WHAT IS THE FORM OF THE DISCOURSE?

What is the problem of which metaphysics is the inquiry? Passing by Heidegger’s imagistic allusions to soil, extrapolated from Descartes’s letter to Picot outlining the arborescence of philosophy (a metaphor Deleuze turned on its side),1 perhaps it was the great rival to Heraclitus, Parmenides,2 who, eschewing organic metaphor altogether, truly expressed it best: the same is to think as to be.3 The gap, indistinction, or indiscernibility between “thought” or thinking and “what is,” by no means necessarily a “separation” to be resolved, is what metaphysics names, and it goes without saying that working out the places and operations implies and entails a lot of toing and froing, of back and forth, of fortida.4

Parmenides’ injunction, or perhaps declaration – it is important to remark the type of his utterance – is then in no way an answer, definitive, or even propositional, for nothing is to be tested or verified as such. Rather it is the task for philosophy to take up, the consequences philosophy draws each and every time it exists. Every time it is made, this declaration marks the recommencement of philosophy, and it provokes, every time, the question: “What is the form of the discourse by which being lets itself be said?” The answer, evident in the developed orientations to it – analytical, phenomenological, existential, formal, etc. – in turn positions being and thought with regard to each other. It decides: what of being can be thought, and thus what (is) not. In other words, it establishes being for thought – whether as potential, limit, chaos, imaginary, whole, indeterminate, inconsistency, and so on. Immediately, we can see that
Parmenides’ declaration – maybe even a declaration of war or πόλεμος contra Heraclitus, the type of declaration the latter would have to respect – separates the thought of being from the imperative of nature, insofar as insisting on the indifference of being and thought is to unify them only in terms of the void – the nothing that is. What makes them indifferent cannot be something or other, some third thing relative to them. There is literally nothing to tell them apart. In other words, it is by no means necessary to the thought of being that being and nature be conflated as φύσις, or in any other fashion, hidden or vital, driven or willed. As such, it becomes possible to say that if being can be thought outside the varieties of adequation, then nature does not exist. Being can be thought not only as not nature per se, but by a form of thought that is absolutely un-natural and absolutely rational – right up to the point of demonstrating as consistent the inconsistency at its own heart. Thus, by existing, this discourse – being the thought of being qua being – refutes natural being by being what it is not. To jump ahead, this means that the thought of being as such can be the thought also of real change: thinking what is in exception to it. Metaphysics is not constrained to be either the impossibility of change, as in Parmenides, or the all of change, as in Heraclitus. Metaphysics is the site of a war on two fronts.

What form of discourse can think being, such that the void of being’s relation to thought is at its core, yet can think the what is-not-being-qua-being as rational for it? For Alain Badiou, following and extending Plato, mathematics alone is capable of such a thinking: it is, he says, the science of being qua being. Mathematics (qua discourse) is ontology. The entirety of Being and Event is the demonstration of the veracity of the consequences of this philosophical decision. Invoking all necessary qualifications and precautions against the over-excitable (both analytic and continental), this has been the most misunderstood decision of Badiou’s philosophy: mathematics thinks or is the discourse of or the science of being qua being.

In the first instance, then, philosophy is divorced from ontology. Extrapolating on his own interrogation of this decision via set theory – which couples to it a theory of the event, the generic form of a truth, and thus its “subject” – Badiou will argue that mathematics has always been ontology. Not that mathematicians are decidedly ontologists, but, given that what they work on is literally nothing, not-being as object, as substance, or as an “empirical given,” it is being itself which they inscribe in the numbers and letters which make up their discourse. Out of the void, then, which, as Badiou establishes, is the “name of being” – the name of what is un-presented in presentation as such, pure multiplicity and not One – ontology constructs an entirely consistent and infinitely extensive system of thought. Thus mathematics thinks of being what of being can be thought. Philosophy, then, as Descartes alluded to, is under conditions; yet it thinks in its own terms, relative to the concepts and categories it renders thinkable, the thought of being as such. This makes of mathematics itself a thought, something philosophy after Plato has always been less
than willing to grant. Even when it has shown mathematics all due respect, philosophy has almost always assumed that it can go one better when it comes to thinking what it is to be. Philosophy has considered its operators conceptually superior to the technical (or aesthetic) specificities of mathematics, even when it is plainly number which is at stake – the one and the many, parts and wholes, the finite and infinite.

If mathematics is integral to philosophy as a condition, just as art, politics, and love are also conditions for Badiou, at the level of what can be thought of being as such, it is also crucial in that it demonstrates that the thought of being is both possible and consistent, thus rational and not indeterminate, senseless, or theological. Mathematics is a discourse which is not reducible to or subsumable within the framework of language: neither the well-made language of logical positivism and its heirs in the analytic tradition, nor the poetic, fragmentary form it takes in post-Heideggerian postmodernisms, nor, finally – though this constitutes an entirely distinct relation in Badiou’s thought – the place assigned to language in psychoanalysis. But let us stop here, as the introduction of mathematics is to get ahead of the game, as it were, given that in the paper whose analysis forms the bulk of this essay, Badiou posits this interruption of metaphysics hitherto only at the end and under the signification of what he calls a Platonic gesture.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF METAPHYSICS

The declaration of Parmenides, under all its possible interpretations, remains the recognizable core of all metaphysics. It is audible for instance in the famous “know thyself,” which for Plato can only be a task: not because being is ineffable, but because it already contains a division, which is to say it insists on a thought of the void as what must be traversed. The knowing of the self is the knowing of the division at the core of thought as the impetus to thought. The problem evoked here is of the in-discriming of inside/outside, finite/infinite, mediation/immediacy, and so on, all relays of the initial decision on being thought. A distinct strategy since Nietzsche, broadly agreed to by a coterie of seemingly diverse and opposed thinkers in the twentieth century, has been to deny the problem as such. For if, as a problem of metaphysics it is “metaphysical,” and if metaphysics is what must end for the thought of being to truly be, then the question, in Wittgenstein’s terms, is outside the sayable as such. The upshot of this strategy is to say that “the same is to think as to be” is itself propositionally unsayable, and so should not be said if one wants to make sense. Even if Heidegger does reopen the question of being qua being as an anti-Platonic gesture, and so in terms of being as being said, he did so under the injunction of language or of the poem. This reopening is, in a certain sense, to comply with Wittgenstein’s injunctions about the coincidence of the limit of thought and world as only thinkable to language. What is without language is nonsense for Wittgenstein, while for Heidegger the poem speaks being since it
is free of what annuls it as such: Plato’s idea, the inaugural and mathematically conditioned gesture of metaphysics.

Hegel already pointed out that those who claim to abandon metaphysics can often be seen to do so on metaphysical grounds. It is always, for them, Hegel says, the question of identity – or of a unity in some way. Today’s version of this identity is surely the market as imagined in the Hayekian sense as at once beyond our reason yet amenable to it in some way – in fact, as that to which human being naturally tend. It is reasonable, the refrain goes, that we do not know what the market knows – such knowledge being virtually absolute and so beyond our capacities. What the market knows and we never can attain, is precisely, the ends of our reason nevertheless. It is our limit and our destiny. Its potential is what we act out, thus making known to us our true nature. This non-knowledge at the heart of our knowledge which is thus the very knowledge of our being, the very thing we cannot know, is a sophistic convenience, which is to say it is an ideology at the level of practice. Ideology should not be understood as a negative term here; it just marks a function. What is negative about ideology is its use as a negative by those who practice it necessarily and deny it actually – in fact, denial and occlusion are the positivist essence of ideology.

For Hayek et al., and as we know there are many in this et al. (known to it and unknown to themselves both) the market is not an ideology and not, thus, a metaphysics. It is supposedly a fact of our existence, and the fact or pragmatics of our existence is to naturally fall short of knowing by nature: thus we cannot know; better we submit to this nature than attempt to scale the mountain of what we are capable. If we reconcile ourselves to this finite framework, empirically attested or, as the self-styled anti-metaphysicians like to say, “evidence-based” (so long as we agree the parameters), what we are capable of will be revealed in good order as in accord with such a nature. But clearly this is the assumption that consists in metaphysics: the assumption of the true nature of our nature or what we might call subject as subjection. It is one option but, as always, relies on a priori conditions off limits to creatures like us. So these conclude with what they contend, and thought (in the sense of an intervention on this construction itself) becomes an annoyance best disavowed, just as Plato’s Socrates was disavowed by the panoply of “patrons of the flux” and thinkers of the state contemporary to him. Thus thought, in the sense that aims at that of which we are capable, must be precisely exceptional to facts of existence, not being some creature of the limit, thus, not being the subject of this constraint regulated by the rule of language, world, sense, nature, or horizon. In other words, thought requires a subject-figure that does not by the necessity of its nature return to the rule.

What, then, does it mean to hold that nature does not exist? If such can be thought, thought that interrupts the adequation between nature and language, Being and beings, then a whole swathe of metaphysical and anti-metaphysical traps might be sprung – given that, on either side, some sort of natural ineffability serves to unify their opposition. Badiou’s ontological
intervention is to show that the rule as such, which is always some assumption of what it is to be – φύσις, market, fact, etc. – posits itself as incomplete, thus leaving open the space precisely for: first, some form of thought that can think incompleteness as such, in other words actual infinity; and second, some subject which is not at all reducible to some rule. Thus something else can be thought. Certainly the theme of the impasse is explored constantly in Plato, and in Plato the geometric paradigm, as the “Platonist” Gregory Vlastos labels it, serves as that which forces the impasse to which all the Athenian language games concede, with great shows of satisfaction. If, on the contrary, this impasse can be thought, we avoid precisely the circularity inherent to classical metaphysics and to its supposed contraries: in this sense both metaphysics and anti-metaphysics succumb to the same circle. It would then be this same/difference, rather than metaphysics as such, that needs to be terminated altogether.

PLATONISM IS AN ANTI-PLATONISM

In his first Manifesto for Philosophy, Alain Badiou announces his project under a double Platonic disposition: as a “Platonic gesture” correlated to a “Platonism of the multiple.” The latter phrase marks the renewed necessity of an ontological project in the wake of and contra Heidegger; the former the formal arrangement for the thinking of truth or truths. Since a truth is what is truly new, this makes truth (once again) “a new word in Europe (and elsewhere).” This double dispensation is necessary, Badiou declares in the Manifesto, if philosophy – a term he happily interchanges with metaphysics – is to “return to itself” and not submit to the incessant calls for its end; that its ends be circumscribed, that it end, or that it has come to its end. Against this tendency toward ends, philosophy, Badiou argues, is possible: “The crux of the matter is to know what the following means: taking one more step. A step within the modern configuration, the one that since Descartes has bound the three nodal concepts of being, truth and the subject to the conditions of philosophy.” In several works Badiou gives shape and form to what such a renewed philosophy must traverse and pass through; it is to this adversary that he gives the catch-all term “anti-Platonism.”

I have explored this self-situation more fully elsewhere, but for a general picture we can adduce: the vitalist (Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze), the analytic (Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap), the Marxist, the existentialist (Kierkegaard, Sartre), the Heideggerian, and that of the “political philosophers” (Arendt and Popper). In Badiou’s words, “ultimately the 20th century reveals a constellation of multiple and heteroclite anti-Platonisms.” Taken together, “their anti-Platonism is incoherent” but what unites them is that each ostensibly accuses Plato of being ignorant of something essential to philosophy and “this something is identified with the real itself” (e.g. change for the vitalists, language for the analytics, concrete social relations for the Marxists, negation


for the existentialists, thought in as much as it is other than understanding for Heidegger, democracy for the political philosophers).\textsuperscript{19}

Badiou identifies this anti-Platonism, such is its ubiquity and extension, as what passes today for Platonism as such – that is it forms the hard-core of what is the received wisdom on Plato. This “Platonism” is then that common figure, montage of opinion, or configuration that circulates from Heidegger to Deleuze, from Nietzsche to Bergson, but also from Marxists to positivists, and which is still used by the counterrevolutionary New Philosophers (Plato as the first of the totalitarian ‘master thinkers’), as well as by neo-Kantian moralists. “Platonism” is the great fallacious construction of modernity and post-modernity alike. It serves as a type of general negative prop: it only exists to legitimate the “new” under the heading of anti-Platonism.\textsuperscript{20}

Badiou elaborates three predominant “philosophical” tendencies derived from this anti-Platonist collective: (1) the hermeneutic tendency, whose central concept is interpretation; (2) the analytic, whose concept is the rule; and (3) the postmodern, concerned with the deconstruction of totalities in favor of the diverse and the multiple. What they have common is a commitment to language, its capacities, rules, and diversity such that language is the “great historical transcendental of our times.”\textsuperscript{21} The obvious consequence of this fundamental accord, for Badiou, is a commitment to the end of metaphysics and thus philosophy since Plato. Plato thus marks the point of an inception that must be reversed. Contemporary “philosophy” or anti-Platonism, he says, effectively “puts the category of truth on trial.”\textsuperscript{22}

Nonetheless, Badiou agrees with two allegedly anti-Platonic claims that arise from the contemporary critiques: Being is indeed essentially multiple;\textsuperscript{23} and Plato does indeed mark a singular and decisive point in the history of thought. Here Heidegger as much as Deleuze is a central figure of reference.\textsuperscript{24} However, in regard to the first point of agreement, to say that being is multiple today is to say, as noted, that it falls under the regime of mathematics qua ontology and not “language.” Badiou’s position is thus to invert this accusation and argue that it is precisely Plato’s conception of what there is that matters, and what there is are truths whose ontological status is at once undecidable and generic and whose presentation is evental, thus exceptional, and subjective.\textsuperscript{25} In regard to the second point, Plato is to be understood as the incitement to thought, through whom thought is given “the means to refer to itself as philosophical” and thus “independently of any total contemplation of the Universe or any intuition of the virtual.”\textsuperscript{26} Plato is decidedly not the moment at which thought turns to despair.\textsuperscript{27} For Badiou, the rejection of the linguistic (re)turn is predicated on the existence of “a regime of the thinkable that is inaccessible to this total jurisdiction of language.”\textsuperscript{28} What is required therefore is a “Platonic gesture” whose condition is a “Platonism of the multiple.”
“METAPHYSICS WITHOUT METAPHYSICS”

In the essay under consideration here, entitled “Metaphysics and the Critique of Metaphysics,” Badiou names this Platonic project, noting the paradoxical form of the utterance, as a “metaphysics without metaphysics”; a metaphysics that in its first indication cleaves itself, as dialectical, from a pre-Kantian “classical metaphysics” and from the post-Kantian (but not simply Kantian) modern negative variant, “archi-metaphysics.” However, this Hegelian dialectical metaphysics must itself give way to the second Platonic gesture, to a mathematical and thus ontological reconsideration of “the links between finitude, infinity, and existence.” This second gesture ensures that being and truth remain thinkable in their division and, moreover, that this division not be characterized or overdetermined by any extrinsic knowledge as to their coupling: not by a theory of correspondence, adequation, transcendence, or language.

As so often in Badiou’s work a negation provides the impetus of interrogation. So he moves from the rejection of anti-Platonism to an analysis of the impossibility of the void as what marks the history of ontology from Aristotle to Heidegger (passing by Spinoza, Leibniz and Hegel, as seen in Being and Event), to disprove the positive assertion of “democratic materialism” that no exception exists to its double remit of bodies and languages. Conversely, we also often see the affirmation of an impossibility, contrary to what particular philosophies conceive to be their rational kernel: in reading Hegel, we find Badiou’s counter-affirmation of the inexistence of the whole; in Deleuze, the counter-affirmation of the impossibility of the eventum tantum (or even the thesis that multiplicity drives the Deleuzian metaphysics); in Aristotle or Spinoza, the counter-affirmation that the void insists for thought.

These interrogations have in common the axiomatic that organizes Badiou’s philosophy: that the One is not, and, if the One is not, then the nothing is. This axiomatic, which contemporary post-Cantorian mathematics provides, is the basis both of a reinterrogation of philosophy tout court, and a point of orientation for the present of philosophy. The critique of prior metaphysics, then, begins in this same way: claims to “the end of metaphysics” organize the entire contemporary system of reference, from Kant to the present. For such post-Kantians, metaphysics is either obsolete or in crisis. That it is dying, or it should die; that it is in crisis, or that it be radically overhauled such that the means of its confinement attest to the rightful antipathy of contemporary “rationality” – much as Guantánamo Bay, in the global sense, or Nauru or Manus Island, in the Australian context, serves the hubris of an empty reason.

The productions of this “opera of the end,” as Badiou calls it, vary. He delineates four “librettos”:

1. Critique. Kant’s critical limitation of the reaches of dogmatic metaphysics (as we shall see, this is the metaphysics which accounts for or even counts the indeterminacy of God in its systematics) as too ambitious
or categorically promiscuous; the intellectual, political and historical exhaustion of what metaphysics was supposed to provide as the virtue of knowledge or its guarantee.

2. **Positivism.** A rational positivism, as “mathematized experimentation” based in the empirical sciences (or in a knowledge of them) substitutes its virtues for the exhausted guarantees of an indeterminable God. Comte, Wittgenstein, and Carnap serve to name the arbiters of this paradigm for Badiou here.

3. **Dialectics.** The dialectical refusal of any metaphysics of the one in the sense of eternal, stable entities supported by “fixed categories through which metaphysics,” as the “mutilation of a complete form of thought,” “allows something like a submission to death to prosper.” Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Lacan name this deposition of the “principle of identities” in the name of the real of contradictions and “concrete becomings.”

4. **Hermeneutics.** Suggesting Heidegger without naming him, positing the epochal nature of the return of the dead Gods: “that which discerns under the name of metaphysics the nihilistic disposition of the entire history of the West.” This disposition is what must be reversed and thus metaphysics itself must, via a patient hermeneutics, come to nothing. Its origin, as it were, must be unfounded such that the history of the present be revoked. Natural being, φύσις, “holds sway” against the Idea. 39

These four operas, Badiou avers with all seriousness, do violence to philosophy as cry, insult, and mockery. Eschewing a more extended account of Badiou’s somewhat ironical review of the charges— including Kantian hubris, Comtean physical and political pathology, and Heideggerean global terrorism 40— what we need to note is that their general consensus turns on the impossibility of metaphysics to think the new. For Kant, nothing new is achieved in all the “chatter and bustle” of metaphysics, which has effectively remained unchanged since Aristotle; for Comte, metaphysics is not only a sickness (“but is it so different for Kant? And will it be so different for Wittgenstein, or Heidegger?”), 41 but also the ideological apparatus of a certain formation of power. In both cases, it blocks “a strategic passage: the passage between philosophy and social order” or “the ‘social installation’ of anti-metaphysical philosophy.” 42 As for Heidegger, the reign of metaphysics as Idea suppressing the nature of being as coming forth culminates in the *enframing* of the entire earth qua technology. Thus, while referring to Nietzsche as the last metaphysician via his “will to power,” Heidegger finds the “the truth of Being . . . replaced by machination’s erection of ‘goals’ (values).” 43 As with the Platonism of the anti-Platonists, the metaphysics of the anti-metaphysicians is what it is because it leaves something out: “the true nature of what is.” 44 And thus “what is to be feared in [metaphysics] is precisely the apparent weakness of its content.” 45
Ultimately, then, what is left out is thought itself, given it must name what addresses itself to this “what is” under the mode of a formal clarity – whether that be of the critical, positivist, hermeneutical, or clearing type. But we might venture, it is thought as a peculiar form of salvation – not just for Heidegger, clearing space for the Gods, but for Kant too, so as to save humanity itself as author of subjective reason; and for Comte, as access to the world as such devoid of “vagueness” and “equivocity.”

What remains over in each of these thinkers, we can say, pre-empting Badiou’s exposition, is the supposition that metaphysics stripped bare reveals the extant truth of being as such. One is reminded here of Nietzsche’s comment regarding truth being a woman and philosophers being “clumsy” and “unskilled.” Badiou says: “What makes metaphysics fearsome is that it ignores the discipline of the true questions in favour of an indeterminacy that any signer of mastery whatsoever can come to inhabit.” Metaphysics thus is fiction: the search for (the) truth (of being) in name only – hiding in fact a true indifference to it. Thus the anti-metaphysician (so, physicians of the cure) are the true champions of truth. After Heidegger, putting into play the adage that the cure is often worse than the disease, Badiou avers that much of contemporary philosophy, in a strange parody of this claim against the indifference of metaphysics, simply excises truth from all consideration – other than, perhaps, as virtual adjunct to an affective knowledge: the logical rule in analytic philosophies, or the transcendental ground for the equality of opinions or perspectives in postmodernisms.

So this is the horn of the dilemma for the varia of anti-metaphysicians – the proper approach to being is occluded as metaphysics, which posits an indeterminacy at the heart of its rationality. Anti-metaphysics counts indeterminacy qua indeterminate in what can be thought. It not only holds off from interrogation of the indeterminate as indeterminate, but occludes the necessity for the indeterminate in the very form of its rationality. Hence anti-metaphysics is a dogmatic metaphysics, asserting as reasoned the full place of the indeterminate – God as we know it, but as Badiou says, any “master signer” whatever – and thus feeding off of its “own inability to attain knowledge.” Badiou notes that Kant had already spotted what Heidegger makes palpable as the necessity of its end: “that of the indifference of non-knowledge” qua the question of Being. Because Badiou’s interrogation of the anti-metaphysicians as the proponents of an “archi-metaphysics” allegedly subversive of and directed towards power “dogmatics” shows how they maintain being in the place of being undecided, this master signer must be dealt with. The surprise is how they go about it.

Badiou is able to weave together under this designation of an archi-metaphysics – a designation none of its proponents aspire to – its critical, positivist, and hermeneutic strands. He shows how the delimitations of each, real in their operational form, nonetheless conform in the orientation and structure of their address: annunciation (indifference), determination (of the indeterminate), and desire (end). Badiou is thus able to show how certain utterances and determinations of Heidegger resonate back into Kant (for example,
the analysis of the power of metaphysics as occlusion), and that Comte preempts Heidegger’s claims for the ontotheological destination of metaphysics, the famous “forgetting of forgetting.” Badiou cites Comte: “‘Metaphysics’ – he writes – ‘is in fact nothing but a form of theology gradually enervated by dissolving simplifications.’”

These decidedly un-casual remarks highlight what each archi-metaphysician in their own defense would no doubt seek to occlude. So Badiou demonstrates the negative nature of their conceptual alliance. “Indifference, simplification, abstraction, separation, dissolution: such are the operations through which, under the accepted name of metaphysics, the power of a neutral thought, or of the object-less argument, establishes itself. The power of the undecided and the undetermined as such.” I cite this to pre-empt: for everything archi-metaphysics opposes of dogmatic metaphysics, Badiou, in slightly different terms and by subtractive rather than strictly negative operations, will affirm. But in affirming that thought must affirm the existence of the indeterminate as thinkable, Badiou, via the contemporary mathematics of set theory, breaks also with the dogmatist schematic, such that the infinite or indeterminate is not potential, and so off limits to thought as such, but actual. And so, contra archi-metaphysics – and the latter distinction draws many more contemporary thinkers into the archi-metaphysics remit – what is, the infinite, is actually thinkable as such: it is not the known or determined un-thought of all thought. The infinite is neither ineffable nor determined. After Cantor, the infinite is not off-limits to thought. The saving grace of archi-metaphysics, that it knows the infinite qua indeterminate, whereas the dogmatists treated it as resource for knowledge, saves only the indeterminate whose thought it was to have deposed. The indeterminate – on the basis of the say-so of dialectics but not as a dialectics – must therefore be thought again. Hence the indeterminate becomes actual, not virtual: thinkable, but outside the constrictions of language (critical, positivist, hermeneutic).

Just as Plato was wont to do with Homer, Hesiod, Heraclitus, and Protagoras, Badiou will ally these hermeneuts and critical reasoners with the contemporary positivists or “partisans of linguistic empiricism” for whom metaphysics, by its utterances, makes no sense – the holy grail of logical positivism. Citing Wittgenstein and Carnap, but following the former through the chicanes of the final propositions of the *Tractatus*, in which Wittgenstein imposes, by turns subtly and in sledgehammer style, the limits of our world as being the limits of our knowledge (language): beyond this being-said is what is mystical. Hemmed in by this tautology of sense making, reminiscent of the great Protagoras, we are condemned to say, as subjects of metaphysics, only what can be said. Such a trajectory is of course proper to philosophy, Wittgenstein says. To take the

propositions of natural science – i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to
give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person – he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy – *this* method would be the only strictly correct one.\(^{59}\)

It is curious that the motif of a certain stealth must appear in this archi-metaphysics, that thought itself is too much for us to bear. So we must outsource what is right to a logic of sense that remains apart from and exceeds that of which we are capable. Yet this stealth and this mysticism claims to be rationally deduced. Once again we see the unconscious at work: “For Wittgenstein, metaphysics denotes the void in signification, just like for Heidegger it denotes the void in the problematic or the question, and for Comte the void in scientific denotation.”\(^{60}\)

Something is missing, the fact of the question – whether as statement or law or as the presence in thought of being itself. Yet, as Badiou mischievously points out,\(^{61}\) when it came to love for Comte, an unsayable remains in play. As for Wittgenstein, the mystical, as noted, is given its place relative to sense: “just the facts, ma’am,” do not after all exhaust our experience. And, completing the trilogy, Heidegger’s ever-returning saving God marks this same “void” place. Thus archi-metaphysics sets itself a task in contradiction to its original target of critique: to “over-determine the undetermined,”\(^{62}\) which is to say, for archi-metaphysics “the last recourse to the metaphysically undetermined, poses itself with a certain intensity.\(^{63}\)

So the problem for archi-metaphysics in its contrary delimitation of dogmatic or classical metaphysics is what to do with the indeterminate that dogmatics simply assumes to be there for it. The power of dogmatics lay in its use of this indeterminacy; the correction of archi-metaphysics is to determine this unknowable unknown, to, as Badiou puts it,

replace it with what we shall call an archi-metaphysics, that is, with the suspension of sense to an undetermined that is purely and simply left to the historial indeterminacy of its coming. Archi-metaphysics is the replacement of a necessary undetermined with a contingent one, or: the established power of an unknown master is opposed by the poetics or prophetics of the to-come.\(^{64}\)

This is exemplified in Kant – to whom Wittgenstein and Heidegger and Comte pay their own particular homage\(^{65}\) – by the shifting of God to regulative idea, from knowledge to “matter of faith.” We thus recover religion within the limits of reason alone, while leaving God as indeterminate to his own devices. Once again, the limits of reason are coordinated with those of experience, enabling a closed world without any place for what is in exception to it. What Kant regulates is the place of the indeterminate as such, such that it be at any time God, man, rule, or law: whatever must name that space as off limits to thought as saving reason. This, for Badiou, is the
great terror of critical, positivist, or hermeneutical archi-metaphysics – the ruin of the concept. The sophistry of it – which in a certain sense is also a conceit – can be put in this way: to know what cannot be known; to have the knowledge of what cannot be known to knowledge. Thus, as ever, in thrall to this indeterminacy at the limit of a conceit, all thought is reduced to a form of expression or a making sense or a language game which requires that it never overstep the mark marked out for knowledge beforehand, so that it never strays into “metaphysics.” To reverse a favorite citation of Badiou from Mao: for archi-metaphysics, “we will not come to know all that we do not know.” Or: we must not because we cannot.

It is no coincidence that what is common to the three creatures of archi-metaphysics is a reductive approach to mathematics. Badiou, taking Kant as exemplar, compares them unfavorably to Leibniz, Spinoza, and Descartes in terms of the proof of God (or whatever master signifier you like). For Badiou, the rationalism of these latter three, derived in good measure from their specific, extensive and knowledgeable interrogations of what mathematics thinks, trumps the former insofar as this rationalist metaphysics “blunt[s] indeterminacy and expose[s] transcendence to a rational control more rigorous than could ever be exerted by positivism’s Humanity, Kant’s moral subject, or the poet of hermeneutics.”

Certainly Hegel, Badiou argues, recognizes this rationalist advance in dogmatic metaphysics over archi-metaphysics. Hegel in fact recognizes and takes as fundamental for thought itself that axiomatic alignment of thought and being, conceived by Parmenides. In other words, the subject/object dichotomy – the subject of thought and the object of its thought qua unknowable being – essentially concedes in advance and militates against what it supposes as the mark of the human and subject as such – its very subjectivity. Or, at least, one side of subjectivity, that which is not so much subject as subjective; which is to say, that which would be subject not to the limits of language and world but to what is in exception to it and thus become a maker of its world as such. As Hegel puts it: “that thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things form one and the same content.”

If Hegel points the way, he still is not the answer for Badiou. What this means is that Hegel recognizes an essential aspect of dogmatic metaphysics that archi-metaphysics cannot see, and that is the exceptional nature of the indeterminate. Exceptional, then, in some form of thinkable relation to thought itself, not excluded from, but immanent to it. As Badiou writes: “A being, philosophically accessible as a name, can be said to be essentially undetermined if amongst the predicates that permit its definition is the claim that this being exceeds, in its very essence, any predicative determination available to an understanding such as ours.” And: “The name of ‘metaphysics’ will then be given to that discursive disposition which claims that an undetermined being, as we have just defined it, that is, a being whose determination exceeds our cognitive power, is required in order to complete the edifice of rational knowledge.”
Let us here note: Hegel does not endorse classical metaphysics, but recognizes in it the power of the concept – to make a “predicate of the impredicable.” But only insofar as this determines the question or marks the site from which the question of being thought must take its orientation. We can call this site negation, though that is only indicative of an operation at this site. This site is what is nothing for the efforts of predication and can thus have no bearing on reason; but for Hegel – and Badiou in another way again – this being which exceeds determination in its essence (not its substance) is what must not be excluded from thought as such or else an integral aspect of the thought of being, namely that which is in exception to it, cannot be thought.

In other words, rational knowledge, classical metaphysics, would be that which takes on its own ἀπορία as itself, that admits a thinking exists capable of working through what exceeds it without either reducing its essence to knowledge or knowing its essence to be unthinkable as such. Rather it constructs a discursive framework capable of supporting and articulating as real what is nothing to knowledge. Thus, as Badiou says, “that it be able to place, within a discursive framework available to all – an argumentative and not a revealed framework, in other words a rational framework – a point of indeterminacy that may, from that moment on, harbour any signifier of mastery whatsoever.” In Badiou’s determination of a set-theory ontology, this role is taken by the void: Ø. The nothing as name of being, that is!

But before we return to this metaphysics without metaphysics we must continue to see what dogmatic metaphysics admits which archi-metaphysics – the metaphysics of contemporary philosophy – refuses to know as knowledge. Badiou recognizes in this classical schema the sense given to what is pursued by Aristotle – metaphysics as the science of being qua being. Let us note first that this makes metaphysics the same as ontology for Badiou. Ontology, he says elsewhere and everywhere in his work, quoting Aristotle, is “the science of being qua being.” We must also note that ontology, for Badiou, thinks also the exception, and thus the place or site of the coming to be of that which is not being qua being. What is not being qua being for Badiou is what the event names within a situation of being, and as such marks the place of the possible coming forth of a new truth of that situation as in-exception to it – an imminent exception. All truth such that it must come to be is subjective, the subject being the finite support of an infinite truth (infinite in its being). For Badiou, the subject is the meta-physical category par excellence, being what is between what is not being qua being and its being a body in a determinate world: as such, having “no place to be.” It requires a meta-physics because “of the subject, there can only be a theory. ‘Subject’ is the nominal index of a concept that must be constructed in a singular field of thought, in this case philosophy.”

Thus: to think and to be.

But again this is to get ahead of ourselves in the sense that what forms the framework of the rationality of a classical metaphysics – that one may prove an existence without thereby determining what exists – is correlated to the notion of the indeterminate as One, while for Badiou, adhering to this same
determination as to the power of a metaphysics qua the concept, rationality—mathematics (as for post-Aristotelian rational metaphysics) — dictates that being is not One. For the classical world, the One—in Plato, the Good which is not an Idea—serves as the determination of the indeterminate such that a thought can think it. That is to say its existence is thinkable while its essence remains indeterminate. Or:

That one may prove an existence without thereby determining what exists is the core of metaphysics as power.

Metaphysics is classical, or dogmatic, when it grants the undetermined point of its apparatus the rationality of its existence.

This point is crucial. What classical metaphysics after Plato borrows from mathematics is the demonstration of existence purely on the basis of the concept. Metaphysics is at base the recognition of a pure existence. Meaning that this existence, which cannot be empirically attested, and the being of whose content is beyond the measure of our cognition, can nonetheless be rationally demonstrated.  

For Badiou, then, this is what is essential to classical metaphysics or what a classical metaphysics under the condition of the rational force of mathematics shows us to be crucial for thought as such: that existence is rationally shared between the undetermined and the determined, the infinite and the finite. In other words, that the transition from the finite to the infinite is “by way of existence,” the decision that existence is not reducible to known knowledge, or that “there exists” is the recommencement and not the end of thought. A “thought” that is, in Badiou’s words from Being and Event, “nothing other than the desire to finish with the exorbitant excess of the state.” That is, with a predication in excess of itself as what Plato called a false conceit of knowledge—knowing what must not be known.

In the end nothing, is more corrosive for philosophy than to separate itself from this [rational] regime, which creates, beyond that which can be empirically attested, the real of a simple possibility, and destines thought to the only thing that matters, its absolute identity with the being that it thinks.

For Badiou this “subsumption of the existential” by the mathematical—which Hegel has pointed to—is both shared in common by Plato, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Descartes, and missed by Kant, and by extension the positivists and hermeneuts. However, Hegel thinks that this rationality is lacking in terms of the absolute, that this rational apparatus lacks, if you like, the form of its rationality—which has to be given by speculative dialectics. As Badiou notes and laments, here as elsewhere, Hegel was himself not shy in depreciating mathematics. But it is with respect to the infinite that Hegel does not fall into line with the anti-metaphysics of archi-metaphysics which, for Badiou, prides
itself precisely on reducing knowledge to the dimensions of the finite alone; of
what, in other language, can be demonstrated to be constructible relative to
any posited existence.

This also links Hegel to dogmatic metaphysics, which, as we have seen,
gives us a “rational treatment of the existence of the infinite,” thus holding
at bay the finitist demands of constructivist-empiricism, which render death
as the horizon of the knowing subject. Dogmatic metaphysics is a discourse
of the effective proof of the infinite – proof as what assures the “mathema-
ticity of existence.” Its proof is in its discourse, that infinite being is say-
able beyond knowledge as what we will (have) come to know. Thus the
anti-metaphysics of archi-metaphysics must separate out the infinite from
what can be thought, from the subjective capacity for thought. Denying the
discursive capacity of mathematics is one step in this deposition, returning
us, Badiou says, to an empirical finitude that “Plato would not have failed
to consider as anterior to any philosophy whatsoever.” Thus in these terms
archi-metaphysics is a sophistry: at least insofar as it is hostile to what math-
ematics effects as real with regard to the infinite (and so what is not real with
regard to the finite).

Badiou notes here that Kant recognizes another feature of metaphysics that
treats it less in terms of it being an operation of thought than of it being some-
ingthing integral and indeed natural for thought itself. This biological metaphor,
Badiou notes, is fundamental. Hence Kant can recognize metaphysics as an
existence of nature such that it underpins cognition – the always there – and
he can at the same time displace it from the subjective framework of this same
cognition. Hence it is always there, in the nature of thought, as that which
must be overcome or maintained in its proper place as excessive to reason, rel-
ative to the faculties available to the transcendental subject. “Kant is very close
in the end to collapsing his critique of dogmatic metaphysics into an equally
dogmatic metaphysics of the nature of thought and of the ultimate ends of the
contradiction between the transcendental organisation of the understanding
and reason’s urge-to-transcendence.” In concentrating his attention on the
faculties of cognition and the determination toward transcendence wherein
the nature of this thought is annulled as, again, without knowledge, in the
literal not relative sense, Kant exacerbates or even, as Badiou suggests here,
dogmatizes the separation of thought and being all over again. Thus in rec-
ognizing existence qua metaphysical – the natural thought of “what is” so to
speak – and separating it off from what is the subject’s cognitive capacity qua
subject, Kant “augments rather than decreases the part played by the unde-
termined, and consequently the recurrent possibility of a veritable metaphysi-
cal obscurantism.” “Augments,” because Kant determines its existence, and
“obscurantism,” because there must be an existing part of thought unable to
be thought by thought as such. Previously the indeterminate had no existence
and thought was limited by it: now an indeterminate is posited to exist such
that thought itself must render it inexistent.
The dialectical challenge to this, which points the way out, is to propose a real determination of the undetermined that endows metaphysics with its power – the power to "infinite the finite." So dialectics seeks this answer as the means to have done with the transcendental indeterminacy that organizes and orients classical or dogmatic metaphysics; that is the form of its existence so to speak, while not lapsing back into what it considers worse. Thus, to be "neither Kantian, nor empirico-positivist, nor phenomenologico-hermeneutic." Badiou names in this neither-nor vein – besides and in debt to Hegel – Lenin, contra the double injunction empirico-criticism, and both Freud and Lacan with regard to the "cunning power" of negation and its realization in terms of the subject of the unconscious. The power of the theory of negativity in each, thus that which marks out what inexists as real for any possible knowledge of being as such, maintains discursively this to-and-fro between the finitude of a being and the infinity to which it owes its determination.

However, Hegel's praise of classical metaphysics, in the sense of its rational relation to existence, opens onto what is for him the problem of how the conceptual apparatuses it uses to grasp or name the existence of the indeterminate are themselves constructed. Thus its forms of (pure) thought, pace Kant here, are themselves uncritically deployed; that is to say, what metaphysics brings to bear as thinking itself is pure determination. Metaphysics is indeterminate in actu, we could say, and not just its object. Indeed, the (life of the) object is precisely what must be thought for Hegel, such that being and thought are the same. Being must be thought, in other words, such that we can come to know what thought is – the rational determination of its concepts and categories.

This entails for Hegel, Badiou argues, that:

Each and every category, whether it be being, nothingness, becoming, quality, quantity, causality, and so on, ultimately consists of a definite time of determination, if only one has the patience to follow the true movement of transformation whereby each category takes place as the exteriorization and dialectical truth of the preceding ones.

This is, then, logic, the logic of determination replacing dialectics, a move Hegel says he owes to Kant. The point being that dialectics is destined for higher things while the destitution of metaphysics is carried out by logic. As Badiou describes it, "'Logic' means: a regulated process of determination, whereby the undetermined absolute (for example being, being as such) lets integral singularity take place as the ultimate immanent specification of itself. Logic is here the logic of determination, which leaves no indeterminacy behind, and which, in this sense, abolishes metaphysics. But in this form it clearly has its roots in Aristotle. One of the ironies of Kant's claim against the science of metaphysics not changing since Aristotle is that the logic Kant has recourse to is itself unchanged since Aristotle. So Kant is in the manner of repetition: despite himself, nothing new.
Determination here means to count what shows itself as tending toward its proper end, there being only one. As there is nothing indeterminate for knowledge, knowledge being the extent of determination, metaphysics has no proper end and so by extension there is no knowledge of it: or what it speaks of cannot be known and so is not. Metaphysics is an empty discourse, outside logic, nothing. But in a sense this is an auto-abolition, at least if we ascribe to Kant the nomination archi-metaphysician because the indeterminacy he invokes as nothing is the one that sustains his philosophy as object – being as such or the thing-in-itself. This is the case, Badiou argues (following Hegel), because Kant’s critique of classical metaphysics (ostensibly that it begins with “special objects” – soul, god, the world, etc. – and “forgets” the categories that allow for the capture of these objects as objects) pushes so far against the object that the categories obtain “an essentially subjective signification.”\textsuperscript{92} The object becomes then almost absolutely indeterminate – thus an “infinite obstacle,” as Hegel put it.

“It is this operation,” Badiou asserts – thinking of what he elsewhere calls Kant’s “obscurantist attachment to pious moralism”\textsuperscript{93} – “that creates the radically unknowable. It allows the placing of all signifiers of conformism and of moralising oppression in the beyond of the supra-sensible.”\textsuperscript{94} Hence what Kant calls knowledge is reconciled to a faith that what cannot be thought – qua radical indeterminacy – must be, for this very reason, the site of the Good to whose wisdoms we logically submit. It is a perverted Platonism insofar as, for Plato, under the sign of the Idea, thought names the commensurability of the known and unknown.\textsuperscript{95} What enables an-other thinking of the indeterminate possible is mathematics, which, moreover, allows that a situation be rethought beyond what logically constrains it. Referring to Plato “in passing,” Badiou notes that this is the courage of thought, one which:

Attempts to put an end at the same time to both the objectivity of the undetermined in classical metaphysics and 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.”\textsuperscript{96}

Badiou reduces the principles of Hegel’s argument – indeed that argument is at stake – to two points, which we can summarize. First, that it is by the movement of thought itself that any undetermined will come to be determined or that the “gap” between finite and infinite is the locus of thought itself, the kernel of its procedure as such. In Badiou’s own ontological formalization this locus is centered on the first infinite set – that of all ordinals – and thus the concept of a limit, which can be marked as such and traversed, is critical
to it. Referring to Hegel, Badiou remarks that this is what the real is rational means and moreover this implies that to the extent that thought is thinkable, it is thinkable absolutely. So thought as absolute and not the absolutely indeterminate. This thought, Badiou remarks, takes time, being the labour of the concept – what Plato referred to, speaking of hard things being worth doing, as “the long detour.” Second, and now contra archi-metaphysics (and still classical qua objects) dialectics claims that the categories of thought are not simply, singularly, subjective: rather dialectics is a form of thought adequate to its objects as such. In other words, its categorical determinations are those adequate to that which it thinks, which is to say it can only think categorically with regard to what it thinks. Categories are not first a priori and then addressed to an object thus making of the object, which cannot be thought, a knowledge. In this way dialectics is that form of thought which is conceptual and, as Badiou avers, absolute: no indeterminacy remains over on either side. There is then a category for every determinate content and “the becoming of concepts exhausts the real.” Thus: “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.”

This is what philosophy is constrained to think, the thought of the absolute, which is not, as we can see here, the thought of the One or the whole as such, but of the Two. As Badiou notes, the change in the form of the transcendental under positivist and hermeneutic direction, from subjectivity to language, changes nothing in terms of this schema. Rather, as we have seen already, “we are dealing here with a reinforcement, by means of a synthesis between criticism and positivism, and soon, via cognitivism, with a hermeneutics of intentionality, of all that which for the past two centuries has taken place in the way of archi-metaphysics.”

Now as we have said, dialectics points the way – it opens up these determinations of the (being of the) One to the Two which founds them in order to rethink entirely what is thought as being or, as Badiou says, referring again to Plato beyond Hegel – which is of course where he wants to get to recommence philosophy for today – “between the absoluteness of the concept and the creative freedom of negation.” The problem is that while dialectics opens this question to thought, dialectics itself is behind the game in regard to what is thinkable of this relation between the finite and the infinite. “Hegel himself underestimates [. . .] the link between finitude, infinity, and existence within a mathematical paradigm,” Badiou argues. If we were thus tasked to re-examine the “axioms of classical metaphysics,” to re-intervene on the question posed there of the rationality of the indeterminate, “we would learn that, as Descartes once glimpsed, it is possible, in light of contemporary mathematics, and namely of the Cantorian treatment of the infinite, to begin purely and simply with the infinite.”

Thus the form of the relation that has hitherto underpinned “speculative ontology,” and so also classical and archi-metaphysics, which comes in the
two dialectical couples of the-one-and-the-many and the-whole-and-part, is no longer thinkable. Set-theoretic ontology, contemporary mathematics, has substituted for them a wholly other double relation, one based in the actuality of the infinite, and which, woven from the void, thinks no objects whatsoever: belonging, “which indicates that a multiple is counted as element in the presentation of another multiple” and inclusion, “which indicates that a multiple is a sub-multiple of another multiple.”

Set theory sheds light on the fecund frontier between the whole/parts relation and the one/multiple relation; because, at base, it suppresses both of them. The multiple-whose concept it thinks without defining its signification-for a post-Cantorian is neither supported by the existence of the one nor unfolded as an organic totality. The multiple consists from being without-one, or multiple of multiples, and the categories of Aristotle (or Kant), Unity and Totality, cannot help us grasp it.

Badiou’s notion of a “metaphysics without metaphysics” is thus subject to this contemporary mathematical condition. That the infinite can be thought undermines the necessary object of an archi-metaphysics and posits by this thought the absoluteness of the concept. Thus it has no need to posit the indeterminate at all, given that mathematics renders such a notion superfluous to the thought of being – indeed “metaphysical.” But of course this mathematical materialism of the infinite, to wax rhetorical, also breaks with dialectics. The axiom schema of set theory, while historical in terms of its invention, has no recourse to what Badiou refers to here as “the theme of a historical auto-determination of the undetermined.” That is to say, set theoretical ontology has no recourse to a notion of immanent becoming to account for being, being thought. As the discourse of presentation as such, set theory thinks infinity directly and is the means of its coming to be. Hence we have our Platonic gesture or affirmation: “in a style bereft of any hyperbolic transcendence of the Good (and therefore outside of metaphysics) that for everything which is exposed to the thinkable there is an idea, and that to link this idea to thought it suffices to decide upon the appropriate axioms.”

As we have said this “demand to the world that it adjust its dread to rich and numbered postulates,” apropos and contra Heidegger (the “last universally recognizable philosopher”), is the task Badiou has taken up, as for him any philosophy must, confronted with the inventions and interventions of the forms of thought that are its conditions. Badiou’s anti-metaphysical metaphysics is thus what he calls the return of philosophy to itself – which means also that philosophy is integrally divorced from ontology per se. Mathematics, we might say, bequeaths philosophy the freedom of thought it had erroneously supposed as its alone – which is to think again the complex of being, truth, and subject.
NOTES

1. See M. Heidegger, “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” It is not without interest that, like the pre-Socratics, Parmenides and Heraclitus, who sold the all of truth, Heidegger considers metaphysics to be concerned with the whole (essence/existence, Being/beings) and not the arcana of the pieces (to use Heraclitus’ allusion).

For Descartes see “To the French Translator of the Principles of Philosophy serving as a preface,” in The Principles of Philosophy. For Deleuze (and Guattari) see A Thousand Plateaus, “Introduction: Rhizome”: “We’re tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes” (p. 15). To be fair, Descartes is not mentioned in this passage, and is named only a few times in the entire text (Chomsky and psychoanalysis are the primary referents, but the discussion points back to a classical even biblical approach). What is clear is that what is at stake is a certain form of the subject.

2. See Plato, Theaetetus, 152e (translations of Plato are from Complete Works, ed. John Cooper):

Let us take it as a fact that all the wise men of the past, with the exception of Parmenides, stand together. Let us take it that we find on this side Protagoras and Heraclitus and Empedocles; and also the masters of the two kinds of poetry, Epicharmus in comedy and Homer in tragedy.

Elsewhere he calls them “patrons of the flux.” See also 180d–181a (emphasis added):

But I was almost forgetting, Theodorus, that there are other thinkers who have announced the opposite view; who tell us that “Unmoved is the Universe,” and other similar statements which we hear from a Melissus or a Parmenides as against the whole party of Heracliteans. These philosophers insist that all things are One, and that this One stands still, itself within itself, having no place in which to move.

[...] we have got ourselves in between the two parties; and if we don’t in some way manage to put up a fight and make our escape, we shall pay for it, like the people who play that game on the line in the wrestling schools, and get caught by both parties and pulled in opposite directions.
3. A literal translation from the Greek is rendered “to think and to be is the same thing.” Published translations vary.

4. See Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, pp. 8–11. Note: “Finally, a reminder may be added that the artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which, unlike children’s, are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable.”

5. See Ray Brassier, “Presentation as anti-phenomenon in Alain Badiou’s Being and Event.” Brassier understands Badiou’s invoking of Parmenides’ maxim as meaning “thinking and being are both nothing” (p. 63). Thus there is no identity between them and this lack of predication is the point of the same. For Brassier, critical of Badiou’s position here, this results in an impossibility of distinguishing “between discourse and world, thought and reality, logical consequences and material causes” (ibid.).

6. See Alain Badiou, Being and Event [BE], p. 140:

   If it is clear that a natural being is that which possesses, as its ontological schema of presentation, an ordinal, what then is Nature, that Nature which Galileo declared to be written in “mathematical language”? Grasped in its pure multiple-being, nature should be natural-being-in-totality; that is, the multiple which is composed of all the ordinals, thus of all the pure multiples which are proposed as foundations of possible being for every presented or presentable natural multiplicity. The set of all the ordinals – of all the name-numbers – defines, in the framework of the Ideas of the multiple, the ontological substructure of Nature.

   However, a new theorem of ontology declares that such a set is not compatible with the axioms of the multiple, and could not be admitted as existent within the frame of onto-logy. Nature has no sayable being. There are only some natural beings.

   Hence Nature does not Exist.


8. François Laruelle calls this an act of “cultural ‘matricide’” which is the core, he says, of Badiou’s inherently conservative, Maoist, “re-education of philosophy.” “Rather than an invention, re-education is a particular type of repetition; one that seeks to modify everything while conserving for it the destination and the ends of philosophy.” “Re-education,” Laruelle continues, “makes use of mathematics, and then logic, only as pedagogical disciplines safeguarding the correct image of thought – a project that some would not hesitate to call a bootcamp.” The explicit implication is that Badiou is a reformer rather than a revolutionary (to use the well-worn charge) – a clever accusation vis-à-vis what underpins Badiou’s thought: real change. Whether Laruelle successfully makes his case for Badiou’s authoritarian conservatism is another matter: his concentration on
mathematics reduces Badiou’s other conditions to oppressed adjuncts of this science, and that his interrogation draws on a particular political – itself well-worn – orientation to Maoism and Platonism gives pause. But Laruelle is at least militantly honest in his address. He is a philosopher, not a commentator – the two being deliberately conflated in our mediatic age to the exaltation of the latter, the debilitation of the former. François Laruelle, Anti-Badiou: On the Introduction of Maoism into Philosophy, pp. vii–xii.

9. BE p. 435. In Alain Badiou, Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II [LW], the mathematical logic of Category Theory provides the onto-logic of appearing – or what is being-appearing as such. See also Alain Badiou, “Mathematics and Philosophy,” pp. 15–16, apropos the distinction between mathematics and logic – mathematics being the science of being qua being:

In my work [. . .] logic pertains to the coherence of appearance. And if the study of appearance also mobilizes certain areas of mathematics, this is simply because, following an insight formalized by Hegel but which actually goes back to Plato, it is of the essence of being to appear. This is what maintains the form of all appearing within a mathematizable transcendental order. But here, once again, transcendental logic, which is a part of mathematics tied to contemporary sheaf theory, holds sway over formal or linguistic logic, which is ultimately no more than a superficial translation of the former.

For a summary appraisal of Badiou’s move from set theory to category theory see A. J. Bartlett and A. Ling, “Translators’ Introduction: The Categorial Imperative.”

10. BE pp. 52–9.


12. See the final section on “Metaphysics Without Metaphysics.”

13. Just as in our parliamentary systems, democracy presumes the role of reason for the insurgency of natural capitalisms.


15. BE p. 3; Badiou takes this from Saint-Just, who said “happiness is a new word in Europe.”

16. MP p. 32.

18. “Pour aujourd’hui: Platon!” These seminars are part of an ongoing series given at the Collège de France over three years 2007–8, 2008–9, and 2009–10. The 2007–8 seminars and Badiou’s seminar on the Republic given in 1989–90 (just after the publication of Manifeste pour la philosophie) are reproduced in full on François Nicolas’ website. The notes which reproduce the seminars are by Daniel Fischer: http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/Badiou/seminaire.htm. All translations of these seminars are my own.


20. Alain Badiou, Deleuze: The Clamor of Being [DCB], pp. 101–2. After praising Deleuze as “the most generous” anti-Platonist, “the most open to contemporary creations,” Badiou concludes: “all that Deleuze lacked was to finish with anti-Platonism itself” (ibid.).

21. Alain Badiou, Infinite Thought [IT], p. 46. Badiou invokes this tripartite schema in a variety of texts and with a series of nuances, the latter dependent on the topic at hand. In the essay “The (Re)turn of Philosophy Itself,” Badiou contends that this discourse concerns itself with “language games, deconstruction, […] heterogeneity without end, différend and differences, the ruin of Reason, [and] the promotion of the fragment […]” (p. 20).

22. IT p. 6. In seminars from 2007, Badiou also notes another form of contemporary Platonism, “la Platonism mystique,” which he links to the events of May 1968 and, he says, is manifest in the work of Guy Lardreau and Christian Jambet (see “Pour aujourd’hui: Platon!” of 5 December 2007). See also LW p. 522: “What may be called ‘Platonism’ is the belief that in order to come close to this ideal, it is necessary to mathematize, by hook or by crook. This is opposed by all the doctrinaires of sense or meaning, be they sophists or hermeneuticists – all of them, at bottom, Aristotelians.”

23. MP p. 85.

24. On Deleuze’s compatibility with the “linguistic turn” and the “great lineage of contemporary sophistry” and, therefore, with the discourse of the contemporary state see LW p. 386.

25. For a discussion of these features of truths, see BP.

26. DCB p. 102.

27. In speaking of the function of ἀπορία within the Platonic dialogues and within the history of philosophy more generally, Samuel Scolnicov, in Plato’s Metaphysics of Education, at p. 50 observes that it registers in two ways. For the sophist it registers as despair, as the beginning of the end, while for the philosopher it is an incitement: the site, if you like, of a recommencement. We return to this in the next section.


30. Ibid. p. 190.
32. “MCM” p. 190.
33. See further *TS* p. 122:

The inventory gives us four philosophical names for truth: coherence, repetition, totality, torsion. There are no others. The “adequation” of Aristotle and Saint Thomas has never been anything but a nicety out of a dictionary. To say that there is truth when the spirit agrees with the thing does not dispense anyone from looking for the effective law of the agreement in question. Aristotle and Saint Thomas offer their solutions to this problem, which, like all others, are distributed in the system: coherence, totality, repetition, torsion.

34. *LW* p. 1. Equivalently, for democratic materialism “there are only individuals and communities” (ibid. p. 8). Badiou counters this with a metaphysics of the subject which is never a body as such. See ibid. p. 37:

That is the content of Book I, which is a metaphysics in the strict sense: it proceeds as though physics already existed. The advantage of this approach is that we can immediately see the (subjective) forms of ‘life’ that the materialist dialectic lays claim to, which are the forms of a subject-of-truth (or of its denial, or of its occultation). This study obviously remains formal as long as the problem of bodies, of the worldly materiality of subjects-of-truth, has not been treated. Given that a subjectivizable body is a new body, this problem requires that one know what the “appearance” of a body means, and therefore, more generally, that one elucidate what appearing, and therefore objectivity, may be.

35. See *DCB*, or *LW* pp. 281–7. For a contrary view on this last impossibility see Jon Roffe, *Badiou’s Deleuze*, pp. 119–20.
36. In order to serve a (re)newed will to classification, determination, and circumscription of peoples, and thus a metaphysics all too human and thus without truth, Australia runs an offshore “archipelago” of detention for would be seekers of asylum, specifically those who arrive by boat and from countries Australia is actively involved in rendering uninhabitable one way or another: military and surveillance support of the Sri Lankan state against the Tamils, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq etc., and the usual “run of the mill” exploitation and corruption of resources and peoples a functioning democracy requires. The status and treatment of these people is subject to periodic, formulaic, and ineffective criticism from external and international agencies, including the UN. This has no effect because the logic of classification, determination, and circumscription is impeccably contemporary and global,
and would-be critiques only serve to repeat it after their own fashion. Hence the critical (liberalist) posture, including empirical “data” and hermeneutic nuance, is its own repetition, lacking the capacity or the knowledge to break with its own form. The irony of Australia’s terror of arrivals by sea should be lost on no one familiar with its short history; that this irony affects a symptom in Lacan’s clinical sense, would bear analysis. This is also to say that philosophy is worth nothing, considered as an academic game.

38. Unless otherwise noted, the following four paragraphs quote from “MCM” pp. 174–5.
39. BE p. 123.
40. Speaking of Comte/Heidegger, Badiou says at “MCM” p. 178: “on the one hand, a civil servant failing to attain his professorship, on the other, the planetary reign of technology, with a little of what I’d like to call ontological ecology. It is, as it were, a Franco-German difference.”
41. Ibid. p. 176.
42. Ibid. p. 177.
43. Quoted at ibid. 177. Badiou quotes from Martin Heidegger Nietzsche, Volume III [Nietzsche], p. 175.
44. “MCM” p. 178.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid. p. 179.
47. Friederich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, “Preface.”
49. Ibid. p. 179.
50. Quoted at ibid., again from Heidegger, Nietzsche.
52. Quoted at ibid. 179, from Auguste Comte, Discours sur l’Esprit Positif, p. 20.
53. “MCM” p. 179.
54. Deleuze most emphatically and contentiously, even if it is undeniable he affirms the indeterminate as without the form of its thought. Indeed it is un-contentious to speak of Deleuze as a metaphysician – he is not one for the end of philosophy – thus it is the shape of his metaphysics that matters, and as a good Aristotelian it is still Kantian at the level of being as being thought, as One virtual or indeterminate as such (consider DCB). For other archi-metaphysicians, see MP pp. 47–52.
56. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus [TLP], from 6.4 forward.
57. Ibid. 6.522.
58. “Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the thing that are not, that they are not.” For this translation: Jacqueline de Romilly, The Great Sophists of Periclean Athens, p. 97–8. Protagoras’ assertion concerning the gods is exemplary also as precursor to Wittgenstein’s
fondness for the limit: “I am unable to know whether they exist or do not exist or what they are like in form; for there are many hindrances to knowledge, the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life,” quoted in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 9.41.

61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid. p. 181.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
68. “MCM” p. 182.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid. p. 183.
71. Ibid. p. 182.
72. Book I of *Logics of Worlds* is entitled “Formal Theory of the Subject (Meta-physics).”
73. *LW* p. 47.
74. “MWM” p. 183.
75. Ibid. p. 184.
76. *BE* p. 282. Badiou continues:

Nothing will ever allow one to resign oneself to the innumerable parts. Thought occurs for there to be a cessation – even if it only lasts long enough to indicate that it has not actually been obtained – of the quantitative unmooring of being. It is always a question of a measure being taken of how much the state exceeds the immediate. Thought, strictly speaking, is what un-measure, ontologically proven, cannot satisfy.

77. “MCM” p. 184.
78. Ibid. Hence in their rationality, Badiou remarks, “these thinkers were and remain of a calibre which Kant could never lay claim to” (ibid.). See also *LW* p. 353:

Kant is the inventor of the disastrous theme of our ‘finitude’ […] Nevertheless, once he broaches some particular question, you are unfailingly obliged, if this question preoccupies you, to pass through him. His relentlessness – that of a spider of the categories – is so great, his delimitation of notions so consistent, his conviction, albeit mediocre, so violent, that, whether you like it or not, you will have to run his gauntlet.
See, for example, Alain Badiou, “Philosophy and Mathematics: Infinity and the End of Romanticism.” For a different view of Hegel on mathematics (of the infinite) see Simon Skempton, “Badiou, Priest, and the Hegelian Infinite.”

Badiou’s definition of sophistry can perhaps be summed up as hostility to the place of mathematics, which is not reducible to language, relative to philosophy.

For Badiou, as noted above, mathematics does not treat with objects and moreover the very conception of the subject is determined by Badiou to be “objectless.” See, for example, Alain Badiou, “On a Finally Objectless Subject,” trans. Bruce Fink, in Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy (eds.), Who Comes After the Subject (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 24–32. In Logics of Worlds, Badiou develops a new theory of objects, which in turn has no recourse to a subject. An object appears for a world.

Platonism, as Badiou conceives it and takes up, is both the “knowledge of ideality” and “the knowledge that access to ideality is only through that which participates in ideality” (Alain Badiou, The Concept of Model, p. 92). Or: “The Idea is the occurrence in beings of the thinkable” (BE p. 36). In this sense, of maintaining the “co-belonging” or “ontological commensurability” of “the knowing mind and the known” (Alain Badiou, “Platonism and Mathematical Ontology,” p. 49), Plato is Parmenides’ heir or his patricide: and we could venture, given the pronounced “fidelities,” and more clearly the intervention that is Being and Event, Badiou is Heidegger’s – the last anti-(archi)metaphysician.

The Hegel quotation is from SL p. 45.
Badiou’s intervention in “Metaphysics and the Criticism of Metaphysics” on the question of metaphysics today, thus essentially on Heidegger, is a double irony: (1) that he uses the words of the poet (Mallarmé) to conclude this intervention on the famously and resolutely “poetic ontology” of Heidegger; (2) that he invoke dread, where the concept of dread or anxiety, distinguished from fear, is one Heidegger uses in “What Is Metaphysics” to insist on being as thought under the orientation of the nothing. But for Badiou the nothing can be thought – this is the adjustment that anxiety (after Lacan) opens up as possible for us at the point of a decision – being can be thought, and as such we can go on.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


