

From Duration to Eternal Return: Deleuze's Readings of Bergson and Nietzsche
Dr Nathan Widder
Royal Holloway, University of London
(for Bristol University Geography Department – 15 February 2011)

One of the most remarkable aspects of Deleuze's *Bergsonism* is its positive portrayal of two of Bergson's most controversial and, for many, weakest works, *Duration and Simultaneity* and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. The first seems not only patently to misunderstand the implications of Einstein's special theory of relativity, but to amount to a regression of Bergson's thought back to his early work, *Time and Free Will*. The second seems to represent an aging Bergson's turn to mysticism and transcendence – although these appear already in the 1911 Huxley Lecture that opens *Mind-Energy*. Against such views, Deleuze contends that *Duration and Simultaneity* does not invoke a new psychologism but instead challenges the physicist for confusing different types of multiplicity and continuing to treat time as the counting of instants, Bergson offering the alternative metaphysics that modern physics needs. And he argues that the significance of Bergson's late work is that it demonstrates the process by which duration, as difference actualizing itself, underpins social and moral history. Both defences accord with Deleuze's larger thesis that duration's structure of a virtual past contracted into the actual present and propelling time into an open future expresses a conception of internal difference, which Deleuze deploys explicitly against a Hegelian conception of internal difference as contradiction. Duration, of course, is at the centre of Bergson's philosophical endeavours, and in the development of his thought it comes to define both the separation and the connection between time and space, nature and memory, the closed systems of scientific enquiry and the open systems of life and evolution that surpass scientific analysis. Deleuze's reconstruction of Bergson's thought makes clear that time, as a differentiation of difference that is more than a chronological passage of instants, is the foundation of all fields of becoming. Bergson and Deleuze in this respect clearly occupy

the same terrain.

Nevertheless, despite Bergson's presence throughout Deleuze's work, and against the many scholars who see Bergson as Deleuze's principal inspiration, the multiplicity and differentiation that characterize duration play only a limited role in Deleuze's philosophy of time. This is clear in the 1960s in *Difference and Repetition*, where duration is linked only to the second of three syntheses of time, and in the 1980s in *Cinema II*, where Bergson all but vanishes once the chapter on 'The Powers of the False' is reached. In both cases, Nietzsche is the figure who replaces Bergson, and the eternal return replaces duration, Deleuze holding that the latter concept only grounds time's chronological passage, whereas the former effects time's ungrounding. This turn to Nietzsche is most certainly not a 'Bergsonization' of Nietzsche, as some have claimed. Rather, Deleuze's early reading of Bergson, as will become clear, is more an attempt to introduce into Bergson's thought themes that find a proper home only in Nietzsche. In this way, Deleuze's turn to Nietzsche, I will argue, represents a fundamental break with key features of Bergson's thought: the priority of the pure past, which Deleuze argues implies a continuing form of transcendence; the thesis of continuity, which in Bergson sustains a revised concept of the ego; and the way the new emerges in time. These are the themes Bergson tries to sustain when, after the absolute separation between time, associated with quality, and space, associated with quantity, in his initial formulation of duration in *Time and Free Will*, he seeks a rapprochement between quantity and quality and between philosophy and science. Deleuze opposes Bergson on all these points by turning to an intensive discontinuity, and while Deleuze in his early writings tries to read this discontinuity into Bergson's later works, he clearly abandons this attempt shortly afterwards, writing in *Difference and Repetition* that Bergson's critique of intensive quantity 'seems unconvincing'. From this point onwards, Bergson assumes no more than a middle position in Deleuze's ontology of time, and Deleuze never returns in a serious way to either *Duration*

and Simultaneity or *The Two Sources*. The turn to Nietzsche will have profound consequences for Deleuze's reflections on time, philosophy, and science, but also for the relationship Deleuze draws between time and the self. Time no longer sustains an ego that changes but endures; instead it becomes the time of a fractured ego and of a self that overcomes. In Deleuze's final conception of time, the endurance of the ego is only an appearance, but a necessary one for the emergence of the new.

* * *

Time and Free Will opens with a critique of the concept of intensive quantity, defined as quantity that 'while admitting of no measure...can nevertheless be said that it is greater or less than another intensity'. Bergson holds the idea to be self-contradictory, since 'as soon as a thing is acknowledged to be capable of increase or decrease, it seems natural to ask by how much it decreases or by how much it increases'. He therefore maintains that all conscious states that may appear to relate to one another in terms of more or less are in fact qualitatively different in kind. This forms the prelude to Bergson's presentation of duration as a continuous succession of distinct but interpenetrating qualitative states, one that appears discontinuous and quantitative only when time is abstracted and symbolically represented in space, thereby becoming extended, divisible, and hence numerable. The illusion of quantity easily arises through the way the self relates to the extended, external world, which allows quantitative exchanges associated with bodily experiences to be linked to inner states, ultimately to the point where they become confused. The error is consolidated by language and the way extensity is introduced into inner life in order to designate inner states. The ego is the linchpin of these two orders. Its substantiality is never in doubt for Bergson, but he believes its form is frequently misunderstood. Contacting the extended world at its surface, the ego's true nature is found not in space but in time: 'Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from

separating its present state from its former states'. The error of psychological associationism lies in separating the ego from its states, conceiving the former as an indifferent thread holding together a discrete multiplicity of the latter, and 'thus substituting the symbol of the ego for the ego itself'. In contrast, the concrete ego, for Bergson, is something that both changes and endures.

Bergson insists on the absolute separation of these two worlds: 'The fact is that there is no point of contact between the unextended and the extended, between quality and quantity'; also, 'If magnitude, outside you, is never intensive, intensity, within you, is never magnitude'. But this insistence takes Bergson into a series of quandaries. He maintains that only the ego endures, that the only duration existing outside us is the present moment, but he must then treat the undeniable perception of external change as something mysterious: 'we must not say that external things *endure*, but rather that there is in them some inexplicable reason in virtue of which we cannot examine them at successive moments of our own duration without observing that they have changed'. And he can only gesture towards the deep psychic life that his absolute division requires: 'certain states of the soul seem to us, rightly or wrongly, to be self-sufficient, such as deep joy or sorrow, a reflective passion or an aesthetic emotion. Pure intensity ought to be more easily definable in these simple cases, where no extensive element seems to be involved'. Unsurprisingly, the articulations Bergson attempts to give of these self-sufficient states carry seemingly ineliminable elements of extensity and magnitude. He asserts that aesthetic feelings of beauty and moral feelings of pain go through a series of qualitative changes, as though their progress did not involve and perhaps depend on, say, physical sensations such as an empty feeling in the pit of the stomach from the start. Yet he admits by the conclusion of his discussion that 'there is hardly any passion or desire, any joy or sorrow, which is not accompanied by physical symptoms, and, where these symptoms occur, they probably count for something in the estimation of intensities'.

Addressing affective sensations of pleasure and pain, he simply asserts that while the succession seems to become greater as more parts of the body are involved and in sympathy with the affected part, this is preceded by a purely qualitative series of changes. Perhaps nowhere are intensive feelings mixed more obviously with extensive elements than in Bergson's frequent use of simple motion to illustrate duration and its continuity, since, despite Bergson's insistence that such movement, being successive, is durational, it is also clearly visual and hence extended (Russell is thus quite correct, contra most of today's Bergson interpreters, that Bergson's thought is articulated primarily through visual images). Ultimately, Bergson can sustain the separation of quantity and quality only by invoking a crude idealism. He holds, for example, that 'sound would remain pure quality if we did not bring in a muscular effort which produces it or the vibrations which explain it', as though sound were anything other than vibration – a confusion exactly the same as the error Nietzsche identifies in thinking lightning is something distinct from its flash and the associationist error Bergson himself criticizes of dividing the ego from its states.

Bergson later retreats from this absolute separation in favour of a reconciliation between quality and quantity. An obvious route is available: a synthesis à la Hegel that, based on how sufficient changes in quantity yield changes in quality, would reunify the two in the concept of measure. Such a resolution, however, would quite clearly be anathema to Bergson (and it would significantly lessen his value to Deleuze). So Bergson pursues two interrelated paths. In the first, which appears first in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson holds that science can move closer to consciousness and life by going beyond mechanistic abstractions that deny movement its unity, indivisibility, and qualitative heterogeneity, and he praises modern physics for doing just this by treating the universe in terms of forces rather than atoms, thereby rediscovering the continuity of space. The worlds of internal duration and external space and movement may still be irreducible, and the translation of one into the other still an

enigma, but this is the case only ‘between quality on the one hand and pure quantity on the other’. This opens the way for Bergson to ask whether ‘real movements present merely difference in quantity, or are they not quality itself, vibrating, so to speak, internally, and beating time for its own existence through an often incalculable number of moments?’ His answer is that the continuous flow of qualitative sensations in consciousness and extended movements occurring in space, both can be seen to involve the contraction of innumerable vibrations. The way modern physics and energetic have dissolved the atom into wavelengths and frequencies of force thus provides a common denominator for the distinct worlds of consciousness and matter, ensuring that ‘we grasp, in perception, at one and the same time, a *state* of our consciousness and a *reality* independent of ourselves’.

Yet Bergson knows that modern physics does not abandon quantity. Indeed, these vibrations, which he holds to be innumerable, continuous, and qualitative, are characterized by alternation (hence discontinuity) and are constantly being quantified. In principle they must be numberable, since they demonstrate that there are, ‘beneath the apparent heterogeneity of sensible qualities, homogeneous elements which lend themselves to calculation’. But Bergson maintains, carrying forward an argument from *Time and Free Will*, that the actual calculation of these vibrations presupposes a consciousness with a quality of duration adequate to the task of tallying them. Having suggested that duration might be a vibration (‘real movements...vibrating so to speak, internally, and beating time for its own existence’), it now becomes the ground for vibrations to exist. To say that light waves vibrate 400 billion times a second, an alternation that cannot be grasped by our own lived duration, means that there must either be a real consciousness able to grasp this in a single intuition with the same ease at which we count the ringing of clock bells, or we must dismiss the number as a fiction given to us by a still too quantitative science. In *Matter and Memory*, the idea of multiple rhythms of duration is affirmed, whereas in *Duration and Simultaneity*, they

are dismissed (and consequently Bergson argues that the physicist's vibrations and reciprocal forces are really just 'interposed human conventions' and that Peter on earth and Paul in his spaceship travelling at near light speed will in fact age at the same rate, and only seem to age differently from each other's different perspective). While Bergson may seem to contradict himself in these two texts, the different conclusions are based on the same principle: that quality and consciousness must have priority over quantity and measurement. The affirmation or rejection of constitutive vibrations and of the existence of different paces of duration both rest on claims that reality is fundamentally qualitative and quantity is only an abstract and external view of this qualitative world.

The same priority of quality over quantity also governs Bergson's other proposed reconciliation of the two. This one is prefigured in *Matter and Memory*, where Bergson suggests that 'the interval between quantity and quality [might] be lessened by considerations of tension; it continues in the 'Introduction to Metaphysics' essay where the diversity of durations is considered in terms of compression and dialation; and it reaches full articulation in *Creative Evolution*, where Bergson distinguishes consciousness and matter by how tightly they compact durational succession. Duration now infuses matter, but matter and spirit are defined as two opposing tendencies, spirit compressing the past into the present in order to explode in a creative evolution, and matter relaxing this compression and coagulating into relatively inert substance. Thus 'physics is simply psychics inverted'. Nevertheless, the primary tendency is spiritual and hence qualitative, Bergson portraying the relationship between spirit and matter in terms of a jet of steam thrown into the air, with droplets forming through condensation and falling back to earth, though they are still pressed upward by the continuous force of the uncondensed part of the steam jet. 'The evolution of living species', he declares, 'represents what subsists of the primitive direction of the original jet, and of an impulsion which continues itself in a direction the inverse of materiality'. Thus even though

the genesis of intelligence and matter are inseparable, the former retains priority over the latter. Ironically, then, while physics seems to have moved closer to life in *Matter and Memory*, in *Creative Evolution* Bergson holds that positive science in principle bears on reality only ‘provided it does not overstep the limits of its own domain, which is inert matter’.

All this undercuts Deleuze’s claims that Bergson’s critique of intensity in *Time and Free Will* is ambiguous and not necessarily even directed at intensive quantity as such; that for the Bergson of *Matter and Memory*, ‘there are numbers enclosed in qualities, intensities included in duration’; and that ‘one of Bergson’s most curious ideas is that difference itself has a number, a virtual number, a sort of numbering number’. Deleuze’s early readings try to save Bergson’s philosophy from self-contradiction by distinguishing its methodological and ontological aspects. Bergson’s method, he argues, isolates time and space by insisting on their difference in kind and establishing a strict dualism between the two. Bergson’s ontology, on the other hand, relates time and space in terms of different tendencies to contract and relax, during contracting into itself all levels and thus accounting for the genesis of both time and space, but this ontological unity remains virtual and thus only potentially numerical. Invoking the virtual in this way, Deleuze contends that quantity is indeed reintroduced into quality, not in terms of the numerically distinct differences of degree that Bergson always criticizes, but as ‘degrees of difference’ – degrees of more and less, where number is not discrete but virtual. These differences of degree differentiate levels of duration and distinguish time and space, all within an ontological monism.

This methodological vs. ontological division may answer some apparent contradictions in Bergson’s thought. But whether intensive quantity really re-emerges in it is another matter. That Bergson himself does not recognize such a move is evidenced by the paucity of textual evidence that Deleuze can muster to demonstrate it. None is cited in the key pages where the position is advanced in *Bergsonism* (pp. 91-94). In ‘Bergson’s

Conception of Difference’, Deleuze partially quotes a passage in *The Creative Mind* where Bergson states that physics is ‘more and more clearly revealing to us difference in number behind our distinctions in quality’. But examination of the full text shows that this point applies only ‘to the world of inert matter’ and remains dependent on ‘the choice of a certain *order of greatness* for condensation’ that consciousness realizes when it contracts material vibrations to grasp these qualities in a perception. Moreover, Bergson’s peculiar stance on modern science, as already discussed, surely indicates that if, as Deleuze says, his philosophy ‘triumphs in a cosmology where everything is change in tension and nothing else’, it remains very different from the measurable change in tension of modern physics. Indeed, Bergson’s own words indicate that despite his terminology of contraction and relaxation, of more and less, to describe the differences within duration that define spirit and matter, it is clear that he considers these differences not to be quantitative, even in a virtual or intensive sense, but to be qualitative. Thus the passages Deleuze quotes from the ‘Introduction to Metaphysics’, where Bergson speaks of a continuous multiplicity of durations above and below human duration, are followed a few pages later in Bergson’s text by a dismissal of infinitesimal calculus as a science of symbols and magnitudes and a call for metaphysics ‘*to operate differentiations and qualitative integrations*’.

Bergson would be correct to worry that a reintroduction of quantity, even as virtual quantity, would undermine key aspects of his philosophy. It implies a fundamentally different relationship not only between metaphysics or ontology and science, but between time and the self. In Deleuze’s turn from Bergson, the introduction of intensive discontinuity or an ‘irrational cut’ creates a time that is the fractured and discontinuous structure of an ‘aborted cogito’. Deleuze is certainly able to identify in Bergson’s thought all the major ideas of his own philosophy of time, but through his engagements with Nietzsche, each of these elements is transformed.

* * *

Nietzsche shares Bergson's view of the deep flaws of the mechanistic conception of the world. Seeking purely quantitative analyses of phenomena, it can only describe the world, not know it, and even this depends on fanciful essentialist assumptions that posit the atom as the seat of motion, accept the 'sense prejudice' of motion in empty space, and ascribe, without demonstration or justification, mysterious powers of attraction and repulsion to independently existing material entities. On the one hand, as Deleuze points out, Nietzsche's critique of atomism, which 'consists in showing that atomism attempts to impart to matter an essential plurality and distance which in fact belong only to force', conceives of force as essentially relational: 'the essence of force' is 'the relation of force with force'. On the other hand, removing the fiction of the atom is insufficient because mechanism's 'purely quantitative determination of forces' still remains 'abstract, incomplete and ambiguous'. Nietzsche thus maintains that the physicist's 'victorious conception of "force,"' still needs to be completed through the introduction of what he calls the will to power. Despite general similarities, this will to power differs in fundamental respects from Bergson's supplementary driving force of duration, the *élan vital*.

Nietzsche parallels Bergson in holding that 'in a purely quantitative world everything would be dead, stiff, motionless'. Nonetheless, this is only the beginning of what Deleuze shows to be an extensive rethinking of quantity and quality. Mechanistic theory holds all qualities perceived by the sense to be reducible to quantitative formulae. Yet on the one hand 'everything for which "knowledge" makes any sense refers to the domain of reckoning, weighing, measuring, to the domain of quantity; while...all our sensation of value (i.e., simply our sensations) adhere precisely to qualities'; on the other hand 'we need "unities" in order to be able to reckon: that does not mean we must suppose that such unities exist'. While mechanism correctly locates knowledge in quantity, through its uncritical assumption

of unity (the atom), it reduces quality directly to quantity and establishes an absolute division between knowledge (what can be 'objectively' quantified) and value (the 'subjective' interpretation or assessment of this 'objective' reality). Units enable counting and calculation, but they also abstract away constitutive relations. Thus on a concrete level where no unities or things pre-exist their relations, quantity cannot be a number but only a relation. As Deleuze declares: *'Quantity itself is therefore inseparable from difference in quantity'*. This difference in quantity is intensive, an ordinal relation of more or less. Nietzsche calls it an 'order of rank', which is also an order of power, of strength and weakness. As an intensive difference, it cannot be measured along a fixed numerical scale that could reduce difference between forces to equality: as Deleuze maintains, 'to dream of two equal forces...is a coarse and approximate dream, a statistical dream in which the living is submerged but which chemistry dispels'. Difference in quantity thereby designates a fundamental heterogeneity within force relations.

However, although the world of forces is one of differences in quantity that are only later organized into unities, Nietzsche maintains that this quantitative difference is never experienced as such, but instead is felt in terms of quality: 'Our "knowing" limits itself to establishing quantities; but we cannot help feeling these differences in quantity as qualities...we sense bigness and smallness in relation to the conditions of our existence...with regard to making possible our existence we sense even relations between magnitudes as qualities'. Deleuze thus holds quality to be 'distinct from quantity...because it is the aspect of quantity that cannot be equalized, that cannot be equalized out in the difference between quantities'. Qualities are therefore heterogeneous, just like forceful differences in quantity, but while qualities are entirely a matter of perspective, they are not merely subjective interpretations of an independent quantitative reality. The link between quantity and quality thereby subverts mechanism's partitioning of knowledge and value: values may not be

reducible to fixed quantities, but they remain immanent to the domain of quantity, since values refer to power relations and are constituted so as to be ‘our perspective “truths” which belong to us alone and can by no means be “known”’. Consequently, ‘the reduction of all qualities to quantities is nonsense: what appears is that the one accompanies the other, an analogy’.

Once mechanism’s abstractions of unity and numerical quantity are eliminated, Nietzsche holds, ‘no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta; their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their “effect” upon the same’. But if the connection between difference in quantity and the feeling of quality is accepted, then the will to power must be acknowledged, simply because ‘mere variations of power could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wants to grow and interprets the value of whatever else wants to grow’. This makes the will to power ‘not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos* – the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge’. The various meaning of the Greek *pathos* – ‘occasion, event, passion, suffering, destiny’ – are all significant. The will to power arises with the event of clashing forces, and, indeed, is nothing but the clash: ‘The degree of resistance and the degree of superior power – this is the question in every event’. It is an affect or feeling of power that is inseparable from the clash, and it defines a perspective that it carries forward. No force could be or become without this feeling of power and the non-subjective compulsion to discharge itself, and this discharge is governed by the principle that each force, which is what it is by virtue of its relations to all other forces, expresses itself so that its feeling of power can be satisfied. For Deleuze, although the will to power emerges from clashing forces, it is also their genetic and creative element, both determining the difference in power between related forces and the corresponding qualities (active and reactive) of each force in the relationship: ‘The will to power here reveals its nature as the principle of the synthesis of

forces. In this synthesis – which relates to time – forces pass through the same differences again or diversity is reproduced’. In the terminology of *Difference and Repetition*, the will to power is the ‘differentiator’ that ‘relate[s] different to different without any mediation whatsoever by the identical, the similar, the analogous or the opposed’. It is a ‘dark precursor...[a] difference in itself or difference in the second degree which relates heterogeneous systems and even completely disparate things’. It is this discontinuity that cannot be found in Bergson, nor in Deleuze’s reading of Bergson.

The language of synthesis appears in both Bergson and Deleuze’s early Bergson texts only negatively: duration is not a synthesis of unity and multiplicity, even if it is both a unity and a multiplicity; synthesis constitutes number and motion, but it depends on duration even though it also leads to the confusion of duration and space. Deleuze does eventually adopt the language of synthesis, and he links it to duration, holding duration to be the second of two ‘passive’ syntheses of time. It is passive because in it, ‘time is subjective, but in relation to the subjectivity of a passive subject’. This is what marks its inadequacy. Deleuze holds concrete duration to be a synthesis conceived in terms of disjunction. ‘The whole question’, he states, ‘is to know under what conditions disjunction can become a veritable synthesis’. But it must therefore be a synthesis that is neither active nor passive, as it is one that dissolves the subject. The significance of the will to power in this respect is that its drive is one of overcoming, such that even its negative form ultimately negates itself, and even if only the negative will to power is knowable, as Deleuze argues its essence is found in an affirmative will to power that exceeds it. In this way, the will to power’s disjunctive synthesis breaks with Bergson’s commitment to the ego’s endurance and continuity. If endurance continues to appear, it is only as a surface effect of a foundational disjunction. But as a consequence of this, the emergence of the new goes hand-in-hand with the appearance of continuity.

* * *

Deleuze's first break with Bergson is therefore to treat it as a synthesis. He first identifies a passive synthesis, associated with Hume, that connects successive independent instants into a first line of time, without which the active powers of memory recall and intellect would be impossible. This first synthesis of time is analogous, Deleuze notes, to the synthesis of time that for Bergson constitutes number and motion but leads to the erroneous spatialization of time. And like Bergson, he holds it to depend on duration, arguing that the first synthesis cannot account for the passage of the present and thus for the flow of time. The present's passage, Deleuze maintains, can only occur by virtue of the continuation and inherence of the past within it, such that each moment is both present and past at once: 'No present would ever pass if it were not past "at the same time" as it was present'. Duration, as a synthesis of multiple layers of memory compressed into the present, thereby serves as the transcendental ground of time and its passage: 'The claim for the present is precisely that it passes. However, it is what causes the present to pass, that to which the present and habit belong, which must be considered the ground of time. It is memory that grounds time'. However, Deleuze continues, beyond the virtual inherence of the past in the present, duration introduces a dimension of 'pure past' in which both present and past moments are 'two asymmetrical elements of the past as such'. The pure or *a priori* past, which never passes, remaining ever present but unrepresentable, constitutes the milieu within which past presents are felt and recalled, and is the mechanism in which 'the entire past is conserved in itself'. The form in which the pure past makes itself felt in the present, the form in which it is lived, is reminiscence, 'an involuntary memory which differs in kind from any active synthesis associated with voluntary memory'. Although it is here, Deleuze says, 'that Proust intervenes, taking up the baton from Bergson', comparable ideas are certainly to be found in accounts of pure memory in *Matter and Memory* and the creative emotion of dynamic religion in *The Two Sources*.

The present is the most contracted form of this pure past, but between successive

presents, each of which compresses and so repeats the entirety of its respective past, there are ‘unlocalisable connections, actions at a distance, systems of replay, resonance and echoes, objective chances, signs, signals and roles’, so that ‘however strong the incoherence or possible opposition between successive presents, we have the impression that each of them plays out “the same life” at different levels’. Duration thereby assures a repetition ‘in which difference is included’. But for Deleuze, this repetition does not yet engender the new. It retains the coherence and continuity of the ego, as Bergson explicitly intends, and the pure past functioning as time’s transcendental ground retains a trace of transcendence. Having linked duration to Platonic reminiscence in *Bergsonism*, in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze identifies a pure past in Plato that is ‘necessarily expressed in terms of a present, as an ancient *mythical* present’. This implies an equivocation in which the pure past transcends the world of representation only to function as ‘the ground, the in-itself, noumenon and Form. However, it remains relative to the representation that it grounds...It is irreducible to the present and superior to representation, yet it serves only to render the representation of presents circular or infinite’. This transcendence of the past, whereby it becomes the unrepresentable foundation of representation, suggests that Bergson does not so much overturn a linear, chronological order of time as simply complicate it, introducing an unrepresentable dimension that is discontinuous with chronological order, but circumscribing this discontinuity of time for the sake of knowledge. On the one hand, Deleuze argues, ‘the shortcoming of the ground is to remain relative to what it grounds, to borrow the characteristics of what it grounds, and to be proved by these’, so that it remains ‘a correlate of representation’. On the other hand, to the degree that the pure past remains related to actual past and present moments, it lacks a synthetic connection to them, which allows it to assume a transcendent status. Despite his rejection of a static Being beyond the physical world, Bergson nevertheless duplicates a Platonic gesture by holding that intuition of a past that was never present provides a

mechanism to grasp the absolute.

By contrast, the third synthesis of time, understood as eternal return, fractures both time and the self that exists within it. Deleuze introduces it through Kant's insistence against Descartes that the cogito's self-determination as a 'thinking thing' must take place within time, where it can be apprehended only as the effect of some prior cause. As a result, the cogito's spontaneity of thought can be understood 'only as the affectation of a passive self which experiences its own thought – its own intelligence, that by virtue of which it can say *I* – being exercised in it and upon it but not by it'. Or, as Nietzsche declares: 'a thought comes when "it" wishes, not when "I" wish, so that it is a falsification of the facts of the case to say that the subject "I" is the condition of the predicate "think"'. In this way, the ego is fractured by its own temporality. Instead of a self unified by the continuous succession and retention of the past, the eternal return posits the self as a disjunctive synthesis, a relation of disparate differences brought together through a difference or differentiator (the will to power) that sustains their heterogeneity. The eternal return is therefore not simply a repetition/return of difference in time, a version Deleuze sometimes offers when opposing the standard reading of Nietzsche's doctrine as the endless recurrence of identical events. The eternal return cannot refer to a dissymmetry recurring in time, but instead must designate the dissymmetrical structure of time itself. This structure, Deleuze contends, involves at least two temporal series, which are not successive but coexistent and which come together through a caesura, differentiator, or dark precursor that circulates through them. No series serves as a foundation for the others, and the various series do not refer to the same subject, so that together they express a power of the false' absent in Bergsonian duration, a power that 'poses the simultaneity of impossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts'.

Deleuze offers as illustration a revised version of Freud's Oedipal story, in which the Oedipal trauma, which need not refer to a real childhood event, both separates and joins

together two sexual orders, one infantile and pregenital, the other adult and genital, within the unconscious. The orders have divergent body images and both real and imaginary objects of desire, memories of the past, and expectations of the future, and they are linked through an event that can only be expressed by the phallus, the signifier of the mysterious law of the Father. Constituting the separate series through a radical break, it cannot be localized within either series but instead resides in the margins of each. But the phallus does not establish an identity between the two temporal series, because it has no identity itself, and so it is univocal across the series, but the univocity is that of an enigma. The phallus therefore functions as a differentiator, connecting temporal series that 'are not distributed within the same subject'. In place of a subject, then, is a self that is out of sync with itself, caught up in diverse lines of time referring to different subjectivities within the same, not-so-unified being. These disparate subjectivities are brought together by way of their repetition and resonance with one another – the adults we knew or expected to be as child subjects, Deleuze says, resonate in the unconscious with the adult subjects one is among other adults and children – and they communicate through a traumatic event that is never fully defined for any of them. But this multiplicity can easily be effaced – and indeed, it regularly is – leaving an apparently singular subject living a single line of successive events. The enigma of the traumatic event may then appear as an original or early childhood event that later events repeat well or badly – this is Freud's frequent error with respect to the event – rather than being an untimely element that sustains the heterogeneity of different temporal series. Deleuze maintains that this reduction of multiplicity is due to the way the differentiator of difference necessarily projects an original term in the process of differing from and hiding itself as it circulates through the series it brings together. The result is the appearance of the continuities that characterize the first and second syntheses of time. In this way, the eternal return engenders a structure in which identity and continuity always float on the surface of disparate disjunctions of

difference.

When realized in action, Deleuze holds, the third synthesis of time presents a temporal order in which ‘the present is no more than an actor, an author, an agent destined to be effaced; while the past is no more than a condition operating by default’. The past provides the default conditions for the act of overcoming – the willing of eternal return – but the performance of so great an act in the present requires the consolidation and unification of the ego around an ego-ideal that makes it equal to the task. But while overcoming finds its origin in this unified ego, Deleuze argues, ‘the event and the act possess a secret coherence which excludes the self;...they turn back against the self which has become their equal and smash it to pieces, as though the bearer of the new world were carried away and dispersed by the shock of the multiplicity to which it gives birth: what the self has become equal to is the unequal in itself’. The overt form of willing the eternal return thus involves transforming every ‘it was’ into ‘thus I willed it’ and finally into ‘thus I will its eternal return’. It thereby retains the appearance of circularity and continuity, but beneath this it carries out a profound transmutation, which dissolves the ego and opens the self to multiplicity. In this way the eternal return institutes a creativity, realized in thinking and the thought of eternal return, that makes possible a break with the past. In the end, therefore, and in contrast to Bergsonian duration, the eternal return concerns only the future, and the repetition it engenders is always a multiplicity that exceeds the forces that engender it. The whiff of Platonism in Bergson is found in the transcendental memory that grounds duration; in contrast, the novelty of becoming that Deleuze takes from Nietzsche is one that necessarily locates it in the future. Novelty enters history only from the future, and where history seems to be a mundane continuity, the event of novelty is nevertheless created. In turning to Nietzsche, Deleuze finds, with the eternal return understood as the structure of time, the guarantor of this novelty.