

Paul the Antiphilosopher; or, Saul Among the Sophists

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For Jonathan on his return

“Is Saul among the Prophets?” [I Samuel 10:12]

“The conditions of philosophy are transversal. They are uniform procedures recognizable from afar, whose relation to thought is relatively invariant. The *name*

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of this invariance is clear: it is the name ‘truth’.”<sup>1</sup>

“To mock philosophy is to philosophize truly.”<sup>2</sup>

In his recent book, John David Dawson has written of an earlier theoretically minded reader of Paul’s letters:

Any Christian claim that Boyarin has misconstrued Paul’s intention runs the considerable risk of simply repeating Paul’s indictment against his own Jewish contemporaries—that they cannot understand Paul because they refuse to entertain as a real possibility the very conclusion that his argument advances.<sup>3</sup> In the counterreadings I offer in order to highlight the presuppositions of Boyarin’s reading, I point out ways in which Boyarin’s approach to Paul does systematically deny one possible conclusion to Paul’s argument. As a consequence, by reading Paul at his theoretically most accessible, Boyarin fails to read him at his

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1. Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy Followed by Two Essays: “The (Re)Turn of Philosophy Itself” and “Definition of Philosophy”*, ed. and trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), 33.

2. Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*, trans. O. W. Wight, Mary L. Booth, and W. F. Trotter (New York: P. F. Collier & son, 1910), 513, cited in Louis Marin, “On the Interpretation of Ordinary Language: A Parable of Pascal,” in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josue Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 255.

3. I can understand well Dawson’s dilemma, as well as his frustration. It is not unsimilar to the frustration of the critic of Mel Gibson’s film who is sure that his critique simply reinforces the very message of the film over and over again.

theologically strongest.<sup>4</sup>

This not the place, nor do I have a wish, to defend my reading of Paul.<sup>5</sup> But it must be said that Dawson is, of course, exactly right; that is precisely my project, namely to read Paul at his theoretically most accessible and thus to make sense of the implications of his texts for those who “refuse to entertain as a real possibility the very conclusion that [Paul’s] argument advances.” My question, quite an obvious one I would think, and the question of all non-Christian thinkers who read Paul seriously, is what can we learn from Paul if we *don’t* believe Christian theological claims, per se; don’t accept the “trinity,” the “Incarnation,” nor even, for some of us, the apparent abrogation of Torah law. On my reading, “texts and meanings,” and the ethics of group identity formation exercise this ancient converted reader, at least as much as the intelligibility of divine performances, and his thoughts on texts and meanings, as well as his textual practice, have much to teach us, precisely when read at their most theoretically accessible points. I am sure that much is lost when we don’t read Paul at his “theologically strongest” points, tantamount to those points which are entirely contained within a believing Christian’s discourse, but I would submit that even more is lost when we read them only that way. In other words, if we are to consider the value or interest of a Pauline contribution to theory—one way, at least, of understanding “Paul among the philosophers”—it will be precisely by bracketing or even denying the theological claims

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4. John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 20.

5. Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, *Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

of his text.<sup>6</sup> And so, it seems, thinks Alain Badiou, as well. I share with Badiou the sense of Paul as a radical thinker but differ quite significantly in quite what that means. For both of us Paul is a radical. While for me he is, however, a radical Jew in a particular time and historical clime, the first Bolshevik indeed,<sup>7</sup> but only metaphorically so, for Badiou, after his operations of subtraction, Paul is simply an instantiation of the Idea of the radical, the militant, per se, almost literally Lenin himself.

#### Badiou's Truth

At the very outset of his book, Badiou stakes out what might be taken as the exact contrary of Dawson's position: "Basically, I have never really connected Paul with religion. It is not according to this register, or to bear witness to any sort of faith, or even antifaith, that I have, for a long time, been interested in him."<sup>8</sup> Badiou goes further, however, than merely stating his own lack of interest in Paul's specific religious commitments and methods; he actually characterizes those as irrelevant, as so much noise along with everything else that renders Saul/Paul a particular historical individual: "Anyway, the crucible in which what will become a work of art and thought burns is brimful with nameless impurities; it comprises obsessions, beliefs, infantile puzzles, various perversions, undivulgeable memories, haphazard reading, and quite a few

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6. See too Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 4–5. I agree wholeheartedly with Badiou that any version of a subjectivism that says: "You must be an X to understand X-ness" is worse than pernicious. For an elegant counter to that version of identitarianism, see David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62?.

7. Boyarin, *Radical Jew*, 228.

8. Badiou, *Saint*, 1.

idiosyncracies and chimeras. Analyzing this alchemy is of little use.”<sup>9</sup> For Badiou what Paul is is a “subjective figure of primary importance,” not, that is, a Jew (or even a Christian) but pure subject. We need to pay attention to the particular sense that “subject” has in Badiou’s thought: “For Badiou, the question of agency is not so much a question of how a subject can *initiate* an action in an autonomous manner but rather how a subject *emerges* through an autonomous chain of actions within a changing situation. That is, it is not everyday actions or decisions that provide evidence of agency for Badiou. It is rather those extraordinary decisions and actions which *isolate* an actor from their [sic] context, those actions which show that a human can actually be a free agent that supports *new* chains of actions and reactions. For this reason, not every human being is always a subject, yet some human beings *become* subjects; those who act in *fidelity* to a chance encounter with an *event* which disrupts the *situation* they find themselves in.”<sup>10</sup> Not only then is Paul a subject entirely abstracted from the “accidents” of specific religious ideas and socio-cultural, historical entanglements, this abstracted or subtracted subjectivity is a kind of incarnation of a Platonic idea, the idea of the militant: “For me, Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practices and states the *invariant traits* of what can be called the militant figure. He brings forth the entirely human connection, whose destiny fascinates me, between the general idea of a rupture, an overturning, and that of a thought-practice that is this rupture’s subjective materiality.”<sup>11</sup>

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9. Badiou, *Saint*, 2.

10. Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham, introd. by Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham (London New York: Continuum, 2003), Introduction, 6.

11. Badiou, *Saint*, 2 (emphasis added).

Materiality in its most common acceptance is, however, of no interest finally to Badiou, remaining so much “alchemy,” unworthy of analysis, just as for Paul (my formulation) the accidents of Jewishness and its particular practices of kinship, community, and custom are *adiaphora*. It is hard for me to conceive of a more radically Platonic basis for a philosophy of the subject (or of any other part of philosophy) than this one in which a Form—not beauty but militancy—is so embodied in the figure of an erstwhile human being that contemplation of that human being, nay that subject, can lead thought beyond to the very idea of militancy itself. Thus, though, as Clemens and Feltham state: “So, what is the general result of Badiou’s adoption of set theory as the language of being? Quite simply that it has nothing to say about beings themselves—this is the province of other discourses such as physics, anthropology and literature. This is one reason why Badiou terms set theory as *subtractive* ontology: it speaks of beings without reference to their attributes or their identity; it is as if the beings ontology speaks of have had all their qualities subtracted from them. As a result, unlike Plato and Aristotle’s ontologies, there is neither cosmos nor phenomena, neither cause nor substance,”<sup>12</sup> nonetheless, there seems to me to be a very Platonic moment in this ontology, precisely in its ascription of “invariant traits” to a “general idea of rupture,” an ontological insistence, as it were, on the possibility of truth.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, as Badiou himself asserts, “the philosophical gesture that I propose is Platonic.”<sup>14</sup>

For Badiou, Paul’s great contribution is epistemological, that is, to a theory of truth, and the epistemology of his contribution is precisely homologous with Paul’s own subjective figuration as articulated by Badiou: “Paul’s unprecedented gesture consists in

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12. Badiou, *Infinite*, Introduction, 23.

13. See the subtitle of Badiou’s *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*.

14. Badiou, *Manifesto*, 96.

subtracting truth from the communitarian grasp, be it that of a people, a city, an empire, a territory, or a social class.”<sup>15</sup> For Badiou this term “subtraction” is a term of art. What sutures any given situation to being is subtractive in a double sense.<sup>16</sup> “The first is that it is subtracted from presentation and, second, it does not participate in any of the qualities of the situation—although it is proper to the situation, it is as if all of the particularities of the situation are removed or subtracted from it.”<sup>17</sup> That is, Paul does not participate in any of the qualities of the situation that he is in and he calls for a new People, equally subjective figures as a People, who also will not/do not participate in any of the qualities of their situation, as if all these particularities of their situation are subtracted from it.

It needs to be said, contra a certain mood or tendency among Paul scholars, that Badiou is frequently enough a very good and close reader of Paul, even though he does not perform the close reading before our eyes. Badiou’s language of event and militant capture something about Paul’s texts (and especially the crucial Galatians) that more properly theological language misses. The notion of fidelity to the newness of the event and the absolute rupture that it occasions, out of history but a total reconfiguration of history, seems to me to gloss Paul’s language of fidelity to the cross and the total betrayal of that were one to continue to observe the Law better than any I’ve seen.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, while

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15. Badiou, *Saint*, 5.

16. Alain Badiou, *L’être et l’événement*, Ordre philosophique (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 68.

17. Badiou, *Infinite*, Introduction, 15–16.

18. On the other hand, when Badiou goes off, he does so spectacularly as well: “It is John who, by turning the logos into a principle, will synthetically inscribe Christianity within the space of the Greek logos, thereby subordinating it to anti-Judaism,” Badiou, *Saint*, 43. I simply cannot imagine any Johannine passage that could possibly be glossed as “turning the logos into a principle”!

Badiou is accused (as we all are) of making a Paul in the image of his own thought, I am tempted, against Badiou's own declarations, to imagine Badiou's thought being formed by Paul, so fine is this fit in my eyes.

Badiou, I repeat, captures something vital about Paul that even the most uncompromising of theological interpretations miss. This can be exemplified by looking more closely at the crucial passage at the end of Galatians 2, where Paul argues most forcefully that keeping the law at all renders the death of Christ δωρεάν, of no avail at all. I will quote the passage in the familiar RSV translation:

**15** We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, **16** yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. **17** But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin (ἀμαρτίας διάκονος)? Certainly not! **18** But if I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor. . . . **21** I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

A Badiouish reading of this passage makes sense of it in a way that nothing else can, in my view. There are deep flaws in Paul's logic here, for there is nothing in what he says that disqualifies the Jacobean—so-called “Judaeo-Christian,” what an unfortunate choice of terminology in this context—idea that faith in Christ comes to add to the law and not to subtract it, that when Jesus says (as, to be sure, he will only say a generation after Paul) that he comes to fulfill the Law, he means just that, to supply its meaning and fulfillment, to complete it, not to abrogate it. Keeping the Law and having faith in Jesus Christ would not be, on that account, in any way contradictory, and, I repeat, there is

nothing in Paul's argument as it is usually understood that disproves such a theology. Badiou's Paul, however, makes sense of this passage. Faith here does not mean believing in Christ, or even trusting in his faithfulness to us, in any conventional sense, but fidelity to the event of the absolute newness that has entered the world with the crucifixion (By the way, I find that Badiou's reading of Paul strangely de-emphasizes the cross for the resurrection, but it *is* the death here to which Paul appeals, not the resurrection. In the crucial passage for Badiou of I Corinthians, Paul preaches Christ and him crucified, not and him resurrected!<sup>19</sup>) In that sense, anything that would suggest that the world has not been entirely transformed through this event, will precisely make it not be an event at all; Christ will have died for nothing. Badiou's thought makes clear the Paulinian claim that the event is such only by virtue of the militant subject-ive response. Without that fidelity, nothing will have taken place; the world will not have changed at all. The faith of which Paul speaks here is militant fidelity to the event. Anything less than militance does not compromise the event; it disqualifies it entirely as event, throws us back into the situation. Yes, Badiou has read Paul well, even brilliantly here, if I may make so audacious as to say so, insofar as Paul is theologian, something like this reading seems imperative to me. Badiou's language gives us language that makes theological sense of Paul, paradoxically traditionalist sense—according to one sort of Pauline tradition. It is Badiou's reading, then, that I would adduce against Dawson as showing that at least sometimes precisely when we don't read Paul theologically, we read him at his strongest and not his weakest as Dawson would have it.

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19. See discussion in Mark Douglas Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning, and Deception in Greece and Rome*, Emory Studies in Early Christianity (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 97 and especially n. 54.

There is, however, another reading lurking (actually standing on the side of the crowd, waving a red flag, and hollering: look at me!) But in order to see it, we have to put back all of the “nameless impurities” into the crucible. Speaking in literary terms, there are, in a sense, two characters named “Paul” in this piece of the text. There is Paul the author of the epistle who is telling us a story about Paul and in which Paul the apostle is a character. (Indeed much of the argument of Galatians proceeds as a kind of autobiography; that much is obvious I think.) That is, there is Paul inside the story of the incident at Antioch and Paul outside the story and telling it to us. They are not necessarily saying the same thing, or if they are, they are not necessarily making the point in precisely the same way. The argument of Paul the character is a simple and highly pointed political and rhetorical one, not philosophical at all.<sup>20</sup> Paul the narrator relates that Paul and Peter had been together in Antioch among the Christian community there. They, together with all of the other Jewish members of the community, have been eating with the Gentile members together (presumably this means eating non-kosher food). But when “men from James” come to Antioch from Jerusalem, Peter, afraid of being condemned as a sinner, separates from commensality with the Gentiles, as do all the other Jews in the community including Barnabas, naturally infuriating the militant, Paul. Given these conditions, we can understand Paul’s logic quite straightforwardly and in a much more worldly manner. He attacks simply Peter’s alleged hypocrisy and weakness.<sup>21</sup>

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20. For this opposition, see Badiou, *Manifesto*, 29: “It is thus entirely conceivable that the determination of Nazism—for example, of Nazism as political—be removed *de jure* from the specific form of thinking which, since Plato, has deserved the name of philosophy.”

21. Margaret Mitchell has pointed out, partly following Tertullian, that Peter was behaving in a manner not entirely un-Pauline here; indeed, he was being all things to all

We (I and you, Peter), albeit born to the Law, have shown through our previous actions of violating the Law that we know that it is powerless to save. If, now you go back on your previous behavior, you are, as it were, confessing that you have been a sinner till now and that, therefore, the Gospel with which you have acted in accordance is a message of sin, and Christ an agent of sin. If you confess that with your behavior, then indeed the game is lost. No one will believe again that salvation is through faith and Christ will have been crucified in vain.<sup>22</sup> Badiou characterizes Paul's discourse "knowing how, armed only with the conviction that declares the Christ-event, one is to tackle the Greek intellectual milieu, whose essential category is that of wisdom (*sophia*), and whose instrument is that of rhetorical superiority (*huperokhē logou*)."<sup>23</sup> Yet it must be observed that the situation of Paul's own logos with respect to the Antioch event is rhetorical, precisely one of rhetorical superiority.

The philosophical reading gleaned from Badiou and the rhetorical/political reading of Paul's logic in these verses that I have just proposed thus correspond to these two levels within the text itself. As addressed to Peter and Barnabas and their fellows, Paul's utterances are precisely in "persuasive words" and, if not wisdom, certainly powerful rhetoric. It is in that context that the wordly meaning of his words functions most powerfully. On the other hand, Paul's quotation of them now makes that historical instance, his report of what happened at Antioch, into a paradigm with which to persuade the present-day Galatians of something, as well, namely, you too, if you now,

people, "Pauline Accommodation and 'Condescension' (συγκατάβασις): 1 Cor 9:19–23 and the History of Influence," in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 202–03.

22. Cp. Badiou's own reading of the Antioch episode (Badiou, *Saint*, 26).

23. Badiou, *Saint*, 27.

having once accepted Christ on the terms with which I presented him to you, that is, saving through faith alone, now in fear of the same sort of men whom Peter feared, accept the Law on yourselves, you too will be confessing Christ as agent of sin. In the case of the Galatians, however, it is not the practical, political effect that their activities will have on others that is at issue but rather their own fidelity to the event or alternatively their acting in a way that will discredit the event qua event and render them themselves non-subjects. It is thus this level which can be translated into Badiou's terms of fidelity to the event, while the first one, the narrative within the narrative, is political speech and rhetoric, par excellence. Paul produces here a virtual allegory, in which the earlier incident, at Antioch is type for the antitype in Galatia.

The key passage to support Badiou's epistemological reading is surely the beginning of I Corinthians, to which he alludes several times and discusses at some length once:

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (I Cor 1-20b-25)

The climax of Badiou's gloss on this statement is, "It is through the invention of a language wherein folly, scandal, and weakness supplant knowing reason, order, and power, and wherein non-being is the only legitimizable affirmation of being, that Christian discourse is articulated. In Paul's eyes, this articulation is incompatible with

any prospect (and there has been no shortage of them, almost from the time of his death onward) of a ‘Christian philosophy.’”<sup>24</sup>

Paul here truly does seem to be referring to three kinds of knowledge, knowledge given by wisdom, knowledge given by signs, and knowledge given by faith. The first two—if I may simplify Badiou’s formulation to terms which I can apprehend more readily—are opposed to faith, precisely because they depend on external verification and not internal conviction.<sup>25</sup> So far I can go along with Badiou and reiterate what seems to me his real contribution to Pauline interpretation, seeing the radicality in his rejection of philosophy and why it is parallel to his rejection of knowledge through signs. Indeed, here is an instance where the non-theological (anti-theological) reader has penetrated more deeply into the text than such theologians as Walter Bauer who claim that “1 Corinthians is that unit among the major Pauline letters which yields the very least for our understanding of the Pauline faith,”<sup>26</sup> or Hans Conzelmann who writes that “the great attraction of I Corinthians, however, lies in the fact that here Paul is practicing applied theology, so to speak.”<sup>27</sup> Badiou surely has demonstrated the theological import

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24. Badiou, *Saint*, 47.

25. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. George W. S.J. MacRae, trans. James W. Leitch, bibliography and references prepared by James W. Dunkly (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 47.

26. Walter Bauer, Gerhard Krodel, and Robert A. Kraft, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity.*, ed. Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 69, cited in Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 9.

27. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 9.

precisely of Paul's language in 1 Corinthians, import that, it seems, can best be seen by not reading Paul theologically.

In his insistence, however, on only finding philosophical meaning in Paul, meaning that is philosophical (antihistoricist) in its antiphilosophicality, elegantly reproducing in his reading the subtraction which he is taking Paul to be exemplifying, Badiou partly loses sight of some of the political stakes of Paul's writing. It is not, of course, that Badiou ignores the political dimension of Paul's writing—indeed Paul is a veritable poster-boy of the political as event in Badiou—; rather, Badiou's own notion of the political itself seems to me to evacuate the latter of import as praxis, in its very substitution of militance for praxis. Seeking to avoid misunderstanding, let me emphasize that I am *not* arguing for a cynically political Paul—not political in that sense—but a Paul for whom the Christ event has distinct and political stakes in his immediate, historical and concrete real world, stakes that have to do with the concrete relations, discursive and enacted, of concrete groups of people, named Jews and Greeks with each other every day. If Badiou, paradoxically, loses the practice from praxis in his reading of I Corinthians, the theologians, it seems, lose the theory.

Badiou takes Paul's famous statement in Galatians 3:28, "There is no Jew nor Greek," as being about theories of discourse—not in any Foucauldian sense—, modalities of truth, about the subtractability of Truth from any communitarian grasp. For him, when Paul says "There is no Jew nor Greek," he "institutes 'Christian discourse' only by distinguishing its operations from those of Jewish discourse and Greek discourse." Badiou argues that Jewish and Greek discourses are two sides of the same symbolon: Greek discourse allegedly bases itself "on the cosmic order so as to adjust itself to it, while Jewish discourse bases itself on the exception to this order so as to turn divine transcendence into a sign," and, therefore, "Paul's profound idea is that Jewish discourse and Greek discourse are the two aspects of the same figure of mastery," and,

moreover, “neither of the two discourses can be universal because . . . the two discourses share the presupposition that the key to salvation is given to us within the universe.”<sup>28</sup>

Although in the passage from Corinthians, the Greek and the Jew indeed abandon former discourses for a new Christian discourse of faith, I submit that discourse is not what Paul is about when he says in Galatians “There is neither Greek nor Jew because you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Something else is going on there. When Paul speaks about Jew and Greek there, it is not “subjective dispositions,”<sup>29</sup> of which he is speaking but precisely religious identifications and religio-ethnic practices, as I shall try immediately to show. Greek is simply a synecdoche (from a Jewish point of view) for pagan.<sup>30</sup>

Closer reading, in context, is necessary to see what it is that Paul might be saying in that verse. The verse under investigation makes its appearance in the following context: “Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our child-minder<sup>31</sup> until Christ came; that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a child-minder; For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s

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28. Badiou, *Saint*, 41–42.

29. Badiou, *Saint*, 41.

30. Conzelmann gets this just right, “The classifying of mankind from the standpoint of salvation history as Jews and Greeks is a Jewish equivalent for the Greek classification ‘Greeks and barbarians,’” Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 46.

31. I depart here from the RSV’s “custodian.” The *paidagogos* was a fairly low level slave who took the child back and forth from school.

offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:23-29). Paul, I submit, is decidedly not speaking here of epistemology, of how we know or what we know, of discourses, neither Greek nor Jewish, but of peoplehood, precisely the possibility denied by Badiou. The event in question here is as social as it is ontological, divisions among human beings have been replaced by one-ness in the maturation into Christ, from children born of woman and under the law or the equivalent pagan gods to adults adopted by the Father and free of such childish constraints.

To understand the continuation, it needs emphasizing that the beginning of Galatians 4 is entirely a continuation of the end of chapter 3 and the explanation of the figure of the child-minder and not the beginning of an entirely new section of the letter.<sup>32</sup>

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32. As Betz would have it, Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Church in Galatia*, in *Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 202. Burton, too, claims that the thought of chapter 3 is complete with v. 29 and that Paul now “takes up again the thought of the inferiority of the condition under law” (Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians*, reprint, 1920, The International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988], 211), quite missing the point, thus, in my opinion, that this is precisely an interpretation of the somewhat cryptical, “there is no Greek nor Jew” at the end of chapter 3. Even Longenecker, who seems to me so often right and sure in his exegetical judgment does not regard the end of the passage (vv. 8-11) as anything more than a virtual appendix to it (Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41 of *Word Biblical Commentary* [Dallas: Word Books, 1990], 178–79), whereas I am arguing that it is only with these verses that the point of the whole illustration becomes at all clear or do we see, in any way, what the elements of the universe, to which we have been enthralled, are.

The RSV translators get this just right by translating 4:1-2 as “I mean [Λέγω δέ] that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by the father.”<sup>33</sup> This verse clearly hearkens back to (and interprets) vv. 23-24 of chapter 3 which state that “Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our child-minder [παιδαγωγός] until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith.” In verses 3 ff. of chapter 4, Paul begins to give us the application of the parable: “So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe, slaves to our child-minder(s), just as the child is. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” There seems to be a difficulty in this last verse. The question that exercises many commentators is what is “born of woman” doing here. Born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, but why was he born of woman? The verse, according to these commentators and scholars, doesn’t tell us. They note that the phrase does not appear anywhere else in Paul and believe that it has no semantic function here and therefore conclude as does, for instance, Betz that “This suggests that it was part of the pre-Pauline material, taken up here by Paul in full and without regard to its usability in the argument.”<sup>34</sup> This is, in my humble opinion, entirely to miss the point. The verse is a perfect chiasmic structure: Jesus was born of a woman so that we might receive adoption as sons, born under the law to redeem those born under the law. In other words, Jesus’s

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33. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 162 also captures this connection perfectly, as does Frank J. Matera and Daniel J. Harrington, *Galatians* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 148.

34. Betz, *Galatians*, 207.

own self-redemptions from those two situations are what make possible the redemption (achieved) by Paul and the redemption of all of us (potential). Born of a woman, and therefore, of a human genealogy, under the law, and therefore, as a Jew, Jesus like Paul himself now redeemed (and thus redeeming) from both of those conditions and adopted, on the same basis as the Galatians (and thus all of “us”), as a son of God. Those readings<sup>35</sup> that insist that Paul has misadopted a formulation from elsewhere, and that it doesn’t fit here, are badly missing the mark. It may be that, as Longenecker remarks, that “born of woman” is a hapax in Paul, but it cannot be that it is not “really germane to the argument of Galatians,”<sup>36</sup> since it is precisely the antithesis to born, by adoption, of the Father. Another way of saying this would be to remark that it is being born of woman and redeemed from that condition that corrects gender difference and instanciates “no man nor woman” in Christ Jesus, just as it is being placed under the law and being redeemed from it that in the resurrection corrects ethnic difference.<sup>37</sup> All now, Jews and Greeks, are only sons by adoption. “Born of woman” could not then be more germane to the argument of Galatians, as it suggests a profoundly soteriological import for an adoptionist Christology. No wonder that readers, more orthodox than I in their

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35. see Betz’s n. 55 documenting many.

36. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 166.

37. Cf. Richard Hays who writes, “I began this study under the assumption that Gal 4:4-5 was in fact a fragment of pre-Pauline tradition; this investigation has substantially undermined my confidence in this assumption, as most of the features which have been thought to mark it off from the ‘grain’ of Paul’s thought have been shown to be capable of explanation in other ways,” Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, SBL Dissertation Series (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 135, n. 80

Christologies, would wish to exile it from the text. The climax of this adoptionist soteriological Christology is Paul's cry: "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir."

Returning now to the first part of the verse: "So with us; when we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe, slaves to our child-minder(s)," we see much that is puzzling, including the question of who precisely is included in the referent of the utterance. On the one hand, speaking of those under the law seems strongly to suggest that it is Jews to whom Paul addresses these words, but we know that this is not the case; they are written to Galatian gentiles. Secondly, who were slaves to the elemental spirits of the universe, the τὰ στοικεία τοῦ κόσμου, Jews or Gentiles, and what are these anyway? Third, how to explain Paul's shifts in pronominal reference in the passage from first person to second person plural and back again. The answers that we give to these questions will determine the sense that we attribute to the passage as a whole. The interpretation that I will now offer is considerably simpler than the dominant ones within the literature.

It may be that "a large number of scholarly investigations have arrived at the conclusion that these 'elements of the world' represent demonic forces which constitute and control 'this evil aeon,'"<sup>38</sup> but I simply don't believe that that is what Paul is talking about. Pace Betz (and his minions and hosts), it seems to me simply a misreading to wish to see here a whole theory of subjection to demonic forces in nature and negative appreciation of the world that Paul is allegedly finding and condemning in Jews and Greeks; the slavery being the allegedly constant attention to appropriation of these "demonic forces." Paul's point is, I think—almost necessarily—much less arcane than

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38. Betz, *Galatians*, 204.

that. Nor, however, do I accept that Paul is speaking here of philosophy, of thrall to a science of the cosmos, as Badiou would have it. In order to make sense of the passage as a whole, I think it is necessary to assume that the “elements” here refer to the heavenly bodies, deified in most versions of so-called paganism. Paul is simply referring to the Galatians’ former worship of, understood as thralldom to, gods of sun, moon, and stars.<sup>39</sup> The point is, let us remember, that there is no Greek nor Jew, that a distinction

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39. That this is one of the possible acceptations of the term, as shown clearly by usages in Diogenes Laertius and Justin Martyr, Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians*, 512–13. I believe that it is the only sense that enables Paul’s comparison of the observance of the law to pagan worship of gods who are not gods, the στοιχεῖα. This is the interpretation of Theodoret, generally adopted by most of the fathers (Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians*, 515), and should never have been strayed from, in my perhaps less than humble opinion. Burton himself rejects this view, but I find nothing of his objections telling, certainly not in the face of the eminent sense that this reading makes of Paul’s rhetoric. Burton interprets (following Tertullian): “the rudimentary religious teachings possessed by the race,” thus completely undermining Paul’s argument and rhetoric, making nonsense of his allegation that keeping the law is equivalent, literally, to returning to pagan worship! I have similar concerns with Longenecker’s interpretation of the elements of the world themselves as being “the Mosaic Law” (Longenecker, *Galatians*, 165–66), taking the στοιχεῖα, once again, as Burton does, as “basic principles of religion,” which also seems to me to fatally weaken Paul’s argument against the Galatians that by keeping the Law they are reverting to their former state of paganism. It is *not* that the Torah is the στοιχεῖα, but that by adopting the Torah, with its observances based on the movements of heavenly bodies, the Galatians have returned, in effect, to their former worship of these heavenly bodies

understood as terribly significant by Jews, including Jacobean Christians (and now by the Galatians backsliding into Judaism), makes no difference at all. “We” were under thrall to the elements of the universe, that is, all of us, both (former) Jews and (former) Greeks—we through our enslavement to set times and observances controlled by these bodies and you through your sacrifice and worship to them—, and now we have all been liberated by the spirit of the son. Being slaves to the elements has to be read as identical in import and significance, but not in denotation, to being under the law in order to make sense of the passage at all.<sup>40</sup> Paul’s shifts between second person and first person are, therefore, precisely the point of his argument, the equivalence of the enslavement of the Jew to the elements of the universe via her observance of days and months and

themselves. To miss this is to miss the whole force of Paul’s bitterly ironic argument (cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 181). I would argue similarly against F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, reprint, 1982, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1990), 193. If the elements are the Torah, then the whole rhetorical force of the bitter comparison is lost. It is not finally the point that, “if former pagans accepted the Jewish calendar, old astral associations could easily reassert themselves” (Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, 206–07), but that in Paul’s rhetoric, they are already asserting themselves by the very fact of such observances.

40. Betz, *Galatians*, 205. Burton gets this right, when he writes, “Jews and Gentiles are therefore classed together as being before the coming of Christ in the childhood of the race, and in bondage, and the knowledge of religion which the Jews possessed in the law is classed with that which the Gentiles possessed without it under the common title, ‘the elements of the world,’” Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians*, 212. For a veritable inventory of complicated and distracting interpretations, see Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, 202–04.

seasons and years to the pagan’s enslavement to his celestial no-gods.<sup>41</sup> Hence, the “we” of the narrative, the “you” of the address. In the “we” of the narrative, former Jews and former “Greeks”—Paul’s former life in the law as well as the Galatians’ former lives as worshippers of divinized elements—are rendered equivalent in order to persuade the Galatians that if they become Torah-observers they might just as well have slid back into their former worship.

Continuing to read the passage, we find: “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods; but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain.” Despite the machinations of some commentators, to me it seems crystal clear that the last observances to which Paul refers here are the very ordinary Jewish ones of sabbaths, new moons, Passovers, Tabernacles, and Rosh Hashana, all of them determined by reference to heavenly bodies. Indeed, these heavenly bodies *rule over* these observances: “And God said Let there be lights in the heaven to divide between the day and the night and let them be signs for seasons, and days, and years. . . .And God placed them in the heaven to light up the earth and to *rule over* the day and the night” [Gen. 1:14-18]. In a typically brilliant rhetorical move, Paul declares that such observances of the Torah are functionally equivalent to worshipping these heavenly bodies, these elements of the universe who are no-gods, and, therefore, the Galatians’ acceptance of the Torah (and we see from here that they are already engaging in such observance) constitutes almost literally, argues Paul, a return to Paganism, a return to thralldom under the elements of the universe. Paul is taking on here one of the three of the major religio-cultural markers

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41. Longenecker, *Galatians*, 164.

that most distinguished the Jews from the Greeks (especially in the eyes of those Greeks), namely the observance of the special days and holidays on which Jews did not work (the other two being circumcision and the eating of kosher food thematized in the Jerusalem and Antioch incidents respectively).<sup>42</sup> It is in this sense that Paul can claim parity with the Galatians and they with him. We have all been slave-children under the elements of the universe, each in our own way, you with your worship of nature gods who are no gods and I with my observance of Sabbaths, new moons, and solar years, and it is this which explains his use of the first-person plural in v. 3.<sup>43</sup> It is from this thralldom that

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42. I find that Burton misses this point when he writes that the letter to the Galatians is silent “about any statute of the law except circumcision, which they had not yet adopted, and the fasts and feasts, which they had, there being, for example, no mention in connection with the situation in Galatia of the law of foods,” (Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians*, 233). As I have said, I believe that the law of foods is precisely what is thematized in the report of the Antioch incident. I agree, however, that it seems most likely from Paul’s language that the Galatians were already observing the holy days but not yet either circumcision nor kashrut laws. This makes sense from what we know, in general, of the attractiveness of the Jewish holy days to Gentiles. It would seem that it is about circumcision that the “opponents” are pressing now, with kashrut, perhaps, less urgently on the agenda.

43. Of course, as Betz points out, the Jacobean tutors of the Galatians would not agree here that observance of the Torah constitutes Paganizing worship in effect but that hardly justifies Betz’s conclusion that “the opponents understand their religion as a cultic-ritualistic system of protection against the forces of evil,” Betz, *Galatians*, 217. I would have said that this is as distorting a reading of Judaism (not justified even in Paul) as any produced to date, except that Betz writes “the cultic activities described in v. 10

the son has redeemed all of us; we are no longer children, hence slaves but free, adopted sons and heirs. Be as I am, as I have become as you are; not a Greek nor a Jew and hence a slave but this new thing in Christ which is neither Greek nor Jew.

Badiou, in sum, has more than adequately answered the challenge of Dawson to demonstrate that Paul can best be understood in his own terms sometimes by precisely ignoring the particular theological claims that he seems to be making. Badiou's philosophy of the event and fidelity make better sense of Paul's discourse of faith opposed to the law than any interpretative structure I have seen. At the same time, mindful of the injunction to always historicize, I insist that something vital is lost when Paul is read in a way so disrespecting of time, place, and circumstance, simply repeating Paul's own gesture as if indicative of the non-being of ethnicity, gender, and class. The radically thematized dehistoricizing that constitutes for Badiou the very structure of the event renders all revolution the same revolution and all militance the same militant. It seems to me not unfair to see in this an instantiation of a modernist Platonism of a

are *not* typical of Judaism (including Jewish Christianity), although they are known to both Judaism and Christianity" (emphasis added). What can he mean? What cultic activities are described in v. 10 if not the ordinary Jewish (and Jewish-Christian) ones of observance of the sabbaths, new moons, and festivals determined by the sun and the moon? Betz could not be more mistaken, in my view, in seeing Paul's critique of the Galatians as being for "religious scrupulosity" or "superstition," Betz, *Galatians*, 218. Paul must be referring here to his own former observances that put him, in his own view, in the same situation as that of the Galatians in their own former life and thus, equal to them in need of redemption, and they equal to him in the finding of redemption through Christ if they do not slip into his (Paul's) own former life-style. Hence: I have become like you; do you remain as I am (in this, v. 12).

radical sort in which the event is, unbearably, a newness in the noumenal world that changes nothing, can change nothing whatsoever, in the phenomenal world. Lenin and Paul are both embodied avatars of the Form of Militance in precisely the same sense that Agathon and Antinous are embodied avatars of the Form of Beauty.

Badiou is entirely on the side of the philosophers in his insistence that whatever truth is—Paul’s truth, Badiou’s true reading of Paul, Badiou’s truth—it cannot be a matter of a particular time, place, historical set of circumstances, conflicts, and possibilities. It has to be radically subtracted from anything “communitarian.” While having been made out to be antiphilosopher, Badiou’s Paul ends up strangely philosophical precisely in the insistence that the Truth Procedure involves the radical subtraction of history.<sup>44</sup> As Badiou quite openly states of his own thinking, “The statement ‘truths are, for thought, compossible’ determines philosophy to the thinking of a unique time of thought, namely, what Plato calls ‘the always of time’, or eternity, a strictly philosophical concept, which inevitably accompanies the setting-up of the category of Truth.”<sup>45</sup> For Badiou, it might be said, Paul even as antiphilosopher operates precisely in that always of time, in which communal identity is impossible as well, as it is necessarily diachronic. The so-called communitarian is, for Badiou, a matter only of mere rhetoric: “No real distinguishes the first two discourses [Jew and Greek], and their distinction collapses into rhetoric.”<sup>46</sup> Badiou reveals his own philosophical (Platonic)

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44. Cf. Badiou’s own demurral (*Saint*, 108).

45. Alain Badiou, “The (Re)Turn of Philosophy *Itself*,” in *Manifesto for Philosophy Followed by Two Essays: “The (Re)Turn of Philosophy Itself” and “Definition of Philosophy”*, ed. and trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), 123.

46. Badiou, *Saint*, 57.

understanding of rhetoric here, one that is uncannily like that of Levinas, who wrote: “Our pedagogical or psychagogical discourse is rhetoric, taking the position of him who approaches his neighbor with ruse. And this is why the art of the sophist is a theme with reference to which the true conversation concerning truth, or philosophical discourse, is defined. Rhetoric, absent from no discourse, and which philosophical discourse seeks to overcome, resists discourse . . . .But the specific nature of rhetoric (of propaganda, flattery, diplomacy, etc.) consists in corrupting this freedom. It is for this that it is preeminently violence, that is, injustice. . . .And in this sense justice coincides with the overcoming of rhetoric.”<sup>47</sup> Badiou, like Levinas, as so many others, has bought Plato’s characterization of rhetoric and sophistic wholesale, one in which the mere characterization of speech as “collapsing into rhetoric” is sufficient to discredit it. Given such a view, the charge of rhetoricity consists consists of a charge of cynical manipulation of opinion that has no purchase in “the real.”

In a crucial moment for his text (and mine), Badiou mistakes Pascal, the anti-philosopher, on Paul. Pascal (cited by Badiou to disagree with him) writes “And thus Saint Paul, who came in wisdom and signs, says he came neither in wisdom nor signs, because he came to convert. But those who come only to convince can say that they come in wisdom and signs.”<sup>48</sup> Badiou, himself still in thrall I think to the philosophical

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47. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 72–74. For this citation and a brilliant discussion of Levinas on rhetoric, see Susan E. Shapiro, “Rhetoric, Ideology, and Idolatry in the Writings of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Rhetorical Invention and Religious Inquiry: New Perspectives*, ed. Walter Jost and Olmsted, Wendy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 254–78.

48. cited Badiou, *Saint*, 50.

condemnation of rhetoric, can only see Pascal’s “reticence in the face of Pauline radicalism” as the attribution of an insincerity or a manipulation on the part of Paul—“For Pascal, Paul hides his true identity.” For Badiou this hiding of identity could only be a lack of fidelity to the event. But what if precisely that which is being denied is the very concept of a “true identity”—There is, after all, no Jew nor Greek, no slave nor free, no man nor woman—, and Pascal has understood Paul perfectly in this? Pascal’s own radicalism would appear in the denial of true identity itself, a denial that is the contribution of rhetoric to the germane discourse of antiphilosophy. This reading of Pascal, at any rate, can be supported by attention to another text of his, a parable:

A man was cast by a tempest upon an unknown island the inhabitants of which were [anxious] to find their king who was lost; and [bearing] a strong resemblance [both corporally and facially] to this king, he was taken for him and acknowledged in this capacity by all the people. At first he knew not what course to take; but he finally resolved to give himself up to his good fortune. He received all the homage that they chose to render, and suffered himself to be treated as a king.<sup>49</sup>

In Louis Marin’s brilliant interpretation of this text, the conclusion (or better, one consequence) of the parable is: “One must act as a king and think as a man, but not because the sociopolitical order, even an upright one, is the truth of man, the place of judgment . . . .”<sup>50</sup> But also, I hasten to add, not because it is false; it is no more false

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49. Pascal, *Thoughts*, 382. I willingly confess that I, almost innocent of any claim to knowledge of Pascal, came across this passage decades ago in an essay of Louis Marin, “Interpretation”, and barely, as yet, know any other. I took that essay and its analysis of the parable to be parabolic of parables; now I use it for another purpose.

50. Marin, “Interpretation,” 244 (ellipsis original).

than true. One must act as a Greek (or as a Jew), says Pascalian Paul, but not because the ethnic order is the truth of humanity: “It is because the notion of representation articulates the whole of the astute man’s discourse that this discourse can turn the notion of representation back against itself in its contents.”<sup>51</sup> For Pascal, I think, we all hide our “true” identity, and the astute man, such as Paul, knows this.

If all identity is performative, as Paul/Pascal would seem to suggest, then being in Greek drag is as good as being in under-the-law drag; both are equally drag performances. The point has been made, of course, by Judith Butler:

[T]o understand identity as a practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic acts. Abstractly considered, language refers to an open system of signs by which intelligibility is incessantly created and contested. As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames.<sup>52</sup>

This is precisely how Paul enacts being neither Greek nor Jew. Pascal captures something very important about Paul that Badiou’s own Platonic Gedenken seems unable to grasp. For there are, of course, Greek thinkers, Gorgias and Protagoras for instance, whose thought was shaped by denial of the “a metaphysically underpinned epistemology.”<sup>53</sup>

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51. Marin, “Interpretation,” 246–47.

52. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender (London: Routledge, 1990), 145. I am grateful to Dina Stein for reminding me of this passage.

53. Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 20.

This denial is the explicit argument of Gorgias's founding text against Parmenides (and parodying his title), namely: "On That Which is Not; or, On Nature." For thinkers such as these, rhetors indeed, the statement that "No real distinguishes the first two discourses [Jew and Greek], and their distinction collapses into rhetoric"<sup>54</sup> is either nonsense or a tautology.

In the final part of this paper, I hope to adumbrate a shift in our reading of Paul that can result from a re-appreciation of sophistical rhetoric as an important body of thought, promulgated itself in good faith.<sup>55</sup>

"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified": Paul and the Sophists

In setting up his own binary of Greek and Jew, for Badiou there is only one kind of Greek and one kind of Jewish discourse, namely philosophers on the one hand, prophets on the other. What is common to both is, in my view, commitment to an absolute and knowable truth. In this sense, of course, they are, for sure, "two aspects of the same figure of mastery." However, the discourse of philosophy, precisely that to which Badiou would have us return, does not constitute the whole of Greek discourse; nor does the discourse of the prophet constitute the whole of Jewish discourse—even less

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54. Badiou, *Saint*, 57.

55. Badiou is, of course, well aware of the possibility of such recuperation and dismisses it *a priori*: "Philosophy today, caught in its historicist malaise, is very weak in the face of modern sophists. Most often, it even considers the great sophists—for there are great sophists—as great philosophers. Exactly as if we were to consider that the great philosophers of Antiquity were not Plato and Aristotle, but Gorgias and Protagoras," Badiou, "(Re)Turn," 116. Well, yes. Yes, precisely, that's it.

so.<sup>56</sup> Some Jews claim that a sage is superior to a prophet, and some Greeks that a sophist is to be preferred over a philosopher. Both are articulated explicitly within their own cultural frameworks as antiphilosophers.<sup>57</sup> Badiou cannot even afford the Sophists the name of antiphilosopher—even against the explicit evidence of one of his heroes, Pascal—, and thus his ascription of the status of antiphilosopher to Paul has to involve as well an explicit denial of the Sophists: “*Every definition of philosophy must distinguish it from sophistry.*”<sup>58</sup> This is so, for distinguishing itself from Sophism—renamed sophistry—is the founding gesture of philosophy, otherwise known as Plato.<sup>59</sup> If we do not buy into that gesture, however, or at least not fully so, then perhaps we can read Paul more richly as antiphilosopher, that is, as sophist. The continuation reads: “For what the ancient or modern sophist claims to impose is precisely that there is no truth, that the concept of truth is useless and uncertain, since there are only conventions, rules, types of discourse or language games.” A fair gloss, I would suggest, on Paul’s thought. The prime site for such a reading would be I Corinthians, precisely as Badiou has discovered it.

Let us then briefly revisit the passage of that letter:

Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and

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56. I say this because there are Greeks for whom the discourse of philosophy constituted the whole of discourse but there were no historical Jews for whom prophecy was all and everything.

57. Serguei Dolgopolsky, “The Rhetoric of the Talmud in the Perspective of Post-Structuralism” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2004).

58. Badiou, “(Re)Turn,” 119, emphasis original

59. Badiou, *Manifesto*, 34.

Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (I Cor 1-20b-25)

Once again, Badiou's summing comment on this passage is "It is through the invention of a language wherein folly, scandal, and weakness supplant knowing reason, order, and power. . ."<sup>60</sup> Revising his reading in a historicistic direction, I hope to be able to preserve what I take to be its signal insight as I have stated above, but also to capture something of its import that is lost in the resolutely antihistoricist mode of Badiou's own reading.

I propose a different context for reading this passage in Paul than the metaphysical one offered by Badiou. I would suggest that there is already a language for Paul, indeed a very ancient one, wherein folly, scandal, and weakness supplant knowing reason, order, and power, namely the language of Sophism. The crucial point is to move beyond the notion of sophists and rhetors as mere teachers of a technique—or worse, charlatans—and to see them as thinkers in their own right. We need to move beyond the negative and pejorative senses that sophistry has had for so many centuries.<sup>61</sup> A recent writer has put this well:

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60. Badiou, *Saint*, 47.

61. This is an intellectual project that has been going on now for a century, largely inspired, it seems, by Nietzsche. See, inter alia, John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, Studies in Rhetoric/communication. (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). Paul's own affinities to Nietzsche have been adumbrated by Badiou in ways that are different from my own sense of these. On Nietzsche himself as the originator of contemporary anti-platonism (that which I am pleased to call the third sophistic), see Badiou, *Manifesto*, 99.

‘Sophist’ is a dirty word in the history of philosophy (since it is virtually synonymous with ‘practitioner of rhetoric’); in some mouths it is also virtually synonymous with ‘liar,’ ‘opportunist,’ or ‘con man.’ Nevertheless, if one is willing to treat the term sophist as a descriptive one rather than a pure pejorative—as a description of a group of thinkers expressing a secularism, relativism and pluralism in thought not unlike that with which we are familiar today (rather than those who are inevitably wrong because Socrates and Plato must inevitably be right) the term loses its menace.<sup>62</sup>

Taking a look at Protagoras, the earliest and one of the greatest of the Sophists, we can find an explicit anti-philosopher. A classic (scandalous) example of a term of sophistic art is “making the weaker cause the stronger.” Invented by Protagoras, if not by the surely legendary Corax and Tisias, “making the weaker cause the stronger,” has generally been interpreted as making the worse decision or course of action seem the better for reasons of gain or other cynical motive. So fraught with the fraudulent had this term become that it is Aristophanes’s charge against Socrates in *The Clouds* (and, of course, in that play Socrates is himself a Sophist par excellence). There is also more than a hint of a suggestion that this charge, derived from Aristophanes, was a major cause of the execution of Socrates only a year or so after the production of the play (Apology 18b).

According to Aristotle this topos is almost a metonym of the entire rhetorical/sophistic [eristic] enterprise:

The *Art* of Corax is made up of this topic; for example, if a weak man were charged with assault, he should be acquitted as not being a likely suspect for the

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62. Michael G. Dzialo, “Legal and Philosophical Fictions: At the Line Where the Two Become One,” *Argumentation* 12 (1998): 219.

charge; for it is not probably [that a weak man would attack another]. And if he is a likely suspect, for example, if he is strong, [he should also be acquitted]; for it is not likely [that he would start the fight] for the very reason that it was going to seem probable. And similarly in other cases; for necessarily, a person is either a likely suspect or not a likely suspect for a charge. Both alternatives seem probably, but one really is probably, the other so not generally, only in the circumstances mentioned. And this is to “make the weaker seem the better cause.” Thus, people were rightly angry at the declaration of Protagoras; for it is a lie and not true but a fallacious probability and a part of no art except rhetoric and eristic [1402a].<sup>63</sup>

It is worthwhile, I think, to spend a little time glossing this passage, for through it we can arrive, against Aristotle’s grain, at a more sympathetic reading of the topos and thence to its value for a reading of Paul. For Aristotle, of course, as for philosophical (and authoritarian) thinkers before him, rendering the weaker the stronger is only a matter of a lie. For Aristotle it seems that we can know in advance which is the “better” cause, the sophist/rhetor himself knows that too, and, therefore, the activity of rhetoric consists merely of slyly overturning the truth with a lie, making the weaker cause *seem* the better.<sup>64</sup> It is this understanding of sophistical rhetoric that motivates philosophical disdain for Sophism from Plato to Badiou.

There is, however, a bit of an interpretative puzzle in Aristotle’s statement. In the beginning of it, he discusses a certain topos or enthymeme, allegedly invented by Corax, and names it making the weaker cause the better. Then, however, he speaks of the people as being rightly angry at the declaration of Protagoras, an apparent reference to an

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63. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George Alexander Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 210.

64. Cf. discussion of epistemological confidence in Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 34.

incident that later (in Diogenes Laertius??) is narrated as a deportation of Protagoras that resulted in his death. However, it seems highly unlikely that it is the making of the weaker cause the better that allegedly caused the Athenian ire, for that is no declaration [τὸ Πρωταγόρου ἐπάγγελμα] but a practice and, moreover, seemingly attributed by Aristotle to Corax and not Protagoras. It seems that Aristotle refers then to some or another declaration of Protagoras that is associated with or productive of or derived from the practice of making the weaker cause the stronger.

As Kennedy points out,<sup>65</sup> there are two candidates for the *declaration* of Protagoras that might have aroused the ire of the Athenian demos. Not choosing between them, but reading both of them together as pieces of a certain *theoretical* whole will further my investigation here. The first is the (in)famous utterance at the opening sentence of Protagoras's lost treatise, *On the Gods*, as reported by Diogenes Laertius and a host of ancient witnesses (Plato being the earliest but only affording a partial quotation or even allusion [Thaetetus 162d]). The fullest version of the statement as extant in Diogenes reads: "Concerning the gods I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist, or what form they might have, for there is much to prevent one's knowing: the obscurity of the subject<sup>66</sup> and the shortness of man's life."<sup>67</sup> According to Diogenes (and

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65. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 210, n. 254.

66. On this phrase, Schiappa writes: "What Protagoras had in mind as 'the obscurity of the subject' is difficult to say. *Adélotês*, translated above as 'obscurity,' can also imply uncertainty, to be in the dark about, or not evident to sense. One can imagine a number of reasons why the gods are a 'subject' too obscure to reason about confidently," Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 143.

67. Hermann Diels and Rosamond Kent Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, ed. Rosamond

Philostratus<sup>68</sup>), it was owing precisely to this statement that Protagoras was exiled from Athens.<sup>69</sup> Edward Schiappa shows, however, that there is very little reason to credit this story, and, moreover, following Werner Jaeger, demonstrates that this fragment is not a statement of agnosticism—or worse, atheism—as it is frequently taken to be but rather a statement of a human-centered (or anthropological) origin for religion, denying only that theology provides knowledge useful for deciding philosophical matters.<sup>70</sup> What is finally to the point (and to my point) is Jaap Mansfield’s insight that “as soon as an important thinker says that the notion of ‘gods’ is epistemologically irrelevant as far as he is concerned, this cannot but have far-reaching consequences for his notion of ‘man.’”<sup>71</sup> Given, moreover, that the content of the statement is epistemological, then the shift in the notion of “man” involved also has to do with man’s knowing or not knowing, or, in Badiou’s terms, a “truth procedure.”

And this brings us neatly to the next prospect for a Protagorean statement that might have been what really made the Athenians angry according to Aristotle, namely Protagoras’s notorious “the human is the measure” fragment: “Of all things, the human is the measure; of that which is, that it is, and of that which is not, that it is not” [καὶ ὁ

Kent Sprague (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 20. On this last phrase, Schiappa (*Protagoras*, 143) has compared Empedocles’s claim that life is too short to acquire knowledge of ‘the whole.’

68. Diels and Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 6.

69. Diels and Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 4.

70. Schiappa, *Protagoras*, 144–48.

71. Jaap Mansfield, “Protagoras on Epistemological Obstacles and Persons,” in *The Sophists and Their Legacy*, ed. G. B. Kerferd (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981), 43.

Π. δὲ βούλεται πάντων χρημάτων εἶναι μέτρων τὸν ἄνθρωπον τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν].<sup>72</sup> Although this is not the place to go into the myriad philological and philosophical issues involved in the interpretation of this passage,<sup>73</sup> what is crucial for my argument here is to note the close relation between the denial of human knowledge of gods and the insistence that (subjective or relative<sup>74</sup>) human perception is the only criterion that there is. If we take the two statements together (which they seem rarely to be), we can see an epistemological theory begin to emerge at least inchoately. Since the gods are epistemologically irrelevant (i.e., there may very well be gods but we don't know anything about them),<sup>75</sup> therefore there is no criterion by which judgments can be made other than human perception (although this latter term may be anachronistic).

In other words, the major focus of each of Protagoras's two most famous "declarations" is entirely epistemological and moves in the direction of an indeterminacy principle. It follows that in any given forensic contest or in any given metaphysical inquiry, since we know nothing of the gods *and* human experience is the measure of truth, there can be no determination of absolute truth through logic alone. Combining our analyses of these two famous Protagorean utterances, we can easily understand why

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72. Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, Griechisch und Deutsch.*, ed. Walther Kranz (Zürich: Weidmann, 1966), 258 in Sextus's formulation. Once again, we have an earlier Platonic citation of the principle as well.

73. for which, see Schiappa, *Protagoras*, 117–33.

74. For this distinction, see Schiappa, *Protagoras*, 129–30.

75. When this is combined with Protagoras's evident continued practice of worship of the gods and other observances, one might dream up an early version of Pascal's wager, but a highly sophisticated one.

“[Protagoras] was the first to say that on every issue there are two arguments opposed to each other.<sup>76</sup> [Καὶ πρῶτος ἔφη δύο λόγους εἶναι περὶ παντὸς πράγματος ἀντικειμένους ἀλλήλοις [DL 9.51].” As a recent critical legal scholar, Michael Dzialo, has defined it, this comes startling close to the modern doctrine of legal indeterminacy: “legal doctrine can never determine a legal outcome because every argument in favor of a particular outcome can be met with an equally valid counterargument.”<sup>77</sup> Now, however, we must return to Aristotle, for according to the passage, there is a direct entailment between these snippets of Protagoras’s epistemology and the practice of the Sophists of making the weaker cause the stronger. What is that entailment?

Reading directly against the grain of Aristotle’s text, I would answer this question in a way that credits the Sophists and does not discredit them. In any given situation, one side or the other may appear more strong at the outset. Rather than glossing the weaker and stronger argument phrase as Aristotle does, then, as making the weaker cause appear the stronger, one could easily gloss it as making the apparently weaker cause the

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76. Diels and Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, 21. Schiappa discusses at length difficulties with this translation (a traditional one, to be sure) in that it reduces “all sophistic teaching to rhetoric” (Schiappa, *Protagoras*, 90), by which he means rhetoric itself in its least elevated acceptance, essentially how Kennedy takes it as sort of a founding charter for debating societies, i.e., simply it is possible to organize a debate on any topic. I cannot make short work of Schiappa’s compelling discussion but suffice it to say that by the end Protagoras’s statement makes a profound philosophical point, (Schiappa, *Protagoras*, 91–100), in which, again we find Protagoras on the side of Heraclitus against Parmenides (Schiappa, *Protagoras*, 92). This is a discussion for another venue, however, and I hope to come back to it.

77. Dzialo, “Legal,” 217.

stronger. This, then, ascribes great ethical and political force to the Protagorean practice and training, for it involves the systematic critical overturning of what appears to people to be the truth, not, however as in Platonic terms, where the real truth, the “really real,” *episteme*, will be revealed but rather in the interest of an educated *doxa*, of an educated decision regarding probability within a given particular situation. As Johan Vos has shown, the practice “says nothing about the true or intrinsic values of the arguments. An argument can be weaker simply because the majority do not accept it or because the opponent has better argumentative skills.”<sup>78</sup> Following this reasoning, it may be that indeed even Socrates (that is “the real” Socrates) professed this practice as well and the “charges” against him at his trial would then be well-founded, at least as well-founded as those allegedly brought against Protagoras, charges that is, of impiety and the fulmination of social change. Clearly a case can be made for reading Protagoras’s theory and his practice as an invitation to change the weaker cause and render it the stronger.<sup>79</sup> On this reading, the interpretation from Aristophanes forward, that it consists of making the worse argument (that is the ethically worse or less just argument) defeat the better one through fancy rhetoric and fallacies, is nothing but a parodic slander on the genuine practice of the sophists.

How might we read Paul in such a context? Through analysis of a vitally important documentary papyrus, Bruce Winter establishes the importance and prestige

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78. Johan S. Vos, “‘To Make the Weaker Argument Defeat the Stronger’: Sophistical Argumentation in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts*, ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Übelacker (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2002), 217–31.

79. John Poulakos, “Rhetoric, the Sophists, and the Possible,” *Communications Monographs* 51 (1984): 215–25.

of sophists in first-century Alexandria: “The sophists emerge from *P.Oxy.* 2190 as an important group in the Alexandrian educational system. In an age in which declamation was deemed the best method for advanced education, the sophists were in great demand. . . .The sophists had always charged fees, which distinguished them from the philosophers. It mattered little that philosophers denigrated their professional ability: parents who paid substantial amounts to sophists were acknowledging their primacy in *paideia*.”<sup>80</sup> Sophists were already in the first century among the leaders of the Alexandrian, at any rate, *politeia*, prefiguring already their explicit role in the Second Sophistic of a century later.<sup>81</sup> Dio also provides important evidence for the central role of *rhetors*/sophists at Tarsus in the first century, as well.<sup>82</sup> Nor, as Winter amply demonstrates is *sophist* per se a negative term for Dio. He attacks weak and charlatanical sophists but not sophists per se. Indeed, for him the seven vaunted sages are sophists.<sup>83</sup>

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80. Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 2nd (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 39. It seems not inapposite to note that Winter’s translation of the pair παιδεία καὶ λόγος as “education and rhetoric” (Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 45), certainly implies that rhetoric (like sophism) for him is merely an art of speaking and not a theoretical enterprise of thinking at all. Interestingly, in another collocation, παιθὸς καὶ λόγος, Winter translates the latter as “reason” (Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 47). On p. 53 of the same work, *logos* is translated “reason” even in the first collocation. This all makes a difference.

81. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 49.

82. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 54–55.

83. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 56. See Winter’s further very strong arguments that the term “sophist” is not pejorative for Dio. While Winter is correct to emphasize that reading it as such, as C. P. Jones does, involves an anachronism, Winter only sees the

Winter is also able to make a highly persuasive case for the prevalence and prestige of sophists/rhetors in Corinth, as well.<sup>84</sup> Later thinkers (such as Plutarch) who were not, themselves, sophists also did not use the phrase pejoratively, discussing, rather, particular groups of sophists and rhetors who were charlatans and not the sophistic movement as a whole.<sup>85</sup>

anachronism as proceeding from the fact that later on, *sophistes* is pejorative, but is this not the case for Plato already? This provides support for the view defended in my current work that the Platonic value-system was not as dominant as we might think. On the other hand, Winter seems to suggest on p. 58 that Dio's usage is consonant with Plato's, and he may, of course, be correct in this.

Another very important point is made by Winter when he argues that the very distinction between philosophers and sophists was not as sharp as some would like it to be. See his discussion (Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 116, n. 11 of Graham Stanton (Graham R. Stanton, "Sophists and Philosophers: Problems of Classification," *American Journal of Philology* 94, no. 4 [1973]: 304–06) and Stanley Stowers (Stanley K. Stowers, "Social Status, Public Speaking and Private Teaching," *Novum Testamentum* 26 [1984]: 59–82) on this question, a discussion in which Winter comes down clearly on the side of Stanton's insistence that the distinction is blurred.

84. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 140 for summary of his case. Winter's argument goes to the heart of the methodological question raised by Mitchell, to wit that any argument for specific Hellenistic background in Paul be evaluated by the likelihood that he was aware of that background, Mitchell, "Pauline Accommodation," 199.

85. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 139 is a bit unclear on these points, seeming almost to contradict himself on the same page. Reading the original texts, as I will do presently, bears out the judgments I have presented above.

All of this attests the likelihood that Saul/Paul had imbibed the thought of the Sophists with his mother's milk, as it were. If this meant only that he knew techniques of formal rhetoric as might appear from some recent scholarship, it would remain rather inert knowledge in my opinion. The significance of the observation that Paul inhabited a sophistic world will only come to the fore when we take into account the deep theoretical import of Sophism and its own challenge to any form of epistemological certainty, whether prophetic or philosophical. Although, as I have mentioned, for Winter himself Paul is the antisophist, I believe that this judgment needs nuancing.

Given this back-story, we can reread the crucial passage in I Corinthians itself, not losing, I hope, Badiou's genuine insight into it but seeing the value, as well, of the discarded nameless impurities of historicism. Winter quite brilliantly argues that in vv. 3-5 of chapter 2 of that epistle, when Paul writes, "And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom [οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις], but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power [ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως], that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God," what Paul is actually doing is eschewing the ethos, logos, and pathos of traditional rhetorical training. He will not establish his own worthiness to persuade, nor depend on the power of his logos, nor to seek to create an emotional effect in his listeners. And yet he does seek, nevertheless, to achieve conviction [πίστις], meaning "proof" in general Greek usage but "faith" in Pauline usage,<sup>86</sup> which is, after all, the goal of the ethos, pathos, and logos of rhetoric.<sup>87</sup> (In a convincing demonstration, Mark Given has shown the Paul of Acts 17:31 playing ironically on this

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86. Not only in him, of course, and the question of whose faith, ours or Jesus's is not germane here.

87. Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 157–60.

double-meaning.<sup>88</sup>) But it needs to be noted that in no wise does this claim indicate a total rejection of the epistemological position, and especially the anti-foundationalism, that characterized the sophists as thinkers. As Given has written, “Paul’s epistemology, especially as illustrated by his Christology and theology, did not discourage but rather encouraged the use of an ambiguous, cunning, and deceptive rhetoric of both body and voice,”<sup>89</sup> without—and this is precisely the point—allowing these terms any pejorative force whatsoever, difficult as that may be for us, accidental Platonists all.<sup>90</sup>

Paul may claim, for rhetorical purposes, not to use rhetoric in his discourse, but the claim is, of course, impossible to sustain.<sup>91</sup> Paul is rhetor nonpareil.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, one is tempted to compare his declarations of rhetorical inability in his own and his specular

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88. Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 74.

89. Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 8.

90. “What,” I hear a voice saying, “speak for yourself Platonist!” Let me just say that for decades I have maintained in a more-than-intuitive, less-than-scholarly way that in important, very important ways Plato and Aristotle are one, or, better put, Aristotle is a Platonist too. It is very gratifying indeed to have been vindicated only just now by Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). The practice of dividing the world of thought into Platonists and Aristotelians is, as much, from where I sit, an ideological exclusion of Sophism as it is a real division within philosophy.

91. apparently pace Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 185.

92. Johannes Weiss, “Beiträge zur Paulinischen Rhetorik,” in *Theologische Studien Herrn Wirkl. Oberkonsistorialrath Professor D. Bernhard Weiss zu seinem 70. Geburtstage dargebracht*, Bernhard Weiss and Caspar René Gregory (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1897), 165–247.

opponents' voices as so much rhetoric, much as Isocrates's repeated similar declarations five-hundred years earlier.<sup>93</sup> To see these verses of I Corinthians as only a polemic against sophists or an encouragement to the untutored to express themselves is to miss their major theological force, which Badiou has captured so well. In overstressing Paul's oppositional position to sophisticated rhetoric, as if that were the goal of his speech rather than an instrument towards something else, Winter who has taught us so much, has somewhat missed the mark, I think.<sup>94</sup>

Given has written: "Suffice it so say for now that I believe that deception (*ἀπάτη*) is of great importance for understanding Paul's apocalyptic epistemology and rhetorical strategies, and it leads us into deep and sometimes disturbing aspects of his theology, Christology, soteriology, anthropology, missiology, and ecclesiology."<sup>95</sup> Given goes on to analyze the first chapters of I Corinthians as an instance of Paul's adoption of sophisticated rhetoric, "True rhetoric," as his discursive mode, showing how Paul carefully adopts language of double-meaning to do his persuasive work. Moreover, it is in this context that we can best understand as well Paul's famous (or infamous) utterance in I Corinthians 9:19-23 that he becomes all things to all people, like a Jew to the Jews and lawless to the lawless, in order to win and save souls. After disputing various major lines of interpretation with respect to this passage, Given himself writes that "just as Plato's Socrates feels free to break the rules of dialectic if necessary in order to win an argument, and Aristotle can counsel the use of sophistic *elenchus* to defeat sophists on their own terms, so Paul feels free to leave the world of being for that of seeming, 'to become all

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93. This point was originally made by Hans Dieter Betz, for which see Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 13.

94. Cf. too Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 99, n. 58.

95. *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 5.

things to everyone,' in order to propagate the Truth, his gospel Truth. However different the reasons for their conviction that Truth is real and knowable, however differently they define the Truth, the rhetorical effect is rather analogous: a willingness to employ intentional ambiguity, cunning, and deception to disseminate the Truth, a willingness to employ True rhetoric."<sup>96</sup> The difference between Plato's (and Paul's) "true" rhetoric and the false rhetoric of Sophists comes down, then, to a matter of intention alone; Socrates and Paul do it for the Truth, the Sophists for the money, but for this latter judgment we have only the word of their enemies. I would rather suggest that the difference lies here: the Sophists in their travels from place to place, from culture to culture, have learned that everywhere folks have different customs; they relativize truth and teach an art of living well and honestly in a world in which there are two sides to every question, while Plato finally cannot stand such a world and thus escape to another one in which finally there is an extramundane, extralogical source of Truth, the forms. Paul is all things for all people, among Sophists a Sophist, but like Plato in that he too finally seeks that extramundane absolute truth—for Paul, Christ and him crucified. As Susan Jarratt has put it, "Their effectiveness in teaching this *technē* derived in part from their experiences of different cultures; they behaved and taught that notions of 'truth' had to be adjusted to fit the ways of a particular audience in a certain time and with a certain set of beliefs and laws."<sup>97</sup> The ancient Sophists too, were all things to all people.<sup>98</sup>

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96. Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 117.

97. Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), xv.

98. Interestingly, notwithstanding the seven options for "Hellenistic" background for this verse cited by Mitchell, "Pauline Accommodation," 198, the one that does not figure at all, is not even mentioned, is Sophism. Nor does Mitchell herself, in her

Paul is aware of the weakness of his position from the point of view of logic [=wisdom] and Scripture/Jesus' tradition [=signs], and yet seeks mightily to make the weaker cause the stronger. Moreover, as Vos points out, Paul is explicitly aware—Protagoras-like—that at many points equally good arguments could be produced for the other side, or, alternatively that his own arguments could lead to results that he hardly wants.<sup>99</sup> μή γένοιτο! Paul explicitly describes his own logos as well as his own ethos and even that of his Corinthian congregation as the weaker, “nevertheless, Paul presented his position so strongly that he convinced the majority of Christian believers from his time until the present day”<sup>100</sup> and hence made the weaker cause the stronger.

Having come this far, however, Vos's argument now breaks down in a rather village-atheist like attack on Paul's integrity. Vos completely *accepts* the philosophically pejorative characterization of the praxis of making the weaker cause the stronger, simply describing Paul in as negative a guise as any ancient philosophical anti-rhetor could wish, concluding that “all [the] characteristics of the ‘mal-artful arts’ of rhetoric mentioned by Sextus Empiricus can be found in Paul's interpretation.”<sup>101</sup> Invoking rather the defense of Protagoras that I have briefly adumbrated above, I would concur in seeing Paul as a sophist (at least at times), rejecting entirely (as I do for Protagoras himself) any of the pejorative connotations of that term. Or better and more modestly put, it seems to me

excellent and illuminating discussion, even pick up on Clement of Alexandria's explicit mention of the sophists in this context (Strom. 7.9), despite citing the Clementine passage, “Pauline Accommodation,” 204. Rehabilitating Sophism will be very much to the point, I think.

99. Vos, “To Make.”

100. Vos, “To Make.”

101. Vos, “To Make.”

that Paul is to be found at least as much among those ancient antiphilosophers, the Sophists, as among the philosophers. At least as much as Paul calls for fidelity to an event, he envisions also social change in which the weak are made strong: “If rhetoric is to mean anything as a practice, a theory of discourse, or a philosophy by which to understand the world, it must be given the potential to transform the world. If there is to be a substantive difference between ‘rhetoric’ and ‘propaganda,’ then it must start from the following distinction: propaganda is the invitation to envision the world according to the people who own and rule it. Rhetoric is the invitation to change the world.”<sup>102</sup>

In this context, Paul’s weakness made strong can be read anew, as we can read anew his Hellenicity among Greeks and his Jewishness among Jews. Paul’s challenge to Greek wisdom is precisely an attack on the epistemological certainty that is the hallmark of the bulk of philosophy (to be sure, there are *sophisticated* versions of philosophy that interrogate that as well). Both his capacity for making the weaker cause the stronger and his being all things to all people can be read in this sophisticated context as having positive political import, providing surprisingly a way beyond, a poros through the aporiae of ethnic particularism and liberal universalism. Paul’s seeming equivocation precisely on this issue, both asserting the value of Jewish difference and totally disdaining it almost at one and the same moment would be seen on this account as a negotiation of difference, precisely in a Sophistical and rhetorical manner—both in form and in substance, insofar as it is one of the very substantive characteristics of Sophists to understand that they can be Athenians in Athens and Corinthians in Corinth—and not the adoption of a

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102. Omar Swartz, *The Rise of Rhetoric and Its Intersections with Contemporary Critical Thought*, Polemics Series (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1998), 40. Would that this book, frequently stirring and more than occasionally illuminating, had undergone editing, even copy-editing, before being printed by Westview Press.

position.<sup>103</sup> This is then a somewhat different Paul from the Paul of my own Paul book, too, in which I read him rather too definitely as a Platonist. I would argue now that as both theorist of the event and a practicing Sophist, Paul is not laying claim to a “hellenizing” universal truth as knowledge-to-be-possession but performing an act of faith or fidelity in or to the radical transformations that may be effected within the rhetorical negotiation of difference. This Paul would be then a postcolonial Sophist and also a Paul who could conceivably provide more of a resource for negotiations of democratic differences as well. At the same time, I cannot abandon my sense that even such a more complexly theorized Paul still evacuates of significance histories, memories, practices, discourses that I hold most dear as my own. There *is* something troubling about itinerant Sophists who relativize everything in both their cosmopolitanism and insistence that for everything there are two *logoi*.

In his own zeal against the Sophists—which could indeed be another title for his *Manifesto*—Badiou cannot see the Sophist in Paul, and this proud adherent of the third Sophistic would argue, misses, therefore, much that is valuable for thought in the epistles. The task is—and I, of course, agree with Badiou that it is—somehow to make sense of a Paul for those of us who do not know Christ and him crucified. But it is precisely here that I don’t somehow “get” Badiou. To my mind in the subtraction of everything but militance itself and fidelity, Badiou leaves us with almost nothing of value. Having subtracted everything of the contingent, the historical, even the individual in his account of Paul, he is left knowing nothing but Paul asserting Jesus Christ and him crucified (or resurrected). It is finally unclear from Badiou’s Paul-book, especially when read in the context of the Badiouish corpus as a whole, whether Paul is to be seen as a

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103. I am grateful to Virginia Burrus for conversations that have led to this formulation.

positively marked figure, antiphilosophical but in his militance on the side of those possibilities that constitute the conditions of philosophy for Badiou, or as on the negative side of those enemies of truth whom Badiou denounces as adherents of the Great Sophistry. Once again, we are thrown back on Badiou's professed Platonism<sup>104</sup> in realizing that it doesn't matter to him what Paul says at all.<sup>105</sup> The manner of his militance, the dehistoricization of all truth, is critical. It is not fortuitous. For Badiou in some profound sense, all historicism is the antithesis of truth: "Philosophy must break, from within itself, with historicism. . . .It must be bold enough to present its concepts without first bringing them in from of the tribunal of their historical moment."<sup>106</sup> In his denial of the name philosophy to Wittgenstein and Derrida—referred to by him as neo-Sophists—, Badiou reproduces the Platonic denial of the name philosophy to Gorgias, Protagoras, and Isocrates, claiming it only for his brand of "transversal" thinking. For this Sophist, at any rate, such philosophy will always be a dead letter or an unreadable one at any rate.

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104. "Today the Nietzschean diagnosis must be toppled. The century and Europe must imperatively be cured of anti-Platonism. Philosophy shall only exist insofar as it proposes, to match the needs of our times, a new step in the history of the category of truth," Badiou, *Manifesto*, 101.

105. Badiou, "(Re)Turn," 128–31.

106. Badiou, "(Re)Turn," 114.

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