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## If there is a Greater Ecological Good: On the Way to an Ethico-Politics with Žižek and Sluga

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### Abstract

Is there such a thing as “a/the greater good”? Could it be conceived in radically ecological terms? By critically drawing on skeptical insights presented by Slavoj Žižek and Hans Sluga, the article articulates what I am calling “a/the greater ecological good” as an end and as the ethico-political means to this end. I begin by describing this good as an aim: the survival-flourishing of earthly entities and environs. Its contours and limits are outlined, and various Žižekian objections are addressed. Next, the ethical and political means for this good’s realization are delineated. We are summoned to allow things to survive-thrive (the ethical dimension). But the existing order excessively disallows things from surviving-flourishing, so we are compelled to struggle against it and foster a society of letting-be (the political dimension). The article concludes by proffering an outline of a possible strategy for this political struggle. It would involve (a) the collaborative conception of a blueprint of this envisioned society; (b) popularizing and building mass solidarity around the blueprint; and (c) leveraging this solidarity to, ideally, peacefully implement the blueprint; otherwise, ethico-political violence may be required in order to realize this greater ecological good.

### Keywords

greater ecological good; Žižek; Sluga; survival-flourishing; (political) struggle

## Introduction: Skeptical Skepticism

Slavoj Žižek and Hans Sluga are quite skeptical when it comes to the notion of “the greater good.” So why draw on their work when attempting to outline a way toward an ethico-politics informed by this notion? For one thing, I am quite skeptical myself. Skepticism is a resistance to the desire and demand for absolute Certainty and Control; many of the world’s ills (political, economic, theistic, atheistic, etc.) may be traceable to this drive. A discerning, measured skepticism understands the longing for certitude even as it questions, corrects, and/or rejects its excesses. Skepticism’s goodness may also be evinced etymologically: it derives from the word *skepsis*, which simply means: to think (Liddell and Scott 1940: unpaginated). Also note how *skepsis* denotes “viewing, perception by the senses . . . examination, speculation, consideration . . . doubt”; when one is *skeftikos*, one is “thoughtful, reflective.” To be skeptical is to think, question, doubt. And surely we can agree that thoughtfulness lies at the root of all right action, of ethics — or is, at the very least, concomitant with it. But how far should our skepticism go? Our skepticism should so radically rigorous and thoroughgoing that it questions even itself — yes, a skepticism skeptical of itself. Such skepticism ensures that our skepticism does not degenerate into excessive cynicism and pessimism. And so, we should be skeptical skeptics. It is as such a skeptic that I attend to the work of Žižek and Sluga, two philosophers skeptically reflecting on the notion of the common/greater/higher/etc. good. As exemplary skeptics, they offer compelling insights that are described, analyzed, and critically appropriated in the process of developing a way toward an ethico-politics of a/the greater ecological good.

*Demanding the Impossible* (2013) is the transcript of a dialogue between Žižek and presumably the editor of that text, Yong-june Park (Žižek’s interlocutor is never explicitly identified in the work). As part of the opening series of questions, the interviewer asks Žižek: “is there such a thing as the common good? To what extent is it useful to speak of the common good?” (2013: 1). Žižek responds by stating that

he finds the concept problematic, certainly dismissing the notion of some kind of “*supreme Good* . . . God, humanity, the universe, etc.” (2013: 1). However, he seems to acknowledge more garden-variety goods when he poses the leading question: “What is a common good today?” (2013: 2). (He shall, of course, cite “ecology” as an example, and I will duly return to his discussion of it.) Žižek is a constructivist when it comes to this concept; he talks about common goods being “defined” or “imagined” (2013: 2, 5). But their constructedness does not preclude accountability; our “definitions” of the common good must be owned: “we have to take *responsibility* for defining what is good” (2013: 2). Žižek surmises — presumably with the notion of a supreme good in mind, so that there is no apparent contradiction here: “I think there is no common good” (2013: 9). Without being privy to the tone of this statement, I cannot determine whether/to what extent the “I think” denotes a dogmatic assertion and/or an epistemically humble proposition. Whatever the case may be regarding this remark, as I intend to show in due course, Žižek’s skepticism appears to soften as the dialogue progresses — “soften” here indicates a radicalization: skepticism sometimes softens when skepticism becomes more skeptical of itself.

Sluga apparently shares Žižek’s skepticism toward any singular good. The blurb on the cover of his *Politics and the Search for the Common Good* (2014) states that “Hans Kluga challenges the firmly held assumption that there exists a single common good which politics is meant to realize.” Kluga himself proposes: “We can envisage [note how “envisaging” may be synonymous with Žižek’s “imagining” and “defining”] the common good in very different ways . . . of justice, of freedom . . . individual well-being . . .” (2014: 2). Like Žižek, Sluga is skeptical about identifying a discernible good: “If there were a determinate common good, we would have an easier time at passing judgment on our political reality” (2014: 4). He even surmises: “we seem to have become disillusioned with the very idea of searching for it” (2014: 4). Societal skepticism gives way to pessimism.

### **This Good’s End: “survival or flourishing”**

But Sluga’s skepticism eschews such disillusionment; indeed, he is willing to skeptically speculate: “If I had to name a single good for society . . . it would be survival or flourishing” (2014: 4). This proposition’s profundity is perhaps obscured

by its obviousness, requiring much unpacking and repackaging. We begin by immediately noting the significance of the very first word —“If” (which is also the first word in the title of the present work): Sluga is here speculating, wagering. And the whole first phrase — “If I had to name a single good” — signals that Sluga is here inducing himself to name “one” common good. As may be gleaned by my endorsement of a skeptical skepticism, I commend such tentativeness: any conception of a/the greater good, which is an obviously ambitious philosophical endeavor, should retain a certain degree of doubt and openness to allow for justified critique, possible correction, and even rejection.

There is also the ambivalence and significance of the “or” in “survival or flourishing”: does it unite or contrast the terms? Are the terms to be interpreted synonymously, as some kind of coupling, or as polar opposites? Perhaps Sluga intentionally introduces some ambiguity, given his reluctance to name a/the good. Or maybe this ambivalence is purely incidental. In any case, since Sluga himself does not elaborate, one can only rationally speculate. On the one hand, “survival” and “flourishing” are typically/often understood to denote quite different things — indeed, one may easily mount the case that they are contraries (i.e., “mere survival” versus “abundant flourishing”). However, reading this as an opposition perhaps clashes with Sluga’s preceding words: “If I had to name *a single good* . . .” (emphasis mine): Sluga is about to announce *one particular good*. So it is reasonable to posit that the “or” signals a convergence rather than a divergence. Perhaps.

By reading/interpreting the “or” as a conjunction rather than a disjunction, there is also the added advantage that we may construe the coupling of “survival” and “flourishing” as a range or continuum, from surviving to flourishing, from a minimal to an optimal condition. Why is this an advantage? Understanding these terms as the poles of a continuum would allow us to side-step tricky problems associated with trying to determine whether/to what extent a thing is “either” surviving “or” flourishing. It may often be difficult for us humans to precisely gauge whether an entity’s or environment’s condition may be simply reducible to each of these polarities. I shall therefore conjoin the two terms — i.e., “survival-flourishing” — to stylistically indicate the strategy of reading Sluga’s coupling as a continuum.

Another thing to note with Sluga's wager is that it is probably rendered anthropocentrically, i.e., when he states "'If I had to name a single good for society . . .," Sluga likely means *human* society when he employs the word "society." This rendering might be validated by the fact that, only a few pages earlier, he refers to "community" in the following way: "We can, moreover, envisage the community for which such a good is sought in different ways, as tribal, local, national, international, or even global, as egalitarian or hierarchical . . ." (2014: 2) — there is no mention here of the good of the biospheric "community." (A few pages later, he also refers to "the human condition" [2014: 11].) So, while *Politics and the Search for the Common Good* is quite eco-aware in other ways, it appears that Sluga's wager seems to be cast anthropocentrically.

What, then, would happen if the term "society" were rendered ecocentrically? What if "society" were to signify "earthly society," i.e., the society of worldly things? What would happen is that such a concept would precisely coincide with the "imagined" or "envisaged" end or goal of a/the greater ecological good that I am proposing here: the survival-flourishing of earthly entities and environs. This particular "definition" is grounded in the banal empirical fact that we humans, other creatures, and other entities are all "thrown" into the world (Heidegger 1996), and, as such, have a right to be here by virtue of the fact that we come-to-be, and that we should be allowed to persist in our being (Crowe 2009; Stone 1972). Every thing that exists should be allowed to be-come in its being — to "survive or flourish."

Given that this good is obviously an extremely expansive one, it is imperative to outline key contours and limits, as well as delineating how this good might be ethically and politically realized. But first, a general question: does this "survival or flourishing" extend all the way to "the Earth itself" — and even further, the cosmos, everything? To begin, the world "as a whole" is not — and will possibly/probably never be — under human threat, even with all the nukes we possess (as opposed to other possible cosmological dangers, such as a collision with another astral body, or being scorched or engulfment by an expanding sun, etc.). Humanity is not a threat to the Earth's "survival," if this term can apply to our world. Likewise, humanity doesn't affect the world's "flourishing" because I question whether a world *in toto* is capable of "flourishing": what is capable of "flourishing," as I ordinarily understand it, is a

world's — or at least *this* world's — constituent parts (its ecosystems, species, etc.). Whatever the case may be, for the sake of practicality and economy, the present focus is on the survival-flourishing of the Earth's entities and environments — though there appears to be no good reason why the good of survival-flourishing is not applicable beyond our world, to the things of other worlds. In other words, a/the greater ecological good may also be a/the greater cosmological good.

### **This Good's Ethic: Letting Things Survive-Flourish**

If this ecological good's end is survival-flourishing, then we can readily identify the fundamental ethical act for obtaining it (the political dimension shall be duly discussed): human society and its members are summoned to allow things to survive and thrive — in other words, to let things be. How is “letting-be” understood here? We may begin describing it by first noting some pivotal moments in its venerable but rather under-researched philosophical and spiritual-theological heritage. For instance, there is the Taoist concept of *wu wei*, signifying non-doing or actionless action (Liu 1991). We also have the old German term *gelassenheit*, where the root term *lassen* means “letting” or “allowing.” This was a favored word of the philosopher-theologian-mystic, Meister Eckhart (approx. 1260-1328 C.E.), denoting non-willing and a certain detachment, which is radically different to nihilistic indifference. Martin Heidegger, of course, appropriated this notion, refiguring it as “openness” and “releasement” (1966; Watts 2014: 91-94), so that letting-be is also a letting-go, allowing things to be-come, survive-thrive, and pass away. Debra Bergoffen (2006: 99) also insightfully draws our attention to Simone de Beauvoir's (1948) retrieval of letting-be in her effort to construct an existential ethic.

The fact that such distinguished thinkers from disparate cultures and times articulate and promote letting-be begins to indicate how this concept-precept-practice is so very different from — and so much more dynamic and demanding than — its pop-philosophical/ psychological renderings and misappropriated by hyper-permissive culture so that it has become synonymous with the anti-ethical nihilism of “anything goes.” But letting-be is radically counter-cultural and counter-capitalistic. This active passivity stands in sharp contrast to contemporary society's hyperactive interference with almost everything, busying itself with mastering and devouring more and more

of the world's entities and environs. (I shall have more to say about this interventionism shortly, as it moves into more overtly political terrain.)

Furthermore, since letting-be maintains a certain respectful "distance" from Earth's entities and environs, it also somewhat differentiates itself from the well-meaning environmentalism that seeks "communion" with others. To put it crudely: the emphasis lies with letting a tree be more so than hugging it. Note that this differentiation is not cast as a hierarchical bifurcation: there is no need to choose between the one or the other; such a practice does not preclude a loving, caring relation toward things (tree-hugging would still be allowed). However, letting-be remains vigilantly attentive to preserving the necessary spacing to allow entities and environs to be-come. (Herein lies a crucial reason why the act of loving is so difficult: it demands of us that we allow the beloved to be in its own way.)

And so, this letting-be is not totalizing in the sense that we should always and everywhere allow things to be-come without any kind of interactivity whatsoever. Indeed, our creaturely relatedness entails the impossibility of an absolute allowing. A first unavoidable intrusion has to do with our material proximity with other beings. For instance, even when I innocently walk along or take a bath or shower, I am disfiguring and destroying countless creatures (underfoot, on my skin, etc.). This interference is inescapable due to our materiality, as I have explained elsewhere [quote deleted to maintain authorial anonymity]. There is also the necessary disallowing associated with predation (McDaniel 1990). To be sure, we humans may minimize this kind of unavoidable disallowing by limiting the kinds and amounts of food we eat, but even the most animal-sensitive diet does not evade intervening with other organisms (plants, seeds, etc.). A further exception to the rule of letting-be is self-defense. The right to survive-thrive extends to all, including humans, so whether we are, for example, unfairly attacked by another person human or hunted by another animal, we possess the right to defend ourselves, which will involve disallowing the other in some way, which might entail killing them. There are contexts when it is ethical to privilege our own being-becoming over the being-becoming of others; letting-be does not involve insane self-surrender.

Let us also address some of Žižek's concerns regarding the possibility of ecology as "a common good today." A first observation is that there are "so many ecologies" (2013: 2). Once again, we are not privy to the tone of this statement, so we cannot determine whether it is only a statement of fact (which it is) or whether it also signals a kind of criticism: that there are so many different opinions or theorizations about the ecological that it suggests that it is so highly contested that it warrants rejection. The plurality of ecologies does not necessarily entail that none of them are worthy of consideration; it just means that some might be better than others ("better" in the sense of more logically rigorous, more practical, etc.). For instance, I somewhat share Žižek's skepticism toward "Mother Earth" ecologies that promote Nature as a caring, ordering force:

Nature is crazy. Nature is chaotic and prone to wild, unpredictable and meaningless disasters . . . — there is no such thing as Mother Earth. In nature, always, there are catastrophes, things go wrong, and sometimes a planet explodes. . . . I see that all harmony is only *partial harmony*. . . . So nature is not balanced. I don't think there is any natural order. (Žižek 2013: 2, 3, 9)

Apart from the fact that Žižek's colorful language tends toward absolutism ("always," "all," "not," "any"), his contention is constantly being confirmed. The continual reporting of natural disasters powerfully revokes the myth that reduces the world to an intrinsically caring "Mother" always seeking the survival-thriving of her creatures and environments. While we humans have thus far faced relatively stable conditions that have favored human survival and flourishing — what Žižek perhaps/probably downplays as "partial harmony" — a longitudinal perspective discloses a broader truth: biospheric instability. Consider glacial ages, axial tilts, tectonic shifts, and so on. Indeed, while it seems rather unthinkable, even today's "partial harmony" is predicted to eventually give way to something less-than-harmonious, as noted above (i.e., being blasted by another astral body, or being scorched or engulfed by the sun, etc.). Hence, the construal of the good that is being offered here is not pinned to the anthropomorphic conception of the Earth as intrinsically-constantly caring and ordering. Ecology and a/the greater ecological good needn't be reduced to archaic or New-Agey nature mythologies.



Žižek's skepticism toward any common eco-good is also fueled by his psychoanalyticism. He asserts that ecologies contain "*hidden*" political agendas or "secret priorities" and "Whenever something is proposed as being for the higher good, and we say we should transcend our egotism and work for it we will always discover that we are already secretly doing just this" (2013: 2, 3). Žižek concludes his criticism in his typically bombastic way: "Ecology, from my point of view, is the most egotistic, human-centered machine there is" (2013: 2). There is much warrant in this argument and it is difficult to disagree with it: we humans want to survive-thrive; hence, we supposedly want to "care" for the Earth in order for our own survival-flourishing. Nevertheless, there are some debatable dimensions to this line of thought. First, assuming there are "hidden political agendas" and "secret priorities," some of them might be ethical ones. A secret motivation does not automatically make it an unethical one. Furthermore, Žižek's argument is again framed in questionably absolutist terms: "whenever," "always," "the most," etc. Is it the case that we *always* act egotistically when we claim to be transcending our egotism? Do we *never* transcend our selfishness? If we never do, then can we account for *all* cases of co-operation, altruism, sacrifice, and so on, as simply and strictly reducible to egotism? Moreover, should self-interest be cast in completely negative terms? Isn't an ethical form possible? — a self-interest that also actively makes room for the interests of others, first of all their survival-flourishing? Žižek's skepticism here appears to be driven by his contention that there is "a terrible Darwinian survivalist individualism beneath everything" (2013: 5). Hyper-individualism is obviously pervasive and intensifying, but the phenomena of co-operation (both individually and ethico-politically), altruism, sacrifice, etc., undermines the claim that selfishness underlies "everything."

### **This Good's Politics: "common struggle"**

We could also respond to Žižek's skepticism regarding the purported selfishness of ecology with his own observation from another text: "let us not blame people and their attitudes: the problem is not corruption or greed, the problem is the system that pushes you to be corrupt" (2012: unpaginated) — more accurately: let us not *completely* blame people; let us place *much more blame* on our existing systems of prohibiting things from surviving-flourishing. (One might even render "ideology" as

the shifting of blame from systems to individuals.) Different forms of social organization may foster or inhibit different aspects of our psyches. In other words, different cultures may encourage self-interest and other-interest to different degrees. With this point about shifting the blame from people to systems, we now draw closer to broaching more directly the question of the political dimension of the greater ecological good presented here.

When human systems excessively disallow others (both human and otherwise) from surviving-thriving, then we have an ethico-political imperative to stop this systemic disallowance. As I noted above with regards to various exceptions to the precept of letting-be, the key here is to disallow human systems from *excessively* disallowing others from being, from the disallowing that is unnecessary and avoidable. In this regard, I therefore propose that the true/ultimate polarity is not between “survival” and “flourishing” but between these conditions and unnecessary “annihilation” and “oppression” (which are completely different to predatory violence, etc.). The true contrary is not between survival and flourishing but between survival-flourishing and annihilation-oppression. As the environmental crisis clearly shows, we humans significantly influence whether/to what extent entities and environs survive-flourish or are annihilated-oppressed. So we require an ethico-politics that fosters the former and disrupts-eradicates the latter. An outline of one possible way of realizing the requisite ethico-politics means for realizing the greater good of surviving-flourishing will be delineated as I proceed.

I noted in my Introduction that Žižek begins his dialogue in *Demanding the Impossible* by exhibiting skepticism toward any common good. But as the discussion proceeds, his position appears to soften (“soften” in the sense of being more self-skeptical). He remarks: “When you say common good, I think of something like true political activity” (2013: 13). This notion of the greater good appears to be developed with greater certainty and specificity toward the end of the conversation: “The common good is a *common struggle for freedom . . .*” (2013: 134) — the emphasis is Žižek’s. So, by the time the dialogue has concluded, one may rightly wonder whether Žižek has softened his skeptical stance to the degree that his position has shifted or altered. But what is of greater importance than the possibility of Žižek’s shifting

position is the content of this latter position: that the greater good somehow involves political encounter and transformation. What could this mean in the present context?

A preliminary query is how a/the greater good — something that is ordinarily understood in ethical terms — may be (also) rendered in radical political terms. After all, a “common struggle for freedom” is a thoroughly political act. During his discussion with Park, Žižek asserts that “politics has *priority* over ethics” (2013: 2; his emphasis), and goes on to claim that he is “in favor of the *politicization of ethics*” (2013, 10; again, his emphasis). To begin with, any prioritization appears unnecessarily hierarchically dualistic: why the need to prioritize one over the other? In fact, Žižek himself recognizes the two terms’ interwovenness, often using the hybrid “ethico-political” in his writings to register their intertwinement — indeed, he employs the compound term several times during this particular dialogue, even appearing in a chapter title (“Communism: The Ethico-Political Fiasco”). This strongly indicates a certain symbiosis between the political and the ethical. (Sluga perhaps confirms this symbiosis when he states: “politics might usefully be conceived as a search for the common good” [2014: 2].) Hence, whether “a politicization of ethics” is even necessary is perhaps a moot point, given that the two are already interwoven, even if their complicity is not always recognized. But to the extent that we wish to maintain the distinction between the ethical and the political, we may express our definition of the greater ecological good presented here in this way: as the (political) struggle for freedom to (ethically) allow earthly things to survive and flourish.

But how, “exactly,” might “common struggle for freedom” be construed in the present context? Once again, the answer is quite obvious when the end of the greater ecological good is survival-flourishing: “freedom” here means the freedom for human and non-human things to survive-flourish. The “common struggle” here includes the earthly community’s struggle against those human systems that excessively annihilate-oppress it.

Will this struggle be some kind of unforeseeable spontaneous event, or can it be planned? I cannot say whether it will be one or the other — or even, somehow, one *and* the other. But let us suppose that the struggle can be strategized. What kind of strategy do I envisage or imagine? For reasons that become apparent as I proceed,

a first step should be an envisioning of the kind of global society that would allow things to survive-flourish. But how might such a mammoth task be accomplished? I propose that such a daunting conceptual challenge can only be achieved if the world's leading thinkers work collaboratively to produce a blueprint of a better society — to do collectively what the likes of Plato (*The Republic*, 1974) and Thomas More (*Utopia*, 2005) attempted to achieve individually. This collaborative project would involve the creation and sustenance of a worldwide network drawn across a range of disciplines (politics, economics, education, etc.) working to conceive a society that maximizes survival-flourishing and minimizes annihilation-oppression. Sluga confirms this necessity for collective action conditioned by some idea of a/the greater good: “We can be [politically] effective only once we have reached a coherent verdict on what needs to be done and a proper assessment of the situation in which we find ourselves. We certainly cannot advance the human [*and earthly*] condition if we lack a conception of the common good” (2014: 11).

Now, while Sluga's remarks therefore appear to indicate that he might be in favor of at least entertaining the idea of something like a collective of thinkers co-operatively creating a blueprint of a better order, I am nevertheless skeptical that he would endorse such a “strong” normative strategy. One page after the above-cited statements, Sluga presents an “either/or” formulated as a “not . . . but . . .” that appears to prohibit such a strategy: “our philosophers see themselves not as interrogators of the political realm, as they might well do, but as judges on how politics should be conducted” (2014: 12). But why should we thinkers limit ourselves to interrogation? And isn't the point of interrogation adjudication? Sluga's favored “diagnostic” approach to politics appears to lack the confidence to reconceive society (“reconception” in both senses, theoretical and concrete). Sluga's diagnostic method therefore ultimately belongs to the famous Marxian (1845) category of those philosophers who “interpret” the world, in contrast to those who also seek to change it. But we philosophers must regain a kind of Enlightenment confidence to not only pass rational judgment on our existing political systems but to also proffer alternatives in light of the overwhelming evidence that our political systems are annihilating-oppressing the things of this world. Questioning and diagnosis alone are insufficient: norms and prescriptions must also be sought and implemented. Of course, there is always the risk of the catastrophic failure of the utopian vision

turning into a dystopian nightmare, but our multiplying and accelerating crises (environmental, financial, extremist-religious, etc.) indicate that it is a gamble worth taking.

Given that I share Sluga's desire that our political philosophizing should be humble (2014: 7), I should stress here that the ambitiousness of the group's task to create a blueprint of a better society should not be confused with arrogance: one may be ambitious without being arrogant, even though the two are often linked — a linkage that contributes to the dystopic disfiguration of the utopian vision. But ambition shouldn't automatically be reduced to arrogance — especially when it comes to the noble ambition of changing the world for the better, for the good. But this ambition needn't be arrogant (closed-minded, inflexible, etc.). Humility can be posited with ambition, each dimension conditioning and mediating the other, each keeping the other in check. Ambition without humility would lead to tyranny and totalitarianism, while modesty without ambition risks sliding down the slippery slope of silence and quietism. And so, anything less than a "strong" normative approach might pave the way for apoliticism.

Returning to the question of the blueprint's conception: could one risk speculating about the nature of a rationally reconceived society? As stated, this daunting questions requires a group effort. I can only wager at this stage that I think an eco-society guided by a greater ecological good of survival-flourishing would be significantly different to the present global order — but who knows? The network might determine that the present order is the least annihilistic-oppressive. While such a conclusion appears unlikely, we are required to remain open-minded until the network of thinkers makes its determination, which, I anticipate, shall take time. So, patience is required. In the meantime, we should not expect comprehensive answers from brilliant thinkers, including Žižek. We impatient ones (e.g., Kunkel 2012) should not be too critical of Žižek for shying away from offering any kind of substantial concrete alternative to neoliberal capitalism, although it should be noted that he is beginning to contribute to the task of re-conception by offering some normative dimensions to his thinking (e.g., 2008a, 2009 [with Milbank]). But any authoritative solution — if there is any — would only be made possible by a massive co-operative effort.

During the dialogue in *Demanding the Impossible*, Žižek raises a further issue relating to ecology that provides an opportunity to go at least some way to demonstrating how a society driven by this greater ecological good would broach social challenges. Žižek echoes the widely-held claim that the human population is growing at an environmentally harmful rate, and refers to the radical proposal of “encouraging infectious diseases so that at least two-thirds of humanity will die” (2013: 10), “two-thirds” being the purported portion required to reduce the population to a supposedly sustainable level. This dilemma directly encounters the notion of letting-be: should humans be allowed to procreate freely or should there be radical intervention? A first thing to note is that there are scholars who compellingly contest the claim that we are experiencing overpopulation (e.g., Angus and Butler 2011). So what we have here is a contested issue, and the collective of thinkers would hopefully be able to determine whether overpopulation is actually occurring and, if so, how to curb it. I do not know what they would surmise. In the meantime, I tend to agree with Žižek insofar as excessive population growth appears to be occurring. Overpopulation and its effects (pollution, urban expansion, etc.) are consequently disallowing all kinds of entities and environs from surviving-thriving. So, if excessive population growth is occurring, then its disallowing is required in the form of restrictions, in other words, allowable disallowances. However, the drastic measure cited by Žižek is unnecessary. There are more rational solutions, such as China’s two-child policy. And other sociological trends, such as greater gender equality and female education, appear to be contributing to declining fertility rates (Basu 2002). So, what would be expected in an eco-rational society is the arresting of any exponential population growth by a combination of radical rational measures (such as restricting excessive procreation rates) and accelerating progressive sociological phenomena. “Encouraging infectious diseases” would not be one of these measures.

Now, once a blueprint is created, the next step would be to advocate it, perhaps “marketing” it in socially concentric circles: scholars, university students, artists, political activists, workers, the unemployed, and so on. The aim would be for the blueprint to gain ever-greater popularity for its implementation, which is possible, given a growing awareness of, and opposition to, ever-intensifying systemic crises (e.g., the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring, Greece’s SYRIZA, etc.). When the

blueprint generates a kind of “critical mass,” whereby the multitude exhibits an overwhelming display of solidarity or “people power” (demonstrations, strikes, etc.), this solidarity may be applied as leverage to transform the global order from one of annihilation-oppression to one of survival-flourishing. In the face of overwhelming solidarity, it is therefore hoped that the transformation would be a peaceful one.

But what if the power-holders do not surrender their power voluntarily? Then transformative violence would be required. But isn't the use of any violence completely antithetical to letting-be? As already explained, those systems that annihilate-oppress must themselves be thwarted so that annihilation-oppression is halted and survival-flourishing (re)allowed. What we have here is the radical extension of the self-defense argument: those of us who take up this common struggle shall take it up on behalf of ourselves and others, human and otherwise, biotic and otherwise. Coincidentally, Žižek speaks of “defensive violence” in the dialogue (2013: 114-115), confirming the validity of applying ethico-political violence if peaceful transformation is refused. Elsewhere, Žižek courageously defends the notions of “ethical violence” (2004) and “divine violence” (2008b). It is encouraging to note that other scholars are also beginning to defend good violence (e.g., Zolotin 2017). While such terms and practices appear contradictory to our “hyper-peace-loving” sensibilities, we must entertain transformative violence as a possibility when the time comes to confront our annihilators-oppressors. For it may turn out to be a choice between endlessly enduring existing structures of annihilation-oppression or taking the gamble to overcome them.

Such a program for achieving and perpetuating the greater eco-good is certainly ambitious — one could thus object: where is the humility of which I spoke? As I explained above, we should now be both ambitious and humble in our thinking — there is no need to choose between the one and the other; indeed, if we are to truly honor Reason, then we should begin thinking humbly-confidently. While the presented program's ambitiousness is obvious, I have noted from the very beginning and all along that it is one possible pathway. I welcome critique, revision, and even rejection if it can be rationally shown to be invalid in some way. I am open to the possibility of other possible — and possibly/probably better — approaches. But such openness does not subtract from my contention that this particular plan appears to

have traction and should be seriously considered: as far as I can tell and until it can be proven otherwise, the proposed program is rational and realizable. Shouldn't we therefore further explore this way to determine where it may lead us? In an age of multiplying and intensifying systemic crises, where annihilation-oppression reigns supreme, it's highly unlikely we'd end up somewhere worse.

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