

**Gilles Deleuze**

**Seminar on *Anti-Oedipus* III, 1973-1974**

**Lecture 02, 14 January 1974**

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**The Univocity of Being**

I must pass through a kind of terminological detour. This detour consists in recalling a certain terminology. We find that, in the whole current of the Middle Ages up to and including the seventeenth century, a certain problem is posed concerning the nature of being. And this problem concerning the nature of being adopted some very precise notions: equivocity, analogy, univocity.

At first sight these terms appear dead to us. They make up part of the great discussions of Scholasticism, but the great metaphysical disputes always hide something else: people are never burned or tortured over ideological questions, even less over metaphysical ones. I would like for us to try to feel what was very concretely in question in these stories which were presented under an abstract form: is being equivocal, is it analogical, is it univocal? And after all, this is not because today, except among the seminarians, we have abandoned these terms, not because we do not continue to think in them and through them.

I would like to content myself with very simple definitions. There are people who said: being is equivocal. They argued, they burned one another for things like that. But “being is equivocal” meant a precise thing: being is said in several senses. That means: being is said in several senses of that of which it is said. That is to say that the implication [sous-entendu] of the proposition was already: being is said of something. I'm not even interested in knowing if it's an ontological problem; it's a problem of utterances [énoncés] as well. Being is stated [s'énonce] in several senses of that of which it is stated. Concretely, what does that mean? One assumes that a table is not in the same manner as an animal and that an animal is not in the same manner as a man; that a man is not in the same manner as God. Therefore there are several senses of being.

Those who were called the partisans of equivocity, no matter who they were, argued a very simple thing: that the different senses of the word “being” were without common measure and that, in all rigor—and what is interesting in theology are always the limit points at which heresy peeks out—in every doctrine one can always locate the exact point where, if the person says a word more, that's it, the machine is set in motion, one starts a process. That runs through the whole history of the Middle Ages, it's very interesting because it's an actual struggle of an obviously political nature.

Well then, the heretical point of equivocity is that those who said that being is said in several senses, and that these different senses have no common measure, understood that at the limit they would have preferred to say: “God is not,” rather than to say “He is” to the extent that “He is” was a utterance which was said of the table or the chair. Or else He is in a such an equivocal manner, such a different manner, without common measure with the being of the chair, with the being of man, etc... that, all things considered, it's much better to say: He is not, which means: He is superior to being. But if they had a sense of wordplay this became very dangerous, it sufficed that they insist only a little on “God is not,” if they were discreet they said “God is superior to being,” but if they said “God is not,” that could turn out badly. Broadly speaking they were partisans of what is called the equivocity of being.

Then there were those who were partisans of the Univocity of being. They risked even more because what does this mean, univocity, in opposition to the equivocity of being? And all the treatises of the Middle Ages are filled with long chapters on the univocity or equivocity of being, it's very interesting. But those who said that being is univocal, supposing that they had done so and were not immediately burned, what did that mean? That meant: being has only one sense and is said in one and the same sense of everything of which it is said. Here one feels that if the equivocists already had such a possible sin in themselves, the univocists were thinkers who told us: of everything which is, being is said in one and the same sense—of a chair, of an animal, of a man or of God. Yet again, I'm simplifying everything because perhaps they didn't dare go that far, perhaps there's only a single thinker who would have gone that far, perhaps none, but in the end there is this idea.

And then inevitably there are those who were between the two, between the univocists and the equivocists. Those who are between the two are always those who establish what we call orthodoxy. These people said that being is not univocal because it's a scandal; to claim that being is said in one and the same sense of God and of the flea is a terrible thing, we must burn people like that; and then those who say “being is said in several senses which have no common measure,” we no longer know where we are with them: there is no order anymore, there's no longer anything. Thus these third people said: being is neither equivocal nor univocal, it's analogical. Here we can say the name, the one who elaborated a theory of analogy on the basis of Aristotle, Saint Thomas, and historically he won. Being which is analogical meant: yes, being is said in several senses of that of which it is said. Only these senses are not without common measure: these senses are governed by relations of analogy. Thus the equivocity of being, the univocity of being, the analogy of being, you're going to ask me where all this leads us?

So what does this mean: being is said in several senses of that of which it is said? And these senses are not without common measure, they have an analogical measure. Well then, in Saint Thomas' theses, which I am simplifying a lot, this means two things, because analogy, which is taken here in a technical or scientific sense, analogy was double, in any case taken in a technical or scientific sense, that is to say that it was not a question of common analogy. Common analogy is simple similarity of perception: something is analogous to something else. If you like it's the similarity of perception or the analogy of imagination, generally speaking. Scientific or technical analogy, the analogy of concepts, is double: the first sense was termed by Saint Thomas “analogy of proportions” and the second was termed by Saint Thomas “analogy of proportionality.”

The analogy of proportion was the following: being is said in several senses and these senses are not without common measure, they have an internal measure, they have a conceptual measure, they have a measure in the concept. Why? Well, in the first sense of the analogy of proportion, that meant—because there's a primary sense of the word “being” and then derived senses—the primary sense of the word “being” was what's often translated by the term “substance” or sometimes by the term “essence.” The other senses of the word “being” were the different senses of the word “being” which were derived from the primary sense following a law of proportion. Thus being was said in several senses, but there was a primary sense from which the others were derived.

This has hardly carried us forward because the primary substance was not univocal, it wasn't said in a single sense. At the level of substance in its turn there were going to be analogies, namely: substance was said in several analogical senses, and of that which was substance it was necessary to say that certain substances were primary in relation to others, which were not substance in the same sense. For example, the so-called “incorruptible” substances were primary in relation to the perishable substances. Thus the analogy of proportion consisted in setting out a plurality of hierarchized and methodical senses on the basis of a sense that was assumed to be primary. This was the analogy of proportion.

And then the second form of scientific analogy, which was not opposed to the first, this was the analogy of proportionality, which consisted this time in a figure quite close to its equivalent, mathematical analogy: A is to B as C is to D. Example given by Saint Thomas: God is good. Following the analogy of proportion: God is good and man is good; following the analogy of proportion God is formally good, that is to say possessing in Himself goodness in the plenitude of this quality, and man is only good by derivation insofar as he is a creature of God, thus man is secondarily good. This is the analogy of proportion. The analogy of proportionality is the same example, but you must sense how it changes. What infinite goodness is to God, finite goodness is to man.

I would add, to finish with this: yet again do we not continue to think theologically? To this whole group of notions, analogy, analogy of proportion, analogy of proportionality, was linked a very precise notion which was that of category. In what way did the categories make up part of the analogical vision or the analogical conception? For example, the categories, common to Aristotle and much later to Kant, let's put down substance, quantity, etc. Why categories and not concepts? What difference is there between the concept of causality or quantity and the concept of lion? Quite simple: every thing, all that is not [connected?], alternatively everything that is substance, has a quality, a quantity, etc. Hence the very strict definition of what must be called a category: one calls categories the concepts which are said of every possible object of experience. Lion is not a category because you cannot say “lion” of every possible object of experience. On the other hand, every possible object of experience has a cause and is itself cause of other things. There, that clarifies everything. The categories, thus defined, are strictly inseparable from an analogical conception; one calls categories the concepts which are said of every possible object of experience, or what amounts strictly to the same thing: the different senses of the word “being.” And the categories in Aristotle are presented as the different senses of the word “being,” exactly as in Kant the categories are defined as the concepts which are said of every possible object of experience. Therefore there's no question of a thought proceeding by categories if it

does not have, as background, the idea that being is analogical, which is to say that being is said of what is in an analogical manner.

At this point I make a leap: what appears to me the strangest thought, the most difficult to think, if it has ever been thought, is univocity. Suppose someone arrives there, in an assembly of priests, or even here and says: being is said absolutely in one and the same sense of everything of which it is said. One could say that this does not go very far, but this means precisely that being is univocal, that is to say neither analogical nor equivocal—and understand well that in the Middle Ages those sorts were very up-to-date on all this, as you are—if someone happened by speaking of univocity of being, he was quickly spotted, he could pack his bags; that meant, yet again, that a chair, an animal, a man and God are in one and the same sense. Then what: you treat God as matter? Are a dog and a man in the same sense? Quite tricky, that.

And nevertheless there is a man, the greatest thinker of the Middle Ages, who says yes, being is univocal, that is Duns Scotus. This story of Duns Scotus' univocal being turns out rather badly—but happily he took precautions, he said yes but be careful: being is univocal insofar as it is being. That is to say that it's metaphysically univocal. He said: sure it's analogical, which is to say that it's said in several senses physically. This is what interests me: he was at the border of heresy, had he not specified metaphysically univocal and physically analogical, he would have been done for. But for Duns Scotus' disciples, less prudent than he was, it turned out badly. Because I say: being is univocal, this means there is no categorical difference between the assumed senses of the word “being” and being is said in one and the same sense of everything which is. In a certain manner this means that the tick is God; there is no difference of category, there is no difference of substance, there is no difference of form. It becomes a mad [démence] thought.

My question is, if I say being is univocal, it's said in the same sense of everything of which it's said, then what could the differences between [beings?] be? They can no longer be differences of category, they can no longer be differences of form, they can no longer be differences of genus and species. And why can they no longer be all that? Because, once again, if I say: the differences between beings are differences of form, are formal, generic, specific differences, at that moment I cannot escape from the analogy of being for this simple reason: the categories are the ultimate genera of being. If I say: there are several senses of the word “being” which are precisely the categories, I must say that what is, that of which I say, “this is,” is distinguished by the form, the species, the genus. On the other hand, if I say that being is univocal and that it's said in one and the same sense of everything of which it's said, I fall into that which becomes the mad thought, the thought of infamy, the thought of the formless, the thought of the non-specific, the thought of the non-generic.

The only means of getting out of this is to say: of course there are differences between beings, and in any case being is said in one and the same sense of everything which is. Then what do the differences between beings consist in? The only difference conceivable at this very moment, from the point of view of a univocal being, is obviously difference solely as degrees of power [puissance]. Beings are not distinguished by their form, their genus, their species, that's secondary; everything which is refers to a degree of power.

Why is the idea of degrees of power fundamentally linked to that of the univocity of being? Because beings which are distinguished solely by the degree of their power are beings which realize a single univocal being, except for the difference in the degree of power or its withdrawal. So between a table, a little boy, a little girl, a locomotive, a cow, a god, the difference is solely one of degree of power in the realization of one and the same being. It's a strange way of thinking, since once again it consists in saying to us: the forms, the functions, the species and the genera are secondary. Beings are defined by degrees of power and there you are. Insofar as they are defined by degrees of power, each being realizes one and the same being, the same being as the other beings since being is said in one and the same sense, except for the difference in degree of power. At this level, there are no longer any categories, no longer any forms, no longer any species.

In a sense, it's a thought so very far from the ordinary notions of species and genus that, once again, between two members of the same species there can be more differences, more differences in the degree of power than between two beings of different species. Between a racehorse and a draft horse, which belong to the same species, the difference can perhaps be thought as greater than the difference between a draft horse and an ox. Which comes down to saying that the draft horse and the ox are taken in the same assemblage [agencement] and that their degrees of power are closer to one another's than is the draft horse's degree of power to the racehorse's.

A further step can be taken, that is, that this thought of degrees of power is linked, no longer to a conception of genera and species, but to a conception of assemblages into which each being is capable of entering. We had begun with Spinoza for Spinoza is perhaps the only one to have worked from the point of view [sous les espèces] of reason, to have pursued a kind [espèce] of mad thought. There's always in Lovecraft, the author of novels of terror and science fiction, there's always reference to a mysterious book which falls from the hands of whomever touches it and this book is called the *Necronomicon*, the famous book of the mad Arab. And Spinoza's *Ethics* is just that, the famous book of the mad Jew. The true name of the *Ethics* is the *Necronomicon*. I had begun by explicating the following: imagine how Spinoza saw things; when he directed his eyes toward things he saw neither forms nor organs, neither genera nor species. It's easy to say, but less easy to live like that. It's necessary to train oneself, although there are those who are gifted.

I open a parenthesis: French philosophy...there are bits of nationality about which I understand nothing, but I note that the French are the sort who believe for example in the ego [moi]; it's not by chance that their only philosopher said "cogito." The subject, the ego; there are some strange people who say "the ego." I don't understand. I think of the differences of nationality because the English are the sort who have never understood what the Ego means. There was a famous colloquium to which all the sorts of so-called analytical philosophy, of current English logic, had come, and then there was Merleau-Ponty on the French side, and the others, the English, were there like they were at the zoo. It's not that they were against him.

But it's quite curious, if you take the great English philosophers—of course, they say "I," but yet again it's not this that's the problem—for them it's the most comical notion and they ask themselves from where can such a belief, that of the ego, come. A belief in the identity of the ego is a madman's trick [truc de fous]. And they really think like that, they don't sense "egos" in

themselves. The English novelists are similar: their heroes are never presented as “egos.” Think of French novels, then it's truly the opposite, one wallows in “egos,” everybody says “cogito” in the French novel.

Let's try to imagine how Spinoza saw things. He did not see genera, species, he did not see categories, so what did he see? He saw differences of degrees of power... I said broadly that to each thing will correspond a kind of degree of power and that, if need be, two things said to be of the same species might have degrees of power much more different than two things of different species. To make this more concrete we say that to each degree of power corresponds a certain power of being affected. Its power of being affected is what reveals the degree of power of a thing, of an animal, of [*unclear word*]. In other words, you will not be defined by your form, by your organs, by your organism, by your genus or by your species, tell me the affections of which you are capable and I'll tell you who you are. Of what affects are you capable? It's self-evident that between a draft horse and a racehorse the power of being affected is not the same, in a fundamental way; the proof is that if you put a racehorse into the assemblage of a draft horse, it's quite likely that it will be worn out in three days.

We have this group of notions: being is said in one and the same sense of everything of which it's said; hence beings are not distinguished by their form, their genus, their species, they're distinguished by degrees of power. These degrees of power refer to powers of being affected, the affects being precisely the intensities of which a being is capable. Now it's becoming more coherent. With the result that, I assume, when Spinoza directed his eyes toward whatever, he grasped powers of being affected. He grasped populations of intensities, he grasped capacities and perhaps he confused an ox and a draft horse, and on the other hand he did not confuse a racehorse and a draft horse. As we would say today, he makes these cuts [*coupures*] differently than the others. Then there's no more than an effort to accomplish.

In any case, it's not necessary to believe that power [*pouvoir*] means a possibility that might not be fulfilled. Power [*puissance*] and degrees of power, this is no longer the Aristotelian world which is a world of analogy, it's not power which is distinguished from the act. The power of being affected, in any case, is or will be fulfilled, is fulfilled at each instant; it's necessarily fulfilled, and why? It's necessarily fulfilled at each instant by virtue of the variable assemblages into which it enters. That is, the affect is the manner in which a degree of power is necessarily actualized [*effectué*] as a function of the assemblages into which the individual or the thing enters.

A power of being affected is always fulfilled; it can be fulfilled in different ways, everything depends on the assemblage. In what ways can it be fulfilled, since it's fulfilled in any case? This is Spinoza's last thought: he says broadly that it's fulfilled in any case, but it can be fulfilled in two fashions. A degree of power is necessarily realized, or a power of being affected is necessarily fulfilled, that refers to these same two propositions, but very broadly speaking it can be fulfilled in two directions: either my power of being affected is fulfilled in such a way that my power of acting increases, or in such a way that my power of acting diminishes. Spinoza specifies: when my power of acting diminishes, this means, very broadly speaking, that my affects are sad; my power of being affected is completely fulfilled by sadness. For example “I'm

guilty” or “I’m depressed” or “it’s not going well”; but “it’s not going well” completely fulfills my power of being affected.

And why, when my affects are sad, is my power of acting diminished while my power of being affected is fulfilled? The way in which Spinoza views people is very, very beautiful. It’s even more beautiful when one sees the objections that people made to him, for example that imbecile [débile] Hegel. When Hegel says, against Spinoza, “ah that one never understood anything of the labor of the negative,” it’s perfect, the labor of the negative is a load of crap. It’s not that he doesn’t understand, he understands very well: the labor of the negative or the sad passions are those which fulfill my power of being affected in conditions such that my power of acting necessarily diminishes. When I’m sad, my power of acting diminishes.

It’s obvious, it sufficed to think it: when you’re affected with sad affects, there’s an object, something, an animal or a person which combines with you and that person or thing affects you with sadness. But in the case of the sad affect, the power of the other thing and your own would be subtracted since all your efforts at that moment would consist in struggling against this sadness and hence your power and the power of the thing which affects you would be subtracted. When, on the contrary, you are affected with joyful affects, the power of the thing which affects you with joyful affects and your own power are combined and added so that your power of acting, for that same power of being affected which is your own, is increased. Thus everything is crystal clear.

There you are, the linkage of notions: univocity of being, differences of degrees of power, powers of being affected each of which corresponds to a degree of power, power of acting which increases or diminishes depending on whether the affects which fulfill your power of being affected are by nature sad or joyful.

**A student :** Are the degrees of power degrees of the same power?

**Deleuze:** Obviously. Power is being, therefore there’s only one single power and the differences of power are intensive differences.

**The student:** Isn’t this in fact a model of causality? Several years ago we had interpreted causality in Spinoza in terms of structural causality. For my part, I think that one could interpret Spinoza’s thought in terms of energetic causality. Effectively this would be a substance defined as potential energy, and I would take this potential energy as an operational concept, a concept rigorously equivalent to the Nietzschean concept of the will to power.

**Deleuze:** Okay. This seems dangerous to me because we’re just barely getting out of the abstract, and you’re putting us back into it. It’s not simply a question of a peculiar vision of the world; it’s again eminently a question of politics. Spinoza’s basic idea is very simple, it’s that there are two plagues of the human genus, and it’s in this that Spinoza is Nietzschean and Nietzsche is Spinozist. He says that there are two scourges: hatred and remorse. Nietzsche will say that there are two scourges: man as malady, resentment and bad conscience. Resentment and bad conscience are literally what Spinoza called hatred and remorse.

Here one could find a kind of psychiatric tableau of the affections of hatred and the affections of remorse. But what interests him in this way of seeing all that -- this is not a psychiatry -- what interests him is obviously politics. Spinoza asks himself: what are those things called powers-that-be [pouvoirs]? He posed the question of power in a ridiculous enough way: power [pouvoir] is opposed to power of action [puissance]; power of action [puissance] is concerns us personally, concerns each one of us, concerns animals, concerns things. But power [pouvoir] is something else. He asks how it functions: people take power over others. What does it mean to have power over someone? Having power over someone is being in a position to affect her or him in such and such a way. The powers-that-be are fundamentally institutions built to affect you with sadness, they work like that and can only work like that. Things like hope, reward and security are put on the side of sad affects.

**A student:** Desire also.

**Deleuze:** No, how awful, what are you saying? Don't listen to him. -- The powers-that-be only keep hold on us by affecting us, which is to say by fulfilling our power of being affected with sad affects, and undoubtedly thousands of ways of doing this exist. And what Spinoza had in view is the power of the State and the power of the Church. He thinks that the power of the State and the power of the Church are fundamentally powers which take hold of their subjects by affecting them with sad affects, which is to say that power depresses them. This is the fundamental operation of power; affecting us with sadness, which obviously implies a whole play of compensations, "if you were wise, you would have had a reward," it's for that reason that Spinoza puts the taste for medals on the side of the sad affects, rewards are like a kind of compensation for a fundamental sadness of being.

Power [pouvoir] and power of action [puissance] are opposed since power [pouvoir] is an institution which functions essentially by affecting us with sad affects, which is to say by diminishing our power of acting. It needs to diminish our power of action precisely in order to exercise its own power over us. On the contrary, the powers [puissances] of liberation are, or will be, those which affect us with joyful affects. If you're sad you are oppressed, depressed... you've been had. How do they live, the sad and depressed? They live under the form of contagion, they won't let you go. A depressed person is an explosive force, you grasp that. It's tragic, it's tragedy itself. Nietzsche developed this quite simple idea even further: the man of resentment is venomous; his idea is to render you ashamed of the least happiness. Spinoza won't even say that social institutions furnish us with models. He will say that they fulfill us with affections. A social institution is a machine of affects; it fulfills your power of being affected. This is not ideological.

He's really very, very clever, and truly in the Nietzschean sense of "why I am so clever," he takes terms which are current in his epoch, most notably the Cartesian vocabulary, and turns it against Descartes.

**A student:** [*Inaudible comment*]

**Deleuze:** The whole discourse of representation is structured by analogical principles and thus Spinoza's whole operation consists in making, in imposing a kind of assemblage of affects which implies likewise a critique of representation.



The *Ethics* is a book which proceeds via a quite malicious system; this system consists in producing texts, and then notes and notes to notes, and then notes to notes of notes. It's obviously in the notes to notes that an enormous thing will be let loose. Spinoza himself found a far more formidable thing, and doubtless the geometrical method was necessary for that. His book has the appearance of being completely continuous, but in fact when one looks at it, one sees that there are propositions—like geometrical propositions—there are demonstrations, and then there are corollaries and then there are these strange things he calls *scholia*.

At first glance, it all follows. If you look closely, you'll notice that in fact it's not so tightly knit, that is to say the proposition-demonstration-corollary system is an autonomous system, that is the demonstrations always refer to other demonstrations or to other corollaries. And then the system of scholia is another system which coexists with the first and the scholia refer to one another. Thus there are two *Ethics* in one: an *Ethics* which functions in the mode of continuity and a secret *Ethics* which functions in the mode of discontinuity, and which is constituted by the scholia. If need be, there are forty pages without scholia and two scholia which refer to one another across these forty pages, and it's in the scholia that he gives an aggressive version of what he says geometrically in the other system; so much so that, literally, the *Ethics* is simultaneously written twice: a violent and affective version and a rational and geometrical version.

It's in the scholia that he says what an ethics is, to make an ethics is to make a theory and a practice of powers of being affected, and an ethics is opposed to a satirics [satirique]. What he calls a satirics is tremendous enough: it's everything that takes pleasure one way or another in sad affects, everything which is depreciating and depressing. That's the satirics. It's obvious that all of morality goes under the name of satirics. What exactly does powers-that-be mean? And in what ways do the powers-that-be take hold in order to depress, to affect people with sad affects? ... [End of the text]