

# Comparing alain badiou's ideas in his books being and event and logics of worlds ...

[Science](#), [Mathematics](#)



## - Introduction

Alain Badiou is a French philosopher, born in 1937 to a war-ravaged France. Throughout the years, he has written a number of important texts; the two most important of these texts were *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds*. As philosophical texts, they caused a great deal of noise and discussion in the philosophical community.

Badiou has addressed a number of important philosophical concepts in these texts, including the concepts of truth and being-- the latter of which became the subject of one of his most important texts, *Being and Event*. To discuss his views on these subjects, Badiou often uses a number of important mathematical concepts in his work. This use of mathematics has gained him praise from some fields of philosophy, while others have lambasted him for trying to pigeonhole philosophical concepts into mathematics.

Badiou himself admits that he was shaped by the events that he experienced as a youth; these events were the often-chaotic reality of the world in the 1960s and 1970s. The philosopher became part of one of the most prestigious French universities in the tertiary educational system in Paris. Badiou continues to be a part of this educational system in France to this day.

## - Context and Historical Overview

It is important to understand the context in which a text is conceived of and released, especially a philosophical text. Badiou is as much a product of his environment as any other philosopher; recognizing the features of his work is fundamentally important in the quest to compare and contrast newer work with older work for philosophers. The first text that the author completed,

entitled *Being and Event*, was written in 1988, and then translated into English for the first time in 2005. In terms of politics and philosophy, the era in which this text was written is fundamentally important; Badiou had lived through a number of terrible events in his lifetime, and was about to see the end of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of East Germany. These were all very important, very impactful events, and undoubtedly they shaped Badiou's worldview and his search for truth and being.

Although not considered to be a modernist thinker, Badiou is certainly not a post-modernist thinker; his arguments most closely line up with the poststructuralist forms of thought, although they deviate from this reality as well. Postmodernism favors a skeptical approach to culture, art, literature, and philosophy; Badiou demonstrates little of that apparent skepticism in his work. However, the tendency towards deconstruction is apparent in his work, especially as he deconstructs social concepts into mathematical ones.

Indeed, the best umbrella under which to categorize Badiou is, perhaps, post-structuralism; the other French thinkers of his time were post-structuralists, understanding reality not as a structure modeled on language, as the structuralists would have suggested. Instead, post-structuralists would suggest that language, as a social construct, cannot be the structure upon which culture is built, as it cannot stand on its own without the reality of human culture to sustain it.

- *Being and Event*

First published in 1988, *Being and Event* was the first major work that Badiou published. In *Being and Event*, Badiou espoused a few of his central philosophies, many of which would become central to his train of thought in

his other works. Badiou's work in *Being and Event* can be described as decidedly poststructuralist, with constructivist tendencies; Badiou writes extensively about how he wants to break out of the confines of language and express philosophy on a much truer level.

One of the problems that Badiou attacks with fervor in *Being and Event* is the idea that beings are singular. Badiou suggests, instead, that there is multiplicity to beings, writing extensively on the nature of singularity and multiplicity. Badiou writes: "because the law is the count-as-one, nothing is presented in a situation which is not counted: the situation envelops existence with the one. Nothing is presentable in a situation otherwise than under the effect of structure, that is, under the form of the one and its composition in consistent multiplicities. The one is thereby not only the regime of structured presentation but also the regime of the possible of presentation itself. In a non-ontological (thus non-mathematical) situation, the multiple is possible only insofar as it is explicitly ordered by the law according to the one of the count. Inside the situation there is no graspable inconsistency which would be subtracted from the count and thus a-structured. Any situation, seized in its immanence, thus reverses the inaugural axiom of our entire procedure" (52). However, despite the ontological argument and the intellectual discussion that Badiou is introducing, the individual has a sense of being, and of him or herself: and the sense of being that one has is singular.

It is not only the individual pieces of a human being that Badiou forces into a set; humanity itself is the structural concept of a set, while each individual human being within the set work together to make up what can be referred

to as the set that is humanity. Every human being in the world contributes to this set. Badiou also spends some time considering the outcomes for everything that does not fall into the set of humanity as well.

Perhaps the other fundamentally important concept contained within Badiou's theory of the set is the concept of the being. The being is defined as the void set by Badiou, or the set to which no elements belong. He comes to this conclusion through a fundamental mathematical tenet: a set cannot contain or belong to itself, so the being must be the void set, which contains nothing and is contained within nothing.

#### - Logics of Worlds

The Logics of Worlds is often considered to be the sequel to Badiou's first work, Being and Event. They are both philosophical works that address similar issues; in both pieces, Badiou's main focus is to discover the nature of being and encompass that nature of being into mathematical language. This mathematical language is used to help Badiou escape from the jail of everyday language. Badiou notes that normal, everyday language acts almost like a trap, keeping meaning locked away within structural and cultural realities that hide meanings from the philosopher.

In Logics of Worlds, Badiou has a major goal: he is focused on building a theory of radical novelty. This idea of radical novelty is not one that is unique to Badiou; other thinkers have named radical novelty differently. For instance, mathematician and philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb calls this "radical novelty" the "black swan." Radical novelty is an unforeseeable event or change, much like Taleb's metaphorical black swan event which cannot be seen before it happens or prepared for in any way.

Most of the text of *Being and Event* is spent developing a quite elaborate mathematical structural system that utilized ontology based in mathematical models and structures. This structure was then used to discuss set theory and the nature of being; it defined much of the world (indeed, all of humanity) using this set theory. The innovative structure that is developed in *Being and Event* then, is formal ontology based on mathematical theorems and mathematical functionality.

What do each of these events look like? In *Logic of Worlds*, Badiou looks at the events that occur that make up the idea of “natural belief” in the contemporary world, and what definitions exist as a framework for these ideas. Badiou writes, “We call atomic object-component, or simply ‘atom’, an object-component which, intuitively, has at most one element in the following sense: if there is an element of A about which it can be said that it belongs absolutely to the component, there is only one. This means that every other element that belongs to the component absolutely is identical, within appearing, to the first (the function of appearing has the maximum value M when it evaluates the identity of the two elements in question)” (247). Badiou then suggests that the solution to the contemporary obsession with “materialist dialectic” is unhesitating affirmation and realization of truths that are generally denied by the public.

Badiou has a somewhat unique notion of what consists of truths; these truths are mathematical truths in addition to philosophical truths. Badiou’s idea of the truth-- or perhaps more ideologically, Truths-- pieces of information that have the ability to break from the existence of any particular language or knowledge structure as a whole. This, Badiou suggests, is the type of truth

that is a heterodox concept; something not held into strict roles by the perceptions of reality that other individuals have.

Logics of Worlds is a book that takes the philosophical foundations of Being and Event and lays down further paths into the discussions and concepts addressed within Being and Event. Although it can stand on its own, it is best read as a piece that exists within the context of Being and Event.

#### - Significant Philosophical Similarities

Being and Event and Logics of Worlds both investigate the philosophical meaning behind set theory and how this can apply to humanity as a whole.

As a postmodernist thinker in many ways, Badiou suggests that the issue of the plurality of the human existence has never been properly addressed; human beings and humanity as a whole, Badiou suggests in both of these texts, are members of different set pieces. The being-- the unit of being-- is part of the void set, which cannot contain itself and does not contain the void set either.

Logics of Worlds borrows language from the earlier philosophical work that Badiou created; much of the mathematical language, for instance, is the same. The focus was different for the two works. Being and Event was focused on the definition of being and event in an ontological structure and sense, while Logics of Worlds is more concerned with the phenomenal elements of events.

Logic of Worlds expands upon the philosophy that Badiou finds so alluring, suggesting that the appearance of events is governed by certain conditions. These conditions can be manipulated and changed; it is these appearances and different conditions which Badiou terms his " worlds." These worlds are

merely an extension of the theory of sets that Badiou sets forth in his first text, *Being and Event*. The relationship between being, event, and appearance is examined in the later text *Logic of Worlds*, after Badiou has had some time to examine the relationships between the ideas and the mathematical concepts that he lays out in his first text.

Badiou also examines the ideas of excrescence, normality, and singularity throughout these texts. Excrescence is the excess growth of a particular institution within the set of human society; the example that Badiou gives, for instance, is the military-industrial complex. The status of a particular excrescence is linked in such a way that it cannot be removed from the initial stages of what Badiou terms a "truth procedure." The excrescence that Badiou refers to often plays a significant role in the way historical events occur. Normality, to Badiou, is vastly different in concept than the general concept of normality. A normal event is one that occurs when the idea being represented and presented coincide: this is another significant part of the set theory that Badiou suggests as true. Normal elements of the set are both self-contained and self-representative. Conversely, the singularity represents a term that is presented within a set but is not represented within that particular set.

#### - Significant Philosophical Differences

Despite *Logic of Worlds* being an extension of the philosophy laid out in *Being and Event*, there are also some distinct differences between the two pieces and the philosophies that are contained within them. *Being and Event* first introduces the idea of radical change as a result of an unexpected event, but it is *Logic of Worlds* where this theoretical idea is truly fleshed out.



Being and Event is a text that defines an ontological structure for conditions for a specific event, but Logic of Worlds defines the appearance of events. The appearance of events is what causes these events to come about; events and their appearance become one of the main thematic ideas of Logic of Worlds. The titular worlds described in the latter text are also something that is new to the philosophical world that Badiou has created; in Logic of Worlds, the worlds that are created are defined by Badiou as “determinate, structured situations.” These situations-- and the rules that govern these situations-- are the worlds that Badiou is discussing in the title to this particular work.

Badiou has made a number of changes to his original theory in his second piece regarding events and being. He has not thrown out the structure that he created entirely, but he has built significantly upon the theoretical framework that was outlined in the first text. There are degrees of existence, Badiou suggests; there are also degrees of identity that exist between two objects. As the degree of identity changes, the degree of intensity of appearance is changed for the object.

Being and Event created a theory of the structure of being: the structure of being for any particular individual can be modeled by set theory, according to Badiou. The second text takes the philosophical basis that was created by Being and Event and tries to model the domain of appearing, using the mathematical constructs that were designed by the author in the first text.

- Discussion and Conclusion

There is, according to Badiou, a structural expectation for the random event

in the world, and it should be taken into account when considering the structure of the world as a whole. Badiou writes: “ Take any situation in particular. It has been said that its structure-the regime of the count-as-one- splits the multiple which is presented there: splits it into consistency (the composition of ones) and inconsistency (the inertia of the domain) .

However, inconsistency is not actually presented as such since all presentation is under the law of the count. Inconsistency as pure multiple is solely the presupposition that prior to the count the one is not. Yet what is explicit in any situation is rather that the one is. In general, a situation is not such that the thesis 'the one is not' can be presented therein” (52).

Inconsistency is a part of life-- so much a part of life that it can be written into a mathematical structure designed to give people the basis for discussing random, chaotic events within a set system. Badiou attempts to remove himself completely from the social constructs that have been used to describe society in the past, and by doing so, creates a mathematical construct and discussion of events, worlds and appearance.