

Hegel and Deleuze: a differential relation in the Idea

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Abstract

This paper is meant as a return to the Deleuze-Hegel debate from a polemical angle; against the extended conviction of their mere opposition, this is intended to consider both philosophies in a relation that could create new possibilities of thought. We claim that Deleuze's radical anti-Hegelianism extends itself until 1966, but that starting with 1968's *Difference and Repetition* there are positive relations to be found, especially through the concept of Idea. In order to support these claims, on the one hand, we show how Deleuze implicitly addresses Hegel's critiques of Spinoza, and gives an adequate response by positing that the gap between being and its genetic principle has the form of a *fold*. On the other hand, we analyse the main critiques that Deleuze explicitly addressed to Hegel: the primacy of negativity and the circle of return as an image of the identical. We try to avoid the abstract and general considerations of these concepts in Hegel, by analysing them directly in his *Science of Logic*. And we propose the possibility of interpreting Hegel's Idea not as the ground that assures identity (repeating itself as the same in its manifestations as a teleological necessity) but as a source of the creation of difference.

Keywords: Deleuze-Hegel debate, Idea, return, negativity.

Why would we return to the Deleuze-Hegel debate? Why would we, when, as Kane X. Faucher pointed out in a recent paper, the generalized opinion is that this debate has become stale (Faucher 2010, 329)? Aren't we committing the mistake Faucher intends to

prevent, that is, making the debate rage on endlessly? But precisely, the very question of the *return* to the Deleuze-Hegel debate makes this return as meaningful as it is necessary - because both are thinkers of the return. For both of them, endlessness is not necessarily a fault. Not all infinity is spurious. An endless return *must* exist for existence not to become a desert, to avoid our lives embarking on a quest for entropy. Hegel called the real, positive return *Rückkehr*, and Deleuze named it *répétition vetue* or *éternel retour* (Nietzsche's *ewig wiederkunft*). But both thinkers warned about a return that must be avoided: Hegel's "spurious infinity" (*schlechten Unendlichkeit*), and Deleuze's "naked repetition" or "repetition of the same" (*répétition nue* or *repetition du même*).

At first glance, both conceptions oppose each other: Hegel's *Rückkehr* would be a *répétition du même*, and Deleuze's creative repetition would be a case of the *schlechten Unendlichkeit*. This would fit very well in the orthodox view of their relation as an *extreme opposition*. But things are not so simple when confronting the thoughts of two philosophers as complex as Deleuze and Hegel. Affronting their conceptions of return pushes the limits of our common sense, and takes us from the usual paths of our thought; as Deleuze would put it: it constrains us to think (Deleuze 1994: 144-145). That is, if we do not continue to consider their debate as one on *error* (who is wrong? Does Deleuze *incorrectly* read Hegel? Does Hegel construct an ontology of the identical by *mistake?*), or a debate on *negativity* versus *positivity* (an opposition that, we will try to show, is not as meaningful as supposed), but a debate on the relation between Ideas and the actual world (what distinguishes Deleuzian Ideas from Hegelian Ideas? How does the empirical, sensible reality relate itself to this ideal reality?). It is in the vicinity of *ideas* where an interesting, philosophically relevant relation can be found (which does not mean *any kind of identity* between them)?

I.A debate in propositional logic

The Deleuze-Hegel debate is one of the lengthiest in Deleuzianism. Its birth can be dated **to as** early as 1963. Deleuze was then just a nearly anonymous researcher at the CNRS, far from the figure he would become at the end of the sixties with the shock that meant for the philosophical *milieu* the nearly simultaneous publication of three major works (*Difference and Repetition*, *Logic of Sense* and *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*). He was not even a professor in the University (he would be named in Lyon in 1964). He had just published *Nietzsche and Philosophy* the year before, and it was in Jean Wahl's review to that early book where the first sprinkles of the Deleuze-Hegel debate can be found. It would prolong itself through Houlgate (1986), Hardt (1993), Malabou (1996), Simont (1997), Brusseau (1998), Butler (1999) and Smith (2001). It then seemed to extinguish, but a recent paper of Kane X. Faucher has renewed the scholarly interest¹.

Faucher begins his paper by stating that “several commentators are of the opinion that the entire Deleuze-Hegel debate has become stale” (Faucher 2010, 329). Faucher does not give his explicit opinion on this regard, and the only example he offers (Olkowski's *Gilles Deleuze and the ruin of representation*) is far from definite. If anything, Faucher shows the vitality and potential of the debate. It can only seem stale as long as it is considered from the point of view of its need for a *solution*, and is not considered in its problematic nature. Paradoxically, this Deleuzian debate has been ruled by one of the characteristics of the “dogmatic image of thought” described in the chapter three of *Difference and Repetition*, that is, the *propositional* logic:

There is always a difference in kind between problems and propositions, an essential hiatus. A proposition by itself is particular, and represents a determinate *response*. A series of propositions can be distributed in such a way that the responses they represent

constitute a general *solution* (...) But precisely, propositions, whether general or particular, find their sense only in the subjacent problem which inspires them. Only the Idea or problem is universal (...) A problem does not exist, apart from its solutions. Far from disappearing in this overlay, however, it insists and persists in these solutions (Deleuze 1994: 162-163)

When considered from a *propositional logic* standpoint, the Deleuze-Hegel debate is meant to find a solution, a response that will make it disappear. The traditional affirmation of an extreme opposition between Hegel and Deleuze is nothing else than the intent of solving the debate and continuing to study one of these philosophers regardless of the complexities of the other. I think that the influence of the propositional logic is what causes that, even when the objective is to think Deleuze and Hegel *together*, authors conclude their articles confronting opposing, contrary propositions.² Daniel W. Smith begins his “Deleuze, Hegel, and the Post-Kantian Tradition” by pointing out that the “anti-Hegelian” characterization of Deleuze has become a *cliché* in the secondary literature (Smith 2001: 119). But he concludes the paper by sustaining Deleuze’s anti-Hegelianism (just with a new characterization): “he is anti-Hegelian in that he pursues these problems in a different manner” (Smith 2001: 128). Oddly, in order to outline the anti-Hegelianism of Deleuze, Smith refers to the following passage of *Difference and Repetition*: “Whenever the dialectic ‘forgets’ its intimate relation with Ideas in the form of problems (...) it loses its true power and falls under the sway of the power of negative” (Deleuze 1994: 164). But in a way, Smith himself has forgotten the intimate relation of Deleuze’s thought with Ideas in the form of problems. If we are to think the Deleuze-Hegel relation from a Deleuzian perspective, that is what we should do: stop trying to solve, close or distribute the debate and start thinking about its problematic nature and thus its *creative* potential.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when the critique of Hegelianism was already a vintage philosophical habit, Benedetto Croce wrote a major work: *What's living and what's dead in Hegelian philosophy*³. One may write today *What's living and what's dead in Deleuzian philosophy* and point out that what is dead is the effort to reconstruct his *true* philosophy, to isolate it from the external errors that menace its pure Deleuzianism. There are no terms outside of their relations. The Deleuzian *corpus* is nothing in itself, nothing isolated: just dead letter, just a too long bibliography that does nothing but link Deleuzian terms in a desert of thought. In order to find what's living in Deleuzian philosophy, relations with problems in the form of Ideas must be built. There is no *just* Deleuze. The object of the thought is always a differential relation. That might be the one between *Deleuze / Hegel*. This does not mean (at all!) that there is a necessary relation between Deleuze and Hegel, or something special, unique (as Malabou affirms⁴). Just that thought could swarm in the gap between them.

II. Confronting Hegel

It made sense that in 1963, Wahl's review of *Nietzsche and Philosophy* posited the confrontation with Hegelian dialectics as one of the keys to Deleuze's thought. However, it is a tragically narrow approach to the thought of Deleuze after 1966⁵. It is true that *Difference and Repetition* points out the "generalized anti-Hegelianism" of its time (Deleuze 1994: ix), what has usually been read as one of Deleuze's most explicit anti-Hegelian comments.⁶ Nonetheless, I prefer to read it in the contrary sense: when Deleuze wrote *Nietzsche and Philosophy* he believed he was living in a "generalized Hegelianism" and thus he had devoted many pages of his book to contend with this "dogmatic image of thought"⁷; it was then just consequent that in Wahl's review the confrontation with Hegel

was central. However, the generalized image of thought changed in the late sixties: it had become anti-Hegelian. There was then no more need to combat dialectics - or at least it was no longer urgent. He could lower the guard. 1968 is the year of both Kojève's and Hyppolite's death, and the game is open again to debate with Hegel. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze will consent himself with many expressions that are undoubtedly linked to "Hegelianism": terms such as "dialectic" and "Idea" are not only used in a positive sense, but key to the exposition. Even the titles of the first and second chapters ("Difference in itself", "Repetition for itself") have a Hegelian weight that would be unthinkable in the early sixties.

It does not mean, however, that the connection with Hegel is now central (as the confrontation had been). The list of Deleuze's heritage is unlimited: from the obvious Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson, to the extended list we can find in Jones and Roffe's *Deleuze's Philosophical Lineage* (Jones and Roffe: 2009). The delusion of grandeur of the Hegel-Deleuze debate (into which I think Malabou falls) must be avoided; it is just a handful of dust in the broad range of Deleuzian secondary literature. But it is nonetheless a part of Deleuze's Philosophical Lineage worth exploring.

However, this exploration may be obscured by the question of the extent of **the** justice that Deleuze to Hegel. In Brusseau's terms: "Deleuze's covering of distinctly Hegelian ground lead immediately to a fair question: does Deleuze (through his Nietzsche) do justice to Hegel?" (Brusseau 1998: 23). It is not a question of exposing Deleuze's misreading (as Houlgate did) or of defending him (as Faucher intended⁸). The point is not really whether Deleuze's critics would stand an analysis from the perspective of a Hegelian scholar. Because what he targets is always Hegelianism, or at most Hegel as a conceptual character

meant to contribute to the definition of some concept (such as “orgiastic representation”), but is rarely a question of the letter of Hegel’s work.

There is, of course, no way to be sure. Maybe Deleuze just misread Hegel. Maybe the *finesse* and insight with which he confronted Hume, Bergson, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Kant or Leibniz was just lost when he read Hegel. Maybe, as Wahl suggests, Deleuze was just blinded by his “resentment” vis-à-vis the Hegelian philosophy (Wahl 1963: 353), or his “bad mood against Hegelianism” (Wahl 1963: 370). But if it was true, how did he take Wahl’s criticism so good heartedly? I mean, Deleuze is not characterized by his tempered reactions to criticism. The harsh letter to Michel Cressole would be proof enough, but we can also take into account his reaction to Kostas Axelos’s review of *Anti-Oedipus* in *Le Monde*, or even Foucault’s *History of Sexuality, I*, whose clear stand against parts of the main thesis of *Anti-Oedipus* was one of the reasons for their distance - just to name a few. So, how could we explain that, after Wahl’s 1963 review, Deleuze continues to show affection and respect for Wahl’s work (even though he was clearly a Hegelian)? Wahl is part of the philosophical lineage of *Difference and Repetition*, and in the bibliography we find the reference *passim*, which means that Deleuze advises his reader to review the full corpus of Wahl’s work in order to reflect on “dialectics and difference.” How can it be possible after Wahl wrote phrases such as “G. Deleuze’s critique is not less superficial in this point than that of the Marxists” (Wahl 1963: 371)?

My hypothesis is that Deleuze *knew* that his critique was superficial, and that there were passages of Hegel’s work that could be read differently. After all, Wahl did read him differently. Other examples are the 1931 issue of the *Revue de la métaphysique et morale* (with contributions of Croce, Gueroult, and others), and the 1968 seminar on Hyppolite (later published as *Hegel et la pensée moderne*), both familiar to Deleuze. His

attack was then not aimed to the letter of Hegel, but to a certain Hegelianism that was hegemonic at the beginning of the '60s, and fundamentally aimed at its presuppositions: a superficial conception of dialectic, a teleological understanding of history as driven by a mystified force called *Idea*, and an anthropocentric conception of reality. That was the result of Kojève's seminar (Kojève 1947). But it would be a mistake to think that Deleuze had thrown the baby out with the bath water. Sometimes the Hegel-Deleuze debate forgets what Wahl has very clearly stated in his 1963 review: Deleuze's stand was not against Hegel but against a certain interpretation of Hegel.

Hegelianism has damaged contemporary philosophy. One of the injuries is the impossibility of interpreting Hegel in a living fashion. The question is not if Deleuze is or is not fair to Hegel's letter. The question is if we can put Hegel's letter in relation with Deleuze's letter and create living philosophy.

III. Where negativity was, return shall become

There is another aspect of Wahl's review that has been disregarded by the Deleuze-Hegel debate: the possibility of a new take on Hegel that would make it possible to relate his thought to Deleuze's: "Is it not in the passages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* something else that's deeper and that can resist Nietzschean critique?" (Wahl 1963, 364). Deleuze himself was soon explicit about this issue. He wrote in his 1954 review of Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence*:

Hyppolite thus rises up against any anthropological or humanist interpretation of Hegel. Absolute knowledge is not a reflection of humanity, but a reflection of the Absolute in humanity. The Absolute is not a second world, and yet absolute knowledge is indeed

distinct from empirical knowledge, just as philosophy is distinct from anthropology (Deleuze 2004: 16).

Any productive relation between Hegel and Deleuze demands a different interpretation of Hegel's letter than the one that characterized the Hegelianism that Deleuze explicitly rejects. It's kind of common sense to think that in order to perform such a switch it would be only a slight displacement on the shelf: from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the *Science of Logic*. This is not of course an insignificant shift: it means to create a distance from Kojève's legacy. After all, his seven-year long seminar on Hegel at the *Ecole d'Hautes Etudes de Paris* (Kojève 1947) was nothing else than a step-by-step reading of the *Phenomenology*. And, without doubt, Kojève represented Hegelianism from which Deleuze's generation wanted to distance itself.⁹ Throughout his seminar, Kojève had insisted on a parallelism between the stages of the *Phenomenology* and the history of mankind. This led him to read the last pages of the book (the chapter on "absolute knowledge") as *the end of history* and the triumph of the American way of life (Kojève 1947, 436-437). Anthropocentrism, teleology, nihilism: all that made Deleuze resent Hegelianism.

As a consequence, as long as we interpret Hegel in the light of his 1807 work, his relation with Deleuze is likely to be nothing more than one of mere opposition, which is the obstacle Hardt and Butler could not overcome. When Wahl wonders if there isn't something *deeper* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, I think that it's this nihilistic reading of Kojève which he is targeting. Something deeper, something higher: not the end of history, but a "higher step" (*höher Stufe*) in the adventure of thinking¹⁰: that is what the *Science of logic* intends to achieve.¹¹

The trouble is that it is not enough, because one of the most pregnant obsessions of anti-Hegelian Deleuzians lies in the *Science of Logic*: the obsession with negativity. Faucher states: “Without negation, there is no determinateness, no quality, and so no real object” (Faucher 2010: 331). And later: “it is a matter of *perspective*: to see things affirmatively or negatively” (Faucher 2010: 338). He grounds this statement in several pages of the “determinate being”; that is, one of the first stages of the first book of the *Science of Logic*.¹² It is important for Hegel *in that moment of the exposition* to put the emphasis on negativity, for it is what will allow the transition to the second book, the logic of essence, where negativity will become central. It is *the essence* which is characterized by Hegel as “the negative totality whose determinatenesses have sublated themselves in themselves” (Hegel1969: 384). It is in the essence where “everything determinate and finite is negated” (Hegel1969: 389).

Any analysis focused in the second book of the *Science of Logic* will emphasize the importance of negativity for Hegel. But we must bear in mind what the Hegelian essence is: illusory being (*Schein*). It “stands between *being* and *Notion (Begriff)*; it constitutes their means, and its movement is the *transition* from being to Notion” (Hegel1969: 391). Therefore: the work of the negative is just a transition - a transition to the Hegelian Idea, which is to be found in the third book of the *Science of Logic*: the logic of Notion. And it’s there where we must research the link with the Deleuzian Ideas and the Deleuzian *concept* (the French translation for the German *Begriff*).

Wahl had pointed this out sharply already, in 1963: “One of the advantages [according to Deleuze] of this idea of the non-subsistence and deletion of the negative elements would be to allow us to distinguish the Nietzschean and the Hegelian thoughts. But, in spite of all that (...) when he [Deleuze] talks about an affirmation of negation [Deleuze 1986: 71], we feel

very close, maybe too close to Hegel” (Wahl 1963: 362). After all, Hegel himself warns us about the dangers of making negation an ultimate:

Determinateness is negation posited as affirmative and is the proposition of Spinoza: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. This proposition is infinitely important; only, negation as such is formless abstraction. However, speculative philosophy must not be charged with making negation or nothing an ultimate: negation is as little an ultimate for philosophy as reality (*Realität*) is for its truth (Hegel 1969: 113).

As we can see in this quotation, negation *as such* has no value; it is *not* an ultimate for philosophy. It would not be fair then to characterize Hegelian philosophy through *negation*. To posit *negation as affirmative* is to take negation *as if* it were positive, which is in itself negative: the finite, the real-immediate (*Realität* and not the real-rational: *Wirklichkeit*), e.g. that which is given to perception. If we do so, then we would be thinking an abstraction, and not what we ought to think: the truth, the absolute. Hegel’s negativity is not an *abstraction*, is not what the immediate sense of “negation” expresses. It has a technical, specific sense that should be kept in mind. Not just any negativity is good for Hegel: he has in store a specific role for negation, that it should fulfil in order to allow the deployment of the real (the *Wirklichkeit*).

On the other hand, not just any negativity is rejected by Deleuze.

Being (what Plato calls the Idea) ‘corresponds’ to the essence of the problem or the question as such. It is as though there were an ‘opening’, a ‘gap’, an ontological ‘fold’ which relates being and the question to one another. In this relation, being is difference itself. Being is also non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative*; rather it is the being of the problematic, the being of problem and question. Difference is not the negative; on the contrary, non-being is Difference (...) For this reason non-being should rather be written (non)-being or, better still, ?-being (...) This (non)-being is the

differential element in which affirmation, as multiple affirmation, finds the principle of its genesis. As for negation, this is only the shadow of the highest principle (Deleuze 1994: 64).

There is in fact a sort of negativity that Deleuze needs; if there were not, there would be just *being*. Then, there would be *affirmation* of reality without *genesis*. That would mean to affirm what exist such as it is - without any hope of change. Just what *is*. Injustice, hunger, misery: yes, yes, yes. That would mean nihilism, not optimism. Being (existence) needs “a principle of its genesis”. Something *different* from being must be posited in order for difference to differentiate itself. Deleuze is not stubborn. He accepts the logical consequence: “being is also non-being”. A sort of negativity. But, beware: “non-being is not the being of the negative”. This could be read as a typical anti-Hegelian theme. But, as we saw, Hegel himself prevents from positing negation as affirmative. We feel very close, maybe too close to Hegel: the “shadow of the negative,” is not that close to the “negation as formless abstraction”? Is not the “not being of the negative” similar to the “negation posited as affirmative”? There is being: affirmation. There is its “principle of genesis”: (non)-being. The negative *is* not: neither for Deleuze, nor for Hegel. For both there is being (existence, the extensive space-time reality where we carry on our lives). For both being does not explain itself. For both there is a principle of the genesis of being that must be posited. There is a *gap* between being and the principle of its genesis (the Idea, the question). It seems that Wahl was right all along: there seems to be no advantage for the non-subsistence and deletion of the negative elements.

It is how Deleuze and Hegel think this gap where the difference emerges. Deleuze had made it explicit already in 1962, in the passage underlined by Wahl: “In and through the eternal return negation as a quality of the will to power transmutes itself into affirmation, it

becomes an affirmation of negation itself” (Deleuze 1986: 71). No acceptance of the existence as such, but a power to *transmute*. Not just being, but the problematic, the question that corresponds to it. And the Nietzschean “eternal return” (*ewige Wiederkunft*) running through the gap, transmuting reality, enforcing becoming, folding *the fold*. On the other hand, Hegel will posit the *negativity of essence* that must assure the return (*Rückkehr*) of being to its principle. The real point of fracture between Hegel and Deleuze seems to have been found: the gap between the *ewige Wiederkunft* and the *Rückkehr*, between the repetition and the contradiction. Faucher has glimpsed into the abyss: “we must here dwell a bit longer on this notion of return” (Faucher2010: 346). Only he does not dwell long enough, and he takes Hegel’s return to be only “Miltonic”: “The human subject leaves the simple and bestial bliss of the animals (empty empiricism) and undergoes a gruelling journey only to return home again as a whole and articulately concrete self” (Faucher 2010: 246). We will dwell here a little longer, in order to analyse what kind of *return* Hegel is positing and what its real difference is from the *eternal return* that Deleuze supports.

IV. Is that all there is?

Deleuze says, so calm and quiet: there is a gap between being and its principle of production. Hegel, on the other hand, is terrified of the gap. He believes it to be the great failure of Spinoza’s system, its “orientalism”:

In a similar manner [to Spinoza’s], in the oriental conception of *emanation* the absolute is the light which illuminates itself. Only it not only illumines itself but also *emanates*. Its emanations are *distancing* [*Entfernungen*] from its undimmed clarity; the successive productions are less perfect than the preceding ones from which they arise. The process of emanation is taken only as a *happening*, the becoming only as a progressive loss. Thus

being increasingly obscures itself and night, the negative, is the final term of the series, which does not first return into the primal light [*das nicht in das erste Licht zurückkehrt*] (Hegel 1969: 538-539)

This objection is crucial to our debate, because the Spinozist ontology underlies that of Deleuze (and his kin to orientalism). A gap between essence (such as they are in Substance or God) and the modes (such as they exist in time and space), leads to the distancing of the being from their principle of production (non-being or ?-being): “thus being increasingly obscures itself and night, the negative, is the final term of the series”.

The positivity of the (non)-being or ?-being is jeopardized by this distance: once *through* the gap, what is affirmed is just empirical being: its negativity, its finitude. This was exactly the critic that Hegel addressed to the abstract negation. As we can see now, it is linked to the critique of Spinoza (if *omnis determinatio est negatio*, then we must affirm negativity). Deleuze naturally will not care for this consequence. The problem is: is it a logical consequence of his “Spinozist” ontology? In the Deleuzian gap between ?-being and being, is there a *distancing* and the actualization of a process of “progressive loss”?

As we said, Hegel is terrified by this gap, and it is in order to fulfil it (or suppress it, or repress it), that he will introduce the key concept of return (*Rückkehr*). The return is what will assure that the “final term of the series” will return to the primal light. Without return, reality such as we know it, the existence that we live in, is condemned to darkness and finitude. Philosophy would have no point, for empirical existence is all there is. And that is the reason, the *ground*, for the negativity in the Hegelian system. Negativity is the operation that assures the return. At the same time, assuring the return is the criteria for distinguishing the real, concrete negativity from the spurious. The Hegelian logic is tight. He is convinced that without negativity *such as he poses it* the system of reality will melt

down. We would be living in a desert where a finite being would lead to another finite being, a pointless chain linked by an abstract negativity: the *schlechten Endlichkeit* that progresses into nothingness. Nada! Nada! This is all there is: nihilism would have arrived. That is why concrete negativity must be posited.

The analysis of the work of this concrete negativity is developed in the second book of the *Science of Logic*: the doctrine of essence. Essence is not what the abstractive reflection believes it to be,¹³ *i.e.* “the sum total of all realities.” For Hegel, the essence is characterized by *negativity*. This negativity is not the *external negation* of something finite by another (such as was the case in the first book of the *Science of Logic*, “The doctrine of being”); it is not the negation of all the “determinatenesses of being” (which would only put existing beings elsewhere, leaving them as they were, projecting them to the spurious infinitude) but “it is *itself* this negativity” and thus “the infinite movement of being” (Hegel 1969: 390). Essence is not *affirmatively present* (negation posited as affirmative) but what posits that which is affirmatively present. As a consequence, essence *is* not, but posits what *is* (Hegel 1969: 391.)¹⁴ Not every determination *is* negation, because the essence determines without *being*. This determination is produced by the reflection that posits the determinations of being – and by doing so, it fulfils the *gap* and assures the return.

That is how concrete negativity works. That’s how, in the Hegelian system, the mediation between Being and Notion (at its last level, Idea) is assured. The essence is “the negatively self-related negation which would be *in its own self* the return into the first identity, so that this identity would then be veritable identity” (Hegel 1969: 538). Now the hasty Deleuzian will cry: hey, there it is, identity! Let’s get ourselves some torches and stakes! As we will see in the next section, Deleuze himself is in this case the first of all hasty Deleuzians. But let’s hold the torches back. In the first place, we must still analyse how the Deleuzian

(eternal) return works, to see how disruptive it is vis-à-vis the Hegelian return – and we will see that this concept responds to some of the objections that Hegel had raised with respect to the ontology of Spinoza. And in the second place, we must contemplate, at least briefly, the strange identity of Hegelian return, because what returns may be, after all, different from what it first was: the movement of the Idea perpetually different from itself.

V. The eternal return as the fold in the gap

Deleuze himself is in fact the first of all the hasty Deleuzians in raising the torches against Hegel's return as the return of identity. All throughout *Difference and Repetition* the critique repeats itself: the circle of return banishes difference from the Hegelian philosophy.¹⁵ Contradiction may seem the greatest of all differences, but it cannot be so, as long as it follows the shape of a circle: through negativity or reflection the same element is the principle and what returns after the self-movement. There has been no *becoming* in the process:

Difference is the ground, but only the ground for the demonstration of the identical. Hegel's circle is not the eternal return, only the infinite circulation of the identical by means of negativity (Deleuze 1994: 50).

We are here in the crucial point: the *Rückkehr* is *not the eternal return*. It is not *difference* but *identity* which circulates. By the means of *negativity*. Everything wrong with Hegel is there: circle, identity, negativity. Deleuze is not using negativity here in its nominal, abstract sense. He is targeting the negativity of essence, as the intermediate moment between Notion and Being. The insipid monocentricity of the circles makes the Hegelian dialectic no real movement, only the appearance of movement - and the Hegelian difference no real difference but the appearance of difference. Hegelian return (*Rückkehr*) is not the

eternal return (*ewige Wiederkunft*). Thus, it does not have difference as its ground, but identity. Negativity grants “the circulation of the identical”. Through negativity, Notion leaves itself and becomes Being, but only to return such as it was: the circle of the eternal return *of the same*, Zarathustra’s nausea. Hegel not only does not free empirical reality from its condemnation to be just what it is, but enchains it to the powerful force of the absolute (in political terms: we are slaves, and the State does not only not free us, but grants us our slavery, enforces our chains). The eternal return, the third synthesis of time, on the contrary, links us to the new, to the possibility of change, of creation. The repetition is a window to the future: the *Wiederkunft* leads to the *Zukunft* (Deutsch for future).

Why shouldn’t we hastily embrace Deleuze’s critique and throw ourselves into the *Wiederkunft*? Because it would be reasonable to assess Hegel’s ground for positing the necessity of the *Rückkehr*. The circle of reflexion is, in Hegel’s perspective, the only way to prevent Spinoza’s mistake, which we mentioned above. That is, the *gap* between ?-being and being could become a river of ontological degradation: being would increasingly obscure itself and the final term of the series (us, our world) would be *night*. Without the *Rückkehr*, difference would dissolve itself in its repetition. This Hegelian accusation is of great concern for Deleuze: by looking forward to affirm difference, he would be led to one of the aspects of *indifference* mentioned at the very beginning of the book: “the undifferentiated abyss, the black nothingness, the indeterminate animal in which everything is dissolved” (Deleuze 1994: 28).

However, in Deleuze’s view, this critique misses the essence of his ontology: there is no distancing because ?-being (or Difference) does not transcend the *beings* it engenders. There is a relationship of *immanence* between the “elements.”¹⁶ It is in that sense that Deleuze affirms that *being is also non-being*: what exists in space and time (the

contractions of Deleuze's first synthesis of time) is immanent to the principle of its genesis. The "elements" are not external to each other. "Difference is the first affirmation; eternal return is the second, the 'eternal affirmation of being'" (Deleuze 1994: 243). Difference, the first affirmation, is ?-being; the repetition of the eternal return is the second: the affirmation of being. This eternal return or third synthesis of time must not be thought as an external operator. That is the mistake committed, according to Deleuze, by the empiricist: "to leave external what is separated" (Deleuze 1994: 170). When that is the case, then effectively the gap between the elements can become an ontological fracture. But Deleuze will not make that mistake. He searches the "internal problematic objective unity" through which "difference immediately reunites and articulates that which it distinguishes" (Deleuze 1994: 170).

In order to articulate this complex question Deleuze creates a concept, for which he chooses a problematic term: Idea. Heavily invested by the history of philosophy, from Plato to Hegel, this term may lead to countless misunderstandings. But, of course, Deleuze uses it in a very technical, very unique sense. The task for Ideas in Deleuzian ontology is to avoid the 'gap' between ?-being and being becoming an ontological degradation, without needing to posit any kind of negativity. Non-being is not the being of the negative precisely because it is the being of the problematic and "problems are Ideas" (Deleuze 1994: 168). Ideas "swarm in the fracture" and by doing so they "retain what it fractures". The "opening", the "gap" in Deleuze is an "ontological fold" that articulates ?-being and beings, injecting creativity and becoming both in the empirical experience, and in the *ground*.

I believe that Hegel's critique of Spinoza is very much present when Deleuze develops his concept of Idea. That is why, when he accuses Kant of being "too empiricist", he credits the objection to post-Kantians:

We should seek the real reasons for which, just as the post-Kantians objected, Kant held fast to the point of view of conditioning without attaining that of genesis. If the mistake of dogmatism is always to fill that which separates, that of empiricism is to leave external what is separated, and in this sense there is still too much empiricism in the *Critique* (and too much dogmatism among the post-Kantians) (Deleuze 1994: 170).

For the orthodox history of philosophy, “post-Kantians” means essentially three major names: Schelling, Fichte and Hegel. And even if Deleuze considers Salomon Maimon as the “grounded” of post-Kantianism and has a clear preference for Schelling among the classic post-Kantians, Hegel must undoubtedly also be credited for the intention of going beyond the point of view of conditioning and attaining that of genesis, namely the Idea. The Idea is the ‘principle of genesis’ for Deleuze as much as it is for Hegel.

VI. Hegelian Ideas

Deleuze takes into consideration Hegel’s objections to Spinoza, not only by fully assessing the risks of a “gap” in his ontology, but also by playing with the problem and thus making the gap itself the articulation of the elements. It is naturally harder for Hegel to address Deleuze’s objections: the history of philosophy gave him the lower hand. There comes Deleuze with his anti-Hegelian stakes and torches, and Hegel must stay still in his grave. It is for us to wonder: is Hegelian *Rückkehr* really the return of the same? Is the Hegelian circle a monocentric one?

Let’s start with that which Deleuze credits to post-Kantians – in our interpretation, also to Hegel. Kant is “too empiricist”, as long as he “leaves external what is separated”: he should not have held fast to the point of view of conditioning. Hegel himself tried to attain the

point of view of genesis. Of course, there is too much dogmatism in Hegel: he fills that which separates. That would be the point of fracture between Hegel and Deleuze—Hegel needs to *fill* the gap: that is why he creates the logic of essence, with all the negativity and reflection, with the *Rückkehr* and the circle. For Deleuze, this means the return of the same. There is not real difference, for example, between the Idea and the State, or the Essence and the Nature: “Thought ‘rediscovers’ the State, rediscovers ‘the Church’ and rediscovers all the current values that it subtly presented in the pure form of an eternally blessed unspecified eternal object” (Deleuze 1994: 136).

In his courses, Deleuze used to say that the interpretation of a philosopher is a question of emphasis: where we put our stress defines what we make of a particular author.¹⁷ When Hegel says, for example, that “in that negativity the Notion has determined itself in such a manner that its *particularity* is an *external objectivity*, or it has determined itself as a simple concrete unity whose externality is its self-determination” (Hegel 1969: 753), we can emphasize the negativity, and then place ourselves in the standpoint of the *essence* or *reflection*. By doing so, all we would find in Hegel is the repetition of the same: the structure of the monomaniacal movement of dialectics (affirmation, negation, negation of negation, once and over again). After all, the *process* of the Idea is one with its *identity*: “the Idea is the *process* of sundering itself into individuality and its inorganic nature and again of bringing this inorganic nature under the power of the subject and returning to the first simple universality” (Hegel 1969: 759). Through the external objectivity, it’s only the identity of the Idea which is reaffirmed.

But we can interpret the same passage of page 753 differently. It would suffice to place the emphasis in the Idea as “a concrete unity whose externality is its self-determination.” The Idea would thus be for Hegel what it is for Deleuze, that is, an “internal problematic

objective unity” (Deleuze 1994: 170), and *this internal problematic unity* would be the principle of its productivity. The Idea is the unity of the Notion and reality (Hegel, 1969: 586), but this unity expresses the process of self-determination of the Idea. This process is too rich to only be the circle of identity closing in on itself. The self-determination is endless: each time the Idea manages “apparently from its own resources to bring itself to maturity, it is none the less on a *higher* level [*Stufe*] that it starts” (Hegel 1977: 492).

This does not mean to deny the negativity of the Idea, only to think beyond the negativity, in search of that something deeper towards which Wahl has pointed. Beyond the “fundamental prejudice in this matter” according to which “dialectic has *only a negative result*” (Hegel 1969: 832). The Hegelianism, such as Deleuze despises it, have hitherto only interpreted negativity as a result; the point is to think of it as a *turning point*: “the negativity just considered constitutes the *turning point (Wendungspoint)* of the movement of the Notion. It is the *simple point of the negative relation to self*, the innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual self-movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses” (Hegel 1969: 835). If we consider the process of the Idea not only as a *Rückkehr*, but also as this *Wendungspoint*, then the emphasis moves thus from the figure of the circle towards that of the fold.¹⁸ The transcendental landscape comes to life, and the post-Kantian shift towards the standpoint of genesis emerges. The Idea becomes the “innermost source of all activity” and the dialectics “the soul of everything true.”

The Idea is “a universal *first, considered in and for itself*, shows itself to be the other of itself” (Hegel 1969: 832-835). Deleuze’s critique points out that this *other of itself* is not really *other* but *the same*. However, *if* we consider the Idea as the source of all activity, *if* we consider that the self-determination of the Idea is endless and *if* we consider *Wendungspoint* as the ontological fold which relates being and the question one to the

other, *then* we are close, maybe too close, to the genetic principle that Deleuze also tried to think. And instead of forgetting all about Hegel, we could benefit from all the subtle distinctions he introduces into the Idea to improve our understanding of the deep meaning of some of the key Deleuzian motives and concepts, and continue to keep his philosophy living through a productive *relation* with him whom we always thought was merely his enemy.

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Notes

1 Faucher's paper offers an excellent image of the ensemble of the debate as he analyses in detail the points of view of Houlgate, Butler and Malabou, which he considers its three main positions. The first section is not as much about Houlgate as about the point of view of the extreme opposition between Deleuze and Hegel. While according to Houlgate "Deleuze performs an aberrant misreading or distortion of Hegelian themes" (Faucher 2010: 330), commentators such as Brusseau and Hardt "border on editorialising in favour of Deleuze" (Faucher 2010: 341). But the outcome is much the same: "judging Hegel from a purely Deleuzian standpoint, or, vice-versa, is an exercise that will most likely end in a stalemate" (Faucher 2010:353). Butler's section allows Faucher to present a different perspective of the relation between Hegel and Deleuze: no longer one of mere opposition, but one of contagion. Deleuze in fact approaches Hegel more than he dares admit, but only to burden himself with the metaphysical sins of the German Idealist. For Butler, Deleuze would suffer from "residual Hegelianism" as long as his position is not freed from "the Hegelian dream that the satisfaction of desire would establish the primacy of plenitude, the presumption of ontological integrity and immanent metaphysical place" (Butler 1999, 217). Only Malabou will try to find positivity in their relation. Faucher's position in the debate is that Deleuze's critiques must be read "in response more to Hegel's *Logic* than to his *Phenomenology*" (Faucher 2010, 345), that Hegelian's return (*Rückkehr*) is impossible, untenable and undesirable in the Deleuzian ontology (Faucher 2010, 346) and that the comparison between the two thinkers must be abandoned to focus on "what emerges from each thinker's metaphysics" (Faucher 2010, 353). Beaulieu (2011), Groß (2011) and Krause (2011) are some of the scholars that intervened in the debate shortly afterwards.

2 That is the kind of dialectic that Deleuze tries to prevent: "Substituting for the ideal objectivity of the problematic a simple confrontation between opposing, contrary or contradictory propositions" (Deleuze 1994 (1): 164).

3 Ficara has recently published a beautiful piece on the relation between Deleuze and Croce (Ficara 2009).

4 "Hegel, is, to a certain extent, given privileged treatment; he becomes the *only one* (...). Does not Hegel, inasmuch as he incarnates the extreme of a 'normal' unity, become Deleuze's '*anomalous*', the unavoidable and indispensable 'phenomenon of bordering'?" (Malabou 1996: 120).

5 1966 is the year of publication of *Le Bergsonisme*, where we find the last of the truly anti-Hegelian perspective of Deleuze.

6 See for example, Smith 2001: 119, and Beaulieu 2011: 60.

7 In his "Letter to Michel Cressole" of 1973, Deleuze points out *in the past tense* that what he "most detested was Hegelianism and dialectics" (Deleuze 1995: 6). He is referring to his books on the history of philosophy, a period we could date from his book on Hume (*Empiricism and Subjectivity*, of 1953) to the publication of *Bergsonism*, in 1966.

8 The defense proposed by Faucher is notoriously weak: "Deleuze's version of difference and determination differs from Hegel's, and this distinction must be emphasized: in particular, for Hegel the role of determination is performed by Thought, while for Deleuze determination occurs in what he calls the virtual" (Faucher 2010: 334). The virtual and a thought without image are closely linked in Deleuze's ontology, and, in any case, what needs to be addressed is how the determination of the virtual is different from the determination in Hegel's Idea.

9 For example, in the bibliography of his 1972's *La patience du concept*, Gérard Lebrun writes: "I have never followed the famous book from Alexandre Kojève. I have thus chosen not to mention him" (Lebrun 1972: 417).

10 "Although this Spirit starts afresh and apparently from its own resources to bring itself to maturity, it is none the less on a *higher* level [*Stufe*] that it starts" (Hegel 1977: 492).

11 This displacement was characteristic of the French Hegelianism after Kojève. Gregoire's *Etudes hégéliennes* (1958) starts by stating that the study of the works of the young Hegel and the *Phenomenology* had displaced that of the achieved system, and for that reason he had decided to publish some works on the period of maturity (Gregoire 1958, v).

12 The passage chosen by Faucher is also especially anthropocentric: it is a reflection on the determination of man (Hegel 1969: 123).

13 The critique of the abstractive reflection, the understanding or the common sense runs through the work of Hegel. That is one of the many points of contact with Deleuze, who will make the critique of common sense or the "dogmatic image of thought" the necessary prolegomena to philosophy (Protevi 2010: 36).

14 Miller mitigates Hegel by translating "in essence the determinateness is not a simple immediacy" (Hegel 1969: 390), where Hegel writes "am Wesen hingegen *ist* die Bestimmtheit nicht" (Hegel 1992: 5). Hegel doesn't write "is not a simple immediacy" but just "*is not*": there is not *being* in essence: the essence posits being, reflects itself in the illusion of being (*Schein*).

15 "Hegelian contradiction appears to push difference to the limit, but this path is a dead end which brings it back to identity (...) Nothing shows this more clearly than the insipid monocentricity of the circles in the Hegelian dialectic" (Deleuze 1994: 263). "Infinite representation may well multiply figures and moments and organise these into circles endowed with self-movement; these circles no less turn around a single centre" (Deleuze 1994: 68). "Always the same ambiguity on the part of the ground: to represent itself in the circle that it imposes on what it grounds, to return as an element in the circuit of representation that it determines in principle" (Deleuze 1994: 110).

16 The quotations indicate that there are not really "elements" for the existence of any determination depends on the unity of the undetermined, the determinable and the determination as moments of the Idea. We cannot develop here this key aspect of Deleuze's ontology, that leads ultimately to the question of the Idea as a differential relation dy / dx .

17 For example, in his class on Spinoza of March 17 1981.

18 "It is the point of inflection itself, where the tangent crosses the curve. It is the point-fold" (Deleuze 1993: 14).