INTRODUCTION

Deleuze, Kant and ‘Kantianism’

In the discussion following a presentation on Kant to the French Society of Philosophy in 1968, French philosopher Ferdinand Alquié is reported to have said:

Why does Kant have the sad privilege of being, among all philosophers, the one who everyone wants to prolong in one direction or another?... The most diverse interpretations come from thinkers who all nevertheless agree in saying that Kant, whether through timidness or inability, did not fulfil his own thought. It seems to me, on the contrary, that Kant perfectly well fulfilled and expressed his thought, which doesn’t prevent me from recognising that there may be other thoughts one might prefer to his.¹

We can recognise the phenomenon that Alquié is lamenting as ‘Kantianism’: a specific form of response to Kant’s philosophy which, distinct from Kantian scholarship or influence, treats Kant’s thought as something which both falls short of and exceeds itself in such a way that its identity can be pursued in thoughts ‘other’ to it. Jules Vuillemin’s book, *L’heritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne*, is dedicated to examining the mechanism of and dialectic between three successive waves of ‘Kantianism’, through their key representatives—post-Kantianism (Fichte), neo-Kantianism (Cohen) and existentialism (Heidegger). He describes the ‘Kantian’ approach in the following manner:

The interest of these interpretations is... not at all historical: it is not a matter of reconstituting Kantian thought with all its elements and, if there is the occasion, with all its contradictions; rather one must detach the kernel and the husk, the interior and the exterior, trusting that health is in the former, all sickness and rot only coming from the latter.²

In this way, ‘Kantianism’ is a selective and ‘untimely’ kind of reading where, in Steven Galt Cromwell’s terms, “Kant” refers to a “semantic field” rather than an “historical figure.”³

If Kant has been the special object of such attention, it is because he successfully conveyed his thought as *revolutionary*: the famous ‘Copernican revolution’ in philosophy to match that in the sciences, as well as an expression of broader cultural changes attendant to the Enlightenment era. While the notion of critique is a signature concept of Kant’s, as the sign of a revolution, and thus in some respects a ‘call to arms’, it already implies an origin and a
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destiny beyond an individual thought. Already during his lifetime, debates concerning Kant’s work were addressed to the ‘spirit’ of the revolution rather than its letter, and the history of Kantianism assumes traits typical of revolutionary fallout in any field: dramas of fidelity and betrayal, ‘carrying on the banner’, denunciation and counter-revolutions. If ‘Kantianism’ came into being through persuasion of the revolutionary nature of Kant’s work, it is perpetually renewed by divisions concerning its sense. The second character follows from the first to the extent that part of the notion of a revolution is a certain indeterminacy concerning its ultimate causes and significance, or at least an openness in principle to constant re-evaluation.

The character of Kant’s oeuvre itself contributes to the disparity of the traditions that claim to be heir to Kant. There is, for example, its literal ambiguity, whose symbol is perhaps the discrepancy between the first and second editions of the first critique. There is also the multiplicity of its dimensions, as Kant’s vision proceeds through the progressive revelations of the first, second and third critiques, each of which themselves contain striking subdivisions, as so many possible perspectives from which to view the whole. Vuillemin identifies for example in the successive waves of Kantianism a respective focus on the Dialectic, the Analytic and the Aesthetic of the first critique, each seeking the “privileged element of the system assumed to be essential by the interpretation, [leaving] to the side all that, not agreeing with it, risks contradiction.”

It is the status of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze as a ‘Kantian’, rather than as a scholar of Kant or a philosopher ‘influenced by’ Kant, which is the particular object of this thesis. In his 1980 book surveying the contemporary philosophical scene in France influenced by the local interpretation of German idealism, Vincent Descombes opens his section on Gilles Deleuze with the statement: “Gilles Deleuze is above all a post-Kantian.” In Deleuze’s work, we find at once the affirmation of the revolutionary potential of Kant’s project, the accompanying reservations concerning its realisation, and the subsequent commitment to its reinvention. The theme of the critical destiny of philosophy runs throughout Deleuze’s philosophy, from his first book on Hume in 1953, to his last collection of essays in 1993, entitled Critique et clinique. At the same time, Deleuze frequently
expresses a great ambivalence towards Kant, almost as if the greatest enemy of the critical project were Kant himself. Kant is perhaps the most canonical of the philosophers to whom Deleuze devotes a book, and at one point he distinguishes it from the others as “a book about an enemy, where I try to expose how he functions, what his mechanisms are.” When Deleuze opposes Nietzsche, for example, or Hume, to Kant as the ‘true’ avatar of critique, however, it is on the grounds of principles that are recognisably Kantian.

In many ways, Kant occupies a similar place in Deleuze’s work to that of Plato: a great philosophical “sign” with a double edge, “one by which it expresses… the productive dissymmetry, the other by which it tends to annul it.” It is part of Deleuze’s conception of philosophy that it has a duplicitous nature, comprising a disparity between the competing perspectives of difference and identity, production and product. At one point, Deleuze writes that in taking up Nietzsche’s project of “the reversal of Platonism”, it is not only “inevitable”, but “desirable” that this reversal conserve many aspects of Plato. It is in the same way that we can understand Deleuze’s relationship to Kant, as not only a challenge to Kant that also retains many aspects of his philosophy, but a challenge to Kant in order to preserve what he sees as valuable in critique.

The relationship between Kant and Deleuze is one that is relatively underdeveloped in the secondary literature on Deleuze (and certainly in that on Kant). The ‘breakthrough’ work of Deleuze’s in both the French- and English-speaking world was his manifesto-style volume with Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Volume I*, published in 1972 and written in the wake of the political and intellectual upheavals of May ’68. The English translation appeared five years later, in 1977, and in the same year there appeared several translations of chapters from Deleuze and Guattari’s follow-up work, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia Volume II*, published in 1980 and completely translated into English in 1987. It is fair I think to say, in the first place, that the secondary literature on Deleuze as a whole is dominated by threads drawn from these two major works, over Deleuze’s relationship with any other thinker, or even on his own. *Difference and Repetition*, published in 1968, and probably the work which most integrates
Deleuze's own philosophy and his debt to Kant, appeared in English only in 1994.

There is thus the simple ‘facticity’ of timing in the impact and reception of an author’s work when considering the prominence of this area in interpretations of Deleuze. There is also the related fact, which Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam draw attention to in their introduction to Deleuze’s book on Kant, namely that “it is difficult to think of two philosophers more apparently opposite than old Immanuel Kant, ‘the great Chinaman of Königsberg’, and Gilles Deleuze, the Parisian artist of nomadic intensities.”

This disparity in ‘image’, or perhaps in readership, between two philosophers, is less marked in the case of the other major figures that feature in Deleuze’s work, such as Nietzsche, Bergson and even Spinoza and Leibniz. It is a disparity Deleuze himself remarks upon, as in the reference given above to Kant as an “enemy”, and in comments in his lectures about the suffocating “fog” of Kant’s work, so unlike Deleuze’s own mercurial lightness.

Presenting Deleuze as a ‘Kantian’, however, is one way of re-evaluating this disparity, so that it is not a simple antipathy, or an intriguing localised deviation, but rather an organising principle for understanding Deleuze’s philosophy: it is entirely natural for a ‘Kantian’ to entertain a certain rivalry with Kant; it is part of what makes a Kantian a Kantian. Deleuze is a singularly eclectic philosopher, and it is not necessary to claim any priority for this perspective over the many others that can be employed to elucidate Deleuze’s work. Following Deleuze’s own tendency to ‘make over’ the objects of his studies in the light of a governing problem, the intention here is to produce ‘a’ Kant and ‘a’ Deleuze whose resemblance to each other or to the ‘original’ is less important than an internally coherent development of the issue in question: in this case, the project of a critical philosophy. Through a ‘Kantian Deleuze’, which both highlights and reflects a ‘Deleuzean Kant’, we arrive at a perspective on both which no doubt goes beyond the position of either one alone.

As suggested above, ‘Kantianism’ as much implies a polemical engagement with previous Kantianisms as one with Kant himself. While this thesis will focus primarily on the direct links between Kant and Deleuze, and the themes arising from these links, it is worthwhile here to briefly situate
Deleuze in relation to other Kantian traditions. In the first place, Deleuze manifests an affiliation with the group of German philosophers contemporary with and immediately following Kant, commonly called “post-Kantian”, including Fichte, Maimon, Schelling, Novalis and Hölderlin. Maimon and Hölderlin, in particular, are foregrounded in Deleuze’s reflections on Kant. Maimon, who greatly influenced all of the post-Kantians, as well as Hegel, carried out a sceptical critique of Kant’s philosophy, whose vulnerabilities he claimed to solve through the reintroduction of a Leibnizian-inspired metaphysics. To Kant’s analysis of the structures of our understanding based on the question of right—*quid juris?*—he repeatedly opposed the question of fact—*quid facti?*—and argued for the necessity of a “genetic” method which would account for the production of our *real* experience rather than remaining at the external and hypothetical conditions of *possible* experience. Maimon posits an infinite understanding within our finite understanding in the form of a “differential unconscious”: an ideal field beneath representation of what might be understood as ‘micro-schematisms’, whose laws of combination generate both the form and content of our understanding, and overcome the Kantian duality of concept and intuition.

At a relatively early point in his writings on critique, Deleuze embraces the necessity of positing “genetic” principles for thought, which account for ‘real’ experience beyond its conditions of possibility. In his earliest work on critical philosophy, however—his book on Hume—Deleuze explicitly repudiates the question of “genesis” as a valid concern. There, he considers this notion to refer either to matters of psychology—which he excludes from the purview of philosophy—or to metaphysical questions of origin, which do not enter into his critical reading of empiricism: “empiricism does not raise the problem of the origin of the mind but rather the problem of the constitution of the subject”. As this distaste for psychology and questions of origin is maintained by Deleuze throughout his work, we can anticipate some of the modifications that the notion of genesis undergoes in order to become integrated into Deleuze’s perspective on critique. In the first place, genesis becomes essentially what ‘comes about’—a genesis in the sense of an “epigenesis”—instead of being an innate principle of generation: the external relationship forged in an encounter between an interiority and exteriority that are properly transcendental rather than psychological or metaphysical. In the
second place, Maimon finished his Versuch über die Transcendentalphilosophie (Essay on Transcendental Philosophy) a year before Kant published the Critique of Judgement. Kant himself, on Deleuze’s account, goes some way in this work to address the problem of genesis in his own terms, also going beyond the “thetic” or “hypothetical” model of judgement objected to by Maimon in order to develop a dialectical conception of reflective judgements.  

In fact, we can appreciate some of the most important aspects of Deleuze’s position in relation to Maimon through his estimation of Hölderlin as a reader of Kant. Deleuze introduces Hölderlin into his discussion of Kant around the issue of the role of time in thought. Hölderlin’s analysis of tragedy is based around the notion of a “caesura” that splits the subject and the dramatic action into two unequal and irreconcilable halves. It is, on Deleuze’s reading, the “pure and empty form of time” itself, the form of the indeterminate or image of the future, that constitutes this unbridgeable “fracture.” This tragic form lies at the heart of Kantian thought in the form of the “paradox of inner sense”, whereby I am unable to reconcile the thought of my action as a spontaneous ‘I’ and my passive experience of myself as an object of sense. Between the two comes precisely the form of time as the condition of determinability, which both introduces an ‘outside’ into thought at the same time as being its condition. In the first place we can note here a divergence from Maimon. Maimon’s ‘infinite understanding’, whether constitutive or regulative in nature, is a form of ‘intellectual intuition’ which ultimately reduces all spatio-temporal determinations to conceptual analysis, and renders the subject transparent to itself in principle if not in fact. The autonomy of space and time and the heterogeneity of sensibility and the understanding remain important Kantian tenets for Deleuze, even if he reinterprets their nature and relationship. On the other hand, it is precisely within the “fracture” that Deleuze locates the “swarming of Ideas” which constitute the differential unconscious. Between Maimon and Deleuze, there is the influence of Bergson, who identifies time with subjectivity itself, beyond the personal ‘ego’. In his last work, Deleuze posits the “transcendental field” as precisely an unconscious and supra-personal plane of “qualitative duration”. Unlike the Maimonian unconscious, this sub-representative domain is one that is accessible to us: we can “reach right to the roots of spatio-temporal dynamisms, to the Ideas which are actualised within them.” It is an open and undetermined field, rather than
being tethered by the unifying principle of the divine. As Dan Smith has suggested, Deleuze frequently renews classical philosophers by reconfiguring their thought as if it were based on the absence rather than the presence of God: in this case, time itself takes the place of God, as productive indeterminacy rather than an ultimate ground of determination.23

It is this maintenance of an ‘outside’ to thought that marks one of Deleuze’s main divergences from the post-Kantians: the refusal to posit the unity of thought and being in the form of an organising concept. In this and other respects there are points of affinity between Deleuze and the neo-Kantians: the group of the Marburg School formed around the turn of the 20th century, which included such figures as Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer. One of the main platforms of the neo-Kantians against the post-Kantians is the resurrection of the question of right as the sole terrain on which questions of morality and knowledge can be posed. A transcendental philosophy cannot take either ‘being’ or ‘experience’ as its point of departure, as morality and knowledge are constituted not as matters of fact (whether empirical or metaphysical), but through their lawfulness, which is an agent rather of the transformation of fact. The Kantian project, in Cassirer’s words, “does not concern things, but judgements on things.”24 The neo-Kantians thus focus on the epistemological significance of the transcendental apparatus, understood as the methodological conditions of a universally valid science, rather than a quasi-psychological metaphysics of the innate conditions of subjective experience. The Kantian ‘subject’ is science itself: the ‘I’ of transcendental apperception is neither a psychological nor metaphysical subject but the quasi-grammatical ‘persona’ or ‘subject of enunciation’, who authorises the judgement and ensures the coherence of the system of knowledge. The indeterminacy of experience outside of this process of legitimation is implicit in this position, as is the susceptibility of the edifice of knowledge to constant re-evaluation.

Despite the ‘scientistic’ focus of the neo-Kantians, and the associated reclamation of ‘possible experience’ as the proper object of thought (which is to say, the natural world as constituted through science), there are many elements which the neo-Kantian perspective shares with Deleuze’s understanding of Kant, and indeed of thought in general. First among these,
already suggested by Deleuze’s position on “genesis”, is the ‘anti-innateism’ and anti-representationalism of the neo-Kantians, opposed to a psychology of the structures of experience or a metaphysics which simply reproduces psychological experience on a more “refined” plane. Deleuze has a special understanding of empiricism, which will be examined at a later point, but its negative sense is invariably identified with the field of the representation of objects by a subject. It is not this field that Deleuze identifies with “real experience”, and in this respect he repudiates its philosophical value as much as the neo-Kantians. Beyond “experience”, in this sense, for Deleuze, are the ideal transcendental conditions which serve as its foundation, but this is also the indeterminate or determinable field from which ideas emerge, as described above. There is again a Bergsonian inflection to Deleuze’s position here: that of Bergson’s project of going beyond the “turn” below which our habits organise our field of experience, in order to analyse both the “real” elements of experience and their laws of combination. Deleuze also shares with the neo-Kantians the notion of thought as a legislative and transformative instance, rather than being subordinated to an existing state of affairs. This fiat is not for Deleuze restricted to the scientific domain: it belongs to the creative character of all thought, more artistic than scientific. Similarly, a methodological apparatus is for Deleuze simply one case of the broader category of the “dramatological” nature of thought, organising a transcendental field of right as its scenario and assigning “conceptual personae”, neither of which can be assimilated to empirical states of affairs or persons.

Following Vuillemin’s classification of the ‘Kantianisms’, something should be said of Deleuze’s relationship to the phenomenological school and Heidegger. Here, Deleuze keeps a certain distance. In the first issue of Magazine littéraire dedicated to Deleuze, appearing in 1988, there appears a set of “biographical coordinates” for Deleuze, most likely written by himself. Among the list of “distinguishing characteristics” is included: “has never been either a phenomenologist or a Heideggerian.” In Deleuze’s lectures on Kant, he notes the transformation that the notion of “appearance” undergoes in Kant’s philosophy, such that it refers not to an essence but to its “sense”, this transformation representing both a starting point for the subsequent phenomenological tradition and an important aspect of Deleuze’s own reading
of Kant. As Michel Foucault notes, however, Deleuze’s own philosophy of sense could not be more “alien” to a work such as Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, in which “the body-organism is linked to the world through a network of primal significations, which arise from the perception of things.” It is indeed the normative and pre-determined aspect of notions such as the ‘primal’ and ‘primordial’ that Deleuze typically criticises when he addresses phenomenological thinkers in his work. Thus, for example, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze cites Heidegger’s notion of the “pre-ontological comprehension of Being” as a form of the myth of “common sense”, whereby the fundamental elements of thought are shared by all in a subjective and pre-conceptual form. Similarly, in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze reproaches Husserl for maintaining the form of consciousness in the transcendental domain and positing a fundamental matrix of sense as “non-modalized root-form” or “*Urdoxa*.”

Deleuze’s reservations with regard to the phenomenological school are not unrelated to his explicit and violent hostility towards Hegel. Although there is no shortage of material in Deleuze’s work from which we can gather the main points of this antipathy—the critique of the negative, the ‘intellectualism’ of understanding difference as contradiction—it remains a challenge to precisely locate the problem which defines their difference. This is partly because, as is also the case with the phenomenologists, there seem also to be many concerns that they share: the question of the unity of thought and being in difference, for example, or the struggle against abstraction and the critique of a conventional understanding of the concept. Mostly, however, it is because while Deleuze often finds aspects of major thinkers objectionable, he tends nevertheless to find ways of adapting their thought to his own purposes, or identify more productive ‘undercurrents’: Hegel alone is singled out as a kind of ‘plague’ on thought with no redeeming features. Deleuze has been accused of (wilfully) misreading Hegel, which is undoubtedly the case, but this simply begs the question of his motivation for doing so. Whether Deleuze is ‘really’ so different from Hegel or not, it is clearly the case that from Deleuze’s point of view, his entire philosophy could be understood as a ‘corrective’ of sorts to Hegel, and as such this is an important structuring theme that should not be overlooked.
It is not the object of this thesis to directly examine in any detail the relationship between Deleuze and Hegel. However, given Hegel’s own denunciation of critical philosophy, by pursuing the idea of Deleuze as above all a critical thinker we provide one context within which their disparity can indirectly be understood. If we confront Kant and Hegel rather than Hegel and Deleuze, the dividing issue that immediately raises its head is the speculative relationship to the Absolute: the signature of transcendental illusion for the one, the only true ground of philosophy for the other. With this in mind, what a critical reading of Deleuze in turn highlights regarding his relationship to Hegel is not the question of negation or difference per se, but precisely Hegel’s affirmation of the Absolute as the highest object and subject of thought—its highest ‘being’—, and the unity of thought and being within the concept. In Deleuze’s book on Nietzsche, Deleuze describes this affirmation as the “yes” (ja) of the ass: the thought that wants to take on what ultimately “is”, to assume its weight and truth, and is opposed to the thought animated by the powers of the false which seeks to create new possibilities for existence:

Nietzsche is engaged in a critique of all conceptions of affirmation which see it as a simple function, a function of being or of what is. This applies however this being is conceived: as true or as real, as noumenon or phenomenon, and however this function is conceived: whether as development, exposition, unveiling, revelation, consciousness-raising or knowledge. Philosophy since Hegel appears as a bizarre mixture of ontology and anthropology, metaphysics and humanism, theology and atheism, theology of bad conscience and atheism of ressentiment.32

What, for Hegel, is the reciprocal and meaning-generating embrace of the Whole, is, for Deleuze, a stifling ‘totalitarianism’ of the concept which allows of no escape or outside to thought, and thus no allowance for freedom, change, or the absolutely new. Conversely, what is simply an external and abstract position of “reflection” for Hegel, is for Deleuze the evaluative position of the Master (in the Nietzschean sense), the spirit of levity who “discharges” and transforms being rather than taking it on.

Some of these ‘anti-Hegelian’ aspects of Deleuze have already been indicated under the auspices of Deleuze’s ‘neo-Kantianism’. A more telling reference point, however, which encompasses both Deleuze’s affinities and divergences with this group, as well as the particular character of his anti-
Hegelianism, would be to speak of Deleuze’s “pragmatic” orientation: his self-proclaimed “radical empiricism”, of the sort contemporary with the neo-Kantians themselves (thus James, Peirce and Bergson himself). Like the neo-Kantians, the early pragmatists were partly inspired by a scientific methodology that attended to localised problems, provisional results and experimentation rather than a totalising speculative system. Unlike the neo-Kantians, however, the pragmatists, and James and Bergson in particular, with Deleuze, are ‘anti-intellectualist’ in orientation: pluralist, suspicious of the concept and focused on immediate phenomena of novelty and change. In his piece in *Dialogues*, “On the superiority of Anglo-American literature” (which also addresses certain Anglo-American schools of philosophy), it is precisely a kind of ‘levity’ that elicits Deleuze’s admiration: the absence of the weight of ‘being’ as a problem, the pursuit of external relations “outside of everything which could be determined as Being, One, or Whole.”

It is the sense in which Deleuze develops the critical project in this direction, and the issues it raises concerning the “theoretical” and “practical” orientation of thought, which will form the particular focus of this thesis, as the substance of Deleuze’s “transcendental empiricism.” The difference in nature between the theoretical and practical interests of reason is of course a theme of defining importance in Kant’s critique, and the illusions which are created when our speculative drive holds sway is one of the central motivations of Kant’s project. We also know, however, that this division is not self-explanatory: “practical”, for Kant, does not mean ‘instrumental’ in the sense that a narrow understanding of pragmatism would suggest, and theory itself is for Kant based in a model of thought as a kind of action. The highest expression of our reason, for Kant, is neither theoretical nor utilitarian, but moral: the realisation of our lawful freedom. For Deleuze, on the other hand, the ultimate secret of our freedom and thus all of our thought is to be found rather in the realm of the aesthetic. In developing this problematic between the two authors, the hope is not only to provide insights into an important aspect of Deleuze’s philosophy, but to revitalise certain problems in Kant, in the way all new ‘Kantianisms’ do, and also to provide material for reflection on some questions regarding “orientation in thinking” on its own account.
The critical problems: foundation, coherence, orientation

The trajectory of this thesis develops the problem of the foundation and orientation of thought in Kant’s work, as addressed by Deleuze. In broad terms, this development is marked by a progressive ‘tapering’ of the conception of the foundational instance of thought, in three stages: from the speculative field of *being* to the practical field of *reason*; from the intellectual category of the *concept* to the problematic category of the *Idea*; from the teleological notion of the *organism* to the aesthetic notion of the *singular*. This progression can also be noted within each of these separate stages, as a polemic between two terms: it is in each case a question of the ‘sufficient reason’ of thought, the conditions of the actuality of thought beyond its possibility. There is thus a relative autonomy to each of the sections as they broach this issue from different standpoints. The first section addresses the ground of thought in terms of its model or image, the second section addresses the determination of thought in terms of its problem or schema, and the third section addresses the genesis of thought in terms of its ‘event’.

The problem of foundation in Kant’s philosophy can first be raised in a ‘global’ or ‘metaphysical’ sense. At the same time as the revolutionary impact of Kant’s philosophy is recognised by both its supporters and its detractors, it presents a disconcerting image of the status of ‘man’ in the world. Kantianism would never have existed if the stakes involved in identifying its essential core were not perceived to be so high. If these stakes could be adequately summarised in a phrase, it would be something like “the modern human condition”, or: “what is man?” It is not a matter here of repeating ‘eternal’ questions, but of locating the genesis and nature of a field of enquiry. It is again a matter of ‘Kant’ being the name or marker of an *event*: questions concerning the human condition, or “man”, now incorporate a difference between a ‘before’ and an ‘after’, which is perhaps another way of saying that modernity itself becomes a philosophical object.

By asserting that finite reason is the ultimate author and authority for our knowledge and morality, Kant’s critical philosophy seems, on the one hand, to greatly magnify the dignity of the human subject. On the other hand, however, this enlarged figure is now ‘alone’ on the worldly stage. Indeed, the
sense of the human milieu being a ‘world’—as existing ‘for us’—is in fact greatly reduced, as what it contained of order and meaning is shown to be perhaps wholly given to it by ourselves. The source of the anxiety lies in the basic critical principle that we can have no knowledge of things in themselves. Kant’s work of course consists just as fundamentally in the attempt to show that we also have no need to know things as they are in themselves in order to have a science, a metaphysics and a morality, and that these are in fact impossible based on such an assumption, as well as a diagnosis of why we think we need such knowledge. These ‘compensations’, however, cannot ultimately eradicate the conviction of reason that it is entitled to entertain the absolute—as this for Kant is not simply an error but a “transcendental illusion”, inscribed within the tendency of reason itself to surpass experience.

If this anxiety concerning foundations in an ‘existential’ sense can be put aside, there remain similar problems on the more formal or specific level of our cognitive apparatus. Kant rejects a purely rationalist basis for philosophy on the grounds that our cognitive judgements could not be just conceptual, but must be ‘synthesised’ with the material of sensibility. Concepts and sense impressions are different in source and in nature, but must be combined in order to form valid judgements. The nature of this connection, along with the status of the ‘thing in itself’, is probably the most controversial area of Kantian scholarship: their interpretation differentiates mutually antagonistic schools of ‘Kantianism’. Kant’s Transcendental Deduction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which deals with the problem of the necessary connection between our *a priori* concepts and sensibility, is the most changed between the first and second editions of this work, and manifests ambiguities that touch on Kant’s work as a whole. Appearing at worst like Descartes’ introduction of the “pineal gland” to overcome the mind/body dualism, having created a clear separation between the concept and sensibility, Kant creates a mediating third term in the form of the “schematism” in order to render “homogenous” these separate elements. The schematism is by Kant’s own admission a “secret art”, whose full clarification is beyond the scope of his treatise.

The nature of this problem itself depends on one’s interpretation of Kant’s critique. The language of the ‘faculties’ and ‘conditions of experience’ easily gives Kant’s critique at times the appearance of a psychological study or
even a physiology of coherent perception, despite the fact that Kant energetically distances himself from empirical approaches to philosophy, and differentiates perception from his notion of “experience.” At the other extreme, the radical nature of Kant’s claims against metaphysics form a fertile ground for the construction of a kind of ‘metaphysical anti-metaphysics’: the post-critical meditations on our finite ‘being’. Either interpretation is particularly sensitive to the presence of ‘gaps’ in the system. It is in this respect that readings of the more ‘scientistic’ kind are on stronger ground, considering the critique as essentially a formulation of methodological rules. The schema is a vital tool here, as simply the “rule of construction” for our concepts. The central notion of critique on this reading is the judgement: it is our judgements which combine our concepts with the data from intuition and it is our ‘judgement’ which sees fit to do so. These are of course informed by the methodological apparatus, which is open to revision, and the experimental possibilities of the schema. Given inevitable contingencies, however, the ‘gap’ is straddled by judgement, whose nature is to be adaptable, provisional and to ‘make leaps’. The psychology or metaphysics of such an operation is not a pertinent question on this model.

The notions of method, schema, and judgement are guiding and interrelated themes in the development here of Deleuze’s interpretation of Kant. They are not raised as solutions to the problems raised by Kant’s critique, but, in the first place, as suggesting a way of posing them. To connect the mystery of the schematism to the more familiar impenetrability of the art of judgement is not to dismiss both as beyond discussion, but rather to open an avenue of enquiry that may shed light on both. At the same time, to ‘shed light’ on these notions does not mean that the ‘gaps’ in their explanation can be filled in, but is just as liable to reveal how such gaps form a necessary part of their operation. For a thought that wishes to remain critical, the challenge posed by Kant’s uprooting of knowledge and morality from a transcendent ground is not how to re-establish this connection, but how to make this disconnection or ungrounding viable—how it is workable, and how it can be lived with.

Descombes’ account of the ‘Kantian’ character of Deleuze’s philosophy immediately raises the issues contained in the problems of the critical ‘worldview’ and the internal coherence of critique as outlined above. In the
first place, Descombes sees Deleuze’s thought as an affirmation of the criticism Kant undertakes in the Transcendental Dialectic of the ideas of the soul, the world, and of God: “No experience can justify us in affirming a single substantial self, a totality of things and a first cause of this totality.” On the contrary, for Deleuze, it is the postulation of a transcendent first principle that prejudices and enslaves. In the second place, Descombes identifies the character of Deleuze’s philosophy of “difference” in Kantian terms, its focus being not the difference between two concepts or identities, but that between the conceptual and the non-conceptual:

the one which obliges thought to introduce difference into its identities, particularity into its general representations and precision into its concepts. The real difference is that which exists between concept and intuition, between the intelligible and the sensible, between the logical and the aesthetic. Descombes also indicates the framework that Deleuze utilises to approach these issues, itself based on an understanding of Kant. This is the reading of critique as above all the substitution of a practical ideal of thought for a speculative one:

Liberation of the will is the significance of the critical idea… Deleuze gives the name ‘philosophy of being’ to the old, pre-Kantian metaphysics, and ‘philosophy of will’ to the metaphysics born of the accomplished critique.

The affirmation of critique as a “philosophy of the will” is evident from Deleuze’s first monograph on the philosophy of Hume. Deleuze gives a ‘critical’ reading of Hume, minimising its ‘naturalist’ or psychological aspects to portray it instead as a study of the principles by which we surpass experience in order to constitute a subject of knowledge and morality. The greatest obstacle to his critical reading however is Hume’s notion of the “intentional finality of nature” which is postulated as a ground of the validity of our associations. After dedicating his final chapter to the question of finality, Deleuze concludes with a tranquil dismissal of the necessity of this postulate:

This accord can only be thought; and no doubt it is the most empty and impoverished thought. Philosophy must constitute itself as the theory of what we do, not as the theory of what is. What we do has its principles, and Being can never be grasped except as the object of a synthetic relation with the very principles of what we do. A synthetic conception of knowledge is by its very nature ‘active’, for Deleuze. In one of his seminars at the University of Vincennes, Deleuze contrasts Kant’s
position with Leibniz’s claim that all knowledge claims are in principle analytic.” Such a claim needs to be understood, according to Deleuze, as reflecting “a certain idea of knowledge, that is, that to know is to discover what is included in the concept.” More specifically,

I would say of knowledge in this case that it is modelled on a particular model which is that of passion or perception. To know is in the end to perceive something; to know is to apprehend, it is a passive model of knowledge, even if many activities depend upon it.

In the case of Kant, however, the postulation of the synthetic a priori judgement as the basic element of knowledge translates into a conception of knowledge whose nature it is to “go beyond the concept to affirm something else… it is a model of knowledge as act.”

In his book on Kant, Deleuze understands the distance of critique from both rationalism and empiricism to be based in its postulation of the self-determination of the will. If philosophy is “the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason”, it is in the first place distinguished from empiricism, which subordinates reason to the ends of Nature, and in the second place from rationalism, which takes “a Being, a Good or a Value” as its ultimate goal. In both cases, it is an external object that determines the will and compromises its autonomy:

In so far as the representation is of something external to the will, it hardly matters whether it is sensible or purely rational; in any case it determines the act of willing only through the satisfaction linked to the ‘object’ which it represents.

The elaboration of the internal ends of human reason according to its interests is the object of both the critique of pure and practical reason. The ‘practical’ nature of the “philosophy of the will”, as Deleuze conceives it, is thus not connected to any utilitarian or instrumental conception of thought, but rather a legislative one. The critical ‘purity’ of both the theoretical and practical interests of reason concerns the immanence of its principles and independence from external determinations. It is on the contrary the most ‘speculative’ philosophies that reveal themselves to be animated by the pursuit of an object, however idealised, and thus representative of a ‘lower’ (non-transcendental) expression of the will.

There is thus little sense in Deleuze’s reading of Kant as the philosopher of ‘finitude’, in the negative sense: the one who bars our path to the absolute and confines thought to all-too-human limits. In the first place,
this is because, in Deleuze’s view, Kant has transformed the terrain of thought such that the sense of these notions has radically changed. It is also because the absence of a transcendent foundation for thought is the object of a more direct affirmation in Deleuze’s work. It is the presence, rather than the absence, of a transcendent absolute, that signifies limits for Deleuze. Deleuze describes the Kantian milieu in the absence of God as a “desert terrain”, and such a terrain is a space of freedom rather than constraint, prefiguring a new ‘persona’ and quest of the thinker: the Romantic wanderer in search of a foundation. In his later work with Guattari, Deleuze presents the desert as the symbol for the “nomadic” milieu of thought. Deleuze more specifically affirms the ‘modern’ character of Kant’s thinking because it breaks with a ‘cosmic’ vision of a holistic order of things to focus rather on the universal laws that regulate local events. This reading of Kant within the context of cultural modernity is one reason why the Critique of Judgement is a pivotal text for the relationship between Deleuze and Kant. Deleuze reads aesthetic judgements as symbols of discord, or a “discordant accord” rather than as the symbol of a return to a cosmic ideal under the auspices of a teleological, organised nature.

It is this aspect of Deleuze’s work that makes him, along with Foucault, a rather atypical heir of the tradition of the Enlightenment. Although Deleuze considers Kant to have fallen short of the more radical potential of critique, he affirms the critical understanding of the Enlightenment project as an exercise in demystification, a challenge to traditional authorities, an agent of liberation, and as promoting the ideal of “thinking for oneself”, or “saying simple things in ones own name”:

Is there any discipline apart from philosophy that sets out to criticise all mystifications, whatever their source and aim, to expose all the fictions without which reactive forces would not prevail? Exposing as a mystification the mixture of baseness and stupidity that creates the astonishing complicity of both victims and perpetrators. Finally, turning thought into something aggressive, active and affirmative. Creating free men, which is to say men who do not confuse the aims of culture with the benefit of the State, morality or religion. It is to the extent to which Kant still upholds orthodox ideals of truth and morality, and the ‘form’ of the orthodoxy in the structure of cognition that he comes under attack by Deleuze. It is nevertheless in the name of the critical ideals and formulae laid out by Kant that he leads this attack, and pursues its possibilities in his own and other’s thought.
If Deleuze denounces or dismisses any loss of ‘connection’ to an essential or supreme being that ensues from the critical ‘worldview’ (or lack thereof), there is on the other hand his preoccupation with the necessity for thought to attain what is singular and concrete—pure “difference.” This latter aim can appear to contradict the former critical commitment, as in his essay on “the conception of difference in Bergson”, where he claims that the aim of a philosophy of difference is “to ‘return’ to things themselves, to account for them without reducing them to something other than themselves, to grasp them in their being.” He readily cites to this end the Bergsonian ideal of philosophy as a special form of empiricism, which tailors for the object “a concept appropriate to the object alone, a concept one can barely be say is still a concept, since it applies only to that one thing.”

A first step towards reconciling this apparent disparity in Deleuze’s work is to understand it in the context of his criticism of the concept of identity as the basic element of thought. The function of the concept of identity in philosophy, on Deleuze’s account, is effectively to ‘manage’ difference. On the one hand, the concept subordinates differences by picking out qualities as ‘the same’ or identical across different cases. On the other hand, differences are inscribed within the concept as a mode of its division, for example on the Aristotelian model of genera and species, where a concept is divided according to the difference of contrasting attributes, or on the Hegelian model where the concept is divided according to the difference of contradiction. In either case, the explicit or implicit argument is that whatever differences may exist outside of the concept, these cannot be ‘thought’ without being referred to a concept or category of identity. A pertinent example in this context is Hegel’s critique of the alleged “richness” of “sense-certainty” at the beginning of his *Phenomenology.* The immediate data of consciousness appears to be the truest and most concrete form of knowledge, but when it comes to formulating this knowledge it reveals itself to be the most abstract and impoverished: simply an “I”, “this”, “here”, “now”, which could apply to any experience and precisely says nothing of ‘this’ one. The problem is one of both analysis and synthesis: what are the terms of a division that follows the true ‘differences in nature’, and how do we integrate the dispersal of the given in such a way that it can be thought?
Deleuze's response to these problems continues his emphasis on a model of thought grounded in action. Hegel's example, for Deleuze, presupposes the centrality of the general concept as reference point for the thinking of particulars, according to a speculative model of thought as representation. Deleuze posits instead the Kantian notion of the Idea as the 'animus' of thought, which integrates singularities in function of a fundamental problem, according to a model of thought which he calls “dramatisation”:

He thus remains in the reflected element of 'representation', within simple generality. He represents concepts, instead of dramatizing Ideas...

The significance of the singular—“this”, “here”, “now”—is only grasped within the context of a problem, a ‘drama’ of thought that gives it sense, in the absence of which it is effectively impoverished. The state of 'being thought' here is not one of representation or comprehension through a concept, but being aligned along the coordinates of an action or event. Deleuze contrasts the converging of the data of the faculties in representation, where an identity is formed at the overlap of what I perceive, remember and conceive, to the open relay of information, transmitted across each faculty in turn, without a common measure.

There is thus no identity posited as underlying the passage from the unthought to the thought: thought is an addition, it creates something new. Rather than an act of representation, Deleuze conceives thought as an act of unilateral determination: unilateral because there is ultimately no reciprocity or common measure between thought and its outside. The “difference” of interest to Deleuze is thus not the conceptual difference represented by its division, nor in effect the sea of differences too large or small to be inscribed within a concept, but the difference that thought makes in its act of determination:

Difference is the state in which one can speak of determination as such [La determination]. The difference ‘between’ two things is only empirical, and the corresponding determinations are only extrinsic... Difference is this state in which determination takes the form of unilateral distinction. We must therefore say of difference that it is made, or makes itself, as in the expression 'make the difference'.

Deleuze credits Kant with this discovery of “a transcendental Difference between the Determination as such [La determination] and what it
This non-identity of the unthought and thought, this unthinkable "difference", is precisely the highest object of thought for Deleuze:

How could thought avoid going that far, how could it avoid thinking that which is most opposed to thought? With the identical, we think with all our force, but without producing the least thought: with the different, by contrast, do we not have the highest thought, but also that which cannot be thought? 

The conditions of thought “making” a difference follow from Deleuze’s ‘anti-cosmic’ reading of critique. It presupposes the existing state of affairs as indeterminate by default, rather than there being an essential nature of things which it is the task of thought to represent. The relationship between the intellectual and the sensible is presented as a conjunction of orders that differ in kind, where truth is an effect of this meeting point rather than its cause. It is this meeting point that Deleuze has in mind when he enjoins philosophy in his essay on Bergson to return to the true “articulations” of the real, his interpretation of Plato’s injunction to carve nature at its joints. This conjunction, however, presents itself ultimately as more of a “disjunction”, on Deleuze’s interpretation, in virtue of the irreducible disparity between the two sides of thought, and the dissymmetry between thought and the unthought. In another of his seminars, Deleuze describes Kant’s critical subject as one who “limps”:

Finally man becomes deformed [deformed], deformed in the etymological sense of the world, which is to say dyses-formed [dys-forme], he limps on two heterogenous and non-symmetrical forms: the receptivity of intuition and the spontaneity of the ‘I think.’

Thus, rather than representing a return to the “thing-in-itself”, in the pre-critical sense, Deleuze’s insistence on the relevance of the singular in thought is based rather on recasting thought in an active mould, as a response to problems, and on a position of principle concerning the open-ended nature of thought.

It is perhaps the notion of thought as “problematic” which forms the thematic centre of Deleuze’s relationship with Kant’s philosophy, as well as forming the literal centre of this thesis. It is thought considered as a responsiveness to problems which both distances its character from a speculative ideal, but equally, in virtue of the element of indeterminacy that a problem carries at its heart, from a simple resolution of a technical difficulty. The competing viewpoints concerning the nature and goal of thought
themselves form the terms of a problem that is the starting point of the critical project, in turn expressed in a dialectic of true and false problems rather than truth and falsity *per se*. The problem, by its nature, engages and transforms the subject of thought, and 'complicates' its object by entwining the simplicity of the concept with its spatio-temporal coordinates and the horizon of an Idea. It is, finally, the imperative of a problem that challenges our habits or presuppositions and obliges us to be creative in our thinking, to *think per se*, under the compelling force of what is most singular in experience.
Endnotes for the Introduction

2 Jules Vuillemin, L'heritage kantien et la révolution copernicienne, p. 12.
4 Vuillemin, L'heritage kantien, p. 12.
5 Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, p. 152. Descombes uses 'post-Kantian' here in the broad sense of 'following from Kant', rather than related to the specific group of thinkers immediately subsequent to Kant.
6 Negotiations, F14-15/E6, translation modified.
7 DR, F31/E20, translation modified.
8 DR, F82/E59.
9 By 'breakthrough' work, I mean both the work that brought Deleuze to the attention of a broad public within France (when Deleuze died, in 1995, he was still recalled in French news reports as "the co-author of Anti-Oedipus") and the one which (almost) marked his debut in the English-speaking academic world (before Anti-Oedipus, only Deleuze's Proust and Signs had been translated into English, in 1972).
10 PCK, Exv.
11 First lesson on Kant, 14/3/78, para. 1.
12 See, for example, Deleuze’s response to Philonenko in the discussion following his presentation on "dramatisation", MD, p. 116.
13 In his 1962 work on Nietzsche, for example.
15 ES, F15/E31.
16 "Epigenesis" is a term from biology, "the theory according to which an embryo develops through the successive differentiation of new parts" (Petit Robert), and is opposed to the theory of "preformation". Deleuze’s interest in embryology is pervasive in his work, and can be seen for example, in his 'Method of Dramatisation', Appendix 1.
17 Deleuze, "The Idea of Genesis in Kant's Aesthetics", p. 62: "The post-Kantians, notably Maimon and Fichte, addressed a fundamental objection against Kant: Kant had ignored the demands of a genetic method… If we consider that Maimon’s Essay on Transcendental Philosophy appeared in 1790, we must recognize that Kant, in part, foresaw the objection of his disciples.”
18 DR, F117/F87
19 CPR, B158.
20 DR, F220/E169.
21 Gilles Deleuze, "L'immanence: une vie…", Philosophie, p. 3.
22 MD, p. 117.
24 Cited in Philonenko, Métaphysique et politique chez Kant et Fichte, p. 154.
25 Vuillemin, L'heritage kantien, p. 135.
26 Bergson, Matter and Memory, F321 (original pagination 205, E184, 185), cited in Deleuze’s Bergsonism, F17-18/E27. Bergson himself goes on to refer to the calculus of differentials following this passage: “To give up certain habits of thinking, and even of perceiving, is far from easy: yet this is but the negative part of the work to be done; and when it is done, when we have placed ourselves at what we have called the turn [le tournant] of experience, when we have profited from the faint light which, illuminating the passage from the immediate to the useful, marks the dawn of our human experience, there still remains to be reconstituted, with the infinitely small elements which we thus perceive of the real curve, the curve itself stretching out into the darkness behind them.”
28 First lesson on Kant, 14/3/78, para. 15, and Deleuze’s reading of critique in NP.
29 From Michel Foucault’s review of Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition and The Logic of Sense, “Theatrum Philosophicum”, in Language, Counter-memory, Practice, p. 170.
30 DR, F169/E129.
32 NP, F210/E183, translation modified, Deleuze’s italics.
33 Dialogues, F71/E57.
34 Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, p. 152.


ES, F152/E133, translation modified, my emphasis.

Deleuze, Seminar on Leibniz, 20th May 1980.


Deleuze, Seminar on Leibniz, 20th May 1980, para. 49.

For example, “1227: Treatise on Nomadology:—The War Machine” in *A Thousand Plateaus*.

See discussion in Part III, Chapter 3.

“Letter to a severe critic”, *Negotiations*, F15/E6, translation modified.


Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Section A, I: “Sense-certainty: or the ‘this’ and ‘meaning’”.

DR, F18/E10.

DR, F43/E28.

DR, F116/E86.

DR, F292/E226.

Seminar on Kant and Foucault, c. 1982-3, para 3. Nb. Deleuze’s ‘etymology’—substituting the Greek ‘dys’ [=bad] for the Latin ‘di/de’ [=‘un’] in order to make a connection with the Greek/Latin ‘duas’/‘dy’ [=‘two’]—is, characteristically, highly dubious if not entirely fabricated, but not essential to the point, which is no doubt inspired by Hölderlin.