

Christian Kerslake

Immanence and the Vertigo of Philosophy: From Kant to Deleuze.

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In this volume we find the relations between Kant and Deleuze developed through a wide ranging analysis of philosophical texts. Christian Kerslake tells us that his book can be treated as ‘a sourcebook of ideas and arguments’ (vii). As such it has great value because many of the thinkers explored here are little known and little translated. However, this book also presents us with a unified argument that takes us from Kant’s writings to Deleuze’s most pressing concerns. Its approach to the reading of many texts is one that seeks to extract consistency and what Kant called an ‘idea of the whole’ (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxlv). This unifying method takes us from Kant’s pre-critical writings to the central developments of his critical project. Kerslake renders consistent what many Kant scholars believe to be a fragmented corpus. He seeks to reveal the genesis and development of Kantian concepts rather than indulging in the common practice of simply labeling certain moves arbitrary and unconvincing. Also of note are his re-evaluations of the relative importance of the various influences on Deleuze’s thought. Many of these are explored and original conclusions are drawn about their role in shaping Deleuze’s philosophy. The foundation of *Immanence and the Vertigo of Philosophy* is Kerslake’s emphasis upon a series of lecture notes from a course given by Deleuze in 1956-7 and recently made available online under the title ‘What Is Grounding?’ He makes a strong case for regarding these as central to our understanding of Deleuze’s thought.

The introduction prepares us for a thorough development of the insights of the ‘What Is Grounding?’ lectures. We are introduced to a post-Kantian reading of Deleuze, one that understands his work as being concerned with the problems of metacritique and of the self-grounding of a systematic philosophy. Kerslake identifies two conceptions of immanence in Deleuze’s work. The first presents immanence as a philosophical procedure of self-grounding, ensuring the identity or *immanence* of thought and being. However, Deleuze’s later writings present a second conception of immanence, characterizing it as pre-philosophical and pre-reflexive. Subsequent chapters explore the first conception of immanence before returning to the second and seeking to reconcile them.

Chapter 1 makes a strong argument for returning to Kant himself and finding a consistency in his work that spans its pre-critical and critical periods. Schelling is intriguingly placed as a precursor to Bergson. He is said to have developed a notion of the ‘transcendental past’ which is first outside of the self and which influenced Deleuze’s thought alongside Bergson’s better known development of this idea (86-7). The second chapter of the book engages with the history of the ontological argument and claims that

here we find a new means of articulating the relations between Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant and Deleuze. By exploring the distinction between the logical and the real in the context of Kant's pre-critical writings Kerslake expands upon his relations with rationalist philosophies. This allows him to make claims such as the following re-assessment of Kant's critical writings: 'If the subterranean Kantian idea of space is transformed via reference to the Leibnizian *spatium*, the field of intensive differentiation of space is *in principle* expanded' (144). Kerslake provides us with an expanded sense of the role of real relations in Kant's work. The stages of his philosophy are rigorously defined, providing an 'idea of the whole' and of the consistency of its development over time.

Chapter 3 takes forward this approach to Kant's work when it traces the lineage of the 'object = x' in Kant's pre-critical writings. It is said to be behind the birth of Kant's notion of 'a *problematic* concept, or a task' (171). This forces us to look beyond the transcendental dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* when we consider the development of his notion of Ideas, which present us with a problem or task rather than a determinate object. It suggests that Kant's work can be unified because 'if we keep sight of the present problematic, it may be possible to see how Kant's various accounts of a transcendental object [or object = x] may be consistent after all' (171). This unifying reading locates Kant's move from the ontology of his pre-critical writings to the epistemology of his critical period. It is the result of his concern to place limits or boundaries upon experience. However, pre-critical concerns persist in such notions as the object = x, if we follow Kerslake in deepening Kant's relation to his rationalist predecessors. The case is made for regarding the work on Ideas in the *Critique of Pure Reason*'s dialectic as a third deduction alongside the subjective and objective transcendental deductions that appear in its analytic (178). In this way, we make sense of key moves in Kant's thought when we consider it as a whole.

This approach is developed by Kerslake's reference to the role of isolated 'regressive arguments' and unifying 'progressive arguments' in Kant's account (179-80). Many Kant scholars focus upon scattered regressive arguments which begin from some initial presupposition and work toward a conclusion concerning the necessary conditions of possible experience. However, Kerslake makes the case for taking our bearings from arguments that concern Kant's system as a whole. In this way, we do not consider how Kant's account is grounded bit by bit, but how it as 'grounded as a whole' (180). This allows Kerslake to relate Deleuze's work to a conception of Ideas that existed as a latent potential from Leibniz to Kant. Such Ideas are distributive, distributions of singularities, rather than collectively unified. This conception of Ideas may only be 'latent' in Kant but the case is made for recognizing the necessity and reality of Ideas in his account (193). Deleuze goes beyond Kant and this is here understood as a return to Leibniz and Spinoza's concern with the 'play of compossibilities' (197) that determines real experience, leaving behind Kant's dominant concern with logical relations and with an indirect, analogical thinking of reality.

The final chapter returns to the problem of two different conceptions of immanence in Deleuze's thought. The systematic and metacritical conception has been elaborated in the preceding chapters. The later, pre-philosophical conception must now be related to it. Deleuze's later turn to vitalism and a philosophy of life (in texts such as 'Immanence: A Life') leads Kerslake to speak of there being 'two poles' in Deleuze's thought about immanence (213-14). To find consistency here we are directed to the non-organic vitalism found in lesser-known thinkers like Józef-Maria Hoëëne Wronski, the later Schelling, Eugen Fink, Kostas Axelos and Francis Warrain. This final chapter develops the *vertigo of immanence* in this context to show its compatibility with the systematic and self-grounding account given through the relations of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant and Deleuze in the preceding chapters. We find here a response to Quentin Meillassoux's critique of Kant and his legacy in his *After Finitude* (2006). Kerslake argues that Meillassoux misreads Kant as a phenomenalist, an empirical idealist and as a proponent of anthropomorphism (225). Proponents of the non-organic vitalism linked to Kant and his legacy can respond to this challenge from the school of Speculative Realism. The expanded role of intensity in Kant's thought, which Kerslake sought to establish in the preceding chapters, means that it (intensity) can be understood as 'the fundamental unit of intuitive "reality"' (227). While this is in tension with other aspects of Kant's account, Deleuze seizes upon it in order to expand the role of intensity in his own thought about reality. Deleuze challenges Meillassoux on the basis of the 'ancestral' reality of the intensive processes he considers in *Difference and Repetition* (233-4). Heidegger's role is also re-assessed here. In the 'What is Grounding?' lectures, Deleuze was inspired by Heidegger's thought to "repeat" the philosophical history of post-Kantianism' (241). Deleuze's relative neglect of Heidegger in his later work is attributed to the abstract nature of the latter's philosophy. It failed to articulate concrete problems, concentrating on *the* event of Being rather than the multiple events that Deleuze is concerned with.

The conclusion Kerslake draws is that immanence presents us with three 'vertigos' (264). The first is a condition of individuation and concerns the 'ungrounding' that makes this an open and indeterminate process in Deleuze's thought. The second concerns the post-Kantian search for metacritical consistency and a self-grounding system. The third vertigo is identified as 'specifically Deleuzian' (265). This is a practical vertigo because it concerns our relation to immanence as an impersonal and transcendental condition of life, as a 'plane of immanence'. Kerslake leaves us with questions concerning this practical conception of immanence. These focus upon the relation between the systematic and metacritical concerns of the second vertigo and the role of freedom in the third vertigo (267). This leaves us at the heart of problems that arise in Deleuze's philosophy. We are brought face to face with challenges to his account of the subject and its role in the contemporary world. Having reached this destination we are able to understand how the problem of immanence combines systematic thought with a distinctly Deleuzian concern with a vertiginous limit. The book reveals the scope of unifying systematic readings of Kant and Deleuze, showing the relevance of this approach to

philosophical texts and accounts. Rather than enclosing thought or limiting what it can encounter, systems can in fact realize the *vertigo of immanence* in the most productive way.

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