

Žižek's Kant, or The Crack in the Universal (Politicising the Transcendental Turn)

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Introduction: Žižek as Hegelian or 'NeoKantian'? Yes, Please!

Although Slavoj Žižek presents his texts as reflecting a decisively Hegelian or (since 1997) Schellingerian philosophical heritage (Žižek, 1997; Žižek, 1998), this paper argues that two distinctively Kantian preoccupations are central in everything Žižek has written. The first is the 'transcendental turn', and Kant's contention that subjects' access to the world is never direct but always mediated (in Kant's system, through the forms of sensibility and the schematised categories of the understanding). This move in Žižek's work is 'cashed out' in his Lacanian rereading of the category of ideology. How and why this Marxian term should be used to describe the collective representations and practices Žižek contends structure individuals' being-in-the-world yields one register of the 'primacy of political reason' in Žižek's work. (see the **Conclusion** below). The second, 'neoKantian' *motif* that informs Žižek's *oeuvre*, decisive for Žižek's reading of Kant, is his concern with epistemic and moral finitude. Žižek's political ontology originates in what I will term a 'politicisation' of the ontological field. Yet this politicisation, in its turn, is carried out under the heading of this second Kantian motif of *finitude*.

To anticipate, the argument will be that Žižek's entire philosophy, and his reading of Kant, turn around the following two positions:

1. Žižek (with Heidegger) argues that Kant was the first thinker to broach finitude as the starting point for philosophical inquiry. The contours of this Kantian move are well known. In the first *Critique*, Kant asserts the impossibility of humans ever immediately accessing Things-in-Themselves. Mediation through intuition, understanding and the imagination—far from being regrettable necessities, or simply deceptive—are the necessary conditions of the construction of sense. In the second *Critique*, Kant argues that human beings do not have access to the sovereign good or *summum bonum*. In Kant's words: "If we assume any object under the name of a good as a determining principle of the will ... and then deduce from it the supreme practical principle, this would always introduce heteronomy, and crush out the moral principle". The moral law, Kant *dixit*, must accordingly "abstract as a determining principle from all matter", which is exactly why it is so famously and inhumanely formal. (Kant, 1952: 338)
2. Nevertheless, Žižek asserts that Kant was never able to fully think through the radical nature of his broaching of the epistemic and moral finitude of our human being. In a way that might reflect Žižek's early debt to Derrida, Žižek asserts that the logics of Kant's concern with finitude commit him at certain points to positions that he could not finally avow. In the first *Critique*, Žižek argues, in Kant's postulation of the empty subject of apperception, he introduced a post-metaphysical conception of subjectivity, yet repeatedly withdrew from this postulation by suggesting that the 'spontaneous' moral subject is a noumenal—and so transcendent, not just transcendental—Freedom. (see Allison, 1983: 286-287; Pippin, 1997: 53; 51)¹ In the second *Critique* and in several of the later practical writings, Žižek argues, Kant was led towards an intimation of the 'speculative identity' between the perfectly Good act and Diabolical Evil (evil performed for no 'pathological' reason). The need to cover over this 'speculative identity', Žižek argues, is the real impetus behind Kant's emphasis on the rigorous formality of the moral Law.²

It is only Hegel, for Žižek, who is able to fully think through the notion of human finitude introduced by Kant, which is why Žižek's 'neoKantianism'—to be ironic—is a Lacanian Hegelianism. But an adequate reading of Žižek's Hegel is another matter. The work of understanding Žižek's understanding of the first and third *Critiques* and their inter-relation in what follows can serve as a prolegomena to any such reading.

I Žižek and the Subject of Kantian Apperception

Tellingly, Žižek's interpretation of Kant is situated in terms of the 'Transcendental Dialectic' in *The Critique of Pure Reason* from the start, as that section wherein Kant most fully argues for the

unsustainability of traditional metaphysics. In *Tarrying With the Negative*, Žižek introduces his reading of Kant through recounting Kant's critique of Descartes' famous *cogito sum*, which features in this crucial section of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. As Žižek glosses Kant:

According to Kant, Descartes falls prey to the 'subreption of the hypostasised consciousness': he wrongly concludes that, in the empty 'I think' which accompanies every representation of an object, we get hold of a positive phenomenal entity, *res cogitans* (a 'small piece of the world', as Husserl put it), which thinks and is transparent to itself in its capacity to think ... (Žižek, 1993: 13)³

Kant's problem with Descartes concerns how Descartes, upon reaching the performatively self-guaranteeing certainty of the *cogito*, immediately added to this 'I think', 'therefore I am'. In this move, as Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*, Descartes showed his lasting indebtedness to the scholastic categories bequeathed to him by the philosophical tradition. He conceived the point of thought or doubt as a thinking *thing*: *res cogitans*. (Heidegger, 2003: 364-359) The *cogito* was to be opposed to material reality (*res extensa*), to be sure—this is Descartes' much-maligned dualism. However, it was only to be opposed to the *res extensa* as another *type* of substance (or *res*) within the whole of reality. Thereby, as Žižek puts it, what was debarred from Descartes was the insight that 'in itself' the *cogito* is less a part of this reality than:

... correlative to the whole of reality, i.e. ... the point external to reality, exempted from it, which delineates reality's horizon (in the sense of Wittgenstein's well-known *Tractatus* metaphor of the eye that can never be part of the seen reality). (Žižek, 1993: 13)

To cite Kant's first *Critique* itself, and its remarkably worded repudiation of Descartes' move: "Of this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts= X ..." (Kant, 1978: A346)

It is above all in this formulation that Žižek claims to discern in Kant an already meaningfully 'post-metaphysical' and *non-substantial* notion of the subject.⁴ The Kantian subject is anything but another figuring of metaphysics' founding drive towards a self-transparent, "ontotheological" (Heidegger) being, according to Žižek. Any attempt to simply write, or write *off*, the subject of the first *Critique* as a founding statement of the modern(ist) notion of world-founding subjectivity is thus misguided, as when Derrida (for example) writes in *Of Grammatology* that:

However (the category of the subject) is modified, however it is endowed with consciousness or unconsciousness, it will refer, *by the entire thread of its history*, to the substantiality of a presence unperturbed by accidents, or to the identity of the proper, self-same in the presence of self-relationship ... (Derrida, 1976: 68-9)

According to Žižek, this misses what is most interesting in the first *Critique*. Žižek stresses how the key formulations of *The Critique of Pure Reason* are far indeed from presenting an agency that, secure in its own identity, could render everything else in the world transparent to its knowledge and pliable to its will. Kant places an irreducible self-*ignorance* at the heart of the modern subject.

(Žižek, 1993: 15) As Kant continues at A 346: “This I or He or It ... is known only through the thoughts that are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, *we cannot have any concept whatsoever.*” (Kant, 1978: A346 (my italics))

The text that underlies Kant’s critique of Descartes in the ‘Transcendental Dialectic’ of *The Critique of Pure Reason* is found in the ‘Analytic of Concepts’, earlier in the first *Critique*. The ‘Transcendental Deduction(s)’ represent the ground-breaking chapter of *The Critique of Pure Reason* wherein Kant tries to establish the necessity of the synthetic activity of the subject in the constitution of a sense of a meaningfully ordered external world. (Kant, 1978: 120-175) According to Kant, we constantly receive a manifold of sense data from the spatiotemporal world, through the faculty of sensible intuition. However, we do not finally experience the world as a Heraclitean flux. We experience it as an ordered ‘nature’, containing objects which exist for varying periods of time, and which exist in multiple but determinate interrelations. About these, we can make predicative judgements that legitimately lay claim to objective validity. There is thus a gap between what we intuit and what we experience, for Kant. And what this gap requires us to accept, Kant contends, is that the subject’s faculty of understanding, aided by the transcendental imagination, must always be at work. Its work brings the sensuous manifold under the sway of synthetic *a priori* rules (or ‘categories’), in order that ordered perceptions can arise. (*CPR*, A51/B76)⁵

What is decisive for Žižek is that Kant equally ‘deduces’, especially in the second or ‘B’ version of the deduction, that this synthetic activity of consciousness over time requires a single perduring point of subjective ‘spontaneity’ in which the work of synthesis can take place. If there were no such ‘unity of apperception’, in which past intuitions are held and brought into line with fresher intuitions, Kant reasons, no ordered empirical judgements could be formed. At B132, Kant accordingly broaches what he terms a “representation ‘I think’ ... which must be capable of accompanying all other representations.” (Kant, 1978: B132) This ‘I’, he stresses, is in no way equivalent to the ‘I’ that we can become aware of through introspection upon our behaviours, body language, and so on. This latter ‘psychological’ or ‘empirical’ self is the way in which:

I, as intelligence and a thinking subject, know myself as an object that is thought, insofar as I am given to myself ... like other phenomena, only as I appear to myself .../ I therefore have no knowledge of myself as I am, but merely as I appear to myself. (Kant, 1978: B155-156/ B167-168)

The crucial philosophical distinction Žižek emphasises in Kant’s text is thus that contained in the following Kantian quote:

Only insofar ... as I can unite a manifold of given representations in *one consciousness*, is it possible for me to represent to myself the *identity of the consciousness in (i.e. throughout) these representations.* (Kant, 1978: B133/154)

In other (Žižekian) words: although the subject of “pure apperception” is properly to be thought of

as a “logical construction” necessarily accompanying every representation and presupposed by them, it is incapable of ever being “filled out” with intuited experiential data. (Žižek, 1993: 14; cf. Pippin, 1997: 33, 52) In quasi-Derridean terms, we could say that this Kantian subject of apperception is at once necessary, but impossible. As Žižek details in *Tarrying With the Negative*, drawing on the work of Henry Allison, the consequence of Kant’s later attempt to identify the subject as a Thing (albeit noumenal), is disastrous in terms of the conceptual architectonics of his own texts. All phenomenal things in Kant are the appearances to finite subjects of noumena / Things-In-Themselves. If we were thus to argue that the transcendental I was a noumenal Thing, we would be indirectly maintaining that the empirical self is at once an appearance of, and an appearance to, the noumenal self. (cf. Allison, 1983; 286-293; Žižek, 1994; 16) As Žižek comments:

This doubling, however, is a nonsensical, self-cancelling short-circuit: if the noumenal subject appears to *itself*, the distance that separates appearance from noumena falls away. The agency which perceives something as an appearance cannot itself be an appearance. (Žižek, 1994: 16)

And, as Žižek reasons:

... lack of intuited content is constitutive of the I; the inaccessibility to the I of its own ‘kernel of being’ makes it an I .../ The I’s apperception is by definition empty of any intuitional content; it is an empty representation that carves a hole into the field of representations. (Žižek, 1993: 14/ 16)

Žižek’s emphasis on how Kant’s subject of apperception is *necessarily* unknowable in itself is the central pivot of his reading of Kant. Žižek contends that: “there is an aspect of Kant that is totally obliterated by the standard academic image of him”. (Žižek, 2000a: 227) This image, as we are all taught it, and as Nietzscheans continue it, reads Kant as *the* philosopher of the universal. Kant is concerned to establish the universal forms and faculties constitutive for knowledge, moral agency, and aesthetic judgement.⁶ On Žižek’s reading, in stark contrast, Kant figures as the first consistent thinker of “the crack in the universal” opened by the *cogito*. (Žižek, 1993: 45; 1997a: 237) What this ‘crack’ corresponds to, he claims, is:

... the impossibility of locating the subject in the ‘great chain of being’, into the Whole of the universe- (as in) all those notions of the universe as a harmonious whole in which every element has its own place (today, they abound in ecological ideology). In contrast to (these theories), (the) subject ... constitutively lacks its own place (in Kant), which is (also) why Lacan designates it by the matheme \$, the ‘barred’ S ... (Žižek, 1993:12)⁷

For this reason, in his striking essay “Kant With (or against) Sade”, Žižek asserts—evoking an Epicurean notion⁸—that the Kantian subject is: “*clinamen*, the out-of-joint excess, the paradoxical point at which an extreme excess itself, an element which sticks out, *grounds* universality”. (Žižek,

II Žižek on the Sublime, and the Antinomies of Pure Reason

In chapter 2 of *Tarrying With the Negative*, having presented his case that the Kantian subject of apperception is a legitimate non-metaphysical conception of subjectivity, Žižek contends that “the sublime is the site of the inscription of pure subjectivity” in Kant’s thought. (Žižek, 1993: 46) What does he mean? Following on from the work of Part I, I want to try to explain the reasoning, and Kantian textual evidence, underlying Žižek’s further, striking assertion. What we require is an exposition of how Žižek provocatively ties his reading of the sublime in *The Critique of Judgement* to a reading of the ‘Transcendental Dialectic’ in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁹ By giving such an exposition, we will also make clear how Žižek’s reading of Kant stands in relation to a sense that may have arisen in the reader’s mind as s/he read Part I. This is the concern that, far from adding anything substantially new—or potentially edifying—to contemporary theoretical dialogue, Žižek’s Lacanian reading of Kant’s subject only repeats the Hegelo-Kojevian terms of Jean-Paul Sartre’s account of subjectivity as a “nothingness” in *L’Être et Neant*. (see Derrida, 1998; Borch-Jacobsen, 1991)

Kant broaches the topic of the sublime in the first Part of *The Critique of Judgment*. As Žižek notes, the analytic of the sublime has a peculiar place in Kant’s system. The third *Critique* deals for the most part with two types of judgements. The first are teleological judgements. In teleological judgements, subjects attribute an inner purpose to nature, which Kant otherwise stipulates as being wholly governed by teleically-blind Newtonian causality¹⁰. The second type is the aesthetic judgements concerning the beautiful. Beautiful objects are objects which have no purpose, despite—in the harmonious arrangement of their parts—bearing the marks of intelligent ‘purposiveness’.

In Žižek’s precise formulation, however, the sublime in Kant is “conceived precisely as the index of the failed ‘synthesis’ of Beauty and Purpose”. It is:

... the intersection of the two sets, the set of what is ‘beautiful’ and the set of what is ‘purposeful’- (but) a negative intersection ... i.e. an intersection containing elements which are neither beautiful nor purposeful. Sublime phenomena (more precisely, phenomena which arouse in the subject the sentiment of the sublime) are in no way beautiful; they are chaotic, formless, the very opposite of harmonious form, and they also serve no purpose, i.e. they are the very opposite of those features that bear witness to a hidden purposefulness in nature ... (Žižek, 1993: 46)

What is at stake in the sublime, Žižek accordingly stresses, is the limit of what can be experienced and represented by the finite subject as ordered nature. Kant is precise about this. The

harmonious components of beautiful objects invite the imagination's play, and a sense of "the furtherance of life". By contrast, the chaotic multitude that presents itself to the subject in the sublime arrests this happy play of the imagination. The sentiment of the sublime, Kant stipulates, arises:

... from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and (is) a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason ... (Kant, 1952: 501)

In Kant's telling, the subject confronted with a sublime representation puts her/his imagination to work to try to apprehend it, but *fails*. At this instant, however, something peculiar occurs. The imagination as it were reflexively doubles back on itself. Thereby, it attains an "indirect" pleasure. This strange pleasure arise from its apprehension that the very failure of its own capacity to represent the sublime object might intimate a truth of a different order: namely, the failure of representation *as such* before the transcendent reality of the Ideas, which is the dimension which our Faculty of Reason directs us towards.¹¹

What interests Žižek about Kant's account here is that he stipulates *two* ways in which the imagination necessarily fails and gives rise to the apprehension of the sublime. The most well-known is undoubtedly what is involved in the "dynamic sublime" (which is sometimes called 'the sublime of power' or of 'might'). The dynamic sublime has been made famous in the work of romantics like Wordsworth, or the paintings of figures like Turner. It involves the subject's confrontation with the might of nature: things like hurricanes, stormy seas, grand crags and precipices, lightning and thunder, or (to use a more recent case) jet planes flying uncannily into tall buildings.

The other way the imagination fails, in the so-called mathematical sublime (sometimes called, "the sublime of magnitude"), is less well-known, although Kant introduces it first in *The Critique of Judgment*. Kant's examples of the mathematical sublime include the "bewilderment, or sort of perplexity, which ... seizes the visitor on first entering St. Peter's in Rome ..." (Kant, 1952: 499) Kant also invokes, in Pascalian vein, the necessarily failed attempt to picture the magnitude of the spatially infinite universe: "... the system of the Milky Way, and the immeasurable host of such systems ..." (Kant, 1952: 501) As Žižek explains, what is at stake with the mathematical sublime is the inability of our "synthetic comprehension" to fully encompass the quantitative magnitude of what is given to us through our sensuous apprehension. (Žižek, 1999: 38)

Vitaly, when Žižek broaches the two modes of the Kantian sublime, his stress is almost always on how their "conceptual matrix" is laid out in the "Transcendental Dialectic" of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. (Žižek, 1993: 54; Kant, 1978: 297 ff.) Chapter II, Book II of "The Transcendental Dialectic" sets out what Kant argues are four "antinomies" that ensue whenever subjects seek to

apply the categories of their understanding beyond their legitimate scope, and try to make judgements concerning such 'Ideas of Reason' as God, Freedom, or the Universe as a Whole. Antinomies, as Kant specifies, are not contradictions. His whole point in the *Critique* is that we are simply not *able* to decide between the opposed propositions we can generate regarding these objects (eg: "the universe had a beginning in time"/"the universe did not have a beginning in time"). (Kant, 1952: 156) The reason is that, in each case, the common ground of the dispute is not something that we can meaningfully talk about in the same way as we can concerning the objects we encounter within the scope of our possible experience. (Kant, 1952: 153; Cf. 'The Discipline of Pure Reason in Polemics', 218-223; Allison, 1983: 50-61)

The feature of Kant's "Transcendental Dialectic" that Žižek's reading picks up on is that—as in Kant's analytic of the sublime—Kant once more divides the antinomies into two species. And with good reason, Kant labels these the "mathematical" and the "dynamic" antinomies. The dynamic antinomies involve propositions concerning the disputed existence of God and an "intelligible causality of freedom in nature". Kant's argument concerning these antinomies is that both poles of each (eg: "There is no causality of freedom (i.e. free will) in nature"/"A causality according to freedom is necessary to account for at least certain phenomena" (Kant, 1952: 140)) is that both can simultaneously be true. In other words, their contradiction as far as we are concerned is a merely apparent one. This strange consequent follows from the truth that the disputed objects (an intelligible non-natural causality or an absolutely necessary being) are only conceivable by us as noumena or Things-in-Themselves which would belong to a realm wholly beyond the scope of any possible experience. (*loc cit.*: 152-153; 164-171) It is therefore fully legitimate to see the same event (say, someone performing a remarkable act of bravery) as something wholly determined by the mechanical laws of nature, and as testimony to the efficacy in nature of free human will. (*loc cit.*, 166-171) As Žižek notes, it is this noumenal dimension of freedom and God that Kant thinks does the violence to the imagination in the dynamic sublime. The raging forces of nature at once pale in the face of, and negatively invoke, the truly transcendent force of the moral Law within us. This is after all, as the second *Critique* has told us, a force which ought and so *can* call upon us to put aside all of our natural selfishness, and to act for the sake of duty alone. (*loc cit.*, 507-8) It is insofar as the might of nature invokes the infinitely greater force of the Moral Law, which is nevertheless given to us by our reason, that Kant thinks we can explain the strange yield of pleasure we get when we see something dynamically sublime. Unless the sublime representation invoked this much greater power within us, the experience would be simply humiliating and painful.

Žižek stresses how Kant's argument regarding what he calls the mathematical antinomies is different. In mathematical antinomies (eg: "the world had a beginning in time, and is also limited in regard to space"/"the world had no beginning, and no limits in space"), Kant argues that both poles are false. This is because the object in question ("the world") is different in kind than the disputed Things in the dynamic antinomies. Whereas God and the Soul are intelligible as noumena beyond

phenomena, at least according to Kant, the “world” as a whole is not something beyond the phenomenal realm. It is the totality of this realm. (*loc cit.*, 160-163 (“Solution of the Cosmological Idea of the Totality of the Composition of Phenomena in the Universe”))¹² There is no phenomenon that we encounter that is not given to us through our sensible intuition. Nevertheless, the totality of all coexistent phenomena is never given to us in any one intuition. As we saw, this is what Kant stipulates as decisive when treating the mathematical sublime. (*loc cit.*, 502, 503) In Žižek’s words, with the first mathematical antinomy:

Both the thesis and the antithesis are false, since the very thing to which the thesis attributes finitude and the antithesis infinitude does not exist. The universe as the whole of phenomenal reality is a self-contradictory entity: (each antithetical proposition) speaks of ‘reality’ i.e. it uses transcendental categories constitutive for the field of possible experience, yet simultaneously it reaches beyond possible experience, since the universe in its entirety can never be the object of our finite experience. (Žižek, 1993: 35 (*sic.*))

Having laid out the architectonic of Žižek’s systematic alignment of the mathematical sublime and antinomies, and the dynamic sublime and antinomies, we can now lay out where Žižek departs from the letter of Kant’s texts. We should always emphasise that Žižek presents this departure from the letters of Kant’s texts as in fact an attempt to “be more Kantian than Kant himself”. Žižek’s key contention on this point is as follows:

What is revealed philosophically by the resolution of the mathematical antinomies, and “experienced” by subjects in the trauma of the mathematical sublime, can be shown “within the bounds of reason alone” to be more profound (and ultimately “more Kantian”) than what is postulated by Kant’s resolution of the dynamic antinomy, and what Kant takes to be intimated to us in our experience of the dynamic sublime.

From the perspective of his reading of Kant, which Žižek calls at different points both “materialist” and “authentically idealist”:

... the dynamic antinomy itself appears as an attempt to resolve the inherent deadlock of mathematical antinomy by transposing it into the coexistence of two distinct orders, the phenomenal and the noumenal ... Materialism, in contrast, gives priority to mathematical antinomy, to the inherent inconsistency of the phenomenal domain: the ultimate outcome of mathematical antinomy is the domain of an ‘inconsistent whole’, of a multitude that lacks the ontological consistency of the noumenal ... (Žižek, 1999a: 39)

According to Žižek, when Kant resolved the dynamic antinomy by “presupposing” the noumenal domain of Things-in-Themselves, he drew back from the most radical moment of his critical achievement, in delineating the nature and scope of human epistemic finitude. Žižek draws this “proto-deconstructive” claim from out of Hegel. (Žižek, 1993: 15-31) Its central argument is

this. Kant's central gesture of drawing a limit around what we can know, and positing that we can never have any comprehension of the noumenal Truth of things, is apparently profoundly humble or Socratic. However, and more deeply, this is discernibly not so. Why not? If we truly had no comprehension at *all* of the noumena, Žižek notes, we would also not be able to measure the finitude of our understanding against their 'greater' or 'truer' reality. To invoke Wittgenstein, whereof one cannot speak, thereof one really *must* remain silent. Hence, we are bound as philosophers to suppose that, although Kant argues in the first *Critique* that the noumena are necessary *presuppositions* of our empirical knowledge, and although he claims in the second *Critique* that noumenal freedom is a necessary *presupposition* of our ability to follow the moral law, these noumena can only be in the Kantian system what Hegel called "pure positings". This is the force of Žižek's recurrent recitation of Hegel's formulation from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, from near the end of the text on "Consciousness":

It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain (of phenomena) which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to see unless *we go behind it ourselves* as much in order that we may see, *as that there may be something behind there which can be seen ...* (Hegel, 1977: 103 (my italics))

So, to return now to the consideration which opened this section, we can state now the principal difference between Žižek's account of Kant's subject and Sartre/Kojeve's accounts of subjectivity as a *neant*. As Part I showed, it is not that Žižek denies, in his reading of Kant or elsewhere, the force of Lacan's deflationary *bon mot* that "the subject is what is not an object." However, Žižek's more radical thesis is that the lack of being that the subject "is" is correlative to the lack that renders the phenomenal world minimally inconsistent and so non-totalisable by finite understanding. The subject is not simply a *neant* coiled in the heart of being-in-itself: it is the gap that renders this plenitude inconsistent or not-all.

This can be read as the final meaning Žižek gives to Kant's claim cited in Part I, that we can only ever know the subject through the phenomenal representations that it conditions. The subject for Žižek can never be adequately represented either in the phenomenal field, or in the terms of an enunciated sentence. Rather, the *insistence* of subjectivity in ontological reality can only be indirectly *shown*, to again invoke Wittgenstein. And it can be shown only in and through the inconsistencies or—in Kant's terms—the antinomies that arise whenever creatures within the phenomenal universe push up against the boundaries of sense.

The singularity of Žižek's move deserves emphasis. "Kant's basic premise", Žižek asserts:

... is that the universe as the totality of beings, which includes us as its part, does not exist .../ Kant's solution to the mathematical antinomy is therefore very audacious. He breaks with the entire tradition of *Weltanschauung*, of the worldview (or world intuition). (Žižek, 1993: 89 / 110)

And, for Žižek, it is this minimal inconsistency in the flesh of the world that *is* the point of subjectivity, broached by Kant in the “Transcendental Deduction”. Just as we have seen how the sublime is the failed intersection between teleology and beauty in *The Critique of Judgment*, so Žižek argues that the subject is the point of failed intersection between the empirical self and whatever phenomena could be given to us through our senses and the categorising work(s) of our understanding.

III Failure=Success: Žižek on the Transcendental Imagination

The work of Part II puts us now in a position to lay out the most radical claim that Žižek makes concerning Kant in *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Indivisible Remainder*. This move, as I shall expand in the **Conclusion**, is also absolutely vital in terms of understanding Žižek’s wider political-philosophical position. Žižek’s position comes very close to having the look of a speculation in the pre-Kantian (pejorative) sense. It is as follows.

Žižek claims that the failure of the synthesis of imagination in the mathematical sublime is not only a truthful index of the non-completeness of phenomenal reality which does violence to the totalising aspirations of our Reason (Part II). Furthermore:

If the synthesis of the imagination were to succeed without a gap, we would obtain perfect or self-sufficient auto-affection .../ ... (hence) far from being at the root of the antinomies of our comprehension, finite-temporal reality itself emerges because Reason, in its inherent movement, became involved in inconsistencies, and continues to exist as long as Reason does not disentangle them ... (Žižek, 1993: 37-38 /1998, 110)

Žižek is drawing here on the work of Jacob Rogozinski¹³. The force of the position is that we are mistaken if we think that the failure of the imagination before the sublime representations is simply exceptional in the cognitive life of the subject. Sublime representations, Žižek wants to say, are the exceptions that evince a larger rule. This is that the synthesis of comprehension *necessarily* fails, *wherever there is perception*. This synthesis fails always, Žižek argues, in exactly the same, “quantitative” way that Kant isolated in his discussion of the mathematical sublime. There is always, according to Žižek, a minimal gap between the quantity of sensations the subject receives, and what it can comprehend. More precisely, there is always a *surplus of the former (sensation) over the latter (comprehension)*. And this holds whether we are faced with the starry skies above, a mighty hurricane here below, or something altogether more banal again.

Here Žižek’s reading of Kant most closely (and explicitly) approaches that of Heidegger in

Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics. As Chapter 1 of *The Ticklish Subject* expounds, Žižek lays emphasis, like Heidegger, on the transcendental or “productive” role of the imagination. This is the role that Kant assigns to the imagination not only in reproducing and combining previous representations, but in *generating* representations in the first place. For Kant, as Heidegger emphasises, a work of imagination is constitutive to the work of the synthesis of the manifold of intuitions which makes our ordered experiences possible. Beyond Heidegger, though, Žižek argues that the “productive” role of the imagination is not exhausted in its work of schematising the categories, and bringing their formal rules down to the earth of temporality and our sensations. (Heidegger, 1962) Žižek claims that it plays a further role. This work is to ceaselessly “cover over” the minimal *gap* that Žižek asserts exists between what we sensuously apprehend and what we can intelligibly comprehend.

Interestingly, Žižek’s argumentation supporting this claim once more evokes Jacques Derrida’s work, which he elsewhere excels in deriding. Everything turns on Žižek’s locating (or “deconstructing”) what is indeed a telling exception in the conceptual architectonics of Kant’s system. Usually, Žižek notes, Kant rigorously separated regulative principles—principles which regulate future cognitive or moral activity—from anything to do with the constitution of our everyday sense of the world. Kant’s argument in the “Transcendental Dialectic” of *The Critique of Pure Reason* is that the only legitimate use a critical mind can have for these regulative principles is *practical*. As he writes of the Idea of the Universe-as-a-whole at this point of *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

Still less is it a constitutive principle of reason authorising us to extend our conception of the sensuous world beyond all possible experience. It is only a principle for the enlargement and extension of experience as far as is possible for human faculties ... It is hence a principle of reason which, as a rule, dictates how we *ought* to proceed in our empirical (investigations), but is unable to anticipate or indicate, prior to the empirical investigation, what is given in the thing itself. (Kant, 1978: 358)

Nevertheless, Žižek notes rightly that in two decisive points in *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant upsets this strict opposition. Kant in these places argues for a constitutive role for regulative positings in the subject’s constitution of sense. Where are these places?

For purposes of economy, we will restrict ourselves to the “exceptional (Kantian) use of the constitutive / regulative pair” which Žižek identifies in the “Analytic of Principles” in *The Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁴ In section III of this “Analytic”, entitled “The Systematic Representation of all Synthetic Principles of the Pure Understanding”, Kant broaches what are avowedly “... merely regulative principles ... distinguished from the mathematical, which are constitutive”. These are the so-called “Analogies of Experience”: the principles that *all* substance is permanent; that *all* change takes place according to the laws of cause and effect; and that *all* coexistent things exist “in a state of complete reciprocity of action” (Kant, 1952: 74, 76, 84). In each case, the use of the

universal quantifier (everywhere vital for Kant) is the decisive thing. Kant is concerned here with the topic of the “Analytic” more generally: namely, how it is that the purely universal, formal categories can work upon the always-particular contents given to the senses. Furthermore, he wants to establish how we can accordingly establish the “real existence” of the objects that the categories enable us to make judgements about. (Cf. (eg) Korner, 70-79) Kant argues that, for us to get a real sense of the existence of objects, we need to have always already made *a regulative wager* about what is given to us. The content of this regulative wager is contained in what Kant calls the “general principle” of the analogies. Žižek’s stress is to note how this principle, in order to attain to Universality, necessarily invokes something beyond the scope of any possible single experience: namely “... the necessary unity of apprehension in relation to *all* our empirical consciousness (perception) *at every time* ...” (Kant, 1952: 73 (my italics))

Why is this vital? As Žižek notes, the ‘Analogies of Experience’ are not themselves categories of understanding. We could say imprecisely that they supplement the categories. More to the point, they function to guarantee that the categories will apply “at every time”, no matter what may come to the senses of the subject in any possible future time. To quote *The Critique of Pure Reason* again:

... in philosophy, analogy is not the equality of two quantitative terms (as in mathematics), but of two qualitative relations. In this case, from three given terms, I can give *a priori* and cognise the *relation* to a fourth member, but not this fourth term itself An analogy of experience is therefore *only a rule according to which unity of experience must arise out of perceptions in respect of objects (phenomena) not as a constitutive, but merely as a regulative principle* ... (Kant, 1952: 73 (my italics))

This point in Kant’s first *Critique*, Žižek ventures, is enacting a radical “extraneation” of “our most ‘natural’ sense of reality”. As a finite, embodied subject, we are always confined to a spatiotemporally limited segment of the universe. The horizon of the material universe always extends indefinitely in space and time beyond what is immediately apprehended by us at any one time. Yet, Žižek argues, in the analogies, Kant is forced to argue that our ability to comprehend any given local point(s) in space and time is only possible because of the transcendental deployment of a regulative analogy that “the universe is a consistent whole, about which sense will always emerge”. In other words, although Kant stipulated in his resolution of the mathematical antinomy that our Idea of the universe as a whole is an illusory one, in the Analogies, we learn that this illusion is a *transcendental* one. It is a constitutive illusion constructed and maintained by the work of the “productive imagination”:

The crucial point ... is that this illusion of the Universe is not something we can realistically renounce, but is necessary, unavoidable, if our experience is to maintain its consistency: if I do not represent to myself things in the world as entities that exist in themselves; if I do not conceive what I perceive as a partial aspect of some reality-in-itself ... then my perceptual

field disintegrates into an inconsistent mess ... / In short, it is an inherent part of our 'common sense' that we humans are part of the universe which exists in itself as a finite or infinite whole ... (Žižek, 1993: 85/84)

In characteristic fashion, Žižek seeks to "render palpable" his reading of what Kant's doctrine of the analogies commits us to, through reference to "a somewhat similar cinematic experience":

Today, one often supplements a shot of 'real reality' with a computer-generated image (a 'live' picture of planes flying, of a waterfall) which not only fits harmoniously into the framework of screen reality but is actually responsible for the shot's 'impression of reality': if one were to subtract this 'artful', computer-generated element, the remainder would suddenly change into a puzzle with some crucial pictures still missing ... (Žižek, 1998: 111)

In the spirit of the famous quip that sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction (and Lacan's remark that truth is structured *like* a fiction), Žižek's claim is that this cinematic phenomenon again gives external or technological form to a more basic truth of subjectivity. A further proximity with some of Derrida's thought, and that of Stiegler more recently, could be entertained. On Žižek's reading, Kant's regulative analogies in *The Critique of Pure Reason* play precisely such a "transcendentally artful" role in all of our experience as do these often clumsy, computer-generated images in contemporary films. Indeed, as transcendental, without them, we could not experience true phenomena at all.

Conclusion: From the Politicisation of Ontology to Žižek's Ontology of Politics

The essay's expository work is now complete. To repeat the premises:

- i. Žižek argues that the subject of apperception in *The Critique of Pure Reason* is not a being that could ever be objectified, but only a necessary condition for any objectification. (Part I)
- ii. Žižek stresses on how the two modes of the sublime 'map' on to the two types of antinomies of pure reason in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Žižek argues for the epistemic priority of what is intimated to the subject in the "experience" of the mathematical sublime: namely, that the universe as a unified finite whole we could ever predicate about consistently 'does not exist'. Žižek's position is that the lack-of-being that "is" the subject is equivalent to the inconsistency of phenomenal reality. (Part II)
- iii. Žižek argues that this equivalence—which Žižek often describes by saying, in Hegelian terms, that the subject 'is' the crack in the (social) substance—is

demonstrable, at least indirectly. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the "Analytic of Principles" (and also in the "A deduction") can be shown to have conceded that the synthetic work of the imagination extends to filling in an irreducible gap between what we sensuously apprehend and what we finally comprehend. This work of supplementation is carried out by the transcendental imagination. The imagination unifies the subject's sense of reality, or rather *guarantees that such a unity will always be comprehended*. It does this work by referring all our apprehensions concerning material phenomena to the regulative "transcendental illusion" that the universe exists as a fully unified totalizable whole. (Part III)

What unifies these premises is Žižek's commitment to trying to think through fully the implications of Kant's starting point: epistemic finitude. Žižek argues that Kant, in the critical project of trying to delineate the legitimate use of our faculties, opened this problematic. But he "opened" it in the two senses of having both inaugurated it, and left it incompletely thought through.

According to Žižek, it was only Hegel (and later Lacan) who fully thought through the *aporiai* that arise when a limited creature tries to comprehend its own limitation, and what these *aporiai* point us towards. To conclude, building on our exposition of Žižek's reading of Kant, I want to pose what I will call three principles of Žižek's political ontology. All of these follow from Žižek's avowed intention, whose parameters we have seen, that his Hegelian and Lacanian theory be "more Kantian than Kant".

First Principle:

Limitation precedes transcendence. (Žižek, 1993: 15 ff)

The first of these Žižekian principles is stated directly in chapter 1 of *Tarrying With the Negative*: "limitation precedes transcendence." What this means, in a slogan, is that:

... there where we might be tempted to follow the Kant of the dynamic deployment of Reason, and explain the more Unheimlich aspects of our experience as marking the interventions in the phenomenal world of an Other, noumenal dimension, we should instead only see in these exceptional moments the indices of the inconsistency of our own phenomenal world.

What is at stake in limit experiences of the sublime is nothing beyond the scope of possible experience. Rather, what these experience index is that the field of possible experience (which

Žižek usually talks of under the aegis of the Lacanian ‘big Other’) is itself inconsistent (or ‘not-all’). It needs our subjective, imaginative or (in psychoanalytic terms, fantasmatic) ‘supplementation’ if it *is to appear* fully consistent and ‘in itself’ to subjects (see Principle 3).

Principle 2:

The inconsistency of phenomenal reality precedes and ‘generates’—as a fantasmatic misrecognition—any sense we may have of its incompleteness before a more True, Noumenal or Other level of reality.

The second ontological principle follows from Principle 1. In the terms of Kant’s system, the Ideas of Reason Kant thinks the sublime objects in phenomenal reality intimate are the active *positings* of our productive imagination. They are posited by this faculty to save the (semblance of the consistency of) phenomenal experience. They do this “through (elevating) the noumenal (realm) which is their constitutive exception”. (Žižek, 1999: 39) The truth of such Ideas of Reason, Žižek effectively maintains, is accordingly to be found less in the “Dialectic” of *The Critique of Pure Reason* than in the earlier section on the “Analogies”. Here, as we saw in Part III, Kant argues that the *dynamic* principles of the understanding—which ‘oversee’ the interconnectedness in space and time of objects of subjects’ possible experience—are *regulative*, even though they operate at the very heart of the subject’s most basic, sense-constituting activities.

Principle 3 (the move from ontology to politics, via ideology):

Given Principle 1, Sublime Objects (of Ideology) are the Ways that Subjects misrecognise their own Irreducible (Political) Responsibility.

We commented in introducing this essay that Žižek’s largest aim is to contribute to political philosophy, and the modern project of enlightenment. Reading Žižek’s interpretation of Kant, however, shows us with regard to this wider or more basic orientation, that Žižek’s contribution to the political philosophy is grounded in his understanding of a much more basic, indeed transcendental, ‘politicisation’ of the production of Truth—and thereby of the object-field of philosophy itself.

How can we exactly locate the sense this ‘politicisation’? From 1989 onwards, “ideology” is the key term Žižek insists on using to describe the transcendental frameworks within which subjects constitute their understandings of the world. In the lineage of Marx, Žižek wants to insist that the ways that people ordinarily understand their political worlds and relations is saliently false or deceptive. To base his theory of ideology as he does in a Kantian account of how subjects make

sense of the world, then, seems on the face of it deeply problematic. Why? Because Kant, as standardly read, takes the scope of the categories that he uncovers to be—by definition—“synthetic *a priori*”, which means: universal. Far from being possibly false or illusory, they set out the framework within which things can appear truly or falsely to subjects in the first place.

In this paper, we have laid the grounds for understanding how Žižek nevertheless can and does consistently read “Kant with Marx” on this issue. Žižek accepts Kant’s transcendental turn. Yet he holds that Kant broached but couldn’t finally accept that the subject’s work of making sense of the world is finite: which means, minimally partial, ‘subjective’. Žižek’s analytic of the sublime shows how the phenomenal world is never given to us all at once (Principle 2), so that the sense we usually do have of it as a unified whole *can only be* the result of our *own* partial or biased supplementation of what is given by way of the productive imagination. If the term “ideology” assumes such a wide scope in Žižek’s work, we can then say, it *is* because *all* experience, according to his revamping of Kant, involves a “falseness”, in his exact sense.

Žižek then keeps, in Kantian form, a kind of “primacy of practical reason”. Only, it points him in a distinctly *political* direction, far removed from Kant’s salutary intentions to make room for faith. For Žižek, we each *always* have an input into “how the world is”, or at least how it is taken by us to be. Kant’s transcendental analyses show us how the world can never be wholly, or wholly consistently, given to us. Yet we each have the sense that yet it *is* unified. This can only mean that we, as subjects, have regulatively unified what we experience according to one or other positing of our transcendental imagination. This contention in fact points us towards how the title of his first book in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* needs to be read. In the terms of Kant, Žižek’s claim is that ideological representations politically ‘colonise’ this activity of the transcendental imagination in subjects. They provide it with ready-made sublime images (eg: the interminable shots of sports champions winning in national colours, or, differently, of the second plane hitting the WTC) and elevated, but profoundly empty, ‘master signifiers’ (like ‘the people’, ‘Australian-ness’, ‘war on terror’). Through these (in psychoanalytic terms) fantasmatic positings, political subjects can be both captivated, and in this way brought to misrecognise, their own responsibility in maintaining commitment to hegemonic ways of understanding the world.

As subjects of ideology, Žižek argues, we “love our political community’s sublime objects as ourselves”. This means: we love them as the alienated projections of the kind of world-constituting potential we each harbour within us, as the finite subjects Kant disclosed us as being. Yet just as Kant (mis)read the experience of the dynamic sublime as pointing towards the provenance of the Ideas of Reason within ourselves, what ideologies do is get us to read our experience of sublime objects as pointing towards the provenance of the key ideological signifiers within us.

... And a Final Remark on the (Political) Subject

So what then does our third principle point us towards, in the political field? According to Žižek, to be a subject is to have an inalienable, indeed transcendental, *responsibility* for how one stands in the world, and what world it is that one stands within. Such an inalienable responsibility, Žižek thinks, is identifiable in the first *Critique*, despite Kant's attempts to identify the subject of apperception with a noumenal Self or Thing. Because of this transcendental responsibility or "abyss of freedom" in subjects, Žižek then reasons, we must also accept that subjects' accession to see the (socio-political) world according to the interpretive categories furnished them by the dominant discourses in their socio-political world must always have involved a primordial *activity*. This is where he sharply differs from Levinas or the later Derrida, who elevate a sublime passivity before the Other as at the heart of subjectivity and responsibility. To see the world according to an ideology always involves an *active* acceptance and "supplementation" of the minimally-inconsistent conceptual coordinates furnished us by the dominant worldviews of our socio-political communities.

This primordial activity is, Žižek agrees, usually only "a blind but indispensable function of the soul", as Kant described the imagination in the first *Critique*. (Kant, 1978; 112) But in Žižek it also becomes the deepest ground for (the possibility of) any transformative political act. If subjects can be brought by critical philosophy to avow this originary responsibility—and if they can accordingly be drawn to re-examine their fascination with the sublime objects and narratives that ideological systems provide for them to *passively* accept—perhaps we can also be brought to *act* to institute new, and better, socio-political regimes. That is the basis of Žižek's political challenge to us.

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¹ To quote and compare Robert Pippin's 'Kant and the Spontaneity of Mind', in *Idealism as Modernism*, at page 51: "For one thing, there is ample evidence that Kant often thought one way to resolve the ambiguities was just to state flat out that the transcendental subject was the noumenal self. Perhaps his most famous statement is the *Reflexion*: 'The soul in transcendental apperception is *substantia noumenon*, hence it has no permanence in time, since belongs only to objects in space'. The same identification between the 'self proper as it exists in itself', with the 'transcendental subject' occurs in the *Critique* at B520/A492."

² "[I]n each of his three *Critiques*", Zizek suggests:

"... [a]fter indicating the contours of this concept [which would fully register our constitutive finitude], Kant quickly withdraws and offers another, supplementary concept in exchange, a concept which already 'pacifies' the unbearable dimension of the first one: the Sublime [is offered] (instead of the Monstrous) [in the *Critique of Judgement*]; radical evil [is offered] (instead of 'diabolical evil') [in the texts on practical reason]..." (*Plague of Fantasies*, 227)

The problem within *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* concerns Kant's seeming need to postulate the possibility of an act of evil which is not pathologically motivated, which is a privilege he wants to reserve for action for the sake of moral duty. As Zizek acutely diagnoses the issue:

i. Kant usually holds that it is *solely* our autonomous capacity to legislate for ourselves *in line with the moral law*, that is capable of 'lifting' us out of the causal-phenomenal nexus. Practical reason, Kant remarkably says in the second *Critique*, requires: "... a respect for something entirely different from life, in comparison to which life and its enjoyment have absolutely no worth. [A man] lives only because it is his duty, not because he has the least taste for living. / *Such* is the nature of the genuine drive of pure practical reason." (*Critique of Practical Reason*, 328 (my italics))

Yet;

ii. Kant wants to hold that, underlying our empirical tendency to prioritise our pathological selves over moral duty is an initial, founding or transcendental choice: this is what he terms 'radical evil'. The problem is that a choice or tendency which is *transcendental* can't be 'pathologically' motivated, in Kant's system. When Kant speaks of our desires as 'pathological', what he is asserting is that our motivations to act, *except* when we act morally, are conditioned by representations of 'normal' or 'empirical' things in the world (this pretty girl, that cup of coffee), which drive us to act in their pursuit. However, to take the most famous Kantian candidate of what is transcendental, the categories of the first *Critique* are *themselves* absolutely *not* empirical 'representations'. They are the purely formal frame given whose schematization by the imagination, such representations can *emerge* in the first place.

Hence, Zizek deduces, if:

- i. the good is Kant's model for what allows us to transcend the 'pathological', and:
- ii. radical evil as transcendental cannot be pathologically conditioned, therefore:
- iii. the transcendental adoption of 'radical evil' qua maxim subordinating universal law to one's particular ends, can itself only have been a purely formal, free and non-pathological act. As such, this opting for evil *will have been indistinguishable from a purely good moral act. the ordinary opting for evil that Kant posits as underlying all subsequent pathologically motivated acts of evil can only have been an act of evil for the sake of evil, untainted by any pathological gain, and yet also strictly amoral.*

Having reached this conclusion himself, however, Kant explicitly withdraws from it. Here is the relevant passage pointed to by Zizek's reading:

The ground of [human] evil can ... not be placed ... in a *corruption* of the morally legislative reason, as if reason could extirpate within itself the dignity of the law itself, for this is absolutely impossible. To think of oneself as a freely acting being, yet as exempted from the one law commensurate to such a being (the moral law), would amount to the thought of a cause operating without any law at all ..., and this is a contradiction. *Sensuous nature* therefore contains too little to provide a ground of moral evil in the human being, for, to the extent that it eliminates the incentives originating in freedom, it makes of the human a purely *animal* being; [however] a *reason exonerated from the moral law, an evil reason as it were* (an absolutely evil will), *would on the contrary contain too much* [to provide a ground for human evil], because resistance to the law would itself be thereby elevated to an incentive ... [Hence] the subject would be made a diabolical being. - *Neither of these two is however applicable to the human being.*" [Kant, *Religion within the bounds of Reason Alone*, Cambridge edition, 82 (my italics)]

³ What is perhaps most interesting here about Husserl, however, is that he arguably traces out the same 'withdrawal' in the space of a few sections in his *Ideas*. Having specified that the subject is

transcendental for there to be a world rather than itself being a piece of the world, he goes on almost immediately to try to specify the being of this subject. In doing so, though, he names it an absolute sphere of being which could feasibly exist without the world of 'transcendent' phenomena. (See Husserl, 1976: #33-50)

- ⁴ It would be interesting to compare Zizek's reading of the unity of apperception in Kant with Robert Brandom's, in *Making It Explicit*, centrally. For both writers at least, the notion of *responsibility* and in this way *freedom* is decisively *close* to the core of this Kantian concept. How this would play out in terms of Brandom's emphasis on the Kantian subject as always a rule-bound subject, is another question. (See below, and Brandom, 1998: 9-11)
- ⁵ I am directing the reader to Kant's famous slogan: 'Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind'.
- ⁶ One more extreme case of such a 'standard' reading, for example, is Zygmunt Bauman's treatment of Kant in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, where he picks up on Kant's frequent judicial metaphors and tropes to paint the latter as the archetypal exemplar of the hubristic ancient or modern dream of the 'philosopher as legislator'.
- ⁷ Although I cannot examine this here, Zizek argues that, on grounds of *this* 'Copernican revolution', "... each of Kant's three critiques 'stumbles' against universalisation": "In 'pure reason', antinomies emerge when, in the use of categories, we reach beyond our finite experience and endeavour to apply them to the *totality* of the universe ... In 'practical reason', the 'crack' is introduced by the possibility of 'radical evil'... In the 'capacity of judging' the split occurs twice. First, we have the opposition of aesthetics and teleology that, together, do *not* form a harmonious whole. (and second) the Sublime is to be conceived precisely as the index of the failed synthesis of Beauty and Purpose ..." (Zizek, 1993:45, 46) Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this paper to examine these in anything like the depth they deserve. More immediately, however, you can now see how the sense of the human-being as 'nature sick unto death', which Zizek takes from "the young Hegel" (Zizek, 1991a: 37) needs also to be read as positing that human-subjectivity is beyond not only that 'first nature' of 'things in themselves' which man, as "a speaking being" is irreducibly debarred from, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis. More than this, the 'subject' also represents a 'variable' that properly has no place in that 'second nature' particular to human-being *qua* '*parletre*'. (Zizek, 1993:14): namely, "... nature's circular movement ... insofar as this circular movement is already symbolised/historicised, inscribed, caught in the symbolic web ..." (Zizek, 1989:135) or- in Kantian terms- insofar as its percepts have been schematised and ordered by the categories of our Understanding
- ⁸ Epicurus largely adopted the atomism of the preSocratics Empedocles and Democritus. However, with the idea of the *clinamen*, he introduced the possibility that the atoms may randomly swerve from their ordered paths. It is this that Zizek is evoking, as a way of describing the Kantian subject.
- ⁹ In a move mediated by his reading of Lacan's infamous formulae of sexualisation, to make things even simpler (sic.).
- ¹⁰ Such a purpose cannot be empirically verified, Kant stipulates- here as elsewhere, he follows other modern thinkers in rejecting the constitutive efficacy of final causes. Nevertheless, he holds that the presupposition that nature follows such inner purposes can legitimately serve as the regulative principle for empirical investigations.
- ¹¹ This author has expounded on this in Matthew Sharpe, "A (Kantian) Critique of the Post-Structuralist Position on Ethics: On the Dumb Sublimity of Law", *Minerva* Volume VII, 2003. There is nothing significantly controversial in this part of Zizek's reading of the sublime in Kant. It is how this analytic is signified in Zizek's wider project that is novel (in particular, I refer to the notion of 'sublime objects of ideology'.
- ¹² Twentieth and twenty first century readers of Kant have good reason here to be put in mind of Wittgenstein's distinction in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* between statements that are *nonsense* and statements, like the *Tractatus* itself, which are *senseless*, laying claim to describe neither what is within the limits of natural science, nor what is wholly beyond, but this limit itself.
- ¹³ In particular, Jacob Rogozinski, *Kanten* (Paris: Editions Kime, 1996).
- ¹⁴ The first is Kant's enigmatic postulation of the 'transcendental object' in the first edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. In this deduction, Kant stipulates that it is not enough to recognise the work of the categories and their schematisation by the imagination, if we want to explain how it is that the subject generates meaning from the multitude of sense impressions it receives. In order that the purely formal categories can synthesise this manifold of intuitions, Kant stipulates that they must also be referred to "the transcendental object, that is, the completely indeterminate thought of something in general". (CPR, A109) What is crucial about this transcendental object, then, is that it is purely a product of the productive imagination of the subject. As Zizek comments, it is thus the very opposite of what Kant thinks concerning the Things-in-Themselves, insofar as "... it is devoid of any 'objective' content ... i.e. all sensations by means of which the subject is affected by (the) *Ding* (Thing-in-Itself)". (Zizek, 1993: 151) The transcendental object, Kant is clear, thus adds no new content to the object to which the categories are applied. Its eminently anti-Humean and *regulative* function is simply to guarantee that, no matter what intuitions may be given to the subject,

these categories will apply, or- in slightly different terms- that our judgements will refer to things, *no matter what*. To use an example, before the referring of the categories to the transcendental object, we might be able to say something like: 'this seems to be a table, because it appears to have qualities x, y, z'. After this reference has been made, we will be able to say: 'this object has qualities x, y, z, *because it is a table ...*' In Žižek's gloss on a comparative example:

"At work here are regulative principles, since (the) dynamical synthesis (that refers the categories to the transcendental object) is not limited to phenomenal features, but refers them to their underlying-unknowable substratum ('tableness'), to the transcendental object." (*loc cit.*, 152)