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I am grateful that someone whose work I greatly admire could be the philosopher to so eloquently and succinctly cut to the heart of the problem that I posed in the previous issue of *Deleuze Studies*. James Williams’ critical reply leaves me, *prima facie*, confronted by a stark alternative: *either* I have misunderstood Deleuze, *or* I have illustrated problems and lacunae in Deleuze. I will suggest, however, that this is a false alternative, and that Williams’ and my divergent accounts of *The Logic of Sense* – and even Deleuze’s oeuvre as a whole – is better understood as a situation of ‘both/and’ rather than ‘either/or’, and hence that my interpretation of Deleuze isn’t wrong, but necessarily iconoclastic.

This is not to dispute that Williams has put forward a compelling interpretation of the work of Deleuze (both here and elsewhere), but if it can be said that my reading is mistaken at one level, let’s say on the level of authorial intention and in regard to the most charitable reading of some parts of some of Deleuze’s most important texts (particularly *Difference and Repetition*), I don’t think I am mistaken in maintaining that something like the hierarchical evaluative component I describe (e.g. in relation to the virtual and the actual, and myriad related polarities) persists in Deleuze’s work, despite the fact that the important doctrines of ontological univocity and asymmetrical reciprocal determination count against this. In this sense, I can agree with Williams when he observes that ‘Privilege one or the other and you have not understood your engine.’ But my suggestion would be that Deleuze *didn’t* understand his own engine from time to time (who amongst us consistently does?), and that while the contested term ‘priority’ ought to be understood neutrally by Deleuze as Williams argues, quite frequently something else is going on in his texts, which intermittently expresses itself (to greater or lesser extents), and which philosophers like Hallward, Badiou, and myself, have attempted to
thematised, albeit in quite different ways. Unlike Badiou, I do not think Deleuze is a philosopher of eternity or the One, although I do agree that there is, at times, a reification of the virtual in Deleuze. As for whether I share Badiou’s desire to discredit the appeal to the virtual entirely and speak instead of the univocity of the actual as a pure multiple, this depends upon one’s conception of the transcendental, which I certainly want to retain in some form, albeit of a more grounded variety – perhaps something like an historical *a priori* – than that which is instituted by Deleuze.

I think Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense* evinces a hierarchical evaluative tendency in many places, as is indicated in my essay. That said, Williams does have me rethinking my account of counter-actualisation somewhat, through the role he attributes to intensity as a kind of middle term between the virtual and the actual, although I don’t think that the many citations I make from Deleuze are thus all explained away. Nor am I sure about Williams’ equation of intensity with the surface and the related argument that the relevant opposition of *The Logic of Sense* is between depth and sense (height) rather than between depth and surface. While Williams is the expert in this regard, I also wonder how he explains Deleuze’s remarkable essay, ‘Michel Tournier and the World without Others’, where something like the virtual (or what Deleuze calls there, apparently equivalently, the ‘perverse-structure’ and the ‘pure surface’) is imagined as somehow instantiated, and a clear normative impetus is accorded to this world that has dispensed with what he calls the other-structure and its ‘relations of explication’. The other-structure is envisaged as organising and regulatory: as ‘imprisoning elements within the limits of bodies’ (Deleuze 2004: 351). Deleuze is even ‘tempted to conclude that bodies are but detours to the attainment of images’ (Deleuze 2004: 352) and he asks, ‘when we desire others, are not our desires brought to bear upon this expressed possible world which the Other wrongly envelops, instead of allowing it to float and fly above the world, developed into a glorious double?’ He intimates that perhaps, ‘the absence of the Other and the dissolution of its structure do not simply disorganise the world, but, on the contrary, open up a possibility of salvation’ (Deleuze 2004: 354). These are curious remarks that seem to add weight to my interpretation that there is a value judgment attached to this order of priority, rather than merely the neutral transcendental priority that describes a difference between processes, and I argue this in greater detail elsewhere (Reynolds 2008).

Nor is it that Deleuze is merely voicing the logics of Robinson Crusoe’s perversion as they are presented in Tournier’s novel. After all, *Difference*
and Repetition also refers to a leaving behind of the other-structure. And Deleuze again derives an intriguing ethico-political injunction from this: not to explicate oneself too much with the Other, and not to explicate the Other too much, but to ‘multiply one’s own world by populating it with all those expressed that do not exist apart from their expressions’ (Deleuze 1994: 260). On what basis then, does Deleuze derive his injunction to multiply these possible worlds, these \textit{a priori} expressed others that have not yet been explicated, developed, subsumed within the forestructures of our understanding and deprived of their difference? It seems that the transcendental condition (the other as expressive of a possible world) is simultaneously a moral injunction to maximise actual occurrences of such expressivity. The spirit of this injunction is roughly equivalent to that which accompanies his valorisation in \textit{Difference and Repetition} of the disruptive trauma of learning and apprenticeship (Deleuze 1994: 192) and his references to the child-player who can only win (Deleuze 1994: 116). I explore both these issues in another essay (Reynolds 2006), but I will return to them here because the fundamental \textit{differend} between Williams and I seems to concern the issue of ‘coping’.

But for the moment my question for Deleuze and Williams is a simple one: is the implied denunciation of relations of development and explication justified? After all, while relations of explication might come to domesticate the Other’s ‘otherness’ and to partially deprive them of their radical difference, as Deleuze suggests, it is also the case that they open up different and more diverse kinds of relations (kinds of intensity) that cannot be captured on this view that juxtaposes the relative purity of expressed ‘possible worlds’ that have no ties of allegiance (that is, the different and the new), against their shutting down and increased monotony in the world of identities. To put the problem another way, even if the condition for relations of explication (a quarrel, a revelation, anything that remains with the play of identities) is the other as possible world, it does not follow from this that we could or should live privileging this transcendental condition, or perhaps even the intensities and singularities that this condition makes possible. Indeed, while Deleuze himself repeatedly insists that there is reciprocal asymmetrical determination between the actual and the virtual (which means that neither legislates and draws up limits or rules for the other, whereby we might obtain clear moral rules about what should take place in the actual), in practice it seems to me that the virtual plays the determinative role in his injunction to multiply encounters with the expressivity of others. So, in response to Williams’ conclusion that as philosophers we should not be too worried about normativity, I actually
agree in a sense and I hope that I am no knight of good conscience, but my critical essays on Deleuze are meant to be immanent critiques of the intrusion of this surreptitious normative element in Deleuze’s own work.

But Williams’ final remarks also pose perhaps a more pointed challenge to my project, in that they call into question the value of a negative philosophical engagement with another thinker in this manner. I sometimes ask myself something like this question: Although I disagree with many of Deleuze’s positions, I do not dispute that he is a great philosopher, so why do I focus upon (or even misread, according to Williams) aspects of his work that merely trouble me? Is this petty procedure what a philosopher should do, living off the backs of other long-dead philosophers? I don’t think there is a simple answer to this question. I can point out in my own defence that this is done in the hope that it will illuminate my own creations on these lofty themes, particularly vis-à-vis time and transcendental philosophy, the interconnection of which serves to distinguish poststructuralist philosophy quite radically from much of what takes place in analytic philosophy. Nonetheless, Williams’ questions make prescient to me that we do have a different conception of philosophy, and that there is a sense in which mine remains more closely related to what Deleuze critiques as the model of judgment. After all, what I have been doing in various publications on Deleuze is to work through some of my intuitive concerns with Deleuze, and I mean intuitions in the standard non-Bergsonian sense.

Now various questions and objections might be raised about this modus operandi. If one is a Deleuzian about philosophical method then I am likely to be exposing little more than my own encrusted assumptions and prejudices, in short my subjective presuppositions. Another way of putting this might be to say that one inevitably finds what one is looking for, as in Heidegger’s version of the hermeneutic circle. Unlike Heidegger, however, Deleuze thinks that there is a way out of this dilemma, which is a version of both Meno’s paradox and the paradox of analysis. Meno’s paradox roughly states that if we know what we are looking for in advance, then when we find it we will merely confirm what we already knew; and yet if we do not know what we are looking for we will not know when we have found it and hence not know when to stop our enquiry. The paradox seems to suggest that the learning of something new is impossible, as is any kind of non-circular philosophical enquiry.
I think Williams and I agree that Meno’s paradox is misstated, but for different reasons. For both of us, I imagine, the problem with this conception revolves around the focus on knowledge (and the atomistic understanding of what knowledge consists in). I resist this understanding by turning to a phenomenology of the body as a way out from this paradigm, whereas the Deleuzian move is to see intensity as a way out. The latter route, though, depends upon a quite elaborate metaphysics in a way that the former does not. Roughly put it requires a metaphysics of difference and the new, along the lines enumerated by Deleuze in his descriptions of the interrelations between the virtual and actual. Moreover, I think it fair to say that on the latter route judgment is more maligned than on the former route, where it is ‘disciplined’ by embodied and practical concerns but not necessarily cast asunder. Of course, this phenomenological route has been criticised, too, by Deleuze and others, for remaining a form of doxa. That said, Deleuze’s engagement with Merleau-Ponty is insufficiently detailed to be convincing in this regard, but there is a minimal sense in which I think this is correct, as I have argued elsewhere (Reynolds and Roffe 2006). But the key question is whether doxa and common sense really ought to have nothing to do with philosophy at all, as Deleuze supposes. If we accept that conclusion, it would not merely be me, but most of us in academia, who are either pretending to be philosophers or being poor philosophers. I cannot justify this here but I find the Deleuzian critique of good and common sense hard to accept in its entirety, despite it being an amazingly powerful critical tool.

Vigilance about good and common sense is undoubtedly called for – this is perhaps what Merleau-Ponty advocates under the name ‘hyperdialectic’ – but it is not clear to me that we can (or should) understand the genuine philosophical pursuit as ultimately immured of these aspects as Deleuze does. Likewise, Deleuze’s positive understanding of philosophy as concept creation is also but one part of philosophy. Partly because of these metaphilosophical reservations, I am not convinced of the necessity for all of the metaphysical moves made in the Deleuzian philosophical system. Williams, however, has seen the necessity for the Deleuzian transcendental and metaphysical turn and I think that is what is at stake in his disagreement with me in regard to coping.

Williams not only shows the manner in which we need to understand intensity as a middle ground between virtuality and actuality, but he also tells us that intensity must be understood in disjunction from coping (or scarification in the terms of my Deleuze Studies paper), which on his view is a reactive rather than creative force and its teleological impetus
precludes new intensities and creative affirmations. I am still not totally convinced about the severity of this Deleuzian distinction between habit, skill acquisition, and learning – Deleuze and Bergson might argue that they involve differences in kind, but I see differences in degree – but I do see where Williams is coming from when he states:

> When has cultural context not involved creativity and novelty? When was learning from contact with others not a form of practical wisdom? When has embodiment been ‘given’ rather than undergone as a shifting experience of varying intensities? Only if you retain too much nostalgia for norms in your practice – and your account of the given – can you hold such views.

I am certainly prepared to accept that there is always some minimal creativity/change at work in any given environment, whether socially or naturalistically conceived. I should also add that I don’t maintain that embodiment is given in anything but a very minor sense. I know from my one-year-old daughter just how much we take for granted about ‘normal’ bodily motility when at one stage these activities were far from normal. All bodies – human and animal – have a minimal proprioceptive sense from the ‘beginning’ (i.e. the earliest stages of foetal life), that is, an unrefined positional awareness, which serves as the basis for the development of a body-schema, habits, and even intelligent skills and learning, as we seek to establish maximum grip, or optimal gestalt, with a given multiplicity. In a sense, Williams is right to say that adjustment towards one’s environment is the telos of learning and skill acquisition on this view, but this does not necessarily precludes change and transformation, indeed our skills must be flexible enough so as to respond to difference. It is even arguable that it is only with certain abilities and capacities made possible by the body-schema and the acquisition of habits and skills that one can be truly attentive to the singularities that present themselves.

But this is not the view of Deleuze (or Williams) whose models of intensity are the trauma of apprenticeship and the experience of disequilibrium and discontinuity. Williams states that coping is ‘always an illusion given the gradual degradation and hope for an end implied by the term’. These are strong words. In his view, coping is an illusion, a phenomenological illusion that covers over deeper intensities. Even if this were so, I’m not sure in what sense coping can be said to be an illusion unless we understand the virtual alone as real, something that Williams would not want to do. Equally strongly, Williams also contends that any philosophy that pays attention to this experiential phenomena is irremediably nostalgic. Against this view, I hold that this
embodied maintenance of intentional arcs is a fundamental part of both human and animal existence, even if transcendental arguments can be mounted to show that there is a neutral order of priority that conditions it. Am I nostalgically invoking the myth of the given in insisting on the value and importance of this embodied ‘coping’ or ‘l’habitude’? I don’t think so. It may enact a form of ‘presentism’ in that one responds to circumstances with a view to optimal gestalt, but I don’t see why it is incurably nostalgic. Moreover, I do not, of course, want to maintain that it exhausts the dimensions of human life, or life per se. Indeed, much of my work insists on the co-imbrication of these two tendencies – equilibria and disequilibria – and is hence meant to be a corrective to what I take to be the Deleuzian view that downplays the centrality of habits, coping, and the acquisition of skills to both learning and to ethics/counter-actualisation (the embodied phronesis I talk of is based on the specificities of the human body-schema and the feedback mechanisms it makes possible).

I suspect that there is something akin to a \textit{differend} here between my still too phenomenological account and a Deleuzo-Bergsonian response which might pose the following questions about my apparent reification of actual proprioception and what it means for animal organisms: What about embryology? What are the conditions of actualisation of bodies? Do we not need reference to the virtual? I cannot satisfactorily address these questions here, but there is certainly an important difference between a phenomenological and a more metaphysical account of intensities (and the virtual) working with the variabilities of an environment to produce bodies. If this is so, what separates Williams and I is less the desire for some series of rational or ethical norms, but, as he discusses in regard to Deleuze and David Lewis in \textit{The Transversal Thought of Gilles Deleuze}, the differences between two kinds of pragmatism. Rather than align myself with Lewis, the relevant contrast is perhaps better exemplified in terms of the differences between a metaphysical and experiential pragmatism of the Bergsonian variety, and a more mundane pragmatist view which sees ‘know how’ as more fundamental than ‘knowing that’, with all of the various consequences that this entails. Indeed, despite the admiration that William James consistently expressed for Bergson, there is a sense in which Bergson was right to be wary of James’ declarations of intellectual kinship and to insist on the differences between their respective philosophies. It seems to me that some similar differences are at work between James Williams and myself. The fact remains that some aspects of
the Deleuzian metaphysical leap are not yet ones that I have seen the necessity of taking, either intellectually or experientially.

References


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