



Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction

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Other books have tried to explain Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), one of the twentieth century's most important and elusive thinkers, in general terms. However, Todd May organizes his introduction around a central question at the heart of Deleuze's philosophy: How might we live? He demonstrates how Deleuze offers a view of the cosmos as a living entity that provides ways of conducting our lives that we may not have even dreamed of.

Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction Details

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From Reader Review Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction for online ebook

Dara Ghaznavi says

This book changed my view about life! I do not claim to have been able to grasp all the technicalities of Deleuze's philosophy but his general approach towards life and thought was quite liberating for me.

A.J. says

A unique introduction to Deleuze that, as its primary motif, centers around Deleuze's philosophy as a way to live (or ways to live), rather than an interconnected set of doctrines and ideas.

Jonathan Karmel says

1. How Might One Live?

Conformity is one way we might live. Foucault said we conform to things that have been determined historically, such as sexual normality. Derrida said we conform to things that have been determined linguistically. But suppose we stop trying to discover the truth and instead just try to be creative. Deleuze believed that philosophy is “the act of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts.” Concepts reach beneath the apparent world of stable identities and disrupts them. An ironing board is different from a shoe, but each moment offers the possibility of disrupting any given identity. “Thought” moves beyond “knowledge” to the difference that is beneath it.

A concept is not fiction when philosophy is not even seeking the truth. Deleuze believed that nothing has a stable identity, and we should think of everything as being different from itself. How should we live? Don’t conform to what you think is “true.” Instead, think differently in order to conceive new concepts about how to live that are Interesting, Remarkable and Important.

2. Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche: The Holy Trinity

(1) Baruch Spinoza effected Deleuze’s idea of immanence, which is basically the opposite of transcendence. Spinoza questioned the concept of a transcendent God, believing that God and Nature were of a single substance. Deleuze rejected the distinction between natural and supernatural, body and mind, and instead believed that life and death, creation and non-creation, identity and difference, are all part of a plane of immanence.

(2) Henri Bergson effected Deleuze’s idea of duration. There is no past; there is just a memory of the past in the present, which is “virtual,” not “actual.” But this virtual thing is “real.” In contrast, something that is just “possible” is not “real.” The “possible” and “real” have the same quality except for realness. The “virtual” and “actual” are both real even though in the present moment we only have direct access to what is actual. Our present exists in the context of our past. “The actualization of the past is the psychological moment.” Most ontologies lead to conformism, because they’re dominated by transcendence and spatiality. Deleuze,

however, believes an ontology dominated by immanence and temporality can achieve something other than the withered task of ratifying the status quo.

(3) Friedrich Nietzsche effected Deleuze's concept of the affirmation of difference. Nietzsche wrote about the "eternal return" of ourselves to the same, selfsame life, and Deleuze said there is no being, just becoming. Liberation, joy, creation and the affirmation of difference is the embrace of the eternal return.

If we refuse to ask how one might live, established values lead us to quiescence. Instead of being conformists, we should become different from ourselves by constantly embracing creativity.

3. Thought, Science, and Language

Thought, science and language are the mediums of the new conception that makes affirmation of difference possible. We can use these mediums to leave behind the "dogmatic image of thought."

(1) Thought. The truth of statements is based on the stability of concepts; but what if there's chaos to both the world and language? Stop searching for what is true; think differently. What is Interesting, Remarkable and Important? Good sense is rational and common sense allows us to get along in the world, but both lead to the deathly conformity of doxa (acceptance of the common opinion). We should reject the dogmatism of representational thought. Instead, seek out difference by believing in paradox, which is the stimulus to real thought and philosophy. A problem can be thought of as something other than a thing that needs a solution. Pure difference resists representation, but even if it cannot be experienced directly, if we palpate what we can experience, we can get a sense of the difference that lies below the surface.

(2) Science. According to Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation, things do not have stable identities; rather, they go through a never-ending ontological process of becoming. For example, identical twins have the same genes, but they become different because they individuate differently. The only being is the being of becoming. Science confirms this.

(3) Language. Language isn't just logical; there is also sense. Sense is what happens at the point where language and world meet. For example, when a man walks into a bank and says "This is a stickup!" there is a "sense" that is more than the literal meaning of the words. There is also nonsense: a paradoxical element that both is and is not language, that both is and is not of the world. This is captured in the book *Through the Looking Glass*. True learning is not the transferring of dogma from teacher to student; but rather, it is experimentation that takes place in and through the unconscious.

4. The Politics of Difference (ideas created in collaboration with Felix Guattari)

Is there more to politics than representation of the interests of "individuals" who are governed? Michael Sandel, in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, argues that people exist in connection with people and things outside of themselves; they are not merely separate individuals. The dogma is that individuals form governments to get what they lack. Deleuze believes in machinic thinking. The machinic concept is that there is an environment of interacting machines (systems) and human-machine systems, and perceptions only become intelligible in relation to them. Machines produce in a creative way; they are not trying to satisfy a desire by getting something they lack.

Something in the environment, like El Nino or polar bears, could be a political actor. Think about how Hurricane Katrina ended the era of George W. Bush and brought about the era of Barak Obama. Traditional political theory (capitalism, Marxism) only captures some aspects of our political experience. But think

about the experience of nomads and minorities, who interact with the world outside of the realm of “conservatives” and “liberals.” Think about the Gathering of the Juggalos, the festival put on by the record label for Insane Clown Posse. It’s a politics that is about experimentation and creativity and finding new connections. Parts of individuals also can be political actors. For example, people lose themselves in erotic love not necessarily as complete individuals but also because of body parts.

5. Lives

John Coltrane was revolutionary because of the way that he created; he didn’t rebel against what already existed. In the 1950s and 1960s, urban renewal failed. Jane Jacobs knew that cities are machinic; they must be designed to allow the connection of many different aspects of human existence to create new things in unpredictable ways. People make different connections and these chance connections cause people to create in different ways. As Nietzsche advocated, we must embrace the throwing of the dice. Experiment. Throw the dice. Palpate difference. There is more, always more.

Heavy stuff. I think I got the gist of it, but I’m sure I didn’t fully understand it. To me, the most interesting concept is that perhaps the meaning of life does not come from belief in God or from the search for truth, but rather from the process of creativity. A person does not have a stable identity. Rather than looking for the “truth,” each person has a genius that is capable of generating new concepts that are Interesting, Remarkable and Important. Individuation is not about being ourselves; it is the never-ending process of becoming ourselves.

Soroosh says

Todd May gives a clear account of Deleuze's philosophy. He starts by focusing on a very important issue which helps the reader to understand Deleuze: what is Deleuze's question? Unlike the philosophers before him (whose question was "How should one live?") Deleuze asks a Nietzschean question: "How MIGHT one live?". I suppose the important clue to understand Deleuze is to read him as a Nietzschean philosopher. What matters to Deleuze and Nietzsche is to CREATE new possibilities and invent new ways of living; becoming Non-human.

Cu?ng Say says

here to more Deleuze in the future

the gift says

170914: well now i have to reread those deleuze books i could not follow. because: this is fascinating. this even interests me in reading more nietzsche, as may contends deleuze operates a sort of holy trinity of thinkers: spinoza, bergson, nietzsche. or as they are foci of his radical new ontology(or,-ies)- immanence, duration, affirmation... which leads not necessarily to 'truth' but through 'difference', to concepts that are remarkable, interesting, and important...

i must suggest this is definitely a good place to embark on unguided, unread, deleuze. it helps to have read

entire histories of continental philosophers. and be prepared for everything to be up for reassessment...

the key abstract at the beginning of this work, is the question which occupies d throughout his entire career: 'how might one live?' this is not a question that often comes to conscious mind, as we are so busy, so involved, in our daily projects, there is no time for introspection, or so we tell ourselves. if we are to ask this question, we are likely to confront this question in however many possibilities, and see how it has changed from the original greek project, to the modern formulation, in recognition that d proclaims as, quoting spinoza: 'we do not know what a body is capable of'. for the ancient certainty of cosmological order reflected in human life, is transformed by the rise of individualism or subjectivity, and we are no longer seen to be necessarily following dictates of order, enforced values, of some god or sovereign. may refers to how this question is approached differently in the styles of philosophy known as analytic and known as continental, with the contention all of the latter must deal in some way with nietzsche's 'death of god'. there is the historical sense of this, the work of foucault in delineating structures of society, of discipline, in systems, in instituting, in finally resulting in the state. there is the linguistic sense of derrida, in which representational accuracy is known as truth, but representation is itself a question, for what you say, what you begin with, is perhaps not best conceived in static being but dynamic becoming- i love this stuff, this argument that it is in the very nature of language to think of 'representation' when the structuralists must confront the world that is the 'excess' and not the 'sign', but always already beyond our terms, our language..

once again it is an introductory work on a particular philosopher that is a favourite, though it only gives a sketch of d, an idea of where he is going, and in this we begin with a philosopher whose entire metaphysics demonstrates immanence. and this immanence accounts for all that is, as described metaphorically by the folding and unfolding of an origami form, a swan perhaps, which has no dualism, no transcendence, no loss or gain of given style, yet it becomes the sculpture when handled correctly. this immanence is spinoza. as d sees it, as d mentions it, this is the first 'ontology of difference', this is against the 'transcendence' which western philosophy has long associated with god, previously and then integrated, with platonic 'forms', but this intends two substances, one which we sense in this world and one that is above, beyond, that determines, or founds metaphysics of all our thoughts, of sense or concepts. this is in what way 'immanence' is more elegant, more simple, even if it seems against the entire history of our attempts to connect the two substance ideas, whether we call it 'participation or 'manifestation'- there is instead one, one monad, a kind of being that is neither simply ideal or simply material. this is spinoza...

bergson, his concept of 'duration', is one i have read of in several books as it appeals to the artist, the 'idealist', the sensualist in me. duration is what makes spinoza's immanence work: time, not as a series of points, infinitely divisible, a linear form that tracks 'history' but not the ecstatic unity of time, before, after- as much as directions of a compass offer north, south, east, west, rather than before, beside, behind- time is not simply the passage of these homogeneous empty moments, time as heterogenous change of each unity, each tension, each spectrum, each duration. not just time as offered in clock or calendar, but time as lived. usually, in philosophy and life we think of those successive numbers, and a second is always the second on a clock face, such is the 'spatialized' conception of time. st augustine might have proclaimed time as a mystery beyond his thoughts to explain, but this is necessary to investigate, if we want to understand how immanence can change, how 'multiplicity', how 'quality', describe time rather than space. how the 'immanence' 'expresses' itself through 'duration'...

nietzsche, his eternal return, is the focus of d and his concept of difference, in which it is 'return is the being which is affirmed in becoming'- it recalls n's challenge to the person, if her life was to recur without changes, could she say 'yes'? could she celebrate endlessly, and this is the 'affirmation' d finds in n. too often in traditional philosophy there is attention given only to being, where n emphasizes becoming, where the time of past, present, future, is entwined- this is n's contribution to this 'interesting, remarkable, important'

ontology of d...

i feel an unreasoned impatience with myself, as i enjoy this work greatly- i am reading it again- but would like to feel i can tell just how interesting are the problems of d. the point is not to ask questions with the assurance of already knowing the answer, imparting 'knowledge' in its limited practical formula, the way we learn at school from the youngest child to university graduates- the point is to ask questions to spur 'thinking'. thought is the act of philosophizing, but d never accepts a dialectical, argumentative, model as prevails in some styles of philosophy. he is interested in answering 'how we should live' on an alert, questioning, problem-offering level, and in this disregards those rules of logic to such an extent some insist he is not a philosopher at all. i would say that he is more. more than captured in our history or our language, forever to be thought of, forever to be questioning, no this is not remotely analytic... investigation of ontology is not a problem to be solved but an ambiguity to live...

this review has been only the first two chapters of the book, if you are not intrigued by now, i have failed to fully express the great pleasure here- though much of it may be his thought and not the book, and perhaps you should try this other, easier, introduction to d.: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/9...>

as this is only the first third of the book, and being only the second work on d that i think to understand- i could mention the titles of next chapters: 3- thought, science, and language 4- the politics of difference 5-lives. and all this review has not yet mentioned one of his conceptual tools: planes, as in planes of immanence... difference? yes, it shows up everywhere. i do not know what professional philosophers, especially those of analytic style chasing something called 'truth' think of d: all i know is that i find it engaging, fascinating, and of course remarkable, interesting, and important...

and of course, my interests in all philosophy- particularly phenomenology but now also deleuze, i describe here: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2...>

Joshua says

This is an excellent overview of Deleuze's work. It centers around questions within Deleuze and stays within his project rather than trying to artificially impose a false ontology onto it. I recommend this to anyone interested in Deleuze because it shows his relationship to the central questions of his work, but it also focuses on his major influences and clarifies the relations of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson to Deleuze.

Ron Spencer says

Best intro to Deleuze I've read.

Charlie says

easy to grasp

Rob says

A very accessible exposition of an apparently very difficult philosopher. I might even try reading the man himself soon ;)

As far as Deleuze's philosophy, the groundlessness, the openness to everything, perhaps even essenceless?....a very interesting approach to how we can see the world...however, I think I will stick to my Tibetan Buddhist weltanschauung.

chaos says

good overview for those who want to have an idea of what deleuze is all about. to be praised for trying always to keep an eye on the ethical implications of his thinking.

Charles says

A remarkably clear and concise introduction to Deleuze's works, from one of the smartest writers on the topic.

Anil Kahvecioglu says

Gilles Deleuze is not a philosopher that can be digested in a breeze not only because his philosophy touches upon miscellaneous fields, but also because his approach is a striking harvest of the philosophies which are the milestones of their epoch. Todd May's *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* should be read as a different insight towards Deleuze which constitutes its framework around the question "how might one live?" and the study, no doubt, presents a productive discussion in order to answer this question.

It is always difficult to write a review for a book written on a certain philosopher or a certain tradition, as the main part of the book is reserved for the ideas of the philosopher/tradition and in many respects the author remains passive. For this reason, I will also strive to explain, as much as I know and can, Deleuze's own arguments through May's reading. The book contains several interesting detections concerning Deleuze such as ontology as a matter of creation instead of discovery which yields one with the opportunity to excess the limits of what is, which has not been identified yet. To put it another way, it provides one to consider not identity, but difference. As Deleuze puts it "difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing." (19) The most cardinal point here is, in my view, to understand creation within an immanentist ontology from which any sort of transcendental value is excluded. In effect, Deleuze's endeavor, as Todd May underlines, is not to designate an ontology that seeks beyond what is. Ontology "speaks of what there is. But what there is cannot be identified." (21) For Deleuze, the unidentification of what there is entirely stems from the assumption that what there is is nothing more than a difference. In this way, Deleuze does not concentrate on the question of absolute truth whose function is nothing but creating an insight about what there is, but rather focuses on the concepts of difference that motivates us to answer the question "how one might live." (22) May argues that in such an ontology "we can discover our possibilities (...) by probing difference, seeing what new foldings, unfoldings, and refoldings it is capable of." (25)

This introduction automatically entails a perscrutation to the philosophical background of Deleuze which finds itself, according to May, in three important figures: Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche and three concepts accordingly: immanence, duration and affirmation. (26) I think that the most powerful part of the book is May's systematic reading of Deleuze in this context in which he traces the links between these figures and Deleuze. It is not possible to give here a detailed picture of May's analysis. To put it all in simple terms, "immanence is the first requirement of an ontology of difference," for what immanence is the very ground that vitalize Deleuze's ontology. On the contrary, transcendence is what "freezes living, makes it coagulate and lose its flow." (27) In other words, one might say that transcendence is what totalizes, completes and in the end what produces an identity. That is why "univocity of Being" is a necessary condition for an ontology, otherwise "transcendence will inevitably return to haunt the construction of any ontology." (35) Deleuze himself stresses the importance of Spinozism, which "asserts immanence as a principle and frees expression from any subordination to emanative or exemplary causality... And such a result can be obtained only within a perspective of univocity." (35) In brief, the ultimate conclusion is "there is no transcendence, only immanence." (38) Properly speaking, after reading May's analysis I discerned that Spinoza is not only the fundamental thinker that constitutes the very philosophical and political ground of Deluze, but Spinoza's immanentism is like substratum of the very close links between him and Nietzsche.

Spinozist immanence is followed by Bergson's duration. I have to admit that I could not comprehend this part very well most likely because my lack of knowledge pertaining to Bergson's philosophy. Yet as far as I understood, May analyzes two different conceptualizations of time; one is linear, and the other one is existential. In linear time, objects occupy space, but never overlap. In other words, two objects cannot be in the same space and time. It is like Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction. In addition, in linear view, time is a container in which things happen. That is to say, time is always in the condition of subsuming the things that happen which validates the thesis that time is "transcendent to what happens." (42) The second one, existential view, does not recognize time as a container, but rather grasps it as something which is lived that is followed by a linear form. On the one hand, linear time privileges the present, because time as a container involves things happening in the present in a non-contradictory way. On the other hand, according to existential stance, the present is meaningless without past and future, because what defines the present is the past and the future themselves. (43) May argues that these approaches are not convenient for Deleuze which puts Bergson's duration onto the stage. Instead of accentuating only the Now, Deluze simply offers the coexistence of past and present from which the concept of virtuality is presented. "It is not an instant, or a thing. But it is there, in a different way from the way the present is there." (48) May simply says that virtuality can be defined "as something that exists but not in actuality." (48) In other words, the past through which virtuality manifests itself in the present as non-actual "exists within me, and appears at each moment I am engaged with the world." (51) Considered in this respect, "the temporal character of Spinoza's substance is beginning to come into view. Substance is duration, the virtual that is always there in all of its modes. Actualization is the 'modalizing' of the virtual, the folding, unfolding, and refolding of the virtual into modes. This actualization, this 'modalization,' is not making of one thing into another. It is not a creation or an emanation. It is a process in which substance expresses itself in the course of folding, unfolding, and refolding." (52) According to Deleuze, the significance of duration underlies this reversal of the relationship between past and present: "We do not move from the present to the past, from perception to recollection, but from the past to the present, from recollection to perception." (55)

Nietzsche is the last thinker that May scrutinizes on so as to complete his investigation. I personally think that the concept of affirmation is the most remarkable concept of the 20th century, specifically in terms of the political sphere. In my opinion, politics, radical politics in particular, has reshaped itself through affirmation by dislocating the idea of negation. We can observe a significant impact of the concept of affirmation in the philosophies of Deleuze, Foucault, Badiou or even Latour. May particularly focuses on the concept of eternal return, which is "the being of becoming itself, the being which is affirmed in becoming."

(59) As one might notice in the concept of difference, Deleuze is the thinker of becoming, not being. The univocity of Being always extends and renews itself; it is composed of multiplicities which “are the affirmation of unity.” (60) It is unity, because there is no place for a transcendent being in Deleuze’s philosophy that may interrupt the order of that unity. “There is no constant identity outside our world –no God, no laws of history, no goal- that dictates its character.” (60) In this context, eternal return always signifies the return of difference itself, not identity. If a unity is in question, it is the unity of difference, multiplicity. What should be affirmed is this difference which constitutes the very ground of immanent thinking. It is a simple yes to difference, to multiplicity, to the productive side of becoming rather than stability of being. There is no Nietzschean resentment at stake. “To affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives. To affirm is to unburden: not to load life with the weight of higher values, but to create new values which are those of life, which make life light and active.” (65) To affirm is always to experiment. When you say yes, you find yourself in a bet that permanently maintains itself as an experiment.

Without doubt, May brilliantly explains Deleuze’s philosophy through a deep analysis of Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche which brings us to “The Politics of Difference”, the title of the fourth chapter. “The question for Deleuze, the political question, is whether we can think otherwise” May states. What one can clearly discern is that Deleuze’s concern is not macro, but micro; not molar, but molecular; not anthropocentric, but object-based. That May underscores quantum flows as striving to explain Deleuzian politics is quite interesting, as what I can see in the 20th century is a parallel development in philosophy, physics and mathematics. That is to say, it would not be wrong to assert that philosophical formulations are influenced by the developments in natural science at a great degree. Quantum flows, May argues, are “fluid identities that arise from a chaotic and often unpredictable folding, unfolding and refolding of matter. Micropolitics is not an issue of the small; it is an issue of quantum flows.” (127) Deleuze’s attention is not directed towards stable entities such as state or society, but rather he would like to deal with things remaining out of the boundaries of these static beings. The ultimate answer to the first question “how might one live?” is given at the end of this chapter by May: “Our task in politics is not to follow the program. It is not to draft the revolution or to proclaim that it has already happened. It is neither appease the individual nor to create the classless society. And it does not lie in the slogan “To the molecular, to the lines of flight.” Our task is to ask and answer afresh, always once more because it is never concluded, the question of how one might live. It is a question we ask and answer not solely with our words or our thoughts but with our individual and collective lives, in an experimentation that is neither guaranteed nor doomed but always in the process of becoming.” (153)

This is a brilliant introductory book for those who want to learn something about Deleuze’s philosophy and May presents not a sum of superficial arguments with respect to Deleuze, but a deep analysis, which does not choke within the complexity, but helps the reader to get into the depths of a Deleuzian life.

Jacob says

A strong introduction to Deleuze. I particularly enjoyed the introduction to Deleuzian politics in chapter 4 which focuses on Deleuze’s move towards a new political ontology which moves away from liberalism, but digs deeper than communitarianism towards a new political ontology which centre’s around inclusion. The concept of “and...and...and...” where in liberalism/communitarianism the “either/or” is prominent. Earth, animal, AND, human are all important political categories. None taking precedence or transcendence is given to any category.

Abdellatif says

Well! This is one of the best books that I have recently read! I have devoured its 170+ pages in just two days! I thought I knew Deleuze before I read this book, but ended up re-discovering his thought and re-inventing and re-visiting my own! But the question now is 'How might one understand?' ...I am aware that I am being subjective here! But that's absurd, Todd May's style is highly subjective; yet, it is that kind of subjectivity that gives one enough space for re-s and un-s! I have decided to re-visit one whole chapter about Deleuze in my Applied Theories lectures and tutorials!
