5

Kierkegaard and the Logic of Sense

Henry Somers-Hall

Long live the stagecoach horn! It is the instrument for me for many reasons, and chiefly because one can never be certain of wheedling the same notes from this horn. A coach horn has infinite possibilities, and the person who puts it to his mouth and puts his wisdom into it can never be guilty of a repetition, and he who instead of giving an answer gives his friend a coach horn to use as he pleases says nothing but explains everything.

<div align="right">

Søren Kierkegaard, "Repetition,"
in *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*

</div>

My aim in this chapter is to explore how we might understand the relation of Deleuze's early works to ethics and to develop the connections between this way of understanding Deleuze and the work of Søren Kierkegaard. I will claim that we can view both figures as arguing that the sense or meaning we take from the world, and the metaphysical structure we ascribe to it, is secondary to an ethical stance we take in the face of a world of becoming. As such, the central preoccupation of both Kierkegaard and Deleuze is how we make sense of an existence that is necessarily temporal. As we shall see, recognizing the importance of temporality involves a move away from the traditional resolution of the problem of sense that operates by making temporality an accidental aspect of a world. In the first half of this chapter, I explore this claim in relation to Deleuze's reading of Plato, tying his claim that Plato is essentially developing an ethical rather than metaphysical doctrine with the claim that "the task of modern philosophy has been defined: to overturn [*renversement*]

Platonism" (DR, 59). My emphasis in this section is on how Deleuze, rather than "overturning" Platonism by simply rejecting the priority it gives to Forms or essences over appearances, the *renversement* of Deleuze's reading *inverts* the relation to show how the search for essence is in fact grounded in an ethical decision, or "selection," in the world of appearances/simulacra itself. As such, both Plato and Deleuze can be seen as presenting different trajectories for making sense of a world of becoming, either by grounding it in a transcendent, atemporal realm or by seeing it as an intensive field of processes. In the second half of this chapter, I will argue that Kierkegaard's philosophy rests on a claim – similar to the one we find in Deleuze's work – that we need to develop a logic of sense in response to a world of becoming. I will conclude that Deleuze's reading of Kierkegaard is limited by its focus on the theological aspects of his thought and that Kierkegaard provides a sophisticated and complementary taxonomy of the ways in which we try to make sense of our existence in a world of becoming by developing diverse ethical postures.

I. THE LOGIC OF SENSE

I want to begin by asking the question: What is a "logic of sense"? In his review of Jean Hyppolite's *Logic and Existence*, Deleuze claims that "we find [the] substitution of sense for essence already in Plato, when he shows us that the second world is itself the subject of a dialectic that makes it the sense of this world, not some other world" (DI, 16). Accounts of Plato often begin from the claim that the world we find around us – the world of appearances – is a copy of a real world of eternal Forms or Ideas. Plato presents a number of arguments for the need for an eternal realm of truths beyond the sensible world. First, we can note that many of the properties we find in the world are contradictory. Nothing is simply beautiful, for instance, as at various moments in its existence its appearance will change. At some point something may be beautiful whereas at some other point it may not be. The *same* object therefore exhibits contrary properties.[1] Similarly, Plato notes that a lot of the concepts we have are never encountered in the world around us. For instance, we have the concept of a circle, but when we look around the world we in fact do not sensibly encounter any actual perfect circles. Because of the nature of the world, things always manifest imperfections, yet we nonetheless have an idea of beauty, for instance, that goes beyond the imperfect

beauty we find in the world.[2] At the heart of this account is the claim
that the world as we encounter it is in a state of flux.

What makes it possible for us to talk coherently about objects in
the world, or to have an idea of beauty or of geometrical forms that
do not exist concretely in the world as do most things we encounter,
is that there is a realm of perfect instances of these entities that form
a model for the world we find around us.[3] Now, the typical way of
reading Plato on this model is metaphysical. Philosophy is an attempt
to move beyond the realm of appearances to the realm of the Ideas
themselves. The analogy of the cave is the classic example of this
model of Plato where we aim to enter into relationship with Ideas
themselves. For Deleuze, this reading of Plato leads to the develop-
ment of the Western metaphysical tradition. With the notion that the
objects of the world have a rational ground, we open up the possibility
of tracing out and specifying the nature of the objects of the world
in rational, atemporal terms: "representation runs through and covers
over the entire domain, extending from the highest genera to the
smallest species, and the method of division takes on its traditional
fascination with specification which it did not yet have in Plato" (LS,
259). This project culminates in the projects of Leibniz and Hegel,
which rather than attempting to extract the rational from the field of
becoming, hold that becoming itself is simply a confused expression
of the rational.[4]

For Deleuze, to understand Plato in this way, as operating in terms
of a distinction between Ideas and copies, is to read Plato anachro-
nistically from the perspective of the tradition he instituted. "This
distinction operates completely within the world of representation"
(LS, 262). Seeing Plato as operating in terms of this distinction between
Ideas (or essences) and appearances leads to a narrative whereby
Platonism is overcome in the nineteenth century with the emergence
of the German Idealist tradition that reorients philosophy towards
appearances. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, for instance, Kant recon-
ceives the major categories of metaphysics as modes of synthesis of
appearances themselves, and argues that positing them as a ground
for appearances is the result of a "transcendental illusion." "[N]othing
is more natural and seductive than the illusion of taking the unity in
the synthesis of thoughts for a perceived unity in the subject of these
thoughts."[5] Hegel similarly argues in the *Science of Logic* that essence
is simply the process of the movement of appearance itself.[6] Deleuze's
claim is that these revisions to the essence/appearance schema do not

really go beyond Plato because they fail to "bring to the light of day" the "motivation" for Plato's institution of this distinction (LS, 253). Seeing Plato as attempting to return us to the Ideas rests on a failure to recognize that the real distinction for Plato is not between the Ideas and the empirical objects that participate in them. Rather, for Deleuze, at the heart of Plato's thought is "a will to select and to choose" between different notions of copies themselves. Once we recognize this, our conception of Platonism becomes reoriented towards *sense* rather than *essence*. With this reorientation, we move to a position whereby an ethical decision precedes our understanding of the structure of the world. "The model–copy distinction," Deleuze writes,

> is there only in order to found and apply the copy–simulacra distinction, since the copies are selected, justified and saved in the name of the identity of the model and owing to their internal resemblance to this ideal model. The function of the notion of the model is not to oppose the world of images in its entirety but to select the good images, the icons which resemble from within, and eliminate the bad images or simulacra. (DR, 154–5)

So how does this reorientation take place? Well, when we look at the Platonic dialogues, we frequently find at their heart the question that defines representation for Deleuze, the question, "What is x?" Thus, the *Laches* asks the question, "What is courage?," and the *Euthyphro* asks the question, "What is piety?" These questions appear to fit naturally into the Aristotelian tradition, in that they ask for a definition of the essence of a particular kind. In fact, however, Deleuze claims that this structure of definition is in fact ironic and that it covers over a more fundamental question of selection. In the *Statesman*, for instance, the Eleatic visitor asks for a definition of the "statesman," and defines statesmanship as "knowledge of the collective rearing of human beings."[7] Discovering this definition, however, does not resolve the question at the heart of the dialogue, since there are a number of figures who meet this definition: "merchants, farmers, millers and bakers."[8] "Difference is not between species, between two determinations of a genus," Deleuze notes of this model, "but entirely on one side, within the chosen line of descent" (DR, 72). What Plato is trying to do, according to Deleuze, is not to define a particular class of individuals (and thus to answer the question of representation), but rather to trace the genealogy of the subject in question – to distinguish

between the statesman and the pretender in terms of their origin.[9] The aim of the project is therefore not to determine the characteristics of a class, but to assess the validity of a claim. "It permits the construction of a model according to which the different pretenders can be judged. What needs a foundation, in fact, is always a pretension or a claim" (LS, 255). At the heart of the Platonic method is therefore not a taxonomy of essence, but a more existential question of distinguishing the well-founded from that which lacks foundation. The visitor makes this project explicit in the *Statesman* when he describes the project of determining statesmanship by analogy with the separating out of unalloyed gold from rocks and minerals by the use of "smelting and testing." Thus, we separate off "those things that are different from the expert knowledge of statesmanship, and those that are alien and hostile to it" so that what remains are those "precious and related to it."[10] How do we therefore distinguish the statesman from the merchants, farmers, millers, and bakers, or Socrates from the sophist? It is through the introduction of a myth. In the *Statesman*, it is through the incorporation of a myth into the structure of our inquiry that we are able to resolve the question of which of the various contenders is in actual fact the statesman. Myth provides an archetype by which to properly separate the pure gold of the statesman from the mixed elements of the other figures; myth provides a model to determine what the statesman should be. Now here we arrive at the question of selection, and the selection that Plato introduces is between different kinds of copies. There are two ways in which something can be a copy of or resemble something else. Something can resemble the way something *is* (in which case it is an *icon*), or, like the manner in which sculptors may employ tricks of perspective, it can resemble the way something *appears* (in which case it is a *phantasm*, a term rendered in Latin as *simulacrum*). The true statesman resembles the Form of the statesman in the first of these senses, since the form itself cannot be given in appearance, as it is not spatiotemporal. The pretender only resembles the *appearance* of the Idea, not the Idea itself. The problem, therefore, is to distinguish those candidates who bear a true likeness from those who merely appear to do so.

Deleuze takes this distinction between different forms of resemblance to be the essential feature of Platonism, rather than the one between model and copy, and it is a distinction that is key to Deleuze's own early philosophy. In effect, Deleuze reads Plato as attempting to make sense of the world of appearances by relating it to the Idea. The

focus is on giving meaning to the Heraclitean world of becoming by positing a realm of Ideas that makes possible discriminations in *this* world. Thus, at the heart of Plato's thought, for Deleuze, is in fact something like an empiricism. We can see the radicality of this reading through the fact that Plato here moves beyond Spinoza. On Deleuze's reading in *Difference and Repetition*, Spinoza privileges substance over modes: "Spinoza's substance appears independent of the modes, while the modes are dependent on substance, but as though on something other than themselves" (DR, 40). For Plato, on the contrary, Ideas emerge from the need to make sense of categories such as beauty that we encounter in the world of appearance. They allow us to cut up the world of appearance according to its natural articulations. In the *Republic*, for instance, Plato describes the eternal Ideas of numbers as "compulsory for warriors because of their orderly ranks and for philosophers because they have to learn to rise up out of becoming and grasp being, if they are ever to become rational."[11] In this sense, Plato inaugurates the process we find at the heart of Aristotle's work, which Deleuze identifies as "the extraction or cutting out of generic identities from the flux of a continuous perceptible series" (DR, 34). Thus, on Deleuze's reading, the notion of an Idea in Plato's philosophy is related to an ethical question of selecting among different ethical attitudes (cf. LS, 361).[12] In essence, Deleuze's claim is that metaphysics is introduced simply because it is needed to provide a test or method of selection that will lend coherence to the ethical claims.[13]

For Plato, the Idea presents the ground for the sense of things. As Deleuze puts it, "the Idea is not yet the concept of an object which submits the world to the requirements of representation, but rather a brute presence which can be invoked in the world only in function of that which is not 'representable' in things" (LS, 59). Deleuze notes at the opening of the *Logic of Sense*, for instance, that Plato seems to suggest in the *Cratylus* that there might "two languages and two sorts of 'names,' one designating the pauses and rests which receive the action of the Idea, the other expressing the movements, or rebel becomings" (LS, 2).[14] In the *Cratylus* itself, these two accounts of names are related to a Platonic account and one is grounded in a Heraclitean understanding of the world, suggesting that the model of representation is not yet established. This notion of an Idea as the non-representable ground of things fits with Deleuze's own account of the Idea as an *n*-dimensional, virtual multiplicity that gives the genetic conditions of things, while not itself being thing-like (DR,

182-3). There is thus a parallel between the structure of Plato's meta-physics and that of Deleuze's. In both cases, we are confronted by a world of appearances that we make sense of by reference to the underlying conditions that transcend it (albeit with a very different notions of transcendence).

   If it is the case that "with Plato, a philosophical decision of the utmost importance was taken: that of subordinating difference to the supposedly initial powers of the Same and the Similar, that of declar-ing difference unthinkable in itself and sending it, along with the simulacra, back to the bottomless ocean" (DR, 127), is there a similar though inverted philosophical decision at the heart of Deleuze's thought? For Plato, the Idea allows us to institute a test of selection, and there is a parallel test for Deleuze: the eternal return. At the heart of Nietzsche's eternal return for Deleuze is the aim of determining whether something orients itself towards the world in terms of a "sedentary" or a "nomadic" distribution (DR, 36–7).[15] The eternal return allows us to distinguish two ways of understanding the ground of the world. At the heart of it is the question asked by the demon: "This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence."[16] Only that which is "not separated from what it can do" (DR, 37) can truly will the repetition of everything that makes it what it is. Those who cannot affirm this do not have their ground in the affirmative field of differ-ences, but are instead grounded in the sedentary distribution, the kind of distribution favoured by Plato – they are in effect the figures who, like Plato, attempt to rise up out of the flux of becoming to grasp being. The fact that they make a distinction between what can be done and what is done (i.e., that they posit agency) means that as agents they are not the same as their actions and that they see actions as derivative of a prior field of subjects. On that basis, we can posit the return of the subject without necessarily the return of their actions. *Contra* Nietzsche, we can affirm our own return without having to affirm the whole of our past. On a metaphysical level, rather than an ethical one, we can interpret the sedentary distribution in terms of a separation that is not between subjects and actions but rather between subjects and properties. This becomes the basis for the kind of account of determination we find in the philosophy of Aristotle,

with determination operating through the attribution of one of two opposing predicates to an abstract subject.

Instead, for Deleuze's Nietzsche, what returns is the nomadic distribution. Taking up the eternal return, what the test selects is a prejudicative relationship to the world, prior to the distinction between subjects and actions: it is the intensive, nomadic distribution that returns as the field of processes from which subjects emerge: "Eternal return cannot mean the return of the Identical because it presupposes a world (that of the will to power) in which all previous identities have been abolished and dissolved" (DR, 41). In doing so, it unfolds a certain conception of being and thus calls into play the Deleuzian conception of an Idea as the genealogical origin of the world of intensity that is founded in process and becoming rather than being. For Deleuze, the eternal return is explicitly related to the Heraclitean world view.[17] The eternal return is therefore a test that allows us to show that our orientation to the world is in terms of the virtual tendencies that map the field of intensities, rather than the structures of representation that will emerge from the Platonic emphasis on permanence. Once we have accepted the mode of orientation towards the flux of intensity, or appearance, which surrounds us, the twin structures of the "virtual" and "actual," which allow us to formulate a test in terms of non-representational tendencies, come into play.[18] In this sense, if we accept Deleuze's account of his philosophy as a reversal of Platonism, the distinction between virtual and actual that we find in his philosophy emerges from a primary ethical decision and is introduced in order to explicate and give coherence to a life built on that ethical decision.

Deleuze's discussion of Plato's metaphysics, and his own inversion of it, presents to us a fundamentally existential rather than metaphysical question at the heart of *Difference and Repetition*. Thrown into a world of intensities, we face a fundamentally ethical decision of which orientation to adopt. Plato's test of descent from the Ideas orients us to the world of intensities by imposing a logic of stability that relegates change to the accidental. Deleuze's test of descent from the structure of the virtual orients us to this same world of intensities by positing permanence as a transcendental illusion. For Plato, the aim is "to rise up above becoming to grasp being,"[19] while for Nietzsche it is to recognize the truth that "everything recurs is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being."[20] In each case, however, the structure of the metaphysics we adopt

follows from the ethical decision we take when we are thrown into a world that is fundamentally at odds with our structures of discourse and representation. Metaphysics makes possible the formulation of a coherent test of selection and, with it, a coherent orientation toward life. At the heart of these two models are also two different conceptions of repetition. Do we see repetition in terms of the return of the soul from the realm of Ideas (metempsychosis), as in Plato's model, or do we see it in terms of the instantiation of a field of intensity in different empirical situations? These questions move us away from a logic of essences toward a logic of how one is to *make* sense of the world.

2. KIERKEGAARD AND SENSE

While Deleuze shows that a logic of sense makes existential orientation a priority over metaphysics, we are still left with the question of what an ethics of sense grounded in a nomadic distribution would look like. While Deleuze's later work with Guattari does develop an ethics, it also moves away from the logic of sense we find in Deleuze's earlier works. It is also notoriously difficult to determine the form an ethics of sense might take in these early works.[21] In this section I look at how an ethics of sense might function by turning to the work of Kierkegaard. I will begin by exploring Kierkegaard's own relationship to Plato to show how irony plays an important role in his understanding of Socrates as a thinker of sense before showing how the interplay of the temporal and the eternal shows a similar orientation to the world as we find in Deleuze's work. I will conclude by looking at the limitations of Deleuze's critique of Kierkegaard.

In *Repetition*, Constantine Constantius explicitly relates the question of Platonic anamnesis to that of repetition:

> Say what you will, this question will play a very important role in modern philosophy, for repetition is a crucial expression for what "recollection" was to the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowing is a recollecting, modern philosophy will teach that all life is a repetition … Repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward. Repetition, therefore, if it is possible, makes a person happy, whereas recollection makes him unhappy – assuming, of course, that he gives himself time to live and does

not promptly at birth find an excuse to sneak out of life again, for example, that he has forgotten something.[22]

The question of how one is able to repeat is thus a central question for Kierkegaard, but the key question here, just as it is for Deleuze, is not simply whether one *can* repeat, but rather "the possibility and meaning of repetition."[23] As Kierkegaard notes, this question is fundamentally related to time. Constantine writes that "when the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been."[24] Recollection is a way of fixing existence outside of time, in an eternal past. *Repetition* opens with an account of Constantine's attempt to repeat his previous visit to Berlin, which is frustrated by the minor changes that have taken place. He arrives on the wrong day, takes a different seat in the stagecoach, and discovers that his landlord has married. While at first such changes are renounced ("otherwise everything repeated itself"[25]), it quickly becomes apparent that the absolute repetition of his past experiences is impossible (and in fact Constantine Constantius's own name is a failed repetition of this sort). Repetition is not only physically impossible but also philosophically impossible: "A Greek would choose to recollect without being troubled by his conscience. Modern philosophy makes no movement. In general, it merely makes a commotion. To the extent that it makes a movement, it is always within the sphere of immanence. Repetition, on the other hand, is transcendence."[26] Here, the terms "immanence" and "transcendence" point to a fundamental resonance between Deleuze and Kierkegaard: the metaphysics of the encounter. For both Kierkegaard and Deleuze, thinking in modern philosophy is construed as operating within the sphere of a representation of the world, merely drawing out the implications of a set of postulates underlying an "image of thought" that covers over the true nature of thinking. Genuine thinking needs to break from this sphere:

Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think. The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself. (DR, 139).[27]

As such, despite differences in terminology, Kierkegaard's use of *immanence* refers to modern philosophy's (principally Hegel's) immanence to an image of thought, while *transcendence* implies an encounter that forces us beyond this image. It correlates with the movement Deleuze makes when he calls for an encounter that moves us from the transcendent image of thought to the immanent plane of non-representational thinking. Now, transcendence for Kierkegaard should here be read as the claim that repetition is not possible purely in terms of actuality – that it requires a reference to another ontological plane, much as it does for Plato and for Deleuze.[28] As such, despite antithetical terminology, we find laid out the same method for arriving at genuine thought. Physical repetition, therefore, seems to be impossible. At the point that he visits the theatre to watch a farce, where no repetition is possible due to the novelty of each performance, Constantine writes what I consider to be one of the keystones for interpreting Kierkegaard:

> My unforgettable nursemaid, you fleeting nymph who lived in the brook that ran past my father's farm and always helpfully shared our childish games, even if you just took care of yourself! You, my faithful comforter, you who preserved your innocent purity over the years, you who did not age as I grew older, you quiet nymph to whom I turned once again, weary of people, weary of myself, so weary that I needed an eternity to rest up, so melancholy that I needed an eternity to forget. You did not deny me what men want to deny me by making eternity just as busy and even more appalling than time. Then I lay at your side and vanished from myself in the immensity of the sky above and forgot myself in your soothing murmur! You, my happier self, you fleeting life that lives in the brook running past my father's farm, where I lie stretched out as if my body were an abandoned hiking stick, but I am rescued and released in the plaintive purling![29]

At the heart of this passage is a recognition that making sense of life requires reconciling two different moments: *time*, which imperceptibly and blissfully "slip[s] by, like the running water that murmurs and disappears," and *eternity*. Constantine suggests the possibility of giving up eternity by slipping back purely into time. In his journals, Kierkegaard himself brings up this metaphor of the babbling brook, but rejects this solution, claiming that the temptation of the babbling brook is a temptation of the "muddled heads" of "nature worshippers."[30]

As well as the rejection of the life of temporality, there is also the recognition that traditional philosophy both denies time and falsifies the eternal itself. The key figure in this regard is Hegel, whom Kierkegaard and Deleuze both charge with bringing about a "false movement" through a play with and on words. Referring to Hegel's repetition of the Greek claim that essence is "that which has been," rendered in German as *das Wesen ist gewesen*,[31] Kierkegaard writes that "a later age would perhaps be surprised to see that what are regarded as discarded witticisms once played an important role in logic, not as incidental explanations and ingenious remarks but as masters of movement."[32] As Kierkegaard notes, Hegel replaces movement with logical transition, effectively falling foul of a transcendental illusion whereby time is misconceived according to a representation of time. As such, Hegel falsifies experience by reducing the question of a logic of sense to the other of its terms: the eternal. He "makes no secret of the fact that things indeed do not happen quite that way in the world and yet conceals the consequence of this for the whole of logical immanence by permitting it to drift into logical movement."[33] Kierkegaard here makes three points against Hegel. First, that logical transition is not equivalent to the kind of movement we find in time. As he puts it in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "misled by repeated talk about a continual process in which opposites combine in a higher unity and then again in a higher unity etc., people have drawn a parallel between Hegel's doctrine and that of Heraclitus: all flows and nothing abides. This, however, is a misunderstanding, because everything that is said in Hegel about process and becoming is illusory."[34] The point here is not that Hegel's account is incomplete, but rather that Hegel falsifies the world by giving it a false sense:

> I remember once having heard a speculator say that one must not give undue thought to the difficulties beforehand, because then one never arrives at the point where he can speculate. If the important thing is to get to the point where one can begin to speculate, and not that one's speculation in fact becomes true speculation, it is indeed resolutely said that the important thing is to get the point of speculating.[35]

As such it is a misreading of Kierkegaard to see his work as developing a supplement to or completion of the Hegelian project,[36] as some recent commentators have done.[37] Second, Kierkegaard notes that transition brings even this false movement into philosophy as a simple

presupposition. The transition between categories is prior to the categories themselves. Finally, transition itself cannot be explained in logical terms, since it is not itself a category of logic. As Kierkegaard notes: "One can see how illogical the movements must be in logic."[38] Just as with Deleuze's critique of Hegel, therefore, Kierkegaard claims that Hegel replaces temporality with a representation of temporality. By operating purely in the realm of representation, Hegel avoids the problem of the incongruity of sense and time, but only at the expense of reducing becoming to a confused representation of a rational world.[39] As such, Kierkegaard prefigures Deleuze's claims that sense requires a second distribution to operate in relation to becoming, and that philosophy has tended to cover over the problem of sense by reducing the two terms to one plane.

Each of these projects, the project of giving up the eternal to live entirely in time, or of giving up time to fall into the eternal or conceptual, therefore operates by rejecting the interrelation of time and the eternal. For Kierkegaard, therefore, the problem of philosophy is how to relate together these two categories. As Kierkegaard notes, the key problem is their incommensurability. In this manner, there is something of an existential reworking of the Kantian problem of combining concepts and intuitions in Kierkegaard's work.[40] The problem of living a meaningful life is that of reconciling time and the eternal, or of giving sense to time.[41]

To give a brief sense of how this account plays out, I want to turn to the *Concept of Irony* and Kierkegaard's account of Socrates. In this text, Kierkegaard takes up Schleiermacher's distinction "between the [Socratic] dialogues in which the dialogical is the main element and the tireless irony at times disentangles, at times tangles, the disputation and the disputants, and the [Platonic] constructive dialogues, which are characterized by an objective, methodical style."[42] The Socratic dialogues are the early dialogues, which tend to be aporetic in character; whereas the Platonic dialogues propound a definite doctrine, and as in the case of the *Statesman* I mentioned in relation to Deleuze, they do not necessarily include Socrates, or if they do, they do not include him in his individuality. Together with these two sets of dialogues, we have two conceptions of irony. In the later dialogues, we have the notion of irony as essentially a stylistic device. Readers who focus on these dialogues, such as Hegel, tend to downplay the role of irony.[43] Kierkegaard writes that "as a rule, irony is understood ideally, is assigned its place as a vanishing

element in the system, and is therefore treated very briefly. For this reason it is not easy to comprehend how a whole life can be taken up with it, since, after all, the content of this life must be regarded as nothing."[44] In the early dialogues, however, irony is central to Socrates's method. This is tied to the fact that the early dialogues end inconclusively. As Kierkegaard notes, however, the inconclusive ending is not even a negative conclusion. "Even skepticism always posits something, whereas irony, like that old witch, continually makes the very tantalizing attempt to eat up everything first of all and thereupon to eat up itself."[45] As such, while Platonic thought is grounded in knowledge, Socratic irony conceives of sense in a manner different in kind from knowing.[46]

So what is the purpose of this kind of irony? Well, much as Deleuze sees the aim of Plato's method as giving sense to the world by introducing the eternal realm of Ideas against which a selection can be made in this world, Socrates's ironic method is, for Kierkegaard, a way of introducing the notion of the eternal while avoiding the flight away from appearances that we find, for instance, in non-ironic philosophers such as Hegel. Kierkegaard talks of Socrates as hovering above the world to get a bird's-eye view of it through the dialectical method, but through irony preventing the move away from giving sense to this world towards what Deleuze would call a metaphysics of essence. Here is Kierkegaard's summary of the ironist's method:

> But it is precisely this hovering that is so very significant; it is the attempted ascension that is accomplished only when the whole realm of the ideal opens up, when this staring into oneself allows the self to expand into the universal self, pure thought with its contents. The ironist, to be sure, is lighter than the world, but on the other hand he still belongs to the world; like Mohammed's coffin, he is suspended between two magnets.[47]

In effect, therefore, the early Socratic dialogues introduce the eternal into the world, in the form of metaphysical speculation, in such a way that the incommensurability between it and the world of appearance is maintained through a process of suspension. Prefiguring Deleuze's reading of Plato, the effect of this is to transform the eternal from a structure of essence to that which allows us to make sense of *this* world.

At the heart of Kierkegaard's project is a taxonomy of the different ways in which we can bring sense to time, just as it is for Deleuze

and for Plato. Deleuze focuses on the paradigm case of Abraham in his reading of Kierkegaard. Here, Kierkegaard deals with the binding of Isaac, God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his only son as a test of faith. In working through how Abraham makes sense of his actions, Kierkegaard offers two alternatives. At the heart of these alternatives is the binding of Isaac as a metaphor for the incommensurability of sense (and the eternal, in the form of God) and time. Given the senselessness of God's commandment, Abraham could have renounced time, in effect taking the opposite path of Constantius in resolving the issue of incommensurability. In that case, he would have maintained simply a relation to the eternal: "[His love would] be transfigured into a love for the eternal being which, true enough denied the fulfillment but nevertheless did reconcile him once more in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take away from him."[48] He renounces Isaac, and with it the sense of the world. He is an "alien in this world,"[49] in his engagements with the world, no longer at home in the world of finitude. Such a position is reminiscent of Hegel's approach, but with the caveat that it both recognizes and renounces time rather than just passing over it. The alternative is to have faith. Abraham is a "knight of faith," for Kierkegaard, and despite the incomprehensibility of the possibility of reconciling the eternal and the temporal, he believes on the strength of the absurd in their commensurability. He believes that Isaac will be returned to him, knowing that there is no rational possibility of this happening. Ultimately, as Kierkegaard makes clear in *Repetition*, repetition itself is this orientation towards the future on the basis of the absurd, or that which falls outside of the empirical, where Abraham receives Isaac back despite the senselessness of that return. Whether faith is possible, or is more a *focus imaginarius* for raising the question of sense, is open to question.[50] The important point to note is that all of Kierkegaard's examples of orienting oneself to the world – the tax collector, Abraham, Job, the knight of faith who believes he will win the princess despite the impossibilities thrown up by the contingencies of the world – revolve around giving sense to time in *this* world.[51]

3. DELEUZE'S CRITIQUE OF KIERKEGAARD

I want to conclude by turning to some of the critical remarks Deleuze makes about Kierkegaard. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze notes

that Kierkegaard and Peguy are "the culmination of Kant, they realize Kantianism by entrusting to faith the task of overcoming the speculative death of God and healing the wound in the self. This is their problem, from Abraham to Joan of Arc: the betrothal of a self rediscovered and a god recovered, in such a manner that it is no longer possible truly to escape from either the condition or the agent" (DR, 95). The root of this assertion is an attempt by Deleuze to remove God from Kierkegaard's interpretation of repetition. Kierkegaard describes the religious moment of faith, where time and the eternal are brought into relation as reliant on an immediate relationship between the self and God (Abraham's relationship to God is shown to be immediate by the fact that it is inexpressible through the categories of representation). Deleuze's criticism is that this relationship between self and God, in which man is reconciled with the world on the strength of the absurd, is still too closely tied to the concept of identity and essence, albeit an essence that falls outside of the law. In effect, at heart, the relation of Abraham to God is something like Kant's relation between the transcendental unity of apperception and the transcendental object, each of which is also unknowable and extra-categorical, but which reaffirm the transcendental grounds for repetition as reliant on constituted centres of subjectivity and objectivity. While Deleuze's response to Kierkegaard privileges faith as the relation between sense and becoming, in fact, Deleuze's characterization of Kierkegaard here is rather simplistic. Ironically for a writer renowned for his sensitivity to the diversity of voices and languages within philosophy, Deleuze provides a literal reading of the various pseudonymous works of Kierkegaard that subordinates their different perspectives to one overarching project.[52] As opposed to the binary distinction between the sedentary and the nomadic we find in Deleuze, Kierkegaard writes that "the exuberant growth of the spiritual life is not inferior to that of nature, and the varieties of the spiritual states are more numerous than those of the flowers."[53] That is, rather than the telescopic relation of aesthetic, ethical, religious, the ways in which becoming and sense should be reconciled for Kierkegaard form something more like a field of relations that blur into one another. At the heart of his project is an anthropological taxonomy of the multitude of ways in which we struggle to make sense of living in time.[54] Both for Kierkegaard and for Deleuze, the problem of ethics is to reconcile our representation of ourselves with our existence within time.[55] Similarly, for both, the problem of ethics has a Kantian inflection, but

one that derives from Kant's metaphysics rather than his ethics: the problem of bringing into relation time and representation, given the difference in kind between them. Here we find the weakness of Deleuze's own account. Whereas Deleuze distributes the sedentary and the nomadic according to a sedentary distribution, seeing essentially two modes of relating to the world, the ways in which sense is made of the world for Kierkegaard form an interpenetrating, non-hierarchical multiplicity of positions.

NOTES

1 See Plato, "Parmenides," in *Complete Works*, 129c.
2 Plato, "Phaedo," in ibid., 74a–75e.
3 See Plato, "Republic," in ibid., 508.
4 See Somers-Hall, *Deleuze's* Difference and Repetition, 43–60.
5 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 442 [A402].
6 As Hegel puts it: "Illusory being, therefore, is essence itself, but essence in a determinateness, in such a manner, however, that this is only a moment of essence and essence is the reflection of itself within itself." *Science of Logic*, §831. For an analysis of essence in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, see Houlgate, "Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy."
7 Plato, "Statesman," in *Complete Works*, 267d.
8 Ibid., 267e.
9 Julius Moravcsik calls Plato's method the "quilt" method of division, given its lack of reliance on Aristotelian differences, though Moravcsik still sees this method as one of the determination of species or sciences. *Plato and Platonism*, 213-24.
10 Plato, *Statesman*, in *Complete Works*, 303d-304a.
11 Plato, *Republic*, in ibid., 525b.
12 Here, Deleuze's reading of Plato is very close to Jacques Derrida's in "Plato's Pharmacy."
13 The connection between the theory of the forms/Ideas and ethics is recognized in Plato scholarship, and the theory of Ideas emerges from the ethical concerns Socrates deals with in the early dialogues. For instance, C.J. Rowe notes that "the assumption [of the independent existence of the forms] simultaneously feeds from and secures a fundamental premise of arguments in the moral and political spheres: that of the objectivity of moral values." *Plato*, 83. Such accounts part company with Deleuze in not seeing Plato as making a decision for a particular kind of ethics, and by

seeing Plato as operating with a distinction between making sense of the world in terms of being and a senseless world of becoming, rather than between two attitudes of sense-making.

14 Socrates suggests that there is a "civil war" between different names, with some having their origin in an understanding of the world as a Heraclitean flux, and some in terms of stability. He writes that the "name-giver might have made a mistake at the beginning and then forced the other names to be consistent with it. There would be nothing strange in that. Geometrical constructions often have a small unnoticed error at the beginning with which all the rest is perfectly consistent. That's why every man must think a lot about the first principles of any thing and investigate them thoroughly to see whether or not it's correct to assume them." Plato, "Cratylus," in *Complete Works*, 436c–d. In fact, Socrates concludes the dialogue by arguing that knowledge is impossible if we assume that the world is flux.

15 For a more detailed account of the distinction between sedentary and nomadic distributions, see Somers-Hall, *Deleuze's* Difference and Repetition, §1.6.

16 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, §341.

17 "When Nietzsche says that hubris is the real problem of every Heraclitean, or that hierarchy is the problem of free spirits, he means one – and only one – thing: that it is in hubris that everyone finds the being which makes him return, along with that sort of crowned anarchy, that overturned hierarchy which, in order to ensure the selection of difference, begins by subordinating the identical to the different" (DR, 41). Deleuze expands on this claim in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (NP, 22-5). Deleuze also notes that while Heraclitus is close to Nietzsche, "he only had a foreboding of the meaning of the eternal return" (NP, 201).

18 Returning to Plato's distinction between two kinds of image-making, Deleuze in these early works favours the simulacrum over the icon. In this regard, he takes up Maurice Merleau-Ponty's claim that sense also involves perspective and directedness, thus uniting its various French acceptations: "The only way we have of knowing what a painting is and what a thing is, is by looking at them, and their signification is only revealed if we look at them from a certain point of view, from a certain distance, and in a certain direction [*sens*], in short, if we put our involvement with the world at the service of the spectacle. 'The direction of a stream' would be meaningless if I did not take for granted a subject who looks from a certain place toward another. In the world in itself, all directions and all movements are relative, which amounts to saying that there

are none at all." Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 453.
Kierkegaard also notes the necessity of perspective. For instance: "If some-
one who wanted to learn to dance were to say: For centuries, one genera-
tion after the other has learned the positions, and it is high time that I take
advantage of this and promptly begin with the quadrille—people would
presumably laugh a little at him, but in the world of spirit this is very
plausible." Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 46. Deleuze moves away
from a logic of sense in his collaborations with Guattari, a move that can
be tied to his explicit rejection of the importance of the simulacrum.

19 Plato, "Republic," in *Complete Works*, 525b.

20 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 617.

21 For instance, see Badiou's claim that Deleuze presents an ethics of ascetism;
Deleuze and the Clamor of Being, 17.

22 Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 131.

23 Ibid., 150.

24 Ibid., 149. This Platonic notion of the real as pastness carries on in
Aristotle, where his term essence, *to ti ên einai*, could be more literally
translated as "the what it was to be" for a thing; see Marc Cohen,
"Aristotle's Metaphysics." For a full analysis of the development of the con-
cept of essence in Greek thought, and its influence on the development of
philosophy, see the first chapter of Miguel de Beistegui, *Truth and Genesis*.

25 Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 151.

26 Ibid., 186.

27 For Deleuze's theory of the encounter, see Somers-Hall, "Feuerbach and
the Image of Thought." Kierkegaard makes this need for an outside clear
in *Fear and Trembling*, where infinite resignation is seen as "a purely
philosophical movement that I venture to make when it is demanded,"
whereas faith is seen as something "over and beyond human powers" (48).
Similarly, in the aesthetic, it is only through a contingent relation to
another that the world can take on sense. This is true of the contraction
of temporality into a moment in the seducer's diary, and similarly, in the
realm of sin, the merman is only saved through the intervention of Agnes
(ibid., 98).

28 Here, Kierkegaard is prefiguring the claim that opens *Difference and
Repetition* that "repetition is not generality" (DR, 1). As Deleuze notes,
understanding repetition in terms of actual states of affairs in fact reduces
it to "extreme resemblance" (DR, 2). For both, true repetition involves a
relation beyond actuality, and orients us to the future.

29 Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 166.

30 Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 86.

31 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, §807.

32 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 12.

33 Ibid., 30.

34 Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 812.

35 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 83.

36 Just as Deleuze argues that Plato differs from later philosophers of representation such as Aristotle or Hegel, Kierkegaard argues that Plato has an understanding of the problem of making sense of time that is lost in Hegel's reduction of movement to a logical category: "Plato fully recognized the difficulty of placing transition in the realm of the purely metaphysical, and for that reason the category of the moment ... cost him so much effort. To ignore the difficulty certainly is not to 'go further' than Plato. To ignore it, and thus piously to deceive thought in order to get speculation afloat and the movement in logic going, is to treat speculation as a rather finite affair." Ibid., 82–3.

37 Michael Burns writes that "Kierkegaard offers a thoroughly systematic account of the grounds of reality and subjectivity and uses this systematic account to clear the space for a rigorously existential account of the lived experience of actuality. To use a metaphor, while music possesses a systematic structure, simply knowing advanced musical theory will not lead an individual to instantaneously produce beautiful melodies. Instead, the individual subjectively appropriates the systematic structure of music, and in the space between the ideality of this structure and the reality of their contingent and free subjectivity, something new emerges." *Kierkegaard and the Matter of Philosophy*, 66–7. Such a reading is prefigured by Jean-Paul Sartre in "Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal." Burns's account relies on sidelining Kierkegaard's focus on temporality, and on the categories of the aesthetic. It is in these two areas in particular that Kierkegaard explores the claim that non-dialectical structures are either transposed into representation by dialectics, or are treated as unstructured immediacies. Similarly, Burns downplays the role of pseudonyms in Kierkegaard's thought. The reading offered here instead argues that Kierkegaard prefigures Deleuze in developing an account of structure that is different in kind from representation.

38 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 13.

39 In this manner, I take many of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, such as A in *Either/Or*, to be taking up the idea of immediacy as that which is prior to the mediating functions of representation, and showing that, *contra* Hegel, the immediacy has its own form of determinacy, and thus can form the basis for a form of life. As such, I take it in a much more positive sense

than does, for instance, Stephen C. Evans in *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*, 68–89. This difference hinges in large part on whether one gives weight to the independent perspectives of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, or, as with Evans, sees them as largely inessential when considering Kierkegaard's overall position.

40 Deleuze takes this difference in nature between the faculties as "one of the most original points of Kantianism." *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, 22. Hereafter KCP.

41 This need to reconcile sense and becoming is at the heart of Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms, since to believe that the different attempts at reconciliation that Kierkegaard develops can be related together in the form of a direct representational discourse is to presuppose that sense can be understood as representation. As such, I reject here what Roger Poole calls in "The Unknown Kierkegaard" the "blunt" or "literalist" reading of Kierkegaard.

42 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 53.

43 Michael Inwood notes that, for Hegel, irony is roughly another word for dialectic, thus once again reducing the Socratic project to a precursor of Hegel's own thought. *A Hegel Dictionary*, 147.

44 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 166.

45 Ibid., 56.

46 Kierkegaard contrasts the Platonic and Socratic readings of the *Protagoras* and argues that Socratic irony prevents a reading of recollection as the retrieval of knowledge in this dialogue (ibid., 60). Cf. Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, where Deleuze similarly shows the priority of learning over knowledge (and their difference in kind) in his project of escaping the image of thought (DR, 164–7).

47 Ibid., 152.

48 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 43-4.

49 Ibid., 41.

50 See, for instance, Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 44, where Silentio presents an account of a figure who fails to achieve even infinite resignation, which bears a strong resemblance to Kierkegaard's own relationship with Regine.

51 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 151–4, provides a taxonomy of ways in which we might fail to make sense of temporality. Thus, alongside seeing this interrelation in terms of metaphysics, or in terms of a fall into senseless becoming, Haufniensis introduces the idea of seeing the eternal as the limit of the temporal, or of integrating both moments through the imagination. Haufniensis makes explicit in these analyses that the eternal

is to be understood as repetition, thus reiterating that sense is a way or orienting oneself to the future in *this* world.

52 There is a further irony that the reading of Kierkegaard implicit in Deleuze's work, with its subordination of a variety of different pseud-onyms to a single underlying schema, in fact mirrors Badiou's reading of Deleuze, where, "in starting from innumerable and seemingly disparate cases, in exposing himself to the impulsion organized by Spinoza and Sacher-Masoch, Carmelo Bene and Whitehead, Melville and Jean-Luc Godard, Francis Bacon and Nietzsche, Deleuze arrives at conceptual pro-ductions that I would unhesitatingly qualify as monotonous, composing a very particular regime of emphasis or almost infinite repetition of a limited repertoire of concepts, as well as a virtuosic variation of names, under which what is thought remains essentially identical." Badiou, *Deleuze and the Clamor of Being*, 14.

53 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 127.

54 Kierkegaard's taxonomy is spread across his pseudonymous works, all of which explore from different perspective how one might formulate a logic of sense. Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*, 151–4, provides a summary of many of the ways in which one might attempt to reconcile time and the eternal.

55 For both, this problem is formulated in terms of the categories of the past and the future, with the past signifying representation, and the future as becoming that falls outside of our categories of representation. This is evidently clear in Kierkegaard's claim that "it is perfectly true, as the philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards." Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, 161. Similarly, Deleuze's analysis of *Hamlet* sees Hamlet, whom Deleuze sees as a symbol for the reconciliation of time and rep-resentation, as caught between his knowledge of what he should do to avenge his father and his inability to make this act actual. Here, the rep-resentation of what he should do is likewise understood in terms of the past in contrast to the horizon of the future: "they are in the past and live themselves as such so long as they experience the act as too big for them" (DR, 112). For a more detailed reading of Deleuze and *Hamlet*, see Somers-Hall, "Time Out of Joint," 56.