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Deleuze and Derrida: Difference and the Power of the Negative

Description

The first scholarly comparative analysis of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze's philosophies of difference.

Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze are best known for their respective attempts to theoretically formulate non-dialectical conceptions of difference. Now, for the first time, Vernon W. Cisney brings you a scholarly analysis of their contrasting concepts of difference.

Cisney distinguishes their conceptions of difference by differentiating them on the basis of the criticisms they level against Hegel, as well as their valorisations of Nietzsche, and the ways in which they understand Nietzsche's thought to surpass that of Hegel. The contrast between the two, Cisney argues, is that while Deleuze formulates an affirmative conception of difference, Derrida's *différance* amounts to an irresolvable negativity.

Keywords

Deleuze, Derrida, Continental Philosophy, Post-structuralism, Difference

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Chapter I

The Question

If one were to crystallise twentieth-century continental philosophy into a single problem, it would be the 'problem of difference'. The demand to think a concept of difference and differences that is not subordinate to a primary conception of identity, but would be constitutive of those given identities, is evident in Heidegger's 'ontico-ontological difference' and in his later '*dif-ferenz*', Merleau-Ponty's chiasmatic notion of 'flesh', Levinas's 'face of the other', Foucault's 'thought of the outside', Irigaray's 'sexual difference', Butler's 'gender performativity', and Lyotard's 'differ-end'. These point to the ubiquitous sense in twentieth-century continental thought that, across all domains – ontological, ethical, social, political, and so on – our efforts to think the nature of things will always be short-circuited by the same self-enclosed, representational categories by which we attempt to think them in the first place. When confined to only what things have in common, thought cannot get at the heart of what makes them singular, what John Duns Scotus called 'haecceity', or the 'thisness' of a thing. To truly think the nature of the thing, thought must reach to the constitutive conditions of those identities, and to the differences and relations between those identities.

The 'problem of difference' is that difference and relation necessarily elude the stasis of representational thought, which traditionally seeks to fix borders around conceptual content, thereby halting the passages between various concepts. In order to truly think difference, then, it must be conceptualised on its own terms, constrained neither by the logic of identity, nor, consequently, by the requirements of a standard philosophical concept. It must not be thought as a merely empirical relation between given things, nor should it be conceived in the Hegelian manner as a diametrically opposed contradiction which, by virtue of its bipolar

and reciprocal nature, would ultimately unite dialectically into a higher, homeostatic identity. The 'philosophy of difference' is the designation for the philosophical response to this problem.

Standing out in this tradition are Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida, who address the problem of difference directly, formulating their own explicit conceptions, respectively 'difference in itself' and '*différance*'. While other philosophers are frequently occupied with questions of difference in specific contexts (ethical, epistemic, subjective, sexual, etc.), Deleuze and Derrida grapple with difference 'itself'. Hence, we can say, in a sense that I shall have to define and defend in what follows, that their conceptions of difference operate at the level of the ontological. Theirs are rigorous engagements with questions of being and time, identity, force, and meaning, across the history of Western metaphysics – spanning from Heraclitus and Parmenides to Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger – and culminating in original and highly unique conceptions of difference constructed to engender the thinking of the impossible: the conditions of identity and thought themselves. It is to Derrida and Deleuze that Vincent Descombes refers when he speaks of the 'remarkable point of modern metaphysics which all preceding discourse had indicated like a flickering compass', calling the philosophy of difference the 'crux' of contemporary French philosophy.¹ The aim of the present book is to articulate the fundamental distinction between the philosophical conceptions of difference as formulated in the works of Derrida and Deleuze.

Given their shared desire to formulate non-dialectical, non-Hegelian conceptions of difference, we might, with some justification, suspect that Deleuze and Derrida have the same or very similar conceptions of difference. In what little textual dialogue occurs between Derrida and Deleuze, it seems as though they themselves would agree with this assessment. While I cannot agree entirely with Jeffrey Nealon's conviction that 'Deleuze and Derrida so scrupulously avoided writing about each other's work',² it is certainly the case that they address each other only rarely; and almost always in laudatory ways. On the event of Deleuze's death, Derrida famously cited the 'experience of a closeness or of a nearly total affinity' with Deleuze with respect to the thesis 'concerning an irreducible difference in opposition to dialectical opposition', later adding that, 'one day, I would like to try to provide an account of such an agreement in regard to philosophic "content. . .".'³ On occasions when they point to differences between them at all, the differences are typically brushed aside as merely stylistic or methodological. Derrida cites disparities in 'what I would call – lacking any better term – the "gesture," the "strategy," the "manner" of writing, of speaking, of reading perhaps'.⁴ Deleuze also cites Derrida in an affirming way on a number of occasions, and appears to emphasise

their differences as strictly methodological: 'As for the method of textual deconstruction, I know what it is, and I admire it, but it has nothing to do with my own method.'⁵ Given these expressed affinities, and given their obvious similarities in formulating productive, constitutive concepts of difference, one might suspect that I am attempting to forge distinctions where there are none.

On the contrary, I shall demonstrate that these methodological differences are rooted in deeper conceptual tensions between the two thinkers, and precisely at the point on which they may seem most completely to converge – their conceptions of difference. While this claim will have to be defended in what follows, there is sufficient evidence, even at the surface level of their comments, to warrant the investigation. Just moments after fondly recalling the 'nearly total affinity' he shared with Deleuze, Derrida qualifies this affinity with a hesitation: 'even if I happened to grumble a bit . . . about the idea that philosophy consists in "creating" concepts',⁶ noting elsewhere that 'deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order'.⁷ While Derrida treats this grumbling as a trifle, we must note that Deleuze's understanding of philosophy as concept-creation is not a minor or peripheral element of his thinking but one of the defining principles that pervades the entirety of his thought.⁸ Likewise, just after professing his admiration for deconstruction, Deleuze relegates it to one among many practices of 'textual commentary', a characterisation that Derrida would almost certainly reject.⁹ Moreover, Deleuze (with Guattari) famously claimed that 'the death of metaphysics or the overcoming of philosophy has never been a problem for us: it is just tiresome, idle chatter',¹⁰ no doubt with deconstruction in mind. Thus, there are philosophical tensions between the two, sufficient to warrant this inquiry.

The landscape of work dedicated to comparing and contrasting these two figures has been somewhat sparse, especially considering their shared philosophical heritages, milieus, and concerns. In 2001, John Protevi writes, 'Although Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze are the leading philosophers of French post-structuralism, very little has been done to compare their work on common issues.'¹¹ Since that time, the situation has changed somewhat. Besides Protevi's book, there has been the groundbreaking edited collection by Protevi and Paul Patton,¹² Jeffrey Bell's *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos*, an edited collection by Gabriele Schwab,¹³ and in French, Sergeant's *Deleuze, Derrida: Du danger de penser*. Besides these, there have been a handful of works dedicated to themes or other figures, or to contemporary French philosophy in a broad sense, in which discussions of Derrida and Deleuze are prominent.¹⁴

From this body of work, there have been two major strategies for

differentiating the philosophies of Derrida and Deleuze. The first is the systems-oriented approach, which distinguishes them on the basis of their respective conceptions of systems and systematicity. The major proponents of this approach are Jeffrey A. Bell and John Protevi. In *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos*, Bell distinguishes Derrida and Deleuze by arguing that, for Derrida, 'the very identity of a system presupposes . . . a fundamental difference that prevents the system from ever attaining any sense of completion or closure'. This fundamental difference is the condition of the system, and the system is its 'effects', but in its constitutive play this difference also continually destabilises the system. For Deleuze, by contrast, 'what is implicitly developed is the notion of a fundamental both/and or difference that is inseparable from dynamic systems that are at the "edge of chaos"'.¹⁵ For Derrida, systems are always both constituted and subverted by a rupture or difference which prevents their completion, while for Deleuze, systems, while ever in flux and always open to the force of the outside, are nevertheless, in their own way, whole. This open completeness entails that the system itself, as a nexus of relations, informs and modifies the relations by which it is constituted, and affords Deleuze's thinking with a dynamism that is denied of Derrida's, according to Bell, in so far as Derrida understands the system as a mere 'effect' of its *differance*.

Similarly, in his *Political Physics*, John Protevi argues that 'deconstruction is top-down: starting with claims of bodies politic to natural and simple identity it shows *differance* or its cousins worrying and shaking those pretensions and thus opening those inhabiting that body to the critical claims of the call of the other in the democracy to come'.¹⁶ Beginning from the self-contained 'presence' of phenomenological consciousness, Derrida's analyses consistently demonstrate the contamination of the 'I' by the 'not-I', exposing the play of forces out of which both are constituted. Nevertheless, this 'force' itself remains, for Derrida, unthinkable and in his terms 'mystical'. So, Protevi argues, while Derrida's thought is effective in destabilising the presumed finality and completion of given political systems, its capacities are almost exclusively critical. Contrary to this 'top-down' approach, Deleuze's thinking is 'bottom-up', demonstrating the material, historical forces by which bodies politic are produced. Hence, Deleuze's thinking is also critical, in that it illustrates the ways in which present systems have come to emerge, but it is better equipped than deconstruction to point to positive alternatives and 'avenues for nuanced pragmatic intervention and experimental production of immanent and democratic bodies politic'.¹⁷ What Protevi and Bell hold in common is that they distinguish the philosophies of Derrida and Deleuze on the basis of their understandings of systems.

The other major strategy by which the two figures are most often

distinguished is through their respective views on immanence and its relation to transcendence. While Deleuze remains committed through the entirety of his professional career to the principle that philosophy must be rooted in immanence and must abolish all transcendent modes of measure and evaluation, Derrida is much more comfortable overall with the language of transcendence, even if it is a transcendence always constituted within the immanence of the phenomenological subject. This is evident through a number of different emphases between the two philosophers. First, while Derrida cuts his philosophical teeth on Husserl and Heidegger, culminating in 1967's *Voice and Phenomenon* where he formulates the strategies that will occupy him for the remainder of his life, Deleuze maintains a comfortable distance from the phenomenological tradition and its emphasis on subjectivity, critiquing (with Guattari) the tradition for turning immanence into an immanence 'to' a consciousness, thereby reinstating a transcendence in the breach between the plane of immanence and the subjectivity by whom it is cognised.¹⁸ Second, while Deleuze retains the Kantian language of the 'transcendental', seeking a 'transcendental empiricism' to think 'not the conditions of all possible experience . . . but the conditions of real experience',¹⁹ Derrida famously characterises his concepts as 'ultra-transcendental',²⁰ where 'the condition of possibility of those effects is simultaneously . . . the condition of their impossibility'.²¹ Third, while Deleuze seeks to think being *as* difference, a concept wherein 'being is said of becoming, identity of that which is different, the one of the multiple, etc.',²² Derrida's 'difference is older than Being itself' and 'still more unthought than the difference between Being and beings'.²³ Finally, in their respective engagements with theological language and thinkers, Deleuze is aligned most closely with the tradition of univocity, and hence, immanence and affirmation – stemming from the Stoics, Lucretius, Duns Scotus, Spinoza, and Nietzsche – in which being 'is said in turn *in a single and same sense*'²⁴ of all of which it is said. For Derrida, on the other hand, given that '*differance* is not',²⁵ his operations and strategies 'resemble those of negative theology'²⁶ or apophatic mysticism, which attempts to secure the absolute transcendence of the divine by way of the negation of any positive characteristics one would ascribe thereto. In each of these cases, Deleuze's allegiances fall more on the side of uncompromising immanence, while Derrida is more immersed in a certain experience of transcendence. One of the early and major proponents of this transcendence/immanence distinction is Giorgio Agamben, who traces two distinct lines in contemporary continental thought: a line of transcendence extending from Kant, through Husserl and Heidegger to Levinas and Derrida, and a line of immanence extending from Spinoza, through Nietzsche and Heidegger to Deleuze and Foucault.²⁷ Daniel W.

Smith has also argued quite effectively for this reading,²⁸ while Leonard Lawlor rejects the transcendence/immanence distinction, arguing instead that ‘both are philosophers of immanence’, and that ‘there is only a formal difference between Deleuze’s thought and [Derrida’s]’, stemming from the single point of their respective concepts of ‘simulacra’.²⁹

My reading is deeply indebted to these major strategies, and to the excellent analyses by those who have both articulated and critiqued them. Nevertheless, what these two strategies share is that they operate primarily at the macrocosmic, aggregate level, focusing on large-scale questions of commitment with respect to the concept of the whole or the system. In a certain sense, the transcendence/immanence distinction is a variation of the system-oriented distinction: is it possible to think the inside of systems without also looking outside, toward the beyond of the system? My aim, on the other hand, is microcosmic. Given that Derrida and Deleuze are both thinkers of the minute, elemental, constitutive force – that is, difference – by which systems are constituted, given that this is their shared, express task, especially salient in their 1960s texts, my question is: is there a difference between them at the microcosmic level? Are their conceptions of difference *different*?

The response I shall defend in what follows is that there is indeed a distinction in their conceptions of difference, that this distinction is deep and undeniable, and that it factors into everything else that separates the two thinkers. To state my thesis clearly – for Deleuze, difference is understood as pure affirmation and relationality, while for Derrida, difference is always formulated in terms of a fundamental negative, rupture, or breach. *Différance*, for Derrida, is always a ‘not’, a conflictuality that he calls in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ a ‘transcendental violence’,³⁰ while for Deleuze, the ‘not’ is a secondary ‘epiphenomenon’³¹ that indeed makes itself felt in the ‘bloody and cruel’³² movement of human history and experience, but is not a fundamentally constitutive or definitive aspect of being itself. This difference marks the two thinkers from Deleuze’s emphasis on immanence to Derrida’s experience of transcendence, from Deleuze’s ‘bottom-up’ ‘constructivism’³³ to Derrida’s ‘top-down’ ‘deconstruction’, from Deleuze’s notion of being as ‘full positivity and pure affirmation’³⁴ to Derrida’s ‘cinder [or ash, *cendre*] as the house of being’,³⁵ and in countless other minute ways.

My strategy will be to differentiate Derrida and Deleuze on the basis of specific decisions they make in their interpretations of key moments in the history of philosophy. It is true that Derrida and Deleuze are both uniquely preoccupied with differing primary groups of thinkers. Derrida focuses much of his philosophical effort, especially early on, with unorthodox readings of ‘the three H’s’³⁶ of French philosophical orthodoxy

– Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. Deleuze, on the contrary, refers to phenomenology as ‘our modern scholasticism’,³⁷ and ‘wrote his first book on Hume . . . as if he wanted to add a fourth “H” of his own to the list’,³⁸ and in his other published writings turned to a multitude of other heterodox figures, such as Bergson, Lucretius, and Spinoza, in whom he found a ‘secret link . . . constituted by their critique of negativity, their cultivation of joy, the hatred of interiority, the externality of forces and relations, the denunciation of power . . . and so on’.³⁹ Nevertheless, despite these differing influences and objects of philosophical engagement, when it comes to the question of difference, the distinction between Derrida and Deleuze is most evident in the shared triumvirate of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Deleuze and Derrida will each reject the Hegelian understanding of difference. Likewise, each will reject a crucial aspect of Heidegger’s important and influential reading of Nietzsche, thereby valorising Nietzsche as contributing to a post-Hegelian conception of difference. But at each of these three points, their reasons for these commitments differ, and it is in these differing commitments that their respective conceptions of difference emerge.

In this book

The next chapter, Chapter 2, constitutes the second part of the introduction, in which I ground the question of difference in the history of philosophy. I do this by characterising the history of philosophy as the thought of the centre, where the ‘centre’ functions as a kernel or kernels of identity and stasis that have traditionally anchored some aspect of Western thought. I then show that the question of difference has operated throughout the history of philosophy, in so far as that history has frequently vacillated toward and away from that emphasis on the centre. This movement culminates in the nineteenth century, bookended as it is with Hegel’s efforts at the most comprehensive and systematic centring in the history of philosophy, and Nietzsche’s radically Dionysian and Heraclitean decentring. I then conclude with Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician, predicated upon three specific critical points: (1) that the will to power is to be understood in a substantialist way; (2) its essence is understood as the ever-expanding desire for more power, which relies upon the securing of the power it has gained; (3) that this amounts to a reversal of the binary terms of the metaphysical tradition, but that in so far as it reverses, it remains enchained to what it reverses.

Part 2 of the book, consisting of Chapters 3, 4 and 5, looks at the ways in which Derrida and Deleuze engage with and critique the philosophy

of Hegel. In Chapter 3, 'The Two Pillars of Deconstruction', I isolate what I understand to be the two guiding impulses of Derrida's project: (1) the closure of Western metaphysics as embodied in the philosophy of Hegel, making impossible any would-be radical anti-Hegelianism, according to Derrida; (2) Heidegger's critique of ontotheology – that Heidegger demonstrated throughout the history of Western metaphysics the commitment to privilege *presence* in both its temporal and spatial senses – this too reaches its apogee in Hegel's system, with his notion of the *Aufhebung*. But in critiquing Hegel, Heidegger also points toward a constitutive absence or difference that the *Aufhebung* ignores, while also falling prey to the ontotheological impulse himself. Hegel, and Heidegger after him, posit difference only in order to ultimately cancel it out in the name of presence or primordially. The question for Derrida will be, then, how to think beyond the system when the system has already thought all that can be thought?

In Chapter 4, 'Deleuze and Hegelian Difference', I look at three specific criticisms of the negative, Hegelian notion of difference as offered by Deleuze. The first is that the concept of negation is in fact *less than*, which is to say, *less profound than*, the concept of difference that Deleuze is looking for – things must *differ* before they can be *opposed*. The second is that the impulse to conceive of difference in terms of the negative derives from a nihilistic spirit of *ressentiment*, that sees negativity at the heart of being itself, and is incapable of thinking being *except* in terms of its negative relations with others. Finally, Deleuze critiques the *Aufhebung* on the grounds that its *difference* is ultimately overcome, and that, in each case, *this* difference is only constituted *as* this difference, precisely because it *will be* overcome.

In Chapter 5, 'The Tremendous Power of the Negative', I examine the different understandings of the concept of 'force' as found in the writings of Hegel, Derrida, and Deleuze, as it is here that the distinction between Derrida and Deleuze becomes salient. For all three figures, force acts as the constitutive and genetic conditions that make thinking possible. Both Derrida and Deleuze critique Hegel on the basis that his conception entails the harmonious balance of two opposed but equiposed forces, subsisting in a homeostatic relationship. The very concept of force is bound up with the notion of difference in quantity. But the difference between Derrida and Deleuze is that, where Derrida understands this imbalance as essentially oppositional, Deleuze does not. This distinction has further implications. Where Derrida, like Hegel, understands forces as operating in specific, interdependent relationships, for Deleuze forces can potentially interact with any other forces (even if they do not do so in fact). For Derrida, forces are conflictual, and hence conflictuality resides

at the heart of being; while for Deleuze, conflictuality or cooperation are predicated upon the fundamental fact of difference itself. For Derrida, Hegel's concept of difference is *almost* right – it is right in the sense that it is oppositional, but it is *wrong* in assuming a counterbalance of specific relations. This is why, as we will see in Chapter 3, deconstruction seeks merely the *displacement* of, not the escape from, the Hegelian system. It seeks to unleash the power of a *negativity so negative* that it can no longer be assimilated beneath the traditional definition of the negative. For Deleuze, Hegel's negative concept of difference is the enemy, the antithesis of life and of philosophy.

While Part II was primarily critical, Part III aims to articulate the positive conceptions of difference for Derrida and Deleuze. Where Hegel is the touchstone for Part II, Nietzsche, read through the lenses of Heidegger, serves as the touchstone for Part III, which consists of Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Both Derrida and Deleuze understand a certain Nietzscheanism as the key to thinking difference beyond Hegelian trappings, and both reject Heidegger's famous reading of Nietzsche, but they do so for different reasons.

Chapter 6 is titled 'Traces and Ashes', and weaves a thread through Husserlian time-consciousness and Freud's understanding of the trace, to Nietzsche's emphasis on truth as a mobile army of metaphor and metonymy. Husserl's phenomenology provides the contemporary and most impassioned defence of the interiority of consciousness as the guarantor of presence. Through his deconstruction of Husserl's 'living present', Derrida exposes the thought of the 'trace', as the imprint of the other in the ipseity of the same, the structural possibility of repetition itself. This thought is prefigured in the works of Freud and Nietzsche, who first undertook the radical deconstruction of consciousness. But of these two thinkers, Freud remains committed to a notion of the trace as, in some senses, unerasable, and hence, he remains bound up in the metaphysics of presence. Nietzsche, on the other hand, liberates the signifier from any pretence to truth or being. Thus, Derrida rejects the first of Heidegger's criticisms, denying the substantiality of will to power, and thus denying that Nietzsche is in any way carrying out an ontology. The trace, constituted by the oppositional play of *differance*, is the mark of its other. It is only ever understood as the trace of other, absent traces, and is, hence, akin to ashes and ghosts.

In Chapter 7, 'Deleuze, Plato's Reversal, and Eternal Return', I show that for Deleuze, the reversal of Platonism does not affect from the outside a simple binary structure, but rather liberates a suppressed third term in the Platonic paradigm, that of the *simulacrum*. Where the copy (the icon) is for Plato predicated upon its internal *resemblance* to the model (the

eidos), the simulacrum is understood only in terms of its internal *difference*. This internal difference is the difference at the heart of being that allows one to think the *thisness* of the thing. Against Aristotle's analogical understanding of being, Deleuze posits, with John Duns Scotus, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, the univocity of being. This thought finds its fullest expression in Nietzsche's notion of eternal return, according to Deleuze. I highlight three specific aspects of eternal return, according to Deleuze: (1) the affirmation of chance with no fresh, 'transcendent' injections thereof; (2) the disjunctive synthesis – understood as the affirmation of impossibility; (3) the selective heartbeat of time that casts out the self-identical and the negative in the constitution of the 'same' as a play of the different. Eternal return makes it possible to think being as a multiplicity, a purely differential and purely relational field of pre-individual singularities and intensities.

In Chapter 8, 'Derrida, Deleuze, and Difference', I look more closely at the ways in which Deleuze and Derrida reject aspects of Heidegger's Nietzsche reading. Point by point, I show that Deleuze rejects each of Heidegger's criticisms. He *accepts* that Nietzsche is in fact an ontological thinker, but denies that this entails a substantiality to the will to power. Deleuze formulates his understanding of being as purely relational. Deleuze rejects that there is an isolable *as such* to the will to power, because the will to power, according to Deleuze, is *essentially* multiple. Finally, he rejects that the reversal merely inverts a binary relation, because for Deleuze, to cast the Platonic tradition as binary is to overlook the suppressed term of the simulacrum. Derrida, on the other hand, *accepts* that *if* Nietzsche is carrying out an ontology, the rest of Heidegger's criticisms would prevail against Nietzsche. Instead, Derrida rejects the claim that Nietzsche is doing an ontology at all. Nietzsche, instead, is attentive to the *production* of sense, and this production takes place by way of the interval-creation that occurs as a result of the oppositional play of forces, pressing outwardly against each other. For Deleuze, the constitutions of difference are positive and relational, while for Derrida they are negative and oppositional, understood only in terms of *what they are not*.

Part IV focuses on the implications of the book's discoveries. Given that the question of the nature of philosophy is raised throughout Chapter 8, this becomes the explicit object of Chapter 9, titled 'Deconstruction vs. Constructivism'. While Deleuze embraces the characterisation of philosophy as ontology, Derrida explicitly rejects the language of ontology, and consistently gives very good reasons for doing so. To address the *nature* of philosophy for these two thinkers, my analysis focuses on two specific *origins*, both of which are arguably formative for Derrida and Deleuze: Plato and Husserl. From Plato, I take the motivation from the *Republic*

that the philosopher is the one who actively disrupts the *doxa* – the prevailing ‘common sense’ opinions of her day – in pursuit of the ‘fundamental’. Understanding this fundamental in the broadest sense possible, I characterise it with the term ‘being’, and therefore, the pursuit of this fundamental I define as ‘ontology’. From Husserl, I take the emphasis on the *epoché* as the reduction of being to the sphere of sense, which opens up the structure of temporalisation, in light of which I perform a phenomenological analysis of the consciousness of time. From this analysis, I derive a differential structure at the very heart of the present itself, on the basis of which I posit that philosophy for Derrida and Deleuze is differential ontology. Using terminology from Eugen Fink, I then characterise Derrida’s project as a negative differential ontology, while Deleuze’s is understood as a positive differential ontology.

Finally, in Chapter 10, ‘Conclusion(s)’, I further clarify and defend my thesis by: (1) distinguishing Derrida and Deleuze on the specific question of affirmation; (2) discussing in depth the role of the negative in Derrida’s concept of ‘undecidability’; (3) revisiting the criticisms of Hegel offered up by both Derrida and Deleuze, redirecting them this time against each other, in order to assess the projects of each. On the question of affirmation, I show that while both Derrida and Deleuze employ a notion of ‘double affirmation’, Derrida’s sense of ‘archi-originary affirmation’ is always already torn open by the threat of oblivion and of radical evil. Deleuze’s sense of affirmation, on the contrary, is the Dionysian, expressive power of becoming. With respect to undecidability, I show that while the negative differential aspects of Derrida’s thinking still apply with respect to the question of the ‘decision’, nevertheless this does not divest one of the responsibility of *deciding*. My reading of deconstruction as a negative differential ontology does not, therefore, amount to the assertion of a quietism or political ineffectuality embedded therein. With respect to the Derridean and Deleuzian criticisms of Hegel, I argue that Deleuze would indeed find in Derrida a spirit of *ressentiment*, and that Derrida would likely locate in Deleuze a spirit of naivety, but that I myself understand that particular question (of affirmation or negation) to be a matter of taste. However, on Deleuze’s criticism that a negative conception of difference amounts to a concept that is *less than* difference, I agree with Deleuze, on the grounds that *différance* maintains a lingering affinity with binarism, with *two-ness*, and hence, with the *this-not-that* of identity. I then offer one last bit of argumentative support, concluding the book with brief reflections on political and ethical engagement, through the lenses of the early feminist engagements with Derrida and Deleuze. I argue that while deconstruction is potentially more useful for addressing the immediate needs of excluded and marginalised *others*, when it comes

to imagining a world beyond the binarity of *I* and *other*, of *us* and *them*, Deleuze's thought is more useful.

Notes

1. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, 136.
2. Nealon, 'Beyond Hermeneutics: Deleuze, Derrida and Contemporary Theory', in Patton and Protevi (eds), *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, 158.
3. *WM*, 192–3.
4. *WM*, 192–3.
5. *DI*, 260.
6. *WM*, 193.
7. *LI*, 21; *MP*, 329.
8. See *DI*, 22; *DR*, xx; and *WP*, 2.
9. *DI*, 260.
10. *WP*, 9. We should note, however, that while the 'overcoming of metaphysics' is a motif that Derrida adopts from Heidegger, the matter is not so simple for Derrida. He is ever suspicious of philosophical themes of 'death', whether of the subject, of God, or of philosophy: 'I try to keep myself at the *limit* of philosophical discourse. I say limit and not death, for I do not at all believe in what today is so easily called the death of philosophy (nor, moreover, in the simple death of whatever – the book, man, or god, especially since, as we all know, what is dead wields a very specific power)' (*P*, 6). As Derrida frequently notes, at the heart of deconstruction lies the suspicion that it is not 'possible *simply* to escape metaphysics . . .' (*P*, 17). Moreover, it is possible, perhaps likely, that Deleuze and Guattari have in mind Heidegger as much as Derrida in this proclamation. Immediately prior to the remark about the overcoming of philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari write, 'To say that the greatness of philosophy lies precisely in its not having any use is a frivolous answer that not even young people find amusing anymore' (*WP*, 9). This is almost certainly directed at Heidegger, who in his 1937–8 Freiburg lectures claims that 'philosophy is the immediately useless, though sovereign, knowledge of the essence of things'. Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, 5. Nonetheless, to invoke the theme of 'overcoming metaphysics' is to put one's critique in the vicinity of deconstruction.
11. Protevi, *Political Physics*, 1.
12. Patton and Protevi (eds), *Between Deleuze and Derrida*.
13. Schwab (ed.), *Derrida, Deleuze, Psychoanalysis*.
14. Roudinesco, *Philosophy in Turbulent Times*; Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*; Gendron, *Repetition, Difference, and Knowledge in the Work of Samuel Beckett, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze*; Davis, *Critical Excess: Overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek, and Cavell*; Choat, *Marx Through Post-Structuralism: Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze*; Goddard, *Violence et subjectivité. Derrida, Deleuze, Maldiney*; Sato, *Pouvoir et Résistance: Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Althusser*; Halpern (ed.), *Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze: Pensées rebelles*.
15. Bell, *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos*, 3–4.
16. Protevi, *Political Physics*, 5.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *WP*, 46.
19. *DI*, 36.
20. *VP*, 13.
21. *LI*, 20; *MP*, 328. See also *VP*, 87.

22. *DR*, 40.
23. *MP*, 67.
24. *DR*, 35.
25. *MP*, 21.
26. *MP*, 6.
27. Agamben, 'Absolute Immanence', in *Potentialities*, 238–9.
28. Smith, 'Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought', in Patton and Protevi (eds), *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, 46–66. This essay also appears as Essay 16 in Smith's *Essays on Deleuze*.
29. Lawlor, 'The Beginnings of Thought: The Fundamental Experience in Derrida and Deleuze', in Patton and Protevi (eds), *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, 67. This essay also appears as Chapter 8 in Lawlor's *Thinking Through French Philosophy*.
30. *WD*, 128.
31. *DR*, 54.
32. *DR*, 268.
33. *WP*, 35–6.
34. *DR*, 269.
35. *C*, 23.
36. Smith, 'Deleuze, Hegel, and the Post-Kantian Tradition', in *Essays on Deleuze*, 62.
37. *NP*, 195.
38. Smith, 'Deleuze, Hegel, and the Post-Kantian Tradition', in *Essays on Deleuze*, 62.
39. *N*, 6.