



Publication details, information for authors and referees and full contents available at: <http://global-discourse.com/>

ISSN: 2043-7897

Suggested citation:

Dunham, J. (2010) 'Review of "Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence" by Levi R. Bryant', *Global Discourse* [Online], 1: 1, available from: <<http://global-discourse.com/contents>>.

All copyrights of this article are held by the author/s.

Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence by Levi R. Bryant

Review by Jeremy Dunham¹

In 2008 Deleuze was inaugurated into Daniel Dennett's *The Philosophical Lexicon* – a set of often humorous satirical dictionary definitions based on philosophers' names. His entry reads: '**deleuzion**, n. A false, persistent philosophical belief, unsubstantiated by evidence or argument. "He suffered from the deleuzion that Spinoza could be used to clarify Lacanian psychoanalysis"' (2008). If this entry into the lexicon smarts a little it is because those interested in Deleuze are well aware that this is exactly how he is viewed by the broader intellectual community. Admired by many but hated by even more. There are of course reasons why this view of Deleuze as a twentieth century dogmatist free from evidence and argumentation has become so widely spread. Firstly, Deleuze's works are extremely difficult to read. The most important argumentation and defence of his position are found in his major works *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense* and these two in particular are tough mountains to climb. It is in these works that the groundwork is constructed for his later more political, and marginally easier to read, works such as *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. When the importance of these earlier works is ignored, the interpretations and discussions of these later works suffer immensely.

Despite the enormous amount of work that has been written on Deleuze in the past couple of decades, a decent introduction to his philosophy is not easy to find². There has been a general failure in the literature surrounding Deleuze's thought to highlight exactly what the philosophical problems are that he investigated and exactly how he argued for the philosophical conclusions which he arrived at. There seems to be no problem explicating his conclusions but decent discussions of how he got to those conclusions are much harder to find. Given this void in the literature and the difficulty of the primary sources it is unsurprising that such a view of Deleuze has been promulgated throughout the philosophical community. However, there continues to be many of us that believe such a view of Deleuze to be a huge misunderstanding and that there is much at stake in Deleuze's philosophical investigation which can contribute to many contemporary discussions from which his thought is currently excluded. If Deleuze is, as James Williams is fond of saying, 'the Kant of the twentieth century', something has got to change.

In the 1850s the attitude to Hegel shared by most British Philosophers was similar to the attitude to Deleuze shared by most Anglo-American philosophers today and in 1854 the Scottish Philosopher James Ferrier exclaimed that no intelligible word had been written by any of Hegel's followers nor by Hegel himself. However, in 1865 James Hutchinson Stirling changed everything by publishing the era-defining *The*

¹ Jeremy Dunham is PhD candidate in Philosophy at the University of West of England. Email: Jeremy2.Dunham@uwe.ac.uk.

² James Williams' important introductions to *Difference and Repetition* (2003) and *Logic of Sense* (2008) and Ronald Bogue's *Deleuze and Guattari* (1989) are notable exceptions.

Secret of Hegel. What Stirling did was present far more clearly than any other prior *exactly* what the problems of Hegel's philosophy were and how he came to argue for the position that he did. It is immensely difficult to review a work which you admire and appreciate as much as *Difference and Givenness* because it is hard not to come across sounding like an hysterical child, overwhelmingly pleased by a new toy, but at the risk of sounding like such an excited adolescent, *Difference and Givenness* could be considered the most important book written on Deleuze's philosophy for exactly the same reasons that Stirling's book on Hegel was considered so important over a hundred years earlier. It is the first book published in English to really show what Deleuze is doing philosophically and to present a clear and reliable guide to how he argues for his philosophical position.

In the introduction to *Difference and Givenness* Bryant is mercilessly clear about what the book is about. It is a book on Deleuze – it is not a book on Deleuze and Guattari – or Spinoza, Hume, Bergson etc... Specifically, it is a philosophical book on Deleuze's metaphysics. Bryant's book is a book on Deleuze's metaphysics alone because, he argues, Deleuze's ethics and politics *follow from* his metaphysics. Yet the all too common tendency has been to treat his ethics and politics almost as if they were primary – or worse – completely separate from his metaphysics. What must be emphasised, if we are to understand Deleuze at all, is that Deleuze does not construct this system of metaphysics because of his ethical or political views, but rather his politics and ethics follow from his metaphysics. Bryant seeks to start from an examination of the problems which informed Deleuze's thought and follow the construction of his metaphysics from these initial problems. Deleuze does not attempt to critique representation because of its political or ethical problems but rather because it is a philosophically ungrounded problematic and he believes that his own philosophical methodology 'transcendental empiricism' is capable of offering us a better way of working through this problematic. The main aim of *Difference and Givenness* is to explicate exactly what Deleuze means and aims to do by this introduction of a new philosophical methodology 'transcendental empiricism' – and show why such a methodology is not an impossible paradox.

One of the most pleasing aspects of *Difference and Givenness* is how well Bryant explicates Deleuze's engagement with the Kantian critical project. Deleuze does not simply reject the critical project out of hand and return to dogmatism but rather tackles the critical project head on and attempts to push it one step further in order to go beyond the internal conditions of possible experience towards the genetic conditions of *real* experience. As a result, Deleuze produces a metaphysics which is not anti-critical but rather hyper-critical. Deleuze finds the leaking pipe in Kant's system in the conception of time and the core of Bryant's book (chapters 4-6) is an exquisite exegesis of Deleuze's philosophy of time and the encounter. Preceding this section, the first three chapters discuss Deleuze's philosophical methodology and what exactly is meant by 'transcendental empiricism' and the final section of the book discusses the genesis of extensities and individuation. One of the key difficulties of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* is that the structure of the book is particularly difficult to follow. While many of the key metaphysical assertions are outlined in the early chapters of the book, their tone of certainty – 'There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal'³ - is not supported until later in the book and the keys to understanding Deleuze's epistemology and methodology are found

³ Deleuze, G. (1994:35) *Difference and Repetition*. London: The Athlone Press

scattered throughout the text rather than being explicitly stated early on in the book: Again, aiding the assertion that Deleuze's work is a return to pre-critical dogmatism. The structure of Bryant's *Difference and Givenness* is far more reader friendly and sets out the methodology and epistemology before guiding us through the intricacies of Deleuze's metaphysical arguments.

Bryant's work is far from being simply an introduction to Deleuze's thought and presents challenging and controversial interpretations of a number of Deleuze's key philosophical arguments which will be of interest for experienced scholars. Perhaps most controversial and at the same time most important is Bryant's insistence that the transcendental in Deleuze's 'transcendental empiricism' is not underestimated. One of the key errors in the interpretation of Deleuze is to claim that his proclamation that we must overturn Plato is a form of anti-Platonism – a rejection of Plato's transcendentalism. The same is true of the picture of Deleuze as 'anti-Kantian'. Contrary to traditional interpretation, Bryant argues, Deleuze is not anti the transcendentalism in either philosopher; rather, the problem is that these two philosophers are not transcendental enough. Both thinkers fail to truly philosophise the transcendental because their picture of the transcendental is 'traced' from the empirical. Both therefore fail to account for the genesis of the forms or categories which they present us with. This leads us to the second controversial claim which is that Deleuze is not an anti-essentialist philosopher. Deleuzian essences are 'real, independent of subjectivity, and their intelligibility has a universality proper to it that is every bit as binding as that found in Platonic forms' (2008:13). Again the claim is not that essences are an illegitimate move into transcendental philosophy but rather that this move is traced from our traditional empirical models of recognition. This is as true of the 'new-essentialisms' found in contemporary analytic philosophy as in the traditional Platonic essentialism. 'New' essences 'include the basic kinds of physical and chemical substances, such as the various species of atoms, molecules and subatomic particles' (2002:17). An electron is an example of the new essentialist's natural kind because it is necessarily disposed to act a certain way. Its necessary charge is what makes it essentially what it is, and without this necessary characteristic, it would not be an electron. Not only are there natural kinds of substances and objects but there are also natural kinds of events and processes (such as the laws of energy transmission or of particle interaction). While new essentialists claim that their work is 'twentieth century' essentialism, they nevertheless repeat the errors of the old essentialism. They trace new essences from the current discoveries of science but fail to recognise that these may soon appear as lacking in fundamental necessity as Aristotle's plant and animal essentialism. Any claim for certainty of fundamental essences drawn from the discoveries of a particular eras contemporary science seems a perilous endeavour. Deleuze's triumph is not to reject essences *tout court* but rather to turn essences into singularities, to replace Platonic essences with Leibnizian essences. The essences Deleuze discovers are particular, individual and individualising. While the terminology of essences disappears in *Difference and Repetition* the job that they do does not. The so called 'new essentialists' will always be old essentialists for as long as they continue to trace the idea of what essences should be from the empirical. This is the true mark of 'old essentialism'. Deleuze argues that we can keep hold of the term essence, but only if we recognise that essences are accidents, events, sense. Deleuze understands that nature is dynamic and that the role which essences play cannot be merely eliminated and he therefore

replaces these essences with a theory of dynamic Ideas free from the problems of traditional natural kinds.

What Levi Bryant's work shows is that claims that Deleuze dogmatically asserts his conclusions uncritically can no longer be tolerated. Bryant presents Deleuze's metaphysics as a serious challenge to Kant's critical philosophy. Not because Deleuze is a 'belligerent anti-Kantian' but because Deleuze's philosophy seriously engages with the Kantian project and produces a systematic metaphysics which is 'hyper-critical' rather than 'anti-critical'. If this is a book about 'Deleuze's metaphysics' then what is really important here is 'metaphysics' and its potential future given the important arguments and radical methodologies employed by Deleuze. The key question for Deleuzian scholarship should now be: how do we begin to introduce Deleuze's metaphysical arguments into the broader metaphysical discussions developed by both continental and analytic philosophers? If Deleuze's 'hyper-critical' development of the Kantian project is as successful as Bryant suggests then *Difference and Repetition* represents an extremely important moment for metaphysical speculation – the consequences of which, thanks to Bryant's work, should now begin to be fully appreciated.

Bibliography

- Bogue, R. *Deleuze and Guattari*. (New York: Routledge, 1989)
- Byrant, L.R. *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (Evanston; Northwestern University Press, 2008)
- Deleuze, G. *Difference and Repetition* translated by Paul Patton (London; Continuum, 2004)
- Deleuze, G. *Logic of Sense* translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (London; Continuum, 2004)
- Dennett, D (ed.) *The Philosophical Lexicon* [online] available at:
<http://www.philosophicallexicon.com/> accessed on 12.12.2008
- Ellis, B. (2002) *The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism*.
Chesham: Acumen
- Ferrier, J.F. *Institutes of Metaphysics*. (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1854)
- Stirling, J.H. *The Secret of Hegel: Being the Hegelian System in Origin, Principle, Form and Matter*. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1865)
- Williams, J. *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2003)
- Williams, J. *Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense: A Critical Introduction and Guide*. (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2008)