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Lecture Eleven – Kant, the Transcendental Deduction, and Passive Synthesis

We spent last term looking at some of the reasons why Deleuze believes that our understanding of the world needs to be modelled on a concept of difference rather than identity. This week, I want to set up the groundwork for looking at chapter two of *Difference and Repetition*. At the end of last term, we looked briefly at Merleau-Ponty's account of how it is that we develop the notion of a self-identical object as the source of our perceptual experience. Merleau-Ponty claimed that we posit the 'memory of the world' which explains the interrelation of our various perspectives on objects. Once we have a notion of the object from all possible perspectives, our own perspective becomes inessential to our understanding of the object. We then posit a self-identical object as the ground for our perceptions of it. This week, I want to look at one of the most important sections in the history of western philosophy: Kant's transcendental deduction. Here, Kant is concerned with showing how our categories of thought are able to relate to intuition, and through this, how we are able to make judgements about the material world. As such, the transcendental deduction draws together a number of themes which we explored last term: the notion of representation, the subject, judgement, and the relation between these concepts. It also introduces several new notions. Kant's account is premised on an understanding of synthesis is conducted by an agent. If concepts are able to apply to the world, it is because the world is constituted by the subject. Now, it is because synthesis is an activity carried out by a subject, and because this synthesis is carried out by the understanding, that we are able to talk about the world using subject-predicate judgements. Now, if Deleuze is going to move away from an understanding of the world in terms of subjects and properties, then he needs to provide an alternative account of the constitution of the world of objects to that which Kant provides. At the end of the lecture, I want to talk a little about how this alternative conception emerges from recognising that there may be alternative ways of conceiving of the notion of synthesis to that which Kant provides.

The Transcendental Deduction

The transcendental deduction is really the heart of Kant's *First Critique*, and concerns the fundamental question of how judgement is able to be brought into accord with the world. Now, in a sense, this is one of the classical problems that we encounter in both the rationalist and empiricist traditions. As well as Hume's scepticism about causality, Hume also presented a sceptical argument against our knowledge of the external world. How do we know that our internal representations of things accord with the things themselves? Well, the only way to know this for sure would be to compare our representations with the things that they are representations of. But the difficulty is that we can only ever have access to one of the terms of this comparison. We can never therefore know if our knowledge of objects accords with the objects themselves if Hume is correct. In fact, Kant generalises this point:

> Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *a priori* by means of concepts have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge. (CPR B xvi)

What does it mean to say that objects conform to our knowledge of them? Essentially, Kant is going to claim that the reason that we can be sure that our representations of things conform to them is because the same faculties of our minds which produce these representations on another level constitute the objects of those representations. So, for instance, in the first part of the critique of pure reason, Kant attempts to justify our faith in geometry by showing that space must be something that we ourselves impose upon the world. As we organise external objects spatially, we know that geometry, which is the science of this mode of organisation, must necessarily correspond to the structure of the external world.

Now, even though objects conform to our knowledge of them, this does not mean that we have something like a radical idealism. While we may organise what is given to us, there is still a given. Our relation to space and time is essentially receptive, while our cognitive faculties are active. This brings us to the central problem of the critique. We already saw in relation to the argument from incongruous counterparts last term that there was a fundamental difference between sensibility (intuition in Kant's terms) and the understanding (the idea of 'handedness' could not be understood unless we took space to be fundamentally non-conceptual). Deleuze puts the problem as follows:

> We have seen that [Kant] rejected the idea of a pre-established harmony between subject and object; substituting the principle of a necessary submission of the object to the subject itself. But does he not once again come up with the idea of harmony, simply transposed to the level of faculties of the subject which differ in nature? (KCP 19)

In other words, although the fact that we constitute objects and our representations of them allows us to solve Hume's problem of the external world, Kant has introduced a new, internal problem. How can two faculties which are different in kind relate to each other? Kant himself raises this difficulty. He begins by claiming that knowledge involves some kind of synthesis. That is, to make a statement involves bringing together different concepts into a unity. He then notes that 'appearances might very well be so constituted that the understanding should not find them to be in accordance with the conditions of its unity.' (CPR A90/B123) That is, there may be nothing in intuition which the understanding can apply itself to.

Kant's solution to this difficulty involves arguing that conceptual thought plays a necessary role in experience. We can draw a distinction between perception, which simply involves us being presented with appearances, and experience. Kant argues that the difference between perception and experience is that whereas perception simply requires intuition, experience also involves the notion that we experience a world of objects. Now, when we look at our experience of the world, Kant argues that the notion of an object is not directly given in intuition. Rather, our experience of a world made up of things, rather than, for instance, sense-data (although the term sense-data is not really appropriate for Kant) *presupposes* a conception of an object, or object-hood. The question of the deduction can therefore be reformulated as, what is it that allows us to experience a world of objects, rather than simply appearances? The claim that the transcendental deduction makes is that it is the understanding, which is the faculty of concepts (or, as we shall see, rules) which gives us the concept of an object. As such, the understanding plays a necessary role in experience, and the gap between the different faculties has been bridged:

> The question now arises whether *a priori* concepts do not also serve as antecedent conditions under which alone anything can be, if not intuited, yet thought as object in general. In that case all empirical knowledge of objects would necessarily conform to such concepts, because only as thus presupposing them is anything possible as *object of experience*. (CRP A93/B126)

In this lecture, I want to deal with the A-Deduction, which Kant included in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant later claims that this is a *subjective* deduction, as it explains the relation of the categories to intuition in terms of the acts of intuition on the part of the subject. Kant replaces this deduction which a more formal objective deduction in the second edition of the *Critique*. While the argument of the second edition is presented rather differently, the A-deduction allows us to test an important claim that Deleuze will make about Kant, namely that the transcendental merely doubles empirical psychology, and so fails to provide a true explanation of the ground of judgement:

> Kant traces the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical acts of psychological consciousness: the transcendental synthesis of apprehension is directly induced from an empirical apprehension, and so on. In order to hide this all too obvious procedure, Kant suppressed this text in the second edition. Although it is better hidden, the tracing method, with all its "psychologism", nevertheless subsists. (DR 171)

Kant's Three Syntheses of Time

Kant's claim is that experience rests on a threefold synthesis, which in turn requires us to posit a subject and an object, leading us to introduce the categories, as rules which relate to the constitution of objects. So, what are the conditions for experience?

The first condition is that what Kant calls a 'synthesis of apprehension' is performed by intuition, the faculty responsible for giving us the spatial and temporal manifolds that experience takes place in. Now, although everything which we experience in the external world occurs in space, Kant here concentrates on time, as he claims that even non-spatial phenomena, such as mental states occupy a position in time. Thus, if he can ultimately show that the categories are responsible for temporal experience, he will have shown that the categories are responsible for all experience. This condition relates to our understanding of experience as essentially temporal and involving a manifold, or diversity of different moments. Now, in order for us to be able to experience the world, we have to somehow be able to order these experiences. That means that we have to apprehend the different temporal moments of experience as forming a sequence of moments. Without some kind of unifying synthesis of time on our part, all we would encounter is a series of moments without relation to one another. In such a situation, experience would simply be impossible. This first synthesis therefore '[runs] through and [holds] together' (CPR A99) the various moments of time in order to allow us to be presented with a unified temporal framework. It's worth pointing out that even if what is given to us is a well ordered temporal sequence, we still need some kind of synthesis on the part of the subject to take up this temporal sequence and recognise it as well ordered.

In order for the synthesis of apprehension to be possible, we need a further synthesis. The synthesis of apprehension allows us to recognise different moments as belonging to the same temporal sequence. Kant notes that we often make use of these kinds of relations in our

imagination's use of associative principles, particularly in the contraction of habits. So, if we see a pattern, or hear a melody often enough, we come to expect the next sign, or musical note. Now, this is an empirical synthesis on the part of our imagination, to the extent that our particular habits themselves are not conditions for the possibility of experience. The possibility of contracting a habit *does* imply a transcendental synthesis on the part of the subject, however:

> If cinnabar were sometimes red, sometimes black, sometimes light, sometimes heavy, if a man changed sometimes into this, 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. (CPR A100-101)

This synthesis is the synthesis of production in the imagination. If we turn to Kant's example of drawing a line, we can see what this deeper synthesis is. In order for there to be the possibility of associating representations, they have to be in themselves associable. That is, they must have an 'affinity' (A 122) to one another. That is, as well as being brought together, as the first synthesis shows, they must be related to one another in such a way that they have some coherence to each other. If I draw a line in thought, to use Kant's example, it must be the case that I can reproduce the previous moments as being contiguous with the present one in order for the thought to be complete.

This synthesis in turn implies a third synthesis. In order to have experience, we don't just need to have an affinity between different moments of experience, but these different moments of experience need to be related to one another as a unity for consciousness. In the (B) deduction, Kant puts this point as follows:

> It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all our representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that couldn't be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me. (B131-2)

Now, when we think of a process such as listening to a melody, all of the different notes of the melody need to be related to the same consciousness, and recognised as belonging to the same consciousness. Otherwise, we would have a sequence of moments, rather than the unity of a melody. Likewise, the process of counting requires us to recognise that each individual number relates to a unified notion of the total. Otherwise, we would simply have a series of moments. Now, if we think of the process of counting, or listening to a melody, then neither the total nor the melody itself is given as an appearance. If we introspect, then all we have is a series of notes in the latter case, or a procession of numbers in the former.

We can make a similar claim about the relationship between the different moments of our experience of external objects. When we walk around a building, we are given a series of perspectives on it. Now, a condition of seeing these different perspectives as being perspectives of the same building is that I am able to relate them together as being *my* perceptions of the building. Otherwise, we would simply have a series of fragmentary appearances. We can go further than this, and say that without the unity of consciousness we would not just see appearances of different

buildings. We would simply just see a series of appearances without any kind of unity – they wouldn't relate *to* anything.

So material objects unite appearance in the same way that the melody unites the individual notes that relate to it. In a similar way, the notion of a material object is not itself discovered in experience. Rather, it is that which allows a series of appearances to be conceived as forming a unity. Now, this is a key point. Kant has claimed that in order for experience (that is, a relation to the world that gives us knowledge, rather than just sensation or appearances) to be possible, we need to be able to see appearances as belonging to the same subject. Now, in order for this to be the case, they need to exhibit some kind of unity. It is the concept of the object that gives all of these moments of appearance a unity, as it is by seeing all moments of appearance as referring to an underlying object that we are able to unify them. The concept of the object thus makes the unity of consciousness possible.

The Nature of the Transcendental Unity of Apperception and the Transcendental Object

If the self is going to be able to unify experience, then we need to ask what Kant thinks this self is. Earlier on, I said that Kant takes as fundamental that 'I think' must be able to accompany all of our representations. It's a rather obvious fact that most of the time, we do not go around explicitly referring to ourselves ('I see a building', 'I am counting', etc.), but rather we tend to be directly engaged with the world ('there is a building', 'the total is x'). The 'I think' cannot therefore be the foundation of experience, as it is not always present, but is rather a mark that the kind of synthesis which gives unity to our representations has taken place. Similarly, if we introspect, we do not find a self, but rather simply a series of related impressions – 'no fixed and abiding self can present itself in this flux of inner appearances.' (A 107) The situation here is rather like the case of the imagination. The fact that we were able to discover affinities between appearances presupposed a deeper synthesis whereby the imagination produced these affinities. Here it is the case that the 'I think' is made possible by a prior, transcendental synthesis.

This condition which makes possible the 'I think' has what appears to be a faintly paradoxical nature in Kant's account. It is transcendental because it is a condition of the possibility of experience. As such, it doesn't occur in experience itself. This means that it is not something that we can have knowledge of, but something we must presuppose as a foundation for experience. If we return to an earlier distinction Kant made between perception and experience, we can see that the situation is even more extreme. Experience is related to objects that we can make judgements about, rather than perception which just gives us a manifold of appearances. If the transcendental unity of apperception, as Kant calls it, is prior to experience, then it is also not the kind of thing we can make judgements about. While we can say, following Descartes, that 'I think, therefore I am', we cannot say what this 'I am' consists in. Much like with Aristotle, substance is a category, and as the transcendental unity of apperception is supposed to be the ground for our use of the categories, we cannot even judge the self to be a substance. Nevertheless, Kant's deduction shows that we need to posit some such subjective unity if experience is going to be possible.

We can say something similar about the object. It cannot be given in experience, and rather is a condition for the possibility of experience. It is really simply a way of allowing the various

appearances that are given to us to be united in a rule-governed manner. Essentially, it allows appearances to refer to something beyond themselves, and thus, like musical notes that refer beyond themselves to a melody, to form the kind of unity that we need in order to be able to apply the 'I think' to our representations.

The conclusion of this, therefore, is that both a transcendental subject and a transcendental object are necessary for Kant in order for us to move from perception to experience. If these are necessary, then one further question we need to ask is, what makes possible the subject and object?

The Grounds of the Transcendental Unity of Apperception and the Transcendental Object

It turns out that the subject and the object determine each other reciprocally. First, the subject makes the object possible. For representations to stand in relation to objects, it is necessary that the representations themselves have a certain unity. This unity is provided by the transcendental unity of apperception, which allows the 'I think' to accompany all of our representations. As subjects unify representations, they consequently ground the transcendental object, which is simply this formal unity of representations. The subject in turn is grounded by the object, since through the synthetic nature of the manifold it comes to know itself as a subject, and as that which synthesises the manifold. As we have argued, Kant cannot know the self as substantive, since it is not given in intuition, being a bare unity. Therefore, it is necessary for the subject to ground itself through some other means. In this case, the manifold, which is a synthetic unity, gives us this grounding, since it appears as the result of an act of the subject. If the subject were passive in relation to the representations which come before it, the subject would find itself unable to draw apart from those representations. Without the notion of an object, there can be no distinction between a representation and an object, and without this distinction, the subject would be unable to know representations as representations. They would simply "crowd in upon the soul" (*CPR*, A111). The concept of an object allows the subject to recognise representations as representations of the object, and thus to distinguish itself from them. Thus the subject becomes aware of himself through the unification of representations into an object, through his recognition of himself as a spontaneous consciousness. The subject therefore makes the object possible for Kant, and the object makes the subject possible. This means that the subject necessarily relates to something beyond its own empirical representations, to a world of objects, even though the form of these objects must be generated by the subject itself.

The Resolution of Kant's Dilemma

We can now return to our initial question. How does Kant show that the faculties can be related to one another? Well, for experience to be possible, the subject needs to synthesise appearances into objective unities. How is it able to do this? The categories give us the essential characteristics of what it is for something to be an object (to be a substance, to have properties, etc.), and so it makes sense for the categories of the understanding to provide the rules by which the synthesis takes place. Thus we have a situation whereby appearances are synthesised into experience by relating them to the notion of an object, and in order to relate appearances to the notion of an object, we need rules governing objects in general, and these are the categories.

The Interrelation of Judgement, Objectivity, and Synthesis

Kant's account is important because it shows the interrelation between several concepts which we saw Deleuze as opposed to last term. Kant essentially shows that the notions of objecthood, judgement and synthesis are all interconnected. Because we see experience as being about a subject relating to an object, we are forced to invoke the concept of judgement. Now, given that all of these concepts reciprocally imply one another, how can we develop the kind of sub-representational account that Deleuze is looking for? Deleuze's response, as we shall see will centre on the concept of synthesis which is driving this account. As I mentioned earlier, Deleuze's claim is that Kant has essentially taken a psychological account of what it is for the temporal world to emerge from us, and reiterated it at a transcendental level. Now conscious synthesis takes the form of a judgement. When I count, or bring together the moments of a judgement ('the table is red'), it is me who actively relates these representations to one another. In a sense, the spontaneity of my ego is what holds together the passive determinations, 'table' and 'redness'. By using this model, Kant ties the notion of synthesis to the notion of consciousness, and hence any form of synthesis that is not ultimately governed by judgement. Deleuze's approach is therefore going to be to try to provide an alternative account of the synthesis of time which does not rely on this sharp divide between the activity of consciousness and the passivity of the given:

> It is impossible to maintain the Kantian distribution, which amounts to a supreme effort to save the world of representation: here, synthesis is understood as active and as giving rise to a new form of identity in the I, while passivity is understood as simple receptivity without synthesis. (DR 109)

In doing so, he will try to show how our experience is also the result of syntheses which occur prior to consciousness on our part, and hence prior to the imposition of the structure of judgement. Providing an account of this kind is going to be the primary focus of chapter two.