

Perception, Judgment and Individuation: Towards a Metaphysics of Particularity

ANDREW BENJAMIN

1.

What does it mean to perceive?¹ The importance of this question can be located in the nature of the relationship that it envisages to what can be described as the ineliminability of judgment. Here, in regard to the presence of judgment, there is a range of different, and, in the end, incompatible positions. For example, judgment may be the same as perception, or judgment could only supervene on perception and thus would have to be radically distinct from it. In other words, allowing for judgment's ineliminability does not, on its own, entail an automatic conflation of perception and judgment. All that is being suggested is judgment's necessary presence. Rather than arguing that perception can be separated from judgment, or indeed that it is the same as judgment, what needs to be examined is the claim that perceiving implies the already present role of judgment. This will have to be the case — i.e. judgment will have to play a role — even if judgment is not thought of as

¹ This paper — initially given as a lecture — is intended to be the provision of working notes that address the question of whether perception is conceptual. I attempt here to link materialism to the conceptual, and thus to argue that, rather than either an empiricist or idealist account of perception, a materialist account gets closer to the truth of perception. That truth — which is that perception involves repetition — is already known by empiricism. However, empiricism reaches its philosophical limit if it is necessary to account for the centrality of repetition from within the philosophical framework of empiricism. Perhaps, though with a certain presumption, part of the work undertaken here is intended to extend and clarify work done in my book *The Plural Event* (London: Routledge, 1993). This paper could not have been written without the stimulation provided by discussion with friends and colleagues. In particular I would like to thank Tim Thornton and Alberto Toscano.

intentional. The presence of judgment need not involve the decision to judge, or even the capacity to define in advance the rules that are followed in judgment.²

What then is involved in the claim that to have perceived is to have judged? What is initially complex and therefore potentially problematic is that it seems to assume the presence of two actions. The first action would be the perception and the second would be the judgment (be it intentional or not). Rather than attempt to resolve the problem either by conflating or separating these 'actions' in terms of their content, a more constructive approach can be found by defining their locus (or loci) of activity. From one position it is possible to argue that to perceive X is to assert that the content of a given perception is X. Error in this regard could be either a flaw in the act of perception — what this means is that the perceiver will have been impaired in some way — or, in certain instances, a resemblance between X and Y. In the second case, error will be defined in terms of resemblance. Y resembles X and therefore, in given conditions, it is possible to claim — albeit fallaciously — that Y is X.

On this level it is possible to argue that perception, all things being equal, cannot be separated from the physical act of seeing. To perceive X is simply to see X. Naming X as X would involve no more than the correct allocation of a word to that which is seen (or which has been seen). All further claims would be parasitic upon the physical act of seeing, as that which has already taken place. Judgment therefore can be located after the act of seeing. (This 'after' will prove central.) Moreover, the activity of judgment would involve claims made on the basis of having seen. This formulation of judgment — and thus also of perceiving — allows an initial distinction between empiricism and materialism to be formulated.³ Precisely because this distinction is at work here, it is essential to delineate its presence. It figures in the way perception and the identity of the object of perception are articulated. Insofar as it pertains to the identity of a given particular — the identity of X as X — that identity would be established and maintained via an inferential relation between instances of X. The identity of a given instance would have to be inferred

² The obvious corollary here is rule following. It does not have to be the case that a rule is followed only when there is the intention to follow a rule.

³ Materialism in this context needs to be distinguished radically from the conception developed by J. I. C. Smart. Smart argues that "materialist" means "the theory that there is nothing in the world over and above those entities that are postulated by physics" (*Essays Metaphysical and Moral* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987], p. 207). In the end there is little that divides Smart's position from an empiricist position.

from the presence of earlier instances of X.⁴ Inference, in this case, is to be counterposed to the conceptual. This counter-positioning yields empiricism as bound by inference, and materialism, as will be argued, as bound by the concept. (Even though what is meant by a concept is yet to be defined.) From within this position — the one determined by inference — perception cannot have any conceptual content.⁵ Concepts may supervene on perception, but perception itself is strictly delimited by the content of a given act of seeing. Judgment, here, opens up that particular area of investigation that would have been defined by what seeing entails. In other words, since seeing entails the evaluation of what is seen, actions based on what is seen or on what has been seen would fall under the heading of judgment. From within the ambit of empiricism, judgment may allow for concepts, but only to the extent that concepts, and hence judgment, supervene on an original act of seeing. (Concepts, in this context, would be abstractions or generalizations drawn from particulars.)⁶

Therefore, what defines judgment in terms of its location is its temporal separation from the act of seeing. *Ab initio*, judgment would not have taken place. At the beginning there is seeing. Moreover, this original seeing, from within the frame of reference set in place by this position, defines what 'perceiving' is taken to be. Instead of asking the question of how it is that seeing takes place, as though there had to be a necessarily transcendental answer — an answer that would provide the ground of seeing — it is possible to recast this description of seeing in different terms in order to highlight the issues involved.

Thus, rather than arguing that seeing occurs in its necessary temporal distance from judgment, it is possible to recast the position in terms of 'recognition'. This term will complicate the issue, precisely because it

⁴ While it cannot be taken up at this stage it is nonetheless vital to identify the problem posed by the nature of the distinction between X and instances of X.

⁵ There is, of course, an enormous literature on this topic. The most important recent contribution is Christopher Peacocke, 'Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?', *The Journal of Philosophy* XC VII.5 (May 2001), pp. 239-64. The intent of this paper is not to engage directly with the debate between the positions established by Peacocke and McDowell (*Mind and World* [Cambridge: Harvard, 1994]) but to direct attention to the nature of conceptuality. Only by developing a response to the question of the conceptual will it be possible to intervene in this debate. It is a simple confusion to think that the philosophical problem of the nature of conceptuality is addressed by concentrating on the psychological problem of consciousness.

⁶ And yet even this claim is problematic within an empiricist framework. As will be argued at a later stage, Hume's argument against the possibility of abstraction could be deployed here.

introduces another temporal register. It is essential to be clear here. Time is not being adduced as though it were an arbitrary element in the argument. The fundamental difference — in terms of location — between perceiving (understood still as the physical act of seeing) and judgment is that they are temporally distinct. Judgment occurs after seeing; seeing is prior to judgment. Judgment, with regard to its own possibility, has to be defined in terms of its supervening on seeing. The question that needs to be addressed is what happens to this position if, instead of arguing that what occurs is seeing, the subject's confrontation with the world involves recognition. It must be allowed from the start that recognition can succeed as well as fail. Recognition is not *de facto* successful in terms of the truth of what is recognized. Recognition allows for error.

The distinction between seeing and recognition involves a temporal dimension as well as a cognitive one. The distinction between seeing and recognizing is not to be understood in terms of two slightly different formulations of the same process. Seeing and recognizing are not synonyms. The force of 'recognizing' as marking a particular cognitive state is that it introduces into the relationship between subject and object — or what can be initially described as subject and object — a term whose effect will be to generate a fundamentally different frame of reference. Recognition — unlike seeing (at least the way seeing is usually presented) — is defined in terms of repetition. To recognize is to *re*-recognize. Why, however, introduce this term? Why recast the question of perceiving and its relation to the ineliminability of judgment in terms of repetition? As will be seen, repetition is already involved. To allow for recognition is, perhaps, to have already allowed for the truth of perception. This is the position that will need to be developed.

The first part of an answer to the question as to why repetition has been introduced stems from the role that time plays in the initial formulation of the relationship between perceiving and judging. The distinction was instantiated and held in place by time. Each perception was in some sense new and what content it had had to stem from an inferential relation to an earlier perception. Even if the originating 'perception' that occasions and thus allows for the inference was in fact conveyed information rather than pure perception — pure to the extent that it could be taken to have been identical with the physical act of seeing — any subsequent perception will have to be determined by the singularity of the object and the attribution of the correct word to that perception, an attribution made possible by inference. (This is the state of affairs demanded by empiricism.) And yet, there is a difficulty within the demand that each perception be new. There is no doubt that on one level

each perception is new. The particular perception is both spatially and temporally unique and, in terms of its content, it could be completely new; new in the precise sense of its not having occurred before. What this means is that this conception of the new is defined by the law of the identity of indiscernibles.⁷ What makes an occurrence new is that it is not identical to any other occurrence. This opens up what will emerge at a later stage as an important part of the argument; namely, a distinction between identity and sameness. Identity, in this sense, is defined by a conception of the unique. The content of each perception has to be unique. The interlinking of the new and the unique — an interlinking articulated within the law of the identity of indiscernibles — plays a defining role within empiricism. In contradistinction to this interconnection is a conception of sameness.⁸ Sameness, as opposed to identity, allows for a conception of difference. Moreover, it may be that to argue that X and Y are the same and different becomes an assertion that X and Y are both particulars which, while not identical, are nonetheless both the same and different. To the extent that this formulation is accepted, the question that emerges concerns what conception of universality will allow for the co-presence of sameness and difference, while still working as a universal.⁹

Once it is also allowed that the connection between the 'new' perception and the inference is what allows for the identity of that new perception to be secured, then what is demanded is that the connection be established by a form of repetition. The move from one perception to another, such that the move is what secures the identity of the latter, is one where there is a form of repetition, even if that repetition is only ever implicitly present (and this would only be because the explanation of the nature and consequence of that relation is in terms of inference, rather than an explicit conception of repetition.) Inference is an implicit form of repetition since it allows for the movement between what has previously been identified as X and further instances of X. If X at t_1 is known and X at t_2 is identified as X, then the second is inferred on the basis of the first if there are sufficient qualities of the second that allow it to be re-

⁷ The most important formulation of the "law" is Leibniz's. See his 'Discours de Métaphysique' in C.I. Gerhardt, *Die philosophische Schriften von G.W. Leibniz* vol. IV (Hilderstein 1978).

⁸ Although it may seem an odd term, "sameness" is presupposed within argument based on inference and, as shall be argued, is fundamental to a reworking of inference in terms of repetition.

⁹ For a contemporary empiricist account of this problem see P. F. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 54-58.

identified. Even in the case of inference, the claim is always going to be that the X at t_1 is another X. While this leaves open the question of how the original X came to be known — and know such that will allow for the further identifications, thus re-identifications, of X — it remains the case that inference, in the sense presented above, is a form of repetition.

What this means is that differentiating perception and judgment in terms of time — precisely because it is a distinction established by temporal succession — inscribes a form of repetition into that distinction. Moreover, it is not a simple inscription since it is precisely that inscription and therefore the primacy and centrality of a form of repetition that secures the identity of any new perception. To allow the shift from this conception of repetition to recognition is to allow for the implicit presence of repetition to be given a more positive content. In other words, it is to argue that, as has already been suggested, even an empiricist conception of perception depends upon a form of repetition. To move from such a conception of perception to recognition is simply to state perception's founding truth. And yet, once the primordially of repetition is allowed, this will open up other ways of formulating the relationship between perception and judgment. Part of the strategy at work here is to stage a gradual transformation in how these terms are understood. In this instance, this is taking place because of the recovery of the ineliminable role of repetition within perception (even in perception as generally construed).

The question that has to be addressed now is what occurs when repetition — understood as an inherent element of perception (perception in general) — is given centrality. What will be argued is that repetition allows for the move from empiricism to materialism. Moreover, what will be argued in addition is that this move brings with it the necessity of what can be provisionally identified as the 'transcendent'. As will emerge, 'transcendent' is tied to materialism once materialism is defined in terms of repetition.¹⁰ However, the transcendent will come to be recast as the immaterial.

¹⁰ This is a complex point. There is a temptation to use the term transcendental as opposed to transcendent. The reason, at this stage at least, that the latter term is being used, is that it is still not clear to what extent the conceptual functions as a ground. The question is not whether it is a ground. Rather, the issue is what would be meant by ground in such a claim. All that is being suggested at this stage is that materialism will bring with it what can be minimally identified as a transcendent dimension. Indeed, it will be just such a dimension that Hume will exclude in his critique of abstraction and general ideas.

2.

In order to develop this position elements of Hume's argument against abstraction will provide the point of departure. In the *Treatise of Human Nature* Hume formulates his position in the following terms.¹¹

Let any man try to conceive a triangle in general which is neither an Isosceles nor Scalenum, or has any particular length or properties of sides, and he will soon perceive the absurdity of all the scholastic notions with regard to abstractions and general ideas. (155)

There is something historically as well as philosophically compelling about this argument. Conceiving, in the formulation given to it by Arnauld and Nicole in *L'art de penser* — a formulation straightforwardly Cartesian in origin — was always linked to the idea, and the idea had to be of the particular — a given X — though equally it would allow for generality, insofar as all bodies could be thought in terms of the idea of extension. Hume's response is that it is impossible to have an idea of extension that would have the same status as the idea of a specific particular object without being the idea of some particular object.¹² For Hume any thought of the 'general' can only ever be the thought of a particular. A way of reformulating this position is that for Hume the general would have to have a content other than that of a particular and that this is an impossible situation.

Hume advances the same argument in his treatment of Abstract Ideas (Part I. Section VII), the conclusion being that an abstract idea cannot have any content, since the content of all ideas is derived from impressions. Even in this instance, when use is made of 'general terms', it remains the case that 'we form the idea of individuals'. Generality is the truth of ideas on the level of representation, even though ideas are necessarily particular in nature. The imagination and custom work together to make this possible.

¹¹ All references to Hume are to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). Page numbers are given in the body of text.

¹² The point here is that Hume's use of the term "conceive", in recalling the French term "*concevoir*", can be read as signaling a response to the use made of the latter term in the Cartesian tradition.

A particular idea becomes annexed to a general term; that is, to a term, which from a customary conjunction has a relation to many other particular ideas, and readily recalls them in the imagination. (22)

The clue to what is occurring in this argument is provided by the opening line of the first passage cited above. Hume begins, '(L)et any man try to conceive a triangle in general'. Once the position is formulated in that way there can be no response. It is impossible — in Humean terms — for there to be conception in general. The question here has to concern the nature of their limitation. On one level, the position has to hold precisely because impressions are the origin of ideas, and the connection between ideas is established in terms of the operation of the imagination and custom. There is however another moment in the argument that opens up a different approach. Hume has to account for how it is that custom operates to recall earlier instances such that the 'same word' can be given the extension that it clearly has. He formulates this position in the following terms.

But as the same word is suppos'd to have been frequently applied to other individuals, that are different in many respects from that idea, which is immediately present to the mind; the word not being able to revive the idea of all these individuals, only touches the soul, if I may be allow'd so to speak, and revives that custom, which we have acquired by surveying them. They are not really and in fact present to the mind, but only in power; nor do we draw them out all distinctly in the imagination, but keep ourselves in a readiness to survey any one of them, as we may be prompted by a present design or necessity. The word raises up an individual idea, along with a certain custom; and that custom produces any other individual one, for which we have an occasion. But as the production of all the ideas of which the name may be applied, is in most cases impossible, we abridge that work by a more partial consideration and find but few inconveniences to arise in our reasoning from that abridgment. (20-1)

A word cannot 'revive' all the instances to which it refers. What is awoken is the custom for dealing with that to which the particular pertains. The totality of particulars is not present in the mind; what is there is in fact a 'power'. It will be essential to return to this term. What cannot be produced — where this power encounters its limit — are all the

ideas to which the word can be 'applied'. What enables this impossibility to be maintained is that custom intervenes allowing any 'inconveniences' to be circumvented.¹³

What is meant by the term 'power' emerges in the contrast staged in the passage between, on the one hand, that which is present — and here Hume has to allow for the possibility that all the 'individuals' could be present and present in the same way — and, on the other hand, a capacity for recall or revival, the realization of which cannot be guaranteed and indeed is impossible if understood in terms of completion. In the first instance, presence is its own guarantee. In the second, the absence of that guarantee is mediated by custom. The distinction is between actual presence and that potential identified by the use of the term 'power'. What has to be taken up is the relationship between power and impossibility. The passage can be reworked such that what is being argued is that any new particular, or the word referring to any new particular will, at the same time as referring to it, refer to all other particulars of the same status. What this means is that there is a commitment, perhaps a necessity, at the heart of Hume's undertaking for the word to refer both to itself and beyond itself. (It will be essential to return to this point.) While the word cannot, in fact, refer to all the particulars, this is not the significant point, since what is at issue here is a potentiality. The realization of that potential would be the interconnection between all 'individuals'. What allows for individuation and connection is not power as an activity but power as a potentiality. The complicating factor is that this potentiality cannot guarantee its own field of operation. Such a guarantee can only come from the effective presence of custom.

The limit is established by 'power' understood as potential, and possibility understood as the complete realization of that potential. Impossibility is the mark of the actualization of a limit. The implicit point here is that if there is generality — or more directly if generality were possible — then it would be the same as the complete actualization of this potential (assuming the potential itself could be generalized). This is what is impossible. This point can be restated in order to argue that universals are possible to the extent that they have complete content. This is impossible. This impossibility does not restrict human activity precisely because what occasions such activities — what gives the limit — is the operation of custom. Universals either have full content or they are

¹³ Parenthetically it should be noted that custom allows the incomplete to be maintained as a norm. What does not emerge, of course, is a philosophical thinking of the ineliminability of the incomplete.

impossible. There is no way of turning Hume's position into one that would allow for a version of universality. Perception and judgment are rewritten in terms of impressions and custom. And yet, if the potential — 'power' — is taken as marking the nature of possible universality, then the universal inherent within it must, of necessity, be incomplete. The argument against its functioning as a universal is that it cannot have complete content, and yet it may be that this is what universality is. In order to get to this position it is essential to note the way in which repetition figures within Hume's formulation of his position.

As has been noted, Hume formulates the relationship between the new occurrence and previous occurrences with regard to the term 'revive'. What the new 'revives' is the capacity — the custom — for dealing with what is occasioned by the word. While it is clear that what is identified by the use of this term — 'revive' — has to be understood in terms of a form of repetition, one which of necessity remains unthought in Hume's writings, there is a more significant formulation of repetition within the overall argument. It is present in the identification of 'general terms' as those which occasion the recall of other particulars. This occurs in the imagination. There is a continuity of movement between particular and general that is continually presented in terms of either revival or recall. What makes this latter formulation important is that it establishes the relation between general and particular as grounded in repetition. Given that repetition is the ground, the only way in which it can be effective is if the general (or universal) is incomplete. Repetition is bound up with the incomplete. The limit of Hume's position lies not in the centrality of repetition, but in the way the incomplete is formulated. Its strength is that it allows a conception of particularity — here to be reexpressed as finitude — to take a potential infinite as its ground. The limitation lies in the way that infinite is thought. Here, it is thought as having the same quality as particulars. In other words, the infinite in question is additive in nature. The move from finitude to a potential infinite is to be understood in terms of further additions. The finite and the infinite — even if the latter is only a potentiality — is not thought in terms of two ontologically distinct realms (even though the distinction between actual and potential being could allow for just such a distinction). In part this is consistent with the general critique of abstraction and generality at work in the *Treatise*. However, what it opens up is a move beyond Hume that does not slide into a form of idealism. What is central to Hume and thus what needs to be retained is his refusal of that conception of the causal relationship between ideas (or universals) and particulars, according to which the identity of the particular is given in terms of its relation to the

universal.

The difficulty with Hume's position concerned how the general or the universal were thought. The problem with idealism concerns the relationship between universal and particular, insofar as the identity of the particular is given by a causal relationship between universal and particular.¹⁴ Hume allows the recognition that there cannot be an answer to the question of the general *qua* general. The difficulty, however, is that this does not mean that it is impossible to have universals. Indeed, as has already been suggested, it may be the case that universals are necessarily contentless and that particulars refer to them without being subsumed by them. The force of empiricism is that it allows for the particular. Moreover, it allows for the insistence of the particular. What remains unthought is the general or the universal. The question concerns how, if at all, either universality or generality is to be thought. At its most emphatic the question is: what is a concept?

Any attempt to consider the relationship between perception and judgment has to address this question. If perception has to be distinct from the conceptual, then Hume's argument against general terms and

¹⁴ This conception of causality can be noted at work in Plato's argument concerning the role of "ideas" in the *Phaedo*. The relationship in question concerns ideas and particulars and specifically the identity of particulars. At 100e the interrelationship between the elements is defined more tightly. Here Socrates argues that it is "by beauty that beautiful things are beautiful" (*to kalon ta kala [gigantai] kala*). This is the Platonic theory of causation. Beauty operates in this way in terms of its presence (*parousia*). Within this relation the two elements — absolute beauty and particular beautiful things — give rise to different philosophical demands. In the first instance absolute beauty becomes that which can be identified and defined independently of its relation to particular beautiful things. The defining Platonic question is always concerned to uncover that which is essential to what it is that defines a given form. What *auto to kalon* names is the *ousia* of *to kalon*; it names its essential being. While the detail of aesthetic and ethical activity has to be worked out, and while Plato concerns himself as much with, for example, questions of education as he does with those of statesmanship, all such investigations take place within a mode of philosophical thinking structured by an ontologico-temporal distinction between the realm of forms (or ideas) and the realm of particulars. Relationality here has to be thought in terms of external to internal relations. If a practice of individuation exists and if that account is to explain why a given particular has the quality that it has, then in the case of actualized particulars it has to do with a relationship they have to that which is necessarily external to them. Plato accounts for their presence in terms of "participation" or "partaking". With regard to the forms themselves the matter is more complex, precisely because the philosophical task is defined by thinking them in their necessary differentiation from that which pertains to particulars. As such they have to be thought in terms of pure externality.

what he identifies as 'abstract ideas' will have to pertain. However, the limit of the Humean argument allows for a reworking of abstract ideas and therefore of universals in order to open up a conception of universality that will link perception and the conceptual in another way. Part of that move will involve redefining the nature of the conceptual.

3.

The point of departure is that any perception of X is always a perception of another X.¹⁵ Perception needs to be linked to repetition. This is not established on the basis of inference, if inference is taken as an end in itself. Inference is simply a form of repetition. The question that emerges at this point concerns how this repetition is to be understood. What is being repeated? To what is the repetition referring?

In order to take the argument a stage further the assumption has to be that X at t_2 is not identical with X at t_1 . It is another instance of X. If that is the case then an interesting problem emerges. To say of a given X that it is another X — and assuming that it is not a question of identity but of sameness — raises the problem of how this move from identity to sameness is to be understood. The first part of any response is that repetition secures sameness, it is also the case that it is repetition that allows for the co-presence of sameness and difference. Admitting the centrality of repetition means that what is repeated is always the particular; it is always a specific X. However, it cannot be that it is just the specific X that is repeated. Were this to be the case, then it would entail that every repetition would be either identical rather than the same, or completely different without any determination by sameness. (In this latter instance every perception would be completely 'new'.) While it is possible to introduce temporal and spatial distinctions as preconditions of the ground of experience (and thus establish a form of transcendental aesthetic), such a move would fail to consider the central role played by

¹⁵ How knowledge or perception of the first X occurs is clearly the fundamental question at this point. The only answer that can be given here is that any subsequent perception of X confirms — retroactively — the initial perception. There would not then be a founding perception that was any sense an origin or even originating. Rather, there would be a network of activities within which X was re-identified. Part of that network would be the initial perception. However it would not, simply in virtue of being the initial perception, provide the basis in terms of which all other perceptions of X would be inferred.

repetition. Spatial and temporal considerations are raised necessarily by this consideration of identity and sameness and yet have to be rethought in terms of repetition. Such an undertaking is only possible once the link between repetition and individuation is set in place. (The detail demanded is a task for another occasion.)

Given that what is repeated is always a specific X, the repetition must be the particular. And yet, what must be given at the same time is that which is always more than the singular. The quality of being 'more' is not there in addition.¹⁶ It must be understood as the founding plurality proper to any particular. While its nature remains to be specified, that 'more', which is integral to the particularity of the particular, comprises the universal as well as the reference to that universal of which the particular is the particular. The materiality of the particular is, from the start, bound up with an immaterial force. Force is that quality of the particular that is its referral to the universal. It is neither an extra element nor an addition. It is part of the mode of being proper to the particular.¹⁷ However, as will be suggested, it is a mode of being that is only actualized with a judgment. With regard to the particular, this means that particularity is always complex. This possibility has already been noted in Hume. While in that instance it was the case that a particular referred to all other particulars of the same status, that act of referral was present, not as realized, but as potential. The particular therefore was already divided between potential and actual being. Even though this was a state of affairs

¹⁶ I am suggesting here that all particulars need to be understood in terms of what I have elsewhere called anoriginal plurality. See my *The Plural Event* (London: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁷ The inscription of a dynamic quality within matter forms an important separable strand within the history of materialism. What is important is that the retention of the centrality of "power" or "force" not lapse into a form of vitalism, but that it retain its grounding ontological nature. What this means is that the question of being cannot be separated from questions pertaining to power. What has to be argued is that power is an immaterial quality of matter. The immaterial cannot be granted a spatio-temporal location, and yet it is integral to the mode of being proper to matter. While Leibniz is a key figure within the development of this argument, there are other important seventeenth-century figures. Rather than the mechanistic conception of materialism that comes from an emphasis on Cartesian mechanics and on Descartes' use of the body as an analogy, there is the strain of materialism that grapples with the inscription of a dynamic process as part of matter. One significant figure here is Margaret Cavendish. For an important introduction to Cavendish that emphasizes her importance within a history of materialist philosophy see Susan James, 'The Philosophical Innovation of Margaret Cavendish', *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 7(2) (1999), pp. 219-44.

that could not have been explained further by Hume, it indicates the presence of an irreducible ontological plurality that defines the nature of particulars. Repetition involves more than just the self-subsisting particularity of the particular. Part of what is repeated is the anoriginal complexity proper to particulars.

Within this set-up the universal in question cannot be given any content because any attempt to specify content would be simply to identify another particular or to operate on a level of generality that would bear no relation to particulars. This is not to argue that there cannot be defining characteristics or even generic determinations. Rather, the claim is that the only way it is possible to identify their field of activity is in terms of particulars.¹⁸ Developing this position, as has been indicated, involves arguing that particulars manifest themselves while referring to a universal which does not determine the identity of the particular, since that identity is secured through repetition. If this universal does not have any content — a content other than the presence of particulars — then two questions arise. Firstly, how it is possible to maintain and thus

¹⁸ There have been many attempts to provide a sustained distinction between singular and general terms. For example, in his *On Universals. An Essay in Ontology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), N. Wolterstorff provides a formulation that is echoed in a great deal of the literature. He formulates the distinction in the following way: "... a singular term ... can be true of just one thing with the same import ... a general term can be true of more than one thing with the same import" (p. 52). The difficulty, as is emerging, is in providing a description of a general term that makes it more than a complex instance of a singular term. Indeed, it can be argued that precisely because there cannot be a complete description there cannot be general terms. Part of the argument being staged in this paper is to rescue the notion of generality by reworking the nature of the particular and by extension the conception of generality proper to it. What this opens up is another instance within mereology. Particulars will have an in-built plurality that is ontological in nature. The single will already have two ontological properties. Aggregates, manifolds or fusions are more complex, in both senses, than was initially envisaged. This point not only opens up the possibility of developing a mereology defined in terms of ontological complexity, it will also allow for a critical position to be developed in relation to questions concerning "bare particulars". While they cannot be considered in this context, central to developing the argument would be the encounter between Mertz and Moreland over this issue, and particularly the latter's critiques of Keith Campbell's *Abstract Particulars* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990). See D. W. Mertz, 'Individuation and Instance Ontology', *Australian Journal of Philosophy* 79(1) (2001), pp. 45-61. J. P. Moreland, 'A Critique of Campbell's Refurbished Nominalism', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* XXXV (1997), pp. 225-46; 'Theories of Individuation: A Reconsideration of Bare Particulars', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (1998), pp. 251-63.

develop such a conception of universality? Secondly, why does such a conception of universality have to be maintained at all, if the universal in question cannot be attributed any content?

The second question involves a pragmatic possibility. It would be as though pragmatic results were all that were necessary. They would prevail as if there were no universal, or as if universals were almost an unnecessary intrusion. Countering these possibilities means that the first question needs to be taken up. In order to address the possibility of a contentless universal as in some sense already implicated in the process of perception, which in virtue of that positioning brings a reconsideration of the nature of the relationship between perception and judgment into play, it is essential to reformulate the process in which the pragmatic figures. What needs to be argued is that the pragmatic is an expression of finitude and that the condition which establishes and holds finitude in place is its relationship to an infinite; not an infinite which is additive in nature but an infinite that could be reformulated in terms of a specific construction of universality. Any argument that focuses on pragmatic considerations as though finitude could be self-subsisting would have misunderstood the nature of finitude. (This is why the second question posed above, while important, has an in-built redundant quality.) Part of what emerged from Hume's consideration of particulars was a conception of finitude which was dependent upon the infinite, even though the infinite in question was additive in nature. Nonetheless, despite that restriction, what remains the case is that finitude presupposes the presence of the infinite. The infinite need not be a transcendental ground. However, its presence is presupposed in the actualization of particulars.

If the position, which is yet to be fully developed, is extended to include a consideration of perception, then it would need to be argued that the conception of particularity that figures in the perception of X involves a pragmatic dimension. However, what is perceived does not exist *simpliciter*. A particular is perceived with the possibility of its opening up a relation to a universal. Even though it is the universal proper to the particular, it must still be the case that such a universal is contentless. Its presence — perhaps the effective nature of its presence — occasions judgment. The move from perception to judgment is the move from particular to universal. What allows the move to take place is that any particular is at the same time both itself — it is that particular — and it is the universal, though only to the extent that it is a contentless universal. The locus of both freedom and creativity is found in the continuity of the oscillation between perception and judgment.

The conceptual becomes the contentless universal to which the

particular refers. Perceptions of X refer to an X that is itself bound up with the universal of which it is also the instantiation. The evaluation of X is always in terms of the way in which it is X. Such claims will, by definition, always address the particularity of the particular but in terms of the particular being the realization of X. There can be no description of X in general or X as a universal. Hume is right to argue that any such move would be impossible because all that would be given is another instance of X. However, it does not follow from Hume's correctness concerning the problem of attributing specific content to universals that there cannot be universals at all. While it does not pertain to perception as such, an example can illustrate this point. It is possible to argue that there are crimes against humanity without it being necessary to define exactly what humanity is in general. Humanity — understood as a universal — can only be instantiated in the being human of either individuals or groups. Once such entities are subject to attack, it may not be simply their person that is being assaulted; it may be their very humanity. The question of what their humanity is independently of their being human, is one to which there is no answer. And yet the universal to which all humans refer, although it does not determine the identity of a human as a human, is humanity. (What prevents this position from amounting to a naïve humanism is that the universal does not determine the identity of particulars — for were it allowed to do so, it would efface the co-presence of sameness and difference by way of an overarching identity. This co-presence of sameness and difference is a further index of the founding plurality that characterizes particulars.) Hence, it is possible to encounter instances of crimes against humanity wherein the nature of the crime is always against the humanity of specified groups or individuals. As has already been indicated, this example illustrates what was referred to above as the original plurality that is integral to the process through which particulars are individuated. Indeed, there is an additional argument, namely that it is this quality that allows particulars to be drawn into considerations that pertain to judgment.

4.

Empiricism argues for the insistence of the particular (and equally insists on the particular). However, the particular is not a simple entity of the kind demanded by the empiricist frame of reference. Once it is allowed that a particular is given within repetition, then part of what is repeated is not the concept that determines the identity of the particular — such a

position is straightforwardly a type of philosophical idealism — but the contentless universal to which particulars refer in virtue of being particulars. This position, which involves the truth of empiricism but allocates to the particular a quality that does not determine its identity, but which is nonetheless integral to its identity, can be described as materialism. The justification for that description is, on the one hand, that it allows for the materiality of the object to be fundamental, and yet on the other, that it does not identify the object's material presence with its empirical presence. This opens up the possibility of a reconsideration of the object as a complex relationship between material and immaterial elements. Materialism, in twisting free from its reduction to empiricism, has to acknowledge the truth of empiricism. Part of that acknowledgment involves recognizing that the truth of empiricism is defined as much by the particular as it is by the role of repetition and the 'more' to which repetition refers.

While there may appear to be something contradictory in the claim that the co-presence of the material and the immaterial form part of a materialist account, that would only be the case if empiricism prevailed in the interpretation of materialism. Clearly, with regard to perception the cognition of a particular X is the recognition of that particular X. On the level of perception — understood as recognition — the claim made of any given X is that it is another X. Once the question is asked — in what way is it an X? — then, working with the assumption that universals do not subsume particulars and are not able to account for the identity of particulars, that question marks out the place of judgment. However, how does the nature of the response — which here involves the evocation of judgment — reflect on the way the distinction between materialism and empiricism has been drawn? What has already been discovered is that universals are impossible if their infinite nature is thought as additive. There cannot be an adequate, definite description of the universal *qua* universal. Although there can always be a description of a number of generalizable qualities, they are not adequate on their own. From out of the activity of perception and within the process of judgment there is the emergence of a universal. What is being described therefore is the universal to which the particular refers. This is occurring even though there cannot be a complete description of the universal in question. Empiricism, by way of contrast, demands that if there are universals they should involve an exhaustive description, only then to conclude that given that exhaustive descriptions are impossible, so too are 'general' or abstract terms. However, as has already been intimated, instead of taking this limit to be the limit that eliminates universals, it could be a

description of the nature of universality itself. From being that which should have had a complete content, universality becomes the contentless universal.

What is meant by the contentless universal can be defined in terms of two specific qualities. The first is that it is the universal to which all particulars refer in virtue of being particulars. (Part of what this means is that particulars are not purely self-referential since what has become complex is the nature of the 'self' involved.)¹⁹ The second is that it cannot have either an identity-providing or an identity-sustaining content independently of the content of any given X. And yet, precisely because that referential quality is part of the particularity of the particular, its being present is what allows for the difference between a materialist and an empiricist account. For the empiricist it would have to be an addition having the same ontological status as that to which it is added. (A state of affairs that yields the aporetic nature of an infinite defined in terms of addition.) The materialist position would be that which allows for the insistence of the particular — and thus its materiality — but which attributes to the work of matter immaterial possibilities. One is the act of referral to a universal. Another is the insistent presence — insistent within judgment — of a universal that has to be contentless. If there is an answer to the question concerning the concept, then it is that the concept is the contentless universal.²⁰ Although it requires further elaboration, the point of departure underlying this reworking of the concept in terms of the contentless universal is clear. There cannot be an exhaustive description of the universal. Any attempt to provide content ends up with a partial description and as such would be no more than the description of a possible particular. Rather than being external, universals are internal, and thus part of a set-up that involves an inherent relationality.

¹⁹ What is being questioned here is the possibility that any universal could have a "definition" in Aristotle's sense of the term. There is not a "phrase indicating the essence of something" (Aristotle, *Topics* 101b39). In fact, to the extent that the definition is precluded and the possibility of a contentless universal takes its place, the fourfold distinction between "definition", "property", "genus" and "accident" as established in the *Topics* would need to be distanced and another language of classification would then have to be introduced.

²⁰ There is a great deal more that has to be argued here concerning the nature of the concept. Two differing though important paths are opened up by, on the one hand Béatrice Longuenesse's important re-reading of Kant's *Transcendental Analytic* in her *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), and on the other by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in 'Qu'est-ce qu'un concept?' in their *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1991), pp. 21-38.

What is at work here is a process. Within it, perception and judgment become modes of individuation. Perception can be said to individuate to the extent that perception understood as recognition becomes a form of repetition. Judgment would equally be part of this process. Yet it is not as though judgment is secondary and depends upon a founding perception. Judgment, in this context, is the account given of the way in which a given X is X. Perception always involves a pragmatic element insofar as it involves finitude. However, the perception of X will always involve the 'more' that is involved in the activity of judgment. Judgment also has a pragmatic dimension. It is not just that the judgment is specific. What is important is the nature of that specificity. Precisely because the contentless universal does not subsume particulars, there can be disagreement concerning the way a given X is what it is. Disagreements cannot be resolved by invoking the universal. Judgments therefore take on the quality of a decision. In other words, they interrupt a potential infinite with a specific claim. That claim is the expression of a finitude whose ground is the infinite. This process indicates that if perception and judgment are moments of individuation they cannot be understood outside the activity of the repetition they enact.²¹ Moreover, if perception and judgment demand the insistence of the particular then that insistence brings with it that immaterial dimension of referral and power (potentiality) necessitated by such insistence. This set up, the process itself, the ineliminability of repetition and the immaterial, stage another materialism. Neither pure matter, nor matter seeking a transcendental ground: at work here is the complex materiality of ontological plurality.

²¹ The proximity of this position to the one developed by Simondon in his *L'individu et sa genèse physico-biologique* (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 1995) needs to be noted. Simondon in formulating his position argues that his project has a specific aim: "Nous voudrions montrer que le principe d'individuation n'est pas une réalité isolée, localisée en elle-même, préexistant à l'individu comme un germe déjà individualisé de l'individu; que le principe d'individuation, au sens strict du terme, est le système complet dans lequel s'opère la genèse de l'individu; que, de plus, ce système se survit à lui-même dans l'individu vivant, sous la forme d'un milieu associé à l'individu, en lequel continue à s'opérer l'individuation: que la vie est ainsi une individuation perpétuée, une individuation continuée à travers le temps, prolongeant une singularité" (61). The importance of this position is that individuation marks a process in which the individuated is the consequence. It does not precede predication but is defined by a range of possible predicates. The real difference here is the absence from Simondon's conception of individuation of the role played by repetition within any system based on a distinction between the individuated and the individual. The process — or in his terms "le système" — works precisely because of the effective presence of repetition.

The impossibility of original singularity opens matter up. The particular, in its always being 'more', inscribes the immaterial as part of matter. What matters therefore is a founding ontological plurality.

This means that simplicity and other forms of holism are eliminated in the name of a founding ontological plurality. Particulars, as with the individuated, are always the finite effects of complex systems. Although we have left a number of central topics unaddressed, all that we can provide here, in the guise of a conclusion, is a sketch of elements central to two of them. These topics are, firstly, those raised by the claim made in the opening section that perceiving implies the already present role of judgment. It is now possible to give greater precision to this condition of being 'already present'. The second area that needs to be taken up is the way in which allocating centrality to repetition and offering an explanation of individuation in terms of that centrality changes the way subject/object relations within perception are to be understood.

As was indicated in the beginning, the formulation of the relationship between perception and judgment allows for either their conflation or their separation. Rather than accepting either of these determinations as given, an implied connection between them was presupposed even though the nature of that connection had yet to be determined. What emerged in the preceding analysis is not that judgment is the same as perception but that the ontological nature of the particular within perception was what allowed for judgment. Although it may be possible to argue that perception is seeing, insofar as perception involves a physical act, what the act stages is the recognition of a particular as that which it is. Once the question of how the particular is what it is, has been raised — and in this context this is the question of judgment — then the fact that the particular is a recognition and thus an individuation within repetition, allows judgment to consist in an attempt to justify the initial individuation. The justification however is not based on recourse back to the universal or to the particular as an end itself, but on the inherent referral to a contentless universal that the particular stages by virtue of being a particular. Justification, however, will always be interrupted by custom and norms, precisely because the universal is contentless and thus dispute and contestation are ineliminable. Norms and customs can thereby be transformed.

This opens up the second topic. Perception and judgment are too quickly conceived of in terms of a subject's relation to a world. Both would be taken as prior to a given encounter. However, an important inversion occurs once perception and judgment have been reformulated — accepting the centrality of repetition — in terms of finitude. If the

finite takes a potential infinite as its ground, then just as the perception or the judgment is an effect of that process, the subject is also an effect. In other words, perceiving, which is always the recognition of X, yields the perceiver of X. Once it has been allowed that intentionality is not strictly intentional but describes the activity of consciousness, then what is given with any intentional act is the agent. What had been initially assumed to be independent — namely the subject and the object of perception — are themselves effects of a general process of individuation; a process which, in holding to the ineliminable and effective presence of repetition, has to allow for a conception of original complexity. The particular, in always being more than one, takes on the status of a plural event. It is a plurality allowing for, indeed occasioning, individuation. However, it is not individuated within a holism defined by variety, but rather within a complex system defined by ontological and temporal differences.²²

²² It is the philosophical work of Deleuze that has allowed for a conflation of difference and variety. Part of developing what has been provisionally identified here as a metaphysics of particularity is stemming this conflation and thus arguing, *pace* Deleuze, for the centrality of difference in the place of variety. While Badiou's critique of Deleuze (Alain Badiou, *Deleuze. La clameur de l'être* [Paris: Hachette, 1998]) may be misplaced, it remains the case that the argument developed by Deleuze concerning the "univocity of Being" — a position that is formulated in his *Logique du sens* (Paris: Editions de minuit, 1969) — leads in the direction of variety rather than towards a sustained philosophy of ontological difference.