CHAPTER 3

# The Exhaustive Partition

Look at the room you are in. Does it contain at least one distinction: one boundary, one contrast, one pair of items that are not the same? Plainly it does. Now ask it of a thought, or of the whole of reality. The answer is yes or no. Nothing else is on offer, because a condition and its absence leave no gap between them.

Chapter 3 turns that one question into the book's working division. A state with at least one distinction inside it belongs to diversity. A state with none belongs to equality, the book's name for the wholly undifferentiated condition. Equality has no parts, no regions, no stages, no features that could be told apart.

Chapter 2 ended owing this answer. Its reply to Jacques Derrida, who put difference first and refused to treat it as a foundation, was staked on the split being complete. This chapter argues that the split is complete, and that it matters as no other complete split does. Two worries arrive at once. The split may be complete only in the trivial way that any condition and its absence are. Or it may be one more binary opposition of the kind Gilles Deleuze, G. W. F. Hegel and Derrida have taken apart.

## The two cells

Diversity is cheap. A single distinction places a state on that side as firmly as a billion do.

The chapter reads "internal distinction" broadly, and later chapters lean on the breadth. A state counts as distinguished when it holds two items separated by a boundary. It counts equally when it is some positive way at all, when it bears a property. A lack does not count, because lacking distinction is no way a state is.

Completeness itself is easy. Having at least one distinction, and having none, are contradictories, so exactly one of them is true of anything. Logic alone delivers that much.

## Why the split matters

Logic is not enough, and the chapter concedes it at the start. Having at least one electron, or having none, is just as complete, and it matters only where electrons matter. Two arguments carry the weight, and they can fail separately.

The first is predicative priority. Before anything can be called red, round or a cause, it must already stand apart from something. Distinction is therefore the first thing sayable about anything that is not nothing. The claim stays modest. Someone who takes a thing's nature as basic keeps her natures. She is refused only a description that excludes no alternative.

The second argument needs no earlier chapter. Sorting is distinguishing. To sort anything, you separate what meets a condition from what does not, and separating is drawing a distinction. This split is about distinction, and the act of sorting is an instance of distinction. It is the only complete split whose subject matter the sorting operation instantiates. Instantiation is all the chapter claims, and it calls the thesis constitutive instantiation.

Two things follow. Nothing deeper can sit beneath this split, since any deeper split would itself be an act of distinguishing. And the instantiation is what makes the split substantive, since completeness on its own comes from logic.

A separate argument meets the critics of binary oppositions. An opposition needs two positive terms, and equality has no features of its own.

A corollary matters for later chapters. Every relation that does structural work holds between two different things, so it gives out where distinction gives out.

## Six traditions and a third option

If the split is complete, no tradition should produce a real counterexample. The chapter tests six, and predicts how the tests must go. To put a third option forward, you have to tell it apart from both cells, and that act is an act of distinguishing. So each case displays the prediction and supplies no separate evidence for it. A tradition that produced a real third would refute the split.

Deleuze, who treats difference as a force that comes before identity, is called the most serious challenge of the six. The chapter grants that its split cannot capture his contrast between two kinds of difference, since both land in diversity. It calls that a strength, since the split works below that level. The book’s own account, from Chapter 2, also puts identity after contrast throughout. The chapter presents this as Deleuze’s thesis in the book’s vocabulary. It refuses only the further step, that what precedes identity cannot be put into words.

Hegel expects a third, since a concept and its opposite yield a synthesis that cancels and preserves both. A synthesis that keeps its moments distinguishable has internal distinctions, so it is diverse. One that fails to keep them has collapsed into equality. Hegel’s Becoming is still real. The chapter absorbs it as the split seen in motion, the passage from undivided to structured.

Three more traditions never offered a third, so an appendix runs them as a weaker check.

Negative theology holds that the ultimate transcends every category. By predicative priority, a reality beyond all description lacks all distinction, and so answers to equality. Anything said or thought about such an ultimate is classified by the split. And a tradition that owns its description has described equality, while one that disowns it keeps ineffability at the price of theoretical vacancy. The fork is exhaustive, since no third course is left open. Only the identification binds as far as a tradition owns its description.

## The two names of nothing

One candidate belongs to no tradition. Perhaps, beside differentiated being and undifferentiated being, there is nothing at all. Nothing has no distinctions, so it is not diverse. Nor is it a state that is, so it is not equality.

The chapter answers with its two-names result. Equality and non-existence both lack every distinction, so no feature could tell them apart. They differ in one respect only: whether they obtain, which means whether they are the case. An undifferentiated condition that obtains is equality. One that does not is non-existence. So non-existence never obtains. The moment it did, it would be equality.

An objection comes straight back. If equality obtains, then obtaining is a feature it has, and a feature is a contrast. The chapter answers with a criterion: obtaining marks a difference only between states. Equality against nothing involves one state only, and a contrast needs two. Two further contrasts are sorted the same way. The chapter owns the third, where equality is the stopping point of diversity, a fact about whether diversity is bounded.

## The objections the chapter answers

The first objection is about vagueness, and the chapter separates two readings of it. On the milder reading, quantum states blur the boundaries between particles, and blurring leaves distinctions present. The serious reading is that the world itself might be unsettled between the two cells. An unsettledness is itself a way things stand, and one such difference is all the threshold needs. The chapter claims nothing more general. For an ordinary word like cloud, an unsettled case stays unsettled. The reply turns on this one threshold. What the chapter claims here is the hard-edge corollary, that the equality cell cannot go borderline.

The second objection says predicative priority is only a point about the order in which things can be described. Conditions of describing need not be conditions of being. Describing is itself a real event, as Chapters 1 and 2 argued, which costs a premise a critic may refuse. The sorting thesis holds whatever one thinks of description, and it leaves open the gap between the distinguishing act and the thing distinguished.

The third objection is that a test which digests every counterexample cannot fail. The chapter separates a rigged test, which misclassifies real counterexamples, from an empty one, which asks for something that undoes itself in any attempt to supply it. This test is empty, it says, and the emptiness was derived. It admits that a future tradition might still propose a third option.

## What the chapter claims

The completeness of the split takes no grade at all. It is true by logical form, so the book’s ladder of grades would add nothing. Its strength is that of the law that a claim or its denial holds.

The substantiveness of the split is graded *established*, the rung below the book's top mark. *Established* means the result follows validly from premises the book defends, so a challenger has to reject one of them. Predicative priority depends on Chapters 1 and 2, and the sorting thesis does not.

The relational corollary is *established* as well, since it borrows from the grounding literature the rule that nothing grounds itself. Self-identity is conceded as a real relation with one term, and it buys nothing. The testing against the six traditions is *established*.

The two-names result is *established*. It includes the three-contrast criterion, that obtaining marks a difference only between states. Its one condition is a contested premise, that a lack confers no inner structure. The hard-edge corollary is *established* too, and the chapter's notes and the book's register of premises give it that same contested premise.

One limit is stated in the open. The chapter does not show that an undifferentiated state could obtain, and its appendix shows only that the description carries no logical contradiction. The chapter argues that its results do not need that claim. Equality works as a limit concept, like absolute zero: never reached, and needed by every temperature scale. Every major result is delivered on both branches, the limit reached and the limit only approached.

Chapter 4 takes up what follows: whether the hierarchy of explanation has a bottom, and what this split says about it.