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Kant and Ideas (214-217)

Introduction

The aim of chapter three of *Difference and Repetition* was to show how the true nature of thinking was covered over by a representation of thought. As we saw with Feuerbach, in order for thinking to express itself, it needs to take on a certain structure. This was essentially the structure of good sense and common sense. That is, thinking takes the form of centralised subjects and objects with dependent properties. Feuerbach's claim, taken up by Deleuze, was that while thinking expresses itself in this form, this expression was also a falsification of the nature of thinking. So what is expressed is merely those aspects of thought which are abstract and communicable between individuals. In other words, reason expresses what what is shared by the species (Feuerbach), or the everybody knows (Deleuze). What interested Feuerbach and Deleuze instead was that which gave rise to the image of thought. Within the image of thought, the grounds of thinking were the structures of common sense and good sense. For Descartes, this meant that if we trace back our claims about knowledge, we find at their root the clear and distinct idea of a pure subject, the cogito. For Kant when we look for the source of our empirical judgements about the world, we find that they are justified by parallel structures at a transcendental level. So the functions of judgement that allow us to make claims about the world are paralleled by the categories which condition the world to make such judgements possible. Neither of these approaches therefore seems capable of giving us an account of the genesis of common sense itself, as they both presuppose it.

Towards the end of the chapter, Deleuze turned from the object of knowledge to the structure of language. Here we encountered parallel difficulties to those found when we looked at the object itself. The sense, or meaning of a proposition was given by a further proposition. Either this proposition was more general, in which case it simply repeated the proposition, or it traced back to the structure of common sense, the cogito, as a structure that was intrinsically meaningful. Instead, Deleuze attempted to ground sense in structures that were not analogous with those of common sense. In particular, he presented the possibility that the sense of a proposition might be a question, or a problem from which it emerges.

This is the structure Deleuze is going to take up in chapter four of *Difference and Repetition*. When we looked at Plato earlier this term, we saw that knowledge of Ideas emerged for him because of a problem encountered within experience. That is, he argued that while we were able to talk about two things as being equal, every instance of equality encountered in experience turned out to be an imperfect, deficient case of equality. The Equal itself was therefore a problematic idea for experience, in that it could not be given in experience, but yet seemed to be presupposed by experience. Now, as Deleuze noted in the previous chapter, problems and questions themselves can be understood as reliant on the structure of the proposition. Thus, if we have a proposition such as 'Man is a two-legged animal', we can construct a question from it in the form, 'Is man a two legged animal?'. If we understand problems in this way, then we still remain within the model of common sense, and hence cannot provide a proper account of the genesis of experience. The reason for this is that on this reading problems are ultimately reliant on the solutions, and hence on common sense.

The aim of chapter four is therefore to provide a model of problems that are not parasitic on the solutions they engender, but are genuinely different in kind from them. By providing such a model, Deleuze aims to give a genetic account of the emergence of the structure of common sense we encountered in the previous chapter whilst simultaneously undermining its foundational role. In order to do this, Deleuze turns to the calculus, which we will look at next week, but for now, I want to look at some sections of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that Deleuze once again takes to provide a model for how we should conceive of problems. As we shall see, Deleuze's claim will once again be that Kant stands on the brink of escaping from the image of thought, but ultimately simply reinforces it.

Kant and Ideas

As we have already seen, for Kant, knowledge requires a connection between different faculties. That is, knowledge requires a relationship between the faculty of the understanding and the faculty of intuition. When we make judgements, they are judgements *about* some feature of the world. Now, it might appear that the relationship between these two faculties is sufficient to give us knowledge of the world, but Kant claims that in fact we need a further faculty, Reason, to give us knowledge. The reason for this is that knowledge does not simply involve knowing true judgements about the world – if it were, then the understanding and intuition *would* be able to give us knowledge – it rather involves understanding how our true judgements are systematically connected. Kant draws attention to this as follows.

First, if we take his suggestion of the proposition, 'Caius is mortal,' then, as he suggests, this proposition can be understood purely in empirical terms. It is merely the attribution of a property to a particular object of intuition, and so only requires intuition and understanding. Kant's claim is that to make this proposition comprehensible, we need to understand what condition makes it possible to assert it – that is, what allows us to assert of Caius that he is mortal. The condition that makes this assertion possible is that Caius is human. Now, in order to explain the conditions for the statement, 'Caius is mortal,' what is needed is not simply that Caius is human, but also the universal proposition, 'All humans are mortal.' Now, in order to give meaning to the concept, human, we need a further concept, animal, as it is by virtue of this characteristic that humans are judged as mortal. What reason gives us, therefore, is not the basic building blocks of knowledge, but rather the systematicity of statements which is truly what knowledge is. It allows us to move from a series of disconnected assertions about particular objects that we might encounter in the world to a theoretical framework.

Now, Kant makes the claim that reason 'does not *create* concepts (of objects) but only orders them, and gives them that unity which they can have only if they be employed in their widest possible application, that is, with a view to obtaining totality in various series.' (CPR A643/B671) In order to unify knowledge, reason requires the idea of total unity, as a focal point for its enquiries. That is, in order to unify knowledge, it needs the working assumption that a totally unified account of knowledge is truly possible. That is, it needs the promise of a final conclusive systematic understanding of the world (which would be given at the conclusion of its task) in order to sustain the process of systematising. Here is where we come to Kant's Ideas. In order for reason to operate systematically, Kant claims that it presupposes three concepts. Kant's claim is that each of these concepts corresponds to a different kind of relation that is found in all of our representations. All representations either relate to the subject, or to objects, whether objects of appearance, or any

object more generally. (A391/B334) In this sense, each of these Ideas represents a different kind of totality such that reason can conduct its task of systematising experience. Kant therefore gives the following taxonomy of the Ideas of reason:

> 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*. Pure reason thus furnishes the idea for a transcendental doctrine of the soul (*psychologia rationalis*), for a transcendental science of the world (*cosmologia rationalis*), and, finally, for a transcendental knowledge of God (*theologia transzendentalis*). The understanding is not in a position to yield even the mere project of any one of these sciences, not even though it be supported by the highest logical employment of reason, that is, by all the conceivable inferences through which we seek to advance from one of its objects (appearance) to all others, up to the most remote members of the empirical synthesis; each of these sciences is an altogether pure and genuine product, or problem, of pure reason. (A336/B392)

So Kant's claim is that just as the structure of Aristotle's taxonomy led us to posit a highest genus, the systematic functioning of reason leads us to posit the Ideas of the self, the world, and God. Nonetheless, none of these ideas can be given in experience. Each merely functions as what Kant calls a '*focus imaginarius*' (CPR A644/B672) for our enquiries. In this sense, as we saw, reason is subject to a natural illusion that the end point of all of the understanding's rules for understanding the world is 'a real object lying outside of the field of empirically possible knowledge.' (CPR 644/B672) Thus, Kant's claim is that thinking presupposes a structure that can never relate to anything that can be given in experience – something that is strictly nothing in terms of the image of thought.

This is what gives rise, according to Kant, to the transcendental illusion that reason is capable of fully determining its objects of knowledge, and Deleuze will put forward an analogous claim that it is this that makes us believe that everything can be captured by representation. We fall into error when we confuse this general rule that we should seek more general conditions for specific phenomena with a cosmological principle that 'when the conditioned is given, then so is the entire series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is also given (i.e. contained in the object and its connections)' (Kant, 1929, A307-8/B364). The fact that reason is susceptible to internal illusions such as this was according to Deleuze, revolutionary, as already pushes us beyond the Cartesian view that when reason is operating correctly, it cannot fall into error. For Kant, on the contrary, illusion is a necessary part of the functioning of reason.

While the Ideas go beyond all possible experience, and can never be shown to be true or false, they are nonetheless necessary for Kant as regulative ideas that allow reason to carry out the task of unifying knowledge, even if a final unification is beyond it. Much of Deleuze's concern in the previous chapter was in developing a notion of a problem that wasn't defined in terms of the truth or falsity of their solutions. Now, we can already see that the Ideas overturn this conception, to the extent that they are concepts that cannot be given in experience. Since Kant's notion of an Idea goes beyond experience, and hence specifies an object that simply cannot be given, Kant calls the status of the Idea 'problematic'. It is an object that can be thought but not known. Furthermore, Kant asserts that 'it remains a *problem* to which there is no solution.' (CPR A328/B384) Now, the fact

that Ideas do not correspond to anything given in experience appears to allow them to escape from being characterised in terms of the given, and they thus appear to offer an answer to Deleuze's attempts to characterise the grounds of experience in terms that are not themselves dependent on experience. Kant goes further, and notes that it would be wrong to say that each of these Ideas were 'only an idea' as our inability to determine these ideas does not mean that they do not relate to objects. In this sense, the Idea appears to fulfil Deleuze's requirements for a notion of a problem that is both real, an 'indispensible condition of all practical employment of reason,' (CPR A328/B385) but not reliant on the empirical content of experience itself (the field of solutions). Ideas are thus structures that cannot be derived from the empirical world, but yet make the function of empirical reason possible. In this regard, they seem be the kind of pre-representational structures that make representation possible while not being specifiable in terms of it that Deleuze is looking for. While Deleuze will take up many of the features of this account, ultimately, he will argue that Kant has failed to properly escape from the Image of Thought he presented in chapter 3. In order to demonstrate this, Deleuze introduces three categories: the indeterminate, the determinable, and the determined. These are three moments that must be present in any theory of thinking that accounts for the genesis of representation.

Deleuze and Ideas

The three categories of the indeterminate, the determinable, and the determined together make up the kind of genetic account of thought Deleuze was looking for in his account of Feuerbach. First, our model of thinking has to involve a moment that escape from representation – that is, a moment which is indeterminate with regard to actual objects. This would be the moment of pure pre-representational thought that Deleuze sees as the preceding representation. Second, this moment would have to be determinable. That is, they would have to be capable of being related to experience. Finally, they would have to have a moment of determination itself – that is they would have to be actually instantiated in experience. We can map these on to the Feuerbach account as the indeterminate (from the point of view of representation) thinking is determinable (under time – it is put into successive form) as a determined thought. These three moments describe the movement from something that is outside of representation, to something that is capable of sustaining properties in general, to a particular determined object. An account of the interrelation of all three is therefore an account of how judgement becomes possible. Deleuze claims that these three moments are present in Kant's notion of the Idea, but that the second two are only extrinsically connected with it. That is, they are determined from the perspective of the image of thought, rather than determining the image of thought. I want to run through how these moments are present in Kant's Idea.

First, the claim that the Idea itself is undetermined. That is, the object of the Idea cannot be presented in a determinate form in intuition. Taking, for instance, the idea of God, which Kant considers to be the ground of all appearances, it is clear that the categories of thought cannot apply to him, because the grounds of appearance are not themselves appearances: 'Outside of this field [the categories] are merely titles of concepts, which we may admit, but through which we can understand nothing.' (CPR A696/B794)

It is nonetheless a concept that we can determine to some extent by analogy with our own empirical intelligence. In doing so, however, we only determine it '*in respect of the employment* of our reason

in respect to the world.' (CPR A698/B726) That is, the concept of God is determinable (we can specify what properties inhere in it) by analogy to the empirical world, but only on condition that we use this idea to allows us to further unify our understanding of the world (by seeing it *as if* it were created for an intelligible purpose, for instance).

Furthermore, the Idea is also present in empirical objects, insofar as we consider them to be completely determined. If we are going to consider empirical objects as being completely determined, that is, they are completely specifiable in terms of intelligible properties, we need the Idea of God. In order to completely specify something in terms of the properties that it has, we need some kind of account of all properties it is possible for an object to possess, so that we can determine which of each pair of properties (the property and its contrary), inheres in the object. God provides this model, as the being with the most reality, thus allowing us to conceive of a completely determined entitiy. 'The Ideal is, therefore, the archetype (*prototypon*) of all things, which one and all, as imperfect copies (*ectypa*), derive from it the material of their possibility, while approximating to it in various degrees.' (CPR A578/B606)

Now, as Deleuze notes, these three moments of the Idea together make up a genetic account of actualisation. The Idea as undetermined provides a moment which differs in kind from the actual, and hence falls outside of its categories. As determinability, it is a moment whereby the object of the Idea becomes capable of sustaining predicates, and hence being determined as an actual object, and as determined, it provides a moment whereby it takes on the actual properties the object has. The three moments of the Idea therefore could provide an account as to how the ground of appearances expresses itself within the world of appearance itself. It would thus provide an account of how a problem finds expression in empirical solutions without having to understand the problem itself in empirical terms, as the Idea remains indeterminate in relation to that in which it is expressed, while determining it. In order for this kind of account of the movement from the problem to its empirical solution, all three moments would have to be intrinsic parts of the Idea. That is, the Idea would have to determine itself from the indeterminate to the determined, constituting empirical experience in the process.

As I've said, Deleuze notes that for Kant, 'two of the three moments remain as extrinsic characteristics.' (DR 216) While the Idea is genuinely undetermined in regard to empirical experience, the two moments of determinability and determination are both understood in terms of empirical experience. Just as in the last chapter we saw that problems were ultimately understood in terms of solutions, here, the fact that an Idea is understood in terms of empirical experience means that it fails to provide an account of the genesis of representation. That is, the way in which we understand the determinability and the determined nature of an idea such as God is solely in relation to already existing empirical states of affairs. We do this purely in order to allow reason to follow its interest in order to allow reason to pursue its interests in systematising our knowledge of the world, and not in order to explore the conditions for the constitution of the world itself. It is only determinable to the extent that we determine it by analogy with a world that pre-exists it. Furthermore, while it provides a model of the complete determination of an object, this is only as a heuristic principle. The Idea 'is not a constitutive principle that enables us to determine anything in respect of its direct object, but only a merely regulative principle and maxim, to further and strengthen *in infinitum* (indeterminately) the empirical employment of reason.' (CPR A680/B708) In this sense, while Ideas at first appear to offer us a way to think of problems in a way which is not

dependent on solutions, Kant's account ultimately only allows us to make use of them insofar as they are thought of by analogy to empirical objects, and in relation to them. What is needed, therefore, is an account that intrinsically relates Ideas to the empirical world, while allowing them to maintain their difference in kind, rather than Kant's merely extrinsic and regulative use.

Conclusion

So while Kant's account of Ideas does provide an account of the unification of experience, this account is not an account of the genesis of experience or of thought itself. Rather, it simply serves to reinforce a representational model of thought by covering over those moments where representation fails. While the image of thought is unable to give a properly grounded concept of totality, Kant provides a way for this image of thought to overcome this difficulty by determining totality by analogy with objects that can be found in experience.

The aim of this fourth chapter is to give an account of Ideas that doesn't simply see them as regulating experience, but rather as constituting it. In this sense, he wants to provide an account of Ideas where all of the moments are intrinsically related, and not understood by analogy with empirical experience. Clearly, this is a difficult project, as it would appear at first glance that anything that could be a feature of thought must in some respect be given in experience. In order to provide this model of an Idea, therefore, Deleuze turns to the differential calculus. As we shall see next week, the calculus provides a model of how indeterminate entities (the differentials, *dy* and *dx*) are determinable in relation to one another, leading to a determinate formula. Using this model, Deleuze is going to attempt to provide a model of how we can think a field of intensive difference from a position of extension or the empirical world, whilst at the same time not characterising the intensive in empirical terms. As such Deleuze's Idea will take up the feature shared by the Platonic and Kantian Ideas of a structure outside of, but determinative of experience.