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“What about Life?” What Starts as a Contingency is Understood Retroactively as Necessity

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Abstract: There is an emphasis on the politics of ‘life’ through the lens of ‘marginalization’ and the giving and taking away of life with the solution being reducible to Said’s understanding of the marginalized making a “voyage in” from the periphery to reclaiming the center. While clearly these are useful political questions, they reach an impasse, which Zizek’s work while (he claims) is in favor of immigration and open borders, correctly raises some anxieties about the politics of life from a completely different perspective. This is what I want to explore in this paper, what does Zizek’s work make possible in thinking beyond the ideological way that the ‘politics of life’ has been framed, thus opening up discourses that have been ‘set’ by a limited ‘post/de-colonial-biopolitical’ set of signifiers, which to my reading of Zizek, he is right to point out, have become the ‘master’-signifiers in the ideological matrices of how the question of life is currently framed.

Keywords: Philosophy; Zizek; Psychoanalysis; Ideology; Oedipus; Biopolitics; Life

The political contingencies that determine the concept of 'life' often do so without falling under close scrutiny. Life is a presence that appears without question as something that must continue on. Questions like, "Is there life on other planets?" or, "Will life continue on Earth?" or, "When does life begin? Does a single cell have a right to life?" As Eugene Thacker states "The concept of 'life' appears to depend on an ontology that can never be explicitly stated as such... the elusive concept of 'life' appears to be the horizon of the political itself."¹

While I agree with the concept of life as the horizon line of politics, and this has been an ongoing philosophical concern in biopolitical ethics for several decades now, I do not have enough space to go through all of these texts. Starting from Michel Foucault's work in the History of Sexuality and elsewhere, Cary Wolfe's work on posthumanism, Roberto Esposito's *Bios, Immunitas, and Communitas*, Antonio Negri's work with Michael Hardt in the *Empire, Multitude, Commonwealth* trilogy and prior to that in Negri's work, the work of Edward Said in *Orientalism*, and *Culture and Imperialism*, and lesser known but equally as important the work of my teacher William Spanos in *America's Shadow*.

There is an emphasis on the politics of 'life' through the lens of 'marginalization' and the giving and taking away of life with the solution being reducible to Said's understanding of the marginalized making a "voyage in" from the periphery to reclaiming the center. While clearly these are useful political questions, they reach an impasse, which Žižek's work while (he claims) is in favor of immigration and open borders, correctly raises some anxieties about the politics of life from a completely different perspective. This is what I want to explore in this paper, what does Žižek's work make possible in thinking beyond the ideological way that the 'politics of life' has been framed, thus opening up discourses that have been 'set' by a limited 'post/de-colonial-biopolitical' set of signifiers, which to my reading of Žižek, he is right to point out, have become the 'master'-signifiers in the ideological matrices of how the question of life is currently framed.

¹ Eugene Thacker. *After Life: De anima and Unhuman Politics*. Radical Philosophy vol. 155. May/June 2009.

What About Life?

Recall the famous scene at the beginning of the film *Zizek!* Where we see a frantic Slavoj Zizek explaining his metaphysical view of the universe:

“What would be my, how should I call it, spontaneous attitude towards the universe? It is a very dark one. The first thesis would be a kind of total vanity. There is nothing. I mean it quite literally, like, ultimately there are some fragments, some vanishing things, if you look at the universe it is one big void. But then how do things emerge?

Here, I feel a strange affinity with quantum physics.² The thesis here is that the universe is a void, but a kind of positively charged void, and then particular things appear when the balance of the void is disturbed. I like this idea spontaneously very much, the fact that its not just nothing, things are out there, it means something went terribly wrong. That what we call creation is a kind of cosmic imbalance, a cosmic catastrophe, that things exist by mistake. I am willing to go to the end and claim that the only way to counteract this is to assume the mistake and go to the end, and we have a name for this, it's called love.

Isn't love precisely this kind of a cosmic imbalance. I was always so disgusted with this notion of “I love the world” universal love, I don't like the world. Basically, I am somewhere between “I hate the world” and “I am indifferent towards it,” but the whole of reality, its just it, its stupid, its out there, I don't care about it. Love for me is an extremely violent act. Love is not “I love you all.” Love is, I pick out something, and again its this structure of imbalance, even if this something is a small detail, a fragile individual person, I say, “I love you more than anything else.” In this quite formal sense, love is evil.”³

In many ways, you get a glimpse into Zizek's entire oeuvre with this one small scene. The desperate humor, the existential dread, the sardonic overturning of basic

² Unfortunately, here Zizek misses a very obvious point of affinity in directing his attention to his “affinity with quantum physics” he misses the clear connection with what he is saying and the “avatar” which is the appearance of a being that masks a deeper cosmic void.

³ Zizek! (2005)

assumptions about stupid ideas on love, but more importantly, the cosmic mistake that is 'life' which is the crucial point. Life exists as a contingency, and only retroactively is understood as a necessity, through the concept of love, love is the quilting point upon which, retroactively, the contingency must be understood to make sense. Zizek comes daringly close to this realization in his analysis of Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," in *Living in the End Times*, where Zizek points out that Poe's "figure is revealed as the personification of the Red Death itself which goes on to destroy all life in the castle."⁴ I will present a further discussion of Zizek's views on Poe later in the essay, but the appearance of the Red Death exemplifies this point that life starts as contingency, and can only be understood to be necessary in a retroactive sense.

What starts as a contingency, is understood retroactively as a necessity

What starts as a contingency, is understood retroactively as a necessity. Zizek's thesis, time and time again in lieu of the Lacanian signifying-chain in its reiterability, the telos does not emerge until after it has been reached, but what does this mean for 'life' - in the sense that we can apply this thesis so life, it began as a contingency and is understood only in a retroactive sense as necessary, its momentum has been initiated accidentally and only retroactively does the rationalization for its existence emerge. ala, the Book of Genesis, or any number of creation fables after the fact makes sense of the creation, but only as a sort of quilting point that is clearly so flawed that one has to patch together the pieces into a functional narrative with some sort of moral purpose to it.

With regards to the political conceptualization of 'life' there is no indication of any intrinsic purpose to life. In terms of older theories on natural law, "The Law of Nature is that which God at the time of creation of the nature of man infused into his heart, for his preservation and direction; and this is *lex aeterna*,¹¹⁸ the Moral Law, called also the Law of Nature. And by this Law, written with the finger of God in the heart of man, were the people of God a long time governed, before that Law was written by Moses, who was the first Reporter or Writer of Law in the world."⁵ Clearly, this thesis is attacked by Zizek. The a-priori understanding of *lex aeterna* as an intuition before the law was

⁴ Zizek. *Living in the End Times*. Pg 61.

⁵ Selected Writings of Sir Edmund Coke.

written can only be understood to carry significance a-posteriori, after the fact the law gains significance retroactively. Therefore, there is no prior essence before existence, and the existence of a meaningful understanding to the concept of life can only make sense retroactively after the Law has been instituted. As Žižek points out: “in our ‘postmodern’ world, this dialectic of the Law and its inherent transgression is given an additional twist: transgression is more and more directly enjoined by the Law itself.”⁶ Žižek gives numerous examples of this, and later on we will discuss this in lieu of Edgar Allan Poe. It is not that ‘existence is prior to essence’ and therefore essence is useless and can be reinvented at any moment, as claimed by the later existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

It is that the implementation of the Law is necessary for ‘life’ to be infused with meaningfulness. It is not as dualistic as the existentialists make it out to be say, for example in some readings of Kafka’s “Before the Law” where we see Kafka revealing that the Law never had any intrinsic meaning and therefore the truth is revealed, the emperor has no clothes and we can be free to disobey the law. It is that ideology functions at the level of the reality that appears as real and as natural as can be, and yet to the subject is indistinguishable as the illusion that it is.

That is, it is when the Law appears to be as real and natural as can be, that is when ideology sinks its teeth in and gets the subject hook line and sinker. In this sense, the same that can be said about Law, can be said about ‘life’ it is an ideological symptom that is not an escape from a deeper concealed reality, but the ideological fantasies form the basis for support for reality itself. What political discourse says and thinks about ‘life’ sets the basis for social bonds that traverse our interactions in ways that have a real effect but may not reveal the ideological biases in any apparent way.

The Anatomy of Man is Key to the Anatomy of the Ape

Perhaps the quote that Žižek goes back to time and time again as indicative of his position on that which starts as a contingency is understood retroactively as necessity, is the line from Karl Marx in the Grundrisse: “The anatomy of man is key to the anatomy of the ape.” The full quote reads:

⁶ Žižek. In Defense of Lost Causes. Pg. 29.

“Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape. The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species, however, can be understood only after the higher development is already known.”⁷

Implication being that the emergence of the ape does not make necessary the evolution of the human being. It is only made apparent after human beings exist that we can see the necessity of the ape and study it as a rudimentary form of human being. The path of telos becomes clear only after the contingency is resolved by its goal. One would also conclude that the Nietzschean thesis, that man is a halfway between ape and ubermensch, to the ubermensches (which have not yet come) the human is a laughing stock, just as the ape is to man. The crucial point is that if the unwritten jump from human being to ubermensch has not yet occurred, we do not know, and cannot speculate about what that jump will be until it actually happens. Then, only after the fact will the jump appear as necessary, not before the fact. In the case of Slavoj Zizek’s political ontology, this would obviously be the jump from capitalism to communism, but we do not yet know what this will be, as the past can only serve as a semblance, a useful set of errors (albeit, even saying this is making a point that is run through with ideological biases that perhaps Zizek would find revolting). Every fascism arises as a failure of socialism, and, again to make this point, if the past is an ideological tool to see the biases clearly, whilst in the midst of history the ideological blindspots do not become clear until after the fact.

⁷ Karl Marx. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, New York: Penguin Classics. 1993, pg. 105.

Humans are the Animals Who Possess Logos

What does it mean that humans are in possession of logos? Logic? Language? Speech? Reasoning? All of these seem to indicate a superior status for human beings over and above other animals. We can think and articulate thoughts using sophisticated levels of communication in ways that far surpass any animal known to humans. Why is this? Does this indicate an awareness among humans that allows us to express our needs, desires, and fantasies in ways where social bonds are sedimented by discursive practices? Social needs required the use of language in a social context for the reproduction of 'life' and this was an end result of human beings becoming self-aware. Humans were developing in cognition to such an extent that the 'logos' was developing, probably due to a surplus of caloric intake that accumulated greater and greater development towards the frontal lobes, our most precious tool and weapon as intelligent sentient beings. As this organ developed and evolved, as did the logos. Our awareness of ourselves in a self-reflective sense developed and evolved as well. Along with it was the awareness that our 'logos' gave us superior choices, freedoms unavailable to mere animals whose motivations are based on instincts, hunger, security, sex as merely reproductive, and things resembling the base of the human brain. Over the course of eons our human brains developed the frontal lobes and with it complex systems of what Zizek would certainly call 'ideology,' or in a way, to put it bluntly, humans create social institutions such as religions, governments, advanced technologies, and economies. Yet, there is no such equivalent to any of these in such sophistication among animals. Our 'logos' gives us far more range of motion in regards of our actions and imagination. We can act freely, rather than merely upon instincts. Along with that is the self-reflective knowledge that we are free and that we are mortal creatures. In the meantime we also tend to have this strange curse and blessing of knowing that we are 'free' - we have choices available to us that a mere animal working upon motivations from the base of the brain does not, as Zizek points out, in paraphrasing Schelling: "the most horrible thing to encounter as a human being is the abyss of free will; when someone simply acts out of free will. And that's very traumatic to accept."⁸

⁸ Zizek, Slavoj, and Glyn Daly. 2004. *Conversations with Zizek*. Cambridge: Polity.

'Life' is about the awareness of this abyss of freedom. Fantasies that form the basis of the reality are where ideological certainties fill in the gaps in discursive social bonds, and bridge the unsettling explosion of this abyssal freedom. Relegating the spectre of this freedom as barred from consciousness.⁹

Repressive Desublimation

But, the thesis that Zizek makes time and time again, this primordial 'eden' has replaced the paternal Father of prohibition who tells the subject 'No!' Repression is no longer the injunction the subject must progress beyond, loosening repressive forces so that desires can be released in a cathartic expression of selfhood. The deeper way that subjects are controlled in postmodern society is through permissive interpellative forces that call the subject through an unprovoked, seemingly spontaneous call to express one's deepest hidden desires. All around us, we see the unprovoked madness of those who are living under complete control but who feel they are yet, totally and utterly 'free' in a sense of what Herbert Marcuse called "repressive desublimation," where technology liquidates the transcendent aspects of higher culture and lowers the bar to the point of no prohibitions placed upon desires and their fulfillment, no higher ideals are to be obtained, we simply act spontaneously upon our immediate desires.

As we will see later in Zizek's analysis of the Oedipal and Christian anxieties in the son the reason he is interested in Christianity is the overturning of the pleasure principle and its injunction to enjoy as expressed by repressive desublimation. As Zizek says time and time again, the function of psychoanalysis in this postmodern era is to allow for the subject to not enjoy.

Life, the Contingent Stuck and Retroactive Detachment

In a minor point made by Zizek in his 2015 book *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*, there is an opportunistic way that his remarks on Buddhism and the idea that suffering originates from excessive attachment to worldly

⁹ In Zizek's two major studies on Schelling, *The Indivisible Remainder* and "The Abyss of Freedom" highlights precisely this horrifying abyss of freedom.

identity. “The difference between Buddhism and Lacan is crucial. It concerns not only the fact that while Buddhism strives for eternal peace, Lacan focuses on what Buddhism perceives as the Fall (the fixation on a particular feature which starts to matter more than anything and thus derails the cosmic balance). Lacan’s point is a much more precise one: only the ‘getting stuck’, the fixation on a particular feature, opens up the space for the possible withdrawal into eternal inner peace. That is to say, prior to fixation, the subject does not dwell in inner peace but remains fully caught in the flow of things, their generation and degeneration, the circle of life. What if there is no world, no disclosure of being, prior to this ‘stuckness’ and its excess of willing that opens up a space for inner peace.”¹⁰ What Zizek is saying in such clear terms is that life has no meaning disclosed to it, unless we understand that meaning retroactively.

‘Detachment’ as a total and absolute detachment from all of existence can only occur after a fixation to a thing. Detachment is provoked retroactively, after the fact of being stuck onto something that provokes such pain and anguish that one must yearn to detach from it. Desire can only be overcome upon the attainment of nirvana. A key point about the double-meaning of nirvana is that nirvana literally means the extinguishing of the funeral pyre upon the cremation of a body after its death. Nirvana also takes the figurative meaning of overcoming desire. However, the literal and figurative meanings both indicate the true meaning of nirvana. One constantly detaches from desire, but the work is never fully complete until the body is in ashes and the subject has completely detached from its physical form. Therefore, detachment is not merely ‘detachment’ from the temptation of a subject fixating upon a fetish-object in a physical-material sense of lusting after a commodity, but the total and absolute recoil of the subject in a complete and total sense of detaching from the entirety of the cosmos.

As Zizek claims in *Sublime Object of Ideology* “capitalism runs on the leftover of the Real, eluding the symbolization, the Lacanian object petit a as the embodiment of surplus enjoyment...the limit of capitalism is the capitalist mode of production.”¹¹ all that remains, dissolves into the air, all moral foundations melt away as inessential non-

¹⁰ Slavoj Zizek. *Absolute Recoil*. pg. 118.

¹¹ Slavoj Zizek. *Sublime Object of Ideology*. pg. 50-1.

considerations in the mind of the capitalist. Capitalism is an economic formation that is always striving to push beyond the current forms of productive forces, finding new ways to maximize profits, and appropriate surplus-value regardless of the moral consequences.

The reason I am bringing up these points about Buddhism here in the context of determining the ethics of Zizek's views on evil, is that in a now classic text by Slavoj Zizek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, he evokes precisely this analysis of evil in lieu of a discussion of Martin Heidegger and a Zen Buddhist reading of the ethics of the late Heidegger offered by Bret Davis. Evil may have nothing to do with technology because the face to face, will to violence, of willing someone into submission, of the sheer humiliation that can only occur in the face to face dimension of violence. There marks an evil that cannot be reconciled through the use of technology. Technology can create more sophisticated weapons, but it has yet to tear away the heart of darkness that is within us all (the *objet petit a*, that which is in us more than we know, to put it in Joseph Conrad's terms - 'the horror, the horror,' that violence that emerges, unspeakable when no rules apply).

“If God Does Not Exist, Then Nothing Is Permitted...”

The terrible thesis forwarded by Slavoj Zizek (through Lacan of course) is echoed by Nietzsche. God is a narcissist who loves only himself. If, the sending of Jesus as the savior was the culmination of God's plan to save humanity from sin, then there was no greater enjoyment for God than the excruciating crucifixion of Jesus on the cross. The only way to truly admit this, rather than suppress this disturbing idea is to admit that the Fall was the starting point of a chain of events that culminated in the crucifixion of Jesus.¹² A bit of evil had to exist in the mind of God while setting these events in motion, because if God was all-powerful his omnipotence would have encompassed the power by which he created the Devil, a sinister side must exist in the mind of God to have the power to create sin and the Devil.

¹² Slavoj Zizek. *Living in the End Times*. Pg. 93.

Zizek, Kant... and Nietzsche: God has been Refuted, But not the Devil

What is meant by 'ethics' in *Beyond Good and Evil*? Typically, the move beyond good and evil is understood to be a move against 'good' and towards evil. When theorists, such as Bataille take this approach it misses many crucial points that Nietzsche makes obvious. One such point is that evil relies on good as an objective against which it resists. If ethical systems take away the objective sense of good, then the drive towards evil will no longer exist. One simple problem arises. If motivation is solely driven by transgressing good, then that subject acts in a reactive form of power. Merely reacting to the good means that the act of transgression has been determined by the law of the master who produces the definition of what is 'good,' hence, the resentment of a slave morality is precisely someone who: "gives birth to values: the resentment of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying 'yes' to itself, slave morality says 'no' on principle to everything that is 'outside', 'other', 'non-self': and this 'no' is its creative deed...slave morality must first have an opposing, external world, it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, - its action is basically a reaction."¹³

The liberatory possibilities in removing good as the point of resistance means that only the truly strong, the *ubermensch* (the over-Person) will be guaranteed the activation of an active will to power, but after the fact, life makes its definitions known in the slave resentment? Well, Zizek is clear to point out that the slave is not an actual slave. As everyone knows who reads Nietzsche, it is a morality and a morality is a form of economic balancing out. Morality is about debt, gift-giving, giving back what is given to you, and therefore the slave morality holds resentment, vengeance, and as an escape from powerlessness the slave produces an entire moral belief system as a way of compensating for this debt the slave feels s/he is owed.

There most certainly are unexplored avenues of convergence between Slavoj Zizek's work and the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche. By his own admission, Zizek claims that his work deals mostly with a Hegelian-Lacanian theoretical locus, however,

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Genealogy of Morality*. Book 1, #10, pg. 20. 2010. Cambridge University Press: New York.

there are many unexplored points of convergence such as 'necessary illusions' are formative of ideological structures, rather than an illusion from which we can awaken through the use of factual evidence:

"This is probably the fundamental dimension of 'ideology': ideology is not simply a 'false consciousness', an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as 'ideological' - 'ideological' is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence -that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals 'do not know what they are doing'. 'Ideological is not the false consciousness of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by false consciousness. Thus we have finally reached the dimension of the symptom, because one of its possible definitions would also be 'a formation whose very consistency implies a certain non-knowledge on the part of the subject': the subject can 'enjoy his symptom' only in so far as its logic escapes him - the measure of the success of its interpretation is precisely its dissolution."¹⁴

And, Nietzsche's dubious phantasmagoria of Platonism that truth is a kind of error,¹⁵ that truth is an illusion of which we have forgotten is such. To put it succinctly in the words of Nietzsche taken from his Unpublished Fragments from Spring 1885 - Spring 1886, "the great danger is not pessimism (a form of hedonism) the calculating of pleasure and pain... Instead, the meaninglessness of all events! The moral interpretation has become invalid at the same time as the religious interpretation: this they do not know of course, the superficial! The more impious they are, the more instinctively they cling with their teeth to moral valuations... to what the previous morality has also fallen away with 'God': they mutually supported one another... God has been refuted, but not the devil."¹⁶

¹⁴ Slavoj Zizek. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. 1989. New York: Verso Press. Pg. 16.

¹⁵ I am aware that Zizek constantly uses this exact phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche's nachlass as counterpoint to the argument that he then makes, but perhaps this is for show, since the illusion is the support of reality, rather than simply external to it and into which one can be released through objective facts.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Unpublished Fragments (Spring 1885 - Spring 1886)*. #39(15). Pg. 182. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Perhaps this is a reductionary form of Žižek's work. By turning to a Hegelian-Lacanian dialectical interpretation of Christianity, Žižek is finding the Devil in Christ, but never fully atheist enough to completely eradicate the Devil itself. He is constantly looking for the remainder, the less than zero, the point beyond the negation in which the subject may tarry. Take for example many of the remainders in his views expressed in his reading of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Black Cat,"¹⁷ in that the murder in the story retells the story of a character who acts for reasons that he knows he should not, a motive without a motivation. Start with a step back to Kantian thought and Nietzsche's Žizekian response to deontology and the non-consequentialism of Kantian ethics.

Did Kantian ethics produce Poe's Black Cat and the 'Spirit of Perverseness'?

Kantian ethics of non-consequentialism finds its telos retroactively with the writings of Edgar Allan Poe.¹⁸

In the Black Cat we see the 'Spirit of Perverseness' where you must do something, precisely because you cannot, and should not. One does something precisely because it is prohibited, because Kantian desire refers to pathological biases and temporary motivations that are materially contingent, what Poe does in that story is produce a fictional account of an a-priori transcendental completely autonomous sense of desire. In being autonomous and transcendental, the highest version of the 'ethical subject' in Kant's philosophy is unbound by external pressures to find virtue outside of itself, and by mobilizing free-volition in a transcendental act, the ethical subject is no longer bound by fear of the law. In Kant's non-consequentialism, the ethical subject is

¹⁷ Ironically, the short story by Poe, is one of the earliest short stories in the horror genre in the United States. While Poe was also the first author in American history to make a living completely off of his fiction writings, there is something ironic about the fact that this story depicting a man viciously murdering his wife was published in the August 19, 1843 edition of the Saturday Evening Post. A periodical known for the cover art of Norman Rockwell whose portrayals of small town hijinx have become renowned Americana cliches, often stereotypical of the 'wholesome nostalgia' of a bygone moral era, a 'greatness' in America's past. In missing the low-hanging fruit here, Žižek had a golden opportunity to make his point that we are more regulated than ever before, when one recollects 'Americana' it is always in the eyes of a wholesome, Puritanical past with solid morals and not in the sense of a magazine that would publish a story like The Black Cat by Edgar Allan Poe. If anything, the categories of horror films and Hallmark 'Norman Rockwell-esque' films are more segregated now than ever before!

¹⁸ The parallels are clear in a way the ideological 'gap' in Kantian deontology and non-consequentialism is returned to the master by the subject whose evil was the remainder in the master's discourse. Elsewhere Žižek draws on Lacan's dualism between Kant and Sade. "Kant and Sade: The Ideal Couple." lacanian ink 13, 1998.

totally free, and of course, unbeknownst to Kant, totally free to act upon the 'Spirit of Perverseness.' If an act gratifies an impulse and does so beyond the pleasure principle, effectively maintaining its transgressive connotations, then in a purely non-consequentialist fashion it enhances the enjoyment of the act and by enhancing the passion of the subject it remains "stricto sensu ethical..."¹⁹

Edgar Allan Poe even makes note of this in the story of desire to kill the Black Cat, "Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart - one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not?"²⁰

Exiting the Garden of Eden, Regressing Back Towards It

Many cultures speak of an alleged golden age that has been lost. The biblical fable about the Garden of Eden is no different in that the sense of something that was perhaps taken for granted, something crucial to our humanity has been lost. We as humans have been taken out of our natural embodiment into a realm where the knowledge of good and evil brought us into separation from ourselves and brought an awareness of our own alienation from each other. Our minds began the process of using thought as a tool to sort out 'this not that,' and another example of this is very early on in the Tao te Ching, the philosopher Lao Tzu describes a similar case where he says:

"The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao, the name that can be named is not the eternal Name. The unnamable is the eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things. Free from desire, you can see the hidden mystery. Caught in desire, you can see only what is visibly real. Yet mystery and visible reality arise from the same source. And the mystery itself is the gateway to all understanding."²¹

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Edgar Allan Poe. The Essential Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe. "The Black Cat." pg.321.

²¹ Tao te Ching by Lao Tzu. verse #1.

What occurs is the separation of 'this not that' through the development of language. Discourse becomes the preferred method by which to set social bonds, as a necessary tool for communication to fulfill our basic material needs we must use language to fulfill those needs. However, we also develop ways of categorizing 'this not that' and separating out various categories of things in order to differentiate out of the necessity for security. One of many examples would be in early stages of this development of human language (human 'logos') to know this food will make you healthy, that food will poison you, and so forth.

But, the issue is that the beauty and tranquility of this golden age, the garden of eden prior to the development of 'knowledge' and sophisticated forms of communication, the beauty of that phase of human history can only be understood as beautiful a-posteriori, after the fact of losing it forever. Hence, like with the other theses forwarded in this paper, Zizek's argument is quite convincing. What starts as a contingency (perhaps the development of language as a useful tool for human cognitive and social development) can only be understood retroactively as forcing humanity out of a natural phase of immediate, instinctual embodiment, into reflective and perhaps over-analytical neurosis.

Adrian Johnston has perhaps tried to show the connection between Zizek's political work on ideology and Lacan's understanding of "primary narcissism," and I believe it is useful to make this connection, however the theorization of this connection has been improperly drawn. Depicting the infantile state of "primary narcissism" where the infant exists in a blissful state of oblivious perfection, "where the libidinal economy is unperturbed by deep dissatisfactions and inherent inequalities (i.e., depicting the starting condition of human existence as being that of a "primitive monad of enjoyment")"²² Johnston follows up this quote by stating this thesis, "makes it almost impossible to explain why individuals would ever strive to exit from this archaic Garden of Eden."

²² Adrian Johnston. *Zizek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*. pg.213.

Johnston's approach is backwards, because if any understanding of aggressivity and narcissism proves correct it is that these are 'infantile regressions' where the subject (be it a historical, political, or interpersonal conflict) yearns time and time again to reconnect with this infantile state of bliss, the entire metaphysics of history is a yearning to return to this primordial memory of the Garden of Eden in the crib, the womb. More to the point, nobody 'strives' to get out of the Garden of Eden, we are all thrown out of the garden by the brutality of exploitation and the necessity to work.

Our discovery of our own freedom, the appearance of the serpent in the garden of eden is most phallically literal and figurative,²³ because what appears are the choices we have between good and evil and this direct confrontation with the terror of our absolute freedom presses the subject into subjection. This is the backwards awakening of western maturity, to force our severing from our infantile regressions, our infantile memories of bliss are repressed. Hence, Lacan's thesis that the subject passes through a "retroversion effect by which the subject becomes at each stage what he was before..."²⁴

The Law that Mirrors the Public Law is the Super-Ego

There is a difference between 'freedom' and 'a superego that withers away,' the postmodern condition conflates these two things, the work of Slavoj Zizek, by drawing on psychoanalysis from a Marxist perspective earlier on in his career, makes this distinction the purpose of his career. Zizek needs to get back to earlier work where he draws heavily on Marx.

Everyone has heard of Sigmund Freud's theory of the Id, Ego, and Superego. I am not the first to do this, the Frankfurt School made their careers off of this sort of

²³ Hebrew translators have known that the passage in Genesis 3:1, עֵרֶוּם rendering the appearance of the serpent as 'nude,' rather than the typical King James Version that censors this into "the serpent was more subtle..." the passage should read "the serpent was more nude..." an overtly phallic imagery to the temptation offered by the serpent. See the work of Mark Gadd. "A New Look at an Old, Subtle Serpent: Naked in Genesis 3:1," June 2007, Brigham Young University: *Studia Antiqua*, volume 5, number 1. Agamben scholars who do not understand this text and the biblical rendering of 'coverage' and Eve's name in Greek as 'Zoe' are only doing a superficial reading of Agamben's 'bare-life,' which not coincidentally occurs merely a few passages after the presentation of 'chattel.'

²⁴ *Écrits. Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire*. pg. 306.

thing, but I want to update these theories and process the importance of Freud's Tripartite Soul, as I call it, in contemporary sociological context.

Think of Freud's theory as layers. The first two layers, the Id and the Ego, are contained within the individual. Every person has an Id and Ego. My hypothesis today is that in 'neo-liberal' capitalism, the shriveling away of the state means that virtually nobody has a superego anymore, and if they do, it is a cynical attitude towards what once remained of the superego. The Id consists of our buried desires, aggression, primal instinctual drives, libidinal drives, and most importantly you cannot hear the Id in your mind. The Id manifests as the feeling of hunger, a surge of anger, the hair on the back of your neck rising up when you feel a sudden chill of fear, a flush of sexual arousal that makes your heart flutter with excitement. These are felt instinctual responses and do not constitute thoughts that manifest in the mind as words.

The Ego is the conscious-self, imagination, daydreaming, inner thought processes, language that manifests within and outside of the mind in conversations and inner dialogue with oneself. The ego is contained within our own body and gives us a moral conscience, if a beautiful woman walks by and suddenly a surge of excitement pours over a person, and they feel a surge of libido, and a rush of sexual hormones and pheromones, that is the Id talking to you. The Ego then translates that into conscious thoughts. Whether you go over and talk to her, or shy away, or feel embarrassed and start to think to yourself, or maybe if you're with friends you sort of elbow a buddy and say, 'Hey, check her out,' consciously aware of the libidinal impulses but in a socially acceptable way. The reason you do not act like a caveman in prehistoric days and take a club and pounce on the woman instinctually, is because of the Superego bearing down on us.

The Ego is the gatekeeper of the Id, the go-between mediating between the Id and the Superego, the latter being the forces bearing down on the individual that are external to the self. Forces outside of the self may include things like, religious beliefs, government and the fear of consequence for breaking the laws against rape and sexual assault, pressures from family members, parents, relatives, spouses, friends, the judgement of peers who may see the incident and make you feel ashamed or embarrassed, even if it is not something as violent as rape, there may be feelings of

shame associated with being turned down if you simply walk up and start talking to the beautiful woman and this may be a imaginary construct in the mind (ala your ego) that is constructing that phantasy in a way to mediate between the lustful instincts of the Id and the delaying of gratification that civil society makes necessary through the teachings offered by the institutional implementation of the Superego (schools, churches, government policies, policing, ideological and repressive state apparatuses²⁵).

Neurotic Anxiety : Anxiety which arises from an unconscious fear that the libidinal impulses of the ID will take control at an inopportune time. This type of anxiety is driven by a fear of punishment that will result from expressing the ID's desires without proper sublimation.

Moral Anxiety : Anxiety which results from fear of violating moral or societal codes, moral anxiety appears as guilt or shame.

In this conception of Anxiety, we can see why Freud concentrated on strengthening the Ego through psychoanalysis, however, there are epiphenomenon that penetrate the subject so deeply that when the stimulus is removed in the case of Reality Anxiety, it is the worry over spiders crawling on your skin and biting you with poisonous venom. A person may have experienced a real spider bite and therefore feels a rush of fear upon seeing a spider, even if the spider is a safe distance away and there is no threat of being bitten. The epiphenomenon occurs when the memory of that spider is transmogrified into another form, the fear is still there within the subject, but it is shifted onto another object, or so deeply penetrates the subject into its memory banks that the

²⁵ This is a direct appropriation from Louis Althusser's "On the Reproduction of Capitalism." where he defines the state as a repressive apparatus in the Marxist tradition. "The state is a 'repressive machine' that enables the dominant classes (in the nineteenth century, the bourgeois class and the 'class' of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class in order to subject it to the process of extorting surplus-value." pg. 70. This would be fear of constraint, fear of sanction, fear of going to jail. Ideological apparatuses on the other hand serve the dominant class as the production of ideologies, with ideologies being the production of phantasies, the way that 'wish-fulfillment' is enframned to the public. The real struggle for liberation as a Marxist was the base, not the superstructure. The ways that the productive forces and the relations of production and social relations will shift as the class struggles are the last instance of these inward antagonisms finding full resolution. As for Marxists the inward consciousness is determined by material conditions that are external to the subject, consciousness is not an idea that falls from heaven out of thin air. Marxist views on the state are that the state is superstructural and secondarily determined by the modes of production which produce the relations of production. State repression simply mirrors the repression with which capital blockades resources from the working class.

nervousness from the spider persists without provocation. This is most common, one might think, in cases of severe trauma. Deeply impactful brushes with death, experiencing violent abuse, an attack, seeing someone close to them die, or a tragic accident that happened unexpectedly. Reality Anxiety can transform into neurotic anxiety if the stimulus then transfers onto a more permanent, deeper sense of memory within the subject, and that is where you run into deeper neurosis running the risk of becoming psychosis and more permanent forms of psychological illness, rather than a mere disorder, something treatable that may be a temporary condition.

Oedipal or Christian Anxieties?

It is well known that Sigmund Freud forwarded the thesis that these anxieties and neuroses originate in the Oedipal desire. That innate sexual drive a child has towards the parent of the opposite gender. A son has an innate desire towards his mother and in order to fulfill that desire the son must remove obstacles in his way, which means killing the Father whose role is to set up a prohibition against the son acting upon the lust towards the Mother. In the Oedipus Trilogy, Sophocles writes that this happens unintentionally. Freud's thesis is that these are subconscious drives and acts, and when Oedipus finds out that he has unintentionally killed his father and slept with his mother, the news is so excruciating to comprehend, he claws his eyes out.

In Slavoj Žižek's work, there is a clear inversion of this when we read the Christian family triangle. The son is born to a virginal mother. Jesus is allegedly devoid of all lustful desires and it is bizarrely traumatizing to believers to find out in the apocryphal gospels, or the Da Vinci Code that Jesus was sexually active like any other human being with desires. More importantly, the violence enacted between Father and son is directed towards the son by the Father.

If you think about it, the evidence is hidden in plain sight. Why does God use man to promulgate his own glory? Is God merely a sadistic narcissist demanding praise? A borderline personality who gives life and can also take it away? Žižek argues precisely this, which should be clear to anyone who has read the Bible or attended a Christian church, Lacan's reversal of Dostoevsky's famous phrase, where Lacan says, "If God does not exist, then nothing is permitted." Žižek continues:

“It is not true that, if Christ had not come to earth to deliver humanity, everyone would have been lost - quite the contrary, nobody would have been lost, that is, every human being had to fall so that Christ could come and deliver some of them...”²⁶ Clearly, the point is that the Salvation offered by Christ, retroactively makes the Fall necessary, but that God in his omnipotence and omniscience knew that a savior would have to be sacrificed in order for His plan to take shape. “Since the death of Christ is a key step in realizing the goal of creation, at no time was God (the Father) happier than when He was observing His son suffering and dying on the Cross.”²⁷

Zizek then continues by saying the only way to avoid this perversion is to accept the Fall as the starting point, that there was no Fall from which Salvation can save humanity, and then if you do that you are obfuscating the main thesis of the entire Bible and the coming of Christ is no longer a monumental event in human history. This is a line of argumentation I take up in my work on Nietzsche and Pelagianism and the myth of Original Sin.

Terror and Mercy: “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword”

This dialectic of fear and anxiety between the Father and son is the myth that informs how political power can utilize Agape in order to instill totalitarian power. In contrast to eros which creates erotic love as a subtraction from social life, lusting after your partner in privacy secured through the bonds of marriage, agape is fundamental to the creation of a community. Agape love is the patient friendship, the diligence of instilling morals into your children, the connections you have with your neighbors, the charity work you do that brings you out into the larger community.

Zizek asks provocative questions that lead to his typically controversial, yet hidden in plain sight, true conclusions. Which are the regimes whose power is most commonly exerted through the discourses (the social bonds of language that beckon the subjects) that utilize ‘love’ - if you look around the world, it is always regimes like the communists in North Korea. Unconditional love, the love between a parent and a child,

²⁶ Zizek. Living in the End Times. Pg. 93.

²⁷ Ibid.

must involve master and subject, not an involvement in selecting out particular qualities in a person (a slight shift from the opening to Žizek!), but an unconditional love in all its imperfections and weaknesses.

Classic Žizek move gets the reader to think about the rhetoric from the North Korean regime, which mobilizes support through messianic perfection of the Father (the sovereign) who radiates love to the people, and the people radiate love towards the leader, and the Leader for his people, “expressed in continuous acts of grace.”²⁸

The Law at Home is Evil

In Kant’s now famous essay “What is Enlightenment?” he makes a remarkably terrible thesis about what has become commonplace now. What is Enlightenment he is asked, and he answers, Public Freedom, and Private Obedience. You are allowed the freedom to debate tax policy openly in public, but privately you still must obey the law. One can see this formula leading to a point where even the most heinous violence is projected through public free discourse and then subsequently rationalized as acts to obey in private. In Deontology coupled with non-consequentialist universalism of the autonomous transcendental volition of the will, one finds oneself in some disturbing territory. One must obey, have an ethical intuition that burgeons forth from within, the ethical subject must not have an external point of motivation for the ethical act (a point that Žizek then constructs as the mediating point that a group must establish to stabilize the boundaries of ethical behavior, Žizek uses the example of the film *A Few Good Men*, with the ordering of the ‘Code Red’ as the way to forge positive group identity through violence exerted upon the soldiers who disobeyed the commands of the officer played by Jack Nicholson). Kantian ethics involves a person being autonomously driven by an inner sense of ethical norms that then transcend the limitations of the law. In many ways, the modern conditions left to us by the Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant produce a situation where the subject must always be at the limits, and must always consider how to transgress the limits.

Žizek’s thesis is that social transgressions are a part of the maintenance of social control, even in the production of its ethical obverse in the Big Other in its ‘Evil’-

²⁸ Living in the End Times. Pg. 98-99.

otherness, because this 'Evil'-otherness serves to distance the pathology of evil from what is considered normal, without threatening the basis upon which this system functions, which is that evil is integral to the system itself. Even a sentimental family man can become an evil racist, a drug dealer, an 'irrational-evil'-other when threatened, because a narcissistic subject can have desires flipped into becoming a violent subject, because the production of narcissistic subjects is ultimately an ordinary experience of everyday life in consumer society. The violence is consumer society in another form, manifest as violent territorialized protection, a security measure to protect the home, which is codified as the most sacred entity one can possess.