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POLITICS AND PERVERSION: SITUATING ŽIŽEK'S PAUL

What is distinctive about Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Paul is not immediately clear. This is due first of all to the context in which his primary readings of Paul take place. In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek discusses Paul in the course of a critique of Alain Badiou's philosophy and particularly his book *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, but Paul in himself is not at issue for Žižek at this point, leaving his own position on Paul ambiguous. Žižek again turns to Paul in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, specifically in the midst of a somewhat elliptical critique of Agamben's book *The Time That Remains*, but more broadly in the context of an interpretation of Actual Existing Christianity, in which Paul serves as the point of Christianity's emergence out of Judaism.¹ Beyond the necessity of discerning Žižek's implicit positive position on Paul from his critique of another reading, there is a further potential for misunderstanding. Given that Žižek is often seen (erroneously) as an advocate or popularizer of Badiou's philosophy, one might assume that Žižek's critique of Agamben amounts to a simple reassertion of Badiou's reading of Paul. This is not the case. In fact, Žižek's reading of Paul in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* is at least implicitly a critique of Badiou's, and more importantly, represents a significant advance over Badiou's, particularly on the question of the law in Romans 7. In support of this contention, I will first briefly outline Badiou's interpretation of Paul's position on the law, then move on to Žižek's critique of Badiou in *The Ticklish Subject*. Finally, I will turn to the task of making sense of Žižek's discussion of Paul in the context of his argument in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*.

In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*,² Badiou organizes his chapter "Paul Against the Law" around five parallel oppositions: faith vs. works, grace vs. law, spirit vs. flesh, life vs. death, and universality vs. particularity. The first member of each pair is what Paul is supposed to be advocating, and in Badiou's argument any of the terms on one side can be substituted for any of the other ones on that same side—so law is opposed to grace first of all because grace is necessarily universal. This is because grace would only be truly gratuitous if it applied to all. Yet "for Paul, the law always designates a particularity, hence a difference."³ In

¹ Paul also makes a few appearances in *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), but these references do not represent a qualitative development beyond the position arrived at in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*. For a summary and brief analysis of these references, see Adam Kotsko, "'Žižek's Flawed 'Magnum Opus'" (Review of Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*), *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 8.1 (2006): 111-12 <<http://www.jcrt.org/archives/08.1/kotsko.pdf>>.

² Alain Badiou, *St. Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003).

³ *Ibid.*, 76.

fact, it is only in the context of the opposition between universality and particularity that Badiou treats *directly* of the opposition between grace and law. Law deals with the sphere of rights, of wages, of the state—grace, by contrast, “comes *without being due*” and is “communist.”⁴ Insofar as grace is in excess of law, it is also in excess of sin, which depends on the desire generated by the law: “The law is what gives life to desire. But in so doing, it constrains the subject so that he wants to follow only the path of death.”⁵ Sin colonizes the life of the subject, turning it into a living death—the goal of redemption is to reverse this, so that sin as repetitive desire “would occupy the place of the death.”⁶

Sin errs not in breaking the law, but precisely in not breaking *with* the law—it gets sucked into the automatism of desire, hovering around the same particularity, tracing the limit of the law. This is a living death insofar as death *is* the limit, whereas what Badiou wants is the unlimited, the universal, the sheer gratuity that is unlimited by qualification or desert. The subject is a sinner insofar as he stands in relation to the law—because for Badiou sin denotes *the only possible relationship to law*: sin “is that of which the law, and the law alone, is capable.”⁷ Badiou wishes to distinguish the subject of salvation from the pre-legal subject insofar as the latter was undivided. The legal subject is constituted by the division between life and death, which is always and only brought about by the law: “The law distributes life on the side of the path of death, and death on the side of the path of life.”⁸ The subject’s power is separated from life and given over to death, separated from spirit (thought) and given over to flesh (for which “sin” as a subjective position seems to be the name throughout this chapter). The law as power of death is the coercive force of the commandment, which renders thought powerless through its automatic application of the prescribed letter.

Sin is the subjective position of the subject of law; it can only be overcome by breaking from that subjection to become the subject of life. Thought, being initially powerless under the condition of law, “cannot *wholly* account for the brutal starting over on the path of life in the subject, which is to say, for the rediscovered conjunction between thinking and doing”—some contingent event that “exceeds the order of thought,” what Badiou calls a Truth-Event, is necessary precisely in order to reinstate the power of “an active thought.” Paul’s word for this reinstatement of the power of thought is “resurrection,” which “redistributes death and life to their places, by showing that life does not necessarily occupy the place of the dead.”¹⁰ The law—the law of the particularity—is always and everywhere what killed the subject who stands in

⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰ Ibid., 85.

need of resurrection, because the law was the sole agency capable of putting death in the place of life and life in the place of death.

In the following chapter on "Love as Universal Power," Badiou emphatically raises the stakes: "the Christ-event is essentially the abolition of the law, which was nothing but the empire of death," and so continued observation of the law is tantamount to denying the Resurrection (86). Badiou explains those statements in which Paul seems favorably disposed toward the law by proposing the existence of "a transliteral law, a law of the spirit,"¹¹ that is, the law of love. The subject who is saved from the law that kills "recovers the living unity of thinking and doing. This recovery turns life itself into a universal law."¹² While Badiou is implicitly arguing that Paul's statements would hold for every culture's legal code, he clearly believes that Paul's primary target is the law of his own people and excludes the possibility that Paul could, on principle, say anything positive about the Jewish law—for instance, Badiou seems to regard the inclusion of the love commandment in the Old Testament as a fortunate accident that Paul exploits for political purposes,¹³ rather than taking seriously the idea that "love is the fulfillment of the law." Overall, Badiou envisions a break with the law that allows for an overcoming of the division of the subject.

In *The Ticklish Subject*,¹⁴ Žižek undertakes a broad critique of Badiou's philosophical project as a whole. The point on which Žižek finds Badiou to be most questionable is on the question of the law in Romans 7, and as is usually the case, he poses the problem with Badiou's reading by reference to his distance from Žižek's two primary authorities: Hegel and Lacan. The distance from Hegel is found in Badiou's one-sided insistence on the Resurrection as opposed to the cross; for Žižek, Badiou

*radically dissociates Death and Resurrection: they are not the same, they are not even dialectically interconnected.... Here Badiou is openly anti-Hegelian: there is no dialectics of Life and Death ... The Truth-Event is simply a radically New Beginning.*¹⁵

In terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this can be expressed as a radical dissociation of the death drive and the Truth-Event. This is a natural connection not simply because Badiou lays out parallel oppositions between law vs. grace and death vs. life, but more significantly because of the way Badiou describes the relationship of the sinful subject to the law—all his references to a continual

¹¹ Ibid., 87.

¹² Ibid., 88.

¹³ Ibid., 89.

¹⁴ Slavoj Žižek, "The Politics of Truth, or, Alain Badiou as a Reader of St. Paul," in *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Core of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999). I commend his chapter on Badiou to anyone who is looking for a clear and straightforward introduction to the latter's thought that does not require knowledge of set theory.

¹⁵ Ibid., 146.

circling around the law, to an automatism of desire, etc., are clearly intended to evoke the Lacanian death drive.

Thus one could say that for Badiou, the problem in Romans 7 is how to escape the law and thereby the death drive. Žižek, drawing on Lacan's own reading of Romans 7 in his seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, argues that the situation is more complex than that—the question is not that of escaping the law as such, but rather of escaping a particular relationship to the law. Specifically, for Žižek, "the problem St Paul struggles with is how to avoid the trap of *perversion*, that is, of a Law that generates its transgression, since it needs it in order to assert itself as Law."¹⁶ As should be clear from this quotation, "perversion" here is not meant in the usual sense of unusual sexual practices. Rather, it refers to the system of psychoanalytic diagnoses, which Lacan formalizes into a series of subject positions that are "detachable" from their metaphoric ground (a homosexual is not necessarily a psychoanalytic "pervert," a "hysteric" does not have to be a biological woman, etc.). Throughout Žižek's work, the term "perversion" has a negative valence, whereas the "hysterical" (or "feminine") position is highly valorized. The hysteric's relationship to the Other (the symbolic order, the law) is one of perpetual questioning, attempting to discover what it is that the Other wants. By contrast, the pervert believes he immediately *knows* what the Other wants and directly delivers it. Thus, the hysterical position opens up the possibility for change, whereas the pervert is essentially locked in place.

The opposition between perversion and hysteria is tied in with the problem of what Žižek calls the "obscene superego supplement." In contrast to the popular notion of the superego as something analogous to the guilty conscience, Žižek follows Lacan in arguing that the superego actually incites the subject to *enjoy*. Behind every moral prohibition there stands an incitement to violate it, precisely to reinforce its power as law—that is, to increase the law's hold over the subject's enjoyment (*jouissance*). The classic example of this effect is found in the dynamics of ascetic renunciation: the ascetic performs various rituals of renunciation in order to free himself or herself from sexual desire, but those very rituals become libidinally charged. Hence the apparent paradox that the most fastidious individuals feel most guilty isn't really a paradox at all—the feeling of guilt is a form of libidinal satisfaction, by which the law binds the subject to itself. The subject of Romans 7 is essentially a hysterical subject who has become conscious of this mechanism. The temptation, then, is to take up the perverse position by skipping over the tortured ambiguity and cutting straight to the violations that the law so obviously desires; or in the words of Paul's opponents, to say, "Let us do evil that good may result" (Romans 3:8).¹⁷ Accordingly, Žižek can say:

St Paul's problem is thus not the standard morbid moralistic one
(how to crush transgressive impulses, how finally to purify

¹⁶ Ibid., 148.

¹⁷ I would remark that the very fact that Paul's opponents apparently draw this conclusion from Paul's teaching indicates that Žižek is correct in citing it as a "temptation" for the Pauline subject.

myself of sinful urges), but its exact opposite: how can I break out of his vicious cycle of the Law and desire, of the Prohibition and its transgression, within which I can assert my living passions only in the guise of their opposite, as a morbid death drive?¹⁸

In other words: How can I reach the point of "a fully subjectivized, positive 'Yes!' to my Life?"¹⁹

Thus, while he disagrees with Badiou about the problem at issue in Romans 7, Žižek agrees with Badiou about the final goal. The question that arises is whether Lacan can get us to that point or whether Lacan stops at the analysis of the problem without giving any positive replacement. This hinges on the definition of the term that Badiou cites as the core of the problem: namely, the death drive. For Žižek, Badiou has not simply used the term "death drive" where he should have used the term "perversion," but, beyond that, that Badiou has misidentified "death drive" as a problem when it is precisely the *solution*. That is, in Lacanian theory, "death drive" indicates a radically negative gesture of "unplugging" from the symbolic order. The hysterical's incessant questioning of the Other's desire, which can end in capitulation to the trap of perversion, can also lead to the acknowledgment of the "nonexistence of the Other" or of the Other's constitutive incompleteness—that is to say, the fact that *the Other doesn't know* what it wants from the subject, that there is no positive and fully consistent "content" that the subject is failing to live up to. When this position is reached, the problem of the "obscene superego supplement," grounded as it is in the question of the Other's (law's) desire, dissolves as a matter of course. Thus it appears that Lacan simply "wipes the slate clean," opening up the space for the kind of Truth-Event that Badiou (and Badiou's Paul) are calling for. Žižek argues that this negativity of the death-drive is constitutive of the faithful subject and that only the Lacanian death drive can allow one to discern a genuine Truth-Event:

Lacan is not a postmodernist cultural relativist: there definitely *is* a difference between an authentic Truth-Event and its semblance, and this difference lies in the fact that in a Truth-Event the void of the death drive, of radical negativity, a gap that momentarily suspends the Order of Being, continues to resonate.²⁰

Badiou wants to deny the necessity of this gap and proceed as if the response to the Truth-Event is obvious and straightforward—this places him in fundamental opposition to Žižek's philosophical position, even if Žižek will come to find in Badiou an increasingly indispensable point of reference.

¹⁸ Ibid., 149. Here he is summarizing Badiou's argument and thus uses the term "death drive" in Badiou's sense.

¹⁹ Ibid., 150.

²⁰ Ibid., 162-63.

While Žižek's critique of Badiou in *The Ticklish Subject* is relatively clear, his position on Paul is ambiguous—on the one hand, he correlates Romans 7 with Lacan, but on the other hand, he does not clarify whether Paul should be understood to be calling for a Truth-Event of a Žižekian rather than a Badiouian type. Before Žižek explicitly turns to this question in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), two books intervene that appear to change the terms of debate for him, specifically by adding greater complexity on the question of law. The most important is Eric Santner's *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*.²¹ Santner is himself highly influenced by Žižek's work, and this appears to have made Žižek understandably more open to this reading of Rosenzweig, a thinker in whom he otherwise would seem to have had little interest. While Santner is one of the most-cited figures in *The Puppet of the Dwarf* (and not only for *Psychotheology*), the insights Žižek gleans from his work that are most relevant for our purposes are the broadly Rosenzweigian idea that Judaism and Christianity need each other and the claim that the devout Jew typifies a relationship to the law that avoids perversion or “the obscene superego supplement”²²—that is to say, in contrast to “normal” or “pagan” law, Jewish law does not generate its own inherent transgression. Santner's understanding of Judaism and of its relationship with Christianity serves as the lens through which Žižek proposes to “read Paul from within the Jewish tradition.”²³

The second book that intervenes is Agamben's *The Time That Remains*.²⁴ What Žižek takes from Agamben's text is the division of the law into its meaning and its force and the ways that those two aspects can be separated. In the Schmittian “state of exception,” the law's force remains active, while its meaning is suspended, producing an emergency situation in which literally any act could be punished as a violation of the law. Agamben argues that in Paul's understanding of the messianic event, Schmitt is done one better: the force of the law is suspended as well, leaving the law inoperative—yet somehow fulfilled insofar as it is pure potential. Žižek seems to accept this basic schema, but he translates the

²¹ Eric Santner, *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

²² This contention is repeated in *The Parallax View*, 427, note 55.

²³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 10.

²⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary On The Letter To The Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005). Due to the vagaries of academic publishing, the English translation of this work was delayed until 2005, meaning that Žižek was once again able to introduce English-speaking readers to a major European thinker's book on Paul significantly before it was available in English, as he did with Badiou.

Žižek's reading of Agamben does not appear to have been as careful as his reading of Badiou, producing at least two major errors: namely the claims that Agamben is trying to argue that “Benjamin ‘repeats’ Paul” and that he (Žižek) is the first one to ask why both Paul and Benjamin are readable in the current political situation (*Puppet and the Dwarf*, 108). In point of fact, the latter is precisely Agamben's argument, and Agamben does not go beyond arguing that Benjamin includes several distinctly Pauline echoes in his Theses on the Philosophy of History. While this mistake does not, in my view, affect the overall structure of Žižek's argument, it still seems worth pointing out.

difference between the meaning and the force of law (or the way law operates under the state of exception) into psychoanalytic terms as the difference between the law itself and its “obscene superego supplement.” Žižek’s parallel for Agamben’s second suspension, the suspension of the force of law, is the “excess of mercy without proportion to what I deserve for my acts.”²⁵ For Žižek, this excess of mercy is eventually reinscribed back into the domain of law, such that Christians eventually do end up falling into the temptation of perversion (“Let us sin more than grace may abound”).

This reference forward to Christianity in its present form indicates what is distinctive about Žižek’s approach to Paul—whereas both Badiou and Agamben are only interested in Paul “in himself,” Žižek tries to understand Paul as the moment where we see Christianity “in its becoming,” more specifically in its emergence from Judaism. Žižek begins his analysis in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* by citing certain “perverse” (in the Lacanian sense) features of Christianity: the fall of humanity and the betrayal of Judas. In both cases, God appears to be following the logic of the “obscene superego supplement,” giving a positive command, but actually desiring its transgression—that is, God seems to need the fall to happen in order to allow him to save humanity, and Jesus needs Judas’s “officially” despicable act of betrayal in order to carry out his sacrifice. These are not isolated incidents in Žižek’s mind. In fact, the entire chapter on Chesterton, despite Žižek’s obvious love of Chesterton as a writer and thinker, stands as an indictment of the perverse character of Christianity, which puts on an act of renunciation, but only to provide a safe context for the enjoyment of pagan pleasures. Thus, vis-à-vis Judas’s betrayal, Žižek says that “the entire fate of Christianity, its innermost kernel, hinges on the possibility of interpreting this act in a nonperverse way.”²⁶

What makes this question so urgent is not a concern for Christianity as such, but rather his search for a way out of the deadlock of perversion. For Žižek, modern society as a whole is “perverse” insofar as the dominant ideological stance requires subjects to *enjoy*—but to do so in a completely non-dangerous way. Similarly, the project of revolutionary communism ends in the disaster of Stalinism, which serves for Žižek as the privileged example of perversion. Eastern religions, harshly critiqued in the first chapter of *The Puppet and the Dwarf*, seem to Žižek only to reinforce the logic of perversion. Thus while one would be tempted to understand the subtitle “The Perverse Core of Christianity” as referring to the “subversive” element that Žižek is hoping to retrieve, the “perverse core” is instead precisely what needs to be jettisoned if one is to reactivate the revolutionary potential of Christianity.

This revolutionary potential is encapsulated in the founding gesture of St. Paul—a gesture that Žižek argues is only possible within the Jewish context. As noted above, Žižek gets from Santner the idea that the Jewish law already operates without the obscene superego supplement, but he specifies this idea in terms of a

²⁵ Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 110.

²⁶ Ibid., 16.

rereading of the Book of Job. For Žižek, God's appearance to Job at the end of that book is, for all God's boasting, a tacit confession of God's own impotence. Job's silence, then, has to be reinterpreted: "he remained silent neither because he was crushed by God's overwhelming presence, nor because he wanted thereby to indicate his continuous resistance..., but because, in a gesture of solidarity, he perceived the divine impotence."²⁷ The Jewish subject, then, always lives in the wake of the acknowledgment of the non-existence of the Other (i.e., the powerlessness of God). The Jewish community's relationship to the law is thus free of the superego supplement; instead of being stuck in the cycle of the prohibition generating the transgression, they follow God's law in order to hide God's powerlessness: "The paradox of Judaism is that it maintains fidelity to the founding violent Event [of confronting the impotence of God] precisely by *not* confessing, symbolizing it: this 'repressed' status of the Event is what gives Judaism its unprecedented vitality."²⁸ At the same time, despite the "unplugged" character of the Jewish experience of law, precisely this shared, disavowed secret binds the Jewish nation together in a form of "pagan love" directed toward one's in-group.²⁹

Based on this reading of Job, Žižek develops what amounts to an entire Christology, which he then appears to tacitly attribute to Paul. Where Job, symbolizing here the Jewish community as a whole, expresses his solidarity with the divine impotence by remaining silent about it, Christ as God-become-man directly reveals the divine impotence through his death on the cross and particularly in his cry of dereliction, meaning that Christianity is essentially "the religion of atheism."³⁰ For this reason, Žižek argues (against Badiou) that cross and resurrection are dialectically identical, insofar as Christ's death immediately is the foundation for the new community, which Žižek calls the "Holy Spirit." This is because the public disclosure of what Judaism kept secret makes the Jewish "unplugged" stance toward the law available to everyone, resulting in a new, universal form of love to go along with the Jews' "new" (from the pagan perspective) experience of law. This combination is illustrated by Paul's logic of the "as if not" in 1 Corinthians 7, in which the subject does not simply maintain a vague distance toward symbolic obligations—which for Žižek is how the symbolic order *normally* works—but enacts "the disavowal of the symbolic realm itself: I use symbolic obligations, but I am not performatively *bound* by them."³¹ That is to say, I am freed from the logic of the "obscene superego supplement" that binds me to the law through enjoyment. Referring to Agamben's idea of the messianic law as a further state of emergency above and beyond the "normal" Schmittian state of exception, Žižek argues that

²⁷ Ibid., 126.

²⁸ Ibid., 128.

²⁹ Ibid., 120.

³⁰ Ibid., 171. For this reason, one could argue that Žižek is essentially a "death of God" theologian.

³¹ Ibid., 112.

what the Pauline emergency suspends is not so much the explicit Law regulating our daily life, but, precisely, its obscene unwritten underside: when, in his series of *as if* prescriptions, Paul basically says: ‘obey the law as if you are not obeying them,’ this means precisely that *we should suspend the obscene libidinal investment in the Law, the investment on account of which the Law generates/solicits its own transgression.*³²

Thus Paul radicalizes the Jewish tradition by “betraying” it—that is, revealing its secret through his reference to the cross—and universalizing it precisely by forming *particular* communities founded in this new experience of law and love.

Unfortunately, Žižek’s point here is obscured by what seems to me to be a surface-level error. It is clear, on the one hand, that Žižek views the law confronted in Romans 7 as being the normal or “pagan” law that generates its own transgression through the obscene superego supplement. Strangely, Žižek simultaneously claims that the Jewish law “is already a law deprived of its superego supplement, not relying on any obscene support,” i.e., the Jewish stance toward the law is fundamentally what Paul is after, yet he also follows the long-standing tradition of claiming that, nonetheless, the Jewish law is “the main target of Paul’s critique.”³³ The problem with this contradiction is obvious: it presupposes that Žižek understands the Jewish law better than Paul does. If asked, Žižek (it seems to me) would almost certainly give up the idea that Paul’s main target is the Jewish law, simply because he hangs no further interpretative weight on it whatsoever. In these terms, he could easily argue that later Christian interpreters got Paul wrong on this point precisely because they reject the anxiety of rootlessness that is introduced by “unplugging” pagans and giving them the Jewish “rootless” stance toward the law.³⁴ In fact, Žižek effectively argues precisely that: for him, Christianity needs the “reference to the Jewish Law” because only that reference can “sustain[] the specific Christian notion of Love that needs a distance, that thrives on differences, that has nothing to do with any kind of erasure of borders and immersion in Oneness.”³⁵ It is the rejection of the Jewish stance toward law and the reintroduction of the pagan experience of law that forms the “perverse core” of Actual Existing Christianity.

That being said, one can state the inner logic of Žižek’s reading of Paul in a fairly straightforward schematic form. Judaism represents an “unplugged” stance toward the law that Žižek valorizes, but it is combined with a “pagan” form of love that is bound to one’s own in-group. Actual Existing Christianity represents a universal love that cuts across differences, but it is combined with a “pagan” form of law that generates its own transgression through the obscene superego supplement. What the letters of Paul present to us is a fragile moment of emergence, where pagans are inducted directly into the Jewish “unplugged”

³² Ibid., 113.

³³ Ibid., 113.

³⁴ Ibid., 119.

³⁵ Ibid., 120.

stance toward the law, not through adherence to the positive law of the Jewish community, but rather through participation in the love beyond the law. Yet tragically, it is precisely that "love beyond the law" that necessarily collapses back into the obscene superego supplement, generating a return to the perverse pagan stance toward law.

To my mind, this reading has much to recommend it over Badiou's. First and foremost, it takes seriously Paul's self-understanding as apostle to the Gentiles, but precisely *from the Jews*, whereas for Badiou Paul's reference to Judaism is a superficial and instrumental one. Second, although on the surface he follows the broad consensus of biblical scholars in supposing that Paul only ever uses the term "law" to refer to the Torah,³⁶ the inner logic of his argument points toward the fact that this univocality of the term "law" cannot possibly be sustained in light of what Paul is actually saying in Romans 7—that is, Paul must be referring to pagan law and describing the plight of a pagan subject. Although he arrives at this position "dishonestly," through an anachronistic application of Santner's psychoanalytic reading of Rosenzweig, without very much in the way of detailed readings of particular texts, and in the midst of some logical inconsistencies and general *faux pas*, it seems to me that at a very basic level, Žižek's fragmentary argument gets Paul *right* and opens up promising paths for future work on Paul, Judaism, and Christianity—some of which Žižek himself actually follows up on in later works, most notably *The Parallax View*. Beyond that, Žižek's approach of reading Paul in relation to later Christianity has the benefit of insisting that every philosophical interpretation of Paul and of Christianity must necessarily also be an interpretation of Judaism, not as a dispensable historical preface, but as that which Christianity constitutively betrays.

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³⁶ See, for instance, Stanley Stowers, *A Re-Reading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale, 1994).