S. Žižek, The Puppet and the Dwarf

have the properly Hegelian matrix of development: the Fall is *in itself* already its own self-sublation, the wound is *in itself* already its own healing, so that the perception that we are dealing with the Fall is ultimately a misperception, an effect of our distorted perspective—all we have to do is to accomplish the move from In-itself to For-itself, that is, to change our perspective, and recognize how the longed-for reversal is already operative in what has been going on for a long time. The inner logic of the movement from one stage to another is not that from one extreme to the opposite extreme, and then to their higher unity; the second passage is, rather, simply the radicalization of the first passage. The problem with the "Western mechanistic attitude" is not that it forgot-repressed the ancient holistic Wisdom, but that *it did not break with it thoroughly enough:* it continued to perceive the new universe (of the discursive stance) from the perspective of the old one, of the "ancient wisdom," and, of course, from this perspective, the new universe cannot but appear as the catastrophic world which came "after the Fall." We rise again from the Fall not by undoing its effects, but in recognizing the longed-for liberation in the Fall itself.[25]

It is with regard to the theme of the Fall that the opposition between Gnosticism and Christianity is most conspicuous. Both share the notion of the Fall—for Gnosticism, however, we are dealing with the Fall from the pure spiritual dimension into the inert material world, with the notion that we strive to return to our lost spiritual home; while for Christianity, the Fall is not really a Fall at all, but "in itself" its very opposite, the emergence of freedom. There is no place from which we have fallen; what came before was just the stupid natural existence. The task is thus not to return to a previous "higher" existence, but to transform our lives in *this* world. In Saint Thomas's Gospel, we can read: "His disciples said to him: 'When will the resurrection of the dead take place, and when will the new world come?' He said to them: 'That (resurrection) which you are awaiting has (already) come, but you do not recognize it.'"[26] This is the key "Hegelian" point of Christianity: the resurrection of the dead is not a "real event" which will take place sometime in the future, but something that is already here—we merely have to shift our subjective position.

The problem with the Fall is thus not that it is in itself a Fall, but, precisely, that, *in itself, it is already a Salvation which we misrecognize as a Fall.* Consequently, Salvation consists not in our reversing the direction of the Fall, but in recognizing Salvation in the Fall itself. To put it in simplified narrative terms: it is not that we must first make the wrong move, introducing a split, so that we can then heal the wound, and return to a higher unity: the first move is already the right move, but we can learn this only too late. Here again, one should apply Hegel's dictum that Evil resides in the gaze which perceives Evil: the true Fall is in the very gaze which misperceives the first move as a Fall. It is not that things went wrong, downhill, first with Adam, and were then restored with Christ: Adam and Christ are *one and the same* ("Christ is Adam"—perhaps the ultimate speculative judgment); all that changes in order for us to pass from one to the other is the perspective. Here we should recall the Hegelian notion of speculative judgment, which *should be read twice:* to get at its truth, we should not go on to another judgment, but just *read the same judgment again, including in it our own position of enunciation.*

And the same goes for the relationship between "abstract" and "concrete" universality: in a first move, universality has to be asserted in its negativity, as exclusive of all particular content—that is to say, not as an all-encompassing container, but as the destructive force which undermines every particular content. One should not oppose to this violent force of abstraction, of tearing-apart the concrete fabric of reality, concrete universality as the totality which mediates all particular content within its organic Whole; on the contrary, the true Hegelian "concrete universality" is the very movement of negativity which splits universality *from within,* reducing it to one of the particular elements, one of its own species. It is only at this moment, when universality, as it were, loses the distance of an abstract container, and *enters its own frame,* that it becomes truly *concrete.*

Adam and Christ also relate as "negation" and "negation of negation," but in the above-mentioned precise meaning—Adam is

Christ "in itself," and Christ's Redemption is not the "negation" of the Fall, but its accomplishment, in exactly the same sense that, according to Saint Paul, Christ accomplishes the Law. In a wonderful alternative history essay, "Pontius Pilate Spares Jesus,"[27] Josiah Ober entertains the hypothesis that Pilate did not yield to the pressure of the mob, and spared Christ, who survived, and thrived to a very great age as a successful preacher, supported by the Roman authorities against the Jewish establishment; his sect gradually became dominant, and also became the Roman state religion, albeit in its more Jewish version, without the Cross and Redemption by Christ's death. The coincidence of Fall and Redemption makes this hypothesis *stricto sensu* beside the point.[28]

Both Christianity and Hegel transpose the gap which separates us from the Absolute into the Absolute itself. In terms of the gap that separates man from God, this means that this gap is transposed into God Himself, as the gap between Christ and the God-Father—Christ is the new, second, Job. In ethical terms, this means that we should acknowledge the positive force of Evil without regressing to Manichean dualism. The only way to do this was deployed by Schelling: Evil is not "substantially" different from Good, a positive force opposing it—Evil is *substantially the same* as Good, simply a different mode of (or perspective on) it. To put it in Kierkegaard's terms, Evil is Good "in becoming": the radically negative break, rupture, with the old substantial order as the condition of a new universality.

In a classic Bosnian joke, a guy visits his best friend, and finds him playing tennis in a backyard court—Agassi, Sampras, and other top players are waiting there for a game with him. Surprised, the guy asks his friend: "But you were never much of a tennis player! How did you manage to improve your game so fast?" The friend answers: "You see that pond behind my house? There's a magic golden fish in it; if you tell her a wish, she immediately makes it come true!" The friend goes to the pond, sees the fish, tells her that he wants his closet full of money, and runs home to check up on it. When he approaches his closet, he sees honey dripping out from it everywhere. Furious, he runs back to his friend, and tells him: "But I wanted money, not honey!" The friend replies calmly: "Oh, I forgot to tell you—the fish has impaired hearing, and sometimes misunderstands the wish. Can't you see how bored I am, running around playing this stupid game? Do you think I really asked for an outstanding tennis?" Is there not a Kafkaesque twist to this story? There is a God; He is good, and answers our requests—the origin of evil, and of our misfortunes, is just that He does not hear very well and often misunderstands our prayers.[29]

In his reading of Sylvia Plath's poem "The Other," Tim Kendall points out the limitations of "decoding" her late poems—that is, of precisely identifying the biographical details to which a poem refers: the impossibility of doing it, the way the reader gets lost in the multitude of contradictory indications concerning not only the events in question (is this a reference to *that* precise conflict between Sylvia and Ted recorded in her diary?); but also the fact that the very identity of the speaker (is the "I" who speaks here Sylvia, or her rival, Assia?) and the tone in which a line is meant (irony? disdain? is Assia perceived as a threat to Sylvia, or as her intimate double, part of herself? or both?), "force the reader to become implicated in this unstable world, where meaning can only be derived from the external imposition of tone and emphasis. The reader must perform the same cognitive leaps, and pursue the same hints and suspicions, as the poem's speaker."[30] In addition to all this, it is not simply that one failure overlaps with another: it is through this very failure to show its "true reference in reality" directly that a poem sublates its "pathological" idiosyncrasy, and generates its properly *universal* artistic impact. This shift, this sudden recognition of how the very obstacle preventing us from reaching the Thing Itself enables us to identify directly with it (with the deadlock at its heart), defines the properly *Christian* form of identification: it is ultimately *identification with a failure*—and, consequently, since the object of identification is God, God Himself must be shown to fail.

In his (unpublished) seminar on anxiety (1962–1963), Lacan explained why a certain fragment of our daily life is picked up as the element into which, in our dreams, an unconscious desire gets invested (the function of the "daily residues [*Tagesreste*]": as a rule, the selected fragment has the character of something unfinished, open (a sentence cut short, an act not brought to fruition, something which was about to happen but, due to some circumstance or other, did not happen): "*The condition of interruption, linked to the message, causes a coincidence with the structure of desire, which by definition has a dimension of lack or inconclusion.*"[31] Are we not, in the case of Christian identification, dealing with something similar? In our very failure, we identify with the divine failure, with Christ's confrontation with "*Che vuoi?*," with the enigma of the Other's desire ("Why are you doing this to me, Father? What do you want from me?"). In one of the most intriguing passages from 2 Corinthians, Paul defends himself against false apostles by assuming a stance of carnivalesque foolishness:

> I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you do bear with me. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as Christ's apostles. And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also masquerade as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. I say again, let no one think me foolish. But if so, yet receive me as foolish, that I also may boast a little. That which I speak, I don't speak according to the Lord, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast after the flesh, I will also boast. For you bear with the foolish gladly, being wise. If I must boast, I will boast of the things that concern my weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest on me. Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then am I strong. I have become foolish in boasting. You compelled me, for I ought to have been commended by you, for in nothing was I inferior to the very best apostles, though I am nothing.

This reference to the carnivalesque reversal is not to be understood along the lines of "I am weak in order to make the strength of God visible," and so on. It is that, in my weakness and ridicule, when I am mocked and laughed at, I am identified with Christ, who was mocked and laughed at—Christ, the ultimate divine Fool, deprived of all majesty and dignity. In Paul's view, false apostles are mighty, taking themselves seriously, so the only way for a true prophet to behave is to mock oneself like a fool. However, it is no less wrong simply to identify Paul's stance with the Bakhtinian carnivalesque reversal of existing relations of authority: this notion is deeply pagan, it relies on the insight that hierarchical power relations are fragile, since they disturb the natural balance of the Order of Things, so, sooner or later, authority has to return to dust.

The true intervention of Eternity in Time occurs when this Lord of Misrule, the Fool-King, does not stand just for a passing carnivalesque suspension of Order, reminding us of the instability of things in their eternal circuit, of the great Wheel of Fortune ("What goes up must come down!"), but starts to function as a founding figure of a New Order. We are one with God only when God is no longer one with Himself, but abandons Himself, "internalizes" the radical distance which separates us from Him. Our radical experience of separation from God is the very feature which unites us with Him—not in the usual mystical sense that only through such an experience do we open ourselves to the radical Otherness of God, but in a sense similar to the one in which Kant claims that humiliation and pain are the only transcendental feelings: it is preposterous to think that I can identify myself with the divine bliss—only when I experience the infinite pain of separation from God do I share an experience with God Himself (Christ on the Cross).