

Difference Monism and Its Philosophical Neighbors: Inheritance, Revision, and Divergence

DM.P10 • Dialogue with Major Traditions

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DM did not emerge from nowhere. It draws resources from multiple traditions while forming its own divergences on starting point, time, internality, and normative generation.

1. Task

P10 answers four questions: (1) Which traditions is DM closest to? (2) What does DM inherit? (3) What does DM revise? (4) What does DM genuinely add?

2. Structural Realism (Worrall, Ladyman, French)

Inheritance: The primacy of structure over entities. DM agrees that structure is epistemically and ontologically prior to objects.

Revision: Structural realism takes structure as given; DM asks where structure comes from — the generation of structure from difference plus non-arbitrary constraint.

DM's addition: A genetic account of structure rather than a descriptive commitment to structure.

3. Process Philosophy (Whitehead)

Inheritance: The rejection of static substance ontology. Both agree that becoming is prior to being.

Revision: Process philosophy starts with “actual occasions” — event-like primitives that already contain temporality. DM starts with difference, which is thinner — it does not presuppose eventhood, process, or temporality.

DM's addition: Time as derived (trace inheritance) rather than primitive (process).

4. Buddhist Dependent Origination

Inheritance: The rejection of svabhava (inherent existence). Both agree that entities lack independent self-nature.

Revision: Buddhism treats emptiness as the endpoint — liberation from attachment to falsely reified entities. DM treats difference as the starting point — the construction of real (though non-ultimate) structures.

DM's addition: A constructive ontology that builds upward from emptiness-equivalent (difference) rather than stopping at its recognition.

5. Phenomenology (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty)

Inheritance: The irreducibility of first-person perspective. The lived body as the zero-point of experience.

Revision: Phenomenology takes consciousness as the methodological starting point. DM derives the conditions under which a first-person perspective can emerge — it asks what structure must exist for there to be a “zero-point” at all.

6. Habermasian Discourse Ethics

Inheritance: Normativity requires communicative conditions — norms cannot be justified monologically.

Revision: DM grounds normativity not in ideal speech conditions but in structural attributability — a norm is binding when the structural chain from decision to consequence can be traced, regardless of whether ideal communication occurred.

DM’s novelty is not in replacing these traditions but in re-wiring their insights into a single continuous chain: difference → structure → time → life → consciousness → normativity. The chain itself is the contribution.