

TWO PATHS TO INFINITE THOUGHT: ALAIN BADIOU AND JACQUES DERRIDA ON THE QUESTION OF THE WHOLE

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ABSTRACT: This essay defends an idea that is no longer fashionable: that there is a whole. The motivation for a defense of this notion has nothing to do with intellectual conservatism or a penchant for Hegel. Rather, what we hope to establish is a second path into what Alain Badiou has called the ‘Cantorian Revolution’. In order to open this path we undertake a three-fold task. First, we deconstruct Badiou’s onto-logical project by isolating the suppressed significance of Ernst Zermelo. This point allows us to recover a Cantorian possibility for addressing the infinite as an inconsistent whole. Second, we turn to work by the logician Graham Priest in order to remove the absurdity of discussing true contradictions. Finally, we return to Jacques Derrida’s early work on Husserl in order to chart a phenomenological path to an affirmation of an inconsistent whole. We close, then, with the implications for contemporary philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Derrida; Badiou; Cantor; Dialetheism; Ontology

I. THERE IS NO WHOLE?

This essay defends an idea that is no longer fashionable: that there is a whole. There are many detractors of this notion, though recently Alain Badiou has provided a novel, non-ethical reason for its rejection: such a notion fails to make the turn into the Cantorian Revolution, and any position that fails to do so is doomed to repeat the

failures of the metaphysics of presence.¹ In opposition to this consensus, and especially Badiou's criticism, what we hope to articulate here is a novel concept of the whole—one that withstands contemporary criticism. In order to do this, we are going to take up the work of Jacques Derrida, already panned by Badiou's supporters, in order to develop our new sense of the whole.² Specifically, we find in Derrida's early work on the experience of the undecidable a statement of what constitutes a defense of the whole, but which equally breaks with Hegel's conception of the absolute. Our thesis is the following: *the experience of the undecidable is the experience of an inconsistent whole*. Like Socrates at his trial, when after being found guilty suggests that he ought to be rewarded with free meals for life at the Prytaneum, the aim of this essay amounts to a defense of Derrida by an admission of guilt. Derrida was a thinker of 'finitude', he did not make the turn into the 'Cantorian Revolution', and he was a thinker of the 'whole'. For all these transgressions, we claim our just dessert: that Badiou himself may be wrong. Or perhaps even more strongly phrased: it is we who remain Cantorian, since Cantor after all *did* hold that there was a whole, while Badiou is rather the descendant of Ernst Zermelo.

The stakes of this encounter, then, should be sufficiently clear. The possibility of transcendental philosophy, a philosophy that would seek to ascertain the limits of thought, has been exhausted. This end, however, constitutes a new beginning. It is the birth of *infinite thought*. While Badiou has established one possible way through to this goal, if we are right, there are two such paths, and failing to meet the requirements of one need not be counted as failing to make the turn into infinite thought. A second closely related consequence of our thesis is the production of a program of research. The role of truth procedures, events, and the possibility of an inconsistent ontology are all suggested. Perhaps most promising, however, is that it provides the way to another model of subjective intervention, which we provisionally call beauty or nobility (*kalos*). This pay-off should entice us enough at least to entertain the possibility of another path into infinite thought.

¹ For Badiou's statement concerning the 'Cantorian Revolution' see for example *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, New York, Continuum Press, 2005, p. 274 (Henceforth BE).

² See for example Peter Hallward, 'The Politics of Prescription', *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 104, 2005, pp. 769-89, or Antonio Calcagno's essay 'Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou: Is There a Relation Between Politics and Time?', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 30, 2004, pp. 799-815, and book *Badiou and Derrida: Politics, Events and their Time*, New York, Continuum Press, 2007. Two caveats here are pertinent. First, we acknowledge that Calcagno is no uncritical fan of Badiou's work. Our point here is that he certainly compares him favorably to Derrida. Second, one should not take away the impression that we here disagree with Calcagno. Indeed, *it is only because we significantly agree with his assessment of Derrida's 'finitude'* that we are able to make this defense of Derrida.

2. ZERMELO'S REVOLUTION

We should like to begin our engagement with Badiou by noting a ghostly presence within Badiou's own thought—a specter (*revenant*) who haunts the whole of his ontology. Consider the following statement from *Being and Event*: 'That it is necessary to tolerate the almost complete arbitrariness of a choice, that quantity, the very paradigm of objectivity, leads to pure subjectivity; such is what I would willingly call the Cantor-Gödel-Cohen-Easton symptom' (BE 280). We are not here interested in this full itinerary, which is punctuated by the names of four great mathematicians, but only its first point, and the *unmentioned name* that stands *between* Cantor and Gödel, namely Ernst Zermelo. This mathematician, who is present only as a dash in Badiou's thought, we argue forms the symptomal point of his enterprise. If attended to correctly, we argue it is here that one can uncover an alternative appropriation of Cantor.

2.1 *Against the Whole*

The 'Cantorian Revolution' in Badiou's thought is tantamount to the rejection of the whole. After Cantor established that it was possible to think the infinite, reversing more than two millennia's wisdom on the matter, there was a short period in which set theory operated by use of something like Gottlob Frege's *unlimited abstraction principle*, which had the advantage of allowing mathematicians to obtain almost all the sets necessary for mathematics from it alone.³ It was as follows: given a well defined property P, there exists a unique set A that consists of only those things that have the property P. Usually, such a set is expressed with braces as follows: $\{x \mid P(x)\}$, which means 'the set of all x having the property x'.

The difficulties with this principle are well-known: such a principle allows for self-membership. If some sets can be members of themselves, then others are sets that are not members of themselves. That this distinction results in a logical paradox was an observation Bertrand Russell made (and Zermelo independently), and has come to be known as Russell's paradox.⁴ The response of the mathematical community was to try to avoid this inconsistency by addressing or reformulating the abstraction principle. This aim was the point of Russell's theory of types. Yet, in the end the solution that was provided by Ernst Zermelo (in 1908) proved most acceptable.

³ We note that Badiou rightly counts Frege as the second attempt to think a set, while Cantor's intuition of objects constitutes the first (BE 40).

⁴ For those interested, Badiou reproduces this paradox in *Being and Event* pages 40-1, and more thoroughly in *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Oliver Feltham, New York, Continuum Press, pp. 153-5 (Henceforth: LW).

Zermelo's reformulation, as Badiou explains, is to produce a limited principle of abstraction by requiring that one *already* have a set from which a property could specify a new set. Badiou expresses this principle, now known as the axiom of separation, as follows: 'If α is given, the set of elements of α which possesses an explicit property (of the type $\lambda(\beta)$) also exists' (BE 501). The change can be noted symbolically as follows: $\{x \mid x \in A \text{ and } P(x)\}$, which means 'the set of all x that are both members of A and have property x '.

The set-theoretical results are two-fold. First, since one must specify a new set only from a previous set, one now conceives of sets in a hierarchy, called V , which is punctuated by two axioms of existence: the null set axiom, and the axiom of infinity. Because it is involved, and because Badiou has aptly demonstrated its construction in *Being and Event*, we shall not here review it. The general point is that one establishes an operation of succession and builds new sets from basic sets established by each of the axioms of existence. This is why this solution is often called the 'set-builder' approach. Second, there is no set of all sets, which is 'in effect the mathematical concept of the Whole' (LW 153). If there were, one would encounter Russell's paradox. Thus, there is no Whole, and by the axiom of separation one cannot produce it.⁵ Since these conclusions follow directly from Zermelo rather than Cantor, then, it might be more accurate to call what Badiou addresses in both volumes of *Being and Event* not Cantor's but Zermelo's Revolution.

2.2 Critique of Finitude

One pay-off for this revolution is that Badiou is able to develop an ontology that does not fall to the critiques of the metaphysics of presence, since at no point is a unity produced that is foundational (i.e. the null-set is a set with empty extension, there is no set of all sets, and the independence of the continuum hypothesis ensures that the ordering of V does not itself produce a unity). Another is that he is able to level a critique of almost all contemporary philosophy, Anglo-American and Continental. Since Derrida is one of the many targets of this latter critique, we shall focus on it here.

This critique has two prongs, only one of which is important to our task. The first is a critique of correlationism. While this was a point Badiou first developed on his own, he has more recently changed his tactic, since it found fuller expression in

⁵ This statement requires a caveat, since, even as Badiou argues in *Being and Event*, the axiom of foundation is *also* necessary to ensure that the theoretical possibility of the whole is excluded (see Meditation 18).

Quentin Meillassoux' work *After Finitude*.⁶ In *Logics of Worlds*, then, one finds that Badiou simply approves of Meillassoux' 'fossil's argument' (LW 119). Since this prong does not concern the status of the whole, however, we are going to focus on the second prong, which also focuses more specifically on phenomenology and hermeneutics. In the third appendix of *Being and Event* he writes the following.

The common conception is that what happens 'at the limit' is more complex than what happens in one sole supplementary step. One of the weaknesses of the ontologies of Presence is their validation of this conception. The mysterious and captivating effect of these ontologies, which mobilize the resources of the poem, is that of installing us in the premonition of being as beyond and horizon, as maintenance and opening-forth of being-in-totality. As such, an ontology of Presence will always maintain that operations 'at the limit' present the real peril of thought Mathematical ontology warns us of the contrary. ... [I]t is not the global gathering together 'at the limit' which is innovative and complex, it is rather the realization, on the basis of the point at which one finds oneself, of the one-more of a step. Intervention is an instance of the point, not of the place (BE 451).

This is an argument that Badiou has continued to develop through *Logics of Worlds*, where it comes under the heading of democratic materialism, and it is closely connected to his critique of nihilism in his short work on ethics.⁷ The outline of this critique, which one can see in the above quotation, can be parsed into the following argument.

Ontologies of presence, which include Derrida's radicalization of phenomenology, are committed to thinking the meaning of being without presence. Yet, this school of thought is also committed to the position that understanding (*verstehen*) is finite. It is this latter commitment that prevents the achievement of the former, since any such limit or horizon of understanding is itself a ghostly presence.⁸ One can witness that the limit *is* a ghostly presence because commitment to this position does not allow one to pass to *intervention* except by betraying the truth (*alētheia*) of the limit situation. It is

⁶ See especially the first and last chapters of Meillassoux' *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, New York, Continuum Press, 2008.

⁷ See especially chapter three of Alain Badiou *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, New York, Verso Press, 2002.

⁸ Badiou explicitly states that constraining being by a limit reinstates the power of the One, or the metaphysics of presence in *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, trans. Norman Madarasz, Albany, State University of New York, 2006 as follows: 'we have to assume, as did Lucretius, that manifold-unfolding [=being as pure multiplicity] is not constrained by the immanence of a limit. For it is only too obvious that such a constraint proves the power of the One as grounding the multiple itself' (pp. 35-6).

this impotence of finite thought that constitutes its nihilism. For the purposes of clarity later, let us call the foregoing the *ghostly presence argument*. Our question now is simple: what are we to learn from it?

The lessons of Zermelo's Revolution may at first appear only negative. First, they amount to a rejection of the whole. In a certain way, though, one may say that this anti-Hegelian goal animates almost all of contemporary philosophy. In this sense, then, it is not special. Yet, second, if Meillassoux's critique of correlationism addresses all contemporary philosophy, the *ghostly presence argument* has it in for anyone committed to the overcoming of the metaphysics of presence. A preoccupation with limit situations, philosophies on the verge, the thematics of death, and especially the horizon shattering epiphany of saturated (especially religious) phenomena are all imperiled.⁹ The theological turn, motivated by the aim to assess the most liminal of all situations, is *at best* a confusion, since no thought occurs there. One must choose: attempt to complete Heidegger's project, and thus finally complete the death of gods (including the poetic), or embrace the impotent nihilism that follows.¹⁰ Yet, all this critique comes with a positive lesson: Zermelo's Revolution shows that *there is a viable path* to accomplishing Heidegger's most fundamental commitments, which of course requires a commitment to some form of materialism (Badiou's dialectical or Meillassoux' speculative). In turning to our critique of Badiou, what we aim to point out is that this project *also* opens up the possibility for another path to infinite thought.

3. THE CANTORIAN REVOLUTION

If it is Zermelo's revolution that establishes the transfinite as a thinkable realm for Badiou, then what precisely was Cantor's revolution? Zermelo, as we saw, set-theoretically eliminates discussion of the whole. Cantor, by contrast, *did* think that there was a whole. Furthermore, he reserved the name 'God' for this whole in his private writings. Let us survey some of Cantor's grounds for these conclusions.

⁹ Badiou directly opposes philosophy to religion in *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran, New York, Continuum Press, 2008 as follows: 'I propose to call 'religion' everything that presupposes that there is a continuity between truths and the circulation of meaning [*sens*]. We can thus say: philosophy is what, against every hermeneutics, against the religious law of meaning, assembles compossible truths on the basis of the void. Philosophy then subtracts thought from every presupposition of Presence' (p. 24).

¹⁰ It is surprising to me that in the attempts to integrate Badiou and Jean-Luc Marion have failed to address this point. Adam S. Miller, for example, in 'Reduction or Subtraction: Jean-Luc Marion, Alain Badiou, and the Recuperation of Truth', *Philosophy Today*, vol. 51, SPEP Supplement, 2007, pp. 23-32 never addresses this point once. This point holds all the more for his book *Badiou, Marion and St. Paul: Immanent Grace*, New York, Continuum, 2008, which focuses on their models of the event. While Miller is quite aware of the thinker's differences on religion, any serious attempt to reconcile these thinkers *must* pay more attention to this point, since it is here that one finds the root of their disagreement.

What must be understood concerning Cantor's mathematical innovation is that it was born from a specifically metaphysical (onto-theological) context. Cantor followed the Aristotelian practice of drawing a distinction between the potentially infinite (*apeiron*) and actually infinite (*aphōrismenon*). The former concerned an undetermined, variable finite quantity, 'which either increases beyond all limits ... or decreases beneath any finite small limit'.¹¹ The latter, by contrast, concerned a quantity that was not variable, and also surpassed every finite quantity in magnitude. Traditionally this latter infinity was understood to be totally incomprehensible, and so not suitable for scientific study. To avoid this conclusion, then, Cantor drew a distinction between two types of actual infinities, breaking with the onto-theological tradition:

[W]e must make a *fundamental* distinction here between:

IIa Inceasable actual-infinite or *transfinite*

IIb Uninceasable actual-infinite or *Absolute*.¹²

What he meant by such a distinction seems fairly clear. Any typical transfinite ordinal, such as ω_0 or ω_1 , has a greater. It is always possible to collect up all these ordinals into their limit to produce a limit ordinal, but these limit ordinals can themselves simply be used to produce yet another level of transfinite numbers. Each of these ordinals, then, is actually infinite, increasable, and thinkable for humans, so that Cantor called them transfinite. The totality of all such ordinals, however, is unincreaseable (*Unvermehrbares*), and incomprehensible, and it is for this reason that Cantor calls it the Absolute.

Though he was not totally consistent in his public statements and private writings, Cantor was nevertheless clear on the connection between this Absolute and God. Starting with his private writings, we note that Cantor simply equates the two:

What surpasses all that is finite and transfinite ... is the single completely individual unity in which everything is included, which includes the 'Absolute' incomprehensible to the human understanding. This is the 'Actus Purissimus' which by many is called 'God'.¹³

While the motivations for this statement are not totally clear, we can determine at least two points. First, there is a long metaphysical tradition of treating the infinite as divine, as one finds in the writings of St. Augustine, whose statements in book twelve of *The City of God* were of particular interest to Cantor, and St. Thomas. Second, the

¹¹ Georg Cantor, *Mitteilungen zur Lehre vom Transfiniten*, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen: Mathematischen und Philosophischen Inhalts*, ed. Adolf Fraenkel, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962, p. 401.

¹² *Mitteilungen zur Lehre vom Transfiniten*, p. 405.

¹³ The quotation is from a 1908 letter Cantor wrote to G. C. Young, taken from Joseph Dauben, *Georg Cantor: His Mathematics and Philosophy of the Infinite*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 290.

‘Absolute’ here is treated as incomprehensible, which has also often been taken to be a mark of the divine. Indeed, this incomprehensibility was, for Cantor, directly linked with the problematic status of overly large ordinals, and he was willing to accept the existence of inconsistent collections as a result.¹⁴

In public statements, while he remained slightly more reserved about the situation, he nevertheless held that the Absolute was incomprehensible. For example, take the following statement.

I have no doubt at all that in this way we extend ever further, never reaching and insuperable barrier, but also never reaching even approximate comprehension of the Absolute. The Absolute can only be recognized, never known, not even approximately.¹⁵

We see, then, that even publicly he was willing to countenance that a kind of mystery was attached to the status of the Absolute, and he did not seek immediately to resolve inconsistencies by stipulating them away (as Zermelo did).

What are we to make of these statements as philosophers? Do they contain anything of which we might use for a conceptual revolution? As they stand, we must agree with Badiou that they do not. Understood philosophically, it is clear that ‘Cantor’s thought thus wavers between onto-theology—for which the absolute is thought as a supreme infinite being ... and mathematical ontology’, or contemporary set theory (BE 42). The reason for this is that, as Cantor’s biographer Joseph Dauben notes, Cantor did not think that the inconsistency of the Absolute ‘compromised the consistency of his own set theory. He was perfectly willing to assert that his theory was completely free of contradictions, and this he regarded as an established fact’.¹⁶ The inconsistency of the Absolute is thus sealed within its incomprehensibility, and so opens onto the same road that onto-theologians have traveled for millennia by acting as the final form of presence that grounds all being.

Yet, there is an unexplored possibility here. The reason Cantor remains an onto-theologian is because he coupled this Absolute with consistency. But what if we were to affirm only what Cantor proved, namely that the existence of such an Absolute is inconsistent? Furthermore, *what if there were a deeper truth here, namely that Cantor could not but assert the existence of the paradoxical, Absolutely Infinite?* Then the Absolute, decoupled

¹⁴ See Georg Cantor’s 1899 ‘Letter to Dedekind’ on this matter in *From Frege to Gödel: A Source Book in Mathematical Logic, 1879-1931*, ed. and trans. by Jean van Heijenoort, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967, pp. 113-7.

¹⁵ Cantor’s words quoted from Michael Hallett, *Cantorian Set Theory and the Limitation of Size*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 42.

¹⁶ *Georg Cantor: His Mathematics and Philosophy of the Infinite*, p. 246. Dauben relates that this is the content of a 1886 letter Cantor wrote to Eulenberg.

from consistency would still remain a Whole, some form of unity, but it could not play its onto-theological role. What we suggest, then, is that a distinction be drawn between the problematic onto-theological Whole, which affirms ‘that beyond the multiple, even in the metaphor of its inconsistent grandeur, the one is’, and a post-Cantorian inconsistent Whole, which affirms the *thinkability* of this inconsistency (BE 42). Even as Badiou recognizes, this inconsistent multiplicity constitutes a form of excess (*excès*), since it is not a set (Cantor called only consistent multiplicities sets). What we have before us, then, is an alternative account of excess; another way to approach the inexistent, another approach to events. Can we affirm this form of excess, as heirs to Cantor’s revolution, rather than Zermelo’s revolution? This is the task we set before ourselves.

4. ON TRUE CONTRADICTIONS

Our aim in addressing Badiou now becomes polemical. We are going to try to affirm explicitly what Badiou axiomatically denies as a possibility: that there is a whole and that it is inconsistent, which is equivalent to affirming what Cantor proved about the Absolute. This task requires two steps. First, we are going to have to provide plausible logical grounds for accepting what will appear to be an absurdity to anyone who is not familiar with the literature on paraconsistent (especially dialethic) logics. To do this, we are going to make use of the work of Graham Priest, a contemporary logician, and address a few questions about rationality that follow from accepting this logic. This point will provide us with some grounds for questioning the adequacy of Badiou’s treatment of logic in relation to mathematics. Following these tasks, we shall turn to Derrida, who will provide a separate, philosophic *motivation* for accepting the Cantorian Absolute.

4.1 Reasonability

Let us begin with the apparent absurdity: the existence of true contradictions seems to require that one jettison the Law of Non-Contradiction (LNC), and it would make rational discourse impossible. In response, we mean principally to remove the impression of this absurdity.¹⁷ An additional aim, however, is to bridge the divide between the Anglo-American discourse on the philosophy of logic and the current mathematical turn inaugurated by Badiou in Continental discourse.

¹⁷ For a full (and non-technical) review of some of the most common objections to dialetheism, see Graham Priest’s ‘What is so bad about contradictions?’, *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 95, 1998, pp. 410-426.

To begin then, we recall that a paraconsistent logic is one in which the semantic consequence relation, namely \models , is not explosive. Here, the term ‘explosion’ is only a colorful expression for stating that from a contradiction whatever follows, which is symbolized as $\{P \wedge \neg P\} \models Q$. Such a logic need not be dialethic, since one may have alternative motivations in denying explosion, though in our current case this is precisely what we want.

Dialetheism, then, is the view that there are *some* statements that are both true and false, which is to say that for some proposition P , its conjunction with its negation $\neg P$, is true. In order to avoid *trivialism*, which is the position that *all* contradictions are true, the dialetheist needs to adopt some paraconsistent logic. The most famous paraconsistent logic that captures this position is Priest’s ‘Logic of Paradox’ (LP).¹⁸ The central move here is to establish that statements may take three values: true and only true, false and only false, and both true and false. True contradictions are statements of this last kind. Such a position certainly seems to run afoul of the LNC. The best response available to the dialetheist on this point is also the simplest: one cannot invoke the LNC as an objection to dialetheism without begging the question. With this response, we take it that the absurdity is removed for two reasons. First, in response, the classical logician must propose some reasons for accepting the LNC. Second, these would be reasons about which we would have to *argue*. Since we are arguing at this point, we take it that the position is no longer considered absurd.¹⁹

Responding to this last task point, however, might seem easy. For example, it is likely that one would object that this position nevertheless seems to reduce reasoning to gibberish. If contradictions can be true, then how could one ever prove another person wrong? Do we not need consistency in order to be rational? Finally, and most interestingly, would not this position require a revision of logic, especially of what is normally meant by the LNC? But how is logical revision even possible? Though we could raise more questions, let us try and answer just these under the following

¹⁸ Graham Priest’s ‘The Logic of Paradox’, *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 8, 1979, pp. 219-41. In this logic, clearly, explosion fails, which is the whole point. This gain comes with a price, however, since the disjunctive syllogism, along with *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, also fails. This means that material implication fails to capture ordinary conditional statements, but this problem is one that symmetrically plagues classical logic as well. In order to address these drawbacks, Priest later suggests that RM_3 is perhaps a better alternative in his own logic text *An Introduction to Non-Classical Logics: From If to Is*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 127.

¹⁹ The interesting point here, of course, is David Lewis’ concern that this debate would not be rational. There seem to be a number of good responses to this point. See, for example, Otávio Bueno and Mark Colyvan in ‘Logical Non-Apriorism and the ‘Law’ of Non-Contradiction’, *The Law of Non-Contradiction: New Philosophical Essays*, eds. Graham Priest, JC Beall, and Bradley Armour-Garab, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 156-75.

simplified form: (1) What does reasonability consist in if there are true contradictions?
 (2) How is logical revision possible?

With respect to reasonability, the answer is unsurprising, if disconcerting for Badiou: there are numerous other accepted criteria for reasonability besides consistency, and being reasonable just means accepting and drawing inferences according to these criteria, *including consistency* in consistent situations. This position is just orthodoxy for contemporary debates in Anglo-American epistemology. To use Priest's example, the basic problem in arguing with a person who maintains that the earth is flat is not that she cannot provide responses to objections, but that there are no conceivable situations that could falsify her position.²⁰ If one points out that humans have sailed around the earth, or that from space the earth looks round, she will answer that we have in fact sailed in a circle on a flat surface, or that the earth only appears to be round because light functions differently in space. Her position fails poorly, then, because it is non-falsifiable and because her responses are always *ad hoc*. To hold to it, in the face of a superior rival position, as the flat-earther does, is just irrational. Yet neither falsifiability, nor non-adhocness are criteria that appeal to consistency. Nor are these the only ones available. To recall just a few, one's position should be adequate to the data, exhibit superior explanatory power to its rivals, and prove more fruitful. Finally, even the dialetheist can appeal to consistency in consistent situations, since classical logic is only a restricted form of LP. Furthermore, in situations that are inconsistent, there is at least good inductive evidence that contradictions are a sign that something has gone wrong. Thus, there is just no reason to think that foregoing consistency requires that one exit rationality into some form of quietism or madness.

We noted that this response would be troubling to Badiou, however, and this is the case for two reasons. First, for him, while there may be rival subjects to an event (reactionary and obscure as opposed to faithful), he provides almost no grounds for determining which is superior. Indeed, the only constraint he seems to impose on fidelity to an event is *consistency* (LW 487). Our appeal to other categories of rationality, then, simply has no basis in his account. Second, in *Being and Event* Badiou argues that fidelity to an event is determined by classical deduction (Meditation 24). In *Logics of Worlds* the stakes are heightened, since category theory more naturally follows intuitionist logic than classical.²¹ It is for this reason that Badiou must filter the theory of points through a Boolean world in order to retain a classical account of

²⁰ Priest, 'What is so Bad about Contradictions?', p. 420.

²¹ This point was established some time ago by Saul Kripke in 'Semantical Analysis of Intuitionistic Logic I', *Formal Systems and Recursive Functions*, ed. by J. N. Crossley and Michael Dummett, Netherlands, North-Holland Publishing Co., 1965, pp. 92-130.

choice (book 4). Granted these arguments, it follows that Badiou *cannot* give up classical logic. For without them *he* cannot explain eventual revolutions.²² This point, however, is one that we believe counts *against* Badiou, and to spell it out we are going to turn to the topic of logical revisability (our second question).

4.2 *Logic and Revisability*

One of the most striking features of Badiou's position, for anyone familiar with Anglo-American debates on these matters, is the way in which he tends to lump mathematics, science and logic together. For example, when providing his subjective typology in *Logics of Worlds*, he writes that scientific subjects pursue mathematizable concepts, where "[m]athematizable' means: submitted to the literal power of inferences' (LW 74). Badiou goes on, of course, to formulate the category-theoretic notion of dependence, from which the notion of (classical) material implication can be derived, as well as (one understanding of) physical causality, but the move remains contentious, since at least the way the disciplines proceed is entirely different from each other. The question we should like to pursue here is whether this treatment is adequate by focusing specifically on the relation of logic to mathematics.

Badiou's axiomatic adherence to classical logic appears problematic, since there is incontrovertible evidence that logic *has* undergone revision. In his most recent book length study, Graham Priest reviews the actual logical revision that occurred in the move from Aristotelian syllogistic to contemporary 'classical' Frege-Russell logic.²³ His point is simple: the idea that classical logic extended Aristotle's work to a more complete theory is false.²⁴ We recall that the following syllogisms, tagged *Darapti* and *Camestros* by the Medievals respectively, are valid for Aristotelian syllogistic:

All Bs are Cs
All Bs are As
Hence some As are Cs

²² For a related series of criticisms on this point with special reference to the status of intuitionism in *Being and Event* see Zachary Fraser's 'The Law of the Subject: Alain Badiou, Luitzen Brouwer and the Kripkean Analysis of Forcing and the Heyting Calculus', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 2, 2006, pp. 94-133.

²³ See Graham Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) especially chapter 10.

²⁴ Apart from the considerations that follow, see also Jakko Hintikka's and Vilko Risto's article 'Existence and Predication from Aristotle to Frege', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 73, 2006, pp. 359-377, which reviews the changes the existential quantifier has undergone from its Aristotelian form to that in Frege-Russell logic.

All Cs are Bs
 No As are Bs
 Hence some As are not Cs

These are not arguments, however, that are valid in ‘classical’ logic. Since the problem turns on the existential import of the quantifiers, if one adds the appropriate clauses to the A and E forms, one could render all syllogisms classically valid. The difficulty, however, is that this would invalidate a central part of Aristotelian logic, namely the square of opposition. There are other technical fixes that one could propose, but none achieve the aim of establishing the equivalence of ‘classical’ and Aristotelian logic. Priest concludes his review on this point, then, by noting ‘however one interprets traditional logic in classical logic, *something* has to be given up’.²⁵

Granted this change we ask: what sense can Badiou make of such logical revision? The whole framework for evental change presupposes such classical logic (with its specific understanding of quantifiers), yet even this has changed. Logicians have numerous responses at their disposal, which would rely on extra-logical considerations, but Badiou has none of these.²⁶ Any position that would be able to explain such revision, then, seems to fair better than Badiou’s currently. At the very least, then, a counter-problem is posed for Badiou: he must specify in a way that is more fine-grained than his current consistentist account, what it is that mathematics, science and logic all share and how they are different in such a way that logic may equally undergo evental change. Our Derridian position that follows, which countenances *dialetheias*, is clearly open to this kind of logical revision.

5. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE UNDECIDABLE

Priest’s work is, at least in the capacity presented here, useful to our enterprise only insofar as he enables us to disrupt the smooth surface of Badiou’s onto-logical edifice. While the latter remains axiomatically attached to classical logic, we have produced grounds that show that this is not the only option available. Indeed, his insistence on this form of logic closes his position from entering the debate on the rationality of

²⁵ Priest, *Doubt Truth to be a Liar*, p. 167. See this section also for alternative proposals to save the Aristotelian syllogistic, and why they fail.

²⁶ For example, Michael D. Resnick in ‘Revising Logic’, *The Law of Non-Contradiction: New Philosophical Essays*, eds. Graham Priest, JC Beall, and Bradley Amou-Garab, New York, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 178-194 makes a case for logical revision as aiming for a Rawlsian ‘reflective equilibrium’. Also Otávio Bueno and Mark Colyvan’s point in ‘Logical Non-Apriorism and the ‘Law’ of Non-Contradiction’ is just to extend Larry Laudan’s reticulated model of scientific change to logic.

logic revision, and so provides grounds for questioning whether Badiou's treatment of logic is adequate. In short, then, Priest opens a space for thought.

In order to dwell in this space, we ask the reader some patience as we review some ground that is well-trod in Derridean scholarship. Our interest in these matters is novel and likely contentious (as scholarship) insofar as the predominant account of Derrida attempts to defend his position from contradiction by arguing for some form of semantic dodge. The payoff for our move, clearly, is an ability to respond to Badiou's criticism of all things phenomenological and hermeneutic. Let us begin, then, by reviewing Derrida's concern with Husserl.

5.1 *The Phenomenology of Undecidability I*

Much of Derrida's early work is motivated by the need to critique an Ideal, an evaluation of rationality that he sees has followed the history of philosophy since at least Plato.²⁷ In his early *Introduction* to his translation of Edmund Husserl's 'The Origin of Geometry', the name that he gives to his own counter ideal is *undecidability*. Here, Derrida demonstrates how Husserl's phenomenological investigations, especially those carried out in the *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and *Ideas I*, must have recourse to one form of this Ideal, which they also expressly prohibit. The Ideal that Husserl prohibits is known in mathematics as completeness. Roughly, a formal theory is said to be complete when no statement can be produced within the system the truth or falsity of which cannot be determined, *tertium non datur* or no third alternative being given. This Ideal must be excluded, or reduced within Husserl's phenomenology, since the 'primordial evidence [Husserl] investigates here are for him prior to those of axioms and serve as their ground'.²⁸ Yet, Derrida asks, what about the unity of geometry's primordial sense, which orients the whole of the investigation in 'The Origin of Geometry'? What, exactly, 'is mathematical determinability in general, if the undecidability of a proposition, for example, is still a mathematical determination' (I 56)? Kurt Gödel's undecidability, then, has 'a

²⁷ One may wonder at the reason for the capitalization of Ideal here. Our answer is two-fold. At times, Derrida himself undertakes to capitalize this term as an Idea, see for example *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1973, p. 100 (henceforth SP). Yet, more important is the need to be clear on this term, which Derrida explicitly identifies as a *value*, and not simply an *idos*. The Greek term *phonē* is one name for this value, but so too is the Kantian conception of a regulative idea, Husserl's eidetic intuitions, and in the current case, the mathematical notion of completeness (SP 77, 100, 101). It is, in short, the evaluative facet of the metaphysics of presence.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1989, pp. 54-5 (henceforth I).

revolutionary and disconcerting sense', because it shows that Husserl's Ideal is itself derived from precisely the history it is supposed to explain (I 53n48). Thus, it is not surprising that Derrida valorizes undecidability as a '*tertium datur*', and opposes it to Husserl's pure phenomenological decidability (I 54).

Despite the warrant for this point, Derrida did not complete his criticism of Husserl in this early work. Even if Husserl covertly imports his ideal, he might still maintain that within the bounds of solitary mental life, such purity might be possible and that language itself remains only as an expedient necessary in order to communicate. It is to accomplish this larger task that he undertakes the investigation in *Speech and Phenomena*. It is here, then, that one finds the fullest (early) statement of undecidability, which we aim to recover in five points.

(1) The first point is the well-known deconstruction of Husserlian phenomenology, which shows, in brief, that every phenomenon requires an inapparent that allows it to appear. Stated otherwise, difference is original (SP 82). Though the argument is well known, in order to make this essay reasonably self-contained, we are going to review its central points. If in his *Introduction* Derrida shows that the Ideal that oriented Husserl in *Origin* is a kind of illegal alien in the land of pure transcendental consciousness, here Derrida uses the same logic to argue that there is no origin at all, that representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) is always already at work prior to presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*). To establish this claim Derrida looks at Husserl's argument in the first logical investigation that there is a central distinction between two kinds of signs: expression (*Ausdruck*) and indications (*Anzeigen*). Generally a sign is something that stands for something else. Expressions are those signs that bear a meaning, as are found in human language. Indications, such as smoke from a fire, are only empirical pointers (SP 17). Importantly, however, Husserl does hold that expressions may also be indications, particularly as intimations.²⁹ When another person speaks to me, I grasp not only the meaning of her expression, but also that these signs intimate that these meanings are her 'thoughts'. Critically for Derrida, there is in fact only one case where an expression does not also intimate, that is to say there is only one instance that separates indication from expression: solitary mental life or soliloquy. In the case of soliloquy Husserl argues that one does not intimate to oneself because one does not need to do so. Intimation in solitary mental life is useless (*zwecklos*) for 'the acts in question are themselves experienced by us at that very moment [*im selben Augenblick*]'.³⁰ Nothing, not the blink of an eye, divides pure consciousness from itself. In response to

²⁹ Edmund Husserl, 'Investigation I: Expression and Meaning', *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Finlay, New York: Routledge Press, 1970, §7.

³⁰ Husserl, 'Investigation I: Expression and Meaning', §8.

this argument, Derrida points out that Husserl refutes his own claim, since in his investigations of internal time consciousness Husserl argues that the 'now' of the lived present is thick. It has a retentive-attentive-protentive structure that is not at all punctiliar. In response to this phenomenological description, of which Derrida approves, he only asks: what *in principle* is the difference between retention, which is in the intuitive lived present, and memory, which Husserl establishes as reproductive secondary memory? A moment, after all, is not something slightly lapsed. And if one were to consider it this, how long is this slight lapse? When does it cease being part of the lived present and become a product of secondary reproductive memory? This distinction, Derrida argues, is specious. It turns out, then, that '[t]his alterity [i.e. the reproductive memory] is in fact the condition for presence, presentation, and thus for *Vorstellung* in general; it precedes all the dissociations that could be produced in presence, in *Vorstellung*' (SP 65). The living present, then, is invaded by an irreducible non-presence; it is the effect of re-presentation.

The immediate result of Derrida's deconstruction is double. First, it constitutes a twisting free from the metaphysics of presence, the Ideal that Derrida did not quite critique in his earlier *Introduction* (SP 53). Second, it establishes the *finitude* of phenomenology.

(2) Taking these consequences in order, Derrida establishes three points of concern with respect to the metaphysics of presence. First, he notes that there is a certain matrix, or systematic solidarity of central metaphysical concepts, such as 'sense, ideality, objectivity, truth, intuition, perception, and expression' (SP 99). All these concepts, however, found their ground in the moment (*Augenblick*) that Derrida has just shown to be impossible save as an original re-presentation. The meaning that they had, then, is altered radically. Specifically, the notion of the beginning or ground of these concepts, their *archē*, must be relinquished, including the Kantian and Husserlian understanding of the transcendental 'I'. The same point, however, holds for any final *telos* that would unite these concepts. All such notions are only so many versions of the Ideal, the rational value, which must be relinquished (SP 101). A second feature of this twisting free concerns deconstructive *immanence*. Having no present on which to ground the eidetic features of consciousness, any phenomenologist must symmetrically relinquish the *classical* understanding of *eidoi* as timeless and unchanging, and rather accept in their place the indefinite repeatability of signs. This substitution constitutes the immanence of Derrida's position, since it abrogates the possibility of referring to something outside this relation of meaning (SP 104). It is with this step, then, that the Kantian distinction between the *de facto* and *de jure* loses its significance, as the latter becomes only a special case of the former (SP

99). Finally, Husserl's account of phenomenological evidence and truth, which are modeled on the fulfillment of empty meaning intentions, must be evacuated. As Husserl himself notes, meaningful intentions function adequately without such fulfillment. That we should take this absence as a norm, as constitutive of these phenomena rather than contingent aberrations, follows both from this well-functioning and the impossibility of founding presence (SP 97).

(3) The other consequence of Derrida's deconstruction is that it establishes the (radical) finitude of phenomenology. We have already noted that there is no transcendental 'I' that could serve as an *archē*, and this just means that when I say 'I' even in soliloquy, this 'I' does not appear without absence (SP 95). A first facet of phenomenological finitude, then, is the contamination of life and death. 'My death', Derrida writes, 'is structurally necessary to the pronouncing of the *I*' (SP 96). The reason for this is that my absence, in order to be meaningful, is requisite for the ideality of the *I*. Yet, with the collapse of the lived presence into absence, this distinction between empirical I and transcendental *I*, lived *I* and the *I* that survives my death through written inscription, cannot be maintained. The second facet of this finitude concerns its radicality. For just as the distinction between life and death is contaminated, so too is the opposition between the finite (empirical) and infinite (indefinitely repeatable). If the living present is deferred *ad infinitum*, if the Kantian Idea can only appear with its absence, this is because the 'appearing of the infinite *differance* is itself finite' (SP 102). Even *differance*, the quasi-structure of intentional signs, only appears as finite, only achieves the infinite through indefinite repetition, and hence can 'no longer be conceived within the opposition of finiteness and infinite, absence and presence, negation and affirmation' (ibid.). This finitude proper to the very structuring of phenomenal appearing (and dis-appearing), then, displaces the old opposition between the finite and the infinite. This finitude is thus properly radical, and it is the finitude proper to this new radical phenomenology.

5.2 *The Phenomenology of Undecidability II*

We come now to the final two points concerning Derrida, and we have marked them off from the others since it is here that we shall expose ourselves to some risk. The foregoing we take to be non-contentious, what follows is the requisite step from commentary into interpretation—something for which we alone must take responsibility.

(4) We begin, then, with what may be called Derrida's *quasi-realism*. It has been a fear of some critics of Derrida (notably Jürgen Habermas), that the displacement of

the *de jure* and *de facto* abrogates any possibility of rationality.³¹ What we want to note here is that Derrida's argument turns on a certain kind of 'realism', that is to say, he holds that we *do* have access to the things themselves. This is why Derrida is clear (point 3) that even *différance* must quasi-appear (which is a point of self-reflexive consistency). We take Derrida at his word when he claims that this investigation occurs 'within the metaphysics of presence', and that it is only possible 'through Husserl's text' (SP 102, 88).³² By unfounding the opposition between the *de jure* and the *de facto*, Derrida does not undercut his own ability to make his claims; he is not an anti-realist or a skeptic. True to the 'the principle of all principles', he holds that our conscious intentions are always already in touch with the phenomena. In this sense, then, he is a realist. Yet, and this is why the tag 'quasi-' must be appended, Derrida is equally far from the classical notion of certitude. While he holds that we can access the things themselves, his deconstruction of Husserl nevertheless shows that the phenomena, the things themselves, are radically finite. They always carry with them something that we cannot know in advance, something of a secret, some no-thing that destabilizes their presence. Because of this absence, because the real lacks the character of an eternal present, something stable and unchanging, the very notion of the *de jure* and *de facto* is displaced. Even though we can lay a claim to *die Sache Selbst*, they are not of such a character that the notion of an 'in principle' describes them. Here, then, Derrida approaches the in-stability of Badiou's ontological universe, in which there is an errancy at the heart of being that allows for events. The difference is that for Derrida, being itself must be understood significantly, since there is no easy escape from language to being.

(5) These points bring us to the aim of these previous steps, which Derrida states in his introduction as follows:

What is only at issue is to *make* the original and non-empirical space of non-foundation *appear* over the irreducible void on the basis of which the security of presence in the metaphysical form of ideality is decided and raised up. It is

³¹ See Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987, especially chapter 7 and the following excursus.

³² This point is of course pure *Rodolphe Gasché* as one finds in *The Train of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. Stating it as a quasi-realism (rather than quasi-transcendentalism) has the particular advantage of highlighting the difference between Derrida and Donald Davidson. Samuel C. Wheeler III, for example, in *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000, argues that Derrida's denial of presence is equivalent to Davidson's denial of the given. Though we have learned much from Wheeler's work, we part company here. The suggestion of point (4) is not that there is no given, but that there is no *pure* given—that is a given that does not also include its absence. The difference here is significant, since Davidson remains a strong anti-realist while Derrida is not.

within this horizon that we will here interrogate the phenomenological concept of the sign (SP 7 *emphasis added*).

In his own words, then, Derrida's aim is to 'make appear' (*faire apparaître*) a certain experience (*éprouvé*) of an irreducible void *on which* the metaphysics of presence is founded. He aims to return us to a moment before Husserl's decision on signs, that is, to a moment of undecidability. Derrida is interested in what is 'beyond' absolute knowledge. If deconstruction occurs within metaphysics, it also goes 'beyond' it—but only in quotes. Specifically, it seeks to respond to the question that is unheard-of, one that is not simply a question of Being. It attends to 'the memory of old signs', to something 'older' (*plus vieux*) than presence (SP 102, 103). Here in this older space '[w]e no longer know whether the force of the *Vergenenwärtigung* ... whether the repetitive force of the living present ... or whether what we call with the old names of force and *differance* is not more 'ancient' than what is 'primordial'" (SP 103). The *response* to the unheard-of question, then, brings us to an experience of undecidability, 'prior' to those decisions of metaphysics.

But what exactly is this experience? Furthermore, how can Derrida even say that it is what structures the relation of signs? Does he not inevitably run up against self-referential inconsistencies? A number of responses are possible, but before turning to our own response, we want to point out what appears to be deficient in one of the most widely held positions: the *semantic dodge*. Here commentators claim that Derrida is writing 'under erasure/ *sous rature*', so that he only points or formally indicates this experience of undecidability, which is literally meaningless. Taken simply, this strategy clearly fails because in order to succeed, Derrida must express exactly what he means in order to be understood at all.³³ This is why commentators often strengthen this response to the *experiential semantic dodge*.³⁴ They insist that Derrida is

³³ This is the point that Graham Priest makes in his own take on Derrida in chapter 14 of *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002.

³⁴ This is not, of course, the route that all commentators take. I draw attention here to just two cases of some better Derridians. First, Gayatri Spivak, in her monograph length introduction to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1974, trans. Gayatri Spivak, suggests that this meaninglessness may continue all the way down. She writes: 'Thus a further deconstruction deconstructs deconstruction, both as the search for a foundation ... and as the pleasure of the bottomless', p. lxxvii. The regress here is problematic, since we do after all understand Derrida. John Caputo, in *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, fastens onto this latter fact stating: 'Truth, after all, is necessary—that is to say, we need our fictions', p. 145. Yet, the recourse to pragmatic fiction needs to be specified somehow, for one must make the case for *why* we only have pragmatic fictions. This much must be undeconstructable. In what follows, I take myself to be closest to Leonard Lawlor's account in *Derrida and Husserl: The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002, since he there focuses on the experience of deconstruction as an *aporia*.

indicating or making appear a certain *experience*, which cannot fully be articulated in words. It is this (silent) experience that finally constitutes the twisting free from Platonism, since it shows how the division into sensible and intelligible is not itself originary. Here, they insist, is Derrida's lasting merit, since he allows us to dwell at the threshold of the metaphysics of presence.

We should be wary of this approach for two reasons. First, it puts Derrida right in line with Badiou's critique of phenomenology and hermeneutics as nihilist, since it claims that these limit situations constitute the peril of thought, rather than the beginning point for transformative intervention.³⁵ Second, Derrida himself denounces it. In his essay 'Cogito and the History of Madness' one of Derrida's central concerns is the very possibility of writing a history of what is *outside* reason, which Foucault at points claims to be doing. In response, Derrida notes that this difficulty of accessing the outside, 'or this impossibility, must reverberate within the language used to describe the history of madness'.³⁶ He then considers a response almost identical to the experiential semantic dodge: 'One could perhaps say that the resolution of this difficulty is *practiced* rather than *formulated*. By necessity. I mean that the silence of madness is not *said*, cannot be said in the logos of this book, but is indirectly, metaphorically, made present by its *pathos*—taking this word in its best sense'.³⁷ He concludes that this response, however, is not adequate:

Now to state the difficulty, to state the difficulty of stating, is not yet to surmount it—quite to the contrary....Who perceives, who enunciates the difficulty? These efforts can be made neither in the wild and inaccessible silence of madness, nor simply in the language of the jailer, that is, the language of classical reason, but only in the language of someone *for whom* [they are] meaningful.³⁸

The pathos about which Derrida speaks is not exactly the experience of the undecidable, but it functions similarly as a response. The idea in both cases is that there is some kind of experience *beyond* the language of reason that these various histories or deconstructions are meant to indicate through some manner that is indirect. This does not work, as Derrida himself notes, because for it to succeed, it must be possible for this experience to escape language—somehow. Otherwise, if it

³⁵ We let pass Badiou's direct and explicit charge that Derrida is a sophist rather than a philosopher in *Conditions*, p. 20. Our thesis, however, directly refutes this point, since we aim to show that Derrida was *not* concerned with the relation between the ineffable and the sayable, which is one of Badiou's formulation of sophism in *Conditions*, but rather what stands beyond classical reason, p. 6.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 37.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

remains in *any* way within language, it would not be radical enough to avoid self-referential inconsistency. Yet *there is no such vantage point*, which is the meaning of deconstructive immanence (point 2). This is why we do not think the experiential semantic dodge works, and (equally) why Derrida himself denounces it.

Our position follows directly from these attempted responses, since we aim *to remove the motivation for them* by suggesting that the preoccupation with contradiction is obviated by the existence of paraconsistent logics. Rather than advocate any form of semantic dodge, we hold that the experience of the undecidable just is the experience of the inconsistency of the whole. As a result, it suggests the inescapability of a true contradiction, and provides a motivation to accept dialetheism. Our position still twists free from Platonism by retaining a crucial role for an originary experience that escapes the distinction of the sensible and intelligible. This experience is that of undecidability, which affirms the whole of signifying phenomena as inconsistent. The central difference between our position and that which we have called the semantic dodge is that it forgoes the need to retain *classical* reason. We do not hold that Derrida's position is somehow beneath or prior to logic, but rather that it is attentive to the ways in which classical logic fails.³⁹

Because we have parted company with some excellent Derridian thinkers, and because it will clarify needless confusion, we shall here respond to one plausible objection to our final point. One might contend that the experience of the undecidable is *not* the experience of true contradictions. What Derrida is after is the way in which guardrails or decision procedures are to be avoided. As John Caputo notes in *Radical Hermeneutics*: 'The real obstacle to understanding human affairs lies in the tendency to believe that what we do ... admits of formulation in hard and irrevocable rules'.⁴⁰ Derrida is against all method and predictability, and favors the anarchy (*an-archē*) that is always beyond some particular method. But settling for a paraconsistent logic (dialetheism or anything else) is precisely to lay claim that *this* method is the right one!

We agree with all that has been said; we only go further. For it must be possible to suggest *why* it is that we must be wary of *all* guardrails and methods—this is an apriori claim, something, like justice, that cannot be deconstructed. First, let us recall

³⁹ Derrida seems to state this point almost exactly in *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1982, as follows: 'Since it can no longer be subsumed by the generality of *logical* contradiction, *différance* (the process of differentiation) permits a differentiated accounting for heterogeneous modes of conflictuality, or, if you will, for contradictions', p. 101. That Derrida had little or no knowledge of formal paraconsistent logics explains why he held *différance* escaped (classical) logical contradiction, but nevertheless affirms some other form of contradiction.

⁴⁰ Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, p. 212.

that our thesis is that the experience of undecidability is the experience of an inconsistent whole. Derrida's quasi-realism (point 4) affirms that we have access to this whole, and this is the way things are (and are not). Since this whole is inconsistent, it follows as a matter of course that this is also an experience of a true contradiction, so Derrida is a dialetheist *too*. Or rather, dialetheism seems to be the best logic we have to capture Derrida's position, and it relieves us of needless semantic gymnastics. If we are right about this, then we have here a second path to infinite thought.

6. A SECOND PROGRAM FOR INFINITE THOUGHT

We have at this point established the grounds by which one might legitimately claim that Derrida's account of the experience of the undecidable is the experience of the inconsistent whole. The path to this summit has not been easy, but we should like to conclude here by collecting the various threads of the argument and pointing out a few of the items that may be seen from here.

We began with our own deconstruction of Badiou's ontological enterprise in *Being and Event* by noting the unmentioned name that guides his thought there as well as in the later *Logics of Worlds*: Ernst Zermelo. His path to the infinite, then, quickly drops Cantor, and thus leaves open a *possible* separate path to infinite thought, one in which the infinite is affirmed as the Absolutely Infinite, which is to say, as an inconsistent whole. The work on dialetheism, especially by Graham Priest, clears the space for one to follow this path in a double way. First, it shows in a fully rigorous way that fears about the evacuation of reason, which follow upon the acceptance of true contradictions, are unwarranted. Second, it provides a counter problem for Badiou. The latter claims to be a philosopher of change, and yet his position is structurally cut off from considerations of logical revisability. At the very least, then, this shows that Badiou's treatment of logic in relation to math and science is not sufficiently fine grained. He will have to distinguish these better than he has. We turned, finally, to a phenomenological motivation for accepting true contradictions in which we followed Derrida's early deconstruction of Husserl. This use of deconstruction turns on two contentious points of interpretation: (i) that deconstruction is quasi-realist, and (ii) that deconstruction does not finally try some form of semantic dodge to avoid self-referential inconsistency. Rather, this kind of paradox is typical of what occurs at the limits of thought and constitutes the very experience of undecidability. To affirm such an inconsistency is to affirm that the whole of thought is inconsistent, which is just to affirm one of the most critical aspects of Cantor's Absolutely Infinite.

Let us take some time, now, to spell out a few consequences of this affirmation, for as yet it is unable to respond to Badiou's critique of finitude. To begin, we must say what exactly is infinite about this Derridian inconsistent whole. The answer requires us to recall what precisely is infinite in Badiou's own thought. His point is not only that we are mathematically able to think the infinite, but more importantly that infinite thought changes one's orientation from a focus on limit situations to intervention. The entire point is that a focus on such limit situations, especially historically constituted ones, has paralyzed thought and can only be called nihilism if affirmed. For Derrida to affirm inconsistency at the limits of thought, then, only makes him a peculiar liminal thinker, but no more infinite than Kant or Hegel.⁴¹

Our response is that the Derridian affirmation of inconsistency *does* translate into a program for intervention. For Badiou, in *Being and Event* at least, the site for intervention is established as a possibility by the discrepancy between membership and inclusion. In one of his now (in)famous attacks on Deleuze, Badiou argues it is because Deleuze lacks such a distinction that he fails to make the turn into infinite thought.⁴² By contrast, the Derridian affirmation of inconsistency, the radical finitude of phenomena, requires that discrepancies similar to the membership/inclusion kind are *always* possible. One can never finally 'count' a unity, and it is the practice of deconstruction above all others that has taught us to be attentive to this feature of signs. Such radical finitude gives rise to an infinite task of deconstructive vigilance, and thus *requires* rather than blocks intervention.

Fine, Badiou might respond, but *how* is it to be carried out? In *Being and Event* there is not only a matheme for intervention, namely the axiom of choice, but also a matheme for situation change, namely Cohen forcing, and these procedures are both deepened and fine-tuned in *Logics of Worlds* through an account of points, bodies, and subject forms. Where is any of that in Derrida?

Our answer can only be that this much remains to be accomplished. Derrida's position was developed in a largely different context of intellectual concerns. That he did not anticipate the exact requirements of his later opponents is not to be counted against him. Yet, at this point it must be admitted, and this was our major point of concern, that *there is a second path to infinite thought*. Not everything is in place already,

⁴¹ Even in Badiou's most ameliorative essay towards Derrida, 'Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)', *Pocket Pantheon: Figures of Postwar Philosophy*, trans. by David Macey, New York, Verso Press, 2009, pp. 125-44, which was written as a tribute, he still does not credit Derrida with having made the turn to infinite thought. Instead, he argues that Derrida's greatness to be able to locate the in-existent of a world, which might begin an eventual truth, but not that he recognized the need for eventual intervention.

⁴² Badiou mentions precisely this point in his essay 'One, Multiple, Multiplicities', *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. by Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano, New York, Continuum Press, 2006, pp. 71-2.

but at least the ground has been cleared. The kind of intervention that Badiou is after may be affirmed from a Derridian position, so that the charges of nihilism and finitude are shown to be unfounded. Furthermore, this means that it is possible to affirm that there is a whole, provided one is sure to recognize that this whole is inconsistent, and so hardly Hegel's Absolute or any other onto-theological notion.

We close, then, with a program of research that might entice us to explore this new ground a bit further. To date, much Derridian scholarship *has* been captivated by the notion that somehow dwelling in this experience of undecidability is enough. To meet Badiou's charge, however, we must focus instead on the passage to intervention. From what we have reviewed here, a first helpful step would be to address a provisional (always for Derrida) inconsistent ontology. This point follows directly from Derrida's quasi-realism. One way to undertake this task might be to look to his work on the *khōra*, which directly concerns one of the most problematic points of traditional metaphysics. Another interesting route to take might be to pursue a purely set-theoretic response. Ross T. Brady, for example in his essay 'The Non-Triviality of Dialectical Set Theory', develops an inconsistent set theory by use of the naïve axiom of comprehension.⁴³ Many interesting points follow, not the least of which is that the matheme of an eventual site can no longer be $\{x \in X, e_x\}$, since self-inclusion is not problematic in the same way. Second, while it is not clear how to specify truth procedures, it appears that Derrida's approach to art may be suitable to begin this task. Furthermore, Derrida's account of truth in no way requires that art, politics, love, and science remain the only truth procedures. As an atheist, he was at least willing to countenance the structure of religion (without religion) as a truth procedure, and it is not out of bounds to consider the possibility of recovering economics as well.⁴⁴ Third, since what is at stake in affirming an inconsistent whole is just an alternative account of events, a new account of the subject who sustains these events must be provided. Derrida provides some clues for how this might be done already, and interestingly they suggest that this account should be elaborated in spatial terms. In a footnote to his commentary on §36 of Husserl's *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, Derrida writes the following: 'This being outside itself proper to time is its *spacing*: it is a *proto-stage* [*archi-scène*]' (SP 84ng). If the meaning of

⁴³ See Ross T. Brady, 'The Non-Triviality of Dialectical Set Theory', *Paraconsistent Logic: Essays on the Inconsistent*, eds. Graham Priest, Richard Routley, and Jean Norman, Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1989, pp. 437-71.

⁴⁴ We note in passing that the use of 'truth procedure' here is somewhat equivocal with Badiou's, since it is certainly not the case that it will function in the same way (starting from an eventual site, forcing a truth on consistent grounds, and so on). We beg the reader's patience with what must remain for now a loose analogy.

Being and time were Heidegger's concerns, they are equally Badiou's, insofar as eventual change constitutes his account of time. Derrida, by contrast, must part company with both if this second path to infinite thought is to be followed.⁴⁵ Finally, Derrida's account of intervention allows one to develop an alternative conception of subjective fidelity or authenticity, which we call simply *to kalon* (beauty).

Let us take a moment to develop this last closing point. Badiou is quite clear on this score: everything that is incorporated into the body of a faithful subject must be consistent (LW 487). For Badiou any failure here is a betrayal of what is beyond the merely animal in humans, and it is for this reason that his subjects, especially political subjects, are not personal subjects. In our Cantorian path to infinite thought we wonder whether *everything* must be consistent. First, Badiou seems to give up too much when he relinquishes the task of accounting for personal subjectivity. Second, personal subjects are sometimes sub-ject to tragic circumstances, decisions between contradictory obligations, such as Antigone faces in relation to her brother (a kind of love Badiou seems not to recognize) and the state. Aristotle taught us that for the virtuous, 'even in such circumstances the beautiful shines through [*dialampeî to kalon*], when a person bears many and great misfortunes gracefully, not because he does not feel them, but because he is noble and great of soul'.⁴⁶ A Derridian subject, though faithful, may always be open to the fragility, the vulnerability, the wound-ability that inhabits, and that constitutes the human condition. This is the condition of the *animal* that therefore I am (*je suis*). Derridian fidelity would then amount to managing one's contradictions *well*, or beautifully, rather than avoiding them. By holding to this point Derrida thus seems to be able to illuminate the more profound dimensions of human existence as well as the need for intervention. And it is here, in the humility of Derrida's position, and not in the heroism of Badiou's subject, that we find what is most fruitful in this approach.

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⁴⁵ Here, in many ways, John Sallis has already anticipated the need to make this move. In *Echoes: After Heidegger*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990, he argues that to overcome the difficulties of identifying Dasein and time, the latter must be understood as clearing (*Lichtung*) (see especially chapter 2). This is a point that he has continued to pursue through his studies of Plato, as well as in his own deconstruction of Husserl's transcendental imagination in chapter 7 of *Double Truth*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Lobe Classical Library: Aristotle XIX*, ed. G. P. Goold, 1100b30-3. The translation is my own, though clearly I consulted H. Rackham's in the Lobe edition.

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