



Twenty-First Century Papers:
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ŽŽEK ON CHRISTIANITY AND REVOLUTION**

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“A man whose whole family had died under torture, and who had himself been tortured for a long time in a concentration camp; or a sixteenth-century Indian, the sole survivor after the total extermination of his people. Such men if they had previously believed in the mercy of God would either believe in it no longer, or else they would conceive of it quite differently from before. I have not been through such things. I know however, that they exist; so what is the difference?”

Simone Weil

“What combats doubt is, as it were, *redemption*. Holding fast to *this* must be holding fast to that belief. So what that means is: first you must be redeemed and hold on to your redemption (keep hold of your redemption) – then you will see that you are holding fast to this belief. So this can come about only if you no longer rest your weight on the earth but suspend yourself from heaven. Then everything will be different and it will be ‘no wonder’ if you can do things that you cannot do now.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein

In the 1962 preface to *Theory of the Novel*, Georg Lukács castigated his long-time opponent Theodor Adorno and other Western Marxists for succumbing to a sense of impotent resignation – as well as an aestheticist revulsion – at the administered world of Western capitalism and forsaking concrete political activity. They had given up the practical and demanding tasks of the revolution of the proletariat to take refuge in the “Grand Hotel Abyss,” where they could indulge in the rarefied pleasures of high art and culture while lamenting the catastrophes unfolding everywhere around them. The kind of commitment exemplified by Lukács, on the other hand, which involved the embrace of and service to a “really existing socialist” regime, led in turn to accusations from his Western counterparts that he was a Stalinist. Nonetheless, it must be said that the fate of Marxist theory in the West and in the United States in particular to remain predominantly the preserve of upper-middle class intellectuals notably fails to diminish any of

the harshness of Lukács's rebuke. A Marxism that has come to operate primarily in the sphere of culture without exercising any kind of significant influence in the arenas of politics and economics would testify to the seemingly limitless capacity of liberal democratic capitalism to defuse and integrate dissent. Reduced to postpolitical outbursts of cultural despair (or euphoric assertions of subversion, its speculative double), Marxist theory has managed to fit itself relatively smoothly into the liberal democratic marketplace of ideas, the shrill charges of sedition leveled by the pundits of the political Right notwithstanding. Indeed, these and other hostile commentators are fond of noting that Marxism and communism have been discovered to be bankrupt everywhere except for the literature and cultural studies departments of American universities.

The question of whether academic Marxists in their despair of praxis constitute a prophetic minority hastening to greet the Day of Judgment or are the lamentable trophies of an ideological system so briskly assured of its triumph that it converts its intellectual opposition into a prosperous career choice is one that ought to be resolved by battering the ivory tower into a stylite's pillar. Or so the prolific Slovene theorist Slavoj Žižek would maintain, in a series of works starting with the publication of *The Ticklish Subject* in 1999. Žižek sets out to break the deadlock of a well-fed futility that paralyzes the academic Left with a distinctive Lacanian-Marxist approach that, to his credit, takes politics seriously as politics, refusing to repress its inescapable sacrifices and cruel dilemmas under an obfuscating discourse of cultural representation. The Marxism he espouses is the harsh, Leninist variety, and the path that he takes towards its revitalization is one which has been generally avoided by much of the political Left, the roots of communism in the Christian tradition. On the one hand, Žižek directs his most

stinging criticisms at the academic Left and the pseudo-radicalism of post-colonial studies and multiculturalism, repeating the charge in several books that the willingness of the political Right to take tough measures is often a source of secret comfort for leftist intellectuals desirous of maintaining their bourgeois way of life, in that these policies actively defend the society that accords them institutional privileges while at the same time confirming the relevance of their social role by giving them something to criticize. On the other hand, Žižek expresses measured admiration for political conservatives, who are at least willing to face up to the realities of power. However, it is not Machiavelli whom he invokes to extol the worthiness of Lenin as a hard-headed revolutionary leader, but rather two of the seminal figures of the Christian religion – Saint Paul and Søren Kierkegaard. Žižek's recent work constitutes a singular attempt in the context of contemporary theory not only to restore a certain level of realism to the analysis of politics but also to advance the argument that the Christian conception of faith, or something like it, is essential to the militant activity of revolution.

For the guiding principle of Žižek's Marxism is "no communism without Lenin," just as he underscores the thesis that there is "no Christianity without Paul." Žižek notes that both Saint Paul and Lenin were outsiders to the respective discourses which they universalized. In their hands the teachings of Christ and Marx undergo a "violent displacement" from their original contexts, yet it is only through such an act of radical reinterpretation that Christianity becomes a universal religion and that Lenin is able to lead a political revolution in a largely agrarian country dismissed as a feudal backwater.¹ It is through the efforts of Paul – who was personally unacquainted with Jesus and not a member of his inner circle – that the Christian religion came to take on its essential doctrinal elements, as he was the one who "miraculously" succeeded in transforming the ignominious trauma of its leader's humiliating execution into the occasion of

the fledgling sect's greatest triumph. Similarly, Lenin pressed the Party to take power straight away instead of accepting the "objective logic of the 'necessary stages of development,'" whereby proletarian revolution is supposed to follow upon the establishment of the democratic bourgeois regime. For Žižek, the comparison between Paul and Lenin is ultimately sustained by a common underlying conception of truth. Echoing Alain Badiou's account of truth as an unforeseen and transformative event, and the subject of truth as a militant who endeavors to remain faithful to it, Žižek seeks to develop what might be termed a Kierkegaardian conceptualization of radical politics.² Such a task appears bedeviled by grave contradictions at the outset. How is it possible to reconcile, for example, the Danish religious philosopher – who withdrew into a solitary existence in order to work out an unprecedented indictment of Christendom and wrote in pseudonyms in part to discourage would-be disciples – with the ruthless political revolutionary who, once in power, terrorized his opposition into silence? Might there be a speculative identity between the eremite who renounces marriage and forgoes worldly acceptance and the militant who devotes not only life but also his or her symbolic afterlife to the cause of revolution? What kind of political program would take shape from the pairing of the pitiless *phronesis* needed for the successful accession to power and the passionate intensity of religious conviction – is it more likely to give rise to a Caesar with the soul of Christ or to a despotism administered by fanatical realists and cold-eyed apostles?

Žižek's "Kierkegaardian" conception of militancy seeks to transpose the inward drama of faith elaborated by the Danish thinker onto the sphere of political commitment. It is Kierkegaard, according to Žižek, who in *Fear and Trembling* revealed most profoundly that the "properly modern post- or meta-tragic situation occurs when a higher necessity compels me to betray the very ethical substance of my being."³ In his reading of the spiritual trial of Abraham, Kierkegaard advances the idea that an "absolute duty to God" is a paradox whereby the individual comes to be "higher than the universal" and "stands in an absolute relationship with the absolute."⁴ Such an absolute duty entails not only the forswearing of aesthetic pleasures and diversions but also the rejection of the ethical dimension – for Abraham, in his willingness to

follow the horrible command from God to sacrifice his son Isaac, the “temptation is the ethical itself.”⁵ Of course, Kierkegaard was not making the case to abandon the ethical altogether but rather underscoring the ultimate antagonism that obtains between this sphere and that of the religious, a point of supreme dissonance in which the “man of faith” takes on the public appearance of “a murderer.”⁶ The “teleological suspension of the ethical” elevates the individual and his or her private spiritual ordeals above the universal, the latter of which Kierkegaard associates with what is communicable, comprehensible, and publicly commended.

Kierkegaard’s radically individualistic conception of faith appears to be fundamentally at odds with a collectivist political project which lays claim to universal historical validity. Kierkegaard himself was deeply critical of liberal reformism, and he endorsed unequivocally the Socratic way of seeking “the single individual” in the multitude to the mass militancy manifested in the crusades preached by the rabble-rousing Bernard of Clairvaux.⁷ Undeterred, Žižek is determined to find within the lineaments of Kierkegaard’s reflections on Abraham the nucleus of militant political subjectivity. For Abraham’s willingness to obey God’s bewildering command is also a readiness to shatter irreparably his symbolic identity as father, husband, patriarch of his tribe and founder of a new people distinguished by their relationship with the one God. It is the catastrophic potential of this inward disposition that draws Žižek’s attention, for nothing less than such a drastic abandonment of all that one holds dear in the world could ever release the subject from the fetters “of existing social reality” and free him or her for properly revolutionary activity. The act of liberating oneself is thus necessarily violent and disruptive, and is often accompanied by horrifying consequences, as Žižek’s further examples drawn from literature and film attest. Žižek’s model of political subjectivity is buttressed by such figures as Medea, the escaped slave Sethe of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, who kills her daughter before she can be forced back into bondage, and Keyser Soze in *The Usual Suspects*, who, upon finding his family taken hostage by his enemies, shoots down his loved ones himself and then proceeds to slaughter his foes. These characters, upon finding themselves trapped in the impossible situation of the “forced choice,” respond with the mad decision to lash out at themselves and at what they hold to

be most precious. The violence they commit should not be regarded as an outburst of “impotent aggressivity turned against oneself” but rather as an act of radical freedom which “changes the co-ordinates of the situation in which the subject finds himself.”⁸ For in “striking at himself” the subject “cut[s] himself loose from the precious object through whose possession the enemy him in check” and “gains the space of free action.”

Žižek insists upon the monstrous dimensions of what he calls the ethical act, epitomized by the mother of *Beloved* who kills her daughter “out of her very fidelity” to her.⁹ Indeed, Žižek, looking to Lacan’s definition of the act as possessing a fundamentally traumatic character, argues that such a “suspension” of the ethical is constitutive of the ethical act itself. He makes the case for reworking Kierkegaard’s teleological suspension of the ethical into a kind of theological politics which is distinguished by an open endorsement of the revolutionary “act of terror” in all of its “catastrophic consequences.”¹⁰ The authentic revolutionary leader, accordingly, is “the one who forever relinquishes the right to claim: ‘But I didn’t want this!’ when things go wrong.” For Žižek, the achievement of Lenin and of any other worthy militant is to break the debilitating cycle of the “hysterical revolutionary” who prefers to avoid the responsibilities of power by “heroically embrac[ing] the onerous task of actually *running the State* – of making all the necessary compromises, but also taking the necessary harsh measures, to assure that the Bolshevik power would not collapse.”¹¹ The political suspension of the ethical thus involves the acceptance of orgiastic terror, of “liberating outburst[s] of destructive energy” in Leninist revolution – as Žižek grimly observes, “the pious desire to deprive the revolution of this excess is simply the desire to have a revolution without revolution.”¹²

However, is this apparently synoptic glimpse of revolutionary realities provided by Žižek to be understood as an attempt to defend the ruthlessness demanded by any genuine program of revolution? Are these concessions not a sign of his partisan honesty, if not philosophical sobriety, about the nature of revolutionary struggle, in marked contrast to the anemic postpolitical entreaties for tolerance from his postmodern rivals, who, in spite of their posturing as radicals

and subversives, reject the idea of unconditional devotion to a cause as a constraint on individual liberty and thus remain at bottom apologists for the liberal democratic order? Certainly, Žižek's violent insistence on the value of universal truth as a political category and an account of militant subjectivization based on Abraham's horrifying dilemma gives a long overdue jolt to the Republic of Letters, which Leo Strauss once described as being "indifferent to the true issues," because it "prefers agreement to truth or to the quest for truth."¹³ Nonetheless, one cannot help but note the basic neutrality of the Kierkegaardian act of renunciation with respect to politics, the fact that it appears to lack any kind of distinct political direction. Even the majority of Žižek's examples of "striking at one's self" drawn from literature and cinema are striking for the absence of explicitly political, let alone revolutionary overtones. A gangster guns down his family and then slaughters his enemies (*The Usual Suspects*). An abandoned wife spoils her husband's wedding plans and then murders her own children (*Medea*). A police officer frees his partner not by firing at the hostage-taking terrorist but by wounding his own colleague (*Speed*). A wealthy media executive, expected to pay the ransom for his abducted son, instead offers an enormous reward for anyone who will turn in the kidnappers (*Ransom*).¹⁴ The fact that all the characters in this series of examples (an underworld boss, a princess, a cop, a corporate mogul) are drawn from the ranks of the classes typically associated with the oppression of the proletariat should give us pause. Indeed, the only properly proletarian figure invoked by Žižek in this context is of course the aforementioned former slave Sethe of *Beloved*. Žižek thus leaves himself open to the charge that there is nothing about "striking at oneself" which would indicate an inherent tendency to work in the favor of the brand of politics he espouses.

Furthermore, it is telling that Žižek does not avail himself of the classic instance of "striking at oneself" in which the political dimensions he invokes ("the heroic sacrifice" undertaken for the sake of securing survival of the revolutionary state) are fully manifest – the decision of Junius Brutus, one of founders of the Roman republic, to execute his sons for conspiring to bring back

the exiled tyrants. Do we not have here, in addition to an act of multiple filicide, an excellent illustration of the “necessary harsh measure” that ensures the survival of the post-revolutionary order? Such an insight was not lost on Machiavelli, who was brought to the severe conclusion that “he who establishes a free state and does not kill ‘the Sons of Brutus,’ will not last long,” a maxim disobeyed at tragic cost, both to them and to their countries, by conscientious and honorable heads of state across the centuries, from Piero Soderini of Florence to Mohammed Mossadegh of Iran.¹⁵ By contrast, the tough-minded acceptance of revolutionary violence and the need for post-revolutionary coercion does not lead Žižek to take up the banner of the Machiavellian “science of politics,” in which accusations of amorality have often overshadowed the laudable political goals that Machiavelli hoped his prince would achieve. Žižek, as it turns out, proves quite anxious to avoid the charge of Machiavellian amorality. The Leninist definition of the communist revolutionary as a subject who “acknowledges no a priori set of moral rules independent of the revolutionary struggle,” he goes so far as to insist, has nothing to do with Machiavellian opportunism, but is in actuality the application of Kierkegaard’s religious suspension of the ethical to the realm of politics.¹⁶

This claim is bound to strike the Christian as both peremptory and unpersuasive, since within the tradition deriving from the Augustinian theology of the two cities and their intermingled destinies, faith in God requires a vigilant skepticism towards matters of politics, where the corruptibility of men is most catastrophically on display.¹⁷ Politics in the Christian tradition can never be entirely divorced from pragmatic concerns or prudential judgments, hence Martin Luther’s quip that he would rather be ruled by “a wise Turk” than “a foolish Christian” and the stipulation in just war theology that one stand a fair chance of achieving victory in the imminent conflict. The realism of the Christian in the realm of politics arises from the desire to avoid committing the idolatry that bestows to men the privilege to act like gods, which is also to say the license to behave like beasts. For a perfect faith in God rules out perfect faith in political authority. When politics becomes divorced from pragmatism in Christianity, Christian spirituality moves toward millennialism, and in many instances, sinks into the heresies of

antinominianism. The “political suspension of the ethical” in the Christian context has shown a pronounced tendency take an antinomian form, perhaps best exemplified by the Taborites of fifteenth-century Bohemia and Moravia, many of whom sold all their possessions to live in communes in which private property was regarded as a sin. However, the belief among the more radical sectarians that they created an Eden in which they were freed of the curse of laboring led them to justify theft and robbery once the communal treasures ran out. The destruction of the sect was set in motion once the “radicals declared that, as ‘men of the Law of God,’ they were entitled to take whatever belonged to the enemies of God – meaning at first the clergy and the nobility and the rich in general, but soon anyone who was not a Taborite.”¹⁸ As Norman Cohn points out, the peasants bore the brunt of these whimsical dispensations, suffering a worse oppression under their Taborite masters than under the feudal lords.

The vicious and instrumentalizing sanctimony of the Taborites anticipates the excesses and self-serving casuistry of the Jacobins, the nascent nomenklatura under Stalin, and the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, against the prospect of disorder and depredation wrought by armed factions operating by whim and taking by force what they desire, anxiously Hobbesian or remorselessly Machiavellian measures to restore the rule of law will inevitably acquire the force of a moral imperative and appear clearly preferable, for better or ill, to the will of the majority. And yet it is not the case that Žižek acknowledges any of the benefits arising from this amoral, purely instrumental, and ultimately atheistic conception of politics. His political program attempts to plot a course between the poles of unconditional subjective engagement and the pitiless, cold-blooded expediency, but one must raise the question of what how consequential his theorizing can be by not pursuing to the end either of these opposed terms and the divergent, often mutually exclusive advantages they offer, whether in the unflagging dedication of the saints or in the delicate art of the cunning ruler. Let us take for example the role of strategy in Žižek’s theorizing. On the one hand, Žižek asserts that revolutionary subjectivity rejects the constraints of any a priori moral rules; he thereby severs the ties he seeks to reinforce between Christian orthodoxy and revolutionary communism by submerging the inward struggles of faith in the

corrosive calculus of a pitiless political strategy released from any kind of ethical restraint. On the other hand, the element of politics as strategy is left out at a vital moment in the process of subjectivization, when the subject performs the “violent gesture of contraction that negates every being outside itself.”¹⁹ This moment corresponds to the eruption of pure contingency issuing from the traumatic force of the “authentic act” which serves to “divide the subject who can never subjectivize it, assume it as ‘his own,’ posit himself as its author-agent.”²⁰ Žižek would maintain that this moment of contingency, though lacking any direct reference to the political, comprises the necessary condition for any unconditional engagement. But the Machiavellian, seeing no respite from the machinations of power, must resist the temptation of exempting any aspect of the subjectivization process from politics. From the standpoint of this more ruthless and therefore more nakedly pragmatic exercise of politics, Žižek’s insistence that “[f]idelity is not fidelity to the principles betrayed by the contingent facticity of their actualization, but fidelity to the *consequences* entailed by the full actualization of the (revolutionary) principles” would amount to an injunction to go blind before the vicissitudes of fortune and lay oneself ignominiously at the mercy of another’s mastery.²¹

It comes therefore as small surprise to discover in Žižek the contention that the unconditionally committed subject must be ready to identify with excrement. This means not only the sacrifice of one’s well-being for the sake of communist revolution, but also the “sacrifice of the sacrifice,” which takes the form of the willingness to renounce even one’s position in the symbolic order of the struggle and be denounced as a traitor out of one’s very loyalty to the Party.²² The recurring literary example cited by Žižek of this fidelity that is unconditional to the point of being willing to feign the act of betrayal is drawn from Bertolt Brecht’s *The Measure Taken* (*Die Maßnahme*, 1930), in which a zealous and impetuous youth joins a cadre of Soviet agents to organize the workers in his home city of Mukden. The youth, however, ends up repeatedly sabotaging their plans as his impulsiveness, imprudence, and impatient sense of compassion get the better of him. During the final attempt to lead a workers’ demonstration amid rioting over food, the young comrade, overwhelmed by pity for the

worsening suffering of the impoverished inhabitants of the city, tears off his mask and reveals his identity. His action draws the attention of the authorities, who set off in hot pursuit of the cadre. Reaching the outskirts of the city, the group then finds itself in the grip of a difficult dilemma. If they try to escape over the border with the youth, they will have to abandon their mission of organizing the workers. If they hide him, they risk their own capture. They decide that they have no choice but to kill the youth, and hurl his body in a lime pit, where it will disintegrate, leaving no trace behind. Žižek takes the fate of the youth in this *Lehrstück* to be the illustration of how the “last traces of terror” can be expunged only by the “‘excremental’ identification of the revolutionary subject with terror” itself.²³ For before shooting him, the agents ask the youth for his approval for what they are about to do to him, though it is clear that they will kill him regardless of his answer. The youth atones for his excessively humanitarian attitude by consenting to the obliteration not only of his body but also to the erasure of his historical identity – not even the memory of who he was is to remain. Brecht thus serves for Žižek as the mediating figure who transplants the Kierkegaard’s suspension of the ethical into the realm of politics by converting the motif of the “sacrifice beyond the sacrifice” into the “disappearance of the disappearance.” Indeed, the killing of the youth and the dumping of his body takes on a sacramental character according Žižek, who compares these acts to the “tenderness” of the *pietà*.²⁴

Yet Žižek’s reading of the play raises some fundamental questions as to its coherence and persuasiveness. There is, first of all, the somewhat obvious point that the play relies on a distancing frame that to a certain extent contradicts its underlying message, as Žižek sees it. This frame consists of the agitators having to make a report of their decision to kill the youth to an authority of the Party. The deliberation of the Party official and the role-playing of workers, the merchant, and the police by the agents thus invite the audience to participate in judging the rightness of their actions. The very gesture of acting as a judge obliterates the youth in the verdict that approves the actions of the agents and yet re-immortalizes him in so far as his case transmits important lessons to the audience about the hazards of excessive zeal and the short-

sightedness of humanist compassion. Secondly, Žižek ignores the point that the youth would have been spared by the agents if they had had the means to get him to safety without having to break off their work and depart from the city. One may assume then that reproof would have taken a milder course. Thirdly, Žižek discounts a more prosaic motive, albeit one not mentioned in the play, for making the youth's body disappear completely – the reasonable desire of the revolutionaries not to acquire a reputation for treachery. For if the authorities had come across his bullet-riddled body, would they not have taken advantage of this discovery to trumpet the cowardliness and duplicity of the communist movement, whose members would sooner murder a comrade and unceremoniously abandon his corpse than valiantly face the risk of death or capture by defending him? Given the group's predicament after the young comrade's self-exposure, their discovery of the lime pit at the edge of the city must surely stand as a fabulous stroke of luck, one which affords the cadre with the opportunity both to overcome the reckless mistakes of the youth and to bring to completion their mission of mobilizing the workers of Mukden. Brecht's play thus depends on two conditions for an ideologically "satisfactory" resolution: one, the guilt (or "errors") of the young comrade and two, the discovery of the lime pit. We may assume that the narrative would have difficulty reaching an ideologically satisfying resolution were the young comrade wholly innocent and unerring, i.e. had he been recognized as an agitator through no fault of his own but through some wholly chance event, or if the revolutionaries had not come across the lime pit. By taking account of these conditions we come upon a darker set of dilemmas suppressed by this particular learning play – if the youth had been exposed by chance and not as a consequence of his deliberate actions, would it still be correct to kill him? If there had been no place to dispose of his body, would it be better to spare the young comrade and risk the lives of all in a fight to the death?

But the thorniest aspect of Žižek's reading of Brecht remains his insistence that this act of "political liquidation" ought to be regarded as a kind of *pietà*, on the basis that the "young comrade is killed by his companions with loving tenderness."²⁵ The agents console the young comrade to help him attain the resolution to face his execution ("Rest your head on our arm.

Close your eyes”), and later praise the youth’s courage and dedication to the party official.²⁶ However, Žižek then goes on to assert, via a detour through Heiner Müller’s play *Mauser*, that the underlying problematic of Brecht’s work is the “horrible task of the revolutionary” to “accept and endorse his own ‘second death,’ to ‘erase himself totally from the picture.’”²⁷ The revolution must feast on its children, and its most faithful prey are the ones who offer themselves up with the least amount of grumbling and protest. But Žižek’s conclusion is a hasty one. Firstly, it ignores the fact that the four agitators initially tried to save the youth’s life, and decided to kill him and obliterate his body only when they saw no other alternative. Secondly, the claim that the young comrade has a “task” of embracing his “second death” brushes aside the disciplinary motive behind his eventual fate, as the youth has brought this fate on himself through his reckless outpourings of compassion that have threatened to doom the mission of organizing the workers and peasants.

It is at this point where Žižek’s attempt to draw a parallel with the Kierkegaardian trial breaks down – Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac as a test of his faith, not as any kind of punishment for his transgressions. One need not be a Christian or a liberal to take affront at the very idea of a “political liquidation as *pièta*,” regardless of whether it is presented through an argument as limp and slapdash as the one offered here by Žižek. Indeed, even a committed communist who fully endorses the use of violent methods in overthrowing the capitalist state might well be repulsed at the crude deviousness of trying to palm off a necessary killing as an act of sanctification. For it is possible, after all, to be a militant and still regard the act of killing in a political struggle at best as a solemn duty undertaken with reluctance, at worst as the outcome of giving full rein to an orgiastic desire for spilling blood, and thus never as in and of itself a praiseworthy deed. The very suggestion that an act of political liquidation can be carried out with love and tenderness must surely strike us as a piece of malignant foolery; that it comes from one of the most eminent theorists on the intellectual scene today is a testament to the immense distance of our literature and cultural studies departments from concrete political realities. It does not help matters that the enigma of an executioner’s tears gets diluted in the salt water of

categorical assertion rather than frozen in the ice of sustained argument. It is as though Žižek could not be bothered to unravel the basic implications of his invocation of Kierkegaard to ground the Leninist suspension of ethics, and instead decided to trust his reader to let pass the not insignificant detail that when God asked Abraham to break an egg, it was not so that he could make an omelet.

Why does Žižek go to the extreme of ascribing love to the act of political liquidation, when solemn duty would provide sufficient justification? Does the very excessiveness of this gesture arise from the anxiety that his theorizing of revolutionary subjectivity cannot escape the logic of his analyses of *jouissance*, the never-ending predicament of which is that we are unable to attain it while being also incapable of getting rid of it?²⁸ Why couldn't there be an "obscene enjoyment" at work even in the revolutionary injunction to "sacrifice the sacrifice," given the ineradicable nature of *jouissance*? When Žižek draws attention to the "genuine tragic dimension" of the Stalinist show trials, discussing how from the Stalinist standpoint, suicide was "reduced to one of the 'most cunning' forms of the counter-revolutionary plot," he fails to note the resemblance between the victims of the Central Committee and the status of the slave in the Roman world, for whom suicide would amount to the crime of robbing the master of his property.²⁹ To theorize the suspension of the ethical without God is to lay claim to the void of a false autonomy that by default delivers the subject into the hands of institutional authority, which will invariably be stained with the outbursts of *jouissance*, in the absence of the divine command. Žižek, to his credit, does point to the way out of the vicious circle of enjoyment by looking to the distinctly Christian manner of "unplugging" from the social and political hierarchies, which, far from releasing pent-up libidinal energies in the short-lived upheaval of the carnival, sets out to build an egalitarian community based upon agapistic love.

But what then is the status of the trial of Abraham in the building up of this alternative order that in Žižek's own words, "suspends not so much the explicit laws but, rather, their implicit spectral obscene supplement"?³⁰ In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard emphasizes the manner in which the horrible command separates Abraham from his family, his tribe, and from

the realm of ethics itself, the universal as such. Faith, according to Kierkegaard, is the “paradox” whereby the “single individual is higher than the universal” and “determines his relation to the universal by his relation to the absolute,” rather than subordinating the absolute to the universal or merging the one with the other.³¹ Abraham is made silent throughout his ordeal; unlike the Greek Agamemnon, the Israelite Jephthah, or the Roman Brutus, he has no way in which express the universal that would not only accord his predicament an intelligible place in the collective scale of values but also confer honor and dignity upon it. Faith thus pertains to the singular relationship of the individual to God, which means that “one knight of faith cannot help the other at all.”³² Faith places the believer in a state of constant tension with respect to ethics and to the social body. It accordingly plays havoc with the relations between and among human beings, corresponding as it does to a purely subjective level of experience that defies representation in any collective sense. Thus, it is difficult to say with any kind of exactitude what sort of political order would emerge out of an aggregate of the Kierkegaardian knights of faith, each of whom “never hears another human voice” in the “loneliness of the universe” and “walks alone with his dreadful responsibility,” on the slight chance that so many of them would happen to be thrown together in a group.³³ Kierkegaard gives us little help on this score and displays instead what appears to be a troubling indifference to politics and issues of social justice. Kierkegaard only specifies that the exalted, “distant and aristocratic” demeanor which is the hallmark of romantics and stoics is foreign to the knight of faith; indeed, the latter appears sooner as a vigorous and self-assured “bourgeois philistine,” taking pleasure in his walks and favorite meals, going to church, working on the details of his ordinary job with an ingenuous enthusiasm, etc.³⁴ But the figure of the “bourgeois philistine” as the mask of the knight of faith is intended less as an endorsement of mercantile capitalism than as the disclosure of what Žižek, through Chesterton, discerns as the perverse secret of Christianity – that it allows the believer to live out the “pagan dream of pleasurable life without paying the price of melancholic sadness for it.”³⁵ For as Kierkegaard puts it, death in the pagan cosmos was an infinitely harsher event than in the Christian world, for what could be bitterer than the dying recognition that one *had been* happy?³⁶

The knight of faith, by contrast, is not given over to the oblivious pursuit of pleasure, rather, the impression of cheerful insouciance he gives is the effect of a supremely graceful and focused operation of the soul:

With the freedom from care of a reckless good-for-nothing, he lets things take care of themselves, and yet every moment of his life he buys the opportune time at the highest price, for he does not do even the slightest thing except by virtue of the absurd. And yet, yet – yes, I could be infuriated over it if for no other reason than envy – and yet this man has made and at every moment is making the movement of infinity. He drains the deep sadness of life in infinite resignation, he knows the blessedness of infinity, he has felt the pain of renouncing everything, the most precious thing in the world, and yet the finite tastes just as good to him as to one who never knew anything higher, because his remaining in finitude would have no trace of a timorous, anxious routine, and yet he has this security that makes him delight in it as if finitude were the surest thing of all... He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and *no one ever suspects anything else* (italics mine).³⁷

The knight of faith is someone who recognizes the ephemeral nature of the world, but this confrontation does not lead him to undertake the extinction of the self and its desires. The movement of detachment and renunciation in this case is followed by a movement of return, with redoubled intensity and commitment, to the very earthly things dismissed by the Buddhist doctrine of nirvana as illusion. And yet what are political implications, if not quite the specific politics, of a human type who has marched through the “dark night of the soul” and emerged from it with a lightened and carefree gait? To what extent does the reputed failure of Kierkegaard, in the example of his own life, to infuse a gloomy and tortured Christian faith with the affirming serenity of Greek antiquity, cast a shadow over the effusive praise of Johannes de Silentio, his authorial persona of the man who lacks faith, for the man who has faith? Is the Kierkegaardian account of faith, like Zen techniques of meditation, ultimately an “ethically

neutral instrument which can be put to different political uses, from the most peaceful to the most destructive?”³⁸

Partly because Kierkegaard’s primary concern was to provoke his readers into the awareness of the daunting task of living as Christian in a society that declares itself to be Christian, one must look beyond the scope of Kierkegaard’s writings to address the properly political consequences of his idea of faith. Having noted earlier the apolitical character of Žižek’s examples of “striking at oneself,” I turn to a narrative in the burgeoning genre of the “graphic novel” which not only thematizes this gesture in terms of revolutionary politics but also develops it in relation to another major problematic in Žižek’s writing, the *Musselman* (the concentration camp inmate who had totally lost the will to live) as the figure of pure survivalist desire that increasingly holds sway in the world of global capital. Alan Moore’s *V for Vendetta* is set in a Britain that has barely managed to escape annihilation in a nuclear war which has destroyed much of the rest of the world. The country, however, was not spared the environmental catastrophe in its wake, suffering radioactive floods, the destruction of crops, lethal epidemics, and famine. The government collapses, leaving rival gangs to fight it out for dominance. Finally, the fascist groups unite and join forces with the remaining corporations, and restore order by imposing a dictatorship. Upon taking power, they begin immediately deporting immigrants of African and Asian descent, Jews, gays and lesbians, and those suspected of leftist sympathies to concentration camps, where they liquidated after being forced to undergo medical experiments. The hero of the narrative is the nameless, faceless “V,” who conceals his face behind a grotesquely smiling doll’s mask. In his first public act of resistance, V, who had been the subject of torture and experimentation as an inmate of one of the camps and had somehow managed to escape, carries out bomb attacks that destroy Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament.

V’s mission to bring about anarchy to the order built on racial purity and gas chambers takes the form of a campaign of violence and subversion against the security apparatus of the fascist regime, targeting its leaders and officials running the extermination camps for

assassination and taking over the airwaves to ridicule the government's pretensions to legitimacy and taunt the population for keeping it in power. But the story reveals almost nothing about V's personal history; he is a kind of walking embodiment of the "empty signifier" of universality, as it is never revealed whether he is black, brown, or white, homosexual or heterosexual, or Jewish or Muslim or atheist. The only exception is a brief, elliptical account of what inspired him to become an avenger of those murdered by the fascist order. While a prisoner, he had found a letter written on toilet paper that was placed in a hole between his room and the next cell. The letter gives an account of the life of a woman prisoner in the adjacent room, an actress named Valerie. She recounts her childhood, her break with her parents over her relationship with another girl, her successes on the stage and in film, and then the war and the coming of the police state, the arrest of her lover and then of her, the suicide of her lover out of guilt for signing a confession betraying her, and then the medical experiment that has left her near death. She writes of how her body will soon give out, how everything that she knew and loved has been destroyed, and how her flesh will soon be reduced to a lump of ashes. But she notes that there is one part of her, that "last inch" of oneself, her integrity, which remains in her power. It may be sold for "very little," and yet it is that small but crucial part of ourselves which enables one to resist to the end the agonies and torments of body and spirit so gratuitously inflicted by one's captors. What constitutes resistance under these bleak and utterly hopeless circumstances? Aside from spectacular actions like the escaped V's bombings and assassinations or Žižek's favored example of the Jewish ballerina who managed to steal a machine gun and shoot down an SS officer before being killed herself, resistance encompasses as well the inner attitude that forms the basis for such acts. Even under conditions of physical helplessness and wrenching coercion, one still has the freedom to maintain fidelity to one's principles, refusing to sign a confession or statement accusing another of sedition, and thereby frustrating, however briefly, the regime's ongoing conquest over its enemies in the form of another broken victim. But what is startling about Valerie's letter is the revelation that in the infernal depths of her cell she is able to experience an outpouring of love that is nothing short of miraculous: "I don't know who you are,

or whether you're a man or woman. I may never see you. I will never hug you or cry with you or get drunk with you. But I love you. I hope that you escape this place..."³⁹

Is this not an extraordinary example of what Alain Badiou calls "immortality," the subject's defiance of the status of "victim" and repudiation of the identity of a mere "being-for-death"?⁴⁰ Is not this sublime capacity for love – and the act of offering love and consolation even to an anonymous other – in circumstances of unbearable pain and ubiquitous death the ultimate form of freedom, or is, in fact, when we are forced to confront the quivering animal beneath our everyday pretensions to moral dignity, the *only* freedom? The letter transforms V, as he realizes that all he has to lose is his fear, his anxiousness, and his self-pity. It is a recognition that is initially terrifying and ultimately joyful, an ecstatic experience of freedom shared by his protégé Evey, who, though emaciated and tortured, calmly chooses execution over signing the confession prepared by her jailers, and even by Eric Finch, the tenacious detective on the trail of V, who, out of desperation, decides to undergo the ordeals of a death camp inmate to figure out how to "think the way [V] thinks."⁴¹ Such joy, which transports one beyond the reach of circumstance, can only be found beyond the pleasure principle; ordinary happiness necessarily stands in the way of ever achieving it ("happiness," as V puts it, is the "most insidious prison of all"⁴²). This is where the liberal and historicist critics of Žižek go pitifully astray when they chide him for demanding too much of his Western academic audience, burdened as we by a "pious force-phobia, our inability to imagine life without TIAA-CREF, our fastidious reluctance to make a *passage à l'acte*."⁴³ For what Geoffrey Galt Harpham misses in questioning both the moral justness of the "ethics of total sacrifice" and its very viability in a liberal society is the fact that nothing short of a stance of uncompromising commitment can shatter the logic of pure survivalist desire – the desire to live only for the sake of living – by means of which the global capitalist order perpetuates itself. It is through such desire writ large that the fascism in Moore's narrative achieves and maintains its hold on power, and it must be said that the nearest avenue of tyranny to our present-day political reality is the overriding compulsion to preserve one's life and expand one's enjoyments at the expense of the lives of others. To dismiss the stance of unconditional

commitment as too strenuous and unfeasible is to counsel irresolution, which consists, by default, of endorsing the existing order and keeping one's fingers crossed that one will somehow be lucky enough to avoid ever having to find out whether one is indeed capable of sublime love. Such a liberal disavowal of these underlying spiritual realities exposes the ties binding the pleasure principle to conservative politics, and thus sheds light on the clandestine posture of assent assumed by liberals towards the tough-minded policies of conservatives, who, as Žižek points out, are "fully justified in legitimizing their opposition to radical knowledge in terms of happiness: ultimately, knowledge makes us unhappy."⁴⁴

Žižek's reliance on the Kierkegaardian suspension of ethics in theorizing the revolutionary subject might be best accounted for by the fact that the unconditional commitment exemplified by the knight of faith is the only weapon left in the arsenal of communist politics. It is, to be sure, a far sturdier instrument than the goads of historical necessity, which fetters human agency to the criterion of success, essentially depriving it of its moral character. It also rejects and counteracts the debased understanding of gratification and the tyranny of the appetites that provide for the subhuman utopia of the Last Men. But it is not a weapon that is oriented towards ends that are exclusively political, and it fits more easily in the hands of the dissidents against state socialism like Lech Walesa than it does those of his jailers and the bureaucrats who keep the machinery of governmental authority rolling. For the Christian, "to the welfare of the soul, or in other words to God, a total, absolute, and unconditional loyalty is owed," whereas the "welfare of the State is a cause to which only a limited and conditional loyalty is owed."⁴⁵ To pledge to the state anything higher than this is to make oneself guilty of idolatry. Thus, in terms of politics, unconditional commitment lends itself more to dismantling tyranny in the full sense of the word, with regard to both oppressive authority and enslavement to the appetites, than to administering the post-revolutionary state. Such considerations do not escape Žižek, whose reticence with regard to the post-revolutionary state betrays unease over the fact that this socio-political order will necessarily occupy a lower moral plane than those whom it persecutes. For why else would Žižek advocate unquestioning obedience to the "authentic Leader" as "literally the One who

enables me actually to choose myself – subordination to him is the highest act of freedom”?⁴⁶

Such an exhortation covers over the fact that there is an essential component of the revolutionary process about which Žižek chooses to say disappointingly little, an element which can be said to lurk in the shadows of his theorizing, and fills the subterranean gap between the pure, committed souls who overthrow the existing political order and the “authentic” leader whose compromises and intrigues establish the new regime.

As noted earlier, Žižek calls upon his readers to identify with “excrement,” which is to say, to embrace the role of the “vanishing mediator,” whose disappearance would mark the passage from the late capitalist to a new communist order. Yet one is led to wonder whether Žižek intends for *all* of his readers to identify with the revolution’s “excrement.” If some of the revolutionaries are to accept the role of “vanishing mediator,” who will carry out the operations by which they disappear? Is there, alongside his call for their unconditional engagement, a more subtle address to those agents who would oversee the process of “vanishing mediation,” that is to say, step into the role of executioner to prune away the excessively zealous and ensure thereby the survival of the new order? Any successful revolution, as Žižek is well aware, requires a mixture of pragmatic “compromises” and “harsh measures.” The problem is that such a “mixture” is not to be found within the individual revolutionaries themselves; it is, rather, *produced* as the outcome of violent disputes between partisans of differing positions. For revolution is to be achieved not by the passion for justice or by harsh and brutal measures alone, but rather by both in their proper measure. Achieving this proper measure means that Žižek’s call to revolutionary action must make room not only for lambs, the sincere and committed militants who are to be slaughtered from two directions, but also for wolves, whose work, unlike that of the lambs, one assumes can never be finished. Indeed, the latter are the necessary consequence of a rhetoric that seeks to convince its hearers not only to embrace martyrdom but also to prepare for the likelihood of being condemned and denounced by the very Party for the sake of which they have risked their lives. Unless of course, their cunning, wiles, prudence, or good fortune enable them to ingratiate themselves into the favored circle of those charged with

purging the Party and institutionalizing its rule. Žižek's appeal to Malebranche's idea of "objective Grace" as the principle that determines whether one will be spared or liquidated in the show trials of the post-revolutionary regime amounts to an instruction to the militant to disarm and render herself defenseless before the proper authorities once the Party has assumed power.⁴⁷ The idea of grace apart from divine mercy is no different from Machiavelli's concept of *fortuna*. But on this score, it is Machiavelli who, in exhorting his reader to achieve mastery over chance, emerges as the more genuinely altruistic.⁴⁸

To reduce, as Žižek does, politico-religious conviction to a mere instrument with a date of expiry and refuse to confront the continued life of the will-to-power in post-revolutionary society is to elevate the authority of an imperfect, ambitious, and often unscrupulous group of individuals to the idolatrous scale of despotism. Indeed, from a Christian standpoint, one ought never to cease being a realist in the realm of politics, least of all when one's sense of reality calls upon one to engage in revolution. We find such an understanding in the work of Simone Weil, whose meditations on the relations between Christianity and revolution are more rigorously complete than those of Žižek and whose own conception of "unconditional commitment" refuses any compromise with tyranny. Whereas Žižek summons the unflagging dedication of the militant subject only to subordinate it to the interests of the state, Weil rejects the view that a state can be treated as a subject with a spiritual life. Collectivities by nature cannot participate in the sufferings and joys of the saint, though, if by some miracle, were a nation to imitate Christ's passion, it would "disappear" as a nation, "but this disappearance would be worth infinitely more than the most glorious survival."⁴⁹ Realism is necessary because generally speaking, only a few will be both willing and able to embrace the arduous demands of the saintly life. For Weil, social life is both "necessary" and "evil."⁵⁰ Even the best type of government will fall short of "the wish to see others suffer exactly what we are suffering" as a "factor making for social stability."⁵¹ For society is beset by irreducible antagonisms, which cannot be "appeased" by the "understanding or goodwill" of the citizens but can only be "smothered by coercion."⁵² The powerful, blinded by the belief in their importance, are cut off from the "recognition of human

wretchedness” that alone prepares for the experience of divine love.⁵³ The powerless, on the other hand, are also impeded from the same recognition by their own belief in the importance of the powerful, and thus are held captive to their immorality. The oppressed prefer to see themselves as future conquerors than as present sufferers: “We are surprised that affliction does not have an ennobling effect. This is because when we think of the afflicted person it is the affliction we have in mind. Whereas he himself does not think of his affliction: he has his soul filled with no matter what paltry comfort he may have set his heart on.”⁵⁴

The staunch Leftist will no doubt protest the inevitable drift of these assertions pertaining to the limitations of human nature towards a timid, reformist politics of choosing the “lesser evil” and of avoiding harm rather than striving after the good. But there is nothing about bringing a “cold lucidity” prized by Weil’s politics of saintliness as well as by Machiavelli’s science of power – to bear on the facts of political life that rules out revolutionary action as an option. Indeed, I propose that it provides a far better measure for determining the necessity of revolutionary engagement than the hysteria of acting-out or the inducement of utopia. Furthermore, Weil’s spirituality takes on sharper political contours when she assails the Christian longing for the afterlife: “Those who wish for their salvation do not truly believe in the reality of joy within God.”⁵⁵ Indeed, she points the way to a distinctly Pauline expression of the political suspension of the ethical in the demand that one love God and others more than one’s own salvation.⁵⁶ Thus, as J. G. Davies puts it, the proper Christian attitude towards revolutionary struggle ought to be based on the principle that the “force of armed conflict is not the only nor the greatest evil in the world.”⁵⁷ *Ut bellum matrimonium*. Hence the central importance accorded to the two contemporary faces of catastrophe by Žižek – as situation (the everyday misery of the shantytowns and recurrent massacres in the so-called developing world) and as event (the shock with which the First World responds to disaster).⁵⁸ For it is ultimately the specter of catastrophe that offers the best chance to reignite the fervor of the multitude through the act of weighing the evils of disorder against the worse evils of tyranny, since the total

domination of corporations threatens to bring about not only economic and environmental upheavals but also the unprecedented degradation of the very possibilities for the moral life.

The principle that every system striving after totality generates the seeds of its own undoing accounts at least in part for the surge of interest in the early Christian church among the leftist critics of global capitalism. But what is missing from the invocation of Saint Francis, Saint Augustine, and the primitive Roman church in the closing pages of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and Žižek's theorization of "vanishing mediation" is the fact that the early Church did not deliberately set out to achieve political dominance over the Roman world. As Georges Sorel notes in *Reflections on Violence*, the primitive Christians understood the stakes of their struggle against the Roman Empire first in cosmological, and not political, terms: "The Christian life of that time was dominated by the necessity of membership in a holy army which was constantly exposed to the ambushes set by the accomplices of Satan." Final victory would come with the return of Christ and the deliverance of the Church from the "reign of evil."⁵⁹ Though it did not experience the triumph after which it had sought, the Church, with its formation of a distinctly warlike way of life ("a fully developed and completely armed pessimism"⁶⁰), demonstrated for Sorel how a socially marginal, apparently insignificant religious movement could "become master of the world when its hour had come."⁶¹ We find a similar recognition in Weil of the mechanism whereby an encompassing faith and devotion come to exert a determining influence upon political life: "One of the fundamental truths of Christianity is that progress towards a lesser imperfection is not produced by the desire for a lesser imperfection. Only the desire for perfection has the virtue of being able to destroy in the soul some part of the evil that defiles it."⁶² The conquest of the Roman world was a side-effect, or by-product, of the intense yearnings of the primitive Christians for the Second Coming. Likewise, someone who aspires merely to become a "vanishing mediator" will most likely fail to achieve success in either, whether to "mediate" or even to "vanish" effectively. Any genuine progress in politics must rely on a morality that takes its bearings from and strives after divine perfection, that is, upon a subject who, in overreaching the earthly, transforms it by imparting the radiance of her joyful travails.

(Endnotes)

¹ Slavoj Žižek,

On Belief

(London: Routledge, 2001), 2-3. Subsequent references cited as *OB*.

² See Alain Badiou,

Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), especially 12-15 and 65-74.

³ Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion*

(London: Verso, 2001), 14. Subsequent references cited as *DT*.

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 81.

⁵ *Fear and Trembling*, 60.

⁶ *Fear and Trembling*, 57.

⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, trans. Alistair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1996), 557.

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 150. Subsequent references cited as *FA*.

⁹ *FA*, 154.

¹⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999), 377-378. Subsequent references cited as *TS*.

¹¹ *TS*, 237.

¹² Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), 28-29.

¹³ Leo Strauss, "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*," in *On Tyranny*, ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 195.

¹⁴ *FA*, 149-153.

¹⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick, trans. Leslie J. Walker, S.J. and Brian Richardson (London: Penguin, 1983), III.3, 393.

¹⁶ *OB*, 149.

¹⁷ See Reinhold Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism," *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986).

¹⁸ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977), 217.

¹⁹ See *TS*, 34.

²⁰ *TS*, 375.

²¹ *TS*, 377.

²² *DT*, 96-97.

²³ *TS*, 378.

²⁴ *TS*, 379-380.

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, "Afterword: Lenin's Choice," in V. I. Lenin, *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917* (London: Verso, 2002), 222 and *Iraq: The Broken Kettle* (London: Verso, 2004), 122.

²⁶ Bertolt Brecht, *The Measures Taken and Other Lehrstücke*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Arcade, 2001), 34.

²⁷ *TS*, 379.

²⁸ *TS*, 291.

²⁹ *DT*, 101f.

³⁰ *FA*, 130.

³¹ *Fear and Trembling*, 70.

³² *Fear and Trembling*, 71.

³³ *Fear and Trembling*, 80.

³⁴ *Fear and Trembling*, 39.

- ³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 48. Subsequent references cited as *PD*.
- ³⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 56.
- ³⁷ *Fear and Trembling*, 40-41.
- ³⁸ Žižek's argument regarding the political neutrality of Zen Buddhism draws from Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* (New York: Weatherhilt, 1998), a study of how Zen doctrines gave ideological support to Japanese fascism and justified its atrocities and massacres. See *PD*, 20-33.
- ³⁹ Alan Moore, *V for Vendetta* (New York: DC Comics, 1989), 160.
- ⁴⁰ Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), 12.
- ⁴¹ *V for Vendetta*, 211.
- ⁴² *V for Vendetta*, 169.
- ⁴³ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Doing the Impossible: Slavoj Žižek and the End of Knowledge," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (Spring 2003), 482.
- ⁴⁴ *PD*, 44.
- ⁴⁵ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, trans. Arthur Wills (London: Routledge, 2002), 115.
- ⁴⁶ *DT*, 247.
- ⁴⁷ *DT*, 101.
- ⁴⁸ As G. K. Chesterton wrote apropos of Nietzsche, who "denied egoism simply by preaching it": "To preach anything is to give it away. First, the egoist calls life a war without mercy, and then he takes the greatest possible trouble to drill his enemies in war. To preach egoism is to practise altruism." See *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* (New York: Image, 1990), 38.
- ⁴⁹ *The Need for Roots*, 158.
- ⁵⁰ Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, trans. Arthur Wills and John Petrie (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1973), 146.
- ⁵¹ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford (London: Routledge, 1987), 5.
- ⁵² *Oppression and Liberty*, 146.
- ⁵³ *Gravity and Grace*, 110.
- ⁵⁴ *Gravity and Grace*, 71.
- ⁵⁵ *Gravity and Grace*, 33.
- ⁵⁶ Romans 9.3.
- ⁵⁷ J. G. Davies, *Christians, Politics, and Violent Revolution* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1976), 183.
- ⁵⁸ *PD*, 165.
- ⁵⁹ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T. E. Hulme (New York: Peter Smith, 1941), 212.
- ⁶⁰ *Reflections on Violence*, 13.
- ⁶¹ Georges Sorel, *Social Foundations of Contemporary Economics*, trans. John L. Stanley (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984), 326.
- ⁶² *The Need for Roots*, 215.