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HUME AND CONTINENTAL  
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The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations  
– David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1.4.6.4; SBN 253)

Hume is one of the greatest philosophers in the English language, so it is no surprise that his work has had a profound influence upon the Anglo-American tradition in philosophy. When one surveys the work of continental philosophers, on the other hand, references to Hume are much less common, and those one does find are often quite critical of Hume. If one looks just under the surface, however, and especially if one looks to the post-Kantian tradition and its continuing response to problems Hume left in his wake, then one will quickly find that Hume's influence upon continental philosophy is far-reaching. A key aspect of the post-Kantian response to Hume, and one that begins with Kant himself, concerns what it means for the mind to be "a kind of theatre." What is the space that is the mind, and what is the relationship between the content that successively appears in the mind? Beginning with Kant's critique of Hume, and especially with his example of the incongruence of the right hand with its image in the mirror, we will set the stage for showing how a broad swath of work in continental philosophy can be seen as continuing the conversation Kant began with Hume. Moreover, it will be argued here that a common strategy among continental philosophers, beginning with Husserl, will be to return to Hume to assist in the development of their own philosophical projects. The following chapter will show how two key founding figures in continental philosophy – Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl – and three important philosophers who were influenced by Husserl and Bergson – Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gilles Deleuze – were influenced by Hume. By showing how such critical figures in continental philosophy are continuing to develop the implications of a problem that Hume brought to our attention, it should become clear that a fuller understanding of continental philosophy will require returning to the work of Hume.

**Kant and Hume**

As is well known, Hume's philosophy led Kant to reconsider his philosophical presuppositions. As Kant put it, "David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my

dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction” (Kant 1950: 8). In particular, Hume challenged Kant’s long-held belief that there is a fundamental, necessary connection between a cause and its effect, and that this connection is rationally justified. Hume “demonstrated irrefutably,” Kant admits, “that it was perfectly impossible for reason to think *a priori* and by means of concepts such a combination, for it implies necessity” (Kant 1950: 5). The problem concerns the origin of the concept of causal necessity, or the origin that accounts for the synthesis that connects causal elements, and a synthesis and connection that possesses, as Kant puts it, “an inner truth, independent of all experience. . . . This was Hume’s problem” (ibid.: 7). As Kant will famously state this problem, the question is whether or not synthetic *a priori* judgments are possible.<sup>1</sup> For Hume, the answer is no, and for Kant, the answer is yes.

The key for Kant is to offer an account of a synthesis that is neither a conceptual or logical synthesis (such as when one says all unmarried men are bachelors) nor is it an empirical, *a posteriori* synthesis (such as when one asserts that the African elephant has larger ears than the Asian elephant). Many within the continental tradition will also attempt to demonstrate the possibility of a synthesis that is neither logical nor empirical, but is, rather, as Kant himself will describe it, genetic. To set the stage for this effort, let us turn to an important example Kant uses to justify his project that will recur in the work of Bergson and Deleuze – the example of the paradox of incongruent counterparts. As Kant formulates the paradox, it would seem that

if two things are quite equal in all respects as much as can be ascertained by all means possible, quantitatively and qualitatively, it must follow that the one can in all cases and under all circumstances replace the other, and this substitution would not occasion the least perceptible difference.

(Kant 1950: 33)

In other words, if we begin with the assumption that two entities share all the same extensive properties, and thus apparently exhaust “all means possible” whereby we can differentiate one entity from another, then it would seem that one entity could be substituted for another. This is not the case, however, and Kant offers his famous example to illustrate this point. If I take my right hand and take its image as reflected in a mirror, I cannot substitute the image in the mirror for my right hand, “for if this is a right hand,” Kant claims, then “that in the glass is a left one,” and a “left hand cannot be enclosed in the same bounds as the right one (they are not congruent)” (ibid.). What this example illustrates, for Kant, is that what we see of the hand is not the object as it really is. As Kant states it, what we have in this example are “not representations of things as they are in themselves . . . but sensuous intuitions, that is, appearances whose possibility rests upon the relation of certain things unknown in themselves to something else, namely, to our sensibility” (ibid.: 33–34). In short, for Kant it is space, as “the form of the external intuition of this sensibility,” that accounts for this difference between the appearances of the right hand and this same hand’s image in a mirror, and this difference “cannot be made intelligible by any concept, but only by the relation to the right and the left hands which immediately refers to intuition” (ibid.: 34). The spatial form of sensibility, therefore, is not itself an object represented through intuition, but the very form of sensibility itself, and this sensibility itself, as Kant noted, is in turn related to “certain things unknown in themselves” (ibid.: 34).

What the sensibility gives us, therefore, is mere appearances, and these, Kant argues, “are based upon a thing in itself, though we know not this thing as it is in itself but only know its appearances” (ibid.: 62). We cannot know the right hand as it is in itself, for this same hand in the mirror is incongruent with the actual hand even though all the extensive properties which

exhaust the manner in which we ascertain and conceptually determine the hand are the same. The conclusion Kant draws is that knowledge itself presupposes a relationship between sensibility and “certain things unknown in themselves,” and it is this relationship which provides for Kant a genetic account of “the origin of knowledge itself.” Knowledge thus presupposes, for Kant, a synthetic process whereby appearances come to be combined in the form of judgments. The syntheses that make these judgments possible, however, are not derived from experience, as Kant argues against Hume, nor are they logical and conceptual. Instead, they presuppose the genetic relation of the sensibility to certain things unknown in themselves, which includes for Kant the “pure concepts of the understanding.” With this move, Kant believes he has resolved the Humean problem that awoke him from his dogmatic slumber. What Kant recognized was “a completely reversed mode of connection” between the understanding and experience in that for Kant, unlike Hume, the pure concepts of the understanding “do not derive from experience, but experience derives from them.”<sup>2</sup>

A central problem that will occupy much of the work that has been done in continental philosophy will be precisely that of demonstrating the role played by synthetic processes that are neither processes of logical and/or conceptual determination nor processes of empirical or psychological synthesis. The point of Kant’s example of the right hand’s image in the mirror was to show that determination in terms of extensive properties and qualities is insufficient in accounting for all differences, such as the difference between left hand and right hand. Kant turned to a non-conceptual sensibility and its *a priori* form of space to account for the difference between the two hands. The relationship between this sensibility and the pure concepts of the understanding makes possible the judgments regarding the appearances of experience. Within the continental tradition as well, a central concern is to account for the possibility of the extensive properties and qualities that constitute the content of our judgments. Two nearly exact contemporaries (both born in 1859) will set the stage for much of the work that will occur in twentieth-century continental philosophy – Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl. What is of crucial concern to both of them is to provide an account of the syntheses that make knowledge possible. Both Bergson and Husserl argue that Kant ultimately failed to provide a sufficient account of the processes that allow for the possibility of judgments regarding experience, and in setting forth their criticisms of Kant return to Hume.

### Bergson

Bergson’s initial reaction to Hume appears to be largely critical, and it largely reprises Kant’s critique. In short, Bergson argues that impressions are what need to be explained rather than presupposed. More to the point, he claims that “the truth is that this independent image [impression] is a late and artificial product of the mind” (Bergson 1988: 165). It was only because Hume assumed that the impression of a cause is distinct and independent of the impression of an effect that he was able to generate the problem of causality, the problem of showing how these two independent entities are necessarily connected. By turning instead to an account of the mind of which these impressions are “a late and artificial product,” Bergson believes he is able, along with Kant, to resolve the problem of causality as Hume bequeathed it to posterity.

Before lumping Bergson into the post-Kantian camp, however, we must first note that Bergson is equally critical of Kant, and he turns to the right/left hand example to make his case. On the one hand, Bergson recognizes that Kant was right to note that the example of the right hand in the mirror demonstrates the inadequacy of conceptual determination – that is, the identification and differentiation of entities in terms of their extensive properties and qualities. For Bergson, “we cannot give a proper definition of right and left” if this entails a conceptual definition

that involves a set of extensive properties and qualities. For Bergson, however, the very possibility of making a conceptual distinction presupposes “clean-cut distinctions and a kind of externality of the concepts or their symbols with regard to one another, . . . [and thus] the faculty of abstraction already implies the intuition of a homogeneous medium” (Bergson 2001: 97). Kant, Bergson argues, will also presuppose this conception of space as a “homogeneous medium,” a “space separated from its contents,” as Bergson puts it.

For Bergson, by contrast, space is not a homogeneous medium but what he will call a “pure heterogeneity” (Bergson 2001: 104). It is at this point where we find a similarity between Bergson and Hume.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Bergson also confronts the problem of accounting for how something new and different can arise out of the repetition of identical elements. As Hume states the problem, “’tis certain that this repetition of similar objects in similar situations produces nothing new either in these objects, or in any external body” (T 1.3.14.18). And yet when one perceives a necessary connection between two objects, one is perceiving something new, and thus the problem is to show how this is possible. Similarly for Bergson: he asks whether, “when the regular oscillations of the pendulum make us sleepy, is it the last sound heard, the last movement perceived, which produces the effect?” (ibid.: 105). If each of the oscillations, each of the ticks of the clock, is the same, then why is it the last one which produces the effect of sleepiness rather than the first? How did something new and different arise out of the repetition of the same?

Bergson also adopts a Humean solution to this problem. For Hume, it is indeed the case that “the several resembling instances, which give rise to the idea of power, have no influence on each other, and can never produce any new quality in the object,” but it is nonetheless the case, Hume argues, that “the observation of this resemblance produces a new impression in the mind, which is its [the idea of necessary connexion’s] real model” (T 1.2.14.20). The idea of a necessary connection is thus the result of a reflection on the impression of the easy transition the mind makes when, through habit, it comes to expect B upon being given A. It is therefore in the mind where we can account for the emergence of something new out of the repetition of identical instances. For Bergson, likewise, the emergence of something novel is to be accounted for by the mind, and thus while we cannot account for the effect of sleepiness by virtue of any determinate difference between the oscillations of the pendulum, “we must admit that the sounds combined with one another and acted, not by their quantity as quantity, but by the quality which their quantity exhibited, i.e. by the rhythmic organization of the whole” (ibid.: 105–106). In other words, what is perceived, Bergson argues, is not a quantitative effect that results from a composition of distinct, independent oscillations, but rather what Bergson calls an “intensive magnitude” or “pure duration” that “consciousness perceives” (ibid.: 106). The novel effect is a consequence of the mind, or it is, Bergson claims, “nothing else but the melting of states of consciousness into one another, and the gradual growth of the ego” (ibid.: 107).

It is at this point where Bergson’s approach breaks with the one Hume takes, for although Bergson can be seen to adopt a Humean solution to the problem of novelty, Hume’s solution does not go far enough. Bergson argues that it fails to account for the emergence of distinct, independent entities themselves, an emergence that arises for Bergson from the continuity of pure duration. The “capital error” of associationism, Bergson claims, “is that it substitutes for this continuity of becoming, which is the living reality, a discontinuous multiplicity of elements, inert and juxtaposed” (Bergson 1988: 134). What Hume in effect does is to think of the mind in terms of an abstract, homogeneous space, the empty stage upon which distinct impressions and ideas strut and fret their fitful hours. Bergson argues instead that the mind is not a homogeneous space upon which the already determined and determinate appears but is “unceasing creation, the un-interrupted upsurge of novelty,” and this continuity and upsurge of novelty is only

“dissociated” (to use Bergson’s term) into distinct, abstract elements “for the greater convenience of practical life” (ibid.: 164). In contrast to Hume’s empiricism, therefore, Bergson offers what he takes to be the “true empiricism” which attempts “to get as near to the original itself as possible, to search deeply into its life, and so, by a kind of intellectual auscultation, to feel the throbbings of its soul; and this true empiricism is the true metaphysics” (Bergson 1999: 36–37). Rather than chart, measure, and quantify (using Bayesian analysis, for instance) the evidence of experience as given to us through our sense impressions, Bergson proposes developing an intuition of what he calls the absolute, or reality as continuous “upsurge of novelty,” a freedom irreducible to any form of lawful determinism; it is thus the intuition of this absolute that is for Bergson simultaneously a true empiricism and a true metaphysics. As an illustration of this shift towards true empiricism he is calling for, Bergson claims that the

absolute is synonymous with perfection. Were all the photographs of a town, taken from all possible points of view, to go on indefinitely completing one another, they would never be equivalent to the solid town in which we walk about.

(Bergson 1999: 22)

The solid town is the absolute and the photographs taken of this town, no matter how exhaustive, will nonetheless never exhaust the reality that is the town, and it is this reality that is the condition for the possibility of understanding distinct, determinate existents (e.g. photographs) rather than the town itself being understood by way of distinct, determinate realities, as Bergson believes Hume does.

In the end, Bergson argues that Kant and Hume are two sides of the same coin. Despite their efforts to provide an explanation for the beliefs and judgments we arrive at, they both ultimately adopt a view of space as homogeneous medium, and a medium that is passive and neutral with respect to the distinct, successive entities that occur in this homogenous space. In doing this, both Hume and Kant fail to think the real as the free, creative upsurge of novelty, the pure heterogeneity that gives rise to the reality of distinct, successive entities.

### Husserl

In contrast to Bergson, Bergson’s contemporary Husserl draws much more fruitfully from Hume. Husserl’s Humean influence, moreover, is arguably one of the key touchstones for subsequent generations of continental philosophers. Husserl is quite forthright in his praise for Hume, announcing in his *Formal and Transcendental Logic* that “Hume’s greatness . . . [is] still unrecognized in this, its most important aspect, [which] lies in the fact that . . . he was the first to grasp the universal *concrete problem* of transcendental philosophy” (ibid.). This concrete problem, as Husserl understands it, consists of exploring “a transcendental subjectivizing, which is not merely compatible with genuine Objectivity but is the a priori other side of genuine Objectivity” (ibid.). In other words, the problem for Hume, and for Husserl as he takes up the *concrete problem* of transcendental philosophy, is to show how the very nature of the objective itself as objective is made possible by the constitutive conditions of the subject. The “Objective itself,” as Husserl summarizes Hume’s position, is “itself a product of that concreteness,” by which Husserl means the “concreteness of purely egological internality” (ibid.). In short, Hume is the first to have outlined what Husserl calls “constitutional problems,” in that Hume set out to understand the constitutive conditions for the very contents of our conscious experience. We can trace this influence more clearly and begin to see where Husserl breaks with Hume by turning to Husserl’s reading of Hume’s section on abstract ideas from the *Treatise*.

In the *Treatise*, Hume argues, *contra* Berkeley, that abstract ideas are more than simply individual ideas that are “annex’d to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification” (T 1.1.7.1). For Hume, an abstract idea arises through an association of ideas, most notably through resemblance, whereby the word that is “annex’d” to this idea revives a custom and habit. While it may perhaps be imperfect in its extension, this idea is nonetheless suitable for the “purposes of life” (T 1.1.7.7). For Husserl, however, Hume has not gone far enough in addressing the constitutional problem but simply leaves us with “particular individual ideas and their attendant habits” (Husserl 1969: 260). In short, Hume leaves us with a psychologistic account of abstract ideas whereby they are explained in terms of certain psychological and behavioral facts. We can thus trace to Hume the roots of the psychologism that Husserl sought to overcome through the development of his phenomenological method. It was this same psychologism that led Gottlob Frege to develop his highly influential distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (*sense* and *reference*).<sup>4</sup> The prevalence of psychologism in Husserl’s day led him to claim that “one can perhaps even say that Hume has never been more influential than he is now” (Husserl 1970: 419).

For Husserl, the fundamental mistake that kept Hume, and his psychologistic successors, from fully developing the implications of the constitutional problem with respect to abstract ideas is the failure to distinguish between an appearance and that which it is an appearance of – or, in Husserl’s terminology, between the intentional content of consciousness and the intentional object this consciousness is a consciousness of. For Hume, Husserl argues, the “appearance and the apparent phenomenon coalesce” (Husserl 1970: 409). By turning to an analysis of the intentional syntheses of consciousness, an analysis Hume did not pursue, Husserl is able to distinguish between the manner in which a consciousness is determined in a particular way and the object that is the object of this consciousness.

This brings us to the core of Husserl’s phenomenological approach. Unlike Hume, who assumes the already-constituted givenness of the data of experience, the impressions that conflate both “the appearance and the apparent phenomena,” and unlike Kant, who presupposes the already constituted givenness of the formal categories of the understanding, Husserl, by contrast, argues for the necessary synthesis and constitution of these givens within and through the intentionality of consciousness itself. For Husserl, therefore, the phenomenological method consists of unpacking the givens of all aspects of experience, which entails an “unraveling of the intentionalities involved . . . [an] uncovering of the ‘multiplicities’ in which the ‘unity’ becomes constituted” (Husserl 1969: 262). Among the multiplicity of intentionalities that are synthesized into a unity are the various ways in which the consciousness is determined as well as the ways in which the object itself is presented. These intentional syntheses are in turn guided in their constitutive process toward unification by the fact, for Husserl, that there is an ego-pole which assures that the various consciousnesses are consciousnesses of one pure ego, and an object-pole which assures that the various presentations of the object are presentations of a unitary object. In other words, for Husserl there is a pure transcendental ego or ego-pole that assures that the multiplicity of consciousnesses will become unified as the unity of a particular ego, and the object-pole does the same for the unity of objects themselves. It was on this point where Jean-Paul Sartre famously broke with Husserl when, in *Transcendence of the Ego*, he in essence invoked the Humean challenge of accounting for the constitutive conditions of every identity by criticizing Husserl for presupposing the identity of the pure ego.

### Sartre

Sartre’s philosophical project can be seen as a continuing response to Hume’s constitutional problem. In his first important philosophical work, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre takes

up the Humean challenge and argues that Husserl's pure transcendental ego is unnecessary. As Sartre argues, "For our part, we readily acknowledge the existence of a constituting consciousness," but why, Sartre adds, "is not this psychic and psycho-physical *me* enough? Need one double it with a transcendental I, a structure of absolute consciousness?" (Sartre 1960: 36). In short, the question for Sartre is whether we must call upon the identity of a pure transcendental ego rather than simply drawing from what is given through psycho-physical processes. Sartre's answer to his own rhetorical questions is that no, we do not need this doubled I and can do perfectly well with a "transcendental field [that] becomes impersonal; or, if you like, 'pre-personal,' *without an I*" (ibid.) Like Bergson, we do not have a homogenous space upon which identities roam but rather have a dynamic field which is the condition for the identities that come to be conditioned by this field – hence the field is impersonal or 'pre-personal' in that it is the very constitutive condition for the identity of personhood. Sartre begins to draw the implications of this move to an impersonal field in *Being and Nothingness*.

At an important juncture in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre calls upon Hume as he lays out his concept of the For-itself and In-itself and thus develops the implications of a constituting consciousness that presupposes an impersonal, transcendental field rather than, as Husserl does, an already constituted and individuated pure ego (the ego-pole) or an already constituted object (object-pole). Initially Sartre's use of Hume appears to be as a foil with which to contrast his own position. For example, Sartre argues that the association theory "is accompanied by a monistic conception to the effect that being everywhere is being-in-itself," and thus for Hume, "one can at will examine any impression, strong or weak [and yet] one will never find anything in it but itself so that any connection or a consequent . . . remains unintelligible" (Sartre 1956: 190). In other words, by dissolving the world into the atoms of impressions and ideas that are simply in themselves and without connection or relation to other impressions and ideas, Hume in effect removes the possibility of there being a relationship between impressions whereby one can be for another, or being-for-itself as Sartre understands it.<sup>5</sup> This criticism of Hume largely repeats Bergson's criticism, which faulted Hume for beginning with impressions which are, in fact, simply "a late and artificial product of the mind." Sartre, however, does not follow Bergson and endorse the notion that the mind is a continuous upsurge of novelty and that discrete, extensive differences are simply effects or abstractions derived from practical necessity. Sartre criticizes Bergson's approach and argues that Bergson unjustly ignores the fact that time is "a dissolving force" as much as a source of unity. It is the dissolving force of time that Hume recognized, Sartre claims, and with this comes a very Humean problem – namely, how to account for the unity of time if time is nothing but the passage of discrete instants. If A is prior to B, and if A and B are distinct, then how do we account for time such that B is before A (for instance)? If A and B are truly distinct beings, Sartre claims, then "it is impossible to establish between them the slightest connection of succession" (ibid.).

To address the Humean problem of accounting for how unity can arise out of a diversity of distinct elements, Sartre attempts, in a manner Deleuze will largely follow, to embrace both continuity *à la* Bergson and discrete elements *à la* Hume. This entails admitting, Sartre argues, that it is essential for there to be something that is both indistinguishable from two distinct elements – e.g. B is indistinguishable from A and C – while at the same time A and C remain distinct. Sartre admits that this would be the way one must go "but," he asks, "how can such a being exist?" (ibid.: 193). Sartre's answer is that it is the very nature of the For-itself to exist in this way, "to be what it is not and not to be what it is" (ibid.: 116). The nature of consciousness is to be what it is not – the objects it is consciousness of – and it is consciousness in the mode of not being these objects. The For-itself is thus indistinguishable from A and C for it is not an ego or I distinct from A and C but is simply the consciousness of A and C respectively. At the

same time, A and C remain distinct for the For-itself is consciousness of A and C in the mode of not being A and C. There is thus a fundamental nihilation associated with the For-itself, and this in turn gives rise to what Sartre calls a “quasi-multiplicity” in that the “rising into being [of the For-itself] as the nihilation of the In-itself constitutes itself simultaneously in all the possible dimensions of nihilation.” The For-itself, in other words, is not predisposed or predetermined by any identity for it is in the very nature of the For-itself “to be what it is not and not to be what it is.” Thus the nihilations of the For-itself range a quasi-multiplicity. The For-itself, Sartre concludes, “is diasporatic,” for it involves at once both “profound cohesion and dispersion” (ibid.: 195). It is this diasporatic nature of the For-itself that allows Sartre to resolve the Humean problem of accounting for unity out of a multiplicity of discrete elements while at the same time avoiding the dissolution of this unity into a diversity of discrete elements. Deleuze, as we will see, will also employ a concept of multiplicity that is neither reducible to being a collection of discrete elements nor is it a unity that reduces the multiplicity to being simply the unity of one nature or type. Deleuze’s concept of multiplicity is also used, as it was for Sartre, to address the Humean problem as we have laid it out here. Before turning to discuss the influence of Hume on Deleuze, let us briefly examine the influence of Hume on Merleau-Ponty.

### Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty’s work extends Sartre’s effort to push phenomenology beyond Husserl’s reliance upon a pure transcendental ego and towards an impersonal transcendental field. For Merleau-Ponty, however, Sartre’s understanding of our conscious lives was too abstract, and this left him unable to fully explicate the varied phenomena of conscious life. To remedy this situation, Merleau-Ponty begins with a phenomenological analysis of perception.

Merleau-Ponty shares with Sartre the Humean desire to lay bare the constitutive processes of conscious life in a way that does not presuppose something that in turn requires a constitutive explanation. Merleau-Ponty best typifies what is important about both Hume and Husserl for his own work when he argues that

we may hold with Husserl that Hume went, in intention, further than anyone in radical reflection, since he genuinely tried to take us back to those phenomena of which we have experience, on the hither side of any formation of ideas, – even though he went on to dissect and emasculate this experience.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 220)

Merleau-Ponty thus echoes both Kant’s and Bergson’s critique of Hume and rejects Hume’s assumption that impressions, which serve as the “hither side of any formation of ideas,” do not themselves require a constitutive explanation. Unlike Bergson, however, and more in line with Kant and Sartre, Merleau-Ponty argues for a constitutive difference in order to account for the content of conscious experience. For Kant, as we saw, this constitutive difference is the difference between the sensibility and that which remains unknown, a difference that Kant accounts for by way of the noumenal thing that remains unknown and the pure concepts of the understanding whereby the representations of this unknown come to be known. Under the influence of Husserl, however, both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty will criticize Kant’s presupposed noumenal entities and pure concepts of the understanding, arguing, along Humean lines, that they themselves require a constitutive explanation. Merleau-Ponty likewise accepts Sartre’s criticism of Husserl’s pure transcendental ego and his call for a constitutive difference on an impersonal transcendental field; however, Merleau-Ponty rejects the constitutive difference Sartre claims is fundamental – namely,



the difference between the For-itself and the In-itself. What Merleau-Ponty finds problematic in Sartre's approach is that the difference Sartre calls for is simply a binary opposition which repeats the problems that befell Descartes' mind-body dualism – in short, if mind and body are fundamentally different, then how do they relate? In the case of Sartre, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "From the moment that I conceive of myself as negativity [For-itself] and the world as positivity [In-itself], there is no longer any interaction" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 52).

For Merleau-Ponty, the constitutive difference that is on the "hither side of any formation of ideas" is the difference between figure and ground. This will remain a constant theme in Merleau-Ponty's work. Early in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty argues that when

when Gestalt theory informs us that a figure on a background is the simplest sense-given available to us, we reply that this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception. . . . It is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be perception at all.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 4)

Nearly 20 years later, and in the notes to his unpublished manuscript, Merleau-Ponty wrote: "To be conscious = to have a figure on a ground – one cannot go back any further" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 191). For Merleau-Ponty, what this entails is that perception involves a fundamental paradox of immanence and transcendence: "Immanence because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given" (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 16). In a late essay, "Eye and Mind," this paradoxical nature of perception will be referred to as depth, "our participation in a Being without restriction" (ibid.: 173), and a participation whereby "there really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen" (ibid.: 167).

To clarify Merleau-Ponty's point, and set the stage for Deleuze's Humean critique of phenomenology, we can turn to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of hallucination. For one who is not suffering from hallucinations, Merleau-Ponty argues that

the perceived world is not only my world, but the one in which I see the behavior of other people take shape for their behavior equally aims at this world, which is the correlative not only of my consciousness, but of any consciousness which I can possibly encounter.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 338)

And in this world, moreover, Merleau-Ponty adds that "the experiences of other people or those which await me if I change my position merely develop what is suggested by the horizons of my present experience, *and add nothing to it*" (ibid., emphasis added). As I sit here and look around, I see the furniture and people before me from my particular perspective, though each person, in their experience, sees one another from yet another perspective, and one I could take up if I were to move to their location; and yet none of these perspectives adds anything to what is not already "suggested by the horizons of my present experience." My present experience, therefore, is full, or it implies more than that which is actually given. "I am," Merleau-Ponty adds, "in present communication with a consummate fullness [that] 'tolerates' nothing more than is written or foreshadowed in my perception" (ibid.: 338–339). It is this "consummate fullness" of our ordinary perceptual experience that is lacking, however, in cases of hallucination. For someone suffering a hallucination, the phenomena of their experience, Merleau-Ponty argues,

“is not part of the world, that is to say, it is not accessible, there is no definite path [that] leads from [hallucinatory experience] to all the remaining experiences of the deluded subject” (ibid.: 339). In the shared world of normal experience, I can take up someone else’s perception, for it is the “consummate fullness” of this world that is shared and my behavior as well as the behavior of others “aims at this world.” In a hallucinatory experience, we discover that this is not an experience we can share. The person suffering from delusion, therefore, lives in an impoverished world rather than a world of consummate fullness. Within a delusional experience, the “hallucinatory thing,” Merleau-Ponty claims, “is not, like the real thing, a form of being with depth” (ibid.). To suffer from hallucinations, therefore, is to be deprived of the fullness and depth of the proper world of perceptual experience.

### Deleuze

We can now turn to Deleuze’s Humean critique of phenomenology. Put simply, by calling upon a fundamental depth, a ground that is never figure but forever prefigures that which comes to be perceived, Deleuze argues that constitutive processes come in the end to be contained and pre-viewed by a fundamental *Urdoxa*, or what Deleuze, following Merleau-Ponty’s own use of the term, calls a fundamental opinion that already contains and predetermines the possibilities that may arise. Rather than a true constitutive difference, we thus have a constitutive template, an organizing set of parameters that “tolerates,” as Merleau-Ponty argued, “nothing more than is written or foreshadowed in my perception” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 338–339). The philosophical problem that motivates Deleuze is precisely to account for rather than presuppose an organizing, systemic template, an *Urdoxa*. Deleuze thus extends the Humean problematic that has been so influential among the central figures of continental philosophy. As Deleuze states in his early book on Hume, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, the problem is to explain how a multiplicity of ideas can “become a system” (Deleuze 1991: 22). More precisely,

the problem is as follows: how can a subject transcending the given be constituted in the given? . . . [or how can the] subject who invents and believes [be] constituted inside the given in such a way that it makes the given itself a synthesis and a system.  
(ibid.: 86–87)

The problem for Deleuze is precisely the problem we saw in Bergson and Hume as they sought to account for the emergence of something novel or new on the basis of the repetition of the same – or, the problem of accounting in terms of the given for that which transcends the given. Rather than presuppose, as Merleau-Ponty does, a systemic horizon or *Urdoxa* that serves as the ground that is never figure and yet prefigures all that comes to be, Deleuze adopts the Humean problem of attempting to understand the very emergence of systemic unity itself. The response to this problem will be the overarching task of much of Deleuze’s philosophical writings, including what he wrote with Félix Guattari.

In his effort to account for the constitutive difference that provides the reasons for identity, systematic unity, etc., and in a way that does not presuppose either the identity that is constituted or a transcendent identity to which this difference is subordinate, Deleuze turns to Hume. In what is arguably Deleuze’s most important philosophical work, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze brings Hume in at a critical point in his argument. Moreover, Deleuze brings in Hume in precisely the same way Bergson does – namely, in order to account for the emergence of something novel or new out of the repetition of that which stays the same. The first line of the second chapter from *Difference and Repetition* reads: “Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated,



but does change something in the mind which contemplates it” (Deleuze 1994: 70). Thus, when A appears and we expect B, Deleuze notes that the expectation is “by no means a memory, nor indeed an operation of the understanding,” but it is a synthesis which “contracts the successive independent instants into one another, thereby constituting the lived, or living, present” (ibid.). Deleuze will refer to this synthesis as “passive synthesis,” arguing that while it is “constitutive it is not, for all that active. It is not carried out by the mind, but occurs in the mind which contemplates, prior to all memory and all reflection” (ibid.: 71).

What, then, is the place where the passive synthesis occurs? Is it a kind of theater, and a theater that serves as a homogeneous medium upon which successive states make their appearance? Deleuze does imply that this is precisely the type of theater Hume has in mind, the homogeneous space upon which “successive independent instants” appear and come to be contracted into habits by way of passive synthesis. For Deleuze, by contrast, this theater is what he will call a plane of immanence, by which he means an intensive field of pre-individual singularities and differences that are the sufficient reason for the determinate, distinct individuals that come to be identified. What is crucial here is that for Deleuze, like Bergson, the conditions that make possible the determinate, extensive properties and qualities are not themselves extensive and determinate but are rather intensive and indeterminate; or, as Deleuze argues, difference is inexplicable:

It is not surprising that, strictly speaking, difference should be ‘inexplicable.’ Difference is explicated, but in systems in which it tends to be cancelled. . . . It [difference] is cancelled in so far as it is drawn outside itself, in extensity and in the quality which fills that extensity. However, difference creates both this extensity and this quality.

(ibid.: 228)

In contrast to Bergson and more in keeping with Sartre’s project, Deleuze argues for the importance of a fundamental, constitutive difference rather than call upon fundamental continuity or absolute as Bergson does. The key move in Deleuze’s argument is the concept of multiplicity, understood by Deleuze to be a substance that is irreducible to extensive, determinate properties and qualities. By making this move, Deleuze is also able to avoid the Humean problem that beset Kant – the problem of accounting for the validity of synthetic *a priori* propositions. Rather than presupposing the reality of distinct, determinate existents that then give rise to the problem of how these distinct entities enter into necessary relations, Deleuze argues for the indeterminate substance or multiplicity as the sufficient reason for the emergence of determinate existence itself. In other words, by turning to the concept of multiplicity, Deleuze attempts to account for the constitutive conditions of determinate, individuated reality itself in a way that does not presuppose any predetermining identity or unity (such as Merleau-Ponty’s *Urdoxa*).

So, how does Deleuze arrive at this concept? The first step is to set up an infinite series. For example, in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze argues that “every phenomenon refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned” (ibid.: 228). That is, every determinate phenomenon in the end presupposes a multiplicity for it involves “a system [that] is constituted or bounded by at least two heterogeneous series. . . . [of which] each is itself composed of heterogeneous terms, subtended by heterogeneous series which form so many sub-phenomena” (ibid.), and so on *ad infinitum*. Deleuze refers to the heterogeneous series that is presupposed by every determinate phenomena as intensity. “Intensity,” Deleuze claims, “is the form of difference in so far as this is the reason of the sensible.” Deleuze further clarifies this point:

Every intensity is differential, by itself a difference. Every intensity is  $E - E'$ , where E itself refers to an  $e - e'$ , and  $e$  to  $\epsilon - \epsilon'$  etc.: each intensity is already a coupling (in



which each element of the couple refers in turn to couples of elements of another order), thereby revealing the properly qualitative content of quantity. We call this state of infinitely doubled difference which resonates to infinity disparity. Disparity – in other words, difference or intensity (difference of intensity) – is the sufficient reason of all phenomena, the condition of that which appears.

(ibid.)

We can clarify Deleuze's point in this passage by turning to Deleuze's book on Leibniz, a book he wrote nearly 25 years after *Difference and Repetition*. In this book, Deleuze finds an ally in Leibniz's philosophy as Deleuze continues to set out to reassert his claim that every determinate phenomenon presupposes an infinite series – or disparity. For example, with “the color green,” Deleuze argues, “yellow and blue can surely be perceived, but if their perception vanishes by dint of progressive diminution, they enter into a differential relation (db/dy)” (Deleuze 1993: 88). The color green, in other words, presupposes the differential relation of blue and yellow, db/dy, and yet, as Deleuze continues, “nothing impedes either yellow or blue, each on its own account, from being already determined by the differential relation of the two colors that we cannot detect” (ibid.). And so on *in infinitum*. Deleuze will thus take up Bergson's critique of Kant and Hume and do so by bringing into play the notion of an infinitesimal, intensive difference that is not to be confused with any extensive property or quality. It is precisely the multiplicity of intensive, pre-individual singularities that is the sufficient reason for determinate extensive properties as the intensive difference is “cancelled.” In contrast to Bergson, however, and drawing from Hume, Deleuze continues to assert that multiplicity is not a continuum, a continuous upsurge of novelty as Bergson put it, but is a multiplicity of pre-individual singularities or infinitesimal differences; or, drawing from Sartre, Deleuze will refer to this as an impersonal, transcendental field.

As he pursues his philosophical project, beginning with his 1953 book on Hume and ending with his essay “Immanence: a Life,” Deleuze continues to work through the Humean problem of accounting for how a determinate, objective entity, along with its extensive properties and qualities, can be understood in a way that does not presuppose that which in turn requires an explanation. Since Kant's initial response to Hume, a key approach to this problem is to call upon a constitutive difference that is presupposed by the distinct, independent entities that are being accounted for. Subsequent philosophers within the continental tradition, as we have seen, have each attempted to remain true to the spirit of Hume's effort to offer an account of the constitutive conditions for the phenomena of the human mind while at the same time being cognizant of Kant's critical response to Hume. Bergson argues that both Hume's and Kant's conception of space as the homogeneous medium upon which independent entities manifest their extensive properties and qualities fails to address the problem of showing how such independent entities come to be in the first place. Husserl further develops what he sees as the constitutional problem that Hume was the first to recognize, and he argues that Kant did not reach the true transcendental conditions which are, for Husserl, the constitutive processes of a pure transcendental ego and its noematic correlates. Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty extend the Humean concern with the constitutional problem by challenging Husserl's very notion of the pure transcendental ego. Deleuze, finally, draws explicitly and even more thoroughly upon the work of Hume and attempts to push the constitutional analysis to the point whereby a constitutive difference, or multiplicity for Deleuze, is the sufficient reason for all determinate phenomena. It would take us too far afield at this point to explicate the full details of Deleuze's project, but it should be clear at this point that Hume has cast a shadow that figures prominently across the continental tradition in philosophy.

## Notes

- 1 Ibid., p. 23 (4: 275): “The real problem upon which all depends, when expressed with scholastic precision, is therefore: ‘How are synthetic propositions *a priori* possible?’”
- 2 Ibid., 60 (4: 313)
- 3 Bergson does not explicitly draw from the work of Hume, though the similarities are quite clear and continental philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze will make the connections between Hume and Bergson explicit (as we will see below).
- 4 It is well known that Husserl and Frege corresponded about each other’s work in the philosophy of mathematics, and for good reason given their shared interest in overcoming psychologism.
- 5 This was William James’ criticism of Hume as well. In his arguments for radical empiricism, James faulted Hume for being unable to account for causal connections because relationships and connections were always subordinate to the reality of impressions, or to the In-itself, to use Sartre’s terminology.

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