

---

# Are We Mad? Intensity and the Problems of Modern Philosophy

Jeffrey A. Bell     Southeastern Louisiana University

---

## Abstract

In this essay Deleuze's concept of intensity is placed into the context of the problem of accounting for the relationship between sense perception and our conceptual categories. By developing the manner in which Kant responds to Hume's critique of metaphysics, this essay shows how Deleuze develops a Humean line of thought whereby the heterogeneous as heterogeneous is embraced rather than, as is done in Kant, being largely held in relationship to an already prior unity.

**Keywords:** Kant, Hume, theory of taste, Empiricism and Subjectivity, apperception, madness

In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Søren Kierkegaard claims that 'the modern age . . . proclaims itself in the question: What is madness?' (Kierkegaard [1846] 2009: 173–4). The question of determining whether or not one is mad is precisely the problem of modern philosophy. What criterion or standard, if any, are we to use to differentiate between sanity and insanity? In Kierkegaard's famous reading of the story of Abraham and Isaac, this problem emerges as that of establishing a moral justification for one's actions. Could God suspend our normal, established ethical standards and order Abraham to slay his only son Isaac, and on what basis should Abraham follow through with this action, given no doubt the fact that others would think he was crazy to set off to sacrifice his son? For our purposes here, the problem Kierkegaard draws our attention to was already at work in the philosophy of David Hume, and the manner in which this problem

*Deleuze Studies* 11.2 (2017): 195–215

DOI: 10.3366/dls.2017.0262

© Edinburgh University Press

[www.eupublishing.com/dls](http://www.eupublishing.com/dls)

emerges in Hume will motivate the responses of the philosophers that will most concern us in this essay – namely, Kant and Deleuze.

In particular, what we will show in this essay is that Hume's attempt to reconcile the role of the imagination with that of the understanding is complicated by the question regarding the nature of madness in that the possibility of madness challenges our attempts to account for the processes of thought and the relationship of thought to reality. Kant will follow through on Hume's efforts to account for the relationship between the imagination and the understanding, and do so in a way that sets up a retaining wall to keep the worst excesses of imagination, and hence the risks of delusion, at bay. As Kant's solution to the problem unfolds, he calls upon a fundamental a priori unity in his effort to reconcile the heterogeneity between the appearances that are given through sensibility and the concepts of the understanding. One of the consequences of this approach, as Deleuze will point out, is that Kant will not adequately account for the heterogeneity as heterogeneity and difference but will instead understand it in terms of a fundamental a priori unity. On this account, therefore, Deleuze will argue that the heterogeneity is displaced in favour of a presupposed unity and identity; or, as Deleuze will also put it, we will have a mediated difference, a difference mediated by a fundamental a priori unity. Deleuze will address the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding by embracing the heterogeneous itself, or what he will refer to in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) as difference in itself. Central to Deleuze's arguments for difference in itself is a theory of intensity. By placing Deleuze's theory of intensity in the context of Hume and Kant, we will discover at least one way in which Kierkegaard was right in his characterisation of the modern age. We will also set the stage for Deleuze's more general and metaphysical understanding of intensity. In short, while Deleuze's theory of intensity does offer an account of the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding, Deleuze's theory of intensity as a theory emerges in Deleuze's work as a general account of all processes of individuation, processes that are irreducible to the metaphysical norms and standards of identity and unity.

## I.

On Deleuze's reading of Hume, a notable feature of Hume's thought is that rather than presuppose the rational operations of our minds, Hume to the contrary assumes that rationality itself emerges from what is essentially madness and delirium. Deleuze is quite forthright on this

point, arguing in *Empiricism and Subjectivity* (1991) that ‘if the mind is manifested as a delirium, it is because it is first of all, and essentially, madness’ (Deleuze 1991: 83). Hume himself recognises the threat of madness when he claims that one of its effects is that ‘Every loose fiction or idea operates with equal force on the passions, when a lively imagination degenerates into madness or folly’ (Hume [1739] 2007: 1.3.10.9). In a fit of paranoia, for instance, a madman may suddenly fear a person who had never before given any indication or reason to doubt their motives. In other words, the usual manner of coming to our beliefs through a customary conjunction and association of experiences comes undone with madness and, as Hume says, any random idea or encounter can suddenly throw all these usual modes of thinking into disarray. These effects of imagination, however, are not isolated to cases of madness. Take the case of a loved one who receives a serious medical diagnosis. In such circumstances it is not uncommon to find that one may let their imagination run far ahead and generate a whole host of scenarios that we begin to fear. The imagination, in other words, creates a series of problems and scenarios that exceed what is justified by the facts at hand, or by the facts as we *usually* come to know and believe in them.

One might suspect at this point that given the pitfalls of the imagination – its tendency toward delirium – that Hume would seek to lessen its influence. To the contrary, and as Deleuze shows, Hume makes the imagination a central pillar of his philosophy. Most notably, for Hume, Deleuze argues, ‘With the belief in the existence of bodies, fiction itself as a principle is opposed to the principles of association ... [and] in the hypothesis of an independent existence [Hume takes] the first step toward this delirium’ (Deleuze 1991: 83). In other words, the very belief in an independently existent object, and in fact the very idea of a continuing, identifiable thing, is itself the result of a fiction. The impressions themselves do not justify, for Hume, the belief in a continued, independently existing thing as the reason or cause that underlies and connects these impressions to one another, and thus for Hume the only justification for the belief in an objective, independently existing thing is the fact that our imagination has fictioned this underlying identity. At the same time, however, Deleuze argues that Hume recognises the important role of an opposing principle – namely, the ‘principle of association’ – and this principle operates in a completely contrasting manner. Rather than fictioning identities that are not justified based upon what is given – that is, the impressions – the understanding works by charting the associations and regularities of that

which is given – that is, that which is fictioned. The understanding thus dissects and analyses the given in terms of its probabilistic likelihood, and in terms of the likelihood of mistake or error, seeking to further justify that which is given but in the process undermining it. As Deleuze puts it, ‘the understanding can do only one thing ad infinitum – to correct its corrections, so that all certainty, even practical certainty, is compromised and lost’ (Deleuze 1991: 84).<sup>1</sup> What the understanding leaves us with, then, if pushed to its fullest extent, is Pyrrhonian scepticism, for by its means we suddenly find that we have reasons to doubt anything and everything that is given.<sup>2</sup> For Hume we are thus left with a terrible choice: we either accept the fictions of the imagination and the threats of delirium and madness it brings in its wake, or we critically examine the creations of the imagination by way of reason and the understanding and in doing so we ultimately undermine all certainty and basis for action. Hume was quite aware of this predicament and admits that ‘We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all’ (Hume [1739] 2007: 1.4.7.7).

Hume’s response to this predicament, however, is precisely what initiates the philosophical trajectory that will be the focus of this essay. In particular, Hume creates a concept of taste in an effort to steer a course between the false reason that operates solely upon what is already created and actualised and an imagination that tends toward madness and delirium. In their own way, both Kant and Deleuze will follow a similar path. Let us begin with Hume.

## II.

The problem of the standard of taste is similar to the problem with which we began – the problem of differentiating between madness and sanity. On the one hand, just as Hume wants to avoid the case of madness which is, for Hume, a case where one’s beliefs result from the predispositions or diseased temperament of the subject, so too he wants to avoid the situation where aesthetic judgements are simply the reflection of subjective reactions. On the other hand, judgements regarding art also resist being captured by objective standards and criteria. How then do we account for what Hume takes to be the fact that some claims regarding art are better than others? What accounts for a superiority in taste regarding art? Hume’s answer, in short, is threefold. The first important feature of good taste for Hume is that one’s faculties are in proper working order and thus one is capable of discerning as much of what is to be discerned as possible. The second

feature is that with repeated exposure to and experience of artworks one becomes better acquainted with the elements that come to constitute these works and hence better able again to discern what is going on in a work and therefore what does or does not work in it. The third and perhaps most important characteristic of good taste is that a person with good taste does not allow prejudice to predetermine their reactions to an artwork. This is perhaps the most difficult virtue to attain, as Hume himself admits, and it is one reason why the true value of an artwork often takes several generations to reveal itself for over time the prejudices of one generation subside and yet if a work continues to draw positive attention then this is likely due to the excellence of the work itself rather than the prejudices of any given time.

With Hume's theory of taste we can return to the problem of the imagination – its tendency toward delirium and madness. In the case of prejudices, the imagination likewise creates beliefs that exceed what is justified by the facts. Hume offers the example of the then contemporary prejudices regarding the Irish and the French. As Hume notes, we may believe that 'An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidity', and continue to 'entertain such a prejudice against them . . . in spite of sense and reason. Human nature is very subject to errors of this kind; and perhaps this nation as much as any other' (Hume [1739] 2007: 1.3.13.7). The running away of the imagination into prejudice is thus not only a characteristic of individuals but of nations and peoples, and it is this prejudice that often clouds our aesthetic judgements as well. But the cure, as we have seen, is equally problematic. An unchecked analysis of reason and understanding will simply undermine all practical certainty and leave us in a paralytic state of scepticism. The problem with which we began has thus transformed into another: how do we avoid the paralysing effects of scepticism and understanding on the one hand and the follies, prejudices, superstitions and delirium of the imagination on the other? In the preface to his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* ([1748] 2004), Hume admits the need for a middle path between these two extremes, calling for a philosophy that avoids the extremes of what he calls abstruse thought while remaining vigilant against the excesses of the imagination. As Hume puts it, 'Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man' (Hume [1748] 2004b8: 3).<sup>3</sup>

Deleuze's philosophy will be in large part a response to a similar problem that motivated Hume's efforts in his *Enquiry* – namely, and to state it in Humean terms, the problem of accounting for processes that are able to avoid the excesses of delirium and madness and

avoid undermining all that the imagination has fictioned and created. Deleuze's theory of intensity will do the bulk of the work in providing for this account, but before turning to this theory let us first turn to Kant's efforts to respond to Hume. By doing this we will be better able to show how Deleuze's theory of intensity not only tracks and develops Hume's initial responses to the problem of the imagination but it also tracks and parallels Kant's own efforts.

### III.

The impact of Hume's thought on Kant is well known, as Kant himself attests to when he famously asserts that it was Hume's philosophy that woke him from his dogmatic slumber. Once awoken, however, Kant quickly turned to address what he saw as the limitations in Hume's thought. Chief among these limitations is the inability of Hume's philosophy to account for the very nature of experience itself, and in particular to the fact, as Kant sees it, that experience essentially involves an experience that is in accord with the necessity of certain universal rules. More to the point and to the purposes of this essay, Hume accepts all too blithely the givenness of the impressions and operates under the assumption that the impressions alone, along with the ideas that are their less lively copies, are sufficient to account for the nature of experience itself. For Kant impressions, or what he calls appearances, do not adequately account for experience but to the contrary actually point to the fact that experience is often heterogeneous with what is given to us by way of appearances. To make this point, Kant uses the famous example of looking at one's left hand in the mirror. By all appearances, the hand as it appears in the mirror appears in every way the same as the hand itself, and yet the left hand in the mirror is incongruent with the hand itself but rather appears as a right hand and thus would not fit in a left-handed glove like the left hand would. The lesson Kant draws from this is precisely that appearances do not give us things as they are in themselves and that experience also involves a conceptual categorisation Hume fails to address. It is this conceptual categorisation that accounts for the phenomena of the left hand in the mirror – in other words, the categories of left hand and right hand are not aligned with the appearances of the left hand in the mirror. The problem this leaves us with, therefore, and one Kant spends a tremendous amount of time addressing, is precisely how that which is given in appearances comes to be reconciled and aligned with the conceptual categories that attend all experience. In Kant's terms, this is the problem of accounting for the relationship between 'two very heterogeneous elements, namely a matter

for cognition from the senses [that is, appearances] and a certain form for ordering it from the inner source of pure intuiting and thinking [that is, understanding] ...' (Kant [1781] 1998: A86 B118).

Kant's efforts to account for the relationship between these heterogeneous elements will bring us back to Hume's efforts to address the relationship between imagination and understanding. With Kant, for instance, the appearances that make up the content of our experience are assured of being connected to one another by virtue of the fact that time itself is the a priori form of all sensibility. All appearances (or representations, as Kant also puts it) are related to another in time – this occurs before that, after that, at the same time as this, etc. But in addition to this temporal connection there is also a unity that needs to be manufactured or produced, and this is precisely the role of what Kant calls the *productive imagination*. For instance, if we take, to use Kant's own example, the image of the number 5 as represented by five dots, ... . . ., or think of the pattern of five dots on the side of a die, then we could see that the image of these dots does nicely agree with our conceptual understanding of the number five. However, if we were to place before us the image of a thousand dots we would no longer have the easy agreement between this image and its corresponding conceptual category. What we would need to do then is to go through the multiplicity of dots, count them up, and then place them under the corresponding numerical category. This is true, however, for Kant, even of the first image. On reading the above line, the reader may well have counted the dots, or think of a child learning to count and methodically using their fingers to do so. For this reason Kant argues that when we think of 'number in general, whether it be five or a hundred, this thought is rather the representation of a method whereby a multiplicity, for instance a thousand, may be represented in an image in conformity with a certain concept' (Kant [1781] 1998: A140 B179). It is in this way that Kant understands and formulates his concept of the schema, the schema being, for Kant, a method whereby the contents of experience come to be represented in conformity with the unity of a certain concept. The production of unity is just what the productive imagination does. For Kant, in fact, all the imagination ever wants is a *unity in the determination of sensibility*. Like Hume, therefore, the imagination produces a unity that was not there before, and the same is true of the transcendental schema for Kant: the schema is in itself always a product of the imagination.

As the example of the left hand in the mirror has shown us, however, the unities of our perceptual experience are not necessarily congruent with their corresponding conceptual categories. The left hand in the

mirror is seen as our left hand and yet it is incongruent with a left hand for it would not fit in a left-handed glove. Kant is aware of this problem and admits that the image of experience that is a product of the productive imagination is something that is as it were a monogram of pure a priori imagination through which images become possible and become connected with a concept but are nonetheless never fully congruent with these concepts. The problem this leaves us with, according to Kant, is thus one of continuing to work to address the contents of experience in such a way that over time they produce a better and better congruence with the categories and concepts that are essential to each and every experience. Let us clarify this point.

For Kant it is crucial to detail what it means to have an experience. This was the critical detail missing in Hume's account. On the one hand, for Kant an experience is not simply an awareness or apprehension of appearances. As Kant argues, 'it would be possible for a swarm of appearances to fill up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it', for what an experience presupposes, Kant claims, is 'a transcendental ground of unity' (Kant [1781] 1998: A111). Appearances are not only connected as appearances in time but they are also appearances that presuppose a unified subject of the experience – the transcendental ground of unity – and a unified object or something in general = X that provides the underlying unity for the objects of experience. This unity, in short, provides the basis for a synthetic process that draws together a manifold of appearances such that they are not simply appearances but experiences. These synthetic processes, however, are not random processes but are rather necessarily in accordance with rules, for otherwise the experiences we have would never come to be. As Kant famously points out:

if cinnabar were sometimes red, sometimes black, sometimes light, sometimes heavy, if a man changed sometimes into this and sometimes into that animal form, if the country on the longest day were sometimes covered with fruit, sometimes with ice and snow, my empirical imagination would never find opportunity when representing red colour to bring to mind heavy cinnabar. (Kant [1781] 1998: A100)

Kant thus concludes that:

The objective unity of all (empirical) consciousness in one consciousness (of original apperception) is thus the necessary condition even of all possible perception, and the affinity of all appearances (near or remote) is a necessary consequence of a synthesis in the imagination that is grounded a priori on rules. (Kant [1781] 1998: A123)



The task for Kant, therefore, and this is what much of the *Critique of Pure Reason* consists of doing, is to detail what the a priori rules of all possible experience are. By doing this, Kant is able to avoid the Humean problem of madness. We avoid madness, according to Kant, for experience itself, if it is to be possible at all, presupposes a process of synthesis in accordance with universal a priori rules. The threat that madness poses to our ordinary way of justifying beliefs in accordance with rules derived from custom and habit is inoculated against by Kant's approach in that the very syntheses of empirical cognition presuppose certain a priori rules. But this has only displaced our problem. Just as there is a necessary lawfulness to the connections of appearances in order for these appearances to become objects of experience – for example, the thought of heavy cinnabar – so too there is the need for a unity of the rules of pure concepts, the concepts that are not related to appearances but rather to the rules of the concepts of understanding itself. As Kant puts it, 'the schema of a *pure* concept of understanding can never be reduced to any image whatsoever. It is simply the pure synthesis, determined by a rule of that unity, in accordance with the concepts to which the category gives expression' (Kant [1781] 1998: A142 B181). And yet what accounts for the application of one rule rather than another, for if we repeat, at the level of pure concepts, the arbitrariness of appearances that would undermine the ability to think heavy cinnabar then similarly we would undermine the ability to think in terms of pure concepts as well. Kant's solution is to call upon the faculty of reason in order to provide for the unity necessary in order to think in terms of pure concepts. It is for this reason that Kant claims that 'Understanding may be regarded as a faculty which secures the unity of appearances by means of rules, and reason as being the faculty which secures the unity of the rules of understanding under principles', and thus reason is never applied directly 'to experience or to any object, but to understanding under principles' (Kant [1781] 1998: A302 B359).

In returning to the problem of differentiating between madness and sanity, we can begin to fill in Kant's response. As we have seen, we do not simply abandon a lawful, rule-based approach to experience, or succumb to madness in Hume's sense, for the manifold of appearances is assured of being both connected by virtue of the temporal nature of all sensibility and in accordance with the a priori rules of the syntheses of the understanding. The a priori rules of the understanding – that is, the pure concepts of the understanding – are the conditions for the possibility of experience at all. As the paradox of symmetrical objects has illustrated, however, the content of our experience as perceived is

not necessarily congruent with the nature of this experience as conceived through concepts. For Kant this heterogeneity opens the door for the continued work of science, or for the ongoing process of reconciling appearances with the unity of the world as it really is, or for an increasingly accurate approximation to a concept, the concept in this case being the world. Stated differently – and in fact as Kant states it – the work becomes a matter of relating appearances to that which conditioned them with the assumption of reason being that there is a fundamental world that serves as the unconditioned condition for the entire series of representations of experience, for the series of approximations. This unity of the world, however, is itself never an object or image to which we can refer but is rather what Kant calls a transcendental idea that is like a problem without any solution, the problem of providing for better approximations regarding the nature of the world in its absolute totality.

We have now provided the background necessary to understand the motivation for Deleuze's theory of intensity. In short, Hume sought to avoid the excesses of understanding and imagination by calling for a balanced approach that serves the purposes of life, and these purposes are best served, Hume argues, by adhering to the customary habits and expectations laid down through experience. Deleuze, as we will see, continues this Humean approach to a degree that is often overlooked, and yet Deleuze is also heavily indebted to Kant, and in particular to Kant's transcendental project. As we saw, Kant does not presuppose the regularities of experience, as Hume does, but argues that they themselves need to be accounted for, otherwise experience itself would not be possible. Kant thus grounds all experience on the fundamental unities of apperception, an object in general, and the unity of reason in accordance with certain transcendental ideas. Deleuze will largely repeat Kant's criticism of Hume, but this time direct it at Kant – namely, whereas Hume attempts to reconcile the heterogeneity of the elements of experience through the regularities of custom and habit, regularities that in turn need to be accounted for, Kant will likewise attempt to reconcile the heterogeneity of sensibility and understanding by grounding it in transcendental unities. By doing this, however, Kant does not account for the heterogeneity of experience but rather imprisons it in what Deleuze calls a general difference, or a difference that is subordinate to a prior unity.<sup>4</sup> What Deleuze will set out to do is to embrace the fundamental heterogeneity of experience, or what he will call difference in itself, and his theory of intensity will be central to this attempt. It is to Deleuze's theory of intensity that we now turn.

#### IV.

In *What Is Philosophy?* (1994) Deleuze and Guattari set up a parallel between Kant and the approach to philosophy they are setting forth in their book. Philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari argue, involves laying out a plane of immanence, inventing conceptual personae and creating concepts. These three elements constitute the ‘philosophical trinity’, as they call it, and it is at this point where they draw a parallel with Kant and invoke a Humean theory of taste. This is the key passage:

Since none of these elements [plane of immanence, conceptual personae, concepts] are deduced from the others, there must be coadaptation of the three. The philosophical faculty of coadaptation, which also regulates the creation of concepts, is called taste. If the laying-out of the plane is called Reason, the invention of personae Imagination, and the creation of concepts Understanding, then taste appears as the triple faculty of the still-undetermined concept, of the persona still in limbo, and of the still-transparent plane. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 77)

Without digressing too far into the intricacies of the arguments from *What Is Philosophy?* we can bring to bear our earlier discussions of Kant and Hume to clarify the significance of the parallel Deleuze and Guattari are setting up. For Kant Reason, as we saw, consists of the transcendental Ideas that provide for the unity of the rules of the understanding. These transcendental ideas, however, are never themselves subject to being an object of perception and serve rather as a problem without a solution, such as the problem of forever approximating the nature of the world as it is in itself. The transcendental ideas reflect the subjective necessity, Kant argues, of their being a unity to the pure concepts of the understanding, a unity of principle that allows for the possibility of being able to have an experience in accordance with a pure concept. This subjective necessity, however, does not entail the objective necessity of that which corresponds to the Ideas. For instance, although the unity of the world may provide the unity of principle that regulates our efforts to overcome the heterogeneity of appearances and concepts by pursuing an ever better approximation of the nature of the world, this does not prove that there is a world as the totality of all that is, the unconditioned absolute from which everything else is derived. To believe there is such a world is an example of what Kant calls a transcendental illusion, and these illusions, Kant adds, are inevitable precisely because of the very nature of Reason itself and the necessary unity Reason provides to the concepts of the understanding.

For Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, Ideas are also problems, and problems that are distinct from and not subordinate to the solutions they make possible.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, and continuing the parallel with Kant, we can think of laying out a plane of immanence as creating a problem space, a space that then makes it possible for various solutions to emerge. For instance, in learning to swim, to use Deleuze's example from *Difference and Repetition*, one must, as Deleuze puts it, put oneself in a situation where one's 'body combines some of its own distinctive points with those of a wave', distinctive points that Deleuze will call signs. As Deleuze will come to characterise the process, he will claim that 'to learn is indeed to constitute this space of an encounter with signs ...' (Deleuze 1994: 23). An Idea for Deleuze, therefore, is precisely this problem space, this space of an encounter with signs. An Idea, however, does not guarantee learning will occur. In fact, Deleuze argues that 'there is something amorous – but also something fatal – about all education' (23), by which he means that the encounter may fail – the problem space may give way to chaos and a failure to establish the connections necessary to learn. For learning to take place, however, it is necessary that there be at least the problem space drawn, or the laying out of a plane of immanence, that involves the encounter with signs (on which, see below).

There is a further parallel with Deleuze and Guattari and Kant with respect to Reason that is critically important both to Deleuze's project and to his theory of intensity. When Reason guides and regulates our experiences properly, according to Kant, then we are able to reconcile, more or less, the appearances that constitute the content of our experiences with the concepts that provide the form and rules whereby these appearances come to be the objects of experience. The tendency, however, is for the principles of Reason that provide for the unity of the concepts of the understanding to be confused with the nature of objective reality itself. We are thus naturally led to illusion, such as the illusions of an absolute unconditioned world and an absolute beginning in time, and we must thus be careful if we are to stay on the path of knowledge. Kant's critical project, as he envisions it, is precisely the necessary remedy to our natural tendency to illusion. For Deleuze as well there is a risk associated with laying out a plane of immanence. The risk is that rather than draw from the problem space of connections necessary for learning, for instance, one might instead collapse into chaos, or into the absolute speeds that undermine the possibility of connections being drawn.<sup>6</sup>

As for the Imagination, this faculty was critical to Kant for it produces the unity of appearances that is necessary for the possibility of

experience, since experience is, for Kant, always a subject's experience of an object. Without the unifying syntheses the Imagination provides, we may have a flood of appearances swarm about our soul, but we could not be said to be having an experience, nor would we have the unities with which Reason could work and apply its principles and Ideas. The risk of the imagination, as Hume himself was keenly aware, is that the productive syntheses may extend beyond what is properly justified by the facts. The very nature of the facts themselves may be brought into question by an overly charged imagination, and thus the delusion and madness that underlies reason resurfaces and leaves us with the problem of selecting the appropriate forms and unities. In other words, we are left with the need for a faculty of taste that can discern the appropriate forms and unities while discarding those that are irrelevant or unjustified. This will be what Deleuze and Guattari call for when they claim we need a 'faculty of taste . . . that also regulates the creation of concepts' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 77). For Kant, however, the risk of the imagination is forestalled because of the presupposed unity of the transcendental unity of apperception and the unity of the object or something in general = X.

For Deleuze and Guattari the concept of the conceptual persona plays a distinctive role in their view of the nature of philosophy. In short, the conceptual persona will provide the necessary unity, but a unity that is not guaranteed a priori, as it is for Kant, but a mobile, dynamic unity that is drawn on a plane of immanence. It is in the 'Conceptual Personae' chapter where Deleuze and Guattari most thoroughly develop the parallels with Kant. For our purposes it is important to note that the role of the conceptual personae is to provide the unity, what Deleuze and Guattari will call the mobile territory, that enables the signs and elements on the plane of immanence to be drawn into a plane of consistency that then allows for the possibility of being actualised as a created concept. The conceptual persona, in other words, is integral to philosophy for if philosophy is, as Deleuze and Guattari argue it is, nothing less than the task of creating concepts, then this task cannot be done without the mobile territories that allow for the foothold necessary to actually create a concept. The risk associated with the Imagination, if it is identified with the faculty of inventing personae as Deleuze and Guattari do, is that the forms themselves will be identified as being the purpose of philosophy rather than a condition for the possibility of creating concepts. Rather than call upon the importance of conceptual personae, one might, if one falls prey to the dangers of the imagination, identify philosophy with a particular philosopher, or with a particular philosophical school. By doing this one undermines the process of creating concepts by erecting

an orthodoxy and dogma that straightjackets and predetermines the manner in which philosophical activity should be pursued.

We come now to the Understanding, or to the creation of concepts as Deleuze and Guattari connect their understanding of philosophy to Kant's. For Kant the understanding allows for the possibility of experiencing objects by virtue of certain a priori rules, rules that determine the syntheses of appearances. As Kant puts it, the understanding 'is always busy poring through appearances with the aim of finding some sort of rule in them' (Kant [1781] 1998: A126). In finding such a rule the understanding in essence allows for the possibility of thinking the appearances in the manner of an object, and thus it allows for the possibility of experience itself. This follows for Kant since, as he argues, 'all experience does indeed contain, in addition to the intuition of the senses through which something is given, a *concept* of an object as being thereby given, that is to say, as appearing' (Kant [1781] 1998: A93 B126). It is the Understanding, therefore, which mediates between the manifold of appearances, poring through them in search of a rule, and the principles of reason so as to create the possibility of an experience that encompasses the heterogeneity of appearances and conceptual form.

For Deleuze and Guattari what is essential to creating concepts is that a plane of consistency be drawn on the plane of immanence, and the 'intensive features' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 77) of this plane that allows for the creative process to unfold. As with Kant, the Understanding, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of this as the creation of concepts, proceeds by poring through elements such that the creation of concepts becomes possible. Where Kant and Deleuze differ is with respect to the nature of these elements. For Kant these elements are signs in the extensive sense, by which I mean that the sign can refer to a number of elements that are encompassed within the extension of this sign. In summarising the progression of thought from mere awareness of appearances to reasoning by pure concepts, Kant argues that either the intermediate step of cognition can take the form of being an intuition, and an intuition in the form of space and time, or this cognition can be a concept, and 'a concept', Kant claims, 'is mediate, by means of a mark, which can be common to several things' (Kant [1781] 1998: A322 B379). The understanding, therefore, encounters a manifold of appearances, and in poring through them for a rule it seeks out the marks that can extend to other possible objects of experience and not just simply to the object at hand, to the object given through intuition and which Kant refers to as a singular cognition in contrast to the mediated cognition of concepts. For Deleuze and Guattari, by

contrast, the Understanding does not seek out marks that extend to other possible objects of experience but rather they search out the intensive features of that which is given, the intensive features that underlie the extensive properties and qualities of the objects that are given in experience. This is the sense in which Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, will affirm the fundamental difference and heterogeneity in contrast to Kant's understanding of difference as difference within a certain form or concept. The intensive is the concept Deleuze uses to characterise this difference. In *Difference and Repetition*, for example, Deleuze argues that:

Difference is a matter of degree only within the extensity in which it is explicated; it is a matter of kind only with regard to the quality which covers it within that extensity. Between the two are all the degrees of difference – beneath the two lies the entire nature of difference – in other words, the intensive. (Deleuze 1994: 239)

Now what are these intensive features, or what Deleuze will also refer to as the pre-individual singularities that are drawn together, or pored through, in a process that establishes a plane of consistency that enables the actualisation and explication of the extensive features and qualities? The answer, put briefly, is that the intensive features that are drawn together are incorporeal transformations. For Deleuze these intensive features, incorporeal transformations or pre-individual singularities will become part of his general metaphysical process and will be used, in books from *Difference and Repetition* up to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) and beyond, to account for dynamic processes of individuation in general. For the purposes of clarification, however, we can turn to Deleuze's discussion of the incorporeal nature of sense. Deleuze does this in a number of places, especially in *The Logic of Sense* (1990), but for the purposes of this essay the most relevant discussion is the 'Postulates of Linguistics' plateau from *A Thousand Plateaus*. In this plateau Deleuze and Guattari argue that an 'incorporeal transformation is recognizable by its instantaneousness, its immediacy, by the simultaneity of the statement expressing the transformation and the effect the transformation produces' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 81). For example, when a judge or jury foreman reads the verdict guilty, this statement, the speaking of the word itself, immediately and instantaneously transforms the accused person into a convict. This transformation is incorporeal, for while no doubt there are many corporeal presuppositions and consequences to the verdict, the transformation itself is irreducible to these extensive, physical contexts

and circumstances. This is the sense then in which the transformation is incorporeal. At the same time, however, not anyone can transform the accused into a convict. A series of other incorporeal transformations must also come into play and are presupposed by the incorporeal transformation. The appointment of the judge, passing a bar exam, graduating from college, the passing of legislation relevant to the case at hand, etc., are all instances of incorporeal transformations that allow for the possibility that when the judge reads the verdict the statement does indeed produce the transformation. Deleuze and Guattari use the term *effectuated variable* to refer to the capacity of a statement to produce an incorporeal transformation, and what allows for a statement to be an effectuated variable is that it brings to bear a multiplicity of other incorporeal transformations, or intensive features, that are the conditions for the possibility of effectuating the incorporeal transformation. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to this multiplicity of intensive features as the collective assemblage of enunciation. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze refers to this as implicated multiplicities, or as intensities. Here is the key passage, and the echoing of Kant should be apparent:

Ideas are problematic or ‘perplexed’ virtual multiplicities, made up of relations between differential elements. Intensities are implicated multiplicities, ‘implexes’, made up of relations between asymmetrical elements which direct the course of the actualization of Ideas and determine the cases of solution for problems. (Deleuze 1994: 244)

What the parallel with Kant should help us with is to understand the relationship between Ideas as *perplexed* virtual multiplicities and intensities as *implicated multiplicities*, *implexes*. To return to the example of learning to swim discussed earlier, the Idea or problem space consists of the signs – distinctive points of the body, waves, currents, etc. – that need to be brought together in order for learning to take place. This problem space or Idea, however, is not itself the process of learning. For learning to occur what needs to happen is for an ‘implicated multiplicity’, or what Deleuze and Guattari will also call a plane of consistency, to be drawn within the problem space, and it is this implicated multiplicity (or collective assemblage of enunciation) that allows for the effectuated variable or transformation that is the process whereby learning creates knowledge. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze refers to Harlow’s learning set experiments where Harlow shows that there is a point in the process of learning to identify the boxes of a particular colour where food will be hidden when the monkey’s



actions are no longer random but it has not yet grasped the rule or acquired the knowledge of what coloured box to look under (see Deleuze 1994: 164). In other words, there is problematic state of searching for food, and encountering the elements of the relevant problem space – the food, boxes of particular colours, etc. – which is the perplexed or virtual multiplicity. That ‘paradoxical period’, as Deleuze (1994: 163) puts it, ‘during which the number of “errors” diminishes even though the monkey does not yet possess the knowledge or “truth” of a solution in each case’, constitutes the implicated multiplicities or intensities that allow for the process whereby learning becomes knowledge, or a problem space becomes actualised in a determinate solution.

Generalising from the context of learning which we have used in order to clarify the processes associated with intensities as implicated multiplicities, Deleuze argues that intensities make possible extensities and the qualities and properties that hide intensities as implicated multiplicities become explicated. Deleuze is quite explicit on this point: ‘However, it remains literally true that intensity creates the qualities and extensities in which it explicates itself, because these qualities and extensities do not in any way resemble the ideal relations which are actualised within them ...’ (Deleuze 1994: 246). Moreover, not only is this true for Deleuze in cases of learning or of the incorporeal transformations associated with the reading of a verdict, etc., but it is true of all qualities and extensities. All extensities and qualities that fill these extensities are explications of implicated multiplicities.

The mistake, or Deleuze’s version of Kant’s transcendental illusion, is to assume that it is the explicated qualities and differences of degree within extensities that accounts for the transformations and processes that interest philosophers, historians, etc. In the ‘Postulates of Linguistics’ plateau, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari subtitle the plateau with the date ‘November 20, 1923’, which is the date the Rentenbank in Germany declared what the exchange rate would be for the recently issued currency, the Rentenmark, and thus on this date the hyperinflation that had plagued the Weimar Republic effectively came to an end. For Deleuze and Guattari, one can write a traditional history that details the development of events that led to the new currency and the declared exchange rate that ended the hyperinflation, but beneath this history, they argue, there are the ‘pure acts intercalated into that development’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 81) – that is, there are the intensities, the implicated multiplicities and incorporeal transformations that are explicated within the determinate events that historians discuss.

## V.

We are now in a position to return to the problem with which we began – to wit, the Kierkegaardian problem of determining whether or not we are mad. To address this problem we can turn to quite a telling and significant passage from *Difference and Repetition*. In this passage, Deleuze offers us an ethics of intensities, and we must think here of ethics in Spinoza's sense, the ethics of his *Ethics*. Deleuze states what could be considered his fundamental ethical principal as follows:

The ethics of intensive quantities has only two principles: affirm even the lowest, do not explicate oneself (too much). (Deleuze 1994: 244)

If we understand the process of individuation by which implicated multiplicities become explicated in terms of learning, a process of learning that Deleuze understands more generally and metaphysically, whereby intensities become explicated as extensities along with the qualities that fill them, then to affirm even the lowest entails the necessity of a minimal problem space. In the examples of learning to swim, or the monkey who searches for food under boxes of a particular colour, for learning to occur there must first be an encounter with the elements that constitute a problem space – the coloured boxes and food for the monkey; the distinctive points of one's body and the water and currents for the aspiring swimmer. As Deleuze puts it in *Difference and Repetition*, 'Learning is the appropriate name for the subjective acts carried out when one is confronted with the objectivity of a problem (Idea), whereas knowledge designates only the generality of concepts or the calm possession of a rule enabling solutions' (Deleuze 1994: 164). To learn, therefore, one must affirm, minimally, the problem space that becomes, through the explication of implicated multiplicities, actualised as knowledge and the possession of rules. The objectivity of a problem or Idea, or what Deleuze will frequently refer to as the virtual, is not a pre-existent state. One does not come upon the virtual and then transform it into an actualised state; rather, the virtual is a tendency within real, dynamic processes toward the problematic, toward a destabilisation of routinised, habituated processes. The risk inseparable from this tendency is that the move toward the virtual and problematic becomes the chaos whereby the infinite speeds of chaos prevent the possibility of even affirming a minimal problem space and hence prevent the possibility of learning. As Deleuze and Guattari state this point in *What Is Philosophy?*, and this largely repeats the 'ethics of intensive quantities' from *Difference and Repetition*, we face 'two

extreme dangers: either leading us back to the opinion from which we wanted to escape or precipitating us into the chaos we wanted to confront' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 199). To learn we must move toward the problematic, toward the chaos that undermines established connections, relations and opinions, but we must do so without falling into the chaos.

At the same time, and as the previous quote warns us, we also risk falling back into the opinion from which we wanted to escape; or, we should not explicate too much as the ethics of intensive quantities puts this. As the intensities as implicated multiplicities become explicated in the process of learning – at the paradoxical point, for instance, where the monkey made fewer mistakes but had still not yet grasped the rule or knowledge of where the food would be – learning makes possible the knowledge, rules and common opinions that then serve as predetermining guides in life. The risk associated with explicating too much is that the dynamism of a life lived in intensity, a life of learning, will become overwhelmed by stratification, rules and the stifling imprisonment of opinion. With this the tendency toward the problematic and virtual is sapped of its power and this, ultimately, is fatal to dynamic processes. As with the virtual, however, this tendency toward knowledge, rules, opinion or the actual as it is usually contrasted with the virtual, is just that, a tendency toward dynamic processes. The actual is not a static state, a completed process that is immune to all transformation; to the contrary, the actual is a habituated tendency of processes themselves, processes that also presuppose the tendency toward the problematic and virtual that is essential, as we have seen, to all learning and, more generally for Deleuze, to all processes of individuation whereby intensities become explicated.

To return, finally, to the question with which we began – to wit, how do we know if we are mad or not? – we can call upon Spinoza's *Ethics* (1994) to see where Deleuze's theory of intensity leaves us with respect to that question. For Spinoza, one way to understand the ethical principle implicit throughout much of his *Ethics* is that for any finite mode or being to continue to persevere in its existence – what Spinoza calls *conatus* – it must both embrace difference but not too much, for excessive difference would destroy it. In the context of the Humean and Deleuzian discussion of this essay, then we must all be mad, must all maintain an intensity that tends toward the problematic and chaotic, but to maintain the integrity of the dynamic, open system that is presupposed by individuals we must not become too mad. Thus in response to Kierkegaard's claim that differentiating between madness and sanity is

the problem of modern philosophy, we can say that the problem is not to identify madness and sequester it safely on the other side of a walled barrier; rather, the problem is to affirm the madness that is essential to all dynamic processes, and thus recognise, as Deleuze says, that ‘underneath all reason lies delirium, and drift’ (Deleuze 2003: 262). There is no determinate rule that will predetermine what is and is not mad; we must rely on a taste for problems, a taste for the slightly mad, for life itself is not a solution to a problem but is a continuing encounter with and response to the objectivity of a problem, and it is a life of intensity that is the ongoing response to this problem. A life of intensity, therefore, is not an option; it is all there is.

## Notes

1. Deleuze draws from the following passage from Hume: ‘For I have already shown, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or in common life’ (Hume [1739] 2007: 1.4.7.7)
2. For the best presentation of Pyrrhonian scepticism, see Empiricus 1990
3. It is important to note at this point a few key issues regarding the imagination as understood in this essay. On the one hand, the imagination serves for Hume both as a transcendental principle (*avant la lettre*) in that it is the condition for the possibility of given identities, for the identities that are then worked upon by the principles of association; and the imagination is understood as an empirical phenomenon, and it is this latter that is susceptible to excesses in that it creates identities that are not justified by empirical evidence. In his discussion of the passions in Book II of his *Treatise*, Hume recognises the importance of habit in providing a buttress against the excesses of imagination, and, moreover, this is where Hume’s theory of institutions would also provide an important means of channelling passions into acceptable patterns. This latter theme cannot be discussed here, but as evidenced by Deleuze’s early essay ‘Instincts and Institutions’ (Deleuze 2003: 19–21), coupled with his early work on Hume, we can see how this would be an important topic ripe for further research.
4. It could be argued at this point that in the anticipations of perceptions section of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant does indeed recognise the significance of heterogeneity when he discusses what he calls ‘an intensive magnitude’, by which he means a multiplicity that ‘can be represented only through approximation to negation = 0’ (Kant [1781] 1998: A168 B210). A friendly reading of Kant’s project could well develop this section and argue that Kant does give credit to heterogeneity. This reading will not be pursued here and the weight of the concerns expressed throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason* tend most heavily toward an a priori unity that short-circuits from the beginning any possibility that this heterogeneity may become active in itself; or, as Deleuze would argue, Kant does not think difference in itself.
5. Deleuze begins the fourth chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, ‘Ideas and the Syntheses of Difference’, with an acknowledgement and extension of Kant’s claim that Ideas are problems: ‘Kant never ceased to remind us that Ideas are essentially “problematic”. Conversely, problems are Ideas’ (Deleuze 1994: 168).

6. See, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari's *What Is Philosophy?*: 'The plane of immanence is like a section of chaos and acts like a sieve. In fact, chaos is characterised less by the absence of determinations than by the infinite speed with which they take shape and vanish. This is not a movement from one determination to the other but, on the contrary, the impossibility of a connection between them, since one does not appear without the other having already disappeared ...' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 42).

## References

- Deleuze, Gilles (1990) *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1991) *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, trans. Constantin Boundas, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1994) *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London: Athlone.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2003) *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1953–1974)*, trans. Mike Taormina, New York: Semiotext(e).
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1994) *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Empiricus, Sextus [?] (1990) *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus.
- Hume, David [1748] (2004) *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Hume, David [1739] (2007) *A Treatise of Human Nature: Volume 1*, Oxford: Clarendon.
- Kant, Immanuel [1781] (1998) *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren [1846] 2009, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Alastair Hannay, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spinoza, Benedict de (1994) *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. Edwin M. Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Your short guide to the EUP Journals  
Blog <http://eupublishingblog.com/>

*A forum for discussions relating to  
[Edinburgh University Press Journals](#)*



EDINBURGH  
University Press

## 1. The primary goal of the EUP Journals Blog

To aid discovery of authors, articles, research, multimedia and reviews published in Journals, and as a consequence contribute to increasing traffic, usage and citations of journal content.

## 2. Audience

Blog posts are written for an educated, popular and academic audience within EUP Journals' publishing fields.

## 3. Content criteria - your ideas for posts

We prioritize posts that will feature highly in search rankings, that are shareable and that will drive readers to your article on the EUP site.

## 4. Word count, style, and formatting

- Flexible length, however typical posts range 70-600 words.
- Related images and media files are encouraged.
- No heavy restrictions to the style or format of the post, but it should best reflect the content and topic discussed.

## 5. Linking policy

- Links to external blogs and websites that are related to the author, subject matter and to EUP publishing fields are encouraged, e.g. to related blog posts

## 6. Submit your post

Submit to [ruth.allison@eup.ed.ac.uk](mailto:ruth.allison@eup.ed.ac.uk)

If you'd like to be a regular contributor, then we can set you up as an author so you can create, edit, publish, and delete your *own* posts, as well as upload files and images.

## 7. Republishing/repurposing

Posts may be re-used and re-purposed on other websites and blogs, but a minimum 2 week waiting period is suggested, and an acknowledgement and link to the original post on the EUP blog is requested.

## 8. Items to accompany post

- A short biography (ideally 25 words or less, but up to 40 words)
- A photo/headshot image of the author(s) if possible.
- Any relevant, thematic images or accompanying media (podcasts, video, graphics and photographs), provided copyright and permission to republish has been obtained.
- Files should be high resolution and a maximum of 1GB
- Permitted file types: *jpg, jpeg, png, gif, pdf, doc, ppt, odt, pptx, docx, pps, ppsx, xls, xlsx, key, mp3, m4a, wav, ogg, zip, ogv, mp4, m4v, mov, wmv, avi, mpg, 3gp, 3g2.*