

## Lecture 10 – Hegel, Difference and Negation

### Introduction

This is the last lecture on chapter one of *Difference and Repetition*. While there is lots of material we have not covered (in particular, Deleuze's relation to Nietzsche and to Plato), I want to leave these sections until next term when we look at the fuller treatment they both receive in chapter two of *Difference and Repetition*. Instead, in today's seminar, I want to begin by looking at the relationship between Deleuze's philosophy and the philosophy of infinite representation, as represented by Hegel. As I hinted at last time, there are some important connections between Deleuze and Hegel, in particular that they both take up certain themes from Spinoza. Nevertheless, as became clear at the end of last week, their uses of Spinoza also diverge quite radically. Deleuze is right to characterise Hegel's philosophy as a philosophy of infinite representation, as it introduces the notion of the infinite in order to save representation, rather than to overturn it. I want to begin by looking at this move and comparing it to Deleuze's use of the infinite that we discussed in terms of Scotus and Spinoza. The key differences between Hegel and Deleuze will be their uses of the notion of relation in explaining determination, and, consequent upon this, their disagreement about how we are to understand the concept of difference. After having explored this notion, I want to turn to Deleuze's criticisms of Hegel. Finally, I want to close our study of this chapter by looking back over Deleuze's criticisms of representation, and at the implications of his alternative position in terms of difference and negation in more general terms.

### Hegel and Spinoza

Hegel's relationship with Spinoza is complex. Stephen Houlgate notes that '[Spinoza] is the metaphysician who, in [his] view, anticipates Hegel most closely (and who least resembles the typical "pre-Kantian metaphysician" identified by Hegel himself).' (Opening of Hegel's Logic, 163) For Houlgate, the reason for this is that Spinoza, like Hegel, recognises that substance, or the infinite, is not understood as a being, but as *being*. If you remember, this was also a key moment in Deleuze's characterisation of Spinoza as developing a notion of a real distinction that was not a numerical distinction. The consequence of this in both cases was the recognition that the finite and the infinite do not stand outside one another. As we saw last week, Hegel's notion of the true infinite is one that is based on the mediation of the finite and the infinite, and emphasised their commonality. In spite of this, Hegel's reading of Spinoza himself is a mixed appraisal at the least:

Spinoza died on the 21st of February, 1677, in the forty-fourth year of his age. The cause of his death was consumption, from which he had long been a sufferer; this was in harmony with his system of philosophy, according to which all particularity and individuality pass away in the one substance. (Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*)

In this criticism, we can see the heart of Hegel's rejection of Spinoza's philosophy in general. If substance is seen as pure affirmation, how is it the case that we are able to understand it as differentiated into moments of particularity? For Hegel, determinate being could only differ from other determinate beings by being separated from them by a limit. Such a limit was construed in such a way that what falls outside of this limit was the negation of the object. This might be seen as quite an odd method of determination, and Deleuze calls the idea that something is defined by not being 'the whole of everything which is not the object' as a 'logical monster' (DR 60) Nevertheless, it seems to be relatively straightforward that in order for something to differ from something else, it must at least *not be* that other thing. On this reading, therefore, Hegel rejects the Spinozan account of distinction. On an account of difference that purely relies on affirmation, it would be impossible to distinguish anything from anything else (we wouldn't be able to say, x is not y). If this were the case, then everything would fall back into the indeterminate infinite ground. For Hegel, therefore, negation is a necessary part of existence.

What, therefore, is the relationship between the infinite and finite that Hegel develops? Deleuze's claim is that infinite representation is no better than finite representation. In distinguishing the two, he writes that 'it treats identity as a pure infinite principle instead of treating it as a genus, and extends the rights of the concept to the whole instead of fixing their limits.' (DR 61)

To begin with the first point, the claim is that the infinite simply takes the place of the genus in Hegel's account. There is clearly some truth to this. If we remember last week, for Hegel, the limit was indeed the determination which existed between two forms of beings: the finite and the spurious infinite. Rather than being related by a higher identity, these two terms were, for Hegel, related by the inherent movement between them. Hegel's approach therefore clearly does maintain something like the structure of finite representation, but attempts to put the terms into motion. There is a key difference, however. While the structure of identity in the form of the genus is logically prior in finite representation, the inverse is true in infinite representation. That is, we begin with a one-sided determination, and through its own contradictions, this determination generates its contrary (as with the finite and the infinite). The resolution of the dialectic then involves the introduction of contradiction, when we realise that the two moments, whilst being contrary, are nonetheless necessarily related. This difference is important from Hegel's perspective, as it means that Hegel has not assumed at the outset that difference is going to be subordinated to identity, but rather that subordination has developed immanently from the structure of the subject matter.

Deleuze's second point is that Hegel extends the domain of the concept to cover the whole. In this sense, what is the ground for the finite is now no longer matter as such, but rather the infinite. Moreover, the species or genus is no longer something that is simply imposed upon the finite thing, but something which is composed out of the movement of the finite itself. Thus, in the philosophy of nature, Hegel describes the genus and individual in terms clearly paralleling those of the infinite and finite:

[T]he genus preserves itself only through the destruction of individuals who, in the process of generation, fulfil their destiny and, in so far as they have no higher destiny, in this process meet their death. (PN, § 369)

The interrelation between genus (or species) and individual is, for Hegel, far more reciprocally constitutive than it is for finite representation. I want to note, though, that in the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel makes it clear, *contra* Deleuze, that the Notion, or infinite thought, is not entirely determinative of the real world object, but that contingency plays a necessary part in the actual form of everything.

Hegel makes this assimilation of the Kantian schema clear earlier in the *Science of Logic*:

[E]ach human being though infinitely unique is so primarily because he is a *man*, and each individual animal is such an individual primarily because it is an animal: if this is true, it would be impossible to say what such an individual could still be if this foundation were removed, no matter how richly endowed the individual might be with other predicates, if, that is, this foundation can equally be called a predicate like the others. (SL, 36-7)

In spite of these differences, it is clear that Deleuze is right to categorise Hegel as belonging to a tradition which is a continuation of the thought of Aristotle. In *Spinoza Practical Philosophy*, he therefore opposes the apparent Spinozism of Hegel to his own:

Goethe, and even Hegel in certain respects, have been considered Spinozists, but they are not really Spinozists, because they never ceased to link the plan [of organisation or plane of immanence] to the organization of a Form and to the formation of a Subject. (SPP 128-9)

I don't want to go back over Deleuze's account of affirmative difference yet in much detail, as we covered it a few weeks ago, but we can here note that Deleuze formulates this notion in direct opposition to Hegel. For Hegel, the ought which finitude was subjected to was to transcend its limits. In doing so, however, it created the infinite series of finite moments which in the end led to the emergence of the true infinite. Deleuze writes instead that there is a single 'obligation' for modes once they are determined as degrees of power:

To deploy all their power *within* the limit itself. (DR 50)

This is at first quite perplexing, as what appears to differentiate finite representation from infinite representation is that finite representation leaves things within their limits, whereas infinite representation allows them to transcend them. Deleuze provides the following account of his own notion of limit, however:

'To the limit', it will be argued, still presupposes a limit. Here, limit [*peras*] no longer refers to what maintains a thing under a law, nor to what delimits it or separates it from other things. On the contrary, it refers to that on the basis of which it is deployed and deploys all its power; hubris ceases to be simply condemnable and the *smallest becomes equivalent to the largest* once it is not separated from what it can do. (DR46)

With this reinterpretation of the notion of limit, therefore, Deleuze seeks to undercut the Hegelian account. If limit is no longer what determines something as this and not that, then the dialectic of infinite representation does not get under way. Once being is distinguished on the basis of its

intensity rather than according to the spatial metaphor, negation no longer enters into the definition of something.

### **Deleuze's Criticisms of Hegel**

The three critical statements about dialectic by Deleuze which I wish to discuss all follow from the move to a transcendental empiricist philosophy. The first of these concerns the status of the movement which Hegel creates with dialectic. As Deleuze writes, '[Hegel] creates movement, even the movement of the infinite, but because he creates it with words and representations, nothing follows' (*DR*, 63). Deleuze takes this criticism to derive from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (*DR*, 8). In this sense, Deleuze is arguing that Hegel has misunderstood the cause of the movement of thought by continuing to represent it, rather than seeing this cause as escaping representation. The aspect of representation which Deleuze takes to be critical here is the universal. "Everyone" recognises the universal because it is itself the universal, but the profound sensitive conscience which is nevertheless presumed to bear the cost, the singular, does not recognise it' (*DR*, 63). In this case, therefore, it is the singular, or singularity, which is neither particular nor universal, is excluded by beginning a term which is essentially universal. In this case, we can return to the figure of Abraham. Abraham cannot be understood within the framework of the universal, just as the theatre of farce cannot be captured by the categories of dialectic. Deleuze's claim will therefore be that the real movement comes not from the logic of species and genera, even when this is incorporated into a form of infinite representation. Instead it comes from that which escapes from representation, which Deleuze has described both in terms of a system defined by accidents, or as a field of intensities. Neither of these can be captured by Hegel's analysis, according to Deleuze.

The second criticism is that this movement is always around a particular point. This criticism is derived from Althusser's study of dialectic (*DR*, 186, 207 – 1994 edition), and argues that Hegel relies on a 'monocentring of circles' (*DR*, 60) which Deleuze claims comes about through Hegel's adherence to the species-genus model. In doing so, all movement must be understood as being referred to a central point. In the case of the infinite and the infinite, movement 'revolves' around the central moment of the true infinite. What is problematic about this, for Deleuze, is that it prevents us from understanding systems as possessing the openness that Deleuze thinks is essential to them.

The third point, which relates the previous two, is that the idea of opposition, which Hegel uses to unite the particular and universal, is too rough to provide an adequate description of the world. 'Oppositions are roughly cut from a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities' (*DR*, 50). That is, Deleuze asserts that simply relying on a reinvigorated understanding of the distinction between finite and infinite will not provide the kinds of fine grained distinctions needed to adequately describe the world. 'We can say "the one is multiple, the multiple one" forever: we speak like Plato's young men who did not even spare the farmyard.' (*DR*, 230)

I don't want to look in too much detail at the validity of these criticisms, but it is worth making a few brief points. One of the key difficulties with Deleuze's approach to Hegel at this stage

is that whilst he recognises that there are certain parallels between Aristotle and Hegel, it is not at all clear that the existence of these parallels is enough to extend the critique of Aristotle to Hegel. For instance, Deleuze is correct to point out that identity is still the highest concept in the Hegelian model. Thus, Hegel calls contradiction ‘the identity of identity and difference’. Whether this is still a problem for Hegel is less clear. The problem with identity for Deleuze was that it meant that differences were to be determined in relation to a highest identity that itself remained undetermined. In the case of Hegel, however, the highest identity *is* determined by the dialectical process through which it develops. We begin with the finite, and show that the true infinite emerges from it. If this is so, then it is also the case that on purely logical grounds, Hegel’s reliance on the notions of species and genera might not be seen as so problematic. This doesn’t mean that Deleuze is wrong to criticise Hegel, however, as the Aristotelian model might prove to be problematic on grounds aside from those provided by a logical analysis. In particular, taking the notion of species to mean anything more than simply a pragmatic way to group individuals together creates serious problems for an understanding of evolution, which relies for the possibility of a positive drift away from the defining essence of a given species. For Aristotle, such a drift would simply be seen as a failure of the matter to truly embody the essence of the species.

### **Difference and Transcendental Illusion**

To finish our discussion of chapter one, I want to look at the interaction between these two concepts of difference. I have been trying to show how two concepts are interrelated: the concept of oppositional difference, and the concept of species. Later on in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze makes the following claim about species:

It is not the individual which is an illusion in relation to the genus of the species, but the species which is an illusion – inevitable and well-founded, it is true – in relation to the play of the individual and individuation. (DR 311)

What does it mean to be a well founded illusion? What Deleuze is talking about here, and elsewhere in *Difference and Repetition*, is the notion of a transcendental illusion, a notion employed by Kant. Kant defines it in the following manner:

This is an *illusion* which can no more be prevented than we can prevent the sea appearing higher at the horizon than at the shore, since we see it through higher light rays; or to cite a still better example, than the astronomer can prevent the moon from appearing larger at its rising, although he is not deceived by this illusion. (Kant, 1929, A297/B355)

Although we know full well that the moon is the same size when it is just above the horizon as when it is at its height, we cannot help but see it as changing in size, even when we see it clearly. Similarly, while we might fully recognise that species and genera are not legitimate ways of characterising the world, we cannot help but be drawn towards this mode of characterisation through the legitimate use of our faculties of thought.

Now Deleuze does have a place for the notion of difference as opposition, although he says that ‘negation is difference seen from its underside, seen from below.’ (DR 67) He also argues that it is

only 'the shadow of the more profound genetic element' (DR 67). When we looked at the notion of law, we saw that physical laws relied on the notion of a geometrical space. We can see that this notion applies to the concept of negation as well. If we think about something not being something else, then we normally think of them as being spatially separated from one another. This pencil is not this piece of paper to the extent that they occupy different positions within the same space. Deleuze seems to be arguing at this point that this idea of space is an illusion, but one that emerges quite naturally from the way in which we relate to the world. The claim that Deleuze seems to be making is that intensive difference in some form is generative of our notion of the objective space, the space which forms the basis of oppositional difference. If we forget the fact that this conception of space is generated from something more primitive, then we end up in a situation where it is possible to introduce the notions of opposition, negation, and species. The world thus has a tendency towards oppositional difference, but we make a mistake when we take this tendency to be a completed state of things.

I want to offer a tentative account of how Deleuze fleshes out the details of this theory of transcendental illusion in chapter one. It seems likely that Deleuze is here presenting a revision of one of the central claims of the phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. In order to explain how this genetic account functions, I think we need to look at three statements from *Difference and Repetition*:

- (1) Infinite representation includes precisely an infinity of representations – either by ensuring the convergence of all points of view on the same object or the same world, or by making all moments properties of the same Self. (DR 67)
- (2) The immediate, defined as "sub-representative", is not therefore attained by multiplying representations and points of view. On the contrary, each composing representation must be distorted, diverted and torn from its centre. Each point of view must itself be the object, or the object must belong to the point of view. (DR 68)
- (3) Difference must become the element, the ultimate unity. (DR 68)

The section of Merleau-Ponty's text which Deleuze is possibly referring to here is his account of the movement from our own perspective on the world to a positing of objective being. Merleau-Ponty writes as follows:

But, once more, my human gaze never *posits* more than one facet of the object, even though by means of horizons it is directed towards all of the others...If I conceive in the image of my own gaze those others which, converging from all directions, explore every corner of the house and define it, I have still only a harmonious and indefinite set of views of the object, but not the object in its plenitude...If it is to reach perfect density, in other words, if there is to be an absolute object, it will have to consist in an infinite number of different perspectives compressed into a single coexistence, and to be presented, as it were, to a host of eyes all engaged in one concerted act of seeing...The positing of the object therefore makes us go beyond the limits of our actual experience which is brought up against and halted by an alien being, with the result that finally experience believes that it

extracts all its own teaching from the object. It is the *ek-stase* of experience which causes all perception to be perception of something.

Obsessed with being, and forgetful of the perspectivism of my experience, I henceforth treat it as an object, and deduce it from a relationship between objects. (PP 69-70)

Merleau-Ponty's point is that perception is always originally from and of a certain perspective. I can never see such a thing as a totalised object. As I move around the object, I begin to notice that although my perspective on the object changes, when I return to my original position, something similar to the original perspective returns. On this basis of the fact that my own memory appears to preserve some perspectives, I posit what Merleau-Ponty calls 'the memory of the world' (PP 70), which includes all possible perspectives on the object. Now, with an understanding of the object based on an infinite number of possible perspectives, my own view ceases to be relevant (I become 'forgetful of the perspectivism of my experience'). I now suppose that rather than the object emerging from the accumulations of perspectives on it, the perspectives are in fact inessential, and logically posterior to the object itself. The last stage in Merleau-Ponty's deduction is to recognise that now the object is not considered to be constituted by perception, we need another explanation of how it is constituted. We thus alight on the idea that it can be deduced 'from a relationship between objects.' This relationship is, of course, the relationship of opposition and limit. At this point, therefore, negation enters our world, as a precondition for limit. This account is therefore the account of the generation of an illusion, which, as Deleuze puts it in the case of species, is well founded. It shows how negation and limit enter the world through representation ignoring its genetic conditions (perspectivalism). How does this then fit in with Deleuze's account?

Such an account fits with Deleuze's characterisation of infinite representation as the convergence of all points of view (quotation 1). Opposition comes into play through the gradual elimination of perspectives. It also fits with Deleuze's desire that each point of view instead be the object, or the object must belong to the point of view. Such a view is a return to a form of perspectivism such as that found in Merleau-Ponty. What about Deleuze's final claim that 'difference must become the element, the ultimate unity'? In the next paragraph, Deleuze claims that 'the intense world of differences, in which we find the reason behind the qualities and the being of the sensible, is precisely the object of a superior empiricism.' (DR 68-9) This suggests that Deleuze's analysis is going to go beyond the kind of perspectivism which Merleau-Ponty proposes. Instead, Deleuze is going to try and explore what makes possible the kind of account Merleau-Ponty gives. Such an account will be what Deleuze calls elsewhere a 'transcendental empiricism', as it will deal with the conditions of real experience. Intensive difference will therefore take the place of identity as being generative of our experience of the world. This means that while Deleuze can accept the phenomenological criticism of the objective understanding of the world, he can also reject phenomenology's own account as not truly explaining the genesis of its own account. Phenomenology rejects the notion that the self-identical object gives coherence to perception, but fails to recognise that perspective itself still needs an explanation, this time in terms of difference. Thus, Deleuze claims that 'the whole of Phenomenology is an epiphenomenology.' (DR 63)

## Conclusion

This opens up the topic of chapter two of *Difference and Repetition*. Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* claims that it is the self-identical object that gives coherence to our different sense-perceptions. The idea is that when I move my head to the left, despite the fact that my perception changes at every point in my visual field, this perception has continuity with the previous moment on the basis that we posit both sets of perceptions as being perceptions of the same object. The self-identical object makes sense-perception possible. If Deleuze is going to get rid of the idea of a self-identical object, a notion which relies on oppositional difference (this and not that), he needs to provide a new account which is instead grounded in difference. Intensive difference will now make the existence of different perspectives possible.