

Badiou, Alain. *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism*. Trans. Ray Brassier. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

Badiou starts off his book with an interesting definition of the fable:

A 'fable' is that part of a narrative that, so far as we are concerned, fails to touch on any Real, unless it be by virtue of that invisible and indirectly accessible residue sticking to every obvious imaginary (4).

Thus Badiou asserts that Paul reduces the Christian narrative to the singular element of fabulation, "with the strength of one who knows that in holding fast to this point as real, one is unburdened of all the imaginary that surrounds it" (4-5).

This seems like a good way for Badiou to preclude any question of the supposed myths surrounding Christianity. Badiou is atheist, but in his reading of Paul he strictly excludes this from affecting his interpretation. In fact, one could say he suspends or brackets off this part of his perspective in order to forestall any skepticism that might encounter Paul along the way of his enunciation of the Christ event.

Even so, the resurrection of the crucified is, "for us," rigorously impossible to believe (5). Since Paul's entire discourse centers around belief (faith or *pistis*), Badiou does not pursue any questions of the veridicality of the resurrection, except to deny it outright.

Thus, a common question to ask Badiou, which has already been addressed by Žižek and Hallward, is: how can Paul be such an exemplary type for the subject of a truth event if atheism is one of your axioms? Badiou might possibly reply that, since philosophy and anti-philosophy must be kept in close proximity of each other, then atheism, in its search for the specific nature of the truth event, should also keep theological assertions nearby for the necessary differences to be accentuated through their juxtaposition. This is the only way for philosophy (and materialist atheism) to guard itself against its sophistic, but necessary double.

One might well question Badiou's opposition philosopher/anti-philosopher and ask some questions about his Platonism. For example, the word rhetoric is coined by Plato in order to distinguish it from true philosophical activity. My point is that: is the gesture of accusing another thinker of sophism axiomatically provable? Or, to put it another way, how does Badiou explicate what it means to be sophistic? This is another question that will hopefully lead to further discussion.

Having begun with those preliminary remarks, Paul is of interest because of three unusual aspects of his relationship to the Christ event:

1. his historical site (or, the distance of Paul spatially and temporally in relation to Christ's crucifixion, etc.)
2. his role as Church founder (one of the main reasons being that his writings are the earliest dated in the NT)

3. his centering of the Christian narrative on its fabulous element (this resonates with Badiou's notion of the declaration of the event)

Paul develops the fabulous element that relates the "proposition concerning the subject to the interrogation concerning the law" (5). He continues:

Let us say that. For Paul, it is a matter of investigating which law is capable of structuring a subject devoid of all identity and suspended to an event whose only 'proof' lies precisely in its having been declared by a subject (5.)

This reminds me of Foucault's *Fearless Speech* with one exception: it focuses superbly on the question of universality, or ununiversalism, as Badiou's subtitle puts it. What I mean is that, for the time being, any thought of *parrhesia* with its context of the enunciation of the truth—being self-founded via the authority of the enunciator—is not at play here, yet. What Badiou proposes through Paul is the empty subject, devoid of any particularity. Therefore, if the event is universal, then it necessarily must have universal effects. Another lengthy quote states:

Paul's unprecedented gesture consists in subtracting truth from the communitarian grasp, be it that of a people, a city, an empire, a territory, or a social class (5).

In declaring the Christ event to be true, he does not restrict it to Jews or Greeks, but declares it universally for all. This will be brought up later. Another question to ask, which needs more formation, is this: considering Badiou's aversion to debate and discussion (against Habermas and Arendt), how is it possible for him to ground enunciation—declaration of the event as such—if it is to be withdrawn from the people. In other words, how is such a declaration mediated and disseminated—if this is possible—and what happens to truth in all of its divergent stages of mediation? What is the role of rumor and gossip to the veridical representation of fidelity to an event? Can fidelity be represented?

No answers yet. But Badiou acknowledges that Paul's project attempts to "sharply separate each truth procedure from the cultural 'historicity' wherein opinion presumes to dissolve it: such is the operation in which Paul is our guide" (6).

Thus the next target on Badiou's list is hermeneutics/analytic philosophy (6). Following from his distinction between the human animal/Immortal, Badiou claims:

All access to the universal, which neither tolerates assignments to the particular, nor maintains any direct relation with the status—whether it be that of dominator or victim [contra Hegel]—of the *sites* from which its proposition emerges, collapses when confronted with this intersection between culturalist ideology and the 'victimist' conception of man (6).

This echoes some of the statements that Badiou formulates in his *Ethics*. While we will return to this book later, we can say up front that the distinction between master and slave, this particular Hegelian dialectic, is nullified for Paul's purpose. To foreshadow a theme that will become clearer later in the text on Paul, we should acknowledge that this clearly means that any

discourse of the Master is always already equalized or rendered equal (in-different) from any new discourse, particularly that of the Son. So the Name-of-the-Father is opposed here, and no particular authority can claim access to the universal without explicitly linking itself with Mastery. Paul's discourse is opposed to the Greek and Judaic forms of Mastery.

The second point to elucidate before we continue with the text is the opposition that develops in Badiou's *Ethics*. If the interests of human beings are considered from the standpoint of man's victimization and oppression, along with the viewpoint that man's finitude inherently binds him towards-death, then we deny the Immortal dimension of humanity. Despite his atheistic bent, Badiou reintroduces a transcendental element into his scheme of immanent ontology. Thus, by laicizing or secularizing the concept of man's Immortality, he essentially wishes to de-sublimate a specifically divine or transcendental attribute of mankind, i.e. immortal qualities as such. Before leaving this topic, one thing to question is: if Kant showed that no existence is specifically *necessary a priori* because existence itself is not a predicate of Being or beings. Therefore, if existence is not a predicate, then can immortality be a predicate of the Immortal? Is immortality existence, or indeed, how are the two asymmetric?

Against cultural relativism, whose reign of tolerating differences is represented by capital's false universality. So, awkwardly, Badiou begins with Paul's declaration and immediately brings up an opposition to "the absolute sovereignty of capital's empty universality" (7). This is Badiou's Marxist ties asserting the importance of Paul for contemporary history. Linked with capital's sovereignty is the "mediocre political appendage" of democracy (7). So, in a tangential way, Badiou and Nietzsche have ties in their skepticism toward and sometimes vehement denunciation of democracy as a true political process or thought, including all of Badiou's appropriation of 'eternal return' in his works (cf. "Philosophy and Politics." *Infinite Thought*).

-Taylor Adkins