



# GILLES DELEUZE

## *Spinoza: The Velocities of Thought*

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TRANSLATION BY CHARLES J. STIVALE (PART 1) AND SIMON DUFFY (PART 2)

#### I

So, I'm considering this point: Spinoza undertakes something that is surely one of the most audacious enterprises in the sense of going farthest with it, specifically, the project of a pure ontology. But my question is still: how is it that he calls this pure ontology an ethics? He doesn't call it ontology; he calls it an ethics. And we began... I'd like for us to hold onto this question somewhat as one that constantly returns to us. Hence, there is no definitive answer. Instead, this would be through accumulating details that little by little would be imposed: ah why yes, that was an quite excellent for him to call it an ethics.

And we saw the general atmosphere of this link between an ontology and an ethics with the suspicion that an ethics is something that has nothing to do with a morality. And why are we suspicious about the link that results in this pure ontology taking the title of *Ethics*? As we say, it's because Spinoza's pure ontology is presented as the position of an absolutely infinite and unique substance. Henceforth, be-ings (*les étants*), this absolutely infinite and unique substance, is Being, Being insofar as it is Being. Henceforth, be-ings will not be beings; be-ings, existents, are not beings, so what will they be? We saw the answer: they will be what Spinoza calls quite precisely *modes*, modes of the absolutely infinite substance. And a mode is what? It's not a being; it's a manner of being, a manner of being. So, be-ings, existents are not beings; only the absolutely infinite occurs as Being. Henceforth, those of us who are be-ings, who are existents, we will not be beings; we will be manners of being of this substance. And if I wonder what is the primary meaning of the most immediate sense of the word "ethics", how is it already something other than morality? Well, I'd say that we are more familiar with

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<sup>1</sup>The transcription on which this translation is based has several sources, notably the principal transcript created by members of the Paris 8 team, and two incomplete transcripts available at Web Deleuze – one found there under the impossible date 21 December 1980 (impossible since the university schedule excludes a course not only on Sunday but also within Christmas break) which, in fact, is a segment of the 9 December session's first part; and the other one found there under the actual course date which is a segment of the session's second part. The BNF recording allows me to fill in gaps in the French transcripts from both sources with hopes of producing then as faithful a translation as possible. Given the numerous gaps in the French transcript from Web Deleuze for part 1 (on which the Web Deleuze translation is based), I rely solely on the Paris 8 transcript, duly revised from the recording, for a new translation of the first part (approximately 45 minutes).



ethics nowadays under another name, which gained its development and earned its success: this is the word ethology, ethology.

When we speak of an ethology regarding animals, or even an ethology regarding humans, what is this about? Ethology in the simplest, most rudimentary sense of the term, in the end, is a practical science of what? A practical science of existent manners, from the viewpoint of a pure ontology.

How is this already different from a morality? What would a morality be? – If we continue on this [topic], just take all this as a kind of, I don't know... take it as within a kind of waking dream; we don't attach a fundamental importance to each proposition we are considering, but we are trying to compose a kind of vista (*paysage*) that would be the vista of ontology. – So, we are “manners of being within Being,” which is the object of an ethics, that is, an ethology. Fine.

In a morality, on the other hand, what is it about? I'd say that it's about two things that are fundamentally welded together. It's about essence and values. A morality calls to us, like that, like an impression. I'd say about morality that it's an operation that recalls us to essence, that is, to our essence, and that recalls us there by means of values. You indeed see that it's not the perspective of Being. I don't believe that a morality can be created from the viewpoint of ontology. Why? Because morality always implies something above Being; what exists above Being is something that plays the role of the One, of the Good (*du Bien*), as the One above Being. In fact, morality is the enterprise of judging not only all that is, but also Being itself. And we can only judge Being in the name of an agency above Being. When a great author says, “value does not await the number of years,” he was saying in some ways that value precedes Being. – Well, don't laugh, it's a joke, so I withdraw it [*Laughter*] –

But, in a morality, in what way is it a matter of essence [*Pause*] and of values? In fact, what's in question within a morality is our essence. So, what is our essence? In a morality, it's a matter of realizing essence. That already implies a great deal; it implies that essence is in a state in which it is not necessarily realized. That implies that we have an essence, that we would have an essence insofar as being human (*en tant qu'homme*). It's not so obvious that there is a human essence. But I believe that it's necessary for morality to speak and to give us orders in the name of an essence. If we are given orders in the name of an essence, it's because this essence is not realized in itself. So fine, it can be said that this essence is “in potential” (*en puissance*) within humans.

What is human essence in power within humans from that viewpoint of a morality? This is well known: human essence is that of being a “reasonable animal”; [being] a reasonable animal is the human essence, [from] Aristotle really, the classical definition within Aristotle: Man is a reasonable animal. Essence is what the thing is, [being] a reasonable animal, it's human essence. But Aristotle is like everyone, and all the moralists know it well: although man can have as essence being a reasonable animal, [man] isn't all that reasonable; he even never stops behaving in an unreasonable manner. How is that possible? It's because human essence, as such, is not necessarily realized, is not necessarily realized. Why isn't it necessarily realized? Because man is not pure reason, so there are accidents; humans never stop getting detoured. The entire classical conception of man consists in inviting him to come back to his essence because this essence is like a potentiality that is not necessarily realized, and morality is the process of realizing human essence.

And how can this essence be realized, which is only “in potential”? Through morality. To say that it is realized through morality is to say that it must be taken as an end. Human essence must be taken as an end, by whom? By existent man. Thus, behaving in a reasonable manner, that is, causing essence to pass into act, is the task of morality. And essence taken as end is its value.



Notice that the moral vision of the world – here, I’m really saying some elementary things; I am just trying to situate the elements of a moral vision of the world – I’d say that the moral vision of the world is made of essence. Essence is only “in potential”; essence must be realized, which will occur to the extent that essence is taken as an end and values guarantee the realization of essence. This aggregate is what I’d call morality, whereas I am immediately trying to transfer into an ethical world. – I’d like you to sense the extent to which, concretely, things... It’s already very important, the manner in which notions are organized, privileged.

In one sense, there’s nothing more in all that. It’s an entirely different portrait, an absolutely different tableau, one that’s completely different. What will they say to us here...? – I’m not at all looking for him to be right. Finally, yet again, that has such little importance. In the end, what they are telling us is that within an ethics, we’re not going to discover anything. There will be no essence, no quest for realizing essence, no values taking essence as an end, there’s none of that. I am saying that it’s a different vista.

What is this different vista? Well, it’s very odd, and I do know that Spinoza very often speaks of essence, but for him – and I insist on this so that you raise no objections – essence is never human essence. Essence is always a singular determination. There’s an essence of this one, of that one; there is no human essence. And moreover, he will himself say that general essences or abstract essences of the human essence kind are confused ideas. In the end, there is no general idea within an ethics. There’s you, this one, that one; there are singularities. So, perhaps the word “essence” exists; the word “essence” runs a strong risk of changing its meaning, and does it still maintain it [*unclear word*]?

It’s obvious that what interests him, even when he is speaking of essence, is not essence. What interests him is existence and the existent, in other words, that which can only be placed in relation with Being on the level of existence, and not on the level of essence. So, if we agree to call this proposition existence, that which can only be placed in relation with Being on the level of existence, and not of essence, then that’s what existentialism was. We must say that there already was an existentialism within Spinoza.

So, it’s not a question of a human essence; what is it about? I’d say that it’s not a question of a human essence that would only be “in potential” and that morality would be responsible for realizing, or having us be realized, causing each of us to be realized. It’s an entirely different matter. You recognize an ethics in that the person speaking to you, discussing ethics with you, [says] one thing or another, either this or that. He is interested in existents in their singularity. And he is going to tell you that sometimes there’s a distinction among existents, a quantitative difference of existence, there’s a quantitative difference of existence; the existents can be considered on a kind of quantitative scale according to which they are more or less... More or less what? We shall see. But, as soon as you recognize this small tone on a page, this tone developing around the idea of no common essence in several things, but a quantitative distinction of more and less among existents, you can then say it’s about ethics.

On one hand, that’s what ethical discourse is: between different existents, there’s a quantitative scale, there’s a quantitative distinction of more and less, and on the other hand, the same discourse is pursued by saying that there is also – and we don’t yet know how this can be reconciled – there is also a qualitative opposition between modes of existence. This is where I was during the last session. The two criteria of ethics, in other words, the quantitative distinction of existents and the qualitative opposition of modes of existence, the qualitative polarization of modes of existence, are going to be the two manners in which existents exist within Being. These are going to be the links of ethics with ontology. Existents or be-ings (*étants*) are within Being from two simultaneous viewpoints, from the viewpoint of a qualitative opposition of modes of existence, and from the viewpoint of a quantitative scale of existents.



Fine, so that's still abstract, but today, I'd like for this not to remain abstract. So, if someone tells you... Understand, this is entirely the world of immanence. Why is this the world of immanence? It's obviously the world of immanence because, because, because... [Deleuze does not complete this] And [you see] the extent to which it's different, here, from the world of moral values such as I've just defined them, moral values being precisely this kind of tension between essence to be realized and the realization of essence. I'd say that value is exactly essence taken as an end. Essence taken as an end is the moral world. You will take human essence as an end, and it's the moral world. In a sense, for those of you who are a bit familiar with this, we can say that the realization of the moral world is Kant; in fact, it's there that a supposed human essence takes itself as an end, in a kind of pure act, but no matter, no matter. The *Ethics* is not about that at all; it expresses... This is what's fascinating, but it's so different, it's like two absolutely different worlds.

What can Spinoza have to say to the others, if the others are working on morality? Nothing. Nothing, or else misunderstanding will occur when they move from one discourse to the other, when they move from an ethical discourse to a moral discourse. It's crazy how many misunderstandings occur. That's almost why, in order not to create misunderstandings for you, that I plead for us to distinguish between the two kinds of discourse. So, I'll start over.

It would be a question of showing this concretely: what does that mean? In morality, you have the following operation: you do something, you say something, etc., you judge it yourself. This is the system of judgment, once again; it's the system of judgment. Morality is the system of judgment. [It's a system] of double judgment: you judge yourself and you are judged. Those that have a taste for morality, they're the ones having a taste for judgment. You have to enjoy judgment. If you enjoy that, then you're moral; if you don't have the sense of judgment, if you don't want to judge either yourself or others, then you're not moral. So, does that mean you are radically wicked? That's what it could mean, right? Or else, it means that your business is somewhere else. In fact, judging always implies an agency above Being; it always implies something above ontology. It always implies the One more than Being, the Good creating being and causing action; it's the Good above Being, it's the One. And in fact, value expresses this agency above Being. So, values are the fundamental system and are even the fundamental element of the judgment system. You therefore always refer yourself to this agency above Being in order to judge. Otherwise, you cannot judge.

Someone finds something – I'm choosing an example so that you understand completely – someone finds something funny, and I don't happen to find it funny at all, or inversely, I find something funny, and the other does not. This topic isn't being considered at the level of discussion. It's just that the person who finds it funny when you don't happen to, he exists following a mode such that what appears to him is indeed funny. So, faced with someone who is laughing [at], euh, an elderly lady falls in the street, ok? [Laughter] and you see that someone is laughing -- this might be you, right? fine – so what is the mode of existence that this implies, that an elderly lady's fall comes out as funny in your world? What is the mode of existence that envelops a soul? Yes, someone says something in front of you; suddenly, you are astounded. You say, I could never have believed this possible! I never could have believed that he'd say that! And you have the impression that this is an entire mode of existence, an entire manner of being that is suddenly being revealed to you. You say, well fine, um, in order to have said that, perhaps that's how he is, maybe that's how he is.

And again, we have this test with your closest friends. Suddenly, someone laughs right in your face, or else says something truly, truly vulgar, and one says: oh my, no, this is not possible! Did I hear right? "What did you say? You said what?" He repeats it with an air of finding it really funny, and you say: My God, I don't know him, I don't know him; that is, he just developed a mode of immanent existence. At the extreme, everyone is unconscious. I am



choosing some awful examples, but these could really be sublime acts. Oh, I wouldn't have believed he was able! He was able to do that!

So, look, being able, perhaps that will tell us, being able, from the viewpoint of an ethics, it's: what are you capable of? What are you capable of? Or if you prefer, what can you do? Hence, perhaps, a return to what I was presenting as a kind of cry from Spinoza: what can a body do? But what can a body do? We don't even know in advance what a body can do? We don't even know in advance what someone is capable of. We don't know. There are always some surprises because we never know how modes of existence are organized and enveloped within someone. What are you capable of? What can a body do if he doesn't mean just any body whatsoever? Spinoza explains quite well one specific body or another; what can a specific body do? What can you do, you, in your body? What can you do?

Fine, then, we've made a bit of progress because what I'm now seeking, I finally grasp my hypothesis: once again, it's that ethics, the discourse of ethics, has two characteristics: it tells us that be-ings (*étants*) have a quantitative distinction of more and less, and it tells us, on the other hand, in the end, existents have a quantitative distinction of more and less, and it's through this that they are distinguished in their singularity. And it tells us also that modes of existence have a qualitative polarity. In general, there are, if you will, two great modes of existence, with all sorts of variants. So, if that's what my object is today -- once again, I am moving forward here in a very clear, very archetypical manner, to make this concrete -- what is this then, this qualitative polarity, and what is this quantitative distinction?

And I am starting with the first point: when it's suggested to us that between you and me, between two persons, between a person and an animal, between an animal and a thing, there only is ethically, that is, ontologically, a quantitative distinction, what quantity is this about? When it's suggested to us that what creates our deepest singularities, the fact that I am this and not that, this is something quantitative, what can this possibly mean? You will learn or you already know that philosophy then, for example, there are nineteenth-century German philosophers, belonging to what's known as German Romanticism that have developed, notably Fichte, then Schelling, that have developed a very interesting theory of individuation that's subsumed under the name of quantitative individuation. If things are quantitatively individuated, good, fine, we understand vaguely, but we don't yet understand anything. What quantity? What is this quantity about? Well, we already do know a bit based on all that we've seen. In fact, it's a matter of defining people, things, animals, anything through what each one *can do*.

You'll tell me, fine, defining someone by what he can do... I mean, I'd both like to -- because that's what philosophical propositions are -- I'd like for you to manage -- this is my goal this year; if I fail, I fail, but it's today that I succeed or fail -- I'd like you to sense that in a philosophical proposition, it is good when it really seems the obvious to us, when you tell yourself, "well, obviously, I knew that! That's been thought forever, and is absolutely obvious," as if it were a very, very familiar proposition. And at the same time, it has to be the strangest thing, the most unheard-of thing, but both at once. This is the way in which it's a good philosophical proposition.

And we say, well yes, people, things, animals are distinguished through what they can do, that is, they cannot do the same thing. For example, I cannot fly, right? You will tell me, that's not very strong, but precisely, we are staying, really, within... But you connect that in order... I'd say, literally, that philosophy is the art of impregnating propositions, and this is splendid, it's marvelous. Take the blandest proposition in the world, impregnate it, and it will have become a philosophical proposition. But this is an art, impregnating propositions. It's the most difficult in the world.



So, what can I do? I cannot fly, fine. What can I do? I can, I can, what... What is it that I can do? It's strange! Notice already the difference with the moral vision of the world? A moralist would never define man by what he can do. A moralist defines man by what he is, by what he is how? By what he is by right (*en droit*). That's it: essence is what the thing is by right. This is essence. So, a moralist defines man as a reasonable animal. This is essence. An ethicist, [Deleuze laughs] that is, Spinoza, does not define man as a reasonable animal, never, never. He defines man by what he can do, body and soul. You know, there are things that man can do and the animal cannot, being reasonable, perhaps, but that changes everything. If I say that "being reasonable" is not human essence, but is something that man can do, that changes so much that being reasonable is also something that man can do. Being crazy is also something that man can do; that belongs to man's power. Laughing belongs to man's power. It's very odd, wanting to define things not at all by a supposed essence, but by what the thing can do.

On the level of an animal, we indeed see the problem. I myself had devoted, I recall, an entire session several years ago – I don't know when, two years ago – to this very question, definitions of the animal. But if you take what is known as natural history, which still has its foundation there in Aristotle, it defines the animal by what the animal is. Of course, it is necessary to include there all sorts of other considerations because within things, everything is always complicated. But, in its fundamental ambition, it's a matter of saying what the animal is. [Pause] What is a vertebrate? What is a fish? etc., and Aristotle's natural history is filled with this search for essence. Once again, he connects all sorts of other considerations to it; that only shows the complexity of things. But in the pure intention of natural history, or in what is called animal classifications, animal is defined above all, each time that it's possible, by its essence, that is, by what it is.

Imagine these guys that arrive – I always have to try to make things as lively as possible for you – they arrive and proceed quite differently: they are interested in what the animal or the thing can do. They are going to create a kind of register of animal powers. This one can fly – they aren't at all interested in essence – it can fly. Well hey, that one, what does he eat? He eats grass. Eating grass belongs to its power, to its power of action (*puissance*). And then a guy returns, he says, no, he doesn't eat grass, he eats meat. Eating meat, that is, the food regime, you indeed sense that this is about modes of existence, what the thing can do, that will define a mode of existence.

So, there are things that can do extraordinarily little. The table... An inanimate thing as well, what can it do? The diamond, what can it do? Gold, what can it do? That is, what feats is it capable of? What can it stand? What can it stand and what can it do? Any given animal, what does it stand and what does it do? Hey, a camel, it cannot drink for a long while. Oh good, not drinking for a long while, this is a camel's passion, it's a camel's power. Abstaining from drinking, fine. Being thirsty all the time, that's something else, it's another world of existence, good, fine.

Things are defined by what they can do. What does that mean? How does this make us dance? Yet again, it's not at all the same thing as essence. What a thing can do is not the same thing as essence. So, if needed, this opens up some experimentation. I see something there. I say, hey, he's strange, that guy. I get the impression that if I press against him, he's going to collapse. A hand is raised to see: what can he do? Is he going to fall if I push him or isn't he going to fall? This is a whole exploration of things. It's not the quest for essence.

This manner of seeing is very odd, if you see things in that way, animals and people, as little packets of power, what they can do, what they cannot do. Ah, that guy, he doesn't hold his liquor, he can't drink. As soon as he drinks, he's drunk Oh, that guy, oh, oh, oh. See? I am not seeking someone's essence; I am creating something like a description of what he can do, a diagram of his power.



So, where does that lead us? So, I'd say, from the viewpoint of an ethics, that beings, all beings – no, I take back all beings since it's... -- all be-ings (*étants*), all existents, are linked to a quantitative scale which is that of power of action (*puissance*), that which they can do. They have more or less power of action. This differentiable quantity, the expression for which I am seeking, I at least have a name for it – but we are only moving forward very, very slowly – it's power of action (*puissance*). Ethical discourse will not cease speaking to us not of essence; it's hardly concerned with essences, since it does not even believe in essences. It only speaks to us of power of action, specifically the actions and passions that something is capable of, not what the thing is, but what it manages, what it is capable of managing and capable of doing. And if there is no general essence, it's because at this level of power of action, everything is singular. So, we don't know in advance that essence tells us in advance what an aggregate of things is, for example, what men are, what fish are, etc. Ethics tells us nothing, cannot know. A fish cannot do what its neighbor fish can do. A man cannot do what a neighbor man can do. There will thus be an infinite differentiation of the quantity of power of action according to the existents.

So, I have nonetheless made some relatively considerable progress. Things receive a quantitative distinction because they are links to the scale of power of action. And understand, well after Spinoza, when Nietzsche will propose the concept of will to power, I am not saying that this is what he only meant, but above all, he meant that. And obviously, one can understand nothing about will to power in Nietzsche if one thinks that it's the operation through which each of us would be inclined toward power of action or would want power of action. Power of action is not what I want, by definition; it's what I have. I have this or that power of action; I have the power of action of this or of that, and that's what situates me within the quantitative scale of beings. And, as for will to power, it's a misunderstanding to make power of action into the object of will. It's precisely the opposite. It's power of action that is the subject of will, that is, it's according to power of action that I can want this or that. Thus, it's just the opposite. Nietzsche never expressed commonplace platitudes of the type "Each of us wants power"; this is not what he meant. Will to power even means the opposite; it means that you will define things, beings, animals not by essence, but by the effective power of action they have. Once again, this is the question: what can a body do? You, what can you do? This is quite different from the moral question: what should you do by virtue of your essence? It's: what can you do, you, by virtue of your power of action?

So, there we see that power of action constitutes the quantitative scale of beings. Beings are more or less powerful, that is, they are situated on this scale. It's the quantity of power of action that distinguishes an existent from another existent. Hence the importance of certain of Spinoza's expressions that, if you come upon them, I'd like you to understand them so that they'll be entirely clear. When Spinoza quite often comes to say, "essence is power (*puissance*)", understand the masterstroke he is accomplishing,<sup>2</sup> because in all these propositions that might appear innocent, there is always some philosophical strokes. This philosophical stroke is what? He is undertaking a strange operation when he tells us "essence is power". I am still trying to develop a free commentary here, a free commentary on this expression, "essence is power", that you find in Spinoza as much on the level of God, of substance – he says, God's essence is power -- as on the level of existents, "my essence is power". What does that mean?

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<sup>2</sup> From this point forward, the Paris 8 French transcript is missing about 15 minutes of Deleuze's presentation, and then the transcript picks up again without indicating any loss of the entire discussion on terminology. In contrast, the Web Deleuze French transcript will begin in a short while (as will be noted) with the discussion of problems of terminology.



First, there is a philosophical proposition since he presents things, it has several layers (*épaisseur*). I'd say, a first layer – but you must pay close attention; he is doing something extraordinary because, in fact, he creates the complete conversion. -- By saying “essence is power,” he changes everything. He means: I am not interested in essences. He tells us, if you want to call something “essence,” well then, in the end, you can only give this word to power of action. Thus, this is a conversion of essence into power of action. This comes down to saying there is no essence. There are only powers of action, “essence is power”.

But a second layer, morality, the point of view on essence, the Classical point of view on essence, could at the extreme understand the expression, “essence is power.” How would it have understood this? You see, it's quite simple; we've seen this. Classical thought – it's what I was earlier calling moral thought – could understand quite well the expression “essence is power” in a precise sense, specifically essence is what the thing is, but given the detours of existence, given the twists and turns of existence, essence is not realized all alone. It must be realized within existence. Essence is only an idea or, if you prefer, essence is only a potentiality, a possibility. Essence is “in potential” (*en puissance*), [Pause] essence is “in potential”. In this classical thought, “in potential” is distinguished from “in action”.

Thus, moral thought at the extreme will tell us essence is “in potential”, which means essence as potentiality must pass into action and must be realized. And morality [*indistinct words*] must make it pass into action. You see, this will thus be when Classical thought offers a meaning to the expression “essence is potential (*puissance*),” it's on the condition of opposing potential and action. It understands essence is “in potential”, and it's up to us to actualize it. You understand?

When, on the other hand, Spinoza says, “essence is power of action”, what is he doing? It's astonishing what he's doing. It's understood that when he says that, he is excluding power of action from having any other status than being in action. All power is in action. There is only power that is actual and in action, [Pause] that is, there is no potentiality of power of action. Power of action does not mean potential. Power of action is what I can do, and what I can do is the aggregate of what I do and what I undergo. It's the aggregate of what I act and what I suffer. It's the aggregate of what I act and what I suffer from. It's the aggregate of my real passions and my real actions in action that constitutes my power of action. Thus, all power is in action.

And this refers to a very, very odd strain of thought. I am citing from memory because it's here that a philosophy of the creation of concepts is formed. There is an entire line of thinkers that precisely had tried to get beyond the duality we find in Aristotle between the “in potential” and the “in action”. And getting beyond this Aristotelian duality on which all theories of essence rest, this duality between the “in potential” and the “in action”, this is a very curious operation. That occurred in relation to expression of the type “all power is in action,” “there is no other power than in action,” “action and power are the same thing.”

To better [understand], this is where a problem resides. You understand, when a philosopher works with concepts in this way, making his attempts to, euh, bring together previously disconnected concepts, [or] separating concepts heretofore connected, or inventing entirely new concepts, there remain for him/her what we call, as belonging to philosophy as art, there remain for him/her some problems of terminology, of inventing words.<sup>3</sup> In order to designate a new concept, sometimes you will take a very common word; it will be even the best fit there. Only implicitly will this very common word take on a completely new sense. Sometimes you will provide a very special sense of a common word, and you will build up this

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<sup>3</sup> It is here that the Web Deleuze text begins, and the translation provided by Simon Duffy offers a guide for much of the following text.



sense; and sometimes a new word will be necessary. It is for this reason that, when one reproaches a philosopher for not speaking like everyone else, that doesn't make any sense. It is sometimes this, sometimes that, sometimes something else (*tantôt, tantôt, tantôt*). Sometimes it is quite proper to use only common words, sometimes it is necessary to mark the move, the moment of the creation of concepts, by an unusual word.

And so, I spoke to you the last time of this great philosopher who was of huge importance during the Renaissance, Nicholas of Cusa. Nicolas of Cusa had to create a kind of portmanteau word; he had contaminated two Latin words. Why? To create; this is a good verbal creation. Back then, one spoke Latin, so he proceeded by using Latin. He said: the Being of things is the *Possest*. – It doesn't matter if you haven't studied Latin, I am going to explain this – *Possest* [Deleuze spells it out] this doesn't exist as a word; it is an inexistent word, he created this word, the *Possest*. It is a very lovely word, it's a lovely word for Latin. It's an awful barbarism; this word is awful, but philosophically it's beautiful, it's a success. When one creates a word, it has to work; there are disasters, nothing is determined in advance. *Possest* is made of two terms in Latin: *posse*, which is the infinitive of the verb to be able to (*pouvoir*), and *est* is the third person of the verb to be (*être*) in the present indicative, he is (*il est*). *Posse* and *est*, he contaminates the two, and that yields *Possest*. And what is the *Possest*? The *Possest* is precisely the identity of the power of action (*puissance*) and of the act by which I define something. So, I would not define something by its essence, what it is; I would define it through this barbaric notion, its *Possest*: what it can do; literally: what it can do in action. Fine.

So, what does this mean? It means that things are powers of action (*puissances*). It is not only that they have potential; they come down to the power that they have, as much in action as in passion. So, if you compare two things, they can't do the same thing, but power of action (*puissance*) is a quantity. So, thanks to this very special quantity, you will have, you will understand the problem that this causes? Power of action is a quantity, agreed, but it is not a quantity like length. Is it a quantity like force? Does this mean that the strongest wins? Very doubtful. First of all, one would have to manage to define the quantity that we call force. What is this idea of quantity? These are not quantities as they are known; they are not quantities whose status is simple. I know that they are not qualities; that I know. Power of action (*puissance*) is not a quality, but neither are they so-called extensive quantities. So, even if they are intensive quantities, this is a very special quantitative scale, an intensive scale. This would mean: things have more or less intensity. This is what would be the intensity of the thing, which would replace its essence, which would define the thing in itself. It would be its intensity.

You understand, [this is] perhaps the link to ontology: the more intense a thing is, the more precisely is its relation to Being: the intensity of the thing is its relation with Being. Can we say all this? It is going to occupy us for a long time. Before getting into it, you see which misunderstanding we are trying to avoid. ... What? ... That what?

Question: [Inaudible; on intensity and the thing]

Deleuze: Oh, that's possible. The question is not what we believe. The question is how we try to manage in this kind of world of powers of action. So, when I said intensity, if it is not that, it doesn't matter since it was already determined, this type of quantity. It is not that. We are here once again trying to evaluate how it could be important to maintain a discourse on power of action (*puissance*) once we admit that the misunderstandings that, in any case, we are trying to avoid, it is in order to understand this as if Spinoza told us, or even Nietzsche afterwards: what things want is power. Clearly, if there is something that the expression "power is indeed essence" doesn't even mean, if there is something that this formula doesn't mean, [it's] if we translated it by "what each person wants is power". No, "what each person wants is power" is an expression that doesn't have anything to do with this, neither close up nor from afar. First, this is a triviality; second, this is something clearly false; third, this is surely



not what Spinoza means. It is not what Spinoza means because it is stupid, and Spinoza cannot say silly things. [Laughter] So, it is not: “Ha! everyone, from stones to men, by way of the animals, they want more and more power of action (*puissance*), they want power (*pouvoir*).” No, that’s not it! We know that it’s not so since it doesn’t mean that power of action (*puissance*) is the object of the will. No. So we know this at least; it’s a relief.

But I would like to insist, once again I appeal to your evaluative sense of importances in what the philosophers have to tell us. I would precisely like to try to develop why this story is very, very important, this story, this conversion in which things are no longer defined by a qualitative essence, “man as reasonable animal”, but are defined by a quantifiable power of action (*puissance*). I am far from knowing what this quantifiable power is, but precisely I am trying to get there by passing through this kind of musing on what is important, practically. Practically, does that change something? Yes, you must already feel that practically, it changes a lot of things. If I’m interested in what something can do, in what the thing can do, it is very different from those who are interested in what is the essence of the thing. I am not looking, it is not really the same manner of being in the world. But I would like to try to show it precisely through a particular moment in the history of the thought.

So here, I am opening a parenthesis, but always within this vision: what is this tale of power of action (*puissance*) and of defining things by power of action (*puissance*)? I am saying: there was a very important moment, a very important tradition, in which it is very difficult, historically, to get one’s bearings if you don’t have some outlines and reference marks, some points for recognition. It is a tale – at first glance, this seems to be very different from what I was discussing – that concerns what was called natural right (*droit naturel*). And this tale concerning natural right, it is necessary that you understand this: today this appears to us at first glance very out of date, I mean, as much juridically as politically. The theories of natural right, in the law manuals, for example, or even in the sociology manuals, we always see a chapter on natural right, and we treat it as a theory which lasted until Rousseau, including Rousseau, up until the 18th century, but today no one is interested in it, in the problem of natural right. This is not false, but at the same time I would like you to feel that, at that point, if there was in fact too scholarly a vision, this is terrible because we are bypassing things -- and, about this, why people are really beaten theoretically -- we bypass everything that is important in an historic question. I am saying this, and you are going to see why I am saying it now and how it is really at the heart of the step that I’ve reached.

I am saying: for a very long time, there had been a theory of natural right, which consists of what? Finally, it seems important to me historically because it was the compilation of most of the traditions of Antiquity and the point of confrontation of Christianity with the traditions of Antiquity. In this respect, there are two important names in relation to the classical conception of natural right: on the one hand, Cicero, who recorded in Antiquity all the traditions on the subject: Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic. He gives a kind of presentation of natural right in Antiquity which is going to have an extreme importance. It is in Cicero that the Christian philosophers, or the Christian jurists, will take (more than other authors), it is above all in Cicero that will occur this kind of adaptation to Christianity of natural right, notably in Saint Thomas. So there, we will have a kind of historical lineage that I am going to call for convenience, so that you can situate yourself in this, the classical lineage of natural right, Antiquity-Christianity.

And, what do they call natural right? [Pause] On the whole, I would say that, in this entire conception, natural right, that which constitutes natural right, is what conforms to the essence. I would almost say that there are several propositions in this classical theory of natural right. I would just like you to retain them, because when I return to power of action (*puissance*), you



must have these four propositions in mind, these four basic propositions which are the basis of this conception of classical natural right.

First proposition: a thing is defined by its essence. [Pause] Natural right is therefore that which conforms to the essence of something. Human essence is: [being a] reasonable animal. This has defined its natural right. Moreover, in fact, “to be reasonable” is the law of its nature. The law of nature intervenes here. There we have the first proposition, thus reference to the essences.

## II

Second proposition, in this classical theory: henceforth, you understand, natural right cannot refer -- and it is striking that for most of the authors of Antiquity, it is very much like this -- natural right doesn't refer to a state which would be supposed to precede society. The state of nature is not a pre-social state, especially not; it could not be so. The state of nature is the state that conforms to essence in a good society. What do we call a good society? We will call a good society a society where man can realize his essence. So, the state of nature does not precede the social state; the state of nature is the state that conforms to essence in the best possible society, that is, the one most apt to realize essence. There you have the second proposition of classical natural right.

Third proposition of classical natural right, -- they flow from each other -- what is primary is duty; what is primary is duty. We have rights only insofar as we have duties. This is very practical politically, all this. These are duties. In fact, what is duty? Here, there is a term, there is a concept from Cicero that is specific to Latin, that is very difficult to translate and that indicates this idea of functional duty, the duties as function. It is the term *officium*, and one of the most important books by Cicero from the point of view of natural right is a book entitled *De officiis*, “On the Subject of the Functional Duties.” And why is it that duty is primary in existence? It's because duties are precisely the conditions under which I can best realize essence, that is, to have a life in conformity with essence, in the best possible society. [Pause]

Fourth proposition, at last: from this follows a practical rule which will have a great political importance. We could summarize this practical rule under the title: the competence of the sage, the competence of the sage. In fact, what is the sage? It is someone who is singularly competent in the studies that relate to essence, and all that results from it. The sage is the one who knows what the essence is. Thus there is a principle of competence of the sage because it is the sage who tells us what our essence is, what the best society is, that is, the society most capable of realizing essence, and what are our *officia*, our functional duties, that is, under which conditions we can realize essence. All this is the competence of the sage. And to the question: to what does the classical sage lay claim? One must reply that the classical sage claims to determine what essence is, and consequently, all kinds of practical tasks follow from this, hence the political claims of the sage.

Therefore, if I summarize this classical conception of natural right, from which [there are] the principles, you understand why Christianity will suddenly be very interested by this ancient tradition of natural right. It will integrate [the tradition] into what it will call natural theology, making it one of its fundamental parts. The four propositions are immediately reconciled with Christianity:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Starting from here, the Paris 8 transcript by Christina Roski resumes, overlapping generally with the Web Deleuze transcript, which stops abruptly before the end of the session. For reasons of commodity,



First proposition: things are defined and define their rights as a function of their essence. Second proposition: the law of nature is not pre-social; it exists in the best possible society. It is life in conformity with essence in the best possible society. Third proposition: what is primary are duties over rights, because duties are the conditions under which you realize essence. Fourth proposition: consequently, there is the competence of someone superior, whether this is the church, the prince, or the sage.

Question: [*Inaudible; on the notion of the competence of the sage*]

Deleuze: The competence of the sage, ah yes. It seems to me that this necessarily results from this in the end, not mathematically, but necessarily; it's the result to a certain extent. For as you say, I am defining a thing through essence, and I will draw from it the conditions in which essence must be realized, which refers to a kind of knowledge (*savoir*). There is a knowledge of essences. Thus, the man who knows essences will be capable of telling us at the same time how to conduct ourselves in life. Conducting oneself in life will be answerable to a knowledge (*savoir*), in the name of which I could not say if it is good or bad. There will thus be a man of good -- in whatever way this is determined, like a man of God or a man of wisdom -- who will have a competence. It seems to me that this is implied. So fine, there we are. Remember these four propositions well. We are going to ease up a bit.

I'm saying: Imagine a kind of thunderclap; we're going to see that all this is a lot more complicated. Imagine that a guy arrives and says: "no, no, no, but there's a sense in which it's just the opposite". Only, the spirit of contradiction never works, that is, it is necessary to have reasons. One has to have even secret reasons. It is necessary to have the most important reasons in order to overturn a theory. If you overturn a theory out of pleasure, you cannot even do so. A theory would never be overturned for pleasure and out of pleasure. A theory is a body; it has its power of resistance; it has all that. And there we are, let's assume -- I will correct this later -- one day somebody comes along who is going to make a scandal in the domain of thought. And here is where I return to my earlier warning: what we are considering today as outdated commonplaces about natural right have no doubt retained and had a kind of possible and enormous revolutionary force. And this someone is an Englishman named Hobbes. He had a very bad reputation. [*Deleuze spells out the name*] He came before Leibniz, Spinoza read him a lot. And here we are -- I am almost creating a painting proposition by proposition -- here is what Hobbes tells us about this problem of natural right; he accomplishes a rather astonishing feat of strength.

First proposition from Hobbes -- I'm summarizing all this, but it's almost my trade (*métier*); I have the sad role of recounting all this to you; I'm telling you a story, so it's just a story -- Hobbes shows up and say, "Well, no, the first proposition, that's not it." He doesn't even say, "that's not it"; he has no need to. For him, it's a matter of cleverness. He's developing his theory. They notice that this isn't like what the others are saying. So, what is he telling us? He say, "You understand, things are not defined by an 'essence'; they are defined by a 'power' (*puissance*)". [*Pause*]

Thus, natural right is not what is in conformity with the thing's essence; it is everything that the thing "can do" (*peut*), and in the right of something, animal or man, everything that it can do -- this is a very strange proposition -- but in its right [is] everything that it can do. It is at this point that start the great propositions of the type "the large fish eat the small ones; it's his right of nature." You understand, when we read that, "the big fish eat," if I just make this... -- Sometimes I say that there is no need for background (*culture*), and I really think that, in many ways, no background is needed; and then sometimes I say, yes, some background is necessary -- Of course, when you come across a proposition of this type, you see that it is

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I follow one transcript or the other depending on which best conforms to the actual recording.



signed Hobbes. “It is within natural right that big fish eat small ones.” I am saying, you risk bypassing it; you risk telling yourself, “Ah fine, it’s true what he says, but in fact, there’s no point in making a big deal of it; yes, big fish eat little ones, and then that’s what you call natural right, ok fine.” Good, but in fact, at that point, you can understand nothing. But, it’s a bit like that everywhere, if you will. It’s like that in painting or if you see a painting, if it’s the first painting that you are seeing, it’s not the same type of emotion because, in the end, you risk passing it by.

I’ll tell you why. Because in saying that it is within the natural right of large fish to eat small ones, Hobbes unleashes a kind of provocation that is enormous, enormous, since up to here, what was called natural right was what was in conformity with essence and thus the set of actions that were permitted in the name of essence, that were allowed. So, you will tell me: “Yes, allowed, but ‘allowed here’ takes on a very different sense!” Hobbes announces to us: “‘is allowed’ [is] everything that we can do”. Everything that you can do is permitted. So, if you are an even bigger fish and you ate men, this is allowed; it’s your natural right. Nonetheless, this is simple; it’s a simple idea, but a relatively overwhelming one. In this case, we have to wait. Someone says: “But to say something like that, what is he trying to achieve?” He’s telling us: it’s in the natural right. He calls that natural right! Never has anyone called it “natural right”! Everyone from time immemorial knew that large fish ate small ones; never has anybody called that natural right! Why? For a simple reason: we reserved the term “natural right” for a completely different thing, moral action that conforms to essence. Hobbes comes along and says: “Your natural right is all your power (*puissance*). Natural right equals power, therefore what you can do is your natural right. If you can kill your neighbor, it’s your natural right.” A very odd right! Let’s wait; we’re going to see the other propositions. Thus, “within my natural right [is] everything that I can do.”

Second proposition – it results from what precedes -- henceforth, the state of nature is distinguished from the social state and, theoretically, precedes it. Why? Because Hobbes hastens to say it: “but of course, in the social state, there are prohibitions, there are interdictions, there are things that I can do, for example, kill my neighbor if he isn’t expecting it. I could do that, but it is prohibited. That means that it is not natural right, it is social right. It is in your natural right to kill your neighbor, but it is not in your social right. In other words, the natural right, which is identical to power (*puissance*), is necessarily and refers to a state which is not the social state. Hence, at that moment [comes] the promotion of the idea “a state of nature is distinguished from the social state.” In the state of nature, everything that I can do is permitted. The natural law is that there is nothing to prohibit me from what I am doing. The state of nature thus precedes the social state.

Already, at the level of this second proposition, “the state of nature precedes the social state”, here as well, we understand nothing at all, us, because we qualified all that by saying: is there a state of nature? They believed that there was a state of nature, those who said that. Not at all, they believe nothing in this respect. They are saying that the logic, the concept of state of nature is necessarily prior, is a state prior to the social state. They do not say that this state existed. If the right of nature is everything that there is in the power (*puissance*) of a being, we will define the state of nature precisely as being the zone of this power. It is its natural right. It is thus distinct from the social state since the social state comprises and is defined by the prohibitions that bear upon something that “I can do”. And moreover, if I am forbidden it, it’s because “I can do it.” It is in this that you recognize a social prohibition.

Therefore, the state of nature is primary in relation to the social state from the conceptual point of view. Which is very important, and which means what? Which means: Nobody is born social. Social, fine, perhaps we become so, and the problem of politics will be: what are we to do so that men become social? But nobody is born social. Here, they really are getting



strong. That doesn't mean that there is a state of nature prior to the social state, as is often ascribed to them. That means that no one is born social. You can only think society as a product of a becoming. And right is the operation of "becoming social."

And in the same way, nobody is born reasonable. For this reason, these authors are so opposed to a Christian theme to which Christianity equally held, namely the theme that is known in Christianity under the name of the "Adamic tradition." The Adamic tradition is the tradition according to which Adam was perfect before sin. The first man was perfect, and sin makes him lose perfection. This Adamic tradition is philosophically significant, and here's why: Christian natural right as I have defined it earlier is very well reconciled with the Adamic tradition. Adam, before sin, is man in conformity with essence. He is reasonable, and it is sin, that is, the adventures of existence, that make him lose the essence, that make him lose his primary perfection. All of this is in conformity with the theory of classical natural right. Just as nobody is born social, nobody is born reasonable. Reasonable is like social, it is a becoming. And the problem of ethics will perhaps be how to make it so that man becomes reasonable. But not at all. How to make it so that an essence of the man who would be reasonable is realized? This is very different according to whether you pose the question one way or another, [hence] you go in very, very different directions. So, I am saying [that] Hobbes's second proposition will be: the state of nature is pre-social, that is, man is not born social; he becomes it.

Third proposition: if what is primary – this links up, it's good – if what is primary in relation to the state of nature, or if what is primary is the state of nature, or if what is primary is right, it's the same. I am in the state of nature, "everything that I can do is my right." Henceforth, what is primary is right. Consequently, duties will only be secondary obligations tending to limit the rights for the becoming social of man. Fine, it will be necessary to limit rights so that man becomes social. Very good, but what is first is right. Duty is relative to right, whereas, in the classical theory of natural right, it is just the opposite: right, you recall, was relative to duty. What was primary was the *officium*. So, he says all that, and then:

Fourth proposition, and which is practically and no doubt the most important, and politically: if my right is my power, if rights are primary in relation to duties, [*Pause*] something results from this. If duties are only the operation by which rights are induced to limit themselves so that men become social, once again, all kinds of questions are placed between brackets. Why do they have to become social? Is it interesting for them to become social? All kinds of questions that did not arise at all from the point of view... From the point of view of natural right, Hobbes says – he says it quite well, and Spinoza will take all of this up again; he says it admirably -- but from the point of view of natural right, the most reasonable man in the world and the most complete madman are strictly the same.

Why is there an absolute identity, an equality, an absolute equality of the sage and the fool? It is a funny idea, you understand. It is a very baroque world; it's purely classical, it's a strange world. And why? From the point of view of natural right, yes, since the point of the view of natural right is: my right equals my power. And the madman is the one who does what is in his power, exactly as the reasonable man is the one who does what is in his. There are certainly... They are not saying idiotic things; they are not saying that there is no difference between reasonable and mad. They are saying that there is no difference between reasonable and mad from the point of view of natural right. Why? Because each one does everything that he can; the madman like the reasonable man, they do nothing other than what they can.

The identity of right and power ensures the identity, the equality of all beings on the quantitative scale. One can quite simply say: fine, they don't have the same power. Fine. However, they do everything that is within their power, one like the other, the insane insofar as being insane, the sage insofar as being sage. Of course, there will be a difference between



the reasonable man and the madman, but in the civil status, in the social status, not from the point of view of natural right. Hence, [there's] a fundamental collapse: everything they are in the process of wearing down, of undermining, is the principle of the competent sage or of the competence of someone superior. And that, politically, is very important.

Nobody is competent for me. There we have the great idea that will animate the *Ethics* as the anti-system of judgment. In a certain way, “nobody can do anything for me, but nobody can be competent for me.” What does this mean? There is something immediately emotive (*de senti*). We must put everything in this sentence “nobody is competent for me”. Of course, there are vengeance. They so much wanted to judge in my place. There is also a discovery filled with wonder, ah, it is fantastic. But nobody can know, nobody can know for me why. Is this completely true? I don't know. I believe, in a certain way, it is perhaps not completely true. I don't know. Perhaps there are competences, but in the end, sense what there could be that is strange in these propositions.

[Pause; interruption due to a continuing noise at the door, someone tapping gently]

Deleuze: No, no, no, no, no, don't open the door, no, no, no.

[Several students say: It's locked. We hear Deleuze's groan; the noise at the door continues, with laughter from the students]

Deleuze: This is nonetheless quite important, this story, because you will learn in the manual that from a certain moment onward, there was (as there had been well before), there had been famous theories under the name of the social contract. The theories of the social contract are...

[Interruption: Someone enters and asks a question, inaudible]

Deleuze: Couldn't someone go out there and see?... But, you have to feel a bit nasty... [Laughter] Someone strong, right? [Laughter; Pause] ... If he comes back bleeding, obviously... [Laughter; Pause] And all that, you understand well, all that's happening here, is an illustration of the question of modes of existence... [Laughter]

So, this story of the social contract – follow me – we are told, here we are, these are people who thought -- why, how, we don't know very well -- but they thought that the initiation of society could only have one principle, that of “consent”. And we say: well, all that is rather outmoded, because in the end, we didn't consent to being in society. It's not true. That's not how it happened. Is that what the question is? Obviously not, that's not the question. In fact, this whole new theory of natural right, natural right equals power -- what is primary is right, it's not duty – results in something: there is no competence of the sage, nobody is competent for myself. Henceforth, if the society forms itself, it can only be, in one way or another, by the consent of those which take part in it, and not because the sage would tell me the best way of realizing essence. And obviously, the substitution of a principle of consent for the principle of competence has a fundamental importance for all of politics.

Therefore, you see, what I have tried to do is just a table of opposition, four propositions against four propositions. I am simply saying that, in the propositions of the classical theory of natural right, [from] Cicero, Saint Thomas, you have the juridical development of a moral vision of the world, and, in the other case, the conception that finds its starting point with Hobbes, you have the development and all the seeds of a juridical conception of ethics: beings are defined by their power. If I've made this long parenthesis, it has been to show that the expression “beings are defined by their power and not by an essence”, had political and juridical consequences that we are just in the process of anticipating, that's all.

Now, to finish with this topic, I am just adding that Spinoza takes up this whole conception of Hobbes's natural right. He will change things; he will change relatively significant things; he will not have the same political conception as that of Hobbes. But on this very point of natural right, he himself declares to adhere to and be a disciple of Hobbes.



And why? Notice here, in Hobbes, he found the juridical confirmation of an idea that, on the other hand, he himself formed, Spinoza, namely an astonishing confirmation of the idea according to which the essence of things was nothing other than their power. And this is what interest him in the whole idea of natural right.

And I add, to be completely honest historically, that never does it emerge like that all at once. It would already be possible to seek in Antiquity a current, but a very partial, very timid current, in which a conception like this of “natural right equals power” would be formed in Antiquity. But it will be stifled; you find it in certain Sophists and certain philosophers called Cynics, but its modern explosion will be with Hobbes and Spinoza.

There you are. So, I am just saying that, I have not even explained... For the moment, I've indicated what it could indeed mean to say: “existents are distinguished from a quantitative point of view.” That means exactly: existents are not defined by an essence, but by power of action, and they have more or less power, and their right will be the power of action of each of them. The right of each one will be the power of action of each one. They have more or less power of action. There is thus a quantitative scale of beings from the point of view of power of action. It will now be necessary to pass to the second thing, namely the qualitative polarity of modes of existence and to see if the one follows from the other. The aggregate will give us a coherent vision, or the beginnings of a coherent vision of what is called an ethics.

So, you suddenly see why you are not beings from Spinoza's point of view. You are manners of being. This is understandable: if each of us is defined by what he can do, it's still very curious. You don't define yourself by an essence, or rather, your essence is identical to that which you can do, that is, you are a degree on a scale of power of action (*puissance*). If you are a degree, if each one among us is a degree on a scale of power of action, you will say to me: are there some who are worth more or less? Let's leave that to the side. That's going to get quite complicated. We don't know; for the moment, we don't know. But if this is how it is, you don't have an essence or you only have an essence identical to your power, that is, you are a degree on this scale, then henceforth you are, in fact, manners of Being.

The manner of being will be, precisely, this kind of existent, of existence quantified according to power of action, according to the degree of power of action which defines it. You are quantifiers. You are not quantities, or rather you are very special quantities. Each of us is a quantity, but of what type? This is a very, very curious vision of the world, very new: to see people as quantities, as packages of power. But is necessary to live it; it is necessary to live it if that suits you. Hence the other question, but at the same time, these same authors, for example, Spinoza, will not cease telling us: there are, on the whole, two modes of existence, and no matter what you do, you are led to choose between the two modes of existence. You exist in such a way that you exist sometimes in one such mode, sometimes in another such mode, and the *Ethics* will be the exposé of these modes of existence. Here, this is no longer the quantitative scale of power; it's the polarity between distinct modes of existence, these polarities of modes of existence.

How does he move from the first idea to the second? And what is it he wants to say to us with the second, [that] there are modes of existence which are distinguished as poles of existence?

[Pause; Deleuze makes a sound, perhaps from fatigue; someone near him suggests that someone open a window]

Deleuze: Yes, there we are, I am asking you this ... There are times that we do this [*the session*] without a stop (*continuu*), but today... Could those of you in the back open the windows a little? And then we will take a five-minute break, and I will finish after. [*Interruption of the recording*]



Deleuze: [There is] something else to say as well. [Georges] Comtesse reminds us of what some of you already know, that for Spinoza, there is a fundamental notion that Spinoza presents as a tendency to persevere within Being. Each thing tends to persevere within Being. And when he is coming to grips with persevering, sometimes one must state the variations of the expression, this is sometimes a tendency to conserve, sometimes a tendency to persevere, and this is sometimes persevering within Being, and sometimes within one's being. So, in any case, there is an aggregate here that comes to asking what does this mean, tending to persevere within Being? So there, I respond: as this question is posed, I respond, we'll put it aside because I don't have the means to answer it as a function of what I said today. I don't have the means to answer this question, given that, I just want to say: that is absolutely not an effort to conserve power of action. That cannot be so since, once again, power of action is never an object. It's "through power of action" (*par puissance*) that I create or that I submit. Recall Nietzsche's mysterious expression: "And it's even through power that I endure (*subis*)."<sup>1</sup> It's through power of action that I act, but it's also through power of action that I endure since power of action is the aggregate of what I can do as much in action as in passion. So then, I can just say – this is the opposite of an answer that I'm giving to this question – I can just say: fine, there is an expression in Spinoza, that will be for us and is already for us a problem of knowing what he could indeed mean with this matter of "conserving within Being or within one's being". So, I haven't answered at all.

So, I pass on to the matter of modes of existence, no long the quantitative distinction between "be-ings" (*étants*) from the viewpoint of power of action, between "existents" from the viewpoint of power of action, but the qualitative polarity between modes of existence, two at least. How can that really occur? And in fact, I was telling you [that] the *Ethics* never ceases telling us this. The *Ethics* never stops proceeding, it's out of convenience, with two modes of existence. It never stops telling us: these are people who tell you generally- really generally, you know – [that] you have the choice between modes of existence, and notably between two poles, and whatever you do, you will see, you correspond to one of these poles or the other. When you do something, doing something or enduring something, it's existing in a certain fashion. So, you do not ask: what is this worth? You ask, what is the mode of existence that this implies. It is what Nietzsche also said with his story of the eternal return; he said: it is not difficult to know if something is good or not; this question is not very complicated; it is not an affair of morality. He said, take the following test, if only in your head: Do you see yourselves doing it an infinite number of times?

This is a good criterion. You see, it is the criterion of the mode of existence. Whatever I do, whatever I say, could I make it into a mode of existence? If I couldn't, it's not good; it's awful, it's evil, it's bad. If I can, then yes! You see, I don't find [that] this it is any morality; in what sense? I say to an alcoholic, for example, I say to him: you like to drink? You want to drink? If you drink, drink in such a way that with each time you drink, you would be ready to drink again and again and again an infinite number of times. Of course, at your own rhythm, at your own rhythm. At that moment at least, be in agreement with yourself. [*Laughter*] So people are going to give you an easier time when they agree with themselves. What one must dread above all in the life are the people who do not agree with themselves. This was something Spinoza said admirably. The venom of neurosis, that's it! The propagation of neurosis, I propagate my illness to you; this is above all those who are not in agreement with themselves. It's terrible, terrible. They are vampires. Whereas the alcoholic who drinks following the perpetual mode of "ah, this is the last time, this is the last glass! One more time, or once again after", you see, this is a bad mode of existence. If you do something, do it as if you had to do it a million times. If you don't manage to do it like that, do something else. So, you understand, that applies to everything (*ca capte tout*). It's Nietzsche who said this; this is not



me. Address all your objections to Nietzsche. [Laughter] That might work, that might not work, all of that is not meant for discussing what I said. It's so that... so that those for whom this might be of use can use it. All that is not an affair of truths; it's a matter of -- how should I say this -- practices of living. There are people who live in this way.

But in fact, what does Spinoza want to say to us? It is very odd. I would say that the whole of book four of the *Ethics* develops above all the idea of the polar modes of existence. And in what way do you recognize this in Spinoza? -- For the moment, I am saying some extremely simple things -- In what way do you recognize it? You recognize it in a certain tone of Spinoza's, when he speaks, from time to time, of the "strong"; he says in Latin: "the strong man", or else "the free man," and sometimes, on the contrary, he says "the slave" or "the impotent". There you recognize a style which truly belongs to the *Ethics*. He does not speak about "the wicked" or "the good man". The wicked and the good man, these are man related to values as a function of his essence. But the way in which Spinoza speaks, you feel that it is another tone. It is like for musical instruments. It is necessary to feel the tone of people. It is another tone; he tells you: that is what makes the "strong man"; that is how you recognize him as strong and free. Does that mean a beefy type (*costaud*)? Of course not! One indeed feels that the strong man can be far from strong from a certain point of view; he can even be sick; he can be whatever you want. So, what is this thing about the strong man? It's a way of life, it's a mode of existence, and that is opposed to the modes of existence which he calls "the slave" or "the impotent".

What do they mean, these styles of life? It is a lifestyle (*style de vie*). Would there be a lifestyle living as a slave, [or] living as powerless? And then, another type of life, what does this mean? Once again, this modal polarity under the form and under the two poles -- the strong or the powerful, and the impotent or the slave -- that must tell us something. Let's continue to go into the dark and examine, following his texts, what Spinoza calls "the slave or the impotent". It's odd because we realize that what he calls the slave or the impotent, it is there, -- and I don't believe I'm forcing the texts when I say -- that the similarities with Nietzsche are fundamental because Nietzsche will not do anything other than to distinguish these two polar modes of existence and to distribute them in very much the same manner. For we realize with astonishment that what Spinoza calls "the impotent" a mode of existence, what is it? The impotent are the slaves. Fine, but what does "the slaves" mean? Slaves of social conditions? Would Spinoza be against slaves? We sense that the answer is no! It is a way of life. So, there are people who are not at all slaves socially, but they live like slaves, slavery as a way of life and not as social status. Thus, there are slaves. But on the same side as the impotent or the slaves, whom does he place? This will become more significant for us: he puts tyrants. Tyrants, fine, tyrants! And oddly, because here there will be plenty of stories, the priests. The tyrant, the priest and the slave. Nietzsche will not say more. I mean, in his more violent texts, Nietzsche will create the trinity: the tyrant, the priest and the slave. It's odd that it is already so literally within Spinoza.

And what is there in common between a tyrant who has power (*pouvoir*), a slave who does not have power, and a priest who seems only to have spiritual power? What is there in common? And how are they "impotent" since, on the contrary, they seem to be, at least for the tyrant and the priest, men of power, one of political power, and the other of spiritual power? If we consider this, it's what I call sorting things out by feelings (*se débrouiller par sentiments*). We feel that there is indeed a common point, and when we read Spinoza, text after text, we are confirmed on this common point. It is almost like a riddle: for Spinoza, what is there in common between a tyrant who has political power, a slave, and a priest who exercises a spiritual power? Is this something in common that is going to make Spinoza say: but they are impotent? It's just that, in a certain way, they feel the need to bring sadness to life. Curious,



this idea. Nietzsche will also say things like this: they need to make sadness reign! This is how Spinoza thinks, he feels it, he feels it very deeply: they need to make sadness reign because the power that they have can only be founded on sadness.

And Spinoza creates a very strange portrait of the tyrant by explaining that the tyrant is someone who needs, above all, the sadness of his subjects, because there is no terror that doesn't have as its basis a kind of collective sadness. [Pause] The priest, perhaps for completely different reasons, has need of man's sadness on his own condition. And when he laughs, it is not more reassuring because the tyrant could laugh, and the counselors, the favorites of the tyrant could also laugh. It is a bad laugh, and why is it a bad laugh? It's a bad laugh not because of its quality; Spinoza would not say that. It is precisely a laugh that has for its object only sadness and the communication of sadness. What does this mean? This is bizarre. The priest, according to Spinoza, essentially needs an action motivated by remorse, introducing remorse. This is a culture of sadness. Whatever the purposes (*fins*), Spinoza will say that at that moment, we don't care about the purposes. He judges only that: cultivating sadness. The tyrant for his political power needs to cultivate sadness, the priest needs to cultivate sadness as far as Spinoza can see, who has the experience of the Jewish priest, the Protestant priest, and the Catholic priest.

And Nietzsche launches a grand phrase by saying: "I am the first to create a psychology of the priest," he said in some very comical pages, and to introduce this topic into philosophy, he will define the operation of the priest precisely by what he will call "bad conscience", that is, this same culture of sadness. He will say that this is to bring sadness to life. It is always a matter of bringing sadness to life somewhere. And, indeed why? Because it's a matter of judging life. And you will not judge life. You won't submit it to judgment. Life is not able to be judged. The only way in which you could pass judgment on life is, first of all, to inject it with sadness. At that moment, one is able to judge it.

And of course, we laugh; I mean that the tyrant can laugh, the priest laughs, but, Spinoza said, in a page that I find very beautiful, "his laughter is that of satire, and the laughter of satire is a bad laugh." Why? Because it is laughter which communicates sadness. One can mock nature; the laughter of satire is when I mock humans. I'm being ironic, a kind of irritating irony. I am making fun of humans. Satire is another way of saying that human nature is miserable. "Ah you see what the misery of human nature is!" This is the proposition of moral judgment: "What misery human nature has!" This could be the object of a sermon or the object of satire. And Spinoza, in some very beautiful texts, said: "What I've just called an ethics is the opposite of satire."

And yet, there are some very comical pages in Spinoza's *Ethics*, but it is not at all the same laughter. When Spinoza laughs, it is in the mode: "Look at this here, of what he's capable of! Oh this, that's something we've never!" So, in fact, that could be an atrocious villainy; Spinoza's impression would likely be, "So fine, going that far, it was probably necessary to do that." [Laughter] It is never the laughter of satire, never: "See how miserable our nature is!" This is not the laughter of irony. It is a completely different type of laughter. I would say that it is much more a Jewish humor; it's very Spinozist. It's like, "Go on, yet another step; I would never have believed that one could have done it!" It is a very special kind of laughter, and in one sense, Spinoza is one of the most cheerful authors in the world. But I believe, in fact, that what he hates is what religion has conceived as the satire of human nature since the tyrant and the man of religion indulge in satire, that is, above all they denounce human nature as miserable since it's all about passing judgment on it.

And, henceforth, there is a complicity -- and this is Spinoza's intuition -- there is a complicity of the tyrant, the slave, and the priest. Why? Because the slave is the one who feels better the more things go badly. The worse it gets, the happier he is. This is the mode of



existence of the slave! You know, he always has to... For the slave, whatever the situation, he always has to see the awful side of things, the nasty stuff there. There are people who have a genius for this: these are the slaves. “Did you see that?” It could be a painting; it could be a scene in the street. The slave, you recognize this sometimes; they have a genius for it. and at the same time, he is the buffoon. The slave is the buffoon. Dostoyevsky wrote some very profound pages on the unity of the slave and the buffoon, and of the tyrant; these are tyrannical types. They cling to you; they don’t let you go. They don’t stop shoving your nose into whatever shit there might be. [Laughter] They are not happy otherwise; they aren’t happy. They always have to degrade things. It is not that these things are necessarily elevated, but it is always too high. They must always discover a small disgrace underneath the disgrace. “Ah, there’s that guy over there, he’s ...” They get all pink with joy. [Laughter] Magnificent! Magnificent! The more repulsive, the happier they are. They live only like this. That’s what the slave is. It’s also the tyrant, and it’s also the man of remorse. It’s also the man of satire. It’s all of that.

And this how Spinoza opposes that with the conception of a strong man, a powerful man, whose laughter is not the same. It’s a kind of very, very benevolent laughter, the laughter of the man said to be free or strong. He says: “Fine, if this is what you want to do, then go on; it is funny.” This is the opposite of satire. This is ethical laughter!<sup>5</sup> ... Yes?

Question: [Inaudible; a reference to Nietzsche and comparison with Spinoza on the slave]

Deleuze: Yes, it is, there is indeed this kind of, let’s say, kind of tonality, tonality of two modes of existence. What we need to have now is precisely along the path that we have just proposed to ourselves in other directions. What does that tonality of two modes of existence in an ethics recover?

And so, I come back to the question – which would be good for me, to find a link between the first question I have considered up to now and this second question that I’ve reached – on the tonality of two modes of existence. And in fact, I believe that something is causing us to pass very rigorously from the first to the second question. For, within the perspective of the first question, I have just shown that all power (puissance) was “in action” (en acte), that there was strictly an identity of power and act, that is, an identity of power with which the thing “does” or “endures”, does and endures (fait et subit). Fine, we have to return to that. This must be our departure point for understanding the connection of these two aspects.

If it’s true that every power (puissance) is in action, that means that at every instant, it is realized. You will never have an instant in which my power of action will contain something unrealized. In other words, you will never have the right to say: “there is in me something better than what I’ve done or have endured.” At every instant, everything is in action. At every instant, my power of action is realized. Fine, by what is it realized? If all power is in action – you see, I am creating a series of notions of the identity of concepts – I am saying “power = action” for Spinoza. Henceforth, every power of action, at each instant, is realized.

Hence, the question: what is that is realized at every instant [in] this power of action? Here there’s a very important terminological question for Spinoza. Spinoza will call “affect” that which realizes power of action. The concept of power of action for Spinoza will be in correlation with the concept of affect. Affect is defined exactly in this way: that which at a given moment fulfills my power of action, realizes my power of action. So, you see, to say that my power of action is realized is to say that it is realized by affects. That means [that] at each

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<sup>5</sup> Here ends the Web Deleuze transcript based on a rather limited recording. The concluding fifteen minutes of transcript are based on the Paris 8 transcript compared to the actual recording.



instant, affects fulfill my power of action. My power of action is a capacity that never exists independently of affects that realize it.

So, as long as I was considering – here we are almost, we are getting hold of something, and then we are going to stop because it’s too... It’s going to get too difficult. -- But just understand theoretically, as long as I was staying with the concept of power of action, I could only say one thing: strictly speaking, I don’t understand how, but the existents are distinguished quantitatively because power of action is a quantity of a certain kind. So, they [the existents] have more or less power of action. But, second, I see that power of action is a notion that only has sense in correlation with the notion of affect since power of action is what is realized, and it is affect that realizes power of action. This time, no doubt, this will be from the point of view of affects that realize my power of action that I could distinguish some modes of existence. As a result, the two ideas would become very, very coherent: to say at the same time that there is only a quantitative distinction according to the power of action between existents and to say that there is a qualitative polarity between two modes of existence, the first proposition would refer to the power of action-act, the second proposition would refer to that which makes power of action an act, that is, that which realizes the power of action, that is, affect. There would be something like two poles of affect, according to which the two modes of existence are distinguished. But affect, at each moment, fulfills my power of action and realizes it.

What does that mean, affect, at each moment, fulfills my power of action and realizes it? Here Spinoza insists greatly on things, so he relies enormously on their literal truth. So, a blind man is not someone who as a potential sight. Here as well, there is nothing that is “in potential” and not realized. Everything is always completely realized. Either he has no sight at all, that is, he does not have the power to see; or he kept some very vague and very fuzzy luminous sensation. And the affects realize his power of action such as it is, that’s all. There is always realization of power of action. But simply, here we are, that doesn’t prevent [limitations].

So, you understand well this idea of affect. Affect is that which comes to fulfill my power of action. I can [act]; I define myself by a power, a power of action. Affects are what, at each moment, fulfills my power of action. So, what will this affect be? This can be perceptions, for example, luminous perceptions, visual perceptions, auditory perceptions. These are affects. This can be feelings, these are affects as well: hope, chagrin, love, hate, sadness, joy; these are affects. Thoughts are affects. These realize my power of action as well. So, I am realized under all the modes, perceptions, feelings, concepts, etc. These are fulfillments, realizations of power of action. So, can we ask, what does it mean that affects have two poles? [Pause] Here, Spinoza is trying to explain something that I only want to outline since we will take this up the next time. It would be too difficult to talk about in our current state. In general, he says: there are two poles of existence. The two poles are sadness and joy, sadness and joy. This is it, the two basic affects. He creates an entire theory of passions in which sadness and joy are the two basic affects, that is, all the other affects deriving from sadness and joy.

And how are the two affects, sadness and joy, distinguished? You understand, it’s right here that this becomes somewhat difficult. So, we just have to live through it (*il faut la vivre*). When it gets difficult to think, one has to try to live through it. He tells us: both of them, sadness like joy, realize my power of action, and they necessarily do so. At the moment that I have understood affect, it’s not a question that my power of action might be realized in some other way. The affect that emerges is the one that fulfills my power of action. It’s a fact; that’s how it is. You won’t be able to say [that] something else could have occurred. No, this is what fulfills your power of action. Your power of action is always fulfilled, but by variable affects. I suppose that it might be a form of sadness that fulfills you, that fulfills your power of action.



What happens? Here is Spinoza's very odd idea: sadness fulfills my power of action but fulfills it in such a way that this power diminishes. You have to understand this. Don't go looking for a contradiction. There are manners. My power of action is supposed, I mean... I'm going to proceed in order: My power of action is supposed to be a certain quantity, a quantity of power of action. Second proposition: It is always fulfilled. Third proposition: it can be fulfilled by sadnesses or joys. These are the two basic affects. Fourth proposition: when it is fulfilled by some sadness, it is completely realized, but it is realized in a manner of being diminished. When it is fulfilled by joys, it is realized in a manner of being increased. Why is that? We shall see; we will try to see this the next time, why he says all this. I am trying to state what he says for the moment or what it seems to me that he is saying.

We sense that there's something that's not right. But if we understood what isn't right, we'd understand at the same time something astounding. He is telling us: at the same instant, my power of action is all that it can be, it is always realized, but it is realized by some affects that diminish it and some that increase it. Reflect on this well; there is no contradiction. Rather, there is an astonishing movement of thought because here as well it's fine: when I was saying [that] every philosophical concept has several thicknesses, has several levels, judge this at one level, and then, you will not have exhausted it, there being another level.

At the first level, I'd say that Spinoza is telling us – we have to proceed from the simplest to the most complicated; in all the arts, that how it goes, or in all the sciences, that's how it goes – at the first level, Spinoza is telling us: I am defining things, beings, etc., by a quantity of power of action. He doesn't want to say too much about it; he doesn't want to clarify this completely. And the reader understands all by him/herself that this quantity of power of action is like an absolute quantity for each person. Second, he says that what fulfills the power of action at each instant are affects, either sadness or joy. Third, so affects of sadness realize my power of action in such a way that my power of action is diminished; affects of joy realize my power of action in such a way that my power of action is increased.

What is he in the process of telling us? It's as if he was saying, "listen closely, he's speaking through my mouth." He's telling you, he's telling you, what's he telling you? He's telling you: "I have indeed been forced in the first proposition to act as if power of action was a fixed quantity, but in fact -- and it's already in this way that power of action is a very strange quantity -- power of action only exists in a relation between quantities. Power of action in itself is not a quantity; it's the passage from one quantity to another. So, what he is saying gets very, very strong, I believe; it's the passage from one quantity to another. I would say literally – here, I am inventing a word because I need it – this is a transitive quantity. It's a quantity of passage.

Henceforth, if power of action is a quantity of passage, that is, it is less a quantity than a relation between quantities, it is indeed required that my power of action is necessarily realized, but that when it is necessarily realized, it can only be realized in one direction or in another, that is, in such a way that insofar as it's a passage, it's a passage at a greater power or a passage at a more reduced power. All this is beautiful. It's fine. He is living something truly profound concerning what one must call power of action. So, being a manner of being is precisely being a passage. That's what it is to be a mode, a manner of being. The power of action is never an absolute quantity; it's a differential relation. It's a relation between quantities in such a way that realization is always going in one direction or another. Henceforth, you will have two poles of existence, you will have two modes of existence: existing along the mode in which I fulfill my power of action, I realize my power of action within such conditions that this power diminishes; or the other mode of existence, existing along the mode in which I realize my power of action in such a way that this power increases.



I'd like for you to reflect – this is remaining very abstract; I will try to be more concrete the next time – for you to reflect; let this move around in your head, and see how...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Note: For archival purposes, the French transcript originates in two separate documents available at Web Deleuze: the first (dated 9 Dec 1980) is a partial version of the second segment of this lecture; the second (dated 21 Dec 1980, a Sunday, hence no lectures taking place) is a partial version of the first segment of this lecture. Both texts were reviewed, revised and completed with additional material based on the BNF recording made available by Hidenobu Suzuki. The translation is a revised version of Simon Duffy's original translation of both Web Deleuze documents, prepared here in the complete version for the first time in January-February 2020 for posting on this site.