

The principle and beginning ... of beings is the limitless ... where beings have their beginning, therein also have their end according to necessity; for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the arrangement of time.

[The limitless is] immortal [...] and imperishable.'

ἀρχὴ ... τῶν ὄντων τὸ ἄπειρον ... ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὕσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεῶν· διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν.

Ἀθάνατον [...] καὶ ἀνώλεθρον.

[Fragments of Anaximander]

The idea of the infinite is, perhaps, the oldest philosophical concept in the Western tradition, dating back to the earliest fragment of Anaximander. In the *Physics*, Aristotle credits Anaximander as the first to name the infinite as the material cause of all things and cites him as asserting that “the first element of things was the Infinite.” What is absolutely spine-tingling about this ascription of generative power to the idea of infinity is the deduction following it: since the other ‘elements’ oppose and balance one another, none of them can equal or surpass the infinite. Thus infinity is both the material cause of all things as well as their ultimate being, since all the other elements which exist are finite, deriving their existence from infinity. And, since it is always within the ‘domain’ (as it were) of the infinite that “things take their rise” and “pass away once more, as is ordained,” these finite creatures, derivative of the infinite but separated from it by their antagonism for one another, must “make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice according to the appointed time.”

From the very beginning of what we think of as philosophy, the infinite has been tied not only to that which floods and exceeds the bounds of all creation, both temporally and materially, but to a fundamental conception of justice and ethical principle. In the idea of the infinite the ethical relation is already asserted. The infinite is not just an illustration of the ethical relation, or the other way around; nor is it a mere similarity in ontological or metaphysical structure which is being played upon; the very transcendence embodied and overflowed in the idea of infinity already ordains respect, as from some ontological height so awesome as so to metaphysically sublime, demands that justice be “paid” or en-acted, not in some afterlife, but “according to necessity,” *within* time itself. That is, justice is not some transcendent figure by which a cosmic judgment is placed; justice must be rendered by “reparation and satisfaction” towards one another within time, “according to the appointed time.” There is no truth without justice and there is no justice without the ethical relation. That is to say that love demands justice, there can be no conception of true justice without invoking an infinite love—that is, there is a radical pre-ontological priority of the relationship to the human face which is the origin of social justice.

The infinite is the meaning of an unencompassable height, radically transcending us, calling our freedom into question by its monstrous presence. This calling into question by that which is limitless, by that which is beyond-being, imperishable and immortal— is already ethics, for justice

is demanded by love, the relation to the other is already transfigured by an ethical relation, by the infinity which the coming of the other into my realm actualizes. The idea of infinity is a sun truly too bright for philosophy to bear without squinting at the truth. Nietzsche's reproach of the philosophers, that they approach it all too directly, is an appreciation of the enigma and wonder of infinity, as well as its (inevitable, we're human, right?) erotic dimension, as Nietzsche puts it: "Truth is like a woman." In other words, philosophers confound themselves with the paradoxes of infinity, whereas there is a completely rational integration with a properly conceived religious perspective. This "trick" is simply an appreciation of the out-of-bounds surplus which the idea of infinity embodies: transcendence, right? In other words, we are situated asymmetrically relative to an Otherness which precedes and supercedes us ontologically and metaphysically; the only possible relation is one of submission, i.e., ethics, being a host, welcoming the other, etc. In sociality we are rewarded amply for such a "subjection" to the beyond. We can see the infinite in language. In short, there is a completely valid perspective which integrates (post)-religion and philosophy while retaining political and moral integrity: in other words, a proper conception of the infinite and of the other, that we are always situated in relation to an-other, and that this being another-to-myself constitutes awareness itself, and moreover, is already an ethical relation.

We are close to Hegel when he tells us there could be religion without philosophy, but no philosophy without religion; the idea of infinity is not just the pure formal representation of 'endlessness,' but is a thought which overflows itself, already springs into action as of its own accord. Even the idea of infinity radically phenomenologically exceeds ourselves: and isn't this Descartes' discovery, where he discovers himself and the absolute simultaneously, as it were? But the temporality is actually reversed, for only once the absolutely infinite is glimpsed, must he squint and dilute the purity of the discovery by conceptualizing perfection or purity itself, purged of the violence of the sacred; he discovered the pinpoint self, the Cartesian subject.

Badiou rediscovers the infinite multiplicity at the core of being one-self, and concludes that the One is not (i.e., God is dead); in ontology, the radical encounter with the idea of the infinite is completely purged of the violence of the sacred. However, to reinstitute it, we don't need recourse to religious faith per se; we need to embark upon a re-understanding of religion, as (after Marx, of course) Badiou himself knows, having written a book about St Paul, not to mention he sometimes calls his project a "laicization" of the infinite, which implies an atheist re-interpretation of religious values. Indeed, he has been preceded on this point by Emmanuel Levinas, who also speaks of a "desacralization" of the world, so that ethics could truly take place (i.e., without the totalitarian structures which currently mediate our relation to the other.)

A proper re-understanding of religion would recognize its function politically and psychologically. Such a revaluation would necessarily involve a reorganization of almost all the academic discourses, a radical re-territorialization of arbitrarily bifurcated and sutured disciplines (ways-of-speaking and ways-of-being.) Honestly, it is about time for another great revolution in even the major categories of human understanding and the way we organize reality. The time is ripe for a concise answer to our epochs' "life persistent questions," some kind of post-religious ethical value-system/life-style which happens to incorporate a convincing rational explanation for our presence and meaning in the universe.

I wonder....

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