

The Shares of Being or Gift, Relation and Participation: an Essay on the Metaphysics
of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou

John Milbank

Alain Badiou has written about Emmanuel Levinas in extremely hostile terms.¹ Yet one could argue that this is because the two thinkers present rival versions of a shared philosophical move that in both cases breaks with most of 20th C philosophy in either its phenomenological or analytic idioms. For each abandons the anti-metaphysical restriction of philosophical knowledge to finitude, following Descartes rather than Kant in asserting the primacy and knowability of the infinite. Each thinker also appeals to something that can be validly known beyond appearances and which grounds them. In either case this is linked to a certain qualification of the Bergsonian or Heideggerean downgrading of the independent ego and in either case also to a concern for a universal truth that will form the basis for a just society as against both modernist atavism and postmodernist relativism.

Finally, both thinkers believe that a return to metaphysical seriousness requires a re-reading of Plato. In Levinas's case this concerns above all 'the good beyond being' linked with ethical subjectivity, while in Badiou's case it concerns a re-working of the notion of the primacy of impersonal forms now reduced to that of mathematical forms (where for Plato these were merely exemplary). Here one seems to have the strongest possible contrast. Yet even here one notices a shared stress upon Plato as the anti-Parmenidean thinker of the co-primacy of the many alongside the One, which both

thinkers wish to radicalise into a sheer primacy of the many. Moreover, both thinkers claim to insert plurality at the basis of their ontologies or para-ontologies in a way that is much more emphatic than the ‘postmodernists’ (Deleuze, Lyotard, Derrida) who are more or less accused (in slightly different yet fundamentally similar ways) of subordinating differentiation to a ‘single’ virtuality that has a power of differential distribution, but just for this reason also always ‘reserves’ this power and swallows back into its empty capacity differentiations that are only ever imperfectly realised within the matrix of phenomenal presentation.

It is in consequence of their promotion of an original as it were ‘spatially dispersed’ difference independent of any shadow of monistic distribution, that Levinas and Badiou also present the reader the same paradox of trying to combine a radically pluralist ontology with a seemingly opposite stress upon a ‘universality’, which is to say singleness, of the norms of ethics and truthfulness.

This means in effect, to put it over-crudely, that they both realise that the issue of truth is somehow suspended between the one and the many. This is the deep reason why they have returned to Plato. Yet the crucial mark of Plato’s thought was his concern with the constitutive *relation (metaschesis)* between the one and the many contained even at the level of the forms themselves and the *participatory relation (methexis)* between the temporal many and the eternal forms of the many and the one. The thinker of truth had to enter into this latter intermediary realm of ‘the between’ (*metaxu*) through the lure of the daemonic *eros* which at once drew upon a nostalgic desire (*penia*) of the subject more original than the subject himself, and released his

¹ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: an Essay on the Understanding of Evil* trans Peter Hallward (London: Verso

latent creative power (*poros*). In this way, for Plato, *eros* as ‘a third’ both connected the human person to the transcendent other and generated in time between self and other a further ‘filial’ thirdness.

What is striking in the case of both the recent thinkers however is that, at the heart of their thinking lies, for a first glance, a *refusal* of both ontological constitutive relation -- according to which notion the poles of a relation would not exist at all without this relation in the specific manner in which they do exist -- and ontological participation as the ‘analogical expression’ of being or beyond being within appearances and the series of temporal events.

In Levinas, this is in the name of the integrity and ontological self-sufficiency of the subject as a springboard for the paradoxically necessary gratuity of the ethical. In Badiou this is in the name of a reductive materialism which must favour the primacy of contentless ‘atoms’ that are but multiples of multiples and constitute only a repertoire of pure possibilities which do not of themselves give rise to anything, much less give themselves to be ‘shared in’ in any quasi-deliberate sense. So much is this the case that he even construes the appearance of real relations within given phenomenal worlds in terms of the operation of a pre-established harmony.²

On the one hand therefore we have a radically pluralist personalism and on the other an impersonal mathematisation which reduces unity to variously emergent axiomatic ‘count as ones’ of the numerical manifold. Yet in either case, it can be argued, the refusal of constitutive relation between the one and the other and of analogical

mediation between the one and the many entails the deconstructibility of their philosophies.

In the case of Levinas, the primacy of the individual (of the cogito) cannot really be cancelled by the co-primacy of the *Autrui* as infinite. Since this is asymmetrical, a regard for the other turns out to mean an aporetic continual promotion of the merely 'egotistic' happiness of a 'final' other who cannot really arrive. In this way an apparent universality of the ethical dissolves into the promotion of endlessly diverse singular pleasures. Equally and conversely, the 'unique' singularity of the other cannot in practice be universally respected, because as soon as it appears it is contaminated by the 'bad' unity of 'the same' and so 'betrayed' as Levinas says and is effectively lost to view.³ If one puts both these contradictory perspectives together, then it appears that the universal command to do justice turns out to mean the exigency of offering a purely disinterested and never merely required 'gift' to the immediate other -- which in effect hands law over to whim and unmediable diversity without any 'just' proportioning.

Thus the command to love the neighbour is, as Levinas says, in its dyadicity 'anarchic', because it concerns the real presence before me of the face of an utterly unique another who presently 'attends' his own speech and is capable as a 'master' of teaching me something unique, not merely of performing the maieutic function of 'reminding' me of what I secretly know already.⁴ In this way Levinas sees himself as evoking the Socratic interpersonal context for the discovery of truth, while refusing

² Alain Badiou, *Logiques des Mondes: L'Être et l'événement*, 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2006) 329 ff 343-49

³ See for example, Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* trans Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991) 158 ff

⁴ Levinas, *loc cit*

the Platonic notion of knowledge as recollection of the eternal, and therefore as insisting, far more radically than Socrates the midwife, that truth is only present at all through the address of the other. However this contrast can readily be inverted in Plato's favour.

For at least at the stage of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas still exhibits a neokantian confusion (as has been best described by J-L Chrétien) between Platonic recollection of a lost origin that is mythically 'archi-historical' and exterior on the one hand, and a modern notion of the *a priori* as an ineluctable structure of given, inward human understanding on the other.⁵ In this way it is arguable that he misses the moment of alterity within the Platonic maieutic, while at the same time his own thinning-out of the Platonic notion of *eros* means that the ineffability of the personal encounter as essential for truth is actually *compromised*. This is because an essentially irreplaceable other who proffers to me a unique word would seem to imply a preferential love on the part of the self for a specifically appearing individual. Yet, to the contrary, Levinas insists on the invisibility of the face, unidentifiable by any gaze, whose expressive word, far from exercising any appeal to a *me* situated *here* that is untranslatable in general terms, *must* be a word that commands a justice objectively identifiable by a third party. In this way the 'anarchy' of the totally specific demand that emerges from a totally specific need only becomes an imperative insofar as it is, after all, always already translatable into the language of objective universal law.

So while the *autre* in the name of the always absent *Autrui* presents us with a uniquely expressive *gift* of saying that is in excess of any economy of the exchangeable said, it

is nevertheless the case that the expressive witness of the *autre* to the *Autrui* as the transcendently general other requires a circular reversion (that many readers of Levinas ignore) all the way from the divine height of ‘otherness’ beyond being back to the economic generality of being as finite. Precisely *because* the *Autrui* lurks behind the *autre*, what is expressed by the *autre* must take the form of a ‘thematisation’ that establishes for the first time, against the amorphous flux of becoming and the Pascalian indeterminacy of elemental space, an ‘economy’ of exchangeable objects which is the social basis for the scientific measurement of being in terms of a conceptual *mathesis*. (And here Levinas remains squarely in a Comtian tradition.)

It follows that while the ‘universal’ command to respect the neighbour seems to fragment irretrievably into the anarchic and socially inexpressible judgement of one individual in the face of another (like the situation of Abraham as described by Kierkegaard), Levinas’s refusal of both Kierkegaardian absurdity and the Platonically erotic means that respect for the absolute specificity of the other can after all only be formally acknowledged as a general right regulatable by a State law (upon whose *necessity* for justice, for all the invective against Hegel, Levinas still discretely insists) and is thereby rendered void.⁶ To be sure, Levinas wishes to say that the measure of the ‘triadic’ logic of state justice (whereby the ‘charitable’ reaction of one person to another must be recognisable as objectively ‘just’ for a third person) is its non-suppression of the dyadic logic according to which each person must ‘apologetically’ attend his own discourse, and so answer for himself at his own trial before a judge who will bend the letter of the law to the spirit of equity. However, if the dyadic

⁵ Jean-Louis Chrétien, ‘L’immémorial et la réminiscence’ in *L’Inoubliable et L’Inespéré* (Paris: Desclée

situation is to contain perspectives only available for the face to face, then one cannot validly rule out (or even rule out of court) judgements that emerge only from the emotional interaction between one person and another. If these judgements can nonetheless become visible to a third party, then this is because some new insight into justice is *engendered* out of this interaction (by the work of *poros*) and not, as for Levinas, because the other as the ethical and not erotically preferred other is *already* implicitly the ‘third person’.

So while, in one direction, Levinas’s universal ‘anyone’ could anarchically collapse into the sheer diversity of ‘each and everyone’ beyond genus and therefore beyond humanity, it is much more the other fork of the *aporia* which Levinas elects: the specific other is always in effect reducible to just ‘anyone’. In practical terms this means a moderation of sheer liberalism by social democracy (which is fine so far as it goes): concern for the individual under the law must exceed observance of contract and extend also to the securing of his material well-being and alleviation of his suffering. These concerns, however, are admissible precisely because they are generalisable and do *not* extend into the positive promotion of the other’s unique capacities insofar as these may manifest themselves only to the ‘interior’ judgment of others within a within a specific and so ‘dyadic’ (not externally surveyable) historic conjuncture. Because the substantive concerns for human well-being mentioned by Levinas are always negative – rescuing from some sort of distress – it is clear that, in the case of positive distribution, he takes as normative and irremediable historical processes of economic ‘justice’ which will always override the needs of individuals and so be in reality profoundly *unjust*. This injustice seems for him to flow

fundamentally from the work of human labour, in which one's inability to keep control over the use and interpretation of one's own products automatically entails in some measure an alienation of self to the abuse of the other (a thesis clearly far more Hegelian than Marxist).⁷ His confinement of a just politics to a social democratic 'rescue operation' therefore correlates with a despair of engendering any primarily just economic procedures. As I shall underline later, this is because he sees history as unfolding within an ontological space that is fatally immune to considerations of both justice and truth.

This depressingly reactive political stance emerges directly from the fact that, when Levinas speaks Platonically of the 'desire' of the other, this means for him a desire not of what is lacking to the self, but of a 'surplus' to egotistic enjoyment that cannot really be registered by any presence of the desired other at all, but only by my wilful donative and sacrificial response to his privative distress. In this way he is talking about a strange desire that interrupts and runs counter to one's normal positive desires.⁸ The *penia* in Platonic *eros* is critically regarded by him as still too much like a mere absence of self-completion, even if he acknowledges that in the *Symposium* Plato refuses any simple version of such a concept. However, for Plato what is lacking to the soul is the true abiding other that exists 'elsewhere', and in the *Phaedrus* this is seen as including an eternal relation to other souls. Plato in fact already somewhat approaches a Christian sense of grace as delineated by Henri de Lubac: according to this understanding grace is a divine gift that supplies a supernatural lack basic to our

⁶ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 157-162

⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*, trans Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP 1969) 158-68

⁸ *Totality and Infinity*, 33-5

very nature and yet prior to our natural being.⁹ Even though Levinas does indeed talk about the relation to the other in terms of such a subjective address that precedes the fully-fledged self, he still thinks that the only guarantee of this radically original gratuity is the contrasting stability of the self locked within the secure *cogito* of ‘enjoyment’, the constant finite cycle of hunger and satisfaction.

It is just for this reason that he cannot read the constitutive desire for the other as also the fulfilment of erotic aspiration for communion, but must rather read it as a corrosion of enjoyment and a rupture of all felt relating. In this way, once again, he refuses Platonic daemonic mediation: between the locked-in and incommunicable self-delectation of a myriad egos on the one hand, and the entirely communicable imperative to respect the needs of the other on the other hand, there can be no connection or any process of ascetic purification of delight.

Instead of this sort of connection, Levinas’s vision is shadowed by a kind of anti-mediation. For given the fact that for him, especially in *Otherwise than Being*, persecution by the needs of the other and self-enjoyment arise together and co-condition each other from the outset, and given also the fact that under triadic justice ‘I myself’ also must appear in the asymmetric relation of ‘Other’ before all other others, it would appear that the multiplicity of enjoyment and the unicity of the law simply dialectically collapse into each other. With a revealingly coy defensiveness, Levinas declared that materialism consisted in immanentism and not in the priority and self-sufficiency of the sensual.¹⁰ Yet the aporetic disintegration of his philosophy proves just the reverse: having once elected a hedonistic version of the *cogito* as his

⁹ See John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the*

starting point which he never abandoned (enjoyment is incommunicable and the only guarantee of the sheer interruption of the same by the other) this hedonism, with its implied materialistic ontological substructure, turns out to be the hidden truth of all his reflections.

In Levinas, without relational mediation, neither the one nor the many are sustained and both invert into each other. A substantively pluralist ethic reduces to a formalistic one supporting the aims of the modern State, while the substance that this formalism conserves subordinates any pursuit of scientific truths or ethical community to the individualistic realisation of *oikeosis* and self-contentment.

In the case of Badiou, at first sight something oddly similar occurs. By the time of the *Logiques des Mondes* he divides reality into 1. mathematical ‘being’, 2. pre-subjective ‘appearance’ and 3. ‘event’ within which subjectivity arises as ‘truth process’. Yet for him, being as totally plural, utterly empty mathematical possibility, only ‘is’ through the surplus of topological appearance (objectively given, pre-subjective phenomenal ‘worlds’ that are only manifest within certain ‘logics’ or algebraic geometries), while pure being can from one perspective be understood as a kind of degree-zero of appearance.¹¹ Appearance, on the other hand, only consists of contingent phenomenal ‘existences’ that are semi ‘fictional’.¹² In this manner being and appearance disappear into each other in a way parallel to the mutual collapse that Badiou identifies in ‘modernist’ (extended into ‘postmodern’) thought between ‘differentiating process’ on the one hand and ‘presences’ on the other. One can think here equally of

Supernatural (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005)

¹⁰ *Totality and Infinity*, 298

¹¹ *Logiques des Mondes*, 197

¹² *Op Cit* 234

Heidegger's Being and beings; Bergson's *durée* and spatialised being; Derrida's *différance* and 'presences', or 'gift' and 'economy', and Deleuze's 'non-identical repetition' and 'regimes of representation'. In each case one has a fundamental unifying power which 'is not' save in its problematic negative cancellation of the very existences which it itself originally distributes and constitutes.¹³

In Badiou's case though, in contrast to the 'postmodern' paradigm, being is primarily 'many', while appearances present arbitrary local logics of unity. However, the problem of 'mutual dissolution' between the one and the many remains somewhat kindred. Badiou seeks to resolve this by introducing a 'third' category of the event, and here one must suspect that really this is to reintroduce mediation. In terms of the event, an extraordinary existence of one self-defining singular instance of reality arises on the surface of a world of appearances normally obeying a closed logic.

At the ontological level, this involves the instance of at least one element within a set which merely 'belongs' to it in isolation and does not, insofar as it does so, present for co-belonging through 'inclusion' any members of itself as a subset – this is in accord with Zermelo's 'axiom of foundation' designed to secure limits to a set and prevent its dissolution into all the infinite sub-sets that it must inevitably contain. For Badiou, such a free-floating and yet necessary 'element' in excess of belonging 'parts', provides in its relative indetermination an 'evental site' upon which, outside ontology as defined by the mathematical (for which no set can be a member of itself), an

¹³ *Logique des Mondes*, 403-11

‘event’ can historically emerge as an aberrant sheer singularity defined purely by self-belonging.¹⁴

At the ‘logical’ level of appearances, the indeterminacy of the evental site somehow allows it to ‘directly appear’ as such on the surface of appearances in terms of an intense stimulus for change and transformation which permits what is ‘unrepresented’ and so ‘inexistent’ in some apparent object (as for example, the Muslim character of a supposedly ‘French Muslim’ in France) now after all to be acknowledged. Because ‘worlds’ are always instigated and sustained by such stimuli which are the dominant ‘points’ (emphases of worlds that define them, one might say) that have the ‘power to localise’ the merely mathematical by a kind of ‘force of decree’, Badiou in his second ‘great book’ (*Logiques des Mondes*) qualifies the dualism that he presented in his first ‘great book’ (*Être et Événement*) between a static socio-historical ‘situation’ that merely instantiates a stable ontological set, on the one hand, and the irruptive event on the other. For the later book there is instead a much more dominant and continuous *changement* which ‘diagonally’ transforms different worlds and weaves them together through releasing the ‘decisional’ power of points and proceeding ‘point to point’.¹⁵

It is in fact the event as *changement* which now realises a synthesis between being and appearance and prevents them from collapsing into each other in mutually assured destruction. Normally, the various transcendental logics of appearing worlds which define them algebraico-geometrically in terms of dominant intensities, conjunctions, ‘enveloping’ media and excluded ‘minima’ are ‘added back into’ the world of sets by the process of ‘bundling’, which means that mere mathematical quantities are also

¹⁴ *Being and Event*, 81-9, 185-90

expressed as degrees of intensity (the ‘algebraic’ aspect) and the interiors of diverse sets come to communicate with each other in terms of true mutually communicating conjunctures that are not simply further ‘settings’ -- where the elements do not interact -- and so thereby establish real ‘sites’ (the ‘geometric’ aspect). Exceptionally, in the opposite direction, as we have just seen, an ‘underlying’ rogue ontological element itself rises to the surface of the phenomenal. But in either case, the ‘real synthesis’ between the ontological and the apparent-logical is brought about by the operation of the quasi-decision of the transcendently dominant object or objects which define worlds and are dubbed by Badiou ‘points’. And it is this decision or series of decisions, which, when accentuated, becomes the fully fledged subjective (‘human’) event.¹⁶

Thus it is *changement* and the event that ensure that something *both* is, and *also* appears, precisely because it is a dynamic process involved with radical alteration that exceeds as actual the mere potential of being, and as dynamic equally exceeds the passive dependency of appearances upon a ‘bundling’ back into the underlying mathematical repertoire. Beyond the postmodern shuttle between the real that is not, and the unreal that always and inescapably dominates our lives, Badiou certainly appears to introduce a synthesising third. He is able to do so because his mathematical ‘real that is not’ is not a forceful ‘One’, while his appearances are themselves but mere deposits of this empty being – hence there would appear to be room for the merely emergent third nonetheless to drive the whole system.

¹⁵ *Logique des Mondes*, 375--463

¹⁶ *Op Cit* 243-4, 277 ff, 433, 462-71

Here, however, one can argue that Badiou is caught within an extreme *aporia*: on the one hand his programme is reductive, such that the ‘real’ content of the event or the ‘truth-process’ that emerges from it must be the re-irruption of the universal void that is the empty basis of all mathematical sets exorbitantly (it would seem) taken by Badiou to compose being as such. The consequence here would be, as he sometimes seems to imply, that the *only* mark of the true is its break with old systems and invention/discovery of a new mode of operation in art, politics, science and love (the four categories which he sees as both defining our humanity and as composing in their interrelation the true subject-matter of philosophy, as Socrates first realised). In this way the ‘universality’ of truth processes would collapse back into anarchic manyness expressing only a nullity and there would be no way to discriminate between one new eventful possibility and another (and indeed Badiou never perhaps suggests any such way).

On the other hand, if only the event causes being to appear and appearances to be, such that, as Badiou says, the event is ‘the fourth’ that includes being, appearance and the event, then his thinking seems to be incipiently somewhat idealist after all – even if ideas interpellate subjects rather than vice-versa.¹⁷ In this case mathematical diversity would itself be upheld by quasi-subjective decisions in favour of unitary and unifying processes, while the more than liberal (formal agreement to differ, or to allot incommensurable spheres of influence) compatibility of these processes would also demand what Badiou does not provide – namely an overarching truth process as such. Indeed, Badiou frequently indicates that even mathematical truth is only upheld by decision and commitment – in a way highly reminiscent of Husserl’s *Krisis*, he sees

¹⁷ *Op Cit* 156

mathematics also as born from an event and sustained by fidelity to a truth-process.¹⁸ Furthermore, if for Badiou the many different truth processes are compatible with each other, then it does not seem satisfactory to say, as he does, that the public measure of their legitimacy is merely the non-interference of one process with another. For this lapse into liberalism, or what Badiou terms ‘materialist democracy’ (for him this would embrace both Levinasians and Deleuzians) implies a permanent static appearing of a formal logic of non-interference and clearly demarcated distribution of boundaries of discourse to prevail over the unpredictability of a newly emerging event which must surely include the capacity to revise any such boundaries. Truly to escape such liberalism, it would seem that Badiou must consider the possibility of a ‘meta-truth process’ arising from an event that is ‘the universal of all universals’. He realises of course that Christianity provides just such a possibility, but seeks, perhaps incoherently, to confine its truth-event to the full emergence of the very idea of a truth event as such, rather than as providing a needed overarching substantive horizon.

It would appear then, that Badiou might be subject to a symmetrically opposite deconstruction than the one which one can apply to Levinas. His anarchic impersonal manyness turns out to be but the residue of unified quasi-subjective election of unifying truths. And his ‘underlying’ hyper-material plural atoms could be but the negative shadow of the light of ideal reason.

So it becomes natural to ask whether the ‘return to metaphysics’, which is inevitably in some measure a return to Plato, which these two thinkers diversely (and in my view

¹⁸ *Being and Event*, 23-81 and elsewhere.

rightly) promise, should not consider more seriously the Platonic centrality of real constitutive relation and participation. In the case of Badiou, they are refused perhaps because he knows that an imprescribable mediation between the one and the two in Plato already obscurely suggests a theistic ontological primacy for subjective judgement. However, in his interesting eagerness to avoid a materialistic immanentism of the One (Spinoza, Bergson) Badiou appears so much to wish to endow contingently emerging truths with the seal of absoluteness, that his position can appear to be incipiently Feuerbachian, and indeed it is clear that his threefold scheme of being, appearance and event (which covertly structures both his ‘great books’ in their interwoven meditations on respectively mathematics, historical conjunctures and the thoughts of individual writers) has Hegelian Trinitarian echoes.¹⁹ It is as if all of reality were upheld by a human projection of true ideas that, as he explicitly indicates, has the force of the Cartesian God’s edict as to the truths even of logic and mathematics.²⁰

Yet Badiou’s primacy of the ‘true idea’ over the person means that this humanism is not really possible for him. If his truth processes are self-grounding and eternal although they arise within time, and if the subject is more the subject of the idea that he is the source of the idea, then it is impossible to see how he can avoid saying that this is because these processes do, indeed, glimpse the eternal. It is as if at one end of the aporetic ambiguity of his entire philosophy, Badiou flirts with full-blown Platonism.

¹⁹ *Being and Event* 18: ‘This book, in conformity to the sacred mystery of the Trinity, is “three-in-one”’. In the light of Badiou’s whole trajectory, this remark seems just as sincere as it is also scornful.
²⁰ *Logiques des Mondes*, 535

This is confirmed in two further respects: first of all his event-category is Kierkegaardian, not Hegelian. If it negates the usual norms of both being and appearance and thereby mediates between the two, then this is because it involves a positive decided-upon surplus to either which appeals to a horizon of actual infinity beyond the Hegelian identity of the infinite with the finite. Astonishingly, this means that his ‘Trinity’ is in fact much more ‘orthodox’ than Hegel’s one, since it is not at all the outcome of a negative agonistic struggle in Being, but rather is the first positing of an in-principle peaceable and creative play between mathematical possibility and topological actuality.²¹

Secondly, his account of truth processes appears remarkably to re-introduce real relation and participation. Interruptive events are always in some measure continuous with other interruptive events and not *merely de novo*, such that they compose a ‘diagonal’ across different sets which forms a real connection between elements in diverse ‘paradoxical’ sets (sets in which either or both the ‘situation’ of the ‘belonging’ of ‘elements’ to an initial set is in excess to the ‘state’ of ‘inclusion’ of the ‘parts’ of subsets, or the content and number of the latter are in excess of the elements) and not simply a new set of elements blindly indifferent to each other – like for example all the ‘2’s in the set of ‘2’s.²² Badiou describes this diagonal as ‘the requirement of two’ necessary for the time of truth which seems to be for him also the ultimate truth of time. This ‘twoness’ refers both to the link between event and event necessary for there to be any newly arising event at all (in discussing Pascal, Badiou gives the example of the Incarnation assuming the giving of the law and elsewhere the example of the Russian Revolution assuming the precedent of the

²¹ *Being and Event*, 161-73; *Logiques des Mondes*, 153-65, 447-59

French Revolution), and the link between the first event and the ‘second event ‘ of fidelity to the event necessary for any truth-process. One can infer that the linking of disparate events and the process of fidelity lie close to each other, if they are not ultimately identical. Later in *Logique des Mondes*, Badiou further identifies this diagonal twoness as Plato’s ‘two’ or ‘Other’ in the Sophist which permits, against Parmenides, the possible ‘is not’ that guarantees the ‘is’ of truth, only by admitting into ultimate reality a positive as well as negative alterity: the blackbird is not an eagle not just because it is a blackbird, but also because there are eagles as well as blackbirds and they can be compared generically, specifically and ontologically. By reading Plato’s ‘other’ as a diagonal, Badiou *does* seem also to ascribe to a participation amongst the forms and a weaving by judgment in any specific instance of a blend of same and other, being and not being, unity and diversity.²³ It is clear then, that his understanding of ‘twoness’ since it already involves a real link of the one with the other, implicitly includes a decisional or judgemental ‘thirdness’.

Badiou’s understanding of diagonal twoness can be well illustrated by his reflection on the history of human art. He convincingly argues that, despite all cultural relativity, the painting of horses from the paleolithic grottoes of Chauvet to the depictions of Picasso, all operate in a shared strange area ‘between’ actual horses and ‘the idea of a horse’. In other words, one can only conclude, the site of the truth-processes of art *is* the site of participation in precisely the Platonic sense.²⁴

As I have said, Badiou’s thought appears, like that of his ultimate master Sartre’s, aporetically to hesitate between materialist reduction and existentialist elevation of the

²² *Being and Event* 210

human. Badiou himself nevertheless most often insists on the primacy of reduction. Yet it is hard to believe this. I would argue that in reality, on a careful reading, the balance of his thought bends towards elevation. I have already partially indicated the ways in which it does not: in terms of a seemingly vacuous account of change as self-validating and in terms of the arguably still very ‘postmodern’ relativism of sheerly diverse truth processes which must simply ‘tolerate’ each other in the public realm.

In both cases this is compatible with the idea that the subjective is possible in terms of the ‘holes’ that open up within fundamental mathematical reality according to various well known paradoxes of set-theory. These are, primarily: 1. the sub-set ‘diagonalising out’ of the initial set according to the ‘theorem of the point of excess’ (there are more ‘parts’ in the sub-groupings of a set of five sisters, for example, than there are the five initial ‘elements’); 2. the diagonalizing excess even of an infinite sub-set over an infinite primary set as shown by Cantor; 3. the undecidable excess or non-excess of sub-sets over a ‘set of all sets’ as shown by Russell, so proving that there is no ‘whole’ of reality, which is rather infinite; 4. the need seen by Zermelo to posit at least one element within a set, none of whose own elements (‘parts’ of the initial set) at all belong as elements to the initial set, such that there is nothing shared between the set and this member save the void, and therefore a set is strangely founded by something radically ‘other’ to itself -- it is thus this axiom which precludes ‘self-belonging’ and ensures that the event lies ‘beyond [mathematical] being’; and 5, the ‘forcing’, invented in the 1960’s by P.J. Cohen of sheerly

²³ *Logiques des Mondes*, 132

²⁴ *Op Cit* 25-9

indeterminable and so purely general mathematical parts within subsets into a kind of equality with the determinable elements of the initial one.²⁵

The opening in being provided by these paradoxes is then supplemented in *Logiques des Mondes*, by the intrusion of the parts of subsets or elements of the initial set not merely into or beyond the primary set, but also, by virtue of what Badiou terms an obscure elective ‘affinity’, into the algebraic-geometric arena of actual appearances.²⁶

Here, normally, a ‘world’ can only appear at all, because certain ‘objects’ of appearance are dominant over others, such that some things appear only through other things or else some things appear alongside others since they are both contained by a background ‘enveloping’ reality. All this depends upon various degrees of ‘intensity’ of individual items which express underlying mathematical atoms.

The prevailing objects of a world of appearances are, however, also for this reason typically, as we have already seen, ‘points’ (echoing Leibniz’s ‘metaphysical points’ or ‘monads’) at which an underlying indeterminate potency tends to come to the surface. These ‘points’ are precisely the hinge between appearance and event, since they contain a capacity for radical change. In proceeding from ‘point to point’ a subjective process of decision emerges which vaults from world to world and yet sustains a continuity. It is very hard to see how Badiou, for all his materialistic intellectual lineage, is *not* talking here about a ‘tradition’ in something like a Gadamerian sense. For the procedure from point to point has its own unfolding integrity: it would seem to consist in the relating through time of one thing with

²⁵ *Being and Event*, 81-123; 173-201; 265-81; 327-441

another by a series of decisions that weaves, in Kierkegaardian fashion (as Badiou indicates) its own specific character which nonetheless should command a universal assent as a process of truth.

One can now express the *aporia* concealed within Badiou's philosophy more radically. The way in which he links mathematical paradox and indeterminacy with the perplexities of human existential condition is cognitively ecumenical, brave and admirable. Yet the more he grounds the latter in the former, the more this merely redounds into a grounding of the former in the latter. Maybe subjects are indeed the scum of the void floating to the surface, but Badiou equally declares that opting for the primacy of the many is a mere decision that contrasts with what he claims was Georg Cantor's alternative *Catholic* decision for the eternal paradoxical unity of the one and the many beyond the principle of non-contradiction, which Cantor's own paradoxes of transfinity seemed to violate. Likewise he declares that the postulation of an actual infinity is a decision taken within the course of Western culture.

And at this point Badiou's own decision regarding the immanence of the infinite seems yet more precarious than he will always concede: for to conclude that infinity, beyond the paradoxes of contradiction that collapse any finite or transfinite totality (after Russell and Cantor), is merely immanent and inaccessible rather than an eternally 'actual' *coniunctio oppositorum* is actually to *evade* the demonstrated limit of finite logic rather than to embrace it.

²⁶ *Logiques des Mondes*, 272

Badiou's mere decision at this point is also supported by an inaccurate history: he claims that in the Middle Ages the Greek horizon of the essential finitude of being was preserved, with God being a mere negative or eminent exception.²⁷ Thus the infinity of being only emerges at the Renaissance with the infinitization of the cosmos. But this is false on two counts: first of all, Badiou reads Medieval theology as if it was all Scotist and divided being primarily into finite and infinite. And in fact even Scotus saw the infinite as primary and the finite as exceptional and secondary, whereas Badiou speaks as if, for the Middle Ages, it were the other way around. But more typically, the early to high Middle Ages, as with Aquinas, saw being as such as being infinite and finite existence as only participating in this. Aquinas, it is true, did not embrace an infinite cosmos nor an actual mathematical infinite, but other thinkers of this period came near to doing so: Robert Grosseteste saw the Creation as initially constituted by a neoplatonic emanative series of transfinites which expressed the propagation of light. Finally, in the Renaissance period, Nicholas of Cusa's assertion of the infinity of the cosmos did not for him imply immanence but rather the paradoxical and continuous passing-over of the finite into its constitutively other and yet 'not-other' transcendent infinite ground. Essentially the same construal was sustained by Blaise Pascal.

Thus the ultimate primacy of the Many over the One is a mere decision. Certainly, one can agree with Badiou that, as already for Plato, and as in Trinitarian theology (as he notes!) the One is later than the Many and emerges only as their unity -- since if being was originally really one, there would not 'be' anything, as with Parmenides,

²⁷ *Being and Event* 142-70

and the One would have no content, as Hegel showed.²⁸ Nevertheless, because there is only ever any specific ‘set’ of the manifold by virtue of its unity, one might still decide, in divergence from Badiou’s fundamental decision, to accord to unity a retroactive primacy (as indeed in the case of Trinitarian theology). Badiou’s option for the sheer primacy of the manifold is undergirded by an equally arbitrary decision for the immanence of the infinite which leaves it within an amorphous indeterminacy, in absolute dyadic excess of and yet ultimately expressive of, the ‘anti-one’ of the void, which Badiou writes runically as \emptyset .

For this reason it would seem that if, as Badiou clearly implies, being and appearance collapse into each other and cancel each other out (in the same fashion as Derrida’s *différance* and presence) that in the end the same thing is true of event as against being/appearance taken together. If the event is supposed to save the actual and rescue us from the postmodern shuttle of indeterminacy between the absent real and the illusory given (so inevitably seductive for Americans, as Badiou says) in the name of universal truth, then it seems to fail to do so because it is captured by a new shuttle between mathematical being and existential decision.

However, as we have already mentioned, Badiou declares that besides the triad of being, appearance and event there is a fourth – and that this is the event! In which case, a Kierkegaardian positive mediation which alone sustains a double negation is the ‘whole’ of reality, constituting in effect Badiou’s ‘absolute knowledge’. And this would seem to be confirmed by the way in which, as we have seen, he says that even

²⁸ *Being and Event*, 23-4

though mathematical entities constitute ‘being’, being can still be read as a minimal instance of appearance – indeed only in this way does it exist.

The position presented here seems extraordinarily like that of substantive relations in orthodox Trinitarian theology: the Father, though the source of all being, ‘is not’ without the Son, even though the Son only images the Father. Here one could argue that only the third person of the Trinity avoids double abolition within the Godhead by insisting that the Father as fully expressed in the Son nonetheless gives rise to a surplus potential beyond even ‘the all’ of what is and what appears or is effective and effected (the Platonic *dynamis*). Only in this way are the Father’s potency and the Son’s actuality both ‘real’ – precisely because they are upheld by the ‘event’ of the Spirit’s dynamism. Badiou’s granting of a fundamental role to *changement* as securing the ‘real synthesis’ of being and appearance seems astonishingly parallel to this theological *topos* – as he is most likely well aware.

Moreover, he *much more* stresses this role towards the end of *Logiques des Mondes* than hitherto, in the course of making generous concessions to Bergson and Deleuze’s vitalism and subordination of finite being to finite becoming. Yet he still in these pages wishes to avoid the notion of an ‘underlying’ virtuality – rather what is fundamental is the very ‘later’ and always actual process of change – finally human historical change – itself.

If change as an actual process is now for Badiou fundamental, then it precludes any notion of a more basic virtual power that nourishes, unfolds, enfolds and at the same time swallows up this actuality. Moreover, it also precludes the idea that such change

is a subjective projection, since for Badiou the subject is constituted within consistent transformation and is in no way its source. But if change directed towards truth is ultimate and self-grounded, such that, as Badiou says, it has the tonality of ‘eternity’, then what is one to say? Surely that indeed this selective but ultimate temporality is *indeed* also eternity or, as it were, the underside of the eternal? It would seem to follow not merely that actual time as truth process participates in eternity, but also that it is included within eternity in exactly the same sense that, for Thomas Aquinas, the creation of the world is included in the Paternal uttering of the *Logos*.

The profound paradox here is that Badiou, as a Marxist, in seeking a hopeful materialist ontology in the face of the current course of history and so in despair of historicism, veers ever closer not merely to Platonism but also to Christianity -- as he is well aware, even if he has wagered on the success of formalistic advance-raids upon alien beauties that will preclude any later yielding to their substantive charms.

For the more that he rejects the unifyingly virtual as a foundational principle, the more he appears to break with a Bergsonian-Husserlian-Heideggerian emancipation of the possible from the primacy of the actual -- an ‘emancipation’ which (as Levinas so rightly says) always subordinates the event to a merely forceful ‘power’ of which it is an instance. Instead, Badiou seeks to render the import of the event itself ultimate, precisely by conjoining it to the ultimacy of actuality -- which is an Aristotelian and Thomistic thesis. He still wishes to insist on the immanent primacy of becoming, yet, arguably, to yoke this to the self-grounding of the actual is barely coherent: an event which manifests only its own actuality as universal truth, must be, as he says, an

instance of ‘grace’.²⁹ But once one has said, as he also says in the same place, that the event and the truth process arrive in their actuality as a ‘gift’, then it scarcely matters that he does not affirm their arrival from an ‘elsewhere’. For indeed, they do not come from an elsewhere in any ontic sense: but if they arrive and reveal the eternal then how is this not the arrival in time of the eternal? To speak of grace without God can only mean to speak apophatically of God – unless the event is entirely hollowed out by the void or is simply a human projection. But we have seen how there are elements in Badiou’s writings that seem to prohibit those renderings.

Even the most reductive moment in Badiou’s thought, namely the mathematical ontology, appears precariously materialist, since the most radically ‘nominalist’ atoms, in collapsing beyond even individuality into pure multiples of multiples, are also by that very token, the most ideal. As the ‘Cambridge Platonist’ Ralph Cudworth noted in the 17thC with respect to Thomas Hobbes, materialism seems to demand atomism, but the most rigorous atomism reverts into intellectualism.³⁰ So to say that numbers are the ontological alphabet runs dangerously close to saying that elements of thought are the constituents of being. And sure enough, as we have seen, it turns out that the mathematical atoms only ‘are’ through actual existing appearances of contingently diverse ‘worlds’ which themselves are only given to possible appearance by exhibiting ‘transcendental’ logical structures (transcendental for the objective situation, not for a subjective observer) that are in excess of the specific content of appearance. These ‘logics’ have, therefore, once again an ineradicably intellectualist and abstract aspect such that while, certainly, one can concur, against the Husserlian legacy, with the realist bias of Badiou’s phenomenology and its freedom from any

²⁹ *Logiques des Mondes*, 534

époche, it is still difficult to elide from it, as he appears to wish, the view that reality, as it exists or appears, is *also* a reality that can only be defined as presenting itself to the human mind in a certain way and may sometimes appear to different persons in incommensurably different ways. Finally, if being only appears and appearance only is through the point-to-point procedure of eventful processes, which give rise to and yet also consist in, quasi-subjective ‘decisions’, then the not merely logical but also intellectual consistency of the material cosmos seems to be now trebly confirmed. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Badiou’s *changement* is not in some sense psychic – rather like the world-soul in Russian thought from Solovyev onwards.

This is further underlined by his refusal to read the aporetic character of the relation of past, present and future in terms of Bergsonian *durée*, Heideggerean *ecstasis* or Derridean *différance*. He denies that presence vanishes in the face of the direct passage from past to future and instead affirms, with Kierkegaard, that past and future are synthesised in the instantaneous ‘moment’ of the present that can occupy no real measured time, and therefore coincides in some fashion with eternity.³¹ For Badiou indeed, also in this specific respect at one with Levinas, time is the Cartesian *creatio continua* that binds moment to moment though an extrinsic intervention which for Badiou is that of the ontological void. Yet he also seems to point beyond such extrinsicism, whether divine or nihilistic. For if the series of replete temporal presences or events are primary, rather than any temporal power of flux, then the flow of time must surely flow into time ahead of itself from eternity, rather than from a latency of time itself – which, be it noted must always, even in Bergson, spatially denature temporality.

³⁰ Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, Volume III (Bristol: Thoemmes

Throughout Badiou's thought (in another point of connection with Levinas) he seems to prefer the thinkers of transcendence to the thinkers of immanence: Paul to the stoics, Descartes and Pascal to Spinoza, Kierkegaard to Nietzsche. His aim of course is always to plunder the valency of transcendence for the confirmation of dialectical materialism – yet it can be argued that the real thrust of his thinking demands rather an outright *theological materialism*. (And then that this alone can overcome 'materialist democracy'.)

This is above all because any favouring of the primacy of the actual, the relational and the participatory cannot be readily divorced from some mode of metaphysical Platonism and what can be regarded as not just its modification, but also its *more emphatic and effective restatement* by Christian theology. For in the latter case, the absolute itself is conceived, in Trinitarian theology, as substantially relational and the Creation, since it is at once *ex nihilo* and emanatively *ex Deo* (in Aquinas for example) is regarded as only existing at all within an entirely asymmetrical relation of dependence upon God which now renders participation more extreme, since there is no longer, as for Plato, an ontologically original matter which both 'imitates' the eternal and receives a 'share' in the eternal.

Levinas regarded creation viewed as participation to be pagan corruption; yet to the contrary, if creation, on his preferred model, is regarded as radically independent of and radically distant from God, it is reduced either to a mythic act of a mere being upon mortal beings, or to an onto-theological drama that idolatrously subordinates

both God and his divine image in creatures to a more-encompassing being -- even if one dubs this 'exteriority'. To view creation as participation is, by contrast, simply to expound the grammar of creation whereby, while God himself is not 'really related' to creatures, creatures only exist at all as related to God, such that their relating to God precedes even their 'own' reality. Levinas imagined that such 'participation' involved a kind of subsumption of persons in an impersonal totality, but this is not the logic of what Aquinas described as the 'quasi-part' taken by the creature.³² This 'quasi-part' hovers somewhere midway between part and copy: the creature is not a part of God who is replete, but rather is a shadowy imitation of the divine. Yet since the creature does not precede his creation, the receiving ground of this imitation is given by God as well as the imitation itself. In fact the ground of the imitation can only be the imitation, such that here uniquely, to imitate is also to receive a share. But because the share is not a simple part it is only a share in so far as it is a new and imperfect copy.

For Levinas, participation cannot render creation a gift, since for him a gift must be gratuitously alienated and ideally (as in paternity) establish an entirely new and independent reality. This is why he theologially undergirds the 'atheist' autonomy of the self-enjoying *cogito* with the notion of an act of divine creation that fully establishes a finite existence completely comprehensible in its own terms as exhibiting a self-sufficient version of being, taken as univocal.³³ Whether or not this is truly 'Jewish', or the only possible Jewish theological option, it is clear that Levinas has here bought into a general post-Scotist Western legacy which divides univocal being into infinite and finite regarded as ontically 'external' to each other. Once

³¹ *Logiques des Mondes*, 377-419; 447-59

again, the danger here of this refusal of a Thomistic ‘analogy of being’ is one of onto-theological reduction of God and creatures to beings on the same plane of reality. But in that case, the giftedness of creation is in reality compromised: one can understand, indeed, how the infinite ‘gives’ the finite ‘to be finitely’, but not how the very beingness of the finite is signed right through the entire surface of its nature with the evidence of its radical reception from ‘before itself’. Moreover, one can here construe the infinite as ‘disinterestedly’ giving the finite what it needs in terms of its finitude (healing its bodily distress and so forth) but one cannot truly construe it as ‘giving of itself’, which Levinas’s notion of the linguistic expression of the other as ‘donating’ a unique word of teaching would seem to require: for all the *autres* certainly, and so also supremely in the case of the divine *Autru*. By contrast, the giving of a merely ‘disinterested’ gift across a gulf of distance reduces either to a granting of what is due in justice to the other by virtue of his independent self-subsistence and dignity (and so is not a gift) or else to an impersonal grant of welfare which can be grasped as public charity but which forms no dyadic personal bond (and so is not a gift).

There can only be a ‘giving of oneself’ and so a unique personal ‘signed’ gift, if one gives a share of oneself which, to be sure, will only be authentic if the self exists as such in sharing. Certainly, Levinas is right, a mere ‘part’ would not be a gift, but instead either an absorption of the recipient into one’s own devices or else a temporary loan of one’s substance. Or else again, if we were speaking of personal shares in an impersonal material or abstract communality, then sharing might be a process of justice but scarcely of donation. On the other hand, to ‘imitate’ is not necessarily to receive a gift but first and foremost to flatter or possibly to steal. It

³² See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001) 19-59

follows that, indeed, only Aquinas's 'quasi-part' is archetypally gift as describing the gift of existence as such. For here the share in the infinite Other is 'handed over' as the possibility of 'imitation' by the finite recipient which first establishes this recipient in being. Such a mode of imitation cannot be wheedling intrigue nor robbery, because the imitator is only possible at all *as* imitation and therefore receives the entire ability to copy as well the form of the copy from the original. Here to imitate is to receive, while to share is to appropriate for oneself, and in one's own limited imitative idiom, the mode and substance of the supreme giver.

It is also this perspective which best shows the unity of charity with justice. For if creatures are only established as 'shares' according to an original distribution whose goodness cannot be questioned without foregoing all evidence of the good as such, then from the outset the just order of due 'parts' is received as gift, while inversely gift can only be most radically present as justice – namely as 'acceptable' gift, where the appropriateness of the content of the gift is not measured merely by the pre-existing 'needs' of the recipient but rather the gift brings with it its own measure of surprising suitability and can only exist at all as in this fashion as 'unexpectedly appropriate', since the creature in its specificity and specific set of relations to other creatures is *itself* the gift.

In this way charity is originally justice, because the untranslatable uniqueness of the individual is registered *with* and not *despite* his constitutive relation to all other creatures. Here the 'dyadic' is already the 'triadic', not because the first and the second are also formalistically substitutable by a third (as for Levinas) but because the

³³ *Totality and Infinity*, 33-60

‘ineffable’ analogical blending through ‘affinity’ of two (as Badiou puts it) can be non-identically extended into the blending of three, and inversely already presupposes this blending. In consequence, Levinas’s ‘charitable anarchy’ of two would no longer demand to be realised in the law of three by which it is also inevitably betrayed. For Levinas, inadequately, the charitable justice of two is at once identical with the legal justice of three and yet in tension with it. But for a true logic of creation and of grace (perhaps more usually, though not exclusively, expressed by Christian than by Jewish or Islamic theologies – one can think here of Ibn el Arabi) there should be no such tension.

So in considering the ‘logic’ of Christianity, one can read Trinitarian relation as radicalising the ‘weaving’ by judgement of the one with the many in Plato that begins to suggest the ultimacy of ‘spirit’ even in the realm of the forms. Likewise one can read creation *ex nihilo* as radicalising the notion of *methexis* in terms that fully express rather than compromise the idea that existence is a personal or hyper-personal gift. To complete this brief picture, one can understand the doctrine of the Incarnation as radicalising the Platonic teaching of recollection, as Kierkegaard so brilliantly realised in his *Philosophical Fragments*. For Plato, recollection was triggered by certain events of historical encounter, which in the later ‘theurgic’ gloss upon his work by Iamblichus and Proclus was read (perhaps correctly) as also the descent of divine powers into physical reality. Christianity, in effect, as later Greek fathers like Dionysius and Maximus came to realise, proffers the most extreme example of ‘theurgic recollection’ imaginable: for here the encounter of all human beings with the life of one man who is personified by the descended *Logos* itself ‘reminds’ the whole of humanity of the forgotten Trinitarian God and its own true lost life which consists

in gradually entering into the eternal triune rhythms. In this way ‘incarnation’ means that participation in the divine relational life is restored. The truth is not recovered by a ‘more precise human gaze’, but rather by a repairing of the asymmetrical relation to God of the creation by the action of God himself. Truth which is itself relational is relationally restored.

If, for Badiou, the Christian event is the event of the arrival of the logic of any universal truth-process as such (albeit in a false ‘mythical’ form), then one can suggest that this is implicitly because it radicalises the Platonic notion of recollection. For here the ‘trigger’ of recollection and what is recollected precisely coincide, such that, as Kierkegaard put it (although he read ‘recollection’ in over-Kantian terms) truth is now a matter of ‘non-identical repetition forwards’ and not simply (instead of Kierkegaard’s ‘rather than’) ‘recollection backwards’.³⁴ In this way, the truth has become a historical project for the first time, since it is tied to the ‘participation-in’ (imitation through sharing) the extraordinary yet ordinary life and resurrection of one human being. Just for this reason, as Badiou rightly says, truth as a project is also for the first time something truly universal, since this imitation is possible for all humans, not just the learned, and can be diversely and yet consistently expressed in a myriad diverse cultural idioms. In this manner Badiou espouses a paradigm which construes ‘truth’ as emerging from a singular event of a mysterious ‘gift’ or ‘grace’ and a ‘further event’ as he describes it (in a transparent allusion to Pentecost) of continuous fidelity to the original event which can only be a relational weaving of witnesses through the course of time.³⁵

³⁴ See John Milbank, ‘The Sublime in Kierkegaard’ in Phillip Blond ed. *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998) 131-56

³⁵ Alain Badiou, *St Paul ou la Naissance de l’universalisme* (Paris: PUF 1999). See also, John Milbank, ‘Materialism and Transcendence’ in Creston Davis, John Milbank and Slavoj Zizek eds

My argument here then is, first of all, that Plato (and Aristotle to some degree) in his wake, favoured the primacy of the actual and the relational and that this stress, under the impulse of ‘revelation’, is much accentuated by Christianity. Secondly, that Badiou’s formalist favouring of a Christian paradigm is connected to those moments in his thought – grounded in the supremacy of the event rather than the supremacy of the void -- when he too seems to favour the primacy of the actual and the relational.

But to what extent is this really the case? Read one way, and perhaps the most ‘obvious’ way, Badiou’s work entirely denies this: what matters is the abstract potential of mathematical elements and the purely monadic (multiples of multiples) basis of relational illusion, such that apparent relational ties are (by a ‘pre-established harmony’) only the trace on the surface of the relative weights of phenomena determined quite independently of each other – as for example, we might see a large house as dominating both its garden and its surrounding wall, yet the fact that they have been constructed and conceived within this pattern of relation is really (on Badiou’s view) subordinate to the way these items embody respective degrees of intensity of appearing. (This of course seems to raise the problem of how such ‘degrees’ could have any meaning outside the relational context.)

Yet if the mathematical possesses for Badiou no Deleuzian force, it is hard to sustain this reading. Instead, the more primary hermeneutic key to his thought appears to be the thesis that the event is the fourth that is ‘the all’ in such a manner that the later, the emergent and purely contingent is bizarrely fundamental. It is for this reason that, as

Theology and the Political: the New Debate (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2005) for a further discussion of

we have seen, Badiou can say that human beings ‘create the truth’ in exactly the same way as Descartes’ God – who, beyond even any medieval voluntarism, ordains even the laws of arithmetic and logic. Here one can suggest that the humanist appropriation of divine voluntarism and of the divine *causa sui* (also first affirmed by Descartes) is not really consistent with Badiou’s view that subjects are only subjectivised within the truth-process, for this implies that if, indeed, human beings create the truth, it is inversely the case that humanity only emerges at all within this creating of the truth. (Since this happens in language, Badiou’s rejection of the linguistic turn also seems questionable – he fails to see that in its most radical form it *breaks* with transcendentalism and phenomenism and points back towards metaphysical speculation, since, if language is always already given, its ‘transcendental’ instance is as much ontological as epistemological and therefore precludes any ‘critical’ certainty about what is merely subjective, and merely confined to the phenoemenal.)

Human beings appear to be ‘compelled’ by events and truth-processes for Badiou just as, for Aquinas, God the Father is ‘compelled’ by the truths of the Son-Logos which he nonetheless utters. This gives a notion of expressive creating as being ‘sur-prized’ (as Levinas in one place declared) and ‘led out’ by the very truth to which it gives rise. In this way Badiou’s *verum-factum* would appear to be more like Giambattista Vico’s scholastic modification of Descartes in his *Liber Metaphysicus (De Antiquissima Italarum Sapientia)* than like Descartes himself. However, the Vichian model is less easily given a ‘Feuerbachian’ treatment than the Cartesian one. For perhaps a finite being could create infinite norms of truth. But if a finite being is

Badiou, Deleuze and politics which at points however reads Badiou, as I now realise in too

‘compelled’ by the norms it creates and projects them to an infinity whose end it can never actually reach and which it also projects as ‘actually beyond’ any mere ‘always one more step’ (as Badiou clearly affirms), then it would seem once again, as I said earlier, that the ‘compelling’ and universal character of truth ‘arrives’ to human beings indeed as a gift, so that its ‘as if from an elsewhere’ is really indistinguishable from ‘indeed from an [ontological not ontic] elsewhere’. The latter would only not follow if human beings were in truth actually infinite and eternal – then, certainly their being compelled by what they make would be identical with their own self-compelling (if not ‘self-causation’, since God always ‘is’). But if human beings, though ‘eternal’ and ‘divine’ for Badiou, are always merely in process of being deified (as he also clearly thinks) then even though, on earth they inaugurate the infinite, they are also here drawn forwards by an actuality that must be inaccessibly ‘already’ and which they can never entirely command.

What I am trying to suggest therefore, is that Badiou, read in terms of the supremacy of the event, is drawn despite himself ineluctably towards a more than formal espousal of Platonism and Christianity. To be able to claim this, one has to make reference to the following statements in *Logique des Mondes*.

First of all, as we have already twice seen, mathematical being can, for Badiou, itself be regarded as a degree zero of logical appearance.

Secondly, as we have also already seen, the ‘worlds of appearance’ can themselves be seen as the fixed deposits of eventful processes pivoting about points: ‘points are

simplicistically dualist a fashion.

metaphorically the indices of the decision of thought'.³⁶ This second position is much less clear in the book than the first, because Badiou admits the existence of 'atonal' worlds without the prevalence of overridingly significant 'points', or else, conversely, 'over-stretched' worlds saturated with such points, as in the case of a scenario of constant crisis where every day one must take crucial and ambivalent decisions – Badiou cites the experience of the *maquis* in France during World War II.³⁷

However, just as one can understand pure being in terms of an exceptional negative instance of appearing which is non-appearing, so likewise one could regard an atonal world without points as presenting a zero-degree of the event, where all commitment to the pursuit of noble ideas has been abandoned in favour of a nihilistic anti-commitment to the levelling of all values that is characteristic of contemporary 'anti-ideological' liberal postmodernism that is dubbed by Badiou 'democratic materialism'. Has the latter not arrived as a kind of negative truth process (rather than its mere refusal or subversion according to Badiou) emergent from certain 'anti-events' and 'anti-fidelities' (like the defeat of trade unionism in the 70's and a merely 'liberationist' construal of the significance of 1968). As for the over-stretched world that is saturated with points, thereby almost compromising the significance of any of them, this seems to concern an excess of event and transformation rather than its inverse.

In these ways the existence of atonal and over-stretched worlds without events does not disprove a reading of Badiou according to which all of reality is actually emergent from events. For how, indeed, can appearing worlds arise at all, save through some

³⁶ *Logiques des Mondes* 443

sort of radical change that elects the dominance of certain privileged points over others, which then settles into a constant logic of fixed comparative ratios between inner-worldly objects? This appears to imply event-processes within pre-human nature that would be dealt with by physics and biology. Badiou says almost nothing about the latter two disciplines, yet if he excludes their role, he would then seem to espouse an extreme Cartesianism which declares that nature may be exhaustively described and accounted for in terms of mathematics and algebraic geometry. This, though, would appear to conflict with the fact that he refuses any Cartesian dualism of mind and matter by locating within the material the mysterious and paradoxical grounds for the emergence of subjectivity. For if, on the one hand, the subjective is rooted in material nature and, on the other hand, the event is the all, then surely one requires a mediating category of forceful physical processes of eventful change and not just modification of a basic scenario. A certain degree of Bergsonian vitalism would have to be incorporated – and indeed Badiou shows signs of moving in such a direction.

If one reads Badiou's philosophy from the vantage-point of the event rather than from the vantage-point of the void, then the void appears to be only the negative shadow that the event works with, like God working with nothing in order to create. Similarly, appearances seem like the deposits of the event, laid down in the past from a future anterior, as *natura naturata*. For we know that Badiou does not ascribe the latter to the workings of a Spinozistic virtual *natura naturans*. But if phenomena are the deposits of the event before they are the manifestations of the mathematical *noumena* (reduced to the raw material that is pure potentiality) and if the event is what produces

³⁷ *Op Cit* 442-7

the human rather than being commanded by the human, then how can there not be a ‘divine shaping’ or a kind of ‘world soul’ at work here?

If the logic of appearances is read in terms of the primacy of the event, then Badiou’s thesis of a pre-established harmony would surely have to be abandoned. For one thing, how can mutually-constitutive relations (like the garden defined by its boundary and the boundary that is only visible as the boundary of the garden) be the apparent upshots of variegated intensities of objects if these intensities merely express abstract mathematical atoms that in reality do no work? Badiou also affirms that the mark of every apparent relation is that it can be envisaged from a standpoint outside the relation, such that this standpoint can in turn be envisaged in relation to the poles of the first relation and so on *ad infinitum*. Yet if relative intensities can only *exist* in appearances and so are only existing-through-manifestation via comparison, then are they not in reality *constituted* through this comparison such that they truly *depend* upon an infinite implied gaze that is forever withheld from their view?

Badiou takes it to be a confirmation of ‘materialism’ that a world can be ‘inaccessibly’ closed by its own transfinitude because, through the process of ‘exposure’ of one relation from a third vantage point that sets up two new relations one can, by imagined endless triangulation, project this process into the infinite.³⁸ However, if the diagonal path of eventful transformation, rather than the atomic insistence of the void, accounts for relations, then it would seem to follow that the latter are *constituted* beyond and yet between themselves by an infinite gaze that is really actual. The ‘materialist’ closure appealing to the paradoxical infinity of the finite, would turn out to be equally a ‘theological’ closure.

³⁸ *Logiques des Mondes*, 329-338

So it has now been seen that worlds of appearance may be regarded as themselves the deposits of consistent processes of fidelity to events in such a manner that the ecology of a specific world sustains, as a coherent logic, the outworking of certain evolutionary interruptions. Furthermore, I have also argued that these processes are constituted through real relation and do not merely express on the surface various intensities of underlying atomic possibility. This is finally confirmed by the dominance of the event. For Badiou, as we have seen, the event as ‘a member of itself’ exceeds the mathematical elements which only qualify as mathematical in so far as they can be arranged in sets as always members of an overarching category (the *mathematical* one is not radically singular but is rather defined as lying within the set of all 1’s, the series of 1, 2, and 3, as sub-included in the set of all 2’s and so forth). Its identity beyond the bare facts of its instance can therefore only be sustained by a process which ‘point by point’ deems it to sustain a consistency with the original event and indeed to other events to which it alludes.

It then follows that relationality must be original and can in no-wise be reduced to pre-established intensities. For the event and its sequence do not hang together for Badiou like a mathematical set, nor like a topological arena which only appears to view in terms of a fixed pattern of relative intensities (else we would only be presented with a blank or a blur.) To the contrary, ‘the pattern’ of the truth process seems to be inseparable from both its *actual* occurrence and the *relational* reference back and forth through time of one thing through another. Indeed, this is exactly why Badiou thinks that Pascal’s typological argument for Christianity is to be taken as exemplary: here foretype and fulfilment are *both* necessary (and therefore inextricably

related) because the Incarnation is only ‘true’ as the miraculous fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in terms of which it alone makes sense and yet is also true as their utterly *surprising* fulfilment – for otherwise the prophecies alone would have sufficed for human salvation.³⁹

And even at the ontological level, Badiou’s ‘pre-established’ harmony seems to get negated by his own manoeuvres. For although relations are supposed to be the accidental effects of the expression of intensities, so that they are only there for a series of triangulated gazes projected into the infinite, we have seen that in reality worlds are constituted as the deposits of the interweaving of the actual and original relations through space and time of the process of *changement*. In this way one might say that the event is always (like de Lubac’s grace) superadded to worlds which nevertheless first exist in terms of this extra. In that case, the relations within worlds are real and constitutive and not mere secondary quasi-illusions. But furthermore, if such relations compose worlds and the logic of worlds is, as Badiou says, ‘retroacted’ back into being, then it would seem that real relations invade even the ‘mathematical’ level. For the mark of retroaction, as we have seen, is the forming of secret ‘tunnels’ between the aberrant members of one set and those of another such that diverse ‘interiorities’ are combined. While Badiou appears to wish to read the conjunction of two topological areas in a ‘Leibnizian’ fashion as the transcendental conjunction of their two interiors, this seems to be negated by the fact that ‘site’ can only be ‘added back’ to set if one assumes that apparent constitutive connections (as between one end

³⁹ *Being and Event* 212-223

of a drawn line and another, or the four points of a square at the very simplest level) are indeed irreducible.⁴⁰

And at the phenomenological level also he is surely wrong: to take roughly his own example, the back garden that might link a house with a lake does not merely reflect the ‘pre-established’ link between the tranquillity of a domestic interior and that of a house, but also tends to imply ‘for the first time’ through metaphoric exchange that this is, indeed, a tranquil house and that the closed water of the lake is indeed a tamed wildness, while at the same time the ‘openness’ of the lake is linked with the house and the secrecy of the house confirms the closure of the lake. Finally, the garden establishes an interchange between the house’s interiority but penetrability and the lake’s openness and yet impenetrable depths. It is – according to the deposit of transition – the garden which ‘gives’ this lake and this house than it is the case that the house as a house-in-general and the lake as a lake-in-general give the garden.

At this point in my argument a possible misunderstanding must be headed off. To insist, with and yet against Badiou, on the primacy of ontological relation is *not* to propose a modern, post-Kantian, as opposed to Badiou’s neo-Cartesian, philosophy. The latter might appear to be the case were one to accord with the view of a writer strongly influenced by Badiou, namely Quentin Meillassoux, that pre-modern thought is characterised by the primacy of substance taken as independent of knowledge, whereas modern thought is ‘correlationist’ or critically idealist, such that while thought is always here taken to be thought ‘of’ something, ‘somethings’ are only

⁴⁰ *Logiques des Mondes*, 433-6

those things which can be thought – outside this correlation one can only be agnostic.⁴¹

However, Meillassoux is wrong on two counts: first of all, the ‘relation’ of thought to appearance in Kant and his successors is only an accidental, not a constitutive relation: for it concerns how being appears for us and not the way in which human knowledge is in some measure truly disclosive of being as such, and thereby ‘really related’ to it. Still less does it concern a fundamental teleological orientation of being towards being known.

Secondly, since in classical and medieval ‘realism’, both these circumstances *were* affirmed, it is wrong to see this realism as defined by a kind of inert substantialism, which was surely *invented* by Descartes with respect to his primary qualities (whereas Meillassoux sees the latter ontology as simply one example of an inherited realist paradigm). On the contrary, it is this realism which is more radically ‘correlationist’. Thus for Plato, temporal formations only exist as participating in (as related to) the eternal forms, while these themselves are relationally defined through mutual comparison and ‘intermixture’. Aristotle may have newly stressed the integrity of substance, but he also regarded all temporal substances as relationally constituted by the lure of the first mover and understood the act of human knowing to be a further relational realisation of the very being of the known existing thing. All four of these emphases were surely confirmed and exaggerated in Christian thinkers and in particular Aquinas, for whom the doctrine of creation renders even matter itself relationally dependent and the doctrine of the Trinity newly suggests the possibility

⁴¹ Quentin Meillassoux, *Après la finitude: essai sur la nécessité de la contingence* (Paris: Seuil, 2006)

that sheerly relational being (being that is relational without remainder) characterises being as such. Participation in this sheer relationality by creatures lays new weight in Aquinas's thought upon mutual dependence, temporal becoming, productive expressiveness and the ecstatic character of knowing and willing.⁴²

Therefore outside antique materialism, there was no notion in traditional realism of a 'substance' indifferent to the relation that is awareness. Rather, the highest substance was typically understood as also knowing and the economy of finite existence was assumed to require the presence of created intelligence both as its author and as its interior culmination. It follows that 'correlation' is scarcely the typical mark of modern thought: rather it is the replacement of (Aristotelian) 'knowledge by identity' with 'knowledge by representation' which leaves substance and understanding indifferent to each other, and knowledge as a merely accidental event which might or might not befall existence. The difference then can be better understood as one between constitutive relation on the one hand and contingent relation on the other. In these terms Descartes falls firmly on the modern side of the divide, while the denial of the objectivity of primary as well as secondary qualities is, after all, *pace* Meillassoux, simply a further evolution of the paradigm which Descartes helped to establish. (It is hard to see why Meillassoux is so convinced that the pre-human past is more of a problem for this model than is physical space without a human presence: surely in either case, on the 'modern', non-realist paradigm -- which I am not assenting to -- one is simply speaking of a projected reality that we are forced to describe 'as if' human beings were there: the pre-human past is neither affirmed nor denied, because we simply cannot know whether, outside our human perspective, temporal

perspectives in our sense have any meaning. And one should add here that *Badiou's* 'realistic' primary mathematical elements do not seem to be tied to any 'actual' past time, nor to any 'actual' spatiality.)

To return to Badiou, it has now been seen that eventful relations finally leak back even into being itself. But in that case, what are we to make of Badiou's comparison of the belonging of elements to sets to the link of things to forms in Plato and his assertion that this belonging is an equivalent of Platonic participation?⁴³ He means this surely in a subversive sense, since this belonging is the mere randomness of possibility. The more serious participation in ideas happens in the course of the event, but here ideas are supposed to be purely immanent. Yet we have seen how this is hard to believe, and now we can also see that these ideas as diagonals percolate back via appearances all the way into the empty font of being as such by virtue of its ineliminable gaps, aberrations and paradoxes. Does this not mean that the manyness of sets is also and 'originally' the dyad and triad of the other which is the diagonalising event? In that case, the participation of elements and parts in sets is really also a participation in the One and the Two and the mediation between them. Or, indeed, in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit who might be read as null origin ('prior' to relation), manifestation and eventful donation.

It has now been seen, in the first place, that Badiou, like Levinas, appears to refuse relation and participation and to be stuck in an aporetic shuttle between the one and the many – in his case between the manifold settings of the void and the universal imperative of the event. However, we have also seen, in the second place, that read in

⁴² See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*. I am indebted to Adrian Pabst of Cambridge

a particular direction, Badiou appears to re-instate relation and even participation. If we take the event as dominant over the void, then, since the event *is* a category of (non-Hegelian) mediation between being and appearance, then he appears to more than flirt with a Christian metaphysics of primary actuality, real relation and participatory sharing in the eternal. The possibility that he points towards a new fusion of the Christian and the Marxist traditions cannot be quickly dismissed.

Yet we can now add, in the third place, that in terms of Badiou's *ethics* this is by no means clear. Certainly he understands subjectivity in terms of collective participation in a truth-process and not, like Levinas, in terms of the encounter of one individual with another, and this is all to the good. However, at times he construes this in terms of the adhesion of an individual to an abstract generality deciphered mathematically in terms of the unLeibnizian 'forcing' of the indeterminable and so individualised *only* as general into the realm of determinations themselves as 'another' member locatable only as non-locatable and so as specifically general. This is the most acute instance of the way in which Badiou consistently associates the diagonalizing excess of 'the state' or 'representation' of parts of sub-sets over the 'situation' or 'presentation' of elements of an initial set with the political 'State' and the political or economic processes of 'representation', where a set of persons is treated in terms of their manifold ways of being such-and-such – citizen, woman, worker, shareholder and so forth. This excess of the parts over the whole is for him at least two steps away from the event or from *changement*: this requires in addition the excess of the singular *element* over its parts (a reverse excess after Zermelo) to give the 'evental site' (for

University for his doctoral work on relation and participation.

⁴³ *Logiques des Mondes*, 317

his later work also ontologically intrusive within appearance) and the more than mathematical or logical irruption of the event itself as ‘self-belonging’.

It is, however, in terms of a certain ambivalent celebration of the first excess of parts over elements and so of ‘state’ and ‘representation’ that Badiou too readily seems to endorse Rousseau’s ‘general will’, which is specifically and immanently universal because it is not merely the abstract empirical outcome of representative democracy, nor universal as mediating the transcendent, but rather as realising the supposedly ‘objective’ emergent essence of all humans taken as citizens as such.⁴⁴

According to this endorsement, Badiou also defends the French revolutionary terror and the Maoist cultural revolution (ignoring the questionably ‘radical’ character of even the aims pursued in both cases). One should presumably construe this dark side of his thought as believing that one requires the initial emergence of the ‘specifically general’ (according to the ‘point of excess’ and of ‘forcing’) as a destructive clearing of the way for the emergence of the event, rather in the way that for Marx the provisional Socialist State must prepare the way for fully-fledged Communism. But why this residually agonistic dialectics and supposed ontological need for an initial tragedy and beneficial purging? For if, as Badiou affirms, the mediation provided by the event is in Kierkegaardian surplus to Hegelian determinate negation, then why cannot this medium be self-sustaining from the outset? Then there would be no need for participation in truth-processes to imply a moment of what Levinas might have rightly described as surrender to ‘totality’.

⁴⁴ *Being and Event* 344-54

Instead, as with Badiou's account of the painted horses, one could speak of a universal truth grounded in an event as *not necessarily* prepared for by an independent and terroristic moment of specifically general 'forcing', but rather as always already overtaking this moment in terms of a hovering 'between' the remotely ideal on the one hand and all the diverse local and individual perspectives on the other. Politically, this would allow that radical movements and processes do not always need to commence with a 'revolutionary' seizure of the State, but like many co-operative socialisms or current movements in central and South America may simply sidestep the State and 'representative' revolutionary forces in order directly to institute newly just collective practices. Indeed, Badiou's usual and correct disdain for representative democracy – as indifferent to truth and so bound to betray the objective interests of what the representatives claim to represent – should allow him to acknowledge this. He needs surely to jettison a residually 'negative dialectical' element in his thought which leads him to suggest – in accordance with the priority of the void – this socio-political moment in which the 'representation' of the 'power-set' or set of sub-sets (as normatively for set-theory 'larger' than the initial set) 'diagonalises out' of the initial set in terms of both the number of elements 'included' in excess of those 'presented' (as, for example, the functions of a populace are in excess of the number of a populace) and also the excess of the indeterminate specified as general over the presented determinate elements (such that you only ever vote 'qua citizen' as such and not qua yourself as unique person).

For if, in accordance with the alternative priority of the event, it is the event itself which actualises amongst appearances the diagonal excess, then representation can be always already overtaken by a substantive procedure which seeks to pursue – not by

voting, but by action – the objectively ideal interests of a variegated populace. These, however, are not (as for Rousseau), any longer reduced to their interests qua citizens, nor to the abstract technological co-ordination of their myriad social functions, but rather are seen as embodied only within an actually realised ‘between’ of collaboration in pursuit of true ideas. This collaboration must involve also a co-ordination of functions not merely in the interests of power and utility, but architectonically in terms of a human meta-function which is a kind of construction of a vast collective work of art proffered beyond humanity itself as a spectacle for eternity. (In Italy especially, one has the sense of a huge continuous collective work of liturgical art being assembled from the time of the Etruscans to the present.) This would mean that, beyond Rousseau, the true ‘general will’ must allude to a true transcendent *telos* for human nature as such.

Then indeed, in Levinasian terms, the truth would not be *in excess* of the interpersonal exchange of unique expressions. Read in one direction against Badiou himself, Badiou’s philosophy turns out to imply, in a somewhat Levinasian fashion, the paraontological primacy of the good – if not, certainly, the good as beyond being, then actual being as supremely the good, though equally (in contrast with Levinas) supremely the true. And if, in the end for Levinas, the good is the expressive and commanding word of the other as ‘master’ and our gift of succour in response, then Badiou’s last word in *Logique des Mondes* in that the event itself is the gift and that this gift is only sustained by the generous and co-ordinated interchange of human beings across time.

In a certain sense then, I am drawing Badiou closer to Levinas by reading him against himself in terms of the priority of interpersonal goodness. But the whole point of doing this only becomes clear when one sees that Badiou's 'subjectivism' can be rendered coherent because it can be made to admit the primacy of the actual, of real relationality and even participation, whereas Levinas's philosophy, in the last analysis, cannot.

This may be primarily because Badiou elects to operate in a post-Christian space which covertly foregrounds creation *ex nihilo*, Trinity, typology and incarnation.

Levinas, by contrast, for all his theism, much more holds out against participation and constitutive relation and indeed this is in many ways his first and last word.

'Participation' is exactly what he is most opposed to, whether this alludes to a Platonic *methexis* of the temporal in the eternal or a 'primitive' gnoseological 'participation' as diagnosed by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, which involves a certain non-distinction between the knower and the known and a kind of 'merging' of the individual in the fluidity of nature and the solidarity of society. Likewise, while Levinas indeed speaks of a 'relation' of the ego to the other, this is a 'relation without relating' or a 'concerning without concern' described as 'illeity' in which the relation can always be refused in order to ensure the gratuity of unilateral gift.⁴⁵ It follows that this is not a 'constitutive' relation.

But there are nonetheless some interesting complications here which show that mediation has more allure for Levinas than one might at first suspect. The 1950's

⁴⁵ *Otherwise than Being*, 12

essay on Lévy-Bruhl later collected in *Entre-Nous* is here quite crucial.⁴⁶ What it discloses is that for Levinas the threat of ‘totality’ comes from two different sources, such that warding off the threat from one direction may be for him to compromise with the threat from another.

In the first place, ‘totality’ threatens in terms of the specifically modern *episteme* of representation, albeit Levinas exaggerates its roots in ancient Western tradition. Here totality is of course linked to the gaze and a visual encompassing. The known is built up from sensory items which supposedly picture objective stable essences or regular processes of transformation. The representative gaze permits measurement, quantitative comparison, regulation and projection of regulation into the future. For Levinas, all historical social processes seem inevitably to be constructed on the basis of representation, thereby reducing persons to the possessability and manipulability of things and the abstract generalisability of things.

In the face of this model of representation, Levinas is clearly somewhat *attracted* by primitive ‘participation’. Its instance proves that ‘representation’ and perhaps even the dominance of the ‘historical’ is only a contingent ‘mentality’ after all. Many human beings for long ages assumed that one can only ‘know’ through a prior given identification of knowledge with the known. Levinas also suggests that the phenomenology of the body has recovered, beyond Husserlian intentionality which was still ‘representational’, the notion that the self can know things directly through feeling and can even encounter Being as such not through ‘representing’ it, but by identifying with it and by immersing itself in the ontological flux of time (whether in

⁴⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Lévy-Bruhl and contemporary philosophy’ in *entre nous: On Thinking of the*

a Bergsonian or a Heideggerian mode), just as ‘primitives’ took religious ecstasy not to be expressive of belief, but as directly disclosive of the ultimate depth of the real.

‘Participation’ therefore, breaks with the representing ego and in this way wards off modern technocratic ‘totality’. Here the individual ‘is’ also the other whether as thing, other person or being itself. But on the other hand, participation itself threatens another kind of totalisation and this ‘pagan’ totality is indeed for Levinas the *primary* totality that is to be guarded against. For here the person is lost as a part within the whole in a manner that undergirds rituals and battles that celebrate the bloody and heroic sacrifice of the individual to an impersonal unity. Clearly and with every warrant, Levinas construed Nazism as exhibiting the danger of a neo-pagan regress that ‘modernist’ art and philosophy had fatally encouraged. In a very precise, though not the usual sense therefore, the *Totalité et Infinité* of 1960 is a ‘post-modernist’ though not a ‘postmodern’ work.

It is exactly because Levinas wished to refuse *both* the traditional pagan totality *and* the modern totality, that he believed that we must now re-invoke the monotheistic tradition as what might alone prevent a technocratic reduction of the person without succumbing to the lure of the blood-cult of sacrifice of the person to the abstract totality. In this move he was surely right, and a large and diverse number of philosophers have now followed in his wake. The issue remains as to whether his construal of monotheism is adequate, and whether he was right so adamantly to refuse ‘participation’ in *either* its ‘primitive’ *or* its Platonic guise.

And one can even argue that to some degree he was unable to do so. For in order to refuse totality as reducing the other to object of the gaze he had to invoke something like an invisible participatory ‘identification’ with the other which was eventually described as the ‘trace’ of the other in the self that always precedes the self. At the same time, he had to ensure that this does not compromise the independency of the ego from the other and the other from the ego, without which one would lapse into a mode of pagan totality. But then again, the more he backs off from the latter the more he must insist that the trace of the other is only effectively and operatively encountered in terms of ‘representable’ thirdness which appears simply to transfer us from pagan to modern totalisation.

If, in Levinas, the refusal of pagan participation tends always to trump the refusal of modern representation, then this accords with his rejection of participation also in the Platonic sense. He aligns himself with the dominant lines of Jewish theology (arguably prevalent in its gnostically mystical as well as scholastic versions) which stress the absolute ‘atheist’ separation of the Creation from the Godhead, the impossibility of predicating attributes of the divine substance and (less so in the mystical tradition), the always equally poised option of humanity (regardless of any ‘fall’) between good and evil. For reasons already given or implied, he is readily able to line up these emphases with certain *post-Scotist* currents within Christian theology and philosophy which insist on the absolute distance of finite from infinite within an embracing univocity of being. Thus Levinas in consequence warmly embraces a Cartesian understanding of a sheerly ‘equivocal’ contrast between divine and human attributes.⁴⁷ And his innovation, of course, is to see the relation of the ego to the Other

⁴⁷ *Totality and Infinity*, 80

as directly equivalent in its asymmetry and ineffability to the relation of the finite to the infinite.

Through this double refusal of participation, Levinas therefore places an absolute gulf between the self and the other. However, he then has the problem of how exactly this gulf is to be bridged -- how am I to become aware of the other as non-reduced other at all? Often it seems that it is only by an act of will that I in effect 'posit' the other who cannot appear to me without self-betrayal. This is just one way in which the plurality of the other dialectically collapses back into the same of the self-sufficient ego.

Likewise the infinite plural good of the *Autrui* which 'is not', since it can only be effectively good within the scope of the phenomenality of being, is always to some degree inevitably 'betrayed' in its very realisation, by becoming subject to the human unifying gaze. Really to be it must show itself in a generalisable manner, but then it also 'is not' in a mode that reveals after all a dialectical identity between a supposedly positive excess to being on the one hand, and a simple negation of being on the other. Finally, if the diverse 'other' is, as he says, the locus of a 'pure' objectivity, uncontaminated by the subjective perspectives of either representation or practical 'care', then he cannot really be touched and he cannot really touch me.⁴⁸ Here original plurality is a dead letter, as it is radically inaccessible and this inaccessibility could indeed legitimate the construal of the other anarchically in any way imaginable, and legitimate as 'ethical' any mode of response to the other whatsoever.

⁴⁸ *Op Cit* 79-102

It appears then, that in order to bridge a seemingly unbridgeable distance between the plural other and the single same, and to avoid a dialectical collapse of the many into the one or the one into the many, Levinas requires some mode of mediation. For this reason, throughout his work he is forced explicitly or covertly to bring back ‘the middle’ or to seek out a middle that will not compromise the pure and equivocal separation of his two poles.

One can, in order to simplify, identify five modes of mediation in Levinas. First of all, there is the question of how the ‘enjoying’ ego relates to the world. As has already been stressed, Levinas insists upon the self-sufficient ‘separateness’ of the ego as a finite foil to the infinite sheer otherness of the other. This is the manner in which he pits a neo-Cartesianism against Heidegger. For him, as for Michael Henry, the cogito can be construed in terms of the repleteness and pure self-reference of enjoyment which involves a kind of undeniable immediacy and indifference to the object of enjoyment. It is this level of sheer ‘hedonism’ which, Levinas says, ensures that the human being is ‘at home’ in the world and not primarily caught within a Heideggerean alien ‘thrownness’. The passive contentment of enjoyment equally precedes a Heideggerean active ‘care’ for being and in fact already secretes the subject ‘beyond being’, since pleasure is incommensurable with its ontological sources.⁴⁹

As an anthropology however, this is scarcely satisfactory. Precisely because culture and language have always already invaded human animality, our specifically human happiness is from the outset bound up with a care that pursues projects, wishes to tend

⁴⁹ *Op Cit* 109-52

things and finds its highest contentment in the realisation of goals and concurrence with the judgement of others. If, indeed, as Levinas says, we do not ‘first’ represent to ourselves an image of something before experiencing it or acting upon it, then nevertheless human experience and action are never purely ‘blind’, and in consequence the specific imagining of an external influence or conjectured project always inflects our mood and our mood in turn affects ‘how we take’ an experience. There is never any pure immediacy here, and furthermore, human enjoyment is always in some measure and often to a surprising degree communicable to another person just because of this mediation by imaging: otherwise the most intense feelings would not call forth poetry and only be fully realised as poetry. Enjoyment is *not* locked within the auto-affecting of the cogito, but is rather thoroughly contagious in its very nature.

This argument undercuts any notion that real otherness can break in upon an initial self-sufficiency. However, Levinas himself has to qualify this self-sufficiency in order to explain how the other can ever impinge upon the sensible *cogito* at all. Here, in a more ‘Lévy-Bruhlian’ fashion, he speaks of enjoyment as being not merely immediate and self-sufficient, but also self-forgettingly ‘immersed in an element’ like that of water or air which ‘envelop’ the world of mere objects. The latter, after Husserl, only show themselves through partial aspects, but they can nevertheless be ‘walked round’ and so encompassed (this physical reduction of the partiality of aspects on Levinas’s part seems dubious). ‘Elements’ by contrast, only ever show to us a *face* (in French) and it is precisely this encounter which prepares enjoyment for the more fundamental meeting with the *visage* of the subjective other. But the mediating here is a fundamentally negative one. For what the elemental *face* reserves is the threatening

and anonymous continuum of the *il y a*, the sheer meaningless endlessness of cosmic existence which also prevents a seamless enjoyment because of the irruption of pain, death or *ennui*. Hence the ego is first jolted out of itself through the shock of ‘otherness’ as something that denies its own self-contentment.⁵⁰

Indeed this threat is so fundamental that in reality, from the outset, there is, in purely natural terms, no pure self-enjoyment whatsoever. And at this point one can notice a great contradiction in Levinas’s outlook. The ‘separation’ of the sensual cogito has to be a naturalistic thesis and yet it turns out that, in the face of the threat of the elemental, it can only after all be a sociological one. But in the latter terms, the security of the ego is *from the outset* secured by the subjective other (who turns out to be ‘woman’) and therefore the foil of self-sufficiency which is supposed to guarantee the gratuity and disinterestedness of the relation to the other is compromised.

To see how this is the case, we need to discuss the second mode of mediation which concerns *the household*. Enjoyment is so encompassed by danger that it can only really be secured when I firmly ‘possess’ something and can contemplate nature through a window, at a safe distance. *Oikeosis* requires the literal home. And in *Totality and Infinity* the entire thesis revolves round the home, seen as representing, against Hegel, a realm more fundamental than the State, and as exceeding its ‘historical’ purposes.

On the one hand the foundation of the household is materialist – the home guards enjoyment. And arguably this thesis is far too reductionist: Heidegger, by comparison,

⁵⁰ *Op Cit* 130-43

was right to see that the human home from the outset was also a temple and a microcosm of the cosmos – as the extraordinarily sophisticated paintings (which appear to anticipate the entire repertoire of idioms of later human art) found in the very first human shelters in Chauvet and many other places so surely indicate. The first refuge was a specifically *human* refuge because it was more than a refuge, since it also stored the first fundamental human visions of reality.

On the other hand – and here the sacral dimension of *domus* is far too immanentised by Levinas – the securing of enjoyment in the home only becomes possible because of the ‘welcome’ given by the initial shadowy other who is the female other. In despite of sybils, and the evidence of the links between settlements, temples and goddess cults, Levinas opines that the female other teaches nothing and merely reserves an absence behind the lure of the beautiful which lead the male subject nowhere. Her *visage* is all too nakedly and obscenely exposed as her whole body which fascinates man as image but finally initiates him into nothing.

Very problematically, this encounter with the female other for Levinas, while being far less than the encounter with the fully-fledged male ‘teaching’ other who makes a real moral demand -- which is at once an ‘invisible’ *visage* and yet ‘fully attended’ by his presence -- also leads us beyond the dyadic moral encounter. For it is the household and birth that *mediates* the dyadic ethical encounter with the triadic social order.

First of all, it is only the securing of enjoyment by the home that allows me to welcome the stranger in hospitality at all. For Levinas this is the basic paradigm of

response to the true other – one offers him the sacrificial gift of one’s own substance, ‘the bread from one’s mouth’ as he later says in *Otherwise than Being*.⁵¹ Hence while, certainly, a secure independent home is seen here as the precondition for disinterested charity (and this is dubious – for what of the charity exercised by those, like tramps, who own nothing?) it turns out that the ‘sociologising of the *cogito*’ means that the home is only there because of the call of the female other, who is bewitchingly half in league with the nihilism of the elements.

Here we can see that Levinas is scarcely free from Hegel at all. For to arrive at oneself and then to engage more freely with a no longer alien other at the conclusion of this dialectic, one must first pass through a moment where the other is alien and disappointing once she has exerted her initial seduction.

Hence while it is supposed to be the case in Levinas that the ego and the other are external to each other in a non-dialectical fashion that precludes the other from being negatively alien, it rather turns out in *Totality and Infinity* that the household is the mediating precondition for *both* the secure ego *and* the arrival of the stranger. The logic of this *ought to be* that in welcoming the stranger one’s own enjoyment blends with that of another. For only by sitting down and eating with your visitor and showing that you are enjoying both your own food and his company could you possibly make him feel happily at home at all! Yet Levinas repeatedly speaks as if the paradigm (rather than the instance *in extremis*, the exception that proves the rule) of hospitality were a situation where one gave the visitor one’s last crumb and left him to

⁵¹ *Otherwise than Being*, 55-6

eat it alone in the front room while one retired with one's wife upstairs to pursue the business of 'filiation'

If the household mediates the *cogito* and the other, then hospitality must mean primarily reciprocal enjoyment, a participatory sharing, before it might imply sacrificial offering. The latter could not possibly be a *telos* for either self or other, whereas the former most certainly can be. It is moreover significant that the female other who secures the household for the male self apparently never gets to meet the male guest..... In this way the *synchrony* of social thirdness -- male, female, guest -- never intersects with the *diachrony* of social thirdness -- which is male, female, child. Were this intersection allowed by Levinas, it would be seen that the family sphere does not stand outside the public and the political and that 'history' interweaves both together. For it is simply not the case that 'history' (the realm of public representations) always and inevitably overrides ineffable personal interests; often it does, but equally the latter frequently invade the public sphere, overriding the general interest and many specific interests, like the intrigue between Paris and Helen that mythically set off a nine year war, or the adultery that may arise within a household when one welcomes a guest -- this being a risk that full generosity as reciprocal festivity must inevitably run.

If, for Levinas, the household is the basis for welcoming the other, then equally the erotic encounter with the female other is the basis for the production of the child who in *Totality and Infinity* is a yet more fundamental 'other' than the stranger. Why is this the case? This is not entirely clear, but there appear to be two reasons. First of all, for Levinas, my most authentic speech is that which I 'attend'. My 'saying' is 'betrayed'

in any specific interpretable ‘said’ and the real transcendental signifier is the speaking subject without which language would not be at all. In speaking the transcendental signifying condition of all language one speaks, ineffably, only one’s own self-expression which, however, once imaged by another person would be lost. But this suggests that all one’s saying will in the future be contaminated by the memory of others: one’s orality will be reduced to ‘script’. Here the child is the only real chance for immortality – as other to one, and yet still in some sense oneself, he can continue to attend with filial piety the paternal word. Just how Levinas justifies this mediating coincidence of ‘same and other’ here in terms of his own presuppositions is very obscure, and the notion seems after all to view the response to the other as a sacrificial abandonment of self to society, even if this is now taken diachronically rather than synchronically.

Indeed Levinas fails to escape a pagan and modernist cult of sacrifice *just to the extent* that he remains rigidly ‘Judaic’ in belittling any afterlife or resurrection: for him the true immortality lies in the infinity of future generations, because the only guarantee of an ethical response is one’s self-obliterating death in favour of the other. Clearly, by failing to see that reciprocity is the *telos* (in religious terms the resurrection of all before the face of God) this absurdly reduces ‘the priority of the other’ to the serial promotion of lone enjoyment, leaving each and every individual with the irresolvable dilemma (which is that of every pagan!) of *when* to enjoy and *when* to sacrifice?

The second reason why the child is the supreme other is closely linked to this. Levinas curiously follows a ‘primitive’ view, as described by Lévy-Bruhl, according to which

death is seen always in 'personal' terms as murder – as something that comes from the threat of the other because it involves the ultimate violence of obliteration of the self.⁵² Here one can recall that 'the other' first of all intrudes negatively as the *face* [aspect] of the elemental, a threat which the female other partially wards off.

Moreover, because the response to the true 'teaching' other is first of all sacrificial, the imperative to save and conserve his life, it is but the reactive face of something that is more fundamentally negative. The first moral commandment is for Levinas 'Thou shalt not kill' precisely because *first of all* the other, is initially defined in his otherness as the reality that can indeed, deliberately kill you. Yet Levinas wishes to say that the other is, para-ontologically, the good beyond being. How can he say this, if the other is primarily a murderer in league with the *il y a* of indifferent cosmic spaces? It is not enough for him to say that, in the face of fundamental danger, we *should* behave ethically: no, he wishes to show that the ethical lies at the heart of society and so at the heart of being as what lies beyond being..... For the good both to exceed being and to be at all, it must be infinite and therefore must in reality trump the *il y a* and the initial appearance of the other (Cain before Abel) as murderer.

Thus, even though Levinas denies or sits light to personal immortality, he has to show that death is infinitely overcome and that the *giving of life* has the last word. It is for this reason that the stranger-other who is initially a potential murderer (or whom I might murder) is exceeded by the child. For here, my gift to the other is not a reactive warding off of his and my murderousness, but rather it is the gift that establishes the other in the first place.

⁵² *Totality and Infinity*, 232-6

However, if this is the case, then 'thirdness' is not something that expresses the merely formal and so substitutable otherness of the other as Levinas's fundamental scheme demands. Instead (as for the Christian Trinitarian outlook) thirdness is the emerging product of a dyad which communicates their unique and reciprocal conjoining. If the child is the true other and alone the guarantee of the primacy of the good, then it is clear that he emerges from the reciprocal co-mingling of egoity and self-offering in the household. Equally, he does not continue merely the male saying that attends itself: rather as child also of the mother (which Levinas suppresses) he perpetuates the pattern of exchanged and *said* words between man and woman.

In these ways the appeal to the mediating household in Levinas is at once necessary for his philosophy and yet destructive of it. This is probably why the thematic is later dropped.

The third mode of mediation in Levinas concerns *the economic* which is ultimately consequent upon the *oikos*. It is here that Levinas most clearly prefers modern totality to pagan totality. For what precisely *is* the 'saying' of the other beyond an ineffable outbreathing? It appears to be precisely a command, a fixing, which has many echoes in the thought of the later Wittgenstein. Levinas, as he repeatedly averred, was a strict French rationalist and intellectualist (fleeing Germanic atavism and obscurantism as he saw it). He sought out the truly objective that can be disinterestedly known and the phenomenon that is reductively self-giving and self-guaranteeing (after Husserl). He therefore argued, in a properly Cartesian initially sceptical gambit, that if all that is known is intentionally represented, then knowledge reduces to subjectivity and finally to the vagaries of my will which can alter things. Therefore he stated (with great

frequency) that reason must fail if there is no ground for this very freedom. This ground he found in the command of ‘the other’ who (despite or rather because of his very subjectivity) he also described as ‘the true object’, since he lies entirely beyond my representative grasp. Here, in one sense, thinking becomes intentional in a fully realist fashion while, in another sense, intentionality is subordinated to the call of the other that is prior even to my intending and so appears to invade even my most own psychic space. While, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas speaks, like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, of the body as within the world realistically intending by feeling things outside itself, the later stress upon the direct invasion by the other into my bodily space seems to be consistent with an more idealist reading of Levinas (like that, for example of Jean-Luc Marion), whereby the externally real remains bracketed and the ‘reduction’ of one’s own internal understanding paradoxically yields the other as alone fulfilling the criterion of objective and purely self-donating phenomenon.⁵³

While such a formalism may serve to ground and justify freedom, it still, when it comes to content, appears to foreground the pure will. Thus at times it would seem (and this is certainly the case in Marion) that *only* my wilful sacrificial response to the other registers her presence at all. Equally, in Levinas, the self-giving of the other has to take the concrete form of *commands* which for the first time fix, as *social* norms, general truths and essences that are otherwise subject both to the ‘primitive’ flux of the elemental and to the domineering vagaries of intentionality.⁵⁴ It is here that Levinas is at once thoroughly sociological – truths are first of all social requirements, as for Comte and Durkheim, and first of all ‘gifts’, as for Mauss – and also close to Wittgenstein.

⁵³ *Totality and Infinity*, 33-105; *Otherwise than Being*, 3-21, 61-97

For Levinas, the ‘fluidity’ of knowledge without the command of the other represents the pagan danger of the sinking of the personal in an amorphous flux. By contrast, modern totality or the regime of representation establishes being in a way that rescues us from pure possessiveness and the sole dominance of the household in a more acceptable manner. Hence money as symmetric exchangeability qualifies possessiveness and is founded upon the asymmetric encounter with the other. The same thing is true of scientific concepts. It follows that this ‘thematization’ actually hovers in a mediating fashion between the pagan same and the ethical other. Indeed it is clear that for Levinas the only gift that the other can give is some mode of the ‘monetary’. Every gift, in order to be given, therefore has to enter into exchangeability. As later with Derrida it would seem, the gift can only be given insofar as it ceases to be a gift at all.

Here Levinas entirely fails to consider, after Mauss, whether there could be alternative economies of ‘gift-exchange’ which fuse asymmetry with circulation. But without such a possibility, his mediation is not a true Platonic mediation at all: rather it is subject to dialectical collapse: the ‘fairness’ of public exchange (of tokens and ideas) reduces to the arbitrariness of an imposed gift one cannot refuse, while the latter equally reduces to the setting-up of the formal norms of an exchange-process.

The fourth mode of mediation concerns ‘the trace’. Abandoning the thematic of the household, Levinas in *Otherwise than Being* promoted a new mode of immortality that now concerned an absolute past and not an indefinitely fertile future. This new

⁵⁴ *Totality and Infinity*, 88-97

move was supposed at the same time to deal with Derrida's objections to the notion of a purely present 'saying' uncontaminated by the uncontrollable 'said'.⁵⁵ Now the saying comes to mean something like that constitutive 'absence' of the signified that Derrida had argued for. As invisible, the other in his integral saying is always already 'past' in a mode that transcendentally exceeds empirical pastness.

Conjoined to this new notion is a yet stronger sense that the other calls me from the very outset. But this is now the call of the fully-fledged other without any appeal to the semi-others of the elements or the female gender. Now, from the outset, I am co-born from self-enjoyment and the persecution of this self by the other who snatches my pleasure away from me – although these remain discrete, unmediated moments. In consequence even my body is first sensible in terms of this persecution and the call of the other enters even – literally – into my inbreathing and outbreathing.⁵⁶

Putting these two new stresses together, it becomes clear that the self is always preceded by an absolute past to which he forever remains in debt and from which he must forever seek absolution, while he in turn must try to pardon the past by repeating it non-identically in the future (at this point Levinas is notably more positive about forgiveness than Vladimir Jankélévitch). Now the typical subject is no longer a father projecting himself into the future, but rather a mother, who has always already inherited ancient, superannuated adopted offspring.

But once again, this is no true mediation, because the call of the other and self-enjoyment do not come together in any process that exceeds negative pardon in the

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics: an essay on the thought of Emmanuel Levinas' in

direction of real festive reconciliation whereby we might 'feast with the ancestors'. Instead, the wrong pagan moment has been covertly elected by Levinas. For what could be more irretrievably pagan than the notion of a never-repayable cosmic debt and the ultimacy of a gesture of sacrifice to an archi-history?

Fifthly and finally, there is the mediation exercised by the third in order to ensure justice. This has been discussed and deconstructed already, but here one can add something concerning the invocation of 'God' in connection with 'the third' at the end of *Otherwise than Being*.⁵⁷ It would appear that God has to be invoked by Levinas as a further transcendent ground of mediation between the private dyadic situation and the public triadic one. Hence because God is the reserved *Autrui* behind the *autre*, he requires the welcoming in justice of the other other who is the third. Once one has the third then, indeed, as Levinas says, one has to 'compare the incomparable' according to an economy of justice, if one is not to abandon one person in favour of another. He admits then that justice is primarily a matter of 'just distribution' if it is to be public justice and not simply the private justice of charity. But on the other hand, God is also invoked as the guarantee of the non-reducibility of each and every person to publicly measurable considerations. He is the principle that demand that a measure of equity enter into the handling of the laws. So in one moment God demands the movements from the dyad to the triad, but in another he underscores the priority of the dyad even within the triad.

Writing and Difference trans Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 79-154

⁵⁶ *Otherwise than Being*, 175-85

⁵⁷ *Op Cit* 157-62. See also Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* trans Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1994). See also for a defence of a non-aporetic reading of Levinas on justice and charity unlike the one proposed here, and also by contrast a defence of Levinas against Badiou,

But for the last time there is no true mediation here either – though it is clearly required. God as standing behind the other simply guarantees that he is ‘any other’ and then in turn that each other must be accorded the same absolute respect as an individual. Only a liberal politics of rights is here legitimated, even if it extends to a ‘social democratic’ concern with welfare. Equity is seen as only possible up to a point, and each application of equity must surely, in Levinasian terms, threaten to compromise the formality of justice in terms of a concealed erotic preference. He never suggests that ‘comparing the incomparable’ could be fairly done.

Were he to have done so, then given that, for him, justice must always already concern the third, then the distributive and analogical comparing of the incomparable would have had to be the *starting-point* of his philosophy of the good and not the ‘face to face’. Equally, if this comparison can truly be fair, all history might in principle become equitable, and the gift need never be even partially ‘betrayed’ within social exchange, since it is from the outset itself an asymmetrical yet appropriate reciprocity.

So as with Badiou, one can make two claims in relation to Levinas. First of all, his philosophy is founded (like that of his hero and Levinas’s interactive contemporary Jean-Paul Sartre) in the Cartesian refusal of Platonic mediation, real relation and participation. Secondly its contradictions force it to pay tribute to these things after all. But in the case of Badiou one can also claim that, read in one fashion, he offers after all a philosophy of mediation in a Platonic and not Hegelian sense. (In the latter case mediation collapses into the supposed identity of identity and non-identity which

is incipiently nihilistic.) Levinas's thought, however permits of no such rescue operation.

One can, in conclusion, ask after the wider reasons why this contrast should pertain. Levinas was entirely right to insist upon the ultimacy of goodness as the key to the European (and also Islamic) Greek as well as Semitic legacy and also upon the uniqueness of this legacy as compared with that of the Far East (whose philosophies may, nonetheless, turn out to have been, via the Silk Route and the Islamic expansion, far more interactive with this tradition than we have imagined.) He was also right to see truth, following Socrates, as inseparable from conversation, since it is collectively embodied in diverse personal perspectives – although one must add, in the ever-renewed *blending* of those perspectives.

However, his own trajectory was actually blocked by his rejection of Platonic relationality and participation. These alone, as we have seen, permit a mediation between the one and the many that prevents a dialectical collapse of the one into the many and vice-versa. Likewise, these alone permit one to see a compatibility between a free single giving on the one hand and a diverse distributive sharing on the other. We have seen how this compatibility is paradigmatically shown in the construal of divine creation as participation in being.

It is this paradigm which also shows how one may refuse both pagan and modern totality without then being stuck in an aporetic shuttle between the two. 'To partake' is here paradoxically to receive one's integrity and not to be swallowed up, precisely

because a radically founding relation is able to give independent freedom and absolute connection in one and the same gesture, which also ensures against any futile fate of hesitation between egotism and self-sacrifice. However, 'to partake' equally means that one's primary relation to what lies beyond is not the representing gaze, but rather the reception – of the divine through the created – of visible idioms which conserve a trace of invisibility in their very form and colouration. If this defines beauty, then one can say that Levinas failed to follow Plato in seeing that the beautiful is the invisible *in* the images, the true idol that is also icon, that always exceeds our constitutive capture. Just for this reason, the mediating is always the beautiful.

So within the terms of 'participation' there is both a conjoining and a separating by virtue of a nonetheless real mingling. And since the horizontal structures of the finite world reflect vertical participation, the Platonic notion of the latter also allows for a revisionary recovery of the 'primitive' sense of the participatory.

Levinas was surely wrong to imagine that Platonic participation and erotic ecstasy were simply residues of paganism rather than, as he saw in the case of the good beyond being, anticipations of its refusal. For if paganism consists in the sacrificial swallowing of the many by the all, it also consists in the sacrifice of all natural and human unity to polytheistic diversity and the competing demands of warfare, love, domesticity, the arts and the chase. Paganism means the unmediated shuttle between the one and the many, the city and the heroes, fatality and the gods. Platonic participation, real relation and mediation point the way beyond this.

But these stresses, as I have tried to point out, are most exaggerated and realised within Christian theology. This is precisely why Badiou, the atheist, by following Christian paradigm, comes nearer than Levinas, the believing Jew, to retrieving a European Platonic legacy for our times. My entire discussion above starts to reveal why ‘strict monotheism’ stressing externality and distance, whether in certain dominant Jewish and Islamic, or else minority or post-Scotist Christian versions, can become dialectically complicit with the very ‘participatory’ paganism which it starts to reject. The genius of Catholic Christendom by contrast, has been more truly to escape paganism by ecumenically incorporating but modifying its emphases: thus it has expressed the fuller truth both of tribal humanity and of the Greek discovery of reason.

Alain Badiou has started to show us (albeit often obliquely) how such an insight need not be a conservative prerogative and to suggest remarkably how we might restore the European tradition of universality – which has always been uniquely a synthesising tradition, welcoming but adaptive of the other – in terms of the concealed underlying homology of socialism, Platonism and Christianity.