed affirmation of some thing—then this suggests that negation is a rather insidious, even if unwitting, form of *ordering*. It is the instantiation of an undisclosed normative order. Bergson is even more cynical about this. He argues that the idea of disorder emerges from a mind that is disappointed and disinterested in what it finds. Let us return to the "disordered" bed-room example. What is found when the person enters the messy bedroom and describes it as disordered is not the absence of order, but the absence of an order one expected and/or wanted to find. The supposed "disorder" that is found is actually nothing but a function of the normative order so desired (254). What this reflects, says Bergson, is "only the disappoint-ment of the mind confronted with an order that does not interest it" (257). That is, this represents the "disappointment of a mind that finds before it an order different from what it wants, an order with which it is not concerned at the moment, and which, in this sense, does not exist for it" (243). Thus, for Bergson, "all that is left of disorder is a word" (299). Like the notions of "the void and of the nought," Bergson pronounces disorder to be a "pseudo-idea" (302). It is a term without a referent.

The resonances of this Bergsonian line of thought with a critical disability studies emphasis on the social model of disability and discrimination are, for me, palpable. Recall how,

within the social model of disability, disability is seen, as Tobin Siebers (2008) notes, as the "product of a disabling social and built environment" (3)—or, we could say, the product of a disabling *order*. Bergson's metaphysics also highlights the rather distasteful subjective and interpersonal dimension to discrimination known only too well to people with disabilities. Of course, commonplace definitions of discrimination—as, say, "any practice that makes distinctions between individuals or groups that dis-advantage some and advantage others"—euphemize or disavow this connection. For Bergson, if I dare to speak for him for a moment, discrimination of people with "dis-abilities" and "disorders" could never simply be unintentional, unwitting, and non-judgmental. Rather, disability and discrimination, as social products, involve at some level a metaphysical and subjective disinterest and disappointment. The phenomenon of interest is, according to psychologist Silvan Tomkins (2008)—as it is, I suggest, for Bergson—an embodied *affect*. We are, thus, not talking about something purely ideational (whatever that may mean). What this suggests is that the active seeking out of a desired normative order entails a subjective and embodied complicity in the negative judgment of "disabilities" and "disorders" that the normative social order does not want to see or to have exist. A judgment of negation, such as disorder (and disability), is an affective rejection of an alternative reality, an alternative order.

What I find less depressing about this foray into Bergson and his repudiation of the idea of disorder is that, far from being redundant, the concept of disorder clearly has a practical and deconstructive utility. Any time the term disorder is invoked, one is alerted to a blatant attempt at the violent substitution of an actual reality (or, order so witnessed) with a wished for normative order. The idea of disorder thus usefully casts a spotlight upon, by objectifying in the order of language, the affective interests, disappointments, and judgments of the Other (other as individual, social, and metaphysical).

But Bergson's analysis doesn't stop at this point of deconstructive displacement. He affirms something in place of this metaphysical system. First, he redefines order. "That order exists is a *fact*," he argues (Bergson 1911, 253). However, he goes on to note that "reality is *ordered* exactly to the degree in which it satisfies our thought. Order is therefore a certain agreement between subject and object. It is the mind finding itself again in things" (244). Therefore, as Lorand glosses Bergson, because "order reflects the operation of the mind, there is no situation in which we cannot find some kind of order...No particular order is necessary in itself, since for any kind of order an alternative one may be found" (Lorand 2000, 90). Bergson is not, however, suggesting this is all there is to order. This ordering function of the mind is what he calls the geometrical, or intellectual, order. But another order exists in nature, and it is here that we arrive at Bergson's theory of "two kinds of order" (Bergson 1911, 253–258). The second order, which is really the primordial order, is the vital order of nature. It is intuitive rather than intellectual; it is the order of becoming, spontaneity, "continuous creation," duration, and movement (244). It cannot be reducible to parts or homogeneous units. It can only be grasped intuitively; once we subject it to the intellect we are in the realm of geometrical order. Hence, the negation of one order is really the affirmation of the other. That is, the absence of one order is merely the presence of the other; it is not an absence of order. What this means for Bergson is that, although disorder *functions like a knowledge*—it produces material power/knowledge effects—it is but an empty idea that needs to be replaced by the notion of two orders.

Orderings and Re-orderings

According to Lorand (2000), not only does Bergson evince a "dualistic tendency...in almost every subject he explores" (82), but he also favours one element in his trademark dualistic pairs: for example, intuition over intellect, time (or duration) over space, vital over geometric order, and, of course, order over disorder. In this sense, it would appear that, for Lorand, Bergson's interventions resemble the deconstructive strategy of reversal. However, I'd argue that Bergson's dualism, especially with regard to his theory

of two orders, is perhaps dualistic in the more generic sense of "something comprising two aspects" than it is dualistic in the oppositional sense.

According to certain renditions of quantum "philosophy-physics,"[6] not only is there nothing wrong or misdirected about the use of the number two, there is, in fact, something quite special about the number two. Bergson's philosophy is seen by some physicists to have presaged the development of early concepts of quantum mechanics (Gunter 1969). But it also reflects arguments of contemporary quantum theorists. Bohm and Peat are two such physicists. Like Bergson, Bohm and Peat reject the concept of disorder. They argue that *everything* in life happens in some order. Even chance, randomness, and what mistakenly goes by the name of "disorder" is but a particular form of order (Bohm and Peat 2000, 127–133). Order is "context-dependent" and dependent upon the scale of measurement (125). What appears as randomness in one particular order according to one particular scale may be another kind of order from a broader scale or contextual frame. For Bohm and Peat, order itself "is neither subjective nor objective" precisely because, when any new context appears, "a different notion of order will appear" (2000, 125). "[W]hatever we say that order is," they argue, "it isn't":

> It is more than we say, as well as being capable of being unfolded in infinitely many ways that are different. To attempt to attribute order solely to the object or to the subject is too limited. It is both and neither, and yet something beyond all this: a dynamic process that involves subject, object, and the cycle of perception-communication that unites and relates them This approach suggests that no constitutive order is an absolute truth. (120)

> [T]he notion of an ultimate limit to the meaning of order that holds in all possible contexts is not admitted. (Bohm and Peat 2000, 135)

What might it mean to begin not from the conceptual ground of the order/disorder binary, but from a notion of two orders and of infinite order? Can we do away with the "pseudo-idea" of disorder? How might a notion of two orders reorient forms of knowledge, politics, and social relations? And how might it do this without erasing the often important distinctions between and among individuals and groups so-labelled as able-bodied versus disabled, "together" versus disordered, sick versus healthy?

I don't pretend to be able to answer these questions, or presume there are not multiple possible and productive responses. However, I do want to gesture towards one possible response, by considering how notions of normality and pathology, health and sickness, might be rethought if we expunge from their conceptual heart the concept of disorder. In formulating this response, I have found the work of French physician and philosopher of biology and medicine Georges Canguilhem to be particularly useful. Canguilhem is most well-known for his doctoral dissertation defended in 1943 and translated into English in 1978 as *The Normal and the Pathological*. What interests me about Canguilhem's thought is both his rethinking of the distinction between normality and pathology, and his conceptualization of normativity. Deftly refiguring these concepts in ways that avoid both idealism and reductionism, Canguilhem seems to avoid the collapse of distinctions between normality and pathology, illness and health, without resort to a *judgment* of disorder and whilst simultaneously retaining the specificity of individual difference.

Interestingly, Canguilhem himself drew on Bergson's notion of disorder as a "pseudo-idea." In so doing, he posited a parallel claim to Bergson's axiom that there is no such thing as disorder, but in the biology of normality and pathology. Canguilhem (2000) declared that "there is no such thing as *abnormal*, if by the term we mean merely the absence of a previous positive condition or state" (351). What is deemed pathological is normal, according to Canguilhem. It is merely "another norm, but," he says, "one that is, comparatively speaking, pushed aside by life" (354). The "normal should not be opposed to the pathological," and neither, for Canguilhem, can the normal or the pathological be defined in any absolute sense. The reason for this is that the normal and the pathological

are specific to individual organisms. They can only be ascertained at the level of individual experience. At the heart of his account was a thorough rewriting of the concepts of normality, norms, and normativity. All organisms are normal, says Canguilhem. "The state of any living thing in a given situation is, in general, always normal" (351). Of course, in conventional medicine, disease or illness is considered a deviation from certain biological norms. However, for Canguilhem, *norms*, in the biological and medical sense, are not universal biological truths. They are instead experiential habits and ways of living established by the individual organism itself in its ongoing relationship with the environment. Normality is not equivalent to health. Rather, normativity is health (351). What he means by this is that normativity, or health, is the ability of an individual, or, organism to tolerate "infractions of the[ir] norm, of overcoming contradictions, of dealing with conflicts" (352). Normativity, or, health, is the state of being "open to possible future correction." To "be sick is to be unable to tolerate change" (354). "A sick individual is an individual locked in a struggle with its environment to establish a new order or stability. Recovery establishes a new norm, different from the old one" (355). Here we have a biological rendition of the two orders thesis.

Importantly, for Canguilhem, "No environment is *normal,*" however (354). This is a critical point, lest we slide dangerously close to re-pathologizing individuals for problems created by social orders. Rather, it "is the relation between the environment and the living thing that determines what is normal in both" (354). This leaves open the possibility of critiquing how the relationship between individual and society is constituted, enforced, and managed. Here we can see a resonance with the critique proffered by the social model of disability, in which disability is seen to be a "product of a disabling social and built environment" (Siebers 2008, 3). In the contemporary intellectual environment of (queer) critique of all-things-normative, Canguilhem's refiguring of the concept of normativity itself introduces and valorizes difference within the very definition of the concept. What is also particularly helpful, I think, is that Canguilhem's model of the normal and the pathological still allows for illness and pathology. Canguilhem is not wishing to deny "the distinctiveness of the pathological," for there is, he makes clear, a "necessary contrast between health and disease" (2000, 351). But it is "suffering, not normative measurements and standard deviations, that establishes the state of disease" (Rabinow, in Canguilhem 1994, 16, emphasis added). Rather than defining the health of an organism by measuring it against universal and static biological norms and standard deviations, therefore, Canguilhem insists on treating the organism in its environmental specificity. Normativity and pathology do have a place, however, but they are not determined by way of a comparison with ideal norms. "A healthy person," says Canguilhem (2000), "is a person capable of confronting risks. Health is creative—call it normative—in that it is capable of surviving catastrophe [or conflict and contradiction] and establishing a new order" (355). Within this model, normativity and creativity are no more associated with the category of the ordered or able-bodied than with the so-called "disabled" or "disordered" body.

It is not difficult to see the enormous potential for applying the ideas of Bergson and Canguilhem within the sphere of bio-medicine. Disorder and its derivative abnormality have no place. Disorder and abnormality are only the judgmental and disinterested negation of alternative orders, alternative norms (in Canguilhem's sense), and alternative lives. Accounting for normality and sickness requires an understanding of the organism's shifting relation to itself and its environment—*not* to the norms of others, or to ideal human norms. To apprehend this requires medical and philosophical analyses to begin not from notions of universal biological norms (and their correlatives of abnormality and disorder), but from the perspective of that individual organism's own order, that is, its own positive condition or state.

Acknowledgments

Endnotes

1. Bohm and Peat (2000) refer to "order both as a means of describing a system—its Descriptive Order—and as the actual way a system is constituted—its Constitutive Order" (272).

2. Of course, it is also evident in cultural feminist valorizations and prioritization of so-called female attributes; in black pride slogans of "black is beautiful," queer slogans of "We're here [as in present], we're queer, get used to it," which contrasts starkly with gay liberation's catch-cry of "we are every-where," as in lurking often invisibly in society.

3. Siebers (2008) notes that "Many disability theorists—and I count myself among them—would argue that disability as an identity is never negative" (4).

4. See Lorand (2000, 82) for a discussion of the default assumption, within metaphysics, of only one type of order.

5. Vicki Kirby (2005; 2006) argues that Derrida's neologism of *différance* is applicable not only to conventional notions of semiotics, but is involved in processes of materiality, embodiment, and perception.

6. Here I am following Karen Barad's hyphenated usage of philosophy-physics (Barad 2007, 66–67). Importantly, in view of my previous discussion of Bergson, Barad characterizes the endeavours of philosophy and physics as "interests."

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