Monism and the Univocity of Being: Deleuze, Davidson, Spinoza

Paul M. Livingston

University of New Mexico

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Anselm Kiefer, *Voyage au Bout de la Nuit (Journey to the End of the Night)*, 2004

Motivation

- *Multiple indications today point to the relevance of a **formally flat** knowing of causes, without teleology, representation, elevation or transcendence*:
  - i) continuing dominance of forms of 'naturalism' within analytic philosophy
  - ii) 'new realisms' or 'materialisms'
  - iii) **most decisive: global crisis of anthropogenic violence and prospect of a 'philosophical' response to it**

  Resistance to this violence requires that we not find in the special logical form of human action or agency a mandate for anthropic domination; that we not think we can sufficiently determine the meaning of our actions or practices from ourselves alone; that we not make ourselves within nature (as Spinoza says) "a kingdom within a kingdom" governed by its own special laws or "norms"

Programmatic Horizon

- 1) "**Flat ontology" of events**: an understanding of the events making up the causal order, as such and in general, that does not accord any *particular* causes the significance of origin, end, or hierarchical elevation of rank or power.

- 2) **Global *realism* about sense**: ultimate sources of sense to be located, not in human psychology, any agency of the subject or any human convention, but in the structure and dynamics of becoming as such. (Linguistic and non-linguistic) sense not determined or imposed by any transcendental exterior, eschatology, or teleology.

- 3) **Monism (or non-dualism) without the One (?)**: possibility of a thinking of the order of causes as non-hierarchical – without assuming or requiring an ultimately determining or Absolute One or One-All

Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition*): Sense and the Univocity of Being

- **The univocity of being** (Scotus, Spinoza, Nietzsche)**:** 'Being' is said in a *single and unitary sense* of everything that is.

- Against the more dominant tradition (since Aristotle) that sees being as having a ***hierarchical*** organization (for example into genera and species, or ultimately determining 'categories') and attributes to human language (at best) an ***analogical*** and ***equivocal*** capacity to name it.

- Deleuze's main argument for univocity turns on the application of the (Fregean) **theory of sense and reference** to the "ontological proposition"

Frege: On Sense and Reference

- A linguistic sign determines its referent through an intermediary sense or "**mode of presentation**" of that referent (example of names: "Hesperus"/"Phosphorus")

- A sentence or proposition is associated with a **sentential sense** or **"thought"**. The "thought" determines a truth value (the True or the False) as its referent.

- Frege argues that *realism and objectivism* about senses is required in order to account for the possibilities of stable linguistic reference and (most important) the possibility of sentences to determine objective truth-values

Deleuze: Sense and Reference in the 'Ontological Proposition'

- In the "ontological proposition" it is possible that Being (itself) is designated by several distinct designators possessing distinct senses, or by several different modes of presentation. Examples:
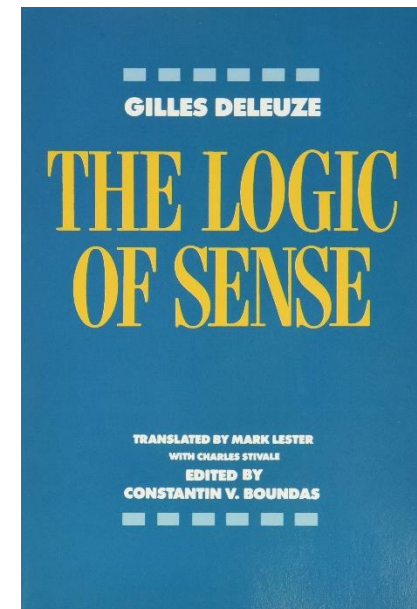 - "**Being** (*To de on*) is said in several ways." (Aristotle)
  - "Only **one** account of a way is left: **that it is**." (Parmenides)
  - "**The world** is **all that is the case**." (Wittgenstein)
  - "**This world** is **the will to power** – and nothing besides!" (Nietzsche)
- We can also understand that, in these cases, what is attributed (i.e. being) as a *singular* referent, using distinct designators, *also* *itself* characterizes the distinct designators (the names of being) **in a unitary sense**.
- According to Deleuze, this is sufficient to establish the claim of the univocity of being, against analogy or equivocity.

Sense, univocity and expression in the ontological proposition

- …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. It is true that such a point of view is not sufficient to prevent us from considering these senses as analogues and this unity of being as an analogy. We must add that being, this common designated, in so far as it expresses itself, is said in turn *in a single and same sense* of all the numerically distinct designators and expressors. In the ontological proposition, not only is that which is designated ontologically the same for qualitatively distinct senses, but also the sense is ontologically the same for individuating modes, for numerically distinct designators or expressors: the ontological proposition involves a circulation of this kind (expression as a whole). (*Difference and Repetition,* p. 35).

- Because of formal flatness of linguistic syntax, any principle or rule of differentiation of senses will not elevate any of the *differentia* above all of the others: all of them are **ontologically equal; none** has the position of **mastery or superior height.**

- The distinct senses do not *partition* being as genus and species or into a number of different regional "categories".

- The senses by which being is designated do not have only the unity of analogy, or of a variety of extrinsic determinations that *just happen* to present the same subject matter. Rather, **the designation of being takes place only on a basis that must be itself ontologically univocal**.

Deleuze on the 'sense-event'

- In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze develops a paradoxical ontology of sense as the presuppositional level of linguistic meaning, underlying the possibilities of the proposition to **denote** referents, to **indicate** a speaker, and to **affirm** an inferentially significant content.

- 'Sense' is here the "*expressed* of a proposition" which underlies its possibility of expressing an event.

- The '**sense-event'** is not itself a proposition, but a determination of the real, evental becoming of a state of affairs: not "The leaf is green" but "The leaf greens" or "The greening of the leaf".

GILLES DELEUZE

THE LOGIC OF SENSE

TRANSLATED BY MARK LESTER
WITH CHARLES STIVALE
EDITED BY
CONSTANTIN V. BOUNDAS

Spinoza and Expression

- (Against Cartesian substance dualism and analogy), Spinoza "organizes a remarkable division into substance, attributes, and modes." (*D&R*, p. 40)
- Here, the univocity of being becomes "identical with unique, universal and infinite substance … proposed as *Deus sive Natura*" (*D&R,* p. 40)
- For Spinoza, there is (ontologically) ONE substance that is:

i) **"really," "formally"** and **qualitatively** distinguished into **attributes** (examples: "thinking" and "extension")

ii) **numerically (or quantitatively)** distinguished into **modes** (individual things or events).

Spinoza on attributes and modes

- Modes are "affections" of (the One) substance (*Ethics* I D5), but (the One) substance only manifests itself *as* modes under the formal condition of its differentiation into attributes (I D4, II P6).

- According to Deleuze, thus: "the **attributes** behave like **real qualitatively different senses** which relate to [the One] substance as if to a single and same designated" but "**substance** in turn behaves like an **ontologically unique sense** in relation to the **modes** which express it" (*D&R*, p. 40)

- In this way, "Being itself is said in a **single unique sense** of **substance and the modes**…" and "**Any hierarchy or pre-eminence is denied** in so far as **substance is equally designated by all the attributes** in accordance with their essence, and **equally expressed by all the modes** in accordance with their degree of power." (*D&R*, p. 40)

Expression, univocity, and causation

- This ontological circulation of substance and its modes through the differentiation of attributes also has a distinctively *causal* meaning (Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*)

- *Ethics* I P25 and Corollary: God[/Substance] is the efficient cause of **both** the **existence** and the **essence** of things; thus "Particular things are nothing but affections of God's attributes, *or* modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way."

- Deleuze: God[/Substance] is thus the cause of all things in the **same sense** that he is the cause of himself. (*Expressionism*, p. 67)

- "For Spinoza … the concept of univocal Being is perfectly determinate, as what is predicated in one and the same sense of substance in itself, and of modes that are in something else." (*Expressionism*, p. 67)

- With this, the unitary form of *immanent causation* comes to explicate the claim of univocity of being, showing: i) that **there is no ontological hierarchy between modes**; ii) (even more radically) that **modes are not ontologically subordinate to (the One) substance itself**.

Implications for mind/body

- The unitary sense of being, demanding the leveling of all possible ontological hierarchy, circulates through the whole system of causes

- The attributes are, though **really distinct**, also **formally equal:** ontologically speaking, there is no *priority* of one over another.

- Each can operate as an order of causes that is complete in itself, even if there is no effective causation between modes of different attributes ("The body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion, to rest, or to anything else" (Ethics, IIIP2).

- The ontological circulation of the one substance with the modes *through* the diverse attributes allows for the relationship of modes of different attributes to be one of **identity**. (IIP7: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."; "…that the [mind] and the [body] are one and the same thing, which is now conceived under the attribute of thought, now of extension")

Donald Davidson: Radical Interpretation

- Davidson's analytic project overall combines a reflective model of linguistic interpretation ('radical interpretation') and systematic formalization, following Tarski, of structure and role of **truth** in a language in relation to meaning.

- A systematic reflection on the ***unity of a language*** and the pattern of understanding which characterizes it in its intelligible everyday use.

- Implies an order of causally interrelated events that is **general** and **ontologically/semantically flat** and hence an 'ontological' integration of human agency action within that order.
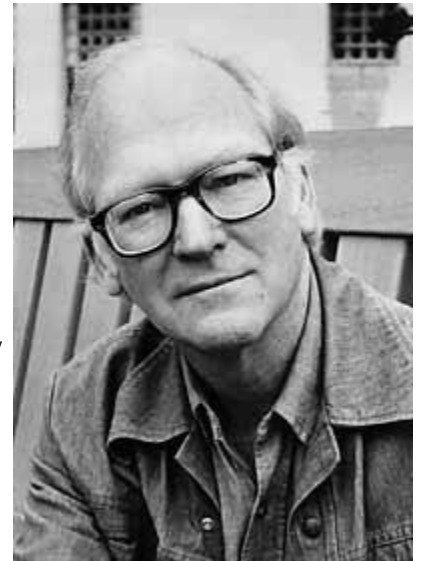
Anomalous Monism

- Any language intelligible as such is committed to an ontology that includes events as datable particulars.

- (Against Ryle/Anscombe): The rational explanation of an action is a matter of genuinely *causal* explanation (i.e., no *ontological* distinction of "reasons" from "causes").

- Anomalous monism:

  - i) There is genuine mental-physical and physical-mental causation in *individual* cases: "Causality and identity are relations between individual events no matter how described."

  - ii) There are strict (exceptionless) causal laws connecting events under their physical description, but no strict psychological laws or psychophysical laws in this sense.

  - iii) Nevertheless, an event as described under a 'mental' description may be *identical* to one described under a 'physical' one. There is thus (monism), ontologically speaking, only one domain or realm of events.

Davidson and Spinoza: similarities and differences

- Similarities:
  - i) both are committed to the *completeness* and *causal closure* of the physical world
  - ii) both suggest (Davidson) a 'dualism' of 'vocabularies or concepts' (Spinoza: really distinct attributes) between the mental and the physical that does *not* imply an *ontological* distinction between substances or ontological types
  - iii) causal relations hold *only* between individual, datable events, however described

  Differences:
  - i) Anomalous monism only asserts the "token" identity of events in the two attributional orders, but does not assert the *complete* parallelism or identity of the total "**order and connection**" of events in both cases (as Spinoza does)
  - ii) For Davidson, the order of "mental" events (events described within the mental order) is not even **potentially** complete: there is probably no way to understand the systematic pattern of explanation of a person's action without often attributing the causes of mental events to "external" physical events

Mental/physical distinction: distinction of attributes, "vocabularies", or what?

- Davidson often follows Quine and others in holding or assuming that the distinction between "mental" and "physical" descriptions is essentially one between *intensional* and *extensional* contexts.

- In *extensional* contexts, co-referring terms can be intersubstituted *salva veritate ;* in *intensional* contexts, including ones involving "psychological" verbs, substitution of co-referring terms may change truth values

  Example: i) The planet Venus exploded/Hesperus exploded;
   ii) Jones thinks that the planet Venus exploded/Jones thinks
       that Hesperus exploded.

- Alternatively, Davidson also suggests that the interpretation of verbal behavior, and hence the attribution of mental events, is governed by a *holistic norm of overall rationality* that has "no echo" in physical theory.

"Conceptual dualism" or "two vocabularies": Spinozist Critique

- Davidson suggests that interpretation, *as opposed to physical theory*, is governed by a "constitutive ideal of rationality" which irreducibly involves exercising holistic "principles of charity" in interpreting the belief and action of others

- Similarly, he suggests that the "mental" and "physical" vocabularies are not "made for one another"

- But from a Spinozist perspective, committed to univocity and the formal flatness of the causal order of events, we might wonder:

  - i) what could (outside an imaginary production of ideology) institute or constitute a "**constitutive ideal of rationality**" and ensure its global but delimited force over *human* acts and affairs, to the exclusion of all other events?

  - ii) what could ensure that the "**mental and physical vocabularies**" are "**not made for one another**" (outside the imaginary figure of a divine creator or human instigator)?

  - iii) more generally: **how to draw the distinction between the two "vocabularies" or "conceptual schemes" in a way that would make it a** *real* **distinction rather than an imaginary, ideological or linguistically imposed one?**

Returning to Spinoza: identity of modes across attributes

- On a particular occasion, a mode of extension can be **numerically identical** to a mode of thinking (or vice versa)

- Della Rocca (1993) ("Spinoza's argument for the Identity Theory"): This commits Spinoza to the claim that certain causal statements (for example statements attributing causation under distinct attributes) must be **referentially opaque** or **intensional**.

- Indeed, this appears to imply that *all* **contexts** which mention a mode "under" its attribute will be **intensional**.

- However, Della Rocca suggests that in order for modes to be numerically identical or distinct, they must nevertheless have some purely *extensional* (i.e. non-intensional) properties that are sufficient to individuate them

Contra Della Rocca:
All modes appear under some attribute

- If modes have "neutral" non-intensional properties prior to their intensional presentation under attributes, then it appears that this presentation is **imposed, constructed, or subjective rather than ontologically real**

- But it would be puzzling if Spinoza held that beneath, behind or before their determination under specific attributes they bear a set of properties that are neutral in this sense

- And in fact, we need not assume that they do have such properties. For we might refer to a mode across attributes, not by means of a discovery of its extensional properties, but **by means of an *indexical* or (temporal) demonstrative**

- Example: "*This* mental event" or "*The* mental event I am experiencing right now" causes my hand to go up.

Spinozistic Monism and Anomalous Monism

- With this in view, we can envision a **successor form of anomalous monism that does not depend on the idea of a differentiation of "vocabularies" or "concepts" or "descriptions"** (where these are understood as simply linguistic in character)
- On this form of anomalous monism, *all* **events are presented (expressed) under some attribute or another** and *each* **attribute is complete and includes** *all* **events**
- There is thus no longer any **asymmetry** between the physical and the mental "orders"
- The presentation of modes under **any** particular attribute is *equally* **governed by a holistic "norm of rationality"** regardless of which attribute is concerned
- We can, further, suppose that the "**order and connection of ideas**" is the same as the "**order and connection of [physical] events**" – since the events are identical, their order must be too
- Nevertheless there are **still no "psychophysical" laws**: since the relationship is one of **identity** rather than (lawlike) correspondence there is no need (or possibility) of laws mediating between them

Beyond Spinoza: anomalous monism without substance

- With Davidson's analysis of the logical form of event sentences, we have identified good reasons for affirming the **overall logical unity** and **formal flatness** of the causal order of events.

- On this basis, we can **dispute** any picture [e.g. Sellars, McDowell] which disjoins the "**logical space of reasons**" from the "**logical space of causes**", the **'normative'** from the **'causal,'** or which sees the 'domain' of rationalizing interpretation and explanation of human action as **radically disjoint** from that of the natural order of causes in general.

- Given these formal tools, we may apparently still **affirm the ontological unity and univocity of the** *single* **causal order of events**, across their expression under different attributes, *even without the assumption of a single substance as ultimate cause.*

- Then the unity of the causal order, which ensures its formal flatness, is now not the unity of a unitary substantial cause, but of the identity of a **univocal logical form** for **all events**

Logical form and the (de-)individuation of events

- As Davidson has argued ("True to the Facts"), on plausible assumptions, **if we assume sentences to have distinct and unique referents** or **truthmakers** (e.g. "states of affairs") then there is no way to prevent the conclusion (the "slingshot") that **all true sentences refer to a single "Great Fact"** (compare Frege on "the True")

- A parallel version of the argument with respect to events shows that if we take sentences affirming the "taking-place" of events to refer to those events, then **all such sentences (that are true) will refer to the same Great Event**

- It appears then that by affirming univocity as a matter of logical form (outside the assumption of substantialism), we *lose the ability to explain the individuation of events*

- [Univocity] occurs, therefore, as a unique event for everything that happens to the most diverse things, *Eventum tantum* for all events, the ultimate form for all the forms which remain disjointed in it, but which bring about the resonance and the ramification of their disjunction. The univocity of Being merges with the positive use of the disjunctive synthesis which is the highest affirmation. It is the eternal return itself or – as we have seen in the case of the ideal game – the affirmation of all chance in a single moment, the unique cast for all throws, one Being and only one for all forms and all times, a single insistence for all that exists, a single phantom for all the living, a single voice for every hum of voices and every drop of water in the sea.

  (*LofS*, pp. 179-80)
- Deleuze suggests that the univocity of being is *completed* with the transition from Spinoza's metaphysics of substance to the affirmative gesture – beyond the identity of modes and substance, making "identity turn around difference"– of Nietzsche's metaphysics of eternal recurrence and will to power. (D&R, pp. 40-41)
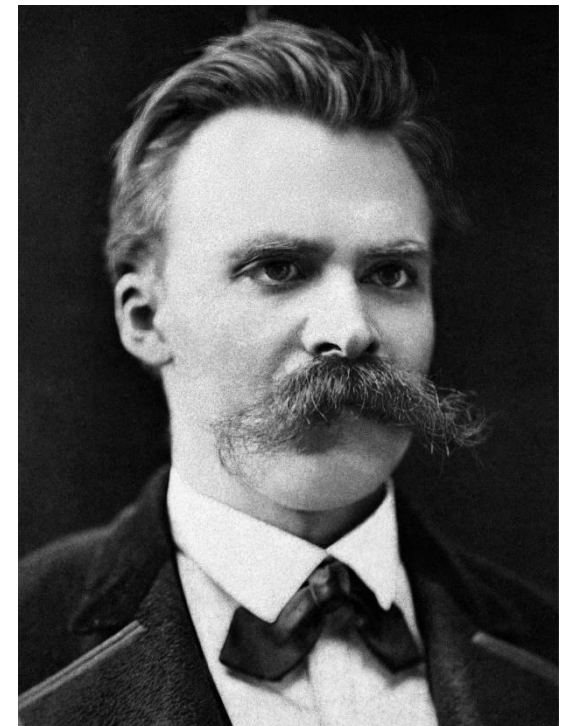
Monism without substance; flatness without the One?

- We have seen how a logical analysis of the form of sentences asserting the taking place of events can illuminate the formally flat order and structure of their causal relationships as such and as a whole

- In Deleuze's terms, to affirm this unitary structure is to affirm – without ultimate substance – the univocity of being and the circulation of its unitary sense throughout all that is, has been, or will be.

- Is it possible to *affirm* being in a unitary sense irrespective of past, present and future? Possible for whom? At what time?

- Does being express "itself"? Who speaks?

Being, Unity and Power: concluding questions

- We may grant that *individual events witness powers*, at least as described or as known.

- But do we really understand a *universal* power, behind all others, one that hides like a noumenal cause behind all that happens?

- Is there an "**absolute" form of power or agency**, of what is essentially the empty form of effectiveness or power in general and as such?

- Does the Nietzschean affirmation ultimately *replicate* **the ancient assumption – determinative throughout the Western tradition – of a fundamental alliance of Being and power**, or of the *ultimate* "metaphysical" determination of being as being-effective? (Spinoza, IP11: "…to be able to exist is to have power (as is known through itself)").

- Can we follow this affirmation, while at the same time affirming the *flatness* of beings and the **non-hierarchy** of causes?