

REVIEW ARTICLE

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

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Three deep philosophical questions have to-date remained without comprehensive answer in Deleuze scholarship, perhaps because work has gone into the related fields of the critical exposition of his work and its practical application to a vast set of disparate disciplines:

1. In exactly what way, if at all, is Deleuze's philosophy transcendental?
2. If we accept Deleuze's description of his philosophy as empirical, how can we accommodate that label with the obvious divergences between his work and traditional empiricism, notably in light of the question of the transcendental nature of his philosophy?
3. What is Deleuze's *philosophical* method, as opposed to the many practical and theoretical methodological approaches that can be traced through his work with Félix Guattari (schizo-analysis, for instance)?

Levi Bryant's recent book offers comprehensive and well-argued answers to these questions. As such, it is an important reference point for academics seeking to determine Deleuze's philosophical import in its own right, as opposed to through his reading of other thinkers, or in its descriptive powers, or as a move within a more tightly defined philosophical area, such as political theory or aesthetics.

The most straightforward account of Bryant's answer to the opening questions is deceptively simple and grounded in very well-known statements by Deleuze. His philosophical method is "transcendental empiricism". Yet, as Bryant is careful to argue, this "oxymoronic" answer raises many more problems than it solves,¹ as if Kant had awoken from his dogmatic slumbers only to remain haunted by impossible hybrid beasts. How can empiricism be transcendental without falling back into a form of dogmatism in the universal and therefore non-historical conditions of any possible experience? How can transcendental philosophy be empirical without

thereby thwarting its search for formal and stable conditions for any possible experience? In themselves, these questions already have great merit, since they force us to reflect again on Deleuze's relation to Kant, a relation that Bryant has analysed better and more deeply than any prior commentator. This allows him to explain and critically evaluate a set of underestimated Deleuzian moves, as set out in *Difference and Repetition*, for instance, in terms of faculties, such as recognition; ontological distinctions, such as subject and object; and constitutive processes, such as syntheses of time. These moves cannot be understood without explaining Deleuze's transformation of transcendental philosophy through an engagement with Kant's critique. This is an explanation over which Bryant has great command.

Bryant draws this philosophical shift by observing how 'intuition' in Kant is replaced by 'encounter' in Deleuze thereby introducing a problematic genetic structure where there was once a stable form. This is the most significant of his analyses of Deleuze's debt to Kant, one that no other researcher has yet remarked upon. Deleuze's notion of problem comes out of Kant's work but radicalizes it in a surprising manner. First, Kant's characterisation of problems is stuck in a taxonomic model that cannot free itself of a prior commitment to the faculty of recognition. Second, Kant treats concepts and problems as exterior to one another, thereby maintaining a formal independence between them, which in turn allows for the whole set of distinctions between faculties and realms in the Kantian account of thinking: "This exteriority is one of the marks of the Kantian system overall and inevitable leads to an account of mere conditioning rather than a true genetic perspective."²

A further advantage of this discussion of Deleuze and Kant is that it allows for a distance to be introduced between Deleuze and Bergson around the concept of intuition; one that is essential for the argument for the importance of Kant's role to survive an objection built on Bergson's critique of Kant. In addition, the reflection on Deleuze's radicalising of Kant's transcendental method allows for a series of useful and interesting connections between Deleuze and Heidegger that rejoin Miguel de Beistegui's work on those authors, also through the concept of genesis.³ In turn, this allows fruitful comparisons with Derrida's philosophy and its Heideggerian roots. Bryant sets out these connections in terms of the play of difference in events and encounters: "In Derridean terms, we could say that the subject is always caught in a play of *différance* producing a simulacrum of identity through difference as an effect."⁴ This is, however, quite a restricted view of Derrida's relation to Deleuze, a relation that has been investigated much more deeply than the concept of *différance* in Paul Patton and John Protevi's *Between Deleuze and Derrida*; for instance, in chapters by Gregg Lambert and Leonard Lawlor.⁵ Further important connections bolster Bryant's argument and the import of his book, most notably in his exposition of the role of Maimon⁶ and his situation of Hegel between Kant and Deleuze,⁷ in particular, in terms of subject and object.

So does this mean that a new philosophical orthodoxy can be set around Bryant's description of, and arguments for, Deleuze's transcendental empiricism? There is a series of views, most already present in some way in the existing literature, offering different takes on transcendental empiricism. Some depend on emphasising other aspects of the figures studied by Bryant. For instance, there is no reference to the Kantian sublime or to Kant's political works in the book. This is significant since the sublime (and Kant's treatment of political enthusiasm) offer the possibility of reading Kant as already moving beyond the role of recognition described by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. This has been noted by Derrida and Lyotard, among others, and it implies that if Kant's philosophy is a restriction on thought, it is so only according to a restricted interpretation of Kant. I do not think that it is too significant that Bryant does not make space for this *in Kant*, but I do think it points to the possibility of more aesthetic or political readings of Deleuze's own concepts and arguments in their relation to Kant. I would turn to Steven Shaviro's recent book for an example of this first route, applied to the beautiful in Kant. Shaviro detects moments of Whitehead's adventure and Deleuze's encounters in Kant's aesthetics: "For Kant aesthetics has no foundation, and it offers us no guarantees. Rather it throws all norms and values into question or into crisis."⁸ This means that the concept of an encounter in Deleuze - which Bryant tends to describe in the form of the negative as it applies to the understanding, and where the encounter is the infinitely other of cognition and recognition ("The sign that can only be sensed is not *opposed* to recognition but is *other*

than recognition⁹) – could be given a description which better bridges to the signs emitted in an encounter, to their relation to ‘dark precursors’, to the roles of creative experimentation and the apprenticeship to signs in an environment conditioned by immanent aesthetic events.

A similar exercise is possible in terms of Deleuze’s empiricism in its debt to Hume, a figure (along with Nietzsche) with a tellingly low profile in Bryant’s argument. He sets mere empiricism in opposition to transcendental empiricism by insisting that the former “... continues to maintain the primacy of the subject or mind to which givens are given in sensibility.”¹⁰ Yet this is a very narrow account of Hume indeed, one that takes little account of Hume’s theory of mind or his work on the passions, both of which have been seen as forerunners of a different definition of transcendental empiricism, one that does not depend so much on the immanent transformation of faculties through encounters, but rather on accounts of thought that are evolutionary and pre-subjective. We find this argument in Jeffrey Bell’s recent book on Deleuze and Hume, and on Deleuze’s “Humean transcendental empiricism”, which stresses the role of creative principles drawn from Hume, rather than a more dichotomous account of established oppositions (between faculties and their other, between faculties, and between subject and object) transcended in encounters. So transcendental empiricism is already there germinating in Hume and takes on a much more experimental form in relation to the creation and experimentation with principles: “It is precisely this creativity of multiplicities that interested Deleuze in Hume; and just as Hume sought, within the given, to account for the constitution of that which is irreducible to the given, so too Deleuze, by affirming multiplicities ... facilitates a creation that is irreducible to anything actual.”¹¹

Even if it is the one underlying Bryant’s approach, I sense that the question ‘Who is right?’ is misleading here, since in their own way each of these *interpreters* gives convincing arguments for their positions and bequeaths elegant readings and suggestive ideas. Instead, the questions are more: ‘Whose line to follow and transform?’ and ‘Who to select as the object of a potential encounter?’ There is also no right or wrong answer to these questions in the sense of a general prescription, nor indeed in having to choose a single figure. In Bryant’s work a series of values emerge with great philosophical force: organise a field according to clear positional limits with respect to definitions and implications, and with respect to who or what is inside and outside given categories; respect the letter of a text by quoting at great length, rather than by dissecting passages in order to find the many different directions in which they can be taken; set out clear boundaries as to the scope of philosophical endeavour (for instance, in terms of ontology, aesthetics, politics and sociology) and with respect to the legitimacy of interpretative moves; eschew style in favour of precision and fidelity. There is something judgemental and taxonomic in this mode of thought and indeed image of philosophy, something that stands at odds with Bryant’s critique of Kantian taxonomy with respect to genetic problems. Oppositional taxonomy becomes an interpretative and evaluative presupposition in this book, an ethos rather than a conceptual frame.

This problematic tension is again not something resolvable, but it leads me to insist on the variety of openings offered by Deleuze’s philosophy, not so much in how it is to be analysed, but rather in how it can be put to work. Thus, for example, the recent collection *Deleuze’s Philosophical Lineage*, edited by Graham Jones and Jon Roffe, contains a series of alternate reference points for thinking about the relation of Deleuze’s thought to other thinkers. One could take Dan Smith’s account from that book, of the importance of Leibniz’s principles for Deleuze, and set it against the more oppositional claims for the transcendental made by Bryant. One could take Simon Duffy’s work on Lautman in order to see a more mathematical and dialectical model for Ideas and problems in Deleuze. Or one could see a much more Platonic Deleuze, with Gregory Flaxman, or one influenced by strange and often partly concealed influences, such as Scotus, Tarde, Ruyer and Wronski (studied respectively by Nathan Widder, Éric Alliez, Ronald Bogue and Christian Kerslake). What matters though is that the field should be allowed to remain open enough to allow this plurality of interpretations to co-exist in productive conversation.

Is this to claim all interpretations are equally valid? No, it is rather to shift the way validity is determined from statements about the methodology of a philosophy and its place on an historical grid to practical developments of a wider set of aspects. So the central question is not about what a philosophy is, but rather about what it can

do, or help us to do. In turn, this means a philosophy will not be judged negatively on perceived flaws or on the implications of a central set of methodological claims, but rather on more open and affirmative attempts to take the philosophy further, *alongside* attempts to make it as consistent and robust as possible. The aim therefore is not to avoid judging and situating philosophies according to method, or to stop criticising methodological flaws, but rather to shift the position of such judgement from a prior and determinant one, to a subsequent one flowing from practical considerations. This is then not a defence of an overly relativistic hermeneutics, but rather a turn to practical assessments alongside methodological ones, because methodology cannot be taken to be independent of context and practice. What we judge a philosophy to be depends on the practical problems we set it to work on. Whether we judge a philosophy to be successful is not strictly dependent on its methodological consistency and on its place within a set of alternative historical positions. Instead, it is dependent on how well it allows us to think through new problems outside the secure ambit of history and known methodological constraints, yet also partly within their scope and measure, as revised given the new developments. Deleuze's philosophy is aimed at such multiple practices and at such flexibility in its methodological core. It is this quality I fear might be missed by the restricted categorisation at work in Bryant's study, despite its great force and philosophical insight, or perhaps even because of them.

In his analysis in *Deleuze's Philosophical Lineage*, Smith insists on the "use" Deleuze is able to make of a set of Leibniz's principles,¹² thereby returning us to an interpretation that picks on the practical and assemblage-driven aspects of Deleuze's thought. Bryant, on the other hand, emphasises breaks with traditional figures, insisting on Deleuzian specificity rather than historical lines, contrasts and connections ("... he is not Leibnizian."¹³) Metaphysical specificity and textual fidelity are certainly timely values. They have proven their worth in eliciting a relation to Kant in Deleuze that is illuminating for a reading of *Difference and Repetition*. They can be dangerous values too, though, for instance in their puritanical tenor. In Bryant's book, the epithet 'brilliant,' when describing a rival interpretation, also carries connotations of regrettable error: "This tendency, for instance, can be clearly discerned in Keith Ansell Pearson's brilliant text [...] which moves fluidly between Deleuze's works co-authored with Guattari, his historical works, and the works in which Deleuze explicated his own philosophy without even raising the question of whether these projects are all continuous with one another."¹⁴ Yet Ansell Pearson's work is much more than a brilliant misconception and can only be seen as lacking in reflection about the continuity of its references if it is assumed that those references have fixed and incompatible futures. They don't. Specificity and its attendant 'value' of oppositional judgements with respect to a field of study apply uncomfortably to Deleuze's metaphysics, but also to his texts with their inner folds, disjunctive series, multiple expressions and fluid boundaries.

The radical openness of Deleuze's metaphysics, also in relation to that very label, lies in the multiplicity of its concepts. Bryant gives us deep accounts of some of them, such as encounter and genesis. Yet, other terms are downplayed in his reading and this *choice* removes the idea of a fold of Deleuze's concepts back on to their source texts, writing styles and structures. Examples of this widest of folds could be taken from the application of counter-actualisation to method itself, to *its* dark precursors, for instance, in the relation of selection to the concept of folding, in its guise as complication, as described in *Proust and Signs*. As paired disturbance to the process of unfolding determined by ideas of encasement, envelopment and implication, Deleuze offers the process of complication. Complication is a matter of asymmetries, breakdowns in communication and separation. As such it necessarily requires "elections" and "choices" which cannot be reduced to a prior systematic logic or ethics, but instead rest on a diversity of forces and tenebrous swirls. Even common names such as "transcendental empiricist" or "speculative realist" only "acquire their value in introducing non-communicating pieces of untruth and truth elected by the interpreter."¹⁵ Brilliant mistakes indeed.

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NOTES

1. *Difference and Givenness*, p 3
2. *Difference and Givenness*, p 173
3. Miguel de Beistegui, *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2004
4. *Difference and Givenness*, p 191
5. Paul Patton and John Protevi (eds.) *Between Deleuze and Derrida* London: Continuum 2003
6. *Difference and Givenness*, p 202-4
7. *Difference and Givenness*, p 24-5
8. Steven Shaviro *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze and Aesthetics*, Cambridge MA: MIT, 2008, p 1
9. *Difference and Givenness*, p 133
10. *Difference and Givenness*, p 11
11. Jeffrey A. Bell, *Deleuze's Hume: Philosophy, Culture and the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p 153
12. Daniel W. Smith 'Leibniz' in *Deleuze's Philosophical Lineage*. Edited by Graham Jones and Jon Roffé Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp 44-66, esp. p 64
13. *Difference and Givenness*, p 228
14. *Difference and Givenness*, p 267
15. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*. Paris : PUF, 1993, p 143