

## **The Daily Dose of The Good (and Not So Good) Words: Self Evident Truths From Bishop Bishop**

Now in the previous, first, and before today, only, Daily Dose, “I” said that “I” was going to reflect and write every damn day to mark a trail to help you find your (own) way. And that for the next month of days (November 6<sup>th</sup> to December 10<sup>th</sup>, to be precise), “I” was going to use and abuse Badiou’s *Ethics* as a source of scripture that may or may not shed some light on our situations.

Obviously, “I” have not done that, though “I” will admit that “I” padded “my” month with a few extra days to make up for any lapses in my administering of The Daily Dose to you. “I” know “myself” well.

“I” have not been feeling well. “I” haven’t felt up to wrestling with truth and what the hell an ethics of truths would look like and other assorted philosophical and theological questions. “I” have found that getting through any given day is a struggle. And it is not a struggle from which “I” rise renamed a mother of a people, though “I” am limping.

“I” want to “keep going” in the spirit of Badiou (see the previous Daily Dose), but some days the quality of that motion is like a partially derailed train. It tries to go down the track. There is some forward motion, but the loud squeals make “my” ears bleed, and the sparks start fires in the dried out, knee high weeds on either side of “my” tracks.

“I” want to do many things. To highlight the shaky ground that “I” stand on, “I” use the used to death and beyond trick of putting “I” in quotes, just to make sure y’all know that “I” have issues with “me, myself and I.” “I” do this to introduce, in a clunky but amusing to “me” way, the passage from Badiou that “I” have chosen for today.

“Every representation of myself is the fictional imposition of a unity upon infinite component multiples.” Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*

As we think about what it means to search for truth or an ethics of truths, following Badiou, we have to think about “who” it is that is searching. We like to think of ourselves as unified. For some, it gets back to the idea of a transcendent soul that predates a particular body and will exist once the mortal coil is shuffled off. For others, even without a belief in a trans-corporal soul, they believe that their particular “self” is consistent, is whole, that there is one self to point to.

The passage from Badiou is a fancy dancy way of saying “my” belief in “myself” is a fiction. “I” would say it is a necessary fiction. “I” need the fiction that the complicated array of thoughts, feelings, sensations, chemical reactions and motions that are housed with this particular body, when added up, equal “me.” Otherwise “I” could never get anything done, and “I” have enough trouble with that as it is.

Now, “I” am going to admit to something that may seem heretical to those of you who spend lots of time in the theoretical trenches. “I” think 20<sup>th</sup> Century thinkers got hung up

on the notion of the fragmented self (and for most of them this was/is a traumatic realization). First off, Buddhists have been saying the same damn thing for thousands of years (albeit with different goals and end conclusions), and second off, it is easy to spend all your time staring to the abyss of that idea.

Something I once read said it like this. When you first start meditating (replace this with theorizing, if you will) then a mountain is just a mountain. You meditate/theorize for a bit longer, and you realize that “mountain” is just a handle for something that cannot be reduced down; a “unity imposed on infinite component multiples.” You meditate/theorize for a while longer, and a mountain is back to being a mountain, not quite the same as before. You know it is a fiction, but you understand that spending all your time focused on the mountain’s fictiveness is going to keep your ass on the mat. And while time on the mat, meditating or theorizing or both, is important and valuable, and more people need to do it more often, you have to get up sometime. You have to get your ass off the mat.

I do not think Badiou wants us to stay stuck on the mat. And pointing to the complexity of the things that we call ourselves is necessary when mapping out an ethics of truths. “I” tend to agree that “my” idea about who “I” am is a fiction that simplifies “multiples.”

What I have seen happen, though, is that folks dealing with these sorts of notions spend hours and hours splitting hairs, and that is fun, don’t get me wrong, and sometimes useful. I can split hairs with the best of them. But the problem is that these folks are preaching to the choir, also fun and sometimes necessary. What does it mean to take this idea, that our notions of ourselves are necessary fictions and that this has implications for how we define truth, off the mat and into the world? To spread the word beyond the priesthood in the temple?

I would say our world desperately needs this particular good and not so good word to be spread, by people who care and are willing to sit with others in uncertainty. What if we went door to door, like Mormons, and took the word out. The image of clean cut young men and women carrying free copies of *Ethics* to hand out is quite exciting. Not that I think Badiou’s text is definitive (and there are problems a plenty in his book, kind like the Bible that way). We could replace it with some other book. The point isn’t the book, the point is the conversation, a conversation in which we say to others, yes, it is uncertain, and yet, we have to pretend that it is while somehow remembering that it isn’t.

Consider this particular Daily Dose, my feeble attempt to go door to door and share this “truth.” Like any missionary just starting out, my script is not polished, and there are many holes in my argument. But of course, I do not want the script to get too polished, and I want others to pull truths out of the holes in my argument.