

THE PSYCHOTHEOLOGY OF SIN AND SALVATION

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation, by employing the work of Slavoj Žižek in his engagement with the Apostle Paul, argues that Paul, in Romans 6-8, understands sin as a lie grounding the Subject outside of Christ and salvation as an exposure and displacement of this lie as one is joined to the body of Christ. In this understanding salvation may be seen primarily in terms of an overcoming of alienation from God, neighbour and self through participation in the Trinity (adoption by the Father through the Son by means of the Spirit), which stands in contrast to the sinful Subject who in his inner alienation and his alienation from God and others is oriented by a deceitful death dealing desire that would find life in the law rather than in God. The specific theological significance of Žižek (along with his predecessors Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan) is his demonstration of the pervasive and systemic nature of this lie (chapter 1) and its description as he finds it in Romans 7 (chapter 2). The general significance this account might have for theology is to frame the concept of sin as a deception (reifying the self) with its own logic, dynamic, and structure, similar to the Subject of psychoanalysis, and salvation, in turn, can be understood as the place and means from which the Subject of sin and its destructive nature are understood and displaced by new life in Christ (chapter 3). Sin and salvation, under this notion, are not forensic categories but have to do

with the lived reality of identity, of being either a Subject oriented to death or to life.

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INTRODUCTION

I make the case in this thesis that the work of Slavoj Žižek is pertinent to theology and specifically to soteriology as his theory illuminates the doctrine of sin and indicates a holistic understanding of salvation, incorporating the individual and the social, the particular and the universal. The understanding of sin which is developed by Žižek, in conjunction with Freud and Lacan and which he finds in Romans 7 is that sin is a deception or a primordial lie which grounds the human Subject and it is this necessary lie which is determinative of the dynamics of the Subject and her world. The question which the work of Žižek raises and which this thesis seeks to answer is whether or how the psychoanalytic Subject, if it is understood as being constituted in deception (chapter 1) fits with the sinful Subject of Romans 7 (first as argued in Žižek's theory which is taken up in chapter 2) and with the Subject of Romans 6-8 (from the perspective of biblical scholarship) and what implications this would have for the doctrines of sin and salvation (as worked out in chapter 3).¹ My argument will be that Žižek's picture of the Subject is analogous to Paul's sinful Subject of

¹ The importance of the topic of Freud's 'death drive' and its possible connection to sin presented itself through my encounter, as a missionary in Japan, with the work of Takeo Doi, a Japanese psychoanalyst who explains all things Japanese in the term *amae*, which is his version of the work of the death drive. Doi's definition of the term and its various developments depend directly on Freud's death drive, though he brings his own unique perspective to the interpretation. Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence: The Key Analysis of Japanese Behavior*, J. Bester, trans. (Tokyo: Kodansha International 1973). Doi's teacher, Heisaku Kosawa, studied under Freud but proposed an alternative understanding to the Oedipus conflict called the *Ajase* conflict which turns the focus from the father onto the mother.

Romans 7:7ff but Paul's description of the Subject 'in Christ' accounts for and displaces the sinful Subject.

The Contribution of Žižek to Theology

Considering Žižek's atheistic materialism the question arises, why read Žižek to help with theology? The value of Žižek for theology has to do in part with his direct engagement and challenge to modernity (e.g., his interpretation of the Cartesian *cogito*) and the modern notion of the Subject and in part with his exploration and development of an understanding of the Subject which is analogous to a Pauline understanding (in that the Subject of sin is constituted in a lie) which counters this modern delimitation.² Psychoanalytic theory, in the work of Freud and Lacan but most explicitly with Žižek, has taken up the theological task of describing and defining the Subject (as Žižek maintains and as the first chapter below develops). Though he is in dialogue with theology and theologians³ his Lacanian-Marxist materialism may not seem to lend itself to being appropriated by theology but he defines himself as a Pauline materialist (*Reader*, ix)⁴ and one of his main concerns is to rework traditional notions of

² Where the theological tradition prior to Descartes and modernity had fully engaged the question of human interiority Charles Taylor traces the reduction of the Subject to the categories allowed for within a rational understanding, leaving human interiority an unapproachable *noumena* (Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 143ff.

³ See Joshua Delpech-Ramey, 'An Interview with Slavoj Žižek "On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love"', *Journal of Philosophy & Scripture* (Volume 1 Issue 2, Spring 2004).

⁴ Due to the frequency of citations the works of Freud, Lacan and Žižek will be cited in the text using an abbreviated title and page number. As Žižek describes himself, 'if I were asked to provide a one-line description of where I stand, I would probably choose the paradoxical self designation of a Paulinian materialist' (*Reader*, ix).

soteriology.⁵ He maintains that he is not simply using theology but that the specific content of Christianity is necessary to his theory.⁶ This necessary utilization and passage through Christianity is an understanding he develops in his early books specifically engaging Christian thought (*The Fragile Absolute* (2000), *On Belief* (2001), and *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003)) but which becomes a part of his theory from this period forward.⁷ His theory of the Subject in this period develops with an interaction with Paul, and, as I demonstrate, can be read as an extended and insightful commentary on the place of the Subject in Romans chapter 7.⁸

⁵ As he describes it, 'My desperate problem is how to draw, how to extract the Christian notion of redemption from this financial transaction logic. This is what I'm desperately looking for ... My big obsession with Christianity is that there is something extremely precious in this legacy that is being lost today' (Delpech-Ramey, 'An Interview with Slavoj Žižek "On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love"', 5).

⁶ As he explains, 'What I find theoretically and politically engaging in the religious legacy is not the abstract messianic promise of some redemptive Otherness, but, on the contrary, religion in its properly dogmatic and institutional aspect (*Reader*, ix). He explains that the 'radical thought' of Paul and of Christianity is to be found in a 'specific Christian content' and not by extracting the teaching of Paul from this context (*Reader*, ix).

⁷ Prior to his theological turn his early works (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), *For They Know Not What They Do* (1991), and *Tarrying With the Negative* (1993)) focused on critique of ideology but the problem which provokes his theological turn is how to sustain the benefits of this critique or of traversing the fantasy without simply falling into another ideology (see Adam Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 72).

⁸ He ties together Paul and Lacan in *The Ticklish Subject* in a fashion that could be taken as a summary of his own work: 'To become a true Christian and embrace Love, one should thus "die to the law", to break up the vicious cycle of "sinful passions, aroused by the law". As Lacan would have put it, one has to undergo the second, symbolic death, which involves the suspension of the big Other, the symbolic Law that hitherto dominated and regulated our lives. So the crucial point is that we have two "divisions of the subject" which should not be confused. On the one hand, we have the division of the subject of the Law between his conscious Ego, which adheres to the letter of the Law, and his decentred desire which, operating "automatically", against the subject's conscious will, compels him to "do what he hates", to transgress the Law and indulge in illicit *jouissance*. On the other hand, we have the more radical division between this entire domain of the Law/desire, of the prohibition generating its transgression, and the properly Christian way of Love which marks a New Beginning, breaking out of the deadlock of Law and its transgression' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 151).

If Žižek were only an interpreter of Lacan this would, by itself, be a significant contribution to theology⁹ as Lacan is consciously developing his theory in dialogue with Christianity and theology but it is Žižek's explicit development of his notion of the Subject through interaction with Paul and Romans 7 that makes him so fruitful for theological engagement, as I will show.¹⁰ In addition, Žižek combines Lacanian theory with philosophy (in particular German idealism and specifically George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel),¹¹ politics (his reference here being devoted almost completely to Karl Marx) and cultural theory so as to encompass each of these areas in a theological critique (a naming of the idols or a critique of ideology) and dialogue¹² advancing the possibility of forming a holistic theology.¹³ In this understanding the

⁹ Tony Myers summarizes the problem anyone faces in studying Lacan and maintains Žižek is the primary representative of Lacan in the English-speaking world. The publishing history of Lacan's work is mired in controversy, but much of it is only available to the Lacanian elite centred around Lacan's son-in-law. That which is available very often only attests to some of Lacan's earlier theories- the very ones that Žižek decries throughout his work. De facto, therefore, Žižek himself functions as a substitute Lacan for much of the English-speaking world (Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek*, (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 112). Žižek's approach to Lacan is through the teaching of Lacan's son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller under whom he studied, by whom he was psycho-analyzed, and to whom he submitted his research. Žižek makes it clear that his understanding of Lacan is through Miller. 'So I must say this quite openly that my Lacan is Miller's Lacan. Prior to Miller I didn't really understand Lacan' (*Conversation with Žižek*, 34).

¹⁰ As I demonstrate in chapter 1, Lacan is already working within a theological mindset and framework and Žižek's reading even more explicitly puts Lacan into dialogue with theology.

¹¹ His reading of Hegel is not that Hegelian dialectics is 'a story of progressive overcoming' rather 'dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts – "absolute knowledge" denotes a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of every identity' (*The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 6).

¹² As I demonstrate below his interaction with Hegel pertains directly to his understanding of Paul in the notion of suspending the law and his Marxist notion of hope is a derivative from Paul.

¹³ Eric Santner has dubbed the common 'theological' element which exceeds philosophy, politics, and culture but which ties them together the 'psychotheology of everyday life'. As Santner puts it, 'the human mind includes more reality than it can contain' and this surplus or 'too muchness' is determinative of human life (Eric L.

Subject (whether that of philosophy, politics, or culture) is ultimately a repressed/unconscious Subject deceived primarily about the Self (the fundamental fantasy) as his own basic dispositional frame is one that obscures the 'place' from which he sees.¹⁴ This obstacle within the Subject, which Žižek finds in Paul's description of sin in Romans 7:7ff but which his theory as a whole illustrates, is the necessary kernel of the real around which the Subject (with the symbolic and imaginary registers) is constituted. So it is in and through fantasy or deception that the Subject arises and this largely accounts for Žižek's dialogue with theology but his theory extends this insight to nearly every realm of human endeavour.

Theological Engagements with Žižek

Theological engagement with Žižek has primarily been limited to utilization or deployment of his theory in various ideological critiques, criticism of his theology as heterodox, or appreciative comparison of his theory with another theology, but there has not been a clear delineation as to how Žižek's theory as a whole might be appropriated into a theological and exegetical understanding which does not also accept his materialistic presuppositions or the permanence of the Lacanian registers to which he adheres. For example, among those who have utilized Žižek for ideological critique is David Fitch, who

Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 8).

¹⁴ Santner notes one of Žižek's favorite quotes from Hegel to get at this understanding: 'The enigmas of the ancient Egyptians were also enigmas for the Egyptians themselves' (Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 7).

appropriates Žižek's theory as a means of critiquing key American evangelical beliefs (specifically the doctrines of inerrancy, conversion or a 'decision for Christ', and America as a Christian nation) as forms of ideology.¹⁵ He notes that these three doctrines are thought to be pivotal and yet are ultimately empty categories (functioning as master signifiers within a Žižekian explanation), indicating the need for an evangelical traversing of the fantasy or an examination of how these doctrines (as they are taken up by evangelicals) serve to co-opt biblical authority, discipleship, and Church life (a life beyond capitalism and consumerism).¹⁶ Fitch employs Žižek in his critique while recognizing that Žižek's ontological commitments limit his usefulness in working out an answer to the problems of an evangelical Christianity (to which he is committed) but he does not incorporate Žižek into a theological or exegetical understanding. Robert Ruehl, in a parallel deployment of Žižek's theory critiquing ideology, notes that capitalism has been embraced by some Christians as if it were intrinsically Christian and he critiques the mix of church, Christianity and capitalism through Žižek's theology.¹⁷ Creston Davis has likewise found in Žižek a possible means of exposing what he describes as theology's 'cosmic false consciousness' in that 'twentieth-century theology has hidden theology's radical stance from itself' in its alignment with 'bourgeois

¹⁵ David E. Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism? Discerning a New Faithfulness for Mission: Towards an Evangelical Political Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011).

¹⁶ Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism? Discerning a New Faithfulness for Mission*.

¹⁷ Robert Ruehl, 'Žižek's Communist Theology: A Revolutionary Challenge to America's Capitalist God', *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 5:1 (2011).

liberalism' and a 'determinist capitalistic horizon'.¹⁸ Davis studied under both Žižek and John Milbank and has perhaps made the greatest effort to bring Žižek into dialogue with theology and particularly with the theology of Milbank.¹⁹ As Davis notes, the common ground between Milbank and Žižek is the understanding that Christianity offers emancipation from a nihilistic capitalism,²⁰ and as Milbank notes, there is the mutual recognition of the universalism of Christianity²¹ but the nature of Christianity (Žižek's dialectic or Milbank's paradox) is up for debate.

¹⁸ John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, Creston Davis, with Catheine Pickstock, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 8.

¹⁹ Davis' effort to bring Žižek and Milbank into dialogue has not been judged entirely successful by either Žižek or Milbank as the dialogue has been more like two monologues. In *The Monstrosity of Christ* Žižek wonders if Milbank, in attempting to critique his position, forgets that he (Žižek) *really* is an atheist. He says of Milbank's critique that he 'fails to see' God in ordinary life, 'Of course I "fail to see" this . . . because, for me, there is no transcendent God-Father who discloses himself to us, humans, only in a limited way' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 235). As another example Žižek cites Milbank's notion that his (Žižek's) is 'a sad, resigned materialism which appears to suppose that matter is quite as boring as the most extreme of idealists might suppose' (Žižek, Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 240). Žižek counters that rather than 'enchanted' the world with spiritual content 'my materialism as it were undermines our common notion of external reality' and accepts the religious premise that 'commonsense reality is not the true one: what it rejects is the conclusion that, therefore, there must be another, "higher," suprasensible reality' (Žižek, Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 240). As Milbank notes in a follow up article, 'Much of his response to me consists in a simple dogmatic reiteration of the claim that an "Hegelian" (Protestant, gnostic and atheist) reading of Christianity is clearly the "true" one. None of my Catholic arguments against this conclusion are really dealt with' (John Milbank, 'Without Heaven There is only Hell on Earth: 15 Verdicts on Žižek's Response' in *Political Theology* 11.1 (January 1st, 2010), 126-135). Žižek in his own follow up article accuses Milbank of not dealing with his objections and concludes they are each reduced to reiterating their positions (Slavoj Žižek, 'The Atheist Wager', *Political Theology* 11:1 (January 1st, 2010), 136). There is the tendency to simply accuse one another of being dualists. Žižek accuses Milbank of dualism in keeping God transcendent and thus removed from the world and simply serving as its mysterious background (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 248).

²⁰ Creston Davis, 'Introduction: Holy Saturday or Resurrection Sunday' in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 21.

²¹ Milbank sees Žižek's recognition of the universalism of Christianity as an advance over theologies that would reduce Christianity to one of many language games (John Milbank, 'Materialism and Transcendence' in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek, Eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 400.

Among critical examinations of Žižek's theory the most prolonged is Milbank's, whose primary criticism is that Žižek's dialectics depends upon Hegel's 'myth of negation' and is thus simply another mode of Cartesian dualism in which the method is removed from the world.²² In Milbank's 'paradoxical reason' the Subject can only be understood as a gift unfolding from the plenitude of the Trinitarian God and participating in the infinite love of the Trinity (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 184-185). Milbank argues that dialectics makes phenomenal reality 'illusory' in that its true essence is nothing.²³ As Graham Ward notes being's excess or the void seems to function as a pornographic lust in Žižek's theory which is combined with a disdain for the material body.²⁴ Though Milbank finds common cause with Žižek in critiquing modernity and getting beyond capitalistic nihilism, his is primarily a critical engagement with Žižek's theory.

²² Žižek replies that the world really is built on negation and so the method is true to the world while Milbank is guilty of the real dualism (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 236-238). See Davis, 'Introduction: Holy Saturday or Resurrection Sunday? Staging an Unlikely Debate', 16.

²³ Milbank maintains that 'this is not, as certain "soft" readings of Hegel suppose, a matter of mere cognitive illusion. To the contrary: several passages make it clear that philosophical scepticism authentically corresponds to the "illusory" character of dialectical contradiction itself. The process of real "becoming" (which is all that there is for Hegel) is the outworking of the initial contradiction according to which abstract original (because univocal) being is identical with its opposite, which is nothing (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 198). Žižek counter-accuses Milbank of dualism in keeping God transcendent and thus removed from the world and simply serving as its mysterious background (Žižek, Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 248). Cyril O'Regan dubs *The Monstrosity of Christ* a 'non-conversation' (Cyril O'Regan, 'Žižek and Milbank and the Hegelian Death of God', *Modern Theology*, 26:2 (April 2010), 278-286) while Carl Raschke concludes that, though the debate appears to be about Christianity, it is really a debate about the role of transcendence and mystery (Carl Raschke, 'The Monstrosity of Žižek's Christianity', *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 11:2 (2011), 13-20).

²⁴ Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 169, 274 fn. 32. As Conor Cunningham puts it in citing and building on Ward, 'For Žižek does seem to display a lust for the void based on the excremental horror he claims to discern in life's excess; the excess which life is' (Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 258). Could it be that this is not simply Žižek's peculiar problem but that Žižek articulates a condition and perspective on the order of Paul's sinful Subject?

On the other hand, among the appreciative appropriations of Žižek's theory, comparing him to other theologians and thinkers, is that of Adam Kotsko, who, in an apparent acceptance of Žižek's Pauline materialism, has written an appreciative introduction demonstrating Žižek's similarity to and theological significance in his advance of the 'death of God theology' of Thomas Altizer.²⁵ Eric Santner deploys Žižek's notion of deception in a theological discussion in which he recognizes the key role of fantasy and of traversing the fantasy as a specifically theological problem and solution which he finds duplicated in the theology of Franz Rosenzweig.²⁶ In Michael Jimenez's description Žižek's theology is similar to Karl Barth's in that Barth's notion of God's judgment or pronouncement of 'no' (this 'no' or judgment being one side of God's relationship to humanity with God's

²⁵ Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology*, 149ff. Kotsko sees Žižek as an advance of the 'death of God theology' of Altizer in that Žižek goes beyond Altizer's 'tragic' loss of God to the comedic turn to the despairing of despair itself (Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology*, 151ff). Kotsko offers one of the more prolonged explanations of Žižek's understanding of Romans 7 and Kotsko maintains Žižek will continue to hold contradictory positions in regard to Romans 7. Kotsko writes, 'It is clear, on the one hand, that Žižek views the Law confronted in Romans 7 as being the normal or "pagan" law that generates its own transgression through the obscene superego supplement. Strangely, Žižek simultaneously claims that the Jewish Law 'is already deprived of its superego supplement, not relying on any obscene support,' i.e., the Jewish stance toward the law is fundamentally what Paul is after, yet he also follows the long-standing tradition of claiming that, nonetheless, the Jewish Law is the main target of Paul's critique' (Adam Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul', *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 9.2 (2008), 51. <<http://www.jcrt.org/>. Accessed Aug. 16, 2012). Žižek makes a sharp departure from Alain Badiou, who would pit law against grace, and death (and death drive) against resurrection (or a Truth-Event), while for Žižek, in reading Romans 7 with Lacan, the problem is not law and death (or the death drive) *per se* but a particular (perverse) orientation to the law. Kotsko likens Žižek's understanding to that of the 'new perspective on Paul' in that in Žižek's reading the Jewish law is already free of the perverse (obscene superego supplement) pagan understanding and as in the new perspective acts to mediate a Christian identification with the law and Judaism (so that Paul is working within Judaism) rather than conversion from Judaism to another position (Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology*, 93ff).

²⁶ Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 10. Santner reads Freud's depiction of psychopathology and death drive as a testament to an excess or a 'too muchness' which points to the fact that the human mind 'includes more reality that it can contain' (Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 8).

'yes' or grace being the other side) like the death drive or negativity means that reality (the death drive or God's 'no') cannot be encompassed within human understanding. So there is a shared critique of ideology in Žižek and Barth and there is an 'overturning of the world' in revelation.²⁷ The potential problem in such a comparison, as noted by Johannes Hoff, is that if transcendence and revelation are functioning in the same way for Barth and Žižek then this is an indictment of Barth's formulation of these concepts as they are reducible to the Žižekian (atheistic-materialist) notion that God is nothing other than revelation.²⁸ Gerald Biesecker-Mast notes how Žižek's theory supports Anabaptist notions of subjectivity in the concepts of an inherent lack or destitution which is part of the new life in Christ instituted in believer's baptism.²⁹ Geoffrey Holsclaw, in contrast, holds that baptism as it is portrayed in Romans 6 is not simply subjective destitution but consists of a suspension between Christ's

²⁷ Michael Jimenez, 'Barth and Žižek: Dialectical Theologians', *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 6:1 (2012).

²⁸ The deployment of Žižek as a critique of Barth is undertaken in the work Johannes Hoff, 'The Rise and Fall of the Kantian Paradigm of Modern Theology', in Peter Candler Jr. and Conor Cunningham eds., *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism* (London: SCM Press, 2010) cited in Jimenez, 'Barth and Žižek: Dialectical Theologians'.

²⁹ Biesecker-Mast connects the feelings of spiritual poverty sometimes experienced by Anabaptists to Žižek's notion of destitution experienced in love and also notes the similarity between the anabaptist life of separateness to Žižek's picture disconnecting from structures of violence within the status quo (Gerald Biesecker-Mast, 'Slavoj Žižek, The Fragile Absolute, And the Anabaptist Subject', *Brethren Life and Thought* 48:3-4 (Sum-Fall 2003), 176-191. In another article Biesecker-Mast explains the importance of Žižek to his own thought: 'What Žižek's work reinforced for me is a conviction that I had learned from Anabaptist teaching—the individual is not an autonomous entity for whom community is a secondary matter of affiliation. Rather, individual self-understanding is given socially amidst the complex field of social differences and antagonisms. Subjects are social through and through, in other words, and therefore just as divided by antagonism as is the social world' (Gerald Biesecker-Mast, 'Three Responses: Psyched over Žižek, Disturbed by Derrida, and Running from Rorty', *Brethren Life and Thought* 48:3-4 (Sum-Fall 2003), 206.

death and resurrection in the life of the believer and he maintains that Žižek misses this eschatological tension.³⁰ Ola Sigurdson, on the other hand, traces the overlap between the biblical concept of hope (with its eschatological tension) and Žižek's Marxism as it pertains to offering *immanent* possibilities for revolutionary change.³¹ In a similar vein, Frederiek Depoortere, demonstrates that 'Christian faith seems to be used by Žižek as a tool to think the possibility of an anti-capitalistic praxis' and community.³² So there is a widespread deployment of

³⁰ Geoffrey Holsclaw, 'Subjectets Between Death and Resurrection: Badiou, Žižek, and St. Paul', in Douglas Harink, ed., *Paul, Philosophy, and the Theopolitical Vision: Critical Engagements with Agamben, Badiou, Žižek and Others*. (Cascade Books, 2010), 170-171.

³¹ Ola Sigurdson, *Theology and Marxism Eagleton and Žižek: A Conspiracy of Hope* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Sigurdson demonstrates the overlap of theology and political theory (see also Ola Sigurdson, 'Reading Žižek Reading Paul', in *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians*, David Odell-Scott Ed. (London: T & T Clark, 2007) and Ola Sigurdson, 'Beyond Secularism? Towards a post-secular political theology', *Modern Theology* 26:2 (2010), 177-196.

³² Frederiek Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy: Gianni Vattimo, René Girard and Slavoj Žižek*, (London, New York: T & T Clark, 2008). Depoortere, along with several who focus on Žižek's political solutions, questions whether Žižek's theory of the sacrifice of love (an ethical sacrifice or a genuine 'act') and sacrifice for nothing (or an inauthentic 'act') can be distinguished (Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*, 133-134). Mathew Sharpe notes that 'The main thrust of criticism has focused on the notion of the Act. Žižek has been accused of misreading Lacan's understanding of the psychoanalytic Act, and of proposing under its banner a normatively empty political decisionism. To show that we can Act is not to speak to why we should (Mathew Sharpe, 'Slavoj Žižek (1949 –)' in *From Agamben to Žižek: Contemporary Critical Theorists*, Ed. Jon Simons (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 256. See also Mathew Sharpe and Geoff Boucher, *Žižek and Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). Adrian Johnston has perhaps done more to answer this criticism than Žižek in his detailed account of political transformation. See Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009). Even as sympathetic a critic as Carl Packman maintains Žižek needs to distinguish appropriate violence (in the 'act') from its inappropriate form (Carl Packman, 'Towards a Violent Absolute: Some Reflection on Žižekian Theology and Violence', *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 3:1 (2009)). As Holsclaw puts it, Žižek 'forecloses the ability to judge between suicide and martyrdom, leading toward a valorization of violence' (Holsclaw, 'Subjectets Between Death and Resurrection: Badiou, Žižek, and St. Paul', 171). Depoortere compares Žižek's understanding of the genesis of sacrifice and violence to René Girard's theory and notes that both would interpret Christ's sacrifice as a sacrifice of sacrifice (or an end to sacrificial violence) but Girard, unlike Žižek, allows for a final defeat of violence in that Christ transcends violence. Depoortere, *Christ in Postmodern Philosophy*, 141-143. Depoortere also notes that Žižek requires the passage through violence and sacrifice (Frederiek Depoortere, 'The End of God's Transcendence? On Incarnation in the

Žižek's theory in limited comparisons and projects. Theological treatments of Žižek's theory have not attempted the comprehensive and specifically exegetical deployment of his theory in connection with sin like that which I undertake.

Marcus Pound's is the most prolonged engagement with Lacan and Žižek aimed at advancing theology through dialogue with psychoanalytic theory. Pound recognizes many of the limitations of Lacan (and by extension Žižek) and seeks to bring a theological depth to his notions of repetition, trauma, lack, the future anterior perspective and the real.³³ Pound's work is a pioneering effort aimed at introducing the Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective into theology, though he presumes that salvation will primarily work within the registers as Lacan has laid them out. Pound describes Christian salvation and Lacanian analysis as having parallel goals and methods and argues that Žižek is not Christian enough (in that he does not have recourse to the transcendent and as a result has a disdain for the material and immanent)³⁴ or Lacanian enough (in that Lacan was on the way to a synthesis between theology and psychoanalysis),³⁵ though he does not mean by this that the Lacanian registers are undone or subverted

Work of Slavoj Žižek', *Modern Theology*, 23:4 (October 2007), 518. Marcus Pound also notes Žižek's similarity to Girard but concludes that violence is necessary and inescapable for Žižek but is not for Girard (Marcus Pound, *Žižek: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 46-48).

³³ Pound's first book is primarily an engagement with Lacan's theory: Marcus Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 113-115). His second work is specifically on Žižek and Žižek writes the 'Afterword' (Pound, *Žižek: A (Very) Critical Introduction*).

³⁴ Pound, *Žižek*, 71.

³⁵ Pound indicates that Lacan wanted to return to a study of the Bible as containing the possibility of an alternative symbolic order (Pound, *Žižek*, 142-143).

in Christ. According to Pound, as the death drive incarnate Christ, like the analyst, brings the real into the symbolic and produces trauma and this trauma provides the power which the Church taps into: 'Jesus founds the Church, not by providing an identity to conform to, but by clearing a path, creating an opening of interpretive potency, a path the way of which cannot be known in advance'.³⁶ In Pound's description, Christ's incarnation of the death drive which is re-enacted in the Eucharist, 'amounts to a form of analytic intervention which opens the historicity of the subject'.³⁷ The trauma of opening the Subject to the death drive allows for the Christian reconstitution of the Subject on the order of therapy as one traverses the fantasy and from a position of subjective destitution a reorientation to the symbolic or law is made possible.³⁸

The line of argument I take departs from other attempts to locate Žižek theologically as I argue that the primary significance of Žižek's

³⁶ Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 115.

³⁷ Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 113, 159.

³⁸ Pound leaves the Lacanian notion of the Subject intact, including his picture of the real and the death drive. Žižek maintains death drive is a radical form of evil: 'Evil is another name for the "death drive", for the fixation on some Thing that derails our customary life circuit. By way of Evil, man wrests himself from animal instinctual rhythm' (*Reader*, 273). The death drive is the evil which precedes and makes possible the 'truth' of the symbolic (See Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 273ff). Lacan describes the death drive as the attempt to go beyond the pleasure principle to the realm of excess *jouissance*, the pure substance of the death drive, which he does not hesitate to call evil: 'we cannot avoid the formula that *jouissance* is evil' (*Seminar VII*, 184-185). Lacan and Žižek have no problem equating the passage through evil as a necessary part of therapy but to equate Christ with the death drive would be a category mistake in their system as death drive arises from a refusal of the body and death and makes its appearance as an 'undead' force or drive that cannot be stopped. Žižek equates the death drive with the living dead and a force that is immortal or indestructible (Žižek, *The Žižek Reader*, 273ff). The question arises, if Pound accepts the registers of the Lacanian Subject as the parameters in which salvation works, will his theological remedies apply? The registers depend upon the very failure which he describes (the structure of a lie), so to relieve this failure would seem to call for more than a reconstituted Žižekian subject.

thought for theology is in terms of its implications for the doctrine of sin and how his theory can serve in systematizing sin and understanding salvation (in part) as a departure from sin.³⁹ Though I critique Žižek, the primary point is to incorporate his psychoanalytical insights into hamartiology, and the various 'problems' with his theory (it is nihilistic, it degrades the body and material reality, it is without true hope or therapeutic power) do not take away from reading his theory as analogous to Paul's understanding of sin and as an insight into the deceptive self-binding nature of sin.⁴⁰ If his theory is understood as both direct insight into the sinful Subject and a worked example of the strategies and delimitations available to this failed Subject the emphasis does not fall upon showing the impossibilities and inconsistencies of his theory (which is not to say this should not be done but it is not what I have focused on). My approach also differs from Pound's in that I presume the Lacanian registers, constituted as they are in deception and fantasy, are not the parameters in which salvation occurs (though salvation addresses these parameters); rather salvation (as pictured in Romans 6-8) reconstitutes the Subject in such

³⁹ Žižek locates his theory primarily in Romans 7:7ff which, I argue, is Paul's picture of the sinful subject and he acknowledges that sin provides the parameters for his own notion of redemption in and through deception. Though the first chapter does not directly engage Scripture, I argue that the structure of psychoanalysis fostered by Freud and taken up by Lacan and Žižek is theological in mapping human deception. In demonstrating that the whole of their theory works with the notion of deception I demonstrate the theological nature of Freud, Lacan, and Žižek.

⁴⁰ In other words, his theory is a worked example, even when it is contradictory, of the sin system.

a way that being 'in Christ' overcomes the deception and alienation inherent and necessary to the Lacanian registers.⁴¹

In broad terms I am using Žižek's theory constructively, as Pound and a number of others have done, but in demonstrating that Žižek's theory of the Subject can be accounted for in the construct and dynamics of a lie (in Freud's, Lacan's and Žižek's own account) and locating Žižek's significance in a detailed comparison with Paul's understanding of sin in Romans 7 this allows for an incorporation of Žižek's theory into direct exegetical and theological insight while remaining true to Paul's understanding. Holsclaw, for example, initiates a comparison between Žižek and Paul (utilizing Romans 6-8) without noting the two different voices or Subjects Paul deploys (the sinful Subject of 7:7ff and the Subject 'in Christ' in the surrounding passages) so he ends by explaining how Žižek misunderstands Paul and fails to note Žižek's insight into the sinful Subject and how this Subject stands in contrast to Paul's own picture of the Subject 'in Christ'.⁴² On the other hand, Kotsko offers one of the more detailed and accurate readings of Žižek's treatment of Romans 7 but he does not take note of Paul's alternative Subject 'in Christ' so it is Žižek's

⁴¹ The point at which Žižek enters into dialogue with Paul is in Romans 7:7ff and, as demonstrated below, the majority of New Testament scholarship interprets this section of scripture as written from a non-Christian perspective with the surrounding passages in Roman 6-8 describing the alternative of being 'in Christ'. To be true to Žižek and to Paul requires then positing two alternative notions of the Subject. This allows for Žižek's theory to be deployed as a critique of theology and ideology as it provides for a clear delineation between two notions of the Subject within Paul with clearly distinct possibilities. It poses a clear argument against a theology that could read Romans 7:7ff as descriptive of the normal Christian life.

⁴² Holsclaw assumes that Žižek does not distinguish the law from sin, so he reads Žižek as advocating dying to the law (as opposed to full identification with the law) (Holsclaw, 'Subjectets Between Death and Resurrection: Badiou, Žižek, and St. Paul', 166).

interpretation and understanding of the Subject from Romans 7:7ff which serves as Kotsko's interpretive frame for Pauline Christianity.⁴³ My approach, by focusing on the core role of deception in the structure of Žižek's theory as it overlaps with Paul's understanding of sin, allows, I would claim, for an integration of (nearly) the whole of Žižek's theory into understanding Pauline theology without a reduction or distortion in understanding Paul.

Extending Žižek's Theological Significance

Others have drawn on psychoanalytic notions of the Subject to advance either a theology primarily geared to secure the individual ego-identity⁴⁴ and utilizing ego-psychology or, as in 'atheology', utilizing the notion of a decentred or completely dispersed Subject without agency.⁴⁵ As Pound describes the original use of Lacan in theology, it was primarily situated in a line of thinkers extending from Kierkegaard to Derrida and it was the orientation from philosophy of *différance*, deferment and absence within the tradition of negative theology that

⁴³ So Kotsko locates Žižek's theological significance in his resemblance to Thomas J. J. Altizer and the 'death of God' theology (Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology*, 150).

⁴⁴ Pound claims that 'most theological engagement with psychoanalysis has . . . engaged with . . . ego psychology' (Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 5). He uses the example of Frank Lake as a representative of one who attempted to fuse ego psychology with theology. See Frank Lake, *Clinical Theology: A Theological and Psychiatric Basis to Clinical Pastoral Care* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966, referenced in Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 2-5).

⁴⁵ Mark C. Taylor's, *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) was the first effort to introduce Lacan into the American theological context. Pound notes that the volume edited by Edith Wyschogrod was the first major set of essays engaging Lacan from a theological perspective. See Edith Wyschogrod, D. Crownfield and C. Raschke, eds., *Lacan and Theological Discourse* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). The question is if they have been true to Lacan. While the Subject is dispersed in Lacanian theory the understanding that the Subject per se is a fiction seems to confuse human agency with the Lacanian registers which Lacan does not do.

guided the effort.⁴⁶ The swing from individualism to the absence of the individual in the theological appropriation of psychoanalytic theory may simply reflect the tendency within theology, traced by Derek Nelson, to opt for either a radical individualism or a corporate and social perspective (with individual agency either the sole focal point or as absent as it is considered as dispersed and decentred) with neither position able to adequately account for the other or for the Subject.⁴⁷ My reading of Paul with Žižek dispels the notion of the possibility of an isolated ego, as the Subject for Žižek and Paul is the Subject of language or law;⁴⁸ yet for Žižek and Paul there is human agency in the deception constituting the Subject in that this deception is ultimately a self-deception (subject to exposure in Žižek's traversing the fantasy or in Paul's picture of salvation). Christian salvation, as I argue below, is not the salvation of isolated egos from the world⁴⁹ nor is it simply transforming the structures of the given categories of the immanent

⁴⁶ Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 10.

⁴⁷ Among Derek Nelson's many examples of this tendency is the individualism of Charles Finney who defined sin as the individual choosing to break God's law, which fails to take into account that it is only in concrete relations with other subjects (in family, church, and state) that one could come to know the law (Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong With Sin: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 181). Finney's understanding also overlooks the reality that breaking the law has concrete effects in the relational spheres in which selfhood is formed (Nelson, *What's Wrong With Sin*, 181). On the other hand, the focus in liberation theology on structural or corporate sin tends to blur the difference between human nature and sin and as a result the agency behind social structures (the importance of the individual choosing) is sometimes lost (Nelson, *What's Wrong With Sin*, 180-187).

⁴⁸ The innovation which Lacan brings to reading Freud is to suggest that the subject is not so much the product of biology as language. Žižek and Lacan understand the construct and function of language in Subject formation as taking the form of a lie. Paul's notion of sin as a deception is analogous to this understanding but Paul conceives of a Subject beyond language and law.

⁴⁹ The Pauline 'I' or *ἐγώ* dies or is crucified and the Žižekian ego is a fiction. The individualist or ego centred perspective with its focus on human interiority (whether the will, the heart or the mind) tends to leave out corporate oppression and it tends to miss that the individual is shaped by the environment of culture and social relations.

world (society, economics, politics, or psychoanalysis), rather sin understood as self-deceitful perversion of the law and the source of oppression is exposed and displaced by the truth of Christ. In this understanding sin is explicable (in its immanence) and human agency is accounted for in its own subversion, and atonement is not so much the repayment of an infinite debt or the relief of social oppression as a transformation of the Subject through participation in Trinitarian community.

The Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter demonstrates that the psychoanalytic Subject is constituted in a lie, first with Freud's positing of the death instinct in which life (the pleasure principle) is muted by the energetics of death, taken up into the Subject as a form of life (*The Ego and the Id*, 46).⁵⁰ Lacan, who displaces Freud's biological explanation with a linguistic explanation, builds on Freud's death instinct and extends the work of deception to the constitution of each of the registers. The first chapter demonstrates with reference to Freud and Lacan and culminating in Žižek that just as a lie can be divided into three parts the psychoanalytic Subject consists of that which is negated (Freud's id or Lacan's real and the death

⁵⁰ References are to the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Freud*, 24 vols. ed. and trans. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974). Frequently cited sources will use an abbreviated form of the title while less frequently cited or minor sources will use the standard *SE* (for Standard Edition) and will cite the volume and page number.

drive), the medium of negation or the substance of the lie (Freud's superego or Lacan's symbolic), and the object of the lie (Freud's ego or Lacan's imaginary). The vantage which Žižek brings to his reading of Lacan is that his theory fuses Lacanian theory with German Idealism and from this perspective the *problems* of the psyche and its identity become the *solutions*. The goal is not to overcome the gaps but to conceive them as the origin of the Subject.

The second chapter demonstrates that Žižek finds each of these registers of the psychoanalytic Subject in the Pauline Subject of Romans 7. He equates the symbolic with the law and the imaginary with Paul's 'I' or *ἐγώ* and the real with Paul's 'body of death' or 'body of sin'. In Žižek's reading of Romans 7:7ff the law which gives rise to forbidden desire (Žižek's *jouissance*), in spite of the life that it seemed to offer and due to the deception of sin (Žižek's fundamental fantasy), produces death for the *ἐγώ* or a life of death described as an agonistic struggle (Žižek's death drive) in which the self is split against itself and sin is in control. In Žižek's reading though, he assumes that Paul is not simply depicting the problem of sin (or perversion), but from 7:1-6 with Paul's illustration of the one who has died to the law, he reads the chapter as Paul's equivalent of 'traversing the fantasy' which Žižek will equate with 'dying to sin' and achieving the hysteric position of questioning sin's deception in regard to the law. The perverse relation and the transgressive relation to the law are suspended in hysteria and this suspension is a particular development Žižek works out

(referencing Hegel) in Paul's vocabulary. Though Žižek's theory makes the identification of the death drive with sin plausible, he cannot presume to completely dispel or do away with the lie of sin, as he is rigorously consistent with regard to the necessity of the fundamental fantasy.

The third chapter compares Paul's understanding to Žižek's and introduces the Pauline answer to the lie in Romans 6-8. While Žižek's understanding allows, at most, for a traversing of the fantasy or a partial exposure of the lie I argue that Paul accounts for the lie of sin and its displacement with the Subject 'in Christ'. The perspective provided in connecting Žižek's theory to Paul's in Romans 6 & 8 is that Paul presumes the lie of sin is not a necessity for human subjectivity. So while the deception of sin, as depicted by Paul and developed by Žižek, is universal in its structure and dynamic (it always works through a specific negation with a particular content), it is not universal in the sense that it is the only interpretive frame. The Subject of sin is only one kind of Subject, but Paul proposes a second Subject; the one who is in Christ. Where the first is dependent upon the deception, the second need not posit a false depth or transcendence as it is 'driven' by the Spirit of life through the Son by the Father. Paul's resolution to the fear and frustration of the *ἐγὼ* is life in the Spirit (8:2) experienced and conjoined to the categories of hope, adoption as God's children, and participation in the Trinity.

The conclusion argues that if sin is understood as a lie grounding the Subject, the exposure of the lie or the dispelling of any

notion of mystery connected to sin is integral to salvation and the reconstituting of the Subject in Christ. While the lie of sin is mediated by the law, new life in the Spirit is not through the law but is a principle unto itself, which though it accounts for the law, is beyond the law. The significance this account might have for theology is to reframe the concept of sin as a deception (reifying the self) with its own logic, dynamic, and structure, similar to the Subject of psychoanalysis. Salvation, in turn, is the place and means from which the Subject of sin and its destructive nature are understood and displaced by new life in Christ. Sin and salvation, under this notion, are not forensic categories but have to do with the lived reality of identity, of being either a Subject oriented to death or to life.

CHAPTER 1

THE SUBJECT OF THE LIE

We arrive at the most concise definition of the subject: the subject is an effect that entirely posits its own cause.

(Metastases of Enjoyment, 37)

This chapter sets forth Slavoj Žižek's notion of the Subject and its origin in the theory of Freud and Lacan in order to introduce into the theological discourse which follows (in chapters 2-3) the perspective of psychoanalytic theory's understanding of human interiority (the conscious and unconscious). In particular it will be shown that Žižek's development of the primordial/universal lie as the grounding gesture of the Subject (the Subject of the law), found in the theory of Freud and Lacan, embraces a holistic insight into the moral and epistemological understanding of the Subject that the following chapters will connect to Paul's understanding of sin.¹

Why Freud?

Žižek's primary influence and source is the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, but Lacan thought of himself only as adhering faithfully to Freud.

¹ Access is opened too onto the cultural level as a reflection and symptom of the subject. For Žižek the lie – the fantasy formation of the Subject – is at the bottom of truth. In this he seems to have followed Hegel who held to the necessity of the fall in order to awaken consciousness. See Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 8.

One never goes beyond Freud . . . One uses him. One moves around with him. One takes one's bearings from the direction he points in. What I am offering you here is an attempt to articulate the essence of an experience that has been guided by Freud. It is in no way an effort to measure the volume of his contribution or summarize him. (*Seminar VII*, 206)

To understand Lacan, and especially the Lacan of Žižek, it is necessary to understand Freud, and in particular the Freud that develops from and after *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.²

It is in this period that Freud proposes a dualistic theory of the instincts. He had become dissatisfied with the singular emphasis on *Eros*, as it did not ultimately explain the inherent conflict that he had encountered in his patients. The monoinstinctual theory he was working under, the pleasure principle, was a 'constancy principle' in which the dynamic was toward a release of tension and a return to equilibrium (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 9). What he discovered in his patients in neuroses and dreams was a compulsion to repeat traumatic thoughts or images which he could not explain in terms of constancy or equilibrium. The idea of the pleasure principle, that dreams are wish fulfilments and pleasure is the aim of psychic life, simply did not account for what he was encountering in his clinical

² Freud captures the characteristic rejection of the death drive from its inception: 'I am well aware that the dualistic theory according to which an instinct of death or of destruction or aggression claims equal rights as a partner with Eros as manifested in the libido, has found little sympathy and has not really been accepted even among psychoanalysts' (SE, 23:244).

practice. The evidence pointed toward a deep seated conflict that went beyond the explanatory power of the pleasure principle. Freud's patients seemed bent toward un-pleasure and self-destruction and not equilibrium. The compulsion to repeat amounted to an exponential build-up of energy. There was also the mysterious problem of masochism, in which the pursuit of pleasure and pain are mixed in a way that a singular instinct could not explain.

The pleasure of hurting one's self in a compulsive repetitive manner did not fit with his understanding of *Eros*. While watching his grandson one day, he discovered a pattern of behaviour that caused him to link all of these elements together into what he would call the death drive or the death instinct (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 14ff). In a near simultaneous move he posits along with this new dualistic account of the instincts a different agency within the ego which he will call the 'superego' (*The Ego and the Id*, 28).³ This would amount not only to a new topography of the Subject but a different understanding of the energetics at work in the Subject. No longer did Freud see mankind as controlled by one goal, rather man seemed bound toward death in and through the detour that is life. It was not that death as a force overwhelms man, but that man stands opposed to himself and brings about his own destruction. He takes death up into himself, all

³ In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he does not name this agency but he lays the groundwork for the splitting of the ego and a division in the pleasure principle (see *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 11ff).

the time imagining that it is the means to secure or save the self
(*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 54ff).

In spite of the importance that Freud came to attach to the death drive, the new theory was not embraced, even by his immediate followers. Freud complained that his new theory had found 'little sympathy and has not really been accepted even among psychoanalysts' (SE, 23:244).⁴ The key exception to this rejection of the theory was the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, who founded his own school of therapy, with the death drive and the reconfiguration of the human subject it entails at its centre. With Lacan the dynamics of the death drive, read through structural linguistics, will take the literal form of a lie that kills, but this is already implicit in Freud's theory.

In spite of the perceived difference between Lacan and Freud nearly every innovation that Lacan brings to the subject of psychoanalysis is first hinted at or worked out by Freud.⁵ Freud establishes the parameters within which Lacan and Žižek will work, and Lacan considers himself true to Freud. His seminars demonstrate his

⁴The theory, it might be speculated, did not appeal to those who had invested their life and career in bringing patients to 'health', but now the very notion of what that might be was thrown into question. There were a few exceptions to the general rejection of the theory; Ettington and Ferenzi accepted the theory and Melanie Klein and her school adapted a reworked version of the theory (Richard Boothby, *Death and Desire: Psychoanalytic Theory in Lacan's Return to Freud* (New York, London: Routledge, 1991), 10).

⁵ This is true of what is sometimes thought to have been his main innovation, 'the mirror stage'. The idea, as will be demonstrated below, is actually there in Freud's original text in a footnote.

near complete reliance on Freud's original texts and apart from those texts would be indecipherable.

The Hebraic Influence on Freud

The convergence of Freudian themes with Pauline theology traced by Žižek indicates a possible origin of those themes. Freud's concern was to translate the human predicament out of its religious-mythical idiom into the positivistic scientific language of his day. This required that imagined external threats be accounted for in terms of internal antagonisms and conflicts. 'So Freud already conceived of psychoanalysis as a secular form of theology to the extent that both play a pivotal role in aligning us within the social space.'⁶ Harold Bloom makes the case that the structure of psychoanalysis in its emphasis on the Oedipus Complex 'makes sense only in a Hebraic universe of discourse, where authority always resides in figures of the individual's past and only rarely survives in the individual proper'.⁷ Freud posits a rabbinical like 'psychic cosmos . . . in which there is sense in everything, because everything already is in the past and nothing that matters can be utterly new'.⁸ Eric Santner describes the

⁶ Marcus Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma* (London: SCM Press 2007) pp. 2-3.

⁷ Harold Bloom, 'Freud and Beyond', in *Ruin the Sacred Truths, Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 161. Quoted in Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 25.

⁸ Bloom, 'Freud and Beyond', 152. Bloom goes on to describe Freud's failure to properly comprehend Judaism and in this failure he pictures psychoanalysis as seeking legitimization in and through the very structures and means that block access to life.

forces of life acting on the individual as a 'too muchness' or excess that he also links to Freud's Jewish heritage.

Now the very religious tradition in which Freud was raised, his protestations of lifelong secularism notwithstanding, is itself in some sense structured around an internal excess or tension – call it the tension of election – and elaborates its particular form of ethical orientation to it. For Judaism (as well as for Christianity), that is, human life always includes more reality than it can contain and this 'too much' bears witness to a spiritual and moral calling, a pressure toward self-transformation, toward 'goodness'.⁹

Freud locates the pressure of this 'too muchness', not in the transcendent realms described by theological and philosophical metaphysics, but 'behind consciousness' in what he describes as his 'metapsychology' (*SE*, 1:274). His description is one in which there is a fullness of life that is interrupted by the Subject's setting obstacles in the way that cuts him off from this fullness through an investment in its opposite.

The stuff of which the obstacles are made, and the means of positing investments in them, in accord with being from 'the people of the Book', are ultimately linguistic. It is the 'text' of dreams, the symbolism of which they consist, it is the magic power of words in religion, it is the conscious and unconscious as a 'mystic writing pad',

⁹ Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 8.

and it is the power of words to simultaneously conceal and reveal and the therapists ability through words to intervene and heal that concerns Freud. In short, the structure of the problem and intervention into it is on the order of a deception and its exposure, which indicates that Freud may have secularized the form and structure of themes from Judaism and the Jewish Scriptures.

Freud's Metapsychology

Though Freud had coined the term metapsychology as early as 1896, his most sustained effort at metapsychology began with the writing of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which simultaneously posited a different notion of internal energetics and the construct of the psyche. The tripartite ego/id/super-ego construct is a direct result of his hypothesis concerning the death drive and constitutes the final phase of his attempts at a comprehensive explanation of human consciousness as the forces of the unconscious influence it. His theory is ultimately dependent on his metapsychology, with its theory of vital forces and energetics, as it will bridge the gap between his theoretical abstraction and lived experience.¹⁰

There is a bit of an irony in the fact that it is in Freud's attempt to give a scientific and biological account of the forces at work in the psyche that he is accused of becoming most speculative. In attempting to describe the 'semantics of desire' as Paul Ricoeur has put it, he has

¹⁰ Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology After Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3-5.

had to translate the material realm of biology into the symbolic realm of language.

Therein lies the deep reason for all the analogies between dreams and wit, dreams and works of art, dreams and religious 'illusion,' etc. All these 'psychical productions' belong to the area of meaning and come under a unified question: How do desires achieve speech? How do desires make speech fail, and why do they themselves fail to speak?¹¹

The 'theological' tenor of Freudian theory comes to the forefront in what Freud determined was its most material ground. The explanation of energetics, in attempting to locate the elemental biological forces of life and death as they are taken up into the human psyche, takes over a theological language in describing a condition in which one is oriented to death. Freud came to see death as the negative force constraining and blocking access to life and reality through its overwhelming presence. While he thought of this in terms of a force of nature, his metapsychology attempts an explanation as to how this force translates into psychic energy. Death is not merely the end of life, but it is a force that is taken up in lived experience in an orientation that would ultimately silence the subject. Death is a 'mute energy' that silences the 'clamor for life' found in the pleasure principle (*The Ego and the Id*, 46). If the construct of the Subject is on the order of a

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 6.

deception, the end product of this deception is a silencing of life in and through the acceptance of death as a form of life.

Freud's incorporation of the death drive is the necessary piece that had been missing from his theory. It would require him to rework his understanding of the relation between the conscious and the unconscious as it introduces a different 'economics'. This different economy though, enabled him to translate the language of biology into that of a sociology of relations in which one party is injured and is demanding a payment from a second party. In this economy guilt, or the working out of guilt, can be said to be unconscious, and yet the evidence that a payment is being made makes itself known in a perceptible way.

But this new discovery, which compels us . . . to speak of an 'unconscious sense of guilt', bewilders us far more than the other and sets us fresh problems, especially when we gradually come to see that in a great number of neuroses an unconscious sense of guilt of the kind plays a decisive economic part and puts the most powerful obstacles in the way of recovery. (*The Ego and the Id*, 27)

In this system of unconscious guilt, a nearly mechanical system is posited, as this economics is rooted in the unconscious. The individual is subject to a power that is somehow not under her control and yet expresses itself in the symbol system of neurotic repetition. She participates in the system and provides the dynamics that constitute it, but the system engulfs her and she is its product. The ego is subjected

to a lying accusation and is made to make retribution to a silent force that will not present itself.

The unconscious nature of the system is one that Freud had earlier theorized makes itself known in the contradictory nature of the totem and taboos of 'primitive religion'. Religion, in this understanding, is the product of an event in the past, which is continually repeated in the human psyche. The primal father was slain by his sons so that they might gain access to the women he was hoarding and this historical event is memorialized in the totemic religion (including animal sacrifice) instituted by the sons.

The animal struck the sons as a natural and obvious substitute for their father; but the treatment of it which they found imposed on themselves expressed more than the need to exhibit their remorse. They could attempt, in their relation to this surrogate father, to allay their burning sense of guilt, to bring about a kind of reconciliation with their father. The totemic system was, as it were, a covenant with their father, in which he promised them everything that a childish imagination may expect from a father –protection, care, and indulgence –while on their side they undertook to respect his life, that is to say, not to repeat the deed which had brought destruction on their real father. (*Totem and Taboo*, 144)

The ambivalence of the sons toward the father translates into the same dynamics memorialized in the Oedipus complex. The nature of this ambivalence, either in the religion or in the individual passing

through the Oedipus complex, is not available to consciousness precisely because its nature as ambivalence (love/hate) becomes a structure in the ego.

They must therefore have an ambivalent attitude toward their taboos. In their unconscious they would like nothing more than to violate them, but they are afraid to do so; they are afraid precisely because they would like to, and the fear is stronger than the desire. (*Totem and Taboo*, 30)

The taboo is that which is forbidden and in being forbidden there is the inclination to transgress. The transgression holds out a 'yes' and a 'no' in that it establishes the desire that it warns against. The one who transgresses the taboo is himself taboo in that the very contagion that is held back by being forbidden becomes a temptation. What stands behind the taboo is, ironically, celebrated in the totem. The totem meal demands that all participate in a re-enactment of a transgression, which in its original and real enactment is responsible for the group and its structure. After providing supporting anthropological evidence Freud speculates as to what event might account for both the totem and the taboo:

One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end to the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually. . . . Cannibalistic savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as

killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers; and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things –of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion. (*Totem and Taboo*, 142)

They hated the father who was the obstacle preventing access to the women, but they loved and admired him as their model. The religion puts on display the moral contradiction taken up in the psyche with its confrontation with the law. What is forbidden by the taboo is the very transgression which founds the human community. In the Oedipus complex, the totem is the father; but the father's position has been taken over by the sons who have consumed him and out of guilt have invented a morality founded on paying for the transgression. This morality institutes the shift of an outward violence unleashed on the father to an inward violence turned on the ego by the superego. The turn from aggression to law is not a resolution of the aggression but a turning of the aggression on the self. The father, embodied in the law or the superego, becomes even stronger in death in that what he had attempted to prevent in life, through the enactment of the taboo, he accomplishes in death. In the Hegelian understanding worked out below, it can be said that the 'work of the negative' is not to be read

out of history. 'The ethical history of mankind is not the rationalization of utility, but the rationalization of an ambivalent crime, which at the same time remains the original wound: this is the meaning of the totem meal.'¹²

Though Freud is trying to establish an historic and scientific basis for his theory through this ethnological account, the question is raised as to whether his theory is best served by taking the story as a myth or as the truth. Is it the truth or is it a lie, taken as a truth that he is positing as the structure of the psyche? Has a crime really taken place and is there some punishment that is being worked out in mankind's guilty conscience? Or is the guilty conscience the product of a false conscience? Is the structure which has resolved the Oedipus complex based on reality or is the repressed unconscious involved in the deception it is foisting on the conscious ego? If the history is a myth, is the structure that unfolds from it not also a myth? Freud seems to want to have it both ways. He is treating the formation of the superego as a mythological structure and yet he is attempting to found the myth in history. Jacques Lacan does not hesitate to refer to the structure of the psyche and its ground as a lie. In the end this seems to serve the Freudian picture more accurately, as is made most clear in the paradigmatic situation in which Freud comes to his notion of the death drive.

¹² Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher*, 210.

The Game of Life

The child's play in and through which Freud came to his theory of the death drive is not only the paradigm in which his theory of the death drive took shape, it is by building on this paradigm that Lacan will initiate the transformation of Freudian theory. It was watching his grandson playing a hide and seek game (symbolizing the absence and presence of his mother) that led Freud to his early formulation of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*:

The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skillfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o' (Freud and his daughter conclude the boy is saying 'fort' (gone)). He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful 'da' (there). This, then, was the complete game -disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there was no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 15)

Freud concludes that the constant repetition of the game was 'the child's great cultural achievement', the compensation for letting his mother go, in that he began to stage the disappearance and return of

objects under his control. The game stages and repeats the disappearance of the love object and as Freud explains in a footnote the child at the same time had discovered how to make himself appear and disappear in a mirror (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 15).

Freud is careful to explain that he is a 'good little boy' who 'did not disturb his parents at night' who 'conscientiously obeyed orders' and above all he never cried when his mother left him for a few hours (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 14). The instinctual renunciation (that, is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting is compensated for by staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach. To find his toys he had to first lose them. For his mother to return she had to leave. The boy was in a passive situation in regard to his mother leaving, but in the game he could take on an active role. Freud surmised that 'Throwing away the object so that it was "gone" might satisfy an impulse of the child's, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 16). Later he observed the boy express such revenge in throwing away a toy and exclaiming, 'Go to the fwont' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 16). His father was at the front (the front lines of the Great War) so he knew it was a bad place to be. That Freud, and perhaps the boy, connects being 'gone' with death is made clear in a footnote explaining the early death of the boy's mother. 'Now that she was really "gone" ("o-o-o") the little boy showed no signs of grief' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,

16).¹³ He had sent her away many times and so had prepared for her death and had even participated in it. Death is the ultimate un-pleasure that overwhelms and which repetition and play attempt to master. It is the final '*fort*' for which the game obscured and compensated for.

The child's game or his entry into language occurs as compensation for the absence of the mother. The spool can only symbolize absence and presence as these are both played out over a final or real absence. While the binary of presence and absence allows for the two opposing positions in turn, it is actually the silent absence of the mother that keeps the game running.

The Ego and the Id

Freud adapted the term *das Es*, which came to be transliterated as 'id', to name the register in the human psyche in which the unknown and uncontrollable forces and drives, such as the remorse passed down from the slaying of the primal father, is taken up into the psyche.¹⁴ He believed the early development, from out of the id, of the superego and ego is available for observation in primitives and the very young. He pictured the ego as emerging from and still partially situated in the id, and thus the ego is involved in a psychic struggle with unconscious forces as it struggles toward consciousness.

¹³ This event is recounted in footnote 1 on page 16.

¹⁴ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London:Routledge, 1996), p. 79.

It is easy to see that the ego is that part of the id which had been modified by the direct influence of the external world. . . . Moreover, the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id. (*The Ego and the Id*, 25)

Where the id contains the passions and desires of instinct that are a product of the working of history and nature, the ego is the emergence from out of this raw nature of a consciousness that might be thought to transcend or dominate the id. Freud pictures the ego riding the id like a rider on a horse. The id is the superior strength and the ego has to in some way tap into the strength of the id in order to control it. The ego has to channel the power of the id 'transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own' (*The Ego and the Id*, 25).

The Lying Energetics of the Superego

Though Freud does not explicitly treat the relation of the superego to reality, he states that the 'the super-ego is always close to the id and can act as its representative vis-à-vis the ego. It reaches deep down into the id and for that reason is farther from consciousness than the ego is' (*The Ego and the Id*, 48-49). Though Freud connects the work of the superego to religion and morality, this has to be understood in light of the fact that he considers religion an illusion and morality a by-product of this same illusion housed in the

superego. Freud likens the judgment that the superego passes on the ego to religious judgments, as they have sprung from the same seed. The religious believer feels his worthlessness, and this is the position the ego is put in by the superego. The superego is the origin of all man's high ideals, such as the immortal soul and religion, but these have been transformed by the superego from 'what belonged to the lowest part of the mental life of each of us' (*The Ego and the Id*, 36).

The split that has occurred in the ego with the death drive is not the product of reality; it is the product of a refusal of reality. As a resolution to the problem posed in the Oedipus complex and as with the sons of the primal horde, the child is presented with the ambiguity of both loving the father and wanting to emulate him, and hating him and wanting to displace him. The choice results in a simultaneous refusal and acceptance of both sides of the choice. The child will be the father, but as the father he will take revenge on the child. The ego, after having passed through the Oedipus complex, contains the same ambivalence as the totem and the taboo. The superego is the reenacted model of the father, which is taken up by the child. He takes the taboo or the forbidding presence of the father into himself. 'We have come upon something in the ego itself which is also unconscious, which behaves exactly like the repressed – that is, which produces powerful effects without itself being conscious' (*The Ego and the Id*, 17). The patient represses the material by repeating some 'contemporary reproduction' (a misconstrued memory or event) that does not include 'the essential part' from the past (the Oedipus

complex and its derivatives). The patient as a result 'mistakes' this reproduction for reality in order to 'forget the past' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 18-19). Within the ego there is both the force of resistance arising from one part of the ego, and the ego upon which this force falls in another part of the ego. There is a force willing something be forgotten and that part of the ego which forgets.

The child faced with the forced choice of both being like the father and receiving the prohibition that he cannot be like the father (he cannot have the mother) resolves the original desire by taking the prohibition of the father into himself and thus becomes the father through the prohibition.

The child's parents, and especially his father, were perceived as the obstacle to a realization of his Oedipus wishes; so his infantile ego fortified itself for the carrying out of the repression by erecting this same obstacle within itself. . . .

The super-ego retains the character of the father, while the more powerful the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression (under the influence of authority, religious teaching, schooling and reading), the stricter will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego later on – in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt. (*The Ego and the Id*, 34-35)

The dominant power of the superego that tends to persist through adulthood can be assigned to the weakness of the child before the father or the original weakness of the ego before the superego. The

mature ego/superego relationship tends to memorialize the original relationship in a permanent psychic conflict in which the ego is alienated and antagonistic towards itself (*The Ego and the Id*, 48-49).

This conflict is the product of a refusal of the reality and the choices the child faces in the oedipal period.

The broad general outcome of the sexual phase dominated by the Oedipus complex, may, therefore, be taken to be the forming of a precipitate in the ego, consisting of these two identifications, in some way united with each other. This modification of the ego retains the special position; it confronts the other contents of the ego as an ego ideal or super-ego. (*The Ego and the Id*, 34)

While the construction of the superego became the psychic mechanism to handle ambivalence, like the religion it memorializes, the superego is not a function of reality but of the fantasy of the id. To succumb to the influence of the superego is to live according to an illusion as strong as the illusion of religion, which Freud considered the worst kind of illusion. The point of Freudian therapy was to reduce the power of the superego over the ego and draw the patient out of this punishing illusion toward the reality of the outward world. The suffering that Freud encountered in neuroses he chalked up to the punishments inflicted by the superego.

A Painful Self-deception

Since the superego suppresses the Oedipus complex, it constitutes a corruption of access to memory, but this corruption is carried out in and through a punishing sense of guilt, which Freud describes as resulting in a 'need for illness' that overrides normal narcissism or antagonism towards the analyst (*The Ego and the Id*, 49). It is, Freud concludes, a "moral factor", a sense of guilt, which is finding satisfaction in illness and refuses to give up the punishment of suffering' (*The Ego and the Id*, p. 49). Freud does not disassociate the patient's will from this system of suffering; rather the energy of the system lies in the motive of the patient. The drive is one that the patient herself puts into play and yet she does not have access to this motive force. The unconscious is a product of the individual's refusal to admit into consciousness her own desire or purpose, and so she establishes or exerts a psychic force opposed to her own idea. The ego exerts the force of resistance to keep certain purposes repressed. The ego, which was once identified primarily with consciousness, is itself subject to an unconscious dynamic brought into play through its own power of repression. The ego is not only split against itself but it is split so that it does not have conscious access to itself.

One of the elements of this memorial is the original ambiguity, the love/hate relationship, in the child's attitude toward the father. This ambiguity also consists of the child's perception of the father's attitude toward him, so that the superego/ego relation retains and reifies this original love/hate relation. The superego takes out the aggressive hate upon the ego. This is seen most clearly in melancholia, where we 'find

that the excessively strong superego which has obtained a hold upon consciousness rages against the ego with merciless violence' (*The Ego and the Id*, 53). The punishing presence of the superego makes itself felt, through guilt, to the conscious self or to the conscious part of the ego, but what remains hidden is the position of desiring to be punished on the part of the ego (SE, 19: 166).¹⁵

The desire to be beaten by the father, closely connected as it is in moral masochism with the desire to have some passive sexual relations with him, provides a clue as to the development of conscience. 'Conscience and morality arose through overcoming, desexualizing, the Oedipus-complex' (SE, 19: 169). The conscience then, is under the control of the masochistic death drive, which Freud, in an ironic twist refers to as the 'categorical imperative' (*The Ego and the Id*, 35, 48). 'Kant's categorical imperative is thus the direct heir of the Oedipus complex' (SE, 19: 167). The exacting universal law, in Freud's estimate, is not a product of a real moral constraint. It is the cruel workings of a harsh superego. The imperative under which the conscience works cannot be said to be moral, rather this imperative is derived from the id. 'From the point of view of instinctual control, of morality, it may be said of the id that it is totally non-moral' (*The Ego and the Id*, 54).

Fleeing the Fear of Death

¹⁵ The reference is from Freud's short article the 'Economic Problem of Masochism'.

Subjection to the id on one side and the superego on the other, accounts for the inherent fear of the ego. Freud describes the ego as surrounded by three dangers: 'from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the super-ego' (*The Ego and the Id*, 56). The ego must negotiate the desire of the id and the constraints of the world; as a result, the ego 'offers itself . . . as a libidinal object to the id, and aims at attaching the id's libido to itself' (*The Ego and the Id*, 56). This means the ego is surrounded by death, and the reality of its dissolution.

Through its work of identification and sublimation it gives the death instincts in the id assistance in gaining control over the libido, but in so doing it runs the risk of becoming the object of the death instincts and of itself perishing. In order to be able to help in this way it has had itself to become filled with libido; it thus itself becomes the representative of Eros and thenceforward desires to live and to be loved. (*The Ego and the Id*, 56)

The ego is the 'seat of anxiety' as it faces possible annihilation from either the libido or the superego (*The Ego and the Id*, 57). The fear of the ego, the 'fear of conscience', is not moral dread of missing the good, but a primordial fear connected to the threat of castration. This could be summed up as the fear of death if it is understood that death *per se* does not really offer any positive object that might serve as the focus of the unconscious. This is an internal fear between the two registers of the ego. Or, to put it more precisely, the fear results in a

splitting of the ego. On one side the ego rejects any prohibition, and on the other and in the same instant, he takes over the fear of that danger as a symptom in an attempt to get rid of the fear (SE, 23:275).¹⁶ Both positions in the dispute are satisfied but this satisfaction is paid for with the split and suffering of the ego. It may result, with the ego turning itself completely over to the super-ego. The 'ego gives itself up because it feels itself hated by the super-ego' or it is put in danger by some excessive force and 'lets itself die' (*The Ego and the Id*, 58).

Where the original view of aggression had presumed the primacy of sadism, Freud now sees that sadism is not necessarily an outward directed violence. Aggression is actually directed inward, which is to say an original masochism, or death drive, stands at the core of self-relation.

Following our view of sadism, we should say that the destructive component had entrenched itself in the super-ego and turned against the ego. What is now holding sway in the super-ego is, as it were, a pure culture of the death instinct, and in fact it often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death, if the latter does not fend off its tyrant in time by the change round into mania. (*The Ego and the Id*, 53)

It should not be forgotten that the one sacrificed and the one to whom the sacrifice is offered are the same subject, so that salvation is sought in and through destruction.

¹⁶ From the short and unfinished article 'Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process'.

The Morality of the Death Drive

The death drive gives rise to an inherently violent and destructive 'morality'. The suppression of instinct gives rise to feelings of guilt which result in a pressure toward aggression. This in turn gives rise to a heightened moral conscience, which increases the internal pressure for aggression. The heightened moral conscience is not a product of social life acting on the individual. This moral sensitivity arises as part of a relinquishing of gratification in the dynamic of the two registers of the ego. This does not give rise to morality but its opposite. The 'masochism in him creates a temptation to "sinful acts" which must be expiated by the reproaches of the sadistic conscience' (SE, 19: 169). The masochist or the moralist is put in the position of ruining his own interests or even of destroying himself in order to satisfy the superego. The other choice would be to turn this aggression outward and destroy a substitute object instead of destroying the self. The death drive in either case establishes a violent economy of exchange, whether with the self or with the other.

It is remarkable that the more a man checks his aggressiveness towards the exterior the more severe – that is aggressive – he becomes in his ego ideal . . . the more a man controls his aggressiveness, the more intense becomes his ideal's inclination to aggressiveness against his ego. (*The Ego and the Id*, 54)

The economy this entails will always demand that a sacrifice be made, it is just a matter of which will be sacrificed, the other in the sadistic sacrifice of the death drive turned outward or the self (as other) in the masochistic and primary form of the death drive.

Whence the Cure

In positing the death drive as the ultimate end of man produced by a cosmic Thanatos and which is irresistible, in that it will in one way or another achieve its aim, Freud raised the question as to the efficacy of psychoanalysis. In one of his late papers (1937) Freud wonders if analysis is terminable or interminable.¹⁷ 'Is it possible', he asks, 'permanently and definitively to resolve an instinctual conflict – that is to say, to “tame” the instinctual demand' (SE, 23:225). The 'general principles, rules and laws' which are thought to bring order into chaos are themselves subject to delusion (SE, 23:228). 'Sometimes one feels inclined to doubt whether the dragons of primeval ages are really extinct' (SE, 23:229).

Freud is not unaware that he is pushing the envelope of understanding. He refers to his metapsychology as the Witch that must be summoned to explain the neuroses he is encountering in the clinic. 'Unfortunately', he laments, 'what our Witch reveals is neither very clear nor very exact' (SE, 23:225). As the very title of the article indicates ('Analysis Terminable and Interminable'), Freud's Witch had

¹⁷ The article is entitled 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable'.

thrown the basic practice of analysis into question. The death drive may constitute a condition that cannot be resolved, so that the notion of a definite termination of analysis is open to question.

Freud has concluded elsewhere, that if the pleasure principle is a 'tendency to stability' in its lowering of the stimulus-tension of the mind, then the pleasure principle is itself serving the death instinct. He adopts the name 'Nirvana principle' to describe the pleasure principle. The Nirvana principle, however, originally 'belongs to the death-instincts' until it 'underwent a modification in the living organism through which it became the pleasure-principle' (*SE*, 19:160). Eros may have 'wrested a place for itself' from the death instinct, but this place seems far from secure. The death drive is so pervasive that 'the topographical differentiation between ego and id loses much of its value for our investigation' (*SE*, 23:241).

It is not clear whether the ego is that 'I' that is to be saved or the 'I' that is itself somehow part of the obstruction. He posits a 'primal sadism' or masochism in which the death instinct attacks that bit of life or libido attached to the ego. But he admits, 'We are without any physiological understanding of the ways and means by which this taming of the death instinct by the libido may be effected' (*SE*, 19:164). The death drive can be turned inward or outward – but ultimately the super-ego in its sadism and the ego in its masochism conspire to work toward the same result (*SE*, 19:170). In turn, the reality that the ego maintained with its orientation to the outside world is thrown into question. Freud does not yet explicitly question whether the ego,

subject as it is to such plasticity and manipulation, is itself part of the fantasy formation he is describing. The splitting of the ego, the positing of a false memory in the ego as a resolution to the Oedipus complex, and the medium of the energetics in language, are all brought together in terms of a game. Lacan is going to reinterpret this structure as part of a linguistic construct, but even his questioning of the status of the ego was a possibility that Freud points to in the content of its original discovery.

The death and violence of the death drive seem inescapable. Lacan and Žižek do not presume to get beyond the death drive, but with Lacan's reading of Freud through the lens of structural linguistics, metapsychology is no longer rooted in an irresistible biological or cosmic force.

The Significance of Jacques Lacan

The death drive was perhaps Freud's most daring idea. Though obscure in its own right, it brings clarity to otherwise unexplainable neurotic and psychotic ailments as it helped explain the elemental conflict in the human condition. Nonetheless it has remained Freud's least accepted idea from the time he proposed it until the present. The exceptional theorist that has given prolonged treatment to the death drive is the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Lacan considered that as a true follower of Freud it was impossible to ignore the death drive. He insisted that 'To ignore the death instinct in [Freud's] doctrine is to misunderstand that doctrine completely' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 301).

In Lacan's opinion the period that begins with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the culmination of his work during a time when he was at the height of his powers (*Ecrits: Selection*, 101). With the entry of this second instinct the entire Freudian corpus must be reinterpreted in its light. It is this rereading of Freud that Lacan undertakes, setting it at the centre of his theory.¹⁸

The platform he used to carry out his interpretation of Freud was the public seminars which form the basis of his published works. The surviving record of these seminars, which were sometimes lectures and sometimes extended discussion, explains in part the obscurity of his doctrine. Lacan considered these lectures as only cohering in a close reading of the original texts of Freud. 'I must note that in order to handle any Freudian concept, reading Freud cannot be considered superfluous, even for those concepts that are homonyms of current notions' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 38). He expected seminar participants to do their homework by reading Freud, and on that basis the discussion would commence. He considered his work as a commentary on Freud and not something that would stand alone. This helps explain, in particular, why he failed to provide a detailed account

¹⁸ Assigning the death drive such key importance set Lacan over and against the accepted understanding of ego psychology as embraced by the International Psycho-Analytic Association (IPA). While the IPA draws mainly on the structural model set forth in *The Ego and the Id*, the reading of the standard model is that the ego is the centre of personality as it plays the crucial mediating role in the three Freudian registers. Elisabeth Roudinesco provides the definitive account of Lacan and his peculiar focus and break from ego psychology. See Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

of the death drive in his overall theory, though he insisted it was central.

Freud himself in referring to the centrepiece of his theory as the 'Witch' does not instil confidence that the death instinct of his metapsychology can be fully clarified. Lacan provides even less assurance.

Contrary to the dogmatism that is sometimes imputed to us, we know that this system remains open both as a whole and in several of its articulations. These gaps seem to focus on the enigmatic signification that Freud expressed in the term *death instinct*, which, rather like the figure of the Sphinx, reveals the aporia that confronted this great mind in the most profound attempt so far made to formulate an experience of man in the register of biology (*Ecrits, Selection*, 8).

The death drive is observed in the clinical setting through the mysterious acts of aggression expressed in masochism, but Lacan's point is that psychoanalysis must remain open as to its precise articulation. It is after all a pervasive and all-inclusive system which by the very nature of its work does not lend itself to a precise formulation. As I demonstrate below, Lacan's and Žižek's theory depends in part on leaving the death drive a mystery which is not open to a precise formulation and it is precisely this mystery which I attempt to dispel.

What Difference Does Lacan Make?

Where Freud situated the psyche in biology, Lacan's rereading of Freud situates the psyche in human language. He will link the meaning of the death drive to the human capacity to refuse death in and through language. Where Freud saw death in terms of a biological or even a cosmological force, Lacan will demystify the death drive (to an extent), by linking it to the logic of a lie. Freud had already indicated the key role of the symbols and signs that are found in dreams, fantasies, and every day discourse. His understanding was that, unbeknownst to the patient, his speech contained the truth, but it was a truth concealed by discourse and consciousness. Lacan takes up this notion and posits it at the centre of his reformulation: 'The unconscious is structured like a language' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 243). The formula arises from Lacan's encounter with the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure analysed language in terms of a holistic structure in which no singular positive term can be posited apart from the system, as the differences between sounds, words, etc. is the source of meaning. 'Structure' refers, then, to this system of differences in which no singular unit has meaning apart from its contrasting pair within the system.¹⁹ To say the unconscious is structured like a language is to posit the meaning of conscious and unconscious as following this same structure of contrasting binary pairs. In this sense the unconscious is not a deep structure obscured from view. It is simply the obverse side of the signs of language. The unconscious is the place of the

¹⁹ See Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3ff.

signifiers. As in one of Lacan's favoured examples, it is like the moebius strip. The moebius strip is a single surface twisted and joined at the ends, so that it appears to have two sides when it has only one. The conscious/unconscious binary is not one of distinct opposites; rather they are on a continuum like the moebius strip (*Seminar II*, 273). The unconscious is on display in language on the same surface as spoken discourse.

Lacan connects the death drive to the binary of language in that it too follows the structure of the symbolic order.

The death instinct is only the mask of the symbolic order. . . .

The symbolic order is simultaneously non-being and insisting to be, that is what Freud has in mind when he talks about the death instinct as being what is most fundamental – a symbolic order in travail, in the process of becoming, insisting on being realized. (*Seminar II*, 326).

Language is a dynamic order which means that it does not exist like an object. An object endures through time due to its static nature, but language does not endure but rather passes away as soon as it arises. It has no enduring being. One who is coming to his identity in and through language is subject to the fate of language. There is the dynamic of language in the chain of signifiers, but meaning is not found in any singular signifier or any moment in time. The play of the signifiers along the signifying chain creates this dynamic possibility. A Subject put into pursuit of an object, or identity as an object, through language is involved in a contradiction. Thus the death instinct, 'the

mask of the symbolic order' is this dissonance (*Seminar II*, 326). The compulsion to repeat of the death drive is a product of the attempt to establish the self like an object, to repeat the self, in and through a medium (the symbolic) that makes this inherently impossible. Where Freud grounded the compulsion to repeat in a biological need to return to the stable material realm, Lacan explains the compulsion as arising from dissonance between the two registers (the imaginary and the symbolic). Lacan connects the compulsion to repeat to the 'insistence of the signifier' or the 'insistence of the signifying chain' or the insistence of the letter.²⁰ As Lacan states it, 'Repetition is fundamentally the insistence of speech' (*Seminar III*, 242). It is in this insistence to be through speech that the death drive functions.

The Intra-dynamic Death Drive

The primary significance for theology represented by Lacan is his understanding of the relationship between the death drive and the ego. His notion of the Subject is not the stable and cohesive self posited by ego-psychology nor is it Freud's notion that the ego must be strengthened against the onslaught of the death drive. In fact he sees a more dynamic and all pervasive role for the death drive throughout the dynamics of the Subject.

Just as Freud's trinity of ego/id/superego emerged as he came to see the importance of the death drive, Lacan also sees the death

²⁰ Fink, *The Lacanian Subject*, 22ff. See Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 164.

drive as central to the imaginary/symbolic and real, ultimately connecting the drive to the topography as a whole. Freud's positing of the death drive caused him to revise his basic understanding of the psyche. The split in the ego bringing about the superego was seen as brought on by passage through the Oedipus complex and taking up the model of the father into the self in the superego. The superego was then the primary location of the punishing death drive. Lacan has changed the name of Freud's three registers, and though they continue to operate along the picture Freud described, they have a slightly different inter-relationship due especially to Lacan's emphasis on the role of language. The superego becomes the 'symbolic' in Lacan's transformation of Freud's concept. While the symbolic continues as the centre of the death drive, on the order of the superego, there is also a tighter and necessary relationship between the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real (*Seminar II*, 29).²¹ The imaginary ego or the *imago* is Lacan's version of the ego. The shift in name shades the shift in meaning. The ego is no longer the stable centre of the self but is that part of the self-understanding fostered by the child first seeing itself in the mirror (*Seminar IV*, 17). Lacan describes it as a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) but this misrecognition becomes a key part of the inner dynamics of the Subject.²² This is a clear departure from the ego psychologists and perhaps represents a

²¹ Lacan explains that it is not that the symbolic comes from the real but the illusion is that the symbolic seems to have sprung from the real (*Seminar II*, 238).

²² The misrecognition, Lacan explains, is not ignorance: 'Misrecognition represents a certain organisation of affirmations and negations to which the subject is attached' (*Seminar I*, 167).

departure from Freud's earlier understanding of the centrality of the ego.

The particular significance of the change in name from ego to imaginary is in connection with the death drive, as Lacan has clearly made the ego *imago* complicit in the death drive. Lacan warns that to miss that the imaginary is part of the 'field of effects' of the symbolic is a betrayal of Freud (*Ecrits: Selection*, 64). To project this topography as anything other than interdependent is to perhaps miss the point that the Subject is dispersed, alienated, and unconscious in and through the inter-dynamics of this topography. Where Freud had presumed the ego and the sexual drives are opposed to the superego and the death drive, Lacan argues that the death drive is part of every drive. While 'the death instinct is only the mask of the symbolic order' it always comes mixed with the erotism of the ego along with the absence of the real (*Seminar II*, 326). Death alone is silent, but death borne along by life becomes an orientation that explains the Lacanian topography.

The distinction between the life drive and the death drive is true in as much as it manifests two aspects of the drive. But this is so only on condition that one sees all the sexual drives as articulated at the level of significations in the unconscious, in as much as what they bring out is death – death as signifier and nothing but signifier, for can it be said that there is a being for death. (*Seminar XI*, 257)

The death instinct is fundamental as it is mixed with each of the drives and it serves both sides of the dialectic between life and death. The

symbolic order in its insistence to be, and its lack of being, takes on this dynamic only in relation with the real and the *imago*. The locus of the death drive may be with the symbolic, but the symbolic is empty apart from the imaginary and the real.

So the topography worked out by Lacan locates its meaning or its existence, not in a duality of drives, but in a fusion or dialectic between life and death. Where Freud had pictured life and death as part of a cosmic dualism, Lacan sees life and death in the Subject as negotiated in and through language. Language creates a subject/object pair in which the imago is an object from the perspective of the symbolic. Lacan referring to himself in the third person, summarizes his work in terms of death and desire: 'Who more fearlessly than this clinician, so firmly tied to mundane suffering, has questioned life as to its meaning, and not to say that it has none . . . but to say that it has only one meaning, that in which desire is borne by death?' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 306). Freud's claim had been that 'the aim of all life is death' (*The Ego and the Id*, 38). Lacan has taken this quite literally, as he has connected desire itself to death. Freud imagined that libido and *Eros* stood opposed to death, but Lacan breaks down the barrier between the two and pictures the death drive as fundamental even in *Eros*.

'Desire borne by death' accounts for each component of Lacan's topography. Libido is 'originally made to pass through an imaginary stage' which is the work of the death instinct (*Seminar I*, 149). The symbolic, like the super-ego before it, is masked by the death instinct

(*Seminar II*, 326). The real is the hole or gap in the symbolic, through which the trauma of the death drive makes its appearance (*Seminar I*, 66). Lacan will reject Freud's biological grounding of this topography and will describe the death drive and Eros as a conflict, not between biological life and death, but within the inter-dynamics of the imaginary, symbolic and real. Lacan pictures these three registers as structured in their inter-dynamics like a lie. The *imago* of the imaginary is the focus or object of the lie, while the symbolic is the substance or medium of the lie, and the real is that which is obscured by the lie. In *Seminar I* Lacan refers to language as that which enables the subject to ground himself in a lie (*Seminar I*, 194). This includes Freud's notion of lying discourse, but it goes beyond this idea. Lacan's entire topography of the subject is constructed along the order of a lie.

The Imaginary Object of the Lie

The identification of the self in the mirror, as important as it is in formation of identity and the establishment of a distinct self, is inherently alienating. The Subject is estranged from the mirror image at the same time as she achieves self-representation. This alienation is not a mere effect of the imaginary; the *imago* is alienation in its essence.²³ As Lacan states it, 'Alienation is the imaginary as such' (*Seminar III*, 146). Alienation occurs in the sense that the subject – object relation is taken up into the self. The imaginary is not cut off

²³ Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher*, 146.

from the symbolic. Language has both a symbolic and an imaginary dimension. 'There is something in the symbolic function of human discourse that cannot be eliminated, and that is the role played in it by the imaginary' (*Seminar II*, 306).

Lacan extracts his idea of the imaginary from Freud's description of the ego as 'first and foremost a bodily ego, it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface' (*The Ego and the Id*, 20). The ego is a product of identification with the visual image of the body in the mirror or with the cohesive image of others. The mirror stage coincides with the entry into the symbolic as the two are simultaneously engaged when the visual recognition of the child is taken up or noted in the symbolic realization of the 'I'. The two positions constitute alienation as they exist as two separate orders in the experience of the subject. The nature of their dynamic interdependency is indicated in Freud's original observation of his grandson's play with the spool.

It soon turned out . . . that during this long period of solitude the child had found a method of making himself disappear. He had discovered his reflection in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach to the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror-image 'gone'. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 14)

The child has learned that his own image, like the mother whom he came to cause to symbolically appear and disappear, is subject to the binary of absence and presence set up in the game. The mirror image presents a full presence that can be made to appear and disappear at

will. He recognizes himself in the visual image, and yet that image is separate from him and not one that he has in his immediate experience. That is he does not experience himself as cohering like the image in the mirror; his is an experience of dissonance and disconnectedness (*Seminar I*, 79).

The function of the 'I' or the 'I' in the mirror arises as the child identifies himself with his image.

It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes . . . an image the little man is at the *infans* stage thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary . . . situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form. (*Ecrits: A Selection*, 4)

The transformation is the positing of the image of 'I' so that the ego as object is conceived. Transference, in the analytic situation, has to do with an inter-subjective relationship established between the analyst and patient. In the mirror stage a new inter-subjective relationship has been established. The mirror image does not stand apart from the symbolic matrix; in fact it completes it or acts as its supplement. The mirror alone does not constitute the ego, but the child's positing of its identity as an 'I' as gained through the mirror. The symbolic and the imaginary constitute the matrix in which the 'I' arises. If mother didn't occasionally leave, or if all one had was the overwhelming spectral presence, the 'I' could not arise.

Lacan first understood the mirror stage, as its name indicates, as a temporary stage that occurs at a specific time. He comes to see it though, not as a stage but as a permanent structure. The ego results from identifying with his specular image and this sets up the dynamics of the imaginary. In the mirror stage there is the 'jubilant assumption of his specular image' since there is the sense of mastery that is not yet available through direct control of his body (*Ecrits: Selection*, 4). The body image has cohesiveness the child feels is missing within himself.

What I have called the mirror stage is interesting in that it manifests the affective dynamism by which the subject originally identifies himself with the visual Gestalt of his own body: in relation to the still very profound lack of coordination of his own motility, it represents an ideal unity, a salutary imago; it is invested with all the original distress resulting from the child's intra-organic and relational discordance during the first six months, when he bears the signs, neurological and humoral, of a physiological natal prematuration. (*Ecrits: Selection*, 21)

What the child experiences internally, is very different from what he sees in the mirror. He is still restricted by a lack of coordination, and feelings of discordance, and yet the mirror image hangs together quite nicely. The ego as bodily or object ego is a misrecognition that Lacan describes as 'frustration in its essence' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 46). The frustration of the *imago* is of not having achieved itself. The mirror image that produces the primordial 'I' is not an image that one can

inhabit. It is an object that has all the characteristics of an object; it is static, distant and cohesive. The ego as an object refuses the dynamics of temporality and change. The Subject knows itself as a unity but it is a virtual unity from which he at the same time feels partially alienated (*Seminar II*, 50). The Neurosis and aggression that arise in the human condition can be traced, according to Lacan, to this key stage.

Thus the ego can be said to have a paranoiac structure (*Ecrits: Selection*, 22). 'The ego is structured exactly like a symptom. At the heart of the Subject, it is only a privileged symptom, the human symptom par excellence, the mental illness of man' (*Seminar I*, 16). The *imago* prevents entry into life and constitutes a certain 'stuckness', in the same way that neurosis is an obstacle that cannot be by-passed. The symptoms of neurosis are, in fact, manifestations of the primordial problem. The ego presents itself in and through a variety of symptoms, each one of which, whether sadistic or masochistic, constitute the original symptom. There is a primal aggression emanating from the ego which might be said to constitute the ego.

Freud had pictured a primary narcissism in which there is an investment of libido in the ego, that is, the ego is taken as an object of desire. Lacan's imaginary can be equated to this primary narcissism. Just as the myth of Narcissus is about trying to achieve the image reflected in the water, Lacan's imaginary register or mirror stage is linked then, both with Freud's primary narcissism and with the myth of Narcissus. As in the myth there is an erotic element or an element of

desire, since the subject is attracted to his image. There is also an aggressive element as the wholeness and coherence of the specular image contrasts with the feeling of physical disunity. Lacan puts particular emphasis on this move as it marks the birth of the ego as a product of the specular image but also as an investment of desire (*Seminar III*, 92).²⁴ The false nature of the mirror stage is like that in the myth. The visual Gestalt forms the primary love object as libido is invested in what is simply a spectral image.

It is this erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the energy and the form on which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego is based. (*Ecrits: Selection*, 21)

The *imago* in the mirror sets up a gap in which the ultimate desire is an exponential desire for the self. Lacan likens the course of these passions to the life of the slave 'whose response to the frustration of his labour is a desire for death' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 46). No matter what his accomplishments, no matter what changes the individual may undergo in the course of his life, the ego is this inert presence left untouched by life experiences.

Just as in Hegel's master/slave analogy the slave is put into the position of carrying out all the work. The Subject/slave expends his life's efforts and invests in a self-relationship which by its very nature

²⁴ See Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 120.

will not change. The more he works, the more he reinforces the bondage. In Hegel's dialectic it is the slave who has the possibility of undoing the relationship. For the subject the possibility of change lies outside the ego. The ego is not subject to growth and change as it is an object fixed as part of a formal structure. 'I am nothing of what happens to me. You are nothing of value' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 22). The effort expended in establishing the self, leaves the *imago*, that primordial static image, untouched. The specular image serves to freeze the *imago* so that life's experiences leave it untouched. The fixed nature of the ego refuses not only temporality but the instinctual impulses that come with natural growth. The mirror stage inaugurates a 'primordial jealousy' in which desire is an unsettled lack, longing for a being or cohesiveness that is present in others but missing in the self. The ego of the imaginary 'turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 6). As a result libido is put into the service of aggression and drives, which threaten the bounded structure of the ego. Each 'great instinctual metamorphosis in the life of the individual will once again challenge its delimitation' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 22). The movement and maturation that are a natural part of life threaten to expose the *imago* to a change which would constitute its demise.

The point of Lacanian analysis is not to strengthen the ego or the image of the imaginary, as the ego is the obstruction to growth and the normal dynamics of desire. Over and against those who take the

ego to be the 'ally' of the analyst or those that presume the ego needs strengthening Lacan says,

it is very difficult to define the ego as an autonomous function, while at the same time continuing to regard it as master of errors, the seat of illusions, the locus of a passion proper to it, one which leads essentially to misunderstanding [méconnaissance] . . . misunderstanding is precisely its function. (*Seminar I*, 62-63)

The ego, far from being an individualistic being or entity unto itself, is a false notion; generating the lie that it is an actually existing thing. The ego is the resistance that disturbs and blocks the analytic situation. The threat of exposure leads to its aggression. It is as likely to express itself in an aggression for the analyst, as it is a masochistic self-relation.

Nor is it by chance that, from the moment that the dialectical progress begins to approach the questioning of the intentions of the ego in our subjects, the phantasy of the analyst's death – often felt in the form of fear or even of anxiety – never fails to be produced. (*Ecrits: Selection*, 109)

As the ego, the symptom itself, comes to be exposed for what it is, fear and aggression arise at the threat of being undone. Lacan likens the alienation that the ego establishes in the Subject to Hegel's master/slave dialectic. The Subject's labour – his striving in analysis or in life to establish himself 'eludes him, for he himself "is not in it"' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 109). The slave can come to himself only through

the master's death, as that is the moment in which he will begin to live, 'but in the meantime he identifies himself with the master as dead, and as a result of this he is himself already dead' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 109).

In the dialectic of the slave and master, the slave equates freedom with the master's death, so that the dead master becomes the sole object, and in this focus the slave has missed the point that his own focus is his true master. The focus on the ego as object is the investment of life in a fruitless situation. The focus of Narcissus must be shifted off the reflected image to the real dynamics of the Subject.

To strengthen the ego would amount to strengthening the lie that is destroying the Subject or that is preventing the Subject from coming into being. There is a life and death struggle taking place in the Subject and it is the imaginary self-relation that initiates the Subject into a false being that is a pact with death.

The Symbolic Substance of the Lie

If the ego is the object of the lie, the symbolic is its substance. It is only the medium of language that allows for lying, and the subject is itself a product, not just of language but of a lie. In *Seminar I* Lacan equates the existence of the Subject with his ability to lie. The speaking Subject imagines some Other which underlies and posits his being as it is expressed in language, when the reality is a complete absence or lack, covered by the symbolic substance (*Seminar I*, 194). The ability of the child to arrive at the 'I' as it points in the mirror illustrates the split Subject of the symbolic. With Freud's grandson it

was language that enabled him to look in the mirror and recognize himself. The self-reflexive capacity of language is the true substance or medium of the imaginary capacity to recognize the visual self.

Just as the primal father was at one and the same time representative of law and its transgression, the law here is split or splitting: there is the Subject of the enunciation (the Subject speaking) and the Subject of the statement (the words spoken). The Subject who speaks or the Subject of the enunciation is not accessible through language as he is in that place from which language arises. In turn the object of the spoken sentence cannot be the location of the Subject as this is merely an object (*Seminar XI*, 211). 'As soon as we turn things into nouns, we presuppose a substance, and . . . we just don't have that many substances' (*Seminar XX*, 21). So where is the substantial dimension? Lacan concludes it is dispersed between 'the thinking substance and extended substance' (*Seminar XX*, 21). He turns the question back to the spoken, maintaining that substance is a notion that arises as part of the spoken word. The proper question might be where is the Subject?

The unconscious structured like a language, it should be realized that this formulation totally changes the function of the subject as existing. The subject is not the one (*celui*) who thinks. The subject is precisely the one we encourage not to say it at all . . . (*Seminar XX*, 22)

'The unconscious structured like a language' reflects Lacan's incorporation of Saussure for whom language (*langue*) is structure per

se. Lacan departs from Saussure's concept that the basic unit of language is the sign. Lacan holds that the basic unit is the signifier. So the unconscious is a structure of signifiers (*Seminar XI*, 20).²⁵ The signifier is the phonological element of language or the basic image of the sound and not the sound itself. Lacan defines it as 'that which represents a subject for another signifier, in opposition to the sign which represents for someone' (*Seminar II*, 207). No signifier can signify the Subject as the Subject exists as a consequence of the chain of signifiers dispersed between their basic element in the unconscious as pure signifiers and in the conscious self as signs.

As in analysis the Subject is always presumed incapable of telling the truth about his symptoms. The analysand does not present himself directly but through uttering 'stupidities'. 'For it is with those stupidities that we do analysis, and that we enter into the new subject – that of the unconscious' (*Seminar XX*, 22). The Subject is an effect of language, spoken rather than speaking and spoken by language. But this effect is only indirectly presented in speaking. To say it more precisely, the speaking Subject is a cover for the one not speaking: 'he is distinct from what he says' for one simple reason – he can lie (*Seminar I*, 194). 'Well, the dimension of the speaking subject, of the speaking subject qua deceiver, is what Freud uncovered for us in the unconscious' (*Seminar I*, 194). The lying Subject is not the conscious Subject as it is itself a product of a deception that is beneath his words.

²⁵ Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 97.

The lying Subject or the deceiver stands behind the conscious spoken presentation of the self. The Subject is shaped by a deception or is deceived in its essence.

Lacan contrasts this Subject of the lie with the Subject as it is posited in science. The Subject in science is held in consciousness. 'It is whoever possesses the system of science that sustains the dimension of the subject. He is the subject, in so far as he is the reflection, the mirror, the support of the objectal world' (*Seminar I*, 194). The scientist encompasses his science in his consciousness so that the entire dimension of the Subject is a possession of the scientist. He can know it and look at it directly as in a mirror. The Subject of the unconscious makes his appearance only in deception.

In contrast, Freud shows us that in the human subject there is something which speaks, which speaks in the full sense of the word, that is to say something which knowingly lies, and without the contribution of consciousness. That restores – in the obvious, strict, experimental sense of the term – the dimension of the subject. (*Seminar I*, 194)

The Subject is structured like language in the unconscious and the nature of this structure is a lie. Lacan is using the term 'lie' to describe the topology of the Subject. For instance, as with the moebius strip there is a singular surface with the appearance of two sides. A lie consists of a singular element but one can stand in relation to the lie either in terms of believing and inhabiting it or in terms of telling it. Normally we would not connect these two positions. Lacan's claim is

that it is a singular surface. The one telling and the one believing the lie are not separate, but the possibility for this self deception requires that there be a separation into three registers. The unconscious is, however, itself subject to deception, so that it cannot be said to contain some pure version of the truth.²⁶ Since the Subject is deceived *per se* (in her entirety), truth is inscribed in the deception. In analysis lies reveal the truth so the truth coheres as an element of the lie (*Seminar I*, 273).²⁷ The registers function like a lie in that the conscious speaking self is speaking from the other side of this lie. The lie has been foisted onto the Subject and the spoken position presumes the truth of the lie. The unconscious is the point from which the lie proceeds: it is the point of deception, and in this is the true Subject as opposed to the ego or the object of speech.

By the same token, this dimension is no longer confused with the ego. The ego is deprived of its absolute position in the subject. The ego acquires the status of a mirage, as the residue, it is only one element in the objectal relations of the subject. (*Seminar I*, 194)

Freud's observation of his grandchild playing with the spool illustrates the ego position. The game is a fictional alternative to having and being with the mother. It is a game played out in frustration as the mother is gone, and the game is built upon her absence. More

²⁶ This double negation of the lie is an especially difficult concept which Žižek takes up in his discussion of Hegel which is unfolded below.

²⁷ In analysis when the analysand begins to lie this indicates the truth is nearby as the truth attempts to hide 'taking flight in deception' (*Seminar I*, 273).

than that, it wills her absence, as is illustrated in the child wishing his father would go to the front lines of the war as he throws his toys under the bed. As Lacan describes it, entry into the symbolic does not relieve destructive desire but it confounds it: 'it raises his desire to a second power' (*Seminar I*, 173). The game displaces the mother and compensates for the reality of her absence by producing the symbolic 'unreality' of the game. In Lacan's reading of the game the privation of having lost the mother becomes the space in which the symbolic is born so that the symbolic is a space of privation.

We can now thereby grasp that the subject does not just master his privation in assuming it . . . but he also raises his desire to a second power. For his action destroys the object that it causes to appear and disappear in the provocation . . . in the anticipating provocation of its absence and presence. It thus renders negative the field of forces of desire, in order to become its own object for itself. (*Seminar I*, 173)

Just as the spool in the game represents the power to symbolize the mother, in and through displacing her, so too the Subject is displaced by the ego as it is born into the game of language. The binary *fort/da*, along with the binaries that make up the phonemes and structure of language, have become the means of entering and controlling reality. The presence/absence of the game is played out over a real absence. Lacan concludes that 'primal masochism' should be located around this initial negation, 'around this original murder of the thing' (*Seminar I*, 173). The murder of the thing amounts to the trade off of entry into the

symbolic. Words and symbols, the spool for the child in Freud's story, replace objects or the mother. The dynamic of the Subject as she is given over to language sets up an aggressive element directed at one's own image. This masochism is located at the juncture between the imaginary and the symbolic and is the determinate factor in the imaginary/symbolic dyad. It is not that one agency is pitted against the other, but rather, antagonism is at the origin of the imaginary and symbolic. The murder of the thing has produced a split resulting in these two registers. Giving up mother or the object for language creates the binary pair that is inherent in the construct of language.

The child only takes on a separate identity as it distances or distinguishes itself from the mother and this comes about through the power of the symbolic, but one overwhelming presence is seemingly traded for another.

Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world those who are going to engender him 'by flesh and blood'; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death.

(Ecrits: Selection, 74)

The web of language is woven so tightly that not even flesh and blood can withstand it. It directs the Subject in all of his paths – having determined prior to his entry into the world the ruts that will direct him.

The symbolic is not a singular agency within the Subject; just the opposite, the Subject 'is spoken' in and through a lie.

The Real as the Power of Negation

If the ego is the object of the lie and the symbolic its substance, the real can be said to be that which the lie negates or that which cannot appear as part of the symbolic. The obverse of this is that the real has itself been invested with the negative power to disturb the symbolic, and this is the power of the death drive. The real is, then, Lacan's transformed understanding of the id. As with Freud's id, basic drives and compulsions arise from the real. Unlike Freud, Lacan will connect each of these drives, including the primary drive of the death instinct, not to biology, but to the effect of language.

In the final phase of Lacan's teaching, the phase with which Žižek is most concerned, the accent falls upon the real as the impossible kernel at the centre of the symbolic. As Žižek describes it, this centre poses the possibility of total effacement and of death (*Sublime Object*, 132). The real is the productive/destructive centre, the force of gravity exercised through the death drive.

In a lie, there is the object or point of the lie, the lie itself, and what the lie negates. The real is the negative force that underlies the object (imaginary) and its substance (symbolic). The real is that inaccessible register around which language revolves and yet which it cannot pierce. Or conversely, the real is the hole or gap in the symbolic and trauma marks the appearance of the real like a rip in the

fabric of the self. The appearance of the real constitutes trauma precisely because it is 'unassimilable' (*Seminar XI*, 55). Its very nature as a resistance to symbolization connects the real to the compulsion to repeat, which is the force of the death instinct. In the seminar of 1954-5 Lacan argues that the death drive is the fundamental tendency of the symbolic order to produce repetition (*Seminar II*, 326).²⁸ Lacan refers to it as the 'automaton', a machine like force behind destructive compulsions.

The real is beyond the automaton, the return, the coming back, the insistence of the signs. . . . The real is that which always lies behind the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of concern. (*Seminar XI*, 54)

The something beyond the pleasure principle acts as an 'insistence' expressed in repetition (*automatisme de répétition*) which first led Freud to his formulation of the death drive (*Seminar II*, 61). The content of the repetition is secondary to the repetition itself.²⁹ The repetition is destructive by virtue of its existence. The resistance posed by the real within the symbolic, acts as the negative force beneath the compulsion to repeat.

²⁸ There is, as Boothby describes it, an agency of death in the signifier (Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher*, 154).

²⁹ Freud's grandson's repetitive game with the spool was matched in Freud's observations in the clinic with the repetition of dreams, repulsive images, or compulsive actions.

Unlike the machines found in factories, which repeat in order to produce something, the repetition compulsion aims at another kind of production.

What is this insistence on the part of the subject to reproduce? Reproduce what? Is it in his behaviour? Is it in his fantasies? Is it in his character? Is it even in his ego? All kinds of things, from entirely different registers, can be used as material and as elements in this reproduction. (*Seminar II*, 63).

The compulsion to repeat can be said to pervade the Subject, but each of the potential products shares the same orbit around the real. The power of the real, expressed in repetition is, as opposed to pleasure, the power of 'unpleasure and suffering and . . . it always returns' (*Seminar II*, 64-65).

The real is the 'residual' to language but it is a residual power in its absolute resistance to symbolization; that is, it is a power of resistance. The real does not take part in the binary of language, or in the presence/absence of language, as the real is the abyss or the zero (*Seminar II*, 313). Symbolic features are dependent on presence and absence. The two sounds for example that Freud's grandson made O/A are a pair of sounds modulated on presence and absence (*Ecrits: Selection*, 65). The sounds correspond to the presence and absence of the spool. Words, always then, are 'a presence made of absence' (*Ecrits: Selection* 65). There 'is no absence in the real' as the real is the obverse side of the symbolic (*Seminar II*, 313). There is no

possibility of a symbolic absence/presence binary in the real. The real does not partake of the symbolic game and yet this game is only possible over the abyss of the real. The child has rid himself of the suffering presence/absence of the mother through the game with the spool. But the game does not offer anything other than the symbol, which has its meaning in and through the negation of the mother.

The real is inaccessible not only as a singular negation; the negation is itself negated (*Seminar I*, 67). The lie of the subject cannot be gotten at as it is buried under a supposed truth. It consists of a two-fold deception. Mother is banished and the game has displaced her. The real is at the centre of the unreal manifestations found in neurosis and hallucination and the unreal character of these delusions point to a displacement of reality. 'In the end, doesn't the feeling of the real reach its high point in the pressing manifestation of an unreal, hallucinatory reality' (*Seminar I*, 66-67)? The fantasies and false memories that plague the neurotic do not have a self-evident explanation but they point to the powerful underlying force of the real.

The real harbours an anxiety that is impenetrable to the symbolic as the symbolic constitutes a substitution which harbours the real.

Hence there's an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarizes what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with

which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence. (*Seminar II*, 164)

The presentation of the real in some positive form, some object or person, is the object of fear only in that what is presented is the radical negativity at the heart of the Subject. The real Thing (*Das Ding*) may make its appearance in many forms, but as Lacan notes it isn't an object any longer. The Thing is entirely outside of language and outside of the unconscious so that it is impossible to imagine it (*Seminar VII*, 125). The Thing is that unknowable element, beyond symbolization, which like Kant's *noumena* is beyond phenomena and yet the centre of phenomenological reality.³⁰ It is perhaps, simply the raw presentation of total destruction of the symbolic order. Death *per se*, or biological death, is handled within the symbolic order so death is just passage to another world of symbolic meaning. In the death drive it is the destruction of even this order that threatens.

The Real of God

The most frightening thing, the thing that represents this total destruction and is inclusive of both evil and suffering (*le mal*) is God, or at least the father as good father. This God or this father, however, is one who is dead, and so is the embodiment of the radical negativity of the real. It is his death that orders everything. 'His attributes are those of a thought which regulates the order of the real' (*Seminar VII*, 180).

³⁰ Žižek will take up a discussion of the Thing in light of German idealism and bring an element of depth and clarity to the concept.

The real doesn't exist in the sense of taking place in reality but it exercises its power in and through the Order of existence. So God is perhaps the ultimate representative of the real, in that all of existence is ordered by him and yet he does not exist.

The dynamic of the Subject, like the religion he practices, is one which in the face of a lack of being, is seeking to fill this lack with absolute Being. The religionist is just a picture of every man in his pursuit of a lost being. So Lacan is, in the first instance, critical of religion as it would seek to bring absolute being and meaning into a Subject lacking in being. Religion in all its forms, like the Subject herself, is an attempt to avoid the lack of being (*Seminar VII*, 130). The inevitable triumph of religion over psychoanalysis is, in Lacan's view, simply a sign of the pursuit of an absolute Being that would drown the world in meaning by closing the chain of signification.³¹ Religion, in other words, offers the solace of a final being on the order of the imaginary. There is the possibility of total unity, and a sense of having become identical with the imaginary image. What Lacan would offer is discontinuity – an interruption of the real – and a continual dynamic pursuit of meaning. Religion, on the other hand, would perform the trick of the fundamental fantasy, of bringing the signifier and the signified into absolute harmony so that there is no more movement along the signifying chain. This closure is not a resolution, but a form

³¹ William Richardson, "Like Straw": Religion and Psychoanalysis', *The Letter: Lacanian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis II*, 1-15, quoted in Marcus Pound, *Theology Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, p. 9.

of neurosis, which would seem to put Lacan in the Freudian anti-religious camp. Lacan however brings a more nuanced reading of reality into play. As Marcus Pound puts it, 'while Lacan reduces religion to language, he also raises language to the level of religion' and so 'his work allows for a shared and creative engagement in the symbolic structures that govern human relations'.³² Language need not be thought of as a limited and determined engagement with reality, as all of reality is structured like a language. So language need not hinder entry into reality.

The rewriting of Freud from the perspective of structural linguistics gives his critique of religion an anti-metaphysical thrust.

The philosophers can speculate all they want on the Being in whom act and knowledge are one, the religious tradition is not misled: only that which can be articulated by means of a revelation has the right to be recognized as one or more divine persons. (*Seminar VII, 31*)

To posit God apart from revelation, in his estimation, is to confuse the 'Subject' of psychoanalysis, caught up in the dimension of the signifier, with the God of revelation. This Subject and this God are subject to deconstruction. They are subject to death and they are in the service of a 'will to power'. The God of the philosophers represents the failed

³² Marcus Pound, *Theology Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, p. 9.

tradition in which the depth of desire is ceded for a middle path, which Lacan connects to Aristotelian ethics.

In the end the order of things on which it claims to be founded is the order of power, of a human –far too human – power. . . . Aristotle's morality is wholly founded on an order that is no doubt a tidied-up, ideal order. . . . His morality is the morality of the master, created for the virtues of the master and linked to the order of powers. (*Seminar VII*, 314-315)

The unmoved mover of Aristotle or the God of the philosophers is linked to an ideal order – an order of the powers. This sort of order does not allow one to act in conformity with desire; rather it demands conformity to the desire of the master. He says this is Alexander's or Hitler's desire which says: 'Let it be clear to everyone that this is on no account the moment to express the least surge of desire' (*Seminar VII*, 315). The essential thing is to keep on working, just keep on working for the master.

The Lie of Sin

Lacan is not unaware that the order he is describing, from the perspective of Christianity, can be summed up as sin. 'The father, the name-of-the-father, sustains the structure of the law – but the inheritance of the father is that which Kierkegaard designates for us, namely, his sin' (*Seminar XI*, 34). By identifying the inheritance of the father with sin Lacan is suggesting that the dynamic of the three registers, as they are a product of passage through the Oedipus

complex, could be understood as parallel to the biblical notion of sin (an idea which Lacan does not develop but which Žižek will address). The Subject of the lie, in and through the symbolic, has been cast into pursuit of an impossible object. He is lost to himself through the objectifying effects of language. The compulsion that drives him and orders his existence arises from within him and yet is somehow out of his reach. The organizing principle of human life is a pervasive 'dumb reality' that 'commands and regulates' our lives by alienating and removing the individual from reality (*Seminar VII*, 55). The lack in human life becomes the power that controls and orders his life.

Žižek, in focusing on what he calls the Lacan of the 'third period' during which time Lacan turned his focus to the real of experience, poses the possibility of a way through the Lacanian notion of sin (*The Sublime Object*, 133). Žižek will turn Lacan, in his interpretation of Lacan's theory, more towards a theological and practical resolution to the predicament he describes.³³ It is Kierkegaard's nemesis, Hegel, that Žižek sees as offering a way out of the sin system which Lacan links to Kierkegaard. The primary way in which he will come to this understanding of Lacan is by reading Lacan through Hegel and Hegel through Lacan.

³³ Žižek, as opposed to the a/theological Lacan of Mark Taylor, recognizes that mere acceptance of the death drive is not the only option. See Taylor, *Erring*, which may represent the first attempt to introduce both Jacques Derrida and Lacan into the American theological context.

Žižek's Subject of the Lie as Seen through Kant, Schelling and Descartes

Žižek's reading of Lacan through German idealism and his reading of German idealism through Lacan, translates the problems of Lacan's three registers and his subject of the lie into the philosophical language of dialectical materialism. The result of this reading is not only a different perspective on Lacan's view of the human predicament, but a different perspective is brought also to the proposal for the way out. In one of his sustained engagements of the human predicament in light of German idealism, *The Parallax View*, Žižek describes the gap within thought and being in a series of systems notable for their irresolvable difference.³⁴ The gap that exists between the conscious and unconscious is one that repeats itself in a series that Žižek maintains constitutes human reality. The goal is not to overcome the gap but to conceive it in its 'becoming' (*Parallax*, 6). His earlier work on Friedrich Schelling reads the gap back into God and offers an insight into the origins of the human Subject.

In his work on Schelling, Žižek connects the death drive to what he calls the 'primordial lie' in which absolutely nothing transforms itself into the Creator God. The significance of this account is not that it tells how God came onto the scene; rather it demonstrates the

³⁴ There is the gap between the individual and the social, the ontological gap between the ontic and the transcendental-ontological, there is the wave-particle duality of quantum physics, and the gap between the face and the skull in neurobiology, and the gap which is the real (*Parallax*, 6-7).

absolute, nihilistic nature of the primordial lie.³⁵ It constitutes a direct translation of Lacan's three registers into a philosophical framework.

In Schelling's mythological portrayal the drive accounts for every beginning including the beginning of God. What Schelling is attempting to account for, in his rather tortured and obscure writings, is the tension between the 'ground' of God's being and that being itself, and since it is this tension between ground and existence that is definitive of the death drive, Žižek's use of Schelling can be understood as illustrative of the death drive. Schelling provides a retrospective understanding of the origin of all things from one who is caught in the death drive. God, like man, is faced with a forced choice (in the retrospective view) of choosing predication and action or literally nothing at all. Mankind likewise, is forced to choose between language, the social network, or a form of non-existence. But the 'ground' of choice, or that from which being, predication, or language arises is the madness, the pure drives (Schelling's rotary motion of repetition of nothing) or the absolute nothing, which continues as the threatening ground of every predication. The beginning of God or the being of God arises from a continually obscured ground (the death drive by definition) of madness or nothing. This ground must in some way always be present and yet at the same time obscured and covered over. 'This is the only way the beginning, the beginning that does not cease to be one; the truly eternal beginning is possible. For

³⁵ Žižek refers to the "primordial lie" in many places but his most sustained explanation is in the opening pages of *The Indivisible Remainder*.

here also it holds that the beginning should not know itself. Once done, the deed is eternally done' (*Die Weltalter Fragmente*, 183-184).³⁶

The ultimate antagonism is between eternity (the eternal rotary motion of the drives – in which God Himself has not emerged or begun) and the singularity of the act ('in the beginning God created'). The passage from nothing (the eternal nothing without beginning or end) to something (the beginning of God) is an act that is eternally repeated in the passage from eternity to time. In other words, everything, including God ultimately arises from and tends toward this absolute nothing. In eternity there is a pure Nothingness, which 'enjoys its own nonbeing' (*Indivisible Remainder*, 23). This Nothing which is without predicate or content is in a state of absolute freedom in that all things are still possible. An absolutely free subject can have no determinate content (it must ultimately be nothing). Eternity holds out absolute freedom the 'pure enjoyment, of an unassertive, neutral Will which wants nothing' but this Will 'actualizes itself in the guise of a Will which actively, effectively, wants this "nothing" - that is, the annihilation of every positive, determinate content' (*Indivisible Remainder*, 23). The formal conversion of nothing into an actively sought after 'nothing' accounts for the absolute 'ground' of God's coming to himself . . . the blissful peace of primordial freedom thus changes into pure contraction, into the vortex of 'divine madness'

³⁶ Quoted in Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, p. 21.

which threatens to swallow everything, into the highest affirmation of God's egotism which tolerates nothing outside itself' (*Indivisible Remainder*, 23).

The death drive works through a time loop in which an original actually nonexistent state is posited: 'a pure gaze prior to one's own conception' or in the case of God a 'pure gaze which finds enjoyment in contemplating its own nonbeing' (*Indivisible Remainder*, 22). 'Isn't this', asks Žižek, 'a fantasy formation at its purest' (*Indivisible Remainder*, 22). The death drive then, functions as the primary part of what Žižek calls the primordial lie: 'the phantasmic construction by means of which we endeavor to conceal the inconsistency of the symbolic order in which we dwell' (*Indivisible Remainder*, 1). The absolute subject, which is the product of this lying construct, in the manner of Schelling's God, serves as its own ground ('I am my own father') and posits for itself an absolute freedom. It is at this point that Žižek sees a convergence between German Idealism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and the Cartesian cogito:

This basic insight of Schelling whereby, prior to assertion as the medium of rational Word, the subject is the pure 'night of the Self,' the 'infinite lack of being', the violent gesture of contraction that negates every being outside itself, also forms the core of Hegel's notion of madness: when Hegel determines madness as withdrawal from the actual world, the closing of the soul into itself, its 'contraction'. . . . Was this withdrawal into itself not accomplished by Descartes in his

universal doubt and reduction of the cogito . . . which . . . involves a passage through the moment of radical madness? . . . That is to say, the withdrawal into self, the cutting off of the links to the *Umwelt*, is followed by the construction of a symbolic universe that the subject projects onto reality as a kind of substitute-formation destined to recompense us for the loss of the immediate, presymbolic real. (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 8-9)

Schelling's God read into the Cartesian *cogito* gets at the madness of a self-positing or self-grounding subject. The point Žižek is making in regards to the *cogito* is not that it is false in terms of some philosophical understanding. The point is that Descartes' *cogito* articulates the Lacanian notion of the human disease.

Descartes' isolation of himself in the 'heated room' and reduction of the real world to a category of doubt and his reconstruction of that world, up to and including God follows the path of the Freudian notion of paranoia which by definition is the 'attempt to cure the subject of the disintegration of his universe' (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 8-9). The point is not that Descartes was a paranoiac, but that his passage into isolation and potential madness retraces the course of the human psyche. The passage into subjectivity (fallen subjectivity?) involves the 'ontological necessity of "madness" . . . the mad gesture of radical withdrawal from reality that opens up the space for its symbolic (re)constitution' (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 8-9). To maintain that the product of thought is objectively true, or to fuse thought and being,

involves a form of madness that is at once so universal so as to be nearly inaccessible.

If, therefore, in this precise sense, as Lacan put it, normalcy itself is a mode, a subspecies of psychosis, that is, if the difference between 'normalcy' and madness is inherent to madness, in what does then this difference between the 'mad' (paranoiac) construction and the 'normal' (social construction of) reality consist? Is 'normalcy' ultimately not merely a more 'mediated' form of madness? Or, as Schelling put it, is normal Reason not merely 'regulated madness?' (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 10)

The normal world constituted in the symbolic is suspended over a world of madness. The occasional trauma or rip in the symbolic is not a failure to align oneself with reality; rather reality is showing through the traumatic rip. The Subject is put into the position of grounding himself, but that ground is constructed in and through a deception. Žižek refers to this construct as part of a universal or primordial lie and it is in and through this lie that he accounts for the conscious/unconscious structure of the Subject. The unconscious is not primarily the drives; rather it is made of that which the 'fantasmatic foundation of his or her being' must necessarily obscure and hide, which he says, is the real itself (*The Fragile Absolute*, 70).³⁷ Part of

³⁷ Žižek provides a definition of the real, which gets at the fact that the real is itself something obscured by its own appearance. 'In other words, the Real persists as that failure or inconsistency of reality which has to be filled in with

the content of the real, or that which is by definition unconscious, consists of the basic 'human project' or the 'founding gesture' of the conscious subject.

. . . what is truly 'unconscious' in man is not the immediate opposite of consciousness, the obscure and confused 'irrational' vortex of drives, but the very founding gesture of *consciousness, the act of decision by means of which I* 'choose myself', that is, combine this multitude of drives into the unity of my Self. The 'Unconscious' is not the passive stuff of inert drives to be used by the creative 'synthetic' activity of the conscious ego; The 'Unconscious' in its most radical dimension is, rather, *the highest Deed of my self-positing*, or - to resort to later 'existentialist terms - the choice of my fundamental 'project' which, in order to remain operative, must be repressed, kept unconscious, out of the light of day. (*The Fragile Absolute*, 72)

appearance. Appearance is not secondary; rather, it emerges through the space of that which is missing from reality' (Žižek & Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, p. 95). Again the ambiguity of the concept of the real and death drive are, as Žižek sees it, inherent to what the concepts name. Along this line he sights Jonathan Lear's critique of Freud, who (Freud) 'takes himself to be naming a real thing in the world but he is in fact injecting an enigmatic term into our discourse. There is no naming, for nothing has genuinely been isolated for him to name. His hope is to provide an explanation, in fact all we have is the illusion of one' (Jonathan Lear, 'Give Dora a Break! A Tale of Eros and Emotional Disruption', in *Erotickon: Essays on Eros, Ancient and Modern*, ed. Shadi Bartsch and Thoman Bartscherer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), cited in Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, p. 71). Lear also makes this same case in *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 85. Žižek's point is to embrace this enigmatic nature of the real. 'The Real is thus *simultaneously* the Thing to which direct access is not possible and the obstacle that prevents this direct access; the Thing that eludes our grasp and the distorting screen that makes us miss the Thing. More precisely, the Real is ultimately the very shift of perspective from the first standpoint to the second' (Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, p. 77).

The child seeing its reflection in the mirror arrives at the symbolic 'I' but the 'I' that is posited is the coherent 'I' of the mirror stage. In choosing the self as object, the multitude of drives are made to cohere in an imaginary ego. 'I' becomes the human project par excellence – but the self-positing nature of this 'I' must be obscured. The act of choosing must itself be repressed as the human project would be exposed.

What is ultimately obscured in this founding gesture is not merely the act of choosing but the unconscious Subject of this choice – or the Subject of the death drive.

My contention is that the Freudian death drive . . . is precisely his name for this 'transformation of the being of man in the sense of derangement of his position among beings', for this mysterious/monstrous in-between which is no longer the Real of prehuman nature, of the worldless enclosure of natural entities, and not yet the horizon of Clearing and what comes forth within it, articulated in speech as the 'house of Being', as Heidegger put it in his *Letter on Humanism*, but, rather, the 'deranged'/twisted withdrawn foundation of the horizon of Clearing itself. (*The Fragile Absolute*, 82)

Heidegger's turn to the traumatic clearing, which opened the door to his participation in National Socialism, and his picture of being in the 'house of language', mark the difference between the real and the symbolic. The former is the domain of the death drive (Heidegger's

entry into the Nazi Party), and the latter is the symbolic (the humane). The two are interlocked as they are both part of the primordial lie.

Žižek goes on to link the fundamental 'derangement' of the subject of the death drive to the 'primordial lie' of the 'fundamental fantasy'.

And one is tempted to take even a step further along these lines, taking the word 'derangement' quite literally: what, from the psychoanalytic perspective, is the very basic form of human 'derangement'? Is it not the so-called 'fundamental fantasy', the *proton pseudos*, 'primordial lie', older than truth itself, this absolutely idiosyncratic pathological scenario which sustains our being-in-the world, our dwelling within the symbolic universe, and which, in order to be operative, *has* to remain 'primordially repressed'. (*They Know Not*, 197)

The fundamental fantasy provides the subject with the illusion of a consistent core. It is a defensive response to repressed trauma, and it is in turn repressed. Schelling's entire work can be read as a fundamental fantasy in the sense that it seeks to present the impossible time loop of being present at God's conception of himself. Žižek identifies this as one of the marks of the fundamental fantasy.

The basic paradox of the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy consists in a kind of time loop -the 'original fantasy' is always the fantasy of origins – that is to say, the elementary skeleton of the fantasy-scene is for the subject to be present as a pure

gaze before its own conception or, more precisely, at the very act of its conception. (*They Know Not*, 197)

The primordial lie or fantasy grounds the Subject in an immortal/timeless space. The Subject is one of pure spirit, inhabiting the body only as a spirit or soul. The body is the mechanism that houses the real kernel of the pure gaze looking out through material eyes. The lie though, cannot be sustained and the Subject fails. The Subject is ultimately a repressed/unconscious Subject deceived primarily about the Self. Man's basic dispositional frame as a Subject of the death drive is one that obscures the 'place' from which he sees.

In *Tarrying with the Negative* Žižek begins his reading of the lie from the opposite direction. Instead of the cosmic lie posited as part of the Cartesian Subject, the Cartesian Subject is pictured as the origin of the great chain of being. He takes as his point of departure the Kantian critique of Descartes, which reduces the transcendental Subject to an empty X or nothing. What Descartes succeeds in hiding, and what Kant brings out, is how ascertaining absolute certainty (and implicitly the absolute self) entails positing a causal chain involving all of reality which must necessarily posit the self as standing outside this reality. If the eye of self takes in all that is, which Descartes' argument does, up to and including God, the place from which the self is looking is exempted from the horizon of reality. The same goes for the self that thinks itself (the first self – the observer) is excluded from the second self – the object observed. Descartes presumes that in "I think" we get hold of a positive phenomenal entity,

res cogitans . . . which thinks and is transparent to itself in its capacity to think' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 13). But thought does not render self present and self transparent the 'thing' which thinks. 'What is lost thereby is the topological discord between the form "I think" and the substance which thinks' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 13). Kant exposes the Cartesian subject as nothing more than a 'vanishing mediator'; a logical construct that in positing its own absoluteness necessarily falls beyond experiential reality. Any predicate, or as Lacan puts it, any enunciation of the subject, cannot be that which predicates or the subject which enunciates (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 13).

What Žižek brings out of his own Cartesian meditations is not ultimately philosophical but analytical, in that he links the moves of the *cogito* to the neuroses and psychoses that result from trying to fuse thought and being. In turn, hysteria or obsessional neurosis constitutes a philosophical-like attitude towards thought and reality. Thus psychoanalytic terms have direct application to particular philosophical systems.

Now we can perhaps understand why, for Lacan, Hegel is 'the most sublime of all hysterics': the elementary dialectical inversion consists precisely in such a reversal of transcendence into immanence that characterizes hysterical theatre - the mystery of an enigmatic apparition is to be sought not beyond its appearance but in the very appearance of mystery. (*They Know Not*, 107)

The hysteric position, as outlined below, is to be able to take both positions – that of the subject of the enunciation and the object of the enunciation. Hegelian philosophy occupies both perspectives, while the Cartesian subject is stuck in a singular perspective. The Cartesian subject displays the problems of all Subjects. The Subject who coincides entirely with itself is not really a Subject, but once she becomes a Subject she no longer coincides with herself and can only speak of herself as an object. So the Subject arrives on the scene missing something and the various neuroses and psychoses display different means of dealing with this absence or loss. The symptom, however, that is displayed in mental sickness and philosophy consists of the same cause; the desire to fuse thought and being. The self is at stake in the attempted fusion of thought and being and the inevitable failure results in neurosis and psychosis (to say nothing of theology and philosophy).

Žižek illustrates the impossibility of arriving at the self through the *cogito* with his interpretation of Ridley Scott's movie Blade Runner, in which the Daryl Hannah character repeats the *cogito* in an attempt to prove her humanity. The problem is that she is a replicant whose memory and thought are artificially produced by her manufacturer, the Tyrell Corporation. In attempting to prove her humanity to herself the very proof she relies on is an artefact of her software. The question Žižek raises is, 'Where is the *cogito*, the point of my self-consciousness, when everything that I actually am is an artefact - not only my body, my eyes, but even my most intimate memories and

fantasies' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 40). The symbolic order creates the same distance between this I that would constitute itself ontologically by appealing to a system that stands outside the self and which has no ontological status. The content and substance of this system cannot be identical with or coincide with an absolute I; rather it is the equivalent of the relation of replicant memories and thought to the self-conscious I doing the thinking. 'Everything that I positively am, every enunciated content I can point at and say "that's me", is not I; I am only the void that remains, the empty distance toward every content' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 40). In Lacanian terms the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enunciated are distinct. There is a gap which separates the two and which renders the former at once inaccessible and impossible.

Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = x. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever. (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 40)³⁸

³⁸ Žižek makes the following comment on this passage relating it back to the problem that Kant faced: 'And my - Hegelian- point here that 'I think' stands in exactly the same relationship to the Thing-in-itself: it designates a hole, a gap, in it and as such it opens up, within the domain of Things which only "truly exist" (i.e., which exist in themselves as opposed to a mere phenomenal experience. In other words, through the "I think", the Thing-in-itself is as it were split and becomes inaccessible to itself in the guise of phenomena. This is the question Kant does not ask: how does the transcendental fact of pure apperception, the "I think", concern Things-in-themselves? The truly Hegelian problem is not to penetrate from the phenomenal surface into Things-in-themselves, but to explain how, within Things, something akin to phenomena could have emerged' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 40).

The self that would predicate its absolute existence renders itself an inaccessible void. There is no content to the thing, which thinks other than the power of predication. 'I am conscious of myself only insofar as I am out of reach to myself qua the real kernel of my being ("I or he or it (the thing) which thinks")' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 40).

Self-consciousness involves an inherent decentring more radical than subject –object opposition, as this decentring is what constitutes the Subject as such. The split between the thinking thing and the 'I' that is thought represents the absolute divide or gap (which is the motivating force behind the drive to fuse thought and being). The compulsion (or root desire) that surrounds this construct (the compulsion to repeat) is aimed ultimately at repeating the self (at making the self repeatable) and the construct, as a whole, is nothing other than that brought about by the death drive. The Subject 'gets nothing in exchange for everything' as it 'passes into nothing other than an empty container' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 40).

Why Hegel?

Žižek's unique understanding of Lacan is brought about through fusing Lacan with George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel's philosophy describing the emergence of consciousness, spirit, or mind out of unconsciousness and death, does not turn from negation or presume to fill it in. In Žižek's reading this constitutes the way through the Lacanian sin system. Hegel uses this negation in an energetics that duplicates Lacan, and this is taken up in Žižek's rereading (*après coup*)

of Lacan. Hegel's philosophy does not turn from the predicament encountered in psychoanalysis, but it is precisely this predicament from and in which he works.

The Hegelian dialectic is not an epistemological program aimed at attaining a philosophical truth. It is a dialectic grounded in an ontology and orientation that revolves around death and negation. It is a description of the emergence of the conscious ('spiritual') self from the abyss of the unconscious. Death though, is the engine that keeps the move toward self-conscious realization running. Life and death are not irreconcilable opposites, but are two sides – *the* two sides, in the dialectic of human consciousness. The natural tendency though is to close the eyes to the true nature of the Subject. As Žižek puts it in the title of one of his books, echoing Hegel, what is needed is to 'tarry with the negative'.

Hegel's pronouncement of the death of God, unlike the atheistic denial of God, does not presume to pass over the negation of the unconscious. Just the opposite, the death of God in Christ points to the absolute mediation of negation as it is experienced in death. Even God must die in Christ. The death and resurrection are traditionally co-opted into a Chalcedonian distinction in the God/man, which in turn testifies to the split in the human condition between the body and the immortal soul. Jesus often simply serves as another evidence that death is not important in light of innate immortality. The death of God in Christ makes of death an absolute that would undermine any onto-theological epistemological approach to truth. His dialectic is not

between two separate ontological categories. He undermines this traditional dualism between heaven and earth or the future versus the present.

For Hegel, death constitutes an internal and determinate negation rather than a sudden disruptive event that strikes from without. Death is a necessary and inseparable aspect of Spirit, an analogue of the very negativity that drives the dialectic onward and leads to the culminating experience of absolute knowing at the conclusion of the *Phenomenology*.³⁹

Hegel poses the possibility of being an atheist in the Lacanian sense. Hegel's Christ does not pass over the real but is an incarnation of the impossible real.

The *death* of the divine Man, as *death* is abstract negativity, the immediate result of the movement which ends only in *natural* universality. Death loses this natural meaning in spiritual self-consciousness, i.e. it comes to be its just stated Notion; death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz. the non-being of this particular individual, into the *universality* of the Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected.

(*Phenomenology*, 475)

While it might be said that Hegel's philosophy anticipates Lacanian psychoanalysis, in Žižek's rereading of Lacan through Hegel it seems

³⁹ Sean Ireton, *An Ontological Study of Death: From Hegel to Heidegger* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 62.

that Lacan has simply articulated and built upon the Hegelian notion of unconsciousness as the unconscious fear of death.

The bondsman's fear of his master poses the possibility in Hegel's estimate of addressing and facing the true fear. Though 'servitude is not yet aware that this truth is implicit in it' the slave relationship contains 'within itself this truth of pure negativity and being-for-self' (*Phenomenology*, 117). The slave, as opposed to the master, is presented with an object (the master) that embodies the reality of a fear, which is so pervasive that it might otherwise control his life out of reach of his recognition. 'For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord' (*Phenomenology*, 117).

The lord's embodiment of death presents the possibility that the servant will realize that this fear of the master arises from a more profound and all pervasive fear. There is the possibility of coming to an authentic realization of 'pure-being-for-self' in which the controlling fear in one's life is exposed.

In that experience it has been quite unmoved, has trembled in every failure of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal moment, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure being-for-self, which consequently is implicit in this consciousness. (*Phenomenology*, 117)

In the face of an authentic fear of death, that is naming the fear for what it is, the stable order of the world in its inauthentic form melts away. The bondsman is enabled through the realization of the nature of this fear to come to a proper self-consciousness. The unconscious fear had produced a world subject to liquefaction [*Flüsigwerden*].⁴⁰ This world in which the slave had total dependence on the master is undone when the slave recognizes that this structure is secondary in comparison to the reality of death. Death or negativity is the 'principle of motion' or the negative 'moving principle' (*Phenomenology*, 21). It is not that this negation lies outside of the self, as in the form of the lord. Hegel says, 'the negative is the self' (*Phenomenology*, 21). The negative is not a disruption that comes upon the self, 'although this negative appears at first as a disparity between the "I" and its object, it is just as much the disparity of the substance with itself' (*Phenomenology*, 21). The disparity in object relations, such as the disparity with the master is, in reality, a self-disparity. As Lacan states it in his discussion of the master/slave dialectic: 'There is no subject without, somewhere, aphanisis of the subject, and it is in this alienation, in this fundamental division, that the dialectic of the subject is established' (*Seminar XI*, 221). In Lacan's reading, the dialectic puts on display the primary problem with the Subject.

Where Hegel sees the possibility of working through the dialectic and arriving at a synthesis, Lacan concludes there really is no

⁴⁰ Liquefaction is Sean Ireton's translation, *An Ontological Study of Death: From Hegel to Heidegger*, p. 53.

successful synthesis. The supposed perspective of absolute knowledge 'never leads us to anything that may, in any way, illustrate the Hegelian vision of successive syntheses, nothing that provides even so much as a hint of the moment that Hegel in some obscure way links to this stage' (*Seminar XI*, 221). In Lacan's view Hegel is an idealist and has not grounded his system in material reality, particularly the material reality of language. Hegel is, simply another Cartesian philosopher. 'I should indicate here where the Hegelian lure proceeds from. It is included in the approach of the Cartesian I think, in which I designated the *inaugural* point that introduces the veil of alienation' (*Seminar XI*, 221).

Žižek's Hegelian/Lacanian Lacanian/Hegelian Theology

Žižek's employment of Hegel has resulted in a Hegelian understanding of Lacan and a Lacanian understanding of Hegel. His reading of Hegel is not that Hegelian dialectics is 'a story of progressive overcoming' rather dialectics is for Hegel a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts; 'absolute knowledge' denotes a subjective position which finally accepts 'contradiction' as an internal condition of every identity (*The Sublime Object*, 6). The point has been made that psychoanalytic discourse is theological in that it addresses the Subject as the Subject of the lie. Žižek's employment of Hegel demonstrates the obverse of the same point. Hegel, who counted himself a theologian, might be said to anticipate psychoanalysis. Properly stated, Hegel, in making a departure from a

purely onto-theological understanding, makes a return to theology that in many of its themes reflects a biblical understanding which psychoanalysis will also address.

Žižek's point of departure with Hegel, repeated in many of his works, consists of two key passages which, he suggests, mark Hegel as a philosopher of the real.⁴¹

The human being is this night, this empty nothing that contains everything in its simplicity - an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him - or which are not present. This night, the interior of nature, that exists here - pure self- in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head – there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye - into a night that becomes awful.⁴²

This 'night of the world' describes, according to Žižek, the 'pure self' – 'in which dismembered and disconnected phantasmagorical representations appear and vanish, (it) is the most elementary

⁴¹ Žižek's interest in German idealism is not exclusive to Hegel. For example see F.W.J. Von Schelling, *The Abyss of Freedom: Ages of the World* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000) in which Žižek writes an introductory article, and *The Indivisible Remainder – An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996).

⁴² G.W.F. Hegel, 'Jenaer Realphilosophie', in *Fruhe politische Systeme* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1974) p. 204; translation quoted, from Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1977) pp. 18-19, quoted in Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, pp. 29-30.

manifestation of the power of negativity' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 29-30).

The second quote ties this power of negativity directly to death.

The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the Understanding, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power . . . this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure 'I'.

Death, if that is what we want to call this nonactuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength . . . Spirit is this power . . .

looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called the Subject. (*Phenomenology*, 18-19)

These two passages, both designating the Subject, represent for Žižek two approaches to one and the same Subject. While they seem to speak of opposite phenomena: the first of the pre-rational/prediscursive confused immersion in the purely subjective interior; the second of the abstract discursive activity of Understanding, which decomposes every 'depth' of organic unity into detached elements, they are to be read together. Both refer to the 'mightiest of powers', the power of disrupting the unity of the Real, violently installing the domain of *membra disjecta*, of *phenomena* in the most radical sense of the term (*The Ticklish Subject*, 31). Both passages get at the 'pre-synthetic imagination' in both its destructive power and through this destructive

tearing apart the 'synthetic imagination' (the integrated Subject) is 'woven'.⁴³

While Žižek does not deny that Hegel might be called an idealist, he raises this notion a notch so that it reverses on itself: 'Hegel's thesis that "subject is not a substance" has thus to be taken quite literally . . . subject is appearance itself, brought to its self-reflection: it is something that exists only insofar as it appears to itself' (*Parallax View*, 206). The Hegelian dialectic transforms the notion that the Subject can be reduced to the ideal or the symbolic, to the notion that the ideal or the Subject has no determinate bounds and this realization constitutes it as Subject and is the constitution of reality.

Žižek's rereading of Lacan through Hegel (*après-coup*) takes its sharpest turn at this Hegelian intersection. But even his rereading is based on a close reading of a particular description of Hegel in Lacan. 'Where is one to place [knowledge] in the [discourse of the analyst]? In the place which, in the discourse of the Master, Hegel, the most sublime of hysterics, designates as that of truth' (*Seminar XVII*, 38).⁴⁴ Lacan comes to define hysteria not in terms of particular symptoms but in terms of structure. He regards hysteria as one of the two key

⁴³The death drive is both the motive force behind the synthesis and the threat that this weave - the warp and woof of the imagination - will unravel. There is a certain ambiguity or subtleness in Žižek's picture of the death drive that is often missed by theorists such as Richard Boothby. In Žižek's estimation Boothby, by missing the dual role pictured above simply turns the death drive into its opposite. 'The elegance of Boothby's theory turns on interpreting the death-drive as its very opposite: as the return of the life-force, of the part of the Id excluded by the imposition of the petrified mask of the ego. Thus, what reemerges in the "death-drive" is *ultimately life itself*, and the fact that the ego perceives this return as a death threat precisely confirms the ego's perverted "repressive" character' (Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, p. 179).

⁴⁴ Cited in and translated by Sarah Kay, Žižek, p. 22.

forms of neurosis.⁴⁵ The neurotic structure is itself structured like a question: there is the question (structure) of obsessional neurosis concerning the Subject's existence; and the hysteric's question about the place from which he speaks, as either the subject or object of enunciation. The Subject who is speaking, the one making the enunciation does not appear in the speaking, so this is the Subject of the unconscious. The source of speech is not the ego; language comes from the Other. The statement itself, or the object position is the conscious dimension. Lacan illustrates the two positions through the statement 'I am lying'. The formal structure of the Subject is brought out in the paradoxical nature of any reply. If one replies to the statement, 'You are telling the truth in saying that you are lying', the paradox presents itself. The Subject position split between the two registers is exposed in 'I am lying' as 'the I of the enunciation is not the same as the I of the statement' (*Seminar XI*, 139).

In Žižek's view, this remark of Lacan's is the key to understanding Hegel. Hegel's hysteric structure is not a disability but an ability to see from two perspectives. The Hegelian dialectic is not about bringing two objective points together. The dialectic is about arriving at the truth of the Subject split between the conscious and unconscious. The slave has the opportunity to realize, by turning into himself, that slavery arises from within himself. Žižek sees Hegel's significance for psychoanalysis then, in his taking account of this

⁴⁵ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 78-79.

reflexive structure. For Hegel "self-consciousness" in its abstract definition stands for a purely non-psychological self-reflexive ploy of registering (re-marking) one's own position, of reflexively "taking into account" what one is doing' (*Parallax View*, 65). Žižek illustrates the point with a parallel to Lacan's 'I am lying'. He describes the unwitting portrayal of guilt that occurs in some compulsive act. Though 'I consciously deluded myself that I had the right to do it', this lie is portrayed in some "mysterious and meaningless" act' (*Parallax View*, 66). Unconscious guilt surfaces and it apparently has been registered in some Other who is 'taking note'. Žižek's point is not to in some way account for this other as part of consciousness but to affirm that consciousness arises from the unconscious. Žižek's claim is that Hegel too is not attempting to enclose reality in some holistic system. The system of Hegel is rather to take account of the Other of unconscious as inherent to the system itself. He is not opposing Kant's phenomenal/noumenal take on reality nor is he attempting to fill the gap between perception and reality. 'We do not pass from Kant to Hegel by filling out the empty place of the Thing . . . by affirming this void as such, in its priority to any positive entity that strives to fill it out (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 39).

According to Žižek, Hegel is not attempting to achieve some absolute truth that would encompass all knowledge; rather he is acknowledging the truth of a lack in reality. In Žižek's understanding, 'the Hegelian notion of "reality" as something which exists only in so far as idea is not full actualized, fulfilled: the very existence of (the

“hard”, “external”) reality bears witness to the fact that Idea remains caught in a deadlock’ (*Indivisible Remainder*, 110). The attempt to escape the deadlock accounts for much of Western philosophy, as well as the neuroticism of the death instinct. Žižek suggests another route. Instead of attempting to overcome, fill in, or get at the gap in reality, and thus give way to the compulsion to repeat of the death drive, one should accept the gap as the place in reality from which the Subject is a participant. The point is not to reduce reality to reason or to posit a reason that can embrace all of reality. The two have to be posited as a dialectic in which reason and reality are open.

The theological import of this (worked out in the next chapter) in Žižek’s understanding is to be found in the move from the legal, symbolic, totalizing religion characterized by Judaism to a Christianity, which suspends the law through the death of Christ. The Hegelian notion of the ‘death of God’ in Christ amounts to the death of the ‘transcendent Beyond’ and the opening of reality from within (*Metastases of Enjoyment*, 39). The Hegelian ‘reconciliation is the ‘redoubling of the gap or antagonism’ as the gap that separates opposites ‘is posited as inherent to one of the terms’ (*Parallax View*, 106). So in the case of Christianity ‘the gap that separates God from man is transposed into God himself’, so ‘the properly dialectical trick here is that the very feature which appeared to separate me from God turns out to unite me with God’ (*Parallax View*, 106). In the Hegelian/Lacanian notion of dialectic, Judaism and Christianity posit the gap either as a gap between man and God or as within God,

respectively. Judaism posits the gap between God and man, as God stands outside the Law in that he cannot be properly represented within it. The holy of holies, the empty room, is isolated and separated from everyone by a series of walls emphasizing God's absolute transcendence to the Law. God is the Other, outside of the symbolic, and yet the one who holds the symbolic together. In Christianity there is an overcoming of the law, or an overcoming of metaphysics as Christ's death suspends the symbolic order and institutes the religion of love and Žižek demonstrates this primarily through his reading of Romans 7; the subject of the next chapter.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Pound, Žižek, 108. Though Žižek continues to mine the New Testament, and in particular Paul, his Hegelian/Lacanian reading revolves around a Hegelian understanding of the Trinity in terms of a thesis/antithesis/synthesis. There is the suspension of the Other (thesis) in the death of God (antithesis). The Holy Spirit is 'then posited as a symbolic, de-substantialized fiction' which exists in and through the 'work of each and all' (synthesis) (*Metastases of Enjoyment*, 42). The incarnation is a repetition of the fall, with a Hegelian twist. It repeats with a difference (*Aufhebung*). For Žižek the Fall and its sublation (*Aufhebung*) are the necessary precursors to Christ's redemption. If there had been 'no sin and no law, there would also have been no love' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, p. 87).

CHAPTER 2

SIN DECEIVED ME

The first chapter of this thesis set forth Žižek's notion of the death drive as founded in a primordial lie (the psychology of nihilism) and this chapter will connect this understanding to Žižek's exposition of Romans 7. In Romans 7:7ff the law which gives rise to forbidden desire, in spite of the life that it seemed to offer and due to the deception of sin, produces death for the *ἐγὼ* or a life of death described as an agonistic struggle in which the self is split against itself and sin is in control. Paul sums this up as the 'body of death' (7:24) or 'the law of sin and death' (8:2). The law of sin and death described by Paul is the structuring principle of the Subject in which life is controlled by an orientation to death (a primordial deception and a destructive drive). In his reading of Romans 7 Žižek, following Lacan, interprets the law of sin and death as a picture of the Subject living under the control of the death drive. Žižek finds each of the Lacanian registers in Paul's depiction of the Subject: he equates the law with the symbolic, the *ἐγὼ* or 'I' with the imaginary or the ego, the deception as the fundamental fantasy, and the orientation to death as the work of the real. In Žižek's reading though, he assumes that Paul is not simply depicting the problem, but from 7:1-6 with Paul's illustration of the one who has died to the law, he reads the chapter as Paul's equivalent of 'traversing the fantasy' which he will equate with 'dying to sin'. To depict the origin of the Subject with its entry into life under the law is

already to have passed beyond an unquestioning subjection to the law of sin and death (perversion) to the opening of a new possibility to reconstitute the Subject (hysteria).

This chapter follows Žižek's examination of the steps in Paul's argument, beginning in 7:7ff, and then returns to the material of 7:1-6, which Žižek reads as setting the stage for the rest of the chapter. According to Žižek, in 7:7ff Paul is exposing the perverse understanding behind sin from the position of the Christian (or the hysteric) who has achieved this understanding from 'dying with Christ' as portrayed in 7:1-6.

Žižek's 'Discovery' of His Theory in Romans 7

Both Lacan and Žižek consider the material of Romans 7 an adequate foundation to illustrate much of their theory of the human Subject, hence Žižek's self-description as a 'Pauline materialist' (*Reader*, ix).¹ In this he is following Lacan who identifies his theory of the three registers and their inter-working with Paul's description of the 'I's first encounter with the law and sinful desire. Lacan writes his theory of the death drive into Romans 7:7ff by taking Paul's 'sin' and exchanging it for the 'Thing'. 'Is the Law the Thing? Certainly not! Yet I can only know of the Thing by means of the Law' (*Seminar VII*, 83-84). The 'Thing' names the void of the real around which the imaginary

¹ Žižek works this out in 'The Politics of Truth, or, Alain Badiou as a Reader of St. Paul', *The Ticklish Subject*, 143-4. For Lacan's exposition of Roman's 7 see Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, (London: Routledge, 1992) 83-84.

(Paul's 'I') and the symbolic (the law) orbit. According to Lacan and Žižek, in this passage Paul names each of Lacan's three registers and describes their interrelationship in such a way that both consider their theory a commentary on this passage. While neither bothers to lay out a detailed analysis of this interconnection, the following aims to make explicit how Žižek's theory can be read as a prolonged exposition of Paul's picture of sin –a transgressive relationship to the law –and of the possibility of suspending this relationship.

The Lying Scene of Sin and Death in Romans 7:7ff

Žižek's reading of Paul is primarily carried out in conjunction with his interaction with Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben and Eric Santner.² If one were to form a timeline of his theological thought it would begin with *The Ticklish Subject* in which he discusses his understanding of Paul as compared and contrasted with Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. While his position in regard to Badiou is clear, his position in regard to Paul will continue to develop through his reading and interaction with Santner and Agamben spelled out in *The Monstrosity of Christ, The Puppet and the Dwarf* and anticipated in *The Fragile Absolute* and *On Belief*.³ It is in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* that he takes up a specific focus on Christianity and Paul

² The major influences on his theory are Lacan and Hegel.

³ The primary texts Žižek will reference are Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, and Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). His interaction with Santner, though less sustained, is key to his shift in understanding the unique nature of the Jewish Law.

and delineates a more fully developed reading of Romans 7.⁴ The evolution of his thought as he interacts with Agamben and Santner is toward a more nuanced reading of the Jewish law and Paul's interpretation of it so that he distinguishes two approaches to the law in Romans 7. However, even in *The Ticklish Subject*, in contrast to Badiou, he understands Paul to be describing a two-fold orientation to death in which the fundamental fantasy remains unchallenged (in perversion) or in which there is a traversing of the fantasy (as in hysteria). The section below will first focus on Žižek's interaction with Alain Badiou in the *Ticklish Subject* with the goal of laying out the basics of this two-fold orientation and the following sections will trace the evolution of his thought as a result of his interaction with Santner and Agamben.

Perversion and Hysteria –Is the Law Sin?

Though Žižek, in *The Ticklish Subject*, is primarily focused on Badiou and does not work out a consistent understanding of Paul, he nonetheless lays the groundwork for the development of his understanding of Romans 7:7ff. He will come to see Paul as

⁴ As Adam Kotsko summarizes it Žižek will continue to hold contradictory positions in regard to Romans 7. See Adam Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul'. Kotsko writes, 'It is clear, on the one hand, that Žižek views the Law confronted in Romans 7 as being the normal or "pagan" law that generates its own transgression through the obscene superego supplement. Strangely, Žižek simultaneously claims that the Jewish Law "is already deprived of its superego supplement, not relying on any obscene support," i.e., the Jewish stance toward the law is fundamentally what Paul is after, yet he also follows the long-standing tradition of claiming that, nonetheless, the Jewish Law is "the main target of Paul's critique".' Kotsko's conclusion will not be the one drawn here, namely; that Paul is referencing the pagan law in Romans 7.

developing an understanding consistent with his own view of the Subject as the Subject relates to the law. In *The Ticklish Subject* he initiates the direction in which his theory will develop in subsequent work. His development of the notion of perversion as being that which Paul is resisting though, is not yet accompanied by the full development of the counter proposal of hysteria.⁵ His complete development of these two structures in relation to Paul will evolve, but already in *The Ticklish Subject* there are enough indicators of the full commentary that it provides the foundation of his approach to Romans 7, which he will continue to develop. The focus in this section, following this development, will be on perversion and will provide only an initial introduction to the possibilities of hysteria in his understanding.

The original question that Paul raises in Romans 7:7 has to do with confusing or equating law and sin. 'Is the law sin (Rom. 7:7b)?' Lacan poses the question as, 'Is the Law the Thing?' (*Seminar III*, 83). Taking into account that, for Lacan, law equals the symbolic and the *Thing* represents the real, it could as well be read as, 'Is the symbolic the real?' The answer is, in both instances, 'Certainly not!' (Rom.7:7). To confuse or to fuse law and sin is to fuse the desire of the symbolic order with the desire for death under the guise of attaining life.⁶ It is to

⁵ Hysteria as the counter to perversion is valorised in Žižek and perhaps is as close as he comes to the notion of salvation. The hysteric, in Lacan's explanation, questions the symbolic (*Seminar III*, 170-175). Žižek equates hysteria with 'failed interpellation' (*For They Know Not*, 101). He particularly likes Lacan's notion that Hegel is 'the most sublime of hysterics' (*Seminar XVII*, 38).

⁶ It is this confusion that Žižek accuses Alain Badiou of generating. Where Badiou would have Paul equate sin and law Žižek is working out a two-fold approach or orientation to the law.

remove the possibility of a desire or of a law or symbolic that is not controlled by a morbid desire, which Žižek equates with perversion.⁷ Quoting Romans 7:7-14 Žižek concludes that these verses stand in contrast to the perverse understanding of the law. Perversion in Lacan and Žižek is a disavowal of castration or a disavowal of anything lacking, and the pervert takes it upon himself to complete or cover up what is lacking (*Seminar IV*, 192-193). The pervert seeks to completely establish the law through a transgressive relationship to the law –sinning so as to increase grace or merging law and sin into two sides of the same coin with each side dependent upon the other.⁸ As Žižek explains,

This passage, of course, must be seen in its context: in the whole of this part of the Epistle, the problem St Paul struggles with is how to avoid the trap of perversion, that is, of a Law that generates its transgression, since it needs it in order to assert itself as Law. (*Ticklish Subject*, 148)⁹

Where for Badiou it is the law *per se* which provokes desire and death, Žižek depicts Paul as struggling with and departing from a perverse understanding of the law and posing a hysteric or feminine orientation

⁷ Žižek, unlike Badiou, will distinguish between the death drive and a straightforward desire for death. For Badiou, death drive, law and sin are all caught in a morbid desire for death. See Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 86 ff and Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 145ff.

⁸ Perversion seeks to complete or establish the Law, while the feminine position identifies with the lack in the Law.

⁹ So Paul is posing both the perverse reading and demonstrating in his questions the hysteric structure.

to law.¹⁰ Paul, as opposed to the perverse understanding which refuses all doubts or questions about the law, takes the position of the hysteric and poses a series of seemingly unanswerable questions (7:7ff). The hysteric or feminine structure gets at the delimitation or the exception which serves as subjective ground of the law. Where the pervert closes off any question as to the desire of the Other or of the law, the hysteric questions the very structure of desire: 'Am I a man or a woman?' or 'What is a woman (*Seminar III*, 170-175)?' Or as in the implied question in Romans 7:15 – 'Why do I do what I do not want to do?' In the hysteric structure desire, as desire of the Other, is subject to exposure.¹¹ Hysteric questioning, as opposed to unquestioning perversion, might serve as the sight of a possible break, and through traversing the fantasy there is the possibility of modifying one's subjective stance.¹² The hysteric is precisely the one who is in the position that Paul is describing, of discovering that the Other is an impostor and that it is not the law but sinful desire that is at work.¹³ The pervert on the other hand closes off the question of the nature or source of desire by equating it with the law.

According to Žižek, Paul, in raising the question 'Is the Law sin?' is referring back to an understanding he has already described when

¹⁰ This reading is true to Žižek but as indicated is not spelled out in the *Ticklish Subject*. Žižek sees Paul as going beyond the perverse position to the position of the hysteric.

¹¹ Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 78-79.

¹² See Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul', 80-81. Lacan's point in regard to traversing the fantasy is worked out in *Seminar XI*, 273f.

¹³ See Žižek, *For they Know Not*, 101, 156. For a succinct explanation see Sarah Kay, *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003) 164.

he first raises the question 'Is the Law Sin?'¹⁴ Žižek points to Romans 3:5-8 as an example of this notion of law that generates its own transgression. 'This "Let us do evil so that good may come [from it]" is the most succinct definition of the short circuit of the perverse position' (*Ticklish Subject*, 148). And 'St Paul's entire effort is to break out of this vicious cycle in which the prohibitive law and its transgression generate and support each other' (*Ticklish Subject*, 149).

It is originally Lacan's point that perversion does not refer so much to abnormal sexual practices as to a structure in which the Subject sides with the law in the attempt to escape its punishing effect and to partake of its surplus enjoyment (*Ticklish Subject*, 247-251). Beneath the denial of castration, Lacan posits the denial of death; both denials constitute a refusal of life's contingent and dependent condition. The pervert essentially is refusing the difference between the sexes and serves as a stand-in to provide phallic enjoyment to the Subject behind the law. In denying castration, a secondary denial beneath which is the disavowal of death, the pervert denies the mother's lack of the phallus (sexual difference), or he denies any enjoyment or Subject position other than that of servant to the law or superego (*Seminar IV*, 194).

There is a denial of sexual difference and of death in what Žižek describes as giving oneself completely over to the symbolic without regard for finitude and mortality: '[P]erversion can be seen as a

¹⁴ In fact Paul raises this same question at least three times in Romans 6-7 alone (6:1, 15; 7:7).

defence against the motif of “death and sexuality”, against the threat of mortality as well as the contingent imposition of sexual difference’ (*Reader*, 117). The pervert lives in a fantasy world, which Žižek likens to that of cartoons in which one can ‘survive any catastrophe’ and human sexuality is reduced to a game. ‘As such, the pervert’s universe is the universe of pure symbolic order, of the signifier’s game running its course, unencumbered by the Real of human finitude’ (*Reader*, 117). The pervert in identifying sin with the law and in denying death and sexuality cannot raise the question of Rom. 7:7 but presumes that the law is sin and that he has access to the power of the law through sin. While Paul, in Žižek’s view, demonstrates how this perverse position arises, he is able to do this only because he is no longer deceived as to the source of his desire.

Forbidden Desire – You Shall Not Covet

Though Žižek and Lacan pose a more nuanced view of desire, they are in large measure in agreement with Badiou as to the desire which Paul describes as being provoked by the law. ‘*Sin is the life of desire as autonomy, as automatism.*’¹⁵ Sin is the repetition of desire, which due to its compulsive autonomy Paul describes as a force unto itself. In his commentary on Romans 7:7-23, Žižek follows Giorgio Agamben’s understanding that Paul is fusing sin and the law in his formula ‘You shall not covet’. As Agamben notes, Paul offers such a

¹⁵ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 79.

drastic abbreviation of the original Mosaic commandment that it 'renders the commandment unobservable and equally impossible to formulate'.¹⁶ Instead of describing, along with Moses, which particular objects are not to be desired (the neighbour's woman, house, slave, mule, etc.) Paul says, 'Do not desire' (Romans 7:7). 'The law here is no longer *entolē*, a norm that clearly prescribes or prohibits something ("Do not desire" is not a commandment); instead, the law is only the knowledge of guilt. . . .'¹⁷ As Badiou describes it, 'law is what, by designating its object, delivers desire to its repetitive autonomy.'¹⁸ In this instance though, the only object named is desire itself, which gets at the self-binding nature of the death drive. Desire folds in upon itself and the compulsion to repeat is born, as in Paul's picture, death and sin are pictured as animating the Subject.

And I was alive apart from the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died; and the commandment, which was unto life, this I found *to be* unto death: for sin, finding occasion, through the commandment beguiled me, and through it slew me. . . . So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me. (Romans 7:9-11, 17)¹⁹

¹⁶ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 108.

¹⁷ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 108.

¹⁸ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 79.

¹⁹ Unless indicated otherwise all Scripture quotations will come from the *American Standard Version*.

The Subject has ironically become one who is animated by a force for death. 'The law gives life to death' and 'death of life is the Self (in the position of the dead). The life of death is sin.'²⁰

Lacan calls this desire which is a force for death *jouissance*. One's orientation to death, which may manifest itself in several key ways, is the role of *jouissance* or Lacan's notion of finding a pleasure that exceeds the bounds of the pleasure principle in painful pleasure or a pleasurable suffering (*Seminar VII*, 184). *Jouissance* names the desire to break through the pleasure principle towards the Thing that holds out an excess of pleasure. Thus Lacan links it directly to the death drive and 'the path towards death' (*Seminar XVII*, 17).²¹

Where the neurotic aims at *jouissance* by a simultaneous acknowledgement of the law and the attempt to snatch back from the Other part of the stolen *jouissance*, 'the pervert directly elevates the enjoying big Other into the agency of the Law' (*Reader*, 117). In the pervert's perspective, pleasure is denied by the agency of the law because this Other itself wants all the pleasure. The pervert seeks to establish and integrate himself into the law by providing this transgressive pleasure to the agent behind the law – the big Other. 'A pervert fully acknowledges the obscene underside of the Law, since he gains satisfaction from the very obscenity of the gesture of installing the rule of Law – that is, out of "castration"' (*Reader*, 117).

²⁰ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 83.

²¹ Quoted in Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 92.

For example, the exhibitionist puts himself on display so as to become the instrument of the Other's pleasure and finds his enjoyment in being reduced to an object of pleasure (*Ecrits*, 320). The implicit claim is that there is pleasure to be had; there is an unlimited, infinite Thing whose power can be established and tapped by servicing it. In Žižek's description, 'for the pervert, the object of his desire is Law itself – the Law is the Ideal he longs for, he wants to be fully acknowledged by the Law, integrated into its functioning' (*Reader*, 117).

Žižek takes up Lacan's illustration of *jouissance*, employing Kant's example of the man given the choice of committing adultery if he knew he would suffer capital punishment as a result. Kant presumes that the building of a gallows outside the door where the girl of his dreams awaits would be enough to dissuade him.²² Žižek, following Lacan, notes, in contrast to Kant, that many Subjects 'can only enjoy a night of passion fully if some form of "gallows" is threatening him' (*Reader*, 289). Lacan's original point was to make a distinction between *jouissance* and that pleasure to be had under Freud's pleasure principle. Where the pleasure principle can be quite sensible and a delimitation of pleasure, *jouissance* is beyond the pleasure principle on the side of the death drive.

The death drive is not so much a conscious embrace of death, as it might appear in the example from Kant, as an attempt at an eternalizing repetition of the same. It is a repetitive attempt to attain

²² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York, Macmillan, 1993), 30, quoted in *The Žižek Reader*, 288.

the satisfaction or enjoyment which can only be achieved with 'the disappearance of this life' and 'a return to the inanimate' (*Seminar XVII*, 51).²³ The enjoyment held out in the death-for-sex scenario of Kant is precisely the requirement of *jouissance*, in which absolute enjoyment would achieve a final and full return to perceived plenitude through an ecstasy so extreme it involves dissolution of the Subject (a return to the inanimate). There is a desire that works against life in its attempt to secure a fullness of being.²⁴

Jouissance is, then, the pure substance of the death drive, which Lacan does not hesitate to call evil: 'we cannot avoid the formula that *jouissance* is evil' (*Seminar VII*, 184-185).²⁵ The suffering and pain that *jouissance* calls for is a masochistic evil, but as Lacan makes clear it is the pain and suffering of the neighbour that is required as well: 'it is suffering because it involves suffering for my neighbour' (*Seminar VII*, 184). He quotes from Freud to make the point:

Man tries to satisfy his need for aggression at the expense of his neighbour, to exploit his work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to appropriate his

²³ Quoted in Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 237-238.

²⁴ The logic of sacrifice explains why one might give up his life for an evening of pleasure. The point is not the pleasure – but the absolute requirement of sacrifice succeeds in covering the nonexistence of the symbolic Other. 'Sacrifice is a guarantee that "the Other exists": that there is an Other who can be appeased by means of the sacrifice' (*Enjoy Your Symptom*, 56).

²⁵ The quotation also reads: 'Those who like fairy stories turn a deaf ear to talk of man's innate tendencies to "evil, aggression, destruction, and thus also to cruelty' (*SE XXI*, iii) (*Seminar VII*, 185).

goods, to humiliate him, to inflict suffering on him, to torture and kill him. (*SE XXI*, iii)²⁶

Lacan explains that *jouissance* is the marker of evil and 'Freud's use of the good can be summed up in the notion that it keeps us a long way from our *jouissance*' (*Seminar VII*, 185). Lacan and Žižek go on to question the possibility of love of neighbour in such a context and both Ricoeur and Milbank wonder how pleasure and desire are to be distinguished from *jouissance* on this understanding.²⁷ In the Lacanian universe it becomes questionable if the woman of Romans 7:1-3 can have desire and love for her husband since *jouissance* pervades desire.

Though Lacan's picture of desire and *jouissance* are sometimes pitted against one another, his descriptions of the two elements converge and explain the other.²⁸ In Lacan's formula, 'Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking' (*Seminar II*, 223). The screen of the law seems to hide a fullness of being (the Thing of the real) that is only accessible by penetrating the screen and obtaining the fullness the Subject of the law

²⁶ Quoted in *Seminar VII*, 185.

²⁷ Ricoeur questions the independence of the pleasure principle from the death drive: 'If pleasure expresses a reduction of tension, and if the death instinct marks a return of living matter to the inorganic, it must be said that pleasure and death are both on the same side' (Ricoeur, *Freud & Philosophy*, 319). See *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 120ff.

²⁸ Nestor Braunstein distinguishes desire and *jouissance* as is indicated in the title of his article 'Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan' in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, Ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 102-115. Just as Freud, through the Nirvana Principle, came to the realization that the death drive makes its appearance through *Eros* Lacan saw the death drive as pervasive (*Seminar XI*, 257) – and so the neat distinction Braunstein draws between desire and *jouissance* is not entirely convincing. While a distinction might be made there seems to be a convergence between desire and *jouissance*.

is holding out. As Žižek explains it, 'What we experience as "reality" discloses itself against the background of the lack, of the absence of it, of the Thing, of the mythical object whose encounter would bring about the full satisfaction of the drive' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 37).

Lacan describes this drive toward satisfaction as an attempt to achieve unity or oneness with the self through the Other. 'Love is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One, which leads us to the impossibility of establishing the relationship between "them two" . . . them-two sexes' (*Seminar XX*, 6).²⁹ He describes *jouissance* as the drive to become one through two – which is why he dismisses the sexual part of the sexual relation.³⁰ There is no real relation and the erotic aspect is not integrated into the desire.³¹ This sort of 'love, in its essence, is narcissistic, and reveals that the substance of what is supposedly object-like . . . sustains desire through its lack of satisfaction (*insatisfaction*), and even its

²⁹ Lacan's description here sounds very much like Freud's Nirvana Principle (*SE*, 18:55-56), which describes a striving toward a release of tension and a return to a unified Oneness that Freud concludes is a fusion of the death drive and the pleasure principle (*SE* 19:160). Lacan concludes that the death drive is not a separate drive 'The distinction between the life drive and the death drive is true in as much as it manifests two aspects of the drive' (*Seminar XI*, 257).

³⁰ Here, over and against Braunstein, Lacan discusses the lack of the other in the same breath as he talks of *jouissance*. Braunstein's oppositional definition between *jouissance* and desire provides a bridge to their convergence: 'Jouissance is the dimension discovered by the analytic experience that confronts desire as its opposite pole. If desire is fundamentally lack, lack in being, jouissance is positivity, it is a "something" lived by a body when pleasure stops being pleasure' (Braunstein, '*Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan*', 104). *Jouissance* might be described as the positive experience of an absence – making absence substitute for a positive experience. Agamben describes this as Aristotle's notion of privation: 'privation still implies a reference to the being or form deprived which manifests itself through its lack' (Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 102).

³¹ In Freud the death drive stands over and against the Pleasure Principle so the erotic is lacking in the death drive – even though it may fuse with Eros (*SE XXI*, 120). The question that remains to be answered is if Lacan and Žižek leave any role for the reality of the erotic and if good and bad desire can be distinguished.

impossibility' (*Seminar XX*, 6). The Other holds forth the (im)possibility of the Thing, creating the conditions for a *jouissance*, a desire that is at once impossible and beyond satisfaction. This impossible desire and loss (or lack of being) cannot be resolved through a corporeal coupling as it is a loss constituted in the symbolic (the 'enunciable' in Lacan's explanation) (*Seminar XX*, 7). It is a loss that escapes or is beyond enunciation (the law).

Žižek does not presume that Paul is offering a resolution to this covetous desire, but by questioning it and demonstrating the agonistic struggle it institutes Paul is describing the founding and necessary elements of the Subject. To resolve the struggle, making the two one, would mean a loss of the Subject. As Žižek explains it, what is being described is not functioning at an epistemological level but at the level of desire. It is only experienced as epistemological when the limit of the law is thought to hide something of substance. The Kantian error is to miss the point that finitude creates the appearance of an infinite beyond (the noumenal behind the phenomenal). 'The limit ontologically *precedes* its beyond' or the law precedes the illusion of a transgressive fullness beyond (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 37).³² According to Žižek, the illusion is necessary, but as with Paul, it is subject to questioning.

³²Lacan illustrates *jouissance* with reference to Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise and the ever receding finish line: 'It is quite clear that Achilles can only pass the tortoise – he cannot catch up with it. He only catches up with it at infinity (*infinitude*)' (*Seminar XX*, 8).

The problem the pervert faces and which his perversion positively answers is that the law 'is not fully established' and is thus his lost object of desire (*Reader*, 118). In Žižek's estimation, Romans 7 deals with this ambiguity; where Paul would maintain it (the ambiguity and question), the pervert would close off any question. Where the hysteric relationship to the Other is one of an open question, the pervert presumes to immediately know what the Other wants.³³ For the pervert there is no question and there is no suspension of knowledge.³⁴ The law and the symbolic rule and the pervert effectively enacts this rule and this universe within himself by becoming the servant of the law (*Reader*, 117).

In following the progression of Žižek's commentary of Romans 7:7, he accounts then, for the perverse position as involving a fusion of sin and the law which results in the perverse desire of the death drive (*jouissance*). This structure, identifying sin and the law, is founded on the fundamental fantasy which Žižek finds in Paul's description of the deception of sin (the subject of the section below).

The Fundamental Fantasy – Sin Deceived Me

The key element of the Subject exposed by the perverse structure, but which is not exclusive to this structure, is the fundamental fantasy or the primordial lie which serves to ground the Subject. As the first chapter of this thesis indicated, the fundamental fantasy describes

³³ Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul', 46.

³⁴ Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 140.

the dynamic of the interworking of the three registers of the Subject and, as demonstrated below, for Žižek it is also the primordial deception that stands at the head of Romans 7:7 and culminates in Romans 7:11 and following. 'For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death' (Romans 7:11).³⁵ Žižek sees the fundamental fantasy as the point of departure but also the orienting factor in the structure of the Subject. There is the perverse relation to this deception, but there is also the departure from this perverse relation which he will connect to Romans 7. His primary dialogue partner in *The Ticklish Subject*, Badiou reads Romans 7 as dealing with the issue of how to break with the law and death drive and sees truth as an event totally cut off from these negative elements.³⁶ Žižek's counter to this is to set forth a reading in which Paul distinguishes two orientations, both of which operate under the law and death drive but one of which is completely subject to deception (the pervert) and the other which is not unaware of this deception (the hysteric). The perverse orientation is one that lines up more with Badiou's understanding of the law, but in Žižek's estimate the issue is a reorientation to the law and death drive, which he will work out as part of the hysteric structure.

³⁵ *New International Version*.

³⁶ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 6 – describes his understanding of Paul's theology as an attempt 'To sharply separate each truth procedure from the cultural "historicity wherein opinion presumes to dissolve it' Žižek would counter this understanding that historicism is only escapable in that which exceeds the historical; namely the rotary motion of the drives (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 37).

Žižek illustrates what he calls the 'perverse access to Being' using Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, from a section entitled 'Of the Wise Adaptation of Man's Cognitive Faculties to his Practical Vocation'. The wisdom and practicality refer to Kant's implicit realization that coming too close to the Other would entail complete loss of freedom and total servitude. What would happen if one presumed to have total access to the noumenal domain (the sort entailed in the perverse structure)? 'The conduct of man . . . would be changed into mere mechanism, where as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.'³⁷ Kant's description not only articulates the perverse position of presuming to know and be controlled by full exposure to the Other, it also exposes the 'fundamental fantasy' or as Žižek calls it in this instance, the 'Kantian fundamental fantasy'. The perverse position puts on display this necessary element behind human subjectivity *per se*. The human Subject, in the Lacanian understanding, has created its agency out of a presumed access to Being.

The fundamental fantasy maintains the notion of a free agent only with the positing of this other scene where Being cannot be approached too closely. 'No wonder, then, that the fundamental fantasy is *passive*, "masochistic", reducing me to an object acted on by others: it is as if only the experience of the utmost pain can guarantee the subject access to Being' (*Reader*, 119). In the perverse structure,

³⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 152-153, quoted in *The Žižek Reader*, 119.

giving oneself over to passive, puppet like acts of perverse suffering taps into Being. The perverse structure posits an excess of pleasure that can only be obtained beyond the symbolic in acts of masochism or sadomasochism. It is this excess that structures the Subject's relation to the law or the symbolic. Kant's *noumenon* posits the fantasmatic support of the symbolic. To penetrate this 'mystery' is not to expose some hidden meaning, rather it is to expose the fact that the Subject is structured around an absence, and the reification of this absence in the fundamental fantasy marks the origin and core of the Subject. It is not the noumenal real that harbours danger for the Subject; it is the exposure of this fundamental fantasy that threatens the consistency of the existence of the Subject (*Reader*, 119).

Paul, in the Lacanian understanding Žižek is developing, is at once acknowledging the perverse position and going beyond it in describing how sin and the law have become fused in and through a deception (the fundamental fantasy). The explanation for this fusion has to do with the primordial deception that both Paul and Lacan see as the founding gesture of the fallen Subject.

Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. (Rom. 7:9-11)

In Lacan's rewriting of the passage this becomes,

But when the commandment appeared, the Thing flared up, returned once again, and I met my death. And for me the commandment that was supposed to lead to life turned out to lead to death, for the Thing found a way and thanks to the commandment seduced me; through it I came to desire death. (Seminar VII, 83-84)³⁸

In Lacan's explanation, he raises the question, which Žižek repeats, as to whether the dialectic between law and desire is definitive of psychoanalysis.³⁹ The answer being worked out, Paul's 'Certainly not!', recognizes the perverse structure but in recognizing it is going beyond it. The structure and failure of the perverse Subject stand on one side of this 'Certainly not!' but Romans 7:7ff and psychoanalysis articulate a position that goes beyond it. The pervert directly desires death or presumes to enact the law through its transgression and in the process has become the unquestioning subject of a deception. In Žižek's understanding, Paul and psychoanalysis will question the lie, if not exactly expose it.

It is not that Paul, in Žižek's estimation, is aiming at some truth beyond the primordial lie, as if uncovering this lie will reveal the truth; rather by reaching a level of awareness of the *proton pseudos* (the fundamental lie) and death drive there is the possibility of re-founding

³⁸ Žižek quotes this passage in *The Ticklish Subject*, 152-153.

³⁹ As Žižek puts it, "The crucial thing here is...for Lacan, there *is* 'a way of discovering the relationship to *das Ding* somewhere beyond the Law' – the whole point of the ethics of psychoanalysis is to formulate the possibility of a relationship that avoids the pitfalls of the superego inculcation that accounts for the 'morbid' enjoyment of sin..." (*The Ticklish Subject*, 153). The quote from Lacan is from *Seminar VII*, 84.

the Subject or bringing about a radical possibility on the order of love.⁴⁰ It is uncovering this dynamic and living within it that is opened by the hysteric structure, which gets at the dynamic possibility for change. Where the pervert is reduced to the compulsion to repeat, the hysteric structure is valorised by Žižek as it holds open the possibility of founding a new mode of subjectivity with the capacity to love.⁴¹ This love is not merely a 'narcissistic screen obfuscating the truth of desire, but the way to "gentrify" and come to terms with the traumatic drive' (*Ticklish Subject*, 162). Death drive and negativity are not, then, the problem but are part of the solution.⁴² Likewise, truth, in Žižek's understanding, is not a dissolution of deception, as truth inheres in the deception and is manipulated through the death drive and traversing the fantasy (as explained below).

The Question of Truth in Romans 7:7-23

Žižek's difference with Badiou concerning the connection between death (drive) and resurrection can be reduced to the singular issue of the nature of truth. For Badiou the Subject of the law is split between life and death and the Truth-Event or resurrection is a

⁴⁰ Again, this is not a possibility completely worked out until the writing of *The Puppet and the Dwarf*. In regard to the nature of the Truth-Event Žižek pits Lacan against Badiou and Paul (*Ticklish Subject*, 153). But it is precisely on this point that his understanding of Paul will evolve.

⁴¹ The hysteric position is one that questions the Law or the symbolic and opens the possibility of an alternative subjective position, the feminine, which is not accounted for by the Law. The hysteric structure then involves the possibility of a break and of a traversing of the fantasy (*Ticklish Subject*, 154). See Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, 35-36.

⁴² Adam Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul', 47.

complete departure from this dialectic. As Žižek states it, Badiou 'radically dissociates Death and Resurrection: they are not the same, they are not even dialectically interconnected The Truth-Event is simply a radically New Beginning' (*Ticklish Subject*, 146). As a result, where Badiou contrasts Romans 7:7-23 with Romans 6 and 8, Žižek's focus is on the dynamics presented within Romans 7 in which he finds both the death drive and a resolution to sin or perversion.

The point for Žižek is not to escape the law or death drive or to in some way found a Subject beyond the law. 'But St Paul's entire effort is to break out of this vicious cycle in which the prohibitive law and its transgression generate and support each other' (*Ticklish Subject*, 149). The solution which Žižek will propose is not an abolition or departure from law and death drive on the order of Badiou. In his estimate this is to remain 'constrained to the field of knowledge, unable to approach the properly positive dimension of Truth-processes' (*Ticklish Subject*, 162). For Žižek and Lacan 'a Truth-Event can operate only against the background of the traumatic encounter with the undead/monstrous Thing' (*Ticklish Subject*, 162). Psychoanalysis does not presume to synthesize or posit a 'new harmony' or 'a new Truth-Event' (*Ticklish Subject*, 153). It 'merely wipes the slate clean for one' (*Ticklish Subject*, 153).⁴³

⁴³ While Žižek argues that both Paul and psychoanalysis share the goal of escaping perversion with its 'superego inculcation that accounts for the "morbid" enjoyment of sin', he assumes that Paul and Badiou both make the same mistake with regard to the death drive and the Law (*Ticklish Subject*, 153). 'It would therefore be tempting to risk a Badiouian-Pauline reading of the end of psychoanalysis, determining it as a New Beginning, a symbolic 'rebirth' – the radical restructuring of

The Lacanian claim is that the negative gesture of 'wiping the slate clean' is "sutured" with the arrival of a new Truth-Event' (*Ticklish Subject*, 154). Death drive and negativity stand as the ground functioning as the condition of any identification with a Cause (*Ticklish Subject*, 154). For Badiou truth is direct identification with an Event, so that the truth is *sui generis* and disconnected from the law and death. Žižek counters this with the understanding that 'one cannot directly have faith in a Truth-Event; every such Event ultimately remains a semblance obfuscating a preceding Void whose Freudian name is *death drive*' (*Ticklish Subject*, 154).

So in regard to Romans 7:7-23 the key issue is the role of the death drive and its relationship to truth, which in turn raises the question as to how an authentic Truth-Event is to be distinguished from the inauthentic sort. For Badiou the death drive and perversion amount to the same thing, so that truth is necessarily a departure from the death drive. Žižek maintains that accounting for the death drive makes the difference between the possibility of authenticity and total cultural relativism. The 'difference lies in the fact that in a Truth-Event the void of the death drive, of radical negativity, a gap that momentarily suspends the Order of Being, continues to resonate' (*Ticklish Subject*,

the analysand's subjectivity in such a way that the vicious cycle of the superego is suspended, left behind . . . Lacan's way is not that of St Paul or Badiou: psychoanalysis is not 'psychosynthesis'; it does not already *posit* a 'new harmony', a new Truth-Event; it – as it were – merely wipes the slate clean for one' (*Ticklish Subject*, 153). This is a position that Žižek will abandon and which even in the *Ticklish Subject* is not entirely consistent, as he also distinguishes Paul's and Badiou's position.

162-163). In Lacanian psychoanalysis the standard for truthfulness has to do with confronting the fundamental fantasy. Only in traversing the fantasy does one arrive at the limit experience of destitution and exposure of the incompleteness or inherent contradiction of the law.

For Žižek the death drive and its attendant categories can be tapped as a source to unplug from perversion and to come to an understanding of Being as sustained in and through the negation of the Subject. The encounter with the death drive is a 'limit-experience' which 'is the irreducible/constitutive condition of the (im) possibility of the creative act of embracing a Truth-Event: it opens up and sustains the space for the Truth-Event, yet its excess always threatens to undermine it' (*Ticklish Subject*, 161). Behind the good, the true and the beautiful is the constitutive background of the death drive – 'the Void that sustains the place in which one can formulate symbolic fictions that we call "truths"' (*Ticklish Subject*, 161). As the next section demonstrates, this means that the means of manipulating the truth is through tapping into the underlying ground of the death drive and approaching the void of deception in which the symbolic truth is grounded. The death of Christ and dying with Christ provides access to this deception undergirding the truth.

Reading Romans 7 in Light of Christ's Cry of Dereliction and the Subject of Nothing

The approach of Badiou and Žižek to Romans 7 reflects their divergent understandings of the meaning of the death of Christ. Where

for Badiou Christ's death simply prepares the site for the Truth-Event while it is the resurrection which constitutes the Event in a *sui generis* fashion, for Žižek the death of Christ is central. He repeatedly refers to Christ's cry of dereliction: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34/Matt. 27:46).⁴⁴ As Marcus Pound summarizes it, 'Christ was the first to "end metaphysics", signalled by both his cry of abandonment and his ultimate death . . .'⁴⁵ As Žižek puts it, 'In Lacanian terms, we are dealing with the suspension of the big Other, which guarantees the subject's access to reality: in the experience of the death of God, we stumble upon the fact that "the big Other doesn't exist"' (*Metastases of Enjoyment*, 42). This is a conclusion he arrives at prior to writing *Ticklish Subject* and which he will continue to mine.

In describing the death of Christ, Žižek equates life and death: 'Life and death here are not polar opposites, contrasts, within the same global Whole (field of reality), but the same thing viewed from a global perspective' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 292). He concludes, 'the (temporal) death of Christ is his very (eternal) life "in becoming"' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 292). Death and life are not in some sort of 'pseudo-dialectic relation as utter loss/negation (death) and its reversal into absolute life' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 292). The death of Christ is the founding of the community of the Spirit and this community is his resurrection. 'That is to say that Christ's death, in the Hegelian reading,

⁴⁴ See *On Belief*, 106-151; *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 171; *The Parallax View*, 106; *For They Know Not What They Do*, liii.

⁴⁵ Pound, *Zizek*, 26.

is the disappearance of disappearance. It is in itself already what becomes for itself the new community.’⁴⁶ Though this is a theme he works out subsequent to the *Ticklish Subject*, his early work seems to have anticipated the direction and departure he will later make.

Christ’s death reveals the psychoanalytic ground; the Freudian moment of madness which Schelling anticipates and which Žižek comes to understand Paul to describe in Romans 7. Radical negativity, the death of Christ or death drive, is the constitutive moment of the event which serves as the ground of a Subject no longer constrained by law or ideology (the significance of the resurrection Event). Resurrection can be identified with death as they both amount to the destruction of one’s symbolic supports and the emergence of a new form of subjectivity.⁴⁷ The feminine, hysteric position from which Paul writes, describes the necessary passage through negativity and death drive as this is the road trod by Christ himself.

Žižek concludes that Lacan and his own theological position, as opposed to Badiou, would tend to favour death over resurrection as death ‘is the “wiping the slate clean” that opens up the domain of the symbolic New Beginning, of the emergence of the ‘New Harmony’ sustained by a newly emerged Master-Signifier’ (*Ticklish Subject*, 154). Without traversing the fundamental fantasy and submitting to ‘symbolic death’ there is not the possibility of bringing about a real change or

⁴⁶ Žižek, ‘On Divine Self-Limitation and Revolutionary Love’.

⁴⁷ Pound, *Žižek*, 82

modification in the structure of the Subject.⁴⁸ Žižek recognizes that his notion of the need for subjective destitution and negativity lines up with his version of Luther's statement that 'man is the excrement that fell out of God's anus' (*Ticklish Subject*, 157). In Luther's terms, Badiou can be counted as a 'theologian of glory' while Žižek in this instance would count himself a good Lutheran 'theologian of the cross'.⁴⁹

Žižek goes on to describe the process of subjective destitution experienced by Oedipus, who at the end of his life at Colonnus, finally arrives at the truth of his humanity: 'Am I to be counted as something [according to some readings: as a man] only now, when I am reduced to nothing [when I am no longer human]?' (*Ticklish Subject*, 156).

Žižek concludes that the matrix of subjectivity is such that 'you become "something" (you are counted as a subject) only after going through the zero-point, after being deprived of all the pathological features that support your identity' (*Ticklish Subject*, 156-157). The subjective destitution of traversing the fantasy reduces the Subject to 'nothing' yet this 'Nothingness counted as Something' is the most concise formula of the Lacanian (barred or split) Subject (*Ticklish Subject*, 157). The Subject is split and the Subject of the unconscious (the thinking Thing of the *cogito*) which escapes any enunciated content can only emerge at the level of enunciation as he is 'reduced to

⁴⁸ See Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher*, 275-276 –on the description of 'traversing the fantasy'. Kotsko concludes that Badiou can be equated to a 'theologian of glory' while Lacan is a good Lutheran 'theologian of the cross'. In Adam Kotsko, *Žižek and Theology*, (London & New York: T & T Clark, 2008) 81.

⁴⁹ Kotsko, *Žižek*, 81. Later Badiou will be characterized as a good Lutheran in separating Law and grace.

the “almost-nothing” of disposable excrement at the level of the enunciated content’ (*Ticklish Subject*, 157). (Žižek will return to this point and connect it to Paul in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*.) The death drive for Žižek is necessarily at the foundation of subjectivity and its reconstitution, as it is in and through the death drive that ‘Nothingness is counted as Something’ which gives rise to the Subject (*Ticklish Subject*, 157).⁵⁰

This is the significance of Schelling’s account of the rise of the first Subject in which Žižek has a sustained interest. God, in the first instance is a pure Nothingness that ‘Rejoices in its non-being’; in the second instance this ‘neutral *will that wants nothing* actualizes itself in the guise of a *Will that actively, effectively, wants this “nothing”*’ (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 16). In the introduction to *The Abyss of Freedom* Žižek touches upon several characteristic themes of his work, linking this passage with the Hegelian and Cartesian ‘moment of radical madness’ and also with the feminine Subject (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 6). The ‘conceiving Ground’ is the ‘feminine foundation of the male Word’ so ‘that subjectivity is, in its most basic dimension, in an unheard of way, “feminine”’ (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 7-8).

Schelling’s radical negativity, which serves as the Ground of Existence, anticipates the Freudian death drive but it points back to the emergence of the Word in John 1. Žižek ties Schelling’s description of

⁵⁰ As he says in this passage ‘Nothingness counted as Something is the most concise formula of the Lacanian “barred” subject (s)’ (*Ticklish Subject*, 157). The possibility of the subject arising is only through the passage into language which necessarily creates the barred or divided Subject.

the founding moment of the Subject to the beginning described in John, and notes that prior to this beginning is that from which the Word arose, 'the psychotic universe of blind drives' (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 14). The Word or the *Logos* 'can emerge only from the experience of this abyss' (*Reader*, 253). All creation and every Subject, whether human or divine, must make the passage through madness and death drive to achieve subjectivity.⁵¹ It 'is not possible to pass directly from the "animal soul" . . . to "normal" subjectivity dwelling in its symbolic universe' without the space of 'the mad gesture of radical withdrawal that opens up the space for its symbolic reconstitution' (*Reader*, 254). Madness and death drive serve as the constitutive moment of the Subject and its entrance into symbolization and law.

In terms of Christ's cry of dereliction it can be seen as a repetition of God's own self-abandonment which results in creation and at the same time it is the dereliction felt by every Subject.⁵² All 'reality involves a fundamental antagonism' and it is precisely in and through this antagonism that the Subject arises (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 17). 'Upon experiencing itself as negative and destructive, the Will opposes itself to itself in the guise of its own inherent counterpole' (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 16). This antagonistic feminine Ground seems to be

⁵¹ Pound, *Žižek*, 30.

⁵² Pound, *Žižek*, 31.

precisely what is touched upon in the hysteric questioning of Romans 7:7ff?⁵³

The difference between Žižek and Badiou seems to come down then, to two contrasting anthropologies. Where Badiou 'dismisses the topic of human finitude', Lacan's notion of the Subject 'can emerge only within the horizon of human finitude' (*Ticklish Subject*, 163). Every Subject including the divine Subject has its Ground outside of itself in negation or Nothing. Žižek suggests that Badiou's dismissal of the death drive amounts to a reversion to 'non-thought' – 'to a naive traditional . . . opposition of two orders' (*Ticklish Subject*, 163). Žižek maintains 'human beings can participate in the Truth-Event' only as the 'unique relationship to . . . finitude and the possibility of death' is opened up (*Ticklish Subject*, 163).

Though Žižek does not exactly arrive at a biblical anthropology, with his understanding of the role of the orientation to death, his theory serves to explain how immortality is grasped at in and through death and finiteness (in the fundamental fantasy). Paul, in voicing the questions of the hysteric, is avoiding the trap of perversion (the grab for immortality) in that the existence or completeness of the Other of the law is under question in Romans 7. This dissolves the issue of avoiding mortality through identification with the Other and what it wants – the constitutive question in transgression and perversion. The Other does not know what it wants and there is no positive content to

⁵³ This is Kotsko's initial reading of the implication of Žižek's theory. Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul', 47.

live up to, and mortality and death must be accounted for. The 'obscene superego supplement', which grounds this transgressive approach to the law, is undone and the slate is wiped clean for an authentic Truth-Event.⁵⁴

Up to this point I have traced Žižek's reading of Romans 7:7ff and I have shown that Žižek finds in Paul's logical progression his own theory of how law and sin are fused in the Subject. This fusion gives rise to a death dealing desire which is founded in the fundamental deception which imagines a direct access to being. In Žižek's understanding, the division within the Subject giving rise to desire and the agonistic struggle (to become one with being or the law) is not a lie to be exposed but a necessary deception giving rise to the symbolic. In Žižek's reading, the subjective destitution of the death of Christ and Paul's agonistic struggle and questioning are a means of manipulating this 'truth' (wiping the slate clean) so as to reconstitute the Subject.

The next section turns to Žižek's examination of Rom. 7:1-6 to demonstrate two orientations to the law (the masculine and the feminine) and how 'dying with Christ' gives rise to the (hysteric or feminine) realization of 7:7ff.⁵⁵ The argument follows Žižek's explanation of 7:1-6 as it unfolds in Paul's explanation, beginning with the illustration in 7:1-4 and dealing in turn with the case of the woman whose husband is either dead or alive in 7:1-3, and then turning to the

⁵⁴ Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul', 47.

⁵⁵ His interaction here is primarily with Agamben.

comparison of the Christian to the dead husband as one who has died in Christ in 7:4-6.

Romans 7:1-4 Sex and Death with the Universal Subject?

The large measure of convergence around Paul between Žižek, Badiou, and Agamben has to do with the project of re-founding the theory of the Subject.⁵⁶ The primary problem, as each sees it in agreement with Paul, is the relation between the Subject and law. Is the identity of the Subject tied to the contingencies of legal circumstance (gender, ethnicity, marital status, sinner, etc.) or does identity float free of these particulars? Is Pauline Christianity advocating the notion that the Christian Subject (being no longer Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free) is free of these contingencies, and so as Subject inhabits the world but is not of the world? Or are these differences in fact constitutive of the Subject so that human subjectivity is bound to historical contingencies? Is identity through difference or is it immune to difference?⁵⁷ The way in which this problem interacts with the categories of life and death and human knowledge, has caused each of them to focus on Paul's resolution to the problem in Romans 7.

Žižek introduces his examination of Romans 7:1-4 in *The Monstrosity of Christ* by characterizing Paul's approach as 'this

⁵⁶ Santner is aiming at a similar goal with less emphasis on the particulars of Paul.

⁵⁷ The primary substance of the Subject is, of course, life and death, and the manner in which these two relate to one another is ultimately determinative of how the above questions are answered.

strangely sexualized comparison of the believer delivered from the Law with an adulteress who, after her husband dies is free to consort with her lover' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273). Paul's sexual metaphor depends upon a tradition in which 'knowing' is a term for sexual intercourse. Adam's knowing of Eve and knowing good and evil speak of two realms of knowledge that in some way have come into conflict. In verse 7 of this chapter Paul introduces what many take to be the Garden scene in which the realms of desire, subjectivity, and knowledge overlap.⁵⁸ The knowledge-is-sex metaphor is linked to an understanding in which knowing and being overlap and yet in which they have been disrupted by death and a death-dealing knowledge.⁵⁹ Sex and death, then, serve to mark two identities under the law and under Christ. Žižek, who fuses human sexuality and subjectivity, finds in Paul's illustration two possibilities, masculine and feminine, for human identity.

Within Paul's illustration (from Romans 7:1-4), Žižek works out the transition from Judaism to Christianity, or what he refers to as a transition from law to love.⁶⁰ In the process he describes the attempt at universality founded on a perverse notion of exception and begins to trace how Christianity breaks free from this obscene superego supplement in a suspension (Paul's word *κατήργηται* in 7:2, 6) of the law which also marks an excess. The masculine structure in Paul's

⁵⁸ For example, James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8 Volume 38A*, (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1988), 357ff.

⁵⁹ See Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 123.

⁶⁰ He deals with this particular text in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273ff. but the parallel concepts are developed in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*.

illustration is ironically represented by the woman (pointing to the fact that what is being described is an orientation to the law or the symbolic and is not determined according to gender) and the feminine structure is represented by the husband. The woman who would consort with another man introduces, though, two possible orientations: the common masculine antagonism toward the law and the distinctive Jewish ambiguity toward the law.

Are you unaware, brothers (for I am speaking to people who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over one as long as one lives? Thus a married woman is bound by law to her living husband; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law in respect to her husband. Consequently, while her husband is alive she will be called an adulteress if she consorts with another man. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and she is not an adulteress if she consorts with another man.⁶¹

The woman who would consort with another man poses the ambiguity of being a Subject under the law. The point that Žižek draws and builds on with the illustration is that the singular act (the woman's consorting with another man) can be construed as either sin or love. The same woman doing the same thing can either be an adulteress or

⁶¹ Žižek quotes the passage in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273. He does not indicate whether the translation is his own.

a good wife.⁶² There is no way to distinguish the two couples law/sin and law/love in terms of their content: 'the difference between the two couples (Law/sin and Law/love) is not substantial, but purely formal: we are dealing with the same content in two modalities' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 272).

So for Žižek the crucial issue is not the act, but how it is construed or the 'modality' and orientation under which it occurs. Until the state of the husband is known, or the modality under which the woman is constituted as Subject is known, the nature of the consorting cannot be known. The force of the law, the force of the symbolic, or the orientation to the death drive and the fundamental fantasy are represented by the condition of the husband.⁶³ The identity of the woman, adulteress or not, is contingent upon an element or force that is at once beyond her and yet definitive of her. Her knowing, as in 'knowing' another man, is determinative of her identity –consorting with another man may or may not fall under the force of the law. A living husband represents a law in force and a transgressive consorting, while a dead husband represents a law without force –though in Žižek's theory this does not necessarily constitute successful

⁶² The one possibility that is not presented in this original scene is that the woman loves her husband and identifies with him, so it is not clear that this is a live option in the illustration.

⁶³ As Dunn points out the same woman doing the same act can be judged either an adulteress or a good wife. It is not the woman's act itself but the state of the husband or the force of the law and its relationship to death that is being examined. 'There is a death which liberates from the lordship of sin (6:9-10, 18); so there is a death which liberates from the lordship of the law' (Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 368).

consorting.⁶⁴ The key in the opening verses is the fact that the law in the form of the (living/dead) husband takes precedent over the living woman.⁶⁵ The law is constituted and has its power as long as the woman remains outside of it. Her objective position or place outside of the law creates the force of the law.⁶⁶ The problem which this raises, examined in the next section, is how to coordinate sin and law or how to differentiate sin and love.

Masculinity - The Woman that has a Husband is Bound by Law to the Husband

The woman's relationship to her husband is the prototypical social obligation, marriage being the foundation of the family and of society, but it is also the prototypical love relationship. The problem occurs when these two are pitted against one another; when 'social life appears to me as dominated by an externally imposed Law in which I am unable to recognize myself . . . precisely insofar as I continue to cling to the immediacy of love that feels threatened by the rule of Law'

⁶⁴ The possibility of there being a sexual relationship – of bringing together the physical act with love is ruled out by Lacan's famous 'There's no such thing as a sexual relationship' (Seminar XX, 12, 34). The question is whether Žižek escapes this formula. Milbank will answer that he decisively does not (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 122). The irony being, that for all his fascination with the pornographic, he seems to fall into what Conor Cunningham describes as the *resentiment* [sic] of a disappointed nihilism which is 'the fruit of the castration complex' (Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*), 257).

⁶⁵ Judaism allowed for remarriage after the death of the husband indicating a possible suspension of the Law. In Roman law, which may be the standard outside of Judaism, a woman was not freed from her husband by his death. As Dunn states it, 'she was obliged to mourn his death and to remain unmarried for twelve months; otherwise she would forfeit everything which had come to her from her first husband.' In Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 360.

⁶⁶ See Cunningham, 'Lacan and Creation from No One', 86.

(*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117). The law can only be said to 'bind' when desire is in some way curtailed by the law. Love, understood as synonymous to this sort of desire, an element deep within the self which only refers to the self, can only experience the regulation of law as an imposition on the true nature of the self. The woman whose husband is alive, but who has fallen in love with another man, experiences the law as that which opposes her love. In fact, her love (her enjoyment or *jouissance*) is here synonymous with sin (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273). Her notion that she is loved by her consort is, in turn, to imagine that deep within her is 'some precious treasure that can only be loved, and cannot be submitted to the rule of Law' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117).⁶⁷

In Žižek's logic of the exception (masculine sexuation), her 'love' is a symptom of the prohibition and the prohibition has its force only in the exception.⁶⁸ The exception, in Žižek's view could be seen as creating the rule. As in Kafka's short story *The Trial*, Josef K. discovers that the elaborate system of the law which bars him from entering a certain door is actually built by himself for himself (*Reader*, 45). The law is a construct erected by and for those who stand outside of it. If the woman in Paul's illustration were to love her husband and not consort with other men, and if this were the universal case, the law

⁶⁷ This precious treasure is, according to Lacan, nothing other than the ego. 'It is one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level' (*Seminar I*, 142).

⁶⁸ The ego as the love object clarifies how the prohibition and the exception come together to constitute identity. The ego is that which is constituted beyond the Law or the symbolic in the imaginary.

would 'disintegrate'. The law functions in this sense like a psychoanalytic symptom: 'A symptom . . . is an element that . . . *must* remain an exception, that is, the point of suspension of the universal principle: if the universal principle were to apply also to this point, the universal system itself would disintegrate' (*The Universal Exception*, 171).⁶⁹

The woman, as the one who is subject to the law, represents an orientation of inherent transgression: '*the subject is actually "in" (caught in the web of) power only and precisely in so far as he does not fully identify with it but maintains a kind of distance towards it*' (*The Fragile Absolute* 148).⁷⁰ The dynamic of sin is an identity caught up in a web which tightens its grip the more it is resisted. In Žižek's description of the couplet law/sin, the law is a transcendent 'foreign' force that serves to oppress what is perceived as the love relationship (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 271).⁷¹ The law becomes an obstacle to be overcome in order for love to be possible.

Žižek's point is that this sort of love is not *agape* love but rather a form of love or enjoyment (*jouissance*) in which the obstacle constitutes the (lost) love.⁷² The woman's living husband is a

⁶⁹ See the glossary to Žižek, *The Universal Exception*, 341, in which this argument is summed up.

⁷⁰ Italics in the original.

⁷¹ Žižek works out the same problem in identical language in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117 f. The difference is that in *The Monstrosity of Christ* he preserves the term 'love' for the couple Law/love.

⁷² This section will continue to explore and define Lacan's notion of *jouissance*, which Žižek usually translates enjoyment – but in fact here (*The Monstrosity of Christ*) he simply sticks with *jouissance*. *Agape* love in Žižek's description is not more real than this *jouissance*. It may simply be a love that comprehends its constitution in and through destitution.

necessary part of this sort of consorting, as he is the obstacle that makes the sexual relationship with the 'other'.⁷³ This construct is synonymous with sin: "Sin" is the very intimate resistant core on account of which the subject experiences its relationship to the Law as one of subjection, it is that on account of which the Law has to appear to the subject as a foreign power crushing the subject' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 271). The Subject is attached to a 'pathological *agalma* deep within itself' and it is attachment to this supposed exception or remainder that gives the law the spectre of an oppressive foreign force (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 271). There is a resistant core, a hold-out or remainder on the part of the Subject: 'the notion that there is deep inside it some precious treasure which can only be loved and cannot be submitted to the rule of Law' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 271). The deception or illusion that sin works is to construe the law as a closure of identity which by its very nature – its absoluteness - excludes love.⁷⁴ Sin mediates the law as a power over and against love.⁷⁵

⁷³ That is the 'other' is only 'other' due to the living husband. If the husband is dead this supposed 'other' is simply the woman's husband.

⁷⁴ For Lacan it is perhaps impossible to distinguish the deception or delusion of the Law from the deception of love. Love is an imaginary phenomenon (*Seminar I*, 142) that is evoked through a lack brought on by entry into the symbolic. 'As a specular mirage, love is essentially deception' (*Seminar II*, 268).

⁷⁵ Freud's original point with the superego is that the supposed ethic invoked by the superego is not moral but immoral. The 'love' that one might obtain in and through this structure is, as well, tainted. In Paul Ricoeur's succinct description of Freudian morality in and through the Oedipus complex: 'The meaning of the Oedipus complex, deciphered in the semitransparency of dreams and the neuroses, solidifies into a real equivalence: the totem is the father; the father was killed and eaten; the brothers never got over their remorse for the deed; to reconcile themselves with their father and with themselves, they invented morality' (Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 208). Love and morality under the superego notion of the Law is ambivalent in regard to the one loved. 'Lacan . . . lays great emphasis on the intimate connection between love and AGGRESSIVITY; the presence of one necessarily implies the presence of the other' (Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 103).

In summary, 'the tension between the All (the universal Law) and its constitutive exception, i.e., "sin" is the very exception which sustains the Law' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 271). This logic of exception follows Freud's notion of the primal father who is the exception that grounds the rule.⁷⁶ The logic of exception also describes the masculine formula of sexualization in terms of castration: 'all men are castrated, but there is one exception that proves the rule'.⁷⁷ The husband of Romans 7 and the primal father killed by his sons in order to gain access to the women, stand in a parallel relationship.⁷⁸ The law does not apply or there is a failure of interpellation in a particular instance and yet it is from this place of failure or exception that the law is enacted.⁷⁹ The point is not that the exception can be done away with and universality achieved. The reifying effects of the exception are the substance of the symbolic and hence of the Subject.

It is from the seeming failure of interpellation or the failure of universality to account for the exception that the totalizing symbolic takes hold. From one perspective it can be said 'that the subject never

⁷⁶ In the original tribe the strongest male or the father took possession of all the women and thus prevented sexual promiscuity. The primal father's exception to the Law was the means by which the Law was enforced (SE, 13:125).

⁷⁷ Pound, Žižek, 106.

⁷⁸ In both instances what is ultimately being described is the manner in which culture itself functions. 'What we call "culture" is therefore, in its very ontological status, *the reign of the dead over life*, i.e., the form in which the "death drive" assumes positive existence' (*Enjoy Your Symptom*, 54).

⁷⁹ Žižek provides several examples of the same logic: Western societies' use of torture in the fight on the war on terror; the United States support of a permanent war crimes tribunal and yet its opposition to being included within its jurisdiction; and the demand by wealthy countries that the Third World enact trade reforms while remaining unwilling to subject themselves to those same reforms (*The Universal Exception*, 269-270). In the glossary to *The Universal Exception*, 341, these examples and others are included.

fully recognizes itself in the interpellative call . . . and this resistance to interpellation (to the symbolic identity provided by interpellation) *is* the subject' (*The Indivisible Remainder*, 165).⁸⁰ The woman consorting with her lover only understands herself over and against the law, while she may imagine her relationship to her lover in some way pre-exists her relationship to the law. 'Is not this hysterical distance towards interpellation . . . the very form of ideological misrecognition? Is not this apparent failure of interpellation . . . *the ultimate proof of its success* . . . that is to say, of the fact that the "effect-of-subject" really took place' (*The Indivisible Remainder*, 166)?⁸¹ Ideological interpellation, from the Subject's perspective, might appear to be relieved or in some way mitigated if the Subject simply maintains a cynical distance toward the interpellating power. The woman in Paul's illustration might say to herself, 'I know the law says not to consort, but the law does not account for my true self'. Hegel's Beautiful Soul maintains a cynical, passive distance toward power, but this is precisely the power of interpellation doing its work (*Reader*, 229-230, 264).

Žižek does not mean that the Subject is any more lacking in reality than anything else; rather the very nature of reality is one in which the Subject is constituted in and through difference. The 'convergence of the two incompatible dimensions (the Real and the

⁸⁰ Žižek is here presenting an Althusserian argument, which is not so much wrong as incomplete (see his footnote 86, in *The Indivisible Remainder*, 185).

⁸¹ Italics in the original

Symbolic) is sustained by their very divergence, i.e., difference is constitutive of what it differentiates' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 275).⁸² The failure or incomplete understanding of the law, as Paul recounts it in verses 1-3, is not a failure of the Subject but is an incomplete understanding of this necessary difference constituting the nature of the Subject (which is brought out in verse 4). As Žižek explains it to Milbank, there is a failure of the 'notion' of the function of the symbolic or the Law in its relation to the real. The Subject of the law is constituted in and through two 'incompatible dimensions'; the 'real' of love (*jouissance*) and the symbolic or the law. There is no dualism of an inward love and an outward oppressive law, rather there is a gap constituted by two intersecting dimensions which is constitutive of the Subject (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 274-275).

It is the very gap which separates/integrates the symbolic and the real that is constitutive of the symbolic and *jouissance*: 'the Symbolic arises through the gap that separates it from full *jouissance*, and this *jouissance* itself is a spectre produced by the gaps and holes in the Symbolic' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 274). The disappearance of the gap between the two domains, or the resolution of their

⁸² In the dialogue with Milbank which makes up *The Monstrosity of Christ*, Žižek claims that Milbank misses this point, presuming that the subject constituted in the dialectic is in some way a contradiction that cannot be there: '... dialectics declares that an existing contradiction, because it is a contradiction, must be destroyed even though it exists'. Žižek counters with two points: 'First, since, for Hegel, the failure of empirical reality to fit its notion is always also an indication of the failure of this notion itself . . .' and 'Second, for Hegel, the "resolution" of a contradiction is not simply the abolition of difference, but its full admission: in dialectical "reconciliation", difference is not erased, but admitted as such' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 274).

incongruence, would entail the disappearance of the two domains themselves: 'when our psyche can directly act upon external physical reality, we not only no longer have a soul, we also lose a body as "our own", as separate from external objects' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 276). The masculine Subject depends upon the gap in his primary identity, so that there is a necessary incongruence between thought and action, intent and will (as in Rom.7:7ff).

In summary of the key part of the argument so far: the woman in Paul's illustration represents the choices available under the masculine orientation to the law; whether her husband is dead or alive defines her and seems to represent every alternative, and yet in either condition she experiences an antagonism between herself or her true desire (*jouissance*) and the law. The following section examines Žižek's understanding of Paul's resolution to this predicament in the feminine orientation to the law.

Hysteric Subjectivity: You Were Made Dead to the Law to be Joined to Another

Where the masculine Subject experiences the law as a foreign crushing power, the feminine Subject constitutes itself as 'not all' in regard to the law. Where the masculine form is one in which the law is omnipotent and omniscient the feminine position posits an incompleteness or lack in the law. Where the masculine form might be associated with onto-theology and transcendence (the transcendent exception proves the rule), the feminine form questions the Other in its

transcendence and might be associated with a radical immanence such as atheism or materialism.⁸³

The feminine Subject identifies with and accepts the incompleteness of the law or the symbolic and in doing so escapes its alienating effect.⁸⁴ In regard to Paul's understanding, it might be said that he finds something prior to and after the law, which throws the law into a different perspective. To achieve this shift in perspective Paul, without transition, moves the subject position from the living woman (in Lacan's masculine formation) to the dead husband (the feminine formation). He is, after all, the only one who has died, and with verse 4 Paul's discourse takes the perspective previously reserved for the dead husband.

So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.
(Romans 7:4)⁸⁵

The dead husband had represented the force of the law, and now it is within that place from which this force was exercised that Paul places his readers. It is not that the feminine realizes a power lacking in the masculine, it is the realization of and identification with the disempowerment or suspension of the law (a question now serves in place of its answer). Paul had described the law in the instance of the

⁸³ Pound, Žižek, 109-110.

⁸⁴ The pervert refuses the Law's incompleteness and attempts to fill the void rather than inhabit it.

⁸⁵ From the *New International Version*. The *New International Version*, not always known for its accuracy renders this particular text in an accessible manner.

dead husband as being rendered inoperative (*κατήργηται*, in verse 2). It is not that the law is 'abolished' (as *κατήργηται* is sometimes translated), as it still applies, but the manner in which it applies is to specify its own suspended force. The word Paul employs and as seen below, for which he develops his own technical meaning, is the perfect passive indicative of *καταργέω*, 'to make void'.

As A. T. Robertson describes Paul's illustration, the husband stands for a void created by and in the law.⁸⁶ The husband, representing Žižek's feminine form, stands in the void. It is not that the void stands outside of the law, rather it is a space created within the law's own taking place. The law's capacity for suspension and application marks the contours, the 'space' or void, from which the law proceeds. In the case of a king or dictator who institutes the laws and whose very word is the law, his own relationship to the law is marked by the power of suspension; the place from which the law originates is marked by its disapplication.⁸⁷

Language functions like law in Lacanian theory so that language can be said to be sexed according to how one fits in regard to its positive (applied) and negative (disapplied) force. The woman in Paul's illustration is in the masculine position because she falls under the force of the law and can be said to relate to the law in the way in which a subject relates to a king. According to Žižek, 'the "masculine"

⁸⁶ A.T., Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997) on Rom. 7:2.

⁸⁷ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 104, traces this understanding – which has its parallel in the concept that the place of love is where the Law originates.

universe involves the universal network of causes and effects founded in an exception (the “free” subject which theoretically grasps its object, the causal universe of the Newtonian physics)’ (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 58). A philosophy or science built on the masculine Subject’s knowledge will attempt to say it all. The woman is completely defined (adulteress or not), by the state of the husband representing the force of the law. Her position is one that can be fully articulated (it is conscious, enunciated, etc.) while the state of her dead husband is not itself subject to this enunciated content, but is in fact the one who determines its content, though only in its disapplication (the pure potential of a question). As Lacan puts it, women are the ‘open-set’ (*Seminar XX*, 9-10). This feminine construct, whether scientific or philosophical, is built on a subjectivity that is unbounded and open, as opposed to the closed masculine Newtonian universe. The dead husband doesn’t have anything to say, but his silence marks a suspension or positive void.

Hegel specifies the nature of this void (the background of Lacan’s feminine sexuation) in his *Phenomenology* in deploying Luther’s translation of Paul’s *κατηργηται* in his key term *Aufhebung*.⁸⁸ Hegel is describing the manner in which the occurrence of language

⁸⁸ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 99. Though it is impossible to trace the exact genealogy of these concepts as they unfold through Paul, Luther, and Hegel to Lacan, Lacan’s borrowings from Hegel are clear. Lacan attended the lectures of Alexandre Kojève the (Russian/French interpreter of Hegel) in 1933-1939, which Evans notes, has an immense influence on his work. See Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 144-145. The correspondence at this point between Lacan’s theory of sexuation and Hegel’s writing on *Aufhebung* seems to indicate a clear line of influence.

creates a negative 'space' on which all the positive elements of language depend. For example, the simple term 'This' can only have a positive reference against the background of everything else which is 'not This'. 'The This is, therefore, established as *not* This, or as something superseded (*aufgehoben*); and hence not as nothing, but as a determinate Nothing, the Nothing of a content, viz. of the This.'⁸⁹ A child who continually pointed at things with 'This' as his first word and posed as a question, is in danger of never learning another word or of never having his question definitively answered. Everything is potentially *This*, but if there is no *not This*, the word is without content.⁹⁰ With *not This* the sense-element is still present, but not as an immediate reference or as the single item that is 'meant', but as the universal background which gives meaning to a particular reference. According to Hegel (*κατηργηται*) *Aufhebung* has a twofold meaning 'which we have seen in the negative: it is at once a *negating* and a *preserving*. Our Nothing, as the Nothing of the *This*, preserves its immediacy and is itself sensuous, but it is a universal immediacy.'⁹¹ Hegel's point, taken up by Lacan, is that the feminine universal is the

⁸⁹ G. W. F Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 68. Quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: the Place of Negativity*, Trans. Karen Pinkus, Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 14-15.

⁹⁰ The reference is to the author's son who seemed to have gotten stuck on *This*.

⁹¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 68.

negative background which serves to give positive content (the supposed masculine universality) its possibility.⁹²

Lacan, though, along with the linguistics current to his time, transformed a discussion of Being into a discussion of the function of language and its relation to psychoanalysis. Where Hegel might in some way imagine himself to be dealing directly with ultimate reality (Spirit), Lacan's induction into linguistics through the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson means that the two realms in which he is working, linguistics and psychoanalysis, do not necessarily converge directly onto any ontological ground or necessity.⁹³ In Žižek's depiction of Lacan's theory, 'sexuality is the effect on the living being of the impasses which emerge when it gets entangled in the symbolic order' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 56). The feminine and masculine do not describe gender so much as positions taken within the formation of the symbolic. Where the Hegelian discussion took place in the register of the philosophical, the linguistics of Jakobson offers a linguistic/symbolic explanation to the philosophical quest for being.⁹⁴ Hegel's *This* and *not This* is a discussion that may simply point to the

⁹² Žižek's rediscovery of the Hegel behind Lacan affirms a direct lineage. The feminist reaction to Lacan's feminine structure (being classed with the negative or not-all), may have missed Hegel's point that negation precedes the various attempts at a positive masculine universal. On the other hand, Lacan reversed himself, and this seems to have created some confusion. This along with his formula striking out woman tended to not endear him to some feminists. See Pound, *Žižek*, 111 ff.

⁹³ The point here is not to definitively say that Hegel's Spirit is God or not, but simply to point out that psychoanalysis nuances this quite differently in its notion of a primordial fantasy.

⁹⁴ See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 465 – 'Absolute Being that is not grasped as Spirit is merely the abstract void, just as Spirit that is not grasped as this movement is only an empty word.' Lacan's notion of full and empty speech reflects his adaption of this understanding (see *Tarrying with the Negative*, 94).

functioning of language and linguistic shifters (terms like *this*, *I*, *now*, *here*), which rely upon the context in which they are spoken.

Agamben describes the shift between Hegel and Lacan as the transition from metaphysics to linguistics. 'The dimension of meaning of the word "being", whose eternal quest and eternal loss . . . constitute the history of metaphysics, coincides with the taking place of language' and it is only 'because language permits a reference to its own instance through *shifters*' that 'something like being and the world are open to speculation'.⁹⁵ Where Hegel was not unaware of the logical implications of being a speaker of a language, he still tied this logic to a metaphysical understanding. Both Hegel and Lacan trace the passage from immediate sense experience into the realm of language in and through shifters, but for Hegel this is a necessary moment in the movement of Spirit, as is the passage through negativity, while for Lacan and Žižek there is a certain ambiguity as to the ontological status of the symbolic and of this passage in its relationship to death.⁹⁶ Where Freud grounded his understanding of the Subject in biology, Lacan cuts any ties to a material ontology by claiming that what Freud said was true, but he was really talking about language. As a result the Subject is abstracted from any necessary connection outside of itself.

⁹⁵ Agamben, *Language and Death*, 25-26.

⁹⁶ As Adrian Johnston spells it out, Žižek's philosophical ambitions are not focused on ontology but freedom. He concludes his book on Žižek's ontology with a quote from *Žižek! The Movie* on the question 'What is philosophy?': 'philosophy is a very modest discipline. Philosophy asks a different question, the true philosophy: How does a philosopher approach the problem of freedom?' (Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, (Evanston Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 286).

Lacan's interest in the shifter 'I' illustrates the point of what Žižek calls this 'ontological scandal' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 61). Lacan takes a special interest in the shifter 'I' as it is employed by René Descartes (and Paul in Romans), and his examination of the 'I' becomes one of his final forms for describing the difference between masculine and feminine. In an early formula of sexuation Lacan poses the masculine and feminine as expressing themselves on each side of the *cogito*: the masculine was pictured as a choice of being, 'I am'; while the feminine was the choice of thought, 'I think'.⁹⁷ The 'I am' in Descartes and traditional metaphysics seemed to fulfill the potential of 'I think', so that the masculine would seem to be the fulfillment of the feminine. Thus woman as *not-all* was thought, particularly by Lacan's feminist critics (and not without some justification), to picture woman as a sort of truncated man (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 58). The shift that intervenes involves the reversal of Paul's *κατηργηται* and Hegel's *Aufhebung* in which an unfulfilled potential does not so much constitute a lack as it does an intervention into a masculine construct.

As with Paul's illustration, identification with the law or the symbolic disrupts or suspends the force of the law so as to attain a new form of subjectivity. The masculine side of the *cogito* chooses being (*I am*) 'yet what it gets is being which is merely thought, not real being . . . it gets fantasy-being, the being of a "person," the being in "reality"

⁹⁷ Lacan's formulas of sexuation describe sexual difference through symbolic equations. See *Seminar XX*, 78.

whose frame is structured by fantasy' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 61). The linguistic shifter *This* depends on its negative form *not This*, and this negative form provides a kind of plenitude or resource which language is dependent upon; so too *I think* and *I am* demonstrate and depend upon the reflexive power of language to posit thought as a mode of being. *I am* has no more ontological reality than *not This*, yet where *I am* was pictured as an ontology it seemed to offer access to being. Where the linguistic shifter, in its positive form, depends upon the negative place of language, the psychoanalytic fantasy (primordial lie), posits a place of fullness and plenitude in the place of death. The letter (of the law) which seems to contain life simply deals in death.

The feminine construct 'chooses thought, the pure "I think", yet what it gets is thought bereft of any further predicates, thought which coincides with pure being, or more precisely, the hyperbolic point which is neither thought nor being' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 61-62). Žižek pictures the feminine as an exposure of death in a gaze that encounters the fundamental fantasy, and this encounter challenges the very core of the Subject.

In Romans 7:4 this is described as the place of the dead husband, but this is immediately translated into an identity with the death of Christ. What Žižek offers seems to be simply an identity with death. The death of Christ is not specific to Žižek's description of the feminine; rather death itself is what makes the dead husband special. Žižek illustrates the point with E. A. Poe's 'The facts in the Case of M. Valdemar': 'When Valdemar, for a brief moment awakened from the

sleep of death, utters the “impossible” statement “I am dead!”, his body . . . changes into “a nearly liquid mass of loathsome –of detestable putrescence’ (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 61). There occurs what Žižek describes as an impossible gaze that arrives at the notion ‘I am dead!’: ‘the pure-impossible fantasy-gaze by way of which I observe my own nonbeing’ (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 6). The title of Žižek’s book –*Tarrying with the Negative* –indicates the goal and cure as Hegel posed it:

Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength. . . . This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being, this power is identical with what we earlier called the Subject.⁹⁸

To tarry with the negative is to traverse the fantasy and to encounter the empty X or the place of death, which is synonymous with the place of inscription of identity. True identity is not in and through the predicates of the law or the symbolic but it is to pass into that which seems to be either a surplus or a suspension (*κατήργηται*) in which identity is recognized in the void.

So both Hegel and Paul, in Žižek’s view, are able to describe the formation of the Subject through taking up death, or in Paul’s terms ‘dying with Christ’. In death the predicates of the law no longer apply, so that by tarrying in the realm of negation there is the possibility of

⁹⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 19.

reconstituting the Subject in the feminine orientation. Žižek's point is that Hegel's 'subject is substance' coincides with Paul's 'dying in Christ' in that both turn to death, to the desubstantialized realm, in which no predicate will hold (*For They Know Not What They Do*, 36-37). The problem, which the next section explores, is the exact nature of this desubstantialized realm of the exception in Žižek's theory.

Romans 7:6 – The Exception

Žižek's interaction with Agamben has resulted in his most prolonged focus on the specifics of how the law can, in Agamben's words, be 'simultaneously suspended and fulfilled' through an understanding of the exception.⁹⁹ Paul's point, according to Žižek, is that one can escape the dilemma of a mutually implied law and transgression and 'belong to another' only by realizing that love is not mediated by the law but involves full identification with the law (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273). Here is the explanation of how Christianity fulfilled the law: 'not by supplementing it with the dimension of love, but by fully realizing the Law itself – from this perspective, the problem with Judaism is not that it is "too legal," but that it is not "legal" enough' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117). This identification with the law, in and through love, constitutes salvation in Christianity, according to Žižek.

⁹⁹ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 104.

One question that this section raises has to do with the status and content of this 'love' to which Žižek assigns key importance.¹⁰⁰

According to Žižek, the way in which one fully identifies with the law is not through a transgressive attempt to get beyond it but with a full identity with it in and through an acknowledgment of a certain lack or suspension (in verse 6, dying to or release – *κατηργήθημεν* - from the law). The 'normal' order is already one which is built upon a perverse relation to the law 'because this order already implies and relies on its own transgression, so the way to truly subvert it is to stick to its letter and ignore its obscene transgression' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 281).

As demonstrated above, Paul makes the point that the law is suspended (Verse 2 – *κατήργηται*) in the case of the dead husband, and this location of the exception serves to locate the place in which the law is pure potential. The power and the potential of the law can be suspended or have its exception in death and so it is here that the inside and the outside of the law fold into a singular threshold. As Agamben describes it, 'in the state of exception law suspends its own application in order to ground its enforcement'.¹⁰¹ 'Dying to the law' does not entail escape from the law but full identification with the law itself in its potential to 'ground' the fruit of love in the work of the Spirit. Paul writes,

¹⁰⁰ Agamben accuses Adorno of reducing redemption to a 'point of view' (Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 38). This sort of fiction seems to plague both Agamben and Žižek. Milbank is suspicious that Žižek is guilty of his own form of Gnosticism (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 18).

¹⁰¹ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 133.

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to another, even to him who was raised from the dead, that we might bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were through the law, wrought in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were held; so that we serve in newness of the spirit, and not in oldness of the letter. (Romans 7:4-6)

To reiterate, the subject of Paul's illustration has been the woman, while the only one who has died is the husband. In verse 4 Paul shifts the perspective to the one who has died (that of the husband). It is the nature of this discharge, release or suspension (*κατηργήθημεν*), as Paul works it out in verse 6 that is under contention between Agamben and Žižek. Žižek seems to accept the basic scheme of Agamben's interpretation, but he would transpose it into a psychoanalytic understanding in which it is not simply the law per se that is left inoperative, but the obscene superego supplement to the law.¹⁰² This problem is specifically addressed in the following section.

There is no Big Other – Discharged from the Law, having Died

¹⁰² On the surface this may appear a minor point of difference but what is at stake, as will be suggested below, may be two versions of ultimate reality. See Kotsko, 'Situating Žižek's Paul', 48.

The corrective which Žižek brings to Agamben's interpretation is to suggest that this state of suspension has a particular identity that is to be distinguished from a mere 'formal gesture of distance' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112). Certainly it enacts 'the disavowal of the symbolic realm itself: I use symbolic obligations, but I am not performatively *bound* by them' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112). Beyond this, though, is Žižek's specific point that this exception suspends the superego supplement to the law. The being 'put to death' or realizing the negative or destitute place of the Subject involves recognition of the reifying effects of the obscene libidinal investment in the law.

The anti-ideological gesture *par excellence* is therefore the act of 'subjective destitution' by means of which I *renounce* the treasure in myself and fully admit my dependence on the externality of symbolic apparatuses – fully assume the fact that my very self-experience of a subject who was already here prior to the external process of interpellation is a retroactive misrecognition brought about by that very process of interpellation . . . (*The Indivisible Remainder*, 166)

Traversing the fantasy and submitting to the effect of symbolic lack or of 'subjective destitution' constitutes the goal in analysis (and the presumed point of Christian salvation or of dying in Christ for Žižek). There is a full realization and acceptance of the fact that 'the subject prior to interpellation-subjectivization is not this imaginary phantasmatic depth which allegedly precedes the process of interpellation but the

very void which remains once the phantasmatic space is emptied of its content' (*The Indivisible Remainder*, 166-167). Those who have died with Christ have escaped the failed process of interpellation through a return to the void or empty place which interpellation fills out (*The Indivisible Remainder*, 167).

Those who 'were made dead to the law through the body of Christ' no longer serve the letter of the law as they have dispelled the fantasy of this failed interpellation. This suspension is not a neutral or merely formal gesture but 'an engaged position of struggle' aimed at 'the performative force of the "normal" ideological interpellation that compels us to accept our determinate place within the sociosymbolic edifice' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112). The excess 'which addresses us' in Christianity and Judaism is not 'the excessive superego injunction' (an interpellation that depends upon failure) but 'the Law beyond every measure' –the Law of love (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112-114).

Law will lose its 'alienated' character of an external force brutally imposing itself on the Subject the moment the Subject renounces its own desire for completeness (with its passage through destitution and forsaking attachment to the pathological *agalma* deep within itself) by putting this form of subjectivity to death in Christ (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117). As the next section explains, this move is the critical distinction found in love.

For Žižek the distinction within *κατηργήθημεν* is the first step and this must immediately be linked to love. Where Agamben seems to allow Christianity only a formal difference from Judaism, Žižek suggests that there is a specific and unique element in Christian love. 'It is only Christianity which properly completes the Law by, in effect, getting rid of the undead remainder –and, of course, this completion is the Law's self-sublation, its transmutation into Love' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 296). He suggests that the exception of Romans (the self-sublation or 'death in Christ') should not be read in isolation from I Corinthians 13 (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 114).

Though Agamben also appeals to I Corinthians 13, he understands it in conjunction with faith and not as adding any positive content to Romans 7:6. I Corinthians 13, according to Agamben, assigns the characteristics it does to love –without envy, boasting, selfishness –precisely because it is not contingent upon anything but itself.¹⁰³ 'When the apostle uses this verb (for example, in the expression *gnōsis katargēsthētai*; I Cor. 13:8), what he is actually referring to in *katargēsis* is not the destruction of being (*aphanisis tes ousias*), but the progression toward a better state.'¹⁰⁴ This incompleteness or inoperative state within knowledge makes room for

¹⁰³ Agamben assigns the same sort of neutrality to love that he does to faith. 'Love has no reason, and this is why, in Paul, it is tightly interwoven with faith' (Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 128). Love cannot be reduced to a reason or appeal to certain qualities in the beloved. One does not love *because* of certain qualities, though qualities such as beauty or blondness may be attached to the beloved. 'Love does not allow for copulative predication, it never has a quality or an essence as its object' (Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 128).

¹⁰⁴ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 98.

a perfect love, and yet Agamben does not draw this explicit conclusion. He does not link *κατηργήθημεν* with any specific content such as love. Žižek, in contrast, suggests a distinction can be made between the law, love and its superego supplement and he links *κατηργήθημεν* in I Corinthians 13:8 directly to love (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 110).¹⁰⁵ Paul says that without love 'I would be nothing'. The obverse is not that with love 'I am something', but 'in love, *I am also nothing*, but, as it were a Nothing humbly aware of itself' and 'made rich through the very awareness of its lack' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 115). Žižek illustrates the point with reference to the formula of feminine sexuation. Just as woman represents the incompleteness of the phallic structure, so too, love is feminine in its structure of acceding to destitution or being 'not-all' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 115). Paul's struggle takes on a particular shape as a clear cleavage is made between the 'difference which separates the excess of the Law itself from the Love beyond the Law' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 110). By locating and reducing the difference within the Subject between the superego supplement and *agape*, Žižek pictures something more than a 'formal gesture of distance'; something like war (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112-113).

Love, freed of pathological constraints – of the pathological notion of 'some precious treasure that can only be loved', is no longer mediated or constrained by sin (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117). As

¹⁰⁵ Love is itself without a discernible content or connectedness beyond itself (Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 99).

Žižek sums it up, 'the problem . . . is not how we are to supplement Law with true love . . . , but, on the contrary, how we are to accomplish the Law by getting rid of the pathological stain of love' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117). The pathological sort of love is mediated by the law and stands in a dialectical relationship to the law on the same order as sin. Just as there is no real gap between law and sin – 'their truth is their mutual implication or confusion' - so too pathological love falls under the law (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 272). Instead of seeing love as a supplement or alternative exception to the law, Žižek proposes a different formula: 'love is Law itself extracted from its mediation by sin' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 272). Love, in this formula, still takes the form of an excess, but it is an exception true to the law and not an exception on the order of sin.

This background explains Žižek's comments surrounding Romans 7:1-6. 'In this precise sense, there is no need for a further "synthesis" between Law and love: paradoxically, their "synthesis" already is the very experience of their radical split' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273). While this realization requires a complete shift in perspective, this shift in no way entails a displacement of the basic structure of the exception. It is not that this structure or its content is to be displaced by love, rather love is to displace sin and this is the real potential/excess of the law. '[T]he difference between the two couples (Law/sin and Law/love) is not substantial, but purely formal: we are dealing with the same content in its two modalities' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 272). The state of exception (verses 4 and 6), in which the law

is no longer in force, has become the point from which the law, love and sin are thrown into a completely different perspective. As explained in the following section, this remainder or exception constitutes the 'ground for the community of love or the 'newness of the Spirit in which we serve' which is the summation and conclusion of Žižek's and Paul's argument.

Salvation in Death – We Serve in Newness of the Spirit

So there are two forms of exception; the masculine/phallic sort of exception in which there is a tension between the All (the universal law) and its constitutive exception (the point of the exception being to constitute or establish the law), and this constitutes sin; then there is love, which involves the paradox of the non-all (the law is not complete –the big Other does not exist) of the feminine, and this constitutes the Spirit (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 116). The Christian community, in its true form, achieves the feminine stance of a love of non-all. This love is synonymous with the gift of the Spirit 'so that we serve in newness of the spirit and not in oldness of the letter' (Rom. 7:6). With Christ, this love 'articulates itself as the stance of total immersion in the Law' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 116). The law, in which one is immersed, is of course, the non-existent law –'the big Other [that] doesn't exist' (*The Metastases of Enjoyment*, 42).

'The "Holy Spirit" is the community deprived of its support in the big Other' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 171). The Church is the Holy Spirit and the resurrection precisely in that the letter of the law has

been put to death in the body of Christ. 'Christ is resurrected in us, the collective of believers, and his tortured dead body remains forever as its material remainder' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 287). God is made alive in the Church and this is the resurrection of love: 'No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us' (1 John 4:12). The true miracle of Christianity 'is not the dead Christ walking around, but the love in the collective of believers' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 291). This collective love is the Spirit, but of course it is a spirit attained through dissolution of the very notion of Spirit.

Žižek contrasts his understanding with Lacan's position, in which 'the Holy Spirit stands for the symbolic order as that which cancels (or rather, suspends) the entire domain of "life"' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 296). Žižek suggests this is an inaccurate picture of both Judaism and Christianity. In his estimate the death of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit is an exposure of the fundamental fantasy structuring the Subject. Christianity makes possible a true atheism in which the death of Christ constitutes the death of the big Other. The true accomplishment of the Holy Spirit is an atheism which can say, not simply "I don't believe", but "I no longer have to rely on a big Other who believes for me" –the true formula of atheism is "there is no big Other"' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 297). What this means in practical terms is that Christianity functions in the same way as psychoanalysis in that it brings about a shift in the Subject by exposing the non-existent Other. With the end of analysis there is a 'dissolution of transference' –

which is to say the analyst has played the role of Christ as a 'self-undermining big Other'.¹⁰⁶

The Peculiar Nihilism of Žižek

The demonstration above of the manner in which Žižek can locate his theory in Romans 7 indicates that he is working within a broad Pauline understanding. However, where Paul depends specifically on the suspension of the law enacted in the death of Christ, Žižek's theory depends upon death as suspension, as opposed to the specific 'death of Christ'. As John Milbank notes, Christ is not just an exception (*homo sacer*), but the exception to the exception, in that as the God-man he fully experiences separation from God so as to bridge and close the gap.¹⁰⁷ Where Žižek holds that the crucifixion and resurrection amount to the same thing (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 287), Paul's message is that the death of Jesus must be understood along with the fact that 'he has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God' (Rom. 7:4). Where Paul concentrates on the distinctive power of Christ's death to rescue from death (7:4, 6), Žižek pictures the death of the distinctive identity of Christ as death's salvific power: 'this is why his death is so shattering, an ontological (not only ethical) scandal' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 285). Even God, as shown in Christ, cannot survive death and the obliterating power of death brings the destruction of even the one presumed to represent absolute

¹⁰⁶ Kotsko, *Žižek*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 82.

symbolic difference. According to Žižek, Christ's death enacts at a 'performative' level (as opposed to a mere propositional level) the possibility to traverse the fantasy and to found a new form of humanity' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 285). Paul's new humanity, however, is not marked merely by subjective destitution but by the possibility of being joined to or belonging to another (7:4). In Paul's imagery Christ makes relationship possible as through Christ the alienated relationship (perhaps in accord with Žižek's understanding of no possibility of relationship) has been transformed into unity and belonging ('you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another' – 7:4) (the subject of the next chapter).

CHAPTER 3

LIFE BEYOND THE LIE OF THE DEATH DRIVE THROUGH BAPTISM

Where the first chapter of this thesis sets forth Freud, Lacan, and Žižek's notion of the death drive as founded in a primordial lie (the psychology of nihilism) and the second chapter connects this understanding with Žižek's exposition of Romans 7, this chapter will examine Romans 6 – 8 as an intervention in Žižek's reading of Paul on the dynamics of death. Romans 7 serves Žižek in his articulation of how law (language) is the structuring principle of the Subject; Paul's conception of sin and the sinful Subject is built upon a very specific deception, and this account is very similar to that of Žižek in broad outline. However, what Žižek misconstrues and in part misses is Paul's picture of Christ's alternative to the law accessed through his death and resurrection; an alternative opened to all through baptism. In Romans 7:7ff sin is depicted as a singular structure described as a living death, while Romans 6 offers a counterpoint in baptism into Christ's death – a death to live by as outlined in Romans 8. The former describes life as controlled by an orientation to death (a primordial deception and a destructive drive), while the latter describes death as a passage into resurrection life. The proposal set forth in this chapter is that death-in-life is an orientation that describes one form of the human Subject, and the alternative of Romans 6 and 8, life-in-death or the death to live by, amounts to an alternative constitution of the Subject

which can be traced in Romans 6 and 8 employing Žižek's interpretive strategy and Lacanian categories.

Thus while Žižek's analysis of the death drive allows for a reorientation to (or within) death, the Christian belief in Christ's death and resurrection calls for an attempt to both think through and beyond Žižek's materialist reading of Paul. So there is the necessity to think against Žižek. Even in this 'thinking against' though, Žižek will prove a helpful antagonist in bringing clarity to the departure that belief in Christ entails (a departure and contrast which Paul sets up between Romans 7 and 8).

We need to keep in mind key differences between Žižekian discourse and Pauline theology so as to keep the implication and application of his theory in proper perspective. Žižek's atheistic materialism means that even when he is employing Pauline language he is construing its function within his materialistic worldview built on the primacy of finitude. Sin and death and salvation work within Žižek's materialistic interpretive frame within an ontological finitude, so that death (in the death drive and the real) marks the limit and potential of his explanation of the Subject. In Žižek's discourse, the language of salvation will still be working within the same parameters of possibility as sin and death.¹ The challenge, then, is to articulate Paul's understanding of the Christian Subject over and against Žižek's

¹ Žižek's work is largely aimed at overcoming false notions of the infinite posited in God, the Law or the Other. The positing of this bad infinite (superego) gives rise to a living death. The infinite, in this sense is a negation of the finite and material, so to negate this negation (in his Hegelian terms) will bring a return of the world. The question is if this double negation brings a return of the world or whether it constitutes an absolutizing of negation. See Milbank's discussion on this in the *Monstrosity of Christ*, 212.

interpretation of the Subject of Romans 7:14ff. On the other hand, the psychoanalytic discourse of Žižek and Lacan, despite its difference from theology, can illuminate theological discourse.

To meet the goal of staging a dialogue between Žižek and Paul the organization of this chapter follows a three step process: First, I will explicate Žižek's own reading of Paul in Romans 6-8 (primarily 6:2, 10; 7:7ff; and 8:2) establishing the set of equivalences he makes between Pauline categories and his own. Next I offer a reading of Paul (focusing on 6:2, 10; 7:7-24) in Pauline terms within his historical context. Third I offer (in dealing with chapter 8) a Pauline reading of Paul in Žižek's terms, which makes closer use of attention to Paul's articulation of his categories to go beyond or correct Žižek.

In broad terms there is correspondence between Žižek and Paul in their description of the predicament of the human situation (primarily Romans 7), while the contrast drawn between Paul and Žižek does not simply stage an artificial dialogue but supports a dialogue within Paul (between Romans 7 and 8).

Dying with Christ in Žižek

This section, under the four headings extracted from Romans, introduces a Žižekian reading of a portion of Romans 6 and 8 in which he builds on and expands his reading of Romans 7. While his theory has been introduced in the previous chapter, this section attempts to determine where and how his basic terms (e.g., death drive, superego, real, traversing the fantasy etc.) fit in his reading of Paul. Žižek

provides a direct correlation of most of his terms with that of Paul; though where he does not offer a direct reading it is fairly clear where his vocabulary fits into this reading.²

The Law of Sin and Death

Žižek's discussion of Paul focuses most intensely on Romans 7, but he locates much of the rest of his reading in the immediate chapters surrounding 7 in chapter 5-6 and 8. Paul sums up the account of sin, death and the law in these chapters in the phrase 'the law of sin and death' in 8:2. This section explores the connection Žižek makes between sin and the 'death drive' to sin and explains how it functions in regard to the law in his theory.

Žižek links sin directly to the death drive, which he describes as that lure or excess which draws humans out of or beyond life into death.³ 'Sin', he explains, 'is the excess which burdened the human race' (*On Belief*, 105). The excess is what 'pushes man to continuing renovation, since he never can fully integrate this excess into his life process' (*On Belief*, 105). It is what pushed the original humans out of the Garden in what is called 'Original sin' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 22) and it is this 'infinite craving of Nothing for Something' which describes 'the ontological condition of all subjects' (*Reader*, 135). This formula already contains the delusion or lure of the death drive in that

² Žižek does not provide a reading of the real in regard to Paul's 'body of sin' but as demonstrated below this is implicit in his reading of Paul.

³ Lacan linked the compulsion to repeat of the death drive to sin. 'Sin is from then on present as the third term, and it is no longer following the path of reminiscence, but rather is following that of repetition, that man finds his way...so you see the meaning of man's need for repetition. It's all to do with the intrusion of the symbolic order' (*Seminar II*, 87-88).

the Something is not itself over and against the Nothing; rather it is 'Something which gives body to the Nothing' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 23). This excess Something giving rise to desire is not something which exists, as desire is related to that which does not exist (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 298)

The passage through sin or death drive opens up nature so that sin is a passage from naïve existence to existence within the realm of knowledge or the symbolic. 'Original Sin itself, the abyssal disturbance of primeval Peace' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 24) creates a wound or cut in nature which constitutes human subjectivity. Into the realm of immediate sense experience and 'natural' animal copulating a gap has been introduced through death drive or sin which constitutes the Subject. Sin, in this understanding, is not something which Adam or anyone 'falls into', as if they were fully functioning Subjects prior to the event; rather sin is the passage into human subjectivity.

As in the Garden what creates the possibility for the opening of sin is created through the prohibition. 'Law generates sin and feeds on it', but to presume that 'God gave Law to men in order to make them conscious of their sin, even to make them sin all the more, and thus make them aware of their need for salvation . . . does this reading not involve a strangely perverse notion of God?' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 272-273). The formal condition for subjectivity is to be found in the positing of the symbolic/law and transgressive desire (death drive) which are each connected with sin, but when it is understood these are necessary elements to the human Subject, sin

and salvation can be seen, not as two separate moves, but as simultaneous (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273).

Prior to the fall humans are pictured as existing in harmony with nature and obeying their natural drives. With the fall a sense of disharmony and of shame have 'entered in', but the split evoked by shame and disharmony creates the realization of a possible synthesis. The synthesis cannot precede differentiation if synthesis is to even be posed as a possibility. The gap separating man from nature, from himself and from God is precisely the gap in which he is constituted. The dream of closing the gap between the real and the symbolic is to miss the fact that they are constituted through the gap (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 275). This is the pervert's dream which Paul states in various formulas in chapters 6-7.⁴ The pervert relinquishes himself to this force and the 'Self is ultimately experienced as "dead"' (*Ticklish Subject*, 149). The 'life-impulse, my desire, appears to me as a foreign automatism that persists in following its path independently of my conscious Will and intentions' (*Ticklish Subject*, 149). Identity is not with the impulse to life but with the 'excess' force of sin. By offering the self as an instrument of this force there is the perception of tapping directly into the power behind the law (or grace). That is, from within the economy of the law (the law of sin and death), the excessive superego injunctions (giving rise

⁴ Paul raises a similar question in 6:1 to that in 7:7, which Žižek connects with the position of the pervert: 'What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?' This 'continuing in sin' describes a relinquishing of human agency to sin or the death drive so that grace might be enacted. This is the problem Žižek locates in chapter 7; 'It is not I, the subject, who transgresses the Law, it is non-subjectivized "Sin" itself' (*Ticklish Subject*, 149).

to perverse questions such as, 'Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound' (Rom. 6:1)) 'no longer imposes specific, determinate, prohibitions and/ or injunctions . . . but just reverberates as an empty tautological Prohibition: *don't . . .*' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 104). This absolute law requires infinite payment and even this infinite payment does not satisfy the continual pressure of the law's demands. 'Christ's death cannot but appear as the ultimate assertion of the Law, as the elevation of the Law into an unconditional superego agency which burdens us, its subjects, and with a debt we will never be able to repay' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 103).

It is this perverse superego pressure, equated with the law, which Žižek describes as connected to the reversal of the law's commands into acts of disobedience (equating the law with sin and sinning that grace may abound). As Freud described it the "masochism in him creates a temptation to 'sinful acts' which must be expiated by the reproaches of the sadistic conscience" (*The Economic Problem in Masochism*, 266). Instead of precise prohibitions not to kill or steal, 'the true superego injunction is just the truncated "You shall not!" –do what? (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 105).⁵ The superego splits the commandment into the prohibition 'You shall not!' and the obscene injunction 'Kill!' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 105). The 'You shall not!' with its infinite weight raises the question 'I shall not –what? I have no idea what is being demanded of me! *Che vuoi?*' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 105). Under this

⁵ As argued below Paul seems to purposefully foreshorten the command from the Decalogue to make transgression inherent with the encounter with the law.

pressure to do something but not being sure what, "I'll just explode, and start killing!" Thus killing is the desperate response to the impenetrable abstract superego prohibition' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 105). Giving in to the obscene superego demand gives rise to a sacrificial economy continually aimed at meeting the all-consuming desire of the Law or the Other who stands behind the law.

Beginning with Freud the death drive was considered to do its work through delusion and the goal of therapy was to expose the illusion.⁶ This perhaps explains the heavy emphasis in Žižek's theology upon the role of revelation. If sin and the death drive are equated then sin functions as a delusion, the resolution for which is exposure in revelation. Žižek's reading of the significance of the death of Christ is focused on his death as revelation (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 127). Specifically what is revealed in Christ is the death dealing orientation to the law through the coordinate of the obscene superego supplement to the law. 'Since the function of the obscene superego supplement of the (divine) Law is to mask this impotence of the big Other, and since Christianity reveals this impotence . . . Christianity is the religion of Revelation: everything is revealed in it' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 127). The death of Christ is the exposure of the obscene superego economy of sacrifice (death drive), or to state it in Pauline terms the exposure of the deception of sin in regard to the law which killed me (Rom. 7:11). Where Christ, in a sacrificial

⁶ Since the super-ego suppresses the Oedipus complex, it constitutes a corruption of access to memory, and this corruption is carried out in and through a punishing sense of guilt. The ego and the superego describe how the self becomes inaccessible to the self through a delusion (*The Ego and the Id*, 50).

understanding, might be seen as representing this Other, in Žižek's theology Christ's death directly addresses the problem of a Subject caught up in the delusion or fantasy of a big Other (*Did somebody Say Totalitarianism*, 49-50).

The impetus behind his project, which he translates into his reading of Paul, is the exposure of the workings of the death drive and the fundamental fantasy. The fundamental fantasy posits the notion of an access to Being (the drive of the real) through the law (the symbolic) which gives rise to the imaginary. The Subject is structured around an absence, and the reification of this absence in the fundamental fantasy marks the origin and core of the Subject. It is not the supposed noumenal real that harbours danger for the Subject; it is the exposure of this fundamental fantasy that threatens the consistency of the existence of the Subject: 'the moment the subject comes too close to this fantasmatic core, it loses the consistency of its existence' (*Reader*, 119). The death drive operates under the cover of this 'primordial lie' destined to deceive the Subject by providing the fantasmatic foundation of his or her being (*The Fragile Absolute*, 70). The self-positing and self-grounding Subject is dependent on the primordial repression, as beneath the fantasy of an access to Being lies the real or the death drive (*The Fragile Absolute*, 72). The death drive is not itself involved in either truth or lies but precedes the place of the truth (the symbolic) as an untruth or the place of concealment and mystery (*The Fragile Absolute*, 80). Obscuring the untruth of the death drive is the 'fundamental fantasy'

the 'primordial lie', 'older than truth itself' as it 'sustains our being-in-the-world, our dwelling within the symbolic universe, and which, in order to be operative, has to remain "primordially repressed"' (*The Fragile Absolute*, 82-83).⁷ Revelation in this framework is the most powerful of forces as it unleashes the creative power of death drive grounding the Subject.

The Body of Sin

The specific way in which this relates to Romans is that Žižek sees this process, following Freud and Lacan, as arising around the real of the body. Though the real is in many ways his most impenetrable category it is founded on what is most concrete in his theory – the mortal body. The 'treasure within' or the 'soul' or 'substance' that is attached to the body amounts to a departure from the body. The original sacrificial relation is established within the Subject (with passage through the mirror stage) between the imaginary (the ego or 'I') and the symbolic (the superego) which establishes the alienated distance from the real of the body. The passage is from being a body to establishing a symbolic distance from the body (and having a body): 'the body exists in the order of *having* – *I am not my body, I have it*' (*Organs without Bodies*, 121). Self-consciousness arises simultaneously with the realization and refusal of the body and its mortal contingencies (sexuality/castration) so that the Subject arises

⁷ The lie of the death drive sets up the necessary coordinates of identity by providing transcendence (God, the Other, etc.) in a materialist universe. Žižek will in no way presume to get rid of this necessary coordinate.

over and against the real of the body.⁸ The symbolic or the soul 'has to be paid for by the death, murder even, of its empirical bearer' (*The Žižek Reader*, vii).

Žižek describes the process as giving rise to two bodies. That body which one might think can be reduced to the biological dimension is refused: the 'subject turns away from her biological body in disgust, unable to accept that she "is" her body' (*Organs without Bodies*, 93).⁹ Since 'the body refuses to obey the soul and starts to speak on its own, in the symptoms in which the subject's soul cannot recognize itself' she rejects the body (*Organs without Bodies*, 93). But this body that is rejected cannot be equated with the biological body as the body has already been overlaid with the symbolic 'forcefully distorting its normal functioning' (*Organs without Bodies*, 93). So there is the biological body and this second body:

the body that is the proper object of psychoanalysis, the body as the inconsistent composite of erogenous zones, the body as the surface of the inscription of the traces of traumas and excessive enjoyments, the body through which the unconscious speaks. (*Organs without Bodies*, 93)

It is this second body, and not the physical or biological body per se, which the Subject struggles against and which makes up unconscious

⁸ The Phallus as the signifier of castration 'is the signifier, organ or both of desexualization itself, of the "impossible" passage of "body" into symbolic "thought", the signifier that sustains the neutral surface of "asexual" sense' (*Organs without Bodies*, 90).

⁹ Elsewhere he describes the relation between the symbolic and Real: 'The impossibility of the Real refers to the failure of its symbolization: the Real is the virtual hard core around which these symbolizations fluctuate; these symbolizations are always and by definition provisory and unstable, the only "certainty" is that of the void of the Real which they (presup) pose' (*Living in the End Times*, 107).

experience constituting desire. The biological body with its biological interests (well-being, survival, reproduction) is not at the center of the human subject but the true 'interior' is this second body. When 'we penetrate the subject's innermost sanctum, the very core of its Unconscious, what we find there is the pure surface of a fantasmatic screen' (*Organs without Bodies*, 93). Žižek describes the rise of this screen of the fundamental fantasy as an attempt to 'outpass myself into death' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 76). One hastens to assume death in the form of the letter or symbolic ('potentially my epitaph') in order to avoid it (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 76).

In the mirror stage it is the image of the body and the body's coherence which acts as an 'orthopedic complement' of feelings and experience arising from the body (*Seminar III*, 95). As Žižek describes it the entry into the symbolic is the passage from being a body to establishing a symbolic distance from the body (*Organs without Bodies*, 121). Self-consciousness arises simultaneously with the realization and refusal of the body and its mortal contingencies (sexuality/castration) so that the Subject arises over and against the real of the body. As Lacan pictures it, 'The being of language is the non-being of objects' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 263).¹⁰ The particular object which language negates is the body. As Žižek describes, the antagonistic dialectic between the imaginary and symbolic (or the ego and superego) takes place through the displacement of the physical body (*Organs without Bodies*, 93). As Pound puts it in regard to

¹⁰ Quoted in Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher*, 155.

Žižek's theory, 'there is no materiality, only the negativity of the *real*, i.e., the body present only in its absence, and which over and against stands the symbolic'.¹¹ In this precise sense one can say that *fantasy*, in its most basic dimension, implies *the choice of thought at the expense of being*: in fantasy, I find myself reduced to the evanescent point of a thought contemplating the course of events during my absence . . . (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 64).

Death becomes an experience which the body undergoes but which is witnessed ('experienced') by the fantasy gaze. Žižek illustrates the fantasy gaze with *It's a Wonderful Life* in which the Jimmy Stewart character observes his hometown from the perspective of one who has died or who was never born (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 63). Death is avoided by presuming a position of total objectivity verging on absence. 'Cogito designates this very point at which the "I" loses its support in the symbolic network of tradition and thus, in a sense which is far from metaphorical, ceases to exist' (*Tarrying with the Negative*, 64). By identifying with absence (death) or with an empty signifier, death is forestalled at the expense of life.

So the body in its biological and mortal function is not available in the symbolic realm of identity. The body of this symbolic identity displaces the flesh and blood reality of the mortal body as identity in the symbolic realm depends upon the gap between the physical body and symbolic identity. Žižek's linking of the death drive with the real

¹¹ Pound, Žižek, 69.

of the body points to the necessity that the biological body serve as the marker of absence. Absence and negation (absenting and negating the body) is the dynamic of repression giving the symbolic its 'life'.¹² Paul's 'body of death' (7:24), it will be argued below, is the formula in which he sums up the dynamic of sin described from 7:7ff, which means that Paul's understanding is also of a split in the 'I' in which the body takes on an alien relation as it is animated by sin. The identity of the 'I' under the law in Paul's description and Žižek's relation to the real of the body under the symbolic describe the same basic construct.

Dying To Sin

This section and the next trace Žižek's understanding of Paul's notion of 'dying to sin in Christ' or the meaning of the death of Christ for one who would follow him. The next section extends this notion into Žižek's more all encompassing framework of salvation which he links to baptism.

If sin names the gap, Žižek maintains, salvation cannot be its closure or its dissolution. The resolution of the gap of sin is not through an abolition of difference but through its full admission (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 274). The resolution of 'dying to sin' as it is found in Romans 6, under this view, cannot be read as doing away with the element which is synonymous with sin (the death drive);

¹² The passive absence and negation is the symbolic experience of a force that seems to arise from outside the self from the absenting and negating actions of the death drive of the real – which is the subject, but the unapproachable aspect of the subject from the symbolic.

rather salvation will involve full identity with this surplus – which is what Christ does in his death. Christ identifies himself completely with the wound of sin and death and this is the paradox of salvation: ‘getting rid of the wound, healing it, is ultimately the same as fully and directly identifying with it – this is the ambiguity inscribed into the figure of Christ’ (*On Belief*, 104). Christ incarnates the surplus (God in the flesh) and his death is ‘the obliteration of this excess’ (*On Belief*, 105). The excess might take the form of any superego supplement to human subjectivity, but God is the ultimate excess. Christ’s embodiment and death gets rid of the excess for all who follow him. So where the Fall is the story ‘of how the human animal contracted the excess of Life . . . Christ then freely assumes, contracts onto himself , the excess (“Sin”) which burdened the human race’ (*On Belief*, 105).

In his discussion of Romans 5-6, Žižek addresses the meaning of the death of Christ for the Christian. The wrong understanding, in Žižek’s view is the sacrificial reading, which simply reinforces the excess (sin, death drive) as it is apprehended through the deception of the fundamental fantasy (the primordial deception giving coherence to the subject).¹³ The Subject arises from the self-negating activity of sacrifice (castration) and *sacrifice is a guarantee that ‘the Other exists’*: that there *is* an Other who can be appeased by means of the

¹³ The sacrificial economy can be said to be wrong only in a relative sense as it is like the castration complex itself a necessary stage or foundation (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 103).

sacrifice' (*Enjoy Your Symptom*, 56).¹⁴ To read the sacrifice of Christ within this economy is to reinforce the sinful subject.¹⁵ He says, 'people are freed from sin, not by Christ's death as such, but by sharing in Christ's death, by dying to sin, to the way of flesh' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 102). In Žižek's explanation of the alternatives, one can either take up the subject position of Christ and 'die to' the identity found in Adam (the subject of the superego)—having the faith *of* Christ (ridding one's self of the superego supplement to the Law) or one can have faith *in* Christ and in his propitiating sacrifice (reinforcing the superego) (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 102-103).¹⁶ Where faith in Christ has to do with faith in the propitiating power of Christ's payment for sin (we can trust in Christ who has paid the penalty), the faith of Christ calls for imitating Christ's faith (walking as he walked and living as he lived) and this constitutes a kind of deliverance as 'people are freed from sin not by Christ's death as such, but by sharing in Christ's death, by dying to sin, to the way of the flesh' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 102).¹⁷

Baptized Into His Death

¹⁴ The sacrificial economy arises as part of the operation of entry into language and 'instillation of the symbolic function'. See Pound, Žižek, 45.

¹⁵ Žižek's critique of the sacrificial economy recognizes a perversity in regard to the law which, it will be argued below, Paul also rejects.

¹⁶ Žižek poses both possibilities but suggests the faith in Christ has more to do with the faith Christ possesses (as the one who believes on our behalf) than it does with belief in the divinity and particular power of Christ. This comes closest to option 2 above but Žižek seeks to trace this shift in purely psychoanalytic and not sacramental terms.

¹⁷ One realizes lack or subjective destitution in traversing the fantasy and this is the realization taken up in Christ.

The key metaphor of Romans 6 occurs at the beginning of the chapter in verse 3, where Paul raises the question regarding baptism, 'Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?'¹⁸ This question serves to initiate and organize the discussion of Chapter 6. With his discussion of baptism, Žižek incorporates 'death to sin' (traversing the fantasy), but he also sees baptism as the final stage in his theology as it is the point of initiation into the community of the Holy Spirit.

Žižek uses the imagery of baptism to make his point that the 'relationship between Death and Life in the figure of Christ . . . is the same thing viewed from a different global perspective' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 292). The death of Christ is eternal life 'in becoming' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 292). Baptism fuses the death of Christ with eternal life so that the two are embraced together, not in the sense that one succeeds the other, but because the death of Christ is the eternal life he offers. Death, in this sense is not *aufgehoben* or suspended in life; rather the two are one and the same (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 292). The eternal life fostered through the death of Christ is the community which can merge in a new sort of human bond called Holy Spirit. Baptism is inclusive then of 'dying to sin' and of the specific new community that forms as a result.

Those baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death, and this death displaces and counters the death drive of the transgressive relation to the Law. In '*imitatio Christi*, we REPEAT

¹⁸ *English Standard Version*. Rom. 6:3.

Christ's gesture of freely assuming the excess of Life, instead of projecting/displacing it onto some figure of the Other' (*On Belief*, 105). As Žižek notes in regard to psychoanalysis, but an understanding which he extends to Paul, is that neither 'remain within the confines of the 'morbid' masochistic obsession with death' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 152). The death of Christ directly addresses 'the perverse intermingling of Life and Death which characterizes the dialectics of prohibitory Law that generates the desire for transgression' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 152). In Žižek's description of the death drive, it is by definition an 'enigmatic signifier' holding out the false promise of a 'beyond' or a substantialized notion of death per se (*On Belief*, 100-101). Christ's death is a negation of this understanding in that he passes through death. This process of undergoing subjective destitution, summed up in Lacan's phrase 'traversing the fantasy', involves a reorientation to the law through death-like realization.¹⁹ Baptism, like the death of Christ, brings life and death into their properly 'parallactic' relationship of being 'one and the same event' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 292).

The superego is the point at which the death drive is articulated and the death of Christ, for Žižek, reveals the lack of 'substance' or the void (the reality of the Other or of God) behind the message.²⁰ As representative of the exposure of the superego two results surface:

¹⁹ This may refer to the dereliction and death of Christ or of his follower in identifying with him. Or it may simply refer to the realization that there is no Other.

²⁰ The lack of substance is of course what serves in place of substance in Žižek's theory. Milbank captures this point: 'For the Lacanian/Žižekian "Real" is less a creative force (natural or cultural) than it is the *interruptus* of the absolutely negative which sacrificially refuses the "All" in the name of nothing, yet brings about the short-circuitings and the switches' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 121).

where the obscene superego gives rise to the economy of absolute sacrifice, Christ turns the message around to say, 'I don't want anything from you!'; and second, 'this gift of no requirements will require your very soul' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 170). The Subject is so drastically reoriented through identifying with the death of Christ that this constitutes a new form of the Subject. 'Here enters the "good news" of Christianity: the miracle of faith is that it IS possible to traverse the fantasy, to undo the founding decision, to start one's life all over again, from the zero point – in short to change eternity itself' (*On Belief*, 148).²¹ Christ suspends this circular logic in which the Subject is attempting to ground himself and exposes the fantasy of this supposed substantial ground – a ground that exacts the payment of a living death (*Did somebody Say Totalitarianism*, 49-50).

Žižek's formula 'Crucifixion is Resurrection' contains the cure; 'one has only to include oneself in the picture' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 291). As Conor Cunningham has restated the formula, 'I am not alive therefore I cannot die' and this constitutes a kind of eternal life.²² The resurrection of Christ has to be understood as a resurrection which takes place in the follower of Christ and the way in which it is made a reality is through the move of subjective destitution. Those united with him in a death like his, crucified with Christ, shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.²³ 'When the believers gather,

²¹ Emphasis in the original.

²² Relayed in conversation.

²³ See Romans 6:5 & 8

mourning Christ's death, their shared spirit is the resurrected Christ' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 291).²⁴

In this instance love is not beyond the Law; they have passed through death (symbolic destitution) and mourning and have shared the death of the one who embodies the Law. The true Pauline Christian communities (found today in radical political groups rather than churches) 'assume all the consequences of what Lacan called the nonexistence of the big Other, and it is only Christianity that opens up the space for thinking this nonexistence, insofar as it is the religion of a God who dies' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 287). Žižek's atheistic theology shares the conservative theological perspective that the specific work of Christ is necessary for 'salvation'. It is Christ alone that reveals the nonexistence of God, not through a symbolic gesture, but at the level of the real, opening up, as a result, new forms of human community built on an alternative subjectivity.

The Law of Sin and Death

The remainder of this chapter examines Paul's understanding of sin and how Christ's death addresses and resolves the problem of sin in the life of the believer in Romans 6-8 and it compares this understanding to that of Žižek. The meaning of sin as it occurs in 7:7ff and the meaning of 'death to sin' in 6:2, 10 is the primary focus, with a concluding section on the displacement of 'the law of sin and death'

²⁴ Žižek illustrates the community of the Holy Spirit with the song about the union organizer 'Joe Hill' who is pictured in the song as living on, though killed by the authorities, in the trade union. 'The immortal dimension in man, that in man for what "takes more than guns to kill," the Spirit, is what went on to organize itself' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 268-269).

with 'the law of the Spirit' in 8:2ff. I will begin by showing that Žižek's and Paul's analysis of the problem coincides on key points (i.e., the antagonistic self-relation under the law due to a deceptive desire which is oriented to death). Paul sums up this universal problem as 'the body of death' or 'the body of sin', and this is analogous in its key elements with Žižek's notion of the Subject of the death drive.

The author makes no claim to be a New Testament specialist so this section will follow scholarly consensus for the most part. Where there is departure from the majority opinion there will still be appeal to and support from New Testament specialists.

The Context of Romans

In order to make the point that Žižek's reading of Paul on sin and death is close to Paul's own understanding in *Romans* 6-8, we need first to locate those chapters in their context in the letter. This opening section shows how the theme of sin and death which is overcome in Christ (as found in chapters 6-8), fits in with the main thrust of the argument of the letter establishing the universal nature of the gospel.

The letter makes sense if we posit a conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians within the Christian community in Rome which Paul is seeking to resolve by showing the differences of these two groups are resolved within a universal understanding. The date of

Romans can be tied to somewhere between 52-59 A.D.,²⁵ in the period subsequent to Claudius decree of expulsion (49 A.D.) which seems to have been a result of the disputes arising among the Jews with the preaching of the Gospel in Rome.²⁶ The Church in Rome may have been started by Jews from Rome present on the day of Pentecost, as the Jewish community in Rome maintained close ties to Jerusalem (paying the Temple tax, and making pilgrimages to Jerusalem), which would also account for a Church that was originally meeting in the synagogues and perhaps causing the conflict giving rise to the expulsion.²⁷ According to Stuhlmacher, the churches were forced into meeting in homes and during the absence of the Jews and the move to Gentile house churches (as evidenced in chapter 16) Jewish food restrictions and other Jewish practices were phased out.²⁸ With the death of Claudius and the beginning of the reign of Nero (54 A.D.) the

²⁵ In 15:19ff Paul informs them that his work in the east is finished and he plans to go to Spain. He describes taking up an offering to take to Jerusalem which puts him in the midst of his third missionary journey (Acts 20). He mentions Achaia and Macedonia but makes no mention of Galatia and Asia which may be the latest churches he has visited on his way to Jerusalem. This may place him in Corinth where the accession of Gallio as proconsul (51 A.D.) provides a time marker. Paul is brought before Gallio in 51 or 52. For these reasons Schreiner locates him in Corinth, writing at the earliest in 54 A.D (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 4). Dodd using the same logic dates the letter at late as 59 (C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Collins/Fontana Books, 1959), 18-19). Barrett places the date between January and March of 55 (C. K. Barrett, *Epistle to the Romans* (London: A & C Black Publishers Ltd, 1957), 4-5). Stuhlmacher dates the return of the exiled Jews to 56 and sets this as the time of the writing (Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, trans. Scott J. Hafemann (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 8).

²⁶ The decree affected Jewish Christians as it is due to this decree that Aquila and Priscilla are in Corinth (Acts 18:2). Stuhlmacher describes this result along with the decree against any public gathering of a political nature since the murder of Caesar in 44, which would have included the perception of public Church gatherings considering the recent expulsion due to the agitator 'Chrestus' the historian Suetonius's apparently mistaken name for Christ (Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 6-7).

²⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 29.

²⁸ Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 7.

Jewish Christians returned to Rome in large numbers to find the Church was less accommodating to Jewish practices and that there was no chance of being accepted back into the Jewish community. They had to adjust to a church that had become Gentile in its practices and the Gentile house churches had to adjust to the Jewish presence in this new circumstance (see chapter 14).²⁹ As Ziesler notes this may have been the clear breaking point of the Church from the Jewish community so that Paul's letter is acting to mediate the transition, arguing for toleration of but also liberation from Jewish practices.³⁰

Paul writes then, to answer arguments that may have arisen about the role of the Jewish law and practices in salvation and to act as mediator in the transition of this key Church into a status distinct from Judaism. Theologically he will demonstrate that the purpose of the law is fulfilled in Christ and this purpose is inclusive of a mind-set, ethic and life-style (pleasing to God – 8:8) which the law alone was powerless to deliver. The Mosaic law only accentuated the need for the enabling power of the law of life in the Spirit. The theological argument and the social development converge in the theme of universality as this new community will no longer bear the marks of exclusive rituals and practices as it will embody the reality of a new form of humanity 'in Christ'.

²⁹ Fitzmyer notes that by this time the Jewish Christians would not have been welcomed back into the Jewish community so that they would have had to congregate in house churches (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 33).

³⁰ John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 14-15. Stuhlmacher offers a slightly different reading of the situation, suggesting that Paul is afraid that his Jewish Christian opponents are turning the Romans against his Gospel prior to his arrival so he is writing to answer their slanderous accusation and to inform them of his true intentions (Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 6).

To understand the contribution of chapters 6-8 to the letter, we need to grasp the larger argument to which they belong. The thrust of that argument concerns the continuity of salvation-history or how God has been and is now making people right in the face of death.³¹ Paul seeks to show the relationship between law and gospel, between Jewish and Gentile believers, and between Israel and the Church so as to make his case that the gospel is universal.³² Under the opening statement (1:16-17) Paul pronounces his theme³³ of 'the righteousness of God', echoing several Old Testament passages which call for God to make things right in the face of shame and death.³⁴ God's faithfulness to his covenant promise (universal salvation) is upheld in Christ who is accomplishing what the Old Testament people and prophets longed for.³⁵ The inclusion of the Gentiles on the basis of faith in Christ is not contrary to this faithfulness but is the fulfilment of God's universal promise to Abraham. The true intent of Judaism and the law was, up

³¹ D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed.). (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994). 'Introduction'

³² Carson, *New Bible Commentary*, 'Introduction'

³³ Most scholars agree that this functions much like a thesis to which the various parts of the letter relate. Cranfield heads his commentary of verses 16b-17 'The Theme of the epistle is stated' (Cranfield, *Romans*, 87. Barrett concludes about verses 16-17, 'Most commentators recognize in them the "text" of the epistle: it is not wrong to see in them a summary of Paul's theology as a whole' (Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 27). As James Dunn puts it, 'These two verses are the launching pad and provide the primary thrust and direction of the letter' (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 1-8*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 46).

³⁴ According to Hays the themes of shame and righteousness are paired in the Old Testament passages Paul is echoing. The language of shame (*aischynein* and *kataishchynein*) appears together in the lament Psalms with Paul's terminology of righteousness (Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* ((New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 36-37).

³⁵ God's righteousness as revealed in Christ fulfils the universality he began to work out in Israel. "The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations" (Ps. 98:2).

to and including living true to the law, to be found in Christ (8:3-4).³⁶

The antagonism between Jews and Gentiles is set in the framework of a more fundamental problem and answer; the reign of death in both Jews and Gentiles overcome in Christ. Those who are baptized into Christ die to sin and conquer death (6:1-6) and become true children of God who are able to meet the obligations of covenant relationship (8:2ff). Chapters 6-8 clinch the argument that all are alike under the law and sin and all are made right (righteous) in relation to Christ.

The letter's theme of righteousness, according to Dunn, is best understood from its Hebrew background in which it is a relational concept, rather than its Greek form and setting in which it has the idea of a standard against which the individual is measured.³⁷ From this background it is understood that God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel (the law) or his saving action for Israel *is his righteousness*.³⁸

³⁶ There are also those who are either Jewish Christians who are opponents of Paul or potential opponents that Paul warns they should have nothing to do with. Some are already slandering him in Rome (Rom.3:8) and he warns them to have nothing to do with such people in 16:17-18. Stuhlmacher imagines an organized campaign against Paul, under the auspices of James, and Paul is trying to squelch this opposition so as not to lose Rome as his staging ground for the mission into Spain (Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 6). Fitzmyer explains that 'Paul is hardly implying that such persons were among Roman Christians' rather, 'Paul's statement undoubtedly reflects rather some past experience of Paul' (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 34). Stuhlmacher sees the opposition against Paul as under the auspices of James and that subsequent to the conference in Jerusalem his opponents considered that they had the upper hand (Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 6). Fitzmyer questions whether these were Jewish Christian opponents of Paul as Acts 28:21 indicates that they had received no letter about Paul and that no one from Jerusalem had spoken evil of Paul (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 33). Moo thinks that rumours of Paul's stance on the Law had given him a reputation as being 'anti-law' and perhaps even 'anti-Jewish' (accounting for some accusing him of saying, 'Let us do evil that good may come'), so he must defuse these rumours and defuse any potential hostility toward him they might have caused (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 21).

³⁷ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 341.

³⁸ The 'new perspective' stemming originally from the work of E. P. Sanders has rejected Lutheran or Bultmannian notions that the law and Judaism were defective. So in interpreting righteousness in Philippians 3:9 Sanders maintains that the only thing wrong with the righteousness by the law is that it is not based on faith

His reckoning and making righteous are part of his initiative to call (Israel originally) into and to sustain a covenant (relationship) marked by the law. Paul's contrasting of works of the law with faith (Rom. 3:20, 28), in this light, has to do with the difference between the two covenants; between covenant faithfulness marked in the first instance by remaining true to the distinctive markers of Judaism, whereas justification by faith removed the restriction of the covenant to Israel so as to embrace both Jews and Gentiles in a universal salvation.³⁹ God is faithful to his covenant with Israel (chapter 4) but through Israel comes the universal covenant with 'all who believe' (1:16; 3:22; 4:11; 10:4), both Jew and Gentile.⁴⁰

Having set chapters 6-8 within the overall theme of the letter the broad outline of the argument needs to be shown as it unfolds from chapters 1-5 to see Paul's line of argument up to chapter 6. According to Keck Paul's Gospel in Romans 'deals decisively with the human condition' (sin and death), as otherwise 'there would be little reason to announce to Gentiles what the God worshiped by Jews has achieved in Christ'.⁴¹ The argument from 1:18-3:20 demonstrates the depth and

in Christ. Paul, in this view, is not saying that the law taught that salvation is through works; salvation is always by grace, whether under the law or under Christ. The law marked the covenant relationship with God, which Sanders calls 'covenantal nomism' and the danger was that Jews would imagine righteousness is through nationalistic markers such as circumcision and the food laws. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). Veronica Koperski, *What Are They Saying About Paul and the Law* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001). Michael Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007). Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, lxiii – lxxii.

³⁹ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 354ff.

⁴⁰ Paul and Žižek both describe sin or the relationship to the law as alienation, but it is only Paul who speaks of reconciliation or restoration of relationship.

⁴¹ Leander E. Keck, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 33.

breadth of the sin problem. He seeks to answer the question of why God needed to reveal his saving righteousness in Christ and why people can only experience it by faith. The answers are found in Paul's contention that 'all are under sin' (3:9)—'helpless captives to the deadly rule of sin'.⁴² Paul eliminates any grounds for exclusiveness in either his Jewish or Gentile readers. In a catena of quotes (from the *law*) which apply in their original context to Jews and sometimes to their enemies, Paul weaves together a picture of sin in which the organs of speech, due to taking up a lie, function as a grave and entrap and poison, leading to bloodshed and violence (3:10-18).⁴³ The *lie of sin deals in death* even among those who have been entrusted with the oracles of God (3:2). The law has its purpose which Paul has just demonstrated; 'through the Law comes the knowledge of sin' (3:20). This is not a bragging right but a cause for silent humility. 'Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God' (3:19). All have fallen short of God and all are in need of redemption from the lie of sin.

The promise which counters this death dealing lie is received by one whose journey into death is definitive of resurrection faith (4:24).

The manner of redemption has to do with the reorientation of faith

⁴² Carson, *New Bible Commentary*, Rom. 1:18–4:25.

⁴³ Nothing, or emptiness, seem to have been taken up into the organs of speech, to become there a grave or a sarcophagus. Throughout the list the organs of speech deal in death. "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit" (3:13 quoting Ps. 5:9). David, in this Psalm compares two kinds of speech, as they orient one, either to God's presence or his absence. Lacan pictures speech in a similar way. See Jacques Lacan, "Le symbolique, l'imaginaire et le réel," In *Des noms-dupère*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 42-43. Quoted in Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 50.

which turns from those who would trust in human language (Babel in Gen. 11) to the one who trusts in the promise of God's word (Gen. 12). In chapter 4 with the father of the Jews but also the father of faith (Abraham), Paul defines faith with the key element of trust in God's promise in the face of death (resurrection faith or death acceptance as opposed to death resistance, 4:24-25).⁴⁴ The specific problem of the reign of death through sin (with the dependence of sin on death) is undone in the faith which overcomes the fear and threat of death (being about a hundred years old and Sarah's womb being dead (4:19)) by trusting God for life 'though he were as good as dead' (4:19).⁴⁵ The argument seems to purposefully reference the events prior to the giving of the covenant of circumcision so as to convince the Jewish Christians of the priority of faith over the law. For we say, 'FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS' (4:9). It was credited 'Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised' (4:10).

Chapter 5 caps his argument against Jewish distinctiveness and the universal nature of the gospel, maintaining that Jews and Gentiles are rendered identical in their relationship in Adam. 'Nevertheless

⁴⁴ In the words of William Frazier, 'What he endured was linked organically with the inherent demands of faith, on the one hand, and the bondage of sin, on the other. . . . There is . . . an exact equation in the text between Abraham's belief and his readiness to accept death. The one is realized in and through the other . . . the point is not that Abraham accepted death and thereby demonstrated his faith. Rather, his death acceptance was his faith' (William B. Frazier, "Where Mission Begins: A Foundational Probe" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* vol.11, no. 4 October 1987, 149). The bondage of sin, as portrayed in the passages Paul has taken up invariably portrays this 'organic link' between death resistance or a covenant with death and sin. Faith then, as death acceptance, involves the exposure of this lie. It requires reversing course, not in fear or an attempt to negotiate the problem but with the full assurance this is the course travelled by Christ.

⁴⁵ The death drive as formulated by Freud and Lacan fits this theological understanding in that death resistance presumes an immortality which is to be gained through a masochistic self destruction. Abraham's and Christ's death acceptance exposes the lie in a life style of faithful death acceptance – which Paul describes as resurrection faith (Rom. 4:24-25).

death reigned from Adam until Moses' (5:14), Adam however, is 'a type of Him who was to come' (5:14).⁴⁶ The reign of death introduced by Adam gives way to the universal reign of life through Christ (5:17). According to Fitzmyer, from chapter 5, with the shift to the focus on Adam, the 'effects of Adam and what he did to the human race' and the effects of the Christ-event on humanity are compared and explained.⁴⁷ As Shreiner states it, 'Adam and Christ are the two most influential individuals in human history, and believers can take confidence because they belong to the one who has overturned all that Adam introduced into the world'.⁴⁸ Where Adam inaugurates death Christ ushers in life, and where Adam began a race of sinners Christ makes a righteous humanity. Paul takes note of the law of Moses in verse 14 but only as a marker of the reign of death which extends in both directions so that Jews and Gentiles are no different in that death rules all. (The argument of the following sections is that it is still Adam as a type of everyman which Paul is describing in Romans 7:7ff.)

Chapters 6-8 deliver the details of Paul's argument as to how the reign of death is overcome in the life of the individual. As Fitzmyer writes, 'Through baptism, they are identified with Christ's death and

⁴⁶ As Eckart Reinmuth notes, Adam is representative for Paul of the reason Christ came. (Reinmuth, 'Allegorical Reading and Intertextuality', 56). Reinmuth finds reference to Adam woven into most every section of Romans dealing with the sins of humans (1:19ff, 3:23, 5:12ff, 7:7-11, 8:18ff). In 1:18-3:20, Paul shows to what extent all are at fault, and 3:23 (*πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ*) is the allusion to the fall of all in the one, so that in the actions of each the loss of the glory of God is manifest (Eckart Reinmuth, 'Allegorical Reading and Intertextuality: Abbreviations of the Adam Story in Paul (Romans 1:18-28)' in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, Leroy A. Huizenga, eds. (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 56).

⁴⁷ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 405.

⁴⁸ Shreiner, *Romans*, 282.

resurrection, and their very being or “self” is transformed’.⁴⁹ Where chapter 5 expresses redemption in two universal types, chapter 6-8 explains what this universality looks like in terms of individual identity and the dynamics of human interiority. Chapters 6-8 is not a change of subject from the universal reign of sin and death overcome in Christ; rather it is a picture of the particular in light of the universal predicament and its resolution. Paul explains *how* God is ‘making things right’ (transforming human beings into the likeness of Christ) in regard to the human plight of sin and death. Death reigns no more as the author of life extends life through Christ so as to defeat the orientation to death inherent in sin. The theme of these chapters is captured in the summation and conclusion in 8:2: ‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.’

The Agonistic ‘I’ of Romans 7:7-25

Having located Romans 6-8 in the context of the letter, we can now compare Paul’s analysis of the human condition with Žižek’s. Chapter 7 is the primary focus of Žižek’s commentary and it offers the most detailed analysis of the dynamics of individual identity under the law of sin and death, so it is the logical starting point in analyzing the problem of sin and its resolution. Here I will argue that Žižek’s exegesis of Paul is largely correct when dealing with the description of sin in 7:7ff and this will set up the comparison and contrast with Žižek’s

⁴⁹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 429.

understanding of Paul's resolution to the problem in chapters 6 and 8. This and the following two sections break down the dynamic which Paul is unfolding in Romans 7:7ff so as to identify who the 'I' is and the nature of his problem and it makes the case that Žižek is correct to locate his understanding of the subject with Romans 7. The agonistic struggle with desire, the law and deception, it is argued, fit the Lacanian identity. I need first to show that when Paul says 'I' in Romans 7, he means the universal 'I', including Jews and Gentiles and himself. The introductory argument of this section, in agreement with Žižek, is that the form of Romans 7 (from the perspective of 'I') is a universal construct (Adam or everyman) which is determinative of human identity. I will also argue against Žižek that Romans 7:7ff does not describe the identity of a Christian⁵⁰ (which Žižek equates with the hysteric) but that rather it describes the identity of the non-Christian from the perspective of Christianity. Paul is describing the death

⁵⁰ As Fitzmyer points out, many Christians may find their experience reflected here but two very different conditions are being described in chapters 7-8; being outside of Christ or being in Christ. Paul is not primarily concerned to reflect on psychology or experience but on the ontological reality of this difference. Those that interpret 7:7ff as a description of the Christian Paul 'tend to make of Paul a young Luther' (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 464-465). Krister Stendahl, for example, holds that the introspective conscience introduces a contrast between Law and faith which is to read Luther back into Paul. As Stendahl describes it, Paul was not plagued with an introspective conscience on the order of Luther or Augustine, but is primarily concerned to argue for the holiness of the Law in 7:7ff and to make an absolute distinction between Law and sin (Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 92-93). While Stendahl may be correct that Paul is not primarily drawing conclusions from his conscience, this conclusion does not exclude the possibility that sin and salvation have affected his conscience and that this effect is not excluded in the description of 7:7ff. Stendahl (by arguing that the focus is on the Law and not on sin), ironically, provides supporting evidence for a position such as John Murray's, which he is attempting to refute. Murray and Stendahl are arguing for a continuity between Law and faith from very different perspectives (for Murray conversion brings on a heightened sensitivity to the Law), yet they both argue that Paul's primary subject is in regard to Law. See John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 254, and Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 92-93.

dealing nature of a sinful identity along the lines which Žižek reads him, except he is not offering a solution by describing the problem.⁵¹

Paul views humanity through Jewish-Christian eyes in historical and corporate terms (without Christ and in Christ),⁵² but this view does not obstruct the individual and the psychological; rather it accounts for it⁵³ as in the case of Paul himself.⁵⁴ The reality of the individual is understood in light of the *experience*⁵⁵ or identity of corporate humanity (unregenerate humanity) in Adam⁵⁶ and in Israel. By describing his

⁵¹ Žižek's logic is correct from his perspective in that being able to name and describe the problem of deception means the problem is solved – which is the first step in therapy. From a Christian perspective describing the deception is not enough, and this ability is explained on the basis of chapter 8 and not chapter 7.

⁵² Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 465.

⁵³ The argument is that Paul could not describe the experience of his pre-Christian life while he was in the midst of the struggle which he only gains a perspective on from being in Christ. The argument that Paul is referencing his Christian life is that prior to becoming a Christian he does not speak of a struggle with sin nor of a failure with regard to the Law. In Phil. 3:4-6 and Gal. 1:13-14 he expresses a confident superiority in his Law keeping and his blamelessness. See W. G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und das Bild des Menschen in Neuen Testament: Zwei Studien* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1974), 117, cited in Schreiner, *Romans*, 365. In Murray's description Paul's conversion may have brought on a heightened sensitivity to sin and a full appreciation of the Spiritual nature of the Law. Murray makes the point that Paul's use of the term 'spiritual' in verse 14 must have reference to the Holy Spirit so that there is a continuity between verses 14-25 and the description of life in the Spirit in chapter 8 (Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 254-259).

⁵⁴ As Schreiner maintains if the 'I' refers to every person, 'then Paul must be included in the "I" since he is part of the human race' (Schreiner, *Romans*, 364). Kümmel would remove the personal and existential element as he maintains the 'I' refers to every person in general but cannot be said to apply to the particular individual Paul. See Kümmel, *Römer 7 und das Bild des Menschen in Neuen Testament*, 118-132, cited in Schreiner, *Romans*, 365. As Dunn points out, it is a logical fallacy to maintain that 'I' refers to every person in general but excludes Paul. See Dunn, 'Rom. 7, 14-25 in the Theology of Paul', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 31, 257-273. Referenced in Schreiner, *Romans*, 364.

⁵⁵ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, trans. John Galvin (Edinburgh: T. & T Clark Publishers, Ltd., 1994), 178. Theissen maintains that while Paul may be alluding to his own background and that his experience provides the depth of understanding but his experience per se is not the necessary point of departure.

⁵⁶ James Dunn notes that of the 64 references to Adam in the Pauline letters, three-fourths appear in Romans and 41 of the 48 occurrences occur in 5:12-8:3. James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 111. Dunn devotes several sections of his book demonstrating the references to Adam – see 79-101.

pre-Christian life⁵⁷ from the perspective afforded in Christ,⁵⁸ wherein he can separate sin and the law, Paul establishes the holiness of the law.⁵⁹ In Žižekian terms, *he separates the law from its obscene superego supplement* (the supplement assuming transgression and punishment). The pervert, who represents the first step in the formation of the subject, fuses sin and law and effectively enacts the law by becoming its masochistic servant (*Reader*, 117). According to Žižek's reading, Paul's relationship to the law is an open question in which he stages the passage from perversion to hysteria (in which law is suspended or separated from sin, guilt and punishment through questioning).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Several positions overlap, as Paul could be speaking of himself and his experience as a boy but he could also be describing the universal experience contained in Adam. Fitzmyer concludes that Paul is talking simultaneously about Jews and Gentiles, or unregenerate humanity faced with the law –but as seen by a Christian. He decisively dismisses the notion that Paul is speaking of a Christian perspective or the experience of a Christian. He contrasts what he calls 'an individual, psychological level' with 'a historical and corporate point of view' and he suggests that it is this latter point of view that best describes Paul's perspective (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 465).

⁵⁸ The most radical division as to the identity of the 'I' is between those who identify the 'I' as Paul's description of the Christian life (in verses 14-25) and those who maintain he is speaking of a pre-Christian condition. Fitzmyer includes Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Barth, and Packer among those who hold that Paul is speaking as a Christian. See Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 464. Packer claims this position is 'beyond dispute' (J.I. Packer, 'The "Wretched Man" Revisited: Another Look at Romans 7:14-25'. In *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, edited by Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 73). The majority of commentators (see below) hold to some version of non-Christian identity for the 'I'.

⁵⁹ As Schreiner says, 'the goodness of the law...is inextricably linked with the wickedness of sin' in the theme of 7:7ff (Schreiner, *Romans*, 358). Where the Law reigns sin abounds, so that deliverance from Sin will mean the enactment of a different Law (Rom. 8:2). Paul's 'blamelessness' as a Jew (Phil. 3:4-6) is not an argument that he was sinless or unconscious of sin but coincides with the understanding that he was the worst of sinners and yet unaware of it. See Schreiner, *Romans*, 365.

⁶⁰ See *Ticklish Subject*, 148.

For Paul, Adamic humanity and those in Christ are two alternative identities (the only two possibilities),⁶¹ and they are *ontological* poles apart in regard to life, death and righteousness.⁶² Jew and Gentile are not distinguished as to their plight in Adam; they belong to one form of fallen, deceived humanity.⁶³ The nature of the

⁶¹ Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 115. Stuhlmacher maintains that the majority consensus is to see the 'I' as Adam or universal experience. To describe this as an experience is not to say that it is only an experience and not reflective of an ontological reality, nor is it a claim that this experience is a conscious experience. The point being that the experience is recognized for what it is only within a Christian perspective. T. L. Carter concludes that 'Romans 7:7-12 is a retelling of the story of the Fall with the ἐγὼ cast in the role of Adam and sin fulfilling the role of the serpent' (T. L. Carter, *Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 186). James Dunn traces Paul's references to Adam and Genesis 1-3 in Romans and concludes that these verses in Genesis and discussion surrounding them in Jewish literature serve as a key part of Paul's resources in developing his own understanding of sin. Dunn finds reference to Adam in Romans 1:18-32; 3:23; 5:12-21; 7:7-13; and 8:19-22. Dunn traces reference to Adam and discussion of him in post-biblical Jewish tradition and concludes, 'It should be evident from all this that Paul was entering into an already well-developed debate and that his own views were not uninfluenced by its earlier participants' (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 90). He argues that Genesis 3 is referenced in chapter 7 as demonstrated in the manner in which Paul's key points are developed along the following lines in tandem with Genesis 3 in 7:7-11: an initial stage of innocence in which sin is disempowered (Gen. 2:7; Rom. 7:9); the prohibition of desire (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 7:7); the prohibition as giving rise to desire (Gen. 3:6; Rom. 7:8) sin personified as a power or force (Gen. 3:1-4; Rom. 7:17); the force of sin works through deception (Gen. 3:4; Rom. 7:11,17); the deception and its result are focused on death (Gen. 3:4,19; Rom. 7:8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 24); the woman's and Paul's complaint – 'the serpent/sin deceived me' (Gen. 3:13; Rom. 7:11); all held together in the 'I' as an 'existential self-identification with Adam, *adam*' (Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 99).

⁶² Paul's understanding is not that of the Reformation notion that one is 'both justified and a sinner'. In Paul's understanding, Christians are not 'reckoned righteous' apart from being made right (or being brought into a right relationship with God, self, and others through following Christ). See J. Christian Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 216.

⁶³ His point is not that the Jewish Law creates an alternative or a third sort of person (Gentile, Christian and Jew), but rather he seems to be arguing that the Jewish and Gentile type of person constitutes a singular form that can be summed up under Adam (so that the Jewish encounter with the Decalogue also falls under Adam's encounter with God's prohibition). The 'I' is carnal and sold under sin (7:14) and this work of death is still at work in the 'I' (past tense 7:7-13 and present tense 7:14ff). The 'I' of 7:7ff can be read as applying to Adam, to Paul, and to everyman as Paul, it is argued below, is fusing a reading of the Decalogue with Genesis 3 so as to describe a universal condition.

deception and the nature of sin render the Jew and Gentile equally oppressed by a sinful orientation to the law.⁶⁴

In Romans 7, then, Paul recounts the experience of fallen humanity in the first person 'I' or *ἐγώ* (first introduced in 7:9). The *ἐγώ* or 'I' arises, according to Theissen, originally with a lack of self-consciousness and a growing cognitive awareness. As he points out, there are no cognitive verbs in 7:8-11, indicating that these events do not take place consciously.⁶⁵ The *ἐγώ* makes its appearance in conjunction with a transgressive relationship to the law, which accounts for its sudden appearance in Romans 7 (and its repetition over 20 times in the following verses) and Genesis 3 and its complete disappearance in Romans 8. Bornkamm's point that 'Only under the law of sin and death does man really become an "I"',⁶⁶ can be taken as a literal description of Romans 7 and the Genesis account.⁶⁷ The speaking Subject of the passage has no 'I' prior to the advent of sin.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ If Paul is simultaneously referencing Genesis 2-3 and the Decalogue the notion that that his reference to νόμος can be identified as either the Mosaic Law or 'the law of sin and death' in 7:7ff becomes moot. This is not to diminish the importance of the Law nor is it to be mistaken as antinomianism (Paul's continual concern in this section); rather it is to acknowledge that sin is the primary agent determining perception of νόμος. As John Bertone points out, the 'distinction (between 'the law of sin and death' and the Mosaic Law) is arbitrary when viewed from the perspective that Paul is describing a pre-Christ situation throughout 7:7-24' (John A. Bertone, *The Law of the Spirit: Experience of the Spirit and displacement of the Law in Romans 8:1-16* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005), 180).

⁶⁵ Theissen works out in some detail the growing consciousness or cognitive awareness of Romans 7. In verses 14-18 however, the verbs indicate a conscious recognition or insight which is missing from the earlier verses (Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, 231-232).

⁶⁶ Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, (London: SCM Press, 2011), 94. Bornkamm is following the Genesis text closely but it is not clear that he is here describing the reality of the text.

⁶⁷ The Cartesian *cogito* functions for Žižek as the universal formula for the split within the 'I'. Žižek in *Tarrying with the Negative* provides his most prolonged analysis of the *cogito*. See the first two chapters, 9-80.

⁶⁸ Hugh C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 126ff. In the same way, in Žižek, there is no 'I' prior to the Fall and the death drive.

We may infer that this subject has created an alternative form of subjectivity through transgressing the law, something on the order of Žižek's understanding.

This corresponds with Genesis 3 when Adam, in confrontation with God, after the Fall, first speaks it and repeats it in four consecutive bursts; 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself' (Gen. 3:10). If Paul in Romans 7:7ff is giving voice to the *adam* of 5:12ff then the 'I' is necessary to his presentation as the introduction of the *ἐγὼ* reflects the loss and death of the self.⁶⁹ In a parallel text, Paul speaks of the death of this 'I' with no apparent harm to himself but as his salvation: 'For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2:19-20). The 'I' that can be crucified or put to death in baptism is presumably a construct of sin and a Subject of the law and is not the individual in his true essence. At the head of the chapter Paul has explained that this Subject of the law is expendable: 'Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead' (Rom. 7:4).

Paul describes a split within the 'I' with one half of the *ἐγὼ* pitted against the other in a struggle in which human agency is entirely relinquished to sin: 'So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me' (Rom. 7:17). Bultmann draws out the idea that the

⁶⁹ See Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 94.

split or antagonism in the 'I' is so severe that one becomes objectified or split within, so that this 'other' alien self is apparently expendable as it is a construct of alienation.⁷⁰ For Bultmann, Paul's notion of flesh (σάρξ) represents this second self in its objectification. The flesh is 'a power that lays claim to him and determines him' to such an extent that one's will (located in σῶμα) is relinquished to this seemingly alien force.⁷¹ The problem with Bultmann's analysis, according to Stendahl, is the presumption that Paul's problem is synonymous with the Lutheran or Western problem of an introspective conscience.⁷² However, if it is understood that Paul is describing his pre-Christian self, then his insight is in regards to an ontological condition (dead in sin) he faced before the law, the experience of which he was not conscious of when it applied to him. So Stendahl may be correct that it is hard to gauge how Paul subjectively experienced the power of sin in his life.⁷³ Paul is not primarily concerned to describe an 'experience' but a failed identity with a failed ontology (given over to death). So his is not primarily a psychological or experiential account but an ontological description, but this ontology is connected to his apprehension and experience of himself. So to speak of Paul's

⁷⁰ Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Volume I*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 199. Bultmann introduces Paul's notion of flesh (σάρξ) as representing this second self in its objectification. Stendahl maintains that Paul's primary concern is to defend the goodness of the law and to distinguish it from the work of sin 'in such a way that not only the law but the will and mind of man are declared good and are found to be on the side of God'. Stendahl does not take into account that Paul may have acquired the ability to distinguish between sin and the law only as a Christian. Stendahl's criticism can, in part, be countered with the understanding that Bultmann's description fits not only a psychological but an ontological or objective condition. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 87ff.

⁷¹ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Volume I*, 201

⁷² Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 87ff.

⁷³ Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 87ff.

'experience' is not to suggest that he is primarily focusing on experience to the exclusion of an ontological order, rather it presumes that there is an ontology giving rise to this experience. This objectified alienated other is not the object of salvation but is the lure or by-product of death dealing deception. In salvation the 'I' is not rescued or brought to maturity but disappears. This *ἐγὼ* is not subject to growth and change as it is an object fixed as part of a formal structure under the law.⁷⁴ It is apparently synonymous with the 'body of death', the phrase in verse 24 which Dunn maintains sums up the dynamic Paul has described and from which he seeks rescue.⁷⁵ It is the obstruction to growth and the subject/object (the two *ἐγὼ*'s) of sinful desire. The *ἐγὼ* of 7:7ff is part of a dynamic of deception, subject to dissolution in the death to sin and the rescue of chapter 8 in which it is absent.

Paul's picture of the *ἐγὼ* as the peculiar Subject which arises with subjection to the law, fits Freud's original formulation, in which he 'discovers' the ego/ superego split at the same time as the death drive. He pictured the ego as emerging from and still partially situated in the id, and thus the ego is involved in a psychic struggle (*The Ego and the Id*, 18-19), which Lacan describes as a struggle for existence as it

⁷⁴ As Bornkamm states it, 'Here one could appropriately say that whoever makes the law itself sin simultaneously also makes sin a "law". That is, he makes it a fate unfolding in a consistent way, for which no one is any longer responsible' (Günther Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), 89). If 5:12 and 7:7ff are read together, the implication is that the fate of humankind has unfolded in a predictable pattern which repeats itself in Adam's progeny. As Ernst Käsemann describes it, 'Every person after Adam is entangled in the fate of the protoplast. The fate of every person is anticipated in that of Adam' (Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 197).

⁷⁵ As Dunn explains, 'The words here simply sum up these earlier descriptions of the interplay of sin, death, and the law in a single forceful phrase' (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 419).

never achieves full reality. It is a construct or a fiction (imaginary): 'Alienation is the imaginary as such' (*Seminar III*, 146). Paul's description gets at the emergence of the $\epsilon\gamma\omega$ in its alienation from the law and the split within the self. In Lacan's explanation, alienation occurs in the sense that the subject – object relation is taken up into the self. Thus the ego can be said to have a paranoiac structure (*Ecrits: Selection*, 22). According to Paul, control does not exist in either the 'I' of the law or its other. There is an inherent incapacity built into the structure of the ego, 'like a privileged symptom . . . the mental illness of man' (*Seminar I*, 16). As Žižek describes, it is 'the human project par excellence' – but the self-positing nature of this 'I' must be obscured as 'the normal world' constituted in the symbolic/imaginary relationship is suspended over pure death drive (*The Fragile Absolute*, 72). As Lacan describes in concord with Paul, the ego or 'I' is a being for death (*Seminar XI*, 257).

Forbidden Desire – You Shall Not Covet

Paul in Rom. 7:7, according to Žižek, is at once acknowledging the perverse position and going beyond it in describing how sin and the law have become fused in an obscene desire.⁷⁶ The problem St Paul struggles with, according to Žižek, is how to avoid the trap of

⁷⁶ As was worked out in the 2nd chapter, Žižek maintains 'human beings can participate in the Truth-Event' only as the 'unique relationship to ... finitude and the possibility of death' is opened up (*Ticklish Subject*, 163). Paul, in voicing the questions of the hysteric, is avoiding the trap of perversion (the grab for immortality) in that the existence or completeness of the Other of the Law is under question in Romans 7. This dissolves the issue of avoiding mortality through identification with the Other and what it wants – the constitutive question in transgression and perversion.

perversion, that is, of a Law that generates its transgression (*Ticklish Subject*, 148). An examination of the text indicates that Paul does indeed present a sinful perspective on the law which generates transgression (and transgressive desire), but he presents no way out of this bind until chapter 8. The problem is worse than Žižek imagines and the solution will require divine intervention.

The prohibition of desire mentioned in 7:7 or the command not to covet seems to allude to the 10th commandment of the Decalogue, but the question is why Paul shortens it so that the objects of desire named in the Law are absent?⁷⁷ The original commandment has a fairly exhaustive list of things that are not to be desired, but desire itself is not forbidden. 'You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor' (Exodus 20:17). Controlling desire for the items on the list seems like a possibility, but to 'cease desiring' poses the problem of whether one is to *desire* to cease desiring? Bornkamm proposes that Paul formulates verse 7 in such a way that both the prohibition in the Garden and the Law of Sinai are referenced and that this ambiguity, purposeful on Paul's part, also creates the ambiguity of the command of 'forbidden desire'.⁷⁸ Whether or not Paul is attempting to capture the urge to

⁷⁷ Käsemann takes it as a secondary reference to the 10th commandment as he sees the passage as following the Genesis account. He maintains Paul followed a branch of exegesis in which Adam was the prototypical recipient of the Law and was linked materially to Moses. 'According to this tradition Adam received the whole law with the commandment which he was given' (Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 196).

⁷⁸ Bornkamm proposes that Paul formulates both verse 7 and 10 in this so that both the prohibition in the Garden and the Law of Sinai are referenced in both verses. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 89ff. Desire without an object is such

transgress in the formula, the work of sin through desire is the problem evoked in the encounter with the law. The case will be made in this section that this *forbidden desire* displays a key part in the logic of sin that Paul is explicating.

In its immediate context, the verse describes the fusion of knowing sin with the simultaneous knowledge of the Law, so it may be significant that Paul shortens the verse, given that there is no law prohibiting desire.⁷⁹ Paul is showing how the law mediates sin but is also showing that the law can be extracted from sin with which it is confused. If 'I's experience of sin is a distorted perception of the law, then the problem is not with the law but with this distortion of it by sin. The shorter version lends itself to being more readily applied to two alternative distortions of the law, in pursuit of either good (zeal for the law) or evil (transgressive desire).⁸⁰ Gaining life through the commandment is thought by some commentators to be an alternative

a pervasive category that the question arises if the attempt to obey the command, in the manner Paul has formulated it, is already breaking it? It creates a double bind on the order of a command not to think of pink elephants. The command generates what it forbids. Paul's formula folds infinitely into itself as desire is kept alive through its being forbidden. What is desired in forbidden desire can only be desire itself – which by definition can never obtain itself as object. Sinful desire seeks only more desire, and the self, subject to the reign of this desire is put into pursuit of itself.

⁷⁹ As both Agamben and Jewett note, there is no prohibition of desire in the Law, though this prohibition may accurately reference the Decalogue as it is taken up in Jewish tradition, see Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 108 and Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 449. Moo notes that the practice of referencing the prohibition of desire as a 'representative summation of the Mosaic law' has Jewish antecedents (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 435). He doesn't take from this notion though that desire may not be the object of the prohibition; rather he notes that, as with the book of James, 'they tended to view "coveting" as the root of all sins' (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 435, see Jas. 1:15). While this may be, James does not equate desire directly with sin or directly to a prohibition. While there may have been precedent for this abbreviated version of the commandment that does not speak to the point as to why Paul would employ it in an argument this tightly woven.

⁸⁰ Jewett notes that it is not desire that is forbidden, 'but coveting what belongs to others' (Jewett, *Romans*, 449).

orientation to establishing the self through transgressing the law.⁸¹

Where the law becomes the primary focus, displacing God and forgetting sin, this may already reflect a distortion of desire.⁸²

Scholars are divided on whether the forbidden desire has a double reference to Genesis 3 and the 10th commandment, and it is precisely this ambiguity that Dunn thinks Paul is creating in his forbidden desire, so that both Jews and Gentiles are addressed in the universal experience.⁸³

According to N.T. Wright, who sees the reference of verse 7 to the 10th commandment, law or Torah does not relieve sin in Paul's reading, but due to sin functions like the prohibition in Genesis, which is not the problem of the law or the prohibition but of the misdirection produced by sin. In Wright's explanation, Exodus is in the background throughout the chapter as Paul's description clarifies, in his defence of the law, how sin has been mediated by the law and demonstrates that this is a failure of its intent.⁸⁴ Though Wright does not see it as the

⁸¹ Käsemann, *Romans*, 198. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 90. Dunn, *Romans*, 384, 400. Wright indicates this reading is incorrect and that it is to confuse Paul's statements here with 9:30-10:4 where he does think the sin is that Israel has sought to establish its own righteousness (Wright, *Romans*, 554)

⁸² Desire can express itself as a desire to keep the law just as much as to break it, as in the zeal for one's own righteousness (Rom. 10:3). See Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 90.

⁸³ This abbreviated form, in Dunn's view, lends support to the notion that there is a double reference to the prohibition in the Garden and the 10th commandment (*Romans* 1-8).

⁸⁴ N.T. Wright works this out in his commentary on Romans accounting for Paul's nuance. 'Within the overarching theme of assurance, the central character in the story of 7:1-8:11 is of course Torah. This is Paul's classic defense of Torah against all the charges that might be and perhaps were being, laid against it. Torah, he insists, is holy just and good; it is not responsible for sin or for death....Having said all that...Torah is by itself weak.' N.T. Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections' in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes: Volume X*, Marion L. Sardis, William L. Lane, Thomas G. Long, James Earl Massey Gail R. O'Day eds., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) p. 586.

subject in Romans 7, he notes that due to sin the Jews attempted to establish their own righteousness through the law and failed to combine it with faith (10:3ff).⁸⁵ Paul's argument throughout the letter is that the law is not an end in itself; at its origin is the faith and example of Abraham and at its end is the fulfillment of Christ. Law alone, apart from this faith, is void and nullifies the promise (4:14).⁸⁶ Forbidden desire may similarly isolate the letter of the law from its intent, voiding the law through the nullity of sin. Sinful desire is life emptying, and reduces the law, voided of its context and purpose, to a means to obtain its own fulfillment. There is no faith in 7:7ff but only law and sin, which demonstrates Paul's earlier point that a law whose origin and end is not in faith, acts to nullify and void its true purpose. The law is holy just and good (7:12), so what is the problem? Sin is the problem, as it would distort the meaning and purpose of the law.⁸⁷

The reading of forbidden desire following Genesis 3 is not without its zeal for the law, but the law which Adam and Eve seek to establish is not God's; they seek to transgress God's law and enact a law which is their own.⁸⁸ The desire is for the tree of knowledge of

⁸⁵ He maintains the episode with Aaron and the golden calf is the immediate reference and connects this with 10:3ff where Paul describes the Jewish failure. Wright maintains the Torah did promise life but sin intervened (Wright, *Romans*, 563).

⁸⁶ In chapter 4 he has already demonstrated how a misreading could mistakenly focus on the law as the source of righteousness, rather than on God and his promise, which Abraham believed and so was counted righteous prior to the law (4:1-13). To imagine that the law itself is the promised life and righteousness misses the point of Abraham's resurrection faith, who even though he was as good as dead (4:19), trusted God would give him enduring life through a son.

⁸⁷ In Wright's picture law mediated sin to Israel 'recapitulating' what it did to Adam (Wright, *Romans*, 562).

⁸⁸ As Heinrich Schlier notes, 'Freedom from sin is necessarily freedom from man's physical desire for life, for himself. This desire is unleashed by the Law' (Heinrich Schlier, *Vol. 2: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed., 1964), 497)

good and evil or for an ethic/righteousness that is 'one's own'.⁸⁹ Far from drawing one closer to life and to God this law, put into place subsequent to sin (Rom. 7:23), displaces God.⁹⁰ Apart from God man can now know good and evil (as the identity of each is in its difference from the other).⁹¹ The good can be known through the evil and the evil through the good, but the problem is that the contrasting pairs depend upon one another. The good cannot stand alone as it needs the evil as its point of reference. There cannot be an absolute incomparable difference or there would be no point of comparison. So the evil must inhere in the good and the good in the evil so that the binary pair is interdependent and bound together. To enact this law is not only to have rejected the prohibition from God but it is to put into play a law which is transgressive (death dealing) in the keeping. The good and evil are necessary to one another, so that one side of the pair is in the service of the other. Doing evil is a means of establishing the good, and doing the good is realized only in its identity with evil – 'evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good' (7:21). Where the law *is* sin (7:7), sin will establish the law – 'the law of sin' (7:23). One who embodies this law is split in an agonizing struggle of law keeping and

⁸⁹ The prohibition called him to have life, not through self, but through God. As it is dominated by sin, by the self-will of being, the encounter with the law becomes a summons to autonomous existence. The Law brings out the sin in experience of existence (Schlier, *Vol. 2: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, 497).

⁹⁰ The status of this second law as it relates to Torah is debated; with Wright and Dunn presuming it is still Torah but Torah perverted by sin. Ziesler, Fitzmyer, Cranfield, Käsemann, & Moo argue that this is a completely separate entity from God's law. Wright is attempting to find Exodus throughout this part of Romans and argues this law of sin is still Torah (Wright, *Romans*, 570-571). The majority dismiss this as unlikely. See Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 395; Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 196; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 476; Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 364; Käsemann, *Romans*, 205; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 462ff.

⁹¹ As Wright puts it, there is a double sided law and a double sided 'I' (Wright, *Romans*, 562).

transgression: 'For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want' (7:19).⁹² The system is closed (isolated from God and his purposes), in that it refers only to itself and depends only on the self who possesses it.⁹³ Paul poses this law as a separate entity or 'another law waging war against the law of my mind' (7:21). This is no longer God's law, which Paul locates in the mind and which is spiritual (7:14), but is 'the law of sin that dwells in my members' (7:23).⁹⁴ The law which 'dwells . . . in my flesh (7:18) or 'in my members' (7:23), seems to have its origin in multiplied desire (7:8) causing 'I' to do the very thing he hates (7:15) by subverting the will (7:18) so that the entire dynamic can be attributed to sin (7:20) or the law of sin (7:23). Where the law of the mind, by definition, is open to articulation, mental agreement (7:16) and delight (7:22), the law of sin works in silence (it can be seen at work in the members of the body (7:23)); through negation (resisting and subverting the will (7:15) and producing death (7:13)). It is a law which is not open to knowledge as 'I' does not know what he is doing (7:15).

⁹² The body of death under the law is then, witnessed in Paul's agonizing struggle. The striving to keep the law or to throw off the shackles of the law is already death. As Shier states, 'Sin carries death within it. Death is present as that wherein it "lives" and therefore as that wherein its "life" is known (Rom. 5:21). Death is its power. Living by death (Rom. 6:23), in separation from God, it promotes its life by death (1 Cor. 15:56; R. 5:12)' (Schlier, *Vol. 2: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, 497).

⁹³ The system is turned inward in two senses: it refers only to its own categories and these categories exist in the 'I'. According to Bultmann, 'This inner dividedness means that man himself destroys his true self. In his self-reliant will to be himself, a will that comes to light in 'desire' at the encounter with the 'commandment', he loses his self and 'sin' becomes the active subject within him (Rom. 7:9) (Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Volume I, 245)..

⁹⁴ Moo goes into helpful detail as to how and why 'the law of the mind' should be equated with God's law and the law of the flesh has to do with the other law (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 463-465).

The alternative is to know God, who is unadulterated goodness. As Bonhoeffer puts it, 'Man at his origin knows only one thing: God. It is only in the unity of his knowledge of God that he knows of other men of things, and of himself.'⁹⁵ The knowledge of good and evil is an alternative knowing and an alternative being to knowing God and being known by Him. 'Instead of knowing himself in the origin of God, he must now know himself as an origin'.⁹⁶ The desire behind this ethic is to 'be like God' through knowing good and evil, and thus no longer dependent upon God for either life or right understanding. The serpent promises that there is not death (Gen. 3:4) but more abundant life, on the order of being like God (Gen. 3:5). The command, subverted by sinful desire, produces the very thing it forbids. In this way 'the self-the "I" –dies' and this death is a natural fruit or outcome of its desire.⁹⁷

Agamben's reading of 7:7, which Žižek follows, maintains, 'The law here is no longer *entolē*, a norm that clearly prescribes or prohibits something; instead the law is only the knowledge of guilt'.⁹⁸ In Agamben's account, Paul's struggle in Romans 7:15-19 'is a perfectly clear reading of the agonizing condition of a man faced with a law that has become entirely unobservable, and, as such, only functions as a universal principle of imputation'.⁹⁹ Žižek does not specify verse 7, but maintains that 'according to Saint Paul, the Law itself generates the

⁹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 21.

⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 22.

⁹⁷ In this way 'the self-the "I" –dies' and this death is a natural fruit or outcome of the goal of the striving (Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Volume I, 245, 247).

⁹⁸ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 108. Jewett, *Romans*, 449.

⁹⁹ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 108.

desire to violate it' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 104), it 'generates/solicits its own transgression' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 113). The intervention of the superego, in his example, takes the command 'You shall not kill!' and truncates it to 'You shall not!' The 'kill', set off from the prohibition, becomes the injunction to 'Kill!' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 104-105). The 'hermeneutical' procedure of isolating the letter of the law creates a frontier or 'coast-like' condition between the real (with the obscene superego) and the symbolic and out of this tension *jouissance* or forbidden desire arises. The letter and *jouissance* describe the form and substance of life under the compulsion to repeat – the letter being that which 'returns and repeats itself'¹⁰⁰ in the *life force* of desire. In Žižek's understanding, apart from desire for self or the compulsion to obtain the self there is no self. What seems evident is that Žižek's theory does not deal with Paul's notion of law as Torah but the law of sin and death (and his primary problem is to extract love from this law). He knowingly and necessarily commits the fallacy which Paul is writing to overcome, of equating the law of sin with the law of God.¹⁰¹

For Žižek, Paul's questioning of the relationship between sin and the law does not mean that there is an original separation (between the obscene superego and law) but rather, the separation is created by a necessary passage through sin and perversion. It is the perverse position to reify the law or Other that provides the background against which hysteric questioning can begin. According to Žižek, Paul, in

¹⁰⁰ Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 100.

¹⁰¹ He understands this is his project for, as an atheist, the law of God is nonexistent except as a category under the law of sin and death.

raising the question 'Is the Law sin?' (7:7) is referring back to an understanding he has already described (in 3:5-8) when he first raises the question.¹⁰² 'This "Let us do evil so that good may come [from it]" is the most succinct definition of the short circuit of the perverse position' (*Ticklish Subject*, 148). The Subject sides with the law in the attempt to escape its punishing effect and to partake of its surplus enjoyment of forbidden desire (*Ticklish Subject*, 247-251). The pervert presumes to enact the law through its transgression and in the process has become the unquestioning subject of a law which requires transgression to complete it or enact it.

Though there is not a direct correspondence, in terms of Genesis 3, the pervert has believed the serpent's lie that God-like existence is to be had through breaking God's law and eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He would establish this binary law – doing evil that the good may come – within himself. Žižek describes it as giving oneself completely over to the symbolic without regard for finitude and mortality (*Reader*, 117), which in terms of Genesis is to have embraced the lie 'You shall not die' (Gen. 3:4). 'As such, the pervert's universe is the universe of pure symbolic order, of the signifier's game running its course, unencumbered by the Real of human finitude' (*Reader*, 117).¹⁰³

¹⁰² In fact Paul raises this same question at least three times in Romans 6-7 alone (6:1, 15; 7:7).

¹⁰³ Paul, in voicing the questions of the hysteric, is avoiding the trap of perversion (the grab for immortality) in that the existence or completeness of the Other of the Law is under question in Romans 7. This dissolves the issue of avoiding mortality through identification with the Other and what it wants – the constitutive question in transgression and perversion. The Other does not know what it wants and there is no positive content to live up to, and mortality and death must be accounted for. The 'obscene superego supplement', which grounds this

The problem is 'how to pass from this superego hyperbole of the Law to love proper' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 107). The Pauline project, in Žižek's reading, is to suspend the 'obscene unwritten underside' of the law and to enact love (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 113). Yet, for Žižek, there is not a means of getting at this excess apart from the forbidden desire of *jouissance*, as recognition of excess opens the way to the dimension beyond the law and this beyond can be transformed into 'love beyond the Law' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 114).

For Paul, the law of God can be extracted from the law of sin without passage through sin, because the original intent of the law was to preserve a relationship with God, which precedes and exceeds the law. Sin and the law need one another in Žižek's theory, while for Paul the law may mediate sin but sin does not mediate love.¹⁰⁴

The Lie of Sin

The explanation for the confusion between sin and the law is the primordial deception related in Romans 7:10-11. Žižek sees the fundamental fantasy as the point of departure but also the orienting factor (for each of the three registers) in the structure of the Subject.

transgressive approach to the law, is undone and the slate is wiped clean for an authentic Truth-Event.

¹⁰⁴ Part of the problem with Žižek's analysis is that he presumes Paul is opposed to the Jewish law and does not recognize 'it is already a law deprived of its superego supplement, not relying on any obscene support' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 113). Paul is, of course, defending the law and maintains that transgression of the law is due to sin, so that while sin may be mediated by law, law is not dependent on sin or the law of sin.

Connected with the above argument, that Paul in his text is fusing experience of the 10th commandment with the prohibition in Genesis, the argument here is that he is continuing to follow both accounts in verses 10-11: 'The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me' (Rom. 7:10-11).¹⁰⁵ Paul is continuing to describe how sin distorts the law in its relation to the sinful self. The 'command which promised life' (vs. 10) serves as an explanation for the content of the deception connected with sin. Dunn maintains that life is not to be had in the law (due to sin), while Bornkamm thinks this positing of life directly in the law is the deception which sin works.¹⁰⁶ The nature of the promise held out by the law is itself the question posed in Paul's formula.¹⁰⁷ What is certain is that Sin finds its deceptive opportunity (7:11) in the command which promised life (7:10). The exact meaning of *ἐντολὴ ἢ εἰς ζωὴν* is ambiguous, as witnessed in the variety of interpretations of the verse, but this ambiguity seems to function in the same way as that of 'forbidden desire'.¹⁰⁸ The perception that *ἐντολὴ ἢ εἰς ζωὴν* is the

¹⁰⁵ *English Standard Version*.

¹⁰⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 383. There is a bit of ambiguity in Dunn's explanation, but the conclusion he comes to is that after sin, life is not to be found in the law, though this was the original purpose of law. Bornkamm argues that in fusing the texts, Paul is reading the prohibition (access to life) into the law; and he is doing so with enough ambiguity that the nature of the promise held out by the law is itself the question posed in Paul's formula (Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 90).

¹⁰⁷ Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 90.

¹⁰⁸ According to Barrett's reasoning the commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil came with continual access to the tree of life so that the commandment brought life (Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 144). Contrary to this, Ziesler notes the emphasis in Genesis falls on the prohibition, and it is Satan and not God who holds out the promise of God-like life by breaking the prohibition. Ziesler concludes that the promise of life in the command does not fit the Genesis account: 'It is hard to detect any such promise in Gen. 2:16ff, where there is only the threat of death if the command is disobeyed' (Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the*

promise of life in the law, is skewed by sin so as to remove the necessity of God as the giver of life. According to Dunn, to still imagine, after sin, that life is in the law, reflects a common Jewish misconception.¹⁰⁹ He raises the possibility that the law contains life; 'Does Paul mean that the commandment was intended to *bring about life*, to lead to life (NEB, NJB), that is, a life not yet possessed . . .?'¹¹⁰ Such a reading, he maintains, does not fit with Paul's understanding of the law as stated elsewhere but reflects a misreading which Paul is repudiating.¹¹¹ What is not to be missed he concludes, 'is the implied sharp reverse to and rebuttal of the traditional Jewish assumption that the law/commandment promoted life'.¹¹² The correct nuance is to understand that the law keeps one in a life giving relationship with God, but it is this relationship to God (and not with the law or the negative prohibition of Genesis) that is the true source of life.¹¹³ As in Harrison's reading, the law is a step removed from life as it is 'to *promote observance* that would lead to divine blessing and consequent human happiness'.¹¹⁴

Wright, who is arguing for the priority of Exodus, nonetheless finds in verse 11 a simultaneous reference to the serpent's deception

Romans, 187). He concludes, 'If Paul is fusing the Genesis story with the Law-giving on Sinai, then here the emphasis is strongly on Sinai, not the Garden (Ziesler, Paul's Letter to the Romans, 187).

¹⁰⁹ Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 384. Wright concludes, 'Torah intended to give life . . . but because of sin all it could give was death' (Wright, *Romans*, 563).

¹¹⁰ Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 384.

¹¹¹ He notes this would not agree with Gal. 3:21. Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 384.

¹¹² Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 384.

¹¹³ The prohibition not to eat did not itself contain life but served as a temptation (through the Serpent) as an alternative sort of life to that which God provided.

¹¹⁴ Everett F. Harrison, *Expositors Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 80. Italics added.

which was repeated with the giving of the law, maintaining the sin of Eden is repeated at Sinai.¹¹⁵ The logical sequence of verses 10-11 is that of Genesis 3: the prohibition posed the possibility of life; sin or the serpent deceived me; and 'I' died.¹¹⁶ The prohibition or law is itself the indicator (the opportunity- *ἀφορμήν*- the base of operations) that something more (life beyond God) is available – it points out the opportunity for life and knowledge.¹¹⁷ 'You shall not die' (Gen. 3:4) indicates God is the liar and the prohibition a cover warding man away from enjoying the privileges of God. The serpent's lie (3:4) negates death but then the negation is negated under a supposed truth (3:5). In Paul's version, according to Käsemann, the lie is embraced under the presumption that life is to be had in the law (7:10) through spiritual achievement.¹¹⁸ Death denied presents itself only under the positive promise of a more abundant life – in a life that is somehow lacking. The deception of the serpent introduces a perceived lack or absence in knowledge and life, and with this lack illicit desire arises.¹¹⁹ Subsequent to the transgression lack or death cannot be avoided, even through the law.¹²⁰ The deceptive desire of verse 7 which would confuse sin and the law and the deception that life is in the law (10-11)

¹¹⁵ Wright, *Romans*, 563. Harrison reproduces Bornkamm's notion that sin promises life as a perversion or deception in regard to the commandment (Harrison, *Romans*, 81).

¹¹⁶ See Dunn, *Romans*, 383-384.

¹¹⁷ In Genesis the prohibition (from the sinful perspective) was hiding the opportunity for true knowledge and God-like life. God is perceived as perverse in hiding what he has behind the prohibition.

¹¹⁸ As Käsemann puts it, the nature of the deception is that 'the law was misunderstood as a demand for achievement. In this perversion, however, the law brings death' (Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 198).

¹¹⁹ The prohibition, under the prompting of the serpent is made to seem capricious and a screen or lie hiding the truth ('Is it all the trees?' 'Did he really say?' (Gen. 3:1)).

¹²⁰ After sin 'life in the law' cannot mean what it meant to Adam. There is no life giving power in the law due to sin. See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 438.

pictures the 'I' in terms of a lack of life, and the law is desired to satisfy or provide life in place of death and dissatisfaction. The turn to the law for life culminates in the dead 'I' (7:11), which is telling this story (indicating this is the living dead of an enduring dynamic).¹²¹ Paul describes the move as setting 'I' upon a course of life that is a living death: 'sin became alive and I died' (7:9); 'it was sin . . . effecting my death' (7:13); 'Who will set me free from the body of this death?'¹²² (7:24). The lack in human life (death) becomes the power that controls and orders his life. The compulsion that drives him and orders his existence arises from within him and yet is somehow out of his reach – 'I am no longer the one doing it' (7:20). Sin through the deception is the productive/destructive centre, the force of gravity, exercised through death.

If Paul is staging the sequence of events and their content giving rise to the *ἐγὼ* then two ingredients are necessary: the law or commandment and the deception. Dunn maintains that the 'word "deceived" characterizes the Pauline understanding of sin's role in the fall of man'.¹²³ If verse 7 and 11 are read together the desire of 7 is defined by the deception of 11, or the desire itself could be said to be the deception. In Bultmann's reading desire contains the lure or

¹²¹ As Bornkamm concludes, 'In the kindling of desire, that is, of my urge for life, the fate of death is sealed for me' in that life is sought through the law (Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 90.)

¹²² As Bornkamm describes, the alien force personified in sin acts almost as another subject in the duel with the 'I' (Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 90).

¹²³ Dunn, *Romans*, 384. According to Dunn the 'I' of 7:11 is actually that of the woman who now characterizes Paul's description of sin's work in deception. He cites Paul's repeated use of the word in II Cor. 11:3 and I Tim. 2:14 – 'the serpent deceived [ἐξηπάτησεν] Eve'

deception that life is promised in the commandment.¹²⁴ 'Sin's "deceit" consists in deluding man to think that if he follows his "desire" he will gain life whereas he only acquires death.'¹²⁵

Desire is the force of sin as it takes control: 'sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind' (7:8). The desire for life indicates its absence, and the bind of pursuing it in the law, like that of attempting to establish Being (God-likeness) through knowing (good and evil), describes Paul's frustrated pursuit in which two principles or laws are waging war within him (Rom. 7:23).¹²⁶ In the deception the law is a means of establishing the self, but it is precisely the self that has become the sight of a destructive desire.¹²⁷ The deception produces an inverted economy of exchange. The 'promised life' is death, which in the serpent's lie is the special knowledge enacted (the dynamic he puts into play does not end in Gen.4 or beyond).¹²⁸ The attempt of the 'I' to possess the commandment, turned back on the subject and sin possessed (λαβοῦσα) 'I'. Where sin lies dead in verse 8 apart from the law, under

¹²⁴ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Volume I, 248. In Žižek's theory this is the superego supplement to the law: 'This is the Lacanian opposition between the symbolic Law and the obscene call of the superego at its purest: all the negations are powerless, and turn into mere denegations, so that what remains is the obscene intrusive reverberation of "Kill! Kill!"' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 105)

¹²⁵ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Volume I, 248.

¹²⁶ See Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 100.

¹²⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield lays out the three step process of the deception in Eden and draws the parallel with the Law of Israel: the serpent distorts the divine command and sin distorts the law 'imposing a false image of it on his understanding'; the distortion serves to negate the positive gift of life with the tree of life and it denied death, while with the law, fulfilling it was seen 'to put God under an obligation to himself'; and using the commandment the serpent insinuated doubts about God's good will and suggested 'the possibility of man's asserting himself in opposition to God' (C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII*, Vol. 1 (*Intl Critical Commentary*) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 352-353).

¹²⁸ As Žižek describes it the choice is one of 'life in death' as in the pursuit of survival 'what we ultimately lose is life itself' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 94).

the law the 'I' lies dead in verse 9 and sin becomes an animate force in the exchange.¹²⁹

The imagery is not of possessing (though to embody or possess the law may describe the desire) but of being possessed by a force that kills (ἀπέκτεινεν) and deceives (ἐξηπάτησέν).¹³⁰ Paul describes the process as one of being reduced to a cadaver as this alien force found an opportunity or opening (ἀφορμὴν), and 'came upon me' (λαβοῦσα) and reduced me to a site of production (κατεργάσατο) for desire and death. The law of sin has colonized 'my members' (7:23), and 'I' is at war with himself in a losing battle. 'Sin came alive' as an animate force displacing the 'I' and 'I died'.

The 'law of sin and death' then, speaks of the law under the auspices of a deception in which possession of the νόμος is presumed to provide life. Life though is given over to the animate force of sin so that Paul can declare 'I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me' (Rom. 7:20). The 'I' colonized by sin takes a passive position toward the force of sin, which Paul makes clear is also the 'I' doing the very thing 'I' hate. The self-antagonism is such that the two 'I's are in a struggle that gives rise to two competing laws. 'I joyfully concur with the law of God' and yet, 'I see a different law in the members of my body' (Rom. 7:23). These two laws with their

¹²⁹ Keck notes this symmetry between verse 8 and 9. See Keck, *Romans*, 183.

¹³⁰ Lacan calls this desire which is a force for death *jouissance*. One's orientation to death, which may manifest itself in several key ways, is the role of *jouissance* or Lacan's notion of finding a pleasure that exceeds the bounds of the pleasure principle in painful pleasure or a pleasurable suffering (*Seminar VII*, 184). *Jouissance* names the desire to break through the pleasure principle towards the Thing that holds out an excess of pleasure. Thus Lacan links it directly to the death drive and 'the path towards death' (*Seminar XVII*, 17).

conjoined 'I's are in a battle to the death: 'I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members' (Rom. 7:23). As Bertone notes, Paul's object here is not to demarcate one form of νόμος from the other: 'The point is that this system represented something that simply did not produce life'.¹³¹ This constitutes the self a 'body of death' requiring divine rescue. 'Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?'

Paul's sinful deception and Žižek's fundamental fantasy are potentially, mutually enlightening, in accounting for the Subject or the 'I'. The Subject structured like a lie, grounded in the negation of death (the real), is not a concept open to easy explanation, and neither are the various biblical formulas (body of death, body of sin, dead in sin) which express a similar idea. It may not be obvious why the Bible aligns sin, death, and deception as constituting an identity outside of Christ. Where deception is given the specific content of Romans 7:10-11 (and by extension Genesis 3:4ff), something on the order of Žižek's death drive offers a parallel explanation. Death denied, in this light, amounts to an exchange of life for death as a form of life. The supposed truth (the symbolic or life through the law) is undermined by its foundation in the negation of the lie. The lie of sin is not simply a problem of the heart (though it is that); it poses itself as an alternative epistemology or means of gaining life and truth through knowing. The lie of sin undermines truth; even God's truth as given in the oracles of

¹³¹ Bertone, *The Law of the Spirit*, 180.

the law (Rom. 3:3) is subject to the deceit of sin. What truth can stand the distortion of the lie? This distortion is inclusive of the truth of the 'I' or ἐγώ; the most intimate truth, that of human identity. The human project is set upon saving the self, but the deception obscures access even to what a self might be. The notion that I have immediate access to myself cannot stand in light of Paul's picture of the deluded 'I'.

The perverse position of presuming to know and be controlled by full exposure to the Other/law (in which God or the law is assumed to be perverse (*Reader*, 119), accords with Paul's picture of sin as an animate force under whose influence what 'I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate' (7:15). 'No wonder, then, that the fundamental fantasy is *passive*, "masochistic", reducing me to an object acted on by others: it is as if only the experience of the utmost pain can guarantee the subject access to Being' (*Reader*, 119). As in Paul's description, sin becomes an animate force of suffering in the agonistic war within the self. 'I' can no longer translate thought into action or understand what the ἐγώ is doing as sin has taken over as agent (7:20) and the 'I' is passive or dead. The perverse position of presuming to know and be passively controlled by full exposure to the Other accentuates or exposes the 'fundamental fantasy' or primordial lie which is at the ground of the human project (*Reader*, 119). The human Subject has created its agency out of a presumed access to Being or life through the law. Desire borne by death accounts for each component of the structure as the death drive is the force of death

taken up into the 'I' through the symbolic or law through the lie's negated death (*Seminar I*, 149). The agency of the Subject (the ability to obey the law or carry thought over into action) is dead. The three registers of Lacan approximate Paul's categories (law/symbolic, *ἐγὼ*/ego, death negated/real) constituting a work of death or Paul's 'body of death'.¹³²

The primary difference between Paul's sinful deception and Žižek's fundamental fantasy is that for Paul the lie negates not just death but life as coming from God. The immortal death drive is the primary form of life for Žižek, so nothing is lost and everything is gained through the fundamental fantasy and death drive. For Paul the lie of sin, in denying death, also denies life and God as the giver of life. Death denied is the staging ground for an autonomous knowledge, which must presume for itself some form of innate immortality so as to obtain God-like status. Death drive comes close to describing the reality of the living death of this 'innate immortality'; what it misses is that death is the result of the refusal of life. To state it differently, while death is prime reality for Žižek, for Paul divine life is primary.

In regard to language or law, the symbolic is necessarily a death dealing fiction for Žižek, while for Paul the word of man has the potential to find correspondence with the word of God. The law holds out this possibility as a holy and just word from God (7:12) as it is freed from the distortion of sin. Where Žižek's symbolic and law have no ground other than within the dynamic interplay of the subject, Paul's

¹³² Death alone is silent, but *death borne along by life* describes this orientation in which 'the aim of all life is death' (*The Ego and the Id*, 38).

law is spiritual (7:14) and is part of God's salvation plan (8:2). The original lie may have subverted the reality of human speech (Rom. 3:10-19), but the word of God is 'near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (10:8) and it is the power of salvation (10:9).

Paul's description of 'the body of death' or its parallel in 6:6 'the body of sin' is described as being put to death in Christ for those who have died in Christian baptism. The next section examines how death and sin are constituted as part of the 'body' so that in the following section it might be determined what it means to die to sin in Christ.

The Meaning of 'body of death' or the 'body of sin'

As Žižek describes, the symbolic or the soul 'has to be paid for by the death, murder even, of its empirical bearer', the body (*The Žižek Reader*, vii). The antagonistic dialectic between the imaginary and symbolic (or the ego and superego) takes place through the displacement of the physical body (*Organs without Bodies*, 93). The argument of this section is that this claim corresponds to Paul's formulae 'body of sin' (σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας) (Rom. 6:6) and 'body of death' (σώματος τοῦ θανάτου) (7:24). Žižek's concept of the death drive arising through the real of the body and Paul's concept of 'body of death' or 'body of sin' both describe a subject engaged in a struggle for life which kills. For Paul seems to not be referring to only the physical body but to the subject, with sin and death describing the orientation or existential reality of the subject. Examining these phrases will also enable us to discover what Paul means when he says that 'the body of

sin might be brought to nothing' in being crucified with Christ in baptism.

A number of commentators hold that Paul means the same thing by 'body of sin' in 6:6 and the 'body of death' in 7:24.¹³³ Fitzmyer defines the meaning as 'the whole person considered as earth-oriented, not open to God or his Spirit and prone to sin'.¹³⁴ Dunn cites *mortal body* and 6:12 (θνητῷ ὑμῶν σώματι) which is a reordering of the same words at 7:24 (σώματος τοῦ θανάτου). His understanding is that σῶμα denotes not only the physical body but the full reality which comes with *embodiment*:

It is man embodied in a particular environment, the body being that which constitutes him a social being, a being who relates to and communicates with his environment. It is as an embodied entity that he can act upon and be acted upon by his environment.¹³⁵

So σῶμα is a permeable identity within an environment so that its capacity to act and be acted upon constitutes its basic nature. 'It is the means of living in, of experiencing the environment.'¹³⁶ What needs to be added to Dunn's description is that this capacity involves the ability

¹³³ The two terms seem to be parallel, and as Cranfield puts it in regards to 7:24, 'Paul means the body or human nature which through sin and law has fallen under the dominion of death' (Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 151. Stendahl, in attempting to expunge 7:24 of any reference to a possible psychological element separates the two metaphors ('body of sin' in 6:6 and 'body of death' in 7:24), maintaining that the 'body of sin' might refer to a 'subjective conscience struggle', whereas the 'body of death' references a specific theological concern with 'a positive solution available here and now by the Holy Spirit about which he speaks in chapter 8' (Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 94).

¹³⁴ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 436.

¹³⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 320.

¹³⁶ Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 285.

to disrupt itself so that it is not just a permeable exchange with the environment.

In his explanation of the Pauline use of the term *σῶμα*, Bultmann employs language that is at times freighted with a philosophical/psychological weight, which nonetheless sheds light on the crisis Paul is describing. Bultmann emphasizes that what is included in the term *σῶμα*, in addition to the body, is a capacity to objectify or spilt the self (to reflect on the self),¹³⁷ witnessed most often (particularly in its negative or fallen state) in the capacity for self-estrangement or self alienation.¹³⁸ He describes the resulting self relation as an experience between the 'I' and the 'not-I' and this dynamic of alienation constitutes the *σῶμα*.¹³⁹ As Paul states it, 'it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me' (Rom. 7:20).¹⁴⁰ This 'body of sin' or 'body of death' (Romans 7:24) may be perceived

¹³⁷ It is also from this *apparent* duality that the 'naïve' or Gnostic understanding can be accounted for, as the physical body is assigned the role of 'not-I' (Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Volume I*, 199).

¹³⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Volume I, 199.

¹³⁹ Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Volume I, 199. Stendahl's critique (evaluated above) of Bultmann is that this understanding presumes that a troubled conscience is at the centre of Pauline theology (Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 87-88). Yet if Bultmann's description is an accurate description of the alienation inherent in 'the law of sin and death' the focus is no longer on human consciousness or conscience (Paul is not describing a condition of which he was conscious but precisely one which entered consciousness only when he became a Christian). Stendahl, in rejecting any notion 'that Paul here is involved in an argument . . . about man' or his own cloven ego or predicament', ends with a dualistic view of the ego and sin with the ego fully acquitted and sin as an alien rather than an alienating force (Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 92-93). The ego and Sin/Flesh become two ontological forces in Stendahl giving rise to a real dualism rather than the apparent dualism of Bultmann. Hans Conzelmann, who follows Bultmann, clarifies that, 'Pauline anthropology is not dualistic. The place where God meets me is not the soul, but the body.' Conzelmann goes on to explain that the capacity of the subject though is that which gives rise to a seeming dualism. '*σῶμα* designates the "I" (I Cor. 13:3; 7:4) in so far as it can be grasped by itself and others as the possible object of action through others and through itself.' The way in which to reconcile the monistic and the seemingly dualistic anthropology is to recognize 'the demand for self-domination is based on the statement that I am alienated from myself in the world' (Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, trans. J. S. Bowden (London: SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd., 1974) 177).

¹⁴⁰ *English Standard Version*.

or experienced as the physical body getting 'out of hand' or out of control, but Bultmann's point is that it is the self in its experience of the self that is out of control.¹⁴¹ The notion that one has a *σῶμα* rather than that one is a *σῶμα* is itself an occurrence within the parameters of self-reflective identity provided for in Paul's use of the term.¹⁴²

The corrective¹⁴³ that Käsemann brings to Bultmann's understanding is to suggest that *σῶμα* is non-isolable; that is, the capacity to turn on one's self or to feed back into the environment of the self is limited.¹⁴⁴ The communication of the self with the self is rendered possible by an already existing communication with the environment. Schweizer would equate communication and service and seems to primarily have service of God and man in mind but does not mention service to evil or service to the law.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Volume I*, 197.

¹⁴² Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament: Volume I*, 194.

¹⁴³ Käsemann sees his understanding as against Bultmann but as it is worked out here the two might be made to complement one another.

¹⁴⁴ He defines *σῶμα* as 'man as a non-isolable existence, i.e., in his need and real capacity for communication as friend or foe – man as a being who finds himself in and is aware of an already existing world, and is conscious of his dependency on certain forces and powers' (Ernst Käsemann, 'The Theological Problem Presented by the Motif of the Body of Christ', in *Perspectives on Paul* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1971), 114). Jürgen Becker counters Käsemann and argues that 'Paul's concern is not communication in general; rather his theme is the status of the individual person before God' (J. Becker, *Paul Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 385). Eduard Schweizer accounts for both of these positions in his conclusion that '*σῶμα* means man in his confrontation with God or sin or fellow-man' (Eduard Schweizer, '*σῶμα*, † *σωματικός*, † *σῶσμος*' in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume VII*, Ed. Gerhard Friedrich, Trans., Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 1066). Perhaps the three positions are not so much opposed as different facets of a capacity that sets man simultaneously into communication and confrontation with himself (Bultmann), others (Käsemann), and God (Becker).

¹⁴⁵ As Schweizer states it, '*σῶμα* is the place where faith lives and where man surrenders to God's lordship. It is thus the sphere in which man serves. Paul has no interest whatsoever in appearance, abilities, or character, but only in the work of the body, in what takes place with it' (Schweizer, '*σῶμα*, † *σωματικός*, † *σῶσμος*', 1066). He concludes that Bultmann 'thinks that *σῶμα* denotes man in so far as he has a relation to himself' and that this leads to a Greek view of man. Schweizer seems to miss the point that Bultmann does not allow for the reality of such a division between soul and body but only its appearance. While it may be the

In conclusion, *σῶμα* is inclusive of a capacity that sets man simultaneously into communication and confrontation with himself, others, and God, and *σῶμα* means the subject in her self-reflective ability to objectify the self. It is the last of these capacities emphasized in Žižek's understanding of the inherent self-alienation of the three registers. Žižek describes the process as giving rise to two bodies. That body which one might think can be reduced to the biological dimension is refused: the 'subject turns away from her biological body in disgust, unable to accept that she "is" her body' (*Organs without Bodies*, 93). As Žižek describes it, the original sacrificial relation is established within the Subject (with passage through the mirror stage) between the imaginary (the ego or 'I') and the symbolic (the superego) which establishes the alienated distance from the real of the body. The passage is from being a body to establishing a symbolic distance from the body (and having a body): 'the body exists in the order of *having – I am not my body, I have it*' (*Organs without Bodies*, 121).

The inadequacy of Lacan's and Žižek's understanding, and where it does not accord with the above description, is that neither has a positive notion of communicative depth. To communicate with others

case that Bultmann sees 'man as a self-enclosed individual' a proper understanding of how one arrives at the 'I' and self-reflection through socialization would allow coordination of his position with Schweizer's. Bultmann allows for both good and evil done in the body and his theory would fit into Schweizer's schema as an explanation of how that which is meant to serve the good comes to serve evil by severing self from God, man, and self. If Bultmann's theory is inadequate to describe the positive realm of community its strength is in picturing the failure of this communal realm as the subject alienates himself from God, others, and self. The insight which Žižek will bring is a coordination of all three points of view. In Žižekian theory an understanding like that of Bultmann will have to be coordinated with that of Käsemann in the same way that the human Subject coordinates himself with the community. Even if Bultmann's theory is inadequate in describing the full range of human community his understanding brings insight to the failure of that community.

and God, or to not give due honor to God, is not a possibility raised in their theory. Lacan sees religion as the attempt to avoid the lack of being and the attempt to do away with any gap between the signifier and signified (*Seminar VII*, 130). Where religion would flood the world with meaning he would pose the disruption of the real, which gives rise to a continual pursuit of meaning (*Seminar VII*, 31).

Žižek's and Lacan's focus is on the turn of communicative capacity against the self in an antagonistic self-relation. The qualifiers added to body such as sin (*σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας*) or death (*σώματος τοῦ θανάτου*) identify their understanding as it overlaps with Paul's. Rather than being in relationship with God, the subject in these modes has a primary relationship to sin and death (or to law, which is in the end definitive of the Žižekian Subject). The failure of the Subject in its self-antagonism and dis-community is a corporeal failure. In the Lacanian formula 'there is no sexual relationship' (*Seminar 20*, 17) as the register of the symbolic cannot be coordinated with the real of the body.¹⁴⁶ The 'body of death' is a failure of communication and a failure to achieve corporate or corporeal identity.

If *σῶμα* is the Subject with the qualifiers of death and sin describing the orientation of the Subject, to crucify *σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας* so that it is suspended or brought to nothing (*καταργηθῇ*) describes the profound reorientation of baptism. But the question is if this 'dying to sin' is a metaphor, which describes an existential change imitating

¹⁴⁶ As Stuhlmacher phrases it 'Paul speaks of the "body" of the person when it is a matter of the circumstances involved in one's communication, in a good or evil sense, that is, when it is a matter of that which a person does and accomplishes toward others' (Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 92).

Christ's death, or if this reorientation is on the basis of an ontological change. This leads to the next section, which focuses on Romans 6.2 and 6.10 in order to examine what it might mean to 'die to sin'. Having so far mainly shown an affinity between Žižek and Paul, in this next section I argue against Žižek, that 'death to sin' is an ontological participation in the death of Christ and not simply symbolic or subjective destitution as it involves being 'joined to' Christ.

Christ's Death to Sin and the Christian's Death to Sin in Baptism

We have seen that sin in Romans is a corporate problem (as well as an individual problem) which exercises its power through τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας because of the environment constituted by Adam. Where sin is understood as a power that rules in the human condition due to Adam, to die to sin for Christians (6:2) and for Christ (6:10) need not be read in a different sense. The meaning of the Christian's 'dying to sin' (6:2) will depend upon the proximate relationship it has to Christ's 'dying to sin' (6:10), and it is the understanding of the nature of this 'likeness' (6:5) that determines this proximity. This section argues that baptism (dying to sin) is a participation in the death of Christ in which there is a fusion with Christ through the Spirit. Paul's picture in Romans 5 is that Adam instituted the age in which sin and death rule and Christ is inaugurating a new age. To die to sin (for the Christian) is to break the rule and power of sin and to enter into the reign of Christ. If Christ's death to sin is in some way inherently different from the Christian's death to sin these two verses cannot be read together. It is

this latter consideration that is first taken up, and then the proximate relationship of 'dying to sin' for Christ and the Christian is examined.

Jesus completely shares in the human condition and this accounts for his death and for his being in a condition in which he can overcome death and break the power that it exercises through despair and fear. For this reason, Dunn concludes that the two verses (6:2 & 10) should not be taken in a different sense.¹⁴⁷ Moo assigns the same meaning to the death to sin in verse 2 and 10, with the understanding that 'Paul is continuing to speak of sin as a "ruling power"' and Christ was subject to this ruling power (without sinning) which he defeated in his death.¹⁴⁸ 'When these salvation-historical perspectives are given their due place, we are able to give 'die to sin' the same meaning here as it had in v. 2: a separation or freedom from the rule of sin.'¹⁴⁹ The reign or rule of sin as it existed in Adam is undone by Christ's death and the Christian enters into this freedom.¹⁵⁰ Reading the two verses together clarifies Paul's description in 6:5 of having 'become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death'. His death was a 'dying to sin' and to the degree the Christian shares in his death he shares this 'dying to sin'.

¹⁴⁷ As Dunn states it, 'What is in view in both cases is the effective power of sin over human life as demonstrated most emphatically in the death which none escape. Jesus, in his oneness with those who belong to this age, shared in that subordination to the power of sin in death. It is because he shared the human condition to the full that his overcoming the death which all die can effectively break the despair and fear of death, and so already break its grip on human life' (Dunn, *Romans*, 323).

¹⁴⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 379.

¹⁴⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 379.

¹⁵⁰ Schreiner advances a similar argument, also tying verse 2 and 10 together. In his explanation verse 10 explains why verse 2 is the case. 'The only way that Christ could defeat the tyranny of death . . . was by overcoming the power of sin. Thus verse 10 explains that Jesus overcame the mastery of death because when he died he broke the power of sin "once for all"' (Schreiner, *Romans*, 320).

The key issue in deciding how the death of Christ relates to the Christian's death to sin, or the relation between the two verses 6:2 and 6:10 has to do with how verse 5 is understood and in particular the phrase *εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγονάμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου* and the key words *ὁμοιώματι* and *σύμφυτοι*. Dunn defines the meaning of the latter as 'knit together' with the sense of 'to make to grow together, unite (a wound)' or to 'plant along with/together'.¹⁵¹ The word is unambiguous, but Dunn has as the object of 'knit together' the 'likeness' so that his translation reads 'knit together with his likeness'.¹⁵²

The critical question which Joseph Fitzmyer brings to this understanding is whether one 'can one grow together with a likeness?'¹⁵³ He goes on to explain, 'For Paul, the Christian is normally thought to be united with Christ himself or "his body," but not with an "image" of the salvation-event'.¹⁵⁴ His question poses not only the dilemma of the status of baptism but along with baptism the nature of the Christian's relationship to the death of Christ.¹⁵⁵ Is the historical death of Christ, like any other historical event, available only

¹⁵¹ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 316.

¹⁵² Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 316.

¹⁵³ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 435.

¹⁵⁴ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 435.

¹⁵⁵ The primary interpretations of Romans 6:5 are in contention over the status of this 'likeness' and in turn are divided in the manner in which 'we have been united with the likeness of his death' in baptism. The meaning of *ὁμοίωμα* can be taken as either a 'corresponding reality' (which would make baptism a likeness once removed from the original and the death an imitation), or a form of the original (which would mean baptism is not a reduplicated dying but a participation in the singular death of Christ). Beasley Murray lays out the two arguments and groups various commentators on both sides of the argument as does Sorin Sabou in a more recent work. See G.R. Beasley Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977) 130ff and Sorin Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope: Paul's Metaphorical Language of 'Death' in Romans 6:1-11* (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 2005) 70-78.

indirectly through a 're-enactment' or through the 'similitude' of a sign such as baptism.¹⁵⁶ Fitzmyer comes to an alternative understanding: 'It is not just that they are to imitate Christ (because he has died to sin, so you too); Christians are also to arm themselves with the mentality that they are dead to sin; for that is what happened to them in the baptismal experience'.¹⁵⁷ As Fitzmyer explains, 'The noun *homoioōma* denotes not merely the abstract idea of "likeness," but the concrete image that is made to conform to something else'.¹⁵⁸ The thought is not that of being conformed to the likeness of baptism or to the image of Christ's death as it is reflected in baptism.¹⁵⁹ 'For Paul,

¹⁵⁶ This similitude is sometimes pictured as an image of an inward event. Dunn writes, 'The thought is not of integration with Christ's death as such, as though believers could actually participate in a historical event that took place twenty to twenty-five years earlier' (Dunn, *Romans* 1-8, 330). The question is then, what is the status of any event, as all are removed by the passage of time? Is Christ only available on the same terms as other events? The search for the historical Jesus in modernity rested on this sort of metaphysical understanding.

¹⁵⁷ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 438. Fitzmyer explains his exegetical move in contrast to Dunn: 'The expression is probably elliptical and the dat. is better taken as a dat. of instrument, referring to baptismal washing as the means of growing together; that means is baptism, a likeness to Christ's death' (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 435).

¹⁵⁸ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 435.

¹⁵⁹ In Dunn's description it is clear that there is a gap between the imaging subject and its archetype or object. He illustrates this understanding with an appeal to Plato in *Parmenides* in which 'finite things are *ὁμολωματα*' in which the heavenly ideas are expressed' Plato, *Parmenides* 132D and *Phaedrus* 250 B quoted in Dunn, 1988, 317. As Dunn works this out in regard to baptism the question arises as to how one can ever overcome the gap between subject and object. Just as the likeness of the earthly and physical is a representation of the eternal form, so Christ's death is the transcendent reality or eternal form, while the individuals conversion is a concrete expression of this form. Dunn, 1988, 317 & 331. Though he is using the word 'form' here he apparently does not have in mind a participatory form but an imitation once removed from the original. As he further illustrates and explains, this 'likeness' is that of the idol, 'intended to give concrete representation to spiritual and transcendent realities' Dunn, 1988, 317. He likens the relationship of the believer to Christ's death, to a 'mirror image and actual outworking of Christ's own death to sin within the present age' (James D. G. Dunn, 'Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice', in S. W. Sykes, ed., *Sacrifice and Redemption: Durham Essays in Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37, quoted in Sabou, *Between Horror and Hope*, 71).

the Christian is normally thought to be united with Christ himself or "his body," but not with an "image" of the salvation-event.¹⁶⁰

In Douglas Moo's understanding, the point is not to eliminate the mediating role of baptism: '*Homoīōma*, while not differentiating the death to which we are joined from Christ's, nevertheless qualifies it in its particular redemptive-historical "form".¹⁶¹ In the same vein R.C. Tannehill points to the parallel use of 'form' in Philippians 2:7 to suggest that the 'form' of self-emptying is one which is made available in baptism. Paul uses the term 'form' in Romans 6:5

. . . because the death and resurrection are connected with the two 'forms of Christ's existence, the earthly existence of the one who was subject to the powers and the heavenly existence of the exalted Lord. The use of *ὁμοίωμα* in Rom. 6:5 reflects this idea of conformation to Christ (Phil. 3:21; 3:10). It adds to the thought of this verse in that it suggests that Christ's death and resurrection are continuing aspects of the 'form' of Christ and that the death and resurrection of

¹⁶⁰ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 435. N.T. Wright notes that this 'likeness' (*ὁμοίωμα*) is the same as that of Philippians 2:7 in which God sent the Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans', 579). The incarnation is not a second order image of humanity but is the 'thing itself'. Wright implies that the tendency to introduce a gap between Christ's humanity and divinity is of the same order as the tendency to introduce a gap between the image of Christ made available in baptism and the reality of Christ. Wright connects the integration of the Christian's dying in baptism with Christ with the solidarity between Christ and his body the Church. There is no gap or notion of a hybrid. 'The theology of baptism, both in terms of the "new Exodus" and in terms of the dying and rising of the Messiah, prohibits such a thing' (Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans', 547). The Exodus from sin is not accomplished in stages, rather the power of sin is defeated and there is a liberation from sin and one is enslaved to righteousness (Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans', 545). He emphasizes that the struggle of the Christian life is not to be thought of in terms of a hybrid of one 'half in Adam and half in Christ' in which the attempt is to achieve conformity to Christ from the position of one who is still in Adam (Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans', 547). The identity of Adam is traded for the identity of Christ through baptism.

¹⁶¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 370.

Christ are present to the believers in transforming power, so that the believers take on the same 'form'.¹⁶²

The likeness or form of Christ in his incarnation is itself one that mediates or makes possible a joining to and conformity with his death. Just as 'we have been joined to the "form" of Christ's death' so too is there the possibility of 'constantly being (and need to be) "conformed" to it'.¹⁶³ So this understanding of *ὁμοίωμα* 'is not simply as a corresponding reality, nor is it a sacramental understanding devoid of hearing and conforming to the Gospel'.¹⁶⁴ While there is a 'redemptive-historical association' with his death in and through its 'form', it is not a repetition of the crucifixion.¹⁶⁵ As Käsemann puts it, the form of Christ's death is 'both a historical and an eschatological event' and so it 'cannot be fixed to a single time alone but concerns the whole world'.¹⁶⁶ While the 'cross is actualized in baptism' it is 'not made its repetition'.¹⁶⁷ There is not the presumption of foregoing time and history, as something new is unfolding from the original event.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² R. C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1967) 39, quoted in Sabou, 2005, 74.

¹⁶³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 370.

¹⁶⁴ Moo suggests that the sacramental understanding is on the right track but he concludes that baptism 'mediates our union with Christ – it does not contain it'. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 370.

¹⁶⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 370.

¹⁶⁶ Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 168.

¹⁶⁷ Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 168.

¹⁶⁸ If the language of repetition applies it might be the distinction between repetition with a difference and repetition of the same. Christ's death and resurrection are an original event and not simply a mimetic imaging on the same order as that which preceded it. As John Milbank formulates it, 'he imbued his human mimesis with an absolutely original creative power able to hold together without any interval between sense and occurrence' (John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 95). Sense or meaning and its occurrence or effectiveness are brought together in Christ and in baptism into him through the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2). The meaning is not one without effect and the effect flows out of the power of the meaning generating 'the event of reconciliation' (Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 95).

To die with Christ in baptism is to be joined to a form which will itself bring about a conformity – ultimately to his resurrection (Rom. 6:5; Philippians 3:10-11, 21).¹⁶⁹ The form of the subject in Christ displaces the form of the subject under the law. ‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death’ (8:2). There is a suspension of the law and a reorientation to death: ‘Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (8:1). Paul’s victory cry proclaims victory over the forces of evil as they work through the force of law in human life.¹⁷⁰ The ‘condemnation’ (*κατάκριμα*), or the curse (Rom. 5:16-18; Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26) of the Law is suspended.¹⁷¹ In Christ the relationship with God is no longer based on an alienating death. The ‘animate force of sin’ has been displaced by ‘life in the Spirit’. Through the Spirit there is resurrection life and conformity to Christ (Rom. 6:4), rather than the compulsion of sin oriented to death.

Paul pictures baptism and the lifestyle it institutes as freeing one from this life of slavery: ‘But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness’ (Rom. 6:17-18). He describes the passage through baptism as a transition from life to death so that its Subjects are to present themselves to God as ‘those alive from the dead’ (Rom. 6:13). Baptism into Christ displaces the primordial

¹⁶⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 370.

¹⁷⁰ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 481.

¹⁷¹ Fitzmyer seems to equate the problem with the law and the answer with a doing away with the law, though his explanation of the law is usually nuanced so as to explain that it is sin that is the problem.

deception (connected with the lure of desire and the Law – death) with the ontological reality of the death and resurrection of Christ. As Fitzmyer writes, 'Ontologically united with Christ through faith and baptism, Christians must deepen their faith continually to become more and more psychologically aware of that union.'¹⁷² Baptism is an ontological alternative to the 'body of death', as there is a joining (σύμφυτοι) to his body as a new Subject. The 'Subject' of death has joined herself to death while the Subject of Christ has been joined to the ontological reality of God in Christ. The psychological realization builds on the ontological ground it presumes.

'We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing' (Rom. 6:6).¹⁷³ The voiding or suspension ('brought to nothing') that takes place in verse 6 (καταργέω) and which is repeated in 7:2 and 6 speaks of a transferral from one sort of Subject to another.¹⁷⁴ The body of sin (το σωμα της ἁμαρτίας) has been entombed by means of baptism into death (συνεταφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ δια τοῦ βαπτισματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον), but this death is not simply anyone's or even one's own as the entombing or burial involves a joining of two bodies in death (συνετάφημεν). According to Graham Ward, the suspension of the Law does not create an absolute void or a mere absence, rather it creates a liminal condition where bodies can merge and where gender and materiality

¹⁷² Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 438.

¹⁷³ *English Standard Version*.

¹⁷⁴ Not only do we not die alone, but the death of Christ opens a space for community.

are no longer the stable defining factor.¹⁷⁵ We were buried together then to him (*ἐβαπτίσθημεν οὖν αὐτῷ*) through immersion to *the particular death* that he died (*εἰς τὸν θάνατον* –into *the death*). The 'likeness' is a real participation in his death while at the same time calling for the participation of the Subject: 'So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 6:11).¹⁷⁶ There is a physical/corporeal/spiritual relationship with Christ which defies Lacan's notion that the real of the body cannot be coordinated with a relationship of love (*Seminar 20*, 58). Being joined to Christ is to pass into an incarnate relationship with one's own body and the material cosmos (the subject taken up in the examination of Romans 8 below). Where Žižek's theory has no means of recovering the body or the material universe Paul pictures the Christian as fully incarnate in both.

Žižek's understanding of dying with Christ was dealt with most extensively in his exposition of Romans 7:1-6, which is Paul's summary illustration of dying to sin in Roman's 6, and as Wright says, it can only be understood in light of chapter 6.¹⁷⁷ It is also easier to understand in light of the rest of Romans 7. To bring the discussion on chapter 6 to bear on Žižek's theory his exposition is compared to Paul's – in light of

¹⁷⁵ Graham Ward, 'The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ', in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, Eds. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London & New York: Routledge, 1999) 164. Ward states that, 'Patristic theologies of both the incarnation and the circumcision emphasize the instability of Jesus' gendered corporeality.' So this gendered liminality of his death points to the condition in which bodies can merge.

¹⁷⁶ *English Standard Version*

¹⁷⁷ Wright, *Romans*, 559.

chapter 6 but also what he does in chapter 7 – all of which prepares for chapter 8.

In Žižek's reading of Paul's illustration of the woman whose husband has died (7:1-4), the death is understood as a reorientation to the law. 'Release (*κατηργήθημεν* in 7:6) from the law' is the manner in which Paul describes the significance of his illustration, and Žižek works within this understanding, shifting the orientation of the Subject in relation to the law being his primary goal. Within his theory, the imaginary and law have to remain in dynamic tension, even in the feminine orientation, as it is in this tension or gap that the Subject is constituted and sustained. Even the possibility that she would love another arises, in Žižek's description, as an experience requiring the law. Her notion that she is loved by her consort is, in turn, to imagine that deep within her is 'some precious treasure that can only be loved, and cannot be submitted to the rule of Law' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 117). This precious treasure is, according to Lacan, nothing other than the ego. 'It is one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level' (*Seminar I*, 142).

What Žižek misses in chapter 6 is that Paul has here determined the content of dying to the law (7:4) as it is illustrated in 7:1-4. The identity of the dead husband of 7:1-4 can be understood on the basis of who dies in chapter 6 and who the dead 'I' is in 7:7ff. The 'old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing' (6:6). The 'body of sin' (6:6) which was identified with the 'body of death' (7:24) is the summing up of the dynamic of the

'I' in 7:7ff. This 'I' will not survive into chapter 8. Žižek is attempting to save the ego or 'I'; while for Paul the 'I' does not survive the death it dies in Christ. In terms of the wife and her dead husband, in verse 4 the 'you' in the first half of the verse locates the readers with the dead husband: 'you have died to the law through the body of Christ' (7:4a). In the second half of the verse the readers are the wife who has died, remarried, and expecting: 'so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God' (7:4b).¹⁷⁸ Žižek's characterization of 'this strangely sexualized comparison of the believer delivered from the Law with an adulteress' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273), does not push the strangeness far enough. Paul's illustration disrupts each of the categories which are the stable, unchanging necessities in the Žižekian universe. The two 'incompatible dimensions' of the real and the symbolic create the gap which is constitutive of the Subject (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 274-275), yet the woman has passed beyond both the real and the symbolic (death and the law). The cardinal rule in the Lacanian universe is here broken: there *is* a sexual relationship; it is possible to obliterate the dynamic of sin, in which the law and the real of the body cannot be coordinated. The believer knows Christ, not in the sense of the knowledge of good and evil, but in the bodily sense – the full-bodied change of baptism. In Žižek's 'dying to sin', the encounter with the death drive is a 'limit-experience' which in traversing the fantasy opens up the possibility of starting again at the origin. Traversing the

¹⁷⁸ As Wright puts it, 'Once we link the law with sin . . . 'you died to the law' can only have one meaning. "You" in the first half of 7:4 is the "former husband"; "you" in the second half is the "wife" (Wright, *Romans*, 559).

fantasy, with its subjective destitution and opening up to symbolic death, means the subject is only momentarily unconstrained by law or ideology.

As a result, in Žižek's understanding of dying to sin, there can be no change in the formal structure or dynamics of the subject, so that the couplets law/sin and law/love, applied to the woman (adulteress or not) whose husband has died, are indistinguishable. The ambiguity is the same as that which the 'I' experiences when faced with 'forbidden desire' or 'life in the law', the structure and dynamic which gives rise to the desire for the self is precisely the dynamic necessary for Subjectivity to occur. The impossibility of the desire is the necessary structuring principle against which desire (*jouissance*) forms. Paul has already addressed the ambiguity that arises between law and sin in chapter 6. While in 7:7ff he seems to be demonstrating, in a manner similar to Žižek that the 'I' arises with this forbidden desire, in chapter 6 he presumes that this desire (the deceptive desire which makes law sin), along with the 'I' is dead. In 6:1 it is no longer sin and law that are in danger of confusion, but sin and grace: 'Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?' The two can be delineated because 'we who died to sin' cannot live in sin. The Subject of sin has been laid to rest so that 'we too might walk in newness of life' (6:4). Where in chapter 7 'coveting of every kind' (7:8) has colonized the body and its members (7:23) in chapter 6 the expectation is that since the body is no longer infested with desire the Subject is able to control its members: 'Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God . . . and your members to God' (6:12-13). The ambiguity of chapter 7 is displaced with perspicuity, and the incapacity of the will, with control.

Chapter 6 also clarifies the nature of *κατηργήθημεν* or the suspension of 7:6, as it is not merely Žižek's obscene superego that is suspended but the 'body of sin' (of 6:6). The voiding or suspension or *καταργέω* of the 'body of sin' and the 'body of death' is the demise of the dynamic of the 'I' or the Pauline version of the ego. Where Žižek would suspend the superego and save the ego, Paul pictures baptism as entombing a cadaver (a subject ready to be buried). The body of sin (*το σωμα της ἀμαρτίας*) has been entombed by means of baptism into death (*συνεταφημεν οὖν αὐτῷ δια τοῦ βαπτισματος εἰς τὸν θάνατον*). As with Paul's metaphor in 7:1-4 what happens in the tomb is a fusion or joining of two bodies (*συνετάφημεν*). 'You also have died' not just any death but 'through the body of Christ' that you might 'belong to another' (7:4). As long as the 'I' is present, death and law and the dynamic of the law are working, but where that which constitutes the 'I' is voided (suspended) it is not simply an absence or potential which remains. Agamben's de-energizing of the law does not go far enough as there is new life under a different principle – 'we serve in the new way of the Spirit (7:6) – 'the law of the Spirit of life' (8:2). As Wright indicates, it is the person and not the law that is released.¹⁷⁹ Žižek's law, the law of sin and death, with its condemning

¹⁷⁹ Wright, *Romans*, 560.

circumstance of sin under the reign of death is finished. For Paul, death is not an origin or ground but is a permeable category. Christ's death and resurrection work to expose the emptiness of the grave and renders death and sin second class powers.

Žižek as a commentator on Paul knows primarily the Paul of Romans 7, which it has been argued is the non-Christian Paul. Though Žižek examines portions of Romans 6, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, he grounds his theory in Romans 7 and does not seem to venture at all into Romans 8. Romans 8, it is argued below, stands in marked contrast to Romans 7 as it counters and displaces the dynamic of the non-Christian Subject with the one who is 'in Christ'. The Paul of Romans 8 will account for his previous identity under the law of sin and death (chapter 7) with categories which are absent in Romans 7 presumably because they are not available outside of Christ. The dialogue between Žižek and Paul has its origin then as a dialogue between the non-Christian Paul of Romans 7 and the Paul of chapter 8 who lives by the law of life in the Spirit. The categories of chapter 8 account for the form (the law) of chapter 7, but fill this form with an entirely new content. This concluding section likewise will presume to account for Žižek's categories with a theological understanding which exceeds the possibilities of his atheistic materialism.

The Law of Sin and Death versus the Law of Life in the Spirit – Paul in Dialogue with Žižek

Chapter 8 of Romans marks the transition in Paul's argument to the description of an alternative understanding of the human Subject. Where chapter 7:7ff is focused primarily on the isolated individual before the law (with its repeated reference to 'I' or 'myself'), chapter 8 speaks of a corporate identity in the Holy Spirit which has cosmic implications ('those in Christ Jesus' vs. 8:1; 'The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed' (8:19)). The Holy Spirit does not appear in chapter 7 but is the theme of chapter 8 (mentioned 19 times explicitly and the main subject of each section of the chapter).¹⁸⁰ Where chapter 7 focused on describing the dynamics of the body of death (7:24) (approximating Žižek's death drive), chapter 8 counters each of the Pauline categories (and their near parallel in Žižek) constituting the Subject addressed in chapter 7 with the work of the Spirit: Paul's 'I' (ἐγώ) (analogous to life in the imaginary in Žižekian terminology) becomes a life of hope (focused not on the seen or the image in the mirror, but on the unseen (vs. 24), which brings about a conformity to the image of the Son (vs. 29) and a reconstitution of the Subject; the work of the law (or the Žižekian near equivalent of the symbolic) is displaced by the law of the Spirit of life (vs. 2) which results in freedom from slavery to fear and relationship to God as 'Abba, Father' (vs. 15) reconstituting the Subject a child of God; the Pauline 'body of sin' (6:6) or 'body of death' (7:24) (analogous to the Žižekian real) is displaced in the resurrection life of the Spirit (8:10-11)

¹⁸⁰ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 480. Adapting Fitzmyer's divisions these sections could be schematized in the following manner: (a) 8:1-13: Christian life empowered by the Spirit; (b) 8:14-17: the Christian adopted as a child and destined for glory through the Spirit; (c) 8:18-27: the cosmic hope in the Spirit; (d) 8:26-39: the fulfilled reality of life in the Spirit. This fits closely with the unfolding logic below.

which is not a departure from the material body or material reality but the beginning of cosmic redemption ('the redemption of our bodies' (8:23) and the redemption of the cosmos (8:21)). Thus Paul, in chapter 8, addresses each of the categories laid out in chapter 7 which Žižek links to the three Lacanian registers, so chapter 8 can be read over and against Žižek as a Pauline counter to and resolution of the dynamics of the death drive.

This reading though is not only against Žižek but with him, particularly in his description of the problem as he relates it to Romans 7 and even as he recognizes what a Christian solution would entail. Žižek, in describing the inherent bind within the dynamic of the Lacanian registers is also describing the structure within which any solution he offers will have to function. His notion that the fall is salvation and that crucifixion is resurrection describes his theoretical procedure, in that for him the problem is the answer or at least contains the answer.¹⁸¹ In turn, his proposed answer (traversing the fantasy, the *act*) is a repetition of the founding moment or entry into the symbolic, which, though it may result in 'an intervention in . . . which the agent's identity itself is radically changed' (*On Belief*, 85), in the attempt to start the relation with the law over again, it reinstitutes the problem (*Enjoy Your Symptom*, 77).¹⁸² The moment of the *act* is the only moment of freedom as a glimpse is had into the real and into the forced choice of

¹⁸¹ As Kay points out, it is sometimes unclear whether Žižek is writing in the role of analyst, patient, or both simultaneously. It certainly raises the question of the therapeutic value of the *act* (Kay, *Žižek*, 155).

¹⁸² See Kay, *Žižek*, 111. She notes that in the *act*, in Lacan's formula, 'we can "treat the real by means of the symbolic' and that as Žižek understands it, the *act* will also 'treat the symbolic by means of the real' – it will 'allow us to reboot in the real so as to start up our relationship with the symbolic afresh (Kay, *Žižek*, 155).

entering into the symbolic (*Enjoy Your Symptom*, 77).¹⁸³ According to Lacan, the only act which is enduringly successful is suicide, as this is the only point at which the conscious assumption of the desire of the unconscious (death drive) is complete (*Television*, 66-67).¹⁸⁴ As Žižek indicates psychoanalysis does not and cannot look to an enduring and complete resolution of the real, which in 'Christian terms . . . can never be redeemed-delivered, laid to rest, pacified/gentrified' (*The Fragile Absolute*, 98).¹⁸⁵ He does not believe in Christian salvation or in the dissolution of the real but he recognizes that for a Christian this is precisely what it would mean to be 'redeemed-delivered'. The sections below follow his logic to an end which he indicates but which he himself cannot embrace as the point of Romans in Žižekian terms, it will be claimed, is precisely the dissolution of the real. With the displacement of desire with hope and the overcoming of symbolic alienation through adoption by God, these are the requisites for an account of Christian redemption that will meet the human predicament as Žižek and Paul

¹⁸³ See *The Plague of Fantasies*, chapter 1.

¹⁸⁴ His descriptions of the act in film describe coming up against the forced choice of a situation and choosing the impossible or suicidal act: in *Speed*, the hero (Keanu Reeves) confronting the terrorist blackmailer holding his partner at gunpoint shoots his partner in the leg; in *Ransom* the media tycoon (Mel Gibson) answers the kidnappers of his son with a refusal of ransom and the offer of reward to whoever will turn them in; and in *The Usual Suspects* Keyser Soeze shoots his own wife and child held by a rival mob so as to be free to take full revenge (*The Fragile Absolute*, 149-150).

¹⁸⁵ In each of these solutions he is dealing with the trauma of the real which is made inaccessible by the fact that it is the centre around which the symbolic and the imaginary orbit. As he states it in the full text referenced in the following sentence, 'one must draw the unavoidable conclusion the psychoanalysis, far from being a confessional mode of discourse, entails the acceptance and admission that all our discursive formations are forever haunted by some "indivisible remainder", by some traumatic spectral "rest" that resists "confession", that is integration into the symbolic universe – or, in Christian terms, that can never be redeemed-delivered, laid to rest, pacified/gentrified' (*The Fragile Absolute*, 98). In straightforward terms he is not a Christian and does not believe in Christian salvation, so Christian redemption and deliverance are not viable possibilities for him.

differently describe it. In so doing one goes beyond what Žižek thinks possible.

So while the reading below takes up dialogue with Žižek, the point is to appreciate the depth of difference between the dynamics of life under the law and life in Christ as spelled out in chapters 7 and 8 and in accomplishing this, to spell out what Paul's redemption would entail in Žižekian terms (which will of course, in part, entail countering Žižek). The dialectic between Žižek and Paul can be read as an extension then, of the dialectical difference worked out in chapters 7 and 8. Žižek's description of the dynamics of life under the law (the death drive) acts as a commentary not only on chapter 7 but also serves to accentuate the difference between the subject of sin (the 'I') in chapter 7 and the saved subject of chapter 8.¹⁸⁶

Žižek, of course would be the first to agree that 7:7ff is about the normal Christian life – as the normal Christian life, like every other, is controlled by the dynamic of the death drive. Žižek sees Romans 7 as a passage from perversion to hysteria and this hysteric questioning constitutes a traversing of the fantasy but not a dispelling of the fantasy or a departure from the clutches of the death drive (*Ticklish Subject*, 148). For Žižek there is no alternative to the dynamics of Romans 7, rather one can only manipulate the Lacanian registers under the power

¹⁸⁶ Douglas Moo spells out the theological framework in which this understanding might be disputed and sets out the arguments for and against the passage referring to normal Christian life. See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 443ff. Fitzmyer lists Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Althaus, Barth, Giese, Nygren, Cranfield, Packer and Dunn among those who have held to the position (that Romans 7 is normative of the Christian life) in one form or another. See Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 464.

of the real and death drive.¹⁸⁷ Yet Romans 7 read as the life of the unregenerate functions not only as a negative contrast to Romans 8 but it marks the point of departure or difference which is to be had in and through the dynamics of life in the Spirit.¹⁸⁸ It is not only the Holy Spirit that is absent in chapter 7 and present in chapter 8 but life and peace (8:6), adoption as children (8:15-17), glory (8:18), cosmic redemption (8:21) and Christian love (8:35ff.) are all themes which can be read as alternatives which displace the frustration and agonistic self relation under the law in chapter 7. In turn the *ἐγὼ* and the dynamics of deception worked out in chapter 7 are not simply absent in chapter 8 but rather they seem to have been displaced in the corporate identity 'in Christ'.¹⁸⁹

New Life in the Spirit through Christ by the Father

The Spirit can be equated with life (8:2, 10-11) and with the introduction of the Spirit in 8:2 Paul's question of 7:24 is definitively answered. 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death' (8:2). The argument of this section is that Christ's death defeated death and founded a new human

¹⁸⁷ He does incorporate categories such as conversion (the act) or 'assuming desire' in regard to the law, but as will be shown below his theology falls short of embracing the realities of Romans 8. While his theory parallels the sections describing 'hope' and 'adoption by God' (assuming desire), the concluding section on the real is without parallel within the realm of his theory as it proposes the dissolution of the real. This is impossible within the realm of his theory but it marks the primary difference between remaining within the realm of possibility he allows for and becoming a Christian.

¹⁸⁸ The dynamic of the real is the closest thing in Žižek's system to a spiritual or miraculous force: 'For Lacan, miracles happen and *that's* the Lacanian Real. The Real is impossible only in the sense that you cannot symbolize or accept it' (*Conversations with Žižek*, 165).

¹⁸⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 416, maintains that the Christ of 8:1 denotes the corporate Christ with whom believers are united.

Subject grounded in life in the Spirit and the communion of the Trinity. The fear and slavery under the law of sin and death, with its work through deceptive desire aroused by the law, became 'another law' (*ἕτερον νόμον*), but this law is now voided and with it all of its various machinations. The punishing effects of the law of sin and death can no longer condemn as God has condemned the law of sin through the death of Christ (8:1-3) who ushers in the law of life in the Spirit. Where 7:7ff described the characteristics of this living death, chapter 8 describes life in the Spirit, which sums up the difference God's righteousness makes. The body is dead due to unrighteousness but the Spirit is life and this *is* God's righteousness (8:10).¹⁹⁰ Christ's death exposes and reverses the lie of sin and chapter 8 describes how the identity of death in sin is displaced in an identity of life in the Spirit. The work of the Trinity is revealed most clearly in the work of founding a new form of humanity as described in Romans 8. The whole action comes from God sending his Son and destroying sin and bringing life in the Spirit through him.¹⁹¹

In the opening verses of the chapter, Paul explains how Christ defeats and exposes the lie of sin in the particular death he died. The punishing effects of the law of sin and death are finished so that there is no condemnation in Christ (8:1). The judgment passed on sin brought condemnation, so that death reigned from the time of Adam (5:16-17) but now God has 'condemned sin in the flesh of Christ' (*ἁμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί*) (8:3) so that it can no

¹⁹⁰ See Wright, *Romans*, 584.

¹⁹¹ This opening section sets the parameters which the following sections will fill out in more detail. See Wright, *Romans*, 579.

longer deal out death by deception.¹⁹² In chapter 7 Paul locates the law of sin 'in my members' (7:23), in the flesh (7:25), or as 'sin that dwells within me, that is, in my flesh' (7:18). The place from which sin works death is the flesh. As Wright explains, the reason there is now no condemnation is 'because God has dealt with sin in the flesh, and provided new life for the body'.¹⁹³ Those in Christ experience the death to sin and the new life which he provides. The sentence of death is passed on sin in the one who was in the true 'likeness of sinful flesh' (*ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας*) (8:3) so those who are found in his *likeness* through baptism (6:5) will also experience this death to sin rather than death by sin.

Paul adds to his description in (8:3) 'and as a sin-offering' (*καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας*). The sin offering, according to Wright, was for the ignorant or unwilling sin, which answers the problem of sin of the 'I' (7:15) who does not 'know' and does not 'will' what he does.¹⁹⁴ Christ does not die for a general wrongdoing but to address the particular

¹⁹² According to Dunn the condemnation is that of death pronounced in 5:16. The condemnation 'includes the carrying out of the sentence . . . death as a consequence of the belonging to epoch inaugurated by Adam' (Dunn, Romans 1-8, 280). According to the TDNT, 'One cannot seek a single historical fact in which the condemnation is pronounced and executed. Paul is obviously thinking of the totality of what God has done, and does, through His Son. He has in mind the whole movement from the incarnation to the impartation of the Spirit to believers, v. 4. The obedience of the Son to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8) is obviously part of this κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί. But in R. Paul's concern is with the whole of God's saving action in the Son, not with details' (*Vol. 3: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.), 951-952).

¹⁹³ Wright, Romans, 575. He goes on to explain that the condemnation is not of Jesus but of sin. 'It is not merely about a judicial exchange . . . It is about sentence of death being passed on "sin" itself, sin as a force or power capable of deceiving human beings, taking up residence within them, and so causing their death (7:7-25)' (Wright, *Romans*, 578).

¹⁹⁴ Wright, *Romans*, 579.

work of sin as it appears in chapter 7.¹⁹⁵ This sin which works through deception and ignorance brings about disobedience unto death, and the one who was obedient even unto death makes obedience possible (5:18-20). The disobedience unto death describes an orientation founded in deception (it cannot obey God) and obedience unto death recognizes death but obeys in light of the resurrection life by which it is empowered (8:11-12).

The body is dead because of sin but the Spirit is a counter power of life (8:10). The Spirit now gives the righteousness of God or the promise of life indicated in the law and the law's 'righteous decree' of life has been fulfilled.¹⁹⁶ This then will result in the capacity to 'walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (8:4). This walk is characterized in all of its phases by the power of life which enables the mindset and hope of the Subject in Christ.

The key difference between the living death of 7:7ff and life in the Spirit of chapter 8, or another way of describing the difference between life and death, is that the death of the 'I' divides and alienates while life in the Spirit is a communion founded by the Father who has sent his Son (8:3) who leads by his Spirit (8:14). The Father is the primary agent who subjected creation in hope (8:20) who makes all things work to the good for those who love him (8:28) who has foreknown and predestined those he called (8:29) and these he has justified and glorified (8:31). This communion is 'in Christ Jesus' who was sent to free from the law of sin and death (8:2, 3) by condemning sin in the

¹⁹⁵ See N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

¹⁹⁶ Wright, *Romans*, 580.

flesh (8:3) and who gives his Spirit of life (8:9) so that those who suffer with him will be glorified together with him (8:17) as he died and was raised and intercedes so that nothing can separate from the love of God (8:34-35). The Spirit is the source of life (8:2) who empowers the walk and mindset of those in the Spirit and in whom the Spirit dwells (8:9) as the Spirit is God's righteousness (8:10) whose resurrection power will 'give life to your mortal bodies' (8:11) as by his life 'you put to death the deeds of the body' (8:13) and through the Spirit adoption as sons enables his sons to cry 'Abba'(8:15) and who helps in weakness and prayer by interceding for the saints (8:26-27). The Trinity is a communion in which and through which the new humanity walks (8:4) has their mindset (8:5-8) sonship (8:15) endurance of suffering (8:17) and saving hope (8:20, 24). Leonardo Boff has described this hope as set 'on a life no longer threatened by death, on a process of self-realization that is continually renewed in line with the future'.¹⁹⁷ The following sections argue that salvation from sin and death and the new life in Christ can be identified in the different Subjects which appear in chapter 7 (with Žižek's similar categories) and 8.

Life in the Imaginary versus the Spirit of Hope

As Freud describes it, the ego is the 'seat of anxiety' as it faces possible annihilation from the super-ego (*The Ego and the Id*, 59-60). The fear arises with the split between the superego and the ego. On

¹⁹⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Wellwood, UK: Burns & Oates, 1988), 126-127.

one side the ego rejects any prohibition, and on the other and in the same instant, he takes over the fear of that danger as a symptom in an attempt to get rid of the fear (*Splitting of the Ego*, 373). In Lacan's commentary on Freud, the spectral relation of the self to the self which gives rise to the imaginary is alienation from the self: 'Alienation is the imaginary as such' (*Seminar III*, 146). The ego as bodily or object ego is a misrecognition of the self that Lacan describes as "frustration in its essence" (*Ecrits: Selection*, 46). According to Žižek, 'Ego itself is, as to its essence, is a symptom, a compromise formation' (*Reader*, 281). In a similar way, in Paul's depiction the split 'I' demonstrates how the law holds out a fullness of being – promising life (wholeness or completeness as the object cause of desire) but ending only in an agonistic struggle to the death (7:16-20).¹⁹⁸ Paul describes life in the flesh as a life of slavery to fear (8:15).¹⁹⁹ Lacan describes it as a drive toward unity or oneness with the self through the Other. 'Love is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One, which leads us to the impossibility of establishing the

¹⁹⁸ The psychological depth implicit in Paul's description points to the first person nature of the experience. Dodd notes the instances in which he uses 'I'. In each instance the shift to this mode of discourse has a distinctive purpose. I Cor. 8:13 in talking about eating meat Paul is commending his practice as an example to follow if not a law to be obeyed. In I Cor. 13 and 9 in regard to spiritual gifts he again gives himself as an example. Gal. 2:19-21 and Phil. 3:7-14 are personal confessions of Paul. Dodd concludes, 'It will in fact be found on examination that Paul rarely, if ever, says 'I' unless he is really speaking of himself personally, even if he means to generalize from the particular instance' (Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 124-125).

¹⁹⁹ The suffering of the 'I' in chapter 7 is a suffering implicit in the use of the word. The suffering of this 'I' is what Vanhoozer refers to as middle voice. It is at once active in that it is the cause of the suffering and passive in that it is the object of this suffering. See Kevin Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 426ff. Paul's 'I' appears as part of a text (Rom. 7:7ff) that is a reflection on two other texts (Genesis and Exodus), one of which records the first 'I' so that while he may be describing a first person experience it is also the history of this 'I' with which the word is weighted.

relationship between “them two” (*Seminar XX*, 6).²⁰⁰ Paul describes this desire as working through a split in the *ἐγώ* (as worked out above), and it is misdirected in that it presumes the law contains wholeness and life and as a result it is simply a work of death (Rom. 7:7, 10).²⁰¹

Paul’s resolution to the fear and frustration of the *ἐγώ* is life in the Spirit (8:2) which he describes in a series of categories which are absent in chapter 7 and which Žižek partly describes and recognizes but which are not real alternatives within the confines of his theory. The first of these, which directly counters the spectral self relation of the imaginary or the fleshly *ἐγώ*, is Christian hope. ‘For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope at all’ (8:24). If the object of hope is within sight then it ceases to be hope.²⁰² Hope, by definition, falls outside the static spectral relation (the bodily image or the image in the mirror) as it reaches forward to that which does not appear.²⁰³ Where the superego/ego split focuses on fulfilling or finding the self in and through a self relation (the bodily image of self or others—*Seminar II*, 306), hope is focused on the prospect of conformity to the unseen image of Christ (8:29) and it does not misrecognize the mortal body (on the order of Lacan’s notion that the ego is a

²⁰⁰ Lacan’s reference here is to the impossibility of sexual relationship between male and female but the origin of this alienation is the split interior of the ego which would also fuse the one with the other. It is the lack of self or the inability to obtain the reflected image, or as Lacan states it, it is the relation to the other but the other isn’t an other at all ‘since it is essentially coupled with the ego, in a relationship which is always reflexive, interchangeable’ (*Seminar II*, 321).

²⁰¹ In Graham Ward’s assessment of the Lacanian real he assumes it is simply a reversal of modern notions of presence. While he is concerned to make the point that theology has always had a more nuanced understanding of presence than is allowed for in modern readings of the tradition, sinful notions of full presence are not the unique domain of the modern. See Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 169.

²⁰² Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 515.

²⁰³ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 516.

misrecognition) but it presumes that through the Spirit the body is resurrected (8:11).

The Subject of hope and the Subject of desire constitute the two alternatives held out in chapter 7 (with its similarities to the Žižekian Subject) and chapter 8. The Subject of deception or of forbidden desire makes the law a means of achieving the self and so enacts a loss in which the 'I' observes or sees (*βλέπω*) himself or his body (7:23) and finds there an alien force (another law) inducing evil works (7:20-21).

Where desire arises through lack (lack of self), the ground of hope is life in the Spirit, which has as its goal 'conformity to the image' of Christ (8:29). His image is not an object of sight (ego) so achieving his likeness is a dynamic process of walking as he did (8:4), of setting the mind on things of the Spirit (8:5), of active submission (8:7,13), and patience (8:25). The hope of resurrection (8:11) displaces the static orientation to death (the negation of death or the real) in the acceptance of the mortal body (8:11) without slavery to fear of the punishing effects of the law (8:15) (or the punishing superego), for through the Spirit of sonship a direct relation to God has been opened (8:15). Put simply the one is the Subject of life and the other is the Subject of death.

For Lacan and Žižek the impetus of the death drive is to secure the ego (imaginary) in the manner of an object and the ego as object refuses the dynamics of temporality and change. The Subject knows itself as a unity but it is a virtual unity (that of the object in the mirror)

threatened by the dynamics of time and change (life) (*Seminar II*, 50). The ego of the imaginary 'turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 6). The movement and maturation that are a natural part of life threaten to expose the imago to a change which would constitute its demise. On the other hand, hope, in Moltmann's description, 'has the chance of a meaningful existence only when reality itself is in a state of historic flux and when historic reality has room for open possibilities ahead'.²⁰⁴

Paul's description of hope allows for a full engagement with the vicissitudes of suffering as this suffering and even death are no longer definitive or determinative of life in light of the hope of certain glory. The 'present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' (8:18) as neither 'death nor life' can separate from the love of God (8:38-39). Hope embraces the dynamics of change as it is focused on certain future fulfilment of a promise which cannot be obtained 'within the framework of the possibilities inherent in the present'.²⁰⁵ In Moltmann's description it becomes possible to experience the dynamic change of history, not as a threat to the static reality of the Self as object, but as a means of fulfilling hope.²⁰⁶

In Fitzmyer's explanation of 8:20ff this hope directly counters the 'lie' or futility of sin: '*matiotēs* connotes what *psuedos*, "lie," meant in

²⁰⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 92.

²⁰⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 103.

²⁰⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 103.

1:25' but here the subjection to frustration is in hope.²⁰⁷ The hopeless futility of chapter 7 and of Genesis 3 is answered for the first time, according to Cranfield, in Romans 8:20 which echoes and resolves an original futility.²⁰⁸ The original lie of the serpent produced a cosmic futility the seat of which was to be found in humanity, but now freedom from the lie or 'the powers of sin, death and corruption' is proleptically realized in hope.²⁰⁹ As Moltmann describes it, the law of sin and death is an immanent law and for this reason contains no hope, but the law of life in the Spirit subsumes this futility into a transcendent hope.²¹⁰

The imaginary or *éyō* prevents entry into life. The ego is not subject to growth and change as it is an object fixed as part of a formal structure: 'I am nothing of what happens to me' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 22). Everything that one is lies within the static object relation to the self. The agonistic self-relation of the 'I' to itself is an obstacle to life and a kind of living death (Rom. 7:24). Paul, in contrast, pictures not only the Subject but all of creation as undergoing a redemptive rebirth. There is 'groaning as in the pains of childbirth' (8:22) as 'we hope for what we do not yet have' (8:24). There is not an abolition of the present world so that heaven might take its place but a transformation on the order of birth, in which the pangs of suffering are fulfilling a purpose.²¹¹ With the 'adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies' (8:23) the purpose of creation's suffering will have appeared and hope's longing fulfilled.

²⁰⁷ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 507.

²⁰⁸ Cranfield, *Romans*, 414.

²⁰⁹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 509.

²¹⁰ See Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 102ff and James C. Livingston, Francis Schüssler Fiorenze, *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006) 277.

²¹¹ See Wright, *Romans*, 597.

Lacan likens the course of life to that of the slave 'whose response to the frustration of his labour is a desire for death' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 46). Where the labour of hope is a life of redemption, the labour of the *ἐγὼ* is the work of death (7:24).

The Assurance of Christian Hope amidst Futility versus the Artifice of Therapy

This section compares the practical orientation of Christian hope that is on the order of, but exceeds the potential, of psychotherapy. The case is argued that psychotherapy has incorporated Christian hope but has emptied it of its power to heal.

The law of the superego or symbolic, like the law of sin and death, is deterministic and unchangeable and the point of therapy is to introduce a future perspective into this past determination (opening the subject up to the trauma of the real and reorientation to the symbolic). Lacan is originally working with the Heideggerian notion of '*Augenblick*', which in Marcus Pound's account translates as 'the moment of vision' or 'the glance of an eye' in which 'the past is illuminated by the future coming towards us in the present' or 'the point at which we encounter how things look differently in the light of the future possibilities, revealing the potentiality of our past'.²¹² Pound notes that the concept is the equivalent of the theological notion of hope, which Heidegger, and by extension Lacan, inherit from

²¹² Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 144. Pound references Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Southampton: Blackwell, 1962), 387.

Kierkegaard.²¹³ Whereas Christian hope, in Pound's description, is in the specific hope of the intervention of Christ into the real (see below), the analytic parody of that theological category cannot create a stable identity that will resist the oppressive futility of the real and death drive.²¹⁴ The futility or frustration that exists within the ego is one that Žižek maintains, *constitutes* human reality. The goal of therapy, therefore, is not to overcome the futility or frustration but to conceive it in its 'becoming' so as to overcome neurotic defences (*Parallax*, 6). The neurotic defences that arise against the frustrating lack of control of the body and the world thwart the attempt to realize thought in action and therapy seeks to account for the past prior to its having already determined the present and future.²¹⁵ Bringing the future to bear on past defences (the future anterior perspective) can sometime break through what amounts to a refusal of the future in the present. Žižek, however, describes the impossibility of accounting for the real as it is the event or ground which founds a structure and the real of the original event cannot be accounted for in the structure.²¹⁶ Žižek

²¹³ Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 150-153. Žižek engages Kierkegaard on the topic of repetition in *Enjoy Your Symptom*, 79-80.

²¹⁴ The point above and worked out below in regard to the real. Žižek is working out Kierkegaard's theology in light of therapy in *Enjoy Your Symptom*, 79-80. It is Pound's notion that therapy is a parody of theology. See Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 142ff. On the fragility and temporary nature of the act see *The Fragile Absolute*, 98, and *Enjoy Your Symptom*, 77ff.

²¹⁵ Pound gives a detailed description of the therapeutic process's attempt to account for the past from a 'future anterior' point of view that he calls Christian hope. He may be correct in reading this as a preliminary step in assuming one's desire and recognizing lack and thus becoming open to God's plenitude. See Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 75, 142ff.

²¹⁶ So in the relation between time and eternity the real falls on the side of eternity and is unapproachable from time apart from some trauma that disturbs the fixed order so that trauma or the *act* is the means of remaking the order (*The Fragile Absolute*, 92ff.). According to Žižek, Christianity, like therapy, is able to intervene in this system: 'Without the Divine act of Grace, our destiny would remain immovable, forever fixed by this eternal act of choice; the 'good news' of Christianity, however is

concludes that as a consequence this entails 'the acceptance of the very fact that our lives involve a traumatic kernel beyond redemption, that there is a dimension of our being which forever resists redemption-deliverance' (*The Fragile Absolute*, 98).

Paul acknowledges the emptiness or 'futility' which arises with the Fall but directly counters it with an ontology of hope in which the futility is accounted for and allowed by God due to his hope: 'For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own choice but through the choice of the one who subjected it in hope' (8:20).²¹⁷ The hope here is not human hope but God's,²¹⁸ which accounts for the futile ontology of Romans 7 (and Žižek's theory of the Subject) from an ontological ground which resolves this futility. While Paul allows for openness (the vicissitudes of suffering) he also brings a God's eye view to the perspective of history in 8:29-30 and from this perspective all of history falls between the call and accomplishment of his purposes in those whom he has hope (or whom he has predestined). As Dunn puts it, 'Paul deliberately sets the whole process of cosmic and human history between its two poles, pretemporal purpose and final glorification as the completion of that purpose'.²¹⁹ Hope has at its centre a certainty based on the shared perspective provided in the finished work of Christ 'that God's will stands over all, in control of all, and that his purpose to

that in a genuine Conversion, one can 're-create' oneself, that is, *repeat* this act, and thus *change* (undo the effects of) *eternity itself* (*The Fragile Absolute*, 97). The problem for Žižek is that each of the registers arises through the other as a pure construct devoid of and incapable of contact with an ontological ground outside itself as it *is* its own ground so that *eternity* has no ground or stability.

²¹⁷ This is Schreiner's translation: Schreiner, *Romans*, 433.

²¹⁸ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 508.

²¹⁹ Dunn, *Romans*, 486.

bring his creation and creatures to their full intended potential is undefeatable'.²²⁰ Žižek, in his notion of the death of Christ as the death of God, relinquishes the certainty of hope from a fixed future anterior view. In contrast, the hope which Paul is describing embraces all things as it *transcends* the futility of the material creation and the futility of the *έγώ*. The creation groans in hope for the revealing of the sons of God (8:19). This hope is not merely anticipation, rather it is a new beginning (rebirth in baptism) with Christ through the Spirit with the Father: it is the hope of God given as 'the firstfruits of the Spirit' (8:23) so as to conform the sons of God into the likeness of Christ (8:29).

The Unendurable Suffering of Desire versus Suffering in Hope with Christ

The question of orientation to suffering is inherent in the discussion of desire and hope. Desire, in Paul's description in chapter 7 and in Žižek's theory, breeds its own suffering which is ultimately unendurable, as indicated in Paul's cry, 'Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?' (7:24).²²¹ The Subject of Romans 7 is engaged in a death dealing agony, an agony reflected as well in Žižek's thematic engagement with personalities that would bring down the world in 'not giving way on desire' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 153).²²² People sacrifice their lives for virtuality and view suffering in the world as a support for (or relief from) abstract (symbolic) suffering

²²⁰ Dunn, *Romans*, 495.

²²¹ *New Revised Standard Version*.

²²² This constitutes Žižek's key ethical principle taken up below.

(*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 155).²²³ There is, in the words of Henri Bergson contemplating a certain uncanny relief with the outbreak of World War I, 'a feeling of admiration for the facility of the passage from the abstract to the concrete' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 159).²²⁴ In chapter 7, Paul is focused on the struggle and sacrifice of life within the 'I' in which 'evil lies close and hand' (7:22); an evil he has earlier described as murderous and death dealing (3:10-15). The battle within the 'I' is self destructive and potentially violent – should 'I' give way to the ever present possibility of evil. The forbidden desire of 7:7 is at the origin of human suffering, which in Genesis is linked not only to the shame of the first couple but the murder of the second son by the first. Suffering and sacrifice are inscribed into the economy of desire as part of the agonistic struggle constituting 'the body of death'.²²⁵ In light of the glory of God, however, suffering becomes something which arises in the tangible realms of 'hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword' (8:35) and given God's glory, death is not denied or refused: 'For your sake we face death all day long (8:36). In Dunn's translation, Paul declares 'the settled conviction that

²²³ Žižek describes this unbalanced view as it existed in Heidegger. 'Is it possible to claim, in a nonobscene way, that the Holocaust is nothing in comparison with the catastrophe of the forgetting of being?' Žižek is commenting on a quote from Heidegger which begins, 'The most violent "catastrophes" in nature and in the cosmos are nothing in the order of *Unheimlichkeit* in comparison with that *Unheimlichkeit* which man is in himself. . . (Martin Heidegger, 'Hölderlin's Hymne "Der Ister"', *Gesamtausgabe* 53 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1984), 130).

²²⁴ Žižek is quoting Henri Bergson, *Oeuvres* (Paris: PUF, 1991) 1110 – 1111.

²²⁵ Žižek's depiction of perverse suffering recognizes that masochism can only find relief in suffering. 'No wonder, then, that the fundamental fantasy is *passive*, "masochistic", reducing me to an object acted on by others: it is as if only the experience of the utmost pain can guarantee the subject access to Being' (*Reader*, 119). In the perverse structure, giving oneself over to passive, puppet like acts of perverse suffering taps into Being. The perverse structure posits an excess of pleasure that can only be obtained beyond the symbolic in acts of masochism or sadomasochism. The problem is that hysteria, his alternative position in regard to the law, does not seem to ease the interior suffering but only removes the pleasure.

sufferings of this present time are not of like value to the coming glory to be revealed to us' (8:18).²²⁶ The suffering of desire pervades everything and is built in to Žižek's universe, but the suffering of chapter 8 is temporal and limited to the present age and points to a coming age of glory.²²⁷ It is a suffering that follows the course of Christ's suffering in that it gives way to resurrection, and more than this it is a sharing in Christ's suffering as a mark of adoption and a sign that 'we may also be glorified with him' (8:17). It is still futile suffering²²⁸ but it is a futility taken account of from the perspective of hope.

The Subject reconstituted in Christ is marked by the suffering he shares with Christ, which indicates a passage from the sort of suffering depicted in 7:7ff which does not and cannot share in Christ's suffering. This latter suffering is isolating and antagonistic (hostile to God 7:6) as it is constituted in the refusal of shared life and is an orientation to death. The suffering shared with Christ, by the very fact that it is shared and engaged with the world through Christ, is not oriented to death in the lie of death denial but accepts suffering and death as Christ did, in the assurance of resurrection. Where forbidden desire (7:7) is understood to be impossible desire, the link between suffering and desire can be understood to be an identity of frustration. 'I's

²²⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 468.

²²⁷ See Dunn, *Romans*, 468.

²²⁸ Is there any other kind? It may be that to assign suffering a purpose (purposeful suffering) is to miss the point that in the New Testament suffering seems to have significance only in conjunction with obedience. Against Barth and Warfield who conclude that Jesus was active in his suffering, P. T. Forsyth maintains, 'The perfection of the Son and the perfecting of his holy work lay, not in his suffering but in his obedience. And, as he was eternal son, it meant an eternal obedience' (P. T. Forsyth, *Marriage: Its Ethics and Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 70. Quoted in Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 429. Perhaps suffering can signify but does not bear the weight of being inherently significant.

suffering desire is definitive of the dynamic in which he is constituted a Subject.

The Subject 'in Christ' suffers as he did, as there is now a capacity to take up the suffering of the world and to bear it in the joint suffering of redemption. The groaning and anxious longing of creation are a suffering on the order of child-birth; it is a suffering which will bear fruit (8:23).

Do Not Give Way on Desire versus the Ethic of Following Christ in Hope

Though Žižek recognizes a destructive form of desire his account of desire and his reading of Pauline desire is that it plays a primary and necessary role in the Subject.²²⁹ The key departure in Žižek's reading from Paul's account of desire, is his Lacanian understanding that desire is itself the 'life force' of the Subject.²³⁰ As Žižek describes it, there is a singular ethic and goal in Lacanian psychoanalysis: 'don't compromise, don't give way on your desire' as 'it is fidelity to one's

²²⁹ Lacan and Žižek distinguish between *jouissance* and the desire constitutive of the subject, but the case argued above is that this distinction does not hold. It is clear that what Lacan calls *jouissance* Paul calls 'covetous desire' (7:8). This *jouissance* or desire is, then, the pure substance of the death drive, which Lacan identifies with evil: 'we cannot avoid the formula that *jouissance* is evil' (*Seminar VII*, 184-185). What is unclear is how *jouissance* is ultimately distinguishable from desire.

²³⁰ As Evan's notes, 'the very centre of Lacan's thought . . . is the concept of desire'. Lacan argues that 'desire is the essence of man' (*Seminar XI*, 275), and the goal of therapy is to articulate and recognise the nature of desire (*Seminar I*, 183). Lacan's three registers (the real, the symbolic and the imaginary) intersect with and emerge from his symbol for desire – *objet petit a* (*Seminar XX*, 87) and the conscious and unconscious dialectic occurs in and around the medium of desire (*Seminar II*, 228). Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 36.

desire itself that is elevated to the level of ethical duty' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 153).²³¹

In chapter 7 Paul pictures desire or covetousness as the root of sin. As I argued above, Paul may be referring simultaneously to the desire of Genesis 3 or to the desire which arises in conjunction with the 10th commandment. The sinful desire that arises with the law is, in both instances, a means of establishing the self and in some way to manoeuvre God so as to obtain what he has. Both the prohibition of Eden and that of the Mosaic Law serve as the site for the agency of sin in distorting or disorienting the Subject's relationship to God, which entails a deception and disorientation in the self-relation. The prohibition and the Law serve in this distorted (deceived) understanding, as a 'mechanism' or instrument of accessing God on one's own terms.²³² In chapter 8 Paul counters this distortion of the law through desire with a description of a counter force which might be termed Spiritual drive.²³³ He contrasts the mindset of the flesh (8:5-7)

²³¹ It is unclear as to what sort of desire one is not to give ground on and which sort is to be relinquished. See Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 123. In Lacan's definition, desire is always desire for something else (*Ecrits*, 167) or the desire of the Other, with the double meaning that desire imitates the desire of the neighbour/Other and it seeks to be recognized by the neighbour/Other (*Ecrits*, 312). See Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 38.

²³² See the argument above. The ἐντολή or command meant to preserve life through a covenant relationship with God only produces death where sin distorts the command and displaces God (7:10).

²³³ ἐπιθυμία (desire) does not appear in chapter 8 but in its place Paul describes the construct which seems to constitute the covetous sort of desire in chapter 7. οἱ γὰρ κατὰ σάρκα ὄντες τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς φρονοῦσιν, οἱ δὲ κατὰ πνεῦμα τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος (8:5); rendered in the *English Standard Version* as, 'For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit'. The mind set on (φρονοῦσιν), whether κατὰ σάρκα or κατὰ πνεῦμα, describes a construct in which intent is not under the control of the Subject. Thus in verse 6 φρόνημα, the noun 'mindset' describes the settled positions of either death or life and peace which is 'under the control' of either the flesh or the Spirit. Dunn connects it to the phrase 'to be of another's mind or to belong to another's party' and concludes, 'The sense is appropriate here where Paul's thought is of an opposition or warfare between flesh

which arises from a gap or obstacle in the self (the incapacity to obey the law in 8:7), and which is synonymous with hostility toward God (8:7), with the mind set on the things of the Spirit (8:5). The first mindset (pointing to the construct of desire in chapter 7)²³⁴ is set on the flesh and is death, while the second, which is of the Spirit, is life and peace (8:6). As I argued above, the alienating gap of the *ἐγὼ* (producing the dynamic of desire) constitutes the 'body of death' and it is the orientation which makes the *ἐγὼ* a 'slave to the law of sin' (7:24-25). Žižek's imaginary is constituted in an agonistic desire and even in the therapeutic cure the notion of a final peace is not the goal, as peace would indicate an end of the dynamic constituting the self (death).

Paul's peace, in a Žižekian context, would amount to a relinquishing of the struggle of 'life'. So for Žižek the struggle of Romans 7, in its questioning of the law and its traversing the fundamental fantasy of desire, though it depicts anything but peace, is the equivalent of salvation. For Paul life in the Spirit resolves the struggle constituting the 'I' and the Subject in Christ has peace, in the sense that the conflict is halted, but also the positive peace of the Spirit.²³⁵

and Spirit' (Dunn, *Romans*, 425-426). The term 'Spiritual drive' gets at the notion of a 2nd party or agency that is determinative of the construct.

²³⁴ The NIV rendering ('Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires') is less true to the original vocabulary but is perhaps drawing the link to Paul's description of desire (*ἐπιθυμία*) in chapter 7.

²³⁵ This peace is an inward peace which accounts for futility and struggle but is not defined by it. Paul, in depicting a life of futility in 7:7ff takes account of the *futility* of the lie (1:25) (inherent in desire) and even goes so far as to locate this futility in creation (8:20).

The Symbolic versus the Law of Life in the Spirit

The contrast between Romans 7 and 8 has similarities to the contrast between Žižek and Paul, and in regards to the contrast between the function of the law or the symbolic might be characterized as the difference between the attempt to be one's own father and being a child of God. The attempt to gain life through the law (7:7ff) or to become the father (God) is a necessary passage in Žižek and Lacan while for Paul it is a rejection of God as father and entails hostility toward God (8:7).²³⁶ For Žižek and Lacan the human Subject's entry into the symbolic or subjection to the law (passage through the Oedipus conflict) is identical to the founding moment of the dynamic of being a Subject. 'It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law' (*Ecrits: Selection*, 74). Lacan recognizes the structure he is posing is the equivalent of sin, though he offers no resolution to this sin but instead sees it as sustaining the Subject.²³⁷ 'The father, the name-of-the-father, sustains the structure of the law' (*Seminar XI*, 34).²³⁸ The Subject arises from the self-negating activity of sacrifice (castration or passage through the Oedipus complex) and *sacrifice is a guarantee that 'the Other exists': that there is an Other who can be appeased by means of the sacrifice'*

²³⁶ Paul's concept of sin does not consider that sin might be tamed or normalized, so that while psychoanalytic hostility to the father may be overcome in therapy, hostility toward God requires repentance.

²³⁷ See chapter one of this thesis for the fuller explanation of the symbolic.

²³⁸ Lacan connects his position to Kierkegaard's definition of sin (*Seminar XI*, 34).

(*Enjoy Your Symptom*, 56).²³⁹ In other words, there is an inherent hostility toward the Other of the law (the symbolic or superego) as this Other demands continual service and sacrifice.²⁴⁰

Paul pictures the law as not only impotent but as an oppressive force (due to sin) over against the individual. The law (in the sinful understanding) simultaneously entices and condemns as it holds out the promise of a transgressive knowledge apart from God and life on the basis of works of righteousness.²⁴¹

Paul's resolution to the alienation of the Subject of the law is to become a child of God. Where the sinful mind is by definition 'hostile to God' the one adopted as a child by the Spirit has overcome this hostility enacted against the law (8:7). As in Ezekiel's prophecy the heart of stone will be replaced with a heart of flesh and God's Spirit will indwell his people and enable them to keep the law (Ezekiel 36:26-27). The move from law as alienating and oppressive to the law written on the heart (Jer. 31:33) seems to be duplicated in chapters 7-8.²⁴² Paul's cry at the end of Romans 7 'Who will rescue me from this body of death?' (7:24) is followed in chapter 8 by a cry of joy, 'And by him we cry, "Abba, Father"' (8:15). The God who is law giver in chapter 7 is

²³⁹ Ultimately death or nothingness is the ontological reality over which the Lacanian registers are constructed and which is the motive force behind the sacrifices in the name of the law. The ontological reality of nothing or the real and its effects in the register of the symbolic sometimes seem to constitute two separate entities in Žižek. Kafka's story, *The Trial*, oft repeated by Žižek, illustrates that the Law is a reality constituted by the individual and has no essence apart from this constitution. See *The Žižek Reader*, 20-21, 38-39, 44-49.

²⁴⁰ The death drive arises through 'the phantasmic construction by means of which we endeavour to conceal the inconsistency of the symbolic order in which we dwell' (*Indivisible Remainder*, 1).

²⁴¹ See the section above explaining this understanding. See Dunn, *Romans*, 491.

²⁴² Fitzmyer provides an extensive Jewish background to this understanding. See Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 517).

'Abba' in chapter 8 and this difference is wrought through 'The Spirit himself' who 'testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (8:15). Christ, as the firstborn son of this new family (8:29), provides the perspective of the successful outcome of a justification or righteousness (*δικαιοσύνη*) already received. The corporate or familial nature of righteousness is, according to Dunn, implicit in the term. 'Righteousness is not something which an individual has on his or her own, independently of anyone else; it is something one has precisely in one's relationships as a social being.'²⁴³ God's covenant faithfulness to his people is the fulfilment of his righteousness, and in turn the faithfulness of his children to this relationship is their righteousness.²⁴⁴ Righteousness is being brought into a right relationship with God and overcoming the alienation and hostility toward God and this resolves the alienating conflict with the self and others. God is fulfilling and has fulfilled this righteousness in those he has called in Christ (8:30). The calling or summons to relationship and its accomplishment, as with every word which God speaks, is certain so that the relationship is also certain.²⁴⁵ This certainty of being a child of God and being able to depend on his love stands in contrast to the oppressive demands of the law and the obscene father of the superego.

The correspondence between the life of slavery (8:15), whether the literal slavery in Egypt or slavery to the law, is not an exact parallel to life under the superego, but the two have their correspondences. Sin or the Fall, is for Žižek, the necessary condition of the Subject as

²⁴³ Dunn, *Romans*, 40–41.

²⁴⁴ See Dunn, *Romans*, 41.

²⁴⁵ See Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 535.

the Subject contains his own ground or is his own father (in the resolution of the Oedipal conflict): 'the most concise definition of the subject: the subject is an effect that entirely posits its own cause' (*Metastases of Enjoyment*, 37).²⁴⁶ The alienation from the father is at once the reality and necessity of Žižek's symbolic order.²⁴⁷ There is the possibility of passing beyond perversion, in which there is an imagined pre-Oedipal father (the obscene father of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*), to the oedipal father and the death of the Other in which the substance of the symbolic is questioned.²⁴⁸ It is, however, the very gap which separates/integrates the symbolic and the real in which they 'exist' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 274). The disappearance of the gap between the two domains (or the collapse of their presumed separate existence), or the resolution of their incongruence, would entail the

²⁴⁶ In his work on Schelling Žižek links the 'primordial lie', in which absolutely nothing transforms itself into the Creator God, to the origin of every Subject. God, like every Subject, has his origins in himself. Žižek (with Paul) links the dynamic of Romans 7 to the Fall but he connects this futility of Sin, the Fall and death drive to the foundation and possibility of subjectivity, as it is in and through the fall into the death drive that 'Nothingness is counted as Something' which gives rise to the Subject (*Ticklish Subject*, 157). Accordingly, 'it is not that the Fall is followed by Redemption; the Fall is *identical* to Redemption, it is 'in itself' already Redemption' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273). So too the alienation and failure before the law as laid out in Romans 7 is a necessary stage on the way to the realization that law and love are synonymous (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 273).

²⁴⁷ For Paul there is the possibility of a Subject and law apart from sin. This means that for Paul, death, the law, and the Subject are entities that are separable and not interdependent, while for Žižek it is impossible to posit any one of the three registers apart from the others. Though the real (as the energetic interplay between the symbolic and the imaginary) is privileged in Žižek's understanding, it exercises this primacy only in relationship to the symbolic and the imaginary. For Paul the subject precedes and exceeds the possibility of death and the constraints of the 'I' or *ἐγώ*, though the status of the law is privileged in that it is determinative of the role of the *ἐγώ* in its relationship to death. Žižek claims, 'The fundamental idea around which everything turns is that reality itself is already based on some exclusion or inconsistency – reality is not-all' (*Conversations with Žižek*, 102). This not-all status is the privileged position of the real.

²⁴⁸ As Žižek explains the goal of Pauline theology, 'what the Pauline emergency suspends is not so much the explicit Law regulating our daily life, but, precisely, its obscene unwritten underside' so '*we should suspend the obscene libidinal investment in the Law, the investment on account of which the Law generates/solicits its own transgression* (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 113). See chapter 2 of this thesis for a complete discussion of this transition.

disappearance of the two domains themselves: 'when our psyche can directly act upon external physical reality, we not only no longer have a soul, we also lose a body as "our own," as separate from external objects' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 276).

Paul's equation of hostility toward God and incapacity to obey the law seems to point to a similar dynamic. Alienation from God, and either a perverse or hysteric attempt to obtain life from the law fits (as described above) with Romans 7 but also fits with the slavery to fear abolished by spiritual adoption in chapter 8. 'For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship' (8:15). Žižek recognizes a theological resolution to the problem of the symbolic in Pauline love:

What we find in Paul is a commitment, an engaged position of struggle, an uncanny 'interpellation' beyond ideological interpellation, an interpellation which suspends the performative force of the 'normal' ideological interpellation that compels us to accept our determinate place within the sociosymbolic edifice. (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112).

Paul says, 'obey the laws as if you are not obeying them' (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112).²⁴⁹ What Žižek does not acknowledge is that the basis of this 'uncanny interpellation' is on the basis of a renewed relationship to God as Father. Žižek's resolution of fear and incapacity

²⁴⁹ Žižek recognizes a theological resolution to the problem of the symbolic in Pauline love but the question is if his theory holds together in light of the recommendation of Pauline love he is making. To end alienation would seem to threaten the Lacanian registers in their support of the subject. As worked out below, it is clear that Žižek cannot accept the position of sonship to God (within his present theory) as the basis of this love and uncanny interpellation. See *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112ff.

to keep the law is the death of God the Father (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 126). It is notable that, in a similar way there is no God the Father in Romans 7 and certainly no intimate cry to *Abba*; rather there is an acknowledgement of the goodness of the law and a simultaneous acknowledgement of an incapacity to keep the law (7:13). The 'wretched man' (7:24) who is a 'prisoner of the law' (7:23) can recognize the goodness of the law and yet he is still oriented to and controlled by death (7:24-25)

In chapter 8 Paul links the capacity behind the cry '*Abba*' to an ontological shift in regard to the law. This shift manifests itself in the move from a previous incapacity to obey the law to the capacity to now meet the righteous requirements of the law (8:4-11). As Schreiner maintains, this is not simply a forensic shift or imputed righteousness, as Paul proceeds to explain how the previous incapacity has now become not only a possibility but an obligation (8:12).²⁵⁰ The obligation is not to the law but to God and it is an obligation that arises with the reception of 'the Spirit of sonship' (8:15). In Žižek's theory the alienation from the father and the incapacity before the law are synonymous,²⁵¹ while Paul's explanation assigns the capacity to obey the law specifically to a renewed relation with the Father: 'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (8:16). The Father of the universe and the Father of the Son, the one who has created the category and reality of familial paternity, is Father through

²⁵⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 410.

²⁵¹ The Oedipal father of the death drive demands what cannot be given. The speaking subject imagines some Other which underlies and posits his being as it is expressed in language, when the reality is a complete absence or lack, covered by the symbolic substance (*Seminar I*, 194).

his action of adoption (8:15). The size of the inheritance is indicative of the ontological shift from being one's own father to being a child of God. The former inherits alienation and death while the latter will be glorified with Christ (8:17). The former is a slave serving the law of sin while the latter is enabled to please God (8:8). This status of being the sons of God means that 'you put to death the deeds of the body' (8:13). Pleasing God, and not simply serving the demands of the law, is the goal but this is an impossible goal apart from the shift described in chapter 8: 'And those who are in the flesh are not able to please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, provided the Spirit of God dwells in you' (8:8-9). As Schreiner states it, 'This is manifestly the language of ontology' and is not simply forensic.²⁵² The specific way in which this ontological shift manifests itself, as would be expected from the displacement of the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life (8:2), is in 'life and peace' and an end of hostility toward God (8:6).

The NASB rightly opens chapter 8 under the heading 'Deliverance from Bondage'. Chapter 7 (with its similarities to Žižek) demonstrates how the force of the law and the dynamic of sin is inherently a punishing (*κατακρινῶν* in 8:1) bondage while chapter 8 explains how this dynamic is displaced and now 'there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (8:1).²⁵³ In Žižekian terms there is not only a passage beyond the Oedipus complex but exposure and displacement of the obscene superego in its connection

²⁵² Schreiner, *Romans*, 410. He notes that Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 518-19, and Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 488, agree with this assessment.

²⁵³ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 481, notes that "Condemnation" is no longer leveled by the law against those not observing its specific prescriptions; nor is there condemnation resulting from sin (5:16, 18) that came through Adam'.

to the symbolic.²⁵⁴ It is not a deliverance from the law *per se* or simply a deliverance from God's punishment but it is deliverance from the bondage to the sin and futility inherent in the symbolic.²⁵⁵ For Paul the law can be extracted from the dynamic of sin and death so that the deliverance of chapter 8 is not deliverance from law but from the sinful orientation toward the law.²⁵⁶ Žižek sets a similar goal in seeking to extract the symbolic or law from the perverse superego supplement but it is by way of sin or the superego supplement that this process is to be engineered and in the end the attempt to find love through the law simply repeats the original gesture of interpellation (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 114). For Žižek each of the registers, the symbolic, the real and the imaginary are interdependent but Paul argues that the fusion of the law with the energetic of death is the result of sin (7:11). Through the Spirit an alternative orientation to the law and a departure from the dynamic of the symbolic is had through a relation to God as Father and as a result the bondage or slavery to the law is overcome.²⁵⁷

The child of God relates directly to God, through the Spirit with the image of the Son before him. Where the law is made primary, as in forbidden desire or the notion that life is in the letter of the law, the relationship is to an object and the image it holds out is one of lack, and deceptive death dealing desire overtakes the will in compulsive

²⁵⁴ A distinction is presumed between language, law and the symbolic as the symbolic is part of the sinful dynamic while language and law are in and of themselves neutral.

²⁵⁵ See Schreiner, *Romans*, 404.

²⁵⁶ With Schreiner *Romans*, 404, but in distinction from Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 481, who, in spite of his recognition of the role of sin can still speak of being 'freed from the law'.

²⁵⁷ According to Dunn, the power of the Spirit to accomplish righteousness within God's people, rather than a forensic or Greek notion of righteousness stands behind Paul's understanding. Dunn, *Romans*, 40-41.

repetition to overcome the obstacle of absence and death. The trinity of law, absence or loss ('I'), and desire, define the Subject of sin. Through the work of the Trinity relation with the Father is no longer mediated through the law but through the Son, and the Spirit is the enabling power of righteousness (8:10). The law marked a covenantal relationship fulfilled in Christ who makes it possible to keep the covenant relationship with God.

The Real versus Unspeakable Glory

This section argues that the passage in Paul from the 'body of death' (7:24) to resurrection life (8:10) is, in Žižekian terms, a dissolution of the real.²⁵⁸ The real is at once the centre of Žižek's theory, constituting as it does the obstacle or absence which stands at the centre of the Subject, and yet the real amounts to loss, negation and death drive.²⁵⁹ As described above, the passage into the real is from being a body to establishing a symbolic distance from the body (and having a body): 'the body exists in the order of *having – I am not my body, I have it*' (*Organs without Bodies*, 121). Žižek's description of the depth of alienation in the real parallels and utilizes Paul's description of the progress of alienation as it turns on the 'I' in Romans 7. In Pauline terms the 'body of death' pits 'the members of my body'

²⁵⁸ Which of course is impossible for Žižek as the real is the center of his entire theory, yet in many ways the real, even in his own estimation, seems to be the least real or an inability to connect with material reality.

²⁵⁹ Both Lacan and Žižek equate the real with sin and evil and yet maintain that therapy must work in and through the real. Marcus Pound, in perhaps the most interesting engagement with Žižek and Lacan to date, in assigning Christian salvation a parallel course to therapy does not seem to take this completely into account. See Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*.

against 'the law of my mind' and this makes 'me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members' (7:23-24). The body of death does its work as the body itself, with its members, stands outside the law of the mind or the symbolic and this constitutes the work of the real or death drive. As Žižek describes it, the antagonistic dialectic between the imaginary and symbolic (or the ego and superego) takes place through the displacement of the physical body (*Organs without Bodies*, 93). There is no sexual relationship as the real of the body cannot be coordinated with the symbolic of relationship (*Seminar XX*, 128). Paul's 'body of death' seems to refer to the dynamic between the 'I' (similar to the imaginary), and the law (with its near equivalencies to the symbolic) which is the work of death (which is not unlike the negation of the real).²⁶⁰ The body per se is not the problem but the 'flesh' becomes an antagonistic force within the divided 'I': 'the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind' results in the 'law of sin' (7:23).

Paul's picture of baptism, described above, is a direct counter to the tendency to set part of the self against the other as body or flesh. Baptism intervenes in this self-alienation of the 'body of death', as there is a joining (*σύνφυτοι*) to Christ's body as a new Subject.²⁶¹ The

²⁶⁰ The 'body of death' as argued above refers to the entire dynamic of sin. Fitzmyer defines the meaning as 'the whole person considered as earth-oriented, not open to God or his Spirit and prone to sin (Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 436).' In reference to 8:2 – 'the law of sin and death' which seems to be a parallel to 'the body of death' Dunn explains, 'The words here simply sum up these earlier descriptions of the interplay of sin, death, and the law in a single forceful phrase' (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 419). This accords with the Lacanian registers which, as described above, are not descriptions of three different things but simply an account of the structure of a lie.

²⁶¹ As described above Dunn defines *σύνφυτοι* as 'knit together' and has the meaning of 'make to grow together, unite (a wound)' or to 'plant along with/together' (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 316).

meaning of being 'baptized into his likeness' (6:5) is that the Christian is united with Christ himself or his body.²⁶² Where the 'Subject' of death has joined herself to death, the Subject of Christ has been joined to the ontological reality of God in the body of Christ. Baptism into his death is a *real* participation in the body of Christ and it inaugurates resurrection life which is inclusive of a manner of life which presumes control over the body – as 'by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body' (8:13).

According to Žižek, self-consciousness arises simultaneously with the realization and refusal of the body and its mortal contingencies (sexuality/castration) so that the Subject arises over and against the real of the body. The symbolic or the soul 'has to be paid for by the death, murder even, of its empirical bearer' (*The Žižek Reader*, vii). The 'word made flesh' is impossible where the symbolic realm exists over and against the flesh. Though Lacan recognizes the goal of a word that is connected to action (full speech – connected to the future anterior of hope) the construct of the lie within which language functions would seem to be a barrier to speech which manifests itself in action.²⁶³

²⁶² Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 435.

²⁶³ One of the goals in Lacanian theory is the notion of 'full speech'. 'Full speech is speech which performs' that is it is speech manifest through action' (Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 124). Pound connects this with his injunction: 'Have you acted in conformity with the desire that is in you?' (*Seminar VII*, 314). As Pound rightly points out, 'from Lacan's point of view . . . language was the condition of its own impossibility. It was the medium of truth, yet simultaneously undermined the truth process' (Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma*, 123).

For Paul, the Spirit is the one who brings things into effect – he is the effective presence of God.²⁶⁴ In the words of Balthasar, ‘the Spirit accompanies the entire work of incarnating the Son’ so that ‘in his humanity, can be the Father’s word of love’.²⁶⁵ The Spirit’s work of incarnation of the word into the flesh or the empirical realm of the body of Christ continues. It is precisely to the empirical realm which Paul turns as he describes the Christian’s ‘walk’ in the Spirit (8:14). Those in Christ meet the requirements of the law by living according to the Spirit (8:4) and ‘mortifying (*θανατώω*-to kill) the work of the flesh’ (8:13). The negation of the body is in its own turn negated in the work of Christ which is a work in and through the body. The body or the flesh is not suspended or, as Balthasar describes it, ‘liquefied into spirit’.²⁶⁶ As Schweizer puts it, ‘Paul has no interest whatsoever in appearance, abilities, or character, but only in the work of the body, in what takes place with it’.²⁶⁷ He concludes that, ‘σῶμα is the place where faith lives and where man surrenders to God’s lordship. It is thus the sphere in which man serves.’²⁶⁸ Parallel to this, Paul’s standard for authentic sonship and future glory is ‘if indeed we share in his sufferings’ (8:17). Christ’s likeness to sinful man (8:3) and the Christian likeness to Christ in baptism describe overlapping and shared realms in which the two become one. The degree of ‘likeness’ (*ὁμοίωμα*) between Romans 8:3 and 6:5 seems to be manifest in the degree to which ‘we share in his

²⁶⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic, Vol. 3: The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 238.

²⁶⁵ Balthasar, *The Spirit of Truth*, 238.

²⁶⁶ See Balthasar, *The Spirit of Truth*, 244-245.

²⁶⁷ Schweizer, ‘σῶμα, † σωματικός, † σύσσωμος’, 1066.

²⁶⁸ Schweizer, ‘σῶμα, † σωματικός, † σύσσωμος’, 1066.

sufferings' (8:17).²⁶⁹ The believers bodily engagement with creation, including engagement with his own body in its present mode is itself part of the process of salvation; it is itself part of the experience of salvation as an experience of hope'.²⁷⁰

An Empty Word from Nowhere versus an Infinite Depth of Communication

Žižek, in part, shares with Paul the emphasis on revelation, except that what is revealed in Christ's death is what Lacan called the nonexistence of the big Other, and it is only Christianity that opens up the space for thinking this nonexistence, insofar as it is the religion of a God who dies' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 287).²⁷¹ The interior dialectic of chapter 7 within the 'I' (Žižek's symbolic and imaginary) is a false communication which therapy (traversing the fantasy or dying with Christ) is meant to expose and presumably silence or change. 'The impossibility of the Real refers to the failure of its symbolization: the Real is the virtual hard core around which these symbolizations fluctuate' and what revelation discloses is that 'the only 'certainty' is that of the void of the Real which they (symbolization) (presup)pose' (*Living in the End Times*, 107). Christ's death, in Žižek's theory, opens up this absence so that the ultimate communication is of no Word or no

²⁶⁹ See N.T. Wright, 'The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections' in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 579.

²⁷⁰ I am following Dunn, *Romans*, 491.

²⁷¹ Milbank (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 123ff) pictures Žižek's project as an ultimate disenchantment of the Universe.

Other and the only certainty is of the obstacle of the real.²⁷² The parallel in Paul to this failed communication is the work of sin through the law in which the command not to covet produces what it forbids (7:7-8). The law approached through the sinful orientation of the 'I' (or the near equivalents of the ego or imaginary) produces death (or something like the negation of the real) which constitutes a counter to communion and communication.

In contrast to chapter 7 and Žižek, Paul, in chapter 8, pictures creation and the Creator as containing an infinite depth of communion and communication. The communication of life in the Spirit through the Son resonates with all of creation as creation's 'groaning' (8:22) and the Christian's 'groaning' (8:23) is pictured as an inter-Trinitarian communion in which 'the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words' (8:26). The unconscious structured like a language in Lacan contains only a deception or an empty word but for Paul the unconscious is not constituted through repression or deception but through a depth of communion. Where chapter 7 and Žižek picture the dialectic of human interiority as an antagonistic failure to communicate, in these verses Paul depicts the unconscious workings of the Christian heart as an open prayer in which 'He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*' (8:27). The tacit knowledge of the heart participates in a prayerful dialectic within the Trinity as 'we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us*'

²⁷² There is no Other to address as God is dead and silence is presumably the goal.

(8:26).²⁷³ Just as Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane is the means by which he faces the suffering of the cross and remains true to his vocation, so too the believer obediently endures suffering by entry into this inter-Trinitarian communication between the Spirit and the Father.²⁷⁴ 'In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness' (8:26) as incapacity (ἀσθένεια) is the precise point that the capacity of the Spirit intercedes. Dunn connects prayer to humility and dependence on God and the counter to the primeval pride which was a grab for knowledge apart from God.²⁷⁵ 'It is', he writes, 'the expression of human helplessness, ignorance and inarticulateness, especially for man who sacrificed his relation to God for the fruit of knowledge . . . since it is that which makes it possible for God to reclaim man for himself'.²⁷⁶ As Paul says elsewhere, 'for when I am weak, then I am strong' (II Cor. 12:10). Prayer is absent from chapter 7 and is absent from Žižek's theory, but there is no end of prayer for Paul as it provides the depth and continuity of all communication.²⁷⁷

Prayerful human knowing is linked to an understanding which exceeds finite knowledge and connects it to the ground of Truth. The communication of the Spirit through the Son is not only an opening to knowing God but it also means being known by Him. This

²⁷³ The dialectic within the 'I' is here replaced with an inter-Trinitarian communication. According to Balthasar, in Jesus' relationship with the Father both renounce being a mere 'I' without a 'thou' (*The Spirit of Truth*, 226).

²⁷⁴ Vanhoozer notes that, 'As he prays, he is "in an agony" (Luke. 22:44), "sorrowful, even to death" (Mt. 26:38), "greatly distressed and troubled" (Mk. 14:33). Clearly, Jesus is already suffering, yet the temptation is precisely to avoid an even greater suffering. Significantly, it is Jesus' communicative activity – praying – that enables him to remain committed to his vocation' (*Remythologizing Theology*, 431).

²⁷⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 493.

²⁷⁶ Dunn, *Romans*, 493.

²⁷⁷ As I Thessalonians puts it 'pray without ceasing' (I Thess. 5:17).

communication, as with any true communication, is multi-directional and thus communal rather than unidirectional (a word from nowhere directed to no one). Communication in the Spirit is a full communion with God in which knowing has its support in being foreknown by God and in which understanding is conformed to the purposes of God (8:29). Vanhoozer maintains that 'God's being is in communicating'²⁷⁸ and that the purpose of God's communicating is communion or sharing the 'love the Father has for the Son in the Spirit'.²⁷⁹ Paul pictures believers as those who are caught up in this communicating activity of the love of God, as the culmination of the work of the Spirit is that in loving God 'all things work together for good'(8:28) and in being loved by Him there is no obstacle which can obstruct this love (8:39). Though Žižek appreciates Paul's depiction of love, as Milbank points out, 'reciprocity in love is impossible within [his] disenchanted cosmos' (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 123).²⁸⁰

The Fundamental Fantasy versus Truth

If Trinitarian love is grounded in communication it can be understood how a primordial lie would constitute the counter system of sin. At the head of Paul's description of sin is the deception which

²⁷⁸ Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 245.

²⁷⁹ Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 280.

²⁸⁰ Žižek claims to embrace Pauline love, yet the form of this love in his theory expresses itself primarily in and through the power of negation: Christ dies to bring the Other to nothing and the suspension of the symbolic or the death of God suspends the obscene superego supplement to the law (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 113ff). Paul posits an inter-subjective relationship for those constrained by the Law of Love in the body of Christ, while Žižek speaks of love and freedom primarily in terms of the negation of the constraints of the symbolic and the opening of new possibility. Love suspends the normative force of ideological interpellation, yet Žižek offers no positive definition (which would itself perhaps be an impossibility as this too would fall back into ideology) of love (see *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 112ff).

it works in understanding, action, and will, in regard to apprehending and doing the law.²⁸¹ In Žižek's theory and in his reading of Paul the deception or the primordial lie is a necessary part of the structure of the three registers.²⁸² It is through the primordial lie or in the Fall itself that 'the human animal contracted the excess of Life' and departs from the level of animal instincts and enters the realm of thought (understanding) (*On Belief*, 105). Sin is what pushed the original humans out of the Garden and it is what continues to drive them (action) (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 22). The alienated Subject, precisely because of the distance and separation taken up within itself, is able to enter into language. 'Original Sin itself, the abyssal disturbance of primeval Peace' creates a wound or cut in nature which constitutes human subjectivity (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 24). The primordial lie poses a choice and all who are aware of the choice have already made it: 'fantasy in its most basic dimension, implies *the choice of thought at the expense of being* (*Tarrying With The Negative*, 64).²⁸³ Entry into thought entails the departure into the fiction of the symbolic as 'in fantasy, I find myself reduced to the evanescent point of a thought contemplating the course of events during my absence' (*Tarrying With The Negative*, 64). Human will or

²⁸¹ To demonstrate the first element or step in the deception, Paul shifts to first person discourse (the 'I' against the 'I'), and what he demonstrates in this mode is a loss of agency or the inability to get a control on the self through comprehension or understanding ('For what I am doing, I do not understand' – 7:15), or through right action ('for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate'), or through the will ('for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not' – 7:18).

²⁸² The main point of chapter one of this thesis. For an example see *They Know Not*, 197.

²⁸³ It is not the noumenal Real that harbours danger for the subject; it is the exposure of this fundamental fantasy that threatens the consistency of the existence of the subject (*Reader*, 119).

agency is relinquished as the price of entry into the symbolic. 'Dying to sin' or traversing the fantasy, at most, exposes the false condition but does not dispel the lie or restore the will but simply manipulates the structuring principle of the Žižekian universe. Resolution of the obstacle or gap of the real within the symbolic is not through its abolition but through its full admission (*The Monstrosity of Christ*, 274). Symbolic destitution brings about the realization of 7:11 that sin worked through the law (the symbolic, or Other) to deceive and bring about a death dealing desire.²⁸⁴ While the goal of Lacanian psychoanalysis is to open up a relationship 'somewhere beyond the Law' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 153) this 'somewhere' remains to be developed. Psychoanalysis does not presume to synthesize or posit a 'new harmony' or 'a new Truth-Event' but 'merely wipes the slate clean for one' (*Ticklish Subject*, 153).

Paul on the other hand, as explained above, sees dying and rising with Christ in Baptism as an ontological alternative to the 'body of death', as there is a joining (*σύνμψυτοι*) to his body as a new Subject. The 'Subject' of death has joined herself to death while the Subject 'in Christ' has been joined to the ontological reality of God in Christ.²⁸⁵ Chapter 8 describes this joining as being 'in Christ' (8:1), living in the power of the Spirit (8:5), belonging to Christ through the

²⁸⁴ *The Ticklish Subject*, 152-153. As Žižek puts it, 'The crucial thing here is . . . for Lacan, there is "a way of discovering the relationship to *das Ding* somewhere beyond the Law" – the whole point of the ethics of psychoanalysis is to formulate the possibility of a relationship that avoids the pitfalls of the superego inculcation that accounts for the "morbid" enjoyment of sin' (*The Ticklish Subject*, 153).

²⁸⁵ The Christian, by definition does not 'live in the flesh' (8:5, 8-9), which according to Moo is a 'positional' (or ontological) rather than a 'behavioral' concept. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 486. This does not entail alienation or departure from the body but full engagement with and a control over the body as 'by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live' (8:13).

Spirit (8:9), living now and in the future in the resurrection power of the Spirit (8:10-11), being adopted as a child of God (8:15), and being joined to the love of God (8:37-39). Where the lie of sin is understood as the engine of death, being joined to God and entering into communion with God through the Spirit is simultaneously the reception of truth and life. The truth in this instance is not an abstraction or a philosophical truth but is a life giving truth which specifically counters the death dealing lie. The lie takes up suffering and death (alienation) as primary,²⁸⁶ but Paul dismisses the power of death in light of God's love: 'Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' (8:35).²⁸⁷ Where death or something like death drive is the orienting factor in chapter 7, Paul sets out in chapter 8 that which trumps death: the love of God in Christ by the Spirit.

²⁸⁶ That is the real of death is at the foundation of the Subject, and the suffering of the Subject is its masochistic economy (sacrifice of the ego to the superego or law).

²⁸⁷ The suffering in 8:35 is not the middle voice suffering of the 'I' but rather is a suffering which arises from someone else or some other place. The point is no longer the suffering Subject but the Subject of Love.

CONCLUSION

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ŽIŽEK FOR THEOLOGY

Employing the work of Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Lacan, and Sigmund Freud, the first chapter of this thesis argued that the psychoanalytic understanding of human subjectivity is that it is grounded and structured around a primordial lie. The second chapter connected this primordial lie to the biblical understanding of sin through an analysis of Žižek's reading of Romans 7, and chapter 3 compared Žižek's reading with Paul's understanding of sin and salvation (in Romans 6-8) and demonstrated that Žižek's theory is analogous to Paul's understanding of sin but Paul sees salvation as a reconstituted Subject.¹ This concluding section will further draw out the significance of Žižek's theory for Christian hamartiology and soteriology, suggesting that Paul's understanding of sin and salvation is to be found in the identifiable shift from the Subject of the death dealing lie (Rom. 7:7ff) to the Subject 'in Christ' living by the Spirit (Rom. 8). One of the implications of rethinking sin and salvation in light of the argument above regarding Žižek and Paul, assuming my argument has merit, is that rather than understanding salvation in terms of the law, the primary focus of hamartiology should be on identifying the work of sin as a death dealing lie and soteriology should be understood in large part as

¹ With the indwelling of the Spirit and the adoption into God's family through Christ there is a different dynamic within the self and in relationship to God and others which amounts to a reconstituted Subject.

the displacement of the dynamics of the lie with the reconstituted Subject in Christ. In order to consider the wider implications of this thesis, it will help to review the argument so far.

Summary of Chapters 1-3

The first chapter demonstrated that psychoanalysis has taken up a task (the diagnosis of human suffering and even called 'sin' by Lacan and Žižek) which is the proper realm of theology. The specific overlap of the two disciplines lies in the psychoanalytic understanding that the human subject or the psyche is structured in three registers, the symbolic, the imaginary and the real, which function like a lie analogous to the deception of sin. The historical development of this understanding from Freud, through Lacan to Žižek (recounted in chapter 1), demonstrated the 'discovery' of the importance of the unconscious as it relates to human consciousness as these realms are founded in an inner antagonism which Freud dubs the 'death drive'. The key shift which Lacan introduces into his reinterpretation of Freud is to read what Freud took to be biological or cosmic, as having its origins and explanation within the realm of language, making it possible to explain the working of human interiority utilizing, in part, the resources of linguistics. The symbolic as the medium of human reality, by its very nature, fictionalizes or displaces the physical reality of things with their symbolic representation, which means that the physical body and its mortal condition are only realized as a gap or the negative force of an absence (the register of

the real) or disturbance (the work of the death drive arising from the real) in the symbolic realm which knows neither death nor mortality. Freud's ego or Lacan's imaginary is assailed on every side by the other registers (by the oppressive superego or its Lacanian equivalent the symbolic, acting on behalf of the id or the Lacanian real) so that the ego is constituted by pure frustration and fear.²

The unique vantage which Žižek brings to Freud and Lacan is that his theory fuses Lacanian theory with German Idealism and particularly the thought of Hegel, and from this perspective the *problems* of the psyche and its identity become the *solutions*. The frustration, negation and alienation inherent to the Freudian/Lacanian picture of subjectivity are subsumed into a larger picture in which the gaps and absences are taken as the formative ground of the Subject. The goal is not to overcome the gaps but to conceive them as the origin of the Subject. As in the example of Cartesian philosophy, the failure of the *cogito* to account for the subject and the object of the sentence accounts for the rise of the Subject. The passage into subjectivity involves the necessity of withdrawal, madness, and failure that opens up the space for its symbolic reconstitution (*The Abyss of Freedom*, 8-9). The fundamental fantasy names this capacity to transform the problem and reify it into the solution because, in Žižek's analysis, it is clearly a deception or lie but it is a necessary lie as it allows for the formation of the Subject.

² Both Lacan and Žižek continue to use the Freudian names of the registers (i.e., ego, superego, and id) as near parallels to the Lacanian registers (i.e., imaginary, symbolic, and real).

The second chapter shows how Žižek reads Romans 7 and how he sees his theory as a development of a Pauline understanding of the Subject. Žižek locates the fundamental fantasy in Paul's depiction of the deception of sin (Rom. 7:11) and he recognizes that the Lacanian focus on desire as primary is matched by Paul's picture of covetousness as giving rise to the sinful Subject (Rom. 7:7). Žižek reads Romans 7 as exposing the problem of the pervert, who would fuse the law (which Žižek understands as the equivalent of the symbolic) with sin (breaking or transgressing the law). So the perverse understanding the law (as in the forbidden desire of Romans 7:7) is synonymous with and gives rise to sin. Where the pervert does not question the status of the law, the hysteric questions this perverse understanding and in questioning it has already moved beyond it. Paul, according to Žižek, provides the question and answer of the hysteric which amounts to a questioning and displacement of the perverse approach to the law: 'Is the law sin? Certainly not!' (Rom. 7:7).³ Hence there is the possibility of reorienting the Subject (from the pervert to the hysteric) through their becoming aware of the fundamental lie (there is life in the law or in the symbolic). Only in 'traversing the fantasy' or in 'dying with Christ' (which Žižek takes as the Pauline equivalent of traversing the fantasy) does one arrive at the limit experience of destitution where the contradiction of the law is exposed (promoting what it forbids), opening the possibility for a new orientation. Those who 'were made dead to the law through the body

³ Where Paul would completely separate the law and sin Žižek's hysteric can only raise the question of a difference. The Subject can question the fundamental fantasy and the reality of the symbolic but he cannot survive their dissolution.

of Christ' no longer serve the letter of the law. That is, they no longer serve the obscene superego supplement to the law (the negative force of sin attached to the law) which causes the law to be equated with sin.

The claim in Žižek's reading of Paul, that the Žižekian and Pauline understandings of the Subject are largely the same, was tested in the third chapter. The two readings, Žižek's and Paul's (as interpreted by New Testament scholars) were compared and I concluded that the diagnosis of the human subject Žižek finds in his reading of Paul is analogous to the problem of sin Paul describes in Romans 7. In Paul's description, the deceit of sin, like Žižek's fundamental fantasy, deludes the Subject to imagine that following desire is the source of life and this desire becomes the animate force of sin. This alienating force is expressed as a split within the self and as alienation from the body indistinguishable from the real/symbolic divide. This dynamic is summed up in Paul's phrase 'the body of death' which is analogous to Žižek's notion of the dynamic of death drive. A key difference is that Žižek sees this alienation from the body (along with the death drive) as necessary to human subjectivity where Paul views this form of subjectivity as an aberration.

I showed that Žižek's attempt to find his theory of a solution to the problem of sin in Romans 6 is inadequate and that Paul's solution would displace the Žižekian registers. Paul's picture of the death to sin in baptism is not simply one of symbolic or subjective destitution since it involves being 'joined to' Christ and is an ontological participation in the death of Christ. By being joined to the body of Christ, the Žižekian

real or the Pauline 'body of sin' (6:6) or 'body of death' (7:24) is displaced in the resurrection life of the Spirit (8:10-11). Paul's resolution of the alienation of the Subject of the law is to become a child of God through the power of the Spirit. The *ἐγώ* or imaginary is crucified or dies with Christ and the life in the imaginary or Paul's 'I' (*ἐγώ*) is displaced by the corporate identity in the body of Christ. Paul's resolution to the fear and frustration of the *ἐγώ* is life in the Spirit (8:2) experienced and conjoined to the categories of hope, adoption as God's children, and participation in the Trinity. Žižek's work, though an inadequate understanding of salvation, supports and accentuates the contrast between Romans 7 and 8 in which Paul is demonstrating how Christ overcomes and displaces sin.

The development of sin and salvation set forth above suggests a different focus than is sometimes found in a theology influenced by the peculiar emphasis on the individual, such as that which Gregory Schufreider describes as developing with Anselm of Canterbury's adjustments to a basic Augustinian theology.⁴ As Derek Nelson

⁴ Gregory Schufreider claims the key figure in the transition from an Augustinian understanding of interiority to Descartes' *cogito*, the one who in fact lays the necessary ground for the transition and transformation of Augustinian thought, is Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm's adjustments to a basic Augustinian theology created a new emphasis in the doctrine of sin and salvation and in how knowledge of God is appropriated, but all of this flows out of the particular emphasis he puts on human reflexivity (see Gregory Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm's Early Writings* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1994), 18ff. See also Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, Translators Karen Pinkus and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 25ff). Augustine, employing Platonic categories, but fusing them with the Johannine Logos and Light and the biblical Trinity, would locate the Platonic truth, not in the forms or transcendent universals but within the self. He directs us toward a radical interiority: 'Do not go outward, return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth.' Plato had employed visionary imagery, but Augustine will turn this imagery on itself to examine the very possibility of seeing. Where Plato would presume to find the 'highest principle' in what is seen, Augustine will focus on what enables us to see

argues, hamartiology and soteriology have tended to either focus on individual salvation or on the social and structural notions of sin, with two different understandings of the function of the law and of human nature.⁵ The claim I would make for the present work is that due to the focus on sin as a lie distorting the law it accounts for the role of the individual and the law as well as the structural and social aspects of sin.⁶ If the analysis of Paul and Žižek above has any value then, at the least, we need to reckon with the explicability or the systematic nature of sin as it exists in society and the individual, and to think of atonement less as the repayment of a debt and more as a transformation of the Subject. Also, because of the social nature of the Subject, neither individual nor social emphases in the doctrine of sin should be prioritised but we should attend to the dynamics which underlie both. The suggestion made below is that part of what it means to overcome sin is to dispel the mystery which is accounted for by its deception and that this dispelling of the mystery opens the possibility of examining the depth and seriousness of sin in both its social and individual aspects.

in the first place (Augustine, *De vera Religione*, XXXIX.72, Quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 129).

⁵ Derek Nelson traces the shift from Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin to a Lutheran notion that sin is against God's word as either law or Gospel to Schleiermacher's exclusive focus on human interiority. He then examines the strengths and weaknesses of several liberation theologies as examples of the most developed and best of corporate notions of sin and salvation (Derek R. Nelson, *What's Wrong With Sin: Sin in Individual and Social Perspective from Schleiermacher to Theologies of Liberation* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

⁶ Žižek's theory, as with the argument above, in positing the Other and the symbolic as part of human interiority does not abolish a distinction between the individual and the social realm but explains how they overlap and are necessary to one another. See Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 85-91.

Accounting for the Mystery of Sin through Salvation

Some theologians have made the origins of sin inexplicable. For example, early in his Christian life Augustine encountered and absorbed the understanding that concerning 'The Ancient Sin: nothing is more obviously part of our preaching of Christianity; yet nothing is more impenetrable to the understanding'.⁷ As Peter Brown explains, *Augustine does not dispel the mystery with his doctrine of Original Sin but in place of explanation offers historical origins.*⁸ Total depravity is attributed to all the children of Adam 'in whom all sinned' (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*, as Augustine read Romans 5:12 in his Vulgate Latin Bible) but the exact nature of how sin is propagated or how all participate in Adam's original act is not entirely clear.⁹ This uncertainty as to how sin is propagated is evident in Calvin's explanation of Augustine's doctrine, in that he will attribute the propagation of sin to either divine ordinance or natural inheritance (as James McClendon notes, 'Calvin wavers between these') with corruption somehow spread to the whole human race.¹⁰ The result, according to McClendon, is that sin is not subject to explanation (in light of salvation) but becomes the lens through which salvation is interpreted.¹¹ As is evident in the theology and explanation of G. C. Berkouwer the doctrine of Original Sin is such that it does not permit deeper insight:

⁷ *de mor. eccl. cath.* (I), xxii, 40. Quoted in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 390.

⁸ Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 390.

⁹ James McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 125. McClendon maintains that the doctrine of Original Sin is based upon Augustine's misreading of Romans 5:12, in which the origin of sin has no place (McClendon, *Doctrine*, 126) (see *De pecc. orig.* II, 35).

¹⁰ McClendon, *Doctrine*, 126. See John Calvin, *Institutes* (2:1, 4, 5, 8).

¹¹ McClendon, *Doctrine*, 126.

. . . there is a riddle that can be dispelled and that can make way for a new and deeper understanding. But the riddle of sin is not of this sort and lies on an entirely different plane. It can never permit a greater or deeper insight into the nature and origin of sin.¹²

The implication of this thesis is that sin is not a mystery or riddle in this sense and that the nature and origin of sin or the working of the dynamic of sin is reducible to a system.¹³ The perception that sin is impenetrable may give it the appearance of being transcendent, containing a meaning which is in competition with the transcendence of God. The fascination with evil and the temptation of sin is that it offers 'something more' (a more abundant life or extremes of pleasure) which is 'divine' in the 'knowing' it imparts. Could it be the case that the mystery of sin is part of the lie and where the mystery remains there is a failure to grasp the truth of sin? Perhaps where sin is mystified or reified the danger is that the formulation of the problem of sin binds itself to a perception which is part of the problem.¹⁴ Salvation understood as the overcoming of sin means sin is known and exposed in this light.

As noted in chapter 3 above, a primordial lie constituting sin makes sense in light of a Trinitarian love grounded in communication.

¹² G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 131.

¹³ To say that sin makes no sense does not mean that no sense can be made of sin and it seems to be these two ideas that are sometimes confused (e.g., in Berkouwer above). See Ted Peters, *Sin: Radical Evil in Soul and Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 9-10.

¹⁴ Žižek's theory requires the reification of the symbolic, though traversing the fantasy, is an exposure but not a dissolution of the fiction of the symbolic and the 'substantial' nature of the Subject.

If the word of God is the ultimate ground of reality and the means and mode of creation and recreation, sin as a lie distorts access to this ultimate reality.¹⁵ That is, the false mystery and false transcendence of the lie displaces the transcendence and mystery of God. In turn, the truth of Christ is the truth which counters and displaces the lie of sin. One implication of the argument of this thesis is that, as in the deeply rooted Christian tradition reaching from Irenaeus to Barth, revelation is part of the work of salvation as it exposes and dispels the lie of sin.¹⁶

Another way of saying that revelation is part of salvation is that, as in my account of revelation which innovates on the tradition which tends to see revelation as addressed primarily to the rational soul or rational Subject, revelation is addressed, in part, to *exposing the unconscious*, as the conscious work of sin is dependent on what it negates. The specific content of the lie or deception exposed by Christ (as argued in chapters two and three above) is the orientation to death analogous to the death drive of the fundamental fantasy at the foundation of the human project of establishing the self in psychoanalytic theory. As Žižek notes, the unconscious is not primarily

¹⁵ Paul begins to explicitly compare and contrast two modes of subjectivity in chapter 3 when he describes the advantage of the Jew as consisting in his having been entrusted with the oracles of God and those who are unrighteous as embracing a death dealing lie (3:2, 10ff). 'What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words (oracles) of God' (Rom. 3:2). Those who have turned away from God's word are practitioners of deceit and violence (3:10ff). As Richard Hays puts it, for Paul, Scripture is 'a living voice speaking directly to the community' (Richard B. Hays *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005) 97).

¹⁶ As a counter-example, Jack Cottrell in separating redemption and revelation pictures revelation as a subsequent word of explanation while the acts of redemption (incarnation, dying for our sins, departing from the tomb) somehow exceed or fall outside the parameters of his definition of revelation. See Jack Cottrell, *Solid: The Authority of God's Word* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2002).

the drives; rather it is the 'fantasmatic foundation of his or her being' (*The Fragile Absolute*, 70). That which is by definition unconscious consists of the basic 'human project' or the 'founding gesture' of the conscious subject. For Paul, the truth of Christ (found in facing the reality of death in resurrection faith as in Rom. 4) stands over and against the lie of sin (the resistance to death of the fundamental fantasy and the impenetrable mystery of the real). Christ exposes the lie of sin (death as life at the foundation of subjectivity) in his acceptance of death and reverses the orientation of sin (slavery to the fear of death) in which the denial is absolute. Christ relegates death and the law of sin and death to a secondary category and displaces them with the truth (resurrection life). The depth of the mystery of the truth of Christ displaces the unconscious structured as a lie; that is, sin as a false mystery is displaced by the true mystery and transcendence of Christ at work beyond human consciousness (the reconstituted unconscious). So, on this account, the truth of salvation necessarily addresses the Subject at both a conscious and unconscious level as the work of sin is exposed as an identity grounded in the dynamics of a specific deception and orientation to death.

The Primacy of Relation to God over Relation to Law

The implication of my argument regarding Romans 6-8 that Christ did not die, primarily, to meet a requirement of the law but to displace a deception which involved the law, is that it is not the law which provides insight into his death, but sin as it is oriented to the law.

This section will suggest the implication this has for theories which make the law primary in understanding sin and salvation.

The thought of Žižek and Paul converge in the notion that relationship to the law is of prime importance in understanding the orientation of the Subject.¹⁷ One key difference between Paul's and Žižek's understanding is that Paul does not see the law, outside the 'law of Christ', as primary for the Christian, or the mediator of relationship in Christ, while for Žižek law or the symbolic is the medium of relationship. As a result, salvation, for Žižek, is primarily a reorientation to the law through a suspension of the obscene superego supplement by means of a total identification with the law. This suspension of the obscene superego though requires that there be an obscene superego to suspend, and on this basis the supplemental ground for love is provided. The supplement is necessary to establish the ground for the excess of love (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 114). In other words, the law in a perverse orientation is necessary as a background to hysteria, but it is still necessary even in the hysterical Subject to have passed through this earlier stage and to have this perverse background.

Paul introduces an economy in salvation which can account for the law but which is not mediated by law. Salvation, in his understanding, is not gauged in terms of the law but as a counter to sin and the establishment of an alternative identity and an alternative

¹⁷ As I argued in chapter three there is a convergence between Žižek and Paul's understanding of the law with a key difference being the significance of Paul's explanation of the fusing of sin and the law in 7:7ff, an understanding which for Žižek constitutes deliverance from the perverse to the hysteric position, but which for Paul does not in itself constitute salvation.

economy in Christ.¹⁸ The law, for Paul, mediates and governs the economy of sin, but law is secondary in the economy of salvation ushered in through Christ.¹⁹ The law could not deliver life but God has done what the law could not do by sending his Son, and Christ has ushered in the life promised by the law (Rom. 8:3). The way God did this was to condemn sin, not Jesus, though it was in the flesh of Jesus that sin was put to death. 'By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh' (8:3). As Wright puts it, 'this is some way from saying, as many have, that God desired to punish someone and decided to punish Jesus on everyone else's behalf'.²⁰

Seen in this way Paul's view seems in contrast to the tradition of atonement as satisfaction, of which Anselm is a leading representative. In Anselm's doctrine of 'divine satisfaction' law is not only determinative of what constitutes sin or disobedience (as with Paul)²¹ but it is also determinative of the meaning and method of the atonement.²²

¹⁸ In Žižek's Hegelian logic negation and death are the power out of which the subject is born. Jesus touches upon these two economies in describing two salvation systems. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk. 8:35). The contrast is between a system of self-salvation in which the attempt to save life ends in losing it and the salvation of Christ in which losing this sort of life is part of salvation.

¹⁹ Moo maintains the 'law of the Spirit' cannot refer to the Mosaic law: 'Throughout his letters, and not least in Romans, Paul pictures the Mosaic law as ranged on the opposite side of the Spirit, righteousness, and life. God's righteousness has come "apart from the law" (3:21; cf. Gal. 2:15-3:14); the promise can be attained only through faith and *not* through the law (4:12-15 cf. Gal. 3:15-18; the believer must be "released from" the law through union with Christ in order to produce fruit pleasing to God (7:4-6; cf. Gal. 2:19-20) (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 474).

²⁰ See Wright, *Romans*, 578.

²¹ See Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 3.

²² Paul's understanding of the law, as I have argued, is that it functions as the orienting factor in sin from Adam, and Žižek follows Paul in the understanding that the law plays this orienting role. Anselm's theory coincides with the understanding that the law is determinative of sin but he would take the law further than Paul in describing it as the determinative parameter under which salvation is accomplished.

Throughout the book *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm describes the atonement in terms of repaying to God the honour taken from him by sin, which makes Christ's death necessary to pay back to God that debt. What Anselm is building toward in Book One of *Why God Became Man* is the necessity of Christ's death based on the rational necessity of a limited whole or what he calls a 'regulated' system of forgiveness.²³ For Anselm sin and salvation work within a 'regulated' economy in which sin and forgiveness are tracked, and in which righteousness and reason reinforce one another as God must of 'necessity' not 'allow anything in his kingdom to slip by unregulated'.²⁴ Anselm assumes there is only so much space in heaven (created by the fallen angels) and a measurable amount of honour (even if the measure is infinite), so that what *one* possesses, whether the self (having robbed God's honour through denying God possession of the self) or a place in heaven, it is given up by *another*, and this limited or measurable amount in an economy of exchange creates the value.²⁵ The manner of gaining admission to heaven is through paying a price greater than the debt owed to God's honour 'considering the contempt

²³ In this system humans have taken themselves from God, which has created their incapacity to repay God what is owed and this incapacity is synonymous with human guilt (Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 11).

²⁴ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 11. As Anselm argues, the rational nature was created so that it might judge and choose the righteous and spurn and hate what is bad. It does this to attain the highest good the purpose for which it was created (Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 11).

²⁵ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 19. The format of Anselm's argument may determine the outcome. *Why God Became Man* (*Cur Deus Homo*) seeks to do for the atonement what the *Monologion* and *Proslogion* did for God's existence (and all that it entails). Anselm is going to set forth the 'reason' why God became man and died on the cross in such a way that a nonbeliever, the role of Boso, would be convinced of its truth. So he will not appeal to the authority of Scripture, but will use pure reason to answer the question, 'By what logic or necessity did God become man, and by his death, as we believe and profess, restore life to the world?' (Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1).

offered'.²⁶ The only one capable of rendering that debt is the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Christ does not owe God a debt other than the obligation incumbent on humans before sin, so his death is voluntary (he offered himself as payment) and of infinite value, and hence his death can be meritorious; though this was also the ultimate debt incurred (by those who killed him), but the manner in which this created a surplus value was that those that killed him were ignorant of Christ's true identity.²⁷ Opponents of Anselm's theory of divine satisfaction argue that salvation depends upon sin in this understanding as the requirements of the law are met through a sinful act (the killing of Christ); infinite satisfaction is obtained in the act of killing Christ.²⁸ For Anselm, Christ's death works according to the logic of law in that the satisfaction demanded by the law is rendered by Christ (but the economy itself is not disturbed or displaced). Anselm is arguing without direct appeal to Scripture (though Scripture is assumed throughout his argument) but the power of his argument is such that it will affect future biblical understanding of the atonement. In William Frazier's description, the act itself (of killing Christ) and the death itself, to say nothing of the life of Christ, are often disengaged from any immediate or practical effect in the world.²⁹ The exchange between Christ and God is complete in and of itself as a legal exchange.³⁰

²⁶ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 11.

²⁷ Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 11, 15.

²⁸ See for example, Brad Jersak, 'Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ' in Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin eds., *Stricken by God: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 18ff.

²⁹ See William B. Frazier, 'Where Mission Begins: A Foundational Probe' in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Anselm sees sin as a gap in the will and the death of Christ enables man to will rightly, and the definition of willing

Paul's understanding of the law introduces a series of categories in chapter 6 and 8 which demonstrate that the law mediates sin but, in contrast to Anselm's understanding, for Paul the law does not mediate salvation (so law has a narrower sense for Paul than it does for Anselm). Salvation destroys the law of sin and death and introduces the economy of life, in which there is no end of resources. Anselm's 'divine satisfaction' works within a closed economy of law and Christ meets the demand of the system. There is, however, no relief from the system of exchange and payment but only a meeting of the demands of the law. In Anselm's system the purpose of the law plays a primary and enduring role so that even in Christ it is the economy of exchange that is determinative.

In Paul's picture of an alternative economy, as argued in this thesis, the promise of the law is fulfilled (the promise of life which it could not deliver), and the law itself has taken on its correct place as secondary to what God has done in Christ to bring life and restore relationship to God by dispelling the lie of sin with the truth of life in the Son. The law only has an enduring role in condemning sin in sinful

rightly is to rightly remember the self (in the manner that God rightly remembers himself). 'To strive to give, therefore, expression to this impressed image; to strive to actualize, by an act of will, this, nature's potential such above all, is, in consequence the debt that rational creation owes its Creator' (*Monologion*, 68). The foundational nature of Anselm's theology is apparent in his attempt to ground it in rationality, in the self, and in ethics or law. What each of these realms has in common is that they ultimately are grounded in a self-authorizing tautology. The tautology of self (I am me) and the tautology of ethics (the will to justice is justice), give rise in Anselm's theology to the need for what might be called the tautologous performance of the law. The need for a continual performance (judging) of a self authorizing rationality in order to attain to the entity of the self, as a mode of salvation, "necessarily" places his theology in the realm of law.

³⁰ Anselm describes sinning as 'violently' taking from God what was his and the implied recourse on the part of God is to take it back (Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* 1, 14). Christ's death does not serve to critique or displace this violence but simply works according to the inherent logic of the system.

man (Rom. 8:4). The alienation (between the law and the 'I' (ἐγώ) or the individual) produced by a misperception of the law is overcome in the understanding that the proper role of the law is to point to life in Christ.³¹ Participation in Christ inaugurates resurrection life which is inclusive of a manner of life which presumes control over the body and an end of alienation (the 'I' against the law) – as 'by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body' (8:13). The split between the individual and the social or between the ἐγώ and the law can be viewed as part of the problem from within the 'body of Christ' which denotes individual and social coherence and unity.

As I have demonstrated, salvation may be seen primarily in terms of this unity in the body of Christ which stands in contrast to the sinful Subject who in his inner alienation and his alienation from God and others is 'grounded' in a destructive lie. The theological significance of Žižek is his demonstration of the pervasive and systemic nature of this lie against which the truth of Christ can be understood in its specific and yet universal significance. The truth of Christ exposes the death dealing nature and deceit of the law of sin and death which is the means by which the sinful Subject would obtain life. Dying with Christ can be understood as the death or end to investing life in this death dealing and alienating lie (the defeat of the

³¹ Perhaps the tendency to focus on a radical individualism or social structures within hamartiology is accounted for with the understanding, worked out by Žižek that these two realms must appear in this manner in his theory. Žižek's reading of Paul's understanding of the perverse or sinful orientation to the law (the law is the reified symbolic structure through which the sinful Subject is constituted) is at the least an indication of how intra-subjective dynamics (i.e., the functioning of the individual heart or mind) and inter-subjective dynamics (i.e., the functioning of groups within socio-symbolic orders) appear as if they are autonomous realms when they are necessarily interdependent (see Johnson, *Badiou, Žižek and Political Transformations*, 85).

law of sin and death) and the beginning of a new kind of life in communion with Christ and his body by means of the Spirit of Life (the law of life in the Spirit). Salvation is the means by which the Subject of sin and its destructive nature are understood and displaced by new life in Christ.

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