THE THREE EVENTS OF PHILOSOPHY

Slavoj Žižek

> "I don't much like hearing that we have *gone beyond* Hegel, the way one hears we have *gone beyond* Descartes. We go beyond everything and always end up in the same place."[1]

This *apercu* by Lacan can serve as our guiding principle: beware of all too easy attempts at "overcoming" metaphysics! There are three (and only three) key philosophers in the history of (Western) metaphysics: Plato, Descartes, Hegel. The proof of their privileged status is their extra-ordinary position in the series of philosophers: each of the three not only designates a clear break with the past, but also casts his long shadow on the thinkers who follow him – they can all be conceived as a series of negations/oppositions of/to his position. It was already Foucault who noted that the entire history of Western philosophy can be defined as the history of rejections of Platonism: in a homologous way, the entire modern philosophy can be conceived as the history of rejections of Cartesianism, from subtle corrections (Malebranche, Spinoza) to outright dismissals. With Hegel, things are, if anything, even more obvious: what united all that comes after Hegel is the opposition to the specter of Hegel's "panlogicism."

The notion of Event seems especially incompatible with Plato for whom our constantly-changing reality is grounded in the eternal order of Ideas. Are, however, things as simple as that? Plato is the first in the series of philosophers who had bad luck in the 20th century, being blamed for all our misfortunes – Alain Badiou enumerated six main (partially intertwined) forms of the 20th-century anti-Platonism:

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[1] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar, Book II.* New York: Norton 1991, p. 71.

1 – the *vitalist* anti-Platonism (Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze): the assertion of the real of life-becoming against the intellectualist sterility of Platonic forms – as Nietzsche already put it, "Plato" is the name for a disease…

2 – the *empiricist-analytic* anti-Platonism: Plato believed in the independent existence of Ideas; but, as Aristotle already knew, Ideas do not exist independently of sensuous things whose forms they are. The main counter-Platonic thesis of analytic empiricists is that all truths are either analytic or empirical.

3 – the *Marxist* anti-Platonism (for which Lenin is not without blame): the dismissal of Plato as the first Idealist, opposed to pre-Socratic materialists as well as to the more "progressive" and empirically oriented Aristotle. In this view (which conveniently forgets that, in contrast to Aristotle's notion of the slave as a "talking tool," there is no place for slaves in Plato's *Republic*), Plato was the main ideologist of the class of slave owners…

4 – the *existentialist* anti-Platonism : Plato denies the uniqueness of singular existence and subordinates the singular to the universal. This anti-Platonism has a Christian version (Kierkegaard: Socrates versus Christ) and an atheist one (Sartre: «existence precedes essence»).

5 – the *Heideggerian* anti-Platonism : Plato as the founding figure of «Western metaphysics, » the key moment in the historical process of the « forgetting of Being,» the starting point of the process which culminates in today's technological nihilism (« from Plato to NATO… »).

6 – the *«democratic»* anti-Platonism of political philosophy, from Popper to Arendt: Plato as the originator of «closed society, » as the first thinker who elaborated in detail the project of totalitarianism. (For Arendt, at a more refined level, the original sin of Plato is to subordinate politics to Truth, not seeing that politics is a domain of *phronesis*, of judgments and decision made in unique unpredictable situations.)

"Plato" is thus the negative point of reference which unites otherwise irreconcilable enemies: Marxists and anti-Communist liberals, existentialists and analytic empiricists, Heideggerians and vitalists… And does exactly the same not hold for Descartes? Here are the main versions of anti-Cartesianism:

1 – the *Heideggerian* notion of the Cartesian subjectivity as the radical step in metaphysical nihilism which finds its fulfillment in modern technology.

2 – the *ecological* rejection of Cartesian dualism as opening up the way to ruthless exploitation of nature – here is Al Gore's version: the Judeo-Christian tradition**,** in establishing mankind's "dominion" over the earth, also charged mankind with environmental stewardship; Descartes remembered "dominion," but breezed past the idea of stewardship, thereby yielding to the "great temptation of the West" and placing the idealized world of rational thought on a higher plane than nature.[2]

3 – the *cognitivist* rejection of Descartes's privileging of rational mind over emotions (see Antonio Damasio's *Descartes's Error*)*,* as well as his notion of the Self as a single autonomous agent which controls psychic life in a transparent way (see Daniel Dennett's critique of the "Cartesian theatre").

4 – the *feminist* claim that the Cartesian *cogito*, while appearing gender-neutral, effectively privileges male subject (only the masculine mind deals with clear and distinct thought, while the feminine mind is under the swell of confused sensual impressions and affects).

5 – the proponents of the *"linguistic turn"* deplore the "monological" character of the Cartesian subject to whom intersubjectivity comes afterwards, as a secondary feature; in this way, Descartes cannot see how human subjectivity is always embedded in an intersubjective linguistic context.

6 – *vitalists* point out that, in the Cartesian dualism of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, there is no place for the life in its full sense, a life which cannot be reduced to the interaction of mechanic nuts and bolts; this is why Descartes claims that, since animals do not have souls, they don't really suffer – their cries have the status of mechanic squeaks of a malfunctioning machine.

This brings us to Hegel, the ultimate *bête noire* of the last two centuries of philosophy:

1 - proponents of the *"philospophy of life (Lebensphilosophie)"* claim that the life of the Hegelian dialectical process is not the actual organic life, but an artificial shadowy realm of arbitrary intellectual gymnastics: when Hegel says that a notion passes into its opposite, he should have said that a living thinking being passes from one to another thought.

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[2] Quoted from http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/chatterbox/2000/08/ plato_aristotle_and_the_2000_election.html.

2 - *existentialists* from Kierkegaard onwards deplore Hegel's subordination of the individual, singular existence to the universality of a notion: in this way, concrete and unique individuals are reduced to mere dispensable paraphernalia of the movement of the abstract Notion.

3 - *materialists* predictably reject Hegel's idea that external material nature is just a moment in the self-deployment of the Spirit: in an unexplained way, the Idea posits nature as its free self-externalization.

4 - *historicists* reject Hegel's metaphysical teleology: instead of opening up to the plurality and contingency of the historical process, Hegel reduces actual history to the external face of the notional progress – for him, a single and all-encompassing Reason rules in history.

5 - *analytic philosophers* and *empiricists* make fun of Hegel as the hyperbole of the speculative madness, playing conceptual games which can in no way be experimentally tested: Hegel moves in a self-relating loop.

6 - *Marxists* advocate the (in)famous reversal of the Hegelian dialectical process from its head to its feet: ideas and notions are just the ideological superstructure of the material process of production which overdetermines entire social life.

7 - for traditional *liberals*, Hegel's "divinization" of the State as the "material existence of God" makes him (together with Plato) one of the main forerunners of the "closed society" – there is a straight line from Hegelian totality to political totalitarianism.

8 - for some *religious moralists*, the Hegelian dialectical "coincidence of the opposites" as well as his historicism lead to a nihilistic vision of society and history in which there are no transcendent and stable moral values and in which a murderer is perceived as equal to his victim.

9 – for (most of) the *deconstructionists*, the Hegelian "sublation (*Aufhebung*)" is the very model of how metaphysics, which acknowledging difference, dispersal, otherness, again subsumes it into the One of the self-mediating Idea – it is against *Aufhebung* that deconstructionists assert an irreducible excess or remainder which cannot ever be reintegrated into the One.

10 – for the *Deleuzian* thought of productive difference, Hegel cannot think difference outside the frame of negativity – however, negativity is the very operatoir of subsuming difference under the One; the Deleuzian formula is thus that Hegel should not even be criticized but outrightly forgotten.

Each of the three philosophers stands not only for an Event – the shattering encounter of an Idea; the emergence of a purely evental *cogito*, a crack in the great chain of being; the Absolute itself as an evental self-deployment, as the result of its own activity. It also stands for a moment of negativity, cut – the normal flow of things is interrupted, another dimension breaks in. And it also stands for the moment of madness: the madness of being captivated by an Idea (like falling in love, like Socrates under the spell of his *dainon*), the madness at the heart of cogito (the "night of the world"), and, of course, the ultimate "madness" of the Hegelian System, this Bacchanalian dance of concepts. So one can say that philosophies which follow Plato, Descartes, or Hegel, are all attempts to contain/control this excess of madness, to renormalize it, to inscribe it into the normal flow of things.

If we stick to the textbook version of Plato's idealism as asserting the immutable eternal order of Ideas, he effectively cannot but appear to deny event as something that belongs to our unstable material reality and doesn't concern Ideas - but there is another reading possible: to conceive "Idea" as the event of the appearing of the suprasensible. Recall well-known descriptions of Socrates caught in a hysterical seizure when struck by an Idea, standing frozen for hours, oblivious to reality around him – is this not an evental encounter par excellence? In *Phaedrus*, Plato himself compares love to madness, to being possessed – and is this not how it is when we find ourselves passionately in love? Is love not a kind of permanent state of exception? All proper balances of our daily life are disturbed, everything we do is colored by the underlying thought of "that." The situation is "beyond Good and Evil": we feel a weird indifference towards our moral obligations with regard to our parents, children, friends – even if we continue to meet them, we do it in a mechanical way, in a condition of "as if"; everything pales with regard to our passionate attachment. In this sense, falling in love is like the striking that hit Saul/Paul on the road to Damascus: a kind of religious suspension of the Ethical, to use Kierkegaard's terms. An Absolute intervenes which derails the balanced run of our daily affairs: it is not so much that the standard hierarchy of values is inversed – much more radically, another dimension enters the scene, a different level of being. Alain Badiou has deployed the parallel between today's search for a sexual (or marital) partner through the appropriate dating agencies and the ancient procedure of arranged marriages: in both cases, the risk of "falling in love" is suspended, there is no contingent "fall" proper, the risk of the real called the "love encounter" is minimized by prior arrangements which take into account all the material and psychological interests of the concerned parties. Robert Epstein pushes this idea to its logical conclusion, providing its missing counterpart: once you choose your appropriate partner, how can you arrange things so that you will both effectively love each other? Based on the study of

arranged marriages, Epstein developed "procedures of affection-building"—one can "build love deliberately and choose whom to do it with"… Such a procedure relies on self-commodification: through internet dating or marriage agencies, each prospective partner presents themselves as a commodity, listing his or her qualities and providing photos. If we marry today, it is more and more in order to re-normalize the violence of falling in love – in Basque, the term for falling in love is *maitemindu* which, literally translated, means »to be injured by love.«

And, of course, the same holds for an authentic political engagement. In his *Conflict of Faculties* written in the mid 1790s, Immanuel Kant addresses a simple but difficult question: is there a true progress in history? (He meant ethical progress in freedom, not just material development.) Kant conceded that actual history is confused and allows for no clear proof: think how the 20th century brought unprecedented democracy and welfare, but also holocaust and gulag… But he nonetheless concluded that, although progress cannot be proven, we can discern signs which indicate that progress is possible. Kant interpreted the French Revolution as such a sign which pointed towards the possibility of freedom: the hitherto unthinkable happened, a whole people fearlessly asserted their freedom and equality. For Kant, even more important than the – often bloody – reality of what went on on the streets of Paris was the enthusiasm that the events in France gave rise to in the eyes of sympathetic observers all around Europe (but also in Haiti!):

"The recent Revolution of a people which is rich in spirit, may well either fail or succeed, accumulate misery and atrocity, it nevertheless arouses in the heart of all spectators (who are not themselves caught up in it) a taking of sides according to desires which borders on enthusiasm and which, since its very expression was not without danger, can only have been caused by a moral disposition within the human race."[3]

THIS dualism is the "materialist truth" of the dualism of Ideas and material things, and it is against this background that one should envisage the true dimension of Plato's philosophical revolution, so radical that it was misinterpreted by Plato himself: the assertion of the gap between the spatio-temporal order of reality in its eternal movement of generation and corruption, and the "eternal" order of Ideas, i.e., the notion that empirical reality can "participate" in an eternal Idea, that an eternal Idea can shine through it, appear in it. Where Plato got it wrong is in his ontologization of Ideas (strictly homologous to Descartes's ontologization of *cogito*): as if Ideas form another, even more substantial and stable order of "true" reality. What Plato was not ready (or, rather, able) to accept was the thoroughly virtual,

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[3] Immanuel Kant, "The Conflict of Faculties," in *Political Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991, p. 182.

"immaterial" (or, rather, "insubstantial") status of Ideas: like sense-events in Deleuze's ontology, Ideas have no causality of their own, they are virtual entities generated by material spatio-temporal processes. Let us take an attractor in mathematics: all positive lines or points in its sphere of attraction only approach it in an endless fashion, never reaching its form - the existence of this form is purely virtual; it is nothing more than the shape towards which lines and points tend. However, precisely as such, the virtual is the Real of this field: the immovable focal point around which all elements circulate – one should give here to the term »form« its full Platonic weight, since we are dealing with an »eternal« Idea in which reality imperfectly »participates.« One should thus fully accept that spatio-temporal material reality is "all there is," that there is no other "more true" reality: the ontological status of Ideas is that of PURE APPEARING. The ontological problem of Ideas is the same as the fundamental problem of Hegel's: how is meta-physics possible, how can temporal reality PARTICIPATE in the eternal Order, how can this order APPEAR, transpire, in it. It is not "how can we reach true reality beyond appearances," but "how can APPEARANCE emerge in reality." The conclusion Plato avoids is implied in his exercise: *the suprasensible Idea* does not dwell BEYOND appearances, in a separate ontological sphere of fully constituted Being; it *is appearance as appearance*.

So why a return to Plato? Why do we need a *repetition* of Plato's founding gesture? In his *Logiques des mondes*, Badiou provides a succinct definition of "democratic materialism" and its opposite, "materialist dialectics": the axiom which condenses the first one is "*There is nothing but bodies and languages …*," to which materialist dialectics adds "… *with the exception of truths*."[4] One should bear in mind the Platonic, properly meta-physical, thrust of this distinction: *prima facie*, it cannot but appear as a proto-idealist gesture to assert that material reality is not all that there is, that there is also another level of incorporeal truths. Badiou performs here the paradoxical philosophical gesture of defending, AS A MATERIALIST, the autonomy of the "immaterial" order of Truth. As a materialist, and in order to be thoroughly materialist, Badiou focuses on the IDEALIST topos *par excellence*: how can a human animal forsake its animality and put its life in the service of a transcendent Truth? How can the "transubstantiation" from the pleasure-oriented life of an *individual* to the life of a *subject* dedicated to a Cause occur? In other words, how is a free act possible? How can one break (out of) the network of the causal connections of positive reality and conceive an act that begins by and in itself? Again, Badiou *repeats within the materialist frame the elementary gesture of idealist anti-reductionism*: human Reason cannot be reduced to the

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[4] Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes*, Paris: Editions du Seuil 2006, p. 9.

result of evolutionary adaptation; art is not just a heightened procedure of providing sensual pleasures, but a medium of Truth; and so on.

This, then, is our basic *philosophico-political choice (decision)* today: either repeat in a materialist vein Plato's assertion of the meta-physical dimension of "eternal Ideas," or continue to dwell in the postmodern universe of "democratic-materialist" historicist relativism, caught in the vicious cycle of the eternal struggle with "premodern" fundamentalisms. How is this gesture possible, thinkable even? Let us begin with the surprising fact that Badiou does not identify as the "principal contradiction," the predominant antagonism, of today's ideological situation the struggle between idealism and materialism, but the struggle between two forms of materialism (democratic and dialectical).

This same struggle assumes a new dimension with Descartes: *cogito* as his starting point may appear as the very model of asserting the primacy of thinking subjectivity; however, the first thing that should draw our attention is the echo that Descartes's thought found from the very beginning among women – "*cogito* has no sex," was the reaction of an early feminine reader. The one who first deployed this feminist potential of Cartesianism was Francois Poullain de la Barre, a follower of Descartes who, after becoming a priest, converted to Protestantism. When the Edict of Fontainebleau revoked the Edict of Nantes, he was exiled in Geneva, where he applied Cartesian principles to the question of women and denounced injustice against women and the inequality of the female condition, championing the social equality between women and men. In 1673, he published anonymously "Equality of the two sexes, speech physical and moral where it is seen the importance to demolish itself prejudge," showing that the inequality and the treatment that women undergo does not have a natural base, but proceeds from cultural prejudice. He recommends that women receive a true education and also says all the careers should be open to them, including scientific ones.[5]

What one should always bear in mind when talking about *cogito*, about the reduction of a human point to the abyssal point of thinking without any external object, is that we are not dealing here with silly and extreme logical games ("imagine that you alone exist"…), but with the description of a very precise existential experience of the radical self-withdrawal, of suspending the existence of all reality around me to a vanishing illusion, which is well-known in psychoanalysis (as psychotic withdrawal) as well as in religious mysticism (under the

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[5] One should nonetheless add that a couple of years later, he refuted systematically his own argument and advocated the excellence of men.

name of so-called "Night of the World"). After Descartes, this idea was deployed in the basic insight of Schelling, according to which, prior to its assertion as the medium of the rational Word, the subject is the "infinite lack of being /unendliche Mangel an Sein/," the violent gesture of contraction that negates every being outside itself. This idea also forms the core of Hegel's notion of madness: when Hegel determines madness to be a withdrawal from the actual world, the closing of the soul into itself, its "contraction," the cutting-off of its links with external reality, he all too quickly conceives of this withdrawal as a "regression" to the level of the "animal soul" still embedded in its natural environs and determined by the rhythm of nature (night and day, etc.). Does this withdrawal, on the contrary, not designate the severing of the links with the Umwelt, the end of the subject's immersion into its immediate natural environs, and is it, as such, not the founding gesture of "humanization"? Was this withdrawal-into-self not accomplished by Descartes in his universal doubt and reduction to *cogito*, which also involves a passage through the moment of radical madness? Are we thus not back at the well-known and often-quoted passage from *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, where Hegel characterizes the experience of pure Self, of the contraction-into-self of the subject, as the "night of the world", the eclipse of (constituted) reality? –

"The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity - an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him - or which are not present. This night, the inner of nature, that exists here - pure self - in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head - there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye - into a night that becomes awful."[6]

And the symbolic order, the universe of the Word, logos, can only emerge from the experience of this abyss. As Hegel puts it, this inwardness of the pure self "must enter also into existence, become an object, oppose itself to this innerness to be external; return to being. This is language as name-giving power. ... Through the name the object as individual entity is born out of the I."[7] - What we must be careful not to miss here, is how Hegel's break with the Enlightenment tradition can be discerned in the reversal of the very metaphor for the

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[6] G.W.F. Hegel, "Jenaer Realphilosophie," in *Fruehe politische Systeme*, Frankfurt: Ullstein 1974, p. 204; translation quoted from Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection*, Albany: Suny Press 1985, pp. 7-8. – In *Encyclopaedia* also, Hegel mentions the "night-like abyss within which a world of infinitely numerous images and presentations is preserved without being in consciousness" (*Encyclopaedia,* Par. 453). Hegel's historical source is here Jacob Bohme.

[7] Hegel, "Jenaer Realphilosophie," ibid.

subject: the subject is no longer the Light of Reason opposed to the non-transparent, impenetrable Stuff (of Nature, Tradition...); his very kernel, the gesture which opens up the space for the Light of Logos, is absolute negativity, the "night of the world," the point of utter madness in which fantasmatic apparitions of "partial objects" err around. Consequently, there is no subjectivity without this gesture of withdrawal; which is why Hegel is fully justified in inverting the standard question of how the fall-regression into madness is possible: the true question is rather how the subject is able to climb out of madness and to reach "normalcy." That is to say, the withdrawal-into-self, the cutting-off of the links to the environs, is followed by the construction of a symbolic universe which the subject projects onto reality as a kind of substitute-formation, destined to recompense us for the loss of the immediate, pre-symbolic real. However, as Freud himself asserted in his analysis of Daniel Paul Schreber's paranoia, the manufacturing of a substitute-formation that recompenses the subject for the loss of reality, is the most succint definition of the paranoiac construction as an attempt to cure the subject of the disintegration of his universe. In short, the ontological necessity of "madness" resides in the fact that it is not possible to pass directly from the purely "animal soul," immersed in its natural environs to "normal" subjectivity, dwelling in its symbolic virtual environs - the "vanishing mediator" between the two is the "mad" gesture of radical withdrawal from reality, which opens up the space for its symbolic (re) constitution. This brings us back to Schelling: following Kant, Schelling deployed the notion of the primordial decision-differentiation (*Ent-Scheidung*), the unconscious atemporal deed by means of which the subject chooses his eternal character which, afterwards, within his conscious-temporal life, he experiences as the inexorable necessity, as "the way he always was":

"The deed, once accomplished, sinks immediately into the unfathomable depth, thereby acquiring its lasting character. It is the same with the will which, once posited at the beginning and led into the outside, immediately has to sink into the unconscious. This is the only way the beginning, the beginning that does not cease to be one, the truly eternal beginning, is possible. For here also it holds that the beginning should not know itself. Once done, the deed is eternally done. The decision that is in any way the true beginning should not appear before consciousness, it should not be recalled to mind, since this, precisely, would amount to its recall. He who, apropos of a decision, reserves for himself the right to drag it again to light, will never accomplish the beginning."[8]

With this abyssal act of freedom, the subject breaks up the rotary movement of drives, this abyss of the Unnamable – in short, this deed is the very founding gesture of

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[8] F.W.J. von Schelling, *Ages of the World*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1997, p. 181-182.

naming. Therein resides Schelling's unheard-of philosophical revolution: he does not simply oppose the dark domain of the rotary movement of pre-ontological drives, this unnamable Real which cannot ever be totally symbolized, to the domain of Logos, of articulated Word which cannot ever totally "force" it (like Badiou, Schelling insists on how there is always a remainder of the unnamable Real – the "indivisible remainder" – which eludes symbolization); at its most radical, the unnamable Unconscious is not external to Logos, it is not its obscure background, but, rather, *the very act of Naming, the very founding gesture of Logos*. The greatest contingency, the ultimate act of abyssal madness, is the very act of imposing a rational Necessity onto the pre-rational chaos of the Real. The true point of "madness" is thus not the pure excess of the Night of the World, but the madness of the passage to the Symbolic itself, of imposing a symbolic order onto the chaos of the Real. (Recall Freud who, in his analysis of the paranoiac judge Schreber, points out how the paranoiac "system" is not madness, but a desperate attempt to *escape* madness – the disintegration of the symbolic universe - through an ersatz universe of meaning.[9]) If madness is constitutive, then *every* system of meaning is minimally paranoiac, "mad." Recall Brecht's slogan »What is the robbing of a bank compared to the founding of a new bank?« - therein resides the lesson of David Lynch's *Straight Story*: what is the ridiculously-pathetic perversity of figures like Bobby Peru in *Wild at Heart* or Frank in *Blue Velvet* compared to deciding to traverse the US central plane in a tractor to visit a dying relative? Measured with this act, Frank's and Bobby's outbreaks of rage are the impotent theatrics of old and sedate conservatives... In the same way, we should say: what is the mere madness caused by the loss of reason compared to the madness of reason itself?

This step is the properly "Hegelian" one – which is why Hegel, the philosopher who made the most radical attempt to think the abyss of madness at the core of subjectivity, is also the philosopher who brought to its "mad" climax the philosophical System as the totality of meaning. This is why, for very good reasons, "Hegel" stands in the eyes of the common sense for the moment at which philosophy gets mad, explodes into a crazy pretense at "absolute knowledge."

However, Hegel's point is here a much more refined one: not that everything is madness, but that "normality," the reign of reason, is a self-sublation of madness, in the same way that the rule of law is the self-sublation of crime. Recall G.K. Chesterton's religious thriller *The Man Who Was Thursday*, in which a mysterious chief of a super-secret Scotland

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[9] See Sigmund Freud, "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia," in *Three Case Histories*, New York: Touchstone 1996.

Yard department who is convinced that "a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilization":

"He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has, therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers. It is their business to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense. /…/ The work of the philosophical policeman /…/ is at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to pot-houses to arrest thieves; we go to artistic tea-parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime."[10]

Would not thinkers as different as Popper, Adorno and Levinas, also subscribe to a slightly changed version of this idea, where actual political crime is called "totalitarianism" and the philosophical crime is condensed in the notion of "totality"? A straight road leads from the philosophical notion of totality to political totalitarianism, and the task of "philosophical police" is to discover from a book of Plato's dialogues or a treatise on social contract by Rousseau that a political crime will be committed. The ordinary political policeman goes to secret organizations to arrest revolutionaries; the philosophical policeman goes to philosophical symposia to detect proponents of totality. The ordinary anti-terrorist policeman tries to detect those preparing to blow up buildings and bridges; the philosophical policeman tries to detect those about to deconstruct the religious and moral foundation of our societies…

This provocative analysis demonstrates the limitation of Chesterton, his not being Hegelian enough: what he doesn't get is that *universal(ized) crime is no longer a crime – it sublates (negates/overcomes) itself as crime and turns from transgression into a new order*. He is right to claim that, compared to the "entirely lawless" philosopher, burglars, bigamists, murderers even, are essentially moral: a thief is a "conditionally good man," he doesn't deny property as such, he just wants more of it for himself and is then quite ready to respect it. However, the conclusion to be drawn from this is that crime as such is »essentially moral," that it wants just a particular illegal reordering of the global moral order which should remain. And, in a truly Hegelian spirit, one should bring this proposition (of the "essential morality" of the crime) to its immanent reversal: not only is crime "essentially moral" (in Hegelese: an inherent moment of the deployment of the inner antagonisms and "contradictions" of the very notion of moral order, not something that disturbs moral order from outside, as an accidental intrusion); but *morality itself is essentially criminal* – again, not only in the sense that the

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[10] G.K.Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1986, p. 44-45.

universal moral order necessary "negates itself" in particular crimes, but, more radically, in the sense that *the way morality (in the case of theft, property) asserts itself is already in itself a crime* – "property IS theft," as they used to say in the 19th century. That is to say, one should pass from theft as a particular criminal violation of the universal form of property to this form itself as a criminal violation: what Chesterton fails to perceive is that the "universalized crime" that he projects into "lawless modern philosophy" and its political equivalent, the "anarchist" movement that aims at destroying the totality of civilized life, *already exists in the guise of the existing rule of law*, so that the antagonism between Law and crime reveals itself to be inherent to crime, the antagonism between universal and particular crime.

It is in this sense that Chesterton asserted the truly subversive, revolutionary even, character of orthodoxy – in his famous "Defense of Detective Story," he remarked how the detective story "keeps in some sense before the mind the fact that civilization itself is the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions. /…/ /The police romance/ is based on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies."[11] Therein resides the elementary matrix of the Hegelian dialectical process here: the external opposition (between Law and its criminal transgression) is transformed into the opposition, internal to the transgression itself, between particular transgressions and the absolute transgression which appears as its opposite, as the universal Law. This point was clearly made by none other than Richard Wagner who, in his draft of the play *Jesus of Nazareth*, written somewhere between late 1848 and early 1949, attributes to Jesus a series of alternate supplementations of the Commandments:

"The commandment saith: Thou shalt not commit adultery! But I say unto you: Ye shall not marry without love. A marriage without love is broken as soon as entered into, and who so hath wooed without love, already hath broken the wedding. If ye follow my commandment, how can ye ever break it, since it bids you to do what your own heart and soul desire? – But where ye marry without love, ye bind yourselves at variance with God's love, and in your wedding ye sin against God; and this sin avengeth itself by your striving next against the law of man, in that ye break the marriage-vow."[12]

The true adultery is not to copulate outside marriage, but to copulate in marriage without love: the simple adultery just violates the Law from outside, while marriage without love destroys it from within, turning the letter of the Law against its spirit. So, to paraphrase Brecht

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[11] Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "A Defense of Detective Stories," in H. Haycraft, ed., *The Art of the Mystery Story,* New York: The Universal Library 1946, p. 6.

[12] Richard Wagner, *Jesus of Nazareth and Other Writings*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1995, p. 303.

yet again: what is a simple adultery compared to (the adultery that is a loveless) marriage! It is not by chance that Wagner's underlying formula "marriage is adultery" recalls Proudhon's "property is theft" – in the stormy 1848 events, Wagner was not only a Feuerbachian celebrating sexual love, but also a Proudhonian revolutionary demanding the abolition of private property; so no wonder that, later on on the same page, Wagner attributes to Jesus a Proudhonian supplement to "Thou shalt not steal!":

"This also is a good law: Thou shalt not steal, nor covet another man's goods. Who goeth against it, sinneth: but I preserve you from that sin, inasmuch as I teach you: Love thy neighbour as thyself; which also meaneth: Lay not up for thyself treasures, whereby thou stealest from thy neighbour and makest him to starve: for when thou hast thy goods safeguarded by the law of man, thou provokest thy neighbour to sin against the law."[13]

This is how the Christian "supplement" to the Book should be conceived: as a properly Hegelian "negation of negation," which resides in the decisive shift from the *distortion of a notion* to a *distortion constitutive of this notion*, i.e., to this notion as a distortion-in-itself. Recall again Proudhon's old dialectical motto "property is theft": the "negation of negation" is here the shift from theft as a distortion ("negation," violation) of property to the dimension of theft inscribed into the very notion of property (nobody has the right to fully own means of production, their nature is inherently collective, so every claim "this is mine" is illegitimate). As we have just seen, the same goes for crime and Law, for the passage from crime as the distortion ("negation") of the law to crime as sustaining law itself, i.e., to the idea of the Law itself as universalized crime. One should note that, in this notion of the "negation of negation," the encompassing unity of the two opposed terms is the "lowest," "transgressive," one: it is not crime which is a moment of law's self-mediation (or theft which is a moment of property's self-mediation); the opposition of crime and law is inherent to crime, law is a subspecies of crime, crime's self-relating negation (in the same way that property is theft's self-relating negation). And does ultimately the same not go for nature itself? Here, "negation of negation" is the shift from the idea that we are violating some natural balanced order to the idea that imposing on the Real such a notion of balanced order is in itself the greatest violation… which is why the premise, the first axiom even, of every radical ecology is "there is no Nature." Chesteton wrote: »"Take away the supernatural and what you are left with is the unnatural." We should endorse this statement, but in the opposite sense, not in the sense intended by Chesterton: we should accept that nature *is* »unnatural,« a freaky show of contingent disturbances with no inner rhyme.

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[13] Op.cit., p. 303-304.

It is only against this background that we can grasp what Hegel intended with his notion of "absolute knowing" – the formula here is: take away the illusion and you lose the truth itself – a truth needs time to make a journey through illusions to form itself. One should put Hegel back into the series of Plato-Descartes-Hegel which corresponds to the triad of Objective-Subjective-Absolute: Plato's Ideas are objective, Truth embodied, the Cartesian subject stands for the unconditional certainty of my subjective self-awareness… and Hegel, what does he add? If "subjective" is what is relative to our subjective limitation, and if "objective" is the way things really are, what does "absolute" add to it? Hegel's answer: the "absolute" does add some deeper, more substantial, dimension – all it does is to include (subjective) illusion into (objective) truth itself. The "absolute" standpoint makes us see how reality includes fiction (or fantasy), how the right choice only emerges after the wrong one:

„absolute knowing is the point at which consciousness reflexively assumes the fact that the share of illusion or fantasy is constitutive of the progress of truth. The truth is not located outside fantasy, since fantasy is the key element of its deployment. This insight compels us to conceive of absolute knowing as the point of traversing the fantasy. /.../ absolute knowing is to be seen as the point at which fantasy acquires its place in philosophy. /.../ If fantasy first appeared as a *negativum*, i.e., as the point of failure of a specific philosophical wager, it is now conceived as a positive moment of the deployment of truth.“[14]

Hegel thus enjoins us to turn around the entire history of philosophy which constitutes a series of efforts to clearly differentiate *doxa* versus true knowledge: for Hegel, *doxa* is a constitutive part of knowledge, and this is what makes truth temporal and evental. This evental character of truth involves a logical paradox deployed by Jean-Pierre Dupuy in his admirable text on Hitchcock's *Vertigo*:

"An object possesses a property x until the time t; after t, it is not only that the object no longer has the property x; it is that it is not true that it possessed x at any time. The truth-value of the proposition 'the object O has the property x at the moment t' therefore depends on the moment when this proposition is enunciated."[15]

One should note here the precise formulation: it is not that the truth-value of the proposition "the object O has the property *x*" depends on the time to which this proposition refers - *even when this time is specified, the truth-value depends on the time when the proposition itself is enounced*. Or, to quote the title of Dupuy's text, "when I'll die, nothing of our love will ever

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[14] Jela Krecic, *Philosophy, Fantasy, Film*, doctoral thesis (in Slovene), University of Ljubljana 2008.

[15] Jean-Pierre Dupuy, "Quand je mourrai, rien de notre amour n'aura jamais existe," unpublished manuscript of the intervention at the colloquium *Vertigo et la philosophie*, Ecole Normale Superieure, Paris, October 14 2005.

have existed." Think about marriage and divorce: the most intelligent argument for the right to divorce (proposed, among others, by none other than the young Marx) does not refer to common vulgarities in the style of "like all things, love attachments are also not eternal, they change in the course of time," etc.; it rather concedes that indissolvability is in the very notion of marriage. The conclusion is that divorce always has a retroactive scope: it does not only mean that marriage is now annulled, but something much more radical – a marriage should be annulled because *it never was a true marriage*. And the same holds for Soviet Communism: it is clearly insufficient to say that, in the years of Brezhnev "stagnation," it "exhausted its potentials, no longer fitting new times"; what its miserable end demonstrates is that it was a historical deadlock *from its very beginning*.

This paradox provides a clue for the twists and turns of the Hegelian dialectical process. Let us take Hegel's critique of the Jacobin revolutionary Terror as an exercise in abstract negativity of the absolute freedom which cannot stabilize itself in a concrete social order of freedom, and thus has to end in the fury of self-destruction. However, one should bear in mind that, insofar as we are dealing here with a historical choice (between the "French" way of remaining within Catholicism and thus being obliged to engage in the self-destructive revolutionary Terror, and the "German" way of Reformation), this choice involves exactly the same elementary dialectical paradox as the one, also from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, between the two readings of "the Spirit is a bone" which Hegel illustrates by the phallic metaphor (phallus as the organ of insemination or phallus as the organ of urination): Hegel's point is *not* that, in contrast to the vulgar empiricist mind which sees only urination, the proper speculative attitude has to choose insemination. The paradox is that the direct choice of insemination is the infallible way to miss it: it is not possible to choose directly the "true meaning", i.e. one *has* to begin by making the "wrong" choice (of urination) - the true speculative meaning emerges only through the repeated reading, as the after-effect (or by-product) of the first, "wrong," reading. And the same goes for social life in which the direct choice of the "concrete universality" of a particular ethical life-world can only end in a regression to pre-modern organic society that denies the infinite right of subjectivity as the fundamental feature of modernity. Since the subject-citizen of a modern state can no longer accept his immersion in some particular social role that confers on him a determinate place within the organic social Whole, the only way to the rational totality of the modern State leads through revolutionary Terror: one should ruthlessly tear up the constraints of the pre-modern organic "concrete universality," and fully assert the infinite right of subjectivity in its abstract negativity. In other words, the point of Hegel's analysis of the revolutionary Terror is not the rather obvious insight into how the revolutionary project involved the unilateral direct

assertion of abstract Universal Reason, and was as such doomed to perish in self-destructive fury, since it was unable to organize the transposition of its revolutionary energy into a concrete stable and differentiated social order; Hegel's point is rather the enigma of why, in spite of the fact that revolutionary Terror was a historical deadlock, we have to pass through it in order to arrive at the modern rational State.

This is why Hegelian dialectics is not a vulgar evolutionism claiming that a phenomenon was justified in its own time, but deserves to disappear when its time passes: the "eternity" of dialectics means that the de-legitimization is always retroactive, what disappears "in itself" always deserved to disappear. Recall also the paradox of the process of apologizing: if I hurt someone with a rude remark, the proper thing for me to do is to offer him a sincere apology, and the proper thing for him to do is to say something like "Thanks, I appreciate it, but I wasn't offended, I knew you didn't mean it, so you really owe me no apology!" The point is, of course, that, although the final result is that no apology is needed, one has to go through the entire process of offering it: "you owe me no apology" can only be said after I DO offer an apology, so that, although, formally, "nothing happens," the offer of apology is proclaimed unnecessary, there is a gain at the end of the process (perhaps, even, the friendship is saved). This paradox is sustained by the distinction between the "constative" and the "performative" dimensions, between "subject of the enunciated" and "subject of the enunciation": at the level of the enunciated content, the whole operation is meaningless (why do it – offer an apology, go through terror – when it is superfluous?); however, what this common sense insight forgets is that it is only the "wrong" superfluous gesture which creates the subjective conditions which made it possible for the subject to really see *why* this gesture is superfluous. It only becomes possible to say that my apology is not necessary after I offer it; it only becomes possible to see how Terror is superfluous and destructive after one goes through it. The dialectical process is thus more refined than it may appear; the standard notion is that, in it, one can only arrive at the final truth through the path of errors, so that these errors are not simply discarded, but "sublated" in the final truth, preserved in it as its moments. What this standard notion misses is how the errors are "sublated" (negated-preserved-elevated) *precisely as superfluous*.

How is this circle of changing the past possible without recourse to travel back in time? The solution was already proposed by Henri Bergson: of course one cannot change the past reality/actuality, but what one can change is the virtual dimension of the past – when something radically New emerges, this New retroactively creates its own possibility, its own causes/conditions. A potentiality can be inserted into (or withdrawn from) past reality. Falling in love changes the past: it is as if I *always-already* loved you, our love was destined,

"answer of the real." My present love causes the past which gave birth to it – and in *Vertigo*, it is the opposite that occurs: the past is changed so that it loses *objet a*. What Scottie first experiences in Vertigo is the *loss* of Madeleine, his fatal love; when he recreates Madeleine in Judy and then discovers that the Madeleine he knew already was Judy pretending to be Madeleine, what he discovers is not simply that Judy is a fake (he knew that she is not the true Madeleine, since he recreated a copy of Madeleine out of her), but that, *because she is NOT a fake – she IS Madeleine -, Madeleine herself was already a fake* – objet a disintegrates, the very loss is lost, we get a "negation of negation." Scottie's discovery *changes the past*, deprives the lost object of *objet a*. The same temporal paradox characterizes all events proper, inclusive of the political ones – Rosa Luxembourg was well-aware of it when, in her polemic against Edouard Bernstein, she provides two arguments against the revisionist fear that proletariat will take power prematurely, before the circumstances are ripe:

»In the first place, it is impossible to imagine that a transformation as formidable as the passage from capitalist society to socialist society can be realized in one happy act. /.../ The socialist transformation supposes a long and stubborn struggle, in the course of which, it is quite probable the proletariat will be repulsed more than once so that for the first time, from the viewpoint of the final outcome of the struggle, it will have necessarily come to power ‚too early.'

In the second place, it will be impossible to avoid the ‚premature' conquest of State power by the proletariat precisely because these ‚premature' attacks of the proletariat constitute a factor and indeed a very important factor, creating the political conditions of the final victory. In the course of the political crisis accompanying its seizure of power, in the course of the long and stubborn struggles, the proletariat will acquire the degree of political maturity permitting it to obtain in time a definitive victory of the revolution. Thus these ‚premature' attacks of the proletariat against the State power are in themselves important historic factors helping to provoke and determine the *point* of the definite victory. Considered from this viewpoint, the idea of a ‚premature' conquest of political power by the labouring class appears to be a polemic absurdity derived from a mechanical conception of the development of society, and positing for the victory of the class struggle a point fixed *outside* and *independent of* the class struggle.

Since the proletariat is not in the position to seize power in any other way than ‚prematurely,' since the proletariat is absolutely obliged to seize power once or several times ‚too early' before it can maintain itself in power for good, the objection to the ‚premature'

conquest of power is at bottom nothing more than a *general opposition to the aspiration of the proletariat to possess itself of State power.*«[16]

There is no meta-language: no outside-position from which the agent can calculate how many „premature" attempts are needed to get at the right moment - why? Because this is a case of truth which arises out of misrecognition (*la verite surgit de la meprise*, as Lacan put it) where the „premature" attempts transform the very space/measure of temporality: the subject "jumps ahead" and takes a risk in making a move before its conditions are fully met.[17] The subject's engagement in the symbolic order coils the linear flow of time in both directions: it involves precipitation as well as retroactivity (things retroactively become what they are, the identity of a thing only emerges when the thing is in delay with regard to itself) – in short, every act is by definition too early and, simultaneously, too late. One has to know to wait, not to lose one's nerves: if one acts too fast, the act turns into a *passage a l'acte*, a violent forward-escape to avoid the deadlock. If one misses the moment and acts too late, the act loses its quality of the act, of a radical intervention as a consequence of which "nothing remains the way it was," and becomes just a local change within the order of being, part of the normal flow of things. The problem is, of course, that an act always occurs simultaneously too fast (the conditions are never fully ripe, one has to succumb to the urgency to intervene, there is never enough time to wait, enough time for strategic calculations, the act has to anticipate its certainty and risk the wager that it will retroactively establish its own conditions) and too late (the very urgency of the act signals that we come too late, that we always should have already acted; every act is a reaction to circumstances which arose because we were too late to act). In short, *there is no right moment to act* – if we wait for the right moment, the act is reduced to an occurrence in the order of being.

It is because of this temporal complication that, in Hegel, everything becomes evental: a thing is the result of the process (event) of its own becoming, and this

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[16] Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, Chapter VIII, quoted from http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch08.htm.

[17] This is what, perhaps, makes problematic the practice of short session introduced by Lacan. The idea is clear: Lacan noticed that, in the standard 50 minutes session, the patient is just going on with his/her bla-bla, and that it is only in the last minutes, when the shadow of the end, of being cut off by the analyst, is close that s/he gets into a panic and produces some valuable material; so the idea came to him: why not simply skip the long period of lost time and limit the session to the (last) when, under time pressure, something really happens? The problem here is: can we really get only the productive final part without the preceding 45 minutes of lost time during which nonetheless functions as the time of gestation of the content exploding in last 5 minutes?

processuality de-substantializes it. Spirit itself is thus radically de-substantialized: it is not a positive counter-force to nature, a different substance which gradually breaks and shines through the inert natural stuff, it is *nothing but* this process of freeing-itself-from. Hegel directly disowns the notion of Spirit as some kind of positive Agent which underlies the process:

»Spirit is usually spoken of as subject, as doing something, and apart from what it does, as this motion, this process, as still something particular, its activity being more or less contingent /…/ it is of the very nature of spirit to be this absolute liveliness, this process, to proceed forth from naturality, immediacy, to sublate, to quit its naturality, and to come to itself, and *to free itself*, it being itself only as it comes to itself as such a product of itself; *its actuality being merely that it has made itself into what it is*.«[18]

The materialist reversal of Hegel in Ludwig Feuerbach and young Marx rejects this self-referential circularity, dismissing it as a case of idealist mystification, and returns to the Aristotelian ontology of substantial entities endowed with essential qualities: for Marx, man is a *Gattungswesen* (being-of-genus) which asserts its life by way of realizing its "essential forces." Robert Pippin exemplifies in what sense the Hegelian Spirit is "its own result" by the finale of Proust's *Recherche*: how does Marcel finally "become what he is"? By way of breaking with the Platonic illusion that his Self can be "secured by anything, any value or reality that transcends the wholly temporal human world":

"It was /…/ by failing to become 'what a writer is,' to realize his inner 'writer's essence' – as if that role must be some transcendentally important or even a definite, substantial role – that Marcel realizes that such a becoming is important by *not* being secured by the transcendent, *by* being wholly temporal and finite, always and everywhere in suspense, and yet nonetheless capable of some illumination. /…/ If Marcel has become who he is, and this somehow continuous with and a product of the experience of his own past, it is unlikely that we will be able to understand that by appeal to a substantial or underlying self, now discovered, or even by appeal to successor substantial selves, each one linked to the future and past by some sort of self-regard."[19]

It is thus only by way of fully accepting this abyssal circularity in which the search itself creates what it is looking for, that the Spirit "finds itself." This is why the verb "failing" used by Pippin is to be given all its weight: the failure to achieve the (immediate) goal is absolutely crucial to, constitutive of, this process – or, again, as Lacan put it: *la verite surgit de la meprise*. If, then, »it is *only* as a result of itself that it is spirit,"[20] this means that the standard

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[18] G.W.H. Hegel, *Philosophie des subjektiven Geistes*, Dordrecht: Riedel 1978, p. 6-7.

[19] Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 332-4.

talk about the Hegelian Spirit which alienates itself to itself and then recognizes itself in its otherness and thus reappropriates its content, is deeply misleading: the Self to which spirit returns is produced in the very movement of this return, or, that to which the process of return is returning to is produced by the very process of returning. G.K. Chesterton who was not afraid to draw the theological consequences from this paradox, locating precisely at this point the break between the Ancient world and Christianity:

"The Greeks, the great guides and pioneers of pagan antiquity, started out with the idea of something splendidly obvious and direct; the idea that if man walked straight ahead on the high road of reason and nature, he would come to no harm /…/ And the case of the Greeks themselves is alone enough to illustrate the strange but certain fatality that attends upon this fallacy. No sooner did the Greeks themselves begin to follow their own noses and their own notion of being natural, than the queerest thing in history seems to have happened to them. / …/ The wisest man in the world set out to be natural; and the most unnatural thing in the world was the very first thing they did. The immediate effect of saluting the sun and the sunny sanity of nature was a perversion spreading like a pestilence. The greatest and even the purest philosophers could not apparently avoid this law sort of lunacy. Why? /…/ When Man goes straight he goes crooked. When he follows his nose he manages somehow to put his nose out of joint, or even to cut off his nose to spite his face; and that in accordance with something much deeper in human nature than nature - worshippers could ever understand. It was the discovery of that deeper thing, humanly speaking, that constituted the conversion to Christianity. There is a bias in a man like the bias on a bowl; and Christianity was the discovery of how to correct the bias and therefore hit the mark. There are many who will smile at the saying; but it is profoundly true to say that the glad good news brought by the Gospel was the news of original sin."[21]

The Greeks thus lost their moral compass precisely because they believed in spontaneous and basic uprightness of a human being, and thus neglected the "bias" towards Evil in the very core of a human being: true Good does not rise when we follow our nature, but when we fight it.[22] This logic is at work in Wagner's *Parsifal*, whose final message is a profoundly Hegelian one: The wound can be healed only by the spear that smote it (*Die Wunde schliesst der Speer nur der Sie schlug*). Hegel says the same thing, although with the accent shifted in the opposite direction: the Spirit is itself the wound it tries to heal, i.e., the wound is self-inflicted. That is to say, what is "Spirit" at its most elementary? The "wound" of nature: subject is the immense – absolute - power of negativity, of introducing a gap/cut into the given-immediate substantial unity, the power of differentiating, of "abstracting," of tearing

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[20] Hegel, op.cit, ibid.

[21] G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*. New York: Empire Books 2012, p. 11—12.

[22] Schelling made the same point when he emphasized how, in Ancient Roman empire, the rise of Christianity was preceded by the rise of decadence and corruption.

apart and treating as self-standing what in reality is part of an organic unity. This is why the notion of the "self-alienation" of Spirit (of Spirit losing itself in its otherness, in its objectivization, in its result) is more paradoxical than it may appear: it should be read together with Hegel's assertion of the thoroughly non-substantial character of Spirit: there is no *res cogitans*, no thing which (as its property) also thinks, spirit is nothing but the process of overcoming natural immediacy, of the cultivation of this immediacy, of withdrawing-into-itself or "taking off" from it, of – why not – alienating itself from it. The paradox is thus that there is no Self that precedes the Spirit's "self-alienation": the very process of alienation creates/generates the "Self" from which Spirit is alienated and to which it then returns. (Hegel here turns around the standard notion that a failed version of X presupposes this X as their norm (measure): X is created, its space is outlined, only through repetitive failures to reach it.) Spirit's self-alienation is the same as, fully coincides with, its alienation from its Other (nature), because it constitutes itself through its "return-to-itself" from its immersion into natural Otherness. In other words, Spirit's return-to-itself creates the very dimension to which it returns. (This holds for all "return to origins": when, from 19th century onwards, new Nation-States were popping up in Central and Eastern Europe, their return to "old ethnic roots" generated these roots.) What this means is that the "negation of negation," the "return-to-oneself" from alienation, does not occur where it seems to: in the "negation of negation," Spirit's negativity is not relativized, subsumed under an encompassing positivity; it is, on the contrary, the "simple negation" which remains attached to the presupposed positivity it negated, the presupposed Otherness from which it alienates itself, and the "negation of negation" is nothing but the negation of the substantial character of this Otherness itself, the full acceptance of the abyss of Spirit's self-relating which retroactively posits all its presuppositions. In other words, once we are in negativity, we never quit it and regain the lost innocence of Origins; it is, on the contrary, only in "negation of negation" that the Origins are truly lost, that their very loss is lost, that they are deprived of the substantial status of that which was lost. The Spirit heals its wound not by directly healing it, but by getting rid of the very full and sane Body into which the wound was cut. This paradox should make us aware of how one can (mis)perform a good deed. There is a nicely-vulgar joke about Christ: the night before he was arrested and crucified, his followers started to worry - Christ was still a virgin, wouldn't it be nice to have him experience a little bit of pleasure before he will die? So they asked Mary Magdalene to go to the tent where Christ was resting and seduce him; Mary said she will do it gladly and went in, but five minutes after, she run out screaming, terrified and furious. The followers asked her what went wrong, and she explained: "I slowly undressed, spread my legs and showed to Christ my pussy; he looked at it, said 'What a

terrible wound! It should be healed!' and gently put his palm on it…" So beware of people too intent on healing other people's wounds – what if one enjoys one's wound? At its sharpest, this coincidence of the opposites appears apropos self-consciousness, i.e., subject as thinking:

"Abstractly, being evil means singularizing myself in a way that cuts me off from the universal (which is the rational, the laws, the determinations of spirit). But along with this separation there arises being-for-itself and for the first time the universally spiritual, laws – what ought to be. So it is not the case that /rational/ consideration has an external relationship to evil: it is itself what is evil."(206)

The serpent says that by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve will become like God; and after the two do it, God comments: "Behold, Adam has become like one of us."(*Genesis* 3:22) Hegel's comment is: "So the serpent did not lie, for God confirms what it said." Then he goes on to reject the claim that what God says is meant with irony: "Cognition is the principle of spirituality, and this /…/ is also the principle by which the injury of the separation is healed. It is in this principle of cognition that the principle of 'divinity' is also posited"(207). Subjective freedom is not just the possibility to choose evil or good, "it is the consideration or the cognition that *makes* people evil, so that consideration and cognition /themselves/ are what is evil, and that /therefore/ such cognition is what ought not to exist /because it/ is the *source* of evil"(205). This is how one should understand Hegel's dictum from his *Phenomenology* that Evil is the gaze itself which perceives Evil everywhere around it: the gaze which sees Evil excludes itself from the social Whole it criticizes, and this exclusion is the formal characteristics of Evil. And Hegel's point is that the Good emerges as a possibility and duty only through this primordial/constitutive choice of Evil: we experience the Good when, after choosing Evil, we become aware of the utter inadequacy of our situation. – At a more formal level of his logic of reflection, Hegel uses the unique term "*absoluter Gegenstoss*"(counter-push, counter-thrust, or, why not, simply counterpunch): a withdrawal-from creates what it withdraws from:

"Reflection therefore *finds before it* an immediate which it transcends and from which it is the return. But this return is only the presupposing of what reflection finds before it. What is thus found only *comes to be* through being *left behind*. /…/ the reflective movement is to be taken as an *absolute recoil [absoluter Gegenstoss]* upon itself. For the presupposition of the return-into-self – that from which essence *comes*, and *is* only as this return – is only in the return itself."[23]

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[23] *Hegel's Science of Logic*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press 1969, p. 402.

"What is found only *comes to be* through being *left behind*," and its inversion (it is "only in the return itself" that what we return to emerges, like nations who constitute themselves by way of "returning to their roots," producing what Eric Hobsbawn called "invented traditions"), are the two sides of what Hegel calls "absolute reflection": a reflection which is no longer external to its object, presupposing it as given, but a reflection which, as it were, closes the loop and posits its presupposition. Some Indian cultural theorists complain that the fact that they are compelled to use English language is a form of cultural colonialism, censoring their our true identity: "We have to speak in an imposed foreign language to express our innermost identity, and does this not put us in a position of radical alienation – even our resistance to colonization has to be formulated in the language of the colonizer?" The answer to this is: yes, but this imposition of English – a foreign language - created the very X which is "oppressed" by it, because what is oppressed is not the actual pre-colonial India but the authentic dream of a new universalist democratic India… (Malcolm X was following the same insight when he adopted X as his family name: he was not fighting on behalf of the return to some primordial African roots, but precisely on behalf of an X, an unknown new identity opened up by the very process of slavery which made the African roots forever lost.) This case shows how, of course, the point is not that there is nothing prior to negation – of course there was something before (in the case of India, a vast and complex tradition), but it was a heterogeneous mess which has nothing to do with the later national revival. (Maybe Foucault has a point here: the discovery of what went on before is the topic of genealogy which, precisely, has nothing to do with the historicist topic of origins.)

To put it in Derridean terms, the condition of possibility is here radically and simultaneously the condition of impossibility: the very obstacle to the full assertion of our identity opens up the space for it. Another exemplary case: the Hungarian ruling class "had long 'possessed' (i.e., patronized and cultivated) a distinctive music, the so-called *magyar nota* ('Hungarian tune') which in educated Hungarian circles was regarded as a stylistic emblem of the national identity,"[24] and predictably, in the 19th century, with the great national revival, this style exploded in operas and symphonies. When, at the beginning of the XXth century, modernist composers like Bartok and Kodalyi started to collect authentic popular music and discovered that it "was of an altogether different style and character from the *magyar nota*,"[25] and, even worse, that it consisted of the inextricable mixture of "all the peoples who inhabited 'greater Hungary' – Romanians, Slovaks, Bulgars, Croats, and Serbs

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[24] Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010, p. 367.

[25] Taruskin, op.cit., p. 375.

– and even ethnically remoter people like the Turks /…/ or the Arabs of North Africa."[26] For this, Bartok was, predictably, reviled by nationalists and felt impelled to leave Hungary.

This, then, is the dialectical process: an inconsistent mess (first phase, the starting point) which is negated and, through negation, the Origin is projected/*posited* backwards, so that a tension is created between the present and the lost Origin (second step). In the third step, the Origin is perceived as inaccessible, relativized – we are in external reflection, i.e., our reflection is external to the posited Origin which is experienced as a transcendent presupposition. In the fourth step of absolute reflection, our external reflexive movement is transposed back into the Origin itself, as its own self-withdrawal/decentering/antagonism. We thus reach the triad of positing, external and absolute reflection.[27]

The ultimate case is here, of course, that of the subject itself: the priority of the Fall means that we should drop all the standard "Hegelian" talk about the subject's alienation, externalization in its own product in which it no longer recognizes itself, and then its re-appropriation of this alienated content a sits own product: there is no subject which is the agent of the process and suffers a loss; the subject is the outcome of a loss. This is what Lacan indicates by his notion of a "barred," crossed-out, subject ($): the subject is not just thwarted, blocked, impeded, stigmatized by a constitutive impossibility; the subject is the result of its own failure, of the failure of its symbolic representation – a subject endeavors to express itself in a signifier, it fails, and the subject *is* this failure. This is what Lacan means by his deceivingly simple claim that, ultimately, a subject is what is not an object - every hysteric knows this well, since the hysterical question is: what for an object am I for the Other? What does the Other desire me? In other words, the primordial lost object of desire is *the subject itself*.

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[26] Op.cit., p. 378.

[27] For a more detailed description of Hegel's triad of reflection, see Chapter VI of Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso Books 1989.