

ALAIN BADIOU
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Alain Badiou is one of the only philosophers on the contemporary European scene to affirm that the Heideggerian and Derridean critique of Western metaphysics has not dealt the death blow to philosophy as a whole. Rather than accepting the view that the philosophical project has come to a definitive close in the twentieth century, he sets himself the task of defining the *conditions* and aims of a philosophy that is not simply reduced either to its own history from the pre-Socratics to the present (that is, the view that philosophy is nothing more than the history of philosophy) or to a "rigorous" theoretical approach to *other* disciplines such as art, poetry, science, and psychoanalysis. Philosophy, according to Badiou, has its own proper field and conditions and is anything but dead.

Nevertheless, Badiou, like other contemporary philosophers, agrees that the philosophical project needs to be radically reconceptualized. The historical abuses of philosophical "enthusiasm" - or better fanaticism - whether in the form of twentieth-century Nazism or Plato's *Laws*, do not effectively refute, morally prohibit, or rule out the pretension to be the locus of absolute truth. Truth, in Badiou's view, is essentially an empty category; there are truths, local truths, and such truths are produced by procedures specific to certain fields: art, science, politics, and love. These latter, which might be referred to as the four major discourses Badiou recognizes as capable of producing truths, serve as the conditions of philosophy - they precondition the existence of philosophical activity as such, generating the truths which philosophy examines. Philosophy's task is not to generate truths, but rather to maintain the distinction between these local truths and Truth as such. The philosophical project is thus "subtractive" - it always maintains the concept of Truth at one remove from any and all local truths generated by the different truth-producing discourses. It has a certain "sobering" effect on such discourses, a restricting or limiting power over them.

While essentially critical in nature - engaged in examining the status of the truths generated by the procedures at work in these different discourses - philosophy is not required to abandon theory construction. It constructs a *site* in which the truths generated by these discourses can be "com-possible," that is, true together, simultaneously true, all true in the same historical era.

As such, philosophy is *one* discourse among others, not *the* final or

UMBR(a)

meta-discourse which provides the Truth about the various truths.

Badiou is one of the foremost philosophical writers today on recent developments in mathematics, and has published a number of extremely rigorous papers on the finite and infinite, set-theory, transcendental numbers, etc. (most notably in his magnum opus, *L'être et l'événement* [Being and the Event]). In one of his more recent works, *Conditions*, he provides a beautifully lucid account of the political and philosophical underpinnings of his work on modern mathematics.

Hegel marks, according to Badiou, a romantic, historicist turn in Western thought away from the mathematical concept of the infinite, Hegel seeing the latter as "interesting" but fundamentally unsubstantiated compared to the "properly philosophical" view that man's existence is essentially finite. Whereas Plato views mathematics as establishing a realm of discourse which has no need to resort to myth or any other discourse to found its conclusions - which thus breaks with mythopoetic discourse and can serve as the foundation or precondition of another discourse (philosophy or dialectics) with its own grammar and methods - Hegel opposes philosophy and mathematics, invalidates mathematical notions of infinity, and rather than effecting an *Aufhebung* (sublation), returns to a *pre*-Platonic view whereby a certain myth (of man's finitude) rules philosophical "reason."

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This romanticism can be seen, according to Badiou, in both the Heideggerian project and the "postmodern" project, both of which refuse the notion of the infinite nature of every human situation, subjecting infinities to the horizons of the "human." The lack of serious attention devoted to mathematics - whether by Carnap, Heidegger, or Derrida - is indicative of a *philosophical tendency which is ultimately conservative and romantic in content*, Badiou argues, and which leads directly to the view that philosophy has reached its end. Badiou proposes that we rethink the very notion of endpoint and limit using modern developments in mathematics, a project which reestablishes mathematics as a condition of philosophy and allows us to think beyond the latter's supposed end.

The importance of Badiou's insight here goes far beyond the "simple" conditioning of philosophy upon mathematics. For what he refers to as romanticism is essentially defined by what he terms the "regime of the One," that is, the regime or rule of a discourse of totalization. As anti-totalizing as certain modern discourses may claim to be, they too succumb, Badiou sustains, to a Parmenidean view of the whole, "counted as One," complete with *notions of limits which predate modern mathematics*. Badiou's emphasis on the modern concept of multiple infinities, of infinities of infinities, subverts traditional views of limits and horizons, and moves in a radically non-logocentric direction. Badiou, in a sense, moves from the post-modern to the post-finite, from the end of philosophy to the beginning of philosophical multiplicity: towards the liberation of philosophy from the regime of the finite.