

The Role of Ontology in the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze  
(Starting from a Comparison with Alain Badiou)

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# The Role of Ontology in the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (Starting from a Comparison with Alain Badiou)

## 1. Introduction - Deleuze and the question

It would seem to be an obvious statement that if the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze is not a fully developed systematic ontology then it is at least a philosophy in which the conception of being is central. Deleuze is, after all, philosophy's most famous (or at least most recent) proponent of being as univocity. The topics of his studies are often the great metaphysicians of the history of philosophy: Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Leibniz, Bergson. His language and problems seem to lend themselves ontological reading, and there has been no shortage of discussion of Deleuze's ontology on the part of his commentators. Victoria Bergen in her book *l'ontologie de Gilles Deleuze* draws on all of Deleuze's work to give a systematic account his philosophy as an ontology. More famously, Alain Badiou devotes most of his book on Deleuze as well as a chapter in his *Court Traité d'ontologie Transitoire* to the names of being according to Deleuze. Badiou goes even further, stating that not only is Deleuze an ontological thinker, but the philosophy that he expounds is an ontology in the tradition of Heidegger. More recently, Miguel de Beistegui discusses Deleuze as being the extension of the Heideggerian problematic of ontological difference (Beistegui 21). Todd May sums up the general consensus on Deleuze and the question of being with the affirmation "Deleuze's works are steeped in ontology" (May 15).

However, the question about Deleuzian ontology is far from definitively answered by the commentators. François Zourabichvili states very clearly that there is no such thing as a Deleuzian ontology which is rather a philosophy of the event. Being, according to him, is a concept that Deleuze always tried to avoid. Moreover, Zourabichvili denies any positive connection between Deleuze's philosophy and the ontological tradition of Heidegger. Zourabichvili does not deny that Deleuze's is a metaphysical or speculative philosophy, but he

denies that being is a viable term for him. Ontology should be understood here as a discourse on or a science of being *qua* being. It is true that Deleuze does not cast his concepts in Heideggerian language nor does he make more than passing reference to Parmenides. Discussions of Being are not totally absent from his works, but neither does ontological language permeate his books in a way that one would expect from a hard line ontologist.

The focus of this essay is the role of Being and event the work of Deleuze. The debate over ontology in Deleuze's work starting from a discussion of Alain Badiou as commentator and philosopher will lead us to interrogate Deleuze's philosophical method. Ultimately we want to pose the question about Deleuze's own impetus for his philosophy of being and event. In this introduction, I will outline more completely the debate in question discussing Alain Badiou's claims about Deleuze's ontology and his participation in the ontological tradition of Heidegger and François Zourabichvili's claims that there is no Deleuzian ontology.

We will start by rehearsing some of the relevant points in Alain Badiou's reading of Deleuze. Badiou was not a student of Deleuze nor is he a simple commentator. Badiou is an interesting and original philosopher in his own right whose philosophical vocabulary (multiplicity, event, etc.) is very similar to that of Deleuze. His book on Deleuze is often seen as Badiou's side of what amounts to a debate between the two. His reading of Deleuze has been criticized especially for Badiou's reading of the One and multiple in the Deleuzian theory of the univocity of being (see Smith). It is not my intention to give an in depth explanation of these critiques or the debate between Deleuze and Badiou concerning the One and multiple. Deleuze's philosophy of the univocity of being will be discussed in some detail later but what concerns us now is how Badiou addresses the issue of ontology in the work of Deleuze.

Badiou's claims can be summed up in the following statement: for Deleuze philosophy *is* ontology. Badiou claims that 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy is dominated by the philosophy of Being (thus Heidegger is the paradigm thinker for the 20<sup>th</sup> century), and Deleuze, belonging "absolutely" to his century, is no exception. Badiou, like Beistigui later, explicitly links Deleuze to the ontological project of Heidegger. Badiou quickly points out however that there are nonetheless important differences between the ontologies of Heidegger and Deleuze. Badiou gives two short citations from Deleuze to justify his assertion that Deleuze identifies philosophy with ontology. One is from *The Logic of Sense*. It reads, "Philosophy merges [*se confonde*] with ontology" (CB 20, LS 179)<sup>1</sup>. The second from *Difference and Repetition* says "from Parmenides to Heidegger it is the same voice that is taken up...A single voice raises the clamor of being" (CB 20, DR 35). Badiou points to the Deleuzian doctrine of univocity as evidence for the importance of ontology for Deleuze. The idea of the single voice expressing being is important and it will be explained in the discussion of the univocity of being, but for the moment, the point that Badiou wants to make is that Deleuze is identifying with this ontological tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger. However, one can question if these two short quotes really support the claim that Badiou is trying to make. Neither of them is a clear statement from Deleuze that philosophy *is* and *should* be ontology or that being as such should have a privileged place in philosophy.

This brings us to the assertions of François Zourabichvili. Zourabichvili's claim is no less bold than Badiou's but it is perhaps a bit more nuanced. He makes these claims in two texts, first in *Le Vocabulaire de Deleuze* and in a new introduction included with the republication of his book, *Deleuze: Philosophie de l'événement*. In the former, Zourabichvili states that

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<sup>1</sup> Texts by Deleuze and Badiou are parenthetically cited using abbreviations listed on the works cited page. Translations of French sources are my own unless a published translation is listed on the works cited page.

“speaking of deleuzian ontology must be done with great precaution” and that “neither in its style nor in its expectations does the deleuzian procedure have anything whatsoever in common with that of Heidegger” (Zourabichvili 2003, 38-39). This word of caution is even more strongly worded in his later introduction. There he writes:

There is no “ontology of Deleuze.” Neither in the sense of a metaphysical discourse [...] Nor in the deeper sense of a primacy of being for knowledge (like for Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty where the subject emerges already preceded by an instance which opens the possibility of its appearance)” (Zourabichvili 2004, 6).

Thus in no uncertain terms Zourabichvili contradicts Badiou’s claims that Deleuze is primarily a philosopher of being and a philosopher in the ontological tradition of Heidegger. Zourabichvili also comments on the passage from *The Logic of Sense* that Badiou uses to support his claim about the deleuzian identification of philosophy and ontology: “Philosophy merges [se confonde}] with ontology.” Zourabichvili rightly points out that the passage continues with the clause “but ontology merges [se confonde] with the univocity of Being” (Zourabichvili 2004, 7-8; LS 179). This, he claims, is Deleuze using the doctrine of the univocity of being “to pervert the whole ontological discourse” (Zourabichvili 2004, 8). One cannot deny that the univocity of being as Deleuze finds it in the works of Duns Scotus, Spinoza, and Nietzsche is central to Deleuze’s philosophy, but one can, and François Zourabichvili does, deny that the deleuzian theory of the univocity of being is part of an ontological project. He also writes:

But the thesis of the univocity is not for him [Heidegger] a source of inspiration, while Deleuze sees in it the most glorious act of ontology – the act which drives directly to its auto-abolition as doctrine of *being*. (Zourabichvili 2004, 9).

According to Zourabichvili then the only way in which Deleuze will discuss being is a way which erases being from the discussion.

If being is erased or simply not privileged in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze perhaps it is in his theory of the event that we should look in order to find the most crucial aspects of his thought. This is the move that Zourabichvili makes in his writings. In *Le Vocabulaire de Deleuze*, it is in the context of discussing the event that Zourabichvili makes his statements about the precaution that one must use if one is going to speak of a deleuzian ontology (Zourabichvili 2003, 36-40). In the conclusion of his later book the title of which could be translated as *Deleuze. A Philosophy of the Event* he refers to the event as the “principle theme” of deleuzian thought (Zourabichvili 2004, 115). Are we to conclude from this that there is some kind of opposition between being and event? That Being and ontology are to be wiped out of philosophy in favor a philosophy of an event?

Zourabichvili’s discussion of the univocity of being in the introduction is well cited drawing on several important works by Deleuze. But, what textual evidence does he provide to show Deleuze’s attitude toward ontology as *discourse* on being? Here he turns to *A Thousand Plateaus*, a book co-written with Félix Guattari, to refer to a deleuzian “program” of substituting “and” (*et*) for “is” (the being verb, *est*. Note Deleuze and Guattari’s pun that “et” and “est” have the same pronunciation in French) (Zourabichvili 2004, 7). This “program” is mentioned in *A Thousand Plateaus* where they state that “There has always been a struggle in language between the verb *être* (to be) and the conjunction *et* (and) between *est* and *et* (is and and)” (TP 98). Earlier in this work Deleuze and Guattari refer to the “logic of the AND” which will “reverse ontology” (TP25; Zourabichvili 2004, 7)<sup>2</sup>. One will note however, that the reversal of ontology is not

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<sup>2</sup> Translation modified. The French reads “*renverser l’ontologie*” (37). I felt it was important to keep the literal meaning as opposed to Brian Massumi’s translation as “overthrow ontology.”

necessarily the same as the abolition or erasure of ontology. It is perhaps right to question the amount of emphasis that Zourabichvili places on this “program.” Like Badiou, Zourabichvili’s position may be difficult to support in all instances.

The point of this introduction, however, is not to declare who is right and wrong in the debate over the role of being in Deleuze’s philosophy. The point is to introduce the basic concepts concerned in the debate and to show that the claim asserted by many commentators that there is a Deleuzian ontology is not without problems. It is with this problematic in mind that we will begin to pose the question of Deleuze’s own questions, about ontology, and about being and event. These terms bring the discussion back to Alain Badiou. Before we begin our discussion of Deleuze’s theory of univocity and his logics of the event it would be useful give an explication of Alain Badiou’s philosophy as it is expressed in *L’être et L’événement* and *Court Traité d’ontologie Transitoire*. A comparison with his philosophy may prove to be useful in understanding that of Deleuze because Badiou is quite clear about the role of ontology in his own philosophy and the opposing relation of being to event is made explicit.

## **2. Badiou: Ontology of the Multiple and Philosophy of the Event**

Before beginning our discussion of Deleuzian ontology, it would be useful to explicate the major themes of Badiou’s ontological project. Badiou provides a good summary of his theory of ontology in the dictionary appendix to *L’être et l’événement* (hereafter referred to as *Being and Event*). He writes that ontology is “the science of being *qua* being. Presentation of the presentation. Realized as a thought of the pure multiple, therefore as Cantorian mathematics or set theory. It is already effective, though not thematically, in the history of mathematics” (EE 551). This definition gives us the major points in Badiou’s ontological theory. In this chapter,

our goal is to explicate these points and discuss the role of ontology in Badiou's philosophy of the event.

The first formulation of ontology in Badiou's definition is the least controversial. Ontology as the study of being *qua* being is found in Greek philosophy especially Parmenides and Aristotle and in other 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, most notably Heidegger (*de Beistegui passim*). The next two points in Badiou's definition is more useful for understanding the uniqueness of Badiou's position. Ontology is "the presentation of the presentation" and the thought of the "pure multiple." The presentation in question is the presentation of being. Mehdi Belhaj Kacem writes in his commentary on Badiou that presentation or presenting are synonymous with existence (Kacem 30). What is presented or exists is essentially multiple. Badiou opens *Being and Event* with the ancient question of whether the One is part of being or whether being is essentially multiple. He writes:

We have to say that the one, which is not, exists only as an operation. Or again; there is no one, there is only the counts-for-one [*compte-pour-un*]. The one, being and operation is never a presentation. (EE 32).

Being presents itself as pure multiplicity according to Badiou. The one does not exist, it can only be thought as an operation, not as a real being. This will make more sense when we look at the example of this kind of thinking later in this section. The idea that the multiple is all that *is* is a central feature of Badiou's thought on the nature of being. Though he has mathematical reasons for maintaining this position, Badiou cites Plato as the original thinker of the non-existence of the one. At the end of Plato's *Parmenides* the young Socrates is brought to the conclusion that "If the one is not, (the) nothing is [*Si l'un n'est pas, rien (n'est)*]" (EE 46). This passage taken from Badiou's translation of Plato's text not only to the non-being of the one that

Badiou reads in Plato's philosophy but also introduces the nothing that is. This is the concept of the void [*le vide*] which Badiou says is the true name of being. He writes, "The void is the name of Being – of the inconsistency – according to a situation, in as much as the presentation gives us access to the unrepresentable (EE 69). We will not here get into Badiou's exact reasoning behind this designation of being as void, but we need to remember that our concern in this section is not the characterization that Badiou ascribes to being but Badiou's definition of ontology.

If being is the pure multiple presenting itself, then ontology as discourse on being is not the presentation of being but the presentation of this presentation or the thinking which concerns pure multiplicity. But there is another vocabulary item that we should discuss before moving on to the next portion of Badiou's definition of ontology: the situation. Badiou writes, "I call a situation, a whole presented multiplicity. The presentation being effective, the situation is the place of the taking place [*le lieu de l'avoir-lieu*], whatever the terms of the multiple in question may be" (EE 32). A situation is said to be structured when it is subject to a counts-for-one operation. Ontology is a structured situation.

If this way of discussing Being seems peculiar, this may be attributable to the final part of Badiou's definition of ontology: the equivalence of ontology and mathematics, or to be more specific, ontology and the set theory of Georg Cantor. Badiou's ontology is a mathematical ontology<sup>3</sup>. The exact relationship between mathematics and philosophy in the thought of Alain Badiou is a complicated topic that we will only briefly treat here. To say that ontology is mathematics for Badiou is not to say that Badiou is concerned with an ontology of mathematics or mathematical objects. He is not concerned with presenting a philosophy *of* mathematics. He writes:

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<sup>3</sup>Mathematics is also important for Deleuzian thought though there are significant differences between his conception of the relationship and Badiou's as Daniel W. Smith points out.

The thesis that I assert here does not declare in any way that Being is mathematical i.e. composed of mathematical objectivities. It is not a thesis about the world but about discourse. It affirms that mathematics, in its entire historical development [*devenir historique*] states that which is sayable [*dicible*] about being *qua* being (EE 14).

The statement that mathematics is ontology should be taken more as a statement of method than as a statement on being itself. Mathematics is ontology and as such mathematics is a mode of thought. This may seem like a strange or obvious statement, but this is not the case. According to Badiou, both Wittgenstein and Heidegger, two of the most influential philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, stated the opposite, that math is not thinking (CT 121-122). Badiou again traces his attitude toward mathematics back to Plato. He writes, “That mathematics is a thought means in particular that, for mathematics the distinction between a knowing subject and known object has no pertinence” (CT 102; see also CT 96. We will come back to this in the conclusion of the essay.).

It should be noted that while Badiou’s ontology can be read as a discourse on the history of mathematics in general, it is Cantorian set theory which carries the most ontological weight. Set theory, which, in a few words, is the study of groups or collections of anything whatsoever, is a turning point in the history of mathematics and a useful tool for thinking according to Badiou (Barker 150). Most notably, set theory allows Badiou to think true infinity. Secondly, set theory can think multiplicity. Badiou writes, “The set, in the Cantorian sense, has no other essence than being a multiplicity [...] every element of a set is itself a set. Which brings about the idea that every multiple is a multiple of multiples without reference to any sort of unity” (CT 35). Set theory is the thought of infinity and the pure multiple.

To sum up, until now we have been explicating Badiou's definition of ontology. It is a discourse on being *qua* being, a presentation of presentation, and a mathematical thinking of pure multiplicity. One might rightly ask, "What kind of ontology does that leave us with? What does an ontology that is really set theory mathematics have to say about what *is*?" I could point to the first one half to two thirds of *Being and Event* as an example of this kind of theorizing. But it would be far more useful to sketch out a quick example here. This example is not entirely my own. It was inspired by Mehdi Belhaj Kacem's published course on Badiou's work, *Event and Repetition* [*Événement et Répétition*]. Kacem in this book departs notably from Badiou's work, but I think that this example is useful for understanding how set theory can be used to think Being.

Take the presentation that is me. We will call the presentation TSH though we could have chosen any presentation. I am made up of a multiplicity of extensive parts, but I can be counted-as-one and given the form  $\{\text{TSH}\}$ . The brackets,  $\{\}$ , denote a set which is the "counts-for-one" of the pure multiple which is either me, TSH, or any multiple whatsoever (Kacem 39). Kacem's way of explaining this is that  $\{\}$  is the form TSH is material and multiple (Kacem 38-39). Put them together and you get  $\{\text{TSH}\}$ , the existence and materiality of TSH. Kacem explains the existence of void in the same way. Void is the form of nothing, in other words, an empty set,  $\{\}$  symbolized by  $\emptyset$  in his and Badiou's work. In this operation, "one materializes that which does not exist" (Kacem 39). Though Kacem introduces problems when he uses the language of "form" and "matter" to explain set theory mathematics, his example is a heuristic which is useful for understanding how set theory might be used to discuss existence and being.

One final element of Badiou's ontology needs discussion before we can move on to his theory of the event: constructability. Badiou's use of this term is not entirely clear nor does he

seem to be entirely consistent in his use of it. It is perhaps more clearly explained in one of Badiou's essays "Conférence sur la Soustraction" than in *Being and Event*. He writes in this essay, "[a set or subset] will be called constructible if there exists in the language a formula  $F(x)$  which constructs it" (C 183). Though it is not entirely clear whether Badiou is referring exclusively to languages of formal logic, one could describe the constructible as that which can be defined or demarcated by a function or formula. It is opposed in this essay to the generic (for which there is no function that names it) and the related concept of the indiscernible (that which is not discerned i.e. distinguishable from another term in a formula) (See C 180-184). So how does this help us understand Badiou's ontology? Ontology is constructivist thought. We find out in Book VI of *Being and Event* that all existing sets are in principle constructible (EE 332). But this is not to say that Badiou's philosophy is a philosophy of the constructible and only the constructible. The event is going to interrupt this line of thinking.

The event cannot be constructed. Badiou writes, "What is more, in the constructivist vision of being, and this is a crucial point, *there is no place for the taking place of the event*" (EE 320 his italics). Or putting it even more succinctly, he writes "Inconstructible, the event is not" (EE 321). The event does not take part in being *qua* being. It is not. So what implications does this have for ontology as the study of being *qua* being? At this point it would be useful to cite at length Badiou's later book *Court Traité d'ontologie Transitoire*. He there writes:

On the other hand there opens the vast question of that which is subtracted from the ontological determination. The question of that which is not being *qua* being. Because the subtractive law is implacable: if real ontology is established as mathematics while eluding the norm of the one, there must be, short of reestablishing this norm, a point

where the ontological field, therefore mathematics, detotalizes itself or rests in impasse.

I have called this point the *event* (CT 56-57, his italics).

There is a limit to what ontology can properly think. That limit is the event. If mathematical ontology is the presentation of presentation focused on constructible multiplicities, the event is the non-being that arrives and interrupts being. It cannot be thought by ontology.

The event is the limit of ontology. In *Being and Event* Badiou explains how the site of the event can undergo a process of “forcing” (a term taken from mathematician P.J. Cohen) and thus gives rise to truth and the conditions for philosophy: science, poetry, love, and politics. It is outside of the scope of this paper to provide a complete account of this. But I would like to point to the way in which the event described in the *Court Traité*. Badiou writes, “We will say also that as much as mathematics secures itself in thought of being as such, the theory of the event aims at a determination of a trans-being” (CT 57). This trans-being is the event.

The main point that I want to draw from this discussion of Badiou’s ontology is that the event, though unthinkable in the discourse of being *qua* being, is not outside the scope of philosophy as theory of the event. At the same time, the event can be thought as having a *certain kind* of being, namely trans-being. The event is not a being, it is more than being, but it is still trans-being. Borrowing a term from Emile Bréhier’s discussion of the Stoic theory of the event, I would say that the event is, for Badiou, a “bastard concept” (Bréhier 12). Though not ontologically determined the event is not nothing. It is with this seeming paradox in mind that we turn to Deleuze, the question of Being and the theory of the event.

### 3. Deleuze's Proposition: Being is Univocal

Having established the main elements of Badiou's ontology and the basis for his distinction between Being and event, we are now ready to begin addressing the question of ontology in Deleuze's work. Those who attempt to explicate the Deleuzian ontology do so by discussing the theory of the univocity of being found in Deleuze's work. So this is where we will begin our discussion. Michael Hardt states that the idea of "singular and univocal expression of being" found in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza is a proposition that "casts our thought on the highest plane of ontological speculation" (Hardt 113-114). Badiou refers to univocity as "the very core of Deleuze's thought" (CB 24). There is little doubt that Deleuze was a thinker of the univocity of being, but what is often less clear is the relationship between the doctrine of univocity as it is espoused by Deleuze and the ontological tradition either in its ancient manifestation or in the twentieth century. Therefore this chapter will address this question. What we are after is, again, less an explication of Deleuze's system than the impetus or reason for the system. We are trying to define the role of being and ontology in Deleuze's philosophical method. However, if we are going to extrapolate how Deleuze questions being, we are going to have to be clear about what it means to say that being is univocal. What is the doctrine of univocity?

Since univocity in Deleuze's work is one subject on which there is no shortage of commentary and critical explication in the secondary literature, what I will attempt here will be no more than a short thumbnail sketch of univocity. Briefly stated the point of the doctrine of univocity is "not that Being is said in a single and same sense, but that it is said in a single and same sense *of* all its individuating differences and intrinsic modalities" (DR 36). This will not be clear though until we understand how univocity is different than analogy.

Deleuze discusses analogy in the context of a critique of Aristotle's theory of difference. In Book X of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle sets out to describe the greatest difference. What is interesting for our purpose is not so much Deleuze's theory of difference or even his critique of Aristotle's theory of difference. But it would be useful to say a bit about how Deleuze sees the relation of analogy and difference. Aristotle, according to Deleuze, defines difference as follows:

For Two terms differ when they are other, not in themselves, but in something else; thus they also agree in something else: in genus when they are differences in species, in species for differences in number, or even 'in being, according to analogy' for differences in genus. Under these conditions what is the greatest difference? The greatest difference is always an opposition... (DR 30).

Opposition is fleshed out into specific difference which is always a predicate of a being<sup>4</sup>. Things are placed in their particular sets and subsets. Individuals are judged as members of genera with certain specific defining differences (see Deleuze 32 and Williams 60-61). What is important is Deleuze's claim that Aristotle's theory of difference judges existence in terms of analogy, which is the theological opposite of univocity, the position that Deleuze defends. Analogy, according to Deleuze, does not come directly from the work of Aristotle but is rather a concept from the work of Aristotle's medieval commentators (DR 308n5). It is in this context that the univocity-analogy distinction takes on its full meaning.

The distinction between analogy and univocity is important in Deleuze's work on Spinoza. For its part, the term univocity comes from theology, more specifically from the theology of Duns Scotus. There are two main streams in the history of theology: positive and

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<sup>4</sup> "Predicate" should be understood generally here. In the following sections this terminology will be more strictly employed and we will later see Deleuze's reworking of predication against Aristotle. Right now I am just trying to give a sense of Deleuze's reading of Aristotle's position.

negative. Negative theology is the idea the god is cause of the world, but not the essence of the world. God is defined negatively by his/her/its radical transcendence of the world. Positive theology on the other hand holds that god is the cause and the essence of the world. Deleuze identifies two forms of explaining this: analogy and univocity (or expression). Theories of analogy like that of Thomas Aquinas hold that there is analogy between God and the beings of creation. They are essential in their essences, but differ in form. Thus they are not said in the same sense. The univocal theory of Duns Scotus and Spinoza asserts that that it is the forms that are the same but essences differ<sup>5</sup>. The key to this notion is found in the Spinozist idea of attribute. The attributes of substance for Spinoza (in Deleuze's reading of him) are formally distinct, but ontologically identical. Deleuze states in *Difference and Repetition*, "What is important is that we can conceive of several formally distinct senses which none the less refer to being as if to a single designated entity, ontologically one" (DR 35). The fact that being is said in the same sense in spite of its formal differences is what allows Deleuze to theorize pure immanence. This is not to say that Deleuze theorized that all is one, but rather that univocal Being is Beingsaid in one sense of all its differences. Deleuze writes,

The univocity of Being does not mean that there is one and the same Being; on the contrary, beings are multiple and different, they are always produced by a disjunctive synthesis, and they themselves are disjointed and divergent, *membra disjuncta*. The univocity of Being signifies that Being is Voice, that it is said, and that it is said in one and the same "sense" of everything about which it is said. (LS 179).

Thus univocity is at the heart of the Deleuzian theory of disjunctive synthesis and difference, though an explication of the details of this theory would fall outside the scope of this paper. The

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<sup>5</sup> Hardt supplies the theological background for Duns Scotus's theory.

univocity of being and the affirmation of pure immanence are closely connected. Todd May explains this as follows

The substance of being is one and indivisible. There are no distinctions to be made into different substances, different layers of substance, different types of substance, or different levels of substance (May 34).

It is a theory of being without hierarchy because hierarchy would reintroduce transcendence.

Deleuze finds univocity exemplified by the philosophies of three figures in the history of philosophy: Duns Scotus, Spinoza, and Nietzsche. Deleuze draws these three diverse thinkers into a kind of tradition of univocity. The medieval philosopher Duns Scotus, in reaction to theories of the analogy of being, treated univocal being as a neutral, indifferent concept. Spinoza's philosophy is an improvement in that it constitutes a veritable affirmation of being as "unique, universal and infinite substance" (DR 40). Nietzsche more fully admits pure difference and becoming when he theorizes univocity as the eternal return (DR 41). There is a sense then in which each thinker of univocity more completely thinks the relation of univocity and difference.

As should be clear from the preceding paragraphs, univocity could be seen as a theory in opposition to metaphysics of Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition. James Williams explains this clearly:

The metaphysical conclusion of this critique of Aristotle's definition of difference is the distinction drawn between an equivocal definition of being (*All things are but how they are differs and that difference depends on what they are.*) and a univocal definition (*All things are in the same way, independently of what they are.*). (Williams 62).

It is significant that Aristotle gave us the important definition of metaphysics as "the science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this I virtue of its own

nature” (Aristotle 1584). The concept of attributes of being will be discussed shortly. The point that should be clear now is that Deleuze positions his theory of univocity in opposition to that of Aristotle. Since Aristotle is one of the founders of the ontological tradition, how are we to read Deleuze’s critique of and dissension from this tradition? Deleuze seems to favor a heterodox ontological tradition (Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Nietzsche) over the orthodox Aristotelian or Thomist tradition. What is the relationship, then, of this heterodox ontological tradition that Deleuze describes to the orthodox mainstream ontological tradition? Deleuze writes, “However, from Parmenides to Heidegger it is the same voice which is taken up, in an echo which itself forms the whole deployment of the univocal. A single voice raises the clamor of being” (DR 35). Ontology has always been since the pre-Socratic Parmenides a theory of univocity, but Deleuze points to Duns Scotus first because he “elevated univocal being to the highest point of subtlety” (DR 35). Deleuze would seem to be effecting a subtle reversal here. What was described above as heterodox ontology, is now regarded as the ideal to which ontology has always striven. Univocity is (and has always been) an ontological proposition.

#### **4. From Ontology to Logic of Sense**

In the above pages I have tried to explicate the idea of univocity of being as Deleuze reads it in the history of philosophy. The centrality of this concept seems to point to an ontological thread in Deleuze’s work. We still have to answer a number of questions: To what extent is Deleuze’s philosophy an ontology? In other words, what status does the concept of being have in Deleuze’s philosophy? We need to put the idea of univocity into a context of Deleuze’s other philosophical interests to assess Deleuze’s relation to the question of Being as such.

A statement that is often used in support of the claim that Deleuze is an ontologist is in *Difference and Repetition* where he writes, “There has only ever been one ontological proposition: Being is univocal” (DR 35). We have already discussed the content of the proposition. “Univocal” in this case means the being is said in one sense. But how are we to understand this as an “ontological proposition?” It is quite significant that Deleuze uses the term “proposition” because the proposition and its relation to sense (as in the definition of univocity) is an important concept in Deleuze’s early philosophy especially in *The Logic of Sense*. In *Difference and Repetition* and later in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze seeks to describe the relationship between the proposition and the sense or meaning [*sens*] of the proposition. Sense/meaning is a relation of the logical proposition, as is denotation, manifestation, and signification (LS12-14). Two of these relations seem to stand out as most important for our discussion: denotation and sense. Denotation is “the relation of the proposition to an external state of affairs (datum). The state of affairs is *individuated*; it includes particular bodies, mixtures of bodies, qualities, quantities, and relations” (LS 12). Sense, on the other hand, is “the expressed of the proposition” (LS 19). The proposition expresses a sense or meaning that is “an incorporeal, complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in the proposition” (LS 19).

This discussion of proposition has the same major elements of the definition of univocity in that there is a sense that is *expressed* in a proposition and Being is *said* in one voice in the theory of univocity. The discussion of the proposition quickly brings in another word that complicates things considerably: the event.

The event is sense. Deleuze’s theory of the event draws much from the Stoic theory of incorporeals as it is explained by Emile Bréhier. According to Bréhier, the Stoics recognized

two divisions to reality: bodies and incorporeal events. Bodies as well as “their tensions, physical qualities, actions and passions” correspond to states of affairs which are determined by the mixtures of bodies (LS 4). These bodies cause each other. On the side of effects we have incorporeal entities or events which are not bodies or physical properties (LS 4-5). The example that comes out of Bréhier is the knife cutting meat. Knife and meat are bodies that mix, but the effect of cutting is an event most appropriately expressed in the infinitive of a verb, to cut. (LS 6-7). This distinction of two kinds of things connects directly to the elements of the proposition. Denotation is the relation of the proposition to a state of affairs or, we could say, to a mixture of bodies. Sense is what is expressed in the proposition and is synonymous with the event. The logic of sense could also be called a logic of the event.

This bifurcation of things and propositions into bodies/states of affairs and sense/event is for the Stoics and for Deleuze a response to Aristotle. Deleuze writes,

This new dualism of bodies or states of affairs and effects or incorporeal events entails an upheaval in philosophy. In Aristotle, for example, all categories are said of Being; the difference is present in Being, between substance as the primary sense and the other categories which are related to it as accidents. For the Stoics, on the other hand, states of affairs, quantities, and qualities are no less beings (or bodies) than substance is (LS 6-7).

Deleuze’s contrast of the Stoic philosophy to that of Aristotle centers again on the conception of being. Aristotle saw being as divided into substance and categories with the ontological weight falling on substance as primary (Aristotle 1606). The Stoics, on the other hand, chose a division between states of affairs and events. What implications does this have for ontology?

We can see from this discussion of Aristotle that the logic of sense/meaning is similar to the theory of univocity in its critique of Aristotle. The logic of sense and univocity are

intertwined concepts. Univocity, as we saw, is a Spinozistic response to the Aristotelian emphases on equivocity and analogy. The logic of sense is a Stoic response to Aristotle's logic of predication. In both the metaphysics and logic of Aristotle, Being is a central concept. It would be difficult to deny that Deleuze adopts similar kinds of ontological language in his responses to Aristotle, but we can still ask if Being has the same philosophical role here. The answer to this question is also found in Deleuze's use of the Stoic theory of the event.

Aristotle divides things into Being as primary substance and categories as predicates. The Stoics recognize that states of affairs, qualities, and quantities (i.e. categories) "are in a part substance, and in this sense they are contrasted with an *extra-Being* which constitutes the incorporeal as a nonexisting entity" (LS 7). The nonexisting entity is the event which is separate from the bodies and states of affairs (Being). This is a central point of the Deleuze's logic of sense: the event, sense and the problem are synonymous or nearly synonymous terms which *are not*. The event is not a being or a category of Being. This is not to say that Deleuze is admitting a nothingness or negation. He writes, "This nonbeing, however, is not the being of the negative; it is rather the being of the problematic, that we should perhaps write as (non)-being or ?-being" (LS 123). Instead of being or non-being, events as incorporeal entities are better thought of as effects that play on the surface of Being (LS 5) or "*something (aliquid)*, insofar as it subsumes being and non-being" (LS 7).

Again Deleuze is drawing extensively on Emile Bréhier's reading of the Stoics. In this book, in a passage that Deleuze does not cite but to which I earlier alluded, Bréhier describes "facts or events" as a "bastard concept" which is "neither that of a being nor of one of its properties but that which is said or affirmed of being" (Bréhier 12). The event is "bastard" in the sense that it does not have a determinate character of being or not being. It subsists. It plays on

the surface of being, but it is not strictly speaking a part of being. Deleuze, it appears, embraces this ontologically indeterminate concept and makes it a central part of his philosophy.

So where does this leave us? We have located the ontological thread in Deleuze's thought drawing on the work of Duns Scotus and Spinoza, but the formulations of the event in *The Logic of Sense* point to a certain limit to this ontological picture. Badiou, as we recall, explicitly formulated his philosophy in terms of ontology and its "evential" limit. What can this comparison tell us about Deleuze's philosophy?

### **5. Conclusion: Being Beyond Ontology**

We are now ready to discuss the connections between the philosophies of Deleuze and Badiou in terms of ontology and the event. The similarity which would form the basis for comparison is apparent. As different as they are from each other, Deleuze and Badiou both have their ontological elements as different as they are from each other. In both cases ontology is seen to have a limit: the event. Badiou is much more explicit in his descriptions of ontology and the event, and we are in danger, however, of simply reading Deleuze's philosophy back into these categories set up by Badiou. How can we formulate the difference between their philosophical treatments of the event? The difficulty is compounded by Deleuze's elusiveness with respect to the event and the many roles he gives it. This last section will be an attempt to qualify and fine-tune the basic similarity established in the previous sections.

The main difficulty that any discussion of Deleuze's philosophy of the event must address is the changing description of the event in the different works by Deleuze. I have concentrated on *The Logic of Sense* because that is where the connection between the event and Being *qua* Being is most clearly described. However the event is also discussed in Deleuze's later book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. The difference in emphasis between these two

works is telling. *The Fold* concentrates on the event in Leibniz's philosophy, and it is not posed in the same ontological terms as it was in the discussion of the Stoic theory. But the Stoic philosophy of the event is not simply abandoned in favor of this modern version. Deleuze indicates that there is a common thread between the first (ancient) "logic of the event" and second (modern) logic (F 53). He writes, "the Stoics accomplished this [raising the event to the state of a concept] by making the event neither an attribute nor a quality, but the incorporeal predicate of a subject of the proposition (not 'the tree is green,' but 'the tree greens')" (F 53). For Leibniz, on the other hand, "the world itself is an event [...] The world is predication itself, manners being the particular predicates, and the subject, what goes from one predicate to another as if from one aspect of the world to another" (F 53). "World" here should be understood as the universe that God created. According to Leibniz, God "foreseeing and having regulated all things from all eternity, has chosen from the first the entire sequence and inter-relation of the universe" (Leibniz 84). God planned out the whole development of the universe from the beginning. The event in this case is "what happens." Though the terms used to describe Leibniz's event are quite different than those used to describe the Stoic theory, the connection is predication as opposed to attribution.

The general idea is that the schema of attribution, subject-copula-attribute, should be replaced with a schema of subject-verb-object that Deleuze (while discussing Leibniz) refers to as predication. For example, one would say the "the tree is green" as an attribution but "the tree greens" as a predication. The attribute is a genus or a species. The predicate is "a relation and an event" (F 53). This distinction, though applied to Leibniz, draws heavily on Bréhier's reading of the Stoics, and (though he does not adopt the same terminology) he describes the movement from predication to attribution as follows:

When one neglects the copula *is* and expresses the subject by a verb where the attribute epithet is not emphasized, the attribute, considered as an entire verb, appears no more to be expressing a concept (object, or class of objects), but only a fact or event (Bréhier 20).

By not using a verb of being we are shifting the weight back onto the expression of the event.

What can we learn from this discussion of the logic of the event? What I have sought to demonstrate in the above paragraphs is that Deleuze is remarkably consistent in his logic of the event<sup>6</sup>. Though “extra-being” is not invoked in this later work, the logic still has a marked emphasis on formulating propositions without expressions of being. The other important common thread is that both the Stoics and Leibniz are reacting against the Aristotelian theory of attribution. Deleuze writes, “The Stoics and Leibniz invent a mannerism that is opposed to the essentialism first of Aristotle and then of Descartes” (F 53). This has ontological importance. Earlier, we described Deleuze’s Stoic-inspired logical-ontological position in its contrast to the Aristotelian ontology of predication. According to Deleuze, Leibniz carries this tradition into modernity. Though extra-Being is not part of the Leibnizian vocabulary, the two logics of the event are united by a similar resistance to Aristotle and the earlier emphasis on the extra-ontological is not necessarily negated.

Having thus described the general outlines of a Deleuzian theory of the event, we are now ready to discuss the possibility of connections between his theory and that of Alain Badiou. For Badiou, as we saw, ontology as the science of being was strictly defined as set theory mathematics, and the event was that which ontology could not think. It was a “surprise” which arrived like a rupture in being. Deleuze, on the other hand, does not define ontology as a

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<sup>6</sup> Some of my readers might be groaning now thinking of Deleuze’s discussion of Whitehead’s third logic of the event. This discussion in chapter 6 of *The Fold* would seem to break with the pattern established here. I think there are nonetheless important continuities between the three logics of the event. I do not have the space to argue fully for that here though.

science; rather his ontological thinking seems to be a logical and metaphysical reaction against the Aristotelian emphasis on attribution's emphasis on the copula. Essence and accident are replaced by a theory of "basis" and "manner" inspired by the Stoics and Leibniz. The event, in this theory, is neither being nor an attribute of being, but rather an incorporeal effect that plays on the surface of being. In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze refers to this as "extra-Being."

The similarities between the two theories are initially easy to see. We should spend a few moments, however, on the important differences that exist in their two treatments of Being and the event. The main difference revolves around the idea of immanence. As we saw, Deleuze's idea of being as univocity excludes any possibility of transcendence. Univocity is pure immanence. The logic of the event also conforms to the norms of immanence, which is to say that even if the event is not a being or attribute of being, nor is it a transcendence, something from the outside. Deleuze and Guattari write in their last work, "The event might seem to be transcendent because it surveys the state of affairs, but it is pure immanence that gives it the capacity to survey itself by itself and on the plane" (WP 156). This is not the case for Badiou's theory. Daniel W. Smith remarks that "since Badiou limits his ontology to axiomatics, he is forced to reintroduce an element of transcendence in the form of the event, which is 'supplemental' to ontology" (Smith 438). Given Badiou's Platonic sympathies, perhaps we should not be surprised that he admits transcendence into his philosophical system. It is not the case though that Badiou is simply running his Platonic program of transcendence. Badiou's ontology, as we saw, is a combination of Plato and mathematics. But this is not to say that Badiou considers being as objectively transcendent reality as one might expect from a Platonist mathematician. Badiou writes, "Plato's fundamental concern is to declare immanent identity, the co-belongingness, of the known and of the knowing mind, their essential ontological

commensurability” (CT 96)<sup>7</sup>. Badiou’s Plato is a thinker of immanence. Badiou also writes, “The Platonic theme consists precisely in rendering immanence and transcendence indiscernible, in establishing oneself in a place of thought where this distinction is inoperant” (CT 97).

Badiou’s more sympathetic readers may be willing to admit that the event is neither transcendent nor immanent because it is undecidable. To simply write it off as transcendent is to give it an ontological determination, which is exactly what we cannot do for the event.

For Deleuze, on the other hand, we know that the event is not outside of being. In the discussions of the Stoics, the event was said to be on the surface of being. “Extra-being” should not be understood as “outside being.” Thus Deleuze preserves immanence of being and event while Badiou possibly allows for a transcendence of the event. This is probably the most fundamental difference between Deleuze and Badiou in terms of their theory of the event, which is unfortunately not noticed when one takes one or the other philosopher as an ontologist and nothing but an ontologist.

So how can we talk about the commonality between these two theories in a constructive way? There are a number of similarities between the two which have been largely overlooked by commentators. Both emphasize metaphysical systems that place being in a central role. Badiou is much more explicit about this, but Deleuze too makes univocal being central to his philosophical system. To this extent, they are ontologists. Also both Deleuze and Badiou separate the event from Being. Badiou describes a radical difference between Being and event. Deleuze is less explicit in this case also. For him the event is on the surface of being but there is a distinction between the event and states of affairs (LS 53). The logic of the event is

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<sup>7</sup> Jason Barker describes Badiou’s position as a somewhat uneasy combination of Platonism and a methodological position in mathematics known as intuitionist. Barker states that Platonism and intuitionism are not necessarily contradictory and helps Badiou conceptualize mathematical objects as internal to thought (Barker 47-48).

differentiated from the logic of being. Both thinkers engage in a metaphysical “sorting out” that distinguishes being from event.

To sum up, I have tried to articulate some aspects of the roles of being and event in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze by confronting his thought that that of Alain Badiou. Badiou’s clear distinction between Being and event leads us to examine the status of these concepts in Deleuze’s thought. This approach has helped us to understand how the impetus of Deleuze’s ontology of univocity lies in his logical reaction to Aristotle’s theory of predication based on essence and accident. Deleuze’s own thought turns to the event as an alternative to this thinking, and in doing this the limits of being as a category become apparent. The theory of the event shows itself to be a central concept of contention in the philosophies of Deleuze and Badiou, which not only shows us the differences between these two thinkers but also some important and often overlooked similarities.

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