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The History of the Image of Thought I: Descartes and Kant

What, therefore is the structure of thinking? Deleuze argues that there are eight postulates of representational thought which together allow it to function as a coherent system. These are listed on page 207 of *Difference and Repetition*:

> We have listed eight postulates, each in two forms: (1) the postulate of the principle, or the Cogitatio natura universalis (good will of the thinker and good nature of thought); (2) the postulate of the ideal, or common sense (common sense as the concordia facultatum and good sense as the distribution which guarantees this concord); (3) the postulate of the model, or of recognition (recognition inviting all the faculties to exercise themselves upon an object supposedly the same, and the consequent possibility of error in the distribution when one faculty confuses one of its objects with a different object of another faculty); (4) the postulate of the element, or of representation (when difference is subordinated to the complementary dimensions of the Same and the Similar, the Analogous and the Opposed); (5) the postulate of the negative, or of error (in which error expresses everything which can go wrong in thought, but only as the product of external mechanisms); (6) the postulate of logical function, or the proposition (designation is taken to be the locus of truth, sense being no more than the neutralised double or the infinite doubling of the proposition); (7) the postulate of modality, or solutions (problems being materially traced from propositions or, indeed, formally defined by the possibility of their being solved); (8) the postulate of the end, or result, the postulate of knowledge (the subordination of learning to knowledge, and of culture to method). Each postulate has two forms, because they are both natural and philosophical, appearing once in the arbitrariness of examples, once in the presuppositions of the essence. (DR 207)

As we saw last week, Descartes argues that philosophy emerges through the critical self-examination of our thought. In this sense, Deleuze's account of the image of thought operates on two levels. On the one hand, he is concerned with the subjective presuppositions inherent in prior philosophical systems. On the other, his concern is with the implicit assumptions of everyday thinking that allow such formal philosophical structures to be traced out of it. Each of the postulates will therefore have a double structure. We have already seen the first of these, which is the *'cogitatio natura universalis*', the presumption which emerges from a paralogism that the structure of systematic thought is such that it is in accordance with knowledge. The double nature of this postulate is clear in that both Polyander (Everyman) and Eudoxus (sound judgement) both held to it. Thought therefore relies on a good will on the part of the thinker, and a good will on the part of thought itself. We can see this double aspect of good will operating in Descartes' *Meditations*. Here, although our knowledge of the world is ultimately guaranteed by God, we only have knowledge of God on the basis of the fact that we can clearly and distinctly conceive of him. 'I now seem to be able to lay down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.' (Meditations, 24) As we saw last week, Feuerbach's claim was that such an account is really an account of the structures of communication, rather than of being.

Feuerbach's claim was that thinking originates with an encounter, and Deleuze supports this claim. At first glance, it appears obvious that all philosophy deals with that which is beyond thought; that is, philosophy seeks to explain, justify and extend our knowledge of the world. This is particularly clear in the case of Descartes, for whom the *Meditations* are not supposed to be read simply as an account of the nature of God and the self, but also to provide an example of his method, and lay the foundations for, Descartes' own account of the natural world. Deleuze's central claim is that while it may appear that an encounter is possible, in actual fact, this possibility is forestalled by the structures of representation. In order to see why this is the case, we need to bring in three more of Deleuze's postulates of the image of thought, and see how they operate in a key section of the *Meditations.* These postulates are 'the postulate of the ideal, or common sense', 'the postulate of the model, or recognition', and 'the postulate of the element or representation.' (DR 207). The section I want to look at is the account of the piece of wax towards the end of the second meditation. Here, Descartes attempts to reinforce his privileging to the *cogito* by showing that material objects are not as well known as the self. Descartes gives us the following example:

> Let us take, for example, this piece of wax. It has just been taken from the honeycomb; it has not quite yet lost the taste of honey; it retains some of the scent of the flowers from which it was gathered; its colour, shape and size are plain to see; it is hard, cold, and can be handled without difficulty; if you rap it with your knuckles, it makes a sound. In short, it has everything which appears necessary for a body to be known as distinctly as possible. But even as I speak, I put the wax by the fire, and look: the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, and the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound. But does the same wax remain? It must be admitted that it does; no one denies it, no one thinks otherwise. So what was it in the wax that I understood with such distinctness? Evidently none of the features which I arrived at by means of the senses; for whatever came under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing has now altered – yet the wax remains. (Meditations 20)

Descartes' immediate point in introducing this claim is that while we might claim that the objects we find around us are more immediately known to us than our own ego, in fact we do not perceive *objects* at all, as is made clear by the fact that all of the perceivable properties of a piece of wax can change while we still continue to see it as the same piece of wax. If it isn't perception that gives unity to objects, then what is it? Descartes continues his analysis by bringing in the following example:

> But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that they are men. And so something I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind. (Meditations 21)

In this sense, it is the subject that is responsible for unifying the various properties of the object into a coherent object, since the possibility of error shows that the object is not given to us as such. For this reason, even when we are dealing with object outside of the subject, we are still in a position whereby we only recognise them as objects insofar as they are brought together by the thinking subject into a unity under the form of an object. Thus in this case too, therefore, we can note that we are in a position whereby what is perceived (or what we take to be important in what is

perceived) is a function of reason itself. The faculty of the subject that is responsible for unifying the different sense modalities of the subject by relating them to the structure of an object is, for Descartes, common sense, or *sensus communis*. If we look at the example of misrecognition, we can say that what leads us to posit the hats and coats as men is the fact that different sense impressions are all in accordance. This accord leads us to misrecognise them as properties of people. As Deleuze notes, therefore, the concepts of common sense and recognition are intimately linked:

> An object is recognised, however, when one faculty locates it as identical to that of another, or rather when all the faculties together relate their given and relate themselves to a form of identity in the object. (DR 169)

Common sense in fact refers to two kinds of commonality. On the one hand, it allows different sense modalities to be related to one another, and brought together into a judgement. On this reading, it literally presents what is common to the senses. On the other hand, it also intimately linked with the 'everybody knows' which was the first postulate of the image of thought. If we return to the work of Merleau-Ponty which we looked at last term, we can see that the fact that consciousness is 'forgetful of the perspectivism of my experience' (PP 70) in positing objects as the source of my perceptions allows the kind of objective world that makes objective knowledge, and hence communication, possible. Referring directly to Descartes' account in the second meditation of the central role of judgement to perception, Merleau-Ponty writes that, 'like the object, the idea purports to be the same for everybody, valid in all times and places, and the individuation of an object in an objective point of time and space finally appears as the expression of a universal positing power...I now refer to my body only as an idea, to the universe as idea, to the idea of space and the idea of time. Thus "objective" thought (in Kierkegaard's sense) is formed – being that of common sense and science – which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience, of which it is nevertheless the outcome and natural sequel.' (PP 70)

At this point, it's worth noting again Deleuze's distinction between two forms of sense, and how this functions in chapter three. The first, common sense provides us with the formal nature of a unified subject to which the various impressions given by the senses correspond. As such, it functions like an underlying substance by which the various aspects of the object can be conjoined to one another. As such, while common sense is a function of the subject, it is what gives rise to the world of objects that we find ourselves surrounded by. Good sense, on the contrary is how we actually carve up the world. It provides the kind of taxonomy we found in Aristotle's hierarchy of species. Thus, common sense is operative in both reality and in dream states, as in both we see worlds that are constituted by objects. To mistake a dream for reality would be a failure of good sense, however, as this would be to illegitimately apply the model of common sense in a given case. As we shall see, often, when we encounter something that cannot be incorporated into this model, often we claim that what is responsible is a failure of good sense that preserves the functioning of common sense. This is what occurs in cases of misrecognition, for instance, where what is perceived is still an object (common sense), but we fail to properly place it in our taxonomy of the world (we take the coat to be a person in Descartes' example).

The postulates of the good nature of thought, common sense, and recognition therefore operate together in order to guarantee that philosophy only produces a restricted vision of the world. The good nature of thought guarantees the communicability of philosophy through a

paralogic confusion of the nature of thought and the conditions for the expression of thought. Common sense forces an understanding of the world in terms of unified subjects, whose faculties are in (or at least can be brought into) accord with one another, and recognition posits a world of objects as a correlate to the unified view of the subject. Deleuze's claim is that while each philosophy puts these assumptions into operation in different ways ('No doubt philosophy refuses every particular *doxa* [popular opinion]; no doubt it upholds no particular propositions of good sense or common sense.' [DR 170]), the essential features of the image of thought that they constitute are at play in the major tradition of philosophy. In each case, our knowledge of the world is defined in terms of structures that are internal to the philosophers. Thus, there is no possibility of a genuine encounter of such a kind as Feuerbach took to be the real root of philosophy. Rather, we always already encounter an object that is at least amenable to the structure of thought. In order to show that this model is also at work in other philosophers, he provides three models of common sense. We have just been discussing Descartes' notion of common sense, and I now want to turn to the second model of common sense that Deleuze considers, that of Kant.

Kant

In this lecture, I just want to explore Deleuze's diagnosis of the operation of the image of thought in Kant's transcendental idealism, as well as to introduce a fourth postulate of the image of thought, the postulate of representation. Deleuze once again presents an ambivalent relationship to Kant, claiming that he 'seemed equipped to overturn the image of thought.' (DR 172) I want to come back to the positive (in Deleuze's eyes) aspects of Kant's position in more detail when I discuss the notion of error later in this term, but for now, we can note that Kant does not claim as Descartes does that thinking is naturally commensurate with things in themselves. Rather, his philosophical approach appears to be governed by the claim that this view is responsible for the failure of philosophy. Instead of natural harmony, we have to see thinking as constitutive of the objects we perceive:

> 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)

Instead, objects are always given in an intuition of space or time that is a faculty of the subject:

> Intuition and concepts constitute, therefore, the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither concepts without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuitions without concepts, can yield knowledge. (CPR A50/B74)

These two claims lead to the fact that reason no longer has a 'natural right' to correspond to objects, and also to the claim that we will explore later that if reason operates without reference to intuition, then it generates what Kant calls 'transcendental illusions.' In this respect, Kant is opposed to the Cartesian view that the faculty of reason is, when operating in accordance with its own interests and without the negative influence of the other faculties, free from error. Rather than to renounce the image of thought, however, Deleuze claims that Kant simply attempts to determine the bounds of reason, and to delimit its sphere of legitimate employment. In the preface to the *Critique of Pure*

Reason, Kant puts proclaims 'a call to reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will institute to reason its lawful claims , and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws.' (CPR Axi-xii) For this reason, Deleuze claims that Kant's critique 'at most amounts to giving civil rights to thought considered from the point of view of its *natural law*.' (DR 173) In attempting to show that the object conforms to our forms of cognition, Kant's project can be seen as a radical attempt to formulate a coherent image of thought, with the core of the *Critique* concerning itself with the problem of common sense. While objects may conform to our sensibility, concepts and intuition are different in kind, as the incongruent counterparts argument shows. The central problem of the transcendental deduction can be interpreted along these lines as determining how a common sense can exist between faculties that differ in kind in this way.

The transcendental deduction solves this problem as each of the faculties plays a role in meeting the conditions of possible experience. The procedure involved three syntheses. First, the manifold is 'run through' by the faculty of intuition. In order for it to appear as connected, however, these connections need to be taken up by the imagination, as we need to not simply reproduce past moments, but also to recognise them as reproduced. Finally, to provide coherence to these various moments, they need to be seen as moments related to the same object. This final stage therefore relies on a conceptual determination of the experience as the successive presentation of the same object. The transcendental deduction therefore provides Kant's own model of the first three postulates of the image of thought. The good nature of thought is maintained, albeit only when thinking is related to a manifold of intuition. Kant claims that 'It must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all our representations.' (CPR B131-2) As Kant noted, however, it is not necessary for the 'I think' to always accompany our representations, and we often just find ourselves preoccupied with the world without any explicit reference to ourselves. In fact, for Kant, common sense is not this 'I think', which is rather a result of the operation of common sense at a transcendental level. Common sense is therefore provided by the transcendental unity of apperception. In this sense, Kant differs from Descartes in that for Descartes, common sense is provided by the cogito, whereas for Kant, since the transcendental unity of apperception precedes experience to make it possible, we have what Deleuze calls a 'logical common sense' (DR 173) that makes possible the analytical unity of the 'I think'. We can further note that whereas Descartes proceeds from the axiom of the cogito to common sense, and the recognition of the object through judgement, for Kant, common sense, and the notion of the object presuppose one another. Thus, as we saw, Kant claims that the subject can only recognise itself as a self if it is able to distinguish itself from its representations. This in turn is only possible if those representations are taken as referring beyond themselves to the object. But the notion of an object is in turn only possible as the result of the synthetic activity of the subject: 'it is the unity of consciousness that alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object.' (CPR B137) Deleuze therefore claims that what Kant has really provided is a corrective to Descartes' project:

> Therefore the real (synthetic) formula of the *cogito* is: I think myself and in thinking myself, I think the object in general to which I relate a represented diversity. (KCP 14)

We can now bring in the fourth postulate of the image of thought: representation. We have already encountered representation in chapter one of *Difference and Repetition*, there representation was related to Aristotle's logic. There, Deleuze claimed that:

> There are four principal "aspects" to reason, in so far as it is the medium of representation: identity in the form of the *undetermined* concept; analogy, in the relationship between ultimate *determinable* concepts; opposition, in the relations between *determinations* within concepts; resemblance, in the *determined* object of the concept itself. (DR 37)

These four 'shackles' of representation mapped on to Aristotle's taxonomy of species and genera in the following way. In order to distinguish two species of objects from one another, they needed to form a common genus, as without a common identity, they would simply be two other to be related. This meant that difference for Aristotle was conceived in terms of opposition – we divided each genus into two species according to whether they had a particular property or did not. Analogy was introduced in order to deal with the highest point in the hierarchy of species and genera, as if a concept can only be determined in terms of a higher identity, then we need some way to deal with the highest point in the hierarchy. Finally, resemblance was needed because properties are not instantiated in different members of a species in the same way. The red of a carpet has a different texture to the red of a piece of paper. These concepts are also necessary in order to allow recognition to function. These can be mapped on to the various moments of the transcendental deduction as follows. First, in order to have experience, we need to relate our different representations to a central unity (the identity of the object in the synthesis of recognition). This in turn relies on an analogy between the rules governing our knowledge of objects and the rules governing the structure of objects themselves (the schematism). Now, in order for these various moments to be related together into a unity, they must have some kind of affinity with one another. This affinity requires that the same properties obtain in the object now and at some moment in the past (if cinnabar were not always red, 'my empirical imagination would never find opportunity when representing red colour to bring to mind heavy cinnabar.' [CPR A100-101]). In order to determine whether a present object is an instance of a type, we therefore need the notion of opposition (red/not-red). Finally, in order to recognise this affinity, we need to be able to determine whether the object presented by a memory and the object presented by perception have *the same* property. As we are dealing with different representations, this is achieved by a comparison as to whether the representations resemble one another. Thus in order for recognition to function, we require the structures of representation to provide the machinery for recognising that we are dealing with the same object, through the diversity of perceptual experience. We can note further that apart from the identity of the transcendental unity of apperception, which is the fulcrum of Kant's theory of common sense for Deleuze, each of the other operations operates between faculties (so, for instance, resemblance is a resemblance between representations given to the imagination and intuition), and so provide the notion of communicability between faculties which is the foundation of common sense.

Conclusion

So, as we see, both Kant and Descartes ultimately understand the world in terms of common sense, and by doing so, close down the possibility of an encounter that would provide the kind of shock to thought Deleuze takes as necessary for proper thinking. Instead, 'according to this image, thought has an affinity with the true; it formally possesses the true and materially wants the true.' (DR 167) Next week, we will look at how this image of thought operates in Plato's philosophy. Once again, Deleuze's relationship with Plato will be ambivalent. Plato recognises the importance of the

encounter. This encounter, rather than freeing us from the image of thought, in a certain sense reinforces it, however.