Henry Somers-Hall
Henry.somershall@gmail.com

Lecture 15: Sense, Problems, and Learning

Introduction

This week, I want to finish looking at chapter three of *Difference and Repetition* by looking at the final three postulates of the image of thought. In the first quarter of this term, the focus was on the notion of common sense as it relates to the faculties of thought. We looked at the way Deleuze characterises the relationships between the different faculties of thought. In particular, Deleuze was keen to show that there is a transcendental illusion at play in our belief that thinking has a natural affinity with the structure of the world. This transcendental illusion leads us to understand the faculties as relating to each other either through another actual faculty (for Descartes), or through a logical faculty (for Kant). Whichever understanding we choose, each of the faculties operates in the same manner, and even if we follow Kant in giving a transcendental account of their operation, they are understood according to the structure of the empirical faculties. As we saw last week with the sublime, however, Deleuze's claim is that communication does not take place in terms of the faculties themselves, but is a result of a field of intensity that is incommensurate with all of them (as we shall see in the next chapter, the faculties appear to communicate because they are all expressions of the same intensive difference in different domains).

In this chapter, I want to turn to the other form of common sense, namely the notion that communication can take place between subjects because they somehow share the same senses when they use language. In particular, I want to look at Bertrand Russell's account of significance, and why Deleuze feels that this account is an inadequate theory of sense. The inadequacies of this theory will lead us to look at the notion of the problem, and its relationship to solutions, and then to knowledge itself, which Deleuze will oppose to learning.

Sense

If we follow the image of thought, and take truth and falsity to be the two fundamental categories of thinking, then it is a short distance to define the meaning or sense of a proposition in terms of these categories of truth and falsity. This move would amount to claiming that a proposition makes sense, or has a meaning provided we can say under what conditions it would be true or false, and that it lacks meaning if it is neither true nor false. The sixth postulate of the image of thought is therefore that sense is understood in terms of the proposition. Deleuze's discussion of sense in *Difference and Repetition* is very compressed, largely because it reiterates the much more sustained account given in the *Logic of Sense*. In exploring the relationship between the sense or meaning of a proposition, and its truth value, Deleuze takes Bertrand Russell's analysis of the proposition as a paradigm case of how it is understood under the image of thought:

> An assertion has two sides, subjective and objective. Subjectively, it "expresses" a state of the speaker, which may be called a "belief", which may exist without words, and even in animals and infants who do not possess language. Objectively, the assertion, if true, "indicates" a fact: if false, it intends to "indicate" a fact, but fails to do so. There are some assertions, namely those which assert present states of the speaker which he notices, in

> which what is "expressed" and what is "indicated" are identical; but in general these two are different. The "significance" of a sentence is what it "expresses". Thus true and false sentences are equally significant, but a string of words which cannot express any state of the speaker is nonsensical. (EMT, 171)

Russell here is making a distinction between the truth value of a proposition (whether it is true or false), and the meaning of a proposition. Truth or falsity determine whether something is successfully indicated for Russell or designated for Deleuze by a proposition. Designation is simply a relation whereby either the structure of the proposition mirrors a state of affairs in the world (and hence is true), or does not (and hence is false). For Russell, truth and falsity cannot capture the significance, or sense of a proposition, because what a proposition expresses is not a correspondence between a state of affairs and a proposition, but rather the beliefs of the speaker who asserts the proposition. While whether a proposition succeeds in indicating a fact or not is dependent on the truth or falsity of a proposition, since the sense of a proposition depends on the psychological beliefs of the speaker, a proposition's significance or lack thereof is not dependent on truth or falsity. A proposition can still 'make sense', even though it is false. Thus, we have to be able to separate sense from truth.

Deleuze draws several implications from this analysis of the sense of propositions. He begins by noting that 'the true and the false are supposed to remain unaffected by the condition which grounds the one only by rendering the other possible.' (DR 192) In this statement are two claims. First, we have the claim that whether or not a proposition actually designates a state of affairs (whether or not it is true) is ultimately a completely separable question from the question of the sense of the proposition. In Russell's case, this would mean that the truth or falsity of a proposition is independent of the context of the speaker's beliefs. As Deleuze notes, however, in actual fact, we can only separate the designation of a proposition from its sense by artificially stripping it of its context. Now, to understand the proposition purely in terms of truth and falsity is to affirm the kind of account put forward by Descartes by which everything can be understood in terms of subjects and objects, and hence in terms of representation. Ultimately, this division of designation from sense makes the image of thought possible, but only by grounding it in 'puerile and artificial textbook examples.' (DR 193) That is, while it is possible to understand language purely in terms of the truth or falsity of the propositions that make it up, such an approach is fundamentally decontextualised, and therefore cannot give us an accurate picture of the way language actually functions within a context. Sense, therefore, is a necessary component of any defensible theory of language.

Now, we need to note further that simply recognising the need for a theory of sense is not enough to present us with a coherent theory of language. Even if we accept that we need a theory of sense, Deleuze makes it clear that a theory such as Russell's will not allow us to escape from the image of thought. To characterise the notion of sense, for Russell, 'we may say that whatever is asserted by a significant sentence has a certain kind of possibility.' (ETM 170) As we saw in the opening quotation, for Russell, the sense (or significance) of a proposition was given by the beliefs of the speaker. As a proposition of sense refers to the speaker's beliefs, these will be in the form of a proposition such as 'I believe that *x* is the case' (and in fact, as Russell notes, in this particular case, the sense of a proposition, and what it designates are identical with one another). For this reason, the sense of a proposition is ultimately grounded in the same structures of representation as designation. While sense for Russell may differ from designation, ultimately, a proposition will have

sense if the statement '*x* is the case' designates a possible state of affairs. Now, this is an extreme case where the sense of a proposition merely repeats the designation of a proposition, but even in cases where the designation of a proposition is some state of affairs not involving the subject, sense will still be tied to designation. When Russell notes that 'true and false sentences are equally significant,' the reason for this is not that sense is different in kind from designation, but rather that it differs in modality. For a statement to be true, it must designate an actual state of affairs. For a statement to be significant, it simply has to designate a possible state of affairs. Just as Deleuze criticises Kant for deriving the transcendental conditions of possible experience from actual empirical experience, Deleuze here criticises Russell for deriving the conditions of sense from those of designation. In both cases, the difficulty is that what underlies experience and language has the same intrinsic structure as them. This leads to a kind of explanatory regress, as we never explain why things are constituted as having structures amenable to judgement, but simply presuppose this constitution at a higher level. Similarly, we never explain why significance operates on a field of objects, but just presuppose this significance as inherent to thought.

In order to avoid the kind of regress that threatens the Russellian model of sense, Deleuze instead proposes a difference in kind between the transcendental and empirical operations of sense: 'from this point of view, sense is the veritable *loquendum*, that which in its empirical operation cannot be said, even though it can be said only in its transcendental operation.' (DR 193) While it is 'easier to say what sense is not than to say what it is,' (DR 193) Deleuze makes clear in this section that it is to be understood as operating according to a passive synthesis that constitutes the very states of affairs that the proposition designates. Thus, it parallels the discussion of the constitution of the Kantian subject that we analysed in chapter two of *Difference and Repetition*. In this respect, 'truth is a matter of production, not of adequation.' (DR 192) This is because truth operates within an image of thought that has been constituted, rather than according to the relation of the good nature of thought and the world. As we have seen all through the course, Deleuze argues that what grounds actual empirical things is rather a field of intensive difference that differs in kind from them (beneath things, we find processes, rather than abstract categories). Once again, I'm afraid, we will have to wait until chapter four to understand exactly how sense is structured in such a way as to allow it to differ in kind from

Problems

We have already noted that sense should not be understood in terms of propositions. The two paradoxes Deleuze introduces make this point clearer. If the sense of a proposition such as '*x* is the case' is the proposition, 'I believe that *x* is the case,' then our account is either sterile in the case of Russell, or leads to an infinite regress. Either sense of the expression, 'I believe that *x* is the case' will be 'I believe that I believe that *x* is the case,' and so on. If this is the case, then we never truly explain the sense of an expression, but merely defer its meaning. Taking this approach, we are naturally led to posit something that naturally has sense, such as Descartes' cogito, as the final term of the sequence, but this leaves us still within the image of thought. The alternative is to derive the condition, sense, from the conditioned, designation, but such an approach is sterile, and 'evoke[s] a simple phantom.' (DR 195) We merely move from designation understood in terms of actual states of affairs to designation understood in terms of possible states of affairs. Deleuze therefore turns to an alternative to the proposition as an account of sense: If sense cannot be given in terms of a proposition, can it be given in terms of a question? It is clearly the case that we can see a proposition

as in some way expressing a question, and it is also the case that a question differs from a statement. The extent to which we are able to understand the ground of the proposition as different in kind from it will depend on how we understand questioning, however. If we take Deleuze's example of a government referendum, (DR 197) then it is clearly the case that the question, or problem, that is addressed by the referendum is primarily understood in terms of the solution or solutions that are the outcome of the vote. In this case, we are therefore once again in the situation whereby sense appears to be defined in terms of a simple widening of the proposition through the addition of possibility: the question is simply a way of expressing a number of different propositional possibilities ('yes' or 'no'). Deleuze's reference to Aristotle's *Topics* makes this point clearly:

> The difference between a problem and a proposition is a difference in the turn of phrase. For if it be put in this way, 'Is two-footed terrestrial animal the definition of man?' or 'Is animal the genus of man?' the result is a proposition; but if thus, 'Is two-footed terrestrial animal the definition of man or not?' and 'Is animal the genus of man or not?' the result is a problem. Similarly too in other cases. Naturally, then, problems and propositions are equal in number; for out of every proposition you will make a problem if you change the turn of phrase. (DR 196)

In Aristotle's case, the problem is simply a syntactical modification of the proposition. As such, it is parasitic on the structure of the propositional solutions that emerge from it. We can further note that the value of a problem is understood in terms of the possibility of its being solved. 'When, however, a false problem is "set" in a science examination, this propitious scandal serves only to remind families that problems are not ready-made but must be constituted and invested in their proper symbolic fields.' (DR 197) Here, what makes the problem false is purely the fact that it does not have any (propositional) solutions. We therefore encounter the seventh postulate of the image of thought, that 'truth and falsehood only begin with solutions or only qualify responses.' (DR 197) While truth does characterise propositions, it is the case that problems can go wrong not simply in not designating a state of affairs, but in aspects that cannot be captured by the notion of truth. They can circumscribe too narrow or too broad a domain to properly capture the point at issue. In these cases, they are false through overdetermination or indetermination, regardless of whether they generate true propositions. We further saw last week that one can fall into error through stupidity or madness as well as through mistaking the true for the false. These forms of error can also apply to the constitution of problems. Empirical truth therefore is not an adequate way to capture the nature of problems. We could, at this point, reject the notion that sense could be understood in terms of problems. Deleuze instead argues that the difficulty is the way in which problems are formulated within the image of thought. We have already seen the reason for this: as with Russell's notion of sense, the notion of the problem is defined simply in terms of possibility. Likewise, when we look at the notion of a referendum, it presents a problem that can be specified purely in terms of a circumscribed domain of possible solutions. A problem in this sense can be seen as simply a disjunction of propositions, one of which is true. As such, it fails to escape from the image of thought.

As we have seen, Kant at first glance appears to provide something of an exception to this conception of the problem by introducing the notion of transcendental illusion. Kant's claim is that Reason's task of systematising knowledge leads it to introduce what are known as transcendental ideas. These are concepts of unconditioned totality that arise naturally when reason goes beyond

the bounds of experience. As such, Reason generates false problems not simply in the sense of problems with no true solutions, but in the sense of its necessary functioning. In introducing the Idea in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explicitly claims to take up the Platonic notion of the Form or Idea as 'something which not only can never be borrowed from the senses but far surpass the concepts of the understanding ..., inasmuch as in experience nothing is ever met with that is coincident with it.' (A313/B370) As modes of thinking of totality, the Ideas emerge when reason considers all possible relations between our representations. There are thus three transcendental Ideas for the three forms of relations that encompass everything: the relation to the subject, the relation to objects, and the relation to all things:

> All transcendental ideas can therefore be arranged in three classes, the first containing the absolute (unconditioned) unity of the thinking subject, the second the absolute unity of the series of conditions of appearance, the third the absolute unity of the condition of all objects of thought in general. The thinking subject is the object of psychology, the sum-total of all appearances (the world) is the object of cosmology, and the thing which contains the highest condition of the possibility of all that can be thought (the being of all beings) the object of theology. (CPR A334/B391)

Precisely insofar as these concepts go beyond experience, Kant calls them problematic concepts. As we shall see after reading week, Kant's conception of transcendental Ideas have many of the properties that Deleuze wants to attribute to problems, and he asserts that 'not only is sense ideal, but problems are Ideas themselves.' (DR 201) For Kant, the Ideas are regulative concepts. They are a projection that allows us to systematise knowledge, and they allow us to introduce concepts into our system of knowledge that cannot be found in nature. Ultimately, therefore, for Deleuze they sustain the image of thought precisely at the moment when reason goes beyond experience. We can see this in the fact that the Ideas of Reason, God, the self, and the world, all have structures that are amenable to judgement, whilst referring to objects that fall outside of any possible empirical experience. They are therefore a means of bringing into the image of thought that which is recognised to fall outside of it. Further, they play a regulative role rather than a truly genetic role. As we saw, when sense was seen as being a merely a condition of the proposition, rather than as that which generates it, it was possible to separate sense and the proposition from one another. This is what gave rise to the 'puerile' examples that Deleuze takes to be responsible for the image of thought. Instead, what is needed is a model that recognises the intrinsic relationship between representations and their non-representational ground. Rather than being interested in what regulates the image of thought, Deleuze is interested in those structures that underlie it. In this way, sense is what makes possible the proposition. Similarly, the Idea is what makes possible the structure of recognition that we encounter in the image of thought. The two processes operate concurrently, just as the passive syntheses operated underneath active syntheses.

Learning

There is one final postulate of the image of thought, and with it, one final reversal of Platonism. This is the postulate of knowledge. If problems are defined in terms of solutions, then our engagement with problems will be determined by the solutions that they engender. That is, we engage in problems in order to develop a better understanding of the world through propositional solutions. The image of thought thus privileges knowledge as the solution itself to problems. Once

problems themselves are not simply characterised in terms of propositions, the situation becomes more complex. For Plato, knowledge is a relation to the Ideas or Forms. For Deleuze, it is the relation to Ideas which is also important, but these Ideas are no longer to be understood in terms of propositions, but in terms of problems. This reversal means that what is important is the engagement with problems, which Deleuze calls learning, rather than the solutions that they engender, knowledge. As such, the supposed result of learning, knowledge, is simply a byproduct of what is primary: a relationship of each faculty to its transcendental ground. As Deleuze puts it:

> [I]t is knowledge that is nothing more than an empirical figure, a simple result which continually falls back into experience; whereas learning is the true transcendental structure which unites difference to difference, dissimilarity to dissimilarity, without mediating between them; and introduces time into thought. (DR 206)

Conclusion

So we can see how this model of sense parallels the account of thinking. The first four postulates set up the relationship between the subject and the object, and orient thinking to the structure of judgement. The second set show how this orientation leads to a particular account of how language gets meaning and is able to relate to a field of objects. Throughout, Deleuze's claim has been that representation requires a non-representational ground, whether this is that which allows us to understand the constitution of subjects, or the origination of sense. As the parallels with Kant and Plato imply, Deleuze models this non-representational ground on the notion of an Idea – that by which what *is* given is given. While we have some notion of what this is from chapter one (a field of intensity), in chapter four, Deleuze will attempt to provide an account of how we might think this difference. As such, it will also resolve the issue of how we think the unity of the faculties, and the genesis of sense, without resorting to a prior model of common sense.