

Transcendental empiricism: Deleuze's response to Hegel*

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1. Introduction

The empiricism of Gilles Deleuze is not a dogma about the essence of mind, nature or reality, or “the doctrine according to which the intelligible ‘comes’ from the sensible.”¹ It is rather a concern for “the concrete richness of the sensible” (*D* 54), for contingency, difference and incommensurability, and a resistance to universalizing abstractions through emphasis on the particularity of situated, historical practices (see *D* 112). But it also wants to be a metaphysics, a transcendental empiricism: “transcendental” in the sense of “necessary condition,” but not in the sense of providing foundations for knowledge claims; empiricism, because it searches for real conditions of actual experience, not because it bases all knowledge on generalizations from experience. It is meant to be an empiricism that would be immune to Hegel’s critique of empiricism as the poorest and most empty kind of knowledge, or a post-Hegelian empiricist metaphysics.²

2. Non-conceptual difference

Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism takes as its starting point the assertion that there is a difference between real difference and conceptual difference,³ and it locates this difference in “the being of the sensible” (*DR* 80). At first

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glance, the sensible can be said to differ from the concept insofar as the concept determines the possibility of repeatable experiences that are identical in respect of their organizational form, whereas the sensible is the actuality of any given experience (*DR* 79–80), and as such is the non-repeatable basis for the difference *between* actualizations. The sensible as the reality of a specific actualization falls outside of the concept; the concept determines the equivalency among actualizations (they are all actualizations of the same concept), the sensible is the ground of their difference.

But if this were all there were to the sensible, then the sensible would only be the indifferent occasion for the actualization of abstract conditions of possibility, the contents of a representation the nature and qualities of which are essentially determined by the concept (see *DR* 21). In that case, it would be the concept and the a priori conditions of experience that explained the sensible and constituted knowledge, not the sensible and the a posteriori actualization. Whatever sensible particularities of a representation are not covered by the concept are merely accidental or extrinsic (*DR* 46), as are the actual (here and now) sensations (since other qualitatively similar sensations at other times could be synthesized into a representation that would be equivalent, from the standpoint of knowledge). Beyond this Kantian challenge to empiricism lies the even greater Hegelian challenge, which does not discard sensible particularity as accidental, but instead makes it a moment in the self-articulation of the Idea, which includes within itself its empirical actuality, in the same way in which a work of art's form does not stand apart from its content, but must be grasped as the synthetic organization of just the contents it has (see *DR* 36–38).

Deleuze would object that actuality is not the accidental instantiation of a concept, and that if the Hegelian Idea includes empirical content, it does not for all that include its own “here and now” empirical actuality. Against Kant, Deleuze argues that the empirical is not what the concept determines *would be* in a representation if it occurred, something hypothetical (see *DR* 10), but actuality itself, real existence as opposed to the possibility of existence indicated by the concept.⁴ Against Hegel, we may note that the difference between performances of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*, which is a unity of form and content equivalent to the Hegelian Idea, are not included in the Idea, since with respect to content, what is performed is identical, but the actual performances differ (see *DR* 79). The empirical is the here and now actuality that differentiates between performances and which makes repetition of the same work possible. The Hegelian Idea, to the extent that it transcends its actualizations, can no more explain the existence of any particular actualization than can the Kantian concept, but only the form that the actualization will take. Empirical actuality, then, is

not to be explained through possibility, however “concretely” determined, but through actual causes (actions of musicians and conductor, materials involved, score utilized, etc.). The empirical is the effect of causes which contain no more and no less reality than it does, causes which are immanent and wholly manifest in the effect through which they are experienced, much as Spinoza’s God is entirely immanent in his attributes (see *EPS* 42, 57–59, 80–81, 173, 178, 180).⁵ Instead of being explicable through the concept, then, empirical actuality, “difference without concept... [is] expressed in the power belonging to the existant, a stubbornness of the existant in intuition” (*DR* 23), and is first given in sensory consciousness, a receptivity which grasps what comes to thought from “outside” (*DR* 74).

Still, if the empirical is pure actuality, the pure here and now that falls outside of the concept and outside of the Idea, then it is without content from the standpoint of conceptual knowledge. This was Hegel’s essential point about the emptiness of sensible particularity in his critique of sense certainty. Every “this” is as much a this as any other. At the same time, each “this” is not the other “thises” in the same way that other “thises” are neither it and nor any other “this.” So instead of being positive, simple and full of content, the “this” given in sensory actuality is an empty, negative universal.⁶ With respect to its utter indeterminacy and lack of content, being, the here and now existence of something, is identical to nothing.⁷

It is here that Deleuze’s debate with Hegel begins in earnest. Deleuze rejects the epistemological model on which Hegel’s argument is based, and according to which whatever does not make a difference *to knowledge* makes no difference (see *DR* 7–9, 18–19). The empirical, to use a Kantian distinction, must be thought, even if it cannot be *known*. The empirical is the transcendental condition of the possibility of concepts, and in two senses: 1) it is the condition of the application of concepts over different cases and so of universality in general 2) it is the real condition of experience. Contrary to Kantianism or Hegelian Idealism, it is the empirical which explains the conceptual and the abstract conditions of all possible experience, not the reverse.

3. Multiplicity and externality

If in its simplest form, the empirical is the reason for the non-conceptual differences between one instance of a representation and another, then it is the basis of multiplicity, of an external and non-conceptual relation between instances, such that one can say there are many instantiations of one concept. Without this multiplicity, there could be no concepts, that is, no rules of synthesis that apply over different instances, or as Kant would say,

over different representations.⁸ This is not the logical restriction of one concept by another, which are negative in form (“not an animal in general, but this type of animal, which differs from others in respects, a, b, c...”), but an existential condition, “the swarming of individuals that are absolutely identical with respect to the concept and yet participate in the same existential singularity” (*DR* 22), thus constituting a multiplicity. Contrary to Hegel, who identifies sensible particularity with the negative determinations produced by thought, equating the “this” with “not that or that,” negative relations, such as those between concepts or between particular “thises,” presuppose rather than constitute multiplicity (*DR* 73–82). This multiplicity is thus a positive fact, the empirical and prior condition of the conceptual determinations of thought, something that thought does not produce and cannot deduce, but can only encounter “after the fact.” This is the priority of the a posteriori characteristic of empiricism.

Expressed in this way, the argument still looks far too Kantian. But Deleuze is not arguing that the condition of the application of concepts is the existence of a given sensory manifold; the sensory manifold is just an instance of empirical multiplicity. Empirical actuality is also the condition of multiplicities of discrete elements, such as sets where a term’s membership in a set was determined on a case by case basis, rather than on the basis of some antecedently specifiable rule, in which case it would be possible to repeat indefinitely the operation by which members would be added to the set, so that one could constitute a multiplicity of dispersed singularities that would not be synthesized into a manifold, in what Deleuze calls a nomadic distribution as opposed to a sedentary and closed one (*DR* 54).⁹ Since it is the “here and now” empirical actuality of each instance that distinguishes it from other instances (*DR* 22–23), empirical actuality is the a priori of any multiplicity, including, but not only, the empirically given manifold, and so is the empirical and a priori condition of the domain of empirical experience (see *DR* 310, 328). This, I take it, is what Deleuze means when he says that difference is the being of the sensible (*DR* 80) and yet that “it is by means of difference that the given is given,” where what is given is multiplicity (*DR* 286).

Deleuze’s “multiplicity” is governed by a logic of difference rather than the logic of identity of the concept.¹⁰ The logic of difference concerns the purely contingent relation between actualities: there is no necessity for a set to have n number of members, it has the number of members that correspond to the quite fortuitous conjunction of circumstances producing actual members of the set (see *DR* 80). Because the actuality of an instance is not included within the concept, the relation between actualities is not internal and conceptual, or dialectical, but external and contingent (see *EPS* 32, 209–210). For Deleuze, “empiricism is fundamentally linked to a

logic... of multiplicities" (*D* viii), of relations that "are external and irreducible to their terms" (*D* 55), as in Leibnizian calculus,¹¹ or as in Hume, for whom "relations may vary without the ideas varying" (*D* 56–57; see *EPS* 243f.). It is this logic of external relations that Deleuze regards both as empiricism's greatest achievement and as the greatest impediment to Hegelianism,¹² since it allows one to grasp terms as having come into relation through contingent empirical events,¹³ that is, through a unique and chance interplay of forces (see *D* 122–123), a "throw of the dice" (*D* 5, 40, 67; *DR* 255).¹⁴

Yet this logic of externality, in turn, is founded on the empirical actuality of instances that makes multiplicity possible, since it is through the empirical actuality that a non-conceptual difference, and hence the purely additive and external relation of the AND, is made possible (see *D* 9; *DR* 71). Not only multiplicity, but exteriority as such, including space understood as parts external to each other, i.e., as extension and dimension (see *DR* 360), and time as a succession of mutually exclusive instants, have empirical actuality as their a priori condition (see *DR* 72, 79–81, 286–287, 296, 310; *B* 38, 77), as their "groundless ground," their aconceptual and yet transcendental source (*DR* 296).¹⁵ Prior to the law and measure of a priori forms of intuition is the ontological unmeasured (*démesure ontologique*) of the empirical, "nomadic distribution and crowned anarchy" (*DR* 55, 388).¹⁶ But since forms of intuition such as space and time are empirically conditioned, rather than pure, they are not necessary and universal, but contingent and particular, concrete rather than abstract, prior conditions that are in each case already conditioned, and which differ from case to case, rather than being the same for everyone.

Although this helps explain how the empirical can itself be a transcendental condition, it is not an adequate response to Hegel's critique of sense-certainty. The basis of multiplicity and exteriority is the difference between empirical actualities, but insofar as this difference can be expressed as the non-identity of actualities, each actuality is really identical to the others in that all share in *not-being the others*. Deleuze will have to give a positive account of empirical difference if this difference is to be irreducible to indeterminate non-being.

4. Empirical conditions and individuation

Deleuze's answer draws on his theory of a "higher empiricism." Not only is the empirical the metaphysical *condition of possibility* of the conceptual (see *DR* 79–81), historically produced empirical actualities are the a priori of actual experience, and it is for this reason that the difference between

empirical actualities can be expressed as a positive difference with a determinate content, even though this determinacy of content is not phenomenal. This part of Deleuze's theory constitutes his most innovative and important response to Hegel's critique of empiricism.

The first stage of the argument comes in Deleuze's book on Bergson. Following Bergson,¹⁷ Deleuze argues that far from being prior to experience, the possible expressed in the concept is only the reflected image of the real, "a retrograde movement of the true," intelligible structures abstracted from real experience and then projected backward in time, creating the illusion of being prior to, and of conditioning, the experience (*B* 18–20). In that case "it is not the real that resembles the possible, but the possible that resembles the real, because it has been abstracted from the real after the real is made" (*B* 98). This is but an instance of an empiricist maxim which Deleuze attributes to Whitehead, namely, "the abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained" (*D* viii).

How, then, to explain the abstract? Not abstractly, certainly; that was Hegel's great mistake.¹⁸ No amount of abstraction will ever generate the concrete, not least because empirical actuality is not an intersection of concepts or a difference between concepts, but the difference between the conceptual and the empirical, difference as Being or Being as non-conceptual difference itself (*DR* 23, 52–61, 80, 94, 376–384; *B* 17–18, 77, 85).¹⁹ Because the concept does not include within it or explain its own empirical actualization, what empiricism requires is not an eternal or timeless a priori, but "the conditions under which something new is produced" (*D* vii; see *L* 107), the actual, empirical conditions of experience and of concepts (see *DR* 3–4, 12f.), conditions which by coming together in new and unpredictable ways are capable of producing unanticipated results.

Although Deleuze rejects the sort of empiricism that would explain concepts as abstractions or generalizations from experience, he nevertheless agrees with Bergson that the empirical is prior to the conceptual. What Deleuze looks for in Bergson is "a higher empiricism" (*B* 30; see *DR* 80) that instead of generalizing from experience goes beyond experience to conditions which are neither general nor abstract, but are themselves concrete and empirical, the conditions of "real experience in all its peculiarities" rather than Kant's conditions of "all possible experience in general" (*B* 27–28; see *LS* 300–302, *DR* 80, 94, *N* 93).²⁰ The real causes of experience, unlike universal concepts in relation to representations, need not resemble their effect in any way (*B* 95–97), any more than an organism need resemble its genetic material, even though the causes are "virtually" or implicitly present in their effect (see *DR* 240; *F* 37; *EPS* 172, 232–233). For real causes are not universal and a priori rules which the effect merely instantiates, in the way in which a member instantiates a species, but are as

determinate and as particular as the effect, with which real causes are coextensive: “the conditions are never more general than the conditioned element, and... are therefore not ‘apodictic’ but problematic” (*F* 114, see *F* 116). Rather than being antecedently given rules or schemas, the forces that actually produce experience are for the most part *without* form or law (*DR* 94), and are for the most part unconscious (see *B* 37, 54, 62–63).²¹ In that case, the actuality of the empirical, instead of instantiating a rule or concept given by the understanding, is *empirically constituted* through a chance concatenation of forces, of converging and diverging series (see *D* viii, *F* 78) or fluxes (*L* 108), differentials of intensity and rates of change (*D* 31–33, 123; *B* 77–85; *EPS* 196–199, 205–206, 236), which together produce something new and unforeseeable (see *EPS* 242). Deleuze calls this unforeseeable emergence of a new actuality “the event” of actuality (see *LS* 13–21, 23–35), this event being “a mixture of the dependent and the aleatory” (*F* 86, 117),²² that is, of the necessary production of an effect by its cause and the purely contingent effective presence of those causes at that particular moment (see *EPS* 208–210, 212, 230, 238ff., 249–250).²³ Essences, whether expressed through Kantian concepts or Hegelian Ideas, do not determine existence; coming into existence is not a transition from the possible (the concept) to the real (its instantiation), but the production of something new by already existing forces entering into new relations through chance encounters, where these encounters are nevertheless the extrinsically determined effects of previous encounters.

This empirical sort of explanation would also account for the production and use of statements, including their use as concepts, or as statements having a determinate meaning in virtue of their relation to a system of statements and rules for the production of statements, and could also explain how statements could come to be used differently by entering into different, contingent and empirically conditioned relations with different systems and practices, and so take on different conceptual functions or meanings (see *F*, chapter 1; *D* 144). To use Deleuze’s spatial or diagrammatic metaphor, a statement has a horizontal relation to other statements that determines its meaning and allows it to function as a concept (for example, a statement of definition), and a vertical relation that allows it designate particulars as instances of a universal, but it also has a diagonal or transversal relation to other conceptual systems, a purely “virtual” relation that becomes actual only when that statement in fact, due to contingent circumstances, enters into one of those systems (for example, when a language adopts a locution from another language). The first type of relation is syntactic or grammatical, the second is semantic or referential and the third is pragmatic and historical, since it concerns the actual historical and pragmatic reasons for a statement’s becoming part of a new

system of statements, or language. The actual functioning of a statement as a concept, then, is determined “in the last instance” by pragmatics (*D* 116–117). So although concepts are not abstracted from experience in any straightforward way, they are nevertheless empirically constituted (as are the systems to which they belong), and are not really prior to the empirical, but only *seem* to be so when examined in the context of stable languages (“normal discourse”), where what can be seen and experienced is determined by an already constituted language.²⁴ Deleuze, then, agrees with Bergson that possible only seems to precede the real, but is actually conditioned by it. Although there is no “wild” or “pre-linguistic experience” for Deleuze (see *D* 34), that does not make the conceptual prior to the empirical.

Together with the logic of external relations, “higher empiricism” affords another way of resisting Hegel. The empirically actual is not a bare particular, a “this” like any other “this,” but a singularity that has a determinate content in virtue of its actual genesis, the history of its coming into being (see *DR* 56). It is both simple and yet, because of its multiple causes, “a virtual multiplicity” with “a plurality of meanings and irreducible multiple aspects” (*B* 14; see *EPS* 64f., 81, 195f.). Its individuality is a function of, and subsequent to, individuating causal processes, not a function of the unity or simple particularity of a “this” or an “I;” it is a matter of intersecting series, like a mathematical point, not a synthesis, and certainly not the act of synthesis of a sovereign reason or transcendental ego (*DR* 56; *N* 7; *D* 92, 120, 131; *F* 78).²⁵ Consequently, “the terms distinguished each retain their respective positivity, instead of being defined by opposition to each other” (*EPS* 60).²⁶ Hegel’s famous critique of the abstractness of sense-certainty can get no hold here.

Yet it should be noted that the determinate content an empirical actuality has because of its causal history may not correspond to any distinguishing phenomenal characteristics, and in that respect, Hegel’s critique of empiricism is completely valid.²⁷ At the beginning of this discussion of Deleuze, we saw that in the case of different actualizations of the same concept, where (*ex hypothesi*) there is *no* difference in the phenomenal content of the representations, empirical actuality is what distinguishes one actualization from another. We now see, however, that the difference between actualizations cannot be accounted for simply by the sheer “thisness” of the actual, but by the differing causal history of each actuality, which makes each “this” a singular “virtual multiplicity.” Since the singularity of this actuality is a function of its historical genesis, and since this empirical actuality is the basis of the multiplicity that is the a priori condition of concepts and of the sensory manifold, it follows that a priori conditions are themselves historical and a posteriori (see *F* 56, 59–60, 84, 114–116).

To a certain extent, Deleuze's position does not seem that far from Hegel's, since Hegel also wants to account for concrete actuality in terms of its historical genesis. The difference between the two thinkers lies in their different conceptions of historical development. For Hegel, development is a series of negations resulting in a synthesis, and so requires that each developmental factor be intrinsically or logically related to the others. In addition, for Hegel the result of the historical process is not simply a causal outcome; it is also the goal and reason for the entire process. Deleuze, by contrast, holds a completely non-teleological view of causation and of causal processes. A causal process involves the interaction of extrinsically related terms which produce an unforeseeable result. There is no final goal that regulates the process and which would make the relation between terms internal and the result foreseeable. Instead of logical necessity, causal geneses are governed by a mixture of the necessity of efficient causation and the contingent presence of causal factors. Genealogy thus stands opposed to any dialectical conception of history that would make particular events and processes subordinate to a teleological process and that would allow one to grasp the particular in terms of the universal.

Because it has a determinate content in virtue of its causal genesis, and because this genesis is not to be understood dialectically, empirical actuality is not the merely accidental and cognitively empty "this" given in immediate sensory intuition. It is not a mere sensation or sense datum. Although Deleuze's empiricism suggests we grasp empirical actuality through a non-conceptual "intuition" (see *B*, chapter 1), this "intuition" is not an immediate impression or feeling. On the other hand, it is not a recognition through the already known (the concept), the reduction of the new to the old, but an encounter with the not-yet-known, with the different and the new as such (*DR* 52–61, 376–384; *LS* 190–197, 208–211; *D* 92).²⁸ "Intuition" is a form of interpretative insight capable of relating an empirical actuality to its causal history or "genealogy" (see *N* 2, 6, 52f., 75, 91, 157f.; *F* 114–116), not according to an antecedently given schema or method, but creatively, in such a way that differences and singularities can be grasped in their uniqueness and positivity. In practice, that means using genealogy to grasp things and events not as new instances of an old rule, or as mere exceptions to the rule, but as new and contingent interactions between terms that have no intrinsic, conceptual connection (see *F* 21f., 36f., 78f.). "Intuition" is thus a complex process that is a goal of knowledge, not a starting point. It is the richest, not the poorest form of knowledge, and although it is capable of formalization, it does not try to reduce the singular to some combination of general rules that would make each actuality or event predictable in principle.²⁹ Yet it shares with the sensible a receptivity to what comes from "outside" thought's conceptual

determinations and is encountered only “after the fact.”³⁰ The empirical can be identified with the sensible, then, only if the sensible is not understood as a discrete given; but as the virtual multiplicity revealed in Deleuzian “intuition.”

The source for this aspect of Deleuze’s empiricism is Jean Wahl, notably Wahl’s *Vers le concret*.³¹ Against Hegel’s speculative identity of thought and being, Wahl counterposes a kind of empiricism, “defined by its affirmation of the non-deducibility of being” or “the irreducibility of being to knowing.” This is not the empiricism of Locke or Russell, in which being is taken to be a discrete “given” revealed in sensation, but the “meta-empirical empiricism” of the later Schelling, of Hamann, Whitehead and Marcel, all of whom, says Wahl, conceive of concrete being not as a construct out of the atoms of sensation, but as a totality “in which no element is absolutely transcendent to any other,” but rather penetrate and are immanent to each other. The elements of experience are thus themselves concrete particulars defined by their contingent and actual interrelations with other beings, rather than isolated atoms. Far from being “given,” concrete being is “a beyond through which knowledge has a meaning [*sens*], towards which it directs itself, from which it derives nourishment.” It is only in subordinating experience to the demands of language (expressibility) and of objective knowledge that the concrete particularities of existence appear to be empty: they are empty for conceptual thought, but not empty in *being*, which is *other* than thought. Wahl in fact follows Marcel in proposing a conceptless intuition of being through bodily feeling as the only genuine access to the real.³² Although Hegel would have considered this position to be equivalent to Jacobi’s doctrine of immediate intuitive knowledge,³³ and so as already surpassed in the System, Wahl protests that Hegel believes he has surpassed this “feeling of existing in the midst of things”³⁴ only because he reduces “reality in its thickness”³⁵ to the determinations of thought, rather than grasping its true nature as “an irrational and unthinkable unity.”³⁶

It is Deleuze’s great achievement to have rendered the richness of concrete being both rational and thinkable without conflating being with thought. Deleuzian intuition is not governed by concepts, and yet is still rational insofar as it tries to grasp empirical actuality through determinate causal processes. As Deleuze puts it: “Hegel wanted to ridicule pluralism, identifying it with a naive consciousness which would be happy to say ‘this, that, here, now,’ – like a child stuttering out its most humble needs. The pluralist idea that a thing has many meanings, the idea that there are many things and that one thing can be seen as ‘this and then that’ is philosophy’s greatest achievement, the conquest of the true concept, its maturity and not its renunciation or infancy” (N 4).

5. Conclusion: Consequences of transcendental empiricism

I hope I am being fair to Deleuze in suggesting that this account summarizes what is at issue in his “transcendental empiricism,” at least that part of it that wants to be a metaphysics. Deleuze does have a theory of perception and of meaning, about which I will say nothing here except that it is neither a theory of representation nor a causal theory of perception (see *LS*). Deleuzian empiricism has nothing to do with Locke. It is part of a tradition of *metaphysical* empiricism that runs from Jacobi through Bergson, which looks to the actuality of the empirical as a way out of Idealism, and whose theme is the priority of the a posteriori and the conditioned nature of conditions.

Still, one might ask whether Deleuze’s metaphysical empiricism makes any sense. Does Deleuze’s “non-conceptual difference” make a difference?

If Deleuze is offering another transcendental justification for the empirical sciences, the empirical sciences can get along perfectly well without it. But perhaps that is not what Deleuze is doing. Deleuze here and there describes his philosophy as an experiment, and invites us to try it out, to see how it works.³⁷ By that he means: does it let us do new things, better things than we did before? For Deleuze, “is a theory useful?” is *the* question, and usefulness does not consist in giving a “foundation” for certain practices which were engaged in before any such foundations were thought up, but in drawing out certain lessons from those practices that allow them to serve as exemplars or models for others, showing, through theory, what those practices allow us to do (how much or how little), and how. Or, on the other hand, a theory may be useful when it shows what certain practices, including theoretical and philosophical practices, prevent us from doing, or how these practices generate bad results. But neither the positive nor the critical function of theory has anything to do with “foundations.”

The question that remains to be answered, though, is: what are the consequences of transcendental empiricism? First and foremost, the consequences are political. For Deleuze, the Kantian language of laws and rules, of “obedience to a law one gives oneself,” and of the determination of the particular by the universal are just so many different forms of repression, “micro-fascisms,”³⁸ Stirner’s “policemen in the breast.”³⁹ The rule of the concept over empirical actuality is the rule of the old over the new, the subjection of singularity to the universal, and so a paradigm of “reaction” in every sense of the term, but particularly the political sense that would sacrifice the individual exception to the law, the State and the march of History. What is wrong with Idealism is that it suppresses creativity and spontaneity, not that it is not well founded, and not even, at least not primarily, that it cannot account for the phenomena, for perhaps it can, if

we are willing to pay a sufficiently high price. The point of French anti-Idealism has always been moral, or moral and political.

The moral political implications of transcendental empiricism are spelled out in the overtly political works Deleuze undertook in collaboration with Félix Guattari, most notably in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.⁴⁰ Whether transcendental empiricism is justified, then, depends on the extent to which it facilitates critical and positive moral and political practices, and whether those practices are themselves good. It is question of whether, for example, it facilitates anti-authoritarian practices, and whether we would be better off as individuals and as a society if such practices were followed. Deleuze thinks that there is a link between transcendental empiricism's ideal of intuiting empirical actualities as historically produced "virtual multiplicities" and a political practice which would not treat individuals either as instances of a rule or as deviations from it ("non-conformists," "marginals"), but would treat individuals and the differences between them in a positive way, in terms of the causal geneses that produced them. Far from celebrating marginality, Deleuze rejects the very concept of "marginality" as involving an essential dependence on a central norm or standard, and so as a merely negative kind of difference (see *D* 139), and asks us instead to focus on singularities, unique conjunctions of forces and circumstances that are capable of being designated by proper names (*D* 40, 51, 92, 120f.). These are the consequences of transcendental empiricism that would constitute its *raison d'être*.

Here, however, caution is needed. Some theorists, such as Richard Rorty, are sceptical that the political implications of abstract theorizing of the sort Deleuze offers can be made good. Not that philosophical theories have no political implications,⁴¹ but that ones that offer us new ways of describing ourselves should not be used as foundations for public policy choices.⁴² Rorty very much fears that letting go of the public/private distinction leads from the personal Romanticism of self-creation and *Bildung* to a dangerous political Romanticism that wants to build the world anew. The bloody consequences of taking this step over the line that separates personal from the political ideals form the essential subject matter of twentieth-century history, from Lenin to Mussolini to Hitler to Pol Pot to Khomeini.

Yet whether or not Rorty is right about the dangers of Romanticism, or even whether Deleuze's politics are accurately described as "Romantic" or utopian, this criticism is clearly inapplicable in Deleuze's case. Deleuze's political philosophy, to the extent that it is consistent with his transcendental empiricism, could not be the basis for institutions and universal norms, the forceful imposition of which has been the catastrophe of our century. Since Deleuze criticizes the supposed ontological supremacy of the concept and the Idea, his politics could hardly license yet another attempt to realize

the Idea, through violence, if necessary. It could only be the basis of a politics of positive individuality, a politics without norms or rules, that is, a form of individualist anarchism. Whether such a form of politics is viable or workable is another question. But it is just this question that would have to be answered to determine whether Deleuze's transcendental empiricism is really something worth *using*, rather than merely a theory which, however cogent or coherent, is interesting only as an object of study.

Notes

1. Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 54; hereafter cited parenthetically as *D*.
2. Vincent Descombes has said that Deleuze's philosophy is above all, post-Kantian, see Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 152. I would argue that insofar as Deleuze's empiricism is meant to meet the challenge of Hegel's critique of empiricism, it is "above all" post-Hegelian.
3. See Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), pp. 21–23, 36, 41, 48 and passim; hereafter given in parentheses as *DR*.
4. See Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 36; hereafter *EPS*. Originally published as *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression* (Paris: Minuit, 1968). References are to the English translation unless otherwise indicated.
5. See section 4 below.
6. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), A. I., "Sense-Certainty: Or the 'This' and 'Meaning'."
7. See *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1989), Book I, chapter 1, p. 82.
8. For Deleuze, as for Kant, "representation" presupposes identity, the sameness of what can be presented repeatedly. At the same time, the term "representation" contains an ambiguity. On the one hand, it refers to what is presented, and hence to the content of the representation as determined by the concept. On the other, it refers to a given, actual "representation," and hence to the actual instantiation of the concept in experience. See Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 8–9; originally published as *La Philosophie Critique de Kant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).
9. The set of clones of an organism might be an example of a discontinuous multiplicity.
10. Deleuze identifies four elements of the logic of the concept: 1) identity of form 2) analogy of relations 3) opposition of internal determinations or differentia and 4) resemblance of the determined object to its concept; *DR* 44–45. A Logic of difference would have to avoid or subvert all four elements (see *DR* 52).
11. See Gilles Deleuze, *Le Pli: Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), pp. 149–150; hereafter *L*. In Leibnizian "fluxions," "variables can exist without the

- relation and the relation without the variables: the relation is external to the variables, just as it is outside of the constant.”
12. Deleuze’s position in some ways recalls Bertrand Russell’s; see David Pears, *Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy* (New York: Vintage, 1967), chapter 10. Deleuze occasionally cites Russell; he may have been impressed by Jean Wahl’s treatment of Russell in *Les philosophies pluralistes d’Angleterre et d’Amérique* (Paris: Alcan, 1920), where Russell, along with other empiricists, is discussed chiefly as indicating ways in which “pluralism” can resist Hegel’s monism. For Deleuze, empiricism and pluralism are one and the same: “I am an empiricist, that is, a pluralist” (*D* vii).
 13. Deleuze refers to such banal conjunctions as “the glass is on the table” (*D* 55), in which the relation does not affect the being of the glass or the table, but he may have been inspired by such Surrealist conjunctions as “the surprising encounter between an operating table, a sewing machine and an umbrella” (Breton).
 14. On the theme of “the throw of the dice,” see Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (London: Athlone Press, 1983) pp. 25–29, hereafter cited as *N*; originally published as *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 29–33. See also Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 29–30, and Michel Foucault, “Theatrum Philosophicum,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 165–196.
 15. Deleuze has in mind Schelling’s doctrine of the primal ground (*Urgrund*) that is a non-ground (*Ungrund*) or abyss (*Abgrund*), which Schelling develops in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters* (1809), and which Heidegger discusses in his *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, or *The Essence of Grounds* (1929).
 16. This sort of language does not fail to arouse anxiety in some commentators, such as Gillian Rose, *The Dialectic of Nihilism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), chapter 6, “The New Bergsonism: Deleuze.” The title of the book expresses Rose’s orientation clearly enough, and calls to mind Lukačs’ rather frantic response to existentialism, *The Destruction of Reason* (1955); indeed, Rose warns us, in the most apocalyptic tone, that Deleuze and his ilk want nothing less than “the destruction of knowledge” (p. 1).
 17. See Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988); hereafter cited in parentheses as *B*.
 18. See Deleuze’s criticism of Hegel’s attempts to explain the concrete through the abstract in *Bergsonism*, p. 120n14 and p. 44: “...we are told that the One is already multiple, that Being passes into nonbeing and produces becoming... To Bergson, it seems that in this type of *dialectical* method, one begins with concepts that, like baggy clothes, are much too big... In such cases the real is recomposed with abstracts; but of what use is a dialectic that believes itself to be united with the real when it compensates for the inadequacy of a concept that is too broad or too general by invoking the opposite concept, which is no less broad and general? The singular will never be attained by correcting a generality with another generality.” See also *Différence et répétition* pp. 16, 73ff. and pp. 18–19: “Hegel substitutes the abstract relation of the particular to the concept in general for the true relation of the singular and the universal in the Idea... One must ask how Hegel betrays and denatures the immediate in

order to found his dialectic upon this misunderstanding, and introduce mediation in a movement which is nothing more than that of... the generalities of [his] thought.”

19. See also Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), pp. 190–197, 208–211, 300–302; hereafter *LS*.
20. See also Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand, foreword by Paul Bové (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), hereafter given as *F*, p. 60: Although Foucault analyses “*a priori* conditions under which all ideas are formulated and all behaviours displayed,” “Foucault differs in certain fundamental respects from Kant: the conditions are those of real experience... they are on the side of the object and the historical formation, not a universal subject (the *a priori* itself is historical)...”. For Deleuze, at any rate, Foucault is also a practitioner of Bergson’s “higher empiricism.”
21. Unconscious, but not unconsciousness, which, according to Deleuze, is an effect, something produced; see *D* 78.
22. Compare Sartre, “Jean Giradoux and the Philosophy of Aristotle,” in *Literary Essays*, trans. Annette Michelson (New York: Philosophical Library, c1955), p. 45: “an event [is]... the irruption of a new phenomenon whose very novelty exceeds all expectation and upsets [*bouleverse*] the order of concepts.” (Translation modified; see Sartre, *Situations I*, Collection “Idées” [Paris: Gallimard, 1975], p. 105).
23. See also Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988), pp. 67, 71, 76f., 93–96, 102–103; hereafter cited as *SPP*. Originally published as *Spinoza: Philosophie pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 1970; revised 1981).
24. In the same way that Kuhn and others have argued that observations are determined by the scientific practice to which they belong, a practice that is constituted by a certain vocabulary, according to which problems, phenomena and evidence are defined. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
25. Similarly, Deleuze argues that Spinoza’s God is coextensive with his expressions (modes), not a transcendent God that precedes and controls those expressions, or lies behind them; see *EPS* 81–82.
26. Translation altered. See also *EPS* 80 and *SPP* 94–97.
27. Deleuze, like Arthur Danto, is fond of Borges’ story of Pierre Ménard’s version of *Don Quixote*, which is word for word identical to Cervantes’ and yet, because it includes Cervantes’ version within its causal history, is different (and indeed, “infinitely richer”). See Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 33–37.
28. See Foucault, p. 194.
29. Deleuze does not develop the formal side of his theory, but refers to the work of mathematicians such as Riemann and Albert Lautman; I am sure that Deleuze would also feel an affinity for recent work on the theory of “chaos.”
30. See *SPP* 100f on the capacity to be affected, which is consciously experienced as sensibility, as openness to the outside.
31. (Paris: Vrin, 1932). See Deleuze, *D* 57–58: “Apart from Sartre, who remained caught none the less in the verb to be, the most important philosopher in France was Jean Wahl. He not only introduced us to an encounter with English and American thought [i.e., pluralist empiricism], but he had the ability to make us think, in French, things which were very new... .” The assertion of

the AND over against the IS, of multiplicity and difference over against identity, and of “the concrete richness of the sensible” over against abstract principles, these are the characteristics that Deleuze’s empiricism (see *D* 54–59) inherits from the empiricist “pluralism” of Wahl’s *Vers le concret* and his *Les philosophies pluralistes d’Angleterre et d’Amerique* (Paris: Alcan, 1920), which Deleuze cites at *DR* 81n. In fact, Deleuze was gracious enough to write, “The entire oeuvre of Jean Wahl is a profound meditation on difference; on empiricism’s possibilities to express poetic nature, free and wild; on the irreducibility of difference to the simple negative; on the *non-Hegelian* relations of affirmation and negation” (*DR* 81). Deleuze also cites *Vers le concret* at *L* 103nl and Wahl’s *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Rieder, 1929) at *N* 217n12 (original French, p. 180n2).

32. See *Vers le concret*, pp. 235–238.
33. See *Hegel’s Logic. Being Part One of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), §61–§70 (pp. 95–105).
34. *Vers le concret*, pp. 3–4n.
35. *Vers le concret*, p. 8.
36. *Vers le concret*, p. 238.
37. See *DR* 94, and “Intellectuals and Power,” a discussion with Michel Foucault, in Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, pp. 205–217.
38. The term was coined by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
39. See Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, trans. Steven Byington (London: Rebel Press, 1982); Deleuze cites this work in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, ch. 5, section 5.
40. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, volume two of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
41. Yet see Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 99, where he tries to minimize the connections between Nietzsche and Heidegger’s philosophies and their political convictions.
42. See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*, pp. 34, 83, 119.