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Individual Existence and the Philosophy of Difference

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It is a commonplace to say that it is hard to understand the trajectory of ‘continental’ philosophy without coming to terms with the influence of Hegel. It might be thought that this is because Hegel led those who came after him in a new direction, which can only be followed by going ‘via’ his work: and in part this is true. But the opposite is also true: namely, that Hegel represents for many ‘continental’ thinkers not a *break* with the mainstream of philosophical thinking, but a *continuation* of it, so that unless one has some insight into Hegelian philosophy, one will not be able to see how through their engagement with Hegel, many continental philosophers are engaged with certain perennial philosophical questions – questions that are often of concern to ‘analytic’ philosophers as well. Hegel should therefore not just be seen as a ‘parting of the ways’ between ‘continental’ and ‘analytic’ philosophy, but as a bridge between them too, as many continental thinkers have come to address the traditional problems of philosophy through their encounters with Hegel, in a way that is hard to see if he is left out of the picture, as most ‘analytic’ discussions of these problems tend to do.

One such traditional question is *the problem of individuality*. This problem concerns the question of what makes something an individual, as a unified entity distinct from other individuals. As we shall see, this problem has its roots in the history of philosophy, from Plato onwards, and is a problem with several dimensions, as it raises concerns not only in metaphysics, but also in epistemology and ethics. Recognizing its importance, Hegel made the issue central to his philosophical system, and offered what he took to be a satisfactory solution to it, using the idea of the ‘concrete universal’. However, from Schelling, Feuerbach and Kierkegaard onwards, dissatisfaction with this solution has been central to ‘continental’ thought, the objection being that Hegel’s solution fails to do justice to the real uniqueness of individuals, where our incapacity to capture that uniqueness in conceptual terms is seen as a crucial limitation on the Hegelian approach, and on the approach of the philosophical tradition more generally. A recent and sophisticated expression of this dissatisfaction can be found in the work of Gilles Deleuze, whose position we will

examine in some detail, in order to see whether his ‘philosophy of difference’ offers a distinctive way out of the difficulties that the problem of individuality poses for us.

1. The problem of individuality

We can begin by looking in more detail at the problem, and exploring its ramifications.

At an intuitive level, it seems commonsensical to hold that the world around us contains individual entities which (a) are unified conjunctions of properties, (b) are distinct from all other entities, (c) belong to a type or class of relevantly similar entities which has or can have several members, (d) instantiate properties that can be instantiated by other individuals, (e) remain the same over time and various alterations, and (f) have properties but are not properties of anything else. Thus Fido the dog has numerous properties belonging to him (being brown, hairy, lazy, four-legged and so on) that belong together as *his* properties, while Fido himself is distinct from Rex and all other dogs. At the same time, Fido is one amongst others of the doggy kind, and he is also one amongst others who are brown, lazy and so on (who may or may not also be dogs: Rex is also brown, while Harry the boy is also lazy).

Now, this commonsense metaphysical position can of course be challenged from the outside, for example by science or theology. But it also has certain internal difficulties, as some of these views seem to be in tension with one another. Two areas of tension will concern us here. The first is that on the one hand, how are we able to do justice to the apparent similarity or sameness between things in terms of their properties and the kind to which they belong ((d) and (c) above), while on the other hand acknowledging their individuality, both as being distinct from other things ((b) above), and as being unified ((a) above)? And the second tension is this: how are we to account for the way in which one entity forms a unified individual, when it exemplifies a plurality of properties? Let us call the first issue *the problem of individuation* (what makes *A* distinct from other things?), and the second *the problem of indivisibility* (what makes *A* a single unified thing?). The real difficulty here (which constitutes *the problem of individuality* as a whole) is that what may look like a good answer to one of these problems leaves us in a poor position to answer the other, so what we want is a position that would properly deal with *both*.

Thus, in relation to the problem of indivisibility, a traditional answer has been that the properties of an individual entity are held together by some sort of underlying substratum, in which the properties inhere. However, substratum theories are then criticised on the grounds that they seem unknowable (what Locke called ‘a supposed, I know not what, to support those *Ideas* we call accidents’),¹ while also leading to the problem of individuation: for if each substance is in itself propertyless, what can distinguish one substratum from another? Reacting against the substratum view, philosophers have therefore adopted instead what are known as bundle theories: individual entities are collections of properties tied together by the relations between those properties, rather than any underlying substratum.² However, a difficulty for the bundle theory is the problem of individuation: if individuals are nothing more than bundles of properties, it follows that to be distinct from one another, two individuals must differ in their properties – but couldn’t there be individuals who have exactly the same properties, which are nonetheless distinct? Couldn’t Fido have an identical twin, while for all that each is a different individual? To deny that this is possible, one would have to be committed to an implausibly strong version of Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles, which would rule this out. The bundle theorist might counter this difficulty by appealing to what are sometimes called ‘impure’ properties (such as being identical with oneself, or being in a specific spatio-temporal location), where including such properties in the bundle would make Leibniz’s principle more plausible, perhaps even trivial – but to have such properties (it might be felt), a thing must *already be* an individual, so this cannot explain or constitute its individuality.

Another response might be for the bundle theorist to query the conception of properties on which the problem arises: for, if we conceive of properties not as universals (which can be instantiated by more than one thing, so that Fido and his twin can both be brown at the same time), but as what are usually called *tropes* (which are *particulars*, so that Fido and his twin each have their distinct trope of brown), then the difficulty disappears, as the bundle that constitutes the individual is made up of properties that are *themselves* particulars (so that the brown property Fido

¹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Bk II, Ch XXIII, §15, p. 305.

² Cf. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edn, ed by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), Bk I, Pt I, §VI, p. 16: ‘[N]one will assert, that substance is either a colour, or a sound, or a taste... We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we talk or reason concerning it’.

possesses could not be possessed by his twin, though of course he could possess one exactly similar to it).

Now, as a form of nominalism, trope versions of the bundle theory have been attacked on that score. But they have also been criticised as not really solving the problem of individuation: for, if this does not now arise at the level of individual entities, it may still seem to arise at the level of individual properties, namely, what makes Fido's brownness numerically distinct from his twin's? A natural answer might be, because brown₁ belongs to Fido, and brown₂ belongs to his twin. But, if Fido and his twin are nothing but bundles of properties, and we are explaining the individuality of each bundle through the particularity of the properties that constitute the bundle, how can we explain the particularity of a property by appealing to the fact that they belong to different bundles – isn't this hopelessly circular? Moreover, the trope theorist cannot appeal to space-time location to determine the identity and diversity of properties, because he must allow such properties to exist 'compresently', that is, at the *same* spatio-temporal location (in the way that Fido's hairiness and four-leggedness do, to the extent that his legs are hairy).³

A natural way to respond to these difficulties, is to look for a position that relies on more than just the properties of the individual (such as brownness or hairiness) to differentiate it, but in a way that does not go back to the earlier substratum model, with its mysterious 'I know not what'. One such response is to argue that what grounds the distinctness of an individual is not the particularity of its properties (as on the trope theory), or the characterless substratum in which they inhere (as on the substratum theory), but the *substance* universal that the individual exemplifies, where the substance universal is the kind to which the individual as a whole belongs (such as 'dog', 'human being', 'rose' and so on) rather than the property the individual may have qua member of that kind (such as being a brown dog, a white dog, a black dog, or whatever). The idea here, then, is that substance universals are intrinsically individuating: it is by virtue of exemplifying the kind 'dog' that Fido is distinct from his twin, even if they have all their ('pure') property universals in common, because qua dog, Fido is a different individual from all members of the same kind. This appeal to substance-universals can therefore be

³ For this and related problems for the trope view, see E. J. Lowe, 'Form Without Matter', in David S. Oderberg (ed), *Form and Matter: Themes in Contemporary Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 1-21, pp. 17-20.

presented as a way out of the difficulties of the bundle and substratum approaches to the problem of individuation:

Kinds are universals whose instantiations are numerically different; but the instantiations of a substance-kind just are the various substances which belong to or fall under it. Thus, there is no need either to deny what is obvious – that it is possible for different objects to be indiscernible with respect to their pure universals [which is the problem for the bundle theory] or to appeal to bare substrata in explaining how this is possible [as on the substratum theory]. Indiscernible substances agree in their substance-kinds; but for two or more objects to agree in a substance-kind is *eo ipso* for them to be numerically different. Substance-kinds of and by themselves diversify their members, so that in being given substance-kinds we are thereby given universals that guarantee the diversification of the objects which exemplify them.⁴

The substance-kind theory (as I will label it) may therefore seem to show a way out of the problem of individuation. It may also seem to show a way out of the problem of indivisibility, for the claim is also that (like the substratum view) we can think of properties as inhering in something while (as on the bundle theory) refusing to treat this underlying subject as a bare particular: rather, the properties inhere in the individual qua member of the kind, not as an indeterminate substratum, so that it is as a dog that Fido is brown, lazy and so on, where it is his doginess that unifies these properties in him as an individual.

It may nonetheless be felt, however, that there is something rather mysterious about this substance-kind theory. For, if the substance-kind is a universal that members of the kind all exemplify, then how can this differentiate the individuals, when as a universal it is the same in each? As an instantiation of a substance-kind, isn't there still a question of what makes a substance of that kind the particular

⁴ Michael J. Loux, *Substance and Attribute: A Study in Ontology* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978), pp. 163-4. Cf. also Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 117-27 and 'Beyond Substrata and Bundles: A Prolegomenon to a Substance Ontology', in Stephen Laurence and Cynthia Macdonald (eds), *Contemporary Readings in the Foundations of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 233-47, esp. pp. 242-5. A similar view is defended by E. J. Lowe: see 'Form Without Matter', pp. 12-13, and *Kinds of Being: A Study of Individuation, Identity and the Logic of Sortal Terms* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 11: '...the notions of *individual* (or particular) and *sort* (or kind) are, very arguably, interdependent and mutually irreducible. Individuals are only recognizable as *individuals of a sort*, while sorts are only intelligible as *sorts of individuals*'.

individual it is, if the kind is common to other individuals of the same type? If, on the other hand, this is accounted for on the ground that the substance-kind is instantiated in the individual not as a universal, but as a particular, then this is to opt for a trope-like view of substance-kinds: but as with the trope view of properties, don't we then need some explanation of what makes Fido's exemplification of doginess distinct from his twin's? To say that it *just is* distinct is not to solve the problem of individuation, but to repeat it.

At this point, it may then be tempting to think we must return to something like a substratum view, as offering some grounding for the difference between individuals. One such view is the traditional position of hylomorphism, which treats individuals as the particular individuals they are in virtue of a combination of the stuff (*hyle*) of which they are made, and the form or nature or essence (*morphe*) imposed upon it, where the matter is then seen as providing a principle of individuation for the individual entity that exemplifies the universal type: what makes Fido and his twin distinct is that the form 'dog' is exemplified in different parcels of matter or stuff.⁵ However, if we are obliged to think of matter as formless in itself, how can this be a source of individuality in a thing?

Another attempt to account for individuality is proposed by those who hold that individuals have a unique feature which is the basis for their difference from other things, usually termed 'thisness' or *haecceitas*, which is a non-qualitative property responsible for individuation (as opposed to 'whatness' or *quidditas*, which are properties the thing can share with other things, such as brownness, laziness etc.). Like the substratum theory, the haecceitas theory therefore introduces something over and above the qualitative properties of a thing to serve as its individuator, but unlike the substratum theory, it treats this 'thisness' as a non-qualitative part of the bundle that constitutes the thing, rather than as a substratum *underlying* its properties. The difficulty with this view, however, is that any such 'thisness' looks as mysterious as

⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1034a5-7: 'And when we have the whole, such and such a form in this flesh and in these bones, this is Callias or Socrates; and they are different in virtue of this matter (for that is different), but the same in form; for their form is indivisible'. This may suggest that the theory for which Aristotle is the main ancestor is hylomorphism: but in fact some support in Aristotle can be found for most of the positions we have discussed. For an interesting discussion of Aristotle that relates to the themes of this paper, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysik. Begriff und Probleme*, edited by Rolf Tidemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998); translated as *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems* by Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

the substratum it partially resembles, in not really *explaining* individuation, but just marking the phenomenon we want explained.

We thus seem to face a fundamental tension on how to approach the problem of individuality. On the one hand, we can try to deal with the problem in a qualitative way, arguing that individuals are nothing over and above the properties and substance universals that constitute them: but then we face the difficulty of explaining the unity of individuals, and that it always seems possible that another individual might exist that shares the same properties, in such a way as to show that they are not really individuating. On the other hand, we can add something further to this qualitative view of individuals; but this additional feature (such as a substratum, or haecceity) seems to involve a problematic ontological commitment that it would be good to be without. The difficulties faced here run like a thread through the history of philosophy from at least Plato onwards.

2. Hegel and the ‘concrete universal’

Having sketched the problem of individuality, and some of the various attempted solutions it has given rise to, I now want to explore the way in which the problem figures in Hegel’s thought. Broadly speaking, as we shall see, Hegel wanted to follow a qualitative way out of the difficulty, while his subsequent opponents argued that this was an inadequate response, and so turned to non-qualitative solutions.

At first sight, it may seem surprising to claim that a concern with such traditional philosophical issues forms part of the Hegelian system, because Kant is widely believed to have shown that such metaphysical concerns can be traced back to nothing more than the ‘natural illusions’ of reason; so further speculation on such matters might be expected to seem futile to a post-Kantian philosopher such as Hegel. However, in fact if anything the Kantian revolution in philosophy had the opposite effect: for, to Hegel, it appeared that Kant had shown how much our view of the world depends on the fundamental concepts (or categories) we bring to it, so that unless we reflect deeply on the kinds of metaphysics implicitly presupposed by these categories, we can never hope to arrive at a satisfactory picture of reality, making metaphysical speculation seem of more vital significance than ever:

...metaphysics is nothing but the range of universal thought-determinations, and is as it were the diamond-net into which we bring everything in order to make it intelligible. Every cultured consciousness has its metaphysics, its instinctive way of thinking. This is the absolute power within us, and we shall only master it if we make it the object of our knowledge. Philosophy in general, as philosophy, has different categories from those of ordinary consciousness. All cultural change reduces itself to a difference of categories. All revolutions, whether in the sciences or world history, occur merely because spirit has changed its categories in order to understand and examine what belongs to it, in order to possess and grasp itself in a truer, deeper, more intimate and unified manner.⁶

Hegel thus believed that ‘to him who looks at the world rationally, the world looks rationally back; the two exist in a reciprocal relationship’,⁷ in the sense that it is only if we come to the world with the right metaphysical framework will we be able to make the world seem a rationally intelligible place, and that continuing metaphysical puzzles are evidence of our failure to achieve this.

Of all such puzzles, Hegel took the problem of the relation between individuals and universals to be the most fundamental, because on this question so much of our view of epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics and much else depends. To take an example: in one of his discussions of the struggle for recognition, which precedes the famous ‘master-slave’ dialectic, Hegel presents a fundamental difficulty we face in our social interaction as the clash between realizing that we are one amongst others who in some sense are the same as us, with the feeling that we are also unique and so fundamentally distinct:

In this determination lies the tremendous contradiction that, on the one hand, the ‘I’ is wholly universal, absolutely pervasive, and interrupted by no limit, a

⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, Zweiter Teil: Die Naturphilosophie*, §246 Zusatz, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden, Theorie Werkausgabe*, edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969-71), vol. 9, pp. 20-21; translated as *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Part 2 of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, by Michael John Petry, 3 vols (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970), vol. 1, p. 202.

⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *Werke*, vol. 12, p. 23; translated as *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 29.

universal essence common to all men, the two mutually related selves therefore constituting one identity, constituting, so to speak, one light; and yet, on the other hand, they are also two selves rigidly and unyieldingly confronting each other, each existing as a reflection-into-self, as absolutely distinct from and impenetrable by the other.⁸

Here, then, the problem of individuality takes a socio-political form, as we attempt to come to terms with our sense of both identity with and difference from one another. The fundamental nature of this problem meant that Hegel therefore felt obliged to deal with it, and thus address the views of the tradition on this question.

As I understand it, there are two strands to Hegel's discussion of the problem, one negative and critical of certain ways of approaching the difficulty, the other positive and constructive, in attempting a solution. The negative discussion comes largely in the opening sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel takes as his target two prominent non-qualitative ways of thinking about individuality (the haecceity theory and the substratum theory), while he is also critical of one form of qualitative approach (the bundle theory). In his positive account, Hegel offers a version of substance-kind theory, which is defended largely in Book III of his *Logic*.

The first part of Hegel's negative discussion comes in the section on 'sense-certainty' at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*. As in the *Phenomenology* in general, Hegel's aim here is to present an 'immanent critique' of a position taken by consciousness: that is, he wants to show that a certain view of the world which consciousness adopts is internally incoherent or unstable. The view taken by sense-certainty which concerns him, is that the best way to gain knowledge of the world is to experience it directly or intuitively, without applying concepts to such intuitions, for fear that this distorts our knowledge or makes it more abstract. The claim of sense-certainty is, then, that the 'richest' and 'truest' knowledge comes from 'immediate' rather than 'mediated' knowledge, which involves 'apprehension' rather than

⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, Dritter Teil: Die Philosophie des Geistes*, §430 Zusatz, in *Werke*, vol 10, p. 219; translated as *Philosophy of Mind: Part 3 of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, by William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 170-1. Cf. also G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, Erster Teil: Die Wissenschaft der Logik*, §163 Zusatz, in *Werke*, vol. 8, pp. 311-3; translated as *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), pp. 240-1.

‘comprehension’.⁹ This conception of knowledge it made plausible for sense-certainty by a certain ontological view underlying it, namely, that because it does not use concepts but just intuitions, it is able to grasp a thing *as an individual*, without any abstraction from its unique specificity or pure particularity, so that for sense-certainty, ‘the existence of *external* objects, which can be more concretely defined as *actual*, absolutely *singular*, *wholly personal*, *individual* things, each of them absolutely unlike anything else’ had ‘absolutely certainty and truth’.¹⁰ In claiming that each individual has a unique nature which is subject to direct intuition, sense-certainty resembles the haecceity theory, where this unique nature cannot be grasped conceptually, for all concepts are general and so only apply to universal and shareable characteristics of the thing:

Consciousness, for its part, is in this certainty only as a pure 'I'; or I am in it only as a pure 'This', and the object similarly only as a pure 'This'. I, *this* particular I, am certain of *this* particular thing, not because I, *qua* consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways; and also not because *the thing* of which I am certain, in virtue of a host of distinct qualities, would be in its own self a rich complex of connections, or related in various ways to other things. Neither of these has anything to do with the truth of sense-certainty: here neither I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation; the 'I' does not have the significance of a manifold imagining or thinking; nor does the 'thing' signify something that has a host of qualities. On the contrary, the thing *is*, and it *is*, merely because it *is*. It *is*; this is the essential point for sense-knowledge, and this pure *being*, or this simple immediacy, constitutes its *truth*. Similarly, certainty as a *connection* is an *immediate* pure connection: consciousness is 'I', nothing more, a pure 'This'; the singular consciousness knows a pure 'This', or the single item.¹¹

In so far as sense-certainty maintains that the being of the object it knows is constituted by its unique individuality in this way (its ‘thisness’ or haecceity), sense-

⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Werke*, vol 3, p. 82; translated as *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 58.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, p. 91; *Phenomenology*, p. 66.

¹¹ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, pp. 82-3; *Phenomenology*, pp. 58-9.

certainty naturally also holds that knowledge also needs to be aconceptual, and that such knowledge is the ‘richest’ and ‘truest’: for (it claims) if we bring in concepts, we bring in general terms that take us away from things in their singularity.

Hegel now goes on to show, however, that this position is unstable, for it turns out that the ‘thisness’ which sense-certainty attributes to individuals is completely indeterminate, and thus far from being specific to each entity, is in fact entirely general – to the extent that sense-certainty grasps what it means by ‘this’, *everything* possesses it. Because ‘thisness’ is conceived as a non-qualitative property, it cannot be described; but because it cannot be described, there is no feature by which the ‘thisness’ of Fido can be distinguished from the ‘thisness’ of his twin, or of any other object – so ‘thisness’ is utterly general or universal:

If they actually wanted to *say* 'this' bit of paper which they mean, if they wanted to *say* it, then this is impossible, because the sensuous This that is meant *cannot be reached* by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal. In the actual attempt to say it, it would therefore crumble away; those who started to describe it would not be able to complete the description, but would be compelled to leave it to others, who would themselves finally have to admit to speaking about something which *is not*. They certainly mean, then, *this* bit of paper here which is quite different from the bit mentioned above; but they say 'actual *things*', '*external* or *sensuous objects*', '*absolutely singular entities*' and so on; i.e. they say of them only what is *universal*. Consequently, what is called the unutterable is nothing else than the untrue, the irrational, what is merely meant [but is not actually expressed].¹²

Hegel’s discussion of sense-certainty, therefore, can be interpreted as a critique of one prominent approach to the problem of individuality, where this is attributed to some unique ‘thisness’ belonging to the individual, rather than constructed through the qualitative features of the individual which it may share with others.

Having come to see that it cannot coherently think of individuality in terms of some sort of unique individuating essence, the presentation of consciousness in the

¹² Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, pp. 91-2; *Phenomenology*, p. 66.

Phenomenology moves on to the next level of *perception*, where consciousness is now ready to conceive of individuals as being constituted by properties, and so treats each individual as a bundle of universals at a spatio-temporal location, which Hegel terms an ‘Also’.¹³ However, consciousness then finds this bundle view of the object is unstable and so moves to the opposite view, which takes the individual to be a ‘One’, and thus a unified substratum over and above its properties.¹⁴ Hegel therefore presents consciousness as playing out a familiar dialectic between bundle and substratum views, and oscillating from the one to the other: on the one hand, the bundle view makes it hard to explain why we think of properties as inhering in an individual, whereby different instances of these properties are distinct from one another; on the other hand, the substratum view leads us to a characterless ‘One’ underlying the ‘Also’. Locked in this dialectic, consciousness cannot find a satisfactory way of dealing with the problem of individuality, as it turns from one standpoint to the other.

Hegel’s diagnosis of what has gone wrong here, and thus the basis for his positive solution to the problem, is hinted at at the end of the ‘Perception’ section of the *Phenomenology*, where he comments that while perception involves universality, ‘it is only a *sensuous universality*’,¹⁵ so that the properties perception attributes to the individual are just sensible properties, such as ‘white’, ‘tart’, ‘cubical in shape’ and so on. The difficulty with such properties, is that they appear to be merely properties or

¹³ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, p. 95; *Phenomenology*, pp. 68-9; translation modified: ‘This abstract universal medium, which can be called simply “thinghood” or “pure essence”, is nothing else than what Here and Now have proved themselves to be, viz. a *simple togetherness* of a plurality; but the many are, *in their determinateness*, simple universals themselves. This salt is a simple Here, and at the same time manifold; it is white and *also* tart, *also* cubical in shape, of a specific weight, etc. All these many properties are in a single simple “Here”, in which, therefore, they interpenetrate; none has a different Here from the others, but each is everywhere, in the same Here in which the others are. And at the same time, without being separated by different Heres, they do not affect each other in this interpenetration. The whiteness does not affect the cubical shape, and neither affects the tart taste, etc.; on the contrary, since each is itself a simple relating of self to self it leaves the others alone, and is connected with them only by the indifferent Also. This Also is thus the pure universal itself, or the medium, the ‘thinghood’, which holds them together in this way’.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, pp. 95-6; *Phenomenology*, p. 69: ‘In the relationship which has thus emerged it is only the character of positive universality that is at first observed and developed; but a further side presents itself, which must also be taken into consideration. To wit, if the many determinate properties were strictly indifferent to one another, if they were simply and solely self-related, they would not be determinate; for they are only determinate in so far as they *differentiate* themselves from one another, and *relate* themselves *to others* as to their opposites. Yet; as thus opposed to one another they cannot be together in the simple unity of their medium, which is just as essential to them as negation; the differentiation of the properties, in so far as it is not an indifferent differentiation but is exclusive, each property negating the others, thus falls outside of the simple medium; and the medium, therefore, is not merely an Also, an indifferent unity, but a *One* as well, a unity which *excludes* an other. The One is the *moment of negation*; it is itself quite simply a relation of self to self and it excludes an other; and it is that by which ‘thinghood’ is determined as a Thing’.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, p. 105; *Phenomenology*, p. 77.

accidents *of* the individual, so that the individual *itself* is treated as something underlying them, which leads us to the substratum view. What we need, then, is a conception of universality which is more than just a ‘sensuous universality’, where the universal which the individual exemplifies is constitutive of it in some way, and so underlies its accidental properties; in this way, the individual is viewed as neither a bundle of diverse property-universals, not a bare property-less substratum, but as constituted by a *substance*-universal (such as ‘man’, or ‘horse’, or ‘dog’) that characterizes it as a unified individual, to which diverse properties belong.

Hegel puts forward a substance-universal theory of this kind in Book III of the *Logic*, where he introduces his distinction between abstract and concrete universality. What this distinction amounts to can be seen by looking at the examples Hegel gives of each kind of universal, particularly as these are presented in his discussion of the hierarchy of judgements and syllogisms. At the most basic level of the qualitative judgement and the qualitative syllogism, the universal is an accidental property of an individual, which fails to differentiate it from other individuals: ‘When we say: “This rose is red,” the copula “is” implies that subject and predicate agree with one another. But of course, the rose, being something concrete, is not merely red; on the contrary, it also has a scent, a definite form, and all manner of other features, which are not contained within the predicate “red”. On the other hand, the predicate, being something abstractly universal, does not belong merely to this subject. For there are other flowers, too, and other objects altogether that are also red’.¹⁶ Thus, with a universal like ‘red’, there is a clear distinction we can draw between the universal and the individual that possesses that property, and that universal and the other properties it possesses. At the next level, in the judgement and syllogism of reflection, we get a closer interrelation: for here we predicate properties of individuals which we take to belong to other individuals of the same kind, where being of this kind then comes to be seen as *essential* to the individual, and where some properties are seen as essential to any member of the kind. Thus, in the case of a judgement like ‘All men are mortal’, we treat being a man as an essential property of each individual man, and not a mere

¹⁶ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie Logik*, §172 Zusatz, p. 324; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 250. Cf. also G. W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Werke*, vol. 6, p. 300; translated as *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, by A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), p. 621: ‘When one understands by the universal, what is *common* to several individuals, one is starting from the *indifferent* subsistence of these individuals and confounding the immediacy of *being* with the determination of the Notion. The lowest conception one can have of the universal in this connexion with the individual is this external relation of it as merely a *common element*’.

feature that these individuals happen to have in common, such as possessing earlobes.¹⁷ Here, then, we get a closer interconnection between the universal and the individual, in so far as the universal is now seen as an essential property of the individual; and we also have a closer connection between the universal and the particular properties that make something an individual, because it is only qua individual of a certain *kind* that the individual has these properties, and not as a ‘bare’ individual: ‘[I]t would not make sense to assume that Caius might perhaps be brave, learned, etc., and yet not be a man. The single human is what he is in particular, only insofar as he is, first of all, human as such, and within the universal; and this universal is not just something over and above the other abstract qualities or mere determinations of reflection, but is rather what permeates and includes within itself everything particular’.¹⁸ This then leads to the judgement and syllogism of necessity, where the particular properties that distinguish one individual from another (e.g. this straight line from this curved line) are seen as different manifestations of a shared substance universal (linearity) by virtue of being different particularisations of the way that universal can be (lines are either straight or curved). So, not only do we see how universality is essential to particularity (Caius can only be a particular individual if he is a man); we also see how particularity is essential to universality (Caius cannot be a ‘man in general’, but must be a determinate example of a man, whose differences from other men nonetheless does not prevent him exemplifying the same universal ‘man’).¹⁹ At this point, Hegel says, the universal as it is now envisaged is truly concrete, in the following respects:

¹⁷ Cf. *Enzyklopädie Logik*, §175 Zusatz, p. 327; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 253.

¹⁸ *Enzyklopädie Logik*, §175 Zusatz, p. 327; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 253, translation modified. Cf. also *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Werke*, vol. 5, p. 26; *Science of Logic*, pp. 36-7: ‘[E]ach human being though infinitely unique is so precisely because he is a *man*, and each individual is such an individual primarily because it is an animal: if this is true, then it would be impossible to say what such an individual could still be if this foundation were removed, no matter how richly endowed the individual might be with other predicates, if, that is, this foundation can be equally be called a predicate like any other’.

¹⁹ Cf. *Enzyklopädie Logik*, §24 Zusatz, p. 82; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, pp. 56-7: [I]n speaking of a definite animal, we say that it is [an] “animal.” “Animal as such” cannot be pointed out; only a definite animal can ever be pointed at. “The animal” does not exist; on the contrary, this expression refers to the universal nature of single animals, and each existing animal is something that is much more concretely determinate, something particularised. But “to be animal,” the kind considered as the universal, pertains to the determinate animal and constitutes its determinate essentiality. If we were to deprive a dog of its animality we could not say what it is. Things as such have a persisting, inner nature, and an external thereness. They live and die, come to be and pass away; their essentiality, their universality, is the kind, and this cannot be interpreted merely as something held in common’. Cf. also Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geschichte*, p. 38; *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*,

- it is not merely a property, in the sense of being a way an individual may be: rather, it is *what* the individual *is*, in so far as that individual is an instance of that kind of thing; it is therefore a substance universal (e.g. ‘man’ or ‘rose’) and not a property universal (e.g. ‘red’ or ‘tall’)²⁰
- it supports generic propositions, such as statements of natural law (‘human beings are rational agents’) and normative statements (‘because this person is irrational, he is a poor example of a human being’); these are therefore to be distinguished from universally quantified statements (‘all human beings are rational’), which tell us about the shared characteristics of a group of individuals, rather than the characteristics of the kind to which the individuals belong
- it can be exemplified in individuals which have different properties, so that there need be nothing *further* in common between these individuals than the fact they exemplify the same concrete universal (the way in which one individual is a man may be different from the way in which another individual is a man)

We can now see what Hegel means by his claim that ‘the abstract universal...is opposed to the particular and the individual’,²¹ while the concrete universal is not: A rose is not an individual rose by virtue of exemplifying the abstract universal ‘red’, whereas it is an individual rose by virtue of exemplifying the concrete universal ‘rose’ – so the latter is dialectically related to individuality in the way the former is not; and it exemplifies the abstract universal ‘red’ in the same way as other red things, whereas it exemplifies the concrete universal ‘rose’ differently from other roses, in so far as some roses are scented and others are not, some are evergreen and others are not, etc. – so the latter is dialectically related to particularity in the way the former is not. Thus, whereas it may appear that we can conceive of ‘red’ in abstraction from individuality and particularity, we cannot conceive of ‘rose’ in this manner, so that

p. 72: ‘For the individual *exists* as a determinate being, unlike man in general who has no existence as such’.

²⁰ Cf. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie: Die Philosophie des Geistes*, §456 Zusatz, p. 266; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 209, where Hegel distinguishes the genus as a concrete universal, from the particular properties of the individual: ‘This common element is either any one *particular* side of the object raised to the form of *universality*, such as, for example, in the rose, the red colour; or the *concrete universal*, the genus, for example, in the rose, the plant’.

²¹ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Werke*, vol 6, p. 275; *Science of Logic*, p. 602.

this kind of universality involves the other ‘moments’ of particularity and individuality in the way that an abstract universal does not.

Taken in this way, Hegel’s position can be viewed as a distinctive contribution to the metaphysical discussion concerning universals, in the tradition of substance-universal accounts. The trouble with abstract universals like ‘red’, Hegel argues, is that instances of such universals are not individuals in themselves, so that individuals are reduced to ‘bundles’ of such universals, while difficulties in individuating these bundles leads to the ‘substratum’ view of objects: but because this substratum is ‘bare’ (i.e. propertyless), it is hard to see how it can do the individuating job required of it. However, if we recognize that there are also concrete universals like ‘man’, we will avoid these problems: for, while instances of ‘red’ are not individuals, instances of substance universals like ‘man’ are; but for this to be the case, it must be possible to exemplify a universal like ‘man’ in many different ways, such that each of us can be a man uniquely, in a way that constitutes our individuality. Hegel thus offers a way of solving the problem of individuation, without appealing to any of the ‘non-qualitative’ solutions we have discussed, such as haecceity theory, substratum theory, or trope theory: while there is nothing more to the individual than the universals it exemplifies, those universals are a combination of property and substance universals, so that it is qua man that I have the particular set of properties that make me into an individual, not as a bare ‘this’. Unless we recognise Hegel’s way of drawing a distinction between abstract and concrete universals, this way of solving the problem is something we will miss.

Hegel’s doctrine of the concrete universal may therefore be summarized as follows: The individual is no more than an instantiation of universals (there are no ‘bare’ individuals). But the universals that constitute the individual are not just property universals, as these just tell us what attributes the individual has, not what the individual *is* (so the ‘bundle view’ is false). But the substance universals which constitute the nature of the individual qua individual do not exist in the abstract, but only as particularised through property universals, and thus as instantiated in the form of individuals (so Platonism is false). So, starting from any one of the categories of the Concept (universality, particularity, individuality), this category can only be made intelligible in the light of the other two: individuality is constituted by the particularised substance universal (as an individual, I am a man with a determinate set of properties that distinguish me from other men); the substance universal exists only

in individuals, through its particularisation (the universal ‘man’ exists *in rebus*, as instantiated in *different* men); and particularity is the differentiation of a substance universal, whereby it constitutes an individual (it is qua man that I have the properties which distinguish me from other men). It is the dialectical interconnection between the three categories which Hegel thinks is needed if we are to have an adequate solution to the problem of individuality, of the sort that is required.

3. The existential protest

Hegel doctrine of the ‘concrete universal’ thus offers a subtle and in many ways appealing approach to the problem of individuality, in trying to account for the singularity of the individual on the one hand, while avoiding the obscurities of substratum or haecceity theories on the other. However, as we saw in the opening section, such theories are appealing to those who feel that no qualitative approach (such as Hegel’s) can really do justice to the individuality of an object.

In Hegel’s case, this worry may be pressed as follows: On Hegel’s version of the substance-kind theory, as we have seen, and individual is viewed as a particularised substance-universal; that is, Fido qua individual is an instantiation of the substance-kind ‘dog’, but in a particular way, so that as a dog, Fido is distinct from Rex. Hegel is therefore suggesting that what individuates Fido is not *just* that he instantiates the substance-universal, as on the ‘classical’ substance-kind theory introduced in the first section – for that gives rise to the question of how this could be so, as Fido and Rex are both dogs, and so both exemplify the *same* universal. Rather, Hegel is claiming that what differentiates Fido and Rex is that they have distinct ways of being dogs – Fido is one colour, Rex another, and so on, so that in each of them the substance-universal is ‘particularised’ in a different manner.²² Now, one question this approach raises, is that if Fido and Rex exemplify doginess differently, how can we say that they exemplify doginess as a *universal*, which is supposed to be the *same* in each of its instances? Hegel’s response would seem to be that this is just what is distinctive of a *concrete* as opposed to an *abstract* universal: whereas a red rose and a

²² Cf. again Hegel, *Enzyklopädie Logik*, §24 Zusatz, p. 82; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 56: ‘“The animal” does not exist; on the contrary, this expression refers to the universal nature of single animals, and each existing animal is something this is much more concretely determinate, something particularised’.

red ball may both be red in the same manner, individuals who are dogs will each be so in different ways. Another question is this: if we are relying on the different properties of Fido and Rex to account for the fact that they are different individuals qua dogs, doesn't this in effect lead us back to the problems of the bundle view? For, it is surely possible that two dogs could have the same particularising qualities (of laziness, brownness etc), so what could then make them distinct? If the reply is, they are distinct qua dogs, even if their properties are the same, we are back with the 'classical' substance-kind theory, which claims that substance-universals are intrinsically individuating: but how? Hegel's doctrine of particularisation seemed to make this less mysterious; but if that means that two dogs can only be distinct if they have different properties, that would appear to mean that like Leibniz, Hegel must deny that two things could ever be qualitatively identical – but then what individuating work is the substance-universal doing, if what makes Fido and Rex distinct are their respective properties?²³

To his subsequent critics, it appeared that Hegel had been led to this impasse because the nature of his philosophical project made it impossible for him to leave room for the unique specificity of the individual: for, as they understood that project, Hegel was an idealistic rationalist, who wanted to show that the fundamental nature of the world is accessible to thought, and who could therefore not acknowledge anything in the 'that' over and above the 'what', for otherwise the existence of a thing would be determined by something unconceptualizable. One of the first to criticise Hegel in these terms was F. W. J. Schelling, who in his later years argued that Hegel had failed to see that 'We live in this determinate world, not in an abstract or universal world that we so much enjoy deluding ourselves with by holding fast to the

²³ Cf. Hegel's discussion of Leibniz in the *Science of Logic*, where Hegel endorses the Leibnizian position, but just argues that it has not been properly proved:

Ordinary thinking is struck by the proposition that no two things are like each other – as in the story of how Leibniz propounded it at court and caused the ladies to look at the leaves of trees to see whether they could find two alike. Happy times for metaphysics when it was the occupation of courtiers and the testing of its propositions called for no more exertion than to compare leaves!...The law of diversity...asserts that things are different from one another through unlikeness, that the determination of unlikeness belongs to them just as much as that of likeness, for determinate difference is constituted only by both together.

Now this proposition that unlikeness must be predicated of all things, surely stands in need of proof; it cannot be set up as an immediate proposition, for even in the ordinary mode of cognition a proof is demanded of the combination of different determinations in a synthetic proposition, or else the indication of the third term in which they are mediated. This proof would have to exhibit the passage of identity into difference, and then the passage of this into determinate difference, into unlikeness. But as a rule this is not done. (Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Werke*, vol. 6, pp. 53-4; *Science of Logic*, pp. 422-3)

most *universal* properties of things, without penetrating to their actual relationships'.²⁴ As a result of this error, Schelling argued, Hegel had propounded what he characterised as a *negative* philosophy, which is confined to a world of concepts and essences, and neglects the facticity of *existence*, with its fundamental contingency and singularity.

Moreover, Hegel's critics did not only set out to explore the inadequacy of Hegel's own position: they also tried to show that his arguments against the alternative views were unfounded. Thus, both Ludwig Feuerbach and Søren Kierkegaard offered criticisms of Hegel's treatment of sense-certainty, arguing that his attempts to refute the insights of this position were unsuccessful and begged the question against it. On their view, Hegel's central claim was that while sense-certainty holds that each individual has the unique property of being 'this' which is meant to belong just to the particular individual, in fact *everything* has this property; for, when we come to say anything about it, there is nothing we can do to characterise the 'thisness' belonging to Fido, or indeed any other individual, so it appears to be an entirely *general* property, and thus universal. It therefore seemed to be crucial to his argument that Hegel made the demand that sense-certainty should be able to respond to the question 'What is the *This*?', where he then stated that this question could not be satisfactorily answered, except in the most general terms:

It is as a universal too that we *utter* what the sensuous [content] is. What we say is: 'This', i.e. the *universal* This; or, 'it is', i.e. *Being in general*. Of course, we do not *envisage* the universal This or Being in general, but we *utter* the universal; in other words, we do not strictly say what in this sense-certainty we *mean* to say. But language, as we see, is the more truthful; in it, we ourselves directly refute what we *mean* to say, and since the universal is the true [content] of sense-certainty and language expresses this true [content] alone, it is just not possible for us ever to say, or express in words, a sensuous being that we *mean*... When Science is faced with the demand – as if it were an acid test it could not pass – that it should deduce, construct, find *a priori*, or however it is put, something called 'this thing' or 'this one man', it is

²⁴ F. W. J. Schelling, *Die Philosophie der Offenbarung Zweiter Teil*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by K. F. A. Schelling, 14 vols (Stuttgart and Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856-61; reprinted Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1974-76), 14: 332.

reasonable that the demand should *say* which ‘this thing’, or which ‘this particular man’ is *meant*; but it is impossible to say this.²⁵

To his critics, however, the question this passage raises is whether Hegel is right to ask sense-certainty to respond to this demand ‘What is *This?*’, and whether in so doing he is proceeding *immanently*, examining sense-certainty in its own terms. For, they argued, language is inherently *conceptual*, so that if we are asked to *say* something about the ‘This’, we will find we cannot characterise it in descriptive terms, and so will appear to be saying that the ‘This’ is abstract and empty, a mere ‘Being in general’ that belongs to everything equally: but why should sense-certainty treat the ‘This’ as if it were linguistically expressible rather than ineffable, something *beyond* the conceptuality of language? After all, isn’t that what sense-certainty claims about it in the first place: that it can be *apprehended* but not *comprehended*? So, by setting his question as a test that sense-certainty must pass, isn’t Hegel in fact begging the question against it, and so not proceeding ‘immanently’ in the way he claims?

In his essay ‘Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy’ (1839), Feuerbach presents this objection as follows, quoting Hegel’s remark about ‘Language being the more truthful’ which we have cited above:

But is this a dialectical [i.e. properly immanent] refutation of the reality of sensuous consciousness? Is it thereby proved that the general is the real? It may well be for someone who is certain in advance that the general is the real, but not for sensuous consciousness or for those who occupy its standpoint and will have to be convinced first of the unreality of sensuous being and the reality of thought... Here, language is irrelevant. The reality of sensuous and particular being is a truth that carries the seal of our blood. The commandment that prevails in the sphere of the senses is: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Enough of words: come down to real things! *Show* me what you are talking about! To sensuous consciousness it is precisely language that is unreal, nothing. How can it regard itself, therefore, as refuted if it is pointed out that a particular entity cannot be expressed without language? Sensuous consciousness sees precisely in this a refutation of language and not a

²⁵ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, pp. 85-7; *Phenomenology*, pp. 60-2.

refutation of sensuous certainty... [The *Phenomenology*] begins, as mentioned already, not with the ‘other-being’ of thought, but with the *idea of the ‘other-being’ of thought*. Given this, thought is naturally certain of its victory over its adversary in advance. Hence the humour with which thought pulls the leg of sensuous consciousness. But this also goes to show that though has not been able to refute its adversary.²⁶

Feuerbach thus tries to turn the tables on Hegel’s argument from language: rather than the ineffability of the ‘This’ showing it to be an empty abstraction, it rather shows the limitations on what language can express, namely the uniqueness of the individual, so that while Hegel refutes ‘“this-being,” *haecceitas*’ as an ‘*idea*’,²⁷ something that can be conceptualised, he does not refute it as a *fact*, as the ‘other-being’ of thought. For Feuerbach, therefore, there is no reason to take Hegel’s arguments against the haecceity theory with any great seriousness, in so far as he himself failed to take that position seriously.

In a similar manner, what Kierkegaard finds striking in Hegel’s discussion of sense-certainty is not that it provides a refutation of the immediacy of sense-certainty, but that it points up a tension between that immediacy and the mediacy of language, as sense-certainty struggles to put into words the nature of its unmediated encounter with the individual:

What, then, is immediacy? It is reality itself [*Realitet*]. What is mediacy? It is the word. How does the one cancel the other? By giving expression to it, for that which is given expression is always *presupposed*.

Immediacy is reality; language is ideality; consciousness is contradiction [*Modsigelse*]. The moment I make a statement about reality, contradiction is present, for what I say is ideality.²⁸

²⁶ Ludwig Feuerbach, ‘Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie’, in *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Werner Schuffenhauer, vol. 9 (*Kleinere Schriften II (1839-1846)*), pp. 43-45; translated in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, translated by Zowar Hanfi (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 77-9; reprinted in Robert Stern (ed), *G. W. F. Hegel: Critical Assessments*, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 117-8.

²⁷ Feuerbach, ‘Zur Kritik’, p. 45; *The Fiery Brook*, p. 79; *Critical Assessments*, vol. 1, p. 118.

²⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer*, edited by P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr and E. Torstling (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909-48, IV B1: 146; translated in *Johannes Climacus, or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, in *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus, Philosophical Writings, VII*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 167-8. Cf. also

In an alternative formulation, Kierkegaard makes the issue even clearer: ‘Intrinsically there is already a contradiction between reality and ideality; the one provides the particular defined in time and space, the other the universal’.²⁹ For Kierkegaard, Hegel is to be criticised as seeming to want to overcome this contradiction, but in a way that favours ideality over reality, the universal over the particular, and it is this then that makes him think he can get beyond sense-certainty, whereas in fact it merely raises problems for him that his subsequent account of the ‘concrete universal’ fails to solve, concerning the ‘contradiction between reality and ideality’.

We have seen, therefore, how there is an important strand of nineteenth century ‘continental’ thought – out of which different forms of existentialism, materialism, critical theory and empiricism were to develop – that emerges as a reaction against Hegel’s approach to the problem of universality. Turning now to the twentieth century, we will consider how this question plays a role in the thought of Gilles Deleuze, who offers a particularly sophisticated treatment of the issue.

4. Individuality and difference

Deleuze’s approaches the problem of individuality from the perspective of what is known as his ‘philosophy of difference’. This perspective is captured in the following passage from one of his major works, *Difference and Repetition*:

That identity not be first, that it exist as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle *become*; that it revolve around the Different; such would be the nature of the Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under the domination of a concept in general already understood as identical.³⁰

a draft of this passage (*Papirer* IV B 14: 6; translated Hong and Hong, p. 255): [I]t is language that cancels immediacy; if man could not talk he would remain in the immediate. This could be expressed, he [Johannes Climacus] thought, by saying that the immediate is reality, language is ideality, since by speaking I produce the contradiction. When I seek to express sense perception in this way, the contradiction is present, for what I say is something different from what I want to say. I cannot express reality in language, because I use ideality to characterize it, which is a contradiction, an untruth’.

²⁹ *Papirer* IV B 10: 7; translated Hong and Hong, p. 257.

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), p. 59; translated as *Difference and Repetition* by Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994), pp. 40-1.

For Deleuze, Hegel is typical of a thinker who does not give difference ‘its own concept’, because for Hegel when something is an individual and so distinct from anything else, it is not distinct ‘immediately’ or ‘in itself’, but distinct from things that are of the same kind as itself, by virtue of properties that set these identical things apart from one another. Thus, Deleuze takes Hegel to put identity prior to difference, because he holds that while the difference between things makes them individuals, their difference is grounded in an underlying identity: Fido and Rex are distinct in the properties they possess, but they only possess those properties qua dogs, which is a substance universal they both share. In this respect, he argues, Hegel puts identity first and difference second, whereas Deleuze wants to put them the other way round.³¹

Deleuze makes clear that he sees the need for his ‘Copernican revolution’ in order to overturn a certain ‘image of thought’,³² which in part arises from treating as essential to individuals what they have in common, in the manner of Plato’s Forms. The danger with this view, as Deleuze sees it, is its essential conservatism: thought will attempt to assimilate all individuals into a general type, and thereby exclude or devalue their difference or singularity, as when we speak of a ‘common sense’ that is supposed to be shared by everyone, but which in fact imposes a false consensus on the minority; or think of the individual as the less than perfect instantiation of the kind to which it belongs.³³ Deleuze believes he can bring out what is wrong with Hegel’s conception of individuation, whereby Socrates is treated as a variant on a kind, rather than something fundamentally new, unique, original, something which thought cannot

³¹ For helpful general discussions of Deleuze’s critique of Hegel, see Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 147-56, and Catherine Malabou, ‘Who’s Afraid of Hegelian Wolves?’, in Paul Patton (ed.), *Deleuze: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

³² Cf. Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, Chap III, and pp. xvi-xvii of the English translation.

³³ Cf. also Adorno, *Metaphysik*, pp. 125-6; *Metaphysics*, p. 79: ‘It might be said with some exaggeration that matter is the *principium individuationis* in Aristotle, and not, as we are inclined to think, form, which is that which determines a particular thing as particular. For him, however, individuation itself is founded precisely on this particularization – the lack of identity, or full identity, of an existent thing with its form. Individuation thus becomes something negative in Aristotle. And that, too, is a basic thesis of all western metaphysics, as it reappears in Kant, where cognition is equated with the determining of an object in its generality and necessity, and as you find it working to its extreme in Hegel, where only the universal manifesting itself through individuation is the substantial – whereas anything which lies outside the identification with the universal principle is regarded as absolutely insignificant, ephemeral and unimportant’.

assimilate as a ‘re-production’ of what it has already encountered (as another man, like Callicles or Caius).³⁴

Thus, in order to turn the Hegelian picture on its head, Deleuze sets out to challenge it as a solution to the problem of individuation. First, he argues that Hegel cannot account for *difference*, because he must do so in terms of the concepts that the individual exemplifies, which are always general and can therefore be shared by other individuals; and second, he argues that Hegel cannot account for *repetition*, because he must think of this as two (or more) individuals exemplifying the same concept at different places and/or times, which is to misrepresent the phenomenon of repetition, which involves one individual repeating another *individual* as such, rather than exemplifying the same properties *as* another individual.

Deleuze urges the problem of difference against Hegel by arguing that, like Leibniz, Hegel must find himself committed to an implausibly strong version of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles. In Leibniz’s case, he finds himself obliged to argue that no two things can be the same with respect to just their non-relational or intrinsic properties, because when God decides to bring an individual thing into existence, what makes it an individual thing different from anything else cannot be its relation to other things, as these relations do not obtain until *after* God’s creative act. Leibniz is therefore forced to argue that two leaves must differ from each other not just because they differ in their relational properties (e.g. in their age, or their spatial properties), but in their intrinsic properties (e.g. their colour or shape). Now, Deleuze suggests that Hegel must also be committed to a view that is implausibly strong in the same way: for, on Hegel’s view, individuation is the result of the particularisation of the substance-universal; but no individual has its relational properties qua instantiation of a kind, or its spatial and temporal properties either, if these are thought of in a non-relational way (as in Kant’s example of left and right hands);³⁵ so that on

³⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 175; translated as *Negative Dialectics*, by E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 173: ‘The concept of the particular is always its negation at the same time; it cuts short what the particular is and what nonetheless cannot be directly named, and it replaces this with identity... The idealist will not see that, however devoid of qualities “something” may be, this is no reason yet to call it “nothing.” Hegel is constantly forced to shadow-box because he shrinks from his own conception: from the dialectics of the particular, which destroyed the primacy of identity and thus, consistently, idealism itself’.

³⁵ Cf. Immanuel Kant, ‘Von dem ersten Grunde der Unterschiedes der Gegenden im Raume’, in *Immanuel Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols, Akademie edition, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902 -), vol. 2, pp. 375-83, pp. 381-2; translated as ‘Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Regions in Space’, in *Theoretical*

this view these properties cannot be what distinguishes one individual from anything else. For example, while being a certain colour or shape is part of what it is for Fido to be a dog, it is arguable that being here or being born when he was is not an aspect of his doginess in the same way. But if this is so on the Hegelian view, where it is only qua dog that Fido is an individual, and none of these relational properties or spatio-temporal properties are parts of his doginess, then isn't the Hegelian therefore required to hold (like Leibniz) that each individual must differ with respect to its *intrinsic* qualities only, where (as with Leibniz) this seems implausible? Deleuze argues, therefore, that what makes an individual *this* individual can be nothing to do with its nature qua member of a kind, which is what he means when he says that difference need not be anything to do with *conceptual* difference: for example, two hands can be identical qua hands, but still be different, where the non-conceptual difference between them (for example, one being the left hand and the other the right) is not grounded in this identity, as it is a difference that is not an aspect of 'being a hand', while nonetheless making them distinct. Deleuze thus argues that while Hegel may have thought that he had a better way of establishing Leibniz's principle than looking to see if in fact two things sharing the same intrinsic properties could be found, his position is equally unsatisfactory:

...is every difference indeed intrinsic or conceptual in the last instance? Hegel ridiculed Leibniz for having invited the court ladies to undertake experimental metaphysics while walking in the gardens, to see whether two leaves of a tree could not have the same concept.³⁶ Replace the court ladies by forensic scientists: no two grains of dust are absolutely identical, no two hands have the same distinctive points, no two typewriters have the same strike, no two revolvers score their bullets in the same manner Why, however, do we feel that the problem is not properly defined so long as we look for the criterion of a *principium individuationis* in the facts? It is because a difference can be internal, yet not conceptual (as the paradox of symmetrical objects shows).³⁷

Philosophy 1755-1770, translated by David Walford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 361-72, p. 370.

³⁶ Cf. G. W. Leibniz to Samuel Clarke, fourth letter, 2nd June 1716, §4; G. W. Leibniz to the Electress Sophia, 31 October 1705.

³⁷ Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, p. 39; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 26.

Deleuze thus concludes: ‘Perhaps the mistake of the philosophy of difference, from Aristotle to Hegel via Leibniz, lay in confusing the concept of difference with merely conceptual difference, in remaining content to inscribe difference in the concept in general’³⁸ – which I take to mean, that because these philosophers have taken the individuality of a thing to be determined by how it differs from other things of the same kind, any non-conceptual basis of difference has been treated as extrinsic to it qua individual, and so has been lost as a ground for individuation, where this can be a basis for difference which is not related to any identity it has with other individuals of the same kind (Fido may differ from Rex in colour qua dog, but his spatial difference from Rex has nothing to do with his doginess and so is a difference that cannot be ‘inscribed in the concept in general’).

As well as claiming that Hegel cannot account for difference in this way, Deleuze also argues that he cannot account for the nature of *repetition*. A natural way to think of repetition, and one that may easily seem to follow from the Hegelian picture, is as follows: *B* is a repetition of *A* when *B* has all the same properties as *A*. So, for example, Fido₁ is brown, hairy, lazy etc, and Fido₂ is just the same, so Fido₂ is a repetition of Fido₁. However, the question Deleuze asks is: why doesn’t this just make Fido₁ and Fido₂ different instances of the same *type*, rather than what we were after, namely a way of seeing Fido₂ as a repetition of Fido₁ qua individual. What has gone wrong, according to Deleuze, is that each individual is seen as an instance of a general kind, whereas the phenomenon of repetition involves the repetition of an *individual*, not merely the instantiation of the same type one more time. Thus, for example, suppose an artist wants to repeat a pattern he has already drawn, or a performance that has already happened – he wants to repeat *this* pattern or *this* performance, not to do something of the same *type* as what has occurred before. But, Deleuze argues, the Hegelian picture has no room for this distinction between repetition and generality, because the individual is never anything more than an instance of a type, so that another individual identical to the first is just another instance, not a repetition of the individual qua individual:

³⁸ *Différence et Répétition*, p. 41; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 27. Cf. also *Différence et Répétition*, pp. 20-4; *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 11-14.

To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent. And perhaps this repetition at the level of an external conduct echoes, for its part, a more secret vibration which animates it, a more profound, internal repetition within the singular. This is the apparent paradox of festivals: they repeat an ‘unrepeatable’. They do not add a second and a third time to the first, but carry the first time to the ‘nth’ power. With respect to this power, repetition interiorizes and therefore reverses itself: as Péguy says, it is not Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates and repeats in advance all the Federation Days; or Monet’s first water lily which repeats all the others. Generality, as generality of the particular, thus stands opposed to repetition as the universality of the singular. The repetition of the work of art is like a singularity without concept... If repetition exists, it expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation and an eternity opposed to permanence. In every respect, repetition is a transgression. It puts law into question, it denounces its nominal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality.³⁹

Deleuze therefore sees in repetition a deep challenge to the Hegelian position, and its account of individuation and individuality.

Having identified these two problems for Hegel, Deleuze makes clear what he sees as the underlying difficulty: that because Hegel adopts a ‘philosophy of identity’,

³⁹ *Différence et Répétition*, pp. 7-9; *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 1-3. Cf *Différence et Répétition*, p. 36; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 23: ‘We are right to speak of repetition when we find ourselves confronted by identical elements with exactly the same concept. However, we must distinguish between these discrete elements, these repeated objects, and a secret subject, the real subject of repetition, which repeats itself through them. Repetition must be understood as pronominal; we must find the Self of repetition, the singularity within that which repeats. For there is no repetition without a repeater, nothing repeated without a repetitious soul’; and Gilles Deleuze, ‘La conception de la différence chez Bergson’, *Les études bergsoniennes*, IV (1956), pp. 77-112, CHECK PAGE REF; translated as ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’ by Melissa McMahon, in John Mullarkey (ed), *The New Bergson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 42-65, p. 58: ‘Repetition does indeed form objective kinds, but these kinds are not in themselves general ideas, because they do not envelop a plurality of objects which resemble each other, but only present us the particularity of an object which repeats itself in an identical way’. In focussing on repetition as a central issue, Deleuze was picking up on critical insights he found in Nietzsche and Kierkegaard: cf. *Différence et Répétition*, pp. 12-13; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 5: ‘There is a force common to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche... What separates them is considerable, evident and well-known. But nothing can hide this prodigious encounter in relation to a philosophy of repetition: *they oppose repetition to all forms of generality*’.

he treats the differences between things as beginning with an underlying identity; but differentiation conceived of in this manner can never go far enough: no matter how many properties are added to the universal ‘dog’, Fido’s individuality must remain elusive, for these properties can always be shared with another individual, and thus all we reach is the ‘*infima species*’ or lowest species, rather than the individual as such:

The individual is neither a qualification nor a partition, neither an organisation nor a determination of species. The individual is no more an *infima species* than it is composed of parts. Qualitative or extensive interpretations of individuation remain incapable of providing reasons why a quality ceases to be general, or why a synthesis of extensity begins here and finishes there. The determination of qualities and species presupposes individuals to be qualified, while extensive parts are relative to an individual rather than the reverse... Because there are individuals of different species and individuals of the same species, there is a tendency to believe that individuation is a continuation of the determination of species, albeit of a different kind and proceeding by different means. In fact any confusion between the two processes, and reduction of individuation to a limit or complication of differentiation, compromises the whole philosophy of difference.⁴⁰

Given this sort of view, it is therefore not surprising to find that Deleuze is drawn to something like a haecceity conception of individuality, as a way of securing his claim ‘that individuation precedes differentiation in principle, that every differentiation presupposes a prior intense field of individuation’.⁴¹ Deleuze accepts that individuality conceived of in this way is ineffable, as something that ‘rises to the surface yet assumes neither form nor figure. It is there staring at us, but without eyes’;⁴² but he resists the Hegelian suggestion that this leaves us in ‘the night in which all cows are black’, where no individual is distinguishable from any other: ‘how differentiated and differentiating is this blackness, even though these differences

⁴⁰ Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, p. 318; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 247.

⁴¹ Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, p. 318; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 247.

⁴² Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, p. 197; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 152.

remain unidentified and barely or non-individuated'.⁴³ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and his co-author Felix Guattari characterise this 'prior intense field of individuation' as the singularity of spatio-temporal relations, where they treat times and places as having a haecceity, rather than individuals as such, and argue that the former are prior to the latter, where individuals should therefore be seen more as 'events' than as 'subjects', in opposition to the traditional metaphysics of individuation that we have been considering.⁴⁴

We have seen, then, how in common with many post-Hegelian thinkers, Deleuze believes that his attempt to construct a 'philosophy of difference' must take him away from Hegel, and into a 'generalized anti-Hegelianism' summarized in the slogan: 'We propose to think difference in itself independently of the forms of representation which reduce it to the Same'.⁴⁵ To Deleuze, Hegel's commitment to this reductionism is clearly evident from the role Hegel (like Aristotle) gives to the substance-universal: for if it is only qua dogs that Fido and Rex can be said to be particularised into individuals, doesn't this show that for Hegel, difference is only allowed to exist in terms of an underlying identity belonging to the generic concept?

However, is Deleuze too quick to set up his 'philosophy of difference' as a challenge to Hegel here in the way he does? Does he overlook the complexities of Hegel's doctrine of the 'concrete universal'? This could perhaps be argued by looking at a passage from Deleuze himself, which comes from an early discussion of Bergson:

In some essential pages dedicated to Ravaisson,⁴⁶ Bergson explains that there are two ways of determining what colours have in common. *Either* one extracts the abstract and general idea of colour, extracted 'by taking away from red what makes it red, from blue what makes it blue, from green what makes it green': one then ends up with a concept which is a genre, with several objects that have the same concept. There is a duality of concept and

⁴³ Deleuze, *Différence et Répétition*, p. 355; *Difference and Repetition*, p. 277. The reference to 'the night in which all cows are black' is to Hegel's well-known criticism of what he saw as Schelling's monistic conception of the Absolute: see Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, p. 22; *Phenomenology*, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie tome 2: Mille plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), p. ??? CHECK PAGE REF; translated as *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1987), pp. 260-3.

⁴⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. xix.

⁴⁶ This is a reference to Bergson's 'La vie et l'oeuvre de Ravaisson', in *La pensée et le mouvant* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1934), pp. 281-322, pp. 287-89; translated as 'The Life and Works of Ravaisson', in Henri Bergson. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), p. 225.

object, and the relation of the object to the concept is one of subsumption. One thus stops at spatial distinctions, at a state of difference exterior to the thing. *Or*, one passes the colours through a converging lens which directs them on to a single point: what we obtain, in this case, is a ‘pure white light’, which ‘brought out the difference between the tints’. In this case the difference colours are no longer *under* a concept, but the nuances or degrees of the concept itself, degrees of difference itself and not differences of degree. The relation is no longer one of subsumption, but participation. White light is still a universal, but a concrete universal, which enables us to understand the particular because it is itself at the extreme of the particular. Just as things have become nuances or degrees of the concept, the concept itself has become the thing. It is a universal thing, we could say, since the objects sketched therein are so many degrees, but a concrete thing, not a kind or generality. Strictly speaking there are no longer several objects with the same concept, as the concept is identical to the thing itself, it is the difference between the objects related to it, not their resemblance. Such is internal difference: the concept become concept of difference.⁴⁷

In treating Bergson as an ally here, Deleuze offers no acknowledgement that the very idea of a concrete universal has an Hegelian provenance, and that in adopting it, Hegel intended to make just the points that Deleuze follows Bergson in making here; and yet, Deleuze does seem to accept that if we think of the universal in concrete terms, ‘the concept [has] become concept of difference’. If this can be allowed, then given Hegel’s own account of the concrete universal, Deleuze’s claim that Hegel reduces difference to identity could perhaps be resisted in the same way:

When people speak of the Concept, they ordinarily have only abstract universality in mind, and consequently the Concept is usually also defined as a general notion. We speak in this way of the “concept” of colour, or of a plant, or of an animal, and so on; and these concepts are supposed to arise by omitting the particularities through which the various colours, plants, animals, etc., are distinguished from one another, and holding fast to what they have in

⁴⁷ Deleuze, ‘Bergson’s Conception of Difference’, p.54. CHECK PAGE REF IN FRENCH ORIGINAL

common. This is the way in which the understanding apprehends the Concept, and the feeling that such concepts are hollow and empty, that they are mere schemata and shadows, is justified. What is universal about the Concept is indeed not just something common against which the particular stands on its own; instead the universal is what particularises (specifies) itself, remaining at home with itself in its other, in unclouded clarity.⁴⁸

Just as Deleuze finds attractive in Bergson's position the idea that the concept of colour cannot be thought of as something in abstraction from the particular colours, so Hegel emphasises that these 'particularities' cannot be 'omitted'; and as a result, like Bergson on Deleuze's reading, Hegel claims that the universal is not just something individuals have in common prior to what makes them distinct as individuals, so that he would agree that 'the different colours are no longer *under* a concept' (in a Platonic manner), but 'the nuances or degrees of the concept itself'. On these grounds, it could be argued, it makes no more sense in Hegel's case than it does in Bergson's to claim that identity is *prior to* difference, in so far as the latter can equally be said to be required for the former.

Of course, even if it can be claimed that Hegel's conception of the 'concrete universal' is closer to Deleuze's philosophy of difference than Deleuze was prepared to allow, this does not show that either position is unproblematic or indeed yet free of apparent incoherence: for each, as we have seen, tries to strike a balance between different competing pressures when it comes to thinking of the problem of individuality. But we have seen how fundamental this problem has become within the 'continental' tradition, and how the complex approaches offered to it reflect the real difficulties it gives rise to, not only in metaphysics, but in ethics, political philosophy and 'philosophies of life'.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hegel, *Enzyklopädie Logik*, §164 Zusatz, pp. 311-2; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, §163, p. 240.

⁴⁹ A version of this paper was presented to a Departmental seminar at the University of Warwick, and I am grateful to members of the audience for comments on that occasion. I am also grateful for comments from Keith Ansell-Pearson and Alison Stone.