

THE OTHER/REAL – TWO PARADIGMS OF FRENCH THOUGHT DURING 1955–2005

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Abstract

This article abstracts and represents two French paradigms of the second half of the 20th century: the paradigm of the Other and the paradigm of the real. The leading names of these paradigms are, on the one hand, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, and, on the other hand, Jacques Lacan and Alain Badiou. Even if these paradigms are close to each other, there are some important differences between them, implicated by the concepts of Other and real. There are no innocent concepts and, thus, these analyzed differences determine, for example, the political and religious positions of these paradigms. In order to be worthy of its name, thinking should pay attention to these often implicit differences and positions.

Keywords: Levinas, Derrida, Lacan, Badiou, Žižek, the Other, the real, continental philosophy

Introduction

Representing the Unrepresentable

Let us imagine that God would say to us:

«Every picture you will draw of me, I will burn it. Every statue you will carve of me, I will shatter it. Every sound you will hear of me, I will silence it. Every word you will say of me, I will stifle it. Every text you will write of me, I will erase it. Every thought you will think of me, I will dispel it. Every belief you will have in me, I will banish it. All images of me will be destroyed. All music composed of me will be hushed. All minds that try to catch me will be broken down. All conceptualizations of me will be collapsed. All religions built on me will be lost. All parties or peoples founded on me will be proven false».

It is clear that in front of such a God every representation would seem to be a vanity – and that the most truthful act would be to be silent. This would lead not only to a radical iconoclastic position, but also to a total annihilation of all representations of God. Thus, the first and uttermost «choice» – that has been chosen a long time ago and will be chosen again and again – concerns 1) the existence of such representations and 2) our relation-

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ship to and with such representations. With regard to these questions, what is represented (the «content») is secondary. Or, so it would seem, if we could make the classical differentiation between the form and the content or, better, between the represented and representing. Unfortunately, things are not so simple.

First of all, the existence of representations is the human condition: we were born into representations and we will die within them. Even the total annihilation of all representations *by human beings* would still entail representations and leave a mark, the representation of the annihilation of all representations. As human beings, we have to choose representations: there is no other option, only hypocrisy (thus the end of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is a testimony to young Wittgenstein's hypocrisy, a mark of fundamental naïveté). The real – and thus uttermost – choice is made with regard to what to do with such representations: how to represent, how to be born, to live and to die *within* representations. These questions cannot be separated from the question of what is represented. However, there are points of representing where representing returns to its origin, to the question of the unrepresentable and to the question of the possibility to represent at all. This return to the origin is present in different ways in different forms and dynamics of representing. In other words, depending on the historical situation of each historical discourse formation, this encounter with the origin is (re) presented in different forms. I claim that the ways of encountering the problem of representing constitute the characteristic matter of all so-called «philosophical» discourses. Thus, in order to discern the essential differences between different philosophical paradigms, it is essential to discern how representing – especially representing of the unrepresentable – is conceptualized, constituted and constructed in each paradigm.

Here, it is essential to note the singularity of each manner of representing. In philosophy, the task has been, is, and will be to catch and to lose the unrepresentable through and within the concepts – whether that unrepresentable is called, for example, *logos*, *idea*, *nous*, *ratio*, reason, the real or the Other. Otherwise we will only have tasteless literature or whatever form of representation philosophy is mixed with. This does not mean that the arts, sciences or politics would not derive anything from philosophy or that philosophy would not learn anything from the other discourses, on the contrary: it is only through this separation that philosophy and other discourses can «animate» each other. The «answer» to the question of how to represent is essential here, in fact, it is the very thing to be thought about all the time while thinking of everything else. This is the very point of view of this text: a bird's-eye view, a bird asking how the representations take place in two continental paradigms of contemporary thinking.

Before dealing with this point of view, two things need to be noted about representing the unrepresentable and the task of philosophy in this respect. First, the impossibility of representing the unrepresentable does not imply prohibiting the representation of the unrepresentable. In fact, it could be stated that through a series of failures of representing

the unrepresentable, the unrepresentable will have been presented. From this point of view, the failure of these representations is the very object of philosophy with regard to the unrepresentable: to present through this failure is philosophy's curse and blessing, its poverty and richness (the corollary of this is clear: all positivism – to which I include both analytic philosophy and pragmatism – means the degeneration of philosophy). This leads us to the second point, to the question of how to fail. For it is only through vigorous conceptualizations that the failure of conceptualizations can be presented. Incoherent representations do not uncover their failure. Thus in philosophy, incoherence is a form of cowardice. As will be seen, this notion has important implications and it signifies a peculiar position within contemporary continental thinking.

A Bird's-eye View

A bird's-eye view has certain advantages and disadvantages. Its main disadvantages include, at least, the following ones: from far away, we easily miss the details and nuances of whatever we are observing and discussing; we easily make coarse misjudgments and base our arguments on popular doxa on the matters; we may also miss the point and the logic of arguments that we are criticizing. These are genuine dangers. However, I must emphasize that we are dealing with these dangers always, in other words, we cannot avoid them: even when we are close-reading a text, we may as easily commit all these transgressions. In fact, staying close to a text implies as much – even if different in some respects – blindness as a bird's-eye view. Many times the closeness of a text seems to function, from far away, as a hypocritical excuse for not thinking radically. In fact, often a close-reading forms a random collage of citations chosen with not so good taste. For a researcher, it is too easy to go behind the safe back of the parent text. To become an adult means, here also, separation from parents. In Lacan's terms, it means that you have to eat your *Dasein*, in other words (Morpheu's from *Matrix* and Žižek's), to be welcomed to the desert of the real... One cannot hide behind the text or far away from it.

This hybrid of apology and accusation points to the main «method» of my article: in it, I try to approach the concepts of the Other and the real from a bird's-eye view. This means that I will omit many details. However, I hope that this bird's-eye view will reveal its advantages: it is the freedom of flying thought that I am after, the only freedom there is for research – the freedom of truth. This freedom expects one to take a position: a bird needs the air beneath its wings (as already Kant and Hegel stressed).

My main proposition is simple, namely that there are two paradigms of representing the unrepresentable within French thought between 1955 and 2005. I will call these paradigms the paradigm of the Other (including especially Levinas and Derrida) and the paradigm of the real (including especially Lacan and Badiou) and I will explicate the differences between them. To be sure, there are several French thinkers who

are not easily counted into these paradigms and who this way provide a kind of non-marginal margin of freedom with regard to them (Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, Blanchot, Foucault...). The objective is not to give an account of the whole of French thinking during 1955–2005, but to abstract two separate paradigms out of the too broad and vacuous term «French thinking/philosophy».

The interests of my article lie in the power of a comparative study: the article brings forth the often-implicit presuppositions of concepts. There are no innocent concepts and thus the duty of an academic researcher is to explicate his concepts as much as possible – even when we are discussing something that will never become discussed, as we are when we are dealing with the concepts of the Other and the real.

I will claim that the paradigm of the Other implies the following features:

1. It inherits the Kantian way to conceptualize the matter to be thought about as something that is *in front* of us, as something that encounters us from the setting between the Same and the Other, transforming the Kantian *das Ding* into the Other. (Kantian undertones.)

2. It interprets Hegel more as a thinker of totality than as a thinker of antagonism and realization. (The question of Hegel.)

3. It rejects systematicity and coherence as the imperative/task of thinking. (The problem of coherence.)

4. It inherits a certain Heideggerian way of looking at the history of Western thought as a kind of homogenic/monotonic/monolithic whole of «Metaphysic», even if the meaning of this term changes between different thinkers of the otherness. (The whole of Metaphysics.)

5. This view of the whole of Metaphysics implies a) the statement that all sciences belong to this simple tradition of Metaphysics and just continue it and b) a certain symptomatic dumbness with regard to natural sciences. (The question of the sciences.)

6. From Heidegger, it also inherits the rejection of the formalization of the language of thinking. (Formalization of language.)

7. It implies, also, some kind of aversion or, at least, flight from Althusserian Marxism and, with this, a certain openness/tendency/toothlessness with regard to right-wing orientations or «political correctness». (Political correctness.)

8. Last but not least, the paradigm of the Other leads to the position of not taking one's position – and thus easily, at least in secondary readings/literature – to the naïveté of a non-positional position. Practically, this means that the rejection of fundamentalism leads this paradigm to the most fundamental position of all positions (a position without a position), that is, to a position that cannot be discussed or conceptualized, in other words, to a religious position.

In contrast to the paradigm of the Other, I will juxtapose the paradigm of the real – and it is already clear to which one I belong to:

1. The paradigm of the real inherits and emphasizes the Kantian difference between understanding and reasoning and transforms the Kantian *das Ding* into the real. (Kantian undertones.)

2. It inherits the Marxian way of seeing Hegel's contradiction as the dynamic antagonism essential to all realizations and to all encountering of the real. (The question of Hegel.)

3. It emphasizes systematicity and coherence as the imperative/task of thinking. (The problem of coherence.)

4. It rejects the Heideggerian way of looking at the history Western thought as a kind of homogenic/monotonic/monolithic whole of «Metaphysic» and considers this as a coarse and often naive way of approaching the history of Western thought. (The whole of Metaphysics.)

5. The paradigm of the real emphasizes the breaks that sciences introduce to the history of Western thought. (The question of the sciences.)

6. The idea of formalizing the language of thinking is central to the paradigm of the real. This does not imply the naïveté of identifying the magnitudes of physics with philosophical concepts or of considering concepts as transparent. Instead, it is a question of a) what you can or cannot teach and learn (Lacan), b) what the roles of university discourse are (Lacan), c) what ontological beings are (Badiou), and, of course, d) what the task of thinking is and what kind of language is the best language for this purpose. This implies, again, a peculiar relationship between exactitude and truth. (Formalization of language.)

7. The paradigm of the real goes as if through Althusser. In other words, it seems to traverse Althusser's work taking its distances from Althusser by working through and with Althusser. (Political correctness.)

8. The paradigm of the real leads one to take one's position. There is no metalanguage or metaethics that would afford a neutral position without a position. In fact, the paradigm of the real leads to a militant position from the perspective of which a position without a position is a fundamentalist position orientated and determined not by reflection but by blind faith.

1. Kantian Undertones

The position of Kant as a cornerstone of the history of philosophy is unquestioned by the thinkers considered in this article: in his Seminar VII, Lacan states again and again that the starting point of his discourse in the questions handled in that seminar is Kant; in his lectures in Helsinki in 2000, Derrida stressed the importance of Kant, used Kant's concepts and expressions and, explicitly, did not want to compare himself to Kant; Levinas recognizes Kant's essential position and states even that the ethics articulated by himself is greatly indebted to Kant; and Badiou pays his own homage to Kant, as well. So, when I refer to the Kantian undertones of these thinkers it is not a question of whether they take Kant seriously or whether they have read Kant. On the contrary, it is a question of what kind of Kant they take as their starting point. It is not a question of who is reading Kant in the right way, but how these two different paradigms can be differentiated from each other with regard to Kant.

It is relatively easy to accept that the paradigm of the Other replaces the Kantian *Ding* with the concept of the Other or otherness, whereas in the paradigm of the real the Kantian *Ding* is transformed into the real. Thus the question of the Kantian undertones of these paradigms can be articulated as the question of *das Ding*, in other words, how *das Ding* is posited in the overall articulations. What kind of *das Ding* do these two paradigms inherit?

Das Ding in the Paradigm of the Other

In the paradigm of the Other, the emphasis is, if I may say so, on the Humean side of the Kantian *Ding*. It is more a question of the problem that Kant inherits from Hume than of the problem Kant delivers to Hegel. A simple example may illustrate this. The classical Humean paradox is that of the cause, and – this is well known – it was this paradox that, according to Kant himself, woke him from his dogmatic slumber. Hume's question is so classical that it does not have to be repeated thoroughly here: we may see in the empirical, sensed world that billiard ball A is moving and soon billiard ball B is moving too, but we do not see in this empirical world that the movement of A would be the cause of the movement of B. In other words, the relationship between the movement of A and the movement of B that we call the causal relationship cannot be empirically observed. Thus the causal relationship does not belong to the empirical world in front of us, but is our subjective interpretation of the events.

This *setting* is the Humean root of the Kantian *Ding* and it has a key position in the first and also, although in a modified way, second Critique, especially in the way a rational being should relate ethically to another rational being. And it is this *setting* that echoes in Levinas's and Derrida's Other. I sense already all the irritation and crying of Levinas's and Derrida's fans, so I emphasize: it is a question of the overall setting of thought, not the actual concepts and their details. Of course, many things change from Hume to Kant and from Kant to Levinas and from Levinas to Derrida, but the setting itself remains more or less the same when Levinas and Derrida talk about the Other. I want to emphasize that this, definitively, does not apply to all Derrida's concepts and thus Slavoj Žižek is more than right when he extracts Derrida's concept of *différance* from this setting: the concept of *différance* – which Derrida launched in the 1960s – can take us to different directions, one of which *may* be the concept of the Other or the concept of play, but these directions cannot be determined or deduced exclusively from the concept of *différance*. In other words, there is no inevitable link between the concept of *différance* and the concept of the Other.

This setting that the paradigm of the Other inherits from the Humean side of the Kantian *Ding* is the setting of «something in front», just as Levinas's face of the Other is always in front of me. In other words, just as Hume's billiard balls are in front of him when he is pondering and reflecting on them, Levinas's Other confronts Levinas face to face. This may sound innocent, but, in philosophy, there are no innocent concepts.

Das Ding in the Paradigm of the Real

In the paradigm of the real, the emphasis is on the Hegelian side of the Kantian *Ding*. In other words, it is *das Ding* that Kant delivers to Hegel. The classical articulation of this kind of *das Ding* is to be found in Kant's third Critique, in the feelings of beauty and the sublime. Again, it is the setting and the change in the setting that we are interested in. It is true that, again, the object is – by definition, if I may say so – in front of the observer, but this time something is different from the ordinary observation of objects: there is a feeling and it is this feeling and nothing else that marks the – almost – presence of *das Ding*. In other words, *das Ding* is in this fleeting moment of tension and dissolution, in this antagonistic dynamics of opposite forces and dimensions. In fact – at least Žižek would prefer this formulation – *das Ding* is nothing but these feelings of beauty and the sublime, these very tensions and antagonisms. The same kind of *das Ding* is also articulated in the second Critique, namely in the way the ethical imperative hits a rational being and subjects this being to its command, thus causing a kind of antagonistic tension and dissolution. It is this *das Ding* that the paradigm of the real picks up, especially since the sixties (in the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties, Lacan still often characterizes the real as Kantian *das Ding* with all its Humean echoes). Needless to say, this way of interpreting the real has become especially clear and important in the work of Slavoj Žižek, a fact that Žižek himself often pays attention to.

All this mean that – from the perspective of the paradigm of the real – there is no need for the horizon of the Other, whether it is the Levinasian Other always higher than me or Derrida's becoming Other. There are, of course, essential differences between Levinas's and Derrida's Others and, to be sure, there are differences even within the Other within both Levinas's and Derrida's texts: there is not just one Other within Levinas's or Derrida's work. This does not diminish the fact that the Other (be)comes always from the beyond as an outsider. For the paradigm of the real, the real could be better characterized as inherent to discourse, in other words, the real is given birth within the discourse and, in this sense, it is an insider, or better, in Lacanian jargon, an extime register of discourse.

2. The Question of Hegel

The question of Hegel is closely connected to the Kantian undertones of the paradigms of the Other and the real. In fact, this is a logical necessity: what we say of Kant determines what we will say of Hegel, and vice versa.

Hegel in the Paradigm of the Other

For the paradigm of the Other, Hegel seems to be, more or less, a totalitarian thinker or the Thinker of Totality. In other words, Hegel's

work incorporates, more or less, a totality, the totality of concepts that encompass everything from being to nothing. And, yes, who could deny that there is such a tendency in Hegel, expressed also by Hegel himself? So, again, it is not a question of being scholarly right or wrong, but of a more or less scholarly description of the implications of two paradigms and of their key concepts.

For the paradigm of the Other, it is a question of breaking away from the System, of finding the blind spots of Totality and – in so far as these thinkers are determined and directed by the concept of the Other – of showing the absolute difference between the Other and the System of the Same. Thus, Hegel is read as someone to be disagreed with, either by opposing the System with the Other or by disseminating the System in favour of the Other.

Hegel in the Paradigm of the Real

In the paradigm of the real, Hegel is seen as a dynamic thinker of antagonism and realization. In other words, Hegel's conceptual system is seen as the articulator of all the tensions and oppositions through which historical reality takes place. Thus, what the paradigm of the Other considers as an all-encompassing and reductive conceptual totality, the paradigm of the real sees as a rigorous conceptualization of the human condition and speaking being.

This way of reading Hegel implies, of course, certain Marxian undertones. However, and this should be stressed, Hegel is not read in any simple Marxian way. On the contrary, Hegel is often seen as philosophically more radical than Marx himself – due to a certain realistic naïveté of classical Marxian theory. However, the Lacanian dialectics of desire and the four discourses as well as Badiou's political theory all have their undeniable Hegelian-Marxian nuances.

3. The Problem of Coherence

The problem of coherence goes hand in hand with the question of Hegel. Thus, for the paradigm of the Other – as rigorous as it is in its thinking and articulations – coherence is certainly not something driven at. In fact, Levinas's and Derrida's texts are full of contradictions, not in a pejorative sense, but as something to be concentrated on and elevated to a kind of ethical level. A classic example here is the question of the Other and the Third, and thus of ethics and justice. For the paradigm of the Other, these cannot be simply reconciled conceptually, and still, in every action one takes part in, one must reconcile them, more or less, somehow.

For the paradigm of the real, coherence – at least when it comes to Lacan and Badiou – is the uttermost requirement of theoretical thinking. It is only through the coherent articulations that one can do justice to the real: coherence brings forth the inherent levels of each articulation, as well as the problems to be thought about. Thus, theoretical

thinking ought to be striving for the more and more exact and coherent articulations.

After one has read several books by Levinas and Derrida, one already knows (about) what is to emerge from the discourse in their other books before having finished reading them. It is the same old beaten path with new cases: whatever their discourses swallow, they spit out the same thing. This is because their seemingly coherent processes are not coherent, but rather build on natural languages and on the history of natural languages. In natural languages, there is nothing coherent.

Thus the coherence of a discourse is testified to by its ability to produce something new. This can be seen in scientific discourses, as well as in radical arts, for example in Joyce or Beckett. Similarly, the ongoing change is more than typical of Lacan's and Badiou's discourses: the Lacan of the fifties is completely different from the Lacan of the seventies, and Badiou's writings of the seventies differ profoundly from his writing at the end of the eighties. There are, certainly, changes in Levinas's and Derrida's discourses, of course, but those changes occur exactly in the dimensions of their work that are not tightly connected to the reactionary concept of the Other.

From this perspective, the coherence of a discourse results in its ongoing renewal. In other words, it is the coherence of a discourse that forces it to become something more/different than what it was. Thus the renewal process is inherent in a coherent discourse. For example, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the coherence and exactitude of the discourse of a «patient» – forced by the silent work of an analyst – gives birth to a new way of knotting the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. In psychoanalysis, it is the very work of the analyst to be quiet and to follow the exact words of the analysand; in this way, the analyst stages the order of the signifiers of the analysand's life. The exact structure of the analysand's particular signifiers – his prison of fate – is traversed by their more or less coherent articulation. Everything else implied by psychoanalysis comes with and after this process.

4. The Whole of Metaphysics

The question of metaphysics ties together the previous points and shows their presuppositions with regard to the history of thinking. For the paradigm of the Other, the whole paradigm of thinking since the Greeks has been guided, led or formed by metaphysical thinking, grounded on a transparent, self-knowing subject that reduces everything into itself, into the Same. Here the paradigm of the Other seems to follow Heidegger's view of the history of Western thinking as the history of forgetting the being of beings, even if for Levinas, Heidegger is the culmination of the metaphysical paradigm. To be sure, Levinas and Derrida both reconceptualize the concept of metaphysics, but both adopt a kind of Heideggerian schema of Metaphysics.

For the paradigm of the real, things are not so simple. Already on the conceptual level, Lacan and Badiou re-evoked the concept of the subject,

but it is evident that their subjects are not the subjects criticized in the paradigm of the Other. And when Lacan and Badiou read the classics of philosophy, it is clear that they disagree with the Heideggerian-Levinasian description of the history of philosophy. In fact, it is difficult to read Badiou's reading of Lucretius without hearing in it a strict criticism of the over-simple Heideggerian view of the history of philosophy as the history of forgetting the being of beings. Thus we could formulate this in Lacanian terms, stating that, for the paradigm of the real, there is no Metaphysics: there are different metaphysics and metaphysical discourses, but there is not a whole as/of Metaphysics.

In fact, it seems to be the very concept of the whole of ontology/metaphysics that provides the background against which both Levinas and Derrida posit the concept of the Other. It is the Other that breaks this kind of whole and that is veiled and mistreated by such a whole. If and when there is no such a whole, the radicality of the concept of the real must be understood differently: it is the real that the repeated breaks within the history of Western (Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, Marx & Engels, Einstein...) thinking approach.

5. The Question of the Sciences

The question of the sciences is a kind of corollary to the question of metaphysics. For Levinas and Derrida, the sciences seem to be categorized – as for Heidegger – as some kind of continuation of Metaphysics. In other words, science just continues what has been begun in ancient Greece. The so-called Copernican revolution was not, philosophically, a revolution at all: science was seen to culminate in the metaphysical opposition of a thinking, self-knowing and transparent subject, and the object, which is, in the final analysis, posited by that subject.

For Lacan and Badiou this is – if I may use a neologism – a philosophocentric and extremely naive supposition. Lacan's basic education was that of a physician and Badiou's that of a mathematician, and both grew up in and adopted the intellectual climate of Canguilhem, Althusser et al. in which science means a clear metaphysical/discursive break and changes almost everything. This is why Lacan emphasizes psychoanalysis as a science – the science of the subject of science – and why Badiou makes such a clear-cut and absolute differentiation between philosophy and science.

6. Formalization of Language

The questions of coherence, metaphysics and the sciences have as their corollary the question of the formalization of language. Namely, if we consider the history of Western thought as the history of *the* Metaphysics and the sciences as the continuation of this Metaphysics, and if we do not strive for the coherence of our articulations, then it is evident that the formalization of language would not be of any advantage to us, on the contrary. This is easy to discern in Levinas's and Derrida's

writings: there is hardly any attempt at formalization and even the sentences are somewhat anti-formalizing, against all possible formalizations. In other words, the sentences play with ambiguities and are often constructed according to the more or less interwoven implications of French language.

For the paradigm of the real, things are often quite different: Lacan and Badiou consider coherence to be essential for theoretical thinking, and the sciences are for them essential breaks in the tradition of Western thinking, with the sciences based on the more or less formalized languages. Thus, it is easy to see why both strive for the formalization of their articulations. Here, Lacan uses his mathemas, topological formulations and knots, and Badiou compresses his basic concepts into the formulations of set theory.

The problem of non-formalized natural languages is evident: the more a discourse is based on a natural language, the more anthropocentric the discourse inevitably is. This does not mean that a discourse could do without natural languages: the human mind is born within and through natural languages and every human enterprise implies them. However, the more a discourse can formalize its representations, the more it leaves behind the picture of man as the model of the universe. This explains the so-called anti-humanistic tendencies of the paradigm of the real: as long as we lean mainly on natural languages, the human being functions for us as the measure of all things. Formalized languages bring forth the non-human dimensions of being.

7. Political Correctness and Religion

The question of politics is not a separate problem, but tied to everything mentioned above. The central question here is the relationship these two paradigms have to French Marxist traditions, especially to that of Althusserian Marxism. Personally, Derrida and Badiou had close contact with Althusser himself, so it is not a question of sociological acquaintanceship. Again, it is not a question of whether Levinas and Derrida had read the Marxians, and everybody knows that Derrida wrote on Marx, too. No, this question is philosophically more fundamental and concerns the ultimate question of all philosophy, namely what philosophy is. The essential dimension of this question is the relationship between religion and philosophy. Thus the question of religion is in no way irrelevant here, but the answers to it determine one's political position, and vice versa.

Thus even if Levinas explicitly separates his philosophical texts from the theological ones and uses different publishers for the two, his religious position is, in itself, highly political. And so far as Derrida adopts Levinas's concept of the Other, he adopts – and nothing can explain this away – Levinas's religious position. For Lacan, whose brother was a Catholic priest, it is essential that psychoanalysis be considered as a science and thus be separated from religion. In fact, Lacan criticizes the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), for example, for making

psychoanalysis a religious cult and not a science as Freud intended. Again, Badiou inherits the strict Althusserian attitude regarding the separation of philosophy from theology, and criticizes Levinas vehemently on this subject.

From the perspective of contemporary Western everyday «politics», Levinas and Derrida could be characterized as politically correct, whereas Badiou is certainly an outsider in this respect: for Badiou, Western everyday «politics» would not even deserve the name of politics. Derrida is referred to approvingly by right-wing thinkers, whereas Badiou is criticized heavily even by social democrats, not to mention representatives of the right wing.

8. Position without a Position

Superficially, Levinas's concepts are politically neutral and as if beyond political debate. However, if you analyze them a little further from an outside perspective, you see that they go hand in hand with a right-wing conservative orientation: you can exploit animals and explain this exploitation away with all the future benefits it will have for the Other; you can well privatize health-care systems for, in Levinas's thinking, there is no reason why a socialist or social-democratic system would work better or in a more just way than a capitalistic one, etc. In fact, the toothlessness of Levinas's concepts with regard to social and environmental injustice makes of the Levinasian edifice a force of reaction to easily be (mis?)used in whatsoever way.

As for Derrida, it is a characteristic of his thinking that his concepts lead repeatedly to a position without a position. Infrastructurally the reasons for this are more than evident: it is a question of a university discourse directed to university discourses, in other words, it is an inside-university-discourse. Within a university discourse, you can wonder endlessly about the miracle of signing. In this way, you do not have to take a side and it is easy to play the role of an intellectual, an intellectual domesticated by academic discourse.

As for Lacan, he worked in a clinical setting. In such a clinical setting one constantly makes important decisions that save or can end lives and have a profound effect on other people. Clinically, there is no position without a position. Again with Badiou, position-taking was like a «natural» outcome of his background, which in his case is the background of a political activist. Lacan's axiom «there is no metalanguage» denies all the «neutral» positions as well as Badiou's view of justice (as the name of truth in politics) leads directly away from a position without a position.

Thus the paradigm of the real makes one take a position, and not just any position but a militant one. Two of the main criticisms against the advocates of the Other expressed by Badiou are: 1) by avoiding position taking, the advocates of the Other are toothless – and thus irresponsible – with regard to the demands of the contemporary world and 2) the advocates of the Other mix philosophical discourse with religious or artistic discourses and thus adopt a discursive position without a discursive

sive position. In other words, in the paradigm of the Other, the position is avoided both politically and discursively.

The paradigm of the real leads one to take a position, for science, politics, art and love always presuppose a position. From the perspective of the tradition of the real, after Newton/Darwin/Marx/Joyce/Beckett, etc. one cannot do philosophy in a way similar to how one did it before. Thus every philosophical discourse must also sign its historical position. This opens the horizon of an immanent development of discourses, for only the articulation of a position makes a genuine criticism of that position possible.

Corollaries

All this leads to the following corollaries:

1. In Žižek's terms, the continental philosophy of these two paradigms approaches Kant in a parallax way. In other words, in Kant there are two Kants, both incompatible and inevitable. Kant himself joined and traversed the empiricist (Locke, Hume...) and rationalistic (Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza...) traditions and brought them together without mixing and fusing them. This was done with his transcendental concepts and arguments. The tensions between these two paradigms continued within Kant's own thinking and his concepts forming the essential problematics from the first Critique to the second and third. These tensions one re-articulated during the 20th century as the tensions between the paradigm of the Other and the paradigm of the real. From this perspective, the famous debates between Lacan and Derrida continue the essential antagonisms of modern philosophy.

Let me emphasize, however, that it is not a question of the banal statement that there are as many Kants as there are Kant's readers. No, the statement that there are two Kants says that there are two logical, coherent Kants within Kant's corpus, abstracted and underlined by these two French paradigms. The unfathomable abyss of Kant's corpus is opened, experienced and conceptualized in two opposing ways of collective reading of the same texts. These two openings are like the two dimensions of Spinoza's God. It is only in infinity that they come together – and for finite beings this parallelism is the best the finite beings can say of the relationship between these two.

Again, it has to be emphasized that the antagonism between rationalism and empiricism is certainly not the same as that between the paradigms of the Other and the real. No, the statement moves on a kind of «metatheoretical» level: the history of philosophy is essentially constituted by *nachträglich* antagonistic tensions which reveal – afterwards – the very “core” of each historical/situational matter of thought.

This brings us to the following question: Why in the 20th century, and exactly in the 20th century, was this kind of tension/antagonism articulated as the tension/antagonism between the paradigms of the Other and the real? Does all this have something to do with the fact that it was in the 20th century that scientific thinking and the technological organiza-

tion of society thoroughly penetrated everyday life? In other words, does not this tension articulate the nuances of «counter-thought» proper to the philosophy of the 20th century? This way of reading opens these debates as sophisticated symptoms of the 20th century, symptoms that the 21st century has to deal with.

2. In Hegel and especially in *nachträglich* Hegel, the question of the task of modern thinking culminates. Thus, again, we have at least two Hegels in one: one builds a system, a Totality, of concepts foreclosing and excluding the Other; the other conceptualizes contradictions, tensions and antagonisms and gives historical realization its proper and primary place. Either one is probably as right or wrong as the other, or – as Žižek would probably say – the real of Hegel is this very antagonism. No one can deny that both Kant and Hegel were explicitly building a system; the debate is about the position, meaning and significance of this tendency. In fact, following and modifying Maurice Blanchot, I would state that the tendency is as old as Western thinking itself: from the pre-Socratic thinkers onwards, thinkers have more or less cherished some kind of systematicity, even in their apparent non-systematicity: in the end, Heraclitus and Pascal are, to mention just two writers, very systematic in their fragmental writing. It could be stated that giving up some kind of systematicity is giving up philosophy and thinking altogether.

3. Thus the problem of coherence implicitly includes the question of the being/existence/taking place/event of philosophy and thinking. It is extremely naive to light-headedly oppose the task and demand of and for coherence. In their fragments, Pascal, Nietzsche, Weil and Blanchot are maybe more coherent than some non-fragmental writers. The pure, absolute «No!» may be an ethical act – like Antigone’s act against Creon – but only in some coherently structured situation. Thus protesting blindly against the demand for coherence is like protesting against the demand to be a human being.

4. All this points to my conclusions on the question of the whole of Metaphysics. What the paradigm of the Other adopts from Heidegger (and Hegel) as the generalization of Western philosophy as some kind of whole, is not insignificant but implies a certain essential blindness to the manifoldness of Western thinking. This blindness is inevitable for the sake of the argument, but when it is heard repeatedly and compared to the actual writings of Western philosophers, one finds it incredible.

It is much more credible to approach the texts of classical philosophers, not as evidence of some kind of whole, but as something inexhaustibly real that is never reducible to any whole. This means that you can testify against the arguments of the whole by close-reading almost any classics of philosophy: whether you take Plato, Aristotle, Kant or Heidegger himself, you always find something that does not fit in the picture of «Metaphysics». From this perspective, the very term «Metaphysics» has become insignificant.

5. Again from this perspective, the tendency to formalize and the project of formalizing the arguments have suffered from the stupidities of so-called analytic philosophy and should be reconsidered and prob-

ably reconstructed. In other words, philosophical debates should return to the questions of formalization and abstraction. The ethical tone – should – is intended here: the fundamental problem of the paradigm of the Other is the way it presents its arguments/projects. There is no philosophy without technical terms and technical terms always imply an essential abstraction – which is the root operation of all formalizations. The significance of formalization is not in the universal structures of modal logic, but in the way it maintains and promotes discourses.

6. All this implies certain carefulness with regard to the sciences. The sciences certainly do not offer any kind of model for philosophy, but nor does philosophy for them. The problem of several contemporary philosophers is that, evidently, they do not know what they are talking about when they discuss science. It is very easy to categorize the sciences as the continuation of «Metaphysics», when you do not know anything about the sciences. It is true that there are a huge number of scientists whose discourses testify to their absolute ignorance of philosophy and their childish inability to narrow their discourse to what they know about. However, showing them an upside-down mirror-image of themselves is of no help.

Again, it is important here to stress that when I refer to the sciences I do not refer to the arts or humanistic disciplines: modern scientific reasoning nowadays always implies and requires at least some kind of mathematics; it is the mathematical tools that open up (and narrow down) scientific generalizations. If there is no mathematics in any form, there is no science. This applies to the natural sciences as well. As an example, let me take the classical Newtonian $F = ma$. This law applies only to a general, mathematically abstracted entity: any concrete, singular entity is affected by so many forces that it is unreasonable to expect a singular being to realize Newton's law in an exact observable way. In other words, no science can say anything about a singular being, but only about a mathematically abstracted being. That this abstracted being would be posited as an object by some kind of metaphysical subject is, however, a naïveté: scientific objects are produced by collective discourses without any special subject. Or, if the sciences do have a subject, it is a Lacanian subject or Badiou's subject of truth that has little to do with the so-called metaphysical subject of the paradigm of the Other.

7. Philosophy must be separated from religion in fact the roots of this secularization process are the very roots of philosophy. Philosophy is, by definition, atheistic. From this perspective, every supposition of any god forecloses and excludes philosophy. This means, of course, that the discourses of the Church Fathers are, at most, philosophical here and there, but not as a rule: generally speaking the Church Fathers remain theologians. Again, to adopt a politically correct position is not in any way an ideal for philosophy: political correctness is not for philosophy, or at least is irrelevant to it.

8. All this implies realizes and explains a strong position-taking tendency. It is not the task of philosophy to avoid positions, but to (re)articulate them. Every sentence takes a position, a new one or an old one,

whether we want it or not. New routes and new positions and thus new possibilities are opened only through taking and traversing the old ones. Instead of avoiding positions, one should try to articulate them in order to move to new ones.

Conclusion

Hence, when we encounter the Other/real, what do we encounter and how do we encounter it? By definition, we encounter «something» beyond all definitions, something non-representable, something more or less alien. The concept of the Other, even the otherness within me, characterizes this encounter as an encounter with «something» as if *in front* of me and, when this Other is explicitly or implicitly some kind of *autrui*, as «something» somehow human. Derrida, of course, has his reservations regarding this anthropocentrism, but any concept carries its roots in itself. Again, this *autrui* is always more or less alive: besides its being a speaking being, it is a living being. In a way, this kind of otherness is, in a speaking being, the ineffable «kernel» of speaking altogether: it opens the very desire that makes us speak. *Summa summarum*, there is always something human in encountering the Other.

Encountering the real differs from encountering the Other in some respects. For Lacan as well as for Badiou, encountering the real bears something non-human within itself. Thus the natural philosophers wondering about the movement of stars were encountering the real and there is not so much that is human in this encounter. Of course, human speaking being is involved, but the encounter itself can hardly be called a human encounter. Again, this encounter is not, by its setting, an encounter with something in front of one: Antigone facing her own death faces, in fact, her own inhuman desire and its essential conflict with the law. *Summa summarum*, there is always something non-human in encountering the real.

This simple difference also implies important differences in the ways these encounters are or could be conceptualized, as clarified above. Levinas and Derrida articulate this kind of encounter basing themselves solely on natural language and especially its poetic potentials. Lacan and Badiou need, of course, natural language in order to articulate their theory, but they also have a clear tendency to formalize their conceptualizations. Here, again, we could discern the parallax of contemporary philosophy: in order to catch anything of continental thinking at the beginning of the 21st century, we must conceptualize these tensions between the incompatible articulations. Maybe and just maybe, it is this parallax that constitutes the acute task of contemporary thinking.

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