

Edward Willatt, Matt Lee (eds.), *Thinking Between Deleuze and Kant. A Strange Encounter*, Continuum, 2009, pp. 188, £ 70.00, ISBN 9781847065940

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In the editorial introduction to this collection of essays, *On the Very Idea of Condition of Thought*, the two editors provide a description of the focus, around which the volume's chapters revolve. This focus, as the subtitle clearly suggests, is placed on the "strange encounter" between two very different philosophers, Kant and Deleuze. The intention of the volume is to reduce the strangeness of this encounter, by showing that Deleuze's philosophy moves within the problematic opened by what the editors call *the critical moment*, that is, "the moment when Kant began his critical period with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, seeking to provide transcendental condition of thought" (p.1). Deleuze, then, thinking inside the critical moment by starting from the question *what can thought do?*, places himself in the tradition of transcendental philosophy and in the classic conflicts between transcendental philosophy and naturalism, which range in time from Herder to Meillassoux.

Hence, the volume's object is, first, to analyse the different use of the notion of transcendental in Kant and Deleuze, focusing on the meaning of the variations Deleuze gives to Kantian transcendental criticism with the notions of transcendental empiricism and transcendental materialism, and, second, to consider Deleuze's place in the mentioned debate between transcendental philosophy and naturalism.

With regard to Kant, it is important to point out that the authors, as the editors bring to notice in the introduction, consider principally the *Critique of Pure Reason*, while they totally exclude the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgement*.

In the first chapter, *The Philosopher-Monkey. Learning and the Discordant Harmony of the Faculties*, Patricia Farrell analyses the Deleuzian reading of the Kantian notion of Idea as *problematic field*. This view of the Idea, as the author shows, produces a radical reconfiguration of the status of philosophy, which represents, for Deleuze, the brilliant legacy of Kant's criticism. Yet for Deleuze Kant is unable to carry out his own philosophical project, therefore the French philosopher "seeks to

unpick the limitations he sees in Kant's philosophy" (p.13), by giving a different answer to the following questions, "What is happening to thinking as it becomes subject to the problematic? Where does this traversal take thinking and how is this educative?" (p.13). With regard to these questions, Farrell displays that, in opposition to Kant, for Deleuze the problem must not be resolved into harmonious orthodoxy and that "thinking subsists within the paradoxical and all 'solutions' are not escapes from but engagements with the problematic field" (p.20), hence learning "is not a methodological rule but rather, a *culture* of engagement with the problematic" (p.17).

Levy R. Bryant is the author of the second chapter, *Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism. Notes Towards a Transcendental Materialism*. Bryant focuses on the seemingly contradictory notion of *transcendental empiricism*, which Deleuze uses throughout his work to describe his own philosophical position. The author shows, firstly, the essential difference between transcendental empiricism and classical empiricism, and then analyses the way in which Deleuze's position, although it remains transcendental, avoids the equation drawn by Meillassoux between transcendental philosophy and what he calls *correlationism*, that is "the argument that we never have access to something apart from that access – that the "in-itself" is unknown since we only know the for-us" (p.30); at the same time does not relapse into a dogmatist view. Bryant then displays the way in which Deleuze paradoxically "finds the resources for breaking the correlationist circle within Kant's thought" (p.39), to the extent that Kant shows that our relationship to ourselves is itself mediated. Yet, Deleuze has no sceptical intentions, but "seeks an ontology capable of reaching the thing itself" (pp.41-42) in its genetic conditions. Hence, Bryant suggests, "it would be more prudent to refer to Deleuze's transcendental empiricism as a 'transcendental materialism'. This term at least has the merit of underlying the *ontological* nature of Deleuze's project" (p.29).

"What I want to do in this paper", claims Matt Lee in the introduction to the third chapter *Levelling the levels*, "is focus on the way in which Deleuze might be said to 'level the levels' of the Kantian philosophy. The levels which Deleuze levels are found in the distinction between the transcendently ideal and the empirical real" (p.49). To accomplish this task, the author examines the Deleuzian interpretation of the Kantian concept of

determinability, which “is crucial to the very notion of a transcendental thought” (p.49). According to Lee, a key move in Deleuze’s reading of the transcendental is represented by the shift from the pair *possible/real* to the pair *virtual/actual*, shift considered just a reaction to the Kantian concept of determinability. As Lee highlights, for Deleuze this shift coincides with the shift from a transcendental idealism to a transcendental empiricism, capable of levelling the levels by claiming, in opposition to Kant, that “the empirical real must become the transcendental framework” (p.58).

The fourth chapter, *The Genesis of Cognition. Deleuze as a Reader of Kant* by Edward Willatt, is of great importance for the meaning of the whole volume, because of the following crucial question Willatt asks himself just at the beginning of his paper: “in what sense is Deleuze a reader of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*?” (p.67). More precisely: is Deleuze’s reading selective or descriptive? To answer this question, the author considers, with an original move, the famous Deleuzian text *How do we recognise structuralism?* and analyses the way in which Deleuze conceives the relation between *structure* and *genesis*. More exactly, Willatt focuses principally on the Deleuzian employment of the notion of *Object=x* or *transcendental object*, which Kant uses in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. So, the answer the author is able to give to the opening question, at the end of the chapter and of his argument, is that “it does then seem to make sense to call Deleuze a reader of Kant without limiting this engagement to a selective or a descriptive approach” (p.84).

In the fifth chapter, *The Nature of Productive Force. Kant, Spinoza and Deleuze*, Mick Bowles concentrates on the fundamental equation, for Deleuze’s thought, between *philosophical thinking* and *productive force*. Bowles notices that this equation is by no means new in the history of philosophy, “but with Deleuze, unlike philosophers of previous ages, one meets an ongoing claim that productive forces coincide [...] with the emergence of the unconscious” (p.86). This is what makes Deleuze, according to Bowles, a thinker of the contemporary intellectual landscape and makes him different from Kant and Spinoza. For Bowles, in fact, “both thinkers share Deleuze’s concern that philosophical thinking must be productive, but it is by no means the case that they accept the epiphenomenalist assumption that a productive force does not require consciousness” (p.86). In this comparison, the author is

particularly interested in the role Spinoza plays and therefore the main part of the chapter is dedicated to him.

Leibniz is instead the “outsider” of the sixth chapter, *Deleuze’s ‘Reconstruction of Reason’. From Leibniz and Kant to Difference and Repetition* by Christian Kerslake. Indeed, the author suggests that “Deleuze’s philosophy is best understood as a ‘Leibnizianism of immanence’ [...] rather than as a contemporary reemergence of Spinozism” (p.105). Kerslake considers the way in which Kant’s criticism exposes and overcomes the crisis of theological reason, and yet shows how Kant’s philosophy produces a new crisis, this time internal to human reason. To get over this second crisis, for Kerslake, Deleuze goes back to Leibniz, so much that “Deleuze’s own central philosophical work, *Difference and Repetition*, does indeed participate seriously in a contemporary ‘reconstruction of human reason’, which moreover can be called *neo-baroque* (or *neo-Leibnizian*) only on condition that it is understood as profoundly *post-Kantian*” (p.101).

In the seventh chapter, *Transcendental Illusion and Antinomy in Kant and Deleuze*, Henry Somers-Hall takes into consideration the Deleuzian use of Kantian doctrine of *transcendental illusion*. For Deleuze, as the author shows, Kant’s great merit is just to have replaced the Cartesian notion of *error* with that of *transcendental illusion*. In this way, Kant rethinks the relationship between appearances and things-in-themselves in opposition to rationalist and dogmatist views. So, in the second half of the paper, Somers-Hall compares the concept of *noumenon* with the Deleuzian crucial notion of *event*. In spite of the analogies that the author specifies, he claims that “whereas for Kant, the noumenal is purely negative, as it lacks all spatio-temporal determinations, for Deleuze, while it also lacks all spatio-temporal determinations, it does not follow from this that it is completely indeterminate. Thus, Deleuze will give a positive signification to what can only be negatively determined for Kant” (p.139).

Micheal J. Olson, with his paper *Transcendental idealism. Deleuze and Guattari, and the Metaphysics of Objects*, is the author who concludes the volume. He considers the way in which Deleuze and Guattari think the fundamental transcendental issue about the constitution of the objectivity of objects and hence answer the central question of general metaphysics: what is it to be a thing? The site where this

“rearticulation of the transcendental analysis of the objectivity” (p.152) is produced is, for Olson, Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*. Here, as the author shows, Deleuze and Guattari try to provide a “transcendental materialist response” to the mentioned question, by replacing the Kantian pair *phenomenon-noumenon* with the immanent distinction between *production* and *product*. “Deleuze and Guattari’s development of the Idea of desiring production”, claims Olson, “offers an overtly materialist metaphysics of the process of production of the real without abandoning the transcendental framework created by Kant” (p.157).

This collection has certainly the merit of showing the belonging of Deleuze’s work to the transcendental philosophy tradition, and of trying to consider Deleuze as a post-Kantian thinker, although eccentric. In this sense, it plays an important role also in urging the international debate on the relationship between transcendental philosophy and Deleuze, which few publications till today have dealt with. The main limitation is instead to be seen in the imbalance between the references to Deleuze’s work and Kant’s work (as suggested by the 21 abbreviations for Deleuze and Deleuze-Guattari’s writings, vs. 1 for Kant’s) and in the sometimes too large employment of other authors, like Spinoza in chapter fifth and Leibniz in chapter sixth: one can have the impression that these two sections actually deal more with Spinoza and Leibniz than with Kant and Deleuze. As a last remark, I think it represents a questionable choice to exclude from the analyses of the volume the *Critique of Judgement*, since this is exactly the work on which Deleuze focuses his attention in the book he expressly dedicates to Kant, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy*.

Websites

<http://deleuzeatgreenwich.blogspot.it/>

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