

This paper proceeds through five steps. I will first give a brief restatement of Badiou's fourfold typology of discourses, followed by a critique of that schema sharply focused on Badiou's treatment of the fourth discourse. In the next sections I demonstrate the collapse of Badiou's structure by means of two of his false dichotomies resulting from his misconstruction of the fourth discourse. These critiques culminate with a broader questioning of Badiou's notions of subject and event based on the experience of St. Paul.

I. Badiou's Theory of Discourses

"In the year 33 or 34, on the road to Damascus Paul is struck by a divine apparition and converts to Christianity" (16). The problem of naming Paul's experience a "conversion" notwithstanding, I emphasize Badiou's admission of Paul's passivity and the resurrected Christ's appearance. For Badiou goes on to enumerate four possible discourses based on Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:22 that Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. First Greek wisdom requires knowledge for verification. Second Jewish prophecy demands a sign as proof. Third Christian faith according to Badiou constitutes eventual declaration, which denies both Jewish and Greek attempts at validation of any kind. Finally Badiou brackets mysticism, "the discourse of the ineffable, the discourse of nondiscourse" (51-52). Badiou wants at all costs to downplay the significance of this fourth, "obscurantist" discourse as nothing more than "a mute supplement" to Christian discourse (52). Much of Badiou's presentation depends on this fourfold delineation. I intend to demonstrate that his schema does not hold and that, as such, Badiou quite simply gets Paul wrong in this fundamental regard.

II. Badiou's Underestimation: Paul and the Miraculous

I begin by rereading key Pauline texts included in Badiou's discussion. Concerning the "political text" about the Jerusalem conference Badiou expressly quotes Paul's reason for going up to Jerusalem after fourteen years of ministry theretofore unsanctioned by Jesus' original followers, viz. response to "revelation" (24; Gal. 2:2). On the related issue of miracles Badiou quotes Paul with regard to what is most likely the apostle's own experiential rapture into the third heaven, again an explicit mention of "revelation" (51; 2 Co. 12:1-2). – Bear in mind that this is a block quote of 2 Corinthians 12:1-11. – In the midst of Badiou's ellipsis Paul, while mentioning the one revelation of Paradise, refers in fact to his "abundance of revelations" (*tē huperbolē tōn apokalypseōn*, 2 Co. 12:7). At the very least Paul's mention of this detail renders his mystical experiences far more commonplace than Badiou lets on.

Even more problematically Badiou elides 2 Corinthians 12:12, which reads, "The signs of the apostle (were) effected among you with total patience – signs, wonders, and *dunamesin*." [The final word is usually translated "mighty works" or "miracles;" Richard Kearney insightfully describes *dunamis* as something between power and possibility.] Badiou admits the occasional place of mysticism within Christian *experience* yet denies it any pride of place within Christian *discourse*: "The fourth discourse...must remain *unaddressed*, which is to say that it cannot enter into the realm of preaching" (52). Badiou's point that Paul does not publicly declare the substantive content of his visions so far as we know is true as far as it goes. However, the apostle does not consider the miraculous mere sideshow. On the contrary, on the basis of 2 Corinthians 12:12, the miraculous appears as the very condition that, when satisfied, opens up the space for

proclamation of the gospel as an apostle. Simply put, Badiou seeks to diminish or even deny precisely that which Paul must necessarily aver and even demonstrate in abundance in order for the Corinthians to acknowledge him as an apostle.

The miraculous, then, reassumes a place for Paul subsequent to the subjectivation of the original truth event and prior to the subject's ensuing declaration of the event.

“Reassumes” because just as declaration first requires the miraculous (hence demonstrating *dunamesin* for Corinthians), so too does the event itself require mystical experience (hence the voice from heaven). So, I return to Badiou's reference to Paul's passivity and Christ's appearance when Paul experienced his call – a point I mentioned at the outset. According to Luke Jesus had been crucified, dead, buried, resurrected, and ascended prior to calling Paul. Jesus had not spoken since his ascension, yet he breaks his silence to speak to Paul. That Jesus shines a light and speaks his voice from heaven to interrupt this one subject surely qualifies as miraculous event or mystical experience. [I note here that I would prefer to separate the miraculous and the mystical into two categories, but I maintain their combination as in Badiou's discussion. Badiou perhaps connects the two as similarly “supernatural” as opposed to “natural,” a distinction tenuous to maintain theologically in the wake of the work of Henri de Lubac.] The miraculous or mystical is the very vehicle of the truth event. Thus Badiou cannot justifiably bracket it as a different kind of discourse since it is in fact the medium of Christian discourse.

To reiterate, in the case of Paul the truth event only subjectivates by means of mystical experience, and subsequent miraculous elements serve as a condition for apostolic discourse (as seen from 1 Co. 12:12). Badiou's selective reading of Paul, i.e. his

inattention to these founding miraculous events, not only calls into question his notion of mysticism as another kind of discourse but also effectively dismantles Badiou's entire schema. In particular, within competing modes of Badiou's third, i.e. Christian, discourse he sets up an opposition between Paul and the evangelist John.

III. One of Badiou's False Dichotomies: Paul versus John

Badiou writes, "The opposing of a diagonalization of discourses to their synthesis is a constant preoccupation of Paul's. It is John who, by turning the logos into a principle, will synthetically inscribe Christianity within the space of the Greek logos, thereby subordinating it to anti-Judaism. This is certainly not the way Paul proceeds. For him, Christian discourse can maintain fidelity to the son only by delineating a third figure, equidistant from Jewish prophecy and the Greek logos" (43). Badiou's formulation of John renders Johannine Christianity insufficient insofar as Christianity so conceived cannot maintain its proper distinction from Greek philosophy. On this point Badiou reads John no better than he does Paul.

In the first place by the time of John's gospel the concept of the logos was already equally at home within both Judaism and Hellenism. [Here the works *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* by Tcherikover and Hengel's *Judaism and Hellenism* could have aided Badiou in the realization that first century Judaism cannot rightly be considered 'pure and undefiled' with respect to Greek culture; cf. also Boyarin's *Border Lines* for the concept of *logos* in particular.] Hence Badiou's notion that John sought to synthesize Christian and Greek discourses misses the mark. That is, a distinction between Jew and Greek is at certain points a matter of degree not of kind given the universalism of Greek culture as a result of Alexander the Great.

Furthermore, even if Badiou's distinction between Paul and John be granted for the sake of argument, his critique of John does not go far enough given the terms of his own discussion. That is, notably absent in Badiou's brief reference to John is any attention to the significance of *semeia* in John's gospel. Whereas the synoptic gospels hold faith as prerequisite to the miraculous (e.g. the hemorrhaging woman touches Jesus, believing that touching him will heal her; then Jesus her that her faith has saved her. Mt. 9:21-22), John's gospel considers a sign prerequisite to faith (e.g. people ask Jesus, "So what sign will you do in order that we could see and we could believe you?" Jn. 6:30). Simply put, John states faith on the basis of signs as the *raison d'être* of his entire project: "these (signs) are written [by me the writer] so that you [the reader] could believe" (Jn. 20:30-31). In Badiou's terms, then, John (rather than *or* in addition to synthesizing Christian and Greek discourses) must have sought in fact to synthesize Christian and Jewish discourses, a relegation of the truth event to prophetic proof from signs. As I have already demonstrated Badiou ignores the fact that signs likewise serve a primary function for Paul's declaration of the truth event. Thus Badiou makes an empty distinction between John and Paul.

IV. Another of Badiou's False Dichotomies: Judaism and Christianity

More fundamentally detrimental to Badiou's fourfold schema, attention to Paul's admittance to proof from signs renders Badiou's distinction between Jewish and Christian discourses useless altogether. He willingly admits that appeals to miracles for proof of Christian proclamation would "*relapse inevitably into the...discourse...of the sign*" (53). He fails to admit that Paul himself did so, thus erasing Badiou's line separating Jewish and Christian discourses. Contrary to Badiou's wishes Paul does

indeed “enter into the logic of the master” and becomes master for the one demanding signs (cf. 59).

Furthermore, with regard to Badiou’s empty distinction between Judaism and Christianity, his formal analysis of Paul could just as easily apply to Moses. Badiou posits four requirements of universal singularity: the new event that constitutes the subject, the subject’s declaration of the event, fidelity to the truth of the event, and indifference to the state of the situation (14-15). First God reveals the divine name to Moses at Horeb (Ex. 3). Second Moses makes a declaration to all the people of Israel (Ex. 4:30). Third the people believe (Ex. 4:31). Fourth Moses shows indifference to the rule of Pharaoh (Ex. 5:1). So Moses most certainly fulfills Badiou’s formal constraints to any truth event. As in the case of Paul, however, Badiou’s formula misses the necessity of the miraculous. In the first place revelation itself must count as a miracle. More importantly, though, between Moses’ declaration and the peoples’ belief comes Exodus 4:30b: “And (Moses) did the signs for the people;” the very next phrase reads, “And the people believed” (Ex. 4:31a). Signs surface as prerequisite for Israelites and Corinthians alike, the respective audiences of Moses and Paul. Therefore with regard to both Paul vis-à-vis John in particular and Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism more generally, Badiou all too simplistically posits a distinction without a difference.

V. On the Newness of the Event as such

Badiou says that Paul understands that “one can only begin from faith, from the declaration of faith. The sudden appearance of the Christian subject is unconditioned” (18). In that explanation Badiou restates his first requirement for truth as universal singularity, viz. that “The Christian subject does not preexist the event he declares” (14).

Rather pedantically, this amounts to a circular argument, given that Paul did not believe the resurrection of Christ until Paul believed the resurrection of Christ.

A more serious critique points out, however, that contrary to Badiou's opinion, the external conditions of Paul as both Pharisaic Jew and pursuer of the Jesus Movement substantially conditioned Paul prior to the event. In Acts Paul says somewhat ironically that he, a Pharisee, is on trial before Pharisees and Sadducees "concerning hope and resurrection of the dead" (*peri elpidos kai anastaseōs nekrōn*, Acts 23:6). To this the narrator adds the explanation that Pharisees believe the resurrection but Sadducees do not (Acts 23:8). So far, then, Paul already believed the resurrection before he believed that Jesus as Christ had resurrected. Furthermore, also according to Acts, the Jesus Movement proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus beginning at Pentecost (e.g. Acts 2:31, 32). In other words, the proclamation of the resurrected Christ both preceded and conditioned Paul.

Badiou, despite his disdain for the ineffable, seems to want a Paul who could have had no comprehension of the resurrection of Christ prior to his own experience of the subjectivating event. In other words, Badiou's formula requires a Paul devoid of both the historical Jesus and early Judaism. For that much particular conditioning would result inevitably in only slightly altered re-inscriptions and combinations of extant particular claims, a poor disguise of someone else's prior belief. Such is Paul as we encounter him in his texts, no matter how much Badiou elides. For the Paul who counted his circumcision, Pharisaic affiliation, zeal, and righteousness as shit (Phil. 3:5-8) had phenomenologically first to have become circumcised, a Pharisee, zealous, and righteous. Badiou's Pauline subject, unconditioned and unprecedented, appears as an imposter instead of the apostle.