Henry Somers-Hall
Henry.somershall@gmail.com

Lecture 11: The Image of Thought

Chapter three of *Difference and Repetition* has two primary aims. First, Deleuze attempts to show why the traditional model of thinking is incapable of developing a proper philosophy of difference. In the first chapter, Deleuze presents a critique of Aristotle's metaphysics. Now, while it is obviously the case that Aristotle is interested in the structure of thought, Aristotle's approach to understanding the world is essentially empiricist. In this respect, Descartes believed himself to be making a radical break with Aristotelian philosophy by founding philosophy on a doctrine of ideas that are perceived clearly and distinctly by the subject. The subject thus becomes the foundation of philosophy. Much of chapter three aims to show why such an approach also fails to develop an adequate conception of difference. In the process, Deleuze will also begin to develop his own conception of thinking, that he will expand on in chapter four.

In order to frame the question of how one should begin with philosophy, Deleuze introduces an incomplete dialogue written by Descartes, *The Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light*. As is well known, a large part of Descartes' project was to overturn the Scholastic approach to philosophy that derived from Aristotle. The key to his challenge was to develop a new method of enquiry which would allow the philosopher to engage in enquiry without having to rely on the kinds of arguments from authority that were commonplace in the Scholastic tradition. In particular, as we shall see, this approach involves a new theory of definition designed to overcome the limitations of Porphyry's account. While the more famous *Meditations* attempts to demonstrate the power of Descartes' method, the *mathesis universalis* (universal mathematics), *the Search for Truth* instead presents a dialogue between Eudoxus, who represents Descartes, and a scholastic named Epistemon. Descartes presents the situation as follows:

> Let us imagine that Eudoxus, a man of moderate intellect but possessing a judgement which is not corrupted by any false beliefs and a reason which retains all the purity of its nature, is visited in his country home by two friends whose minds are among the most outstanding and inquiring of our time. One of them, Polyander ['everyman'], has never studied at all, while the other, Epistemon, has a detailed knowledge of everything that can be learned in the schools. (ST 401)

Epistemon, the scholastic, declares that 'desire for knowledge...is an illness that cannot be cured.' (402) In making this assertion, Epistemon is putting forward the implicit belief that philosophical inquiry involves an investigation of the world, and hence requires us to make a series of assumptions about the nature of things. As he notes, 'there are so many things to be known which seem to us to be possible and which are not only good and pleasant but also very necessary for the conduct of our actions.' (ST 402) The implications of this statement are that philosophical enquiry is external to reason, as it involves some kind of investigation. It is also the case that it is unsystematic. That is, we cannot connect up different philosophical claims in order to generate further truths. Eudoxus instead declares that '[his] mind, having at its disposal all the truths it comes across, does not dream there are others to discover.' (ST 402) Eudoxus' statement carries with it the implication that for a

well ordered mode of thinking, there is no difference between thinking, and thinking what is true. That is, reason is able to conduct a philosophical inquiry simply by using its own internal resources. This has two further implications. First, that the inferences made by reason, when it is operating correctly, are certain, and second that the meaning of terms which reason uses to think through problems is transparent to reason without further need for investigation.

The difference between these two methods can be seen in that for Epistemon, the role of reason is to act as a corrective to the beliefs given to us by the senses and the imagination. It therefore operates on pre-existing beliefs. For Eudoxus, on the contrary, 'as soon as a man reaches what we call the age of discretion, he should resolve once and for all to remove from his imagination all traces of the imperfect ideas which have been engraved there up till that time.' (ST 406) In order to demonstrate this method, Descartes has Eudoxus propose that Polyander attempt the method of doubt. By doubting everything given by the senses and the imagination, we realise that the only thing that cannot be doubted is one's own existence as a doubting thing. The key question is how we might characterise this doubting thing – what kind of being is it? When we came across this question in relation to Porphyry, we discovered that the answer to the question, what is x? Could be given by its species, which in turn was given by its genus and its difference, in this case, man is a rational animal. Eudoxus here explicitly criticises such an approach on the grounds that it relies on terms that are not given by reason alone, and hence are not transparent to it:

> First, what is an *animal*? Second, what is *rational*? If, in order to explain what an animal is, he were to reply that it is a 'living and sentient being', that a living being is an 'animate body', and that a body is a 'corporeal substance', you see immediately that these questions would be pure verbiage, which would elucidate nothing and leave us in our original state of ignorance. (ST 410)

A term such as 'corporeal substance' does not tell us anything more about the world than a term such as 'body', because if we cannot conceive of the terms corporeal and substance clearly, then conjoining them will not help us to conceive of the term 'body'. So how do we determine the meaning of the 'I' of the cogito? Once Polyander has concluded his exercise in Cartesian doubt, he realises that 'of all the attributes I once claimed as my own there is only one left worth examining, and that is thought.' (ST 415) That is, the I is determined according to an attribute that is clearly conceived by reason itself.

We can now see how Descartes attempts to solve the problem of philosophical beginnings. Descartes rejects the scholastic approach to philosophy because it presupposes a whole nexus of terms which are not given by reason, and which cannot be determined through their systematic relations to one another. To determine what a man is, not only do we have to rely on determinations which are given to us by the senses, but as we proceed in analysing the term, 'man', our enquiry brings in more unknown terms, rather than reducing the number. Descartes therefore rejects the approach of Epistemon in favour of that of Eudoxus. We can already state here a number of the key claims which Descartes makes about the true method of philosophy. First, it accords a 'natural light' to reason whereby it is the arbiter of truth and falsity. Second, as a consequence of this, it operates internally to reason, excluding the effects of the other faculties on it, as it takes these to be capable of misleading reason. Third, it does not presuppose anything, apart from reason itself. We can also note that Descartes makes Polyander, the 'everyman' conduct the method of

doubt, suggesting, as Deleuze notes, that Descartes believes that 'good sense is of all things in the world the most evenly distributed.' (DR 166 and Discourse, opening line) A corollary of this is that Descartes' aim is not to teach metaphysics, but rather to provide an example, which when followed by others, given the universality of reason and the certainty of the deduction, will lead each individual to come to the same conclusion by their own active enquiry ('My present aim, then, is not to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his own reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own.' (Discourse 112) By following a deductive method, Descartes therefore believes he has avoided the difficulty of the kinds of presuppositions at play in Aristotle's method.

In this respect, we can see a parallel between Descartes and Hegel, as both attempt to develop a philosophy that cannot be criticised for importing external presuppositions. Thus, Descartes' *cogito* argument rests on a proposition that cannot be denied without contradiction, that I, a thinking thing, exist. Hegel similarly begins his *Science of Logic* with the concept of pure being. Hegel claims that:

> the beginning must be an absolute, or what is synonymous here, an abstract beginning; and so it may not presuppose anything, must not be mediated by anything nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science. (SL 70/1: 68–9 [175])

It is only by avoiding all presuppositions that Hegel believes that we can develop an absolute system of philosophy which does not simply provide an alternative to other systems with different assumptions. That is, by not taking for granted anything at the beginning of our enquiry, we avoid the partialities found in most philosophical systems. As we saw last term, Hegel's claim is that the meaning of philosophical concepts develops immanently as the contradictions inherent in inadequate concepts resolve themselves. As Deleuze notes, Hegel rejects Descartes' starting point, the ego, as it contains an equivocation. While Descartes assumes that we should begin with the ego as 'the simple certainty of its own self,' (SL 76) the ego we actually experience is full of content and perceptions. Descartes thus fails to reach a purely presuppositionless position, and illicitly incorporates the prejudices of the subjective ego, 'whose limitations should be forgotten' (SL 76) into the abstract starting point of the Cartesian project. Hegel instead claims that rather than beginning with the notion of 'I am', we should begin with the notion of pure, immediate being as an absolutely contentless and indeterminate notion. Hegel's criticism is in effect that Descartes has failed to get rid of all presuppositions, but given Deleuze's claim that both Descartes and Hegel are vulnerable to the same criticism, the claim cannot be that both have presupposed certain assumptions from which they reason. Rather, Deleuze's criticism is of 'the form of recognition or representation in general.' (DR 166) Thus, while much of chapter three is framed in terms of the project of Descartes, Hegel is very much in the background. In this respect, Deleuze's brief references to Feuerbach are integral to a proper understanding of Deleuze's criticisms.

Deleuze claims that 'Feuerbach is among those who have pursued furthest the problem of where to begin.' (DR 209) Ludwig Feuerbach was a part of the Young Hegelian movement which emerged after the death of Hegel, a movement which interpreted the Hegelian project as revealing the essential nature of freedom and reason to history, and which sought to draw the radical conclusions of this aspect of Hegel's philosophy. The essay that Deleuze refers to, *Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy*, represents a radical break on Feuerbach's part from Hegel, in which

Feuerbach defends the claims of sensuous consciousness against those of reason. Feuerbach presents three interrelated criticisms of Hegel in this essay, all of which are taken up by Deleuze, and applied to the use of reason in philosophy as a whole. These are that presuppositionlessness usually simply means that the presuppositions of prior philosophies have been removed, that rather that presenting a philosophy of reason, we only attain an image of reason, and that reason emerges through an abstraction from its conditions. I now want to go through what Feuerbach's criticisms are, and how they tie into Deleuze's notion of an image of thought, before turning to Deleuze's criticisms of Feuerbach's view.

To understand Feuerbach's criticism of traditional philosophy, we need to look at what Feuerbach thinks philosophy is attempting to do. We can begin by noting that thinking is an activity: 'Plato is meaningless and non-existent for someone who lacks understanding; he is a blank sheet for one who cannot link ideas that correspond with his words.' (TCHP 102) Feuerbach's point is that a philosophical argument is not of value in itself, but only insofar as it is taken up by the understanding of the person to whom it is addressed. That is why in Descartes' *Search for Truth*, Eudoxus does not present e argument for the cogito, but rather leads Polyander to discover the conclusion through his own reasoning. Similarly, in the *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes claims that his aim is not 'to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own.' (Discourse 112) Implicit in this is the view that philosophy is not about demonstration, but rather about communication, with the aim to simply show that the ideas presented are in keeping with my own thought. Feurbach describes the situation as follows:

> For this very reason, what the person demonstrating communicates is not the *subject matter itself*, but only the medium; for he does not instil his thoughts into me like drops of medicine, nor does he preach to deaf fishes like Saint Francis; rather, he addresses himself to *thinking* beings. The main thing – the understanding of the thing involved – he does not give me; he *gives* nothing at all – otherwise the philosopher could really produce philosophers, something which so far no one has succeeded in achieving. Rather he presupposes the faculty of understanding; he shows me – i.e. to the other person as such – my understanding only in a mirror. (TCHP 105)

If a philosophical text is primarily a means of communication, rather than a demonstration in its own right, then the question arises, under what conditions is thought able to be communicated?

In order make my thinking comprehensible to another, the first point is that I need to 'strip my thought of the form of "mine-ness" so that the other person may recognise it as his own.' (TCHP 104). In effect, in putting thinking into language, we eliminate the thinker's 'individual separateness', and present a form of thinking which is 'nothing other than the *realization of the species*.' (TCHP 103) That is, philosophical thought abstracts from the particularity of my thinking, and operates by presupposing that which is universal to all thinkers. As Deleuze puts it, '*Everybody knows, no one can deny*, is the form of representation and the discourse of the representative.' (DR 165) The second point is that in order to present our thoughts, they must be reformulated in a form that is capable of presentation:

> And yet, systematic thought is by no means the same as *thought as such*, or *essential* thought; it is only self-*presenting* thought. To the extent that I present my thoughts, I place

> them in time; an insight that contains all its successive elements within a simultaneity within my mind now becomes a sequence. (THCP, 101)

As it stands, Feuerbach has simply noted that there is a fundamental distinction between thought and the presentation of thought. This in itself is not a criticism of prior philosophy, but the difficulties emerge when philosophers become to a form of paralogism whereby they mistake the successive, abstract presentation of thinking for thinking itself. This happens quite naturally, since the way in which we present thinking in a systematic manner is not arbitrary, as 'the presentation of philosophy must itself be philosophical.' (TCHP 106) There is thus a tendency to make 'form into essence, the being of thought for others into being itself, the *relative goal* into the final goal.' (TCHP 107) This is the reason why Deleuze writes that Hegel 'remains within the reflected element of "representation", within simple generality.' (DR 11) Deleuze supplements this paralogism with an argument that there is a moral element to systems that mistake the presentation of thought for thought itself, in that to trust in the structure of thinking as communicative implies a fundamental accord between man and the world, and presupposes the belief that 'thought has a good nature and the thinker a good will.' (DR 167)

Feuerbach's claim that 'every system is only an expression or image of reason' (TCHP 106) can be seen as a forerunner of Deleuze's own claim that representational thinking rests on an 'image of thought,' and the aim of chapter three of *Difference and Repetition* is to explore in more detail what this image consists in, and how it is possible to think outside of it. To conclude this account, I just want to explore a number of implications of the image of thought before looking at how Deleuze differs from Feuerbach.

The first implication is that even projects such as those of Descartes and Hegel that attempt to remove all objective presuppositions still make a number of presuppositions in order to operate. As Deleuze notes, (164) the same criticism that can be raised against Descartes, the equivocation of the empirical and abstract egos, can also be raised against Hegel: both begin with an abstraction. While the notion of pure, indeterminate being is communicable, this is only because communication removes the "mine-ness" of my relation to the world. In actual fact, 'sensible, concrete, empirical being' (DR 164) is prior to the abstraction which Hegel takes as a beginning. As well as presupposing empirical reality, philosophy which operates according to the image of thought also presupposes the structure of presentation itself. That is, 'we presuppose the form of representation or recognition in general.' (DR 166) As Feuerbach puts it, 'the artist presupposes a sense of beauty – he cannot bestow it upon a person – for in order that we take his words to be beautiful, in order that we accept and countenance them at all, he must presuppose in us a sense of art...[Similarly] in order that we recognise [the philosopher's] thoughts as true, in order that we understand them at all, he presupposes reason, as a common principle and measure in us as well as himself.' (TCHP, 103) The history of philosophy can from this perspective be seen, not as a progressive extension of our knowledge of the world, but rather as series of more and more accurate ways of systematically providing an image of the presentation of reason. In this respect, Feuerbach considers Hegel not to have provided the final, presuppositionless, metaphysics, but rather the most accomplished image of reason:

> The systematiser is an artist – the history of philosophical system is the picture gallery of reason. Hegel is the most accomplished philosophical artist, and his presentations, at least in part, *are unsurpassed models of scientific art sense* (TCHP 106)

The second implication is that if philosophy simply maps out the image of thought in systematic terms, then it will be incapable of novelty. As Feuerbach puts it, 'the *creation* of concepts on the basis of a particular kind of philosophy is not a real but only a formal creation; it is not creation out of nothing, but only the development, as it were, of a spiritual matter lying within me.' (TCHP 102) As we are just dealing with the presentation of what was already implicated in the structure of pre-philosophical thinking, than we have a philosophical thought that '"rediscovers" the State, "rediscovers" the Church' (DR 172) during its development.

The third implication is that philosophy must begin with something that is outside of thought. In *The Search for Truth*, Descartes tries to show that if one thinks through the structure of everyday reason, then one arrives at philosophy. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* likewise tries to show that speculative philosophy develops immanently from a common sense worldview. In contrast, if systematic philosophy is simply an expression of pre-philosophical reason, Deleuze argues that philosophy must 'find its difference or its true beginning, not in an agreement with a *pre-philosophical* Image but in a rigorous struggle against this Image, which it would denounce as *non-philosophical*.' (DR 167) Here, Deleuze is referring directly to Feuerbach's rejection of reason as a foundation for philosophy. In contrast to the Cartesian account, philosophy must begin with a radical encounter with something outside of it:

> Demonstrating would be senseless if it were not also *communicating*. However, communication of thoughts is not material or *real* communication. For example, a push, a sound that shocks my ears, or light is real communication. I am only passively receptive to that which is material; but I become aware of that which is mental only through myself, only through self-activity. (TCHP 105)

As we shall see, a similar claim can also be made for Deleuze's philosophy, which calls for a 'shock to thought' in order to open it to an outside.

What, therefore, is the difference between Deleuze and Feuerbach? While Deleuze's concept of the image of thought is prefigured by Feuerbach, the difference between them emerges when we consider what it is that we encounter that provides a beginning to philosophy. For Feuerbach, true thinking begins through an encounter with sensuous intuition, which is prior to the abstractions that generate the 'mediating activity of thought for others.' (TCHP 102) Here we have something like the Kantian opposition between active synthesis and passive sensibility that Deleue develops in chapter two of *Difference and Repetition*. For Kant, the understanding was responsible for active synthesis, and therefore organised the world according to its own categories. The active, synthetic nature of the understanding meant that it rediscovered on an empirical what it had previously put into the world on a transcendental level. In this sense, we can note that for Kant too, the understanding is incapable of the discovery of genuine novelty. Sensibility provided the material that was organised by the understanding. As we saw, Deleuze accused Kant of assuming that all synthesis was active synthesis, and we can see a similar assumption is being made here by Feuerbach. In rejecting the active element of reason as unable to provide a genuinely novel beginning to philosophy, he is forced to resort to a purely passive notion of sensibility for his

alternative beginning. Therefore, we move from reason to that which is materially given to us. As Deleuze puts it, 'he supposes that this exigency of a true beginning is sufficiently met by beginning with empirical, perceptible and concrete being.' (DR 209) Once we have recognised the possibility of a passive synthesis, however, we open the possibility that what is given in sensibility is not the sensible itself, but that which gives rise to the sensible. It is this transcendental which is prior to the sensible that will be the site of an encounter for Deleuze. In order to explore how thought is able to operate outside of the image of thought provided by representation, Deleuze proposes to spend the rest of chapter three analysing in more detail how the image of thought operates, in order to develop in parallel and alternative account of imageless thought.