

St. Paul among the Philosophers



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CONTENTS

	· ACKNOWLEDGMENTS · ix
INTRODUCTION	POSTCARDS FROM PAUL: SUBTRACTION VERSUS GRAFTING · <i>John D. Caputo</i> · 1
ONE	PAUL AMONG THE PHILOSOPHERS
1	St. Paul, Founder of the Universal Subject · <i>Alain Badiou</i> · 27
2	From Job to Christ: A Paulinian Reading of Chesterton · <i>Slavoj Žižek</i> · 39
TWO	PAUL BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS
3	Historical Integrity, Interpretive Freedom: The Philosopher's Paul and the Problem of Anachronism · <i>Paula Fredriksen</i> · 61
4	Paul between Judaism and Hellenism · <i>E. P. Sanders</i> · 74
5	The Promise of Teleology, the Constraints of Epistemology, and Universal Vision in Paul · <i>Dale B. Martin</i> · 91
6	Paul among the Antiphilosophers; or, Saul among the Sophists · <i>Daniel Boyarin</i> · 109
7	Paul's Notion of <i>Dunamis</i> : Between the Possible and the Impossible · <i>Richard Kearney</i> · 142
8	Concluding Roundtable: St. Paul among the Historians and the Systematizers · 160
	· LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS · 185
	· INDEX · 187

INTRODUCTION

Postcards from Paul: Subtraction versus Grafting

JOHN D. CAPUTO

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female” (Gal 3:28). As Paula Fredriksen says in the roundtable included in this volume, that is a great sound bite. That is exactly what we want St. Paul to say, we being contemporary democratic, fair-minded pluralists. Viewed more closely, however, Fredriksen adds, Paul was nothing of the sort. He did not affirm the alterity and diversity of Mediterranean culture. He took it for a culture of idol worshipers who, as Fredriksen puts it, “were going to fry.” That particularly colorful excerpt from the conversation that took place at Syracuse University in April 2005 is a good example of the sort of problem posed by the contemporary interest shown by secular philosophers in St. Paul. It points out the difficulties encountered in the exchange between the systematizers (philosophers but also the theologians) who want to put Paul to a contemporary purpose and the historians who are interested in reconstituting the original context of Paul’s work. They are brought together in the present volume.

Is the proper work of reading to reconstitute what the original author said to the original audience? Or is it to retrieve something implied, implicit, a tendency that is possible, repressed, but astir in the text and thus gives the text a history, a future? The name of a thinker—here “Paul”—is the name of a matter to be thought (*eine Sache des Denkens*), as Heidegger famously said. Or is it better to concede that reading is one thing and thinking another? If, as one is likely to say when faced with such a choice, we want to engage in a bit of both, how then is the one related to the other? What limits does the actual context put on our right to say that Paul says this or that? In *The Postcard* Derrida defended the structural possibility of lost mail. By this he

meant not only that a letter can be lost or damaged in the mail, which has certainly been the fate with most of Paul's letters, but that even if it is sent and received it may always be misunderstood, which has also happened to Paul, and beyond that even if it is sent, received, and interpreted in terms of its original context, to the extent that is possible, it is always structurally possible to understand it differently, to recontextualize it. But is there no limit to this? Can any constraints be set in advance to understanding differently?

In this volume we focus on the work of Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, who (along with Giorgio Agamben) are at the center of the current retrieval of Paul. These are secular philosophers who pointedly do not share Paul's core belief in the resurrection of Christ but regard his project as centrally important for contemporary political life and reflection. The Pauline project, as they see it, is the universality of truth, the conviction (*pistis*) that what is true is true for everyone and that the proper role of the subject is to make that truth known, to fight the good fight on behalf of the truth, to all the ends of the earth (*apostolos*). They have in mind the dramatic conversion of Paul—the event!—and Paul's subsequent dispute with the leaders of the early Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem that Christ belongs to all, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, master nor slave, and the militant vigor with which Paul promulgated that belief across Asia Minor. In Paul's view, one does not need to be a Jew or first become one in order to receive the word of the gospel. The historians in this volume agree that while this is true enough, what Paul had in mind was that the gentiles would finally be "grafted" onto "the tree of Israel," that Christ is the fulfillment of a specifically Jewish promise, not a Greek one. "Remember that it is not you [the gentiles] that support the root [Israel] but the root that supports you" (Rom 11:18). What Paul is saying is analogous to saying that Buddhism belongs to all, that in the Buddha there is neither Greek nor Jew, that we are all to be grafted onto the Bodhi tree.

Thus we may take the Pauline project in two different directions. On the one hand, there is Badiou's more formalizing method of "subtraction," that the power of truth is to subtract itself from or annul local differences or identities in order to announce and then implement a true universal where there is neither Greek nor Jew. On the other hand, there is the more historically situated model of grafting, where the gentiles would be grafted onto the one true tree of Israel. One universal tree of truth—or one true tree? One truth without identity or one true identity? Actually, it is Žižek himself who puts this point well:

Saint Paul conceives of the Christian community as the new incarnation of the chosen people: it is Christians who are the true "children of Abraham."

What was, in its first incarnation, a distinct ethnic group is now a community of free believers that suspends all ethnic divisions. . . . Thus we have a kind of “*transubstantiation*” of the *chosen people*: God kept his promise of redemption to the Jewish people, but, in the process itself, he changed the identity of the chosen people. . . . [Paul’s] universe is no longer that of the multitude of groups that want to “find their voice,” and assert their particular identity, their “way of life,” but that of a fighting collective grounded in the reference to an unconditional universalism.¹

But this very point, for Žižek, is to be interpreted as a method of subtraction—a universal subtracting itself from ethnic particularity—rather than as grafting of all the nations onto the historically identifiable tree of Israel. Down each road lies an ominous specter. Down the one, the *extra ecclesiam nullus salus est*, the work of a militant missionary who wants to convert everyone to the religion of Israel, now fulfilled in Christ, which requires a work of global missionary conversion, of world Christianization. Down the other, the specter of the militant revolutionary ready to spill blood on behalf of his view of what the universal is. Still, is the fear of these specters a fear of truth, as Badiou and Žižek claim? Is such fear the product of what they consider a timid postmodern pluralism, in which nothing is really true since no truth claim really has a universal traction, for which there is a whole forest of trees, the tree of Israel, the Bodhi tree, and trees still to be discovered? Is it the best we can do to accommodate as many different takes on what is true as possible?

While they are not unsympathetic with the philosophers, the historians gathered in this volume are interested in adding back what Badiou has subtracted. For Badiou, the Christ-event has abolished Greek and Jew; it has removed or annulled the defining characteristics of each one, and produced an absolute and true universal. But such a universal for the historians would be a gray-on-gray neutral, a neutered and ahistorical structure in which the historical Paul himself would have no interest. For the historians, the unqualified universality of the cross, of the gospel that Paul announces, lies in the universal extension of the Jew to include everyone, to all the “peoples” (gentile or pagans), which for Paul includes the Jews who have rejected Jesus, like branches broken from the olive tree of Israel. Pauline universality is the universality of the inclusion of the Greek in the Jew, and this—here was Paul’s revolutionary gesture—without having to pass through the narrow gate of the Jew, of circumcision or the law. God’s promise to the Jews was fulfilled in Christ, a Jew, whom Paul announces is available to all, Greek or Jew, so that in the end we will all be Jews, spiritually, Jews not according to

the flesh but according to the spirit, having all come to acknowledge and to be acknowledged by the God of Israel. Everyone would be brought under the wing of the One God of Israel. Paul's universalism is the universalism of a monotheist who calls on all people to acknowledge the One God and who claims that the One God makes all people one. This is the universalism of conversion to something quite concrete (grafting), not the formalism of a philosophical universal (subtraction), like the principle of causality, or a mathematical universal, like the Pythagorean theorem. This universal is in fact a paradox, quite like Kierkegaard's paradox. In just the way that Kierkegaard said our eternal happiness is based on a particular point in history, Paul is saying that the well-being of all humanity is based on the events surrounding the death and resurrection of a Galilean Jew named Jesus, at the sound of whose name every knee should bend in heaven and on earth.

So it is not that all differences or distinctions are abolished, but that one difference or distinction in particular, the Jewish difference, is transformed and in being transformed proves to be transcendent, or better self-transcendent, in Christ Jesus, in whom it is able to break out of the particularity of the first form it took in the law and to trump and assimilate other differences, both its own early Jewish form and the Greek difference. Christ fulfills a Jewish promise, not a Greek one; he effects the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, not of Plato and Aristotle. The Christ-event is an event only in the context of the Jewish promise, and he is foretold—at least in the retrospective Christian (or strong) reading—by Jewish prophets and not by Greek wisdom. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is not an event for the Greeks; it makes no sense to them. Events require prior context or else they misfire or fail to register. Events must be inserted and exerted within an existing frame which they subvert, pervert, twist, or reinvent in a way that can catch on and cause things to reconfigure. The Copernican theory was an event in the sixteenth century; the same theory could be found in earlier premodern contexts where it was not an event; it simply made no sense. Events cannot simply happen out of the blue, ahistorically, and the subject of the event, however much fidelity he or she displays toward the event, cannot make it happen, cannot make it a success if the context is wrong. Events are like metaphors; they have to differ *from* the existing discourse while having enough purchase *in* the existing discourse to be recognized as a metaphor. They must have enough of an anchor in the existing usage for their novelty to be felt or for them to have any bite; otherwise, they are just gibberish.

Badiou and Žižek: St. Paul among the Philosophers

One way to see the significance that Paul holds for Badiou and Žižek is to go back to the debate about the economy of desire and recall that there are at least two alternatives to locating the origin of desire in a simple need or lack. One is René Girard's notion that desire is mimetic, that we desire the desire of the other, we desire what others desire; what constitutes the object of desire is our desire to have what others have. But we also desire to have what we are forbidden to have, which is no less constitutive of what we desire; we desire to have what we may not have. That story is as old as the second creation myth—where Yahweh precisely constitutes the tree of life as an object of desire by forbidding it—and that is the one that Paul makes famous in his critique of the law. The law chains us to an object precisely by forbidding it, and then, when we transgress the law, we are driven by guilt to reinforce the law, which sends us through the cycle one more time. When we live under the rule of the law, we are under the dark power of sin, where sin is not an individual deed but a domain or kingdom that holds us in its grip. We are dead under the law, slaves to sin and guilt, robots or automatons endlessly reenacting the pattern of prohibition and transgression. Paul does not want to say that the law *is* sin (although at times he seems to suggest it), but that the law is trapped in this unfortunate cycle of transgression. What the law wants, what it enjoins and prohibits, is good and holy and from God, but the system or schema to which law belongs is imperfect, for it has the effect of entrenching us more deeply in sin, like a driver spinning his wheels in a snowbank. The law is implicated in the system of death, trapped within the rule of “flesh” (desire). What is needed is a whole new order, one that is liberated from the economy of desire as a whole and breaks the entire circuit or cycle of transgression and prohibition, thereby introducing a new domain of life in which the rule of flesh is replaced with that of spirit. That is effected by the Christ-event, the pure grace and gratuitousness of the death and resurrection of Christ, which has purchased our freedom from the law and made us free, now children of God and no longer slaves of sin. Thus in place of a law that prohibits murder, there is the reign (or kingdom) of God, of the love of neighbor and even of one's enemies, in which what was negatively prohibited by the law is superseded by affirmation, by love of the other. At that point, the economy of the desire to have—to have what I lack, to have what the other has, or to have what I cannot have—is suspended in favor of something purely an-economic, which is not a desire to have at

all. We reach a point that is either not well described as desire or is a desire that has become pure love and pure affirmation beyond having. Following an analysis first made by Lacan, this Pauline point has drawn the interest of both Badiou and Žižek.

In “St. Paul, Founder of the Universal Subject,” Badiou condenses the general outlines of his approach to St. Paul.² He is a case in point for Badiou, an illustration and a confirmation of a theory that had been in place long before he turned to Paul. But Paul proves to be such a perfect example that it is as if Badiou could have just started there. In order to see what purpose Paul serves for Badiou, it is helpful to see Paul as the apostle of new life, of life victorious over death. For Paul, we were dead under the law and now are born again in Christ. For Badiou, what Paul calls death and life are allegories of our contemporary condition.

To see how Paul is our contemporary according to Badiou, we need to see the sense in which we too are dead and in need of a new life. This “death” Badiou locates in the deadly cycle of homogeny (sameness) and identitarianism (difference). On the one hand, there is the rule of “abstract homogenization,” by which Badiou means “capital,” the reign or rule of the world market, which can turn anything into a commodity, which can make money off anything. The market counts—it is interested in anything that can be added up and for which a profit margin can be calculated, without regard to content—anything from organic peppers to prostitution to pictures of the pope. It can turn a profit on Christianity or baseball, on religious paraphernalia no less than on adult bookstores. The dollars earned from one can easily be spent on the other; the market is a system of general equivalence. On the other hand, there is the proliferation of identity politics, of women’s rights, gay rights, the rights of the disabled, of anti-Jewish or anti-Hispanic or anti-Italian defamation organizations, and so on, which both Badiou and Žižek treat with great cynicism. Žižek recently quipped that he wanted to start up a necrophiliac rights group. Each segment of identity politics creates a new market of specialty magazines, books, bars, websites, DVDs, radio stations, a lecture circuit for its most marketable propagandizers, and so on. By creating an endless series of proliferating differences, of new specialty markets, cultural identity fits hand in glove with the ever-proliferating system of global capital. According to Badiou, each side maintains and makes use of the other—and what the two sides have more deeply in common is that nobody on either side holds anything to be deeply true. An investment capitalist is as happy to make a buck on an automobile that pollutes the environment as on one that conserves fuel, and will shift from one to the other as the market demands. Identity rights advocates, in

the view struck by Badiou and Žižek, are happy to have as many closed cultural identities as desired, however mutually contradictory they may be, so long as everyone is able to rent their own space. Nothing anywhere has any starch or pulp. The whole process, on both sides, Badiou maintains, is “without truth.” The market has no interest in the truth value of what it sells, and those who practice identity politics are simply defending their own will to power, their own right to be different, not that anything they claim is true. But—and this is central to Badiou—what is “true” must be true for all, no matter who you are or whether it will turn a profit.

It is in the sense that the process is without truth that on Badiou’s view we are “dead,” that we are “under the law,” caught up in the rule or kingdom of death, and that we need a new St. Paul, a Pauline fix. On the one hand, we need someone to hold and say something that is not just one more marketable idea, something that is withdrawn or subtracted from the market’s ability to count and that is not counting on having a local appeal. The market is driven the way the Hegelian system is driven, which feeds on the principle of opposition; if you oppose it, that drives the dialectic, which is spurred on by an opposing principle. If you oppose the system of capital, write a good book on it, and get on the lecture circuit, you may have a best-seller on your hands. So Badiou thinks we need something *different* (a singularity) subtracted or excepted from the rule of homogeneity; we need a “truth procedure” that interrupts the rule of the received knowledge that everywhere prevails. Truths erupt as a singularity. On the other hand, we need a difference that is not just one more plea for the right to be different, one more identity, which Badiou regards as a political dead end. The singularity from which truth erupts must be genuinely universalizable: “Universalizable singularity necessarily breaks with identitarian singularity.”³

When one attempts to universalize identitarian singularity—like “white” or “German” or “Christian”—the result is a catastrophe. We need a singularity, an innovation, a breakthrough, the grace of an event, from which all such differences have been subtracted. But when the rule of the market remains unbroken, the result is no less destructive. Then the truth of the work of art is displaced by cultural artifacts, products of the culture of the group, whose axiom is that you have to belong to the group to understand the culture. Then the truth of science is replaced by the technically useful or even the culturally popular—herbal teas have the same worth as antibiotics. Then the truth of politics is replaced by managers who negotiate among identitarian differences. Then the truth of genuine human love is replaced by the politics of sexuality, like the war between advocates of

classical conjugal fidelity and homosexual rights. For Badiou, the system of abstract homogeneity and identity formation is a function of the interplay of the symbolic and the imaginary, while the singularity of the event has to do with the real, with the truth, which is why we get simulacra (culture/technique/management/sexuality) instead of the real thing (art/science/politics/love) and hence are incapable of genuinely disturbing the rule of capital. The result is a generalized culture war—between family values and feminists, scientists and creationists, all of whom belong to the same system that lacks a universalizable singularity.

Badiou calls on the Pauline paradigm to proclaim an event that trumps identitarian differences. For Paul, this meant proposing an alternative to the Greek discourse on wisdom, whose figure is the philosopher, on the one hand, and to the Jewish discourse on law, whose figure is the prophet, on the other hand. In so doing Paul announced something new that is true for all, something that was previously left out of the count, which interrupts the prevailing paradigms and in so doing introduces the new figure of the apostle who proclaims a new and universal order. This eventuates in a new configuration in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, male nor female, where nationality, class status, and gender are annulled as differences that no longer count. Paul thus supplies a paradigm of a truth procedure. First, the truth erupts as a singular event that interrupts the existing order—for Paul, Christ crucified and raised again, which is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews, something that did not count in either discourse (see 1 Cor 1). Next, this event, which completely transforms Paul's life, is taken to constitute the subject. The subject is the one who is galvanized by the event. The event constitutes those who have accepted the event in their heart and proclaimed it on their lips as subjects. The event, in turn, must be named and offered to everyone without regard to the contingent conditions of their existence. The naming of the event is part of the event, and if the event is not successfully named, it does not happen (*arrive*). In point of fact, Badiou says that Paul himself names the event in a way that is completely fictional—the Pauline content of the event, the resurrection of the dead, is a fable, he says. But given his own theory, that could not be entirely true; otherwise the Pauline event would have misfired or fallen flat. In practice, Badiou actually keeps less of a distance from Paul than he is letting on; his actual treatment of the resurrection is less to dismiss it as a pure fable than to interpret it as a figure to which he attaches great allegorical importance. By adapting Paul's figure of a passage from death to a new life, the figure of rebirth and a certain resurrection, Badiou is signing on to part

of the content of the Pauline event. But Badiou seeks to interpret this figure allegorically, to find the contemporary equivalent of this figure, the sense in which we today are dead (his critique of capitalism is that it is draining the life out of our world) and need a new life, need to be reborn, which is to adopt a view that is not far removed from radical theology or death of God theology, a point to which we will return below. Finally, this proclamation requires fidelity, a Pauline willingness to be shipwrecked, jailed, snakebitten, persecuted, and run out of town, a militant belief in something from which neither powers nor dominations can separate us, a militancy full of conviction (faith), indefatigability (love), and assurance (hope). Paul fought the good fight and stuck to his guns unto death, visiting and sending letters to a small band of brothers and sisters, at a great personal peril, and eventually effected a revolution under which we today still live.

For Žižek, the problem is also (and even more so than for Badiou) to escape the deadly cycle of law and transgression, and like Badiou he turns to Paul for help in finding a way out, a way that is singularly one of life. Like Badiou, Žižek expends considerable rhetoric criticizing the ethics of the other in liberalism and postmodernism, but one might well wonder, when their views are scrutinized, whether their criticism is directed at the principle itself or against the tepid, lukewarm, and compromised way in which they think it is honored in postmodernism. In *The Fragile Absolute* (2000) Žižek treats the Christian command of neighbor love, “the elementary Christian gesture—best designated by Pauline *agape*,”⁴ as a more radical affirmation of the other than can be accounted for by the Lacanian triad of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real:

This injunction prohibits nothing; rather, it calls for an activity *beyond* the confines of the Law, enjoining us always to do more and more, to “love” our neighbor—not merely in his imaginary dimension (as our *semblant*, mirror image), on behalf of the notion of Good that we impose on him, so that even when we act and help him “for his own Good,” it is *our* notion of what is good for him that we follow.⁵

As the famous case of the veil in France reveals, “our post-political liberal-permissive society”⁶ honors the other only when the other is also a tolerant liberal just like ourselves; we honor the other only when the other is the same (narcissism; the imaginary), “a narcissistic (mis)recognition of my mirror-image.”⁷ The same text continues:

[enjoining us to “love” our neighbor . . .] not merely in his symbolic dimension (the abstract symbolic subject of Rights).⁸

We ought to be accountable to individuals in the concreteness of their existence, not as instances or pure rational being in general (Kant), or as cases covered by the Decalogue, which belong to the sphere of the symbolic, where the cycle of law and transgression identified by Paul makes its nest.

... but as the Other in the very abyss of its Real, the Other as properly *inhuman* partner, “irrational,” radically evil, capricious, revolting, disgusting . . . in short, beyond the Good. This enemy-Other should not be punished (as the Decalogue demands), but accepted as a neighbor.⁹

As a case in point, Žižek mentions Sister Helen Prejean, whose stand against capital punishment is memorably portrayed in *Dead Man Walking* (1995), in which she advocates the cause of a homicidal rapist, Matthew Poncelet. The other person here is not idealized, not excused, but accepted with all his or her faults and flaws, accepted even as the “enemy” as such—like the Roman soldiers who crucified Christ and were forgiven by him—accepted *qua* thing (*Ding*), *qua* impossible, unknowable Real. This is a Lacanian rendering of the great paradox of the Sermon on the Mount, whose message has been compromised by any individual, institution, or state calling itself Christian. From a theological point of view, Žižek’s account at this point is not immune from supersedionism; he treats this as a case of “going beyond the Decalogue” and gives no consideration to the argument that this established saying of Jesus is not offered by the Galilean rabbi Jesus in opposition to the Torah but as interpretation of it. Furthermore, Žižek curiously associates himself here with a radical pacifist strain in Christianity of the sort found in John Howard Yoder, with which he otherwise would have little patience. Žižek, who is an admirer of Lenin and on occasion even Stalin, thinks that changing the conditions of an unjust world requires something more than pacifism and nonviolence; the idea of nonviolent change by way of democratic elections is the ultimate illusion of democracy.¹⁰

Žižek compares Pauline *agape* to a shift in Lacan from an earlier masculine logic, in which the point of psychoanalysis is to reconcile the subject with the Big Other and eliminate the symptom, to a “feminine” logic in Seminar 20, in which the law itself is counted as one more symptom or “sinthome.” This is more like “Christian charity, much closer to the dimension of the Other (subject) *qua* real . . . Christian charity is rare and fragile, something to be fought for and regained again and again.”¹¹ Love is the “fragile absolute” which puts individuals directly in touch with the truly universal, with the Holy Spirit, and requires us to “unplug’ from the organic community into which we were born,” from Jew and Greek, male and female, master and slave, to withdraw

from the pagan One-All. The message of Jesus is directed to “those who belong to the very bottom of the social hierarchy,” to those who are unplugged from social systems of power, and requires us to love each one qua Real, as a “unique person.”¹² For example, “a new understanding of the father emerges, the moment the son, in effect, gets rid of the shadow of paternal authority . . . [and] the son perceives his father no longer as the embodiment of socio-symbolic function, but as a vulnerable subject ‘unplugged’ from it.”¹³ The process by which the subject dies to the law, one’s social substance, and is reborn, begins afresh, is called the new creation. The fragile absolute is another dimension that breaks through to us in fleeting and fragile moments, like the love that can be detected in the smile or gesture of someone who has otherwise seemed to us cold and rude. That is sublimation, not idealization, because it has no illusions about the other’s weakness, which is why Kierkegaard was right to say that love is a *work* of love and that while love believes all, love is not deceived.¹⁴ For Žižek, unplugging does not mean to drop out of the social order but to invent an alternative one. With respect to the law, Christianity moves us beyond “masculine sexuation,” which is to transgress the law and in so doing to reinforce it, to “feminine sexuation,” which is an act of freedom and autonomy that abstains from it, suspends it, and refuses to be a part of it. That puts a new Žižekian spin on the crucifixion: God the Father, like Medea and like Sethe in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, sacrifices his own Son rather than be a part of the blood sacrifice system of the law, and he does this precisely to open up a new order of freedom and grace beyond the law.

Three years later, in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, Žižek returns to Paul by way of the very question Badiou first raised in 2002 as a way of casting his reading of Paul: who is really alive today?¹⁵ Those in the West who aim low and focus on sustaining and enjoying the easy drift of the good life, where everything is safe but tedious, where nothing happens—no event—which is what Badiou calls happiness (Freud’s pleasure principle)? Or those who aim high, beyond life, who put life on the line, those for whom something is really happening—an event—just because there is something more important than mere life, some excess of life (something, like freedom or dignity, say) for the sake of which it is worth putting life itself at risk (Freud’s death drive)?¹⁶ For example (citing G. K. Chesterton, along with Paul the other theological hero of this book), a soldier surrounded by enemies on all sides has a chance to escape only if he shows a courageous indifference to his own life, while a coward timidly trying to protect his life is done for. (Jesus on the other hand proposed a third alternative: putting down your sword and turning the other cheek!) Žižek then goes on to denounce opponents of the death

penalty as defenders of the tepid, painless anemic life, Sister Helen Prejean to the contrary notwithstanding! The icon of this tepid life, he quips, is decaffeinated coffee or alcohol-free beer—deprived of the Real!—and its goal is a long, pleasurable life protected from every risk and every real pleasure.

We today, Žižek says, are like those “anemic Greek philosophers” who laughed at Paul’s doctrine of the resurrection.¹⁷ We lack the living power to affirm something dangerous and have only the half-dead negative power to whine about suffering; the only absolute today being absolute evil, like the Holocaust. We are ghosts, the living dead, the undead, not living spirits.¹⁸ Paul is not saying to suspend the law so as to embrace wanton transgression, but (in effect) to obey the laws as if you are not obeying them, to suspend the law, the rule or reign of prohibition that provokes transgression and draws us down its dark corridors (its “obscene underside”), just in order to put on the new being.¹⁹ The law (the symbolic order) is not jettisoned, but we strike up a new relationship to what the law commands. To turn Kant against himself, we do things that are conformable to duty, this time not out of pure duty, *pace* Kant, but out of love. The “time of the event,” the shock of the Real, and of subsequent fidelity to the event, spells the difference between life and death.²⁰ Žižek focuses on Pauline love as what he calls a “fighting universal,” a *work* of love, that wrestles with the Other in all its unpleasantness or even repulsion, which must succeed in concretizing or carrying out the event in day-to-day-existence (which Paul would have called filling up what is missing in the body of Christ). The event means “it is consummated,” something happened—and now the real work of implementation begins. In Christianity, as opposed to the Jewish messianisms, the Messiah has already come and died and done his work, which leaves us not with the luxury of coasting on or living off this event but with the burden of carrying out the messianic event, making it live. As Deleuze would have said, we must make ourselves worthy of this event. Žižek’s interpretation of Christianity here is reminiscent of Bonhoeffer’s—God expects us to assume responsibility for the direction of our lives and not wait for him to show up in the nick of time to bail us out. God is the one who took the risk here: “by dying on the cross, He made a risky gesture with no guaranteed final outcome . . . the divine act stands, rather, for the openness of a New Beginning, and it is up to humanity to live up to it, to decide its meaning.” God steps into his own creation, “exposing himself to the utter contingency of existence.” We live “in the aftermath of the Event, of drawing out the consequences—of what? Precisely of the new space opened up by the Event.”²¹

But beyond Bonhoeffer, Žižek also reminds us of various traditions of radical theology that go back to Hegel, like death of God theology, in which

the death of the Christ is the beginning of the kingdom of God on earth, which we are responsible to realize. The view Žižek strikes at this point comes close to Vattimo's recent work on Christianity, which is importantly influenced by the theory of the three ages in Joachim of Fiore, the age of the Father (the Old Testament), the age of the Son (the New Testament), and finally the age of the Spirit, of the kingdom of God on earth, where we are no longer servants but friends, when we must complete and carry out what the Son initiated.²² The death of Christ represents the commencement of the age of the Spirit for Žižek, for whom "'Holy Spirit' designates a new collective."²³ "The Perverse Core of Christianity," the subtitle of *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, turns out to be a play on words. It means that the orthodox view—God has died for our sins in the economy of salvation—is perverse because it reinscribes us in the economy of debt and payment. But the core of Christianity is exactly the opposite ("an-economic"), introducing "another dimension," a "religion of atheism," which perverts that perversion—for an event perverts an already perverted or subversive system—which recognizes that there is no such economy. The true core of Christianity is the perversion of a perversion, the death of death. What better summary of contemporary death of God theology than the following text from Žižek, in which, comparing his position to Lacanian psychoanalysis, Žižek brings his book to the following conclusion:

The treatment is over when the patient accepts the non-existence of the big Other . . . the patient accepts the absence of such a guarantee. . . . The point of this book is that, at the very core of Christianity, there is another dimension. When Christ dies, what dies with him is the secret hope discernible in "Father, why hast thou forsaken me?": the hope that there is a father who has abandoned me. The "Holy Spirit" is the community deprived of its support in the big Other.²⁴

But this critique of religion is not to be confused with a modernist critique of the big Other, which just reinstates the big Other by another name:

. . . rather it attacks the religious hard core that survives even in humanism, even up to Stalinism, with its belief in History as the "big Other" that decides on the "objective meaning" of our deeds. . . . it is possible to redeem this core of Christianity only in the gesture of abandoning the shell of its institutional organization. . . . That is the ultimate heroic gesture that awaits Christianity: in order to save its treasure, it has to sacrifice itself—like Christ, who had to die so that Christianity could emerge.²⁵

At this point Žižek effectively (if unwittingly) rehearses the argument of Mark C. Taylor in *Erring* on behalf of a "postmodern a/theology," beyond a modern-

ist atheism.²⁶ The age of the spirit is not to be a “vulgar humanist” (modernist) death of God, which puts Man (Feuerbach) or History (Marxism) in the place of God, but a posthumanist one—what virtually anyone working in the field would call a “postmodern” theology, a term regularly denounced by Žižek.

What do Badiou and Žižek desire? What do they want? Cast in its most positive terms, what is finally at stake for Žižek, as for Badiou, is what Paul calls “life,” that is, the new order, the new space opened up by the event, the freedom and ambience of grace, beyond the law, where we find such fragile treasure as life has to offer in the midst of life’s risky and contingent course. With the event comes the ethics of the event, the responsibility to make ourselves worthy of the event (Deleuze)—to produce something new, something genuinely *alive*, which will break the rule of death, of the not-quite dead. In the superficial quasi-life of consumption and “happiness,” all real risk has been removed and replaced with virtual risk—like watching TV thrillers broadcast in surround sound and high definition in a safe and privileged cultural-political site sitting atop a mountain of global injustice. The genuinely vital life, on the other hand, would be marked by the eruptive event of justice, of a genuinely political act, and the turmoil of its aftermath.

In his contribution to the present volume Žižek comes back to the theme of Christian atheism laid out in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*. Here Žižek returns to Paul not exactly as Badiou’s apostolic militant, nor as a proto-Lacanian who leads us out of the circle of transgression, but as the first death of God theologian. By focusing our attention on the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul deserves credit both for inventing Christianity and for seeing Christianity through to its end in the “death of God,” whose meaning Žižek has more and more been attempting to plumb. The present essay might be seen to have three stages: (1) an interpretation of the radical atheism with which his favorite Christian theologian, G. K. Chesterton, wrestles; (2) the ethical implications of this atheism, which can be seen in the book of Job; (3) finally, a radicalized—as opposed to the garden variety—Hegel, in whom the Pauline death of God is laid out in the most decisive manner possible.

The point of departure is a reading of G. K. Chesterton’s novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, which is an allegory of the two-sidedness of God who from one side (the back) looks like evil itself and from another (the front) like the good and beautiful. Taken together with Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*, this novel reveals what Žižek regards as Chesterton’s “darkest moment,” that God is the site of the highest contradiction, the identity of opposites, which shows up in the last words on the Cross where God (in Jesus) laments that he too is forsaken by God, which means that God too is for an instant an atheist,

that God doubts, that God rebels against himself. (The political equivalent of this unity of opposites today, Žižek points out, is the masquerade under which the anarchy of lawlessness—capitalist greed, the war in Iraq—mask themselves as law and order, God and nation, a point made in Shelley’s “The Mask of Anarchy.”)

This metaphysical atheology has enormous consequence for ethics, which means for Žižek that this figure of Jesus on the cross must be linked with the figure of Job before God, who laments the inscrutable way in which God has abandoned him (Job) to the worst. For Žižek the insight with which Chesterton is grappling can be adequately articulated only by a radicalized Hegel. To begin with, God is not the reconciling unity of opposites, but the site of strife and endless antagonism. God falls into his own creation and is torn asunder by it in a battle of good and evil. But as long as one remains in the raw antagonism of God’s two sides—good and evil, peace and rage—the framework remains pagan. The specifically Christian element enters only with the notion of a suffering God, which Chesterton explains in his book on Job. Žižek, who both shares and savors Chesterton’s taste for paradox, underlines Chesterton’s claims that order is the greatest miracle, law the greatest anarchy, orthodoxy the greatest rebellion—and the authoritarianism of the Church is the greatest way to protect reason, for if faith in the authority of God and his Church fails, nothing will be left standing, including reason itself. That is how to understand the long discourse God delivers to Job on the wonders of the natural world he has made. For God himself is surprised by the world’s marvels and by the fact that each and every thing, however commonplace it may seem, is exceptional, a mystery and a miracle all its own, a belief that today motivates not religion but the natural sciences. On Žižek’s telling, the masculine logic of God the creator who has reasons Job’s reason cannot understand gives way to a feminine logic of God embodied in the natural sciences which is truly open to the unforeseeable surprises that nature holds, as the paradoxes of relativity theory and quantum physics confirm. The book of Job ends with the dismissal of the ontotheologians, of the theological rationalizers of the problem of evil, and with Job’s acceptance that there is no rationale for his suffering, no deeper meaning. God is not the one who knows the meaning of what seems to us like meaningless suffering, nor is there anything God can do about it except to look on sympathetically and suffer along with Job (us).

Enter (Žižek’s) Hegel—and a certain (atheistic) Christianity. For Žižek, the received wisdom about Paul as the inventor of Christianity is actually right—Paul made the messenger into the message—and for him the Pauline trail is the one picked up in Protestantism (whereas Greek Orthodoxy

is Johannine and Catholicism is Petrine). Paul focused exclusively on the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the interpretation of that death is still being worked out today. If we do not want to reduce it to sacrifice, which is a pagan-mythic schema, or to a payment for sin, which is an economic schema, then what are we to think is happening in this death on the cross? What dies—in Job’s and then again in Jesus’ lamentations—is the big story that suffering is a short-term pain for a long-term gain and the God who guarantees a happy outcome. What dies along with it is the hand-in-glove unity of the natural world God made with the God who made it, which one sees in Thomas Aquinas. This death and dying shows up in Protestantism, where a war breaks out between a godless universe which is the object of Enlightenment reason, on the one hand, and trusting in a transcendent God with a faith that is pure feeling, devoid of cognitive status, the result of which is to debase both reason and faith. This predicament, Žižek thinks, can be seen in Kant, where Newtonian knowledge, up against an unknowable in-itself, has to content itself with appearance and make room for Protestant faith that cannot understand what it believes. These are opposing forces with which Hegel tried to come to grips in “Faith and Knowledge.”

The theoretical center of Žižek’s unique Paulinianism lies in what he has recently been calling the parallax, the identity lying behind a double alienation (or *kenosis*). Žižek means that just as modern humanity is alienated from God so God in turn is alienated from himself in Christ. How are we to deal with double alienation? Not by going back to Thomas Aquinas’s medievalism but by seeing that just as human beings are called on to rise above their animality and become truly human, so God must descend into his world and assume our miserable status. The abject status of Christ is described in *The Parallax View*, in connection with a provocative reading of Kierkegaard, as the “comedy of Incarnation.”²⁷ These are not two different things, but a parallax, two different ways at looking at the same thing. “The distance of man from God is thus the distance of God from Himself,” he writes in the present essay. Or, as Catherine Malabou puts it, “the suffering of God and the suffering of human subjectivity deprived of God must be analysed as the recto and verso of the same event.” Our own sense of distance from God is the other side of God’s distance from himself. That is what the Marxist critique of religion misses—it is the one ghost too many of religion that Marx dismisses, as Derrida might have put it.

There is thus another Hegel afoot here, for the standard Hegel is complicit with the old God who now has died, with the Absolute Spirit as the immanent Absolute which sees to it that God writes straight with crooked

lines. That, Žižek says in the present essay, is a cliché about Hegel that he wants to upend. As the transcendent Father dies in the Son (Incarnation), so the death of the Son on the cross is also the death not only of the Son (crucifixion) but also of the Immanent Spirit (“my God, why have you abandoned me?”) if the Spirit is misconstrued as the cunning of the Absolute Spirit, who steers all things wisely and well to their end. What dies is God himself under any Trinitarian description you choose:

The point this [traditional] reading [of Hegel] misses is the ultimate lesson to be learned from the divine Incarnation: the finite existence of mortal humans is the only site of the Spirit, the site where Spirit achieves its actuality. . . . Spirit is a *virtual* entity in the sense that its status is that of a subjective presupposition: it exists only insofar as subjects *act as if it exists*. Its status is similar to that of an ideological cause like Communism or Nation: it is the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their entire existence, the point of reference which provides the ultimate horizon of meaning to their lives, something for which these individuals are ready to give their lives, yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals and their activity, so this substance is actual only insofar as individuals believe in it and act accordingly. The crucial mistake to be avoided is therefore to grasp the Hegelian Spirit as a kind of meta-Subject, a Mind, much larger than an individual human mind, aware of itself: once we do this, Hegel has to appear as a ridiculous spiritualist obscurantist, claiming that there is a kind of mega-Spirit controlling our history. . . . This holds especially for the Holy Spirit: our awareness, the (self)consciousness of finite humans, is its only actual site . . . although God is the substance of our (human) entire being, he is impotent without us, he acts only in and through us, he is posited through our activity as its presupposition.²⁸

The *Aufhebung*, then, is not of finite individuals into the Absolute Spirit, but the exact Žižekian opposite: the Absolute itself into finite individuals. Now if we venture to characterize an *Aufhebung* as a demythologization, we may say that just as the transcendent God is demythologized by Hegel, so Hegel as the philosopher of Absolute Spirit is demythologized by Žižek.

And so is Paul, to return to the point.

Paul between the Jews and Christians

Whether Paul would have recognized himself in any of this is not a concern for Žižek. Historians, on the other hand, especially historians who have been lured and cajoled into the same room with philosophers and theologians, are

always worried about anachronism, about shedding too quickly the baggage of historical context in order to soar more freely in the air of speculation. That is a concern of the historians who contribute to this volume, but it is not unmixed with a certain admiration for the case Badiou and Žižek have made, at least on the point of Paul as the founder of universalism (the question of the “death of God” did not come up). If we may be allowed to borrow a venerable distinction from theology, we might say that there are historians who are just and historians who are merciful. In that case, Paula Fredriksen is more just in her approach to the philosophers while Dale Martin, E. P. Sanders, and Daniel Boyarin are more merciful.

Fredriksen, who is concerned with doing strict historical justice to Paul, draws a rigorous epistemological divide between what Paul, a mid-first-century Jewish visionary, thought, and what was made of him in the subsequent history of Western philosophy and theology. While Fredriksen is rigorous in policing this distinction, she is not about to actually call the police on the philosophers or theologians or, in the case of Žižek and Badiou, the atheologians. What the later tradition makes of foundationalist texts is both necessary and necessarily anachronistic—it departs from the original text and context. That is to say, later generations are nourished by the foundational texts in ways that meet the needs of their times and reflect their own standpoints as much as, and perhaps more than, the foundational texts themselves. That is as it should be. The tradition is marked by geniuses who give strong misreadings of foundational texts which shape their own times and that of subsequent generations. Instead of making themselves contemporaries with Paul, they make Paul “Our Contemporary” (the title of Badiou’s first chapter), that is, their own contemporary. Fredriksen is not going to fall on her sword over this, but she would feel better about it if the latter-day philosophers and theologians would at least come clean on this point and admit that such is indeed what is going on.

To illustrate her point, Fredriksen compares Origen’s Paul, Augustine’s Paul, and Badiou’s Paul. Origen’s Paul is a universalist—the author of a theory of universal salvation. God is good, everything God made is good, which means that everything will return to God—eventually. It’s just that some things will return more quickly, depending on how far out on the rim of the material universe their souls have landed. But God does not throw anyone away. Augustine’s Paul is also a universalist—but the author of a theory of universal condemnation. Everything is steeped in original sin and deserves eternal condemnation; still God, in his mercy, chooses to intervene here and there and snap a soul or two from the jaws of hell. Why are some chosen

and others not? That is beyond Augustine, beyond Augustine's Paul, beyond comprehension. It belongs to the unfathomable mystery of God. So don't ask. Both authors clinch their argument by citing exactly the same texts (Rom 9). Badiou's Paul is also a universalist—the author of a post-Marxist theory of universal equality. But what is missing from all three Pauls is the apocalyptic in-breaking God, the imminent arrival of God in time to bring about the kingdom. Thus philosophers and theologians use their considerable powers to “produce a more consistent apostle” by leaving out—by subtracting what does not fit and using what they can. That is tolerable, for Fredriksen, if only they would confess that it is they who speak, not the apostle.

This discussion of the historical and theological context of Paul's universalism is continued by New Testament historians E. P. Sanders and Dale Martin. They do not deny that there is a universalism in Paul, but they think it has a different meaning than the strictly philosophical sense it takes on in Badiou. For Sanders, the question of universalism in Paul's thought does not turn on a philosophical concept of universality but on the theological motif of God's plan for universal salvation. Sanders begins with the question of Paul's context “between Judaism and Hellenism,” which has produced much debate. Paul was at home in the Greco-Roman world and the world of Jewish scripture and interpretation. But which is the more important context for understanding his view of universal salvation, which he held concurrently with the view that some, not all, would be saved? Sanders bases his assessment of Paul's educational background on the quotations made by Paul. In the ancient world, children learned by memorizing, and the quotations used by adults reflected what they had memorized as children. In Paul's surviving letters, one quotation is from a gentile source, but there are dozens from the Greek translation of Jewish scripture. From this Sanders infers that he was most familiar with the Hebrew Bible in Greek translation. Jewish and Greco-Roman conceptions of time and history were quite distinct. The Greeks thought of history as cyclical. The Jewish view was that history runs in a straight line, from creation to a conclusion determined by God. A study of the resurrection in Paul's letters shows that here too his thought was basically determined by Jewish categories, despite Greek touches at various points. Paul's statements of universal salvation appear in the context of the grand climax of history. Paul could have learned the theory of universal truth and universal equality from Greek or Latin philosophers, and they may have contributed to his universalism. In his letters, however, he connects the hope of universal salvation to the coming of Christ and the conclusion of human history: it is a Jewish-Christian theological concept. The

reader of Paul does not know how to reconcile his exclusivism (only those in Christ will be saved) with his universalism (God will manage to redeem the entire creation). This is a question for Christian theology that cannot be solved simply by quoting Paul.

The contribution by historian Dale Martin is a pivotal one in the present collection. For Martin, the readings of Paul proposed by Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek seem remarkably on target, even when judged from the point of view of current professional historical criticism. Badiou's notion of "event" does sound like Paul's ways of speaking about the Christ-event. But Badiou and Žižek do not provide us with much content, certainly not systematic theological or philosophical *propositions*, for the *meaning* of the event. Paul's emphasis on his universal mission does spring, as Badiou and Žižek maintain, from Paul's monotheism. Badiou is right to see grace as central for Paul, and to note Paul's relative lack of interest in distributive justice or, in mythological terms, hell. In these and many other ways, Badiou and Žižek propose a Paul that can be affirmed also by contemporary Pauline scholars. But the one aspect of the interpretation proposed by Badiou and Žižek that is both central to their appropriations of Paul and rejected by many current scholars of Paul, at least in the past twenty years or so, is the insistence, similar to nineteenth-century interpreters, that Paul's main mission was to found a new and universal nation, a new ethnicity, or, even more mistakenly, a new religion. Recent biblical scholars have increasingly argued that Paul saw his own mission as one of grafting gentiles into the already existing ethnos (nation, people) of Israel. He was not suppressing the variety of ethnicities but grafting them all onto the one true ethnos—the olive tree of Israel. Paul's own universalism (there is a *certain* universalism in him, but the question is how to get a fix on it) is affected by his apocalypticism, which constrained his epistemology and provided him with a teleology much different from that of ancient or modern universalist philosophers. When pressed by Sanders in the roundtable that followed Martin's presentation about the extent of the metaphor of the tree, about whether Paul's final vision of the salvation of all humankind did not push beyond the figure of the tree of Israel, Martin thought that there is simply an ambiguity about this point in Paul. As Sanders remarks, it is not clear that Paul himself knew exactly what he thought about that.

Boyarin's argument follows closely along the lines of Martin and Sanders, both of whom link Paul with his Jewish and even apocalyptic roots, but differs on just this point from Badiou's approach. For Boyarin, Paul is a radical Jew and Boyarin undertakes to abstract (subtract) him from his Christianity. For Badiou, Paul is a radical militant, a pure subject, and

Badiou attempts to abstract (subtract) him from his Christianity and his Jewishness. Apart from Badiou's practice of an extreme abstraction (subtraction), which thinks there is nothing to the material particularities of Paul's life, Boyarin agrees that Badiou does get the idea of a world-transforming and life-transforming event in Paul right. Badiou takes Galatians 3 as subtracting community identities from truth. Truth transcends history and community. But for Boyarin, Paul is not trying to establish universality. Greek (or pagan) and Jew are religious identities for Paul, to which faith in Christ is being contrasted. The law was our baby-sitter until we matured into faith. On Boyarin's interpretation, Paul is warning the Galatians away from slipping back into the Torah, whose observance of days (Sabbath) and annual events determined by the place of the heavenly bodies is like pagan worship of heavenly bodies. We were once slaves to all these things, but not anymore.

Finally, Richard Kearney changes the subject somewhat and draws in the voice of Agamben by exploring the Pauline distinction between two radically different notions of *dunamis*—as power and as possibility. Following Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's disclosure of a post-metaphysical understanding of the possible, Kearney's own work turns on a distinction between a metaphysical conception of potentiality (*dunamis*), the classic expositions of which are found in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, in which potentiality is subordinated to and ultimately annulled by actualization, and what he calls the eschatological conception of power as possibility, as possibilizing, as the endlessly spiraling dynamic of a being toward the future. This conception is not ontological but phenomenological, not metaphysical but mystical, religious, and poetic. It is found in a long line of thinkers stretching from Paul's own idea of the power of God through Angelus Silesius and Nicholas of Cusa and the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. After setting forth this distinction in the first half of this chapter, Kearney offers a critical review of some of the recent readings of Paul by Agamben, Badiou, and Žižek in the second part. Kearney concludes his analysis with an outline of a postmodern hermeneutics of the possible, reflecting the controversial theological turn in continental philosophy, and his own notion of a microeschatology of the least among us, rooted in Paul's affirmation of the "nothings and nobodies of the world" (1 Cor 1:28). Kearney's microeschatology is focused precisely on the point of what Žižek and Badiou call singularity, that is, on the one not counted in the prevailing system of counting, for which we are the most accountable of all, which thereby represents the universalizable singularity *par excellence*.

Notes

1. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 130.

2. The book at the heart of the current debate is Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003). Badiou's magnum opus is *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005). The most readable presentation of his thought is *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2002). Peter Hallward has also written the most comprehensive guide to his work: *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, with a foreword by Slavoj Žižek (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

For more on Paul among the philosophers in the literature, see Daniel M. Bell Jr., "The Politics of Fear and the Gospel of Life," *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 55–80; Ward Blanton, "Apocalyptic Materiality: Return(s) of Early Christian Motifs in Slavoj Žižek's depiction of the Materialist Subject," *Journal of Cultural and Religion Theory* 6, no. 1 (December 2004): 10–27; Ward Blanton, "Disturbing Politics: Neo-Paulinism and the Scrambling of Religious and Secular Identities," *Dialog* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 3–13; Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), chap. 7; Alain Gignac, "Taubes, Badiou, Agamben: Reception of Paul by Non-Christian Philosophers of Today," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Paper* 41 (2002): 74–110; Adam Kotsko, "Politics and Perversion: Situating Žižek's Paul," *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 43–52; P. Travis Kroeker, "Whither Messianic Ethics? Paul as Political Theorist," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 2005): 37–58; Denis Müller, "Le Christ, relève de la Loi (Romans 10,4): La possibilité d'une éthique messianique à la suite de Giorgio Agamben," *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 30, no. 1 (2001): 51–63; Gerrit Neven, "Doing Theology without God? About the Reality of Faith in the 21st Century," *Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 30–42.

3. Whatever differences there are between them, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze, Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou all agree on one central point: there is an essential correlation between singularity and universality. Each thing is singularly itself, each and everything. Each and everything, universally, is itself in virtue of its singular structure. That is why the forgotten transcendental in the medieval theory of transcendentals is not the beautiful, as theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar claims, but the *aliquid*: every being, insofar as it is a being, is a "something," something singular, a *hoc aliquid*, as Duns Scotus says. What everything has in common is its unique difference.

4. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute—or Why the Christian Legacy Is Worth Fighting For* (London: Verso, 2000), 113.

5. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 111–12.

6. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 110.

7. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 112.

8. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 112.

9. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 112.

10. Slavoj Žižek, "From Purification to Subtraction: Badiou and the Real," in

Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy, ed. Peter Hallward (London: Continuum, 2004), 180.

11. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 118.
12. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 123.
13. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 126.
14. Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 128.
15. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 94–96.
16. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 95.
17. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 99.
18. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 100.
19. Fortunately, Žižek says that this is how the law actually works in Judaism (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 113), for the Jewish law is not *Sittlichkeit*, not a set of laws regulating social exchange, but a divine justice that separates the Jew from the existing social order, so that the Jews are “unplugged” from the social substance around them (*The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 119).
20. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 134–36.
21. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 136–37.
22. Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D’Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 30–32.
23. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 130.
24. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 169–70.
25. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, 171.
26. Mark C. Taylor, in *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 6: deconstruction is the hermeneutic of the death of God.
27. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 103–11. This section of *The Parallax View*, along with pages 179–87, made up the text that Žižek read at the Syracuse conference in April 2005 under the title “St. Paul with Kierkegaard, or, the Comedy of Christianity.” Žižek contributes a new piece of writing to this volume.
28. Žižek, “From Job to Christ,” chapter 2 in this volume.