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BEING AND EVENT

Alain Badiou

Translated by Oliver Feltham



MEDITATION ONE

The One and the Multiple: *a priori* conditions of any possible ontology

Since its Parmenidean organization, ontology has built the portico of its ruined temple out of the following experience: what *presents* itself is essentially multiple; what *presents* itself is essentially one. The reciprocity of the one and being is certainly the inaugural axiom of philosophy—Leibniz's formulation is excellent: 'What is not a being is not a being'—yet it is also its impasse; an impasse in which the revolving doors of Plato's *Parmenides* introduce us to the singular joy of never seeing the moment of conclusion arrive. For if being is one, then one must posit that what is not one, the multiple, *is not*. But this is unacceptable for thought, because what is presented is multiple and one cannot see how there could be an access to being outside all presentation. If presentation is not, does it still make sense to designate what presents (itself) as being? On the other hand, if presentation is, then the multiple necessarily is. It follows that being is no longer reciprocal with the one and thus it is no longer necessary to consider as one what presents itself, inasmuch as it is. This conclusion is equally unacceptable to thought because presentation is only *this* multiple inasmuch as what it presents can be counted as one; and so on.

We find ourselves on the brink of a decision, a decision to break with the arcana of the one and the multiple in which philosophy is born and buried, phoenix of its own sophistic consumption. This decision can take no other form than the following: the one *is not*. It is not a question, however, of abandoning the principle Lacan assigned to the symbolic; that *there is* Oneness. Everything turns on mastering the gap between the presupposition (that must be rejected) of a being of the one and the thesis of its 'there if'. What could there be, which is not? Strictly speaking, it is already too

much to say 'there is Oneness' because the 'there', taken as an errant localization, concedes a point of being to the one.

What has to be declared is that the one, which is not, solely exists as operation. In other words: there is no one, only the count-as-one. The one, being an operation, is never a presentation. It should be taken quite seriously that the 'one' is a number. And yet, except if we pythagorize, there is no cause to posit that being qua being is number. Does this mean that being is not multiple either? Strictly speaking, yes, because being is only multiple inasmuch as it occurs in presentation.

In sum: the multiple is the regime of presentation; the one, in respect to presentation, is an operational result: being is what presents (itself). On this basis, being is neither one (because only presentation itself is pertinent to the count-as-one), nor multiple (because the multiple is solely the regime of presentation).

Let's fix the terminology: 1 term *situation* any presented multiplicity. Granted the effectiveness of the presentation, a situation is the place of taking-place, whatever the terms of the multiplicity in question. Every situation admits its own particular operator of the count-as-one. This is the most general definition of a *structure*; it is what prescribes, for a presented multiple, the regime of its count-as-one.

When anything is counted as one in a situation, all this means is that it belongs to the situation in the mode particular to the effects of the situation's structure.

A structure allows number to occur within the presented multiple. Does this mean that the multiple, as a figure of presentation, is not 'yet' a number? One must not forget that every situation is structured. The multiple is retroactively legible therein as *anterior* to the one, insofar as the count-as-one is always a *result*. The fact that the one is an operation allows us to say that the domain of the operation is not one (for the one is *not*), and that therefore this domain is multiple; since, *within presentation*, what is not one is necessarily multiple. In other words, the count-as-one (the structure) installs the universal pertinence of the one/multiple couple for any situation.

What will have been counted as one, on the basis of not having been one, turns out to be multiple.

It is therefore always in the after-effect of the count that presentation is uniquely thinkable as multiple, and the numerical inertia of the situation is set out. Yet there is no situation without the effect of the count, and

therefore it is correct to state that presentation as such, in regard to number, is multiple.

There is another way of putting this: the multiple is the inertia which can be retroactively discerned starting from the fact that the operation of the count-as-one must effectively operate in order for there to be Oneness. The multiple is the inevitable predicate of what is structured because the structuration—in other words, the count-as-one—is an effect. The one, which is not, cannot present itself: it can only operate. As such it founds, 'behind' its operation, the status of presentation—it is of the order of the multiple.

The multiple evidently splits apart here: 'multiple' is indeed said of presentation, in that it is retroactively apprehended as non-one as soon as being-one is a result. Yet 'multiple' is also said of the composition of the count, that is, the multiple as 'several-ones' counted by the action of structure. There is the multiplicity of inertia, that of presentation, and there is also the multiplicity of composition which is that of number and the effect of structure.

Let's agree to term the first *inconsistent multiplicity* and the second *consistent multiplicity*.

A situation (which means a structured presentation) is, relative to the same terms, their double multiplicity: inconsistent and consistent. This duality is established in the distribution of the count-as-one; inconsistency before and consistency afterwards. Structure is both what obliges us to consider, via retroaction, that presentation is a multiple (inconsistent) and what authorizes us, via anticipation, to compose the terms of the presentation as terms of a multiple (consistent). It is clearly recognizable that this distribution of obligation and authorization makes the one—which is not—into a law: It is the same thing to say of the one that it is not, and to say that the one is a law of the multiple, in the double sense of being what constrains the multiple to manifest itself as such, and what rules its structured composition.

What form would a discourse on being—qua being—take, in keeping with what has been said?

There is nothing apart from situations. Ontology, if it exists, is a situation. We immediately find ourselves caught in a double difficulty.

On the one hand, a situation is a presentation. Does this mean that a presentation of being as such is necessary? It seems rather that 'being' is included in what any presentation presents. One cannot see how it could be presented *qua being*.

On the other hand, if ontology—the discourse on being qua being—is a situation, it must admit a mode of the count-as-one, that is, a structure. But wouldn't the count-as-one of being lead us straight back into those aporias in which sophistry soldiers the reciprocity of the one and being? If the one is not, being solely the operation of the count, mustn't one admit that being is *not one*? And in this case, is it not subtracted from every count? Besides, this is exactly what we are saying when we declare it heterogeneous to the opposition of the one and the multiple.

This may also be put as follows: there is no structure of being.

It is at this point that the Great Temptation arises, a temptation which philosophical 'ontologies', historically, have not resisted: it consists in removing the obstacle by posing that ontology is not actually a situation.

To say that ontology is not a situation is to signify that being cannot be signified within a structured multiple, and that only an experience situated beyond all structure will afford us an access to the veiling of being's presence. The most majestic form of this conviction is the Platonic statement according to which the Idea of the Good, despite placing being as being-supremely-being, in the intelligible region, is for all that *ἐπέκεινται τῷ οὐρανῷ*, 'beyond substance'; that is, unrepresentable within the configuration of that-which-is-maintained-there. It is an Idea which is not an Idea, whilst being that on the basis of which the very ideality of the Idea maintains its being (*ἡ ἰδέα*), and which therefore, not allowing itself to be known within the articulations of the place, can only be seen or contemplated by a gaze which is the result of an initiatory journey.

I often come across this path of thought. It is well known that, at a conceptual level, it may be found in negative theologies, for which the exteriority-to-situation of being is revealed in its heterogeneity to any presentation and to any predication; that is, in its radical alterity to both the multiple form of situations and to the regime of the count-as-one, an alterity which insinuates the One of being, torn from the multiple, and nameable exclusively as absolute Other. From the point of view of experience, this path consecrates itself to mystical annihilation: an annihilation in which, on the basis of an interruption of all presentative situations, and at the end of a negative spiritual exercise, a Presence is gained, a presence which is exactly that of the being of the One as non-being, thus the annulment of all functions of the count of One. Finally, in terms of language, this path of thought poses that it is the poetic resource of language alone, through its substage of the law of nominations, which is

capable of forming an exception—within the limits of the possible—to the current regime of situations.

The captivating grandeur of the effects of this choice is precisely what calls me to *refuse* to cede on what contradicts it through and through. I will maintain, and it is the wager of this book, that *ontology is a situation*. I will thus have to resolve the two major difficulties ensuing from this option—that of the presentation within which being qua being can be rationally spoken of and that of the count-as-one—rather than making them vanish in the promise of an exception. If I succeed in this task, I will refuse, point by point, the consequences of what I will name, from here on, the ontologies of presence—for presence is the exact contrary of presentation. Conceptually, it is within the positive regime of predication, and even of formalization, that I will testify to the existence of an ontology. The experience will be one of deductive invention, where the result, far from being the absolute singularity of saintliness, will be fully transmissible within knowledge. Finally, the language, revealing any poem, will possess the potential of what Frege named ideography. Together the ensemble will oppose—to the temptation of presence—the rigour of the subtractive, in which being is said solely as that which cannot be supposed on the basis of any presence or experience.

The 'subtractive' is opposed here, as we shall see, to the Heideggerian thesis of a withdrawal of being. It is not in the withdrawal-of-its-presence that being fomentis the forgetting of its original disposition to the point of assigning us—us at the extreme point of nihilism—to a poetic 'overturning'. No, the ontological truth is both more restrictive and less prophetic: it is in being foreclosed from presentation that being as such is constrained to be sayable, for humanity, within the imperative effect of a law, the most rigid of all conceivable laws, the law of demonstrative and formalizable inference.

Thus, the direction we will follow is that of taking on the apparent paradoxes of ontology as a situation. Of course, it could be said that even a book of this size is not excessive for resolving such paradoxes, far from it. In any case, let us begin.

If there cannot be a presentation of being because being occurs in every presentation—and this is why it does not present itself—then there is one solution left for us: that the ontological situation be *the presentation of presentation*. If, in fact, this is the case, then it is quite possible that what is at stake in such a situation is being qua being, insofar as no access to being is offered to us except presentations. At the very least, a situation whose

presentative multiple is that of presentation itself could constitute the place from which all possible access to being is grasped.

But what does it mean to say that a presentation is the presentation of presentation? Is this even conceivable?

The only predicate we have applied to presentation so far is that of the multiple. If the one is not reciprocal with being, the multiple, however, is reciprocal with presentation, in its constitutive split into inconsistent and consistent multiplicity. Of course, in a structured situation—and they are all such—the multiple of presentation is *this* multiple whose terms let themselves be numbered on the basis of the law that is structure (the count-as-one). Presentation 'in general' is more latent on the side of inconsistent multiplicity. The latter allows, within the retroaction of the count, a kind of inert irreducibility of the presented-multiple to appear, an irreducibility of the domain of the presented-multiple for which the operation of the count occurs.

On this basis the following thesis may be inferred: if an ontology is possible, that is, a presentation of presentation, then it is the situation of the pure multiple, of the multiple 'in-itself'. To be more exact, ontology can be solely the *theory of inconsistent multiplicities as such*. 'As such' means that what is presented in the ontological situation is the multiple without any other predicate than its multiplicity. Ontology, insofar as it exists, must necessarily be the science of the multiple qua multiple.

Even if we suppose that such a science exists, what could its structure be, that is, the law of the count-as-one which rules it as a conceptual situation? It seems unacceptable that the multiple qua multiple be composed of ones, since presentation, which is what must be presented, is in itself multiplicity—the one is only there as a result. To suppose the multiple according to the one of a law—of a structure—is certainly to lose being, if being is solely 'in situation' as presentation of presentation in general, that is, of the multiple qua multiple, subtracted from the one in its being.

For the multiple to be presented, is it not necessary that it be inscribed in the very law itself that the one is *not*? And that therefore, in a certain manner, the multiple—despite its destiny being that of constituting the place in which the one operates (the 'there is' of 'there is Oneness')—be itself without-one? It is such which is glimpsed in the inconsistent dimension of the multiple of any situation.

But if in the ontological situation the composition that the structure authorizes does not weave the multiple out of ones, what will provide the

basis of its composition? What is it, in the end, which is counted as one?

The *a priori* requirement imposed by this difficulty may be summarized in two theses, prerequisites for any possible ontology.

1. The multiple from which ontology makes up its situation is composed solely of multiplicities. There is no one, in other words, every multiple is a multiple of multiples.
2. The count-as-one is no more than the system of conditions through which the multiple can be recognized as multiple.

Mind: this second requirement is extreme. What it actually means is that what ontology counts as one is not 'a' multiple in the sense in which ontology would possess an explicit operator for the gathering-into-one of the multiple, a definition of the multiple-qua-one. This approach would cause us to lose being, because it would become reciprocal to the one again. Ontology would dictate the conditions under which a *multiple* made up a multiple. No. What is required is that the operational structure of ontology discern the multiple without having to make a one out of it, and therefore without possessing a definition of the multiple. The count-as-one must stipulate that everything it legislates on is multiplicity of multiplicities, and it must prohibit anything 'other' than the pure multiple—whether it be the multiple of this or that, or the multiple of ones, or the form of the one itself—from occurring within the presentation that it structures.

However, this prescription-prohibition cannot, in any manner, be explicit. It cannot state 'I only accept pure multiplicity', because one would then have to have the criteria, the definition, of what pure multiplicity is. One would thus count it as one and being would be lost again, since the presentation would cease to be presentation of presentation. The prescription is therefore totally implicit. It operates such that it is only ever a matter of pure multiples, yet there is no defined concept of the multiple to be encountered anywhere.

What is a law whose objects are implicit? A prescription which does not name—in its very operation—that alone to which it tolerates application? It is evidently a system of axioms. An axiomatic presentation consists, on the basis of non-defined terms, in prescribing the rule for their manipulation. This rule counts as one in the sense that the non-defined terms are nevertheless defined by their composition; it so happens that there is a *de facto* prohibition of every composition in which the rule is broken and a

Finally, a subject is at the intersection, via its language, of knowledge and truth. Local configuration of a generic procedure, it is suspended from the indiscernible. Capable of conditionally forcing the veracity of a statement of its language for a situation to-come (the one in which the truth exists) it is the servant of itself. A subject is a knowledge suspended by a truth whose finite moment it is.

5. SUBJECTIVE PRODUCTION: DECISION OF AN UNDECIDABLE. DISQUALIFICATION, PRINCIPLE OF INEXISTENTS

Grasped in its being, the subject is solely the finitude of the generic procedure, the local effects of an eventual fidelity. What its producer is the truth itself, an indiscernible part of the situation, but the infinity of this truth transgresses it. It is abusive to say that truth is a subjective production. A subject is much rather taken up in fidelity to the event, and suspended from truth; from which it is forever separated by change.

However, forcing does authorize partial descriptions of the universe to-come in which a truth supplements the situation. This is so because it is possible to know, under condition, which statements have at least a chance of being veridical in the situation. A subject measures the *newness* of the situation to-come, even though it cannot measure its own being. Let's give three examples of this capacity and its limit.

a. Suppose that a statement of the subject-language is such that certain terms force it and others force its negation. What can be known is that this statement is undecidable in the situation. If it was actually veridical (or erroneous) for the encyclopaedia in its current state, this would mean that whatever the case may be, no term of the situation could intelligibly render it erroneous (or veridical, respectively). Yet this would have to be the case, if the statement is just as forceable positively as it is negatively. In other words, it is not possible to modify the established veracity of a statement by adding to a situation a truth of that situation; for that would mean that in truth the statement was *not* veridical in the situation. Truth is subtraced from knowledge, but it does not contradict it. It follows that this statement is undecidable in the encyclopaedia of the situation: it is impossible by means of the existing resources of knowledge alone to decide whether it is veridical or erroneous. It is thus possible that the chance of the enquiry, the nature of the event and of the operator of fidelity lead to one of the following results: either the statement will have been veridical in the

situation to-come (if a term which forces its affirmation is positively investigated); or it will have been erroneous (if a term which forces its negation is positively investigated); or it will have remained undecidable (if the terms which force it, negatively and positively, are both investigated as unconnected to the name of the event, and thus *nothing* forces it in the truth which results from such a procedure). The productive cases are obviously the first two, in which an undecidable statement of the situation will have been decided for the situation to-come in which the indiscernible truth is presented.

The subject is able to take the measure of this decision. It is sufficient that within the finite configuration of the procedure, which is its being, an enquiry figures in which a term which forces the statement, in one sense or another, is reported to be connected to the name of the event. This term thus belongs to the indiscernible truth, and since it forces the statement we know that this statement will have been veridical (or erroneous) in the situation which results from the addition of this indiscernible. In that situation, that is, *in truth*, the undecidable statement will have been decided. It is quite remarkable, inasmuch as it crystallizes the aleatoric historicity of truth, that this decision can be—and not inconsequentially—either positive (veridical) or negative (erroneous). It depends in fact on the trajectory of the enquiries, and on the principle of evaluation contained in the operator of faithful connection. It happens that such an undecidable statement is decided in such or such a sense.

This capacity is so important that it is possible to give the following definition of a subject: that which decides an undecidable from the standpoint of an indiscernible. Or, that which forces a veracity, according to the suspense of a truth.

b. Since the situation to-come is obtained via supplementation (a truth, which was a represented but non-presented indiscernible excrecence, comes to pass in presentation), all the multiples of the fundamental situation are also presented in the new situation. They cannot disappear on the basis of the new situation being new. If they disappear, it is according to the ancient situation. I was, I must admit, a little misguided in *Théorie du sujet* concerning the theme of destruction. I still maintained, back then, the idea of an essential link between destruction and novelty. Empirically, novelty (for example, political novelty) is accompanied by destruction. But it must be clear that this accompaniment is not linked to intrinsic novelty; on the contrary, the latter is always a supplementation by a truth. *Destruction is the ancient effect of the new supplementation amidst the ancient*. Destruction can

definitely be known: the encyclopaedia of the initial situation is sufficient. A destruction is not true: it is knowledgeable. Killing somebody is always a matter of the (ancient) state of things: it cannot be a prerequisite for novelty. A generic procedure circumscribes a part which is indiscernible, or subtracted from knowledge, and it is solely in a fusion with the encyclopaedia that it would believe itself authorized to reflect this operation as one of non-being. If indiscernibility and power of death are confused, then there has been a failure to maintain the process of truth. The autonomy of the generic procedure excludes any thinking in terms of a 'balance of power' or 'power struggles'. A 'balance of power' is a judgement of the encyclopaedia. What authorizes the subject is the indiscernible, the generic, whose supplementary arrival signs the global effect of an event. There is no link between deciding the undecidable and suppressing a presentation.

Thought in its novelty, the situation to-come presents everything that the current situation presents, but in addition, it presents a truth. By consequence, it presents innumerable new multiples.

What can happen, however, is the *disqualification* of a term. It is not impossible—given that the being of each term is safe—that certain statements are veridical in the new situation such as 'the first are last', or 'this theorem, previously considered important, is now no more than a simple case', or 'the theme will no longer be the organising element of musical discourse'. The reason is that the encyclopaedia itself is not invariable. In particular (as ontology establishes, cf. Meditation 36), quantitative evaluations and hierarchies may be upset in the new situation. What comes into play here is the interference between the generic procedure and the encyclopaedic determinants from which it is subtracted. Statements which determine this or that term, which arrange it within a hierarchy and name its place, are vulnerable to modification. We will distinguish, moreover, between 'absolute' statements which cannot be displaced by a generic procedure, and statements which, due to their attachment to artificial and hierarchical distinctions and their ties to the instability of the quantitative, can be forced in the sense of a disqualification. At base, the manifest contradictions of the encyclopaedia are not inalterable. What becomes apparent is that in truth these placements and differentiations did not have a legitimate grounding in the being of the situation.

A subject is thus also that which measures the possible disqualification of a presented multiple. And this is very reasonable, because the generic or one-truth, being an indiscernible part, is subtracted from the determinants of knowledge, and it is especially rebellious with regard to the most

artificial qualifications. The generic is *equalization*, and every subject, ultimately, is ordained to equality.

c. A final remark: if a presentation's qualification in the new situation is linked to an inexistence, then this presentation was already qualified thus in the ancient situation. This is what I term *the principle of inexistents*. I said that a truth, as new or supplementary, does not suppress anything. If a qualification is negative, it is because it is reported that such a multiple does not exist in the new situation. For example, if, in the new situation, the statements 'to be unsurpassable in its genre' or 'to be absolutely singular' are veridical—their essence being that no term is presented which 'surpasses' the first, or is identical to the second—then the inexistence of such terms must already have been revealed in the initial situation, since supplementation by a truth cannot proceed from a destruction. In other words, *inexistence is retroactive*. If I remark it in the situation to-come, this is because it *already measured* in the first situation.

The positive version of the principle of inexistents runs as follows: a subject can bring to bear a disqualification, but never a de-singularization. What is singular in truth was such in the situation.

A subject is that which, finite instance of a truth, discerned realization of an indiscernible, forces decision, disqualifies the unequal, and saves the singular. By these three operations, whose rarity alone obsesses us, the event comes into being, whose insistence it had supplemented.