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*Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*

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## Back to Hegel?

Robert Pippin

It takes some courage to give a book this size the title "Less than Nothing." Žižek must know that the first, powerfully tempting phrase that will occur to any reviewer, even before reading the book, will be "Aptly titled." The book has already inspired dismissive reviews in widely read publications, reviews which seem to be reviews (and dismissals) of Žižek himself (or of the Žižek phenomenon, the Symbolic Žižek), and which mostly ignore his massive tome. But he has written a serious attempt to re-animate or re-actualize Hegel (in the light of Lacanian meta-psychology and so in a form he wants to call "materialist"), and in the limited space available to me I want to try to summarize what he has proposed and to express some disagreements.

The question of the possible relevance of Hegel to contemporary concerns divides into two questions and immediately confronts two objections that have long proven deeply compelling for many. There is first the question of what can be said about Hegel's "system." He is taken to be a hyper-rationalist holist whose central claim is that the Absolute (something like what Kant called the unconditioned) is the Idea, and that everything there is can be understood as the actualization, in nature and across historical time, of the Idea. (And, of course, contra-Kant, he is thereby claiming to know what Kant had denied we could possibly know.) Second, there is the question of Hegel the *Versöhnungsphilosoph*, the philosopher of reconciliation. On some accounts of this side of Hegel's project, Hegel believed that we had reached the "end of history," both in philosophy (his own position had successfully accounted for all possible philosophical options, in their interconnection with each other), and in politics, art, and religion. Human freedom had been realized in the modern state as described in his *Philosophy of Right*, in the rather doctrinally thin Protestant humanism Hegel

championed, and in romantic art, an art form in the process of transcending itself as art, actualizing art in a way that signaled its end as a significant vehicle of human self-knowledge. (The link between the two aspects of Hegel's position is taken to be his theodicy, the role of the Absolute's [or God's] self-actualization in time in accounting for the rationality and culmination of political and intellectual history.)

The objections to both versions of Hegel and Hegelianism are well known. There are a host of objections to Hegelian rationalist holism from the empiricist, scientific naturalist, and analytic approaches to philosophy. (The Anglophone version of that school famously began with the rejection of Hegel.) But in Europe the objections were more often directed at Hegel's uncompromising and supposedly "totalizing" rationalism: his inability, it was charged, to do sufficient justice to the concrete particularity of human existence, to the unconceptualizable human individual, to the role of unreason in human motivation, to the contingency of historical change, and to the phenomena of interest to psychoanalysis, like repetition and the death drive. Objections to the second dimension are more varied and more interesting, because Hegel succeeded in convincing even many of his critics (like the "young Hegelians") that philosophy must have a historically diagnostic task (it must be "its own time comprehended in thought"), even while many also rejected Hegel's "idealist" version of that project and his conclusions about "where we are" in any such process. Others simply point to the fact that no one has succeeded in writing *The Phenomenology of Spirit, Part Two*. The historical world that developed after 1831 and after the twentieth century cannot, it is assumed, be properly understood in Hegelian terms, the world of mass consumer societies, post-colonial states, globalized capitalism and therewith greatly weakened nation states, the culture industry, pervasive reliance on technology in all facets of life, and so forth. Moreover, it is argued, it is not possible to extend even a roughly Hegelian analysis to such phenomena, especially to reason-defeating, irreconcilable-with phenomena like Nazism, the Holocaust, Stalin's crimes, or a communist China full of billionaires.<sup>1</sup>

Simply put, Žižek's ambitious goal is to argue that the former characterization of Hegel attacks a straw man, and that, when this is realized in sufficient detail, the putative European break with Hegel in the criticisms of the likes of Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and the Freudians, will look very different, with significantly more overlap than gaps, and this will make available a historical diagnosis very different from the triumphalist one usually attributed to Hegel. (One of the surprising things about the book is that despite its size, what interests Žižek, by a very wide margin, are the theoretical presuppositions for such a diagnosis rather than much detail about the diagnosis itself.)<sup>2</sup>

The structure of the book is unusual. It is based on the adage that the second and third most pleasurable things in the world are the drink before and the cigarette after. Hence we get "*the drink before*," the pre-Hegelian context needed to understand Hegel's option (a lot of attention is devoted to Plato's *Parmenides*, Christianity, the death of

God, and Fichte); “*The Thing Itself*” (twice! once with Hegel, once with Lacan); and “*the cigarette after*” (Heidegger, Levinas, Badiou, and a concluding chapter on “the ontology of quantum physics”). A lot of this, especially occasional digressions about Buddhism and the quantum physics discussion, not to mention the intricacies of Lacan, are well above my pay grade, so I will concentrate in the following on the interpretation of Hegel and the implications Žižek draws from that interpretation.

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Let us designate the basic problem that the book addresses as the ontological problem of “subjectivity”; *what is it to be a thinking, knowing and also acting and interacting subject in a material world?* Žižek begins by claiming that there are four main kinds of answers to such a question possible in the current “ideological-philosophical field”: (i) scientific naturalism (brain science, Darwinism); (ii) discursive historicism (Foucault, deconstruction); (iii) New Age Western “Buddhism”; (iv) some sort of transcendental finitude (culminating in Heidegger).<sup>3</sup> Žižek’s thesis is that these options miss the correct one, which he calls the idea of a “pre-transcendental gap or rupture (the Freudian name for which is the drive),” and that this framework is what actually “designates the very core of modern subjectivity.” (6-7)

This all means that the discussion must proceed at a very high level of abstraction, and will require a difficult summary of the basic positions of the “Gang of Four” (Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel) that Žižek thinks he needs on the table in order for him to present the core issue he wants to discuss. In the language developed in this tradition, at that high level of abstraction, the problem is the problem of the ontological status of “negativity,” nonbeing, what is not (or is not simply the fullness or presence of positive being). In the simplest sense, we are talking about intentional consciousness, say in perception or empirical judgments, and the ontological status of agency. Consciousness is not a wholly “positive” phenomenon in this (Kantian and post-Kantian) way of looking at it. If it were it would be something like a mere complex registering and responding device (of the same ontological status as a thermometer). But an empirical judgment about the world (“there is a red book on the table”) is not simply wrung out of one by a perceptual episode. One is not simply wholly absorbed in the presence of the world to one, and that “not” is the beginning of all the German problems Žižek wants to trace out in order to get to his own interpretation. In making any such a judgment I “negate” the mere immediacy or givenness of perceptual content, negate it as immediate and putatively given, and take up a position of sorts about what is there.<sup>4</sup> And in agency I am not simply causally responsive to inclinations and desires; there is no fullness of positive being here either. I interrupt or negate merely positive being (what I feel inclined to do, experience as wanting to do) by deliberating and resolving what to do. Any such inclination cannot count as a reason for an action except as “incorporated” within a maxim, a general policy one has for actions of such a type.<sup>5</sup> So when Hegel reminds us in the Preface to

the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that we must think “substance” “also as subject,” he does not, it would appear, mean for us to think subject merely as an attribute of substance or an appearance of what remains, basically, substance, or an epiphenomenon of substance.<sup>6</sup> The whole point of speculative idealism is to think substance as not-just-substance, the negation of mere substance as such; and to think subject as substance, what is not-mere-subject, but still, after all, substance again. A tall order. The closest first approximation of what he means is Aristotelian: subjectivity (thinking and acting according to norms) is the distinct being-at-work (*energeia*, Hegelian *Wirklichkeit*) of the biological life-form that is the human substance. This in the same sense in which Aristotle says, if the eye were body, *seeing* would be its form, its distinctive being-at-work. (Spontaneously mediated consciousness is the distinct being-at-work of human substance, its actualization.) This being-at-work is how that substantial life-form appears, and not any attestation of the self-negating Gap that is substance. (This is in disagreement with Žižek’s Lacanian reading, as at 380, *inter alia*.)<sup>7</sup>

The way Žižek poses the question itself, then, reveals a deeply Schellingian orientation at the beginning and throughout the whole book. (This will not be surprising to anyone who has read *Tarrying with the Negative* or *The Parallax View*.) That is, the question this observation is taken to raise is: what could such a subject with such a negating capacity, *be*? And even more sweepingly: what must *being* be, such that there are, can be, “positive” beings and such “negating” ones. For the early Schelling, this led to the conclusion that the distinction between such subjects and objects could neither be an objective distinction, nor a subjective one, so the “ground” of the possibility of the distinction must be an “indifference point,” neither subject nor object (prompting Hegel’s famous, friendship-destroying remark, that this is “the night in which all cows are black.”)<sup>8</sup> And in what could be called the Schellingian tradition, the assumption has long been that neither Kant nor Fichte had, could have, an adequate answer to this question because for them, “being” is “secondary” not primary (an “appearance,” or a posited “not-I”), and the “Absolute” is such a “groundless” or putatively (but impossibly) self-grounding subject.<sup>9</sup> The interesting question has always been how to locate the mature Hegel in this field of possibilities.<sup>10</sup> As already noted, for Žižek that position involves a commitment to a “gap” or “rupture” in being. “[S]peech (presup)poses a lack/hole in the positive order of being” (75). “[T]he void of our knowledge corresponds to a void in being itself, to the ontological incompleteness of reality” (148). There are many such formulations.<sup>11</sup>

This all has deep connections with the original Eleatic problems of non-being (how I could possibly say “what is not” in uttering falsehoods; a problem because what is not is *not*, is impossible), hence Žižek’s sustained attention to the second half of Plato’s *Parmenides*. But the German version has a unique, different dimension and that dimension is the beginning of my deepest disagreement with Žižek. To see the problem (or to see it as I see it), consider what Hegel draws our attention to when he is stating his understanding of his deepest connection to Kant:

It is one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the *Critique of Reason* that the unity which constitutes the essence of the concept is recognized as the original synthetic unity of apperception, the unity of the “I think,” or of self-consciousness. — This proposition is all that there is to the so-called transcendental deduction of the categories which, from the beginning, has however been regarded as the most difficult piece of Kantian philosophy...<sup>12</sup>

It is *for this reason* — the apperceptive nature of conceiving, the fact that conceiving is apperceiving — that perceptual awareness, judgment, actions, any determinate intentional awareness, cannot be understood as simply being in a mental state (in the fullness or positivity of being, in the manner in which we would say that a computer “is calculating”). For in perceiving, I am also conscious of perceiving, conscious of myself perceiving. In believing anything, I am conscious of my believing, of myself committed to a belief. In acting, I would not be acting, were I not conscious of myself acting. (An action is not something that goes on whether I am conscious of it or not, like water boiling. It is only action if I am conscious of myself acting.)

There are then two complications in this view which require extensive discussion but can only be noted here. The first: as Sebastian Rödl often notes in his book on self-consciousness, the above should not suggest, as the grammar might, that there are two acts of mind involved.<sup>13</sup> There is only one. Action is consciousness of action; there is no action unless I am conscious of myself acting.<sup>14</sup> The second: apperception is not a two-place intentional relation. I am not self-conscious in the way I am conscious of objects (or an obvious regress would threaten). One could say that I am conscious of objects apperceptively or self-consciously; never that I am conscious of objects and also conscious of myself as a second object.<sup>15</sup> (This is also why first-order self-knowledge is not observational or inferential [not of an object “already there”] but constitutive.<sup>16</sup> In any respect relevant to my practical identity [and not any empirical feature], I am what I take myself to be [professor, citizen, social-democrat-liberal]. Or at least I am provisionally; I must also enact what I take myself to be or it is a mere confabulation or an untested pledge about what I will do. In Žižekian language, there is no self except as posited and enacted, and the apparent paradox [who is doing the positing?] is no paradox.)<sup>17</sup>

When Žižek takes on the apperception claim in his own terms (347-8), he notes how implausible it is to think that every act of consciousness is an act of self-consciousness. It seems clearly empirically false. But that is because the supposition concerns two acts, consciousness of the object and consciousness of the subject aware of the object, and the most important claim in the idealist treatment of the issue is that this is not so. There is only one act. Self-consciousness is not consciousness of an object. We do not need Deleuzian “virtuality,” or an ontology with an “actuality of the possible” to account for this. And there is no link in the treatment of this issue by Kant, Fichte,

and Hegel to Žižek's own negative ontology, his claim that "What, ultimately, 'there is' is only the absolute Difference, the self-repelling Gap" (378).<sup>18</sup> What there is, in the sense of this inquiry, is a possible space of reasons, into which persons may be socialized, and within which constant self-correction, self-"negation," is possible.

This may all already be "too much information" for a reader interested in how Žižek proposes to offer a renewed version of dialectical materialism and so a critical theory of late modern capitalism. But this path through German Idealism is the path he has chosen and it is important to know if his version is leading us correctly. With many more pages to demonstrate it, the point of the above formulation would be to suggest a different way of understanding the problem of "negativity" in that tradition, one that will not lead us to gaps or voids or holes in being (or "groundless Acts" in the absence of "the big Other"). I do not fully understand the claims about holes in the fabric of being, and at any rate, we do not need the claim if we go in the direction I am suggesting. For if that formulation of apperception is correct, it means we are able to account for the inappropriateness of psychological or naturalist accounts of such states, all without a gappy ontology (in the sense, if not in the same way, that Frege and the early Husserl criticized psychologism without an "alternate" ontology). If believing is to be conscious of believing, then it is impossible just to "be" believing. For me to be conscious of my believing something is to be conscious of why I believe what I do (however fragmentary, confused, or unknowingly inconsistent such reasons may be). When I want to know what I believe, I am investigating what I ought to believe.<sup>19</sup> Such grounds may be incomplete and may commit one to claims one is unaware of as such, and much belief is habitual and largely unreflective, but never completely so. In any case not connected or connectable with some grounds for belief, the matter would just be a view I am entertaining, not what I believe. Likewise with action. It is constitutive of action that an agent can be responsive to the "why" question, and that means to be in a position to give a reason for my action. (Again, the exchange "Why did you do that?" "I don't know, I just did it." is not a possible one. If that is the case, your body may have moved but you didn't do anything.)<sup>20</sup> Doxastic, cognitive, and intentional states are thus "in the space of reasons" and to ask for, say, neuro-psychological causes for having come to be in that state, is to make a category mistake; to have misunderstood the question; to offer something we cannot use. Such causes are irrelevant to my having the reasons I have (the "for-itself" of any such "in-itself" in Hegelian lingo), and your understanding the reasons I have, all of which must be enunciated and "backed" first-personally. No gaps in being need apply; any more than the possibility of people playing bridge, following the norms of bridge, and exploring strategies for winning need commit us to any unusual gappy ontology to account for the possibility of norm-responsive bridge following. Anyone playing the game is not just acting out responses to cues, but is, at the same time as playing and making moves, always "holding open" the possibility of revising their strategy, challenging someone on the rules and so forth. This is *what it is* to be following rules, not to be

instantiating laws.<sup>21</sup> This capacity is possible because it is certainly actual, and that means that materially embodied beings are able to engage in complex, rule-following practices, the explanation of which is not furthered by reference to their neurological properties. (In his *Phenomenology*, Hegel's formulation of this sort of logical negativity is that consciousness is "always beyond itself," and he frequently, for this reason, characterizes consciousness as a self-negation.)<sup>22</sup>

Now it is possible for Žižek to say that just *that*, that possibility for norm-responsiveness, since a materially embodied capacity not explicable in material terms, just is the gap or void or self-negation he wants to attribute to Hegel's ontology, the "more than material, without being immaterial."<sup>23</sup> But that seems too anodyne for what he wants to say and for the connection he wants to make with Lacan. For, on this way of looking at the matter, there is no need for a paradoxical negative ontology. Of course, it is possible and important that some day researchers will discover why animals with human brains can do these things and animals without human brains cannot, and some combination of astrophysics and evolutionary theory will be able to explain why humans have ended up with the brains they have. But these are not philosophical problems and they do not generate any philosophical problems.<sup>24</sup> (The problems are: what is a compelling reason and why? Under what conditions are the reasons people give for what they do "their own" reasons, reasons and policies they can genuinely "identify with"?)<sup>25</sup>

Put another way, Žižek is quite right to note the importance of the shift from the early to the mature Hegel, which involves at its core Hegel's realization that "logic" was not a preparation for "metaphysics," but that logic was metaphysics. But this means that a consideration of being-in-its-intelligibility is the only sort of metaphysics that is possible (to be is to be intelligible, something like the motto of Greek philosophy and so the beginning of philosophy).<sup>26</sup> But this also means that the "movement" in Hegel's *Encyclopedia* from a "logic of nature" to a "logic of *Geist*" has nothing to do with any "materialist evolutionism" (238). Hegel's metaphysics is a logic, and the intelligibility of nature at some point, speaking very casually, "runs out," is unable in its terms to account for the complex, rule-governed activities materially embodied beings are capable of. This is not a new, non-natural capacity that emerges in time, but it emerges in a systematic consideration of the resources for rendering intelligible that are available if limited to natural-scientific accounts.

There is a phenomenological account in Hegel of the context within which materially embodied organic beings, living beings in a minimal self-relation (a self-sentiment necessary to preserve life) can be imagined interacting in a way that "for them" transcends mere self-sustenance, a "move" that will not be comprehensible as a move in the purposive activities of mere animal life. That is the famous account in Chapter IV of the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The problematic is to imagine such living beings struggling, perhaps over resources, to the death if necessary, when the possibility is introduced of a participant's indifference to his own life in the service

of a demand to be recognized (a “non-natural” norm), when what one demands is not mere submission, but a pledge of service, an acknowledgment of the other’s entitlement. “Spirit” emerges in this imagined social contestation, in what we come to demand of each other, not in the interstices of being. This is a phenomenological account (what it is like to be and come to be *Geist*) not an encyclopedic logic, but it also introduces the Hegelian account of reason. We see that it is not to be understood as a mere capacity for calculation or merely strategic, but as a socio-historical practice, what Brandom calls the “game of giving and asking for reasons,”<sup>27</sup> and it introduces the central question of Hegel’s historical narrative: is it plausible to claim that we are getting better at justifying ourselves to each other, or not?<sup>28</sup>

One can see this (that the above account is not Žižek’s direction) in his very detailed treatment of Fichte.<sup>29</sup> Žižek follows closely the account of Fichte in the recently published undergraduate lectures given by Dieter Henrich at Harvard in the seventies (*Between Kant and Hegel*), and this creates two problems.<sup>30</sup> In the first place, Henrich confuses the problem of apperceptive consciousness in experience and action with the problem of reflective self-identification; how to find and identify my unique self. Those are two different problems and there is no indication that Fichte confused them, and plenty of evidence that he was aware of the difference.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, Žižek accepts Henrich’s charge that Fichte confused “logical” with “real” opposition, switching from one to the other, and so could provide no satisfying account of the relation of the I to the not-I. But Fichte was quite clear on the difference and his remarks track closely the remarks made above about the status of the normative in Kant and the early idealists. A few examples will have to suffice. Here is Fichte in a typical statement of general principles:

The basic contention of the philosopher, as such, is as follows: Though the self may exist only for itself, there necessarily arises for it at once an existence external to it; the ground of the latter lies in the former, and is conditioned thereby; self-consciousness and consciousness of something that is to be — not ourselves, — are necessarily connected; but the first is to be regarded as the “conditioning” factor, and the second as the conditioned.<sup>32</sup>

But we don’t know just from this what “condition” means and especially how it relates to the key term, “positing” (*setzen*), the positing of the *nicht-Ich*.

When he tries to explain what he means, though, he reverts to the “autonomy of the normative” language invoked above. From the 1797 “Introductions to the *Wissenschaftslehre*”:

So what then is the overall gist of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, summarized in a few words? It is this: reason is absolutely self-sufficient; it exists only

for itself. But nothing exists for reason except reason itself. It follows that everything reason is must have its foundation in reason itself and must be explicable solely on the basis of reason itself and not on the basis of anything outside of reason, for reason could not get outside of itself without renouncing itself. In short the *Wissenschaftslehre* is transcendental idealism.<sup>33</sup>

From the “Second Introduction” to the 1796/1799 *Wissenschaftslehre (nova methodo)*, translated as *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy*:

The idealist observes that experience in its entirety is nothing but an acting on the part of a rational being.

There then follows a gloss on “the viewpoint of idealism”:

The idealist observes how there must come to be things for the individual. Thus the situation is different for the [observed] individual than it is for the philosopher. The individual is confronted with things, men, etc., that are independent of him. But the idealist says, “There are no things outside me and present independently of me.” Though the two say opposite things, they do not contradict each other. For the idealist, from his own viewpoint, displays the necessity of the individual’s view. When the idealist says, “outside of me,” he means “outside of reason”; when the individual says the same thing, he means “outside of my person.”<sup>34</sup>

Or, in an even more summary claim from Fichte’s notes: “the I is reason.”<sup>35</sup>

Now this rational self-satisfaction is only something we can “strive” for infinitely according to Fichte, but the larger point is the one of relevance for Žižek’s reading. That point concerns the necessary link between the self-conscious character of experience and action, understood this way, and *reason*, a norm that does not play a prominent role in Žižek’s Schellingian account. (The other Hegelian issue that does not play a major role for Žižek is sociality, *Geist*, and the issues are related, as I will try to show in the next section.) The condition of modern atheism means for Žižek, in Lacanian terms, that there is and can be no longer any “big Other,” any guarantor of at least the possibility of any resolution of normative skepticism and conflicts. But no transcendent guarantor is not the same thing as no possible reliance on reason in our own deliberations and in our claims on others. Even a position (like Nietzsche’s, say) which held that most conscious appeals to reasons are symptoms, that true reasons lie elsewhere (not the slave’s virtuousness, but his *ressentiment* motivated his submission), is committed to the link. (*Ressentiment* is his reason, counted by him — in self-deceit — as warranting action, submission, and moralistic condemnation

of the Master; otherwise there would be no satisfaction in what he did.) To claim something or to do something is to offer to give reasons for the claim or the deed, and if there are reasons either to reject the reasons or to reject the claim of sincerity, we are still in, cannot exit, the space of reasons. (An immediate consequence: the first sentence of Žižek's conclusion ["The Political Suspension of the Ethical"] — "What the inexistence of the big Other signals is that every ethical and/or moral edifice has to be grounded on an abyssal act which is, in the most radical sense imaginable, political" — makes zero Hegelian sense. Something understood by an agent as an "abyssal" act is a delusion, the pathos of self-inflating and posed heroism, and the gesture belongs in the Hegelian zoo along with The Beautiful Soul, The Knight of Virtue and especially The Frenzy of Self-Conceit.)<sup>36</sup> And if the act is "abyssal," then "politics" simply means "power," power backed by nothing but resolve and will, likely met with nothing but resolve and will.)

To see the relevance of, on the contrary, the connection between self-consciousness and reason to Žižek's project in the book, we need to turn to his long, explicit discussion of Hegel.

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In this sense, the post-Hegelian turn to "concrete reality, irreducible to notional mediation," should rather be read as a desperate posthumous revenge of metaphysics, as an attempt to reinstall metaphysics, although in an inverted form of the primacy of concrete reality. (239)

Truer words were never spoken in Hegel's voice. In explaining such a claim, Žižek makes a number of salient points about Hegel. For example, one of the most curious things about Hegel's basic position is that it can be fairly summarized by saying that there is no independent, positive position. Rather it is the right understanding of the other logically possible positions. Žižek gets this aspect of Hegel exactly right (cf. 387 ff.) and has a number of useful things to say about it and its implications. Moreover, Žižek's interest in Lacan leads him to three other aspects of Hegel that are quite important but often neglected in both conventional (what Žižek calls "textbook") interpretations and more "up-to-date" contemporary reconstructions. This is the dimension, first, of "retroactivity," also sometimes known as "belatedness" (*Nachträglichkeit*), or what Žižek rightly described as Hegel's insistence on the logic of a deed or claim or event which can be said to "posit its own presuppositions" retroactively. (A dream's meaning is constituted by the telling; is not "recovered." A trauma becomes *the trauma* it is retroactively, in its interrogation.) In Hegel the notion is most important in his account of act descriptions and intentions. There is no literal backward causation, but what it is we did and why we did it can be said to come to be what they are only after we have acted (after we have seen what we were actually committed to doing; what others acknowledge, or not, as what we did.)<sup>37</sup> Secondly, in

a related claim, Žižek takes much more seriously than most other commentators the unusual and initially paradoxical thesis that Spirit must be understood as a “product of itself.” Žižek’s discussions of all these topics are, in my view, on the mark and valuable.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, because he does such justice to these themes, especially the latter, he can, third, reject the picture of Hegelian historical action so familiar in critical theory criticisms, especially by Adorno and Adornians. This is the picture of *Geist* externalizing itself in its products (its “self-negation”), thereby alienated from them, until it can “return to itself” in its externality, negate this otherness, and so be reconciled with itself in a sublated self-identity (the negation of negation). This is also “the great narcissistic devouring maw” picture of Hegel, devouring and negating otherness in a mad project to become everything, the cartoonish and grossly unfair picture so beloved by Adorno in his dismissal of Hegel as the epitome of “identity thinking.” (Cf. 300.) But however right he is in rejecting that caricature, Žižek’s own picture seems to me too influenced by his picture of Lacan (not to mention middle Schelling) and so does not allow the true Hegelian alternative in these very abstract possibilities to emerge, especially with respect to the problem of reason (Hegel’s “big Other”) and sociality (*Sittlichkeit*, another version of Hegel’s big Other, “actualized reason”).

Given what has been said so far, we can summarize this Hegel-Lacan problem by recalling Hegel’s extraordinary (and one might say Lacanian) claim that *Geist* is a “breach” or “wound,” but one that is self-inflicted (i.e. it is a result; no ontological tear in the fabric of being as such), and one that *Geist* can heal, even without “scars.”<sup>39</sup> (Not at all a Freudian thought. Much more needs to be said about the Hegelian notion of reconciliation than is possible here.) More generally, entry into the signifying realm, the space of meanings, is for Hegel necessarily at the same time the space of reasons because of the profound sociality of meanings; the fact that they must circulate in a larger social economy, an economy always of claims, rejections, contention, struggle, and resolutions (self-inflicted wounds), not just a personal or libidinal economy. And this is an economy that is profoundly historical, one not capturable in a mythic/archetypal meta-psychology limited to a primarily individual ontogeny.<sup>40</sup>

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This brings us in other words to the more practical and “critical” question, as Žižek puts it, of “how to be a Hegelian today,” whether it is possible, what the implications are of Žižek’s interpretation of the notion he places at the center of a Hegelianism — a “self-negating” or “gappy” phenomenal reality. With that ontology as a background, philosophy is supposed to be its own time comprehended in thought. Our time is still the time of bourgeois capitalism and its central institutions: private property, commercial republics, individual-rights-based legal institutions, the privatization of religion and the ideal of religious tolerance, romantic love, love-based marriages, nuclear families, and the (putative) separation of state and civil society. What does

“thought’s comprehension” — in this case “dialectical” thought — “comprehend”?

One broad-based starting point for such a Hegelianism, shared by Žižek and most “Hegelians”: a commitment to the historicity of norms, but without a historical relativism, as if we were trapped inside specific assumptions and cannot think our way out of them. The “universal” for Hegel — the clearest name for which would simply be “freedom” — is always accessible in some way but as the “concrete universal,” a universal understood in a way inflected by a time and a place, partial and incomplete, requiring interpretation and re-interpretation and dialectical extension. For example, if we want to understand why gender-based division of labor became so much less credible a norm in the last third of the twentieth century, and exclusively in the technologically advanced commercial republics of the West, one begins to become a “Hegelian” with the simple realization of how implausible it would be to insist that the injustice of such a basis for a division of labor, the reasons for rejecting such a practice, were always in principle available from the beginning of human attempts to justify their practices, and were “discovered” sometime in the early nineteen-seventies. And yet our commitment to such a rejection is far stronger than “a new development in how we go on.” The past practice is irrational and so unjust, however historically indexed the “grip” of such a claim clearly is.

Žižek proposes to defend a Hegel for whom any claim about historical rationality (like this one) is always retrospective, never prospective and predicting, and in this “open-ended” Hegel, he is surely right. (It often goes unnoticed that Hegel’s famous claim that the owl of Minerva takes flight only at dusk, that philosophy can begin to paint its grey on grey only when a form of life has grown old, means that he is announcing that the form of life “comprehended by thought” in the *Philosophy of Right* has grown old, is dying, and only because of this can it now be comprehended by Hegel. It is hardly the image one would propose were one trying to claim that we had reached some utopia of realized reason. [Cf. 263]) Moreover, the retrospective dimension is quite important. It is only after the world-historical influence of Christianity that Greek philosophy could come to seem unable to provide the resources to account for what would eventually come to be understood as Christian inwardness, subjectivity, and so a very different view of agency. There is no World-Spirit puppet master in this picture.

But the alternative to any “shadow of dialectical materialism” must be something like a “dialectical idealism.” This of course means simply that there are no “material contradictions.”<sup>41</sup> Contradictions result from some self-opposition in an action or practice directed by a subject. This can be in the form of “performative contradictions” in a speech act, or practical contradictions in action. (Hobbes gave us a fine example of the latter: in the state of nature, everyone doing what is maximally rational from the individual’s point of view — preemptively striking others — produces what is for everyone the worst possible outcome. Agents contradict *themselves* by acting rationally.) On the assumption of collective subjectivity (*Geist*), one can imagine how

one might try to show that some institutional practice in a form of life “contradicts,” in the means it rationally chooses, the overall ends genuinely sought by that society. And all of this depends on what one can show or not; whether a successor social form can be said to be achieving more successfully what a prior social form was attempting, or not: hence, determinate negation, internal critique, all the Hegelian desiderata. (Gender-based division of labor came to be understood as inconsistent with the already existing ideal of equal protection under the law and meritocratic social mobility, and at a time when changes in the technology of production and the need for many more workers in the greatest period of economic prosperity in history made possible such a realization.)

But we are certainly far enough from the (“dead”) particular historical form of bourgeois society that Hegel thought he had comprehended, and our own form of life could plausibly be said to be growing sufficiently “old” (dysfunctional at least) before our eyes, for us to ask: what is the Hegelian account of the large-scale collapse of the state-civil society distinction so crucial to him, the disintegration of the *Stände*, or estates, central to his account of political participation, the emergence of mass consumer societies totally unlike anything in Hegel’s political philosophy, the changes in the technology of warfare that make the notion of an occasional war to shake us out of our prosaic complacency suicidal (not to mention the end of citizen armies), the creation of a globalized financial system that renders obsolete even the notion of the “owners” of the means of production, and on and on in such a vein?

Žižek’s answer is not surprising, and that answer raises the largest question of all, the one I found the most dissatisfyingly addressed. Like many others, he wants to say that bourgeois society is fundamentally self-contradictory, and I take that to mean “unreformable.” We need a wholly new ethical order and that means “the Act.” That society’s pretense to having a rational form is undermined by the existence of a merely contingent particular, a figurehead at the top, the monarch. (A better question, it seems to me, is why Hegel bothers, given how purely symbolic and even pointless such a dotter of i’s and crosser of t’s turns out to be.)<sup>42</sup> And, following many others Žižek claims that the admitted *aporia* of “the rabble” (*der Pöbel*) in Hegel, what appears to be a permanent underclass of the poor, is another mark of the fundamental irrationality of the Hegelian picture of modern ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). He agrees with the analysis of a recent author, Frank Ruda, and says that Ruda “is fully justified in reading Hegel’s short passages on the rabble in his *Philosophy of Right* as symptomatic of his entire philosophy of right, if not of his entire system” (431). In other contexts, Žižek claims that modern secular bourgeois culture and late capitalism produce their own opposite, evangelical fundamentalism, for example, for which there is no “*Aufhebung*” no return to an elevated form of bourgeois politics and reformed capitalism. (All this in the Lacanian manner in which what is repressed is “created” by the act of repression itself.)

Whether these relatively brief interludes demonstrate that bourgeois society and a

capitalist system of production are fundamentally contradictory (even in the idealist sense sketched above), and so for which calls for reform would be as absurd as calls for remaining in the state of nature but “reforming it” would be in Hobbes, is too large a topic for this sort of discussion. I can only say that if the basic norm of such a society is, according to Hegel, some institutionally secured state of equal recognitive status, where this also means direct political attention to the material (familial, cultural, economic) conditions for such a possibility, or some egalitarian idea of freedom (no one can be free unless all are), I see no reason to think so, at least given the occasional remarks here. The fact that there appears to be ever weakening political will in, for example, the United States, for any attention to such a common good (even public schools are now slowly but surely emerging as a target for the ever more powerful far right) is very likely a pathology that needs explaining.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps we need the help of Lacanians to do this (although Hegel was content simply to point out the danger and irrationality of romantic nationalists in his own day) but that great dream of social democrats everywhere — “Sweden in the Sixties!” — does not seem to me something that inevitably produces its own irrational and irreconcilable Unreason, or Other. More lawyers for the poor in Texas, affordable daycare, universal health care, several fewer aircraft carriers, more worker control over their own working conditions, regulated perhaps nationalized banks, all are reasonable extensions of that bourgeois ideal itself, however sick and often even deranged modern bourgeois society has become. (Citizens United was not a logically inescapable result of capitalist logic. It was the result of the ravings of several lunatic judges. We are the only advanced capitalist democracy on earth that allows legalized bribery.) But these are topics for another context (and a soapbox). I will close with a reflection in the Žižekian spirit.

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Žižek gives us two images, a literary and a cinematic image, to help us understand the dialectical gymnastics involved in his attempt to re-actualize Hegel for contemporary purposes. The first concerns the problem of Hegelian “reconciliation,” and the example is the mysterious and moving ending of J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*. Žižek invokes the basic logical structure for rendering “negativity” intelligible that he uses throughout his book. David Lurie appears to have “negated” the status quo, the big Other of prudence, trust in the police, holding individuals responsible for their deeds and seeking to redress wrongs done to individuals (justice), because he has come to see the inadequacy of such a faith for the current, post-apartheid reality of South Africa. That is all “negated” by his simply doing whatever he can do to minimize the indignities done to euthanized dogs, satisfied with the gesture of providing for a respectful disposal. That, of course, is, pitifully, not very much in the way of reconciliation. He seems to have accepted his daughter’s guilt-burdened acquiescence to her neighbor’s complicity in her own rape, and internalized it in his own way, as the price one must pay to continue living with some “ethical dignity”

(Žižek's phrase) in South Africa. In the world of unavoidable complicity in the South African crimes, the loss of *everything* is a "wager" that "this total loss will be converted into some kind of ethical dignity" (326).

But Žižek claims that there is "something missing" in this ending, some gesture of defiance and revolt that could be called the "negation of this negation," some "barely perceptible repetitive gesture of resistance...a pure figure of the undead drive" (326), by which he means a *Versagung*, a refusal, of the initial or first negation that would not return us to the status quo ex ante, but that would originate the realization of "the fantasmatic status of the *objet a* (the fantasy frame which sustained the subject's desire), so that the *Versagung*, which equals the act of traversing the fantasy, opens up the space for the emergence of the pure drive beyond fantasy..." (326). The natural thing one wants to say to this suggestion is that any such gesture that would satisfy what Žižek is after would presuppose that everything about David's original position was a "fantasy frame," that there is no big Other, and by disabusing ourselves of this delusion we would be in a position to open up that space for the emergence of a "pure" drive beyond fantasy. *But just this latter sounds like David's original romantic fantasy itself*, that he is a Byronic servant of Eros, can see through the hypocrisy and phoniness of big Other conventional morality, and so forth. That is the fantasy *he has disabused himself of*, and why his gesture of wholly symbolic generosity is at once so affirmative and dignified and so pathetic and so limited. There is no Žižekian gesture of defiance because David has seen through the dangerous self-deceit in presuming one is "he who is supposed to know." His assisting Bev in euthanizing the dogs and caring for their remains is in a different way than that expected by Žižek a "negation of his first negation," a refusal of mere acceptance of his and his daughter's fate. In the last gesture of the novel, he "gives up" the dog Bev had expected him to save, even as he has "given" himself up to his fate, not merely suffered it. Finally, said another way, there is nothing more un-Hegelian than the idea of the "emergence of the pure drive beyond fantasy." David's gesture means he remains the subject of whatever drives he has, not subject to them. The idea of "pure" drives (or "pure" anything) belong in the Hegelian zoo mentioned before.

The second example is equally interesting. It is Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Here the idea of a negation, and a negation of negation, is easier to track. Scottie loses Madeleine, or the woman he thought was Madeleine; she dies. But it was all a plot by Elster to murder his wife. Madeleine was not Madeleine, but Judy, a working class woman Elster had enlisted in the plot. When Scottie finds this out, he can be said to have lost his very loss, lost the meaning of his first loss. He had not lost Madeleine because Madeleine was Judy. He discovers the bitterly ironic truth that the woman he was trying to "make up" to look like a fake Madeleine was (is) actually the real Madeleine, because his original Madeleine was a fake. So, as with *Disgrace*, we get an ambiguous ending: Scottie gazing "into the abyss," looking down where Judy has fallen, either a broken man, disabused of all the idealizations and fantasy that sustain love, or a "new"

man, freed from his illusions and reconciled with this new realism. Žižek makes use of this structure to suggest a limitation in a Hegelian “negation of negation,” that both the suggested readings of Scottie miss something, understand the “antagonisms” at issue still too “formally” (what I called before and defended as “dialectical idealism”). Here Žižek insists that we need to do justice to what falls “outside” of either resolution, an “excess,” a “contingent remainder,” a “little piece of reality.”

As Žižek goes on to explain what he means by this, he seems to me to come close to reverting to the kind of positivistic, pseudo-realist metaphysics he had rightly rejected. (See the quotation at the beginning of Section II above.) And the talk of excess and remainders makes it irrelevant that Žižek does not mean something that “simply eludes dialectical mediation” but is a “product of this mediation” (480). Such an excess or remainder still functions in his criticism as “unmediated” and that notion remains profoundly un-Hegelian, for reasons I have tried to present throughout.

But there is something quite right about the relevance of the *Vertigo* structure to the German tradition as, I want to say, Hegel would see it. For in that tradition there is certainly the notion of modernity itself as “loss.” Hölderlin and Schiller come to mind, and the mourning for the lost “beauty” of the Greek world can certainly mirror the sorrow of Scottie over the lost Madeleine-version of Judy. Then one can say that Hegel became Hegel when, for him, that loss was lost, that negation negated, with a more prosaic view of Greek accomplishments. I mean when, under the influence of the Scottish enlightenment thinkers, he came to see that there was no simple loss in the end of the Greek ideal, and losing that notion of loss was a gain, as he appreciated the development of modern civil society and the error of fantasizing the loss of a more natural harmony.<sup>44</sup> The Helen-like “Madeliene” was really “Judy” all along, (This all in its own way confirms Žižek’s insistence that Hegelian mediation does not issue in a “third,” synthetic position, but in the right understanding of the antagonism between the “negation” and the “negation of the negation.”) This can even be put in terms of Hegel’s secularized Christianity — Madeleine was really Judy, or Judy had successfully, for Scottie, become Madeleine, all prompting her plaintive, “Why can’t you just love me for who I am?” Every “Judy” is also a “Madeleine”; every “Madeleine” really a “Judy” in this egalitarian, Christian vision.

This is of course something Scottie cannot appreciate, and for reasons also relevant to Hegel. For the very structure of the appearance of Judy as Madeleine had been manipulated for gain by Elster, in a way parallel to the ideologically distorted and so false pretensions to achieved equality in contemporary bourgeois societies (“fair exchanges between labor and capital in the marketplace”). The truth of the identity was ruined, made an untruth, because it was staged. What Hegel thought was the greatest accomplishment of modern civil society — its ability to educate (as *Bildung*) its citizens to their equal status and profound dependence on each other, and so to educate them to the virtues of civility and trustworthiness — has become a lie (if it ever was the truth), and the shipping magnates and tycoons like Elster “steer” this

*Bildung* in a way that ends up wholly theatrical, as in the “theater of Madeleine” put on for Scottie’s benefit and to manipulate him. He cannot be educated to the truth of the speculative sentence that “Judy is Madeleine,” that essence is its own appearance, because of this distortion. Accordingly, Scottie’s attempts to remake Judy into Madeleine, rather than being a way of realizing that Judy already is Madeleine, comes off as manipulative and as reifying as Elster’s. (Another, more depressing identity: Scottie and Elster, creators of a false Madeleine.)

This forces the question of whether there is much left in contemporary society that provides any sort of material basis for Hegel’s aspirations about these potentially transformative and educative potentials of modern civil society. No one can be anything but profoundly pessimistic about this possibility, but the search for such possible “traces of reason” seems to me a more genuinely Hegelian and still possible prospect than anything that could result from “abyssal Acts.”<sup>45</sup>

## Notes

1. See Žižek’s remarks on Hegel and contemporary finance capitalism (244). Perhaps Zadie Smith’s trenchant summary is the best: States now “de-regulate to privatize gain and re-regulate to nationalize loss.” NYR Blog, <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2012/jun/02/north-west-london-blues/>, June 2, 1012.
2. There is a sober, clear statement of what, from a Hegelian point of view we now need: “breaking out of the capitalist horizon without falling into the trap of returning to the eminently pre-modern notion of a balanced, (self-) restrained society...” (257). But as he goes on to explain his position, the core turns out to be “the subject has to recognize in its alienation from substance the separation of substance from itself” (258). I have not been able to understand how that helps us do what the sober statement insists on. This is an issue that will recur frequently below.
3. Lots of quibbles and qualifications are possible here. I can’t see why anyone would take (iii) seriously. I would include “deconstruction” under (iv) not (ii), would argue for more categories (pragmatism, of the analytic (Brandomian), Rortyeen or Habermasian variety; anomalous monism; phenomenology is still alive and kicking in some quarters; Wittgenstein’s approach) and I would defend a Hegelian version of compatibilism. But what is important here is what Žižek is for; his own position.
4. In a more extensive and so more careful discussion, several caveats would be necessary here. The case of perceptual consciousness, while apperceptive, is obviously not of the same logical type as a judgment, an empirical claim to knowledge, and more care would be needed to account for the role of spontaneity. But perceptual consciousness is not mere differential responsiveness and that is what we need for the “negativity” problem. See my discussion of this issue in “Brandom’s Hegel,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 13:3 (2006) 381-408.
5. The “incorporation thesis,” given that name by the Kant scholar, Henry Allison, emerged as an explicit theme relatively late in Kant’s work (*His Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* [1793]) and it does not mean that “causes only affect me insofar as I allow them to affect me” (169-70). “Only in so far as I count them as reasonable grounds to do something” would be more accurate, and inclinations do causally affect me (I can be powerfully inclined to do something), they just cannot be said to produce the bodily

movement if that movement is to count as an action. There are not many such errors and slips, but they are irritating when they occur. *The Critique of Pure Reason* appeared in 1781, not 1787 (8); Henrich's famous article referred to "Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht," not his "Grundeinsicht." (11) And (for me the most significant), the newspaper editor at the end of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* did not say "when reality doesn't fit the legend, print the legend" (420). He said something much more relevant to Žižek's concerns: "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

6. I say "it would appear" in order to acknowledge that for Žižek, we should say something like "substance" negates itself, creates a kind of "gap," and incompleteness, and that "space" is the subject. (But in what sense could the subject also be said to "substantialize itself"? Negate itself as subject just by being substance?) At any rate, Žižek doesn't mean that a subject is just a kind of property of material substance. I think I understand what the gap or self-negation view would mean in Freudian terms — that natural, even biological maturation itself produces a subject divided against itself, unable to realize, satisfy the primary processes — but that is only true of the human substance, and I don't think that is the problem the post-Kantians were addressing and will try to say why below.
7. I've no space to discuss Žižek's interesting parallel reading of substance-subject and id-ego except to agree that in neither case does "*wo es war, soll ich werden*" amount to a rational appropriation of or control over or simple reconciliation with the "nicht-ich." See 389 ff.
8. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, facing page translation, trans. Terry Pinkard, <http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/phenomenology-of-spirit-page.html>, 14 (§16).
9. Not an unreasonable view. See G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994) 84.
10. According to Žižek (144), Hegel's unique position is to deny that we need any "third" to ground both subject and object. "...his [Hegel's] point is precisely *that there is no need for a Third element*, the medium or ground beyond subject and object-substance. We start with objectivity and the subject is nothing but the self-mediation of objectivity." But this simply is objective idealism and has not yet differentiated Hegel's view, as I will try to show.
11. Cf. Žižek's claim that Marx and Freud can only understand "antagonism" as a feature of social or psychic reality, they are "unable to articulate it as constitutive of reality, as the impossibility around which reality is constructed." (250) I am with Marx and Freud (and, I think, Hegel) on this one. This touches on the most difficult issue for me in the book, what is announced by the title, that "reality" "is less than nothing." The official explanation of the title occurs on 495. I discuss whatever I can understand of this notion of how to "subtract from nothing its nothing(ness) itself" in the last section below.
12. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1977), 515. This quotation alone seems to me to foreclose the gloss given by Žižek on the Kant-Hegel-apperception relation (286).
13. Sebastian Rödl, *Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2007) 17-64.
14. Cf. Rödl on a "non-empirical knowledge of a material reality," 122. See also 131, 133-4, 138.
15. Put another way, the self-consciousness that is a necessary condition of any human doing or thinking adverts to a way of one's doing or thinking, as if adverbially, and involves no self-inspection. See my *Kant's Theory of Form* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), ch. 6, 151-187. One does what one does, one is aware of what one is aware of, one thinks what one thinks, all *knowingly*. Apropos the discussion below, cf.

Fichte's formulations in the *Wissenschaftslehre*: "...the self and the self-reverting act are perfectly identical concepts..." (37) and "It is the immediate consciousness that I act and what I enact: it is that whereby I know something because I do it" (38). Or: "Without self-consciousness there is no consciousness whatever; but self-consciousness is possible only in the manner indicated: I am simply active" (41).

16. Žižek makes this same point himself, correctly, in my view, in an approving summary of Lukács (220). See also Hegel in the *Science of Logic*: The most important point for the nature of spirit is not only the relation of what it is in itself to what it is actually, but the relation of what it knows itself to be to what it actually is; because spirit is essentially consciousness, this self-knowing is a fundamental determination of its actuality. *Science of Logic* 37.
17. It is not paradoxical because there is no original moment of self-origination. One has always already come to be in some position of self-positing, is always becoming who one is. I think this is what Hegel means by claiming, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, that "one should not begin with oneness and proceed to duality," cited by Žižek (470), but rather with "the inherent self-distancing of the One itself" (471). There is a very great deal more to be said about this problem. For discussions of small subsets of these issues, see chapters 3 and 4 of *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), and ch. 3 of *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
18. And yet, in other contexts — when, for example, he is discussing the "self-consciousness" of the state — Žižek seems to me to state the point being made here in just the way it is made here. See 406 ff.
19. One of the most well known statements and defenses of this "transparency" condition is Richard Moran's *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Rödl, ch. 3.
20. This issue, like every other one in this paragraph, is much more complicated than this summary can do justice to. On this last point, the compelling films of the Dardennes brothers make clear how much more has to be said about the issue. In all of their films, characters certainly look like they are acting without being able to say why. What is especially interesting is that they manage to suggest a link between this compelling opacity and the disintegrating fabric of late capitalist working class life. They integrate these philosophical-psychological elements with the social seamlessly and brilliantly. See *Le fils* (2002) especially.
21. This is also relevant to how the way that animals have representations is different from ours. Theirs are intentional in their way, but they do not have the status of "cognitions" in the way ours do. A dog might see a human figure far away (upwind, let us say) and seeing an unknown person, begin barking, only later to start wagging her tail as the known person it really is comes into view. *But the dog did not correct herself*. Here we want to say that a perceptual cue prompted a response (one we can even call a rational response), and then a different perceptual cue (with more detail of visual features in view) prompted a different behavioral response. The fullness of positive being, we might say. (I've never noticed, for example, that my dog ever became embarrassed that she made such a mistake — which she often makes — since she has no way of knowing that she made a mistake that she ought to correct. That is not how she sees; she sees one set of cues then she sees another. This would be one way of saying she has no unity of apperception.)
22. However, consciousness is for itself its concept, and as a result it immediately goes beyond the restriction,

and, since this restriction belongs to itself, it goes beyond itself too. (*Phenomenology* 76 [§80]). Here is the “logical” formulation of the point from the so-called *Berlin Phenomenology*: The I is now this subjectivity, this infinite relation to itself, but therein, namely in this subjectivity, lies its negative relation to itself, diremption, differentiation, judgment. The I judges, and this constitutes it as consciousness; it repels itself from itself; this is a logical determination. G.W.F. Hegel: *The Berlin Phenomenology*, trans. M. Petry (Dordrecht: Riedel, 1981) 2.

23. This is Adrian Johnson’s formulation in “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation: Giving a Hearing to *The Parallax View*,” *Diacritics* 37.1: 3-20. Something like this position is available to Žižek if we understand the space of the Symbolic (in its Lacanian sense) as the space of the normative and so of reason. See his interpretation of Freud’s controversial remark about “anatomy” being “destiny,” “in other words a symbolic formation,” a destiny we must make. (216)
24. Not that such discoveries could not be relevant to philosophy. They certainly are for Hegel. In §12 of the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel says that philosophy “owes its development to the empirical sciences”; and in the remark to §246 of the *Philosophy of Nature*, he says that the philosophy of nature “presupposes and is conditioned by empirical physics.” See also the Addition to §381 in the Introduction to the *Philosophy of Spirit*. These passages are all relevant to the question Žižek raises at 458 and 462.
25. When Žižek addresses this issue, he adopts a Nietzschean stance that seems to me unargued for and question-begging. What kind of power (or authority) is it which needs to justify itself with reference to the interests of those over whom it rules, which accepts the need to provide reasons for its exercise? Does not such a notion of power undermine itself (429)? He goes on to call such a regime “anti-political” and “technocratic.” But appeals to self-interest are only one sort of reason, and the constraints introduced by such a requirement, if they undermine anything, undermine the notion of mastery and rule. They are not meant to be in the service of such notions, but replacement notions of authority.
26. The skeptical anxiety that we would thereby be treating being only as it is intelligible “by our finite lights” is the illusory anxiety that Hegel takes himself to have methodically destroyed in the *Phenomenology*, the “deduction,” as he says, of the standpoint of the *Logic*. The extraordinarily influential Heideggerian anxiety that this all represents the “imposition” of human will “onto” the question of Being is a matter for a separate discussion. See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Volume 4, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperOne, 1991), and my “Heidegger on Nietzsche on Nihilism,” forthcoming.
27. Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1994).
28. In Kantian terms, the role of reason can be said to emerge in any attempt to lead a “justified” life (and so a free one), to seek always the “condition” for anything “conditioned.” See my discussion of the issue in *Kant in Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) 55-8.
29. It is also the case that this sort of interpretation would mean a disagreement with Žižek’s characterization of the beginning of all this in Kant. It is not the case that Kant and the Idealists conceived the subject as a “spontaneous...synthetic activity, the force of unification, of bringing together the manifold of sensuous data we are bombarded with into a unified representation of objects” (106). See also Žižek 149. This was certainly not the case with Hegel; see his *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H.S. Harris (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1977) 62-70. It is also not the case that “apperception...changes the confused

flow of sensations into ‘reality,’ which obeys necessary laws.” In the first place, Kant often says this impositionism is exactly the position he rejects, that it would give the “skeptic exactly what he wants” (B168). See also B138, B160n, and the “same function” passage at B105/A79. Secondly, it is not the case that this synthetic activity “introduces a gap/difference into substantial reality” (106). The negativity (“not mere being”) in question is a matter of the normative dimension of apperceptive experience and action. One could, I suppose, call this a “gap in being” but that seems to me to mystify everything needlessly.

30. D. Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel*, ed. D.S. Pacini (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). An unusual feature of Žižek’s book is his heavy reliance on selected secondary sources, “straight down the line,” with few exceptions (Lebrun is one with whom he disagrees.) Henrich, Malabou, Miller, Lebrun are the most heavily relied on.
31. I present this evidence in ch. 3 of *Hegel’s Idealism*.
32. G. Fichte, “Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*,” in *The Science of Knowledge with the First and Second Introductions*, ed. and trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 33.
33. G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994) 59.
34. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Transcendental Philosophy (Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo)* (1796/99), trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) 105-6.
35. This is from the notes to his famous *Aenesidemus* review, in G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Reinhard Lauth and Hans Joacob (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1965) 11, 1, 287. It is important to get this aspect of Fichte right in order to avoid the commitments Žižek makes on 283, where we hear again about the phenomena’s “self-limitation,” the “ontological incompleteness of phenomenal reality,” and the ground of freedom in “the ontological incompleteness of reality itself.” Insofar as I understand these claims, they are as regressive and dogmatically metaphysical as the “ineffable particularists,” the worshippers of “the Other,” that Žižek rightly criticizes. The link between self-consciousness, reason, and freedom is not based on such appeals.
36. When it is described as it is, apparently approvingly, by Žižek on 427, a true Badiouian act, the “Act,” is said to be a “radical and violent simplification...the magical moment when the infinite pondering crystallizes into a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’.” “Magical” is the right word; close to mystified and unintelligible. One shudders to think how many such narcissistic Actors gloried in the “infinite” crystallizing itself in *them*. (The idea is supposed to be that the founding of a new ethical order must perforce be “abyssal,” ungrounded and contingent (460), that you can’t have 1789 without 1793 (319), and so forth. But this is a completely non-Hegelian notion of “new” and so of “contingency.”
37. All actions have such have ex ante intentions, but they are provisional until realized in the deed. Another vast topic. See my *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, ch. 6.
38. See especially his rejection of the “organic model” of Hegelian historical change (272), and remarks such as those at 466. (I think the difference between natural and rational necessity could be much clearer in these formulations. Likewise with the animadversions the “necessity of contingency” and “autopoiesis” on 467.)
39. G.W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 8. See also the *Phenomenology*, §669.

40. Nothing in this picture need be qualified even if we admit that it is also the case that any such signification produces its own “excess,” its unmediated and disrupting “remainder.” That may be, but that is another problem with human signifying practices, not the whole problem.
41. I see nothing in what Žižek has said to counter the traditional insistence that any claim about such a material contradiction could not be claiming anything, would not be a claim about anything. The argument seems to be: so much the worse for logic, there are such contradictions. But that does not answer the challenge. See Charles Taylor, “Dialektik heute, oder: Strukturen der Selbstnegation,” in *Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik: Formation und Rekonstruktion*, ed. D. Henrich (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986), 141-53.
42. The real problem with Hegel’s political philosophy is the absence of any account of political will and the politics of will formation. The legislature just affirms “what’s already been decided.” See Michael Beresford Foster’s invaluable and neglected book, *The Political Philosophies of Plato and Hegel* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935).
43. When Žižek gives his list of “what Hegel cannot think” (qualified by a number of “yes, but...” suggestions), consisting of such things as repetition, the unconscious, class struggle, sexual difference, and so forth (455), I see no reason to think that Hegel would have any problem with such questions and issues, anymore than he needs to provide analyses and diagnoses of various individual and social pathologies. They are not his questions. A plague can completely erode the ethical life of some community and it can stay eroded for centuries. So can ever more frenzied and hysterical consumption; so can what may be the death spiral of global capitalism (See David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010]), and so can the beginning of a centuries-long environmental catastrophe.
44. The indispensable account of this is Laurence Dickey, *Hegel: Religion, Economics, and the Politics of Spirit, 1770-1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
45. Rüdiger Bubner’s phrase in “What is Critical Theory,” in *Essays in Hermeneutics and Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).