

Lecture 8 – Spinoza, Affect, and the Plane of Immanence

Introduction

In this lecture I want to pick up the theme of univocity and its relation to Aristotelian thought that we have been tracing throughout chapter one of *Difference and Repetition* in relation to Spinoza. Spinoza represents for Deleuze the second major thinker of univocity, to be followed by Nietzsche. I don't particularly want to focus on Spinoza's philosophy itself, but rather the use that Deleuze makes of Spinoza in developing an alternative conception of thought to that provided by representation. The question of how we think outside of representation is central to Deleuze's philosophy, as if we can think of the world only in terms of representation, in terms of judgement or species and genera, but know that this method of understanding the world is inadequate, then we fall back into something like an existential philosophy with its sharp rift between being and knowledge of being. Last week we saw that Scotus develops several concepts that depart radically from those employed by the analogical theologians: an intensive understanding of the infinite, modal and formal distinctions, and non-oppositional difference. In spite of this, univocity remained a purely formal concept. According to Deleuze, it is Spinoza who develops an ontologically univocal philosophy. As well as looking at Deleuze's account in *Difference and Repetition*, which provides an outline of the place of Spinoza in the history of univocal thought, I want to look at his short article, 'Spinoza and Us,' which is the last chapter of his *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Deleuze's central thesis is that Spinoza replaces determination in terms of form with determination in terms of power. This means that rather than being defined in terms of genus and difference, an object is defined by its ability to affect and be affected by the world. In showing how Deleuze explicates this alternative taxonomy of power or intensity, I want to clarify a number of key Deleuzian terms. These are, the notion of affect itself, sedentary and nomadic distributions, the plane of immanence and the plan of organisation, the meaning of Deleuze's use of Spinoza's question, 'we do not know what a body can do', and some of the meaning of the notion of limit.

Spinoza and Univocity

Scotus in his theology skirted very close to heresy in making the concept of being univocal to God and man. His introduction of a modal distinction between finite being and infinite being allowed him to preserve a difference between the two, as there was a difference in kind between the infinite intensity of God, and the finite intensity of man's being. It is common knowledge that Spinoza makes the transition to heresy by declaring that there is only one substance, and that finite objects are merely modifications of this substance, a position known as pantheism, or perhaps more correctly in Spinoza's case as panentheism. In his *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze argues that Spinoza's position is developed in the light of the concerns of the Scholastic tradition. Spinoza was a Sephardic Jew, whose family originated from Portugal. In Portugal in 1497, all Jews were converted by force to Christianity, and while his family converted back to Judaism on arrival in the relatively liberal Amsterdam. In the intervening time period, a fair amount of Christian theology was picked up by the *conversos*, which remained an influence after their second conversion. Against this claim, the influence of Descartes is very prominent, especially given the publication of an early treatise by Spinoza on his philosophy. Also, as Deleuze notes, Spinoza claims 'pay no attention to the

hodgepodge of peripatetic [Aristotelian] distinctions.’ (EPS, 38) As we are focusing on Deleuze’s philosophy, we don’t need to worry about whether Spinoza developed his philosophy as a radicalisation of Scotus, or a reaction to Descartes. Deleuze in fact claims that Descartes’ philosophy itself develops an analogical conception of being. Similarly, in Chapter three of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze develops the notion of ‘a single Image [of thought] in general’ (DR 167), implying that the basic structures of representation are repeated in all representational philosophies.

I want to go through three of the key terms in Spinoza’s philosophy now, substance, attributes, and modes, in order to highlight how the structures of univocity are taken up on Deleuze’s reading. Spinoza defines substance as follows:

By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed. (Bk I, D3)

Spinoza is here very close to the Cartesian definition of substance as ‘a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence.’ At this point, however, an important difference arises in regard to how we distinguish substances. For Descartes, the fact that a substance exists implies that it is numerically distinct from other substances. Thus, for Descartes, the mind and the body are two distinct substances. This leads to the infamous mind-body problem. In fact, we have more than just two substances. Each person has a separate mind, or soul, and so there are a number of real, numerically distinct, substances which share the same attribute. How does this relate to the theme we have been looking at in chapter one of *Difference and Repetition*, how we distinguish or determine entities? For Descartes, ‘there are numerical distinctions which are at the same time real or substantial.’ (EPS, 30) Spinoza disputes this claim, arguing that substances with the same attribute could only be distinguished by their particular mode (i.e. whether the substance of thought is your or my thought). As substance is logically prior to its modes, it is impossible to numerically distinguish substances with the same attributes. (Bk I P5) Now, this argument is usually taken to be the foundation of the claim that for Spinoza there is only one substance. Deleuze instead wants to make a more radical claim for Spinoza, however, which is that a real distinction, which determines the existence of a thing, is not a numerical distinction at all. That is, existence and number do not mutually imply one another. The upshot of this is that for Deleuze, Spinoza’s philosophy is not one of a single substance, but rather one of a substance that escapes from any quantification altogether. It is singular. This is an important claim, as right from the beginning of the introduction, the failure of representation has been tied to its reliance on quantification. As we saw last week, one of Scotus’ key claims was that distinction did not rely on existential separability (as in the case of intensity and being, for instance). I want to turn to this theme now by introducing the attributes.

Spinoza defines an attribute as:

‘what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.’ (E1D4)

In Descartes’ terms, an attribute is also the essence of a substance, so, for instance, the essence of material substance is extension. So in answer to the question, ‘what is it to be a material substance?’, we would reply, ‘it is to be extended.’ For Descartes, substances are individuated numerically, which means that the distinction between a substance and its attribute is merely a

conceptual distinction. Extension plays a purely definitional role in this case. For Spinoza, however, there is only one substance, and so he cannot simply rely on thought and extension being conceptual distinctions of two different substances. Given that the world contains (at least) both things and ideas, Spinoza has to explain how it is possible for the same substance to be expressed by two different essences, thought and extension. As Deleuze recognises, this problem mirrors one which Scotus dealt with. The question for Scotus was how an infinite being could both be understood as simple, which was a standard part of the definition of God, yet at the same time be composed of a number of proper attributes: how could God be simple, yet still be one, true, and good? This was not a problem for the analogical conception of God, as it held that predication functioned differently, but analogously between the simple nature of God and the diverse nature of finite things. Scotus' solution was to rely on the notion of a formal distinction between the different attributes so that while they were not actually distinct as things separate from one another, they were nevertheless formally distinct in that they picked out genuine differences for reason within the infinite being. Truth, goodness and unity were therefore formally, but not really distinct features of the infinite being (Scotus uses a similar logic for the Trinity).

Attributes operate in a similar way for Spinoza. They are formally distinct from each other, but they cannot be really distinct, as they express the essence of the same substance. There are some key differences between Scotus' account of the attributes of God and Spinoza's account of the attributes of God or substance. First, Scotus' attributes are really just what Deleuze calls 'signs' for the intellect. They express a way in which the nature of God is to be taken up by the finite subject. It is to an extent ambiguous how they are to be read in Spinoza. His definition of 'what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence' can be read both as subjective (by focusing on the intellect's perception) or as objective. Second, and relatedly, for Scotus, God is a separate entity to the world, whereas for Spinoza, as there is only one substance, the expression of the essence of God in the attribute cannot merely be a formal feature. Rather, the expression *is* the world. For Spinoza, therefore, the intellectual and physical realms are just the expression, or explication, of the essence of God. In this sense, 'instead of understanding univocal being as neutral or indifferent, he makes it an object of pure affirmation.' (DR, 49) Whereas the essence of God is known formally for Scotus (as a 'sign'), it is now known expressively and concretely. We therefore have a progression between the nature of God being known analogically for Aquinas, univocally, but only in a formal manner for Scotus, and now univocally and affirmatively for Spinoza.

As for Spinoza there is only one infinite substance, the essence of God is not simply explicated in the two attributes of thought and extension, but in an infinite number of attributes. Each of these attributes fully expresses the essence of God, whilst simultaneously differing from the others. On this basis, there is a certain parallel between the different attributes, so that, for instance, the mind is the idea of the body. In this way, the move to one substance resolves the difficulties of the mind body problem which Descartes encountered when he posited a numerical difference between substances.

So Spinoza's metaphysics presents the world as the expression of the essence of God. This brings us to the final part of his system I want to discuss: the mode. If the world is the essence of God, and God is infinite, how do we account for the existence of finite things within the world? Spinoza argues that finite things are modifications of infinite substance. He defines them as follows:

‘By mode I mean the affections of substance; that is, what which is in something else and is conceived through something else.’ (E1D5)

Here we rely on the second of Scotus’ distinctions, the modal distinction. Earlier on, I mentioned how Spinoza disagrees with Descartes’ equation of real and numerical distinction. Spinoza instead argues that substance is really distinct, but not numerically distinct. Modes operate in the opposite manner. Modes are modifications of a singular substance, and so are not really distinct. They are, however, numerically distinct from one another. Here Deleuze employs the second key distinction from Scotus. If modes are to be distinct, but not seen as existentially distinct from one another (as they are all moments of a singular substance), we need some other way of distinguishing them. This is in essence the same problem that we found in Scotus’ attempt to develop a univocal conception of being which was at the same time applicable to finite and infinite beings. If we recall, Scotus’ solution was to replace Aquinas’ notion of the finite/infinite distinction (which was founded on limit) with a distinction founded on intensity. Thus being is like the concept of whiteness. While we can formulate a concept of whiteness separately from the intensity by which it manifests itself, such a concept would be inadequate. Intensity is the mode by which whiteness manifests itself. According to Deleuze, Spinoza develops a similar account of the nature of finite modes. Just as intensity is only modally distinct from whiteness, finite modes are only modally distinct from substance itself.

Planes of Immanence and Plans of Organisation

What is the role, therefore, that univocity is playing in Spinoza’s philosophy? First, we can see that the nature of substance itself is not given according to a categorial form of definition. In order to define something for Aristotle, we need a genus and a difference. This led to the problem of the highest genus, as the highest genus would seem to require a higher identity in order to be defined, but the presence of such a higher identity would imply that the highest genus was not, in fact, the highest genus. We can phrase this problem in another way by noting Deleuze’s complaint that what we really have in Aristotle’s philosophy is a difference between concepts, rather than a concept of difference. The rational is thus defined as different from the non-rational, the living in opposition to the non-living. In such a case, determination relies on a numerical distinction between terms. We must be able to separate the rational animals from the non-rational animals (as separately existing entities) in order to define man as a rational animal. We define something by saying that it is ‘this and not that’. Spinoza’s substance, however, has an essence which is expressed through the attributes. This essence is not one that can be given in terms of the categories, however, as Spinoza’s substance is not subject to any form of numerical distinction – it is singular. On the basis of this, it cannot be determined through the ‘this and not that’ structure of representation, even in relation to a possible but non-existent object. Substance does have a structure and an essence, however, as is shown by the finite modes which as a whole express substance, and which are distinguished from one another in terms of their intensity. Substance is determined by a difference, but it is not a difference between concepts (everything is substance), but rather a difference that is internal to substance. This is therefore one of the most difficult ideas in Deleuze’s metaphysics: substance expresses its essence by differing from itself. This is made possible on the basis of the univocal conception of being, whereby all modes express *the same* being. This is the root of the central Deleuzian claim that:

[F]rom Parmenides to Heidegger it is the same voice which is taken up, in an echo which itself forms the whole deployment of the univocal. A single voice raises the clamour of being. (DR 44)

So this move is at the root of the distinction between a plane of immanence, as provided by Spinoza, and the plan of organisation, which has its roots in Aristotle. The plane of immanence functions like a plane of a single colour, as in Scotus' example, which is modified across its surface by varying degrees of intensity. As such, it is not the 'undifferentiated abyss' which was feared by representation, but is distinguished into regions by these variations in intensity. Just as each point on the surface is white, whilst still differing from other points, each point on the plane of immanence is substance, whilst still differing from others in terms of the intensity of its being. In contrast to this, the plan of organisation, the Aristotelian model, relies on differentiation in terms of form, rather than intensity. Here, distinction is achieved not by differing intensities, but rather by the imposition of forms from the outside (the form of the rational animal is compared to an object in the world in terms of resemblance – in this case, there is a difference between the form and the object which is supposed to express this form – in Deleuze's terms, an extra dimension is required as a supplement to the real).

What a body can do, Limits and Intensity

Having now given some idea of what the plane of immanence is for Deleuze, I want to return to the question of species which has been the focus of this discussion of chapter one. Deleuze has been highly critical of Aristotelian metaphysics, which he defines as a plane of organisation, or in *Difference and Repetition*, a sedentary distribution. We are now in a position to see how the move to a univocal metaphysics allows Deleuze to open up the possibility of an alternative description of the world. When we looked at the concept of intensity that was introduced by Scotus, we saw that one of the key reasons that he introduced it was to prevent being from becoming a genus. If the infinite was defined as the absence of limitation, as it was for Aquinas, then the finite and the infinite would be defined relationally, in terms of opposition. Being would therefore be a genus above God, as infinite being, which would be heresy, since God would logically presuppose something outside of himself. The intensive infinite was not relational, and so differed from finite intensity whilst not being opposed to it. This meant that the intensive was not understood in terms of Aristotelian categories. For Scotus, however, univocity only applied to the distinction between finite and infinite being; that is, it served as a presupposition for an analogical conception of finite being. For Spinoza, by contrast, the entirety of being is to be understood in terms of intensity. In this case, therefore, the notion of opposition, which was essential to Aristotle's theory of species and genera, simply will not apply to finite beings. If beings are not going to be distinguished in Aristotelian terms, the question therefore is, how are beings distinguished for Deleuze?

For Aristotle, the nature of a finite object is defined through the attribution of one or another of a series of opposed properties – living/non-living, rational/non-rational. This is what Deleuze calls a 'sedentary distribution':

A distribution of this type proceeds by fixed and proportional determinations which may be assimilated to "properties" or limited territories within representation. (DR 45)

These properties are therefore defined through relations of opposition, and there is a fixed divide or limit which separates things with one essence from things with the other. Essence therefore separates things off from one another, and also determines the form or function of things: the reason why a triangle appears in the form it does is that it has the property of having three angles. As man is a rational animal, his function is 'activity of the rational part of the soul in accordance with virtue' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b22-1098a20). What defines a body for Spinoza? Deleuze describes it as follows:

A body, of whatever kind is defined by Spinoza in two simultaneous ways. In the first place, a body, however small it may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body. Secondly, a body affects other bodies, or is being affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality. (*SPP*, 123)

The first of these criteria emerges from the fact that essence cannot be determined by the hierarchical process of division used by Aristotle. This is the root of the assertion taken up by Deleuze at several places that:

[N]obody has as yet determined the limits of a body's capabilities; that is, nobody has yet learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, ..., solely from the laws of its nature insofar as it is considered as corporeal. (EIIIP2S)

On the one hand, therefore, the body is a purely physical object. On the other hand, it is defined by its ability to affect and be affected by other bodies. This second criterion emerges directly from the Scotist notion of intensity for Deleuze. If the plane of immanence is to be univocal, then what defines entities on it is a degree of intensity. Deleuze interprets this intensive difference between finite beings in terms of power. Power, in turn, is understood as the degree to which a mode is able to participate in being; that is, the degree to which a mode is able to affect and be affected by other modes. Somewhat ironically, therefore, the rejection of limit, which relates terms to one another, leads to a conception of affect which is an openness to enter into relations with other entities.

There are several important consequences to this move away from specific essence:

First, affect provides a way of determining classes of objects which does not rely on the notion of species. Thus, when Deleuze cites Little Hans' list of the affects of a draft horse, ('to be proud, to have blinkers, to go fast, to pull a heavy load, etc [SPP 124]) he uses it to note that 'there are greater differences between a plough horse or draft horse and a racehorse than between an ox and plough horse. This is because the racehorse and plough horse do not have the same affects nor capacity to be affected.' (SPP 124) Spinoza makes a similar point in claiming that 'there is no small difference between the joy which guides the drunkard and the joy possessed by the philosopher.' (EIIIP57S) This idea is taken up by von Uexkull, as Deleuze notes in relation to the tick with three affects.

Second, the type of relationality allows for the composition of organisms with other organisms. The Aristotelian conception relates organisms to one another, but only in an exclusionary way. Rational animals are related to non-rational animals by being opposed to each other ('this and not that'). Furthermore, we should note that adding these properties to the organism does not constitute it,

but rather just qualify it. That is, the question, 'what is it?', the question of essence, calls for clarification of something already in existence, rather than the constitution of a centre of subjectivity. For Aristotle, therefore, there is a sharp divide between the inside and outside of the organism. Deleuze, on the contrary, writes in *Difference and Repetition* that a nomadic distribution instead functions with 'a space that is unlimited, or at least without precise limits.' (DR 46) As the organism is defined by its ability to be affected, it is able to enter into relationships with other organisms which are complementary to its own relations of speeds and slownesses. This natural openness means that the inside and the outside are not precisely delimited, allowing for phenomena such as symbiosis, where different systems come together to constitute a single system of relations.

Conclusion

So this week we looked at Spinoza's ontology, and the use that Deleuze makes of it to continue his critique of Aristotle. Developing a univocal conception of being allows Deleuze to move away from the notion of species and to present an alternative account of the nature of the organism. Such an account allows us to understand the world as a single ontological plane whilst at the same time explaining how finite objects are differentiated from one another. Such an account draws together two seemingly unrelated themes. The theory of affects, an non-oppositional difference. Next week, we will look at Deleuze's consideration of an alternative strategy to that he proposes. Instead of formulating a concept of difference without opposition, what if we try to solve the problems of representation by pushing difference to its limit as contradiction. This will be the approach of Hegel.

Bibliography

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