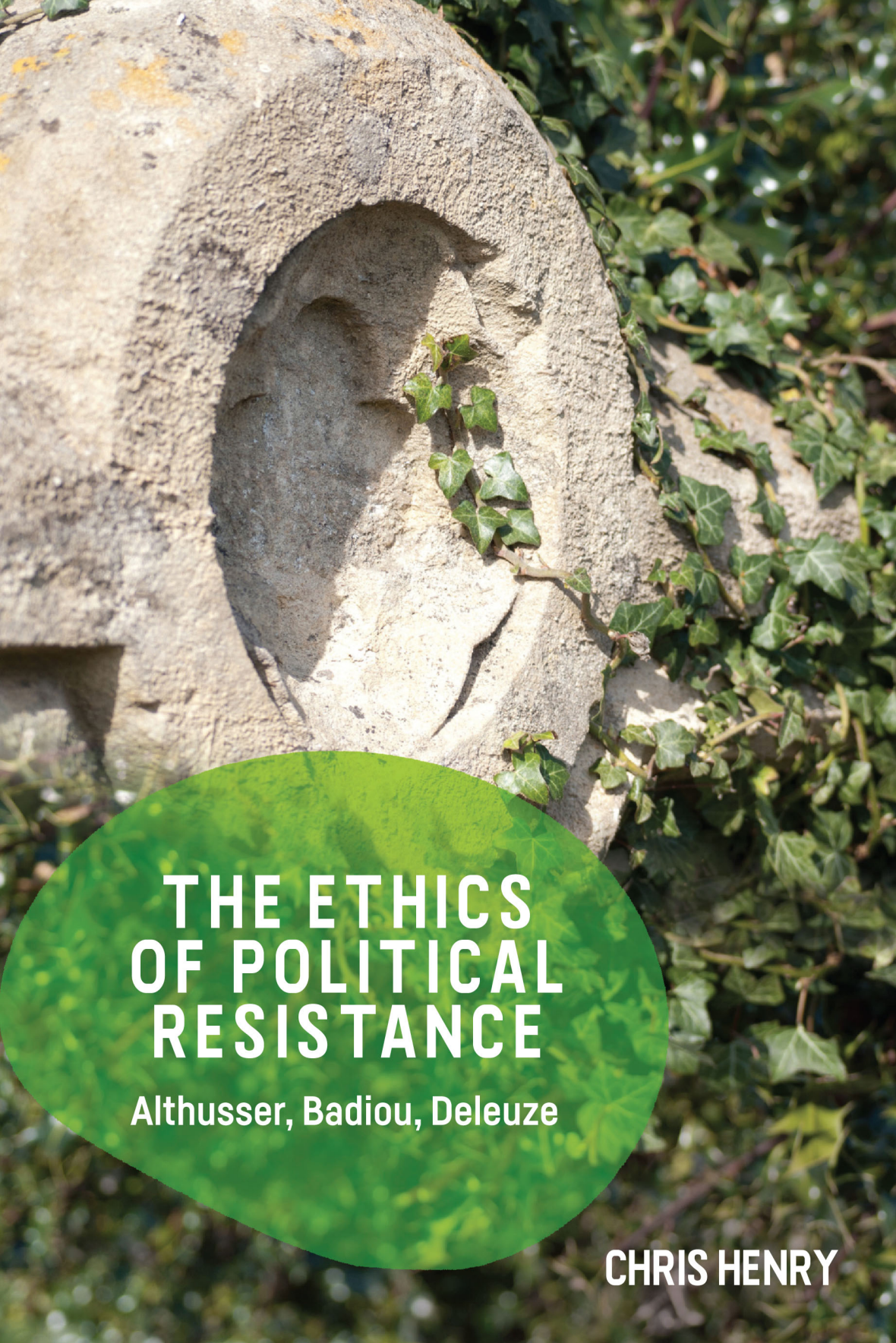
THE ETHICS OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE
Althusser, Badiou, Deleuze
CHRIS HENRY

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Contents

These three dimensions – knowledge, power and self – are irreducible, yet constantly imply one another. They are three 'ontologies'. Why does Foucault add that they are historical? Because they do not set universal conditions . . . they do vary with history. What in fact they present is the way in which the problem appears in a particular historical formation: what can I know or see and articulate in such and such a condition for light and language? What can I do, what power can I claim and what resistances may I counter? What can I be, with what folds can I surround myself or how can I produce myself as a subject? On these three questions, the I does not designate a universal but a set of particular positions occupied within a One speaks-One sees, One confronts, One lives. No single solution can be transposed from one age to another, but we can penetrate or encroach on certain problematic fields, which means that the 'givens' of an old problem are reactivated in another.

(Deleuze 1988: 114–15)

Introduction

What and how should individuals resist in political situations? Both the liberal and republican traditions of political theory, as expressed in contemporary literature by influential names such as Dahl (1973, 1989), Pateman (1970) and Warren (2007), maintain that representative democracy channels citizens' voices into political institutions which exercise legitimate authority. As such, legitimate political resistance is targeted towards the state, and must be pre-authorised by the institutions that are often being resisted: a monstrous grandchild of Locke's theory of toleration, where fidelity to the state is the pre-condition for resistance to it (Locke [1690] 1988). Rejecting this 'juridical model of sovereignty', Foucault (2003) reversed Clausewitz's dictum to claim that 'politics is the continuation of war by other means', and demonstrates both the superficiality of political elites' claims to legitimacy and the contingency of their authority. If Foucault is correct, it is clear that any attempts to prefigure the target and mode of resistance must be examined for the pre-conditions that accompany them.

These predominant schools of political theory are accompanied by a mode of analysis in Anglo/American political studies: comparative analysis. According to this analysis, individual actions are prefigured by the type of actor one happens to be within given situations; an empirical 'grid' is placed over a situation that classifies the situation as a set of dominant political actors, and analysis then attempts to predict the actions they may undertake (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 18). In assuming the stability of political institutions, as codified by the liberal and republican traditions, the best approach to resistance for comparativists can only be understood having ruled out all other available options.[1] De Vaus demonstrates the commitment to naive realism in such

analysis, claiming that 'it is only through making *comparisons* that our observations take on much meaning and we are able to eliminate alternative explanations' (De Vaus 2001: 40). However, whereas comparative analysis may well be able to offer up logical political choices, having subtracted all other apparent options, it is unable (and often unwilling) to take into account the politics of that logic: 'one may applaud *différance* [. . .] in the humanities, but not in the social sciences' (Gerring 2008: 7). The idea that things may not be as they seem is an importance relegated from the study of politics to areas (presumably) less consequential, and questions of political ontology in contemporary political analysis are often superseded by the discussion of methodology (see Katznelson in Lichbach and Zuckerman 1997: 81–112).

The various schools of Marxism know very well however that things are not what they seem and, worse, things might be concealed by false images of ideology. Although developed by Engels and not Marx (Engels 1893), the idea of 'false class consciousness', has provided the Marxist tradition with a useful image by which to analyse situations and prescribe the relevant course of action. Whether it is expressed by the Frankfurt School of critical theorists, humanist Marxists such as Gramsci and Benjamin or Hegelian Marxists such as Lukács, Sayers and McLellan, the dialectic between (either true or false) thought and matter provides the means by which to understand historical change and articulate practices of resistance. Marx's third thesis of Feuerbach proves foundational with regard to understanding resistance against oppressive actors and structures, arguing that the materialist doctrine must 'divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*' (Marx [1845] 1969: 13). In support of revolutionary practice, the various schools of Marxist thought keep the current of ontology flowing, relying on an ontology of the dialectic to conceptualise the structure of practices of resistance. Whether in the form of contradictory ideas in Hegel's *Science of Logic* ([1830] 1969, 1991), consciousness and objects in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1998) or Marx's dialectic of history (Marx [1867] 1976), the relation of two into one as the motor of change underpins much contemporary political theory and accounts of political resistance.[2] And yet, rarefying the dialectic to such importance risks dogmatic idealism, defined by Kant as the use of an idea without prior understanding of its function

(Kant [1787] 1996: B xxxv, p. 34). The idea of what is false as opposed to either true or real, and the sublimation of two into one, begs investigation into the ontological nature of dualities and whether or not practices of resistance necessitate idealism in one form or another.

In contradistinction to commitment-orientated accounts of resistance and the return of classical ontological dyads, this book develops an ontology proper to structuralism that engenders non-idealist and non-dogmatic, yet ethical, practices of resistance. Chapter 1 discusses a prominent account of a philosophy that *does* rely on both commitment and dyads for its theory of political resistance. A prominent contemporary philosopher, an interlocutor with Althusser and Deleuze, and a figure of admiration by writers such as Žižek, Hallward, Douzinas and contemporary Marxists, Badiou writes with a strong polemical style which has garnered the attention of both authors and activists. The chapter examines what is at stake in the three dyads (truth/*doxa*; intelligible/sensible; is/is not) that Badiou maintains – alongside that of being and event – in order to support his 'metapolitical' criticism of contemporary political philosophy. In developing his neo-Maoist metapolitics, Badiou follows both the Marxist tradition of dialectics and Platonic ontology by claiming that political practice can only be carried out in truth by paying fidelity to an event which ruptures the presented order of things. It will be argued that Badiou's axiomatic decision to rarefy mathematics to the height of ontology furnishes him with the grounds upon which to clearly and powerfully criticise contemporary politics and political philosophy. However, his insistence that matter must be subtracted from thought for the purposes of thinking truthful resistance prohibits him from accounting for how his idea of resistance might engage empirically with events. In formally maintaining the distinction between ideas and matter, Badiou's meta-ontology maintains an idealist commitment to mathematics which cannot be explained on its own account, and which Badiou does not explain otherwise. Unable to account for the relation that sublates its neo-Platonic dialectic, his meta-ontological project cannot therefore adequately conceptualise the practice of resistance.

As a member of Althusser's reading group on Spinoza, and an attendee of his 'Philosophy Course for Scientists', Badiou drew inspiration from Althusser's appropriation and development of Spinoza's ontology. Deleuze also drew heavily on Spinoza, both in his books *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988) and *Expressionism*

and Philosophy (1992) and a lecture series on the latter's concept of affect (1980). Nevertheless, whilst all three authors share a commitment to anti-humanism in their work, Deleuze's ontology differs significantly from Badiou's in that he accounts for the differential relations between dyads, as opposed to arguing that they are ruptural (Bowden 2011: 173–7). How though can two ontologies, so apparently at odds with each other, nevertheless claim the same inspiration? Chapter 2 examines the relationship between Althusser's thought with that of Badiou and Deleuze. The chapter begins by outlining Althusser's appropriation of Epicurean atomism to inform his ontology, upon which he builds his social and political theory. When he reads Althusser's ontology however, Badiou reads it through the grid of his own ruptural meta-ontology and thus forces his strict ontological differentiation upon Althusser's work. Having first outlined Althusser's ontology, the chapter substantiates Badiou's misreading of Althusser before foregrounding the differential relations that separate Althusser's categories and situate his work more comfortably in line with that of Deleuze. Althusser's aleatory materialism, however, will be shown still to suffer from an idealism in the form of the Epicurean void, which breaks the persistence of ideas in philosophical practice and, thus, an understanding of series. In order to overcome the idealisation of the void in the work of Althusser, the chapter proceeds to suture onto Althusser's materialism Hume's idea of human nature. Whilst bearing in mind the explicit anti-humanism of Althusser's philosophy, the suture of Hume's relational conception of human nature to Althusser's historical materialism furnishes the latter with a conceptualisation of persistence and overcomes the otherwise eliminative effect of a philosophical void.

However, there is still the danger of replacing one dogma for another: the idealism of Badiou's dyads for the dogma of the relations that constitute Hume's idea of human nature. Why should there be only one particular set of relations, as Hume argues, as opposed to others? What seems to be at stake here is either an ontological or a socio-historically specific account of the relationship between ideas and matter. Extending the argumentation from Chapter 1's criticism of Badiou, Chapter 3 argues that it is necessary for philosophy to be able to explain both. This is to say that philosophy must be able to explain the ontological account of social forms, as well as the social formation's account of ontology. Comparing Chambers's reading of Althusser to Meillassoux's criticism of Hume, Chapter 3 demonstrates that Althusser's ontology,

with Hume's idea of human nature, can indeed account for both, yet that it is necessary to suture onto this conceptual assemblage Deleuze's theory of time (Deleuze [1994] 2011). The chapter argues that Deleuze appropriates and modifies Bergson's theory of time to account for how ideas, time and matter are related in a synthesis that avoids the criticism of idealism. Althusser's emphasis on political practice is then read through Deleuze's synthetic conceptualisation of the individual to form the foundations of a non-dogmatic practice of resistance developed in the final chapter.

This practice is developed in Chapter 4 with an unlikely turn to John Stuart Mill's idea of genius. Distinguishing the idea of genius from both Mill's moral philosophy, as well as utilitarian thought more generally, the chapter argues that the idea of genius provides the ethical imperative that motivates practices of resistance. As opposed to conceptualising political philosophy according to the juridical model of sovereign institutions as per the liberal and republican traditions, or the formal axiomatics of Badiou's militant politics, the political philosophy of Deleuze is, following the work of Patton, described as a 'structural normativity' (2011: 117). Whilst critics of post-structural philosophy have charged it with an inability to adequately account for normative concepts (see Habermas 2015: esp. 282–4), Chapter 4 argues that structural normativity provides in fact the key to conceptualising the relationship of the individual with (political) norms that are also accounted for as part of a structure. The chapter expands upon the benefits of conceptualising this relation as such: with Deleuze's ontology accounting for the individual's structural relation within situations, the idea of genius is the non-ideal function of practice that informs resistance both to and within situations. In sum, this book argues that the principle of genius impels the individual towards cautious, yet creative, practices of resistance, with an emphasis on experimental learning to inform the best course of action. In accordance with this principle, the individual must pragmatically experiment within presented situations, tactically choosing options that supplement and liberate the individual from that which attempts to homogenise and confine them.

A note on methodology

This book avoids, on the whole, sections that exhaustively define ideas. Where exegesis and explanation is needed for clarity, primary and secondary sources have been given. Occasionally, technical

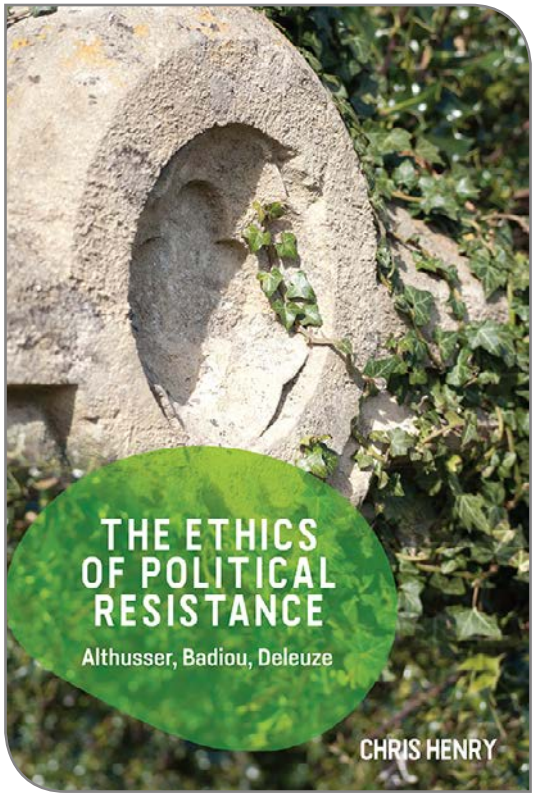
ideas are explained when necessary for argument's sake. The secondary literatures on all of the authors drawn upon herein are developed enough that full discussions of their ideas can be found in much more substantial form there than can be reproduced here. As Bryant avows, this methodology is wholly in line with Deleuze's own reading of the history of ideas, and focuses on addressing philosophical problems rather than simply listing the 'tools' with which one might address them (Bryant 2008: 4–5). So, in line with Deleuze and Guattari's argument that philosophy is the 'art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts' (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994: 2), this book has been written with the aim of fabricating the idea of a non-dogmatic and non-idealist practice of resistance.

In this light, it is understood that the reading of Badiou that comes across in Chapter 1 may appear polemic, if not harsh in its conclusions. Unfortunately, given the vigour and commitment that Badiou infuses into his political arguments, it is difficult not to make similar gestures in response. However, as stated in the chapter's discussion, there is no desire to target Badiou himself, or to undermine the brilliance of his argumentation. Although the chapter is firm in its disagreement with Badiou's political statements, all attempts have been made to disagree on theoretical grounds and to fully elucidate the important conceptual differences. As Hughes clarifies of the critical methodology in *Difference and Repetition* ([1994] 2011), a 'radical critique demonstrates the genesis of that which it has criticised' (Hughes 2009: 3), and so the theoretical presuppositions underlying Badiou's meta-ontology have been excavated in order to level the criticism contained in Chapter 1. The purpose of the discussion of Badiou in Chapter 1 is, on the one hand, to highlight problems with an important, contemporary theory of resistance and, on the other hand, to introduce the key ideas which are thematised throughout the rest of the book: resistance, ontology, thought, being, practice, ethics. These ideas run as guiding threads throughout the argument, structuring the discussion of each author's ontological commitments, towards the conclusion.

With regard to writing conventions, terms (i.e. idea/Idea) are capitalised throughout the book according to the capitalisation found within authors' works. All instances of 'z' in a word (i.e. 'standardize') have been standardised to an 's', not out of a desire for correctness, but uniformity.

Notes

1. For accounts of the comparative method in political analysis, see Heywood (2007), Jones and Gray (2010) and Pollock (2012).
2. Influential examples include Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* ([1930] 2015), Lacan's conceptualisation of the mirror stage (1956, [1949] 1977), Agamben's conceptualisation of biopolitics in *Homo Sacer* (1998) and Žižek's resurrection of Hegel (2012a).



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