

Alain Badiou. *Philosophy for Militants*. Trans. Bruno Bosteels. Verso Books 2015. 96 pp. \$16.00 CAD (Hardcover ISBN 9781844679867); \$11.95 CAD (Paperback ISBN 9781781688694).

Alain Badiou's *Philosophy for Militants* is a short, provocative book that considers the role of philosophy in political struggle. This book is timely as its release coincides with a blossoming of protest around the world from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street to #BlackLivesMatter. While the book is no handbook for militancy, no Mao's *Little Red Book*, Badiou's Maoist philosophy certainly comes through as indispensable to modern political struggles.

Readers of Badiou will find cogent parallels to Badiou's more recent works on communism, and his call for a resurgent communism will no doubt be familiar. Unlike his previous works, *Philosophy for Militants* is not burdened with the mathematic complexity of his earlier work nor the finessed expositions on ontology of Badiou's middle period. This makes the book readable for Badiou aficionados, as well as new readers unfamiliar with Badiou, militancy, or communism.

Bruno Bosteels's translator's foreword begins the text. Readers will find an interesting summary of Badiou's findings as well as a convincing attempt to place this work in Badiou's oeuvre. Of particular interest for this reader was Bosteels's discussion of militancy's etymology (xix). Framing a militant as 'someone who goes the full mile,' recasts militancy as about commitment more than violence, opening up Badiou's philosophy for not only revolutionary Maoist philosophers and advocates, but also those reformists more akin to later Benedetto Croce (xix).

For Badiou, philosophy is regulated by politics, and not, as might be thought, the regulator of politics. This resonates with Badiou's materialism, and also disavows the sort of traditional liberal 'philosophy-is-truth-seeking' current still prevalent in much philosophy. For materialists, Badiou provides an orientation to philosophy that appreciates the ways in which it is mediated by politics, place, and other constraints. This should resonate with philosophers and activists who feel threatened by economics, politics, and the university. No wonder one must be careful about what one publishes or where. No wonder work is derided as too political and not philosophical enough. These situations highlight the ways in which Badiou is correct about politics' regulating role with respect to philosophy.

The book is divided into three sections: 'The Enigmatic Relationship Between Philosophy and Politics,' 'The Figure of the Solider,' and 'Politics as Nonexpressive Dialectics.' The first section is by far the longest, and readers are rewarded with a rich discussion of this relationship. Readers will find Badiou's argument that 'philosophy is to some extent always the same thing' provocative because it underscores the ways in which theorists consistently think their idea is the newest and the indebtedness of philosophy to history (10). Scholars advising advanced undergraduate students and graduate students might encourage their advisees to read Badiou for a little humility. Badiou's discussion of emancipatory politics also recalls earlier work in the communist tradition and emphasizes philosophy's importance to emancipation (29).

'The Figure of the Solider' is less developed by virtue of its references to a diverse group of thinkers. Badiou concludes: 'We must create new symbolic forms for our collective actions,' but does not quite lead the reader to what those forms might be or how one might think through these forms (44). Badiou's discussion of heroism at the beginning of this section seems indebted to Elisabeth Roudinesco's discussion of George Canguilhem and heroism from 2008's *Philosophy in Turbulent Times: Canguilhem, Sartre, Foucault, Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida*, although Badiou does not explore this work. For a philosophy of heroism, students might actively read this section and the Canguilhem chapter together to perhaps move the philosophy of heroism forward.

In 'Politics as Nonexpressive Dialectics,' Badiou attempts to theorize collective action. He contrasts law and desire, pays homage to Lenin and class-based approaches to collectivity, and theorizes the need for a new fiction to guide our political belief. This emphasis on fiction opens up the possibility for new theories of collectivity and also urges activists to think outside standard notions of class, identity, and political subjectivity. Badiou is not prescriptive in that he does not write what fiction should be and for whom, but he does thoroughly convince this reviewer that fiction is indispensable to politics. Readers interested in social movements, invitational rhetoric, group action, and identity politics will find this section particularly rewarding.

The book is not without faults, however. Readers might welcome more notes or annotations. Badiou's references are sometimes cryptic, particularly if one is not familiar with philosophy or communism. The book's short length renders not adding this source material a missed opportunity. Furthermore, the book's length is so short that readers may feel disappointed by the text's academic rigor. Each of the sections was originally a talk, and as is common in talks, much of the argumentation errs toward claims and less complete arguments. Readers will need to consult Badiou's longer works to get a fuller sense of his ideas about politics and philosophy.

Overall, Badiou has provided the reader with thought-provoking material even as he leaves the reader hungry for more. This book is recommended for Badiou, social movement, and communist scholars. It might also be a welcome addition to advanced classes in social theory, Marxism or communism, and politics and identity. While certainly not perfect, this text provides an engaging read from one of our most important living philosophers.

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