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## CHAPTER 10

# Disavowal, Distinction, and Repetition: Alain Badiou and the Radical Tradition of Antisemitism

DAVID SEYMOUR

### INTRODUCTION

I challenge anyone to find a single line in any of my works that can be called anti-Semitic.

*Alain Badiou, 14 August 2014*<sup>1</sup>

**M**y focus in this chapter on the militant French philosopher, Alain Badiou, emerges from my work into the various ways that the Shoah has been incorporated into antisemitic ways of thinking.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I argue that Badiou's thoughts on what he terms "uses of the word 'Jew'"<sup>3</sup> in general, as well as on the Shoah in particular, offers a series of continuities with what can be called the radical tradition of antisemitism—a tradition that reaches back at least as far as Bruno Bauer's anti-emancipationist, and *avant le lettre*, antisemitic texts of the 1840s. It simultaneously questions the notion of a sharp rupture between what have been termed "classical" and "new" antisemitism. It questions also the place of the Shoah in recent critical thinking within a dialectic of disavowal, distinction, and repetition.

### THE RADICAL TRADITION OF ANTISEMITISM—RADICAL THOUGHT

Beginning after the rise or, more appropriately, the defeat of National Socialism, antisemitism has almost completely been identified with the Right and

Far Right of the political spectrum. However, its contemporary iteration within so-called “left circles” has brought that seemingly natural identification into question.

Although accepting the limits of a “natural” identification and exhaustion of antisemitism with the Right and Far Right, I correspondingly eschew a similarly naturalized correlation with socialist and communist praxis. This is not to say that antisemitism is absent from that wing of the political spectrum. Rather, it seems to me that the essence of Marx’s critique of capitalism and its political and social manifestations serve as a welcome disciplinary constraint on the blunderbuss typical of much non-Marxist, radical oppositional praxis, both of the past and the present. Indeed, Marx’s work, from *On the Jewish Question* (1844) through to the three volumes of *Capital* (1867–83), serves in part precisely to put a brake on the personification of capitalist social relations without which antisemitism cannot begin to be thought.

That there should be confusion between “left” and “radical” ways of thinking and the expression of antisemitism is not, however, solely a conceptual matter. Many of those who peddled the errant nonsense of antisemitism were often recognized “radical” journalists and social commentators whose work on this subject sold well, with many books and pamphlets running into several editions.<sup>4</sup> Equally, they were penned as contributions to significant debates taking place within the left and were often treated with the utmost seriousness. In this context, it is worthy of note that, although Marx and Engels did not directly confront the antisemitic content of many of these contributions (with the exception of *On the Jewish Question* [1843] and *The Holy Family* [1844]), they nevertheless felt that such works provided enough of a temptation to counter them in many of their own books and articles. Here, one need only think of Marx and Engels’s critiques of Proudhon,<sup>5</sup> Bauer,<sup>6</sup> Duhring,<sup>7</sup> and Adolph Wagner<sup>8</sup>—writings that spanned both thinkers’ lifetimes.

In view of these comments, radical antisemitism can be defined as that way of thinking disciplined neither by Marx nor by many strands of Marxism in both its socialist and liberal manifestations. It is radical because, unequipped with even a hint of rational understanding of the world and absent a recognition of the complex and obscure nature of modern capitalist relations, it remains unconstrained in its flights of fancy due to a lack of critique sustained by a praxis of experience and reason. Instead, it points to an unreasoned (indeed, anti-reason), utopian and absolute opposition to all that is. It offers an evaluation of the social world in which nothing that exists is of value and, as such, needs be overthrown in toto. This nihilism is carried out as the herald of the new—and

final—emancipation of an equally abstract concept of “man.” Such thought often (but not always) allocates “the Jew” and the supposed dominance and domination of “Jewish values” as the major block to that transcendence. It is within this radical tradition that Badiou’s thinking can be situated.

## DISTINCTION AND DISAVOWAL

A common characteristic between “classic”<sup>9</sup> and “new”<sup>10</sup> antisemitic ideology is that each begins with a disavowal and a distinction. Both iterations will often begin by acknowledging and lamenting prior forms of anti-Jewish hostility. This opening gambit of disavowal is followed immediately by a distinction between these disavowed ideologies and the writer’s own “novel” contribution. This duality of disavowal and distinction expresses itself by claims to “objectivity” such that, though some might find what they have to “report” negative as regards “the Jews,” it is rather a result of careful “scientific”<sup>11</sup> enquiry. To echo this point, many, but by no means all, claim that they would wish no harm to the Jews of their own day, but feel duty bound to report the findings of their research to a wider audience, hitherto deceived by a “Jewish controlled” or “Jewish sympathetic” press. This tendency to distinction and disavowal is clearly in evidence from the earliest works of “classic” antisemitism. For example, Willhelm Marr’s *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism* (1879) opens with the following sentences:

What I intend to accomplish is less a polemic against Judaism than it is a statement of facts regarding cultural history. I, therefore, unconditionally defend Jewry against any and all religious persecution and that it is hardly more possible to express this more closely than I have done here. ... On the other hand, I emphasize the indisputable truth. With the Jews, the Romans have forced a tribe upon the West, which as history shows, was thoroughly hated by all peoples of the world.<sup>12</sup>

A second common theme is that of the shift from Jewish powerlessness to almost unlimited Jewish power. This second constant is illustrated in the reference to the idea of “victory” present in the title of Marr’s tract. While acknowledging that at some points in history Jews may have been subject to great hardships,<sup>13</sup> they are presented as turning that powerlessness into virtually absolute power. More often than not, such an inversion is to be explained by their own underhand and malevolent maneuvers. A similar play of disavowal, distinction, and repetition can be found in the work of Alain Badiou.

## ALAIN BADIOU: DISTINCTION, DISAVOWAL, AND THE IDEOLOGY OF ANTISEMITISM

In the “Introduction” to the section “Uses of the Word ‘Jew’” in the collection *Polemics*, Badiou acknowledges the traces of 1930s antisemitism within certain strains of contemporary France’s left and right. He recognizes also its presence among some of those claiming support for Palestinians.<sup>14</sup> Yet, having done so, he downplays it to such an extent that it no longer appears as a serious concern for the present. Having spoken of what is the presumed distinction between “classic” and “new” antisemitism, Badiou continues:

This being the case, it doesn’t seem to me that the data [concerning anti-semitism], which are freely available, are such that they justify a full alert, although it should be clear that, on such questions, the imperative of vigilance admits of no interruption.<sup>15</sup>

Writing a few years later but with an ill-tempered inflection, Badiou repeats this point but adds to it some “originality.” After again discussing what he sees as the declining legacy of antisemitism among left and right (and the French state, at least since the time of Barres), he states:

Today, there is nothing of this racial kind in France, and for good reason. Before the war, the majority of Jews were foreigners who had arrived from Poland, Lithuania or Romania, who spoke Yiddish and belonged to the poorest section of the working-class: they were the Arabs and Africans of their day. Nowadays, Jews are pretty well “integrated,” and this kind of antisemitism and racism finds other targets.<sup>16</sup>

Badiou’s point here, of course, is to make a distinction from and disavowal of the past when Jews were the target of antisemitism and today when they are not. Yet, this account of the distinction between past antisemitism and the presumed absence of contemporary anti-Jewish hostility contains some questionable assumptions.

First, as the quotation makes clear, Badiou reduces antisemitism solely to its racist variant. All other forms of the expression of antisemitism are excluded. Equally troubling is Badiou’s overlooking the fact that, while non-domicile Eastern European Jews were the target of French and Vichy antisemitism, so too were the “integrated” French Jews of the time. It is only by adopting these

narrow conceptions of antisemitism that Badiou can speak about antisemitism as the form of racism suffered by Arabs and Africans living in France (and, of course, not only France). In other words, antisemitism as an ideology that historically always placed “the Jew” at the center of its imagination becomes now little more than an abstract concept applied to any and all those subject to racist and discriminatory praxis. Distinguished from its historical meaning (animosity against Jews “as Jews”) in this manner, it becomes an empty vessel able to be filled with other, distinct, forms of racism—in this instance, the very real discrimination against Arabs and Africans “as Arabs and Africans.”<sup>17</sup>

## THE TRIUMPH OF JEWISH PARTICULARISM OVER THE UNIVERSALISM OF MAN

This combat between the universalism of “man” against “Jewish particularism” that, as noted above, is part of the definition of the radical tradition of antisemitism, appears in the canon in two forms. The first is the idea that Jews can never be part of the universal as long as they remain Jews. The second is the belief that current claims to universalism present in liberal and modern democracies are a sham masking their usurpation by “Jewish values,” which, therefore, serve an alleged Jewish self-interest. As will become clear in the following discussion, elements of both observations are present within Badiou’s thinking on the Holocaust and the Jews, most notably around questions of human rights and the State of Israel. Each of these formulations will be addressed in turn.

### (a) Universal Humanity versus Jewish Particularism (Exceptionalism)

Perhaps the earliest example of the conflict between an abstract universalist conception of “man” and stubborn Jewish particularism or exceptionalism within the radical tradition of antisemitism can be found in the anti-emancipation tracts of Bruno Bauer:

The Jew, on the other hand, has to break not only with his Jewish nature, but also with the development towards perfecting his religion, a development which has remained alien to him.<sup>18</sup>

Importantly for the present context, Bauer’s argument—and the reason Marx felt called upon to challenge it—was that it originated not from the Christian

Right but from the “critical” Left.<sup>19</sup> Yet, this did not stop Bauer utilizing the former’s arguments for his own anti-emancipationist thinking.

In what Draper calls an act of “wooden sectarianism,”<sup>20</sup> Bauer argued that since no one in the Christian state of the time was free, for the Jews to seek emancipation as Jews would be to make them a special case, or to award them “special privileges” over and above the rest of the population. For the Jews to be free, therefore, would mean not only fighting for their own emancipation, but for the emancipation of all. Moreover, since the modern secular state meant, for Bauer, the emancipation of “man” from the constraints of religion, the Jews had to renounce their Judaism to be emancipated within this new state form. To argue otherwise, whether it was seeking emancipation in the Christian state or in the secular state, the Jews, as long as they remained Jews, would be putting their own particularism over and above that of the universal. He writes:

[The Jews’] Jewish and restricted nature always triumphs in the long run over his human and political obligations. The *prejudice* remains, even though it is overtaken by *universal* principles. But, if it remains, it is more likely to overtake everything else. ... If they wish to become free, the Jews should not embrace Christianity but Christianity in dissolution and more generally religion in dissolution, i.e. enlightenment, criticism and its product—free humanity.<sup>21</sup>

...

“The Jew gives nothing to humanity when he lays aside his limited law,” when he abolishes all his Judaism.<sup>22</sup>

This theme of Jewish particularism claiming privileges at the expense of human, universal emancipation resurfaces in terms reminiscent of Bauer in Badiou’s “Introduction” to his “Uses of the Word ‘Jew’” in the series of essays, extracts, and interviews that constitute the collection *Polemics*. Thus, he writes:

An abstract variation of my position consists in pointing out that, from the apostle Paul to Trotsky, including Marx and Freud, Jewish communitarianism has only underpinned creative universalism in so far as there have been new points of rupture with it. It is clear that today’s equivalent of Paul’s religious rupture with established Judaism, of Spinoza’s rationalist rupture with the synagogue, or of Marx’s political rupture with the bourgeois integration of a part of his community of origin, is a subjective rupture with the State of Israel, not with its empirical existence, which is

neither more or less impure than that of all states, but with its exclusive identitarian claim to be a “Jewish state,” and with it draws incessant privileges from this claim, especially when it comes to trampling underfoot what serves us as international law.<sup>23</sup>

In this formulation, as with Bauer, for Jews to “identify” with the State of Israel as a “Jewish state” (and here Badiou does not refer to the phrase “homeland for the Jews”) is not only to stand against “creative universalism” but also to “draw incessant [particularist] privileges” against the universalism of international law. They must, in other words, complete a rupture with Israel. Badiou, like Bauer before him, demands that for Jews to enter the universal struggle for emancipation demands that they give up not only their Judaism (Paul), their religious practices (Spinoza), and their communal networks (Marx). But Badiou himself also now adds the rejection of Jews’ claims to national self-determination.

However, implicit in the demand that contemporary Jews affect a “rupture” with the State of Israel, Badiou demands a corresponding demand that Jews “forget the Holocaust.”<sup>24</sup> The connection between these two calls becomes apparent in these comments:

It is obviously necessary, not only for the Jews, but for all of humanity, not to forget the destruction of the European Jews. What is at issue here is not exclusively a memory; it is a question of thought, of a great philosophical mediation. ... The only thing we can retain here is a principle of universal scope: there is something monstrous about determining a state from a racial, mythical, or religious point of view, or more generally, by appealing to particularity. ... That is why, although the destruction of the European Jews ought never to be forgotten, it is nonetheless dangerous to tackle the concrete problems of the Israeli state based on this destruction. The memory of the Holocaust concerns all human beings. But paradoxically, in the concrete circumstances of the Middle East, we have to—strict asceticism—forget the Holocaust, since we are exclusively faced with the practical necessity of having to found a new kind of peace by means of a new kind of political [i.e., universal] subjectivity.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, it is by continuing to remain faithful to their particular identity as Jews, as well as to the “memory” of the Holocaust, that the Jews are said to gain an “exception” or “privilege” not available to other peoples:

There is no reason to make on this point [the state as an “open conception”] to make a “Jewish exception.” The argument traditionally advanced for such an exception evokes the singularity of the destruction of the European Jews by the Nazis. ... The question of the destruction of European Jews is a German and European question. If we are to come to a resolution of a Middle East problem, we must manage—and I know it’s a difficult thing—to forget the Holocaust.<sup>26</sup>

However, when we come to examine Badiou’s account of the Holocaust itself, not only does he, again echoing Bauer, claim that a specifically Jewish memory of the Holocaust gives to Jews and the “Jewish” state what amounts to an “exceptional privilege,” but, more fundamentally, he also claims that *any* connection made between those murdered as Jews by the Nazis and those Jews alive today is an illegitimate usurpation of the Shoah. Making such a connection, for Badiou, reflects a particularist “Jewish self-interest” and an illustration of “Jewish privilege.”

### (b) The Usurpation of the Shoah and Jewish Cultural Dominance

Badiou’s thinking on this point arises from his understanding of the nature of the Shoah, while his framing it within the dialectic of universalism and particularism informs his work as a whole.

For Badiou, the obsession with “the Jews” stems from the Nazis presenting their own (national and racial) particularism in universal terms. It was, he says, the Jews, as the “name of names,” that stands for the universality that Nazism could not but mark for destruction according to the “logic” of its own claims. In order to claim its own (pseudo-)universalism, Nazi particularism had to destroy the “true” universalism as represented in the “name ‘Jew.’”

Yet, Badiou’s account is not without its own ambiguities. Badiou argues that choosing Jews to fulfil this (negative) role was not arbitrary but, rather, turns on what he sees as a real link between the name “Jew” and (true, i.e., ontological) universalism. This affinity, however, points less to the particularism of actual living Jews and more to an abstract and nameless ontological universalism that lies at the heart of that identity. Although such a contradiction is present in all others targeted by National Socialism (“the Gypsies, the mentally ill, homosexuals, communists”),<sup>27</sup> Badiou nonetheless states:

The choice of this name relates, without any doubt, to its obvious link with universalism, in particular revolutionary universalism—to that which was in effect already void [i.e., absent] about this name—that is, what was connected to the universality and eternity of truths.<sup>28</sup>

Still, despite arguing that the link between Jews and universalism is “without any doubt” legitimate, Badiou continues almost immediately by disassociating his own claim from that of National Socialism. He does so by claiming that the Nazi category of “the Jews” be understood solely as a category created from within Nazism itself:

*Nevertheless*, inasmuch as it served to organize the extermination, the name “Jew” was a political creation of the Nazis, without any pre-existent referent. It is a name whose meaning no one can share with the Nazis, a meaning that presumes the simulacrum and fidelity to the simulacrum—and hence the absolute singularity of Nazism as a political sequence.<sup>29</sup>

From this account of his understanding of the Shoah, Badiou draws two negative but interrelated conclusions: first, any link made between Jews murdered by the Nazis and Jews alive today is illegitimate; and second, those who make such a connection, most specifically in relation to the State of Israel, gain some form of protected exceptionalism denied other states and peoples. It is in the context of these conclusions that Badiou believes that he has identified the contemporary existence of what has been a staple of radical antisemitic literature—Jewish privilege.

As to the first conclusion—the illegitimacy of any connection between Jews murdered by the Nazis and Jews alive today—Badiou poses a radical disjuncture, as is evident in the rhetorical flourish of an unanswered question. To show such a connection, he argues as follows:

It would be necessary to explain how and why the Nazi predicate “Jew,” such as it was used to organize separation, then deportation and death, coincides with the subject predicate under which the alliance [i.e., between Jews murdered by the Nazis and contemporary Jews] is sealed.<sup>30</sup>

As we have seen, it is precisely the impossibility of such explanation that lies at the core of Badiou’s understanding of the nature of National Socialism and the Shoah.<sup>31</sup> Badiou’s second conclusion follows from his first: by falsely claiming

a connection between Jews murdered by the Nazis and Jews alive today, Jews gain an illegitimate privilege through their suffering at the hands of the Nazis that protects them from criticism, most notably from criticism aimed at the State of Israel.

Badiou articulates this second point through reference to the (Jewish origins) of the dominance of “victimhood” of contemporary society discussed above. It is again worth quoting Badiou at length:

The basic argumentation, of course, refers to the extermination of European Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices. In the victim ideology that constitutes the campaigning morality of contemporary moralism, this unprecedented extermination is held to be paradigmatic. *In and of itself, the extermination would underpin the political, legal and moral necessity to hold the word “Jew” above all handling of identity predicates and to give it some kind of nominal sacralizing. ...* The progressive imposition of the word “Shoah” ... can be taken as a verbal sacralizing of victims. By a remarkable irony, one thereby comes to the point of applying to the name “Jew” a claim that the Christians originally directed against all Jews themselves, which was that “Christ” *was a name worthier than all others.*<sup>32</sup>

The implication here is that what amounts to the doomed “chosen” status allocated not only by Christianity but, more specifically, by the Nazis, is now inverted into a privilege. In other words, just as the radical tradition of anti-semitism spoke of how, after generations of eking out a living on the margins of European society, the Jews, following emancipation, were seen to have gained unwarranted (and corrupt) advantages, so Badiou lays out a similar path and inverts a moment of almost absolute Jewish *powerlessness* into one of almost exceptional Jewish *power*. In this instance, the “sacralization” and hierarchical “worthiness” is far from innocent. It is, rather, pressed into direct service for what is seen as the illegitimate defence of particularist Jewish interests—most notably, the State of Israel. The alleged Jewish power is, for Badiou, entrenched not only in the “contemporary moralism” that marks post-Holocaust society but also in the dominant place gained by Jews through their unwarranted link with the Shoah itself. Nowhere are these points more in evidence than in the following:

Today it is not uncommon to read that “Jew” is indeed a name beyond ordinary names. And it seems that, like an inverted original sin, the grace

of having been an incomparable victim can be passed down not only to descendants of descendants, but to all who come under the predicate in question, be they heads of state or armies engaging in severe oppression of the lands they have confiscated. *Less rational is the claim that we can find the means in the Nazi gas chambers with which to confer on the colonial state of Israel ... some special status other than that all colonial states already have conferred on them for some decades.*<sup>33</sup>

As this quotation indicates, alongside the notion that contemporary Jews have illegitimately usurped the legacy of the Shoah is the idea that they have done so in the name of their own particularist and parochial interests. From Badiou's perspective, commemoration and memory of the Shoah is little more than a weapon used by Jews to unjustifiably, and against all the evidence, silence criticism of Israel. Moreover, the manner in which Badiou sees the articulation of this weaponization of the Shoah is inherent in the claim of contemporary anti-semitism. As noted in this essay's first section, this is a claim to which Badiou denies any empirical existence:

It is wholly intolerable to be accused of anti-Semitism by anyone for the sole reason that, from the fact of the extermination, one does not conclude as to the predicate "Jew" and its religious and communitarian dimension that it receive some singular valorization—a transcendent annunciation!—nor that Israeli exactions, whose colonial nature is patent and banal, be specially tolerated. I propose that nobody any longer accept, publicly or privately, this type of political blackmail.<sup>34</sup>

### (c) Jewish Particularism as False Universalism

It is not without significance that, as noted above, a common characteristic of the radical tradition of the antisemitic canon is written from the position of resigned defeat. As Zimmerman notes in his biography of Marr,<sup>35</sup> this perspective is far from a rhetorical gesture, but something seriously believed. Indeed, a recurrent theme of this literature is the self-image of the antisemite as defeated victim at the hand of the Jewish victor. Although for some, this dialectic of defeat and victory comes at the expense of presumed "national values" for others, it is presented as the defeat of (an abstract) universal humanity at the expense of a dominant, and dominating, Jewish particularism.

In his *On the Jewish Question*, Bauer prefigures this resignation of defeat at the hands of “the Jews” that becomes a common theme of the later antisemitic radical’s canon. He writes:

The Jew, who in Vienna, for example, is only tolerated, determines the fate of the whole Empire by his financial power. The Jew, who may have no rights in the smallest German state, decides the fate of Europe. While corporations and guilds refuse to admit Jews, or have not yet adopted a favourable attitude towards them, the audacity of industry mocks at the material institutions.<sup>36</sup>

After Jewish emancipation had appeared as an accepted fact, this notion of Jewish privilege determining the “fate of Europe” reappeared in the Nazi-era writings of German jurist, Carl Schmitt. Now, Jewish privilege and power were no longer believed to stand in opposition to formal state and social forms, but rather to have infused them with so-called “Jewish values.” Viewed from this perspective, the universalistic claims within liberal democracies—the rule of law, universal suffrage, etc.—are but shams masking their “Jewish” content. Nowhere is this point more to the fore than in Schmitt’s 1938 work, *Leviathan*.<sup>37</sup>

In this book, Schmitt offers a thorough rejection of the liberal nation-state in general and the rights that comprise it in particular. He argues that the origins and development of political and juridical rights arose from the compromises negotiated through the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) to end the bloody Thirty Years War. Signaling this moment as pivotal for the “decline of the West,” Schmitt maintains that these compromises resulted in moments of (individual) freedom immune to sovereign power and which, through gradual increases over the centuries, led to sovereignty’s demise. He held that this “defeat” of “the political” resulted directly in what he understood as the social anarchy of the Weimar democracy and of liberal democracy in general.

Although Schmitt acknowledges the place of Hobbes and others in this defeat, he adds an antisemitic gloss. He claims that once these moments of individual freedom came into existence, they were open to manipulation by “the Jews” who, having jumped at the opportunity, harnessed them for their own nefarious and negative interests. Over time, these “particularist” Jewish values, wrapped in a sham universalism, gained supremacy over the entire body politic, not only in Germany, but also in Europe and elsewhere. The expansion of universal rights, the rule of law and the concomitant demise of sovereignty, as well as social and cultural homogeneity, brought “the Jews” their victory, dominance and domination.

Updated from 1648 through 1938 to 1948, Badiou repeats the same story through what he sees as the contemporary dominance of “ethics” over that of “the political,” of a specious Jewish particularism masquerading as a faux universalism and in so doing obstructing its authentic counterpart. Drawing on Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), Badiou constructs this aspect of his thinking around a critique of both human rights and contemporary ethics, more specifically the ethics of alterity.

Turning first to his critique of human rights, we see that Badiou draws a correspondence between Nietzsche’s aphorism, “Evil is derived from the Good (and not the other way around),”<sup>38</sup> and the nature of contemporary human rights, their form and content. He argues that human rights represent the “good” that, as for the Nietzschean slave, follows from and is defined by a prior definition of “evil.” In this instance, the “evil” that is the progenitor of the “good” of human rights is that of the victim of the mid-century totalitarian camps through which humans are stripped down to their mere “animality.” Measured by such a concept of “evil,” the protection offered by human rights is nothing more than the right not to be harmed or hurt. In other words, far from representing human beings in their humanity and creativity, human rights reduce man to little more than a victim and an animal: “Ethics [human rights] subordinates the identification of this subject to the universal recognition of the evil that is done to him. Ethics thus defines man as a victim.”<sup>39</sup> If it is the case that Badiou’s depiction (and rejection) of human rights arises from the mid-twentieth-century experience of totalitarianism and the camps that were the emblems of their terror directly, as well as the Nazi death camps of the Shoah indirectly, no such ambiguity remains in the account of his related critique of what he sees as the perniciousness of the “ethics of alterity.”<sup>40</sup>

Here, Badiou emphasizes the passivity that he believes he has identified in the nature of human rights. In so doing, he brings to his aid the second of Nietzsche’s aphorisms that “man would rather will nothing than not will at all.” Yet, in so doing, he traces the origin of this passivity in the face of the Other—understood in this context as the “ethics of differences” or “recognition of the other”—to that of the Jewish theology (via Emanuel Levinas), which he opposes to Greek philosophy. In so doing, of course, he reproduces, at the level of ethics, the distinction between the mortal (mere animality) and the Immortal (man):

According to Greek thought, adequate action presumes an initial theoretical mastery of experience, which ensures that the action is in conformity with the rationality of being. From this point of departure are deduced

laws (in the plural) of the City and of action. According to Jewish ethics, in Levinas's sense, everything is grounded in the immediacy of an opening to the Other, which disarms the reflexive subject. The "thou" [you] prevails over the "I." Such is the meaning of the Law.<sup>41</sup>

To put Badiou's arguments in other terms, the passivity of the mortal, present in the universalist aspects of human rights and of the ethics of difference, in the face of the will of the Immortal, is the consequence of Jerusalem's triumph over Athens. That is a victory that underpins the entirety of contemporary society.

## CONCLUSION

There is a certain irony inherent in both Badiou's conclusions and his use of Nietzsche in arguing for this "Jewish" triumph. Just as Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* introduces the figures of the slave and the noble, so Badiou brings into being the mortal and the Immortal. Badiou's own voice is that of the Immortal. Yet, to adopt and adapt these figures in this way is to miss the irony that infuses Nietzsche's own formulations.

Nietzsche's irony is evident when he shows that the voice of the noble (like that of the Immortal) is, in fact, the voice of the slave. Nowhere is this more evident than in book 2, section 7, where "the noble" blames the Jews for the corrupt condition of the social and political world.<sup>42</sup> However, when read through the prism of ressentiment, this alleged nobility is, in reality, nothing other than the slave's own distorted self-image and self-perception. His "good," his "nobility," his "immortality" only makes sense after he has defined the Jews as the (slavish) evil that needs to be destroyed before the "good" can enter the world.

What can be said of Nietzsche's noble, therefore, can be said of Badiou's Immortal. For all of Badiou's distinctions and disavowals, what emerges is, in fact, repetitions. And as with those whose "noble" thoughts he repeats, Badiou's thoughts on "the Jews" and "antisemitism" tells us far more about the phenomena under discussion than he himself would have us believe.

## NOTES

- 1 Alain Badiou, "Alain Badiou's 'Anti-Semitism': Badiou, Segré, and Winter Respond to the Current Accusations in France," Verso Books' web-blog, 14 August 2014, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1688-alain-badiou-s-anti-semitism-badiou-segre-and-winter-respond-to-the-current-accusations-in-france>.

- 2 See David M. Seymour, "Antisemitism Emancipation: The Ressentiment of Loss," in *Law, Antisemitism and the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 2007), 49–82; David M. Seymour, "From Auschwitz to Gaza: Ethics for the Want of Law," *Journal of Global Ethics* 6 (2010): 205–15; David M. Seymour, "Holocaust Memory: Between Universal and Particular," in *The Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century: Contesting/Contested Memories*, ed. David M. Seymour and Mercedes Camino (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 15–32.
- 3 Alain Badiou, "Uses of the Word 'Jew,'" in *Polemics*, trans. by Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 157–247.
- 4 See, for example, Willhelm Marr's *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism* (1879), which ran to twelve editions; note also Eugen Dühring's *The Jewish Question: A Racial, Moral and Cultural Question with a World-Historical Answer* (1881).
- 5 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York, NY: Cosimo Classics, 2008).
- 6 Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, ed. L. Colletti (London, Penguin Classics, 2000), 211–41; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family* (New York, Hard Press, 2013).
- 7 Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Duhring* (New York, NY: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).
- 8 Karl Marx, "'Notes' on Adolph Wagner," in *Later Political Writers*, ed. T. Carvell (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).
- 9 "Classic" here refers to the so-called race-based theories emerging in the late nineteenth century.
- 10 "New" antisemitism refers to antisemitism as it relates to forms of anti-Zionist discourse. As is evident, I do not find the distinction helpful and, as such, prefer the expression "contemporary antisemitism," which allows both discontinuities and continuities in the phenomenon under investigation.
- 11 "Scientific" is here used in the sense of normal academic procedure.
- 12 Willhelm Marr, *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, trans. Gerhard Rohringer (2009), 6, 10; available at <http://www.kevinmacdonald.net/Marr-Text-English.pdf>.
- 13 Although always as a result of the Jews' own malevolent behaviour and actions. For the most recent iteration of this tendency, see the Liberal Democratic peer Jenny Tonge's "letter" of October 2016, available at <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/calls-to-expel-jenny-tonge-for-post-blaming-anti-semitism-on-israel/>.
- 14 It is of some note that he includes within this minority the French comedienne Dieudonné.
- 15 Alain Badiou, "Introduction: Uses of the Word 'Jew,'" in *Polemics*, 158.
- 16 Alain Badiou, "Anti-Semitism Everywhere in France Today," in *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, Alain Badiou, Eric Hazan and Ivan Segre (London: Verso, 2013), 12.
- 17 For a related discussion, see "Holocaust Memory: Between Universal and Particular," in *Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century*, 15–32.
- 18 Bruno Bauer, *The Jewish Question*, quoted in Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, ed. T.B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (London: Penguin, 1975), 215.
- 19 Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: State and Bureaucracy* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 109–28.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 21 Quoted in Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 214/235.

- 22 Ibid., 236 (a gloss by Marx).
- 23 Badiou, *Polemics*, 215.
- 24 Ibid., 214.
- 25 Ibid., 215.
- 26 Interview at the *Daily Haaretz*, 27 May 2005, in *Polemics*, 214
- 27 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2013), 75.
- 28 Badiou, *Ethics*, 75.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Badiou, *Polemics*, 161.
- 31 Badiou, *Ethics*.
- 32 Badiou, *Polemics*, 159–60
- 33 Ibid., 161–2.
- 34 Ibid., 162.
- 35 Moishe Zimmerman, *Wilhelm Marr: The Patriarch of Antisemitism* (Oxford: OUP, 1986).
- 36 Marx, *Early Writings*, 237.
- 37 Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- 38 Badiou, *Ethics*, 9
- 39 Ibid., 10.
- 40 It is interesting to note that, during his discussion of the totalitarian camps and their reduction of man to that of victim and of mere animality, Badiou cites the case of Varlam Shalamov who, in the camps of Stalin, almost willed himself to remain a “man”—to remain “something other than a mortal being” (10–11). This account overlooks those of the Nazi camps in which one’s will to remain alive, to remain a “man,” was not within the control of any individual inmate. This romanticism runs through Badiou’s entire thinking when he discusses opposition to the subject of human rights (the mortal) and the Subject of the Political (the Immortal).
- 41 Badiou, *Ethics*, 19.
- 42 For a full discussion, see David M. Seymour, “The Slave, the Noble and the Jews: Reflections on Section 7 of ‘On the Genealogy of Morals,’” in *Philosemitism, Antisemitism and the Jews*, ed. Tony Kushner and Nadia Valman, (London: Dartmouth, 2005), 215–28.

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