
H-France Review Vol. 14 (September 2014), No. 150

Brent Adkins and Paul R. Hinlicky, *Rethinking Philosophy and Theology with Deleuze: A New Cartography*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013. viii + 253 pp. Notes. \$120.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-14411-8825-0.

Review by Aidan Tynan, Cardiff University.

Gilles Deleuze was one of the most influential French philosophers of the latter half of the twentieth century and a prominent member of the loose grouping of intellectuals known (in the Anglophone world) as poststructuralist. Michel Foucault, his friend and colleague, wrote in 1970 that “one day, perhaps, this century will be called Deleuzian,” but it is only in this century that Deleuze’s work has become widely read and appreciated beyond its immediate intellectual milieu. [1] Since his death by suicide in 1995, Deleuze’s name has become increasingly important in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, successfully displacing Jacques Derrida as the last word in theoretical avant-gardism. Like Derrida (who spoke at his funeral), Deleuze’s project attempts nothing less than a wholesale rethinking of the Western philosophical tradition based on a reconceived notion of “difference” in which the latter would no longer be subordinated to principles of identity, foundation, and origin. This engagement with difference in and for itself is what spurred the break with structuralism, which dominated French intellectual life in the 1950s and 1960s.

For both Deleuze and Derrida, Western metaphysics since Plato has sought to locate difference by way of some unchanging point of reference such as the supersensible Idea, God, moral absolutes or the human subject. Genuine difference is thus sacrificed to some form of rooted identity. Derrida’s solution was to insist on the strict impossibility of the kinds of structural distinctions we generally take for granted in our thinking. To insist, for example, on the priority of speech to writing, as Rousseau did, is ultimately untenable since all utterances exist within a constellation of mental and social inscriptions whose organisation is a kind of writing that makes speech itself possible. To insist on the priority of the idea of justice to laws is, similarly, to ignore the fact that the articulation of laws is necessary for the very concept of justice to emerge in the first place. Derrida’s strategy, which he named deconstruction, involved showing how a close reading of texts often reveals the collapse of some such structuring distinction. Our thought seems drawn towards the idea of a founding or structuring principle—whether this is speech, justice, or whatever—but deconstruction reveals these to be no more than metaphysical phantoms conjured from the seductive play of language itself.

For Deleuze, as for Derrida, the Western metaphysical tradition has generally subordinated difference to various founding principles of identity and sameness. Unlike Derrida, however, his approach does not involve a moratorium on metaphysics *tout court* but a search for an alternative philosophical history and an alternative—more liberating—metaphysics of difference. This is not a search for better or more authentic founding principles but for a way of thinking without founding principles at all, a way of thinking open to the continuous variation of the universe in all its becoming (this latter being a key term in Deleuze’s vocabulary).

The early twentieth-century French philosopher Henri Bergson is a key component of Deleuze’s alternative metaphysics. Bergson, who famously disputed Einstein’s theory of special relativity, insisted

that modern philosophy should provide a metaphysics that was complementary to, and in some cases corrective of, modern science. As Deleuze puts it in *Bergsonism*: “Bergson did not merely criticize science as if it went no further than space, the solid, and the immobile. Rather, he thought that the Absolute has two ‘halves’, to which science and metaphysics correspond. Thought divides into two paths in a single impetus, one toward matter, its bodies and movements, and the other toward spirit, its qualities and changes.”[2] Deleuze’s entire philosophical project revolves around providing a metaphysics that was adequate to the modern scientific view of the universe, but in doing he is also attempting to revive the philosophic concepts of spirit.

While some of the most popular interpretations of Deleuze to date (for example, those of Manuel Delanda and Brian Massumi [3]) argue that his work only makes sense in the context of science and mathematics, recent critiques (most notably Peter Hallward’s *Out of this World* [4]) have charged him with being a kind of postmodern Gnostic or Neo-Platonist, a mystic hiding beneath the cloak of materialism. This critique takes specific aim at the revolutionary claims of the political philosophy Deleuze wrote in collaboration with Félix Guattari. Hallward’s most serious accusation in this regard is that Deleuze is, at heart, an elitist or hermetic thinker with little interest in the real world. Given critiques such as these, it is to be welcomed that recent work in Deleuze scholarship has given serious consideration to the religious, spiritual, and theological dimensions of his oeuvre. Christopher Ben Simpson’s *Deleuze and Theology*, Kristien Justaert’s *Theology After Deleuze*, and Joshua Ramey’s *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal*, all appeared in 2012.[5] Brent Adkins and Paul Hinlicky’s book is a most valuable contribution to this growing body of work.

The real value of this volume is that it places Deleuze within the dominant intellectual and political contexts that have defined how philosophers have positioned themselves in relation to theology over the past few hundred years. The book begins with the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose famous “Copernican revolution” posed the question of how to orient oneself within thought. Kant felt that if the ideals of Enlightenment reason were to survive in the modern world—a world newly vulnerable to political and religious fanaticism—then a reorientation needed to take place in relation to what can and cannot be known by human consciousness. Centuries-old debates amongst metaphysicians about the nature of divine substance needed to be subjected to limiting criteria drawn from the methodological requirements of science. Kant argued that an entity such as God is necessarily beyond the limits of human understanding because the latter can operate legitimately only within the bounds of sensory experience. What lay beyond the phenomenal world—that is, the world furnished to us by the senses—is off-limits for philosophical understanding. The extra-phenomenal or “noumenal” world should be the concern of theologians, not philosophers, and any confusion between these two domains would be politically and ethically pernicious.

Adkins and Hinlicky—a philosopher and a theologian respectively—argue that the relation between philosophical and theological discourse in the modern world thus arose out of a kind of “boundary dispute,” a geographical and legal battle over jurisdictions in which the Kantian position was the victor. Modern Western conscious has been defined by a certain distribution of spirit and matter whose organization relates to the political and intellectual requirements of the liberal democratic state and the kinds of freedoms it presupposes as necessary. By making the noumenal off-limits for philosophical understanding, Kant was “making room” for both faith and reason, reconciling their dispute, albeit in a way which benefited his own intellectual and political aims. Adkins and Hinlicky define Kant’s gesture here in terms of a “parliamentary model with a right and left side” (p. 23). Philosophy, on the left side of the house, would act as a “loyal opposition” to the governing parties of law and religion. In this sense, Kant is what Deleuze and Guattari would call a “State philosopher,” a thinker whose ultimate commitments are to the maintenance of law and order (Kant consistently used the model of the “tribunal” in his philosophical inquiry).

The Kantian position is that for practical (i.e., ethico-political) reasons we need the idea of God in order to act freely and virtuously, but in order to insist on such an idea we need to accept that God is ultimately unknowable. This is the situation that to this day defines much theological and religious discourse, both popular and academic. Disputes between faith and science are still reconciled in this way. When it comes to thinking religion, then, we are still within the State philosophy model. This model draws its efficacy from what Adkins and Hinlicky name “the discontinuity thesis,” the maintenance of an insuperable boundary between the rational and the religious, “between being and such as the highest being” (p.1). The avowed aim of their book is to perform a new kind of reorientation in thought that would overturn the Kantian victory in the border dispute between theology and philosophy, and it draws on Deleuze to this end. This book is very much *not* a scholarly exegesis of the theological content of Deleuze’s thought, nor is it an attempt to “do” theology in a Deleuzian vein. Rather, it is a Deleuze-inspired experiment in thinking that refuses to accept the discontinuity between reason and religion—being and highest being—stipulated by our modern division of intellectual labour. It is this *experimental* impetus that makes the book such a fascinating and compelling read.

The key Deleuzian concept the authors draw on is the “plane of immanence,” a term which crops up most frequently in the philosopher’s collaborations with Guattari. Immanence insists on a kind of radical continuity linking every aspect of reality. While philosophies of transcendence generally insist on hierarchical differences in kind between, for example, creator and creation, subject and object, being and beings, conditions and conditioned, immanence attempts to think in terms of differences of degree. For theology, immanence attempts to think the divine on the same level as profane reality. The most famous proponent of immanence in the history of philosophy is Baruch Spinoza, who in the seventeenth century argued, contra Descartes’s mind/body (or spirit/matter) dualism, that the universe can be accounted for monistically as a single, infinitely modified substance. This substance Spinoza called *Deus sive Natura*—God or nature. Deleuze’s plane of immanence is a reimagining of this idea.

The great advantage of the plane of immanence is that it helps us avoid the humanism inherent in the traditional Christian-Platonist view of humanity’s relation to God: “Deleuze’s strict ‘plane of immanence’ excludes the ‘humanism’ of Platonic transcendence, that is, the notion that the human mind stands out of the plane of immanence and participates in the divine ideas so that by this inner light it can recognize and hence realize (with the aid of grace in Christian Platonism) its true self as conformation to the divine order. Deleuze strikes at the heart of the Christian-Platonist anthropology” (p. 127).

Every argument for transcendence—whether this be a theological argument for the existence of God or a political argument for the necessity of a state or a philosophical argument for a distinction between subject and object—takes us away from the plane of immanence and causes us to trace a kind of stable territory or jurisdiction that we can have power over. In Deleuze’s thought, religion is the very model of transcendence, while philosophy is the principal means to escape it. This is why, for centuries, Spinozism was a byword for atheism. Adkins and Hinlicky’s key point, however, is that we need not follow Spinoza and Deleuze all the way towards pure immanence and radical atheism. Indeed, they argue that contemporary atheism is merely an inability to conceive of a transcendent creator God rather a conscious attempt to escape from one. There is a way to think both transcendence and immanence simultaneously, and this is what theology is capable of doing. Theology can think *both* religious transcendence and philosophical immanence without becoming trapped within either. Securing a “transcendence within immanence” as the meaning of the word, “God” is thus the key stake of Adkins and Hinlicky’s project (p. 184).

They finish their book with a powerful description of “immanent” theology: “What has been often parsed ontologically as a difference in kind between Creator and creature turns out to be the difference of that self-overcoming that does not arise out of a lack or deficiency that must be overcome for God to acquire Himself, but rather out of the God who is always, already the fully giving self-relation that is the Trinity” (p. 209). The transcendent God of Christian Platonism becomes the immanent God of self-

organizing nature, the materiality of whose becoming is also the spirituality of God's self-realization, self-revelation, and self-overcoming. This de-Platonized account is also a re-Messianized one, since it is the eschatological (be)coming of God that constitutes the human relationship to the divine.

Despite the power of Adkins and Hinlicky's argument, I remain sceptical here. Why is their theology of immanence preferable to Deleuze's philosophy of immanence? It is not entirely clear how transcendence within immanence would be different from post-Kantian philosophies that make immanence immanent to a transcendental subject. Deleuze is quite clear that transcendental subjectivity is modern philosophy's cynical way of "saving" immanence, of securing a little patch of the plane of immanence for itself. His conviction is thus that philosophy as a politically charged critique of modernity should not cede any ground to transcendence, and this is why he and Guattari advocate great caution when experimenting on the plane of immanence.

Adkins and Hinlicky argue that there is, ultimately, a political reason for embracing a theological transcendence within immanence. The dangers of the plane of immanence are many, and it leaves us open to "biopolitical captivity" (p. 114). Truncating their argument severely, their position is that pure immanence of the kind Deleuze advocates provides us with little or no defence against the modern secular state, which legitimises its authority on the basis of protecting people from the predations of their own animal instincts. The state is the only thing that stands between us and the chaos of the Hobbesian "state of nature," but in granting the state these powers we are granting it control over life itself, over "bare life." By what authority, however, does the state base its right to distinguish between the human animal and the citizen upon whom rights devolve? Without some spiritual or extra-material agency, it must be admitted that the state is self-justifying in this regard. The Nazi death camps and Guantanamo Bay are the inevitable consequences of this. Without some account of the disruptive presence of the divine in the profane world—such as St. Paul's announcement of "Christ crucified"—state power, even *and especially* in democratic liberal societies, is unlimited.

By accepting the necessity of the theo-political critique of biopolitics, Adkins and Hinlicky align themselves with the recent work of Milbank, Badiou, Žižek, and Agamben, all of whom have drawn on the writings of Paul. Adkins and Hinlicky's search for a Deleuze-inspired Pauline critique of biopolitical captivity is certainly original, compelling, insightful and timely. I hesitate to say that it is entirely successful. I see no way ultimately to reconcile the claims of Paul and Deleuze given the latter's insistence of the political and, indeed, *spiritual* necessity of thinking pure immanence. But this is, perhaps, beside the point since—as Deleuze always insisted—the process of experimentation is far more important than its success or failure.

NOTES

[1] Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," in James D. Faubion, ed., *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Volume Two*, trans. by Robert Hurley and others (London: Penguin, 1998).

[2] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 116.

[3] See for example Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992) and Manuel Delanda, *Intensive Science & Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002).

[4] Peter Hallward, *Out of this World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London: Verso, 2006).

[5] Christopher Ben Simpson, *Deleuze and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012); Kristien Justaert, *Theology After Deleuze* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012); Joshua Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012).

Aidan Tynan
Cardiff University
TynanA@cardiff.ac.uk

Copyright © 2014 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172