4 Metaphysics and Ontology

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In the popular mind, metaphysics is often characterized as the philosophical theory of everything that pertains to the Beyond, to what is beyond experience – God, the soul, the spiritual, belief in the afterlife (Adorno, 2000, p. 6). No doubt this is what led F. H. Bradley to quip that metaphysics is simply an attempt to find bad reasons for what one is going to believe anyway (cited in van Inwagen, 2002, p. 14). Translated into philosophical terms, this would imply that metaphysics is a philosophy of the transcendent as opposed to the immanent. Nietzsche famously ridiculed metaphysics as a doctrine that assumes the existence of a world behind or beyond the world that we know and can know (the 'two worlds'). In *Zarathustra*, he dubbed this other world the *Hinterwelt*, the 'back-world', and he called those metaphysicians who concerned themselves with this other world *Hinterwelter*, 'backworldsmen' (an allusion to the word 'backwoodsmen', *Hinterwälder*) (Nietzsche, 1954, p. 142).[1] Nietzsche's target was primarily Platonism: behind the world of phenomena or appearances, there was supposed to be concealed a truly real, permanent and unchanging world of essences, existing in itself, and the task of metaphysics was to unravel and reveal this other transcendent world. In this regard, metaphysics can be seen to be the result of a secularization of mythical and magical thinking – Plato's Ideas have been called gods turned into concepts (Adorno, 2000, pp. 5, 18).

Yet it would be simplistic to identify metaphysics with transcendence *tout court*. In its most general sense, metaphysics is an attempt to determine the constitutive structures of Being on the basis of thought alone, and thus it is a form of philosophy that takes *concepts* (or Ideas or Forms) as its object. This is why, from the start, metaphysics has been intertwined with problems of logic and epistemology, culminating in Hegel's teaching that logic and metaphysics were really one and the same, immanent to each other. It is true that in Plato, the most transcendent of metaphysicians, these concepts were deemed to be of a higher order of being than existing things; yet even in Plato's late period, one can already find the phenomenal world asserting itself increasingly against the Idea, perhaps under Aristotle's growing influence. The primary object of metaphysics, in other words, is not transcendence *per se* but rather the *relation* between transcendence and immanence, between essence

and existence, between universal and particular – or, in Heidegger's parlance, the *difference* between Being and beings.[2]

The fact is, however, that the terms 'metaphysics' and 'ontology', like many other terms in philosophy, are highly over-determined, and their meaning and use vary with different philosophers and in different traditions. Moreover, in European philosophy, especially since Hegel and Heidegger, the development of metaphysics and ontology has been intimately linked to the rereading and retrieval of various figures in the history of philosophy. In Hegel, these figures tended to be taken up as moments in the dialectic, whereas Heidegger tended to read previous thinkers as his own contemporaries, rather than as representatives of a particular period or 'position'. Most contemporary European philosophers follow Heidegger in this regard, and often develop their own thought in the context of their readings of past thinkers. We have used these two rubrics as our guiding thread in the discussion that follows. On the one hand, we will attempt to elucidate the sense that is ascribed to the terms metaphysics and ontology (and their interaction) in several recent thinkers whose work has focused on these issues (Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou). On the other hand, we will contextualize the trajectories of these thinkers by examining the positions some of their primary historical interlocutors – notably Kant and Heidegger. The result will be a partial but hopefully perspicuous overview of the complex issues involved in contemporary debates in continental metaphysics and ontology.

Ontology in the European tradition is resolutely post-Kantian and post-Heideggerian: it was Heidegger who renewed interest in ontology in European philosophy, following Kant's attempt to determine the legitimacy and scope of traditional metaphysics. In Kant, the difference between ontology and metaphysics can be summarized in the difference between two types of concepts: categories and Ideas. 'The proud name of an Ontology', Kant famously wrote, 'must give place to the modest title of a mere Analytic of pure understanding' (which has sometimes been called a 'metaphysics of experience') (Kant, 1929, A247/B303, p. 264). Kant defined a category as a concept of the understanding that can be said of *every* object of possible experience. The concepts 'red' and 'rose' are not categories, since not all objects are roses, and not all roses are red; but 'causality' is a category because we know, prior to experience, that it is a universal predicate that can be said of *every* object of experience (every object has a cause and is itself the cause of other things). More precisely, a category is more than a predicate. It is a *condition*, a condition of possible experience: it is the categories that define the domain of possible experience; they tell us what it means for any object whatsoever to *be*. In Aristotle's language, the categories are the different senses in which Being is said of beings, *they are the different senses of the word 'Being'*. In Heidegger's formulation, the categories are the fundamental 'determinations of the Being

of beings' (Heidegger, 1988, p. 102; cf. p. 117). Numerous philosophers have proposed tables of categories: Aristotle proposed a list of ten categories; Kant proposed an alternative list of twelve, derived from the model of judgment.[3] An *Idea*, by contrast, is the concept of an object that goes *beyond* or *transcends* any possible experience.[4] In the 'Transcendental Dialectic', the longest section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant sets out to expose the three great terminal points of traditional metaphysics – the Soul, the World and God – as *illusions* internal to reason itself. We can know *a priori* that there is no object that could correspond to such Ideas; we can never have a 'possible experience' of them. The aim of Kant's transcendental philosophy, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is to distinguish between the illegitimate (transcendent) Ideas of traditional metaphysics, and the legitimate (immanent) categories that determine the domain of possible experience, or ontology.[5]

The greatness of Kant's critical project, however, lies less in simply having demarcated the domains of ontology and metaphysics than in tracing out their complex interactions. Kant himself assigned to transcendent Ideas a positive and legitimate use as ideal *focal points* or *horizons* outside experience that posit the unity of our conceptual knowledge as a problem; as such, they can help regulate the systematization of our scientific knowledge, and serve as the postulates of practical reason (we act morally *as if* there were a God and a soul). Heidegger, in his influential *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, emphasized the foundational role played in Kant by the temporal powers of the productive imagination – *schematizing* and *synthesizing* – without which the categories could never determine the spatio-temporal dynamisms of experience (Heidegger, 1962b). In the *Critique of Judgment*, one of the most remarkable texts in the history of philosophy, Kant pushed his earlier analyses in a new and surprising direction: when *synthesis* breaks down, it produces the sentiment of the *sublime*; and a schema, when freed from the legislation of the understanding, is capable of becoming a *symbol* (a white lily is an analogue of the Idea of Innocence). In both these cases, Kant attempted to show that there is *a presentation of Ideas that is immanent within experience itself*, even if this presentation is negative, indirect or 'analogical'. The *Critique of Judgment* thus configured the relation between ontology and metaphysics in a more complex manner than the *Critique of Pure Reason*, setting the agenda for Romanticism and German Idealism, and their current revival (for instance, in the debates concerning the metaphysical and non-metaphysical readings of Hegel; for a perspicuous analysis see Lumsden, 2008).

Post-war French philosophy was similarly engaged in the problems surrounding Kant's critique of metaphysics. Jean-François Lyotard, for instance, wrote extensively on the concept of the sublime (the presentation of the unpresentable) in his effort to think the distinction between the modern and the 'post-modern' (see Lyotard, 1984 and 1994). More importantly, perhaps,

Jacques Derrida's later work, which focuses on pure Ideas such as the gift, hospitality, forgiveness, justice, democracy and so forth, was presented by Derrida himself as a practical variant of Kant's 'Transcendental Dialectic'.[6] Kant had already shown that, whenever we speak of something 'pure' we are outside the realm of possible experience, which always presents us with impure mixtures.[7] Similarly, Derrida shows that a pure gift is an impossibility, since when I accept the gift and say 'Thank you', I am in effect proposing, in a movement of re-appropriation, a kind of equivalence between the giving and my gratitude, thereby incorporating the transcendent logic of the pure gift into an immanent economy of exchange and debt. We can *think* the pure gift, we can even *desire* it, but we never encounter it in experience. When Derrida was looking for a term to describe the formal status of concepts (or rather, 'quasi-concepts') such as the gift, he initially thought of adopting the Kantian term 'antinomy', but decided to use the Greek term 'aporia' instead, in order to distance himself from Kant (the fundamental difference between Kantian Ideas and Derridean quasi-concepts is their temporal status) (Derrida, 1993, p. 16).[8] The fundamental aporia of the pure Ideas analyzed by Derrida is that the condition of their possibility is their very impossibility – which is why he describes his list of quasi-concepts as 'so many aporetic places or dislocations' with Being (Derrida, 1993, p. 15). In general, one might say that, after Kant, there remained two ways of doing metaphysics: either (1) by returning to pre-critical metaphysics (whether or not one remains preoccupied with the traditional metaphysical problems of the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, or the freedom of the will); or (2) by attempting to develop a rigorously post-Kantian metaphysics that jettisons the Idea of the Self, the World, and God (even if this meant returning to pre-Kantian thinkers such as Hume, Spinoza and Leibniz from a post-Kantian viewpoint). Most subsequent metaphysics in the European tradition has followed this latter route, taking Kant's critique as a *fait accompli*. If there is to be a post-Kantian metaphysics, it must be a metaphysics that, in Deleuze's words, 'excludes the coherence of the thinking subject, of the thought world, and of a guarantor God' (1994, p. 58, translation modified). Deleuze's development of a purely immanent theory of Ideas in *Difference and Repetition* is perhaps the most radical attempt to reconcile metaphysics and ontology in the post-Kantian context.

Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* inaugurated the renewal of interest in ontology in European philosophy, and took it in a new direction.[9] Heidegger emphasized the importance of what he called the 'ontological difference' between Being (*das Sein*) and beings (*das Seiende*). For Heidegger, metaphysics is the domain of thought that concerns itself with *beings* (the ontic). Utilizing a medieval distinction, special metaphysics (*metaphysica specialis*) concerns the 'regional ontologies' of the various sciences (biology examines the being of living organisms; theology examines the nature of God as the highest

being etc.) whereas general metaphysics (*metaphysica generalis*) examines the most general concepts that can be predicated of *any* possible being, or all beings as a whole (such as Kant's categories). But if metaphysics constitutes the root of philosophy, the soil from which it draws its nourishment is *ontology*.[10] Rather than examining specific beings, or the nature of beings in general, ontology asks the question of Being itself (the ontological), and in this sense, every metaphysics can be said to presuppose an ontology (Heidegger, 1975). For Kant, the problem with metaphysics is that it is the locus of transcendent illusions, whereas for Heidegger, the problem with metaphysics is that it has forgotten and concealed the question of Being.[11]

Heidegger wrote *Being and Time* as a propaedeutic to his investigation into this question of Being.[12] The book poses the preliminary question: What are the conditions under which the question of Being can even be asked? To do this Heidegger undertakes an existential analytic of '*Dasein*' as a parallel to the transcendental analytic undertaken by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Whereas Kant's analytic provided a deduction of the *categories* as the conditions of possibility for objects and our knowledge of objects (a metaphysics of experience), Heidegger's analytic attempts to deduce the fundamental categories of *Dasein*'s existence, which he thus calls *existentialia* rather than categories. If categories concern the being of objects (What?), *existentialia* concern the being of Dasein (Who?), starting with the fundamental *existentialia* of Being-in-the-world. But as Kierkegaard had shown, the uniqueness of *Dasein* is that it is confronted with two basic existential possibilities: it can either flee from its own being, which is what takes place in our 'average everydayness' (inauthenticity), or it can choose its own being and disclose new possibilities for itself (authenticity). This is why it is the fundamental problems of *temporality* and *truth* that come to the fore in *Being and Time*. The being of *Dasein* turns out to be revealed, not in an essence or in a pre-existing 'human nature', but in what Heidegger calls the three 'ex-stases' of time: in its authentic existence, *Dasein* is always outside itself, transcending itself, open to new possibilities of Being. But if this temporal structure constitutes the 'truth' of *Dasein*'s being, it remains concealed in its everyday existence, which is why Heidegger argued, famously, that the traditional concept of truth as *adequatio* (the correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs) found its primordial existential ground in the notion of truth as *unconcealedness* (*aletheia*). For there to be a science, a 'region' of being must have already been *disclosed*. But this process of disclosure requires a type of thinking that is not merely representational: attaining the 'truth' of Being requires a thought that is not merely directed towards beings as they are already given to us, but that is capable of disclosing *new* possibilities of Being.[13]

For Heidegger, this propaedeutic examination of the being of *Dasein* serves as the guiding thread for his interpretation of the concept of Being

itself, which has a similar structure. If Heidegger calls for an 'overcoming (*Überwindung*) of metaphysics' or a 'destruction' of the history of ontology, it is because the history of metaphysics itself has consisted of a 'forgetting' of the question of Being, concealing the question itself under various determinations. These determinations of Being have included the *Idea* in Plato, *substantia* and *actualitas* in Medieval philosophy, *objectivity* in modern philosophy, *technology* in modern science, and the *will to power* in Nietzsche (the last metaphysician).[14] In his own attempt to think and disclose the question of Being, the later Heidegger turned to the Presocratics, to language, to poetry (Hölderlin, Rilke). But just as Kant had shown that the true object of an Idea was a *problem*, and was grasped in a *problematic* mode, Heidegger showed that ultimately the concept of Being is itself a *question*, that it is grasped in the mode of *questioning*. In Plato, famously, the question of Being appears primarily in the form, 'What is . . .?' [*ti estin*?]. Plato wanted to oppose this to all other forms of questioning – such as Who? Which one? How many? How? Where? When? In which case? From what point of view? – which he criticized as minor and vulgar questions of opinion that expressed confused ways of thinking (see Robinson, 1953, pp. 49–60). Heidegger's fundamental insight, in short, was that *Being always presents itself to us in a problematic form*: it constantly discloses new possibilities, it is the production of the new, the creation of difference. Once Being is disclosed in a particular manner, metaphysics can indeed articulate the categorical truths of both Being *qua* being as well as existing beings, and it can conceive of truth 'in the already derivative form of the truth of cognitive knowledge and the truth of propositions that formulate such knowledge' (Heidegger, 1998, p. 280). But in doing so, metaphysics 'drives out every other possibility of revealing', it blocks access to Being's self-disclosure (*es gibt*), its character as the 'origin' of the new (Heidegger, 1977, p. 27).

We find in Heidegger, then, a new distribution of metaphysics and ontology. For Kant, ontology determines the domain of possible experience (the categories of the Transcendental Analytic), whereas what traditional metaphysics thinks transcends possible experience (the illusory Ideas of the Transcendental Dialectic). For Heidegger, ontology is the exploration of the question of Being, whereas metaphysics is what conceals the question of Being, just as 'average everydayness' separates *Dasein* from its own being (the Existential Analytic). To some degree, every subsequent philosopher in Europe has worked in Heidegger's shadow, whether positively and negatively, and in the remainder of this essay, we will briefly chart out the four Heideggerian paths taken by Levinas, Derrida, Deleuze and Badiou.

Emmanuel Levinas offered a critique of Heidegger that separated ontology and metaphysics in a new manner: the two central claims of his *Totality and Infinity* are that 'metaphysics precedes ontology' and that 'metaphysics is an

ethics' (Levinas, 1969, pp. 42–3, 78–9). Levinas offers a strong critique of ontology, which he defines as that movement of thought that can only comprehend the singularity of things through the mediation of a neutral middle term, which alone renders being intelligible – such as the generic concept of category in Aristotle, or even the 'Being of beings' in Heidegger. But in this movement – whatever form it takes – the singularity of the existent, its *alterity*, is neutralized; the other is reduced to the same and thematized, possessed. Levinas's metaphysical project has a twofold aim. First, in general terms, it attempts to reverse this movement, to 'escape from being', to assert the primacy of the other over the same, and to recover a primordial relationship with alterity (Levinas, 1985, p. 59). Guided by the formal structures of the 'idea of the infinite' in Descartes' *Meditations* and the 'Good beyond Being' (*agathon epekeina tes ousias*) in Plato's *Republic*, Levinas argues that what he calls the 'metaphysical relation', which is prior to ontology, is a relation with *a radically absolute and transcendent Other* (the infinite, the Good) that cannot be thought, and is not a concept, a representation or a thematization (Levinas, 1969, p. 211). What then is it? This is the second pole of Levinas's thought. For Levinas, the relation with the Other is an *ethical* relation, and not a relation of knowledge. Much of Levinas' work is devoted to exploring the structures through which the metaphysical relation is concretized in the ethical relation: (1) the alterity of the *face* of the other, which signifies the other's transcendence; (2) the *command* of the other ('Thou shalt!'), which is not convertible into a content of consciousness; (3) the fundamental *passivity* of the I in relation to the command of the other and (4) the infinite *responsibility* of the I for the other, which for Levinas is 'the essential, primary, and fundamental structure of subjectivity' (and not, as for Heidegger, transcendence) (Levinas, 1985, p. 95). Heidegger himself had written little on ethics, and Levinas' double revolution, against both Aristotle and Heidegger, is to have posited ethics as 'first philosophy', and not ontology; and, in a post-Kantian vein, to have re-linked ethics and metaphysics (transcendence).

In a not dissimilar vein, Jacques Derrida's early work took over the Heideggerian task of 'overcoming metaphysics' or 'destroying ontology'. For Derrida, metaphysics is determined by its structural 'closure', and deconstruction is a means of disturbing this closure, creating an opening or an interruption. The notion of metaphysical closure itself depends on a movement of transcendence, that is, an 'excess over the totality, without which no totality would appear' (Derrida, 1980, p. 117). Since one cannot transcend metaphysics as such – there is no 'outside' to the metaphysical tradition – one can only destructure or deconstruct metaphysics from within. The project of 'overcoming metaphysics', in other words, is an impossibility, but it is this very impossibility that conditions the possibility of 'deconstruction'. Rather than trying to get outside metaphysics, one can submit 'the regulated play of

philosophemes' in the history of philosophy to a certain slippage or sliding that would allow them to be read as 'symptoms of something that *could not be presented*' in metaphysics (Derrida, 1981, pp. 6–7).[15] Immanent within metaphysics, there lies a formal structure of transcendence that can *never* be made present as such, but that nonetheless functions as the 'quasi-transcendental' condition of metaphysics itself. Derrida thus situates his work, he says, at 'the *limit* of philosophical discourse', at its margins, its borders or boundary lines (Derrida, 1981, p. 6). Derrida attempts to *think* this formal structure of transcendence-within-immanence through concepts such as *différance* (which is at best a 'quasi-concept', since the notion of a concept is itself metaphysical). If metaphysics is defined in terms of presence, then *différance* is that which marks 'the disappearance of any originary presence' (Derrida, 1983, p. 168), that which thereby exceeds or transcends metaphysics, and thereby, at the same time, constantly disrupts and 'destabilizes' metaphysics.[16] Commenting on Heidegger's notion of the 'ontological difference', Derrida writes that

> there may be a difference still more unthought than the difference between Being and beings. . . . Beyond Being and beings, this difference, ceaselessly differing from and deferring (itself), would trace (itself) (by itself) – this *différance* would be the first or last trace if one still could speak, here, of origin and end. (Derrida, 1984, p. 67)

The long series of notions developed in Derrida's work – *différance*, text, writing, the hymen, the supplement, the pharmakon, the parergon, justice, messianicity, justice and so on – are all traces of this formal structure of transcendence, marked by their aporetic status. For Derrida, *différance* is a relation that transcends ontology, that differs from ontology, that goes beyond or is more 'originary' than the ontological difference between Being and beings. In this sense, Derrida's work can be seen as an effort to overcome *both* metaphysics and ontology.

Deleuze is one of the few European philosophers who explicitly pursued a post-Heideggerian metaphysical project. 'I was the most naïve philosopher of my generation, the one who felt the least guilt about "doing philosophy"', he once said in an interview. 'I never worried about overcoming metaphysics' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 88). In Deleuze, metaphysics and ontology are combined: ontology is a metaphysics of difference (Being = difference). Heidegger had himself pointed to such a possibility, despite his separation of metaphysics and ontology:

> When we think the truth of Being, metaphysics is overcome. We can no longer accept the claim of metaphysics to preside over our fundamental relation to 'Being' or to decisively determine every relation to beings as

such. But this 'overcoming of metaphysics' does not abolish
metaphysics. . . . If our thinking would succeed in its efforts to go back
to the ground of metaphysics, it might well help to bring about a change
in the human essence, a change accompanied by a *transformation of
metaphysics.* (Heidegger, 1998, p. 279, emphasis added)

What would be the nature of this transformation? Such a transformed meta-
physics would necessarily take as its object the disclosure of Being itself – that
is, the production of the new, the creation of difference – thereby reuniting
what Heidegger had separated. This is the path taken by Deleuze, who
referred to himself as a 'pure metaphysician', and whose magnum opus,
Difference and Repetition, can in part be read as a rethinking of *Being and Time*
(Being is difference, and time is repetition).[17]

In developing his philosophy of difference, Deleuze's *Difference and
Repetition*, like Heidegger's *Being and Time*, begins with a discussion of
Aristotle, since it was Aristotle who bequeathed to later thinkers the funda-
mental problem of metaphysics. To modify a famous phrase of Whitehead's,
metaphysics can be seen as a series of footnotes to Aristotle (cf. Whitehead,
1979, p. 39). Aristotle had a solution to Heidegger's question of the 'onto-
logical difference' that he summarized in a well-known thesis: *different things
differentiate themselves only through what they have in common.* Two terms are
said to differ when they are other, not by themselves, but by belonging to
some other definable thing (the One becomes two). Aristotle had dis-
tinguished between three types of difference – specific, generic and individual
difference – but what is 'common' for each of these types of difference is
not the same: the relation of species to their common genus is not the same as
the relation of individuals to their common species, or the relation of categor-
ies to each other and to 'Being'. In Deleuze's reading, though, Aristotle's
metaphysics subordinates difference to four interrelated principles: *identity* in
the concept and the *opposition* of predicates (specific difference), *resemblance*
in perception (individual difference), and the *analogy* of judgment (generic
difference). Deleuze's philosophy of difference can be seen as a kind of sys-
tematic rethinking of the problems generated by Aristotle's metaphysics.

What is wrong with Aristotle's metaphysics? Put simply, it provides an
inadequate solution to the Heideggerian problematic of ontological difference.
On the one hand, *it cannot posit Being as a common genus* without destroying
the very reason one posits it as such, that is, the possibility of *being* for specific
differences; it can therefore conceive of the supposed 'universality' of the
concept of Being only as a quasi-identity. On the other hand, it has to relate
Being to particular beings, but *it cannot say what constitutes their individuality*:
it retains in the particular (the individual) only what conforms to the general
(the concept). An equivocal or analogical concept of Being, in other words,

can only grasp that which is univocal in beings. *A true universal is lacking, no less than a true singular*: Being has only a distributive common sense, and the individual has no difference except a general and reflexive one in the concept.[18] To overcome these limitations of Aristotle's metaphysics, Deleuze proposes two fundamental theses. On the one hand, he systematically contrasts the 'analogy of Being' (Being is said in several senses) with the doctrine of the '*univocity* of being' (Being is said in a single sense). There are indeed *forms* of Being, but unlike the categories, these forms introduce no division into Being and do not imply a plurality of ontological senses. On the other hand, the single sense of Being is *difference*, which constitutes a field of individuation that *precedes* generic, specific and even individual differences. In this manner, the universal (univocal Being) is said immediately of the most singular (difference), independent of any mediation. If Deleuze considers himself to be a Spinozist, it is because this is precisely the ontological programme laid out in the opening of Spinoza's *Ethics*: the *attributes* are irreducible to genera or categories because while they are *formally* distinct they remain equal and *ontologically* one; and the modes are irreducible to species because they are distributed in the attributes as individuating differences or degrees of power, which relate them immediately to a univocal being (substance). Perhaps no one has gone further than Deleuze in exploring the consequences of this metaphysical realignment of ontology.

On the one hand, Spinoza carried the univocity of Being to its highest point through a profound re-conceptualization of the notion of substance. From Aristotle through Descartes, philosophy defined the individual as a substance, even if the comprehension and definition of substance varied. Descartes' concept of substance, for instance, remains *equivocal* since it is said in at least three senses (body, soul and God), and these three types of substance are substances only by analogy, each being defined by a different 'essential' attribute (extension, thought and infinite perfection). Spinoza's revolution was to make substance equivalent to Being *qua* Being: Being is itself an absolutely infinite, unique and univocal substance (*Deus sive natura*), whose constitutive elements are the attributes (thought and extension).[19] There is no other substance apart from Being, and the concept of substance thus has a univocal sense. Unlike Aristotle's categories, the attributes do not introduce a plurality of ontological senses into Being, nor is there any hierarchical superiority of one attribute over the other (parallelism). In his own writings, Deleuze will simply take the final step and eliminate the notion of substance entirely. 'All Spinozism needed to do for the univocal to become an object of pure affirmation', he writes, 'was to make substance turn around the modes' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 304).

One the other hand, Spinoza's conception of 'beings' is even more revolutionary. Beings are not substances, nor do they have attributes or properties

(since substance is Being itself, and the attributes are the elements of Being). What then are beings? Beings are *modes*, that is, they are *manners* of Being, *modifications* of substance – they are *degrees of power*. Beings that are distinguished by their degree of power realize *one and the same* univocal being, except for the difference in their degree of power. Aristotle sought the principle of individuation (1) in the particular attributes or properties (specific differences) (2) of *fully constituted individuals*, and Spinoza shows the untenability of Aristotle's position on both these points.[20] First, what is it that determines the relevant property that makes individuals part of the species 'human'? The human can be defined as a rational animal, a featherless biped, an animal of erect stature, an animal who laughs or who uses language and so on. The choice of any one of these traits, however, is accidental and variable: abstractions such as 'genus' or 'species', 'classes' or 'kinds', depend as much on the needs and motivations of classifier as on the nature of the objects being classified. Natural history had its foundation in Aristotle: it defined an animal by what it *is*, it sought its qualitative *essence* (analogy of Being). Modern ethology, by contrast, under a Spinozistic inspiration, defines an animal by what it *can do*, it seeks its quantitative *power*, that is, its *capacity to be affected* (univocity of Being): what affects is a being capable of sustaining? What excitations does it react to? What are its nutrients and poisons? What affects threaten a being's cohesion, diminishing its power, or even destroying it? What affects enhance its power? From this viewpoint, a workhorse does not have the same capacity to be affected as a race horse, but rather has affects in common with the ox. The same criteria can be applied to inanimate physical objects: what are the affects of a slab of granite? What forces can it tolerate – for example, the forces of heat or pressure? What are its maximal and minimal thresholds? In this way, we arrive at immanent 'types' of modes of existence that are more or less general, but which do not have the same criteria as the abstract ideas of species and kind. (When Nietzsche later spoke of will to power, he meant something very similar: power is not something the will wants; rather, power is something that every being *has*: beings are defined by the power they have, that is, their capacities and capabilities.)

Second, and more importantly, whereas Aristotle sought the principle of individuation in the properties of fully constituted individuals, Deleuze finds it in the processes that account for the *genesis* of individuals. When Deleuze says that Being is related immediately to individuating differences, he says:

> we certainly do not mean by this latter individuals constituted in experience, but that which acts in them as a transcendental principle: as a plastic, anarchic and nomadic principle, contemporaneous with the process of individuation, no less capable of dissolving and destroying individuals than of constituting them temporally; intrinsic modalities of

being, passing from one 'individual' to another, circulating and
communicating underneath matters and forms. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 38)

The list of notions that Deleuze develops in *Difference and Repetition* –
difference, repetition, singularity, virtuality, problematic etc. – are all differen-
tial notions that describe the composition of this field of individuation
(though they do not describe a list of categories).[21] If Deleuze, following
Simondon, critiques Aristotle's hylomorphic schema, it is because this field
of individuation precedes *both* matter and form. Matter is never completely
inert – it always contains incipient structures, potentials for being formed in
particular directions or ways (clay is more or less porous, wood is more or
less resistant); and form is never simply imposed from the outside, since it
can only work by translating or 'transducing' itself into a material by a series
of transformations that transmit energy, and thereby 'inform' matter (iron
melts at high temperature, marble or wood split along their veins and fibres).
In other words, there is an individuating process of *modulation* at work
behind both form and matter.

Deleuze's entire ontology entails a practical conversion in philosophy,
which Deleuze describes as a shift away from *morality* to *ethics*. Morality is
fundamentally linked to the notion of essence and the analogical vision of the
world. In Aristotle, the essence of the human is to be a rational animal. If we
nonetheless act in irrational ways, it is because there are *accidents* that turn us
away from our essential nature: our essence is a *potentiality* that is not neces-
sarily realized. Morality can therefore be defined as the effort to rejoin man's
essence, to realize one's essence. In an ethics, by contrast, beings are related to
Being, not at the level of essence, but at the level of existence. Ethics defines a
man not by what he *is* in principle (his essence), but by what he *can do*, what
he is *capable* of (his power). Since power is always effectuated – it is never a
potentiality, but always in act – the question is no longer 'what *must* you do
in order to realize your essence?' but rather 'what are you *capable* of doing by
virtue of your power?' The political problem, in turn, concerns the effectu-
ation of this power. What conditions allow one's power to be effectuated in
the best fashion? Conversely, under what conditions can one actually desire
to be separated from one's power? One can see clearly how these ontological
questions form the basis for the ethico-political philosophy (and correspond-
ing 'existential' notions) developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Capitalism
and Schizophrenia*, and how Deleuze's philosophy forms a systematic whole.[22]

The philosophy of Alain Badiou – which is organized around the three
poles of Being, the event, and the subject – once again separates metaphysics
and ontology. Badiou's magnum opus, *Being and Event*, opens with a con-
sideration of Parmenides' problem of the One and the Multiple: whereas
beings are plural, and are thought in terms of multiplicity, Being itself is

thought to be singular; it is thought in terms of the One (Badiou, 2005, pp. 23–4). Badiou resolves this problem with an axiomatic decision: the One *is not*. The discourse of *ontology* (the science of Being qua being), Badiou will argue, is given to us in mathematics, and more precisely, in axiomatic set theory (Zermelo-Frankl), precisely because the latter provides us with a pure theory of the multiple. Metaphysics, by contrast, is always a metaphysics of the One: 'We can define metaphysics as the commandeering of being by the one' (Badiou, 2006, p. 42). By the 'One', Badiou means two things. On the one hand, the One implies any attempt to totalize Being qua being, or to think multiplicity as a whole. Many thinkers before Badiou have claimed that the Whole is neither given nor givable: Kant argued that the Idea of the Whole is a transcendent illusion; Bergson argued that the Whole is equivalent to the Open, since it is the constant production of the new. Badiou arrives at the same de-totalizing conclusion through the path of formalization: there can be no set of all sets without falling into contradiction (Russell's paradox). Consequently, Being qua being always presents itself as a non-totalizable multiplicity – a pure and inconsistent multiplicity ('the multiple is radically without-oneness, in that it itself comprises multiples alone') (Badiou, 2006, p. 47). But from this point of view, on the other hand, the 'one' exists only as an operation (the 'count-as-one') that renders a multiplicity consistent.[23] Thus, the 'one' also implies that beings – entities, quiddities – are themselves unities. On this score, Badiou likes to cite Leibniz's maxim as the central tenet of metaphysics: 'That which is not *one* being is not a *being*' (Badiou, 2006, p. 42). Badiou thus accepts the problem bequeathed to philosophy by Heidegger, but without accepting Heidegger's solution: 'Can one undo this bond between Being [ontology] and the One [metaphysics], break with the metaphysical domination of Being by the One, without ensnaring oneself in Heidegger's destinal apparatus?' (Badiou, 2006, p. 42). Badiou frees himself from the 'metaphysical temptation' of the One through his appeal to axiomatic set theory: Being qua being is the thought of the pure multiple, and beings themselves are multiples of multiples.

If the *event* constitutes the second pole of Badiou's philosophy, it is because set theory itself comes up against its own internal impasses, such as Russell's paradox or the problem of the continuum.[24] In Lacanian terms, if set theory provides Badiou with a formalization of the 'symbolic', then the 'real' is the impasse or internal gap that axiomatic formalization confronts internally. These impasses constitute the site of what Badiou calls 'events'. As such, events appear in Badiou's work under a double characterization. Negatively, so to speak, an event is undecidable or indiscernible from the ontological viewpoint of axiomatics: it is not presentable in the situation, but exists (if it can even be said to exist) on the 'edge of the void' as a mark of the infinite excess of the inconsistent multiplicity over the consistent sets of the situation.

Put simply, an event is that which cannot be discerned within ontology; it is the 'impossible' of a situation, even if it is immanent to the situation. Positively, then, it is only through a purely subjective 'decision' that the hitherto indiscernible event can be affirmed, and made to intervene in a situation. Lacking any ontological status, the event in Badiou is instead linked to a rigorous conception of *subjectivity*, the subject being the sole instance capable of 'naming' the event and maintaining a fidelity to it through the declaration of an axiom (such as 'all men are equal', in politics; or 'I love you', in love). In this sense, Badiou's philosophy of the event is, at its core, a philosophy of the 'activist subject': it is the subject that names the indiscernible, the generic set, and thus nominates the event that recasts ontology in a new light.

As in Heidegger, the concept of truth likewise receives a new determination in Badiou's work. If Badiou holds that 'philosophy is originally separated from ontology' (Badiou, 2005, p. 13), it is because philosophy itself is conditioned by events. And if Badiou distinguishes truth from knowledge, it is because knowledge is what is transmitted, what is repeated, whereas truth is something new, it is a break from accepted knowledge. A truth process appears because an event has interrupted the transmission and repetition of knowledge. Badiou identifies four domains in which the production of truth operates, and which serve as the condition of philosophy: *art* (e.g. the appearance of theatrical tragedy with Aeschylus), *science* (e.g. the eruption of mathematical physics in Galileo), *politics* (e.g. the French Revolution of 1792), and *love* (an amorous encounter that changes one's life). These four domains mark out the instances of individual or collective subjectivity. Badiou distinguishes between the *construction* of a truth from an event, and its *forcing*, which implies the fiction of a completed truth. To say 'I love you' is a finite declaration, a subjective choice; but to say 'I will always love you' is a forcing, the anticipation of an infinite love. Galileo's claim that 'all nature can be written in mathematical language' is the forced hypothesis of a complete physics. 'In a finite choice there is only the construction of a truth, while in infinite anticipation of complete truth there is something like power' (Badiou, 2002). This potency of truth goes beyond the subject of truth, but also contains the possibility of a 'disaster', that is, a total knowledge that destroys the condition of truth itself (the event, the point of the 'real' in a situation). As in Heidegger, one finds in Badiou a reconfiguration of the relations between ontology, metaphysics, and truth that makes it one of the most original and radical of contemporary philosophies.

17 In this respect the question that seems of real interest is the relationship between the account of Hegel Malabou gives and the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, not least in the account the latter is attempting of the 'deconstruction of Christianity'. See Nancy (2008a, 2008b).

18 This is due to the process of simplification of the past through the formation of culture. Malabou describes this simplification eloquently in Chapter 10 of *The Future of Hegel*.

19 For an engaging discussion of the essential nature of comedy in Hegel's view see Rose (1994).

20 This claim is made in Heidegger's 1930s lecture course on Nietzsche in the context of an argument for separating Nietzsche from biologism and so is, to say the least, an ambiguous verdict. See the translations of these courses in Heidegger (1991). For a distinctly different emphasis, see Heidegger (1977).

21 A celebrated account of the relationship between will to power and eternal return is given in Müller-Lauter (1999).

22 For a scintillating account of Nietzsche's view of ecstasy and a placing of it in a tradition of excessive thought, see Marsden (2002).

23 'What one has no access to through experience one has no ear for. Now let us imagine an extreme case: that a book speaks of nothing but events which lie outside the possibility of general or even of rare experience – that it is the *first* language for a new range of experiences. In this case simply nothing will be heard, with the acoustical illusion that where nothing is heard there *is* nothing. . . . This is in fact my average experience and, if you like, the *originality* of my experience' (Nietzsche, 1979, 'Why I Write Such Excellent Books', §1).

Chapter 4

1 Kaufmann translates *Hinterwelter* as 'afterworldly', meaning it to be a literal translation of 'metaphysics'; see Nietzsche (1954), p. 117.

2 This is one of the primary themes of Adorno's *Metaphysics*; see Adorno (2000), esp. pp. 17–18.

3 Other philosophers have proposed their own lists of 'categories', such as Charles Sanders Peirce and Alfred North Whitehead, but such notions do not have the same status as Aristotle's or Kant's categories.

4 See the great passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant explains and defends his appropriation of Plato's notion of an Idea, while modifying its use (1929, A312–20/B368–77, pp. 309–14).

5 See Kant (1929) A295–6/B352, pp. 298–9: 'We shall entitle the principles whose application is confined entirely within the limits of possible experience, *immanent*; and those, on the other hand, which profess to pass beyond these limits, *transcendent*'. It should be noted that the terms 'transcendent' and 'transcendental' are not identical terms, and in fact are opposed to each other. The aim of Kant's *transcendental* or critical project is to discover criteria immanent to the understanding that are capable of distinguishing between legitimate (immanent) and illegitimate (transcendent) uses of the syntheses of consciousness. In this sense, transcendental philosophy is a philosophy of immanence, and implies a ruthless critique of transcendence.

6 See Derrida (1992), p. 30: 'The effort of thinking or rethinking a sort of transcendental illusion of the gift should not be seen as a simple reproduction of Kant's critical machinery. . . . But neither is it a question of rejecting that machinery as old fashioned'.

7 See Kant (1929), B3, p. 43: '*A priori* modes of knowledge are entitled pure when there is no admixture of anything empirical'. And A20/B34, p. 66: 'I term all

representations *pure* (in the transcendental sense) in which there is nothing that belongs to sensation'.

8 See also Derrida (1995), p. 84, where Derrida is still hesitating between the two terms: 'The concept of responsibility [would be] paralyzed by what can be called an aporia or an antinomy'.

9 See Badiou (2005), p. 1: 'Heidegger is the last universally recognized philosopher'.

10 See Heidegger (1975), p. 275: 'Metaphysics represents the beingness of beings in a twofold manner: in the first place, the totality of beings as such with an eye to their most universal traits (*ta kathalon, koinon*), but at the same time also the totality of beings as such in the sense of the highest and there divine being, or God (onto-theology)'.

11 See Heidegger (1975), pp. 268–9: 'From its beginning to its completion, the propositions of metaphysics have been strangely involved in a persistent confusion of beings and Being'.

12 See Heidegger (1962a), p. 274: 'To lay bare the horizon within which something like Being in general becomes intelligible is tantamount to clarifying the possibility of having any understanding of Being at all – an understanding which itself belongs to the constitution of the entity called *Dasein*'.

13 See Heidegger (1975), pp. 268–9: 'The thinking which is posited by beings as such, and therefore representational must be supplanted by a different kind of thinking which is brought to pass by Being itself'.

14 See Heidegger (1962a), p. 44: 'We are to *destroy* this traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being'.

15 See also Derrida (1981), p. 10: one must 'borrow the syntaxic and lexical resources of the language of metaphysics . . . at the very moment one deconstructs this language'.

16 '*Différance*, the disappearance of any originary presence, is *at once* the condition of possibility *and* the condition of impossibility of truth' (Derrida, 1983, p. 168). For further discussion, see May's chapter on 'Philosophies of Difference' in this volume.

17 See Villani (1999), p. 130: 'I feel myself to be a pure metaphysician. Bergson says that modern science hasn't found its metaphysics, the metaphysics it would need. It is this metaphysics that interests me'.

18 For Deleuze's summary of his criticisms of Aristotle, see Deleuze (1994), pp. 269–70, and p. 303: 'The only common sense of Being is distributive, and the only individual difference is general'.

19 It would nonetheless be an error to suggest that Spinoza's *Ethics begins* with substance: in the order of definitions in Book One of the *Ethics*, God is not reached until Definition Six; and in the order of demonstrations, God is not reached until Propositions Nine and Ten. Strictly speaking, Spinoza's ontology has a beginning that is distinct from Being (something which 'is not'), but in Spinoza this 'something' is not the transcendence of the One beyond Being, but rather the immanence of the attributes as the source and origin of substance or Nature, its constitutive elements. See Deleuze (2004), pp. 146–55.

20 See Deleuze (1994), p. 38: Aristotle 'retains in the particular only that which conforms to the general (matter and form), and seeks the principle of individuation in this or that element of fully constituted individuals'.

21 See Deleuze (1994), pp. 284–5: 'None of this amounts to a list of categories. It is pointless to claim that a list of categories can be open in principle: it can be in fact but not in principle. For categories belong to the world of representation, where they constitute forms of distribution according to which Being is distributed among beings following the rules of sedentary proportionality. That is why philosophy

had often been tempted to oppose notions of a quite different kind to categories, notions which are really open and which betray an empirical and pluralist sense of Ideas: "existential" as against essential, percepts as against concepts, or indeed the list of empirico-ideal notions that we find in Whitehead, which makes *Process and Reality* one of the greatest books of modern philosophy'.

22 For further discussion of the distinction between ethics and morality in relation to ethico-political philosophy, see Williams' chapter on 'Ethics and Politics' in this volume.

23 See Hallward (2003), p. 90: 'Consistency is the attribute of *a* coherent presentation of such inconsistent multiplicity as *a* multiplicity, that is, as a coherent collecting of multiplicity into unity, or one'. Hallward's book is the best study of Badiou's thought available: it is both comprehensive and critical, although it was published before the 2006 appearance of the second volume of *Being and Event*.

24 Badiou (2005), p. 5: 'The essence of the famous problem of the continuum was that in it one touched upon an obstacle *intrinsic* to mathematical thought, in which the very impossibility which founds the latter's domain is said'.

Chapter 5

1 There is an archaic sense of the English word 'sense' meaning 'direction', as in 'the sense of the river'. This sense is still present in French, as in, among other uses, the expression *sens unique* for 'one-way street' (Protevi, 1994 and 1998).

Chapter 6

1 The term *différance* is not always the one Derrida uses, and his different terms sometimes reflect differences in the particular philosopher he is treating. Nevertheless, in reflecting on deconstruction, he writes, 'The word "deconstruction", like all other words, acquires its value only from its inscription in a chain of possible substitutions, in what is too blithely called a "context". For, me, for what I have tried and still try to write, the word has interest only within a certain context, where it replaces and lets itself be determined by such other words as "*écriture*", "trace", "*différance*", "supplement", "hymen", "pharmakon", "marge", "entame", "parergon", etc.' (Derrida, 1985).

Chapter 8

1 While I do not think there is a 'political turn' in Derrida's works, as represented by *Specters of Marx*, there is an issue that is very much worth investigating, namely that in the later work, Derrida argues that justice, like deconstruction itself, cannot be deconstructed – therefore *deconstruction is justice* and vice-versa – whereas, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida says that deconstruction must submit to its own critique.

2 Again we might remark upon the resources for historical materialism that come through the Western monotheistic traditions and texts, and we might therefore raise some historical materialist questions concerning the preoccupation with the figure of St Paul in the work of Badiou, Žižek, Agamben and others. In the readings of Badiou and Žižek, Paul is singular, and in his singularity and indeed atemporality/ahistoricity he founds Christianity. Perhaps this ought to be called the 'dialectical materialist' view of the matter (Badiou and Žižek say as much), while a historical materialist reading of the New Testament would see an Early Christian Movement that was multivocal – even after the process of canonization had removed many other accounts of Jesus of Nazareth and his movement. We get to dialectical materialism by removing the rock, as it were – Peter.

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