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Lecture 5 – Porphyry, Representation, and Difference

Introduction

In the last session, we focused on Kant's argument from incongruent counterparts, which aims to show that there is something that falls outside of a conceptual understanding of the world, or what Deleuze calls representation. For the next two weeks, I want to outline Deleuze's account of representation itself, and the limitations inherent to it in the formulation of a concept of difference. Representation is intimately tied to the concept of law which Deleuze introduced in the introduction, insofar as representation relies on the structures of the universal and the particular in order to determine and distinguish objects. As we saw, law is unable to account for repetition, reducing it to resemblance, and chapter one provides a diagnosis of this failure by showing how this failure results from an inability to provide a proper concept of difference. While Deleuze uses Aristotle to set out representation in this chapter, we will be focusing on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which Deleuze references several times in footnotes to the chapter. Porphyry was a third century neo-Platonist philosopher, and the student of Plotinus. It provides an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*, and was one of the key textbooks of the middle ages. The term representation is actually introduced in the introduction in relation to a 'vulgarised Leibnizianism'. (DR 13) Here, Deleuze gives three characteristics:

(1) Every determination is conceptual in the last instance.
(2) There is always one concept per particular thing.
(3) There is one and only one thing per concept.

Kant shows in the incongruent counterparts argument that the third of these assumptions is false. A left-handed and right-handed glove, for instance, can share the same concept. This led him to reject the first of these assumptions by claiming that certain determinations arise from non-conceptual spatial determinations. If all of these assumptions were true, however, it would be possible to provide a complete determination of the object in conceptual terms. Chapter one contains an important distinction, however, between two forms of representation. Infinite, or orgiastic representation operates much like this vulgarised Leibnizianism, and is represented by Leibniz and Hegel. Finite, or organic, representation is more limited, and does not guarantee that an object is completely determined conceptually. Whilst the essence of something is conceptual, it is always possible that this essence will fail to be properly imprinted onto the matter that actualises it. All determinations are still conceptual, therefore, but there is always the possibility of some indeterminacy, lack, or imperfection in the object. Furthermore, as we shall see, Porphyry, along with Aristotle, argues that as the number of things in the world are infinite, but the number of words finite, then conceptual determinations cannot be exhaustive. It will still be the case that whatever falls outside of conceptual determination will be treated negatively, as a privation in the object. As we shall see in a few weeks, infinite representation emerges to shore up certain problems in finite, Aristotelian representation.

Difference and Indifference

Chapter one begins with a discussion of indifference. Deleuze's aim in the opening few paragraphs is to provide an account of why representation emerges as an attempt to make difference 'leave its cave and cease to be a monster.' (DR 38) It is the monstrosity of difference which leads us to posit the structures of representation in order to try and contain it. We therefore need to look at the three classes of monstrosity which Deleuze posits in the opening of the chapter.

(1) 'The undifferenciated abyss. The indeterminate animal in which everything is dissolved' (DR 36)
(2) 'The white nothingness, the once more calm surface upon which float unconnected determinations like scattered members' (DR 36)
(3) The 'accumulate[ion of] heteroclite determinations' or the 'overdetermin[ation of] the animal.' (DR 37)

Deleuze makes it clear that the first and the second of these truly allow for the generation of monstrosities, whereas the third does not. If we were to give an account of the nature of monstrosity involved in these first two cases, we might want to look, for instance at the work of Francis Bacon. We might consider for the first kind of monstrosity, for instance, the absence of figure in much of Bacon's later work, where, in Deleuze's words "the wiped-off zone, which used to make the Figure emerge, will now stand on its own, independent of every definite form, appearing as a pure Force without an object." (Deleuze, LSensation, 28) Equally, Bacon's series of studies of heads, or his *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* show an attempt to grapple with determinations in the absence of relations of these parts to the whole (as Bacon says, 'When we've talked about the possibility of making appearance out of something which was not illustration, I've over-talked about it. Because, in spite of theoretically longing for the image to be made up of irrational marks, inevitably illustration has to come into it to make certain parts of the head and face which, if one left them out, one would then only be making an abstract design.' (Deleuze, LSensation, 160)] As Deleuze will argue in the *Logic of Sensation*, what gives Francis Bacon's work its sinister air is the way he represents bodies at the limit, either before they dissolve into the abyss or disintegrate into their component determinations. While it is clear that there is something monstrous and unsettling to Bacon's paintings, we still need to make the connection between works such as these and representation. So the first question is, why is it thought that is unsettled by these paintings, rather than some other faculty or emotion? We also need to ask, why is it thought in-itself, or the very structure of thinking which is imperilled by these notions of the monstrous, rather than a particular thought or belief within that structure?

As we shall see, Deleuze associates representation with the question, 'what is it?', and this question implies an answer in the form 'it is x'. This structure is the basic structure of judgement: the attribution of a predicate to a subject. Proper functioning of representation therefore requires two parts to it. First there is the subject (the 'it'), which defines the 'what' that is being asked about. Second there is the predicate, or property (the 'x'), which is attributed to the subject. So in order to make a judgement about something, we need both a subject and a predicate. The undifferenciated abyss represents a situation whereby one of these conditions has not been met. There are no properties present in the subject, and so there is no possibility of making a judgement. In fact, we could take this further and say that as there are no limits to the abyss, there is no such thing as a subject present, either. The properties lacking a subject represent the second possibility. There are properties but no subjects to attribute them to. The process of representation therefore collapses,

and thinking is suspended. I want to focus here on the first of these possibilities, the abyss. The undifferenciated abyss doesn't simply mean the impossibility of making a judgement *now*, either. Rather, it is the eternal impossibility of representation. In this respect, Hegel makes clear the terror of the abyss by quoting from Jacobi's critique of Kant:

> [Jacobi] states the problem thus; that there be demonstrated the originating or producing of a synthesis in a *pure* [unity], whether of consciousness, of space, or of time. 'Let space be one, time be one, consciousness be one... Now tell me how does any one of these three ones purely make itself into a manifold within itself...each is only a *one* and *no other*; a one and the same sort, a self-sameness without any distinction of the one from the other; for these distinctions still slumber in the empty infinitude of the indeterminate from which each and everything determinate has yet to proceed! What brings infinitude into those three infinities? What impregnates space and time *a priori* with number and measure and transforms them into a *pure manifold*? What brings *pure spontaneity* (ego) into oscillation? Whence does the pure vowel get its consonant, or rather, how does its *soundless*, uninterrupted *sounding* interrupt itself and break off in order to gain at least a kind of 'self-sound' (vowel), an *accent*?' (Hegel, SL, 95-96)

The abyss signifies, therefore, the permanent impossibility of representation, and furthermore, the impossibility of judgement explaining its own genesis. Hegel summarises the situation as follows:

> The question *how* [does the indeterminate become determinate] itself belongs to the bad habits of reflection, which demands comprehensibility, but at the same time presupposes its own fixed categories and consequently knows beforehand that it is armed against answering its own question. (Hegel, SL, 96)

This brings us to the central problem of representation. While it is able to qualify forms and subjects ('this square is red'), it is unable to account for the genesis of form itself. What is monstrous in the notion of the abyss is the recognition that underlying representation is something fundamentally non-representational; something that simply cannot be captured within the formal structures of judgement. What is sinister in the work of Francis Bacon, therefore, would be the fact that it reverses the direction of genesis by showing the structure of form itself on the point of disintegrating into the abyss. Such an abyss, is in a literal sense unthinkable. It is for this reason that the third notion of monstrosity, that of overdetermining an animal (such as in the case of a centaur) is, according to Deleuze, a bad way to create monsters. When we add determinations to some pre-existing creature, as is the case with monsters such as centaurs and griffins, we are already operating on the level of representation, and nothing is really threatened.

This brings us to the dialectic of representation which operates in the opening of chapter one. If form and with it, the structure of the world of subjects and properties emerges from an abyss, and if this emergence cannot be explained in terms of representation, how can it be explained? The difference between the formless abyss and form must be something that falls outside of representation. Difference is therefore Deleuze's name for this process of the emergence of form, which cannot be captured within the structure of the already formed. The fact that representation cannot think its own ground presents a serious problem, and in order to escape from this dilemma, it attempts to think difference from within the structure of representation itself. That is, it attempts to mediate this concept of difference through the structures of representation of identity, analogy,

opposition, and resemblance ('to "save" difference by representing it' [DR 38]). In this sense, Deleuze is interested in two related questions. First, what is the concept of difference which is presented within representation? And second, what is the account of the emergence of form that is presented within representation? In answering both of these questions, Deleuze takes Aristotle to be the first, and archetypal thinker of representation.
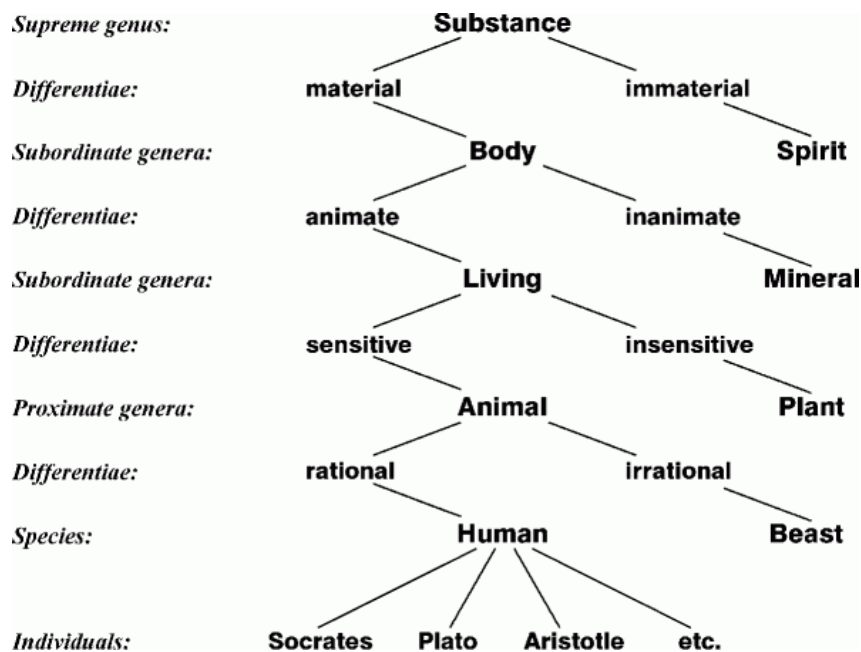
Species and Genera

The key question is therefore, how does something become determined, or, how does form emerge. This is a central question for representation itself, as representation relies on the recognition of an isomorphism between the subject's representation and the object in order to allow thinking to adequately relate to the world. Porphyry provides an account of the five terms which together allow us to form a representation of an object. These are genera, species, difference, property and accident.

To go through the terms quickly, the genus is 'what is predicated in answer to "What is it?", of several items which differ in species, for example, animal." (ISA, 4) Genus therefore is determinative of the essence of something, as is made clear by Aristotle himself: 'what is predicated in the category of essence of a number of things exhibiting differences in kind.' (Aristotle, *Topics*, 102a) I want to return to this connection between the question 'what is it' and the nature of essence when I discuss when we get to the notion of accident. What does it mean to be predicated of items that differ in kind? If we take the case of Socrates, it should be clear that 'animal' can be predicated of him, to the extent that Socrates is a man (a rational animal). For Porphyry and Aristotle, however, there is no difference in kind between different men, but rather a difference in degree (one man is just more or less rational than another). . While it is the case that for a given genus, say, animal, it is predicated of an individual, for instance Socrates, since it is clear that Socrates is an animal, the reference to a difference in kind in Aristotle's definition means that there must be an intermediary between the genus (animal) and the individual (Socrates). This is because if the genus were related directly to the individual, the genus would be the only function which was *essential* to each individual. This would mean that in essence each individual would be different only in number, whereas the definition of genus requires that what it is predicated of also differs in kind. The necessity of this requirement will become clear shortly, but for now it is enough to recognise that between the genus and the individual is an intermediary category. This category is the species. In the simplest case, we can define the species as 'that which is predicated, in answer to "What is it?", of many things which differ in number' (ISA 5). This case would be the one reached so far, where we have one genus, one group of individuals, and one level of species (a genus cannot simply have one species as in this case we could not meet the definition of a genus as applying to a number of things differing in kind). In this case, we can see that a given genus can be predicated of a species, and of an individual can be predicated both the species and the genus. Thus, of Socrates, we can say that he is both animal (according to his genus) and man (according to his species).

So Socrates now has two determinations: we can define him according to his genus on the one hand, and his species on the other. In fact, we might want to make a more fine grained definition by adding in more terms. As Porphyry writes, "the species intermediate between the extremes they call subordinate genera and species, and they regard each of them as a species and a genus, since each is comprehended in relation to the highest genus and the lowest species" (*ISA*, 38). A corollary of

this is that we now need to define the species in terms of something other than the individual, as only the lowest species relates directly to a field of numerical identity. The species will now therefore become defined in terms of the genus above it. Thus we now have a hierarchy, reaching from the highest genera to the individual, through which the individual is specified by a process of division from the genus through the various species, gaining determinations as it goes, since each genus will determine the essence of that below it:

Supreme genus:	**Substance**	
Differentiae:	material	immaterial
Subordinate genera:	**Body**	**Spirit**
Differentiae:	animate	inanimate
Subordinate genera:	**Living**	**Mineral**
Differentiae:	sensitive	insensitive
Proximate genera:	**Animal**	**Plant**
Differentiae:	rational	irrational
Species:	**Human**	**Beast**
Individuals:	**Socrates Plato Aristotle etc.**	

Taken from: http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/433/PorphyryTree.html

This leads to the so-called Tree of Porphyry (above), where we have a hierarchy of genera. Here, body is the species of substance, but the genus of living things.

Accidents and Properties

Before talking about difference, I just want to note briefly the other two parts of the Porphyrian system. First, properties. These define a species, but do not determine its essence (such as, for instance, laughter, which Prophyry takes to be a trait which only man exhibits, but which is not definitive of him). Second, accidents, which do not define a species. These can either be separable (as in the case of Socrates, who can be sitting or not sitting), or not separable (for instance, 'being black is an inseparable accident for ravens and Ethiopians' [ISA 12]), in that an Ethiopian could lose his skin colour without ceasing to be an Ethiopian, whereas a man without reason (at least potentially) is no longer a man. The fact that accidents cannot be a part of essence can be seen if we return to the original meaning of the Greek for essence, *ti ēn einai*,[i] which can be translated as 'the what it was to be that thing'. What is important to recognise about this definition of essence is that it provides a self-identical underpinning for the thing whose essence we are searching for.[ii] Through this self-identity, the underlying essence allows the same individual to be re-identified, even though the individual in question may have altered in his passage through time. Thus essence provides a tool for the selection of properties which are properly definitive of an individual, as opposed to

those which are merely accidental to the individual. The fact that Socrates may be sitting is not constitutive of the essence of Socrates himself, although it does represent a state that he is in. If inessential states such as this were taken to be definitive, the identity of Socrates himself would break down through the collapse of all continuity. Whilst Socrates is becoming, the development of a fixed definition of his essence is problematic, as there is no way to differentiate accident and essence. It is only, however, once Socrates has ceased to be that the fixity we require for a determination of essence comes into being. Thus essence, as the "what it was to be a thing" is essentially retrospective. This means that the becoming of Socrates is related entirely to an atemporal state of being.

Difference

So what is the role of difference in this hierarchy? Porphyry talks about three forms of difference: common difference, proper difference, and more proper difference, only the third of which would be considered to be real difference. Common difference is the difference between two accidents, or non-essential predicates, and is not effective in determining a real difference between two entities. This is because it is possible for the same individual to support contrary accidents (Socrates sitting and later, Socrates standing up, for instance). Proper differences deal with inseparable properties of things, and so do really serve to determine the difference between two things. The most proper difference, however, is specific difference. Specific difference is what allows species to be defined in Porphyry's tree by dividing the genus. So, if we take the genus, animal, we are able to determine the species, man, by dividing animals into two kinds: rational and non-rational animals. In fact, the tree is formed by applying specific differences to the preceding genera until we reach the lowest possible species (we cannot reach the individual itself as they are infinitely numerous, and '[Plato] tells us to leave the infinities alone, for there will be no knowledge of them' [ISA, 7]).

So Prophyry provides an account of the determination of objects that allows us to characterise all of their essential determinations through a process of division. We begin with a property which belongs to everything, for instance, substance, and by a repeated process of division of things into contrary classes, we eventually arrive at a complete determination of the subject. This therefore is representation's attempt to solve the problem of grounds which Deleuze highlights at the beginning of the chapter. The problem was that representation seemed incapable of giving an account of how something could become determined. It now appears that by the repeated addition of predicates, representation is able to account for this process.

In fact, on page 39 of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze gives a whole series of characteristics which seem to show that it is difference which allows representation to escape from the undifferenciated abyss through determination. It appears to be an essential concept, in that it determines the essence of the species, by dividing the genus, it is both synthetic and productive, in that it is what produces species, and it explains the genesis of the species. In this sense, we can see specific difference as giving form to a previously unformed genus. In fact, Porphyry makes explicit this account of generation:

> For in the case of objects which are constituted of matter and form or which have a constitution at least analogous to matter and form, just as a statue is constituted of bronze

as matter and figure as form, so too the common and special man is constituted of the genus analogously to matter and of the difference as shape, and these – rational mortal animal – taken as a whole are the man, just as they are the stature. (ISA 11)

Clearly, Deleuze does not consider this account to be satisfactory, however. The reason for this is that whilst difference appears to play a productive role in the Aristotelian account of determination, in fact it is always understood through (or mediated by) another concept, what he calls the four shackles of mediation. These 'shackles' are identity, opposition, analogy and resemblance. Difference clearly has to be understood in terms of opposition if Porphyry's tree is to function, as each division of the genus has to be complete. If we are to provide an absolute determination of the object, it cannot be possible that it escapes from the hierarchy by existing as some third term between, for instance, rational and non-rational. Identity is essential because in order to determine that two things are different, they need to share a background of identity; otherwise, they are simply diverse, or, in Porphyry's terms, 'otherlike'. We can clarify this by noting that whereas the question which relates to genera is, 'what is it?', the question which relates to differences is, 'what sort of such and such is it?' (ISA 10), for instance, we ask, 'what sort of animal is man?'. In this case, the question of difference makes clear that differences rely on the pre-existing genus in order to be posed. The difference between rational and non-rational only makes sense on the basis that the entities we are discussing share the trait, animality. Resemblance is required because we need some way of determining which particulars fall under which concept. As the properties they possess will be actualised in different ways, we subsume them under a species not on the basis of identity, but of resemblance with the difference.

In spite of this, representation is clearly able to give an account of how an object is determined (namely by the attribution of predicates to it). It therefore does have an account of the determination of form. The last of the shackles of mediation that I want to look at, and will form the topic for next week, emerges in response to a more serious challenge. If difference determines, but only on the basis of a prior genus, then how do we define the highest and most general genus, being, itself? Either we posit an identity above it in the hierarchy, in which case we need to explain this higher identity, or else we seem to be in the position of having to declare this concept itself indeterminate. Aristotle, or more correctly, Aristotle's successors, introduced the concept of analogy in order to try to solve this problem.

Conclusion

The central topic of the opening of chapter one is therefore the genesis of form, and the failure of recognition to explain this genesis. As we saw, difference is a key concept both in the account of genesis provided by Deleuze and by Aristotle. While Aristotle (or Porphyry) has shown that form can be further determined by the attributions of differences to a genus, the key question for representation is whether the origin of form itself can be explained. This returns us to the problematic of the monstrous – we can explain how the given is determined (the centaur or griffin), but can we explain how the given itself, as abstract subject of predication, is given, from within representation?

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[i] C.f. Introduction to Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lawson-Tancred translation.
[ii] Beistegui, *Truth and Genesis*, chapter one, particularly pp. 39-48.