

On the Grounding of Moral Value, or Is A Post-Kantian, Post-*Christian* Morality Possible?

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Abstract

This paper stages a consideration of Slavoj Žižek's recent texts discussing the Christian ethics of *agape*. I read Žižek's 'turn' to Christian ethics as not a violation of his earlier Kantianism, but as an attempt to overcome two related problems which haunt Kantian deontological moral philosophy. The first is the problem that Kant severs morality too totally from the realm of 'pathological' inclination, and does not offer us a realistic depiction of moral psychology. The second is that the formal emptiness of the categorical imperative, especially as this had hitherto been read by Žižek, seems incapable of leading to any concrete ethicopolitical prescriptions. The key move, which is mapped in Part I, is Žižek's adaptation of a Freudian moral psychology, which he reads as already anticipated in Saint Paul. The key notion is that human desire is *generated* 'from the ground up' as a perverse desire to transgress what is legislated by law. In Part II, I then look at Žižek's reading of the Judaeo-Christian heritage as one which addresses its ethical call to subjects, independently of their social stations or personal inclinations. Part III then stages Žižek's recent reading of *agape* as an affirmative drive to do the good, which is premised on individuals 'dying to the law', and therefore liberating their 'pathology' from the perverse dialectic of law and its transgression. When one has attained to this subjective position, Žižek suggests, the need to *follow* the moral law is no longer experienced as a humiliation of our 'natural' self-conceit, but as an affirmative act of bestowal to the Other[s].

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Philosophy arguably began by asking two questions, the first 'on what there is', and the second, concerning the nature of the good. While at least in the natural sciences our culture seems fairly certain as to how to ground answers to the first question, how to ground answers to the second one remains problematic. The philosophical tradition, broadly, affords us three predominant candidates:

- The first type of moral theory wants to ground what is good on a conception of human nature. This type of ontological ethics argues that the primary locus of moral questioning ought to remain the character. In its classical forms, it

- enumerates four cardinal virtues (courage, temperance, prudence, justice). In the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas grafted onto its Aristotelian figuring three, further ‘theological virtues’ (faith, hope, and charity), in line with the new Christian ontology of a creator God and his mediator Jesus the Christ.
- The second type is the utilitarian answer. Again, what is decisive is an ontology of ‘the human things’. However, the locus of morality has shifted to actions, rather than the character. Since humans are conceived as ‘naturally’ wanting happiness, conceived as pleasure (= absence of pain), acts will be good that produce ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’.
 - The third type is Kantian, deontological moral theory. The moral correlative of Kant’s critical postulate of the epistemic finitude of human beings is the impossibility of our grounding an ‘ontological ethics’ in knowledge of the *summum bonum* (highest good). Accordingly, the law for actions is conceived of as wholly formal, and having no preordained content. Moral will be those actions whose maxims can also be willed by the agent without inconsistency to become universal law. *Any* ‘pathological’ motivations that might support this action are conceived by Kant to be contingent to its morality.

It is the third type of moral theory that will be our concern here. Its virtue is that it answers to a sense we have that to act for the good involves an important deprioritising of our own personal interests. However, its deontologism also produces notorious difficulties. Commentators have long remarked how difficult it is to translate Kant’s ‘categorical imperative’ into any concrete directives for action. Moreover, Kant’s

postulate of respect as the only proper motivation for moral action in *The Critique of Practical Reason* arguably drives too deep a wedge between happiness and the moral life for it to be adequate as a descriptive moral theory.

This paper addresses a recent attempt to produce an adequate post-Kantian morality, in the light of especially the second concern. It looks at the works of the contemporary critical Marxist Slavoj Žižek. Žižek has repeatedly broached Kant's ethics in the hope of trying to ground a paradigm of, and reason for, a transformative politics. He is attracted to the formalism of Kant's account of moral agency, and sees in it the contours of a mode of action that can transcend and transform existing social conditions. However, his notion of such a radical 'act' is a clearly inadequate paradigm of the good, for reasons very like those we have cited above concerning Kant.

In two of his most recent works, *The Ticklish Subject* and *The Fragile Absolute*, however, Žižek has begun to address these problems through an explicit linking of the Kantian paradigm with its Christian heritage. In this paper, I want to take a critical look at this interesting move. I begin in Part I with Žižek's reading of the French moral and political philosopher, Alain Badiou on St. Paul. Part II looks at how Žižek believes we might conceive *agapaic* love with the notion of the modern post-Kantian subject open to universal law. Part III looks at *The Fragile Absolute's* discussions of Paulinian *agape*.

My ultimate question in this paper is this: can or do Žižek's most recent texts commit him to a regrounding of a universalist morality via a post-Christian, post-Kantian ethics? At issue here, therefore, is the possibility of our affirming what Kant denied in the second

Critique, when he spoke as follows concerning the Christian ‘law of laws’ (*love God above everything, and thy neighbour as thyself*):

In fact, if a rational creature could ever reach this point, that he thoroughly *likes* to do all moral laws, this would mean that there does not exist in him even the possibility of a desire that would tempt him to deviate from them; for to overcome such a desire always costs the subject some sacrifice and therefore requires self-compulsion, that is, inward constraint to something that one does not quite like to do; and no creature can ever reach this stage of moral disposition (Kant: *CPrR*, 326).

Part I: Anti-Nietzsche: Zizek on Badiou on St. Paul

Signaling how important considerations in moral philosophy are to his work, Zizek devotes a central chapter of *The Ticklish Subject* to the work of the French ethico-political philosopher, Alain Badiou. In order to approach our problematic here, then, I need to recount something of Badiou’s wider position.

As Zizek expounds it, Badiou’s theory is structured around a central opposition. Badiou postulates, on one hand, the order of Being. Roughly, this is the order of what can be said constatively within the terms of an ontological discourse. It is the totality of entities that can be or has been ‘objectively’ laid out and correlated within a single horizon of understanding. Politically, it corresponds to what he terms *les services des biens*, the distribution of discrete goods amongst equally ‘countable’ human units (Zizek: *TS*, 128-9).

On the other hand, there is the order of Truth. ‘Truth’ in Badiou signifies not the correspondence of propositions and things. It is not the coherence of a system of ontological propositions. In Badiou’s work, the term ‘Truth’ names *a mode of subjective intervention* that enacts what could be called a transcoding of the order of Being. This intervention constitutes an ‘event’, in that it cannot be predicted or justified within the ‘objectively preponderant’ understanding of Being. The reason for this is that it actively creates ‘in’ Being the grounds which will then be able to justify it.

What is particularly important about this for us here, therefore, is that every Truth-event requires a kind of premetaphysical *faith* in its agents. Indeed, what is crucial for Badiou is that ‘truth’ is what never simply lets itself be peaceably laid out by our understanding. *It makes us understanders ourselves make a stand* (Zizek: *TS*, 140). And Badiou’s key example of a ‘Truth-Event’ is thus Paulinian Christianity. True subjectivity, according to him, only shows itself in an individual’s fidelity to a Cause nominated by a Truth-Event. It involves “... the continuous effort of traversing the field of knowledge from the standpoint of the event, intervening in it, searching for signs of Truth” (Zizek: *TS*, 135). But Zizek notes that it is:

Along these lines (that) Badiou also interprets the Pauline triad of Faith, Hope and Love: Faith is faith in the event (the belief that the event—Christ’s rising from the dead—really took place); Hope is the hope that the final reconciliation announced by the Event (the last judgement) will actually occur; Love is the ... the long and arduous work to assert one’s fidelity to the Event (Zizek: *TS*, 135).

What is particularly vital for Zizek and us, though, is how this positioning aligns Badiou vis-à-vis Nietzsche’s critique of St. Paul in *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche, of course, was

well aware that Paul's texts turn around certain key oppositions: 'life' and 'death', and 'spirit' and 'flesh'. He also knew that when Paul spoke of 'life' and 'death', he was not referring to biological phenomena. What was at stake in Paul are two existential attitudes: one that lives the life of the spirit 'in Christ', and one dead to His Truth. Life in Christ is 'beyond Law', Paul claimed.

However, the thing is that Nietzsche interpreted Paul's 'beyond Law' as far from a liberating potentiality. For him, Saint Paul instituted a heightened repression of humanity's vital instincts. With Christianity, Nietzsche claimed, it is no longer enough to obey the Law. We must also censor our every desire. But, as Žižek notes, what Badiou suggests is that Nietzsche *misread* Paul. For Badiou, Paul's motivation for elevating a subject-position 'beyond law' is quite different than what Nietzsche imagined. Crucial here is the peculiar Paulinian understanding of sin. The crucial passage is *Romans 7: 7*:

What then should we say? That the Law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin, I would not have known what it is to covet had the law not said: 'Thou shalt not covet'. But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produces in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died, and the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me ...

As Žižek glosses this:

... the direct result of the intervention of the law is thus that it *divides* the subject and introduces a morbid confusion between life and death: the subject is divided between

(conscious) obedience to the Law and the (unconscious) desire for its transgression generated by the legal prohibition itself (Zizek: *TS*, 149).

Accordingly, Badiou claims that Paul advocated anything *but* a heightened repression of our ‘spontaneous’ drives. His point was rather that, for us ‘fallen’ creatures, *there are no such spontaneous drives*. Note how this at once conforms with, and radicalises Kant’s notion of the opposition between respect and our ‘pathological desires’. It is not only that desire is the desire to transgress. It is the mediation of the law that *opens* the space for the play of our desire, by introducing us to the possibility and *lure* of its transgression. Far from ‘affirmative’, my desires in this ‘natural’ state are thoroughly reactive to the law ‘from the ground up’ (Zizek: *TS*, 149-50). “The ultimate result of the rule of the Law”, Zizek expands Badiou/Paul here, is that situation which Kant’s moral psychology also addresses (cf. esp. Kant: *CPrR*, 319 ff.):

I can only enjoy if I feel guilty about it, which means, in a self-reflexive turn, (that) I can take pleasure *in* feeling guilty; I can find enjoyment in punishing myself for sinful thoughts; and so on ... (Zizek: *TS*, 150)

We note with interest that is precisely such a regime that so revolted Nietzsche. But here again is Paul, near the beginning of *Romans*, 7:

... my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another... While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bring fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive (*Romans*, 7: 4-6).

In other words, according to Badiou, like Nietzsche's: "... *St. Paul's* entire effort is to break out of the vicious cycle in which the prohibitive Law and its transgression generate and support each other" (Zizek: *TS*, 149, my italics). The fact that a genuine Paulinian might *not* do certain things is then not because of his subjection to a prohibition. As 1, *Corinthians* 7:12 says, a believer is someone whose moral attitude is: "'All things are lawful for me', but I will not be dominated by anything" (cf. Zizek: *TS*, 150-1).

Part II: The Divided Heritage of Zizek's Post-Kantian Ethics

Our concern here is to understand and evaluate the philosophy of moral value that appears in Zizek's work, and his post-Kantian attempt to answer the questions: *why be good, and how?* Given this interest, and although he deplores the return of 'the religious' in new age philosophies and deconstruction, in *The Ticklish Subject*, Zizek is profoundly attracted to Badiou's reading of Paulinian Christianity.

Zizek's interest, in fact, turns around his subscription to a post-Freudian understanding of moral psychology, drawing on the work of the French theorist Jacques Lacan. The key thing about this understanding here is that Paul's understanding of sin closely anticipates Lacan's understanding of desire. Sexual desire is a desire conditioned by what its impulses seek to transgress: namely, standard social conventions and 'ways of behaving',

for Žizek after Lacan. This most powerful, and seemingly natural motive, is thus thoroughly reactive and mediated by law, he holds.

And accordingly, as Žizek highlights, the question of Lacanian *ethics* closely matches Paul's. In *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, after quoting *Romans 7:7*, Lacan asked exactly:

The dialectical relationship between desire and the law causes our desire to flare up only in relation to the law ... Freud's discovery—the ethics of psychoanalysis—does it leave us clinging to that dialectic? (at Žizek: TS, 153)

What Žizek is interested in *qua* moral philosopher, then, is the possibility of a desire which is not experienced by the subject as necessarily transgressive of his 'better impulses' (TS, 153). His argument is effectively that Kant's proscription of our desire as necessarily (at best) amoral is an adequate description of the way we experience our desires 'everyday and for the most part', as Saint Paul argued. Nevertheless, it is illegitimate to argue that this experience exhausts all our moral possibilities. Saint Paul's interest for him lies, then, in his conceiving of *agape* as a desire which would effectively reconcile man's 'pathology' *with* the law. It is in locating and defending such a desire as a distinct and attainable possibility that Žizek thinks 'the Christian Heritage is fighting for', to cite his subtitle to *The Fragile Absolute*.

Žizek's new conception of Christian *agape*, and how he locates it vis-à-vis the tradition of moral philosophy, can be approached through his adumbration of a crucial distinction

in *The Fragile Absolute*. There are “two basic attitudes” discernible in the history of religion of which Christianity forms a part, Zizek claims:

1. Firstly, there are the *global* paganisms. These religions, and their ‘new age’ derivatives, propound a hierarchical Order of cosmic principles. Within this cosmos, each element has its ‘proper’ place. The moral philosophy that corresponds to these religions, then, is roughly of the first type we expounded in our introduction. It holds that the good of the individual corresponds to her accordance with her place within the social body; this latter being conceived as a microcosmic reflection of the global whole. ‘Evil’ designates any excess that upsets the harmony of the cosmos.
2. Secondly, Zizek says that Judaism and Christianity are religions of the *universal*. They introduce “into this global balanced ... Order a principle that is totally foreign to it” (Zizek: *FA*, 120). He means by this not only the orientation of Judaeo-Christian worship towards a God held to be meaningfully *transcendent*. Also, the question of human *value*, as it is framed in these religions, involves a ‘bracketing’ of the ‘pagan’ concern for individuals’ place within the cosmic and/or social order. The ‘call’ of God and/or Christ is not different for master or slave, but addresses something equally within them *both* (Zizek: *FA*, 119).

Once again, then, Zizek notes, a *parallel* (if not a lineage) between Judaeo-Christian ‘universalism’ and post-Kantian moral philosophy is apparent here, which would legitimate at least the investigation of the possibility of a post-*Christian* grounding of morality today. The construction of Rawls’ ‘original position’, for example, turns around

an *abstraction* of individuals from the ‘accidents’ of their birth comparable to that enshrined by the ‘universal’ religions. It is only in a beneficent ignorance, as nameless atoms, that they decide the principles of justice. Similarly, the subject of the great liberal constitutions, who is the bearer of rights (ideally) independently of his/her age, sex, race, sexuality, etc. is a post-Judaeo-Christian, *declassé* subject (cf. Zizek: *FA*, 112).

The only peculiarity, given that Zizek is concerned specifically to restore Paulinian Christianity to moral relevance, concerns how Zizek has earlier conceived of this ‘universal’ religion, versus its Judaic progenitor. In both *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) and *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (1992), in fact, Zizek argued that, of the religions which locate the source of moral value in individuals independently of their social places, it is *Judaism* which is most profound. The clearest cultural figuring of a supracultural subjectivity is the Judaic God, he notes, whom one is prohibited to name or represent. Accordingly, as Levinas has contended, what a Judaic ethics will turn around is a continual refusal to assume that one *knows* what the Other *qua* subject wants or needs (Zizek: *ES*, 56). The Other here is not respected conditionally, insofar as she follows a good we conceive for her. Nor (in line with Kant) is the Other’s moral worth a function of whether and how their actions impact favorably upon us, or anyone else. Finally, a Judaic ethics does not locate the source of moral worth in individuals insofar as each is a subject addressed by public Law, to be respected as a ‘citizen’ of our polity, above and beyond how s/he might live and act as a private individual.

My point, then, is that the correlative of this Zizekian praise of Judaism is that until 1993 at least he held that the ‘good news’ of the new testament represents a *withdrawal* from Judaism’s radical ethical status. The fascinating image of Christ’s sacrifice, Zizek

argued: "... conceals the anxiety-provoking abyss of the Other's inconsistency, thereby performing the turn from the religion of anxiety (Judaism) to that of love (Christianity)" (Zizek: *ES*, 57). At the point where he re-raises this idea in *The Fragile Absolute* (2000), however, Zizek intervenes with a crucial set of contrary suppositions that shows that he is now open to a reconsideration of this earlier understanding. What if Paul's designation of *agape* as 'beyond Law' enjoins us to love the Other exactly "... in the very abyss of its Real, the other as a properly *inhuman* partner"? Zizek now asks (Zizek: *FA*, 112). And what if Christianity, because of this, represents not a withdrawal from Judaism's 'proto-Kantian' radicality, but a *richer* articulation of its transcendent dimension and legacy? (cf. Zizek: *FA*, 130 ff)

These, in fact, are the questions that focus his closing discussion in *The Fragile Absolute*, and introduce what is of most telling philosophical interest for us.

Part III: Beyond Law, Agape?

Certainly, the final pages in *The Fragile Absolute* contain the most fruitful attempt that Zizek has yet mustered to address the question of moral value, and how it might be grounded. As I indicated in our introduction, perhaps the most crippling problem facing his work surrounds its avowed Kantian heritage. Zizek wants to model a notion of transformative moral and political agency around the possibility of what Kant called a 'non-pathological' act. In such an act, he specifies, we do not accomplish anything within our *pre-given* moral community or form of life, with its set of prescriptions on how to live and flourish. As in a Badiouian event, in the type of post-Kantian *act* he is interested in, we recast this form of life itself, or at least reshape our standing towards its norms and

practices (cf. Part I). This is why one of the things in which Zizek is deeply interested in *The Fragile Absolute* is the Christian idea of *conversion*. “In a genuine conversion, one can ‘re-create oneself’, he says. The force of the Paulinian language of being ‘born again’, he notes, refers to how even the fruits of man’s ‘original sin’ posited by Christian theology are said to be undone in a conversion act. In it, we, as it were, “repeat” the timeless Adamic act. As Zizek puts it: “... without the Divine act of grace (in Christ), our destiny would remain immovable, forever fixed by this eternal act of choice.” Yet “(t)he ‘good news’ of Christianity”, he now says, is that we can (as it were) “... undo the effects of ... eternity itself” (Zizek: *FA*, 97).

But what is crucial here is that *The Fragile Absolute*, via its reference to Paul, also offers us further thoughts. What I want to suggest is that, to the extent that Zizek holds to these thoughts, he proffers a position that allows two things:

1. A move beyond the obvious *impasses* which such a valorisation of ‘conversion for itself’ would entail, and
2. A Kantian ethics *per se* (which of course is not reducible to anything like Zizek’s reading of Kant) to be conceived, and even grounded, in a moral psychology grounded on an affirmative desire to do good much more psychologically robust than what Kant called ‘respect’ (Kant: *CPrR*, 321).

Let us consider these thoughts.

As in Lacan, Žižek says, it is a question of a certain ‘anti-humanism’ which is at stake in St. Paul’s Christian ethics. He cites II, *Corinthians*, 5: 16-17:

From now on ... we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new ...

Žižek then also affirms unhesitatingly that this ‘Christian anti-humanism’ involves an addressing not of the subject *qua* socialised individual whose actions produce measurable, (non)felicific consequences, but of “... the individual ... reduced to the *singular point of subjectivity* ...” (Žižek: *FA*, 127). “Instead of ‘an eye for an eye!’, we get ‘if someone slaps your right cheek, turn to him also your left cheek!’” in the first gospel, Žižek notes (cf. *Matthew*, 5: 38-42). But, as he interprets this: “... the point here is not stupid masochism, humble acceptance of one’s humiliation, but ... *to interrupt the circular logic of re-establishing balance*” (Žižek: *FA*, 125). As Žižek writes, then, Christian ‘uncoupling’ is far from a more intrusive expansion of really-existing laws. It “... actually involves a ‘symbolic death’: one has to ‘die for the law’ (Saint Paul) that regulates our tradition, our ‘social substance’”, and this ‘dying’ enacts a kind of *authenticity* to one’s transcultural singularity as a subject (Žižek: *FA*, 127, 130 ff., 143).

To be sure, this ethics of ‘dying to the law’ is capable of corruption, Žižek concedes. St. Paul can easily be (and has been) read as calling for an obsessive heightening of Law. The history of Christian institutions is marked by multiple instances of the eroticisation of the Law itself. And Christian ‘uncoupling’ can fall into perverse over-identification with the eccentric as such (a trap which Žižek arguably falls into in his own earlier

readings of Kant's practical philosophy) (Zizek: *FA*, 125). Yet Zizek insists in *The Fragile Absolute* that these dangers do not expunge the 'fragile absolute' at stake in Paul, and the gospel literature. What their possibility indicates, Zizek says, is only that *agape* designates a certain "work" (Zizek: *FA*, 119). Christian charity is "rare and fragile". Yet he now specifies that this is not because it can only issue in the eruption of supererogatory 'conversion' acts. More than this, he says that it is: "... something to be fought for *again and again*" (*FA*, 118 (my italics)). *Agape*, he says, is

... the hard and arduous work of repeated 'uncoupling' in which, again and again, we have to disengage ourselves from the inertia that constrains us to identify with the particular order we were born into ... (Zizek: *FA*, 128-9)

We can further, and perhaps most incisively, see the redemptive value that Zizek assigns to this 'work' given how he situates it with regard to the problem of cynicism. This has been a generative (moral) concern for him since he first published in English in 1989. Contemporary consumerism is cynical and self-reflexive, he holds, but no less condemnable for all that. In an unwitting repetition of Kant's second maxim from 'What is Enlightenment?', its message to us is: 'think what you want, *but obey!*' (cf. Zizek: *SO*, ch. 1, ch. 2)

In *The Fragile Absolute*, however, Zizek makes bold to assert that the Christian attitude is importantly *opposite* to cynicism. The cynic, he specifies, is he who would perceive a 'lowly' motivation beneath all noble words and gestures. What the 'work' of *agape* involves, by contrast, is not simply any misty-eyed idealism. The Christian is not blind to

the speck in the other's eye (cf. *Matthew*, 7; 3-5). He just persists in seeing, with or *in* her/his 'all-too-humanness', something else. To quote Zizek:

... the cynic misses the efficiency... of the appearance itself, however fleeting, fragile and elusive that it is; while the true believer believes in appearances, in the magic dimension that 'shines through' an appearance ... precisely in trusting appearances, a loving person sees the other the way she/he effectively is, and loves her for her very foibles, not despite them ... (The Absolute is) something that appears to us in fleeting appearances- say, through ... the warm, caring smile of a person who may otherwise seem ugly and rude: in such miraculous but *extremely fragile* moments, another dimension transpires through our reality ... (Zizek: *FA*, 127-8).

Finally, we can specify how Zizek thinks this places Christian ethics vis-à-vis the 'hard' epistemic and moral problematics of knowledge, truth, and the question of the lie. As in Badiou, Zizek's epistemology *includes* the speaker's position of enunciation in its theorisation of truth. An obsessive compulsive, for example, is for Zizek someone who 'lies in the guise of telling the truth', or whose ceaseless recounting of 'objective' knowledge belies his own 'pathological' investment in what he says. What a Christian ethics points towards, though, is "a language which does not deceive or conceal", Zizek claims (Zizek: *FA*, 139). Just as when Paul says that the believer no longer does anything through being *bound* to do it, Zizek talks of the attitude of the Christian as one which "... sticks to cold impersonal truth ... does not use (speech's) direct meaning as part of some hidden rhetorical strategy of argumentation" (Zizek: *FA*, 139). And the reason is that, having importantly 'died to' his particularistic life-form and/or selfish concerns, the Christian's desires are simply *irrelevant* to whatever matter occupies his concern. A subjective space for truth-dealing, and unhindered *generosity*, has been opened up by

what Zizek terms his "... radical indifference towards the entire domain of pathological ... effects ..." (Zizek: *FA*, 141)

As a 'filmic' example of what Zizek seems to be after, I think of Jeff Bridges' character in Peter Weir's *Fearless*, who loses his fear of *anything* after he miraculously survives an airline crash. When his lawyer tries to make him 'pad' his story, so they can extort extra compensation money from the airline, Bridges bawls: 'I *don't want to lie*'. In *The Fragile Absolute*, in line with this example, Zizek makes a prescription that indeed seems to open onto a discursive and *moral* politics, in the context of a reflection on the work of the psychoanalytic cure:

The fundamental lesson of the psychoanalytic notion of superego... is that there are few things more difficult than to enjoy, without guilt, the fruits of doing one's duty (in this case, the duty of telling the truth). While it is easy to enjoy acting in an egotistic way *against* one's duty, it is, perhaps, only as the result of psychoanalytic treatment that one can acquire the capacity to enjoy *doing* one's duty; perhaps this *is* one of the definitions of the end of psychoanalysis ... (Zizek: *FA*, 141-2; cf. 158 & 160).

Conclusion

This paper has hoped to expound Zizek's rereading of Paulinian Christianity, as an attempt to try to reground a Post-Kantian morality.

At the outset, I reminded the reader of the problems facing Kant's deontological ethics: that they seem to be incapable of yielding concrete imperatives, and that Kant's moral psychology seems to afford us too *little* motivation to be moral.

Part I then recounted how Zizek's Badiouian reading of St. Paul suggests an interesting possibility. Like Paul, Zizek's psychoanalytic moral psychology radicalises Kant on the nature of our so-called 'pathological' desires, by suggesting that usually these desires are wholly bound up in a perverse cycle of transgression with the law. In *agape* as a love 'beyond law', however, Paul thought that precisely this cycle might be broken, at least on Badiou's reading.

Part II looked at how Zizek seeks to think how *agape* might relate both to modern Kantian and liberal thought. The problematic was one concerning the possibility of a moral universalism, which would address individuals in an aspect of their subjectivity irreducible to their particular social differences, since Kantianism must needs regard these as matters contingent to morality.

Part III affirmed what was raised as a question in Part II: namely, that *agape* is in fact precisely a 'love' that does not situate itself in a negative way vis-a-vis what is legislated in any given 'life form', but which involves an affirmative 'non-pathological' desire not to lie, and to place faith in the capacity of Others to transcend their particularistic concerns towards the good.

Clearly, a lot will turn, in our assessment of Zizek's post-Kantian, post-Christian ethics, around how adequate a moral psychology one thinks Zizek's post-Freudian account of the psyche is. This essay, obviously, cannot properly address this question. The key thing I want to emphasise here in closing is that the possibility that Zizek's rereading of Paulinian *agape* suggests, given this moral psychology, is one that has an interesting

bearing in the great divide within moral theory between ontological conceptions, and Kantian deontologism.

Like Kant, Paul held that usually our desires are structured in opposition to the law, so that they need to be resisted if we are to act well. However, by affirming that we could be ‘born again’ beyond law, Paul points to a different possibility, Zizek believes. Insofar as the law does not any longer determine for us what we desire, by naming it as prohibited and thus tempting, a new subjective space is opened up for truth-dealing, and generosity. When we act well, this will not be out of a desire for future ‘pathological’ gain, or by fighting the cantankerous desire to disobey. The reason is that it is simply *not tempting* to act badly, when we cease seeing the law as something external and opposed to us; and when the all-too-human impulse to transgress has been understood as something wholly ‘fallen’, or dependent upon the law that it would transgress.

In *agapaic* love, precisely as Kant denied was possible, we experience the imperative ‘love of our neighbour’ as not a humiliation of our self-conceit (cf. Kant: *CPrR*, 322), but as an affirmative act of bestowal, with no ‘hidden agendas’ or impurity. Our autonomy is maintained, and even as we follow the law, a certain yield of non-reactive, non-rancorous joy is afforded us which might help us to humanely understand why it is better to have wrong done to us, than to not act well ourselves.

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