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Lecture 13: History of the Image of Thought Part II: Plato

Plato (175-183)

We have already seen Deleuze introduce Plato in the previous two chapters, and once again, he plays a major role in Deleuze's exposition, this time of the image of thought. As we have seen, Deleuze's claim is that we need to reverse, or invert, Platonism, and so the account Deleuze gives of Plato at this point will show the basic structure of Deleuze's own position while also providing a critique of Plato's. Deleuze's account of Plato revolves around several questions concerning what the object of knowledge is, and how the relations between the different faculties operate. We have already seen that for Feuerbach, thinking begins through an encounter with something that is outside of thought. As Deleuze notes, Plato has Socrates also put forward this position in the *Republic*, claiming that 'some reports of our perceptions does not provoke thought to reconsideration because the judgement of them by sensation seems adequate, while others always invite the intellect to reflection because sensation yields nothing that can be trusted.' (DR 175) This untrustworthiness of sensations does not, for Plato, simply lead to scepticism, but to a thought which moves beyond actual experience. As we shall see, in this regard, Plato's theory of knowledge appears to mirror Deleuze's own, with anamnesis, or recollection, playing a similar role for Plato as pure memory does for Deleuze and Bergson. In particular, Plato plays an important role in providing an alternative to the model of common sense we discovered in Descartes. Rather than each of the faculties converging on the same object, Plato argues that in order to make a judgement, different faculties must simultaneously relate to different objects. To jump ahead a bit, Plato's claim is that knowledge relies on a reference to the atemporal realm of the forms even when it is knowledge that ostensibly deals with the sensible world. Discussion of Plato in chapter three moves between three Socratic dialogues: *The Meno*, *the Phaedo*, and *The Republic*. His primary concern is with Plato's account of knowledge, and corresponding to this, his account of the faculties. In order to structure Deleuze's account of Plato, I want to organise it around three questions. First, what is the encounter with sensation that provokes thought? Second, what is the nature of the thinking that is provoked by the encounter? And third, what is the relationship between the faculties that becomes apparent in this account of thinking? To these questions, I want to add a final question to address why Deleuze ultimately rejects Plato account, namely, why does Plato, in the end, sustain the image of thought?

So first, what is the encounter that provokes thought? Deleuze begins his discussion of Plato with Socrates' claim that some perceptions summon the understanding to look into them. As Deleuze notes, Socrates does not mean by this those cases where our perceptions of the world do not give us certainty about their objects. He is not interested in those cases where *in fact* there is a limitation on our ability to recognise object, but rather on *in principle* objections to perception. His claim will be that some properties are also their opposites, and it is these that lead us to think. Socrates presents the contrast that he is seeking to develop with the following cases:

> The ones that don't summon the understanding are all those that don't go off into opposite perceptions at the same time. But the ones that do go off in that way I call summoners—whenever sense perception doesn't declare one thing any more than its opposite, no matter whether the object striking the senses is near at hand or far away. You'll understand my meaning better if I put it this way: These, we say, are three fingers—the smallest, the second, and the middle finger. (Republic 523b-c)

Now, to begin with the notion of the 'non-summoners,' those perceptions that do not lead us to think, we can note that the notion of a finger is straightforward. It is only under situations of de facto

perceptual difficulties that we might doubt that a finger is actually a finger. In contrast to this, Socrates argues that if we look, for instance, at the length of the finger, we will find that it is long or short depending on what we are contrasting that length with. These properties are relative properties that depend on other features of the world (other fingers) for their determination. As such, we cannot, even in perfect perceptual conditions, determine whether something is short or long, as it will have both properties, depending on what we compare it to. Similarly, four is both double two and half of eight. Plato also has Socrates argue that this feature of the sensible, that objects have contrary properties, emerges because the world contains objects that 'comes into being and passes away.' (527b) In this respect, even properties that are not necessarily relative, such as beauty, will at some moments apply to an object and at some moment no longer apply. Thinking therefore emerges because of an inherent feature of the object: the contradictory status of the properties which we find within it. When the soul encounters an object of this kind, it 'would then be puzzled, would look for an answer, would stir up its understanding, and would ask what the one [object] itself is.' (524e) While at base, what is encountered is the fact that in the sensory world, things can have contrary properties, as Deleuze notes, the encounter does not have to be with these properties themselves. Socrates himself can be the site of the kind of encounter that leads to thinking. The senses themselves, therefore, 'summon' a form of thinking that does not relate to the sensible, or even to the object that is under the consideration of the sensible. In order to answer the question of what thinking is, Deleuze turns to Plato's account of anamnesis in the *Phaedo*.

Second, what is the nature of the thinking that is provoked by the encounter? The *Phaedo* chronicles the last few hours of Socrates' life. Socrates seeks to assuage his friends fears about his impending death by showing that the philosopher in fact is grateful for death, and its concomitant separation of the soul from the body, 'because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it.' (Phaedo 66a) Much of the dialogue therefore deals with the question of the immortality of the soul itself, as Socrates needs to show that the soul outlasts the body. Our concern will not be so much with this doctrine, but instead with the doctrine of the Forms, and the related doctrine of anamnesis. To begin with, we can note that there is an extension of the critique of the sensible in the *Phaedo*. Whereas, at least from Deleuze's perspective, the interest in the *Republic* was in the claim that thinking begins with an encounter, once we begin to examine the nature of sense perception more carefully, we discover that in itself, it is unable to explain our knowledge of the world. Once the paradoxes of sense perception open us up to this point, we can begin to note that sense perception is reliant on another element which is not itself given to sense perception. If we consider a notion such as equality, we can note that two sticks can appear to be equal in length, or two stones to be equal in size. We can further note that in different circumstances, the length and size of these sets of objects may appear to be unequal. In these cases, we therefore become aware that objects that are equal are not themselves the source of our notion of the Equal, as we think that the Equal itself must always be equal to itself. We might strengthen the argument by noting that other properties that we encounter in the world, such as justice, or beauty, are not encountered in objects that are purely just, or purely beautiful. Rather, as the world is an imperfect place, these objects amenable to sensation are always deficient cases of justice or beauty. 'Our sense perceptions must surely make us realize that all that we perceive through them is striving to reach that which is Equal but falls short of it.' (75b) The implication of this is that as well as the deficient sensory impression of equal or beautiful objects, we are also given by these sensory impressions another object, namely that in relation to which the object is seen to be deficient. Socrates does not take this object to be an ideal sensory object, but rather different in kind. It is for this reason that he is dismissive of answers to questions such as 'what is beauty?' or 'what is justice?' in earlier dialogues that define them in terms of empirical objects. At this point, there are two questions we need to address. First, how do we gain access to the Forms, and second, what is the nature of the Forms?

In order to experience 'equal' objects as falling short of the true idea of the equal, or for beautiful objects to fall short of the beautiful, then we need, according to Socrates, to have a prior notion of what the Equal or Beauty themselves are. In order to explain how these two different classes of objects are related, Socrates introduces the example of the lover:

Well, you know what happens to lovers: whenever they see a lyre, a garment or anything else that their beloved is accustomed to use, they know the lyre, and the image of the boy to whom it belongs comes into their mind. (73d)

Thus, on perceiving the imperfect sensory object, the Form of the object is called to mind. As Socrates notes, this kind of relation between the lyre and the boy is one of recollection. In this case, the recollection is one of a prior moment of sensory experience, as while different, the boy and the lyre are both objects that can be apprehended in the world. In the case of the Equal, however, it is never something that we can experience in the world, as it is presupposed by all cases of experience. In this case, therefore, Socrates argues that the recollection must be a recollection of the soul of a time before it became attached to the body, and thus capable of experiencing the sensory world. In this sense, therefore, knowledge of the essence of equality or beauty, that is, knowledge of the forms themselves, must be the recollection of an experience of the Forms, rather than some kind of extrapolation. What will interest Deleuze in this case, therefore, is that we do not have a 'common sense', but rather we have a transmission between two faculties, each of which has an object that is different in kind from the other. Now that Socrates has argued that the soul pre-exists its union with the body, all that is needed is one further premise, the claim that things are generated from their opposites, in order to make the claim that souls also survive the destruction of the body:

If the two processes of becoming did not always balance each other as if they were going round in a circle, but generation proceeded from one point to its opposite in a straight line and it did not turn back again to the other opposite or take any turning, do you realize that all things would ultimately be in the same state, be affected in the same way, and cease to become? (72b)

As well as the contrary properties we find in sensory experience, we also have, through recollection, knowledge of the forms in their purity. As the forms are not subject to the effects of becoming, the do not contain differing properties, and so in this case, we can develop genuine knowledge.

The question now is, what is the relationship between the faculties that this account presents? To understand this relation, we need to return to the *Republic*. In book *VII*, Plato gives three different presentations of the relationship between these various faculties: the metaphors of the sun and the divided line, and the allegory of the cave. We have already seen that there are two kinds of things that we can have knowledge of: sensible objects and the forms. We can divide those objects that we can relate to according to Plato into four groups by dividing a line into four parts: 'It is like a line divided into two unequal sections. Then divide each section—namely, that of the visible and that of the intelligible—in the same ratio as the line.' (509d) We therefore have four ways in which we can relate to objects, with some sections of the line larger than others. Moving from the smallest section of the line (and least satisfactory form of relation) to the largest, we first have types of knowledge concerning the visible world: images such as shadows and reflections in water (509e), then visible objects that these images are images of, such as 'the animals around us, all the plants, and the whole class of manufactured things.' (510a) Following this, we have the two kinds of knowledge that deal with the intelligible world. The first still proceeds on the basis of images drawn from the visible world, but is not interested in the determinate properties of the image, but instead in its essential nature. Geometry, for instance, uses images, such as a triangle, to develop general truths about all triangles. It proceeds on the basis of hypotheses and uses images solely as guides, rather than relating to them directly. The second, intelligible understanding of the Forms themselves, dispenses with any notion of an image of thought, and relates directly to the Forms by means of recollection. In this case, then, rather than having one object that thinking relates to under different

aspects, as we find with the notion of common sense that we found in Descartes and Kant, we have a whole series of objects. Each of these objects is within the domain of a different faculty of thinking, with imagination and opinion relating to objects of the visible world, and thought and understanding relating to the two classes of object of the intelligible world. These faculties do not converge on one object, but instead simultaneously relate to two separate objects. Thus, to judge that two sticks are equal to one another, we do not simply need the relation of the faculty of opinion to the sticks themselves, but also the relation of the faculty of understanding to the form of the Equal, in order to recognise the presence in the visible world of a deficient copy of the forms.

We can note that the structure of this account mirrors the structure of Deleuze's three syntheses of time. For Plato, an encounter with the sensible triggers the recollection of something different in kind from the sensible itself. There is a communication that takes place solely in terms of difference. This bears a remarkable similarity to the account of the Bergsonian theory of memory in chapter three of *Difference and Repetition*. There, the pure past was brought into relation with the present through the pragmatic requirements of the actual present moment. In spite of this, there was a fundamental difference in kind between the two moments, as the present was understood in terms of actuality, and the past was understood in terms of virtuality. We can further note that just as in the case of Deleuze's account of the three syntheses in the previous chapter, the present and the past were generated in parallel, such that the past was not a past of passed presents, we here find that what is recollected is something that is never experienced by the actual empirical individual themselves, as it is prior to the soul's connection to the body that we have knowledge of the forms. Thus, 'transcendental memory … grasps that which from the outset can only be recalled, even the first time: not a contingent past, but the being of the past as such and the past of every time.' (DR 177) If you haven't had a chance to look at the notes on chapter two, we can also read it in terms of the discussion of the two kinds of distribution in chapter one of *Difference and Repetition*. There, Deleuze was arguing that essence of the substance-property structures that we find around us, was not itself structured in terms of substances and properties – it was not a sedentary distribution. Rather, underlying the material world was what he called a nomadic distribution, a field of pure intensity. His claim about the faculties here is also that underlying our engagement with the world in terms of subjects and properties is an engagement in terms of pure process. Just as Plato argues that we need the forms in order to make judgements about the world, Deleuze is claiming that representation relies on a non-representational use of the faculties that constitutes a field of object that representation can relate to. In a sense, the task of philosophy is, as well as exploring the nature of the world prior to representation, to explore our engagement of the world prior to representation:

We ask, for example: What forces sensibility to sense? What is it that can only be sensed, yet is imperceptible at the same time? We must pose this question not only for memory and thought, but also for the imagination – is there an imaginandum, a phantasteon, which would also be the limit, that which is impossible to imagine?; for language – is there a loquendum, that which would be silence at the same time?; and for the other faculties which would find their place in a complete doctrine – vitality, the transcendent object of which would include monstrosity; and sociability, the transcendent object of which would include anarchy – and even for faculties yet to be discovered, whose existence is not yet suspected. (DR 180)

Plato's theory of the faculties, therefore, with the faculties communicating between each other something which cannot be grasped by that faculty itself (sensibility summoning the forms, for instance), thus mirrors the structure of Deleuze's account of the faculties in chapter two of *Difference and Repetition*. We can therefore see the beginnings of a generalised account of how the relations between the faculties should be understood. As we have seen in chapter one, however, Deleuze's project is one of inverting Platonism, however, and his claim will be that 'the Platonic determinations cannot be satisfactory.' (DR 181) In the final section of this account of Plato's theory of the faculties, I want to explore why Deleuze takes this to be the case.

Where does Plato go wrong? 'Everything is betrayed' (DR 178) by the metaphorical nature of our understanding of Plato's theory of the faculties. This betrayal takes the form of arguing that what is recollected, that is, the Forms, have been perceived, but simply in another, prior life. The difficulty with this claim is that it removes the notion that the perception of the Forms is actually different in kind from perception of objects in the sensible world. Once this move has been made, the notion of recognition is reintegrated into our account. When we perceive two sticks that are equal in length, we are not presented with a test that 'opposes all possible recognition' (DR 178), but merely 'an envelopment that is particularly difficult to unfold.' (DR 178) It is simply challenging to see the Form in the empirical instance. Similarly, we no longer have two different forms of each faculty as we found in the notions of active and passive synthesis. Whereas empirical memory, understood as operating in much the way that Kant described, was opposed to Bergsonian transcendental memory by Deleuze, for Plato, there is merely a difference in degree between the operations of the two forms of memory. Recollection of the Forms is now simply recollection of something further removed from the present than any other possible instance could be.

Ultimately, these two failings derive from the fact that rather than enquiring into the being of the sensible and the being of memory, that is, the way in which the objects of these two faculties are structured, Plato takes the sensible and memory to each relate to a being. In this sense, the notion that the faculties relate to objects is reinstated. As we saw in chapter one, Deleuze suggests that there are two fundamental distributions: the sedentary, and the nomadic. The sedentary understands the world in terms of objects, and understands difference in terms of negation (this is not that), whereas the nomadic distribution understands the world as composed of processes. In treating the Forms as objects, Plato has put into play a sedentary distribution. This essentially means that Plato's conception of reminiscence is static, as opposed to Deleuze, who's non-objectival, processual conception of difference consists in 'introducing time or the duration of time into thought itself.' (DR 179) In this sense, the four categories of representation can all be found in Plato's model. The encounter is triggered by opposition in the sensible between the contrary properties. In opposition to the sensible world, in which properties possess this oppositional nature, the Forms are what they are in themselves. That is, the Form of the Large is absolutely large without also being its contrary. It is thus self-identical. The similarity of the sensible to the Forms allows recognition to take place. Finally, Plato compares the Form of the Good to the sun, which indicates the fact that the transcendental exercise of the faculties is conceived of on the model of the empirical exercise of them (perception of the empirical sun is analogous to perception of the Form of the Good). Through these various claims, Plato, according to Deleuze, founds representation by making the structure of the object the paradigm case for knowledge.

Conclusion

So Deleuze is proposing a two-level model of thinking. On the one hand, we have the empirical faculties of thought, that operate according to the structures of representation. On the other, the transcendental uses of the faculties exceed this level, and operate on a radically different kind of object. Next week, I want to look at this idea in a bit more detail by exploring Kant's notion of the sublime, and Deleuze's use of Artaud's poetry as a model for this kind of relationship between the faculties.