

Justification or affirmation?

To have done with justification: A reply to Christian Kerslake

Peter Hallward

Christian Kerslake is perfectly right to characterize Deleuze's project as 'a philosophy of the absolute', and in particular as one conceived in more or less direct competition with that of Hegel ('The Vertigo of Philosophy', *RP* 113). He is wrong, however, to emphasize the fundamentally discontinuous evolution of this philosophy, from an early period supposedly concerned with a rigorous justification of the immanence of being to thought, to a late period characterized by a merely assertive if not 'pre-philosophical' presupposition of this immanence. He is also wrong to attribute the primary inspiration for Deleuze's early effort to Kant rather than to the admittedly more familiar figure of Spinoza, or, more exactly, to a version of Spinoza filtered through Nietzsche and Bergson. By arguing against the idea that 'immanence is something that can be *immediately* affirmed', by seeking out the Deleuzian equivalent of a '*justification* of structures of knowledge and action that occupy Hegel in the *Phenomenology* and serve to secure the Hegelian *right* to absolute immanence', Kerslake hopes to preserve Deleuze's philosophy of immanence 'against the transgressions of theology and metaphysics'.¹ But while this effort may well make Deleuze more palatable to the post-Kantian tradition, it risks downplaying some of the most distinctive and most unsettling aspects of his work. An interpretation attuned to these aspects would demonstrate, among other things, that Deleuze is nothing if not a vitalist metaphysician, that the insistently *creative* orientation of his ontology does indeed force him into rivalry with certain versions of theology, that his main concern is precisely with the

mechanisms of immediate affirmation, and that as a result the logic of justification, no less than the related procedures of judgement and representation, has only a minimal role to play in his philosophy.

The crux of Kerslake's argument turns on the suggestion that the early Deleuze ensures a genuinely critical rather than simply metaphysical or presuppositional access to noumenal being through a reworking of Kant's regulative Ideas of reason, conceived now as the 'Problems' of *Difference and Repetition*. Like Kant's Ideas, these latter are accessible to thought but remain 'problematic' in the sense that they do not enable the experience or knowledge of a coherent object (in Kantian terms: knowledge of my self, or of God, or of the world as a whole). Deleuze's notoriously convoluted account of virtual Problems or Events might thereby enable a sort of derivation of immanence as the *demonstrably* legitimate dimension of philosophy, and presumably go some way towards answering Hegel's famous objections to Spinoza's own affirmation of immanence as empty and indeterminate. This exceptionally ingenious argument faces at least three related objections.

First, the primary model for the derivation of immanence in Deleuze is perhaps better described as *ethical*, in the Spinozist sense, than as critical in the Kantian sense. Deleuze is quite happy to acknowledge, as one of the 'constants of Spinozism ... that one cannot begin from the idea of God, that one cannot from the outset install oneself in God.' Although in Spinozist terms we *are* nothing other than modes of divine creative force, we begin in ignorance of what

we are, cut off from our true power of action. The learning process that moves us from ignorant passivity to an active and adequate knowledge of being requires, among other things, the manipulation of deliberate ‘fictions’. Nevertheless, once we reach the idea of God (through joyful encounters with other modes, the derivation of common notions, and so on) then ‘this idea, as an absolute principle, frees itself from the hypothesis from which we began in order to rise to it, and grounds a sequence of adequate ideas that is identical to the construction of reality’. Our own causal and ontological inclusion in this sequence is the keystone of Spinozism and is fundamental to Deleuze’s entire project. Less than a matter of essentially problematic justification the process turns on the mere removal of finite limitations and constraints: we are facets of an infinite creativity, and it is enough for us to dissolve whatever ‘hinders’ our awareness of this creativity in order for our own ‘power of action to become actual, and for us to come into possession of what is innate in us’.²

In other words, the idea of immanence in Deleuze is better compared to the idea of God in Spinoza than to a variant of its Kantian alternative: if our initial access to this idea requires the invention of fictional or hypothetical means, once achieved this access retrospectively guarantees our original inclusion in noumenal being without recourse to any quasi-critical justification or deduction. If we need more contemporary guidance in the art of reaching an adequate idea of immanence then the most obvious candidate is that most anti-Kantian of philosophers, Henri Bergson. Many of the guiding principles of Deleuze’s philosophy are already at work in his early article on ‘Bergson’s Concept of Difference’ (1956) and were to change remarkably little over the next forty or so years. Against any neo-Kantian reflection of the conditions and limitations of representation, Bergson affirms an immediate insight into the literal nature of reality, the sort of intuition Deleuze and Guattari were later to attribute to the ‘harrowing’ experience of the schizophrenic, the nomad or the artist: ‘if the conditions of real experience can and must be grasped in an intuition, it is precisely because they are the conditions of real experience ..., because the concept they form is identical to its object.’ Against any neo-Hegelian derivation of difference from relations between things, Bergson offers nothing less than an

unconditional assertion of something ‘which differs first with itself’, namely duration. Truly creative or self-differing difference (Deleuze’s substitute for the prime mover of ancient and medieval cosmologies) cannot itself be derived from any more primitive principle. As for how we become aware that we ourselves *are* nothing other than a conscious extension of this creative differing, this again is a process that bears more resemblance to Spinoza’s ethical or learning process than to Kantian critique. ‘With man and man alone difference becomes conscious’ because while duration and life are themselves ‘consciousness by right’, the emergence of historical man is required as ‘the place in which consciousness reanimates itself and posits itself in fact, for this consciousness identical to life was asleep, numbed in matter’.³ Philosophy is an alarm clock, not a critique.

In the second place, the *ultimate* means of legitimation in Deleuze must indeed rest on affirmation pure and simple. Already ‘with Spinoza univocity becomes the object of a pure affirmation’, such that ‘there is no question of deducing Expression: rather it is expression that embeds deduction in the Absolute, renders proof the direct manifestation of absolutely infinite substance’.⁴ It is above all the equation of thought with affirmation that Deleuze celebrates in the anti-Cartesian ‘naturalism’ he associates with both Leibniz and Spinoza – no doubt the most important contributors to the great project that links ‘Lucretius to Nietzsche’: ‘naturalism makes of thought and sensibility an affirmation’.⁵ Eventual access to adequate forms of knowledge does indeed depend here on an irreducible ‘leap’ in the most literal sense of the word.⁶ It is on precisely this point that Nietzsche’s intervention is so decisive. Deleuze accepts that ‘of course one may ask in what sense and why noble is “worth more” than base’ or indeed ‘why affirmation should be better than negation?’⁷ but to a certain extent these very questions are themselves symptoms of a base or reactive orientation. Active forces indicate themselves through an affirmative power that is utterly indifferent to the business of justification, according to a logic most concisely suggested by the mechanism of the dice-throw – the divine or superhuman move whereby ‘Nietzsche turns chance into an affirmation’.⁸ It is precisely the unconditional affirmation of the *whole* of chance that eliminates any ‘arbitrariness’ in the outcome, and with it any need for a mechanism of

ERRATA – Two errors crept into Christian Kerslake’s ‘The Vertigo of Philosophy’ in *RP* 113. On p.18, left column, line 15, the phrase ‘the categories of space and time’ should read, ‘the categories and space and time’. In note 2 on p. 21, the title of Deleuze’s book should read *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* (not *L’idée d’expression dans la philosophie de Spinoza*).

legitimation as such. For reasons that Deleuze again adapts from Bergson, there can be no deducing such affirmation from anything resembling a demonstration of its logical possibility. Instead, while it's true that 'individuals suppose nothing other than Ideas', the question of 'where ideas come from' is answered in terms that block any distinctively critical interrogation: the ultimate origin is always to be 'assimilated to a divine and solitary game'. This is nothing other than the unapologetically metaphysical game of Creation, one for which 'there is no pre-existent rule since the game includes its own rules', such that 'every time the whole of chance is affirmed in a necessarily winning throw'.⁹ In the wake of this and Deleuze's various other tests of ontological selection, 'only affirmation subsists as an independent power ... there is no other power but affirmation, no other quality, no other element'.¹⁰

Finally, it is misleading to present Deleuze as a philosopher much concerned with the question of an ultimate (or merely epistemological) justification in any case. There are good reasons why Deleuze is generally more interested with what goes on 'in the middle' than with what might have happened, if such a question has any sense, 'at the beginning'. The process of creative affirmation sweeps up both ontological claim and epistemological legitimation in a single movement of thought, itself grounded in the end by the active assertion of an unlimited creative power working at 'infinite speed'. Only when exercised as pure affirmation can thought be adequate to this infinitely creative power. The task of philosophy as Deleuze conceives it remains broadly compatible with the examples set by Bergson and Spinoza; it never concerns anything less than the invention of means to 'liberate man from the plane or level that is proper to him, in order to make him a creator, adequate to the whole movement of creation'.¹¹

Notes

1. Christian Kerslake, 'The Vertigo of Philosophy', *Radical Philosophy* 113, May/June 2002, pp. 10–11.
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, Zone Books, New York, 1990, pp. 137–8, 283.
3. Gilles Deleuze, 'Bergson's Concept of Difference', in John Mullarkey, ed., *The New Bergson*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999, pp. 46, 48–9, 52.
4. *Expressionism in Philosophy*, pp. 67, 22.
5. Ibid., p. 227; Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990, p. 279.
6. *Expressionism in Philosophy*, p. 283; cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Zone Books, New York, 1988, p. 57.
7. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis,

1983, p. 86.

8. Ibid., p. 26. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 198.
9. *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 252, 283; cf. *Logic of Sense*, p. 64.
10. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 176. If, then, Deleuze undeniably engages with some of the major problems inherited by post-Kantian philosophy (regarding for instance the link between intuitions and concepts, the status of the regulative Ideas, the deduction or genesis of what Kant presumed to be the self-evident 'facts' of reason), again, he does so by very much those means he attributes to Nietzsche, who 'relies on no-one but himself to conceive and accomplish the true critique; this project is of great importance for the history of philosophy for it runs counter not only to Kantianism, with which it competes, but to the whole Kantian inheritance, to which it is violently opposed.' Ibid., p. 88.
11. *Bergsonism*, p. 111. Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986, p. 280.

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Copernican Deleuzeanism

Christian Kerslake

Peter Hallward may have conceded too much in his first sentence: we agree that Deleuze is a philosopher of the Absolute, in more or less direct competition with Hegel. If the competition is not to be over very quickly, then surely Hegel's competitor has to be more than a 'vitalist metaphysician', who grounds his philosophy on a 'pure assertion of an unlimited creative power'? To construct a post-Hegelian philosophy of the absolute requires a real engagement with critical and metacritical issues, which entails plunging back into the matrix of Kantianism – which Deleuze does.

There are indeed some crucial moments where Deleuze talks about his horror at the 'tribunal of reason', and also about having done with judgement (but not *justification* as such). Deleuze even describes his own particular 'problem' in terms of 'doing away with the system of judges and replacing it with something else'.¹ But the question is: how to do this effectively? Can an affirmative philosophy of immanence be produced without passing through the fire of critique? In the first phase of his work (1953–68), Deleuze attempts to revolutionize the critical project from within, by shifting its weight onto its outer limits (its teleological and systematic moments), thus effecting a kind of apocalyptic transformation of the Kantian system.² Deleuze frequently alludes to this project as a *completion* of the Copernican turn.³

There are problems with what Hallward wants to replace critical Deleuzeanism with. Let us neglect for the moment the possible analogies Deleuze might want to draw between Spinoza's three kinds of knowledge and Kant's notions of a priori synthesis. Suppose that Deleuze's 'derivation' of immanence is purely Spinozist. Hallward mentions the move from the first two kinds of knowledge to the third, which he says 'retrospectively guarantees our original inclusion in noumenal being without recourse to any quasi-critical justification or deduction'. Now, how is the 'simple removal of finite limitations and constraints' *guaranteed* in Spinozist terms? Isn't this already a critical question?

Kant's philosophy is a turning point because Kant denies the unproblematic transparency of being to thought. It is this 'crisis', opened up in the famous

letter to Herz of 21 February 1772, that leads to Kant's move to construct a 'transcendental' account of cognition in which intuition, concept and Idea are each shown to be different in kind, so that their mutual relations need to be justified. Deleuze, too, is a transcendental philosopher in this sense, one who develops a new form of the Kantian tripartite distinction: intensities–memories–Ideas. Now, it is true that Deleuze is not predominantly concerned with epistemological justification. But that is because he thinks that knowledge, taken strictly, is not the most important element of our cognitive structure. Nevertheless, he *is* concerned with the issue of a priori synthesis: Deleuze's three syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition* present a *de jure* delimitation of the structural possibilities of relating intensities, memories and Ideas. Again, this is an expansion and transformation of the Kantian system, one that does not give knowledge pride of place.

The notion of affirmation cannot be separated from this account of synthesis. Following suggestions from Kant, Deleuze inscribes a teleology into his three syntheses, so that it is necessary to move beyond the synthesis of memory in order to accede to the most difficult task of affirmation of the Idea *as* Idea. Without these stages affirmation remains abstract. There is indeed a kind of leap involved in the thinking of the Idea, but not in the sense Hallward intimates. Just like Kierkegaard's Abraham, the affirmer of the eternal return must make the movement out of this finite world delimited by established concepts into the eternal matrix of the problematic Idea, and return again to the finite world, having given birth to his existence anew. This 'double movement' is the highest form of what Deleuze calls 'repetition'. It is the possibility of this practical moment that finally fulfils, in a metacritically powerful way, Deleuze's system of difference and repetition.

Hallward seems to vacillate on a crucial issue. *Either* his Deleuze has some defensible way of claiming direct access to the 'literal nature of reality';⁴ from this perspective he mentions that the 'ultimate means of *legitimation* must indeed rest on affirmation pure and simple' (my stress). *Or* Deleuze merely *asserts*

access to the noumenon, and is therefore a metaphysician pure and simple. If the latter, then why read Deleuze? With what kind of meaning, for instance, should we endow peculiar claims such as ‘duration and life are “consciousness by right”’? What role would such a reaffirmation of metaphysics be playing in our world?

If Deleuze’s thought is truly making a claim on the absolute, then the techniques and methods one uses to explore and defend it have to be, as much as possible, adequate to such a claim. Without this ‘justification’, wouldn’t there be something potentially solipsistic about reading Deleuze? One would be merely taking a possible, somewhat aesthetic, perspective on the world, in which case one would have already secretly surrendered to our pragmatist, pluralist *episteme*. But why not risk a more dangerous thought: Deleuze may have been *serious* when he claimed to have uncovered ‘the only realized Ontology’...⁵

Notes

1. See Deleuze’s comments on Kant in *L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, dir. P.-A. Boutang, Video Editions Montparnasse, 1996.
2. In my article I had to exclude any discussion of how Deleuze’s philosophical affirmation of absolute problematity is framed in terms of Nietzsche’s eternal return.

Deleuze’s teleology, at its highest point, necessitates an apocalyptic ‘end of all things’: the eternal return is the ‘final end of time’ (*Difference and Repetition* [French text cited second], pp. 94/125). Against Kant’s continual reaffirmation that the boundaries of the unconditioned are marked out by the metaphysical triangle of self–world–God, Deleuze ultimately unveils a new apocalyptic trinity: fractured I–world without horizon–dead God.

3. Many passages in *Difference and Repetition* attest to this: cf. pp. 86/117, 162/210, 180/233, 249/320.
4. It is suggested that Deleuze is permitted this due to his Bergsonism. Again, can’t *Bergsonism* be read as an attempt to recast Bergson in Kantian terms? Deleuze refuses a straightforward interpretation of Bergsonian intuition, talking in Kantian terms about moving ‘beyond experience’ (p. 27). Hallward also refers to Deleuze’s quest to find the ‘conditions of real experience’ in the early essay on Bergson. This ambiguous phrase is also important in *Difference and Repetition*, where it is referred back to problematic Ideas (cf. 154/200, 162/210). In *Kant’s Critical Philosophy* it is clear that the ‘conditions of real experience’ are being related to the Ideas (trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Athlone, London, 1984, pp. 62f). I don’t want to suggest that everything important in Deleuze comes back to Kant – but I do think that none of his explorations of other philosophers (Spinoza, Hume, Leibniz, Bergson) is comprehensible without a framework of Kantian and post-Kantian questions.
5. *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 303/387.

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