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“Naturalism or anti-naturalism? No, thanks — both are worse!': Science, Materialism, and Slavoj Žižek”

ADRIAN JOHNSTON

Nobody has done more to revive the fortunes of materialism today than Slavoj Žižek. Through innovative, heterodox interweavings of what could be dubbed, in Leninist fashion, the three sources of Žižekianism (i.e., German idealist philosophies, Marxist political theory, and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis),¹ Žižek aims to articulate an account of the irreducible subject compatible with the basis provided by a non-eliminative materialist ontology. To be more precise, his “transcendental materialism” seeks to delineate how the negativity of *Cogito*-like subjectivity (especially in its related Kantian, Schellingian, Hegelian, and Lacanian manifestations) is internally generated out of material being.² He insists that this materialism, the one true version, must be founded upon a certain interpretation of Lacan’s dictum declaring that “the big Other does not exist” (“*le grand Autre n’existe pas*”), an interpretation according to which the ultimate *Grund* hypothesized at the level of ontology should be envisioned as a lone inconsistent immanence riddled with gaps and deprived of the wholeness provided by such Others as the theological idea of God or the cosmological idea of Nature-with-a-capital-N (i.e., the monistic One-All of a seamless tapestry of entities and events bound together by mechanical relations of efficient causality).³ The absence of such unity within being, a unity which would be a stifling, subject-squelching closure, is what permits the material genesis of more-than-material subjects; that is to say, this lack of underlying cohesion, as a “barred Real,” is a contingent ontological condition of possibility for the

¹ (Adrian Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek,” *The Blackwell Companion to Continental Philosophy*, Second Edition [ed. William Schroeder], Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2012 [forthcoming])

² (Adrian Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008, pg. xxiii-xxvi, 16, 74, 77, 81, 208-209, 236, 269-287) (Adrian Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009, pg. 79)

(Adrian Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation: Giving a Hearing to *The Parallax View*,” *Diacritics*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2007, pp. 3-20)

³ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 208)

(François Balmès, *Ce que Lacan dit de l’être (1953-1960)*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999, pg. 106-107)

emergence of trans-ontological subjectivity.⁴ As Žižek reiterates recently, “the basic axiom of today’s materialism is for me the *ontological incompleteness of reality*.”⁵ He goes on to propose in the same text that, “a true materialism not only asserts that only material reality ‘really exists,’ but has to assume all the consequences of what Lacan called the nonexistence of the big Other.”⁶ All of this is part of his solution to a philosophically significant problem he poses: “What ontology does freedom imply?”⁷

Žižek’s parallel ontology and theory of subjectivity (the former being reverse-engineered out of the latter⁸) raise a series of interesting, concatenated questions crucial to the future of materialism in contemporary theory: To begin with, what sort of material is posited by Žižek as the groundless ground of not-whole being? What connection, if any, is there between this material and notions of nature associated with various versions of naturalism? Assuming that there indeed is some manner of relation between Žižekian ontologically-primary “matter” (however ephemerally disappearing⁹) and what is imprecisely referred to as “nature” — in other words, this is to presume that, as Lacan would put it, materialism is “not without” (*pas sans*)¹⁰ its naturalism — what can and should the relationship be between materialist philosophy and the so-called “natural sciences,” namely, the empirical and experimental physical sciences? Asked differently, how, if at all, ought philosophical and scientific materialisms to affect each other in terms of both their conceptual contents and methodological procedures? Supposing they rightfully affect each other, what obligations and constraints do theoretical materialism and the sciences place upon one another? Specifically, is a materialist philosophy responsible to and limited by the physical sciences? Even more specifically, is a materialist account of subjects, in whatever might be the

⁴ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. xxv, 65-66, 77-79, 92-93, 106-116, 168-180)

⁵ (Slavoj Žižek, “Dialectical Clarity Versus the Misty Conceit of Paradox,” in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* [ed. Creston Davis], Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009, pg. 240)

⁶ (Žižek, “Dialectical Clarity Versus the Misty Conceit of Paradox,” pg. 287)

⁷ (Slavoj Žižek, “The Fear of Four Words: A Modest Plea for the Hegelian Reading of Christianity,” *The Monstrosity of Christ*, pg. 82)

⁸ (Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek”)

⁹ (Slavoj Žižek, “Interview: Slavoj Žižek and Ben Woodward,” *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* [ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman], Melbourne: Re.press, 2011, pg. 406-408)

¹⁰ (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation, 1958-1959* [unpublished typescript], session of February 11th, 1959)

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IX: L’identification, 1961-1962* [unpublished typescript], session of April 4th, 1962)

(Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X: L’angoisse, 1962-1963* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004, pg. 105)

ways, somehow answerable to the life sciences (in particular, evolutionary and neurobiological studies of human beings)?

These queries, orbiting around the significant core matter of the *rapport* between theoretical and empirical materialisms, are at the very heart of a freshly started debate between Žižek and myself, at least as I see it. This debate began with an article of mine (entitled “The Misfeeling of What Happens: Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Damasio, and a Materialist Account of Affects”¹¹) in an issue of the journal *Subjectivity* devoted to Žižek’s work and his response to this contribution, among others, in the same journal issue.¹² The present article is my reply to his response, a reply guided by the questions enumerated in the preceding paragraph. In the course of directly addressing Žižek’s objections, I will refer to several other of his contemporaneous texts in which remarks relevant to this debate surface, including his contributions to the books *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* and *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism* (given both the need for brevity as well as the fact that I have engaged with his pre-2009 writings in great detail on prior occasions, I won’t spend time in what follows on lengthy analyses of his earlier discussions of materialism).

In order properly to frame this reply to Žižek, rapidly sketching its contextual backdrop is necessary. The article “The Misfeeling of What Happens” was extracted from my half of a book manuscript Catherine Malabou and I finished writing together not too long ago, entitled *Self and Emotional Life: Merging Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Neurobiology*¹³ (Žižek mentions Malabou in his response to me, and, as will be seen subsequently, her corpus illuminates important facets of the terrain at stake here). This article consisted, in part, of an assessment of Žižek’s Lacan-inspired criticisms of Damasio’s neuroscientific depictions of affective life laid out in the fourth chapter of his 2006 tome *The Parallax View*. Succinctly stated, the verdict of this assessment was that Damasio is not nearly so guilty of being quite as un-psychoanalytic, so at odds with analytic thinking, as Žižek charges him with being. In establishing this case *contra* Žižek, I attempted to show that discoveries alighted upon in the

¹¹ (Adrian Johnston, “The Misfeeling of What Happens: Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Damasio, and a Materialist Account of Affects,” *Subjectivity*, special issue: “Žižek and Political Subjectivity” [ed. Derek Hook and Calum Neill], vol. 3, no 1, April 2010 pg. 76-100)

¹² (Slavoj Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture,” *Subjectivity*, special issue: “Žižek and Political Subjectivity” [ed. Derek Hook and Calum Neill], vol. 3, no 1, April 2010 pg. 101-116)

¹³ (Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life: Merging Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Neurobiology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012 [forthcoming])

overlapping fields of affective neuroscience and evolutionary biology offer invaluable components for a materialist account of subjectivity faithful to the essential tenets of Freudian-Lacanian theory. While granting the correctness and perspicacity of many of Žižek's indictments (in which Damasio's fellow brain investigator Joseph LeDoux, and the neurosciences as a whole, come under carefully directed fire), I argued there, as elsewhere, that a truly materialist psychoanalytic metapsychology is obligated to reconcile itself with select findings of the life sciences (of course, this reconciliation should be dialectical, involving mutual modifications between these disciplines, albeit without any formal, dogmatic determination in advance of the delicate calibration of what is likely to be the usually uneven balance between the theoretical and empirical dimensions of this dialectic in the ongoing pursuit of its unfolding).

As a number of his interventions reveal (not only *The Parallax View*, but also such books as *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* [1996] and *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* [2004]), Žižek is hardly averse or unsympathetic to attempts at a rapprochement between psychoanalysis and the sciences. Nonetheless, I alleged in "The Misfeeling of What Happens" that his critical treatments of the life sciences in *The Parallax View* (as well as in 2008's *In Defense of Lost Causes*) rely, at certain moments, on a sharp dichotomy between the natural and the anti-natural that these sciences have undermined empirically over the course of the past several decades¹⁴ and that psychoanalytic metapsychology ought not to invoke theoretically (in other texts, I even try to demonstrate that Lacan himself, contrary to accepted exegetical consensus, doesn't subscribe to any standard type of

¹⁴ (Lesley Rogers, *Sexing the Brain*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, pg. 2-3, 5, 20, 23-24, 47-48, 68, 97-98)

(François Ansermet, "Des neurosciences aux logosciences," *Qui sont vos psychanalystes?* [ed. Nathalie Georges, Jacques-Alain Miller, and Nathalie Marchaisson], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002, pg. 377-378, 383)

(Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are*, New York: Penguin Books, 2002, pg. 2-3, 5, 9, 12, 20, 66-67, 91, 296)

(Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull, *The Brain and the Inner World: An Introduction to the Neuroscience of Subjective Experience*, New York: Other Press, 2002, pg. 218, 220-222)

(Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain*, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2003, pg. 162-163, 164, 173-174)

(Jean-Pierre Changeux, *The Physiology of Truth: Neuroscience and Human Knowledge* [trans. M.B. DeBevoise], Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pg. 32-33, 207-208)

(Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pg. 5)

(Eva Jablonka and Marion J. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions: Genetic, Epigenetic, Behavioral, and Symbolic Variation in the History of Life*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005, pg. 1-2, 5-7, 58-60, 62-65, 67, 72-75, 77-78, 109-111, 144-145, 160-161, 166, 176, 189, 191, 193, 204-205, 220-223, 226, 238, 285-286, 319, 344, 372, 378-380)

anti-naturalism predicated upon a clear-cut contrast of nature versus anti-nature [*antiphysis, contre-nature*] and dictating unqualified hostility to biology and its branches¹⁵). Departing from the Žižekian critique of Damasian affective neuroscience, I pled for something I've been struggling to outline preliminarily and programmatically in recent years, that is, an alternate hybrid analytic-scientific vision of human subjectivity as depending upon and arising from a multitude of constitutive temporal-material strata running the full-spectrum gamut from the natural to the non-natural and sandwiched together as a collage of conflicting layers-in-tension.¹⁶ This vision resonates indirectly or directly with a diverse array of references, ranging from, for instance, Althusser's Marxist (and, to a lesser extent, psychoanalytic) picture of a plurality of (historical) times bound up with "relatively autonomous" (social) structures¹⁷ to contemporary neuroscientific characterizations of the evolved brain as a "kludge," a barely-functional hodge-podge jumble of out-of-synch disparate modules.¹⁸ Apropos Althusser, it's worth briefly noting that the materialist perspective informing this inter-

(Eric R. Kandel, "Psychotherapy and the Single Synapse: The Impact of Psychiatric Thought on Neurobiologic Research," *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and the New Biology of Mind*, Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc., 2005, pg. 21)

(Eric R. Kandel, "A New Intellectual Framework for Psychiatry," *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and the New Biology of Mind*, pg. 41-43, 47)

(Eric R. Kandel, "From Metapsychology to Molecular Biology: Explorations Into the Nature of Anxiety," *Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and the New Biology of Mind*, pg. 150)

(François Ansermet and Pierre Magistretti, *Biology of Freedom: Neural Plasticity, Experience, and the Unconscious* [trans. Susan Fairfield], New York: Other Press, 2007, pg. xvi, 8, 10, 239)

¹⁵ (Adrian Johnston, "Ghosts of Substance Past: Schelling, Lacan, and the Denaturalization of Nature," *Lacan: The Silent Partners* [ed. Slavoj Žižek], London: Verso Books, 2006, pg. 34-55)

(Johnston, "Slavoj Žižek's Hegelian Reformation," pg. 14)

(Adrian Johnston, "Conflicted Matter: Jacques Lacan and the Challenge of Secularizing Materialism," *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, no. 19, Spring 2008, pg. 166-188)

(Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pg. 270-273)

(Adrian Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature: Hegel, Freud, Lacan, and Negativity Materialized," *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics and the Dialectic* [ed. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett and Creston Davis], New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pg. 163-168)

(Adrian Johnston, "Turning the Sciences Inside Out: Revisiting Lacan's 'Science and Truth,'" *Concept and Form, Volume Two: Interviews and Essays on the Cahiers pour l'Analyse* [ed. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden], London: Verso Books, 2012 [forthcoming])

(Adrian Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings: Unconscious Affect Between Psychoanalysis, Neuroscience, and Philosophy," in Johnston and Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life*)

¹⁶ (Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005, pg. xxxi-xxxii, 340)

(Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pg. 260-261)

(Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature", pg. 168-170, 175-176)

(Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

¹⁷ (Louis Althusser, "The Object of *Capital*," in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* [trans. Ben Brewster], London: Verso, 2009, pg. 106-108, 110-112, 114-121)

¹⁸ (David J. Linden, *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, pg. 2-3, 5-7, 21-24, 26, 245-246)

vention is closer to that of Mao, as compared with other inheritors of Marx's legacy, in fashions that take a measure of distance from a certain Althusserian "theoreticist" conception of Marxist materialism (in that Althusserians wrongly might accuse the approach to interfacing the philosophical and the scientific adopted here as flirting with what the Althusser of the mid-1960s condemns as empiricist "pragmatism"¹⁹). Incidentally, it's also worth speculating in passing that historical and dialectical materialist handlings of the infrastructure-superstructure distinction at the level of the macrocosm of societies by such different thinkers as Gramsci, Mao, Sartre, and Althusser might harbor the potential to shed much-needed light on the microcosm of the perennial mind-body problem. But, this is a speculation for another time.

Before presenting and responding to Žižek's replies to me, I feel compelled to highlight an aspect of the place from which I respond here. Already in Žižek's *Ontology*, I detected and problematized instances when Žižek appears to deviate from his own version of materialism, a materialism resting on Lacan's "*le grand Autre n'existe pas*" as a central ontological principle (whether this Other be God, Nature, History, Society, or whatever else along these capitalized lines²⁰). Of special relevance to the debate hopefully to be advanced productively by this article are my hesitations with respect to his occasional talk of there being, in addition to the two dimensions of nature and culture, some sort of un-derived third vector (whether labeled the "night of the world," the "death drive," the

(Gary Marcus, *Kludge: The Haphazard Evolution of the Human Mind*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2008, pg. 6-16, 161-163)

(Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, pg. 106-107)

(Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1999, pg. 331)

(Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, pg. 105)

(LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, pg. 31)

(Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pg. 147)

(Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

¹⁹ (Louis Althusser, "From *Capital* to Marx's Philosophy," in Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, pg. 61-62)

(Louis Althusser, "To My English Readers," *For Marx* [trans. Ben Brewster], London: Verso, 2005, pg. 14-15)

(Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic: On the Unevenness of Origins," *For Marx*, pg. 170-171)

(Louis Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966-1967)* [ed. François Matheron; trans. G.M. Goshgarian], London: Verso, 2003, pg. 185-186)

²⁰ (Balmès, *Ce que Lacan dit de l'être*, pg. 122-123)

“vanishing mediator,” etc.) as the root-source of what comes to be subjectivity proper in and for itself (\$).²¹ On my view as first expressed in *Žižek’s Ontology*, a view to be further clarified and sharpened below, Žižek’s periodic summonings of a mysterious neither-natural-nor-cultural force, as an arguably under- or un-explained supplement to his ontology, are both incompatible with an authentically materialist materialism as well as superfluous considering his Lacanian renditions of nature and culture as equally “barred” Others (*qua* inconsistent, conflict-ridden, and so on). In these disagreements, I find my situation to involve being caught between two Žižeks, as it were. However accurate, justifiable, or not, I experience myself as a voice speaking on behalf of a systematic Žižek and against another Žižek who strays from his own best philosophical insights, instead of as a critic intervening from a position purely external to Žižek’s body of thought. As a Lacanian, he hopefully won’t object in principle to having his subjectivity split.

Žižek launches his rebuttal of my article “The Misfeeling of What Happens” by vehemently asserting that any notion of the unconscious able to be extrapolated from Damasio’s reflections would have to exclude key features of the Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic unconscious. On the Freudian hand, the Damasian unconscious leaves no room for anything “beyond the pleasure principle,” namely, the infamous *Todestrieb* so dear to Žižek’s heart. On the Lacanian hand, the non-conscious layers of Damasio’s embodied mind allegedly lack, in their theoretical descriptions provided by him, the mediators of the big Other *qua* symbolic order.²² Žižek also repeats a Lacanian line integral to his critique of Damasio in *The Parallax View* (contained in a section entitled “Emotions Lie, or, Where Damasio Is Wrong”), maintaining that, “for Freud, emotions cheat, with the exception of anxiety”²³ (both the general psychoanalytic issue of unconscious affects and Lacan’s specific interpretation of Freud’s metapsychology of affective life are reassessed in my half of the book with Malabou,²⁴ so the comparison of Freudian-Lacanian with Damasian portraits of things affective will be left to the side in this piece). As he notes in fairness, I too acknowledge a number of contrasts between the analytic and neuroscientific unconscious.²⁵ Indeed, although I sought to narrow the rift Žižek sees yawning between, on the one side, Freud and Lacan, and, on the other side, Damasio and LeDoux, I want to underscore that I in no way intended to close it altogether. For instance, I concur

²¹ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 188-190)

²² (Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture”, pg. 102)

²³ (Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture”, pg. 102)

²⁴ (Johnston, “Misfelt Feelings”)

²⁵ (Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture”, pg. 102)

that the death drive or an equivalent isn't explicitly integrated into Damasio's picture, although I drew attention to sites within the Damasian apparatus where there are receptive (albeit unexploited) openings for distinctively psychoanalytic concepts, such as the *Todestrieb*, that can and should be inserted at those precise loci.²⁶ I'm less ready to grant that Damasio's and LeDoux's conceptions of everything other than self-conscious awareness are utterly devoid of acknowledgements of the influences stemming from what Lacan christens the "symbolic order." Both Damasio and LeDoux recognize and discuss the role of linguistic mediation in the phenomena they study²⁷ (of course, Lacan's and Žižek's multivalent uses of the phrase "big Other" refer to much more than just language, so it must immediately be conceded that certain aspects of this Other don't find expression in affective neuroscience *à la* the two researchers currently under consideration).

Comparing and contrasting Freud, Lacan, Damasio, and LeDoux aside, Žižek adds on the heels of the above that, "I tend to agree with Catherine Malabou that the neuronal unconscious and the Freudian unconscious are not only different, but incompatible."²⁸ However, Žižek's agreement with Malabou on this topic ends here and goes no further.²⁹ For him, to affirm the split of incommensurability between the analytic and neuroscientific versions of the unconscious is also to affirm the autonomy of the former *vis-à-vis* the latter, or even the former's right to correct the latter without being reciprocally corrected by the latter in turn (i.e., the status of the analytic unconscious as a theoretical object is more or less independent of the empirical findings of the neurosciences). For her, this same affirmation dictates the opposite, namely, the task of thoroughly transforming (perhaps as far as immanently negating) psychoanalysis under the influence of contemporary neurobiological investigations (i.e., the independence of the analytic unconscious as a theoretical object is emphatically denied).³⁰ Observing the profound disagreement beneath the façade of consensus between Žižek and

²⁶ (Johnston, "The Misfeeling of What Happens", pg. 81-82, 89-92)
(Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

²⁷ (Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1994, pg. 130, 185, 187-188)
(Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, pg. 218-219, 222)
(Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza*, pg. 72)

(LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, pg. 197-198, 203-204)
(Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings")

²⁸ (Žižek, "Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture", pg. 102)

²⁹ (Slavoj Žižek, "Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject," *Filozofski Vestnik*, "Radical Philosophy?" [ed. Peter Klepec], vol. 29, no. 2, 2008, pg. 9-29)

³⁰ (Catherine Malabou, *Les nouveaux blessés: De Freud à la neurologie, penser les traumatismes contemporains*, Paris: Bayard, 2007, pg. 59-60, 85, 338-339)

Malabou provides an opportunity for me to highlight, as intimated earlier, that I take a stance in-between these two poles. From this dialectical perspective, Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology, to varying extents depending on the specific concepts concerned therein, is “relatively autonomous” (to resort once again to a handy but tricky Marxist turn of phrase) in relation to the sciences. And yet, this variable-degree independence is far from exempting psychoanalysis, especially if it’s of a sincere materialist bent, from a duty to be “plastic” (in Malabou’s precise sense as a combination of firmness and flexibility³¹) in connection with these other disciplines. Additionally, the shape of this plasticity always should be determined concretely in each instance of a potential point of convergence and/or conflict between the analytic and the scientific (i.e., in a non-*a priori* fashion).

Žižek proceeds to claim that, “For Johnston, the ‘denaturalization’ of the human animal which takes place when the human animal is caught in the network of the symbolic order should not be conceived as a radical break with nature.”³² A lot hinges on how one construes the phrase “radical break.” Insofar as Žižek and I share a notion of subjectivity extrapolated from a merging of German idealism and Lacanian theory, we both are against any kind of crude, reductive conflation of the category of the subject with the register of the merely natural and corporeal (as is Malabou also³³). Nonetheless, I would contend (and, on my reading, so too would the more consistently materialist side of Žižek I appeal to in this debate) that a fully rational and atheistic/secular materialism requires a satisfactory account of how, to put it in Hegelese, subject surfaces out of substance alone.³⁴ This account would identify what the material possibility

(Catherine Malabou, *Ontologie de l'accident: Essai sur la plasticité destructrice*, Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2009, pg. 33, 75-77, 83-84)

(Catherine Malabou, “Postface, The Paradoxes of the Principle of Constancy,” in Johnston and Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life*)

³¹ (Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* [trans. Lisabeth During], New York: Routledge, 2005, pg. 8-9, 73-74, 192-193)

(Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* [trans. Sebastian Rand], New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, pg. 5-6, 8, 12, 17, 29-30, 71-72)

(Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction* [trans. Carolyn Shread], New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, pg. 8-9, 59)

³² (Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture”, pg. 102)

³³ (Catherine Malabou, “Préface,” *La chambre du milieu: De Hegel aux neurosciences*, Paris: Hermann, 2009, pg. 9-10)

(Catherine Malabou, “Les enjeux idéologiques de la plasticité neuronale,” *La chambre du milieu*, pg. 213-218, 227-228)

(Catherine Malabou, “Pour une critique de la raison neurobiologique: À propos de Jean-Pierre Changeux, Du Vrai, du Beau, du Bien, Une nouvelle approche neuronale,” *La chambre du milieu*, pg. 229-231, 233, 235-237)

³⁴ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 165-167, 171-174)

(Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation,” pg. 4-7, 9-12, 16-17)

conditions are within the physical being of “nature” for the internal production out of itself of structures and phenomena (with which subjects are inextricably intertwined) that eventually achieve, through naturally catalyzed processes of denaturalization, a type of transcendence-in-immanence³⁵ as a self-relating dynamic in which non-natural causalities come to function within natural-material milieus.³⁶ Hence, for me, the emergence and self-founding of the subject-as-\$ indeed marks a “break with nature.”

Whether this break is “radical” depends on what Žižek means by this adjective. Given my insistence that the negativity of non-natural subjectivity remains susceptible to being buffeted and perturbed (or, as Malabou’s ontology of traumatic accidents has it, disrupted or destroyed) by the natural ground from which it originally arises and with which it ruptures, perhaps my conception of the break of denaturalization isn’t radical enough in Žižek’s eyes. However, too radical a rendering of this break between the natural and the non-natural, a rendering wherein the subject accomplishes an absolutely total and final subtraction from bio-material being and thereby closes in upon itself at the apex of a perfectly completed movement of denaturalization, would be unacceptable in light of Žižek’s commitment to psychoanalysis (so too would be his non-genetic picture of autonomous subjectivity set against the ontogenetic models of subject-formation ineliminable from Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology). This is because he wishes to capture as essential to his picture of subjectivity the sorts of dysfunctions so familiar in analysis. Not only is there now ample empirical scientific evidence that many uniquely human dysfunctions, even though their modes of being psychically subjectified are anything but prescribed beforehand by exclusively biological variables, have their sources in the sub-optimal, evolutionarily slapped-together anatomy of the less-than-completely-coordinated central nervous system (i.e., the kludge-like brain)—from the vantage point of strictly theoretical musings, it seems probable that an excessively radical break with nature *qua* corporeal substance(s) would yield a subject much too smoothly functional for Žižekian psychoanalytic sensibilities.³⁷ An insistence on denaturalization as not-too-radical, as uneven, partial, incomplete, failed, etc., is more likely to be conducive to the construction of a solidly materialist theory of the subject incorporating characteristics of psychical subjectivity at the center of the psychoanalytic depiction of the “human condition.”

³⁵ (Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008, pg. 53-54)

³⁶ (Adrian Johnston, “What Matter(s) in Ontology: Alain Badiou, the Hebb-Event, and Materialism Split from Within,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 13, no. 1, April 2008, pg. 39)

³⁷ (Johnston, “The Misfeeling of What Happens”, pg. 96-97)

Žižek's ensuing employments of Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* in his criticisms are quite revelatory in relation to the issues presently at stake. As regards Kant, Žižek redeploys his interpretation of a note to §82 (in "Book Three: The Faculty of Desire") of the *Anthropology*, a note wherein infants are said to display an innate "passion" (*Leidenschaft*) for freedom.³⁸ Diagnosing what is "missing" from what he describes as my "vision of the archaic natural substance which is gradually, but never completely, civilized, 'mediated' by the symbolic order," he proceeds, with reference to the pre-critical Kant, to state:

We find the first indication of this third dimension—neither nature nor culture—already in Kant, for whom discipline and education do not directly work on our animal nature, forging it into human individuality: as Kant points out, animals cannot be properly educated since their behavior is already predestined by their instincts. What this means is that, paradoxically, in order to be educated into freedom (*qua* moral autonomy and self-responsibility), *I already have to be free* in a much more radical—'noumenal,' monstrous even—sense. The Freudian name for this monstrous freedom, of course, is death drive. It is interesting to note how philosophical narratives of the 'birth of man' are always compelled to presuppose a moment in human (pre)history when (what will become) man is no longer a mere animal and simultaneously not yet a 'being of language,' bound by symbolic Law; a moment of thoroughly 'perverted,' 'denaturalized,' 'derailed' nature which is not yet culture. In his anthropological writings, Kant emphasized that the human animal needs disciplinary pressure in order to tame an uncanny 'unruliness' which seems to be inherent to human nature—a wild, unconstrained propensity to insist stubbornly on one's own will, cost what it may. It is on account of this 'unruliness' that the human animal needs a Master to discipline him: discipline targets this 'unruliness,' not the animal nature in man.³⁹

This paragraph appears verbatim in Žižek's contemporaneous essay "Discipline between Two Freedoms—Madness and Habit in German Idealism,"⁴⁰ followed by some further specifications regarding Kantian discipline.⁴¹ Subsequently, in his sequel essay in the same volume (a piece entitled "Fichte's

³⁸ (Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell], Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, pg. 176)

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso, 1997, pg. 237)
(Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pg. 180-181)

³⁹ (Žižek, "Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture", pg. 103)

⁴⁰ (Slavoj Žižek, "Discipline between Two Freedoms—Madness and Habit in German Idealism," in Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism*, London: Continuum, 2009, pg. 96-97)

⁴¹ (Žižek, "Discipline between Two Freedoms," pg. 98)

Laughter”), Žižek speaks of Hegel as having “no need for a third element.”⁴² And yet, this ardently self-professed Hegelian materialist seems to reach for what he himself, appealing to the authority of Kant-the-idealist, labels a “third dimension” (at this moment, one wonders whether, in the shadows, there might be a very un-Žižekian argument akin to Italian then-Marxist Lucio Colletti’s contention that Marxism is led away from its materialism by relying on the dialectics of Hegelian idealism instead of the purportedly materialist “rational kernel” of the non-metaphysical anti-dogmatism in the critical transcendental idealism much maligned by ostensibly misguided Marxists, from Engels onward, preferring Hegel to Kant⁴³).

My initial response to the Žižek of the passage quoted immediately above is simple: Put in the form of a naïve question, from where does this enigmatic neither-natural-nor-cultural third stratum come? Even if, sticking with Kant’s example of babies, one quite contentiously insists that this untamed excess of impassioned (proto-)autonomy is, at the ontogenetic level of individual subject formation, something intrinsic and hard-wired, that merely pushes the question back to the phylogenetic level without answering it. One is left to wonder what the cause or origin is for this magical kernel of free negativity, this “mysterious flame” (to borrow the title of a book by Colin McGinn advocating a “new mysterianism,” deservedly criticized by Žižek,⁴⁴ which preaches that the mind-body problem, construed as an entirely epistemic difficulty, is inherently insoluble in that the mental cannot convincingly be derived theoretically from the material due to purportedly unsurpassable limits imposed by an inbuilt human “cognitive closure”⁴⁵). From whence does Žižek’s noumenal monstrosity arise if not nature as an inconsistent, Other-less physical universe: God, soul, *res cogitans*, the Absolute self-positing I, the hazy vapors of a ghostly *Geist*...?⁴⁶ I’d rather my materialism fall flat than be three-dimensional in this non-materialist manner. This materialism, which is as much that of another Žižek (the Hegelian-materialist philosopher of transcendental materialism) as it is mine, rests solely on the two dimensions of a barred Real (i.e., what I’ve taken to naming

⁴² (Slavoj Žižek, “Fichte’s Laughter,” in Gabriel and Žižek, *Mythology, Madness and Laughter*, pg. 127)

⁴³ (Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel* [trans. Lawrence Garner], London: Verso, 1979, pg. 59-60, 90-94, 103, 118-122, 192, 213-216)

⁴⁴ (Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*, New York: Routledge, 2004, pg. 134-135)

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, pg. 217)

⁴⁵ (Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, pg. 43-46, 68-76, 101, 104, 197)

⁴⁶ (Johnston, “Turning the Sciences Inside Out”)

a “weak nature,”⁴⁷ having nothing whatsoever to do with coincidental post-modern bandyings of this adjective, as internally divided and self-sundering material substance) and an equally barred Symbolic (i.e., the Lacanian-Žižekian inconsistent Others of culture and related structures).⁴⁸ Anything more than these two dimensions, any Third, is a derivative, emergent by-product of the natural and/or cultural — and not an inexplicable given always-already there (following the Lacan of the second sentence of the *écrit* on the mirror stage, a Cartesian- or Fichtean-style I is to be eschewed as a non-genetic first principle, although this isn’t tantamount to a rejection *tout court* of *Cogito*-like subjectivity⁴⁹).

To put my cards on the table in terms of making explicit my philosophically ground-zero axioms, decisions, and intuitions, I’m enough of a naturalist — mine is a non-reductive naturalism of an auto-denaturalizing nature, hence really neither a strict naturalism nor anti-naturalism — to wager that an avoidance or refusal of an explanation for the natural/material genesis of non-natural/more-than-material beings and happenings (such as Lacan’s \$-as-*parlêtre* alluded to by Žižek’s phrase “being of language”) is, as the Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* would warn, a dangerous concession cracking open the door to the irrationalities of obscurantist idealisms, spiritualisms, and theisms. In a pre-publication draft version of his debate with the backward-looking theologian John Milbank in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, Žižek declares that, “the ‘theological turn’ of postmodernity is one of THE figures of the enemy for me.” If so, he should be warier of the ways in which he encourages, however unintentionally, attempts to appropriate his work by fanatical advocates of a terribly traditional religiosity deludedly romanticizing the wretched darkness of medieval pre-modernity (regardless of this profound conservatism being trendily repackaged in the flashy guises of “radical orthodoxy” or any variant of “post-secularism” in Continental philosophical circles, including an oxymoronic “theological materialism”).

A few additional remarks warrant formulating before inquiring into the justness and accuracy of Žižek’s reading of the Kant of the *Anthropology*. In the wake of mobilizing the Hegel of *The Philosophy of History*, portrayed as agreeing with

⁴⁷ (Johnston, “Conflicted Matter,” pg. 182-188)

(Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature”, pg. 162-163, 175-176)

⁴⁸ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 122, 169-171, 180, 208-209, 234, 236, 272, 285-287)

(Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation,” pg. 18-19)

⁴⁹ (Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* [trans. Bruce Fink], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006, pg. 75)

(Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 53-54)

the Kantian insistence on freedom as something “in nature more than nature itself” (to paraphrase Lacan⁵⁰)—the role of Hegel’s philosophy in this discussion will be taken up after an examination of Kant’s *Anthropology*—Žižek cites some reflections by Jonathan Lear on sexuality as situated between animal naturalness and human non-naturalness.⁵¹ Elsewhere, he likewise expresses approval of Lear’s recasting of the Freudian death drive⁵² (with Žižek’s recourse to the latter notion clearly being crucial to our exchange). This recasting proposes that the Freudian word “*Todestrieb*,” although naming a hypostatization mistakenly performed by Freud himself, is a concept-term not for a positive thing, but for the negativity of the pleasure principle’s disruptive malfunctioning, its constitutive inability always and invariably to assert its intra-psychical hegemonic dominance (in *Time Driven*, I similarly suggest that Freud’s problem-plagued death drive is best salvaged and reconstructed as designating a discord built into the metapsychological architecture of any and every drive [*Trieb*], more specifically, an antagonistic temporal split between a repetitive “axis of iteration” [the source and pressure of a drive] and a repetition-thwarting “axis of alteration” [the aim and object of a drive]⁵³). That is to say, according to Lear and the Žižek who sides with him,⁵⁴ there is only the dysfunctional pleasure principle, and nothing more; in other words, there isn’t a second, deeper counter-principle externally opposing this lone principle. Once again enacting the gesture of playing off one Žižek against another, I am inclined to pit the Žižek who endorses Lear’s thesis apropos the death drive against the Žižek who appears precisely to succumb to the temptation of hypostatization for which Lear rebukes Freud, namely, treating the *Todestrieb* as a substantial “third dimension” that’s perplexingly neither natural nor cultural. By contrast, for both me and the Žižek who appropriates the Learian death drive, there actually exist nothing more than the two dimensions of nature and culture, plus the insubstantial negativity (i.e., not a positive

⁵⁰ (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan], New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977, pg. 268)

⁵¹ (Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture”, pg. 104) (Jonathan Lear, *Freud*, New York: Routledge, 2005, pg. 19, 75)

⁵² (Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, pg. 13-14, 146)

(Jonathan Lear, *Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, pg. 80-81, 84-85)

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, pg. 70-71)

(Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 186-187)

(Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature”, pg. 159-163)

⁵³ (Johnston, *Time Driven*, pg. 123-154, 175-183, 237, 330-331, 368-369)

⁵⁴ (Žižek, “Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject,” pg. 19)

third thing) of the conflicts within and between, but still immanent to, these two dimensions. What's more, in Schellingian language agreeable to us, I would add that, for a materialism not without its carefully qualified (quasi-)naturalism, the *Urgrund* (as also an *Ungrund*)⁵⁵ of a weak nature (exemplified in this context by Lear's sub-optimal pleasure principle minus the Other of a more profound, underlying meta-law such as the hypostatized version of the *Todestrieb*) is the ultimate baseless base of autonomous subjectivity, whether ontogenetically and/or phylogenetically.⁵⁶ Lumping together allusions to the eclectic set of Paul Churchland, Douglas Hofstadter, and Badiou, this non-reductive materialism is a self-eliminative one (in the sense of natural materiality as auto-negating *qua* canceling of its own dictates) in which the I is a "strange loop" (or loop-hole⁵⁷) ensconced within a nature from which has been "subtracted" this nature's fantasized strength (i.e., its hallucinated deterministic rule as an inescapable, all-powerful tyrant). Through this approach, the I of autonomous subjectivity isn't added to nature as some sort of supplementary super-nature, but arrived at instead through withdrawing things traditionally misattributed to nature.

What about *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*? The least one can state is that the letter of Kant's text is ambiguous enough to render Žižek's presentation of it in his response to me contestable, although admittedly defensible (a later related Kantian essay, his "Speculative Beginning of Human History" of 1786, recapitulates these same ambiguities⁵⁸). On the one hand, Kant overtly claims that the passions for freedom and sex are innate ("*natürlichen*," rather than "acquired" [*erworbenen*]) to human nature.⁵⁹ This detail goes against the grain of Žižek's reading, in that the *Leidenschaft für Freiheit* is counted amongst those features which humans are endowed with by nature, instead of this being bequeathed to them by a neither-natural-nor-cultural (I am tempted uncharitably to employ the adjective "supernatural") "x." On the other hand, two additional details testify in favor of the interpretation upon which Žižek relies: One, in the footnote referring to the example of infants, Kant describes this always-already present sense of autonomy as "a vague idea (or an analogous representation)"

⁵⁵ (Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pg. 109-110, 120-122)

⁵⁶ (Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature", pg. 162-163, 175-176)

⁵⁷ (Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pg. 112-113, 167-176, 186-187, 195-196, 208, 236)

⁵⁸ (Immanuel Kant, "Speculative Beginning of Human History," *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* [trans. Ted Humphrey], Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1983, pg. 49-51)

(Johnston, *Time Driven*, pg. 333-335, 340-341)

⁵⁹ (Immanuel Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, Kant's gesammelte Schriften: Band VII*, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1917, pg. 267-268)

(Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, pg. 175)

(Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pg. 180-181)

“*einer dunkelen Idee (oder dieser analogen Vorstellung)*”⁶⁰—in Kant’s philosophical universe, an innate *Idee* or *Vorstellung* suggests something different from a naturally instinctual animal impulse—that “evolves together with the animal nature” (“*sich mit der Tierheit zugleich entwickele*”)⁶¹ as developmentally parallel-yet-distinct from this nature; Two, in a move Žižek mirrors in his above-mentioned reference to Lear on sexuality, Kant goes on to stipulate that human passion, including those innate ones for freedom and sex, cannot be conflated with rudimentary animal inclination (*Reigung*).⁶² As does Lear regarding sexuality (and Fichte regarding the not-I, for that matter), Kant deploys an argument whose basic structural logic is that whatever is dis-identified with as other than the same or the self (passion as apparently animalistic inclination, or Fichte’s non-me and Lear’s seemingly natural sexuality) can manifest itself as such only in and through its mediated constitution within the framework of scaffolding established by the same or the self (understanding [*Verstand*] and reason [*Vernunft*], or the Fichtean I and the Learian denaturalized, peculiarly-human psyche). In short, the other-than-human can be what it is not as an *an sich*, but solely thanks to being a correlate of already-there humanity. Without pushing the *Anthropology* itself on the tensions internal to its proclamations, suffice it for now to say that while the facets of it amenable to the Žižek replying to me aren’t problematic for an idealist like Kant (or Fichte), they ought to be deeply troubling for a materialist. When Žižek qualifies the death drive as “metaphysical,”⁶³ maybe he should be taken more literally than he might mean to be.

Curiously, in his subsequent recourse to Hegel’s *The Philosophy of History*, Žižek winds up, despite his adamant recurrent self-identifications as a dyed-in-the-wool Hegelian, wielding the earlier-glossed Kantian-Fichtean-Learian logic to counter both Hegel and me (Colletti again comes to mind at this juncture). In the beginning of Žižek’s turn to Hegel here, it sounds as though he has this post-Kantian German idealist merely reiterating what he imputes to Kant apropos there allegedly being something more-than-natural inherent and internal to human nature itself (specifically, the zero-level void of a monstrous, perverse excess of enflamed free will operative from the get-go).⁶⁴ However, three Hegel

⁶⁰ (Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, pg. 269)

(Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, pg. 176)

⁶¹ (Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, pg. 269)

(Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, pg. 176)

⁶² (Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, pg. 269-270)

(Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, pg. 177)

⁶³ (Žižek, “The Fear of Four Words,” pg. 92-93)

(Johnston, *Time Driven*, pg. 368-375)

⁶⁴ (Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture”, pg. 103-105)

scholars whose work Žižek greatly admires — these three are Gérard Lebrun (his 1972 *La patience du Concept: Essai sur le Discours hégélien* is one of Žižek's favorite books on Hegel), Malabou (with her *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*), and Robert Pippin (his 1989 *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* lends crucial support to Žižek's depiction of the Kant-Hegel relationship⁶⁵) — all would take issue with attributing to Hegel a Kantian-style anti-naturalism according to which an un-derived supernatural surplus originally dwells within nature as an inherent potential transcendently responsible for the effective existence of an utterly non-natural, autonomous subject.⁶⁶ What's more, even within the passages from the "Introduction" to *The Philosophy of History* Žižek cites, Hegel is unambiguous in his racist references to African "savages": They are spoken of as "natural man in his completely wild and untamed state" ("*natürlichen Menschen in seiner ganzen Wildheit und Unbändigkeit*"),⁶⁷ as hopelessly submerged in the violent stasis of a pre-historical "Natural condition" ("*Naturzustand*").⁶⁸ Hence, they aren't depicted by Hegel in quite the same guise as Žižek's Kant of the *Anthropology* characterizes human babies. Moreover, Hegel would be loathe to allow for insinuations risking an equivocation between this sort of "state of nature" and freedom proper.

But, something very interesting comes to light if one provisionally entertains Žižek's reading of Hegel's *The Philosophy of History* in conjunction with particular statements to be found within the pages of this text's "Introduction." Therein, Hegel remarks that, "Spirit is at war with itself" ("*So ist der Geist in ihm selbst sich entgegen*").⁶⁹ For the version of psychoanalytically-influenced Žižekian materialism I defend in many other places (and defend on this occasion

⁶⁵ (Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pg. 6-7, 16-17, 33-35, 79, 120-121, 132, 225, 248)

(Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, pg. 265-266)

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, London: Verso, 1999, pg. 290)

⁶⁶ (Gérard Lebrun, *La patience du Concept: Essai sur le Discours hégélien*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972, pg. 145-146)

(Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, pg. 26-27, 37-38, 45, 73-74, 192-193)

(Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pg. 14-15, 36-64, 112-113)

⁶⁷ (G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, Sämtliche Werke, Band 11*, Stuttgart: Fr. Frommann Verlag, 1961, pg. 137)

(G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* [trans. J. Sibree], New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956, pg. 93)

⁶⁸ (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, pg. 144)

(Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pg. 98-99)

⁶⁹ (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, pg. 90)

(Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pg. 55)

against what I perceive as momentary non-materialist deviations on the part of Žižek himself), nature too (i.e., the not-All material universe of physical beings) could be described as “at war with itself.” As Alenka Zupančič observes, “a crucial lesson of materialism... refers to the inconsistencies and contradictions of matter itself.”⁷⁰ Prior to this observation, she notes in her study of comedy that, “comedy’s frequent reduction of man to (his) nature makes a further comic point about nature itself: nature is far from being as ‘natural’ as we might think, but is itself driven by countless contradictions and discrepancies.”⁷¹ Her point is pertinent in this setting too, and she elegantly articulates an idea shared by her, me,⁷² Žižek, Lear,⁷³ and, for instance, the cognitivist philosopher of mind Thomas Metzinger.⁷⁴ All five of us generally agree that naturalizing human beings entails a reciprocal denaturalization of natural being—and this because the effort to render the strangenesses of subjectivity immanent to nature forces a radical recasting of fundamental, proto-theoretical images and ideas of nature itself (that is, if, as per a not-entirely-anti-naturalist materialism, nature is taken to be both the wellspring and enveloping environs of human subjects, containing such beings, these *parlêtres*, as internal to itself). So, in blending Hegel’s ethnocentric comments about the undomesticated volatility of natural-*qua*-ahistorical Africa with Žižek’s loose appropriation of Hegelian nature as per *The Philosophy of History*, one arrives at the following synthesis: Nature itself, “red in tooth and claw,” is an anarchic battlefield lacking harmony, stability, wholeness, and so on; in other words, it’s anything but a cosmic unity of synchronized spheres placidly co-existing with one another. For a dialectical tradition running from Hegel through Marx, Freud, Mao and up to Žižek (himself avowedly influenced by these predecessors), conflictual heterogeneity, instead of peaceful homogeneity, is to be discovered even within the most basic substrates of material being.⁷⁵

Hegel himself voices some fascinatingly suggestive pronouncements about nature in *The Philosophy of History*. In its “Introduction,” he asserts, “Mere nature is too weak to keep its genera and species pure, when conflicting with alien elementary influences” (“*Die Ohnmacht der Natur vermag ihre allgemeinen Klassen und Gattungen nicht gegen andere elementarische Momente*

⁷⁰ (Zupančič, *The Odd One In*, pg. 47)

⁷¹ (Zupančič, *The Odd One In*, pg. 7)

⁷² (Johnston, “Slavoj Žižek’s Hegelian Reformation,” pg. 4)

(Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 200-201, 240-241)

(Johnston, “Turning the Sciences Inside Out”)

⁷³ (Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature*, pg. 210-211)

⁷⁴ (Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*, New York: Basic Books, 2009, pg. 40, 215-216)

⁷⁵ (Johnston, “Conflicted Matter,” pg. 172-182)

festzuhalten”)⁷⁶ (in his compressed outline of the *Encyclopedia* project, Hegel talks similarly about the “weakness of the concept” exhibited by the chaotic proliferating of earthly life bursting forth out of the fecund soil of nature⁷⁷). He later goes on to say, in the paragraph opening the treatment of the “Geographical Basis of History,” that:

Nature should not be rated too high nor too low... awakening consciousness takes its rise surrounded by natural influences alone (*nur in der Natur*), and every development of it is the reflection of Spirit back upon itself in opposition to the immediate, unreflected character of mere nature. Nature is therefore one element in this antithetic abstracting process; Nature is the first standpoint from which man can gain freedom within himself, and this liberation must not be rendered difficult by natural obstructions. Nature, as contrasted with Spirit, is a quantitative mass, whose power must not be so great as to make its single force omnipotent (*allmächtig*).⁷⁸

Without the time to do anything close to exegetical justice to Hegel’s philosophy, these lines are quoted here in order to claim Hegel as a precursor of my Žižek-inspired materialism of a weak nature. Likewise, the Žižek with whom I don’t disagree can be seen characteristically wearing a Hegelian badge with fierce pride at various moments in his contemporary writings, such as when he states, “*spirit is part of nature*, and can occur/arise only through a monstrous self-affliction (distortion, *derangement*) of nature,”⁷⁹ and, “what is ‘Spirit’ at its most elementary? The ‘wound’ of nature.”⁸⁰ As both Pippin (as cited earlier) and Žižek⁸¹ justly maintain, Hegelian Spirit isn’t a substantial, noun-like thing akin to the Cartesian *res cogitans* as a positivized being, entity, or object. Rather, *Geist* is a kinetic, verb-like process. Moreover, this non-substantial dynamism of negativity, as a movement of denaturalization giving rise to complex subject-beings whose complexity escapes and disrupts control by the laws and mechanisms of natural materialities, is entirely immanent to nature itself—with the latter thus being envisioned in Hegelian philosophy as an internally self-sundering substance set against itself (“*selbst sich entgegen*”).

⁷⁶ (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, pg. 103)

(Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pg. 65)

⁷⁷ (G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings* [ed. Ernst Behler], New York: Continuum, 1990, #292 [pg. 196])

⁷⁸ (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, pg. 121)

(Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pg. 80)

⁷⁹ (Žižek, “Discipline between Two Freedoms,” pg. 117)

⁸⁰ (Žižek, “The Fear of Four Words,” pg. 71)

⁸¹ (Žižek, “The Fear of Four Words,” pg. 71-72)

(Slavoj Žižek, “Is it still possible to be a Hegelian today?,” *The Speculative Turn*, pg. 202-223)

What Hegel terms the “impotence” or “weakness” of the natural provides, as a contingent material condition of possibility, the cracks and fissures of elbow room for the immanent transcendence of nature by Spirit *qua* more-than-material autonomous subjectivity still embedded in, but not governed by, its physical ground(s). And, even if, measured against the standards of post-Baconian scientific method, Hegel was presciently right for the wrong speculative reasons, he nevertheless was right. To take just one set of cutting-edge scientific sub-domains among others, non-reductive versions of evolutionary psychology and meme theory (put forward by such thinkers as Richard Dawkins,⁸² Susan Blackmore,⁸³ Daniel Dennett,⁸⁴ and Keith Stanovich⁸⁵) share in common an unconscious Hegelianism in the form of an underlying dialectical thesis to the effect that, to lean on Stanovich’s language in particular, humans are nature-created Frankensteins who can and do rebel against their creator, a creator without sufficient power either to forestall this rebellion in advance or quash it after its outburst so as to rein these disobedient offspring back under the yoke of defied old authority. The sciences themselves are beginning to show that such incarnations of the notion of nature as evolution and genes are, as Hegel would put it, too weak, too powerless (*ohnmächtig*), to dictate the course of lives with an unwavering iron fist.⁸⁶ Human subjects are living proof that this imagined omnipotent big Other, this idol, of an outdated, bankrupt, and scientifically falsified scientism has, in fact, clay feet.

In the closing sentences of his reply to my piece “The Misfeeling of What Happens,” Žižek, after the above-mentioned invocation of Lear on sexuality, corrects both Hegel and me. He contends:

... from the Freudian standpoint, Hegel has to be immanently criticized here: it is not just that sexuality is the animal substance which is then ‘sublated’ into civilized modes and rituals, gentrified, disciplined, etc. — the excess itself of sexuality which threatens to explode the ‘civilized’ constraints, sexuality as unconditional Passion, is the result of Culture... In this way, the civilization/culture retroactively posits/transforms its own natural presuppositions: culture retroactively ‘denaturalizes’ nature itself, and this is what Freud called the Id,

⁸² (Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, pg. 207-208, 213, 215)

⁸³ (Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pg. 79-80, 99-100, 235)

⁸⁴ (Daniel C. Dennett, *Freedom Evolves*, New York: Viking, 2003, pg. 90-91, 93)

⁸⁵ (Keith E. Stanovich, *The Robot’s Rebellion: Finding Meaning in the Age of Darwin*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, pg. xii, 12-13, 15-16, 20-22, 25, 28, 67, 82-84, 142, 247)

⁸⁶ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 174-176, 181, 203-208)

(Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature”, pg. 169, 175-176)

libido. So, back to Johnston, this retroactive excess of de-naturalized nature is missing in the image he proposes of a gradual cultural ‘mediation’ of nature.⁸⁷

I’m not necessarily committed to a gradualist perspective as regards emergent denaturalization (if anything, I’m more inclined in the direction of a “punctuated equilibrium” model *à la* Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould⁸⁸ — as LeDoux hints, evolution does not exclude revolution⁸⁹). Anyhow, that aside, with reference to the third session of Lacan’s fourth seminar, a session entitled by Jacques-Alain Miller “The Signifier and the Holy Spirit,”⁹⁰ Žižek articulates this same line of thought in a separate text:

...the Holy Ghost stands for the symbolic order as that which cancels (or, rather, suspends) the entire domain of ‘life’ — lived experience, the libidinal flux, the wealth of emotions, or, to put it in Kant’s terms, the ‘pathological’: when we locate ourselves within the Holy Ghost, we are transubstantiated, we enter another life beyond the biological one.⁹¹

Žižek’s recourse to blatantly religious language in this specific vein (including Kant’s thinly sublimated, barely secularized version of such language) arguably is no accident or coincidence. Another of the intuitions informing my overall position can be conveyed as the thesis that, especially on the terrain of ideology, the Enlightenment tension between the materialism of (or shaped by) science and the idealism of religion (as theology, spiritualism, etc.) continues to face us as a “point” in Badiou’s precise sense as per *Logics of Worlds*.⁹² That is to say, confronted side-by-side, the *Weltanschauungen* of scientificity and religiosity contain, in however concealed or obfuscated a state, a fundamental and unavoidable either/or choice between mutually-exclusive commitments (this assertion being faithfully in line with Engels, Lenin, and Freud, among others). In my view, the Žižek who conjures up an occult “x” to account for there being free subjects (and, in so doing, who relies upon a still-Christian Kant more than anyone else) is forced to embrace flagrantly theological terminology. By

⁸⁷ (Žižek, “Some Concluding Notes on Violence, Ideology, and Communist Culture”, pg. 104-105)

⁸⁸ (Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, “Punctuated Equilibria: The Tempo and Mode of Evolution Reconsidered,” *Models in Paleobiology* [ed. Thomas J.M. Schopf], San Francisco: Freeman Cooper and Company, 1972, pg. 82-115)

⁸⁹ (LeDoux, *Synaptic Self*, pg. 198)

⁹⁰ (Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IV: La relation d’objet, 1956-1957* [ed. Jacques-Alain Miller], Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994, pg. 41-58)

(Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature”, pg. 170-175)

⁹¹ (Žižek, “Is it still possible to be a Hegelian today?”, pg. 217-218)

⁹² (Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event, 2* [trans. Alberto Toscano], London: Continuum, 2009, pg. 399-401, 403-435, 437-447, 577, 591)

(Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations*, pg. 62-66, 71-75, 80)

contrast, I insist, in fidelity to another, systematically materialist Žižek, the one portrayed in *Žižek's Ontology*, that no such mysterious Third can and should be posited; this sort of Third is ideologically risky in addition to being theoretically gratuitous. Going a step further, I would even venture to propose that, echoing Churchill's overused one-liner, psychoanalysis and the physical sciences are the worst bases for philosophical materialism and leftist ideology critique except for all those others tried from time to time.

Before concluding this intervention, I have three responses to Žižek's critique of Hegel and me, apart from my answer to his question "Is it still possible to be a Hegelian today?" (my answer being that this really is possible for both him and me to a much greater extent than the Žižek of this specific back-and-forth between us seems to admit). First, it's unclear to me whether his non-Hegelian and purportedly Freudian (Freud's engagements with biology render this appeal to authority dubitable⁹³) conception of the "cultural 'mediation' of nature" is epistemological, ontological, or both. I suspect that, given his general philosophical leanings as well as recent textual evidence,⁹⁴ Žižek intends to claim that the retroactive denaturalization of nature is ontological, namely, an *après-coup* "transubstantiation" that, as it were, goes all the way down, permeating and saturating nature through and through.

If Žižek's intention is indeed to posit a real cultural-symbolic mediation of nature in which the latter, in its material actuality, is thoroughly and exhaustively digested by the former, then this leads into my second response to him. Circumnavigating back to a query asked at the outset of this essay, Žižek's indictments of me within the parameters of a discussion in which the *rapport* between philosophical materialism and the physical sciences (especially the life sciences) is under dispute raise the issue of whether or not the theoretical ought to be constrained methodologically by the empirical. Žižek speaks as though all of the above could be adjudicated without leaving the philosopher's armchair. But, wording my objection to this in a Hegelian style, the history of philosophy, in its development in tandem with other disciplines and practices, bears witness to a dynamic within which the mobile line of division between the empirical and the theoretical is a distinction internal to the empirical itself.

⁹³ (Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature", pg. 160-162)

⁹⁴ (Slavoj Žižek, "From *objet a* to Subtraction," *Lacanian Ink*, no. 30, Fall 2007, pg. 138-139)

(Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, London: Verso, 2008, pg. 435, 440, 442)

(Slavoj Žižek, "Ecology," *The Examined Life: Excursions with Contemporary Thinkers* [ed. Astra Taylor], New York: The New Press, 2009, pg. 159)

(Žižek, "The Fear of Four Words," pg. 70)

(Žižek, "Discipline between Two Freedoms," pg. 104)

Put differently, problems previously able to be posed only at the level of the philosophical/theoretical often come to be grasped in time as properly posed at the level of the scientific/empirical. As already stated in “The Misfeeling of What Happens,”⁹⁵ I am convinced that the question of whether or not denaturalization, so to speak, hits rock bottom without remainder is, for a materialism not without its naturalism, both a genuine question as well as one that can and should admit empirical adjudication as an indispensable ingredient in the process of its attempted resolution.⁹⁶

My third response to Žižek is that the Kantian-Fichtean logic informing his replies to me brings him into proximity with a type of anti-naturalist idealism he himself has been appropriately careful to avoid in other instances.⁹⁷ As he stipulates in *Tarrying with the Negative* (one of his very best philosophical works), “simply because the opposition between nature and culture is always-already culturally overdetermined, i.e., that no particular element can be isolated as ‘pure nature,’ does not mean that ‘everything is culture.’ ‘Nature’ qua Real remains the unfathomable X which resists cultural ‘gentrification.’”⁹⁸ Although I have reservations with respect to the supposed unfathomability of this “x,” I enthusiastically endorse the rest of the content of this quotation and want to remind Žižek of it. I would tack on that, as hypothesized in “The Misfeeling of What Happens,” it’s less problematic and more plausible for the kind of materialist ontology I think is most valid and legitimate to speculate that the real genesis of autonomous subjectivity, of the *parlêtre-qua-\$*, splits the material ground of its being into both the first Real of a nature undigested by cultural mediation and the second Real of a nature mediated by culture (this second Real being exemplified by the notions of nature and sexuality Žižek employs as examples against me). Žižek’s own subtle and detailed delineations of the Lacanian register of the Real encourage such a move to be made (particularly his valuable distinction between the “Real-as-presupposed” and the “Real-as-posed”).⁹⁹ In short, I refuse what I see as a false dichotomy, a specious forced choice. As in psychoanalytic interpretation as linked to the crucial analytic concept of overdetermination, when one is faced with the choice between “this or that,” the right answer, an answer refusing one of the key premises of the question itself, frequently is “Yes, please!” (i.e., it’s not one or the other, but both).

⁹⁵ (Johnston, “The Misfeeling of What Happens”, pg. 86, 95-97)

⁹⁶ (Johnston, “Misfelt Feelings”)

⁹⁷ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 16-20, 149-152)

⁹⁸ (Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, pg. 129)

⁹⁹ (Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 18-19, 145-161)

The Žižek with whom I feel the deepest solidarity is alive and well today. Quite recently, he proclaims:

...to be an actual naturalist is not to subscribe to necessary fiction, but to really believe in materialism. It is... not enough to insist that Kant and Hegel have to teach us something about the realm of normativity which takes place in the wider domain of the realm of nature. It is, on the contrary, important to re-appropriate German Idealism to a fuller extent. If discourse, representation, mind, or thought in general cannot consistently be opposed to the substantial real which is supposed to be given beforehand, independent of the existence of concept-mongering creatures, then we have to bite the bullet of idealism: *we need a concept of the world or the real which is capable of accounting for the replication of reality within itself.*¹⁰⁰

Along related lines, he declares in a contemporaneous text that, “we are subjects only through a monstrous bodily distortion.”¹⁰¹ In resonance with these remarks of Žižek’s, the transcendental materialism of a weak nature I advocate, itself profoundly marked by his interlinked ontology and theory of the subject, gestures at a vision of nature as itself monstrous, as self-distorting (insofar as explaining the emergence out of nature of humans *qua* deranged monsters rebelling against nature requires a much weirder picture of nature than standard, traditional species of naturalism usually offer). This vision has no need (nor does Žižek, despite his reaction to me) for imagining the presence of a supernatural excess/surplus as a neither-natural-nor-cultural third power miraculously sparking the *ex nihilo* irruption of peculiarly human subjectivities running amok down paths of denaturalization. Self-sundering natural-material substance is auto-disruptive enough to account for these explosions of unrest, of the restlessness of negativity. Where I perhaps go further than Žižek, beyond laboring to revivify German idealism, is in the amount of explanatory jurisdiction I grant to the empirical sciences (particularly biology and its offshoots, given my interests) in the struggle to construct a truly contemporary materialism with both philosophical and political ramifications.

Not only do I wholeheartedly second Žižek’s cry to “repeat Lenin”¹⁰²—for theoretical in addition to political materialism, I think the moment is ripe to call

¹⁰⁰ (Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction: A Plea for a Return to Post-Kantian Idealism,” *Mythology, Madness and Laughter*, pg. 13)

¹⁰¹ (Žižek, “Dialectical Clarity Versus the Misty Conceit of Paradox,” pg. 277)

¹⁰² (Johnston, *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations*, pg. 115-116)

for repeating Engels¹⁰³ (as well as the Mao of “On Contradiction”¹⁰⁴). *Contra* Lukács’ still-prevailing condemnatory verdict on any “dialectics of nature,”¹⁰⁵ one quite convincingly could maintain that the main flaw of Engels’ efforts to conquer the territories of the sciences and claim them on behalf of Marxist materialism is that these efforts were ahead of their time, that the sciences of his era weren’t yet ready to receive these aggressive overtures. But, starting with such mid-twentieth-century scientific breakthroughs as Donald O. Hebb’s research on the psycho-physiological mechanisms of learning,¹⁰⁶ the biological sciences have managed to “weaken” empirically their image of (human) nature (in the precise sense of natural weakness specified previously). Through this self-induced weakening, empirical, experimental studies of the living material foundations of humanity have given us, in forms like neuroplasticity and epigenetics, the wiggle room we need and want for a materialist ontology of freedom (such as that desired by Žižek). These scientists are falling into our hands through the cunning of their own reason.

Colletti identifies the Italian Renaissance thinker Giovanni Pico della Mirandola as an ancestral precursor of Marx in terms of the foundations of the latter’s idea of human beings as “generic”¹⁰⁷ (i.e., as nature-less by nature, born faceless and taking on plastic visages via the labor-mediated, historicizing subject-object dialectic). Agamben also refers to Pico della Mirandola,¹⁰⁸ similarly recognizing the radicality of this Renaissance author’s humanism (as a humanism of anonymous humanity, akin to what Žižek detects in Descartes’

¹⁰³ (Frederick Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science*, Second Edition, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959, pg. 19-22, 35-39)

(Frederick Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* [trans. C.P. Dutt], New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1940, pg. 1-34, 279-310)

¹⁰⁴ (Mao Tse-Tung, “On Contradiction,” *On Practice and Contradiction* [ed. Slavoj Žižek], London: Verso, 2007, pg. 67-102)

(Johnston, “Conflicted Matter,” pg. 170-176)

¹⁰⁵ (Georg Lukács, “What is Orthodox Marxism?,” *History and Class Consciousness* [trans. Rodney Livingstone], Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971, pg. 24)

¹⁰⁶ (Donald O. Hebb, *The Organization of Behavior: A Neuropsychological Theory*, New York: Wiley, 1949, pg. 63, 70)

(Johnston, “What Matter(s) in Ontology,” pg. 41)

¹⁰⁷ (Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, pg. 234, 238-241, 243-246)

¹⁰⁸ (Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* [trans. Kevin Attell], Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, pg. 29-30)

(Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 114-116)

*Cogito*¹⁰⁹) announced in his 1486 oration “On the Dignity of Man”¹¹⁰ (in relation to Sartre, Badiou, despite what he owes to Althusser and structuralism, recognizes in a Sartrean humanism¹¹¹ resonating with Colletti’s Renaissance-indebted Marx a radicalism allowing it to converge with such an opposite as the anti-humanism of Foucault¹¹²). In the nineteenth century, aspects of German romanticism, Marxism (specifically, Marx’s analyses of industrial mechanization), and existentialism herald subsequent critiques of post-Galilean scientificity as limited, nihilistic, and vulgar *vis-à-vis* the multifaceted richness of lived human experience. By the twentieth century, the majority of Continental philosophers, with such odd bedfellows as Husserl, Lukács, Heidegger, Sartre, and Adorno to the fore, become suspicious of, if not utterly hostile to, the empirical, experimental sciences of modernity. Both mathematized science generally and the life sciences specifically come to be viewed as lamentably reductive and objectifying; from this perspective, a perspective shared by a number of figures on both the right and left sides of the political spectrum, these disciplines are seen as incorrigibly complicit with a range of afflictions plaguing modern societies and their inhabitants. In defiance of European philosophy’s long-standing, deeply entrenched aversion to the “hard sciences” perceived as diametrically-opposed, inassimilable adversaries, the hour has arrived for philosophical materialism to storm the gates of these sciences. Whether the scientists themselves are aware of it or not, their fields have been primed by them to receive the inscription of a portrait of human subjectivity whose first glimmerings already are to be glimpsed in a fifteenth-century ode inaugurating Renaissance humanism. The life sciences are no longer the enemy of the dignity Pico della Mirandola lyrically and lavishly praises. However wittingly or unwittingly, they have become its ally, the very ground for a scientifically-informed materialism incorporating the radical humanism (maybe even superhumanism) of Sartrean-style atheist existentialism. Both humanists and materialists have every reason to be unshakably confident. The future definitely is ours.

¹⁰⁹ (Slavoj Žižek, “Introduction: Cogito as a Shibboleth,” *Cogito and the Unconscious* [ed. Slavoj Žižek], Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, pg. 3-4, 6-7)

(Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pg. 11-12, 21-22, 41-43, 55-58, 80, 166-167, 187, 231, 265)

¹¹⁰ (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “On the Dignity of Man,” *On the Dignity of Man* [trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, Paul J.W. Miller, and Douglas Carmichael], Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998, pg. 4-5)

¹¹¹ (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* [trans. Philip Mairet], London: Methuen, 1948, pg. 27-28, 42-43)

(Johnston, “What Matter(s) in Ontology,” pg. 41-42)

¹¹² (Alain Badiou, *The Century* [trans. Alberto Toscano], Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, pg. 165-178)