

The Triumph of Finitude After Hegel and the (Re)turn¹ of a Philosophy of the Infinite through Badiou

*Philosophy . . . starts off from life, . . . and ends up at life.
What does the epoch in which we live give us? What is this epoch?
What things have value therein? What things don't? Philosophy proposes
a sorting procedure amid the confusion of experience, from which
it draws an orientation. This elevation of confusion to orientation is the
philosophical operation par excellence and its specific didactics.*

- Alain Badiou²

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Abstract

In his first *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Alain Badiou alludes to the idea of sutures occurring between philosophy and the more dominant disciplines like science, politics, art, and psychoanalysis after Hegel. This phenomenon is inextricably linked to discourses about the end of philosophy and the linguistic turn in hermeneutic, analytic, and

¹ The rendering of the term return as (re)turn is adopted from Norman Madarasz's rendering of it in Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999).

² Alain Badiou with Fabien Tarby, *Philosophy and the Event*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 129.

postmodern philosophies. In Badiou's analysis one finds that in so far as these traditions are concerned, systematic philosophy is henceforth impossible.

In this work, I take Badiou's said allusion seriously and argue that after totalitarianism and the two world wars, an antipathy towards systematic philosophy has led to what I call the triumph of finitude after Hegel in which the philosophical orientation not only shifted from truth to meaning, but also from the metaphysical to the finite.

However, in the eyes of Badiou, a philosophy of finitude is unable to confront the challenges to thinking posed by the contemporary world. He thus proposes the return to a philosophy of truth. Taking note of this, I argue that Badiou seeks to replicate in philosophy what Hegel did in metaphysics after Kant.

Key terms *Alain Badiou, (re)turn of philosophy, contemporary philosophy, end of philosophy, linguistic turn*

“[S]omething did happen to (or in) philosophy after Hegel.”³ This declaration is what Alenka Zupančič draws from Badiou's statement in his first *Manifesto for Philosophy* about the rise of antiphilosophical discourses and the promotion of other fields of study at the expense of philosophy, since Hegel.⁴ In the said work Badiou diagnoses philosophy after Hegel as having undergone a

³ Alenka Zupančič, “The Fifth Condition,” *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), 191.

⁴ Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 64.

series of sutures with other fields of study, namely: science, political thought, art, and psychoanalysis, in the sense that it sought to be grafted onto these established activities.⁵ In his eyes this phenomenon gave the impression that “philosophy no longer knows whether it has a suitable place.”⁶ That the dominant philosophical traditions themselves declared the end of philosophy made the situation worse. The core thesis of this trend was that metaphysics, considered since Aristotle as the heart of philosophizing, was no longer possible. A truth-oriented philosophy had already been replaced by a meaning-oriented philosophy.⁷ This would later on be called the linguistic turn.

Meanwhile, twenty years later, Badiou saw that the problem of the end of philosophy had been transformed into what he called the “artificial existence” of philosophy in the form of “moralizing preaching.”⁸ He remarked that “if, twenty years ago, philosophy, forced into ruinous sutures with its conditions of truth, found itself asphyxiated by inexistence, philosophy today, chained to conservative morality finds itself prostituted by a vacuous over-

⁵ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 113. Another marked tendency in philosophy was a preoccupation with its history—a tendency in philosophy, which Martin Heidegger in his work, *What is Called Thinking?*, had noted and criticized: “There is, of course, serious preoccupation everywhere with philosophy and its problems. The learned world is expending commendable efforts in the investigation of the history of philosophy. These tasks are useful and worthy, and only the best talents are good enough for them, especially when they present to us models of great thinking. But even if we have devoted many years to the intensive study of the treatises and writings of the great thinkers, that fact is still no guarantee that we ourselves are thinking, or even are ready to learn thinking. On the contrary—preoccupation with philosophy more than anything else may give us stubborn illusion that we are thinking just because we are incessantly ‘philosophizing.’” Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Perennial, 2004), 5.

⁶ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 113.

⁷ Alain Badiou, “Philosophy and Desire,” in *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London: Continuum, 2003), 34.

⁸ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Louise Burchill (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), 68.

existence.”⁹ This was the problem around which his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* revolved. Linking this to the first *Manifesto*, something definitely changed in philosophy but something was also retained. From antiphilosophical declarations, there was a shift to over-attributions of moral pronouncements to philosophy.¹⁰ But while this was the case, the theme of the incommensurability of differences remained. However, this time, incommensurability was no longer only at the level of language and epistemology, but also at the level of culture and ethics. In this sense, I argue that for Badiou, philosophy after Hegel not only underwent a linguistic turn, but more appropriately, an ethico-linguistic turn.

In Zupančič’s analysis, the after-Hegel effect in philosophy is something that Badiou does not directly address but only hints at. In this essay, I take this hint of Badiou seriously. Here, I argue that Hegel plays a major role in the radical change in the trajectory taken by philosophy in the period after him. Apart from what Badiou called the shift from a truth-oriented to a meaning-oriented philosophy, I claim that it was also a shift of focus from transcendence to finitude. The goal of this essay is to unpack the conceptual interrelations involved in this change in the transcendental framework of philosophy and to find the place of Hegel in this transformation. It is the shift to finitude reflected in the ethico-linguistic turn which I use as the anchoring point to

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Here, Badiou refers in particular to the ‘new philosophers (*nouveaux philosophes*)’ for whom “only the most elementary form of moralizing preaching qualifies any longer as ‘philosophy.’” Badiou further writes that during this time, “[a]ll situations are assessed in terms of the moral conduct of their actors, with the number of deaths being the sole yardstick for political endeavours and the fight against the ‘bad guys’ the unique ‘Good’ possible to be put forward. . . . It is only possible to exist as a ‘philosopher’ then, . . . in so far as one uncritically adopts—in the name of ‘democratic’ dogma the refrain of human rights and our societies’ various customs in respect of women, types of punishment or the protection of nature.” Ibid., 68–69.

interpret Badiou's call for the (re)turn of philosophy. Hence, this work is also an attempt to provide a reading of Badiou's metaphilosophy through the following steps.

First, I discuss the four sutures of philosophy, followed by the discourse about the end of philosophy and the linguistic turn. Succeeding this discussion I interpret the linguistic turn as the entry point for the ethical shift in philosophy, which I place under the heading, "the triumph of finitude" in philosophy. Then I lay out the limits of a philosophy centered on finitude using Badiou's analysis of contemporary philosophy's inability to confront the challenges of today's world. Finally against this backdrop, I situate Badiou's call for the (re)turn of philosophy as a potent idea capable of pushing forward the frontiers of philosophizing at this point in time. Pushing this argument further, I argue that Badiou does the same brand of philosophy that Hegel did in metaphysics after Kant: to put an end to the discourse on finitude and reconstruct the concept of truth according to the necessities of time.

The Four Sutures of Philosophy

In his first *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou argues that there occurred four sutures of philosophy during the nineteenth and twentieth century. First, there was a double suture to politics and science that happened within the period between G. W. F. Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche. Karl Marx, in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, staunchly attacked philosophy: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world . . . the point is to change it."¹¹ Against philosophy's interpretive approach, the declaration of Marx called

¹¹ Karl Marx, Thesis 11, "Theses on Feuerbach" in *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998).

for the world's revolutionary transformation. For Badiou, the interpretive approach signaled not only a political suture but also a scientific one since proponents of revolutionary politics wanted to raise politics to the rank of science, in the sense of aiming for a scientific theory of history, where the laws of dialectics could be equally applicable to Nature and History.¹² One of the most known of such efforts was Joseph Stalin's version of dialectical materialism.¹³ The special attention given to the relationship between science and the sociopolitical system was in fact a distinct characteristic of Stalin's revolutionary government.¹⁴ Peter Hallward, in his *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, recounts how Badiou in his later years realized that the root cause of the collapse of the communist project was the very superimposition of subjective will to the objectivity and necessity of history.¹⁵ This means that at the heart of the communist movements of the nineteenth to twentieth century lay the failure to recognize the absolute gap between the subjectivity of the political project and the objective development of history. In other words, the very inability of communist projects to affirm the constitutive character of risk and the contingency of their movement led to their failure.

Meanwhile, Badiou identifies the positivist movement in philosophy as the predominant version of the scientific suture, which could be traced back to the inauguration of positive philosophy by Auguste Comte. Under this scheme the development

¹² Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 63.

¹³ On this account, Badiou argues that it was a materialism that was otherwise still capable of totalizing science as it was in the cases wherein Stalin meddled with the legislation of genetics, linguistics, and relativist physics. *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴ For further information on this, see Alexei B. Kojevnikov's *Stalin's Great Science: The Times and Adventure of Soviet Physicists (History of Modern Physical Sciences)* (London: Imperial College Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 40.

of human intelligence is manifested in the transition from the theological paradigm to the positivist or scientific paradigm intermediated by the metaphysical paradigm. Such transition is, for Comte, the law of human development. Against this backdrop, Comte asserts the impossibility of any phenomenon not to enter naturally into one of the five great categories of science: astronomical, physical, physiological, chemical, and social. The basic structure of all phenomena for him must be understood as necessarily “subjected to invariable natural Laws,”¹⁶ which include those of the human mind. For Comte, positive philosophy is “the only rational means of exhibiting the logical laws of the human mind.”¹⁷ Comte’s positive philosophy later on gave birth to positivism as a method in sociology and philosophy. Today, the lasting and more pronounced effect of this is found in Anglo-Saxon philosophy with Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell as the crowned pioneers of what is now referred to as Logical Positivism.¹⁸ Under this framework, the ‘sense’ and ‘truth’ of statements are assessed according to their logical correctness and referential content.¹⁹ This thought tradition emphatically dismisses the preoccupations of

¹⁶ Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, vol. 1, trans. Harriet Martineau (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35. In this regard, it will not therefore be surprising why Comte considers the very possibility of Social Science. Regardless of the difficulty entailed in the task, a science of social phenomenon is possible, and in relation to this, there is but the necessity of positive philosophy and positive politics to work together to bring about a utopian society. See Auguste Comte’s *A General View of Positivism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ This is in distinction to the Sociological Positivism of Comte.

¹⁹ Gottlob Frege would for instance refer to “the truth value of a sentence as constituting its reference.” Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Reference,” in *Analytic Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. A.P. Martinich and David Sosa, 2nd ed. (UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 12. Meanwhile, for Bertrand Russell, truth (1) has an opposite, namely falsehood, (2) is a property of beliefs, (3) but it is a property of belief only in virtue of its dependence upon the relation of beliefs to outside things. Russell writes this in his work *The Problems of Philosophy*, chapter XII. Ludwig Wittgenstein would reinforce this by saying: “A proposition can be true or false only in virtue of being a picture of reality” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, prop. 4.06 in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness [London: Routledge Classics, 2001], 27).

traditional philosophy; as the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* would say: “Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical.”²⁰

Meanwhile, the drastic effects of the failure of revolutionary politics on humankind’s idea of social and political movements, and of the possibility of totalizing science and the manipulation of technology in the service of totalitarian state projects, resulted in a vigilant wariness of sorts toward the possibility of another totalitarian regime. The betrayal of the promise of the political and scientific revolution in the wake of the modern and industrial age, by the catastrophic world wars, state totalitarianism, and the destruction and loss of lives that accompanied these developments, gave rise to negative sentiments about the projects of enlightenment. It brought about repulsion toward the projects of modernity itself. This strong aversion to modernity characterizes the two succeeding sutures of philosophy that occurred from Nietzsche onwards: the artistic and the amorous sutures.

In response to Soviet totalitarianism and the “machination”²¹ of life in modern science, Martin Heidegger proposed the recourse to art, more particularly, to poetry. In his posthumously published interview in *Der Spiegel*, he remarked: “Philosophy will not be able to bring about a direct change of the present state of the world . . . the only possibility of salvation left to us is to prepare readiness, through

²⁰ Wittgenstein, prop. 4.003 in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 22.

²¹ Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 3: *The Will to Power as Knowledge and Metaphysics*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 175. In Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*, one sees a radicalization of this idea. Marcuse for instance writes, “the artistic transformation violates the natural object, but the violated is itself oppressive; thus the aesthetic transformation is liberation” (Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* [London: Routledge Classics, 2002], 244).

thinking and poetry” . . . “Philosophy is at an end.”²² For Heidegger, we do not need philosophy; what we need instead is a new thinking. Heidegger saw that the destiny of the metaphysics inaugurated by Plato was to culminate in modern science and technology. The success of metaphysics embodied in the phrase rational man—man going beyond his physical nature through reason²³—could not but manifest in the very existence of science and technology itself:

Philosophy is metaphysics. . . . Metaphysics is Platonism. . . . The development of philosophy into the independent sciences. . . . is the legitimate completion of philosophy. Philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity. . . . The end of philosophy proves to be the triumph of the manipulable arrangement of a scientific-technological world and of the social order proper to this world.”²⁴

Heidegger finds in Plato the beginning of the forgottenness of Being, and the transformation of man’s understanding of his relation with the world or nature as an overcoming, “raising of oneself above

²² Martin Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us: The Spiegel Interview (1966),” trans. William Richardson in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. T. Sheehan (Chicago: Precedent, 1981), 45–67. Available online at <http://www.ditext.com/heidegger/interview.html>.

²³ Heidegger writes: “Man conceived as the rational animal is the physical exceeding the physical”—that is, man raising himself above the animal, the sensual, the physical that he is, through reason,—in short: in the nature of man as the rational animal, there is the passing from the physical to the non-physical, the supra-physical: thus man himself is the metaphysical” (Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 58).

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings from Being and Time to the Task of Thinking* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 432–35.

the physical.”²⁵ Taking into account the loss of meaning in the technological age, the forgetfulness of a reflection directed toward what is most worthy of questioning, Heidegger takes the cue from Nietzsche’s reversal of Platonism and proposed the destruction of the history of metaphysics. Under the banner of overcoming metaphysics as science, poetry would be the inaugurator of access to the originary unconcealedness of Being.²⁶ In this sense the artistic suture in philosophy could be said to be the “anti-positivist and anti-Marxist effort to put philosophy in the hands of the poem.”²⁷

Meanwhile, many philosophers saw that Heidegger’s ontology was not without the metaphysical residues he battled against. I single out Emmanuel Levinas as one of the first philosophers to point out the limits of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. Central to this critique was Levinas’s raising anew the Heideggerian formulation of the question of metaphysics: Why is there Being rather than Nothing? For Levinas, the first and final question must instead be: What justifies our right to be? Levinas writes,

This is the question of the meaning of Being: not the ontology of the understanding of that extraordinary verb, but the ethics of its justice. The question *par excellence* or the question of philosophy. Not ‘Why

²⁵ Heidegger further writes, “Nowhere are we confronted by a thinking that thinks the truth of Being itself and therewith thinks truth itself as Being. This is not thought even where pre-Platonic thinking, as the beginning of Western thinking, prepares for the unfolding of metaphysics in Plato and Aristotle. . . . The history of Being begins, and indeed necessarily, *with the forgetting of Being*” (Martin Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt [New York: Harper Perennial, 1977], 108–9).

²⁶ This idea is most pronounced in the later works of Heidegger. See Martin Heidegger’s *Nietzsche Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and Metaphysics*; also *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 1975).

²⁷ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 66.

Being rather than Nothing?²⁷, but how Being justifies itself.²⁸

This question marks the ethical turn in ontology. What interrupts the reduction of “relations between beings to structures of being,” the ascent from “the sensation of the particular to knowledge of the universal,” from “metaphysics to ontology,” from “the *existentiell* to the existential,” is the Other in his alterity and infinity.²⁹ Our relation with the Other—which is immediately a relation of responsibility, an ethical relation—is the impasse of the concept: the Other simply resists representation.³⁰ In our contemporary world this resistance is manifested in ethical pronouncements about the respect of differences, multiculturalism, and the politics of tolerance, which readily find translation in the core values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, viz., freedom, equality, and brotherhood.³¹ The ethical turn could be read in this sense as the promotion of the love of humanity founded on the principle of alterity and infinity. This is the amorous suture of philosophy.³²

²⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” in *The Levinas Reader* ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 86.

²⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?,” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 5–6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is available online at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

³² The singling out of Levinas supplements Badiou’s allusion to Levinas when talking about the amorous suture in philosophy in his first Manifesto. In reading Badiou, I recognized that in instances where he talks about the ethics of differences and ethics of compassion a he highlights the idea of the widespread promotion for the ‘love for humanity.’ This perspective is for Badiou, an ideology and should be contrasted with his idea of love as a truth process. He directly criticizes the former in his interview article, “On Evil: An Interview with Alain Badiou, by Christopher Cox and Molly Whalen,” *Cabinet Magazine Online*, Issue 5, Winter 2001/02, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/on-evil/>; and book *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2000).

In a similar vein, Theodor Adorno's negative dialectics could be interpreted as advancing an ethics of compassion.³³ In his critique of metaphysics, Adorno highlights the ethical responsibility imposed upon thinking by the horror that was Auschwitz.³⁴ Adorno emphatically reminds us:

Metaphysics has been changed in its innermost motifs. I could, if you like, give this a moral-philosophical twist and say that Hitler has placed a new imperative on us: that, quite simply, Auschwitz should not be repeated and that nothing like it should ever exist again.³⁵

Philosophy, for it to be possible again, would need to accept its guilt.³⁶ This suggestion translates into a call for awareness, a call for a response to the threats and events simultaneously occurring around the human being, which consists in a reorientation of thinking to the materiality of life. The body is not a problem that must be overcome through the metaphysical ascent of human reason, as Plato and Aristotle put it. Rather, the body is the true foundation of being. Ethics is not the quest for the transcendent idea. Ethics is the recognition of bodily existence itself. This proposition is what I would refer to as the Adornoian response to Levinas's question of what justifies Being, the assertion that:

³³ The explicit mention of this interpretation could be found in Alain Badiou's article, "Affirmative Dialectics: from Logic to Anthropology," *The International Journal of Badiou Studies* 2, no.1 (2013): 1–13.

³⁴ See Paolo Bolaños's "Philosophy from the Standpoint of Damaged Life: Adorno on the Ethical Character of Thinking," *Budhi* 16, no.3 (2012): 78–93.

³⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 116. See also Mark Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

the true basis of morality is to be found in bodily feeling, in identification with the unbearable pain. . . . The metaphysical principle of the injunction that ‘Thou shalt not inflict pain’. . . . finds its justification only in the recourse to material reality, to corporeal, physical reality, and not to its opposite pole, the pure idea.³⁷

Emphasized earlier was that Hegel marks a very distinct point in the history of Western philosophy insofar as the paradigmatic shift from the philosophical assumption of totality and oneness to the stress upon non-identity and multiplicity is concerned. It is precisely this shift that we see in Adorno. Despite the preeminence of negation and difference in dialectics, Adorno still finds in Hegel a faith in totality and the one. Against a unified-totality-driven dialectic then, Adorno proposes a negative dialectics: the philosophical method and paradigm that values precisely the nonidentity of material existence. Adorno asserts: “It lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total. This is its form of hope.”³⁸

This articulation of the sutures of philosophy finally leads us to Zupančič’s analysis of the fate that Hegel’s philosophy suffered in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophies. For Zupančič, the critique directed at Hegel narrows down to the impression that

³⁷ Ibid., 116–17. Adorno further writes: “By claiming to be an all-embracing system, philosophy runs the risk of ending in a series of crazy delusions. Immediately it abandons the claim to omniscience, however, and gives up the idea of crystallizing all truth within itself, it denies the whole weight of its own traditions. This is the price it must pay in exchanging its delusions for reality, in purging itself of crazy notions and linking reality with reason. It then loses its character of a self-sufficing and cogent body of justificatory proofs. Its place in society—which it would do well to promote and not to deny—corresponds to its own desperate need to define what, today, is defined by the hackneyed term of the absurd.” Theodor Adorno, *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O’Connor (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 43.

³⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1999), 406.

in Hegel's speculative edifice, it seems that "everything adds up: there are no loose ends, no scars (the wounds of the spirit heal without scars), no cracks."³⁹ To support her point she echoes Freud's fondness of quoting the last verses of a Heine poem that mocks the philosophical project for a unified theory of reality:

Life and the world's too fragmented for me!
 A German professor can give me the key.
 He puts life in order with skill magisterial,
 Builds a rational system for better or worse;
 With nightcap and dressing-gown scraps for material
 He chinks up the holes in the universe.⁴⁰

Freud describes philosophy as a form of psychosis, an *Unglauben*, which the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan interprets as "not wanting to know anything about the spot where truth is in question."⁴¹ Lacan shares Freud's critical attitude toward philosophy. He directs his criticism to ontology and describes it as intellectually bankrupt in its claim to being capable of providing a "theory of everything."⁴² It was, in fact, Lacan who revived the very term 'antiphilosophy,'⁴³ declaring outright: "*I rise up in revolt*, so to speak, against philosophy. What is sure is that it is something finite and done with."⁴⁴ His

³⁹ Zupančič, "The Fifth Condition," 197.

⁴⁰ Cf. Heinrich Heine, "The Homecoming", LVIII, trans. Hal Draper's, *The Complete Poems of Heinrich Heine: A Modern English Version* (Boston: Suhrkamp/Insel, 1982), 99, in Zupančič's "The Fifth Condition," 197.

⁴¹ Cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 63 in Alain Badiou's *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2011), 9.

⁴² Cf. Jacques Lacan, Seminar XIX: ... *oupire*, session of June 21st, 1972; Lacan, Seminar XX: *Encore*, in Adrian Johnston's "This Philosophy Which Is Not One: Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, and Lacanian Antiphilosophy," *S: Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique* 3 (2010): 140.

⁴³ Bruno Bosteels, in his Introduction of Badiou's *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, 6.

⁴⁴ Cf. Jacques Lacan, "Monsieur A," *Ornicar* 21-22 (Summer 1980): 17, in Badiou's *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, 6-7.

antipathy to philosophy is founded on what he recognizes as the inability of philosophy to accept and confront the inconsistency of reality. He writes:

What is the love of truth? It's something that mocks the lack in being of truth. We could call this lack in being something else—the lack of forgetting, which reminds us of its existence in formations of the unconscious. This is nothing of the order of being, of a being that is in any way full.⁴⁵

Just as for Freud, philosophy refuses to see the very questionability of its central concept: truth. In the eyes of Freud and Lacan, philosophy refuses to accept that truth itself consists in contradiction. In reinforcing this, the Lacanian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, also attributes to philosophy the discourse of the ‘master’ who is incapable of confronting the Real.⁴⁶ Philosophy covers up that which resists its grand narrative. It tries to fit the world into its unified system at the expense of the trace, the Other, the body, the unconscious, the Real, the non-identical—the very ground of multiplicity, the embodiment of the constitutive antagonism of reality. Philosophy “chinks up the hole in the universe” because it does not want to see that the hole is in truth what sustains the universe.

Against the backdrop of all these discourses, Badiou recognizes an infallible sign that governs the sutures of philosophy to one or

⁴⁵ Cf. Jacques Lacan, “The Other Side of Psychoanalysis,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 52, in Badiou’s *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy*, 8.

⁴⁶ For further information on the ‘master’s discourse’, see Slavoj Žižek’s *Plague of Fantasies*, *Looking Awry*, *For They Know Not What They Do*, and *Sublime Object of Ideology*.

two more dominant thought traditions. This sign is: “the monotonous repetition of the statement that the ‘systematic form’ of philosophy is henceforth impossible.”⁴⁷ At the core of the alternatives proposed by the philosophies thus enumerated, there seems to be a suspicion that the most that philosophy can do is delegate its task to the more established academic fields like science, politics, art, or psychoanalysis. Philosophy during this period, the period after Hegel, in the assessment of Badiou, “no longer knows whether it has a suitable place.”⁴⁸

The End of Philosophy and the Linguistic Turn

The suturing of philosophy, however, is just one aspect of the problem confronting philosophy. It is not simply a question of being sutured to one or two or three of the more dominant academic practices or disciplines today. But, more alarmingly, as a theoretical consequence of the discourses about the inability of philosophy to provide a solution to what it problematizes—namely the question of truth and the possibility of inscribing change in the world⁴⁹—philosophy itself, in the twentieth century, already seemed to believe its own death and impossibility. This sentiment is something that Badiou recognizes in the three dominant philosophical orientations of twentieth-century philosophy: the hermeneutic, the analytic, and the postmodern, which he discusses in his article “Desire of Philosophy and the Contemporary World.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁹ These two goals of philosophy, is something that could be recognized in philosophy ever since it began, but became most pronounced in Plato’s philosophy.

⁵⁰ Available online at <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/the-desire-for-philosophy/>. This article was later on published as “Philosophy and Desire,” which served as the first section of his book *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (London: Continuum, 2003).

Hermeneutic philosophy, which gained wide recognition in Germany, Badiou notes, is basically concerned with the interpretation of the meaning of Being and our being-in-the-world.⁵¹ It focuses on the reconfiguration of the concept of understanding that leans more on the side of practical knowledge in contrast to representational knowledge. The most famous names associated with this orientation are Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Analytic philosophy meanwhile, having gone beyond its Austrian origin, now dominates English and American academic philosophy. Badiou remarks that this current is mainly focused on the strict demarcation between meaningful and meaningless statements.⁵² It aims to cure us of illusions and aberrations in language and bring about that which is universally understandable to us.⁵³ Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Carnap are only two of the most well-known names from this tradition.

Finally, the third orientation is postmodern philosophy, which is mostly identified with its goal of deconstructing the ideas of totality and essence in speculative philosophy, the emancipatory projects of modernity, and the great narratives of history.⁵⁴ This orientation asserts the irreconcilable plurality of registers and diversity of languages, practices, and worldviews. This orientation is most pronounced in France. Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard are two of the most famous thinkers that belong to this philosophical lineage.

⁵¹ Badiou, "Philosophy and Desire," 32.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

Badiou claims that, despite their differences in principle and theoretical framework, these three philosophical orientations in mainstream philosophical discourse still share something similar among them.⁵⁵ The first one is the rather morose sentiment about philosophy's death. All three signal the end of classical metaphysics. For Heidegger, philosophy since Plato, had been a long tradition of the forgottenness of the proper question that must be addressed: the question what does it mean to be? As has been pointed out earlier, in Heidegger's diagnosis, technology is the ultimate expression of the destiny of metaphysics, the rational man overcoming the physical world. A similar sentiment could be drawn from Carnap. For him the impossibility of metaphysics lies in the fact that metaphysical utterances are devoid of meaning and cannot give assent to thought.⁵⁶ Wittgenstein would echo this sentiment by saying that "what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence."⁵⁷ Finally, we hear the pronouncement of Lyotard that postmodern society is characterized by the incredulity towards metanarratives and signals the end of grand narratives.⁵⁸ These lines of thinking suggest that if anything must be done, it is that philosophy must be purified of its metaphysical residues, which is tantamount to saying: philosophy must abandon itself.⁵⁹ Thus, in

⁵⁵ Ibid., 33–34.

⁵⁶ Carnap writes in the introduction of his essay, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis": "In the domain of *metaphysics*, including all philosophy of value and normative theory, logical analysis yields the negative result *that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless*" (Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language," in *Erkenntnis* [1932]: 60–81).

⁵⁷ Proposition 7 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 89.

⁵⁸ See Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (England: Manchester University Press, 1984).

⁵⁹ Coming from the articulation of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, I argue that the attempt to overcome metaphysics is the very attempt of philosophy to overcome itself.

Badiou's diagnosis, philosophy according to the three orientations "has entered the perhaps interminable epoch of its closure."⁶⁰

The second theme that the three orientations share in common is language being the horizon of their discourse. If Western philosophies of the ancient period revolved around the concept of Being in relation to the cosmos, if medieval philosophy cogitated on the philosophical ground of the idea of God and the rest of knowledge that ensues from it, and if modern philosophizing zeroed in on the liberation and progress of the human subject by way of human reason, contemporary philosophy is caught within the transcendental frame of language.

Hermeneutic philosophy, in privileging interpretation over representation, asserts: "Language is the house of Being."⁶¹ Analytic philosophy, in its preoccupation with the rules and laws governing verifiable propositions, declares: "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world."⁶² Postmodern philosophy, in deconstructing assumptions of unity in order to highlight the incommensurability of differences, argues: "In a language, in the *system* of language, there are only differences."⁶³

Language, in contemporary philosophical thought, has become "the great historical transcendental of our times."⁶⁴ Recognizing this, Badiou claims that "language became the crucial site of thought because it is where the question of meaning is at stake."⁶⁵ For him,

⁶⁰ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 113.

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings from Being and Time and The Task of Thinking* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 217.

⁶² Proposition 5.6 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 68.

⁶³ Jacques Derrida, "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 11.

⁶⁴ Badiou, "Philosophy and Desire," 34.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

the linguistic turn meant the shift of focus from metaphysical truth to the multiplicity of meaning embedded in language. Later on, Badiou would criticize this and highlight how it falls into “linguistic relativism.”

The Triumph of Finitude

From the previous discussions, it could be surmised that the after-Hegel effect in philosophy constitutes three phenomena, namely, the suturing of philosophy to other disciplines, the end of philosophy, and the linguistic turn. Within these three, one recognizable idea that unifies them is the commitment to finitude. Terms like the *differend* of Lyotard, the ‘real’ of Lacan, the ‘non-identical’ of Adorno, the ‘unconscious’ of Freud, the ‘infinity’ and ‘alterity’ of Levinas, ‘facticity’ in Heidegger, Wittgenstein’s reference to the mystical, etc., all refer to the fact of non-totality of human knowledge and systems. In this essay, I situate this discourse against the backdrop of Kant and Hegel. The antitotalitarian tendency in philosophy and the consequent focus on limits, I argue, is consistent with the Kantian revolution in metaphysics.

When Kant inquired into the possibility of metaphysics itself in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, the focus on the ‘objects’ of metaphysical inquiry shifted to the examination of the “capacity or incapacity of reason to make judgments about these objects.”⁶⁶ The central question of this critique was “whether metaphysics as a science is

⁶⁶ Kant continues: “This science, ... has to deal not with the objects of reason, the variety of which is infinite, but only with reason itself, and with problems which arise entirely from within itself, imposed not by the nature of things distinct from it, but by its own nature” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Marcus Weigelt, based on the translation of Max Müller [London: Penguin Books, 2007], 51).

possible.”⁶⁷ In line with this, he crowned Reason as the “legitimate court of appeal.”⁶⁸ The conclusive aspect of this critico-epistemological turn was that in metaphysics, the proper field of “what can be known” had been delimited to the realm of appearances (phenomena) and barred from the realm of things in themselves (noumena). Kant argued that “we cannot have knowledge of any object as a thing in itself, but only insofar as it is an object of sensible intuition, that is, an appearance.”⁶⁹ Knowledge, as Kant understood it, is only possible with the union of understanding and experience; that pure reason has access only to the realm of phenomena. He summarizes this point in that famous phrase: “Thoughts without content are empty. Intuitions without concepts are blind.”⁷⁰ Understanding cannot intuit. And senses cannot think. Therefore, “only from their union can knowledge arise.”⁷¹ This became the central tenet of philosophizing. The finitude of human reason, reason within limits, had become the banner of Western philosophy.

Kant’s critical philosophy won wide recognition and celebration in philosophy. It was not until Hegel that philosophizing took another interesting turn. The significant role of Hegel lies in the attempt to reinstitute a metaphysics that is capable of articulating a truth about the whole of reality—a reality that is in no way split between the noumenal and the phenomenal—and has as its object,

⁶⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁹ He further writes, “And from this it does indeed follow that all speculative knowledge of reason is limited to mere objects of experience; but it should be carefully borne in mind that we must at least be able to think the same objects as things in themselves, though we cannot know them. For otherwise we should arrive at the absurd conclusion that there would be an appearance without something that appears.” *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

Truth “in that supreme sense in which God and God only is the Truth.”⁷²

In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* Hegel writes:

A main line of argument in the Critical Philosophy bids us pause before proceeding to inquire into God or into the true being of things, and tells us first of all to examine the faculty of cognition and see whether it is equal to such an effort. We ought, says Kant, to become acquainted with the instrument, before we undertake the work for which it is to be employed; for if the instrument be insufficient, all our trouble will be spent in vain.⁷³

In this work, Hegel emphasizes Kant’s breakthrough, but also the confusion involved in his project. Hegel highlighted that critical philosophy assumed what it ventured to inquire—“an examination of knowledge that can only be carried out by what is already an act of knowledge.”⁷⁴ Hegel writes: “Unless we wish to be deceived by words, it is easy to see what this amounts to. . . . To examine this so-called instrument is the same thing as to know it. But to seek to know before we know is absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim.”⁷⁵ In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel accuses Kant of “the fear of the object.”⁷⁶ In shifting the focus of metaphysical thought from ‘its objects’ to ‘its limits’ and positing the inaccessibility of the *noumenon*,

⁷² G. W. F. Hegel, “What Is Philosophy,” in *Hegel: The Essential Writings*, ed. Frederick G. Weiss (New York: Harper Perennial, 1974), 19.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanity Books, 1999), 51.

Kant, in Badiou's words, "created an even more radical indeterminacy than the one he denounced in classical metaphysics."⁷⁷ In stressing the finitude of the subject, Kant ended up "increasing the space of indeterminacy,"⁷⁸ arguing in the end for the impossibility of the access of knowledge to the in-itself of reality.

Against the backdrop of the overly cautious Kantian project, Hegel once more asserted the rational treatment of the existence of the infinite.⁷⁹ In this treatment, for Hegel, lay the strength of classical metaphysics. Ancient metaphysics, he writes, has

. . . . a higher conception of thinking than is current today. . . . This metaphysics believed that thinking (and its determinations) is not anything alien to the object, but rather is its essential nature, . . . and that thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things form one and the same content.⁸⁰

It must be noted though that Hegel was not proposing a return to classical metaphysics *per se*. He was only after reviving the faith that classical metaphysics had in the possibility of thinking and knowing what Kant was so afraid of: the noumenon. Indeed, Hegel unabashedly asserted how classical metaphysics had been "extirpated root and branch"⁸¹ after the Kantian critique of metaphysics. Hegel pursued the logic of the Kantian revolution but he was able to see beyond Kant. Hegel proclaimed that the core

⁷⁷ Alain Badiou, "Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics," *Pli Warwick Journal of Philosophy* No. 10 (2000), 188. This refers to the three major concepts of God, Freedom, and Immortality.

⁷⁸ Ibid. What Badiou refers to as the indeterminate here is the *noumena* of Kant. Everything undetermined was thrown into the space of the thing-in-itself.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 184.

⁸⁰ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 45.

⁸¹ Ibid., 25.

consequence of the critique is the affirmation of the possibility of knowledge, but without the remainder of the thing-in-itself—the affirmation of the possibility of knowing “absolutely” with nothing left behind. Hegel declared absolute knowing under the banner of dialectics.

In explaining the revolution of Hegel, Badiou writes,

Dialectical argument, as a courageous argument, . . . attempts to put an end at the same time both to the objectivity of the undetermined in classical metaphysics and to the subjective finitude which, in critical archi-metaphysics, stands alone before the undetermined absolute. Essentially, dialectical argument poses that a category of thought is only such on condition that it exhausts without remainder that which is thought in thought through this category. Or, to quote Hegel, if the category remains a form of absolute thought, there cannot also be the surplus of “a *thing-in-itself*, something alien and external to thought.” When all is said and done, argument, to quote Hegel again: “demands that the forms of pure thought be considered not with any such limitation and reference but as they are in their own proper character, as logic, as pure reason.”⁸²

For Hegel, what guarantees knowledge as absolute knowing is basically that thought, perseveres to “work out the solution to its contradictions” even in its “conscious loss of its native rest and

⁸² Badiou, “Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics,” 188. The quotations of Hegel were lifted by Badiou in the *Science of Logic*, 51 and 62 respectively.

independence.”⁸³ On Badiou’s interpretation, this means “Not only, and contrary to what Hamlet declares, is there nothing in the world which exceeds our philosophical capacity, but there is nothing in our philosophical capacity which could not come to be in the reality of the world.”⁸⁴ Being absolutely exhausts itself in thought.

This had radical consequences to Western philosophizing. The confidence in being able to articulate reality in its entirety—having the “absoluteness of the concept and the creative freedom of negation”⁸⁵ as its justification—became the central target of the political, positivist, psychoanalytic, and aesthetic critiques of philosophy that ensued after Hegel. The declaration of the end of metaphysics itself coincided with these critiques of philosophy. In the eyes of Wittgenstein, Carnap, Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida, and Lyotard, Hegel’s attempt to revive the rational-systematic discourse of the infinite proved to be thoroughly ludicrous. After what totalitarianism brought to the consciousness of humankind, any philosophical system that placed itself in the service of totality, the transcendent, or the metaphysical was abandoned.

Since then, philosophy has become preoccupied with language and the finitude of the understanding. Metaphysics is seen to be impossible because something always slips from cognition, because something unavoidably resists representation and symbolization. Formalization always comes up against an impasse. The name for this resistance is the trace, the Other, the *differend*, the nonidentical, the mystical, or the real. That language is the lawful space of thought is drawn from the claim that thought only happens in and through

⁸³ Hegel, “What Is Philosophy,” 29.

⁸⁴ Badiou, “Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics,” 189.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

language.⁸⁶ But as such, language is incapable of articulating the fullness of reality. Thought, as being possible only within the great transcendental condition of language, is always limited only to that which “can be said,” “to the world as it is,” and thus, to the world as constituted by differences—differences that make totality or the philosophical “system” itself an impossibility.

This was the landscape that gave birth to Badiou’s first *Manifesto for Philosophy* and the monumental work *Being and Event*. As I have pointed out, twenty years later, philosophy was confronted by the phenomenon of its over existence in the form of widespread pronouncements about morality and ethics. In his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, Badiou argues that after the linguistic turn, an ethical shift followed. I have referred to this double shift earlier as the ethico-linguistic turn. Under the ethico-linguistic turn, the primacy given to finitude still holds; its main imperative is the nontotalization of the Other. For this reason I am still linking the ethical turn to the after-Hegel effect in philosophy. It is still consistent with a philosophy of finitude. In his *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* Badiou writes:

A Manifesto always comprises an ‘it is time to say’ that blurs any distinction between what it says and when it says it. What authorizes me, then, to judge that a Manifesto for philosophy is on the agenda, and a second Manifesto at that? What is thinking in our times?⁸⁷

Since the ‘new philosophers’ and the collapse of socialist states, only the most elementary form of moralizing

⁸⁶ This idea is basically what characterizes the linguistic turn in hermeneutic philosophy that boils down to the claim of Johann Georg Hamann. For further reading, see Cristina Lafont’s *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*, trans. Jose Medina (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999).

⁸⁷ Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 1.

preaching qualifies any longer as ‘philosophy.’ All situations are assessed in terms of the moral conduct of their actors, with the number of deaths being the sole yardstick for political endeavors and the fight against the ‘bad guys’ the unique ‘Good’ possible to be put forward.⁸⁸

Badiou recognized that after the failure of twentieth-century political revolutions, “communitarian passions have expanded to fill the void left by the collapse of any viable universalist political project.”⁸⁹ The consequence was a “post-totalitarian ‘repentance’ and liberal respect for human rights.”⁹⁰ It resulted in a strong opposition against anything that violates what is referred to as our most inalienable rights, viz., our “rights not to be offended or mistreated with respect to one’s life (the horrors of murder and execution), one’s body (the horrors of torture, cruelty, and famine), or one’s cultural identity (the horrors of the humiliation of women, of minorities, etc.).”⁹¹ It turned out that contemporary philosophy was not only a battle against the totalitarianism of metaphysics, but also a battle against totalitarian politics.

Henceforth, philosophical inquiry resolved to own up to the finitude of its pronouncements. What exist now are plurality and perspectivism. At the level of ontology and metaphysics, contemporary philosophy argues that something resists total conception or total exhaustion in language. At the level of epistemology, the mind has a limit, it is incapable of accessing that

⁸⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁹ Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 25.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁹¹ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2000), 9.

which resists it. At the level of ethics, the resistant principle is the Other (Levinas), the body (Adorno), or the subject (Lacan) itself. The shift in philosophy consisted not only in the shift from truth to meaning, but also in the shift from metaphysics to ethics; the core of these shifts is the turning from the metaphysical to the finite.

The Challenges of the Contemporary World and the (Re)turn of Philosophy

After the ethico-linguistic turn and the triumph of finitude, philosophy has taken the task of contemplating the possibility of the good life that revolves around the core value of recognizing and respecting diversity in the social world.⁹² However, in the assessment of Badiou, a philosophy centered on finitude is incapable of confronting the challenges and demands of the world. Badiou asserts that contemporary philosophy is incapable of affirming the four desires of philosophy: revolt, logic, universality, and risk.⁹³

According to Badiou, these four-dimensional desires characterize philosophy itself. Philosophy asserts itself through these desires, without these desires, philosophy would not be philosophy at all. Within the dimension of revolt, Badiou argues that “there is no philosophy without the discontent of thinking in its confrontation

⁹² This is reflected even in the recent message of the UNESCO Director-General last November 20, 2014, in celebration of World Philosophy Day: “World Philosophy Day provides an opportunity to underline once more the importance of critical thinking to understanding changes in contemporary society. Change forces us to find new ways of living together and building fairer societies, but it can also erode trust and spark tension. In these circumstances, philosophy is an invaluable ally that draws on reflexive reasoning and engagement in dialogue, to open our minds to a wide variety of opinions and views. Such a shift of focus is crucial in a world of rising diversity. This is both the foundation on which tolerance and peace rest and a means of releasing the creative energy that drives societies forward, while respecting human rights.” The rest of her message is available at UN Website, “Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of World Philosophy Day, 20 November 2014, www.un.org/en/events/philosophyday/messages.shtml.

⁹³ Badiou, “Philosophy and Desire,” 35.

with the world as it is.”⁹⁴ At the same time, philosophy is also logic, because it never gives up its “belief in the power of argument and reason.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, philosophy always delivers itself in a universal address to humanity insofar as “it supposes that all humans think.”⁹⁶ Finally, this universal address in the form of a logical revolt is always a risk: “thinking” for Badiou, “is always a decision which supports independent points of view.”⁹⁷

Badiou recognizes that contemporary philosophy cannot pursue or sustain these four desires. For him contemporary philosophizing is too compatible with the world as it is. He cites four principal characteristics of today’s world, which, in his diagnosis, are what obstruct the very desires of philosophy.

The first of these is today’s world being ruled by merchandise. Philosophy’s desire for revolt is obstructed by the standardization and commercialization of the stakes of freedom.⁹⁸ The world declares itself free, but the free use of this freedom has already been coded into the system of monetary and product circulation. At the end of the day, no action can really be done if one is penniless. It has become an accepted fact of life that you would be lying to yourself if you were to say that you can actually do something without money. Even in the academe, projects, researches, and conferences are all dependent on the availability of funding.⁹⁹ Money is human agency’s gate pass to the free market.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹⁹ As Joachim Jung quotes Martha Nussbaum: “We are portrayed as both lazy and obscure: when we are not simply playing truant from meaningful activity, we are producing works of interest to nobody but one another, and in most cases not even to one another. Academic journals are portrayed as relatively worthless depositories for the uninspired products of the tenure struggle, the intellectual life as a mechanized life in which the grand old humanistic ideas no longer have any validity. To support such irresponsible unenlightening characters is said to be a waste of public

Next to the reign of merchandise is the reign of communication, which challenges the desire of philosophy for logic. For Badiou, the phenomenon of mass communication promotes incoherence and illogicism. It presents the world as a world of disconnected images and a spectacle devoid of memory, as new images and remarks are continuously produced, negating the very images and remarks that have just been shown and said.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, the world for Badiou has been fragmented by the specialization of skills and functions.¹⁰² This for him poses a threat to philosophy's desire for universality. It is becoming more and more difficult to think and come up with a solution, in a universal sense, to the problems we are faced with locally or globally, as diversity and divisions proliferate. In matters of radical cultural differences, it almost seems as if there were no common grounds to which we could appeal when dealing, for instance, with religious fundamentalists on one side, and liberal democracy on the other.

Finally, in Badiou's eyes, the world is obsessed with security. Everything is being calculated and subjected to statistics. No one is willing to take risky decisions and risky commitments anymore, or

and private funding. In our own days, the threat we all face is the termination of funding, which means the loss of a future for many of our students. Joachim Jung, "The Future of Philosophy," *Contemporary Philosophy*, <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Cont/ContJung.htm>. The papers indexed in this site were those delivered in the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, in Boston, Massachusetts from 10 to 15 August 1998.

¹⁰⁰ In an article on business that I have read, money is presented as our times' "great liberator." It says there that money can let you "purchase financial peace of mind." Mandi Woodruff, "21 Ways Rich People Think Differently Than Average People," *RealSuccess.Net* sourced from www.businessinsider.com (2014), <http://www.realsuccess.net/21-ways-rich-people-think-differently-than-average-people/>.

¹⁰¹ Badiou, "Philosophy and Desire," 30. This is very much felt in certain forms of journalism in the Philippines where national issues are foreshadowed by news about actors and actresses, as if trying to mitigate the pain drawn from witnessing the brute facts of existence (e.g., that people would rather be entertained than feel the weight of the reality that somewhere in the country people are starving, and that rape, abuse, murder, theft, corruption, violence are undoing the very morals and claims for rationality upon which our sense of civic society rests).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 30–31.

to submit one's existence to the perils of chance.¹⁰³ It could no longer be denied how more and more books about predictive analysis referring to success rates for certain courses of actions are being published today. Even love is subjected to calculation as dating sites, where people could check grounds for compatibility and likeability beforehand, are becoming widespread—a promotion of love without the fall. Polls have taken over the 'voice of the people.' And with this, people are increasingly becoming fearful and ill-equipped to risk the right response when faced with events and circumstances that evade these calculations.

With these four characteristics of the contemporary world, the desires of philosophy are obstructed at all fronts. Badiou notes that it is precisely because of this that the (re)turn of philosophy is needed. This call for the (re)turn of philosophy could be understood on three fronts: the metaphysical, the epistemological, and the ethical.

At the level of metaphysics, if what qualifies the end of metaphysics as legitimate is its inability to account for the impossibility of 'the excess' to be inscribed in a systematic theory, Badiou in a Hegelian spirit, counters the Lacanian claim that "the real is the impasse of formalization" by stating that "formalization is the impasse of the real."¹⁰⁴ In embodying the power of metaphysics to determine the indeterminable, Badiou is positive as regards the possibility of metaphysics becoming a science that does away with the Kantian fear of the object. The undetermined infinite, for Badiou, can be inscribed in theory as had been made possible in mathematics, particularly in set theory. This claim is the centrifugal

¹⁰³ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁴ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (New York: Continuum, 2009), 23.

thesis that organizes Badiou's monumental work *Being and Event*. What philosophy needs, for Badiou, is to reconstruct an ontology that can really account for the character of reality as 'pure multiplicity.' This is something that Badiou recognizes as one of the great revelations of capitalism, "the pure multiple became the ground of presentation that denounces every effect of One"¹⁰⁵: the replacement of the authority of One, with the authority of the multiple. It could be said, that Badiou here is asserting the power and flexibility of rational discourse in reconstructing itself as it confronts the truths of contemporary time. Furthermore, Badiou sees the impossibility of totality as a wake-up call for ontology's transformation rather than its dismissal.

It is this reconstruction of ontology which anchors Badiou's next steps for the (re)turn of philosophy. The reconstruction of ontology is not simply to configure into theory the infinite or the indeterminable, but it is only needed in order to make possible the thinking of the central category that for him remains to be the object of philosophizing since Plato and Aristotle: the category of truth. For Badiou, it is this central concept which is capable of overcoming the limitations presented by the epistemological-ethical discourse on finitude and differences. Insofar as ontology is concerned with the science of pure multiplicity, Badiou opens *Being and Event* with the claim that the true philosophical question now is the possibility of a universal and singular truth that would itself transcend finitude and diversity. This is Badiou's philosophical project. To reinstitute the possibility of truth occurring in the world otherwise governed by differences. For Badiou, it does not require so much thinking to assert that there are differences among us. He

¹⁰⁵ See Peter Hallward's discussion of this idea of Badiou in his *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 9.

remarks that there should be no reason to “respect or vilipend”¹⁰⁶ differences in the first place. That our life as human animals consists of particularities is the law of things.¹⁰⁷ “Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is.*”¹⁰⁸ What calls for a more difficult thinking is the idea of the same: the thought of what could be universal that is capable of transcending our differences because what it inscribes is something valid for all thinking.

This is Badiou’s response to the linguistic and ethical shifts in philosophy. As regards the discourse on language in epistemology, Badiou follows the lead of Plato in the *Cratylus* that “philosophers do not take as point of departure words, but things.”¹⁰⁹ He writes:

If philosophy is essentially a meditation on language, it will not succeed in removing the obstacle that the specialization and fragmentation of the world opposes to universality. . . . If the category of truth is ignored, if we never confront anything but the polyvalence of meaning, then philosophy will never assume the challenge that is put to it by a world subordinated to the merchandising of money and information. . . . We are subjected to the media's inconsistency of images and commentaries. What can be opposed to that? I do not think that anything can be opposed to it except the patient search for at least one truth, without which the essential illogicism of media communication will impose what we might call its temporal carnival. . . .

¹⁰⁶ Alain Badiou, “Behind the Scarfed Law, There is Fear,” in *IslamOnline.net* (3 March 2004), <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/behind-the-scarfed-law-there-is-fear/>.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ Badiou, “Philosophy and Desire,” 37.

Philosophy requires that we throw the dice against the obsession for security, that we interrupt the calculus of life determined by this obsession. . . . I believe it is vain to imagine that, in the absence of a principle of truth, one can oppose to the calculus of life an existential gamble, which will give rise to something that can be called a liberty.¹¹⁰

Badiou forwards an understanding of truth as essentially disruptive of common opinion and knowledge. Truth for him is that which “punches a hole in knowledges.”¹¹¹ For Badiou, it is the revival of the concept of truth which is capable of embodying the four desires of philosophy for universality, revolt, logic, and risk. It is under this banner that he argues for the necessity of philosophy in today’s world. The contemporary situation of humanity’s obsession with security discourages risk and incapacitates man from being open and equipped with the courage to face events that escape his calculations. At the same time, the reign of mass communication and “the most highly regarded freedom of today: the freedom of opinion,”¹¹² both surrender thought to the realm of opinion and simply sustain incoherence. Furthermore, within the great spectacle of merchandise, humanity is reduced to the capitalist anthropology that we are self-interested animals who only need to be served with ever new products. Finally, the moral injunction of the tolerance of differences which is now turning into a multiculturalist ideology sustains fragmentation and steps back from the challenge of finding what might be considered universal or transversal that is valid for all

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 35–37.

¹¹¹ Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, 70.

¹¹² Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, 15.

thinking.¹¹³ Whether it is in the realm of art, politics, science, or love, the question of race, gender, religion, class, or age, for Badiou, should not be a problem, they do not even count. One can love, solve a scientific problem, create a work of art, fight for justice, while eating what one is used to eat, wearing anything one wants or traditionally wears, praying to a deity or God or not praying at all. Within these human endeavors in the fields of art, science, politics, and love, the domain of particularity is halted. It is these kinds of human undertaking which basically transcend the brute fact of finitude, mortality, and diversity, and are capable of embodying the true life.

Badiou saw the critical status of philosophy in relation to the contemporary world and thus called for its (re)turn:

That it be today possible, and so necessary to desuture philosophy and proclaim its renaissance; that, following the long suspension entailed by the successive and ruinous privileges of the scientific condition (positivisms), the political condition (marxisms), and the poetic condition (from Nietzsche till today), the imperative is once again to configure the four conditions starting from an entirely recast doctrine of truth; that, at odds with the repeated announcements of the ‘end of philosophy,’ the ‘end of metaphysics,’ the ‘crisis of reason,’ the ‘deconstruction of the subject,’ the task is to *resume* the thread of modern reason, to take *one more step* in the lineage of the ‘Cartesian meditation. . . .’¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Badiou, “Philosophy and Desire,” 31.

¹¹⁴ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 79.

There is no doubt that philosophy is ill . . . It is suffering in my opinion from linguistic relativism, from being entangled in the problematic of the disparity of meanings, and it is also suffering from historical pessimism including about itself. My hypothesis is that although philosophy is ill, it is less ill than it thinks it is, less ill than it says it is. . . . And I think that it is so, because the world itself, despite all the negative characteristics and pressures it exerts on the desire of philosophy, the world, that is the people who live in it and think in it, this world is asking something of philosophy.¹¹⁵

The call for the (re)turn of philosophy for Badiou finds its motivation in the fact that for him, the world requires it. He cites four specific reasons for this. The first is that, “we now know that there is no chance that the human sciences will replace philosophy.”¹¹⁶ The human sciences, he says, have “become the home of the statistical sciences.”¹¹⁷ The numerical information that they provide is incapable of accounting what truly matters for the singularity of human beings. The second reason is that “we are witnessing the ruin of the great collective enterprises that we once imagined carried within themselves the seeds of emancipation and truth.”¹¹⁸ The failure of emancipatory politics gave birth to an extreme level of calculative attitude that gradually killed the spirit of revolt and as a consequence, the very possibility of political

¹¹⁵ Alain Badiou, “Philosophy and Desire,” 39.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

intervention. The third reason is the rise of “contemporary figures of irrational archaism”¹¹⁹ among certain cultural, religious, national, or racial groups. Such reactive communitarian passions, Badiou argues, must be confronted by a pronouncement about contemporary rationality, a way of doing things that does not give up on the power of being able to think things through regardless of how difficult it is to come up with an agreeable course of action. And fourth, the need for philosophy arises from the need to have a framework open to the possibility of singular and disruptive events.

Badiou argues that our current ethical ideology is incapable of fortifying in us in our confrontation with the world. It does not help us confront the question of how we are to act in the wake of events that disrupt the very coordinates of the world that we ‘know’. It is because of this incapability that Badiou advances a new understanding of ethics. It is an ethics that does not give up on the desires of revolt, logic, universality, and risk, which are capable of encouraging us to inscribe change and a point of interruption to the world as it is. It is an ethics that bridges the gap between “the world as it is,” and, “the world as we desire it to be.”¹²⁰

In that case, I would argue that philosophy giving up on itself is tantamount to giving up on the world itself. For Badiou, the role of philosophy is to make “a diagnosis of the epoch,” “a construction, on the basis of this contemporary proposition, of a concept of truth,” and, “an existential experience relative to the true life.”¹²¹ Its principal value is to give insight on the Good life, that is, on how

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹²⁰ Alain Badiou, “What Is Philosophy?,” European Graduate School Video Lectures (2010), Part I: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6FQkTajudY>; Part II: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBtZpn_d_TQ.

¹²¹ Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event*, 130.

one is to have “an intense and dignified life that cannot be reduced to strict animal parameters?”¹²²

Conclusion

In the last analysis, Badiou’s response to the antiphilosophical discourses that ensued during the contemporary period is that, simply, in the very critique that they launch against philosophy, they assert the relevance of philosophy. In his appreciation of Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan, the three major antiphilosophers of the contemporary period, Badiou remarks:

There is in anti-philosophy a movement of putting itself to death, or of silencing itself, so that something imperative may be bequeathed to philosophy. Anti-philosophy is always what, at its very extremes, states the new duty of philosophy, or its new possibility in the figure of a new duty. I think of Nietzsche’s madness, of Wittgenstein’s strange labyrinth, of Lacan’s final muteness. In all three cases anti-philosophy takes the form of a legacy. It bequeathes something beyond itself to the very thing that it is fighting against. Philosophy is always the heir to anti-philosophy.¹²³

In Badiou’s perspective, philosophy must learn from antiphilosophy instead of giving up on itself. Antiphilosophy for Badiou is there to wake up philosophy from its stagnation. As a thought of its time, philosophizing must always see its relation to

¹²² Ibid., 129.

¹²³ Alain Badiou, “Who is Nietzsche?” in *Pli Warwick Journal of Philosophy* No. 11 (2001), 10. Further discussions of antiphilosophy could also be found in Badiou’s *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy* (London: Verso, 2011).

the contemporary world and look for the possibility of providing a way through what it declares to be the impasses of thinking and action.

In an article entitled, “Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics,” Badiou asserts that “philosophy does not dedicate itself to the care of the limits, but to the care of the unlimited.”¹²⁴ This philosophical disposition was something already very apparent in Plato’s philosophy, and which Hegel himself did not fail to recognize. After Kant, Hegel tried to bring this attitude back to philosophy. And like Plato, Hegel rallied behind the idea of truth. Looking at the development philosophy underwent after Hegel and after the world wars, Badiou could not accept that the period for a philosophy oriented toward truth and the infinite had ended. If contemporary philosophizing is a philosophizing meant to be cured of Platonism and Hegelianism, that is, to be cured of truth¹²⁵, it is precisely against this claim that philosophy for Badiou, must reassert itself. For him, the world never really offers anything other than the temptation to yield.¹²⁶ Hallward argues, “philosophy, when and where it exists, is as a matter of course in essential conflict with the world.”¹²⁷ And for Badiou, there is only one reason for this—that quite simply, “philosophy is in the world only to change it.”¹²⁸

If Hegel saw promise in classical metaphysics and tried to reconstruct it, Badiou saw and did the same. If Hegel wanted to be done with the finitude of human knowledge using the promise of dialectics, Badiou adopts the dialectical method and asserts the need

¹²⁴ Badiou, “Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics,” 185.

¹²⁵ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 100.

¹²⁶ Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 335, cited in Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 25.

¹²⁷ Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 25.

¹²⁸ Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, 335, cited in Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 25.

for and possibility of philosophy once again. Finally, if Hegel wanted to have as its object of inquiry, the concept of truth, Badiou affirms this and reconfigures it according to the demands of the contemporary world. If changing the world is the goal of philosophy, for Badiou, it can only do this through the return of the concept of truth. As with Hegel, truth was never only an epistemological question for Badiou. Whenever he talks about truth Badiou always refers to the true life—the life that since Socrates is supposed to be worth living.

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