

The Kantian Image of Thought: Beyond Deleuze and Guattari's Analysis of Presuppositions

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In this paper I will argue that Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of Kantian philosophy fails to recognise an essential and radical aspect of Kant's critical metaphysics. Specifically, I will show that Deleuze and Guattari's examination of the *objective* and *subjective* presuppositions that appear in the history of philosophy – and their evaluation of various philosophers on the grounds of their relationships with these two kinds of presuppositions – ignores the specific nature of the *transcendental* presuppositions that Kant introduces in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. What this means is that, while Deleuze and Guattari are correct to point out that Kant's critical metaphysics relies on a pre-philosophical 'image of thought', they are incorrect to say that Kant's presumption of such an image is nothing but a subjective presupposition.¹ However, my own critique of Deleuze and Guattari is not intended to be absolute, and the final section of the paper will offer an opportunity for reconciliation between Deleuze and Guattari's later characterisations of philosophy, as involving both 'the creation of concepts' and 'the instituting of the plane', with Kant's transcendental deduction of the unity of reason.²

By concentrating on what Deleuze and Guattari fail to appreciate in Kant's philosophy, this examination is intended to bring to light some of the peculiarities of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and thus to offer some original reflections on the possibility of the science of metaphysics that Kant attempts to introduce. The

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 172, hereafter DR. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 52-53, hereafter WIP.

² WIP, p. 41.

present paper will include four sections. First, I will offer an exposition of Deleuze's early evaluation of Kant, as it appears in *Difference and Repetition* and *Kant's Critical Philosophy*. Here Kant is charged with the crime of drawing out transcendental structures from an empirical psychology, and thus of importing a set of implicit presuppositions into his metaphysics.³ Second, I will turn to Deleuze and Guattari's later analysis of Kant in *What is Philosophy?* and show that Deleuze's early claim, that Kant's transcendental method is based on an unfounded set of subjective presuppositions, is never rescinded. Third, I will look closely at Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and will offer an explanation of Kant's transcendental deduction of the unity of reason. This analysis will allow me to show what is unique about Kant's presupposition of the unity of reason, namely that it is defended through the use of a transcendental deduction. Finally, I will look again at some comments in *What is Philosophy?* concerning the philosophical practice of instituting a plane of immanence.⁴ Here I will show that Deleuze and Guattari's mature philosophy has all of the conceptual tools required to explain the originality of Kant's first critique, and that by more strictly differentiating the practice of *presupposing* a plane from that of *instituting* a plane, we can use Deleuze and Guattari's analysis to show what is unique about Kant's own attempt to ground the science of metaphysics.

The sections of Deleuze and Guattari's work that I will be addressing – especially the comments on presuppositions and the relationship they take to images of thought – explicitly concern the nature of *philosophy* and not the nature of *metaphysics*. However, there are good reasons to regard these sections as particularly concerned with metaphysics. First, the two major examples that Deleuze and Guattari take from the history of philosophy constitute two of the most pivotal moments in the history of Western metaphysics, namely Descartes's attempt to ground first philosophy on the subject's self-knowledge, and Kant's critical reappraisal of the possibility of such a metaphysics. Second, the philosophical themes that Deleuze and Guattari cover in their discussions of the image of thought are unequivocally metaphysical: the question of where philosophy can begin, the question of the relationship of philosophical thought to its outside, and the question of the historical development of philosophical thinking. For these reasons, we are well-justified in taking Deleuze and Guattari's

³ DR, p. 171.

⁴ WIP, p. 41.

persistent concern with the nature of philosophical presuppositions as indicative of their engagement with what is normally called metaphysics. As such, this critique of Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Kant's presuppositions is well-placed to offer insight into the nature of the science of metaphysics.

I. Kant and The Dogmatic Image of Thought

Deleuze's approach to the history of philosophy in *Difference and Repetition* differs in many respects from the approach taken with Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*. However, both of these texts draw on a distinction between *subjective* presuppositions and *objective* presuppositions, first introduced in the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, titled 'The Image of Thought'.⁵ Here Deleuze offers a sweeping analysis of the Western philosophical canon and describes how his project relates to this history. In effect, what Deleuze claims is that the discipline of philosophy has always defined itself by the activity of doing away with presuppositions: by inspecting their own thoughts, dispelling any unjustified beliefs, and by taking nothing for granted, the philosopher tries to attain knowledge which is certain. Unfortunately, according to Deleuze, while philosophers have been busy expelling their explicit or objective presuppositions, they have failed to recognise a hidden set of implicit or subjective presuppositions. Specifically, Deleuze claims, philosophers have always taken for granted, as a kind of *common sense*, a certain number of presuppositions about what it means to be a thinking agent. Taking Descartes's *Meditations* as his major example, Deleuze writes that the innovation of Descartes's *cogito* can be seen in his avoidance of any scholastic, objective presuppositions: if we define man as a rational animal, then we must presuppose the meanings of the concepts 'man' and 'rational'. The *cogito* avoids any such explicit presuppositions but, according to Deleuze, it faces other issues:

⁵ Deleuze's critique of subjective presuppositions was heavily influenced by Feuerbach's critique of Hegel's presuppositionless logic. This point is made by Somers-Hall, who argues that 'Feuerbach's claim that "every system is only an expression or image of reason" can be seen as a forerunner of Deleuze's own claim that representational thinking rests on an "image of thought"' (Henry Somers-Hall, 'Feuerbach and the Image of Thought', in *At The Edges of Thought: Deleuze and Post-Kantian Philosophy*, ed. by Daniella Voss and Craig Lundy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 264).

[Descartes] does not escape presuppositions of another kind – subjective or implicit presuppositions contained in opinions rather than concepts: it is presumed that everyone knows, independently of concepts, what is meant by self, thinking, and being.⁶

For Deleuze, ‘a subjective or implicit presupposition’ is any proposition which takes the form “Everybody knows...”.⁷ Here Deleuze is not concerned with specific empirical claims which philosophers have taken for granted, but with methodological claims that concern the philosopher’s intimacy with thinking: we know what thinking is like, we know when we are thinking, and once we have reached a conclusion we will be able to recognise it. What the philosopher takes for granted in their implicit or subjective presuppositions is therefore ‘not a particular this or that but the form of representation or recognition in general’.⁸ For this reason, Deleuze will write that ‘conceptual philosophical thought has as its implicit presupposition a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense’.⁹

Overall, Deleuze outlines eight specific postulates that make up the most common implicit presuppositions of conceptual thinking.¹⁰ Taken together, these postulates compose what Deleuze names the ‘Image of Thought’, which is nothing other than the set of presuppositions which western philosophy has failed to expel. As Deleuze explains in an interview published in the same year as *Difference and Repetition*, the problem that we face as philosophers is that ‘we live with a particular image of thought, that is to say, before we begin to think, we have a vague idea of what it means to think’.¹¹ In a move which commentators have viewed variously as brilliant and naïve,¹² Deleuze then sets himself the task

⁶ DR, p. 164.

⁷ DR, p. 165.

⁸ DR, p. 166.

⁹ DR, p. 167.

¹⁰ Namely the postulates of ‘the principle’, ‘the ideal’, ‘the model’, ‘the element’, ‘the negative’, ‘logical function’, ‘modality’, and ‘the end’ (DR, p. 207).

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, ‘On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought’, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, ed. by David Lapoujade, and trans. by Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 139.

¹² For example, compare Toscano’s celebration of ‘Deleuze’s revolutionary project of a thought without an image’ (Alberto Toscano, ‘Everybody Thinks: Deleuze, Descartes and Rationalism’, *Radical Philosophy* (162) (2010), pp. 8-17) with Williams’ characterisation of this goal as an ‘impossible target’ (James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Difference and*

of producing ‘a philosophy which would be without any kind of presuppositions’ that would find ‘its true beginning, not in an agreement with the *pre-philosophical* Image but in a rigorous struggle against this Image’.¹³ This is what Deleuze calls a ‘thought without image’ and it is this which he attempts to produce in the latter half of *Difference and Repetition*.¹⁴

Deleuze turns to Kant as an example of a philosopher who was well equipped to overturn the dogmatic image of thought, but who nonetheless fell into the error of importing certain common-sense assumptions into his metaphysics. First Deleuze praises Kant for his discovery of ‘the prodigious domain of the transcendental’ by which he is able to reorientate philosophy away from problems of error or misrecognition – which presuppose that thinking is essentially representative – and towards problems of immanent illusion, such as the transcendental illusions created by reason itself.¹⁵ Deleuze also praises Kant for disrupting the preconceived notions of the subject, God, and the world, first by recognising the way in which the thinking subject, unlike the Cartesian cogito, is ‘profoundly fractured by a line of time’, and second by announcing the ‘speculative death’ of God by showing that the concept of God has a regulative and not a constitutive role in thought.¹⁶ Deleuze’s praise is, however, quickly replaced with disappointment when he argues that ‘in spite of everything, and at the risk of compromising the conceptual apparatus of the three Critiques, Kant did not want to renounce the implicit presuppositions’.¹⁷ Specifically, Deleuze argues that Kant’s very distinction between the different faculties, and his assumption that each faculty has a rightful domain in thought so that they are able to work in harmony, are both based on assumptions drawn from empirical and common-sense notions of psychology. He writes that ‘Kant traces the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical acts of a psychological consciousness’ and in so doing he accepts a pre-philosophical image of thought as the basis for his metaphysical system. What is more, Deleuze argues that the three Kantian faculties of sensibility, understanding and reason are only able to cohere due to their collective capacity for ‘recognition’ which is expressed ‘in the

Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p.116).

¹³ DR, p. 167.

¹⁴ DR, p. 168.

¹⁵ DR, p. 171.

¹⁶ DR, p. 172.

¹⁷ DR, p. 172.

form of the unspecified object as correlate of the 'I think' to which all the faculties are related'.¹⁸

Here Deleuze is extending a critique which he first raised in *Kant's Critical Philosophy*. There Deleuze had attempted to provide a comprehensive account of Kant's project by showing that the transcendental structures of the *Critique of Pure Reason* ultimately rely on the practical tasks of reason and on the synthesis of judgement. His point is that, because 'the Ideas of reason are speculatively indeterminate, [yet] practically determined', the *Critique of Practical Reason* grounds rather than builds on the first critique.¹⁹ Similarly, because both the first and the second Critiques offer outlines of different kinds of harmony between the faculties, and because '[e]very determinate accord indeed presupposes that the faculties are, at a deeper level, capable of a free and indeterminate accord', it is the *Critique of Judgement* which grounds Kant's entire critical project.²⁰

Taking these texts together, it is possible to summarise Deleuze's early evaluation of Kant's first critique as follows: while Kant challenged the dogmatic image of thought by replacing the Cartesian *cogito* with a subject fractured by time, and while Kant's analysis of the necessary preconditions for experience shifted the aim of philosophical work away from problems of recognition and towards the illusions created by thought itself, Kant reneged on the promise of his critical philosophy by assuming a harmony between the faculties. Despite Kant's later work, which Deleuze praises so highly, Kant's insistence on both the discreteness and harmony of the faculties means that his philosophy repeats certain dogmas that are drawn from what 'everybody knows' concerning the good nature of thought. For this reason, Deleuze will write that 'Kantian Critique is ultimately respectful: knowledge, morality, reflection and faith are supposed to correspond to natural interests of reason, and are never themselves called into question'.²¹ What is most important for our purposes here, and what I will come back to later in this paper, is that Deleuze accuses Kant of grounding his whole philosophy on a subjective or implicit presupposition regarding the harmonious unity of thought. For Deleuze, Kant's assumption that the different faculties of

¹⁸ DR, p. 171.

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Althone Press, 1984), p. 52.

²⁰ Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, pp. 23-24.

²¹ DR, p. 173.

thought can form a harmonious unity is, in the end, nothing but an assumption. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze attempts to go beyond Kant, to examine the discord of the faculties, and to argue that in this conflict it is possible to find not only the necessary preconditions for the *possibility* of experience, but the preconditions for its *genesis*.²²

II. The Kantian Image of Thought

While *Difference and Repetition* ultimately presents Kant's critical philosophy as a failure that does not live up to its radical promise, Deleuze's later mentions of Kant focus more on an appreciation of his originality. One way to capture this shift is to recognise Deleuze's move from an analysis of *the* dogmatic image of thought to an interest in the *various* images of thought produced by different thinkers. While in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze is clear that he is not interested in 'this or that image of thought, variable according to the philosophy in question, but of a single Image in general which constitutes the subjective presupposition of philosophy as a whole', elsewhere Deleuze treats each philosopher as creating their own image of thought.²³ In a number of interviews, and in his first works with Guattari, Deleuze will speak of the process whereby a philosopher inherits an image of thought from their predecessors, but who then challenges the presuppositions left to them: 'someone comes along and proposes another idea, a whole other image'.²⁴ For example, Deleuze will claim in an interview: 'Hume, Bergson, and Proust interest me so much because in their work can be found profound elements for a new image of thought'.²⁵ Deleuze's book on Nietzsche is also filled with references to a 'new image of thought' that would be nomadic and creative.²⁶ At other points, Deleuze refers to the specific alterations in the image of thought created by Kierkegaard, Shestov, and Foucault.²⁷

²² DR, p. 176.

²³ DR, p. 167.

²⁴ Deleuze, 'On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought', p. 139.

²⁵ Deleuze, 'On Nietzsche and the Image of Thought', p. 139.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 104.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 415; Gilles Deleuze, 'Humans: A Dubious Existence', *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974*, ed. by David Lapoujade, and trans. by Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), p. 93.

By the time that Deleuze and Guattari write *A Thousand Plateaus*, the pair no longer aspire to avoid all presuppositions. Here, rather than attempting to simply escape from the Image of Thought, Deleuze and Guattari set out to experiment with the production of a new image of thought.²⁸ They characterise what Deleuze had previously referred to as *the* Image of Thought as operating by the use of binary and exclusive disjunctions and they name this the ‘arborescent’ image of thought, adding that ‘the tree and root inspire a sad image of thought’.²⁹ In contrast to this, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to produce an alternative mode of thinking, which relies on the use of inclusive disjunctions.³⁰ Deleuze and Guattari name this the ‘rhizomatic’ image of thought.³¹ So, while the third chapter of *Difference and Repetition* characterises the majority of the history of the western philosophical canon as a kind of failure for its inability to escape the image of thought, and while it sets up Deleuze’s project as an attempt to find a thought without image, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari give up on the possibility of attaining this presuppositionlessness and instead decide to experiment with an alternative set of implicit presuppositions. This is how

²⁸ Jonathan Dronsfield somewhat dramatically refers to this shift as marking ‘a schism in the work of Gilles Deleuze’, claiming that ‘to seek out a “new image of thought” is utterly at odds with the necessity of “destroying” the image of thought and of coming up with a “thought without image”’ (‘Deleuze and the Image of Thought’, *Philosophy Today*, 56:4 (2012), pp. 404-414). I am inclined to see the shift as a continuation rather than an absolute break. Deleuze and Guattari still allow for the possibility of a thought without image, but they rule out the possibility that *philosophy* can operate on these grounds. Their production of a rhizomatic image of thought is an attempt to produce an image of thought that can maintain relations with an imageless thought, which is otherwise only possible outside of philosophy. Speaking of their own project in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they say that ‘the outside has no image, no signification, no subjectivity’ but refer to their own book as an ‘assemblage with the outside’ (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 25).

²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 18.

³⁰ The concept of the inclusive disjunction is used by Deleuze and Guattari to reject the law of the excluded middle. In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze makes a distinction between exclusive disjunctions, in which two different options are set up against each other and where one must be selected in favour of the other, and inclusive disjunctions, in which two options differ from one another without being opposed, and which can thus both be affirmed together. An inclusive disjunction is defined as ‘an operation according to which two things or two determinations are affirmed through their difference, that is to say, that they are objects of simultaneous affirmation only in so far as their difference is itself affirmed and is itself affirmative’ (*Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 197). This concept is central to Deleuze and Guattari’s work in *Anti-Oedipus* (pp. 84-86) and is also behind their rejection of the ‘binary logic of dichotomy’ in *A Thousand Plateaus* (pp. 5-6).

³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 7.

Deleuze describes the shift in a preface he wrote in 1986 for the English edition of *Difference and Repetition*:

[I]n [*Difference and Repetition*] it seemed to me that the powers of difference and repetition could be reached only by putting into question the traditional image of thought... It is therefore the third chapter which now seems to me the most necessary and the most concrete, and which serves to introduce subsequent books up to and including the research undertaken with Guattari where we invoked a vegetal model of thought: the rhizome in opposition to the tree, a rhizome-thought instead of an arborescent thought.³²

While Deleuze and Guattari draw heavily on Kant in their collaborations, they tend to avoid passing judgement on Kant's metaphysics as a whole.³³ However, by the time Deleuze and Guattari come to write *What is Philosophy?*, they return to Kant's work, and specifically to his *Critique of Pure Reason*, as a key example in their account of philosophical thinking. Here Deleuze and Guattari refuse to give up on the idea that Kant's first critique relies on an illegitimate set of implicit or subjective presuppositions, but they do forgive Kant these presuppositions as being part and parcel of his larger and more creative task. Deleuze and Guattari's decision to relax their critique of Kant comes alongside their decision to relax the conditions they set on themselves. As Miguel de Beistegui has explained: '*What is Philosophy?* seems to mark a shift from a fundamental aspect of *Difference and Repetition*, in so far as Deleuze and Guattari are now claiming that philosophy – including their own – can never quite shake off or determine entirely its own image: a purely imageless thought is but an illusion'.³⁴ If Deleuze and Guattari are now able to look back on their project in *A Thousand Plateaus* and admit that it relied on certain subjective presuppositions, then they are willing to revisit Kant on similar grounds.

³² DR, p. xv.

³³ For example, Deleuze claims that *Anti-Oedipus* 'was Kantian in spirit' because he and Guattari had 'attempted a kind of *Critique of Pure Reason* for the unconscious' (*Two Regimes of Madness Texts and Interviews 1975-1995* (Paris: Semiotext(e), 2007), p. 309).

³⁴ Miguel de Beistegui, *Immanence: Deleuze and Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 10.

In order to conceptually account for this shift in perspective, in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari reconceptualise the ‘image of thought’ as a ‘plane of immanence’ of concepts.³⁵ Here they famously define philosophy as the ‘creation of concepts’, but this declaration also comes with the explanation that to create a new concept is to produce a new image of thought.³⁶ Their description of it can be roughly summarised in the following way: concepts all interact in a mutually upholding web of interrelations; this web of concepts determines a field of thought, which regulates what it is possible to think; when, in an attempt to pose a new problem, a philosopher is forced to create a new concept, the introduction of this new concept into the conceptual field effects a reorientation of the whole web of interrelations. The name that Deleuze and Guattari give to the conceptual field of concept-relations is the ‘plane of immanence’, which they also refer to as an ‘image of thought’.³⁷ They explain that ‘the plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought but rather the image of thought, the image thought gives itself of what it means to think, to make use of thought, to find one's bearings in thought’.³⁸ On this account, each philosopher is defined by the concept (or concepts) that they create, which in turn produces a new plane of immanence, or image of thought.

According to this analysis, it is impossible to think philosophically without making certain presuppositions. They say that philosophy ‘proceeds by presupposing or by instituting the plane of immanence’ and that for this reason ‘the instituting of philosophy merges with the presupposition of a prephilosophical plane’.³⁹ Because of this, Deleuze and Guattari stop criticising the use of subjective presuppositions, and instead they begin to examine the degree of creativity that is required to invent new sets of subjective presuppositions. While Deleuze had taken Descartes and Kant as his two examples of failures in *Difference and Repetition*, here Deleuze and Guattari reappraise both thinkers on the grounds of their creativity: ‘There is no point in wondering whether Descartes was right or wrong. Are implicit and subjective presuppositions more valid than explicit objective presuppositions? Is it necessary ‘to begin’, and, if so, is it necessary to start from the point of view of a

³⁵ WIP, p. 37.

³⁶ WIP, p. 5.

³⁷ WIP, p. 37.

³⁸ WIP, p. 37.

³⁹ WIP, p. 42-44.

subjective certainty?’.⁴⁰ Speaking of Kant’s response to Descartes, Deleuze and Guattari say that ‘Kant constructs a “transcendental” plane that renders doubt useless and changes the nature of the presuppositions once again... Kant demands the introduction of a new component into the cogito, the one Descartes repressed – time’.⁴¹ By raising the philosophical problem of the necessary preconditions for subjective experience, Kant is said to have introduced the dimension of time into thought and thus brought about ‘a reorientation of the whole of thought’.⁴² In summary, Deleuze and Guattari praise Kant for altering the subjective presuppositions on which philosophical thinking must rely and in doing so creating a specifically Kantian image of thought.

What must be pointed out here, however, is that Deleuze and Guattari make no distinction between the kind of presuppositions made by each figure in the history of philosophy. According to their analysis, both Descartes and Kant go through the same procedure: they both expel their objective and explicit presuppositions, they both select a new set of subjective presuppositions which are implicit in their philosophical method, and they both create a new image of thought based on those presuppositions. The problem with this picture is that Descartes and Kant – to remain with the two examples on the table – do not make their presuppositions according to the same method at all. As we will see in the next section, Deleuze and Guattari are correct that Kant’s account of the science of metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason* rests on a specific set of presuppositions, but they are wrong that these presuppositions are subjective, and they are wrong that they are implicit. On the contrary, what is so original about Kant’s transcendental method is the fact that he offers a defence of the presuppositions that he makes, explaining why these presuppositions – which he names ‘transcendental presuppositions’ – *must* be made.⁴³

III. Transcendental Presuppositions and the Unity of Reason

Kant’s use of presuppositions in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is rather odd, and the specific nature of his use of such presuppositions is not captured by Deleuze’s analysis of *the Image of Thought* or Deleuze and Guattari’s later analysis of

⁴⁰ WIP, p. 27.

⁴¹ WIP, p. 31.

⁴² WIP, p. 52.

⁴³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), B679/A651, hereafter CPR.

philosophy's creation of various images of thought. In this section I will offer an account of Kant's transcendental use of presuppositions in order to show that the plane of immanence of Kantian metaphysics is not presupposed, in the usual sense of the word.

Like the majority of modern philosophers, Kant regularly reminds his reader that nothing should be presupposed in an argument that cannot be defended on its own grounds, lest it turn out to be untrue and jeopardise the whole endeavour. Kant warns the reader that any form of presupposition – be it 'hypothetical' or 'axiomatic' – should be 'treated as contraband'.⁴⁴ To put this in the terminology of Kant's first Critique, we might say that, if we wish to provide a foundation for metaphysics, then we must offer an analysis of what can be known *a priori* concerning the necessary conditions of our experience and that it is only by avoiding any reliance on contingent facts that we can reach our conclusions with apodictic certainty. To put this in the terminology of *Difference and Repetition*, Kant follows the standard philosophical line of attempting to expunge the objective and explicit presuppositions of his philosophical forebears.

However, Kant's relationship with presuppositions does not end here, and it would be hasty to assume that Kant simply falls into the trap that Deleuze recognises of 'refusing objective presuppositions, but on condition of assuming just as many subjective presuppositions'.⁴⁵ To see why, we need to look again at the structure of Kant's arguments concerning presuppositions. What is most interesting for us here is that, unlike the vast majority of thinkers before him, Kant regularly found himself providing arguments in which presuppositions come at the end rather than the beginning of the argumentation, filling the place where we would normally expect to find the conclusion. To take the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole, we can say that Kant's aim is to show that, starting from what is given to us in experience, it is possible to determine the necessary preconditions for the possibility of such an experience. Another way of putting this is to say that, if we begin with an analysis of the structure of experience, then it is possible for us to determine what *must be presupposed* in order to offer an account of the possibility of such a structure. In brief then, we can say that Kant distinguishes between two different kinds of presuppositions: there are those which come at the beginning

⁴⁴ CPR, Axvi.

⁴⁵ DR, p. 164.

of an argument and serve as an undefended and dangerous ground for argumentation, and there are those which come at the end of an argument and tell us what must be presupposed in order to account for something that we have already shown to be certain. I am going to suggest that we call the former of these ‘prefatory-presuppositions’ and the latter ‘conclusory-presuppositions’. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant regularly finds himself attempting to unearth and dispel prefatory-presuppositions and to replace them – often via the use of transcendental arguments – with conclusory-presuppositions. To translate this back into the language of Deleuze and Guattari, we might say that Kant seeks to unearth objective presuppositions, but rather than replace them with implicit and subjective ones, he sets out to defend the specific set of presuppositions that he requires. Rather than driving presuppositions underground, Kant seeks to make them stand on their own.⁴⁶

This format can be seen recurring throughout the first Critique in relation to the three fundamental mental faculties of sensibility, understanding, and reason. In regard to sensibility, Kant shows that, while we cannot presume that the world as it is in itself has any specific form, we can recognise that all sensibility is structured by the forms of space and time. Because space and time are the essential forms of our sensibility, we can be sure that all objects presented to us in experience – that is to say, all ‘appearances’ – will be both spatially and temporally organised. Thus, at the end of the *Transcendental Aesthetic*, we can draw the conclusory-presupposition that space and time are ‘pure *a priori* intuitions’, which we are justified in presupposing as the conditions for all possible objects of experience.⁴⁷ Regarding the faculty of the understanding, Kant does something very similar. In the *Transcendental Logic*, Kant proceeds to show that, as well as there being essential forms of the receptivity of impressions, there are certain regular features of our conceptual grasping of experience. Just as possible objects of experience must conform to our faculty of sensibility, possible objects of knowledge must conform to the categories of our understanding.

⁴⁶ We might ask here whether a well-defended presupposition is still a presupposition at all. What justifies the potentially paradoxical name ‘conclusory-presupposition’ is the modality of its use in Kant’s philosophy; Kant never naturalises these claims as being factual propositions concerning the nature of the world, but is always careful to stipulate that they are only ever held provisionally. As will be discussed later in this paper, this is apparent in Kant’s distinction between the *regulative* nature of the ideas of pure reason and the *constitutive* nature of the concepts of the understanding.

⁴⁷ CPR, B73.

Specifically, Kant argues that we can specify twelve ‘pure concepts of the understanding which apply *a priori* to objects of intuition in general’, and which are organised under the four categories of ‘quantity’, ‘quality’, ‘relation’, and ‘modality’.⁴⁸ It is not my intention here to offer a defence of Kant’s deduction of these categories, but simply to point out that the methodology used by Kant to provide such a deduction comes to a resolution with what I have been calling conclusory-presuppositions. We are justified *a priori* in presupposing the necessity of these concepts, specifically because it is not possible for the understanding to operate without them.

I would like to raise two possible concerns at this point, which I will come back to at the end of this section. First, we might ask whether, despite what Kant argues, his argumentation still relies on an even deeper level of subjective presuppositions. For example, doesn’t he take for granted the very operation of the understanding when he argues that the concepts of the understanding are required for it to function? Might this not be what Deleuze was getting at when he charged Kant with presupposing the ‘good nature of thought’?⁴⁹ Second, we might ask whether Kant’s methodology for supplying conclusory presuppositions is based on a moral conviction, by which he aims to keep philosophical discourse contained within bourgeois conventions. Here the line of argument would be that, beneath Kant’s reference to the necessity of a given presupposition, there is a moral impetus which rejects the alternative out of a fear of anarchy.⁵⁰ These two issues are connected because, in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze will say that ‘morality alone is capable of persuading us that thought has a good nature’.⁵¹

Before we are able to answer these two concerns we must consider Kant’s account of the necessary preconditions for the operation of the faculty of reason. In Kant’s analysis of this faculty, he follows the same argumentative pattern as in the case of sensibility and understanding. Here Kant attempts to show that there

⁴⁸ CPR, A79-80/B105-106.

⁴⁹ DR, p. 175.

⁵⁰ See Spangenberg’s claim that, on Deleuze’s account, both Descartes and Kant recognise that ‘the presupposition of the good and shareable nature of thought is only *by right* or *in principle*, and not in fact’, but that Deleuze differs from Kant here because he ‘still insists on the ‘dangerous’ and possibly ‘immoral’ path of uncovering and destroying all presuppositions’ (‘Thought without an Image’ *Deleuzian Philosophy as an Ethics of the Event*, *Phronimon*, 10:1 (2009), p. 91).

⁵¹ DR, p. 175.

are ‘certain concepts and principles’ which originate in the faculty of reason,⁵² which he refers to as either ‘transcendental ideas’ or ‘ideas of pure reason’.⁵³ In the final sections of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant sets out to show that reason produces its own illusions when it steps beyond the bounds of its rightful domain. Kant then attempts to test the exact boundaries of this domain via the use of the paralogisms, the antinomies, and the analysis of the Ideal. Here he shows that reason cannot legitimately apply itself to anything which falls outside of the bounds of possible experience. As such, there can be no proof in psychology of the existence of the unified thinking subject, no proof in cosmology of the unity of the world as a whole, and no proof in theology of the existence of God. Despite the impossibility of providing such proofs, Kant nonetheless argues that these three ideas – namely the self, the world, and God – must be presupposed as regulative ideals in order to allow reason to function.

To make things slightly more complex, Kant also discusses the need for a more general regulative idea of pure reason, which conditions the three ideas we have just discussed. Kant is clear throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the faculties of sensibility, understanding, and reason all support one another in various ways. In the case of the latter, Kant will argue that reason serves to unify the system of concepts which the understanding must use to unify the object of experience: ‘Just as the understanding unifies the manifold in the object by means of concepts, so reason unifies the manifold of concepts by means of ideas’.⁵⁴ Thus, we see that the three transcendental ideas of pure reason introduced above are presupposed to allow for the synthesis of the understanding. Kant adds to this the claim that reason carries out this task by ‘positing a certain collective unity as the goal of the activities of the understanding’.⁵⁵ What Kant seems to be saying here is that the three regulative ideas of the subject, the world, and God, can only operate as regulative ideals at all if reason seeks to unify the understanding. As Kant continues:

The law of reason which requires us to seek for this unity, is a necessary law, since without it we should have no reason at all, and without reason

⁵² CPR, A299/B355.

⁵³ CPR A311/B368; A669/B697.

⁵⁴ CPR, B672/A644.

⁵⁵ CPR, B672/A644.

no coherent employment of the understanding, and in the absence of this no sufficient criterion of empirical truth.⁵⁶

Here Kant has provided a kind of transcendental argument for the existence of a law, which requires pure reason to at least *attempt* to unify the concepts of the understanding. Kant is claiming that the understanding could not systematically organise all possible objects of knowledge under a single set of necessary categories, unless reason put the understanding to work in a specific way. Furthermore, this law-like activity of reason would not be enough unless reason also presupposed the unity of the whole of knowledge. It is for this reason that Kant will write:

In order, therefore, to secure an empirical criterion we have no option save to presuppose the systematic unity of nature as objectively valid and necessary.⁵⁷

For Kant, this presupposition cannot simply be a heuristic device.⁵⁸ We must not simply presuppose the unity of nature as a kind of pragmatic but

⁵⁶ CPR, B679/A651.

⁵⁷ CPR, B679/A651.

⁵⁸ The question of how to read Kant's account of this principle is contentious. According to Ypi's distinction, the 'weak reading' of Kant's transcendental ideas makes them 'no big deal' because it claims that 'the idea of systematicity of nature only has a heuristic or methodological status, with no bearing on the way in which the categories of the understanding are applied to create empirical concepts' ('The Transcendental Deduction Of Ideas In Kant's Critique Of Pure Reason', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Vol. cxvii, Part 2* (2017), p. 167). This is a position implicitly accepted by Walker, who claims that the deduction of the ideas of pure reason 'does not seek to show that the world actually contains these kinds of unity and completeness' but only that 'we are justified in proceeding as if it did' ('Kant and Transcendental Arguments', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 247). The problem with this view is that it goes against Kant's claim in the Appendix that we must presuppose *a priori* that the unity which reason seeks is 'necessarily inherent in the objects' (CPR, B679/A651). A close reading of Kant's deduction of the transcendental ideas shows that the only approach left open to us is the 'strong reading', which maintains that 'upon further scrutiny' Kant recognised that 'reason's heuristic/subjective use had to be grounded on a transcendental principle presupposing the conformity to ends of nature itself' (Ypi, 2017, p. 167). This reading is supported by McLaughlin: 'While these principles are sometimes called 'heuristic' by Kant, they are not methodological suggestions justified by utility or success in practice. They are *normatively constitutive of the rationality of scientific practice itself*' ('Transcendental Presuppositions and Ideas of Reason', *Kant-Studien* 105(4))

ultimately unfounded idea; instead we must genuinely take nature to be inherently unified. Kant writes:

It is, indeed, difficult to understand how there can be a logical principle by which reason prescribes the unity of rules, unless we also presuppose a transcendental principle whereby such a systematic unity is *a priori* assumed to be necessarily inherent in the objects.⁵⁹

Effectively, in this section of the Critique, which comes at the very end of the *Transcendental Dialectic*, Kant posits the necessity of a regulative ideal even more general than the three transcendental ideas of the unity of the subject, of the world, and of God. To these three, Kant has added the requirement that we presuppose the unity of the whole of knowledge and the concomitant presupposition of ‘the systematic unity of nature’. What Kant ultimately argues is that the faculty of reason is driven to ask metaphysical questions concerning the nature of reality and that, given this context, we are faced with two options: either we presuppose the unity of nature, which will allow reason to unify the categories of the understanding and will allow us to make metaphysics into a science; or we can decide not to presuppose the unity of nature, but this will leave the faculty of reason undirected and will allow us to be drawn systematically into transcendental illusions. Of course, Kant does not think there are two options here at all; we must take the former, because reason – acting as a tribunal for the judgment of its own affairs – tells us that the unity of nature must be presupposed.

We are now in a position to respond to the two issues laid out above, namely the possibility that Kant’s transcendental deduction of the unity of reason relies on a hidden subjective presupposition concerning the good nature of thought, and the possibility that Kant’s deduction of the unity of reason rests on an implicit moral conviction concerning the necessity of order over anarchy. In a certain sense, Kant has the same answer for both of these accusations: He recognises that his method does rely on a presupposition concerning the good nature of thought, and that he does presuppose a moral principle as the ground for his analysis, but in both cases he argues that these presuppositions are not simply posited, but defended by the deduction of the unity of reason. Kant’s claim

(2014), De Gruyter, p. 561, *my italics*).

⁵⁹ CPR, B679/A651.

is that, without making these presuppositions – without assuming that the understanding can operate, and without assuming a moral predilection for order – it will not be possible to give a systematic account of reason at all. The deduction of the transcendental idea of the unity of reason is nothing but Kant’s account of the necessity of these presuppositions. This does not mean that he is correct. What I am trying to point out here is not that Kant *successfully* argues for his particular, conservative presuppositions about the nature of thought, but simply that *he does argue for them*. This is enough to show that Deleuze’s early critique of Kant on the basis of his acceptance of subjective and implicit presuppositions misses the mark.

IV. Instituting the Kantian Plane of Immanence

Thus, Deleuze’s early depiction of Kant’s first critique, as relying on a series of implicit presuppositions, mischaracterises Kantian metaphysics by failing to offer a full account of Kant’s transcendental deduction of his presuppositions. As we noted earlier, while Deleuze and Guattari’s later analysis of Kant in *What is Philosophy?* paints a more positive picture of Kant’s creativity, Deleuze and Guattari never relinquish the claim that Kant’s work relies on a series of unjustified presuppositions. As mentioned, in the latter text Deleuze and Guattari equate what they had previously referred to as an ‘image of thought’ with a ‘plane of immanence’.⁶⁰ In this final section, and in order to offer a potential rapprochement between Deleuze and Guattari and Kant, I want to point out an ambiguity in Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the production of such a ‘plane of immanence’. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari use two terms interchangeably to explain the way in which philosophers create such a plane. They speak of both ‘presupposing’ a plane of immanence and ‘instituting’ such a plane: ‘Philosophy... proceeds by presupposing *or* by instituting the plane of immanence’.⁶¹ It is not obvious at this point whether Deleuze and Guattari mean to distinguish these two processes, or whether the ‘or’ in this sentence is intended to cast these two terms as equivalent. However, I would like to argue that, by making a clearer distinction between these two processes, Deleuze and Guattari would have been better placed to explain the methodology of Kantian metaphysics. Specifically, I will suggest that, via the deduction of the unity of

⁶⁰ WIP, p. 37.

⁶¹ WIP, p. 42, *my italics*.

reason, it would be more accurate to say that Kant *institutes* a plane of immanence without simply *presupposing* it.

Let us look again at the specific nature of the Kantian image of thought that Deleuze and Guattari discuss in *What is Philosophy?*. Here Deleuze and Guattari continue to define the Kantian plane of immanence as a development or complication of the Cartesian plane:

No doubt Kant constructs a ‘transcendental’ plane that renders doubt useless and changes the nature of the presuppositions once again. But it is by virtue of this very plane that he can declare that if the ‘I think’ is a *determination* that, as such, implies an *undetermined* existence (‘I am’), we still do not know how this undetermined comes to be *determinable* and hence in what form it appears as *determined*.⁶²

We can understand this claim about determination as follows: while Descartes argues for the indubitability of the thinking subject, Kant asks what the necessary preconditions for this subject are. That is to say, given the fact that ‘[t]he I think must be able to accompany all my representations’, a question remains about the way in which the undetermined ‘I’ becomes determinable in the act of thinking.⁶³ Kant’s analysis of the cognitive faculties, and his account of their interaction, is nothing if not a description of the process by which the thinking subject is determined in thought. Kant’s account of the relationship between sensibility, understanding and reason, and his account of the transcendental presupposition of the unity of reason which allows for the harmonious operation of these faculties, should be read as an answer to the question of how the thinking subject ‘comes to be *determinable* and hence in what form it appears as *determined*’.⁶⁴ With this in mind, we can see that Kant does not push the implicit presupposition of a thinking subject back to a transcendental plane that remains simply presupposed. On the contrary, Kant replaces the *presupposition* of a thinking subject with a process of *instituting* which grounds

⁶² WIP, p. 31.

⁶³ CPR, B131.

⁶⁴ WIP, p. 31.

the thinking subject, or ‘the transcendental unity of self-consciousness’, by way of a transcendental argument.⁶⁵

Another way of approaching the specific nature of Kant’s attempt to institute a new plane of immanence is to pay attention to the political metaphors that Kant uses throughout his first critique. In the preface to the A-edition, Kant characterises the discipline of philosophy as a kind of society in which monarchical power, once held by metaphysics, has collapsed due to the ‘intestine wars’ of the ‘government’; after ‘the administration of the *dogmatists*’ became ‘despotic’ the ‘*sceptics*’ were able to break up ‘all civil society’ resulting in ‘complete anarchy’.⁶⁶ For Kant, if we wish to have a philosophical discourse at all, we must find a way of resolving these conflicts, so that the monarch can be returned to her throne, and civil philosophical dialogue can continue. The first task of the tribunal that Kant sets up in the first critique is therefore to test the legal claims of these different philosophical factions, to give them each their due, and to restore peace. One way to read this political characterisation of metaphysics, which ties in with my re-reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s underdeveloped distinction between presupposing and instituting a plane of immanence, is as follows: Kant can see that the dogmatic use of reason involves a series of implicit presuppositions, and that these presuppositions are uncovered by the sceptics who therefore put the whole of metaphysics into question. Kant’s

⁶⁵ CPR, B132. Of course, Descartes’s work has been somewhat instrumentalised here. While it is outside the scope of this article to offer a full reassessment of Descartes’s work, it is plausible that one could also offer a rereading of Descartes’s supposedly implicit presuppositions as having been *instituted* rather than simply *presupposed*. To do this, it would be important to pay close attention to Descartes’s method of argumentation, and specifically to the fact that the *Meditations* is presented *as a meditation*. As such, it may be possible to argue that the argument used by Descartes to institute his specific image of thought is more phenomenological than it is propositional. While Deleuze’s reading of Descartes is very sophisticated, it would be interesting to assess whether Deleuze carries out the mode of reading that Descartes suggests in his *Preface to the reader*: ‘I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me, and to withdraw their minds from the senses and from all preconceived opinions... Those who do not bother to grasp the proper order of my arguments and the connection between them, but merely try to carp at individual sentences, as is the fashion, will not get much benefit from reading this book’ (René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, ed. and trans. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 13). With this in mind, one might claim that Descartes’s repeated reformulations of the *cogito* in the second meditation are designed to institute the set of presuppositions required for the subsequent claims to be intelligible.

⁶⁶ CPR, Aviii-ix.

aim is to ground the legitimacy of reason not on dogmatic or presuppositional grounds, but through a process of *critique* which will provide institutional grounds for the constitutional monarchy of metaphysics.⁶⁷

On this reading, the difference between ‘presupposing’ and ‘instituting’, as it is introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, can be read as the equivalent to the distinction I made earlier between Kant’s prefatory and conclusory presuppositions. To institute a plane of immanence would then be nothing other than to provide an argument for the necessity of a specific set of presuppositions. With this distinction in mind, we are able to make sense of Deleuze and Guattari’s claim that, ‘although the plane is presupposed by philosophy, it is nonetheless instituted by it’.⁶⁸ In the case of Kant’s first critique, we should say that, while in a certain sense Kant does presuppose a particular image of thought – in which reason unifies the understanding, which in turn unifies sensibility, and allows for the determination of the unity of the thinking subject – this plane of immanence is nonetheless instituted by Kant by way of his transcendental deduction of the unity of reason.

This reading is not only beneficial in that it allows us to reconcile the complexity of Kant’s metaphysical approach with Deleuze and Guattari’s meta-philosophical analysis of presuppositions. It is also useful because it shines a light on the nature of metaphysics. What this reading suggests is that, in order to avoid a dogmatic reliance on subjective or implicit presuppositions about what it means to think, any metaphysical system must provide an argument for the necessity of a specific image of thought. In this paper I have tried to leave open the question of whether Kant’s own attempt to do this was successful, but what I have tried to show is that one of the lessons we can learn from Kant, and from Deleuze and

⁶⁷ For more on Kant’s political metaphors see D. W. Tarbet, ‘The Fabric of Metaphor in Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6(3) (1968), pp. 257-270. For Kant’s analysis of constitutional monarchies see Angelica Nuzzo, *Kant and the Unity of Reason* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2005), p. 322. For Kant’s most direct account of the political significance of justifying the rule of the monarch without relying on a divine law, see *To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, trans. by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003); and for an analysis of Kant’s impact on constitutional reforms in Prussia, see Matthew Levinger, ‘Kant And The Origins Of Prussian Constitutionalism’, *History of Political Thought Vol. 19, No. 2* (Summer 1998), pp. 241-263.

⁶⁸ WIP, p. 93.

Guattari's engagement with him, is that for metaphysics to justify itself it must *institute* rather than *presuppose* the plane of immanence on which it operates.