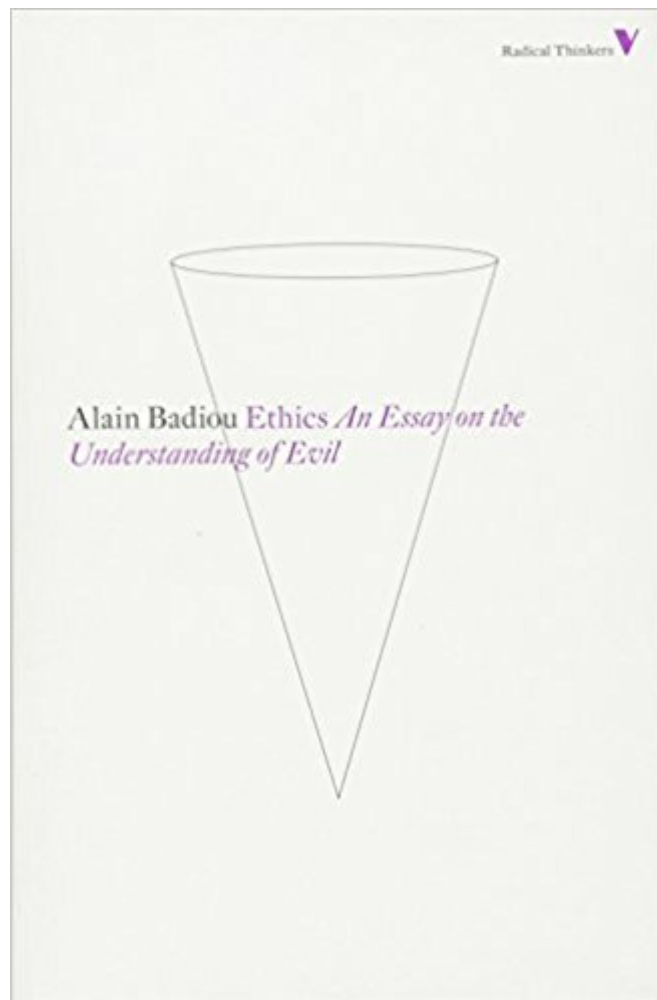




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# Ethics: An Essay On The Understanding Of Evil (Radical Thinkers)





## Synopsis

Alain Badiou, one of the most powerful voices in contemporary French philosophy, shows how our prevailing ethical principles serve ultimately to reinforce an ideology of the status quo and fail to provide a framework for an effective understanding of the concept of evil.

## Book Information

Series: Radical Thinkers

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: Verso; 1 edition (January 15, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1781680183

ISBN-13: 978-1781680186

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #264,609 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Good & Evil](#) #559 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy > Ethics](#) #847 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Political](#)

## Customer Reviews

With this little black book, Alain Badiou sows the seeds of intellectual revolt in the fields of contemporary ethical theory. He argues that the bedrock of present-day ethics--the normative conception of human rights--is morally bankrupt. "It amounts to a genuine nihilism, a threatening denial of thought as such," he writes. As Badiou sees it, current ethics has been enlisted in the army of capitalist-liberalism: "The theme of ethics and of human rights is compatible with the self-satisfied egoism of the affluent West, with advertising, and with service rendered to the powers that be." In support of his startling claim, he sketches a history of ethical theory and argues that today's ethics--the traffic not only of philosophers, but of politicians and professionals--is rooted in Kantian origins and a facile understanding of evil. Badiou proposes a positive doctrine that he calls "The Ethic of Truths," ultimately arguing that "there is no ethics in general." Instead, there are only "processes by which we treat the possibilities of a situation." The book's main failing is its length. It is simply too short to do justice to the panoply of literature on ethics or to inoculate Badiou against a host of objections that are lurking nearby. Nonetheless, his reasoning is powerful and surprising, marking some of the best writing in current European philosophy, and his credentials are



impeccable. He teaches at the École normale supérieure in Paris and is author of a half dozen well-regarded books on a range of philosophical topics. --Eric de Place --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“This is a fiery little book. Choice “His reasoning is powerful and surprising, making some of the best writing in current European philosophy, and his credentials are impeccable. “Badiou is at his strongest in pointing to the inconsistencies of a facile multiculturalism, the pluralism of the food court and the shopping mall, which wilts in the face of any genuine expression of cultural hostility to liberal values. “Radical Philosophy “His lively, stimulating and sometimes completely batty book is an attempt to make us think differently about what matters to us ... it is hard not to feel some sympathy for Badiou’s intuition that morality, evil and indeed much of our standard moral vocabulary often serve as almost deliberate disguises for mediocre policy-making, social complacency and a general lack of adventurousness about life. “Times Literary Supplement

This little book by Alain Badiou is an intervention in the contemporary discourse on Ethics. Badiou targets "negative ethics", arguing that it is limited to forms of damage or violence minimization. For Badiou, such perspectives fail to address illegitimate forms of power or domination keeping people inscribed in existing situations. Badiou proposes an affirmative ethics, one sustained by commitments to Truths. Badiou is interested in those rare moments when a person involved in the busyness of everyday concerns is suddenly transformed by an Event, forcing the person to either follow through with its consequences or surrender. Following a Pauline structure (St. Paul), Badiou names this ethical endurance "Fidelity". The book also includes an excellent interview of Badiou with Peter Hallward, discussing Badiou’s influences, philosophy, and politics. This book is one of Badiou’s most accessible works making it an ideal entry point for beginners and an enjoyable read for those already acquainted. As philosopher Slavoj Žižek says of Badiou, “A figure like Plato or Hegel walks here among us!

In this book, Alain Badiou takes exception to the current Western understanding of ethics in terms of human rights and its violations, violations which are seen to be the justification for the various humanitarian interventions into Third World political situations during the past few decades. His main point is that this understanding of ethics tends to view the human being as a victim, entailing



the splitting of its Subject into both victim and the victim's (Western heroic) benefactor. Seeing the human being in this way is tantamount to degrading him to the level of his merely animal nature, a mortal and transitory being whose life fails to signify anything special beyond his mere suffering. Evil is defined in this understanding as that which is hostile to human rights. But Badiou sees the creation of the human Subject from out of the merely human animal as an ennobling process of participation in what he calls a "truth event." Such truth events are singularities which irrupt into status quo situations within the four separate domains of art, science, politics and love and function as decisive ruptures with "what has gone before." These immanent breaks -- Galileo's creation of modern physics, the meeting of Heloise and Abelard, Haydn's creation of the classical style in music, the French Revolution, etc. etc. -- introduce novelties into the instituted knowledges of the time, forcing them to be recoded in terms of the new subject-language. It is precisely an individual's fidelity to one or another of these various truth events that shifts him from the mode of a merely transitory and ephemeral human animal to becoming a human Subject proper, which ennoble him and lifts him out of his merely quotidian situation, causing him to become the human Immortal that he, in reality, is. Evil then becomes redefined in accordance with Badiou's truth process as a function of the very process of fidelity to a truth singularity. There is not one overarching Ethics, according to Badiou, but ethics of multiple singularities, each one of which is contingent upon the nuances of a singular situation. But the truth process itself redefines evil as a function of a truth event in three ways: evil exists when subjects are faithful not to a real truth event, but to the simulacrum of one, which is defined as a truth event that excludes universal applicability, such as the Nazis with their Aryan exclusivity; secondly, it is defined as the betrayal of a subject to his own truth event, such as when one loses faith in a truth event due to the difficulties such fidelity imposes upon the individual's life, sometimes to the point of wrecking it; and thirdly, evil results when a truth event becomes authoritarian and seeks to name and exhaust all the elements in the set of a particular situation that the event is involved in restructuring, to the point where everything is captured and named to exhaustion. But this is a form of inflation, and magnifies the power of the truth event beyond its proper bounds. Badiou's book is an excellent place to start for the first-timer to Badiou, since it avoids the mathematical complexities of set theory which burden the reader in "Being and Event." Badiou strips his event ontology down here in this book and shows how it is capable of being linked to a redefinition of an ethics of multiple singularities that can be used to counter the One Ethical Way which the West tends to impose upon the rest of the world through its globalizing processes. I highly recommend it. SEE ALSO MY YOUTUBE VIDEO "JOHN DAVID EBERT ON ALAIN BADIOU'S ETHICS"--John David Ebert, author of "The New Media Invasion" (McFarland Books,



2011) and "Dead Celebrities, Living Icons" (Praeger 2010)

This was the first book (but not essay) by French Philosopher Alain Badiou I have read. It is made quite clear from the beginning both in the long scholarly introduction by the translator Peter Hallward and in Badiou's own introduction that this book was written for French high school kids as an introduction to ethics. Readers expecting a hard hitting scholarly work on the nature of evil might be disappointed and bemused French high schoolers might be scratching their heads as to what exactly this book is about but the rest of us are rewarded with an exciting hybrid. Not quite a high school primer (Badiou expertly dismisses the whole western concept of ethics) but a lot more accessible than Badiou's normal set-theory laden philosophical writing. This is at heart a manifesto for a new kind of ethics one that supports radical politics against the status quo and encourages action rather than inaction. Badiou recognises the equality and shared nature of all people rather than being preoccupied by difference. Ideas and excitement crackle off the page a worthwhile read.

Badiou is the most unique voice in radical philosophy. To sum this up: to understand what evil really is, is to be willing to die to end it (or resist it).

I stumbled across this book by word of mouth. Throughout the entire book I felt that Dr. Badiou had good arguments, & I would recommend his Ethics book to any aspiring ethicist.

I already have the book. However, I purchased it for my church book store and I will purchase more books from you for them.

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