The recently translated works of Alain Badiou support the emergence of an anti-phenomenological paradigm of metaphysical philosophy\(^1\) which owes much in inspiration to the work of the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Let us recall the central tenets of Althusser’s ‘theoretical anti-humanism’ first, for this is arguably the impetus behind Badiou’s more recent attempts to combine something like a Marxist politics on the one hand, and a scientific ontology comparable to Althusser’s most innovative work in *Reading Capital* on the other.

Althusser’s concept of history, and of historical materialism, relies on Marx’s statement in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* that men make their own history in circumstances *not* chosen by themselves. Written and published in 1852, according to Althusser Marx’s famous statement belongs to the so-called ‘transitional’ phase of Marx’s writings, by which time Marx himself had outgrown his youthful, humanist conception of the ‘essence of man’, and had begun to conceive ‘man’ as a product of the historical forces and relations of production. Moreover, man, or rather *bourgeois* man, is ‘conceived’ in capitalist society not just as a specific effect of *ideological* practice, but also as a complex

---

\(^1\) The case against phenomenology in recent French philosophy is made by Alliez 1995.
(overdetermined) arrangement of theoretical, economic and political practices which comprise the totality of the historical conjuncture.

The most groundbreaking aspect of Althusser’s theoretical anti-humanism was, and remains, (i) the specificity of the concept of man (like Foucault, Althusserian materialism is founded on the transient, symptomatic status of ‘man’ in the ‘history’ of science) and (ii) of the concept of specificity in general. Yet it also remains the most inconsistent and potentially self-destructive aspect of any would-be Marxist philosophy to relegate ‘man’ and ‘history’ to the status of scientific variables in the development of a problematic whose Theory, Althusser reminds us, does not (yet) exist. For Althusser, moreover, ‘Marxist philosophy’ would effectively be a non-philosophy in everything but name.

Extending Althusser’s anti-humanism to its logical extremes, the work of Alain Badiou has, since his early Maoist writings of the 1970s, consistently refused any confusion of the political realm proper to revolutionary Marxist activism, and the scientific realm, which excludes any historical interpretation whatsoever. Indeed, we can say that Badiou goes one stage further than Althusser, much like Gilles Deleuze, not just in evacuating the human from the field of scientific analysis, but also in denying any meaning to the phenomena of consciousness. Unlike Althusser, Badiou is certainly not afraid of the potentially disastrous consequences for Marxism of relinquishing the phenomenological sense [Sinn] of terms like ‘man’ and ‘history’. This dual anti-humanist and anti-phenomenological break with the history of Marxism, and with history per se, is rather anticipated by Badiou as the condition of re-injecting both philosophy and politics (and certainly against the current of contemporary political philosophy) with an urgent dose of iconoclasm.

Perhaps it may seem strange, then, that Badiou should single out Plato for this task, a philosopher whose theory of ideas was widely regarded as too backward by the Althusserian school (hence prompting its turn to Spinoza), or famously denigrated as ‘totalitarian’ by the ‘new philosophers’ in France. In Badiou’s Manifesto for Philosophy, the legacy of Plato appears more than worthy of defence. Not, that is, as a political philosophy. For Badiou, there is no confusion to be had between philosophy in itself, and politics. To criticise political philosophy – which he does elsewhere with a vengeance – is not to criticise philosophy per se. What is philosophy for, then, if not diplomatic reflection on the raw demands of politics?

[Philosophy] does not exist within all historic configurations; its way of being is discontinuity in time as in space. It must thus be presupposed that it requires particular conditions. . . . The conditions of philosophy are

---

3 See Badiou 1998.