

Philosophies of Difference: A Study of Deleuze and Guattari

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I stumbled across philosophy in the same way you might stumble into a wall in a dark room. I was wandering amiss in a stressful, enclosed, and preordained situation, having moments of enjoyment but mostly lacking interest in anything substantial and doing everything based on pure reflex. It was in that awful stupor that I was fortunate enough to end up, mostly on a whim, in the debate classroom as a Freshman in high school. At some point, after having scooted along for a few weeks, I expressed interest in doing a form of debate focused around philosophical questions which our school had only a single member doing. In a bit of condescending jest, a senior recommended that I should prove myself by writing an argument centered around the philosophy of “Friedrich Nietzsche.” The conditions aligned in that moment and I was compelled and fully willing to take on the challenge. I spent that entire week pouring over various sections of books from, and Wikipedia and Stanford Encyclopedia articles about, Nietzsche. I returned the following week with a poorly constructed, badly defended, and drastically misinterpreted argument based on his philosophy – but it was something! Funnily enough a stupid stumble turned into an invigorating, affirming, and joyful marathon that I’ve been committed to ever since.

The books have become quintessential to my personal development and philosophical experiences. Every philosophical work presents a different system to crawl through, a unique viewpoint to traverse, a world to construct and imagine. There is something unique about being able to view all of these different constructions in the small-form of the bookshelf. To watch those volumes age alongside you, gaining unique signs of transformation, such as a rip from a particularly intense search for a passage, a faded image from being continuously subject to friction in a backpack, is an additionally impactful experience. The same copy of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy* which I began to read as my first philosophical text is the one that I frequently use in an honors seminar here at Swarthmore. Derrida’s *Politics of Friendship* was acquired while on a week-long trip to New York with my girlfriend. An entire series of Harry Potter was shared between myself and my father. All of these present complex, irreducible arrangements within my life which wouldn’t be the same without the inclusion of various books.

All of this exposes is what I found so utterly compelling about the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari. It presents a model for a world which is based upon expanding our various moments of ingeniousness, our creativity, our passion, into breadth-spanning, interconnected mosaics of relationality and possibility. A philosophy of difference is one which isn’t merely *about* difference but is truly *composed* of difference. It accentuates its mechanisms, rides along with its tumultuousness, and allows its continued expansion even when it overruns boundaries. In this image we are presented a world which is truly ours, resonating at the level of our everyday experience, as we are bound only by the conditions of our possibility, by our responses to and developments upon the world as we find ourselves a part of it. We are ruled not by any abstract system of organization, by any codex or dogma – in fact we ought to revolt at all points against them! – but only by our creative expressions. The importance of the primacy of difference is endless, as when the world itself is constituted by diversity everything which follows will have unique weight and importance. What comes from such a way of thinking is a world in which we are both affective and affected, in which we are intimately bound to other individuals in a collective experience of acting upon the world and experiencing the results of others similar expressions. For me, that resonates as the most incredible world imaginable, containing gestures towards all possible imaginations.

Annotated Bibliography

Source Materials

1. Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print.

A Thousand Plateaus is the first book by Deleuze and Guattari that I purchased. In lieu of the traditional structure of “chapters” it is composed of “plateaus” which present winding discussions of topics spanning philosophy, linguistics, literature, cinema, politics, and seemingly infinitely many more. They are meant to be read in any order, presenting a style which matches the content, as the book attempts to trace the possibilities for ways of existing which embrace difference and resist hierarchical and transcendental ways of viewing the world. I still vividly remember the twin emotions of excitement and intimidation when I found the dense volume on the shelf at Barnes and Noble my sophomore year of high school. It had taken a bit of persuasion, but I managed to get my Dad to drive me to the store to get it. Alongside quite a few of the books on this list, my copy survived a house fire my senior year and as a result has significant amounts of smoke damage across the spine and cover. It has a strange smell that is a mixture of smokiness and the chemical agent used to clean it; it’s a unique aroma for a unique text.

2. Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, University of Minnesota Press, 1983. Print.

I recently received *Anti-Oedipus* for Christmas from my parents. It composes the first part of Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* series, the second of which is the aforementioned *A Thousand Plateaus*. While similar in style to its partner, it has a slightly more refined focus, attempting to forward a new understanding of desire. While previous understandings of desire viewed it as dangerous and dependent upon the wanting of particular missing objects, Deleuze and Guattari transition to understanding desire as a productive, creative, and immanent force which serves as the fuel for the fire of our subjectivity. It is through desire, oftentimes described as “schizophrenic” due to its fragmented nature, that we are motivated to act within the world. They hoped to seize the spirit found in the May of 1968 anti-capitalist protests in France in order to develop a theory which could both describe and ward off the still very real danger of fascism. While I haven’t yet had much time to truly sit with this volume alone, the ideas it develops are crucial to the larger mosaic of difference developed throughout Deleuze and Guattari’s work.

3. Deleuze, Gilles. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Translated by Martin Joughin, Zone Books, 1992. Print.

I purchased *Expressionism* alongside *Practical Philosophy* for directed readings on the philosophies of Deleuze and Spinoza that I am doing with Professor Tamsin Lorraine. The copy I have has water damage on the spine and some pages due to rain which seeped into my suitcase while traveling home for winter break. After a few years of slowly revolving around the question of what constituted Spinoza’s philosophy and why it was of such importance to Deleuze, I decided to take the plunge given the resources available at Swarthmore. Deleuze was famous for his book-length studies of other philosophers in which he engaged in liberal reinterpretations of their systems and philosophized from this new terrain. In addition to this one on Spinoza he also wrote on Hume, Nietzsche, Kant, Bergson, Foucault, and Leibniz, alongside writings on other figures such as Proust, Sacher-Masoch and Sade, Bacon, and Kafka. This presents Deleuze’s extensive rereading of Spinoza in order to unravel the concept that Deleuze’s views as central to his thinking (despite it never actually appearing within it): univocity. Univocity represents the view that “Being,” the very nature of existence itself, is the same as “being,” any thing that

is existing; everything which is currently presently existing and expressively acting in the world is itself constructing and expanding the very notion of existence. There is no transcendental category of existence which tethers and structures us, instead we are actively developing the very scaffolding of existence in every unique action we take. This becomes a foundational belief for Deleuze's philosophy, which he finds the primary inspiration for in both Spinoza and Dun Scotus, a medieval theologian.

4. Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Robert Hurley, City Lights Publishers, 2001. Print.

Practical Philosophy is a relatively small book which serves as Deleuze's introduction to Spinoza. In addition to the usual philosophical essays, many of which overlap with the content found in *Expressionism*, it also includes beautifully written biography, bibliography of Spinoza's published works, and a useful dictionary for Spinoza's extensive terminology. It additionally has the privilege of being the place where Deleuze develops the concept of "ethology," the study of humans and animals, as a sort of methodological approach to studying the world inspired by Spinoza. Ethological practice revolves around the studying of things in regard to their concrete possibilities for action rather than their abstract categorization. While viewing humans and horses from the lens of species categories may place them far apart, they appear much closer together when viewed from their capacities, for example their shared ability to run extensive distances. This provides a way to analyze the world which unfolds the various differences within it and the relationships that are engendered as a result, rather than limiting our considerations within pre-given formulas.

5. Guattari, Félix. *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972-1977*. Translated by David L. Sweet, Jarred Becker, and Taylor Adkins, edited by Sylvère Lotringer, Semiotext(e), 2009. Print.

I received *Chaosophy* alongside *Lines of Flight* in a care package sent by Rebar, one of my high school debate coaches. He introduced me to various texts and strains of thought that were oftentimes underappreciated in the study of Deleuze and Guattari's work. What struck a particularly strong note was the importance of Guattari's thought independent from his collaborations with Deleuze, something which is usually forgotten due to Deleuze's prolific status and academic influence. *Chaosophy* is a collection which presents essays which develop upon the concepts in *Anti-Oedipus*, present Guattari's critique of institutional psychology (he helped facilitate an experimental psychiatric facility called La Borde in France), his thoughts on political strategies consistent with the communist tradition but sympathetic to the challenges of the modern world, and his studies of cinema and New York City. It is a useful companion to parse out the ways that extremely abstract philosophy can be concretized to study particular phenomena and situations - plus it's super fun!

6. Guattari, Félix. *Lines of Flight: For Another World of Possibilities*. Translated by Andrew Goffey, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016. Print.

Lines of Flight is another collection of essays written by Guattari. Unlike Deleuze who frequently wrote full length books, Guattari favored shorter publications such as pamphlets and essays, though many of the collections of his writings would remain scattered until after his death. This volume presents a sort of guidebook for struggle against systems of power within an increasingly decentralized world. It sketches the faults with previous methodologies for resisting capitalism, such as orthodox Marxism, Stalinism, Leninism, alongside of course, Nationalism and Fascism, in order to develop a brilliant, adaptive, and subjectivity-influenced understanding of resistance as predicated on micropolitics. It presents a view in which the everyday relationships we experience, collectivities we organize, and desires we express, make up a vibrant fabric which engenders possibilities for political struggle. It shows very clearly what a

commitment to difference amounts to in regard to the concrete realm of politics and people's everyday lives.

Influences and Supplements

1. Spinoza, Benedict. *Ethics*. Translated by W.H. White, revised by A.H. Stirling, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001. Print.

I bought this edition of the *Ethics* at Half Price Books, and I recall there being five identical copies on the shelf, something quite strange for a used bookstore. It's very beaten up, with a wrinkly, bent cover and a stretched out binding from being thrown to-and-fro in my backpack. I also deliberately tore out the first page, where Spinoza defines the foundational concepts for his metaphysics, in order to place it in a time capsule dedicated to things which we are at risk to losing in climate change my first semester at Swarthmore. I later found out that these copies are incredibly cheap online and purchased a few as presents for my graduating debate students. The *Ethics* is a labyrinth of a treatise, dedicated to explaining a metaphysics in which everything is composed of a single substance, known as Nature or God, and follows from this foundation. It is written in dense geometric proof, granting only brief breaks from the intensity when Spinoza determines it necessary to more extensively explain his thoughts in the subterranean space below the proofs. It is true *tour de force*, moving through this metaphysical foundation in order to explain how it results in the necessity of passions and affects within humanity, how those further gesture towards the importance of community, and how we might come to experience freedom in a world which is casually determined and chaotically organized. It is both incredibly important to Deleuze and Guattari's project of difference, with its foundations in monistic togetherness and affective intensity, and a true joy to read on its own.

2. Spinoza, Baruch. *Spinoza: Complete Works*. Translated by Samuel Shirley, edited by Michael L. Morgan, Hackett Publishing Company, 2002. Print.

I recently purchased this beautifully formatted, scarlet colored, hardcover collection of all the books published by Spinoza in his lifetime. In addition to the all important *Ethics*, it also contains Spinoza's younger writings on the philosophy of Descartes, his discussion of ancient Hebrew grammar, his two treatises on politics, and various letters which provide insights into both Spinoza's philosophy and personal life. It is a handy edition and provides access to works which both supplement the *Ethics* and stand alone as important philosophical examinations.

3. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Maudemarie Clark and Alan J. Swensen, Hackett Publishing Company, 1998. Print.

If there were a beginning to my foray into philosophy, it would be Nietzsche. I was a wandering freshman in high school looking for answers to the unfairness of the world and the various questions I had about it and the *Genealogy* became the first pavestone upon the walkway to the rest of my life. I acquired this alongside the other Nietzsche book on this list during a trip to the previously mentioned Half Priced Books in Omaha my Freshman year of high school - I walked out with four of his writings. This copy is particularly well-loved, with frequent scribbles on each page from various passes through, and a well-worn binding from hundreds of openings. Nietzsche had an incredible influence on the philosophy of Deleuze, especially in the significance he places on the importance and uniqueness of subjectivity, his defense of the importance of irrational affects and forces, and his concept of the eternal return in which we live our lives cyclically for all eternity in commitment to our personal experience. All of these present

fragments which Deleuze and Guattari later crafted into a true philosophy of difference. This particular volume presents Nietzsche's genealogical investigation into the foundations of morality, from which he ultimately concludes that morality is a social construction, brought about and universalized through a corrupted societal development in which the uncreative and less inspired of society sought to limit the expression of more creative people.

4. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin Classics, 1961. Print.

Zarathustra is perhaps the most wonderful and strange creation of Nietzsche. It tells the tale of Zarathustra, a thundering exemplar of Nietzsche's philosophical system, as he spreads his gospel of subjectivity and value-creation throughout the world after years of self-exile. He teaches various lessons which are built to denounce those who limit the development of personal systems of thought and construct in its place a world structured around self-mastery and flourishing. While always jarring and difficult, this book presents an intoxicating experience full of wonder and exuberance. It serves as an example of the way that story-telling can embody difference and mix philosophy and mythology.

5. Kierkegaard, Soren. *The Essential Kierkegaard*. Edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, 2000. Print.

I purchased this anthology of Kierkegaard's writings once again at Half Priced Books in high school, having heard of the name but never really getting around to investigating what he was all about. It wasn't until I came to college that I was able to fully investigate what Kierkegaard's philosophy actually entailed, with the prodding of various philosophy and religion professors. While other authors on this list lean primarily into the importance of affects, emotions, and desires to unlock the potential of difference, Kierkegaard makes a stunning turn towards the Christian faith. Subjectivity ultimately turns upon our capacity to realize, yet still accept, the absurdity of faith, which Kierkegaard points to as a necessary part of the human experience, both in the everyday and in our relationships with divinity. It is an unorthodox choice, but Kierkegaard's unique mixture of theology and subjectivity, oftentimes seen as contradictions in terms, has had a lasting impact in expanding my conception of the various ways that difference can be understood and cherished.

6. Pearson, Keith Ansell. *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer*. Routledge London and New York, 1997. Print.

I bought this splendid collection of various essays on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical views my senior year of high school. I had acquired an online copy but was so enthralled with the texts inside that I wanted a physical copy to keep around. It presents wildly divergent discussions, spanning his interpretation of Spinoza's epistemology, the importance of demonology in his writings with Guattari, the place of the production of capital in a world of difference, and investigations of the place of African musical traditions and their modern developments in Deleuze and Guattari's framework for analysis. It houses great examples of the ways that Deleuze and Guattari's theories can be applied in divergent contexts to great effect.

7. Negarestani, Reza. *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*. Re.press, 2008. Print.

Cyclonopedia was another in the collection of books I received from Rebar. It is relatively pristine as it wasn't until this year that I finally got around to investigating what was inside. What I found was an utterly confounding mixture of a thriller-style science-fiction stories, philosophical treatises, and cultural theory. The book seamlessly flows from seemingly authentic, yet actually artificial, historical digressions

into personal side-notes and further beyond into full length essays. The maze broadly centers around questions about the positionality of oil within the matrix of United States imperialism and the way metaphysics might be understood as embedded in questions of geology, earth-sciences, archeology, and culture. It's a wonderful, seductive novel that is just as difficult to read as it is to adequately describe.

8. Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Logic of Hegel: Translated From the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Science*. Translated by William Wallace, Oxford University Press, 1892.

This copy of Hegel's *Logic* was found buried in a bookshelf at a winding, densely packed, and dusty bookstore in Omaha. It is quite old, though a second and later edition, and appeared to only have been opened in order to allow a Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago to write their contact information on the front cover. The Hegelian project of attempting to unfold the reality of the world through human consciousness and the process of the dialectic is radically distinct from the thought of Deleuze and Guattari. In fact, Deleuze frequently highlights Hegel as his primary opponent in the search for authentic difference, calling his approach a mere shadow of difference due to its reliance on negation rather than pure affirmation. While I have barely begun to understand Hegel's system, I appreciate his influence and am hoping to delve headfirst into his thinking sometime in the near future.

9. Derrida, Jacques. *The Politics of Friendship*. Translated by George Collins, Verso Books, 2006. Print.

I acquired *The Politics of Friendship* on a whim at the Strand Book Store in New York City – it's pretty much brand new. While I haven't had much time to peruse its pages, which attempt to develop an understanding of the complexities and difficulties associated with the concept of "friendship," Derrida's philosophy presents an important addition to the study of difference. A contemporary of Deleuze and Guattari (Derrida even delivered a eulogy at Deleuze's funeral), Derrida dealt with the importance of deconstructing various unfounded assumptions within the Western metaphysical tradition dating back to Plato, and produced a system built upon opacity, contradiction, complexity, and infinity. Rather than attempting to imperfectly solve the various conundrums of philosophy through the construction of a comprehensive system, Derrida leaned into them in order to show the possibilities within systemless investigations. This practice of "deconstruction" presents a tantalizing and fruitful methodology for attempting to approach difference in itself.

Desired Books

1. Dosse, François. *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives*. Translated by Deborah Glassman, Columbia University Press, 2011. Print.

Intersecting Lives presents biographies of Deleuze and Guattari in a double-helix fashion, presenting them as both individuals and a composite body developed through their collaborations. It is one of the only extensive biographies of the duo to be undertaken and from the portions I've managed to skin online it offers intriguing insights into the development of their thought, their experiences in the revolutionary movements of contemporary Europe, and perhaps most interestingly of all, their troubles and disagreements as a duo. It does much to humanize and concretize the experiences of the individuals behind the philosophy, revealing motivations and concerns that could not be otherwise deduced.

2. Sharp, Hasana. *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*. The University of Chicago Press, 2011. Print.

The Politics of Renaturalization is an incredible meditation on the philosophy of Spinoza and its application to contemporary problems such as the complexities of identities and their interactions, the development of democratic institutions, and the possibilities for organizing our relationships into communities. I've already extensively read the online version I've acquired, but unfortunately it appears that there was a limited run of print editions, making it extremely hard to acquire a physical copy. The extensiveness of this book and its ability to illuminate difficult portions of Spinoza's thought and then immediately stabilize them in the context of everyday problems makes it a must read for anyone interested in his philosophy.

3. Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton, Columbia University Press, 1994. Print.

Difference and Repetition presents the initial foundation for Deleuze's metaphysical views and should perhaps be considered the core of his entire bibliography. However, I have yet to acquire a physical copy! This book follows Deleuze's attempt to replace identity with difference as the cornerstone of metaphysics. Instead of viewing the world as structured first and foremost by particular essences, characteristics, or attributes, we must recognize that these are all secondary phenomena which arise as a result of the chaotic, spontaneous, and immanent process of difference. When placed at the heart of reality, difference becomes the capacity for the world to be developed and unfolded, and for particular things to become individuated and formulated. This system is open-ended, allowing various developments upon it, and moves towards increasing complexity rather than simplification. It is this radical movement, which upends much of the history of Western philosophy, which lays the foundation for the decades of work which follows.

4. Guattari, Félix. *The Three Ecologies*. Translated by Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. Print.

The Three Ecologies is a comprehensive essay which presents Guattari's political philosophy in the context of the development of an ecological theory. Despite only numbering slightly above a hundred pages, the book manages to be impressive in its scope and clarity. It provides a variety of intriguing examples, ranging from the Trump families real-estate practices to free-radio stations in Italy, to illuminate the difficulty and complexity of the modern ecological crisis and to gesture towards how it might be responded to from the bottom-up, through social revolution, rather than from the top-down, through government bureaucracy. Despite having read the essay a few times, I've yet to acquire a print edition due to its brevity and scarce printing, but I hope to acquire this edition soon.

5. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Mary Gregor, Cambridge University Press, 1997. Print.

Immanuel Kant is nothing short of a juggernaut in the realm of philosophy. He appears seemingly endlessly, having influenced or been studied by nearly every thinker since he published his three *Critiques*. The same goes for Deleuze and Guattari, who despite intense disagreement about particular aspects appreciated much of the speculative metaphysical investigations undergone by Kant in his drive to create an entirely objective moral system. I unfortunately haven't yet dedicated the necessary time to understanding the complexities of Kant's philosophy, but I hope to at some point in my undergraduate career spend some time reading him, ideally alongside Hegel.