

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Twelve, Number Four

A Reflective Note for Dialectical Thinkers

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ABSTRACT: The dominant forms of thought today exist as either deconstructive or metalinguistic structures. Here we attempt to situate dialectical thinking as a constructive meta-mediation of this opposition between deconstruction and metalanguage. Dialectical thinking offers us a way to think about the processual nature of reason itself as a force of thought mediating being. In this mode of understanding we attempt to think the possibility of articulating the meaning and importance of ‘metaontology’ defined as the ontology of epistemology. In a metaontology we treat the structure of concepts not as reflecting external territory (map is territory), nor as existing at a distance from external territory (map is not the territory), but as having their own territory (geometry) (i.e. maps as territory). We attempt to approach metaontology by reflectively observing the singularity of the author’s own internal territorial map, revealing a ‘quadratic twisted circularity’; and also the movement of the symbolic order itself, revealing a possible invariant unsymbolizable real. From these reflections we dive into the foundations of dialectical thinking, starting with Plato, and then exploring modifications introduced by Hegel and Lacan. Finally, we offer a dialectical structure of knowledge for the 21st century. This offering is meant only as an offer, a consideration, for how dialectics can be deployed at the location of key antagonisms in the contemporary field. The hope is that future dialecticians will be able to utilize this logic to engage in crucial intellectual interventions.

1. Between deconstruction and metalanguage

What went wrong with Žižek? We have with us two fundamental works of philosophy, *Less Than Nothing* (2012) and *Absolute Recoil* (2014), with no simple guide to how they can help us to resolve the major paradoxes and antagonisms which we encounter today in epistemological fields as diverse as sexuality, politics, science, religion and so forth. This work aims to play a role in resolving this problem by making transparent as possible the main drive of Žižek's philosophical program. Towards this end let us reflect on the central aim of Žižek's last masterwork, *Absolute Recoil* (2014, p. 18-19):

“The present work endeavors to elevate the speculative notion of absolute recoil into a universal ontological principle. Its axiom is that dialectical materialism is the only true philosophical inheritor of what Hegel designates as the speculative attitude of thought towards objectivity. [...] The consequences of this axiom are systematically deployed in three steps: 1) the move from Kant's transcendentalism to Hegel's dialectics, that is, from transcendental “correlationism” [...] to the thought of the Absolute; 2) dialectics proper: absolute reflection, coincidence of the opposites; 3) the Hegelian move beyond Hegel to the materialism of “less than nothing”.”

This work ‘repeats’ Žižek's gesture as pure repetition with no desire to idealize the end product, it is simply left open to be destroyed and repeated again. We ground this work as a thought on the Absolute itself, as a reflection that attempts an intensive mediation of the coincidence of the opposites. Thus ‘A Reflective Note for Dialectical Thinkers’ offers the reader an attempt to understand dialectical thinking in a subjectively authentic, pragmatic and historically grounded form which aims at a speculative objectivity. Dialectical thinking is a useful tool with a concrete form (a spiritual bone) which reveals an elementary structure to the historical workings of symbolic reason that is at once metaphysically profound and practical. I also want to inscribe myself into this work so that you can see the way in which I subjectively engage with dialectical thinking, and to potentially help you to reflect on the way you already deploy the dialectic, or the way in which you may start to deploy the dialectic.

The dialectic is something that can be situated between (as a coincidence of) two dominant modes of thought today: deconstructive thought and metalinguistic thought. Deconstructive thought would deny the existence of the Absolute, whereas metalinguistic thought would claim that its conceptual schema (alone) clearly and coherently represents (speaks) the Absolute. Dialectical thinking is something other than both of these forms. Dialectical thinking gives us something of a glimpse of the Absolute eternity of rational discourse as it speaks in and for itself. In other words, dialectical thinking *historicizes eternity* (the Absolute). This glimpse was perhaps best articulated on the very last pages of Žižek's *Less Than Nothing* (2012, p. 1010):

“The voice of reason or of the drive is often silent, slow, but it persists forever.”

I would thus like to situate dialectical thinking as the eternal voice of reason itself between the opposites of deconstructive modes of thought and metalinguistic forms of thought. In deconstructive modes of thought what is emphasized is historical relativity. What is emphasized is the historical relativistic nature of our constructions, that any construction we conceive, any construction which we engage with the world, is something contingent, something that could have been otherwise. In that sense there is no such thing as an Absolute ‘eternal truth’ claim, there is no such thing as a truth as we would think of it in the religious perspective as a transhistorical eternal truth subsisting independent of human action and reason. From the deconstructive perspective, any claim whatsoever is just a particular contingent relative truth expressed by a historical sociocultural individual.

On the other hand, metalinguistic thought is something that is often conceived of as on an eternal asymptotic approach to a universal language. Metalinguistic thought is conceived as some way to transcend our partiality and limitation, our historical relativism, for an Absolute expression of eternal concepts. One can see this striving for metalanguage to be at the foundation (repressed, disavowed, or not) of many scientific disciplines, and also many religious traditions. The idea we get in metalinguistic thought is the idea that the language we developed or are developing is a construction project towards some form of universal communication medium that will persist for all time, some guarantee of the Absolute truth (some figure of the Other).

What does the dialectical middle ground look like between deconstruction and metalanguage?

From my perspective I would say that dialectical thought situates itself in the mode of an eternal present constituted by the totality of *logos* (inclusive of its movement, its unconscious and its impossibility). What persists across time in language (or as time), in the rational order of the logos, is that through our partiality, through our limitation, we can come to reason, and through engaging with reason, by the subject engaging with its partial limitation, it can transcend the partial limitation. Technically, you could be anywhere and anytime, and as long as you are open and attentive to reason, then our dialogue can transcend any space or time that separates us, or that would create a distance.

In this way the dialectical reversal of the problems of deconstructive thinking and metalinguistic thinking is precisely not to deconstruct language as irreducibly historically relative, and neither is it to (prematurely, perhaps) jump into the mystical beyond of a universal language. Instead, the dialectical reversal counter-intuitively sees the potential in what most intuitively see as a limitation, of the way in which the necessary self-limitation of reason directly unites the particular finite entity (the creature) with the universal infinite immortal absolute (the creator). When this link is lost, then all is lost. When we unite creature and creator we have perhaps the most important 'coincidence of the opposites', where two things seemingly different (a duality), are revealed as one thing (a singularity). The reason of the drive, logos, allows me to (magically) go beyond my partial engagement with language, to express an infinite judgement, and an immortal truth, despite the fact that I am a finite mortal creature. Through the insistence of my reason I can be united with something that persists. In Plato and Hegel this insistence is already very strong. One can see in *Parmenides* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* that philosophy in its most authentic form is something that allows one to touch 'something' (or less than nothing) in language that is not merely historically relative, and at the same time it is not a type of objective global view of the whole situation. We are, coincidentally, at the same time, irreducibly partial and limited.

This is why the Hegelian formula for the Absolute is C=T (Concept = Time) (Kojève 1980, p. 111). The Hegelian formula for the Absolute does not recognize the concept's temporality as its failure to reach eternity (deconstructive thinking), and nor does it recognize the concept's temporality as immanent to a conceptual eternity (metalinguistic thinking). The concept ("that is, the integration of all concepts, the complete system of concepts, the "idea of ideas," or the *Idea*" (ibid))) and time (temporal reality) are one and the same thing, the deployment of eternity in temporality (Hegel 1998, p. 38, 558):

"Time is the Concept itself, which is there. [...] In what concerns Time, it is the Concept itself which exists empirically."

Here, repeating Žižek, we can clearly unite the Hegelian idealist tradition with the Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition by way of identifying the homology between the concept, the signifying structure of language and the subject's temporal position vis-a-vis this Absolute metastructure (Last 2018a). To define it as clearly as possible, the Freudo-Lacanian psychoanalytic tradition is a tradition that proclaims psychoanalysis as the "science of language inhabited by the subject" (Lacan 1993, p. 243).

Thus to engage a psychoanalytic perspective on the dialectical formula C=T I will attempt to situate two of Jacques Lacan's axioms that capture the coincidence of the opposites between deconstructive historical relativism and universal metalanguage objectivizing our temporal position in their separation and distance from each other. On the deconstructive hand Lacan deployed the axiom that 'language is the torture house of being' (ibid). This is a precise structural response to Heidegger's well-known claim that 'language is the house of being'. 'Language is the torture house of being' notes that there is an 'undeconstructible' emotional dimension of being in the house of language which is related to pain or suffering. 'Language is the torture house of being' notes that in order to really make 'progress' in language you have to struggle and suffer in it via the dissolution of temporal identity. Thus 'deconstruction' does not relativize language, does not do away with the Absolute, but is itself an 'Absolute recoil' which brings the self to the 'Absolute' eternal level internal to and yet beyond language, where the conceptual defenses of the self-

conscious ego (on the register of the imaginary, the specular image), are brought to confront the most real as an anti-identity, or non-identity (a black hole).

On the metalinguistic hand, Lacan often deployed the idea that ‘there is no metalanguage’ (Lacan 2005a, p. 816) or ‘there is no Other of the Other’ (Lacan 1999a, p. 80-1). This means that there is no way to get an objective universal language or absolute conceptualization, there is no way in which you can eliminate the contingency and eliminate the partiality of your engagement with language. There is no way you can develop a conceptual schema that is transhistorical (either scientific or religious), because we are historical creaturely creators, we are living beings. This is a sort of inability internal to the relationship between language and the Absolute. I think that this conversation is important to situate in contemporary discourse specifically between the emergence of language and the (potential) emergence of transhumans (Last 2017). What I mean by this is that the emergence of language (emergence of logos) represents a qualitative transition to a different type of experience, and a different type of realm. And when we hear about transhuman visions (as is quite common in our present discourse), whether about future mind-to-mind communication via brain machine interface, or via interaction with artificial intelligences, we get the image of another qualitative transition in mind, specifically related to language.

Thus, with the formula $C=T$ I attempt to situate dialectical thinking as a bridge (potentially) between the emergence of language (the conceptual fall into time, or the *concept's time*: past-future) and some transhuman future (that we do not understand).

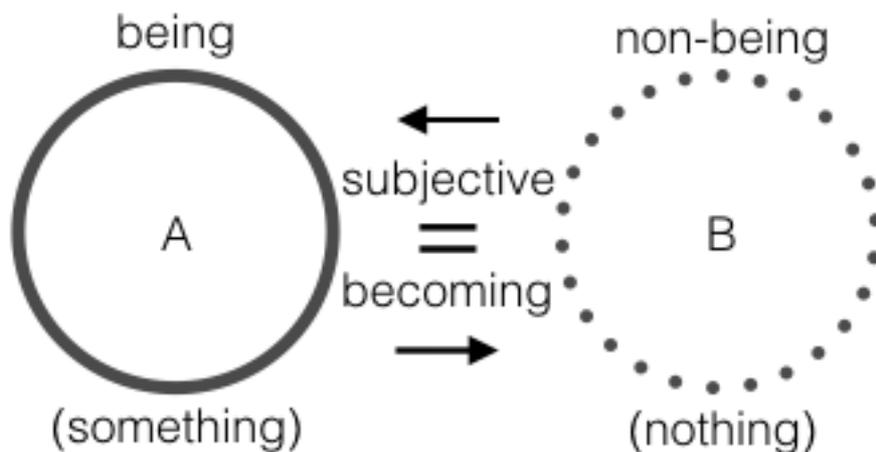
This transhuman future is a mystery pure and simple. Whatever the nature of this transhuman future it could be that dialectical thinking is the structure of our thought in its most rational form and thus our best attempt to understand how to mediate the human realm in its transition state: not an asymptotic approach to the singularity (Kurzweil 2005), but rather a mediation of a singularity (or field of singularities) that are always already here right now. To elaborate on Žižek’s aforementioned insistence (2012, p. 1010):

“In a letter to Einstein, as well as in his *New Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis*, Freud proposed as a utopian solution for the deadlocks of humanity the “dictatorship of reason” - men should unite and together subordinate and master their irrational

unconscious forces. The problem here, of course, lies with the very distinction between reason and the unconscious: on the one hand, the Freudian unconscious is “rational”, discursive, having nothing to do with the reservoir of dark primitive instincts; on the other hand, reason is for Freud always close to “rationalization”, to finding (false) reasons for a cause whose true nature is disavowed. The intersection between reason and drive is best signaled by the fact that Freud uses the same formulation for both: the voice of reason or of the drive is often silent, slow, but it persists forever. This intersection is our only hope.”

In this context we may meta-reflect on our own historical engagement. Humans all gather together to share in language. In this engagement, what we appear to want is to infuse our language with our ownmost rational spirit (inclusive of its unconscious dimension), irrespective of its partiality and limitation (inclusive of our partiality and limitation), as opposed to being a ventriloquist dummy of the symbolic order. Thus we are still very much in the mode of trying to *represent* our partial truth in language, to give voice to our limitation. We will cry out in pain until that is realized. In the Hegelian sense this truth is not the Absolute eternity of an immovable fixed ideality, but rather the oppositional coincidence of the Absolute non-identity of eternity (nothing, chaos) in a temporal becoming (something, order), where self-relativization or limitation and partiality brings one absolutely closer to the universal, not farther away (Fig 1).

Figure 1: Becoming between something and nothing



Thus, instead of seeing language only in its negative historically relative limitation, or as something to be overcome via asymptotic approach to a metalanguage, the dialectician aims to see what we can accomplish universally in language, through a radical partial and contextual engagement with reason.

2. Metaontology (or: map as territory)

For a dialectical program we do not need a metalanguage but we may find useful the introduction of a metaontology. A metaontology is related to the axiom of the Absolute as substance and subject (Žižek 2012, chp. 6). I would situate metaontology as something different than a grand unified theory of everything (as is common in, for example, big history (Last 2017, 2018a)). If you are scientifically minded or aware of the scientific literature, the idea of a grand unified theory is persistent, and many great thinkers and philosophers have tried to come up with a grand unified theory of everything, a theory that would explain everything in existence or being.

There are perhaps two prominent examples today that would claim to be striving for a grand unified theory of everything. One example would be quantum gravity in physics, which represents the idea that one day we will have a complete theory of the macroscopic and the microscopic, general relativity and quantum mechanics (Smolin 2001). This is the idea that we will be able to explain the birth and death of matter, and everything in between, inclusive of reductionist explanations for life and mind. Another contender for a grand unified theory might be self-organization theory in evolutionary paradigms (Kauffman 1995). In self-organization theory there is the idea that we can explain all emergent order in the universe based on local interaction principles of spontaneous organization (Heylighen 2014, p. 14). In this view the universe is totally relational, and everything we see in the world is a consequence of evolutionary processes following or tending towards a logic of increasing fitness which is naturally selected. Both forms of knowledge explicitly posit conceptual schemas which would guarantee their Absolute universality, transcending the postmodern insistence on historical relativity of the concept.

The difference between these types of grand unified theories and a metaontology is that a metaontology is interested in the position of the subject inhabiting language and the nature of the subject inhabiting language. Metaontology inscribes the paradoxical move (essential for dialectical thinking) of epistemology as ontology (C=T). In this view we see our knowledge as a part of the Absolute and our deepest thought as Absolute's own reflection. The reflective metaontological question for people who develop grand unified theories is along the lines of action principles for their own being in the world, for the consequences of their own knowledge constructs in the

world. When you (dear reader) develop a grand unified theory, how is that serving you in the world? And what are the consequences of these abstractions in the world? Metaontology also recognizes that there is a field of knowledge that is itself divided between multiplicity of subjectivities, each of whom have their own grand unified theory (which may or may not be contradictory and inconsistent with each other). This dialectical consideration basically complicates things immensely because it is hard to wrap your own mind (your own identity) around this level of complexity and nuance. It actually requires that you are prepared and able to dissolve your identity.

Why would we want to bother with this dialectical approach of inscribing epistemology as ontology? We would want to bother with this approach in order to counter the postmodern insistence that the ‘map is not the territory’. You will often hear a common criticism against Newtonian epistemology (for example) that the map is not the territory. What the map is not the territory critiques is the naive notion of the scientist who cannot differentiate between his abstraction of the world and the world in-itself. As is not well known, the nature of this gap between our abstractions and the ‘things-in-themselves’ is what gets a lot of philosophical attention in the “unbearable density of thought” that characterizes the idealist passage between Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel (Žižek 2012, p. 8).

In contrast to the postmodern knowledge axiom, we may entertain the dialectical knowledge axiom which suggests that the ‘map has its own territory’. Your maps, your abstractions (dear reader), have their own geometrical structure, and that is what we are interested in. It is invisible dynamical geometry, real knowledge which is not static and fixed but active in the reflective process of constituting the Absolute. To focus on the nature of this invisible dynamical geometry is what it means to inscribe epistemology into ontology. Thus we are not (only) interested in an external view of quantum gravity or self-organization, but the way in which these abstractions curve and warp being, the way in which these abstractions, the movement of them ‘in-themselves’, are negations or nihilations of being. There is something about being that is incomplete, lacking, and not only in terms of our knowledge, but in terms of being itself. How else could our knowledge of being appear?

In this way, with metaontology, we have to inscribe the observer within the system in a very radical way. To put this attempt into the formula of the ‘Absolute’ as ‘substance but also as subject’, we do not only have to understand the abstractions of general relativity, but we also have to understand the way in which a temporal figure of consciousness, Albert Einstein, appears in history and constitutes the whole of being with abstractions. This is why the Lacanian algorithm for the signifying chain follows an asymmetrical logic over and above the signified: S|s. The map has its own territory and points towards a horizon internal to and yet outside of itself, to be immanently constituted by its own dynamical motion.

2.1 Let us get personal

Now to build on this, let us analyze my own personal map, in order to grasp a properly reflective dialectical work. I will cite the following quartet of thinkers from each philosophical epoch: Plato-Hegel-Lacan-Žižek.

2.1.1 Plato

First, Plato. As Alain Badiou emphasized in a series of lectures and in a recent revisioning of *The Republic*: “For Today, Plato!” (2012, p. viii). The reasons I play with Plato is for his attempt to understand geometrical unity (with his mathematical theories of space) and emotional unity (with his sexual theories of man, woman and love), and the coincidental relations between these two forms of unity. I like thinking this coincidence between mathematical and emotional spaces, that there may be some higher order relation between the two, between truth (mathematics) and beauty (emotions). This divide may be at the ground of fundamental philosophy, between someone doing a pure mathematics of the Absolute, like Quentin Meillassoux (2006); versus someone attempting to understand a pure emotion of the Absolute, like Alenka Zupančič (2017).

This can be philosophically grounded in the well-known fact that Plato’s Academy had outside of its door “Let no one ignorant of geometry enter” (expressing the importance of mathematics). However, we must also consider that a well-known contemporary Platonic philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk, started his *Spheres Trilogy* (2011, 2014, 2016) with a modification of this ancient axiom, claiming that by “shutting out the ageometric rabble” Plato started a cult of “an intelligence coming

from the world of the dead” (2011, p. 9). In contrast to Plato, Sloterdijk would have outside of his academy the axiom of “let no one enter who is unwilling to praise transference and to refute loneliness” (ibid, p. 13). Thus, here we may think that the two of the greatest living Platonist philosophers, Alain Badiou and Peter Sloterdijk, embody this higher order contradiction between the importance of mathematics and love. Here a question for a Žižekian philosophy, also very much open to a revisioning of a post-Deleuzian Plato (2012, p. 31-32), is something along the double lines of: can the worlds of the rabble experience (hold) the truth Event of mathematics?, can the worlds of the mathematicians experience (hold) the truth Event of love? Do the coincidence of the living lovers and the dead geometricians meet their singular real in what Žižek articulates in his concepts of the living dead? (2014, p. 235).

Another reason why I am interested in Plato is because he is in some sense the arch-enemy of postmodernity, which emphasizes thinking in terms of multiplicity of multiplicities (over the One). To capture the essence of multiplicity thought consider a well known principle from Gilles Deleuze’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988, p. 8): “Principle of multiplicity: is only when the multiple is effectively treated as substantive, that it ceases to have any relation to the one.” What is clear in this quote is that Deleuze philosophy is trying to get at a total disconnection from the One (as opposed to a positivized or a negativized One). There is nothing of a One in Deleuze, just a multiplicity of multiplicities (inspired by the mathematical work of Gauss, Riemann, Klein). Deleuze attempted to express this concept with the idea of a suprasensible virtual plane of immanence, a centrifugal force spiralling out in a multiplicity of directions indefinitely. This is a direct metaphysical attack on Plato and the Western tradition. The Western tradition has tended to see a suprasensible singularity as a type of centripetal force spiralling inwards towards a common (extimate) core, a singularity that can (perhaps) be mathematical and emotional, a singular coincidence of two fundamental opposites.

Thus it may not be a surprise that in postmodernity proper (among the rabble) we have a situation where anti-religious sophistry predominates over Truth (mathematical and sexual), and religious fundamentalism in its most distorted grotesque form appears as its obscene opposite. In other words, postmodernity can be seen as the absence of the sublime or the sacred (what Plato would call the presence of a ‘horror

vacui’). Of course, Platonic philosophy proper, in its advanced dialectical mediation, can be seen as the most sophisticated attempt to avoid the sophistry of relativistic opinion, while at the same time avoiding the dogmatism of an unknowable Absolute closed to discursive modification (Žižek 2012, p. 77-78). There is really a good philosophical challenge here for reason, thinking again this relation (or non-relation) between Plato and Deleuze. In a precise dialectical move we should not be afraid to assert that even Deleuze, the arch-enemy of the dialectic, may have his own most historical oppositional determination. By doing this it may be possible to inscribe multiplicity directly into the One, through the historicity of oppositional determination.

2.1.2 Hegel

Second, the reason I play with Hegel is for the way in which he attempted to understand the historical movement of the One or the Absolute. If Plato is criticized for his insistence on the fixed ideality, Hegel injects movement as fundamental. In other words, the One or the Absolute can no longer be conceptualized as a fixed transhistorical entity, and also can no longer be thought of as existing independently of subjectivity. This is reflective of Hegel’s time. Hegel was writing at a time of enormous transition, enormous rupture and enormous break with the old world. And that is captured in his philosophy which can dialecticize transitions, ruptures and breaks, where everything appears to get flipped upside down. Hegel very much saw the way the Absolute was subjectively mediated, the way in which the problem of love and the problem of the Absolute were central to the historical drama and could be understood through radical dialectical mediation of this engagement (Žižek 2012, p. 9).

In this way Hegel tried to think the One not as a totalizing sphere but as a One structured by pure division. Hegel thus approaches the problem of love as Absolute Oneness and the reality of a subjectivity seemingly divided from this Absolute Oneness in the mode of a subject-object division opening onto a multiplicity of phenomena (Last 2018b). The genius of Hegel’s phenomenology is that he conceptualizes Absolute love as this cut or division itself and not as the sphere which we supposedly fall from and return to. In other words, what subjectivity tends to

think of as a spherical unity is in fact the obfuscation of a hole or absence at the very core of being, where the subject appears as a cut or a division. To quote Hegelian philosopher Mladen Dolar on this minimal level of Hegel (2011, Part 1):

“What cannot be divided any further is the division itself. [...] The substance [atoms] is permitted by the void, but [the ancients] did not have any inkling that this would have any relation to the place of the subject. This is Hegel at his minimum, the place of the subject, in the adage of substance and subject, is the cut, introduced as the moving principle into being.”

From this perspective there is something about the One that requires a gap or a hole, and this is where Hegel situates his dialectic which we may think of as the narrative path (and where critics of Žižek claim he (re)introduces the ‘wobbly’ (contradictory, impossible) subject). It is a transition from a geometry of thinking a global perfect sphere (an a priori totalizing unity, or Oneness), and being able to think a local division or cut where a story about being itself appears, narrativizing a totalizing unified Oneness. Here is the crucial passage from *Less Than Nothing* regarding the importance of understanding the narrativization of being vis-a-vis the Absolute (Žižek 2012, p. 15-16):

“The narrative is not merely the subject coping with its division from Being, it is simultaneously the story Being is telling itself about itself. The loss supplemented by the narrative is inscribed into Being itself, which means [...] the narrative already does the job of intellectual intuition, of uniting us with Being. [...] It is the narrative path [not intuition] which directly renders the life of Being itself.”

This emphasis on the divided multiplicity of stories as themselves the revelation of the One, as directly uniting us (humans) with the One can be found in Badiou’s “Platonism of the multiple” (2012, p. vii), and also appears in the logical deployment of Sloterdijk’s trilogy, as it evolves towards the conceptualization of *Foams*: “So the One Orb has imploded - now the foams are alive.” (2016) This transition to foams is a broken One, a sea of Ones dividing in themselves, the rabble with voice and vision, immanently expressing the truth of their partial limitation.

In this way we can approach the *movement* of ‘atoms and the void’ (something and nothing) as opposed to a static-fixed representation of atoms and the void.

Throughout the tradition of idealism, culminating with Hegel, the idea that the movement of atoms (something) was dependent on void (nothing) as opposed to some

transcendent other worldly something. This is clearly expressed in Hegel (2013, p. 15):

“[T]he void [is] recognized as the source of movement. This implies a completely different relation between atoms and the void than the mere one-beside-the-other and mutual indifference of the two. [...] The view that the cause of movement lies in the void contains that deeper thought that the cause of becoming pertains to the negative.”

In other words it is clear here that the source the basic mechanics of the Hegelian dialectic, the historical becoming, can be found in the relation between something and nothing. This is a topic that Dolár further identifies as closely linked historically with the concept of *clinamen* qua becoming (2013). This notion of *clinamen* represents a type of formal curvature or twist in being itself that has a rich history in philosophy, from Lucretius and Cicero, and even appears in Deleuze’s meditation on fundamental movement of becoming (2013, p. 18):

“*Clinamen* or declination has nothing to do with the slanting movement which would come to modify by accident a vertical fall. It is present since always: it is not a secondary movement nor a secondary determination of movement which would occur at a certain moment at a particular place. *Clinamen* is the originary determination of the direction of movement of an atom.”

In this way we can think of *clinamen* as representing a type of absolutized movement, or this absolute curvature where there is no flat or non-curved surface which which it can be seen or framed as a deviation. We are not swinging between the poles of astatic-fixed One but a One that is inherently broken, riddled with gaps and holes. The incorporation of *clinamen* is essential for the dialectic, since we are constantly structuring our discourse as if we have the clear or true view (the One vision and voice), and that the other is the cause of the distortion: ‘A thinks that if only we could remove the view and voice of B, then we would be able to situate ‘the way’ to the truth’. What *clinamen* suggests is that B is the ‘nothing’ of A, and that an A capable of recognizing this truth, still moves, has its own inherent curvature. To situate such a logic in the constellation of the postmodern universe, the A of pure multiplicity tries to get rid of the B of an Absolute One, but this Absolute One is the ‘nothing’ of pure multiplicity, the ‘black hole’ around which the desiring rabble unconsciously organize their motion. In this sense it is true that all views and voices are partial distortions (a pure multiplicity without an Absolute One), but it is also true that all of these

distortions must be inscribed as the truth itself, their narrative path, their becoming, is the Absolute One.

2.1.3 Lacan

Third, the reason why I would play with Lacan is because of the way in which he attempted to unearth the meaning of the Freudian unconscious as a form of knowledge that is constitutively unconscious (meaning: a knowledge (form) which *does not know itself*). The definition of the unconscious as a knowledge which does not know itself is sufficiently precise to avoid the type of obscurantism which is often levelled at Lacan as a thinker. What we gain here is a certain level of self-recognition in the sense that we do not know ourselves. The unconscious means we are not as self-transparent to ourselves as we would like to think: our drives, our motives, the distance between our thoughts and our actions (Lacan 2005b, p. 526):

“‘[T]he core of our being’ - it is not so much that Freud commands us to target this, as many others before him have done with the futile adage ‘Know thyself’, as that he asks us to reconsider the pathways that lead to it. Or, rather, the ‘this’ which he proposes we attain is not a this which can be the object of knowledge, as he teaches us, I bear witness as much and more in my whims, aberrations, phobias, and fetishes, than in my more or less civilized personage.”

Thus Lacan identifies the crucial psychical historicization of the gap or absence of unconscious knowledge which is missed by all of the intellectually fashionable secular humanisms which tell us all to self-realize and self-actualize. What these ideologies obfuscate is the way in which the core of our being is never transparent, and even terrifyingly abyssal (‘there is no big Other’). In other words, even for the self-consciousness who wants to ‘self-actualize’, the problem is precisely that there is no ‘global standard’ (perfectly clear spherical One) that one could use to measure this self-actualization.

In this move we also gain an emphasis on the importance of the distinction between the unconscious as understood through psychoanalysis, and the subconscious of neuronal processes, which are endlessly discussed in the contemporary ‘brain sciences’. What Lacan emphasized in the unconscious is not subconscious neuronal processes that influence or determine our self-conscious brain activity. Instead, what Lacan is emphasizing with the unconscious is precisely a type of knowledge which cannot be known, and thus not something that can be approached asymptotically with

advances in science and technology. In other words, the unconscious is not something that we will one day know through future advances in our knowledge. It has a constitutive element of itself the fact that it is not knowable in principle (like the conditions of singularities in the abstractions of general relativity, or like the location of the subatomic particle before its collapse (measurement)).

Thus we can only approach the unconscious through the positivization of a negativity, to see the way in which an unknown knowledge functions and structures human historicity. All of this may be why Lacan found it so useful to engage with Hegel's dialectic of knowledge. Hegel's dialectic is about the movement of the Absolute knowable in its processual narrativization, and the straw-man of Hegel is that we are on this asymptotic approach to total or complete knowledge as if the subject will finally consume all of substance with its narrative performativity (Žižek 2012, p. 399-400). But when Hegel is read through Lacan, and when Lacan is read through Hegel, it is easy to realize that this is not necessarily the nature of the Absolute that is revealed in their reflection. What we learn with Hegel and Lacan is that we must be much more humble with our self-conscious knowledge, we must be much more humble with the story (stories) we tell ourselves because internal to the story is an unconscious real which escapes its mechanics.

In this way the unconscious is actually the true knowledge or order at the 'core of our being' which *precedes and orients our narrative*. This, once again, helps us to avoid a metalinguistic set of perfect concepts for self-consciousness, and also historical relativism and deconstruction. The unconscious as a form of non-conceptual, non-contradictory, non-identifiable real of knowledge that does not know itself and is operative even if you think you have analyzed your own epistemology, your own abstractions (Lacan 1998, p. 20-23):

“[In Kant's] *An attempt to introduce the concept of negative quantities into philosophy*, [...] [he] comes to understanding the gap that the function of cause has always presented to any conceptual apprehension. [...] Cause is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words the *law*. [...] Whenever we speak of cause [...] there is always something anti-conceptual, something indefinite. [...] It is at this point that I am trying to make you see by approximation that the Freudian unconscious is situated at that point, where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong. [...] [W]hat the unconscious does is to show us the gap through which neurosis recreates a harmony with a real - a real that may

well not be determined. In this gap, something happens. [...] [A]nd what does [Freud] find in the hole, in the split, in the gap so characteristic of cause? Something of the order of the *non-realized*. [...] At first, the unconscious is manifested to us as something that holds itself in suspense in the area, I would say, of the *unborn*. [...] It is not without effect that, [...] one directs one's attention at subjects, touching them at what Freud calls the navel - *the navel of the dreams*, he writes, to designate their ultimate unknown centre[.] [...] Now [...] I am in a position to introduce into the domain of cause the law of the signifier, in the locus in which this gap is produced.”

In some way, then, the unconscious of the symbolic order, the multiplicity of narratives, is an invariant principle and the most real locus for the constitution of subjectivity. In other words, the unconscious is there, present in its absence, in all symbolic universes, as both the primordial abyssal cause and the indivisible remainder (where the continuous open mouth of a spurious infinity meets or fails to meet its own tail), the object-cause of desire, of any symbolic-discursive operation.

Consequently, in order to ground a knowledge of this ‘unknowledge’ Lacan emphasizes the organ-without-body, the *objet petit a*, as what we can know of the real in the form of a partial object. One can think of the *objet petit a* as a virtual spectrality or stand-in for the impossibility of unity, rendering any historical identity inherently contradictory. In terms of our raw experience this stand-in for the impossibility of unity can be experienced on several ‘developmental’ levels (although it is not itself following a linear teleological trajectory), from oral, anal, genital, gaze (vision), voice, and possibly, also, smell (Žižek 2012, p. 655). The subject may find itself possessed in relation to any of these partial objects due to contingent sensual engagement in historical reality. One can tell if one is possessed by this spectral virtuality if one pays close attention to the circulation or circumambulation of one's own symbolic chain (usually accompanied by a ‘Master’ or ‘Main’ Signifier).

In relation to the symbolic chain the *objet petit a* is thus an indivisible remainder of the subject's desire which emerges at the core of the subject's own division (own repetition automatism in the symbolic chain). In this way *objet petit a* should not be thought of as a substantial object, but can be thought of as a formal curvature in a state space (and nothing but the virtuality of this curvature) (Žižek 2014, p. 248-249):

“[T]he *objet a*: an entity that has no substantial consistency, which is in itself “nothing but confusion”, and which acquires a definite shape only when looked upon from a

standpoint distorted by the subject's desires and fears - as such, as a mere "shadow of what is not". As such, the *objet a* is the strange object which is nothing but the inscription of the subject itself into the field of objects, in the guise of a stain which acquires form only when part of this field is anamorphically distorted by the subject's desire."

Consequently, the *objet petit a* is a consequence of the symbolic but not on the level of the symbolic. The *objet petit a* is rather something that corrodes symbolism from within, like reason's ownmost otherness. In this very important sense, what thinking this unconscious real allows us to confront in analysis is, ultimately, the immanence of sexuality. Almost without question it is the dimension of sexuality, with its psychical libidinal energies and drives, which proves to be the worthy opposite of reason, reason's ownmost otherness. For anyone who has ever loved, for anyone who has ever desired the unity of the most fundamental opposites, one will understand the importance of the conceptual of the *objet petit a* and its role in the real of symbolic functioning. What should be focused on, precisely, if one is to bring this concept to a new level of understanding, however, is not the spectral unity that is at work in sexuality, but rather the a priori contradiction or antagonism that precedes its emergence (Zupancic 2017, p. 3):

"The pages that follow [in *What Is Sex?*] grew out of a double conviction: first, that in psychoanalysis sex is above all a *concept* that formulates a persisting contradiction of reality. And, second, that this contradiction cannot be circumscribed to reduced to a secondary level (as a contradiction between already well-established entities/beings), but is - as a contradiction - involved in the very structuring of these entities, in their very being. In this precise sense, sex is of ontological relevance: not as an ultimate reality, but as an inherent twist, or stumbling block, of reality."

This notion of 'sex' as an inherent twist or stumbling block of reality is thus not something that we can reduce to either the biological realm of animal instincts, nor something that we can dismiss as a historically contingent social construction, but rather, as a primordial and constitutive feature, the unconscious of the symbolic order. This makes sexuality not only something that we should think of as on the level of the symbolic (Zupancic 2017, p. 1):

"The point is that the satisfaction in talking is itself "sexual". And this is precisely what forces us to open the question to the very nature and status of sexuality in a radical way."

But also something that we should think of as a deeply intellectual, perhaps the most intellectual, activity (ibid, p. 2-3):

"The satisfaction in talking (or any kind of intellectual activity) is "sexual" is not simply about abasement of intellectual activities, it is at least as much about elevating sexuality to a surprisingly intellectual activity..."

Perhaps it is time to talk more time to focus on what the rabble are always (not) talking about, the negativity which underlies their positivized symbolic motion.

2.1.4 Žižek

Now to move to Žižek. Žižek's philosophy in *Less Than Nothing* and *Absolute Recoil* tie all of these figures together in a type of Hegelian-Lacanianism (inclusive of a return to Platonic One that can think movement and the unconscious). What Žižek adds to this tradition is trying to understand the status of repetition qua impossibility, of a repetition freed from its impossible idealization, which paradoxically, sustains a true or real 'materialist' idealism. In this sense, for Žižek, all talk of the One structuring the symbolic order in history is the movement of the unconscious as the voice and vision of the Absolute's impossible fulfillment (2012, p. 651):

“What ultimately distinguishes humans from animals is not some positive feature (speech, tool-making, reflexive thinking, etc.), but the rise of a new point of impossibility designated by Freud and Lacan as *das Ding*, the impossible-real ultimate reference point of desire. The often noted experimental difference between humans and apes acquires here all its significance: when an ape is presented with an object out of reach, it will abandon it after a few attempts to grasp it and move on to a more modest object [...], while a human will persist in its effort, remaining transfixed on the impossible object.”

How do we deal with this dimension of desire? For Žižek we do not reach this impossible object in some futural dimension as the ideal light at the end of the tunnel, but rather via the pure repetition which is the nature of the non-psychical drive beyond psychic desire. Thus almost all of Žižek's philosophy revolves around understanding this transition between desire and drive (2014, p. 150-1):

“[I]n Freudian terms [the] *drive* [...] [is] a joyous repetitive movement in which gain and loss are inextricably intertwined and which enjoys its own repetition. [...] In other words, what pushes the drive is not the persisting attachment to the lost object, but the repeated enacting of the loss as such - *the object of the drive is not a lost object, but loss itself as an object*. [...] The [...] drive which emerges at the concluding moment of the dialectical process [is this] shift from the idealizing progress of sublation to pure repetition[.]”

In this way Žižek brings things full circle, without closing the circle, leaving it open for the pure repetition which is the nature of the non-psychical drive beyond psychic desire. In other words we attempt to think the inscription of impossible negativity of the Absolute in its positive dimension, the singular eternal drive at the heart of the

temporal desires structuring binary opposition. In the mode of desire, subjectivity experiences the real of being internally thwarted, twisted as a fundamental negativity, as what is preventing it from uniting with the Absolute; in the mode of the drive, nothing and everything change, as subjectivity experiences this same real of being internally thwarted, twisted in its positivity, as what unites it with the Absolute.

The difference is a minimal difference, a shift from self-consciousness feeling like it is in control of the process, to self-consciousness recognizing its irreducibly unconscious ‘other side’ as controlling the process. In this process self-consciousness can ‘drive’ but it is not the car (the unconscious). Thus, when self-consciousness is in the mode of desire, we must always remember that the trauma of separation and division has not yet reached its proper level of reconciliation, the subject does not yet enjoy its symptom. What the Žižekian philosophy thus ultimately asks from us is that we, the realm of subjectivity, the realm of partial-limited beings in language, shift from the unreflective stance of attempting the impossible Absolute objectification of self, to the reflective stance of pure repetition as Absolute.

In this way we can conceptualize the dialectical unity/oneness that structures Western history (maths/science, politics, art, love) as a paradoxical impossible virtual entity internal to the repetitive emergence of the symbolic order which can be neither deconstructed nor captured and controlled by a metalanguage. There is something of a conceptual breakthrough in this type of thinking because there is a tendency in contemporary knowledge to see everything as relational (as opposed to Absolute). In both Lacan and Žižek being is relational but what is interesting about the human universe (structured by the symbolic order) is that it is defined precisely as the emergence of the non-relation or the Absolute. This non-relation can be most intensely approached in sexuality and politics where processes of ideal sublation always obfuscate pure repetition. In coming to realize this Lacan proposed the two step dialectical motion where one first realizes that ‘there is no sexual relation’ (ideal sublation) (1999b, p. 144-5):

“There’s no such thing as a sexual relationship[.]”

and then one secondarily realizes that ‘there is a non-relation’ (pure repetition) (ibid):

“I have also defined the sexual relationship as that which “doesn’t stop not being written”.”

This is a much more radical ontology, an Absolute recoil, because it forces upon us the negativity at the core of relationality (impossibility of sublated love with the other) and invites us to explore a paradoxical ontology where we are not just thinking in terms of relations between things present, but also the unspoken, the real absence at the heart of things present. When one understands this absence one may be able to approach a reconciliation between the body and love (Žižek 2014 p. 172-3):

“Love is not an illusory One of imaginary fusion covering up the underlying deadlock of the sexual relationship; authentic love is rather the ultimate case of a weird “one” in which this very non-relationship is embodied[.]”

The notion of the non-relation is pragmatic and useful, and theoretically very interesting because this is where Žižek situates his understanding of the problem of something and nothing, and perhaps most importantly, his engagement with the concept of less than nothing. Whenever we engage with ‘*das nichts*’ in the mode of ideal sublimation we always delay the creation of something truly new in favour of protecting ourselves from the primordial void with a fantasmatic imaginary screen with a presupposed established order of things (Žižek 2012, p. 691-2):

“[T]he image/screen/veil itself creates the illusion that there is something behind it - as one says in everyday language, with the veil, there is always “something left to the imagination.” One should take this ontological function at its strongest and most literal: by hiding nothing, the veil creates the space for something to be imagined[.]”

However, when we embody the non-relationship, the anti-background, when we embody the fact that there is no other who could reconcile our broken symmetry, then we are invited to embody the real of fantasy more intensely in the present. We subtract the futural projection and become a real repetitive agent of the impossible. In this deeply subjective act, something new can be born from the nothingness (Žižek 2014, p. 144):

“[A]lthough within an established order of things, nothing - no particular element - can emerge *ex nihilo* without violating the laws of nature, an entire universe paradoxically *can* emerge *ex nihilo* [against the background of] the virtual Void of which (particular) reality emerges through the collapse of the wave function.”

Thus pure repetition embodying impossibility (non-relation) is how Žižek deploys the dialectical machinery to approach creation *ex nihilo*, creation of something out of nothing. The way he goes about it is innovative on the level of historical dialectics.

In order to understand we have to situate this conversation properly in its historical dimensions.

Consider the historical phenomenology of the emergence of modern science, starting, let us say, with Bacon, Galileo, Newton and Descartes. In this emergence we could not have predicted with any accuracy what would be the status of “fundamental reality”. It could have been the case that when we developed the technology to probe into the deepest levels of reality, that eventually we would have seen looking back at us, the Absolute Other (God), complete, an immanence with an already reconciled core state of being. Of course, that is not how it turned out, but it could have been that way. In contrast to that imaginary experient, how it actually turned out, was that we discovered quantum mechanics, we discovered that the fundamental level of being is not something, not an Absolute Other as a substantial eternal entity, but rather the eternity of a virtual void, the paradoxical quantum void of particles that quasi-exist.

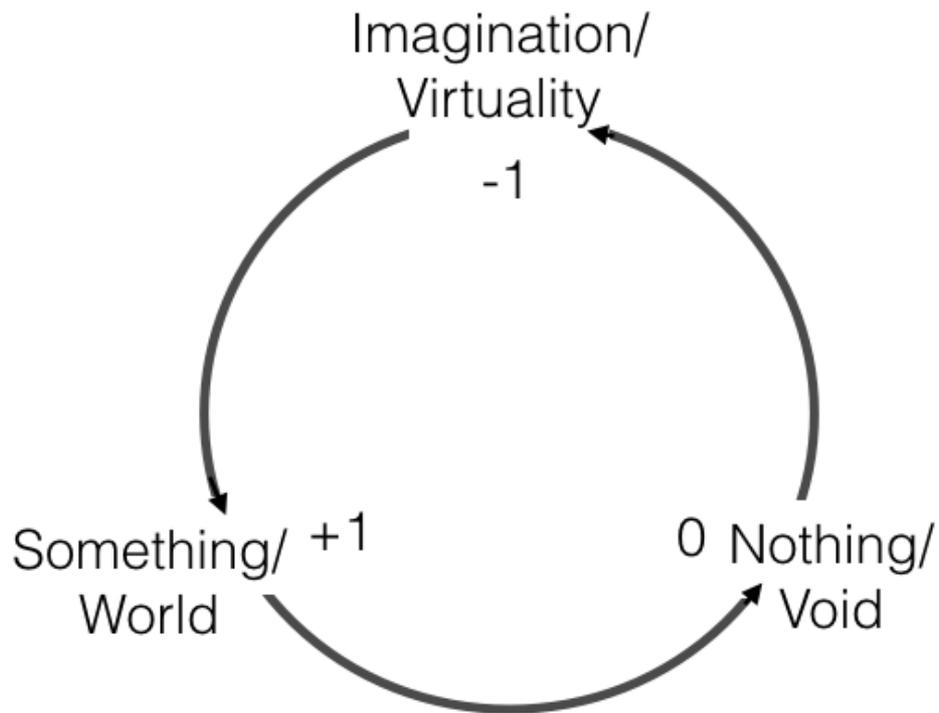
To be sure this reality is a very strange philosophical entity, and nobody is really sure of its ontological status or its meaning to human existence. We know that it signals a fundamental indeterminacy, unpredictability, incompleteness and openness that is inherent to nature.

Žižek situates the historical dialectic in a radical way on this level of inquiry. Instead of asking the standard modernist scientific question: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” (a question emphasized throughout modern science , since Leibniz), he rather emphasizes: “Why is there nothing rather than something?” (2012, p. 38-39).

This is a question which inverts any coherent attempt at a logical positivism which would presuppose a background. How do things (something) emerge from the virtual void? This virtual void, which Žižek refers to as *den* in honor of the classical materialist category proposed by Democritus, is not nothing but teeming with entities which are somehow both more than something and less than nothing (Žižek 2012, p. 495-6) (Fig 2):

“*Den* is [...] *more than Something but less than Nothing*. The relationship between these three basic ontological terms - Nothing, Something, *den* - thus takes the form of a paradoxical circle, like Escher’s famous drawing of the interconnected waterfalls forming a circular *perpetuum mobile*: Something is more than Nothing, *den* is more than Something (the *objet a* is in excess with regard to the consistency of Something, the surplus-element which sticks out), and Nothing is more than *den* (which is “less than nothing”).”

Figure 2: Something, nothing and virtuality



Furthermore, Žižek’s engagement with the question ‘Why is there nothing rather than something?’ can be expressed both on the physical reductionist level (questions of general relativity and quantum mechanics) and the human or spiritual emergentist level (questions of secularism and religion). Why is there this absence on both sides? Why is there this void on the physical side where nature seems to be incomplete, indeterminate, unknowing of its own self. This quantum void may seem eerily similar to the unconscious as a form of knowledge that does not know itself. Is the discovery of quantum mechanics the discovery of nature’s unconscious? And on the human-spiritual side, why are we these conscious beings who strive for immortality and eternity (in both religious and scientific modes)? It is as if we are pathologized or colonized by some excess which can never die, which will forever overdetermine the course of human affairs. At the same time, we all die, we all face the void of our own existential dissolution, leaving our desires permanently incomplete, indeterminate, a form of unknowing. This is what Žižek is getting at, and trying to think this

coincidence simultaneously: the fact that both nature and humanity is incomplete, unable to determine and know its own-most identity, the core of being.

In this structure of thought human epistemology (our knowledge), which is commonly only thought of as subjective ('for-us'), must in fact be inscribed into the object ('in-itself'). In other words, it could be that the objective in-itself requires the subjective for-us in order to be realized, a space of 'to-be-determined' (or overdetermined, by our space of abstraction, our knowing practices). To be clear this does not mean that our knowledge 'creates reality', but rather, our knowledge is itself inscribed into the becoming of reality, as 'an answer' for the incompleteness of nature. Thus where our incompleteness coincides with the incompleteness of nature itself we should imagine that our partial and limited engagement with language is the very location where the Absolute seeks completion and closure. Dialectics is simply the form of knowledge that locates itself in this process of becoming, the location of the becoming of spiritual form (or spirit qua spirit).

2.2 Archaeology of the real's knowledge

In the previous narrative expressing a deployment of Plato-Hegel-Lacan-Žižek it may give the impression that I am creating in the symbolic order as some type of linear progressive development. However, instead, I want to deploy a meta-level structure of the symbolic order that manifests in a strange twisted circularity which brings to mind the notion of a retroactivity. What is clear from this school of thought is that these philosophies do not subscribe to a linear progressive ideology but what is emphasized is circularity and the movement of circularity, even the eternity of the circle. But the eternity of circularity is not an ancient perfect circle, but a twisted circularity.

Thus, when I think about these influences of Plato-Hegel-Lacan-Žižek in my philosophical engagement it is not that we are going from Plato to Hegel to Lacan to Žižek in a linear order, but rather we are putting them together in a way that the new transforms the old. Here I would supplement the notion of an action ontology with the notion of a retroactive ontology. The notion of retroactivity here is to say that we should not conceive of the production of knowledge in terms of a simple intuitive past-present-future. In this view we think that current generations build on the

shoulders of those who came before us. Instead, with the notion of retroactivity we think in terms of its opposite: future-present-past, where the future directed motion of a subject (as its own cause) can transform the past.

Consequently, what happens when we flip temporality in the symbolic order is that the future all of a sudden gains the ability to change (what we think of as) the past.

What this means is that the past is not a fixed substantial actuality but rather a virtual construction in the present. In this way the future present of a work can retroactively change that historical work. Thus, instead of totally destroying the works that feel to us outdated, we can see the old in the light of the new, where a new thinker, by first working through the old, allows us to see the old in a totally new way. This is what I claim can be done with thinkers like Lacan, Hegel and Plato. When we think of understanding the repetitive embodiment of impossibility qua potential, how does this change the way we think about the historical dimensions of the unconscious, movement and unity or oneness? How can these dimensions of historical thought be re-thought in the light of new presuppositions? We can rethink the One: we can go back to Plato with a dynamical repetition of the impossible, with the unconscious of thought, and with incessant movement. We use the new to shed light on the old, to bring it back to life in a new way.

Now let us zoom out of my own particular metaontology to the scaffolding of metaontology as a whole, starting with a network perspective of philosophy as a totality. It is from this perspective that we ask: what is philosophy? Does philosophy have a repeated impossibility? Does philosophy have an unconscious? Does philosophy have its own movement? Its own absent unity? Of course, in the network perspective we have a relational view of the symbolic order, each philosopher representing a part of the becoming of the Absolute in relation to its particular contemporaries. In this meditation I am not conceiving myself above or below the network, I am also (with this work, for example) a part of the network, partial and limited just as everyone else. However, what I want to do is to show what happens when we think the level of impossibility, unconsciousness, movement and oneness internal to the network. What emerges is a different way to represent metaontology, a metaontology that is not merely relational, but a network of relations which repetitively circle, loop, around an impossible unity of knowledge.

The inscription of a repeated impossibility in the symbolic universe around which our minds circulate changes the way we conceive the network dramatically. The reason why this may be a better representation is that I think it allows us to think the way we struggle to relate to each other on a fundamental level, where our identities circulate a real antagonism for recognition which precedes any symbolic presuppositions supporting our becoming. In this way we can see that there is a non-relation as Absolute at the core of discursivity that structures our discourses. You can see this in a discursive mediation (duel-duet), for example, between Slavoj Žižek and Graham Harman (2017). Žižek would emphasize psychoanalytic philosophy structured by the *objet petit a* (2012) and Harman would emphasize object-oriented philosophy of thinking a new approach to reaching the ‘things-in-themselves’ (2018). There is just an inability to relate, there is no way to mediate the two. Harman accuses Žižek of sneaking transcendental subjectivity back into philosophical discourse; Žižek accuses Harman of avoiding the way in which objectivity is always already mediated by the subject. They simply circulate this impossibility, and we have to think the network inclusive of this irreducible antagonism. It is not just a multiplicity of multiplicities (Žižek and Harman as two indifferent atoms side by side), there is this negativity at the core of the multiplicity of figures of consciousness.

The antagonism extends back into time, allowing us to perceive an archaeology of the real. From this perspective can we do an archaeology of knowledge without the historical relativism? Can we think an archaeology of knowledge that situates itself in relation to (not a transhistorical substantial truth, or a ‘Perennial Philosophy’ (Huxley 1945)), but a transhistorical impossibility expressed as a historically idealized repetition that inscribes contingency into its negativized core? Knowledge is still contingent to the obstacles, to the real of a time, but there is still something of the becoming of the Absolute here, something which overdetermines our discourse, something which prevents us from all agreeing, from getting on the same page, so to speak. In Hegelese there is something which prevents the integration of *the* Concept (“that is, the integration of all concepts, the complete system of concepts, the “idea of ideas,” or the *Idea*” (Kojève 1980, p. 111)). My point of reflecting on these non-relations is to potentially help you, if you are following along, to play and represent the nature of this symbolic order.

We can even go back to the ancient world to get at the texture of the becoming of the symbolic order throughout history. Some of the questions that come to my mind are: what are the questions that the human mind comes to find of great importance? Why does the human mind come to find these questions of high importance? How do we view these questions today? How was the Oneness conceived in Plato's time or within alternative conceptual networks? You could technically take any thinker from any historical layer of mind and construct your own structural metaontology. In the same way I am trying to build one from the perspective of Plato, Hegel, Lacan and Žižek, one could easily do this with another layer of thought. The question would be where does this field of thought take you? Can you think something that has never been thought before by playing with a particular curvature of historical mind?

In order to better capture the geometry of these spaces we may need to play with a different metaphor. In network representations we are inspired by metaphors of rhizomatic thinking, multiplicity thinking, and so forth (which is the philosophical ground of network ontologies) (Deleuze & Guattari 1988). But one might also find it useful to use the metaphor of curved spacetime in Einstein, because in Einstein's curved spacetime, and in the Riemannian manifold, things are still all relational. However, what is interesting about Einstein's spacetime is that there are unified unconscious impossibilities: singularities. Material repetitions, the unconsciousness and the movement circle these impossible unities. This may (also) be useful for conceiving the history of the symbolic order. Each map as territory is the becoming of all of these webs of thought across time, and the way in which their repetitions curve and warp the space around their point of impossibility. We are all becoming as a part of this manifold of the symbolic order. In this way we can think repeated relations of being plus impossibility informing possible repeatable relations.

This impossibility is not transhistorical in the fact that it does not change. The impossibility changes but invariant impossibility as such informs possible relations. The possible relations are informed by its internal points of impossibility (Zupančič 2017, p. 24):

“The non-relation [points of impossibility] gives, dictates the conditions of, what ties us, which is to say that it is not a simple, indifferent absence, but an absence that

curves and determines the structure with which it appears. The non-relation is not the opposite of the relationship, it is *the inherent (il)logic (a fundamental “antagonism”) of the relationships* that are possible and existing.”

With this view we can at the same time think the symbolic in terms of effectivity.

Again, instead of map as not territory, map as territory (a positivized negativity). So instead of thinking about the way in which Newton’s map does not get at the real of the in-itself of nature, we can think of the way in which Newton’s map transforms humans into space travelling astronauts. That is a symbolically mediated transformation: humans went to the moon as an ontological fact on the field of Newtonian epistemology. Indeed Newtonian epistemology is a good example of the way in which the impossible itself changes, informing new possible relations. Before the rise of Newtonian epistemology the idea of human beings actually travelling to the moon was in a primordial realm of fantasmatic proto-science fiction (e.g. Johannes Kepler’s *Somnium* (1634)). After the rise of Newtonian epistemology the idea of human beings travelling to the moon became an actual possibility, an embodied impossibility enacted through strict repetitive adherence to the scriptures of natural philosophy. That is a question for the relation of epistemology to the world. But what about the self?

In terms of a question for the self what are the consequences of inscribing epistemology into ontology vis-a-vis the attempt of the self to objectivize itself (to reach the core of one’s being)? When we try to think the curvature which attempts to circle back on itself in a twisted structure, we get at the possibility that metaontology is always about an Absolute reflection, an attempt to understand ourselves in the deepest sense. We may find that this symbolic texture is realized by a future-directed motion which calls back to the origin. Is the discovery of the self a return to this origin? A return to a primordial impossible unity or singularity which births all things? Or is the discovery of the self nothing but the process of this motion? In other words, is the self in terms of a ‘self-consciousness’ nothing but a finite-mortal curved asymptotic approach to (or circumambulation around) singularity (consciousness as *clinamenesque*), whereas the singularity in-itself is the of dimension of unconsciousness as a form of knowledge that cannot know itself? In quantum mechanics this would be the dimension of the infinite virtual void, and in general relativity this would be the dimension of infinite singularities.

3. Dialectical foundations

From this understanding of metaontology we can dive into dialectics proper.

Dialectics are essentially a conversation or discourse mediated by reason and aiming for truth. As mentioned it is not a truth that is some fixed substantial entity, but something rather that requires in our discourse that we stabilize it across time, or as time ($C=T$). That is the point of our conversation. If we can raise our minds to the highest levels of reason, what we are doing is participating in an eternal act, or an eternal repetition, of trying to understand what is true, about being, about thought, and their interrelation. Consequently, in dialectics proper we are not approaching truth in a teleological structure but perhaps in a structure that could be described as *teleiosis*.

Teleiosis is not the imminently determined future that will happen independent of our freedom, but rather the inscription of virtual orientation into the spatiality of the actual present (Žižek 2012, p. 914):

“[T]ime is the sublation (negation of the negation) of space, [thus] we can also say that *teleiosis* is the inscription of time into space in the sense of space-time, of time as another (fourth) dimension of space: *teleiosis* supplements the three dimensions which determine the spatial position of an object with the virtual and temporal dimension of its spatial movement. A purely spatial definition which immobilizes its object produces a non-actual abstraction, not a full reality; the unfinished (ontologically incomplete) character of reality which compels us to include the virtuality of *teleiosis* in the definition of an object is thus not its limitation, but a positive condition of its actual existence.”

Plato’s starting point with historical knowledge is that our phenomenal and discursive reality, in its irreducible temporality, falls into oppositional determination. We fall into contradictory appearances as a feature of the concept (Kant’s ‘antinomies of reason’) which structures conflict and misunderstanding (as opposed to the eternal harmonious One of perfect understanding) (Žižek 2012, p. 958-9). For Plato, thus, the humans of the Cave are the humans who fail to see the way in which we are singularly entangled as One. The oppositional determination that stimulates and motivates Plato from the beginning is the oppositional determination between religious zealotry (1) and nihilistic sophistry (0). Religious zealotry has this idea of the eternal One that exists independently of us, for all time: God, basically, as the ultimate reason and cause. The nihilistic sophist, on the other hand, has the idea that there is no meaning in the universe, that we are just here for no reason. We are in the realm of *doxa*. There is no invariant truth that you can utilize to organize your world.

Whereas the religious subject believes in an invariant truth: the truth of God. This is the problem that Plato wanted to approach with the dialectic in a more sophisticated way.

But it must be emphasized that the dialectic is a general tool beyond that particular duality. As is common knowledge there are dualities everywhere: light and dark, order and chaos, masculine and feminine, life and death, peace and war, health and sickness, temporality and eternity, movement and stillness, something and nothing, and so on. The dialectic is what helps us to realize the entanglement of the paradoxes of these dualities, allowing us to approach them in discourse in a way that sheds light on their singular coincidence. The general mechanism by which dialectics approaches this is the thesis, antithesis and the synthesis. Thus dialectics represent a type of triadic logic ($A + B = C$). In this logic the important dimension is that in the geometry of the triangle, the third term, the synthesis, is never a complete closure, it is rather that the synthesis leads to new oppositional determination. It sets forth a new motion of coincidental structure. The One cannot hold itself in time as a perfect unity, it is only actual as a division.

We could give a quick example of dialectical thought with Plato's original query.

The thesis, antithesis and synthesis might be:

- There is a God (One, nihilating the void)
- There is no God (no One, just a pure multiplicity in a void)
- There is a negative God (not-One, nihilating as time)

The not-One is the singular coincidence of the presence and absence, 1 and 0, something and nothing. The not-One is what allows for subjectivities, irreducible Ones (atoms). In this way you can see the way in which a thesis-antithesis (A-B) can be brought to a new reconciliation (C). However, what is crucial is that this reconciliation does not end the process of reason, but presents to us a new field with new questions: how are we to make sense of science and religion in light of the not-One?

In this perspective the why of dialectics (why bother?) is basically to avoid freezing your reason as an eternal truth. Frozen knowledge is not real knowledge, it is not knowledge connected to the real of life and mind, it is not knowledge which embodies

the non-relationship, and enacts the partial-limitation. In many discourses, religious metaphysical and scientific naturalistic discourses, for example, subjects tend to frame their language as if it is frozen in time, as if it is ahistorical. They try to frame their discourse as if their knowledge reflects an eternal truth or is an eternal truth.

What dialectics forces us to confront is the movement of reason and the paradoxical becoming of eternal truth. There is no system of thought that can close itself off and complete itself. The only closure is the recognition that the truth is our very path of becoming, that we are the temporal nihilation of the truth (or the truth is temporal nihilation).

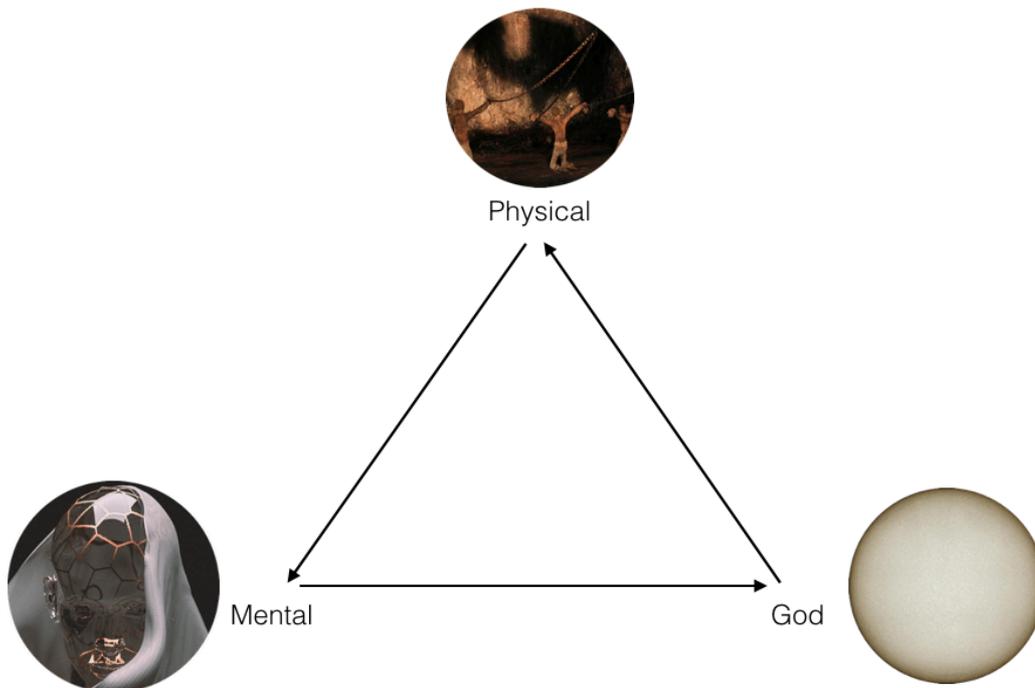
As philosophers interested in the dialectic we are able to approach the truth with a type of rigour and at the same time a type of novelty injected into our discourse.

What is being studied is the discursivity of historical forms or figures of consciousness. For me it is so invigorating to do this because you can take a field of thought and you can see above or below the oppositional determination that structures the characters of this field. For example, it may be useful, especially today, to take the literature and discourse in quantum gravity, and pay attention to the forms of consciousness that are becoming in this field. In this attempt we can study the way two figures in this field will approach the same problem differently, or see the way in which two figures are producing each other. If there can be a synthesis between them, their very historical characters, the opposition of their historical characters, would simply dissolve.

But what I want to emphasize here is the fact that the genius of Plato and Hegel is that the very structure of their discourse is higher order. This is what separates them from the other historical figures of consciousness. If one actually reads Plato and Hegel one will quickly find that the dialectic is built into its very metastructure. In other words, their work is represented in a triadic form making it exceptionally difficult to interpret accurately but at the same time allowing for higher reflection of the Absolute. The machinery of their ideational deployment is mediated by something like a thesis, antithesis and synthesis. On a pragmatic level, when you become sophisticated with your understanding of the dialectic, this can be infused in your own work in a very meaningful way, in a very creative way.

The first example is Plato. In Plato's metaontological triad, as many people know, you have the physical world, you have the mental world, and you have the transcendental truth of God, the Absolute. This is the structure of the Cave Allegory. The physical world is the cave world, the illusory multiplicity of phenomena that the mind is perceiving. However, what is truth, what is good, and what is beautiful, is the One, is God, and that reality is suprasensible, beyond normal perception. In other words, one cannot perceive God through our normal sensations (our sight, our smell, our taste, our hearing, our touch). God is the 'mind's eye', the suprasensible. Many different spiritual traditions talk about this suprasensible realm of Ideas, but in dialectical materialism proper, we focus on mediating the emergence of truth, as understood in terms of the purely formal surface of an event (Fig 3).

Figure 3: Platonic metaontology



Thus, you can see why thinkers like Badiou and Žižek would separate democratic materialism from dialectical materialism. In democratic materialism there are just bodies and languages, but in dialectical materialism there are bodies, languages and truth (Žižek 2012, p. 42). The total situation is not just a pure multiplicity of multiplicities, it is not just anything goes, it is not just that anything is correct. There is an 'up', there is a direction, there is a way forward, there is an orientation. This is in relation to the suprasensible truth of reality. The dialectic is trying to understand the truth of this reality. In relation to the Platonic One, even if the Platonic One has a

difficult time understanding movement or the unconscious or impossibility (as we are trying to inscribe now), we do have this idea of the truth in Plato as a Oneness that orients us. In Plato's *Parmenides* he states that:

“Human nature was originally One and we were originally whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called Love.”

This is what Badiou and Žižek and dialectical materialists do not want to give up, this driving force or force of the drive, is conceived of as the unity of love. We see the One in the way we find our true life's organization, the way it structures the way we want to relate and the way we want to become, and the way we want to express our spirit.

The axiom of Plato is thus 'monism': 'there is only One'. Everything is all and only One, somehow. But as already stated above, what Plato cannot approach is the movement of this One. I am tempted to give some speculations on how Plato's triangle is connected in movement. We could easily situate Plato's ontology into modern cosmology (as Roger Penrose does in *The Road to Reality* (2004, p. 20)). In this 'Platonic cosmology' the big bang is the birth the physical, as God giving birth to the physical; and then the physical gives rise to the mental, through processes of evolutionary transformations (self-organization, natural selection, and so forth), and then the mental returns to God around the cognitive mediation of Oneness (unity), as thought reflecting on its deepest emergent essence. Here even Christian ontology is helpful, since Christianity is essentially built on/from a Platonic ontology (Kojève 1980, p. 106). In Christianity, God falls into the physical world as a finite mortal individual to demonstrate his Love of humanity, and then the field of finite mortal individuals returns to God through a repetitively enacted collective belief in immortal Love (embodying the impossible). It is still possible to hold this ontology with logic. But even if you do not buy those speculations the importance of going back to Plato in the structure of a metaontology (instead of starting with someone like Buddha), is that Plato emphasizes there is a truth in the appearances. For Plato this truth must be dialectically mediated, it must be understood by better understanding the structure of our maps of meaning (Peterson 1999).

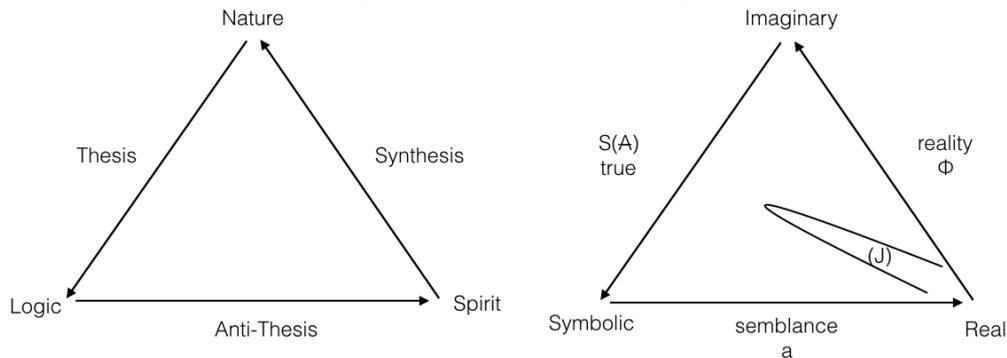
Now what happens when we move from Plato to Hegel and Lacan is really a complexification and a sophistication of the Platonic ontology, but it is the same structure. There is still the triad, but the nature of the triad is different. With Hegel's triad you have nature-logic-spirit, and with Lacan you have imaginary-symbolic-real. You can see here that there is a structural overlap between nature-imaginary; logic-symbolic; spirit-real. This overlap is not precise, not totally equivalent, there are important differences, but they are comparable structures, there is some rough homology.

The point of Hegel's triad is to study historical phenomenology, to study the movement of the One. In this dialectic the spirit becomes in relation between logic and nature, it is a logical sublation of nature, the externalization of the idea, and its return to itself. Thus, when the idea is in the mode of externalization the subject attempts to ideally sublimate nature. When the idea is in the mode of its return to itself, the subject attempts to drop nature and become a passive observer of ideational process. In this conceptual process of externalization and return to itself as its own center of gravity spirit is constituted (Žižek 2012, p. 413-414). What is most real for spirit in this process of sublation, according to Hegel, is what is left of nature after logic has sublated it. Once you have sublimated a natural object, you can let it go; but if an object resists your sublation, then logic remains fixed to it, attached to it. Thus, true spiritual maturity is not holding abstract knowledge of nature, but releasing it (Žižek 2012 p. 401).

With Lacan's triad he is more interested in human psychology and specifically psychoanalyzing the human psyche as constituted by the symbolic order (language) from the perspective of the unconscious. In Lacan the relation between all of the triadic terms change in subtle ways due to his emphasis on a 'return to Freud', and thus an emphasis on designing a triad which can be read from the perspective of the id, ego and superego structures. For Lacan, Hegel's nature becomes imaginary. Thus, we encounter the fully developed understanding that nature is imaginary, we have no illusion about getting to the 'things-in-themselves' of nature. What we are really studying is the way our mental territory is reflected to us as an otherness and the way we do that is through symbolic operation. Consequently, in the Lacanian triad Hegel's logic is represented as correlative of the symbolic. In symbolic

operation we try to realize something real (we try to test the real) in a transformation process. What is left over after this process, the gap between the imaginary desire and the symbolic operation, is the real, which is conceived of as a constitutive absence of obstacle which internally structures the symbolic. The relationship between these three terms captures the way in which can read Lacan or one can read Hegel, or one can read Žižek (Fig 4).

Figure 4: Hegelian historical spirit triad to Lacanian psychoanalytic triad



When thinking this triad we are trying to mediate the dialectical unity of the opposites. We can formalize this with the very general formula $A=B$. The important point to understand is that A and B co-constitute each other. The movement between A and B is that if you took away A, B would disappear; if you took away B, A would disappear. They depend on each other, they only exist in relation to each other, or more precisely, they only exist in the impossibility of their relation to each other.

That is the core of oppositional determination. The dialectic operates in some sense not from the position of A or B, but C. What is C? C is a fuzzy indeterminate space of superpositions. In other words, C is not a higher positivity but rather a reconciliation between A and B which can be identified by the dissolution of A and B as contradictory semblances. The mistake of historical self-consciousness is thinking A is true or B is true; instead of realizing that A true in the way you are relating to B, and B is true in the way you are relating to A. But neither A or B is true in a dialectical sense, since both will dissolve in the temporal mediation of the dialectic.

To demonstrate this dialectical truth in a historically real way, we could analyze the becoming of the religious and secular subject. We can do this by pragmatically operationalizing Johann Fichte's $I=I$. Here the first "I" stands for identity, and the second "I" stands for impossible image. With religious subjectivity we can say that A

(representing religious identity) at first could not equal itself in the form of its own impossible imaginary ($A \neq A$). Of course for religious subjectivity you would say the notional ideal would be something like Jesus Christ or Buddha, the perfect subject. And $A \neq A$ means that the religious subject cannot equal Jesus Christ or Buddha. In other words, there is an irreducible asymmetry between the actual identity and the virtual potentiality therein. Because of this impossibility A spontaneously transforms into B via the practical deployment of reason.

What this means is that the religious subject becomes the secular subject. With the secular subject, in its most extreme manifestation, we get the formation of another impossible imaginary. In its most extreme manifestation this impossibility might be something like someone attempting to become the subject of World Communism or the subject of Global Utopia. In other words, the secular subject's impossibility may be something like the subject attempting to enact the ultimate notion of a world peace and harmony. In our culture we are approaching the impossibility of this identity, we are approaching the impossibility of the naivety of the secular subject, the idea that the secular subject can participate in a transformation of our world into a secular utopia. In that sense B has to spontaneously transform itself into C via the practical deployment of reason. However, at the moment, it is unclear what C is, exactly. We are in this indeterminate fuzzy space, and the identity of C has not yet emerged. This could be why A (religious subjectivity) and B (secular subjectivity) still find themselves in an identitarian conflict, perhaps most obviously and extremely expressed in the cultural battle between Islamic fundamentalism and Western secularism.

On the level of the collective we have the same pattern because the subject and the collective of subjectivities mirror each other. The collective is simply the emergent work product of all and every subjectivity. Thus, to repeat the logic from above, the religious subject makes the Church, and the Church's ideal is the Kingdom of Heaven. Of course, in this construction, A does not equal A. In this way, by forming the Church you do not form the Kingdom of Heaven, and this is a real that corrodes the Church from within. From this you might get the State, which systematically subordinates the power of the Church, so A turns into B. But the problem is that the ideal of the State becomes secular utopia, which is still very much alive. However,

we are reaching a limitation of this ideal and maybe the State is now corroding from within because of this impossibility. In the same way that we do not know the C of the subject, we do not know the C of the next collective stage. We do not know what is to come in the subject and its collective organization. Perhaps it is related to the individuated embodiment of an impossible repetition beyond sublation (beyond or without futural image). But, in either case, this is a practical demonstration of the dialectic because it allows us to understand the structure of history, and brings us to this little piece of the real that we cannot (yet) think (Fig 5).

Figure 5: Contradictory historical identity

$A = \cancel{A}$ Religious Subject = Notional Ideal	$A \rightarrow B$ Religious Subject \rightarrow Secular Subject
$B = \cancel{B}$ Secular Subject = Notional Ideal	$B \rightarrow C$ Secular Subject \rightarrow ?
$A = \cancel{A}$ Church = Kingdom of Heaven	$A \rightarrow B$ Church \rightarrow State
$B = \cancel{B}$ State = Secular Utopia	$B \rightarrow C$ State \rightarrow ?

4. Dialectical structure of our century

Now that we have worked through the foundations of the dialectic we can give some concrete examples that are of pragmatic application in the structure of knowledge today. These examples are just meant to be thought provoking. I want to present the field as I see the field and I just want it to be stimulating for future subjectivity to work through the dialectical contradictions of A=B, to take these oppositional determinations and play with them in a way that we can see a new C, a new singular coincidence. Maybe new thought will emerge from this engagement. The most important thing to note when thinking about this field is that, according to the

Hegelian dialectic, A and B are not equal or balanced opposites. In Hegelian dialectics the opposites are asymmetrical, with one opposite (B, antithesis) representing a lack in the other opposite (A, thesis). Consequently, when one wants to synthesize a given field, it is important to remember that the path to C is most likely to be found by identifying why a lack emerges with respect to the ‘higher’ term necessitating the enaction of a ‘lower’ term (Žižek 2012, p. 303):

“The opposition of poles [...] conceals the fact that one of the poles already is the unity of the two [...] [thus] the goal is not to (re)establish the symmetry and balance of the two opposing poles, but to recognize in one pole the symptom of the failure of the other (and not vice versa).”

The first oppositional determination I will present is the oppositional determination between general relativity and quantum mechanics (A=B and we cannot think C). We cannot think the coincidence between the micro and the macro. The consequences of resolving the micro and the macro would be a totally different understanding of the universe. The micro world in its incompleteness, its uncertainty, its indeterminateness, its fuzziness. The micro world in involving paradoxes of observation, where somehow what is objective is inscribed into what is subjective. In the macro you have a physical world that is not situated in an absolute spacetime background, but something that is a relational and dynamical spacetime. In other words, in general relativity we can no longer think of a global spherical manifold, but rather a manifold that is locally or relativistically constituted. As opposed to existing from all time and for all time, spacetime can emerge from nothing and disappear into nothing. These are strange edges of our knowledge and they are archetypally positioned in a structure of oppositional determination, complete with an open-ended ‘third path’ (Smolin 2001, p. 9-10).

A (general relativity) = B (quantum mechanics)

Second let us consider the oppositional determination that structured my emergence into deep thinking. My becoming as an academic was not a becoming in a pure multiplicity but in repetitively embodied relation to the impossibility of thinking the evolution of change and God as eternal substance. In general this oppositional determination does structure a lot of modern thought. For example, the dominant mode of thought (at least within academia) would conjecture a cosmic or universal evolution as explaining everything. In this mode the concept of evolution goes

everywhere and can describe everything, like a universal acid (Dennett 1995, p. 63). However, there is still something that persists in the notion of religious eternity, at least on the level of phenomenal and discursive historicity internal to itself. The point is that there is no evolutionary argument or logical process which eradicates the phenomenal-discursive real of authentic religious engagement. There must be an enormous lack internal to the evolutionary worldview. To be specific, religious eternity appears to strongly contrast with the evolutionary worldview because it is a real that never changes, it is a real identity that persists as a perfect unified love independent of time.

A (evolution) = B (eternity)

The structure of the oppositional determination between the sciences and the humanities has perhaps had the strongest impact on intellectual or academic life in modern times (Snow 1959). In the sciences we are told to focus on external observation, formulating tests that can be universally repeated, situating ourselves in relation to a knowable nature that represents a collective objectivity that we can all predictively verify. We are trained to think literally and materially about the world and our relation to the world. The world becomes something that can be captured in a formula or embodied in an algorithm. In contrast, in the humanities we have a much stronger emphasis on the experience of subjectivity, that what is experienced as reality is most fundamentally a story or a narrative which is laden with metaphorical knowledge and entangled with ethics, values and morals. For the humanities reality is more open to emergent interpretation and conjecture, where there can be a multiplicity of views that are all somehow valid and real.

A (sciences) = B (humanities)

The next tension we may focus on is one that is paradoxically emergent to philosophy itself where an oppositional determination appears between analytical and continental traditions. The differences between these forms of philosophy can be found in the idea that analytic philosophy emphasizes an argumentative structure of logical rigour, conceptual clarity, general laws and so forth. For the analytic tradition we thus focus on formulating a symbolic knowledge that can be demonstrated to all linguistic subjectivity in a way that leads to a cumulative and measurable increase in our understanding. In contrast continental philosophy emphasizes a universality internal

to our phenomenal world but it is an experience that is not necessarily purely logical or rational, but rather an illogic internal to logic. For continental philosophy we are interested in experiences even if they cannot be shared between subjectivities via language, and even if they are unrepeatable experiences that evade any formula or algorithm. These experiences undeniably shape subjectivity and require their own special attention. We may also say that in the analytic tradition there is more focus on correlationalism and actuality, whereas in the continental tradition there is more an emphasis on speculative imaginaries and potentiality. The main difference between these two communities may involve communication where the analytic camps want to emphasize information that can be universally communicated; whereas the continental camps want to emphasize information that is universally experienced even if it is not communicable.

A (analytical) = B (continental)

In politics we have the manifestation of an oppositional determination that structured much of the 20th century and has apparently not been seriously resolved since many of its forms are re-emerging in the 21st century. On the left leaning side of the political spectrum there exists the form of communism, and on the right leaning side of the political spectrum there exists the form of fascism. Of course there is a huge centrist 'democratic' middle ground but the extremes overdetermine much of the large scale argumentation and conflict, which is now ripping at the heart of democracy.

The leftist-communist end emphasizes universal communitarian values, imaging a world beyond capital and nation-states, and a new world that is humanist and international in its founding principles. Thus, this political pole reflects on the inherent potential of humans to exist on a far higher level of self-actualization than we are now. On the rightest-fascist end what is emphasized, first and foremost, is individual responsibility and traditional family structure. This desire is typically expressed as necessitating a meditated return to national or ethnic loyalty. In some sense both of these poles operate on strange imaginaries, with the leftist-communist imaginary structuring a futures utopia, and the rightest-fascist imaginary structuring a retrotopia.

A (communism) = B (fascism)

The political division may mirror a deeper unresolved psychological oppositional determination between individuation and collectivism. On the level of individuation we would emphasize the becoming of the psychological unit, the irreducible individuality of a psyche, emphasizing its potential to become different, its potential to become other. Here the mystery of the self and its development is taken as the central mystery of the whole. Moreover, it is impossible to know what the consequences and farthest limits of mass individuation (or transindividuation) would really be on the scale of deep time. By definition the farthest limits of the individuated self would represent the capacity for total difference and otherness which eliminates even our notions of self, leaving only pure individuation (Hallward 2006, p. 82). On the other side you have the level of collectivization with the notion that what is of the highest value and importance is thinking the good and the development of society as a whole. Here instead of thinking about the individuation of psychical units we try to think social becoming as a whole, networks of subjects, the entanglement of subjects, identities and experiences that transcend the individual. This view challenges us to think in way that does not 'atomize' the individual, but rather thinks in a way that we are all linked together in a field (Wendt 2015, p. 173).

A (individuation) = B (collectivist)

The political and psychic issues are made all the more difficult by the sexual oppositional determination between the masculine and feminine. The main issue with the sexual level is even being able to study it in the first place in a way that is properly interdisciplinary. From the biological perspective everything is framed in terms of evolutionary paradigms emphasizing adaptive reasons for sexual difference, and from the social perspective everything is framed in terms of constructivist paradigms emphasizing the potential for radical freedom from sexual difference. To make matters more complicated, in terms of transcendental archetypes, both the biological evolutionary and social constructivist arguments fail to recognize the eternal image of man and woman reflected in historical sexual action which constrains the possible good, true and beautiful. Thus we may say that the biological evolutionary paradigms may have to recognize the free performative dimension of sexuality, the social constructivist paradigms may have to recognize the natural historicity of sexuality, and both paradigms may have to recognize the reasons why sexuality appears to be so

tightly intertwined with spiritual and religious foundations. In this quest psychoanalysis may be of the highest utility (Zupančič 2017).

A (masculine) = B (feminine)

The foundational antagonism of scientific modernity may in fact be the relation and mystery of matter and mind or the physical and the spiritual. The physicalist or materialist view of the universe is founded in the origin of philosophical materialism with Democritus and properly formalized by thinkers like Newton, Leibniz and Descartes. In the physicalist view the universe is reduced to fundamental subatomic particles which are governed by eternal physical laws. From this perspective we can understand the nature of reality by understanding the way in which elementary physical interactions are constituted at the lowest scales of being. Although this view structures modern particle physics it also presents irreducible contradictions with emergence and complexity (Carroll 2017). On the other hand, the mental or spiritual view of the universe has represented the other side of philosophy in many ancient forms of idealism. From this perspective we must understand the universe holistically which necessitates recognizing that everything ‘falls into consciousness’. In this view what governs the universe is not physical laws but the freedom of spiritual becoming which always already frames what physicalists claim about materiality.

A (matter) = B (mind)

What could be more fundamental than the oppositional determination between physics and mind? How about the oppositional determination between life and death. The structure of life and death overdetermines our whole existence. We are alive, we did not choose to be alive, we simply appeared here, and we appear to be living systems that are based on biological principles just like other organisms. There are important differences in languages and self-consciousness, which give us a self-referential architecture that other organisms do not seem to have in the same qualitative dimension. Then on the ‘other side’ we die, and we are hyper aware of this real. Humans know that they are finite mortals doomed to a realm of inexistence, that every human that has ever been born has died, and that no matter how much you care for or know yourself, death is waiting for us. We will eventually fall to decay and disorder no matter what we do, the ultimate universal tragedy is a part of the structure of our being. In light of modern science and technology how are we to make

sense of the coincidence of these two determinations? How are we to make sense of the relentless quest for eternity and immortality? (Cave 2012)

$$A \text{ (life)} = B \text{ (death)}$$

Finally: something versus nothing. This is the final oppositional determination I will present in this overview of 21st century knowledge. On the one hand we have something which we can think as the minimal existence of anything at all. Something could be framed as being itself. Something is always the object or other of thought which is why philosophy in some sense forms with the couple thought-being, and why the first gesture of philosophy is the constitution of an idea of the ‘Absolute Being’ (Dolar 2013, p. 11-12). Throughout the history of thought humans have understood something in terms of substance, things, objects, relations or just a presence. On the other side you have nothing. Nothing is usually referred to as a void, vacuum, absence, or death. Throughout the history of philosophy, religion and science nothing and its relation to human beings has received various interpretations. In the contemporary field the idea that nothing requires a more sophisticated inclusion in the structure of our positive knowledge has been seriously entertained (Deacon 2011).

$$A \text{ (something)} = B \text{ (nothing)}$$

4.1 The Absolute

Now towards the end of this reflective note we must approach some final principles that can help to deploy dialectical thinking concretely. I would encourage you to think for yourself on these oppositional determinations that structure our field of knowledge. In our present condition we desperately need a return to serious fundamental metaphysical thought from first principles. The contemporary metaphysical field appears to be fracturing. On the one hand we have ‘scientific ontologies’ of quantum cosmology and the brain sciences (operating as a type of metalinguistic evolutionary thought), which really aim to eliminate philosophy proper. On the other hand we have a type of relativistic or constructivist ontologies structuring most of social, political, cultural and gender studies. In some sense both fields aim to eliminate any reference to a real Absolute. However, in the real of history, both fields are exhausting their potential and may represent a disconnection

from the reflective real depths of human life: individual, familial, communal or otherwise.

The void in academia appears to be filled by many Western thinkers tending towards an Eastern metaphysics which grounds 'non-dualism'. On some level this may be happening because of the failure of Plato. The Platonic and monistic view can be captured by the axiom of 'there is only One', whereas non-dualism represents as its opposite of 'One undivided without a second'. The difference is subtle but important. What non-dualism means, ultimately, is that the world of appearances (of duality) are a fake, an illusion, and that the truth is the underlying pre-subjective unified reality. Consequently, the truth in this view is the 'un-division', the truth has nothing to do with the division of the subject, and the appearances. In this way there is no space for dialectical thought proper. In dialectical thinking the dualistic appearances have a meaning related to the division between A and B (and the emergence super or anti-space of C). In this structure parts are struggling for the meaning of the whole, our partial engagement changes the whole because the whole manifests through the parts. In the Eastern view there are struggling parts but the whole is at rest. Thus, in Eastern metaphysics there is no C term where a radical engagement with the appearances makes meaningful historical sense. One should simply recognize the historical illusion and return to the pre-subjective unified reality (before the introduction of a division).

There is a real challenge for Plato here. 'There is only One' has become unbelievable because it does not help us make sense of temporality. Maybe it has become impossible for the modern 'scientific' mind to conceive or experience the One. However, in the metaontological tradition deployed in this work, stemming from Plato and then following Hegel, Lacan and Žižek, we have the introduction of movement, unconsciousness and impossibility into the One itself, which retroactively transforms Plato's own philosophy. What this retroactive transformation opens up is a revision of monism to 'non-monism' (or an invitation to think the not-One). The axiom I would deploy here is 'more than One, less than two' ($A=B$). This axiom means that there is a fundamental division and otherness, and we should take it seriously as a meaningful historical engagement. Here we focus on the divided subjectivity, emphasizing that there is something in the symbolic chain, something

about language, about logos, that continues to move even after it has been deconstructed back to the (we assume) unified pre-symbolic substance. Even after you have gone into your self-relating spiritual world, there is something about oppositional determination that is essential for understanding the truth of being, and the truth of history (C=T). As you can see it is the impossibility of the two to become One (there there is more than One, and less than two). This is the impossibility at the core of the two trying to become One.

Consider all of the oppositional determinations that structure modernity:

- General relativity = quantum mechanics
- Evolution = God
- Science = humanities
- Communism = fascism
- Individuation = collectivism
- Masculinity = femininity
- Life = death
- Matter = mind
- Something = nothing

What non-monism suggests is that these oppositional determinations can only be reconciled with the historical work of the subject. What non-monism is saying is that there is a point in engaging with the realm of opposites, it is not ‘just appearances’, that there is an effectivity in the appearances, and we can find a cause of this effectivity in the self-referential loop of the divided subject itself. This is why the Hegelian axiom for the Absolute is ‘not only substance, but also as subject’.

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