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From Catastrophic Messianism to Comic Fatalism: A Reply to my Critics

FRANK RUDA

Frank Ruda, "From Catastrophic Messianism to Comic Fatalism: A Reply to my Critics," *Provocations 1* (2016), pp. 53-103.

"This bad system has now issued in such a pompous display of power and such a terrible tyranny that [...] the knowledge [...] of liberty [...] has utterly perished...."

— M. Luther[1]

"I am worst at what I do best."

— Nirvana, "Smells like Teen Spirit"

"In capitalism I am enslaved precisely when I 'feel free.'"

— S. Žižek[2]

The present texts will address some of the intricate issues that were raised in response to *Abolishing Freedom*.[3] Unfortunately, the reader has to suffer through a rather longish introductory detour that will set the stage and provide the whole discussion with some additional gun powder. This gun powder production will be realized by recourse to a position that allows me to articulate the precise contours of the fatalist position that I defend in a more nuanced manner. I foresee this won't end well and will introduce problems that will be far worse for me than the ones I tried to solve. But, well, what else could have been expected. Worstward, ho![4]

Part I. Introduction: Catastrophic Messianism and Beyond

1. Mythical Catastrophism

It is well-known that Walter Benjamin in one of his most famous texts, the *Critique of Violence*,[5] draws on one of the pioneers of syndicalism, Georges Sorel, who sometimes is also accredited with the dubious reputation of having been a precursor of (Italian) fascism.[6] It is also well-known that Benjamin refers to Sorel affirmatively. And the reason for this is that in his *Reflections on Violence*—a violent defense of emancipatory violence—Sorel identified the idea of the proletarian general strike as a means to halt and transform what appear to be the unchangeable laws of (capitalism's) history.[7] It is this idea that Benjamin in turn identified with a form of violence—divine violence—that potentially escapes and interrupts the badly infinite dialectic of law-making and law-

preserving violence that has structured human (state) history since forever.[8] The proletarian general strike names the divine form of violence that will supposedly revolutionize the very workings of history.

What is less known is that in his *Reflections* Sorel argued that the concept or idea of the proletarian general strike is essentially mythical. It is a myth, even though a politically necessary one. Emancipatory politics cannot exist without myths, because the latter provide the required subjective energy-source for objective emancipation. It is hence rationally justified to employ myths in radical politics. Any mass striving for liberation needs a unifying motivational framework, and this is what mythical narratives provide. This is like emancipation's mirror stage: through a myth emancipation receives a *Gestalt*. The proletarian general strike offers a mythical representation of what the (emancipatory) act of abolishing the present state of things will look like. But it is like a purely negative mirror stage: it erects an idea of emancipation by imagining the *Gestalt* of crumbling of all existing *Gestalten* of politics, a representation of the end of (the present kind of) representation. Therefore, it must be mythical. The myth of the proletarian general strike allows us to imagine what seems impossible to imagine and what we nonetheless must imagine to imagine true change.[9] For Sorel, there will never be emancipation without imagining the end (of capitalism) in the mythical form of the proletarian general strike.

What is even lesser known is that Sorel believed the mythical constitution of emancipation to be essentially indeterminate. It provides no determinate vision of the end (of capitalism). This may sound as if Sorel endorses the incoherent position of envisioning the end without really envisioning the end. But even though indeterminate with regard to its concrete manifestation, the myth of the proletarian general strike does tell us something about the form in which the end (of capitalism) will occur. It will occur in the form of a final battle between those who strive to abolish and those who seek to preserve it. The formal determinacy and contentual indeterminacy of the myth—its determinate indeterminacy, as it were—is supposed to allow the masses to project onto the mythical formal frame whatever concrete content mobilizes them most (obviously, they do not decide this consciously). There can be all kinds of concrete fantasies of the final battle, but they are all fantasies of *this* battle. The myth of the proletarian general strike thereby works like a collective-projective screen: "a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by socialism against modern society" (118). It allows the respective individual imaginaries of the activists to be collectivized (and potentially unified). Everyone imagines in the same direction, as it were, and this not only creates (individual as well as collective) motivational energy, but shall ultimately, practically and thus effectively, allow for the formation of an emancipatory mass-movement. What motivates every single activist is his or her imagination—Sorel's language is here reminiscent of later Carl Schmitt—of the moment of "heroic decision" in which it is either them or us (132): "the end must always be the catastrophic defeat of the enemy" (130).[10] If we want to imagine what we cannot imagine, for Sorel, we need a catastrophic myth, a mythical heroic representation of the catastrophic defeat of our enemies. This is

because "*the passage from capitalism to socialism*" can only be "*conceived as a catastrophe*," one that is so drastic it "*defies description*" (130).

2. Traversing Optimism

It is mostly forgotten that the very year Sorel published his *Reflections on Violence* (in 1908), he also published a book with the outspoken title *The Illusions of Progress* in which he violently attacks all forms of the latter. Progress as well as the belief in it are for him *per se* bourgeois.[11] This is why they are a crucial component of any liberalism and why it is disastrous when they are used by revolutionary parties. Sorel's list of the conceptual flaws of the belief in progress reads like this: it privileges historical continuity over discontinuity (reform over revolution); it disregards real historical conjunctures, because it attempts to recognize rational patterns in history; it transcendentalizes one—harmonious—form and direction of historical development (there is—only—*one* history); it assumes that (the motor of) this development is always already at work and thus neither man-made nor to be made; thereby it generally and formally endorses the idea not of change but of reproducing the always already given. These are the illusions of progress. They are illusory because they are what progressive people believe they see, yet what isn't there. But for certain political stances (e.g., liberalism), they are structurally unavoidable. The revolution needs myths, bourgeois liberalism and reformism thrive on illusions. But sometimes the difference between the two is hard to tell. This facilitated the appearance of illusions within Marxism.

Sorel's attack on the idea of progress is therefore part of an attempt to filter out these illusory elements from Marxism. The attempt is to get the bourgeoisie out of Marxism, liberalism out of emancipation, and reformism out of the revolution. Otherwise, one relies on illusions that one believes to be myths and therefore there is disorientation. Unidentified illusions can—often from the outside—appear as if they were nothing but a "superstructure of conventional lies," and such an impression can affect even rational and solid systems of thought like Marxism (which sounds as if Sorel anticipated one familiar critique of twentieth-century communism, namely that people were enticed by irrational mass-illusions whose realities at the same time—should have—cured them of them). The symptom that Sorel focused on most is that by infiltrating Marxism a peculiar result was produced: from the left to the right, from the bourgeoisie to the working class, people started to become optimists.[12] Optimism names a specific—imaginary—relation of a subject to its own—real—historical condition.[13] It is paradoxically—as indicated before—one in which the subject—unknowingly—accepts that nothing will ever change. Optimism as disguised belief in historical progress thereby turns out to be a belief in the end of history. It is the abolishment of practice by means of the belief in its continuous progressive development. It is a practically and politically pacifying, irrational illusion that there is *one* given law of history. Optimism is practically wrong—it even is a wrong done to practice *tout court*—and theoretically untenable—an illusory belief.

What thus far—to the best of my knowledge—was not taken into account at all is that therefore Sorel emphatically embraces pessimism. And it is easy to see why. Sorel proclaims his pessimism is comparable to what Kant formulated in his "metaphysics of morals" (9). If Kant therein investigates both what dutiful acts between people ought to be like (manifested in the form of rights) and what such acts that originate solely in subjective self-determination ought to be like, treating humanity as an end in itself (that manifest as virtues), Sorel's pessimism must by analogy also address the determinations of actions between people (this is what the concept of the myth does) and issues of self-determination.[14] Thereby it would be able to serve as a practical counter-orientation to the optimistically disorienting bourgeois ideology. To see more clearly what constitutes Sorel's pessimism, it is instructive to examine how he distinguishes it from what he thinks is responsible for its bad contemporary reputation. The latter originated at the beginning of the nineteenth century, where one finds a general atmosphere that Sorel describes as "a concert of groaning which greatly contributed to making pessimism odious" (9).

The groaners were essentially "poets" (9), beautiful poetic souls that demanded more from the world than it could deliver. They are culprits of pessimism's bad press, since theirs was triggered by disappointment, and their disappointment was in its turn an effect of their previous exaggerated expectations. Their complaints thus originated in an inability to adopt the reality principle. Yet, because the poets did not want to appear as situation-blind and egoistic as they were, they pretended—this is where being poets helped—to bemoan not only their own disappointment but also a more general mishap: the human condition in general. The poetic groaning of the nineteenth century was fundamentally an expression of egotistic existentialism that had disguised itself as pessimist (structuralism). Shortly after—and this is where the bad reputation ultimately originated—it showed its true face. With the advent of the industrial revolution the poetic pessimists simply stopped complaining.[15] Yore pessimist poets converted into content realists when reality was refashioned to satisfy their desires. The industrial revolution depreciated pessimism altogether by exposing it as a dishonest attitude—pessimism is only for those who believe they did not get what they assume the world owes them. Now all pessimism became "pretended pessimism"; all pessimists were identified with individually disappointed and "disillusioned optimist[s]" (10). Pessimism was the dishonest ideology of the unlucky.

It was thus taken to be a disingenuous and derivative theoretical and practical orientation[16] and identified with an expression of all those who were not lucky enough to be part of the bourgeoisie (but want to). Not only is optimism structurally bourgeois, pessimism is structurally an expression of the disappointment of not being bourgeois. Because it is non-bourgeois, it is stigmatized by the bourgeoisie. But for Sorel one must not be afraid of this stigma. Rather, he argues, one must radicalize pessimism: from poetic to political and philosophical pessimism, since only such a worldview provides a realist vision of society for all those who do not belong to the bourgeoisie. Pessimism is not only not-illusory, it can also serve as a weapon in the struggle against illusions. For Sorel, pessimism provides the very form of the proletarian gaze.

3. Tragic Pessimism

There are thus two readings of pessimism: the bourgeois and the proletarian. The former takes pessimism as a secondary and derivative representation of a subject's position in social reality. It became predominant as an interpretation of the lamenting poets of the nineteenth century. The latter emphasizes a different take on the negation of optimism. Proletarian pessimism is neither an expression of "a lack of mental balance" nor does it endorse the "caricatures [...] usually presented of" it (9). It rather is a system of thought in its own right. But three hundred years ago a crucial intervention against it had been undertaken, when the Jesuits transformed the functioning of the university.[17] They started to govern and direct an institution that was from its beginning closely linked to Catholicism and the Church and therefore to the ideological reproduction of the existing social elites. Jesuits were essentially optimists. And within the university they started to "combat the pessimism which dominated Protestant theories" (8). Optimism vs. pessimism is thereby a new version of the older struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism. This struggle that in the sixteenth century tore apart the unity of the Church—and wherein Catholicism had suffered a major blow—started to threaten in its new form the unity of the university and with it the social reproduction of the bourgeois elites.

If there is thus class struggle in religion, modern capitalism has been born from within it, initially from the spirit of Catholicism. It took the *Gestalt* of optimism, which is thus a child born within and for the sake of class-ideological warfare.[18] Protestantism (in its original pessimist form) seemed to be winning until the religious bourgeoisie (the Jesuits) launched an intervention (optimism) that shifted the terrain of class struggle from religion to education. This intervention had quite a devastating impact. With the institutionally ensured implementation of optimism in the subjective attitudes of the re-educated generations, they were—tragically—deprived of something.[19] What they lost in and through their inculcation with optimism was their sense for tragedy, for the tragic nature of (their own) life and thus a proper understanding of the latter. The tragedy of optimism's triumphant march through the institutions culminates in a tragic oblivion of (pessimism and) tragedy. Sorel's critique of optimism proves to be a critique not only of the reproductive strategies of the bourgeoisie but also of nihilism, since it has always been a constitutive feature of nihilism that makes everyone incapable of even recognizing its own nihilist nature.[20] Optimism's dominance in education thus creates a forgetful reign of nihilism in culture and society in general.

A symptom of this is that the optimistically enlightened moderns started to discredit the validity and significance not only of myth in general but also of tragic myths in particular for modern life. Against this nihilist oblivion at the core of modernity, Sorel seeks forcefully to bring back pessimism to reinvigorate the proper comprehension of tragedy and more specifically of tragic myths.[21] Without it, we lack the most trivial self-understanding and any true historical perspective. But how to resurrect the tragic worldview for emancipatory politics under modern nihilist conditions?

Sorel returns to the birth of (the practice of) pessimism that preceded its institutional implementation in Protestantism. He returns to the (theoretical) spirit of tragedy in ancient Greece.[22] Pessimism there constituted itself as a unified belief-system for all the "complaints of the great poets of antiquity about the sorrow and pain that constantly threatens mankind" (11). It began by transforming the previous poetic practice of complaining into a totalizing system that was not only (in)formed by the history and literature of grief and complaint but also proved practically applicable.[23] Pessimism was in its original conception the name for the practical orientation that emerged from the pain that was linked to being alive. The groaning poets of the nineteenth century where only disappointed optimists and had no sense for tragedy, yet the Greek poets still really felt the pain that perforates the life of every human being. This pain subjectively expressed an experience of negativity that became the building block of pessimism. It gained traction in ancient Greece because it allowed for a consistent total image of the world that provided practical orientation.

With pessimism we thus move, for Sorel, from poetic feeling into a practical orientation. This orientation finally revealed that "social conditions [...] form [...] a system bound together by an iron law which cannot be evaded." Pessimism thereby proved to be rational(ist), since it made people see and decipher those allegedly unchangeable laws that constitute(d) reality. To modify one of Hegel's famous sayings: to she who looks upon the world in a systematically pessimist way, the world in its turn presents a systematic-pessimist aspect. This aspect consisted back then and still consists for Sorel today in making us understand that the existing social and political conditions "can only disappear through a catastrophe which involves the whole" (11). Pessimism makes us into realists. It forces us to see that tiny adjustments of the system will not change anything. Pessimism makes us into paradoxical realists, as we face the fact that we can only change the world if we imagine what seems impossible to imagine, and thus take recourse to myths of the final catastrophe. Things can only be changed if all things (as they are) disappear.[24]

Yet, pessimism is not only systematized tragedy; it is also a tragic system. And the coincidence of form and content is the "most fundamental element of pessimism." It is not simply a way out. Rather it is a position that takes seriously the assumption that there is no way out. But the tragedy of pessimism lies not simply in the claim that a catastrophe is necessary, but rather "in its method of conceiving the path towards deliverance" (11). It is linked to the insight that the very agent who potentially will be able to transform the world—by destroying it as it is—is at the same time fully determined by the structure it will abolish. The future catastrophe, therefore, will also be the catastrophe of those bringing it about. By destroying the world, the emancipatory agent will thus also destroy itself; it will heroically self-destruct—just as the proletariat in Marx was supposed to be able to revolutionize the world by also abolishing the very conditions of its own existence, i.e., by abolishing itself.[25] This is why "[t]he dogmas of sin and of predestination" (14) are fundamental axioms for contemporary pessimism. That their significance and political validity have been weakened by the optimist

interventions of the bourgeoisie will not irritate the revolutionarily firm pessimist, as she can live with the fact that "many people" will be "annoyed [...] because of the pessimistic conception"—as Sorel noted *apropos* of his *Reflections* (8) and because thus far nothing justifies optimism. This is why one must abide by pessimism.

For Sorel only a tragic pessimist is able to see that we are, in a sense, all sinners (affected by the very corrupted system we seek to overcome) and that emancipation might only be brought about by acting upon a myth of an unimaginable catastrophe the outcome of which is at the same time entirely out of our hands (as it is predestined in the sense that its outcome is, from our point of view, as necessarily contingent as God's plan for Protestant theories of predestination). The first act of preparing emancipation is thus to pessimistically accept one's own tragic involvement in what one wishes to overcome and not hope for individual salvation. Tragic pessimism allows us to see that not even the revolutionaries can be saved from the dynamic of the revolution to come—which overall does not seem to be the worst anticipation of what will happen in most subsequent revolutions in history. For Sorel this is true because the revolutionary catastrophe is only the beginning of a process that is entirely non-anticipatable. What will follow is even more unrepresentable and unimaginable—if these categories allow for further superlatives—than the end of the present system. There can therefore be no mythical representation of what will happen after the mythically imagined catastrophe at the revolutionary end of the world—only God knows, hence predestination. There can be no after-myth to the myth of the catastrophe—communism (or socialism, in Sorel's nomination) remains unimaginable, unavowable.

4. That's One Small Step for Modernity (from Pessimism to Fatalism), One Giant Leap for Mankind (from Tragic Pessimism to Comic Fatalism)

But why discuss all these details of a messianic, mythical, tragic pessimism in a text that is supposed to respond to, if necessary rebut or counter, or if worst comes to worse, chicken out of confronting the counter-provocations that were devoted to *Abolishing Freedom*? The answer is that the reconstruction of Sorel's position can provide a background against which the contours of the fatalist position that I seek to defend can be more precisely articulated, especially by acknowledging that Sorel's tragic pessimism might inhabit a conceptual neighbourhood located rather nearby. Yet, there are significant differences. Differences so fundamental that they turn the common ground into a rift as deep as (or deeper than) the Mariana Trench.

It is important to draw lines of demarcation in one's neighbourhood, as sometimes a position is criticized that is effectively closer to one's neighbour's than to one's own and sometimes one's neighbour's position is closer to the position of one's critic than to one's own. Sorel thus serves me here as a kind of prism of such demarcations. The aim of the following remarks is to point out that Sorel ultimately and involuntarily remains too optimist, his pessimism is not enough. After establishing what distinguishes the fatalism I defend from Sorel's pessimism, we will be equipped to turn to the counter-provocations.

1. When the primordial choice is declared to be between optimism and pessimism (as elaborated by Sorel), this very choice can be taken to be a given or something that needs to be constructed. Sorel mediates these two and claims that identifying the choice between pessimism and optimism as an historically (but forcefully forgotten) given is already an emancipatory move. Rejecting any assumption of givenness, a fatalist will at first also opt for pessimism—as it does not seem to be a validly *given* option, and this is why Sorel is, for a bit, a fellow traveller.[26] Yet, the fatalist will exaggerate pessimism—methodologically following Adorno's witticism that in psychoanalysis nothing is true except its exaggerations. Fatalism exists only in exaggeration, exaggerating even all forms of exaggeration. The fatalist will exaggerate pessimism to a degree that she forces out what is in pessimism more than pessimism,[27] so that the assumption that there is always a given—even if forgotten—choice between pessimism and optimism—and that potential emancipation arises from identifying this choice as a choice—is also pessimistically given up. Emancipation is not *per se* linked to identifying a choice different from the ones that appear to be the only ones; it is not about (free) choice.

This breaks with the latent optimism—and all-too structuralist inclination—of pessimism. The struggle between optimism and pessimism continues inside of pessimism, and only fatalism, being more pessimistic than pessimism, is able to take this into account. This is not a scholastic competition about who actually thinks and says the worst best (to modify Beckett hereon). It is rather an attempt to clarify what it means to conceive of what is worst as the actual and of what is actual as the worst, to borrow Andrew Cutrofello's brilliant formulation.[28] Only such a position, flagged out consistently, can actually provide the contemporary precondition for truly conceiving of emancipation, i.e., of freedom. *Abolishing Freedom* argues that the act of thinking freedom must be conceptually linked to a specific kind of fatalism—that is a specific understanding of fate and determination, as articulated, in part, in theories of predestination—*at least when* the very means of emancipation, i.e., freedom, are corrupted and turned into means of oppression (so a situation similar to the one described by Sorel). This is why a consistent fatalist position is not content with constructing the choice between pessimism and optimism, but rather also problematizes the assumption that we are always able and have the capacity to make this decision.

2. This implies taking a distance from Sorel's account of the coming revolution: because he could still optimistically believe that "revolution" or "catastrophe" are concepts that we just have at our disposal for imagining a future transformation. Fatalism is not about imagining change by using anew what is given. It rejects the optimism of givenness as well as the givenness of optimism. It is about imagining how not to imagine freedom—it is thus about imagining differently (and thus radicalizes the idea inscribed in Sorel's conception of myth). The language of freedom and liberation is no stable requisite or given in advance—fatalism's

language rather resembles the stuttering creation of concepts while speaking that Hegel depicts in the beginning of his *Logic* (after the end of all—phenomenologically conceivable—worlds). This is also why a presumed language of freedom can sometimes be or become an obstacle to freedom and why it is justified to undertake an ideology-critique of the ideology of freedom (as given) or of freedom as ideology. Fatalism thereby aims to liberate us from problematic ways of imagining ourselves to be free—notably in terms of a capacity that we (naturally) have.

3. Fatalism therefore does not aim at generating an activating impulse (in the masses). Rather it consciously rejects immediate activation, seeking to draw us out of and liberate us from our spontaneous involvement and belief in the givenness of freedom that plays a crucial part in the reproduction of the situation as it is (tempting us into all kinds of unacknowledged forms of reproductive actions).[29] Even though this seems to condemn the fatalist position to inaction, it is crucial to repel the mythical assumption that there is an always already given agent of change that just needs to be mobilized or that there is always already something significant to do—mythicisms pertinent in many interpretations of Marx. Fatalism does not aim at activation but at a peculiar form of de-activation; against the assumption of an always constituted subject it repeats Luther's gesture of subjective destitution—and this can entail acting differently. Only in this way, we exorcise not only its mythical kernel but also—and this is precisely what Sorel deemed impossible—its mythical shell, the attachment to the existing system as well as to the dominant forces of oppression at work in them. Comic fatalism is an attempt to turn us into "pitiless censors of ourselves"—a method of forcing us out of ourselves.[30] It endorses the unlikely comedy of Celan's Münchausen-like imperative: "throw yourself // out of yourself."[31] Fatalism emphasizes the preparatory element of emancipatory unbinding.[32] This is also why *Abolishing Freedom* speaks of preparation, not of revolution.[33]

4. All this is to say, at least, that the assumption that there can (or will) be a revolution with a potentially positive outcome—and we just have to find the appropriate means—is clearly too optimist.[34] It is optimist in at least four senses: first, it believes that there will be a revolution; second, it believes that we will be the ones who are able to make it; third, we have all we need to do so, and even though it will first lead into a final catastrophe, we, fourthly, cannot but assume that with and through it, things will get better: Even if there will be nothing left, this nothing will be a better nothing. This is an elaborate theory of progress. This fourfold (of) optimism (the optimism of the future, of the subject, of its capacity, and of progress) should be rejected to get rid of what Sorel rightly sought but fell short of exorcising. To do so, it is rational to assume that there is right now no future and that there never will be anything worthy of that name. There is not and never will be a subject of emancipation, and if there were any subject it would be totally empty, which is why, if there ever were one, it would certainly not be capable of doing what we now presume it should be able to do. Therefore

things will not get any better. Yet, it is calming to assume that they will also not get worse, as with these assumptions, the worst already took place. There is nothing to hope for but also, finally, nothing to fear—even though this can make us quite anxious.

5. In all its preparatory guise—and part of this preparation is the insight that preparation is absolutely in vein, as it is a preparation for what one cannot prepare for and hence coincides with de-preparation—comic fatalism describes a philosophical and not political concept, even though it does have practical implications. Sorel's pessimist stance aims to provide a frame for a political intervention, even though it borrows from essentially artistic resources: pessimism is tragedy turned into a political and practical orientation. Sorel's pessimism vs. comic fatalism is a poetic-political position vs. a philosophical one—as the comic nature of fatalism does not lyricize the philosophical discourse. If "pessimism is a lyrical failure of philosophical thinking,"[35] and this failure is embodied in the rational recourse to an orientational myth, comic fatalism finds its medium neither in poetry nor in myth but traverses both. It consciously takes up and emphasizes a feature of modern rationalism (notably a form of determinism) to subtract the last bit of *mythical* givenness from the concept of freedom. But fatalism does not thereby succumb to a poetic, Hölderlinian myth of emancipation, endorsing the principle that where the danger lies, there also lies the rescue.[36] Rather it seeks to exorcise everything that needs to be exorcised to conceive of freedom in a non-mythical way. There is no readymade lyrical wisdom to rely on.

6. Therefore, if one were to read Sorel's pessimism as an attempt to prepare us for emancipation, its understanding of preparation is fundamentally different from that of rationalist fatalism. And not only is one dealing with two different understandings of what preparation is and of who is being prepared, but—as indicated—also what preparation is actually preparing for. Sorelian and fatalist preparation are two different means of relating the imaginary and the real.[37]

7. This difference also manifests in a major methodological difference: rationalist and comic fatalism opposes what we can anachronistically describe as Sorel's Marxist Heideggerianism. The bone of contention concerns Sorel's claim that the emancipation is linked to resurrecting what has been forcefully forgotten. He seeks to bring back a solution from the past for the sake of building a new perspective on the future, whereas comic fatalism seeks to recall and repeat a transhistorical philosophical gesture for the sake of detaching us from a problematic presence and present of freedom and its immanent conception of time.

8. Part of this is that comic fatalism thereby exorcises the belief that we would always already have a stable footing in and take on the present, simply because of its emergence from a past. Rather fatalism assumes the Hegelian insight that the

only thing one can learn from history is that no one ever learned anything from history. There is thus no instructive and helpful past (solution) on which we could rely. The past does not invite us to assume the heart-warming perspective on so many unrealized and/or forgotten potentialities, potentialities that one might enjoy bemoaning. Rather it assumes that we are responsible for our own bondage, as long as we take freedom to be something we are endowed with and whose potential we can actualize or resurrect whenever. Fatalism thereby breaks with the understanding of temporality that has been put to work by contemporary capitalism wherein a mythical past is the only means we have for conceiving of a future—this comes out in the belief that capitalism existed since forever or is an almost natural condition of human conduct. Capitalism is an historical mode of production, which actually de-historicizes temporality and thereby itself. Conceiving of the future as repetition of the past is capitalism's way of transforming the structure of temporality into the annihilation of that very temporality (by robbing time of one of its dimensions: the present). Fatalism seeks to annihilate this annihilation or, more trivially, just take it as its word and structure.

9. The temporal orientation of the two respective projects is thus radically different. One identifies solutions in the past and seeks to resurrect them for a construction of the future, the other seeks to unfold the consequences, in and for the present, of the insight that the worst already happened and not even time (and certainly not history) is on our side or something we could rely on.[38] A Heideggerian framework, even in its Sorelian rendering, will only redouble the present deadlock of being stuck in the repetition of the past as future and vice versa.[39] Even though both projects oppose problematic versions of historicity, the main enemy of rationalist fatalism is less the idea of progress—comic fatalists are endorsing an (anti-)progressive worsening—but a model of historical transformation that privileges the future as a time in which something given (a capacity that we always already have) is realized. The future as time of liberation and freedom. This is to say that rationalist fatalism is (structurally) modern, whereas pessimism is avowedly structurally Greek. The problem that the former addresses is a decidedly modern problem—not one that co-emerged with the origin of western history, but with the dominant form of organizing our society through the signifier "freedom." It was this problem that in different forms was pointedly identified by rationalist thinkers from Descartes onwards up to Marx. It is a modern problem because it is intimately linked to the specifically modern form of organizing society: capitalism.[40] If the problem is modern, one should reject the fantasy of solving it by returning to some lost and obfuscated origin. If there can be a preparation for solving it, it must also be rigidly modern.

10. All this proves finally that rationalist fatalism can essentially not be tragic. This is already the case because it does not rely on any transcendental structure, but is rather concerned with the breaking up, the doing away with (and implicitly coming to be) of transcendental structure—whereas tragedy epitomizes the

transcendentality of structure. Tragic structuralism, structural tragedism transcendentalizes failure. Comic fatalism is not a transcendental position. It does not even take failure as stable coordinate or constant. When we get to failure, we have something to work with. Not even failure?

11. As *Abolishing Freedom* argues, fatalism as construable from the history of modern rationalism is in its very constitution and proceedings comic, by forcing the transcendental structure of tragedy beyond itself into a collapse, by leaving behind even the givenness of the human condition, of history, or of tragedy itself for that matter. Comedy emerges precisely at the point where tragedy is pushed beyond its own limits. This also means that tragedy, especially when it is elevated (or essentialized) into the defining feature of the human condition or of history, is structurally too optimist—since it is at least this very condition that we can nonetheless and always rely on. Which is also why in ancient tragedies, after the tragic disappearance of the hero or heroine, things—in the community—(almost) always go back to normal. Comedy begins when we arrive at a point where this latent structural optimism of tragedy breaks down, a point where its transcendental form of tragedy itself cracks by being internally related back onto itself, a point where historicity proper arises. Rationalist fatalism does thus not resurrect a given form of practice and seek to mobilize it for a new per*form*ance (of freedom), but it insists on the comic afformative dimension of freedom.[41] This means to assume that one does not have anything, not even nothing, at one's disposal. There is less than nothing to begin with, and this is why the (comic) axiom of rationalist fatalism is that "there is no there is."

Part II. Kantian Problems? On Alenka Zupančič's "The End"

Against this background, let me finally turn to my inquisitors. I will pass through the individual counter-provocations and address some of the points that I take to be most pointed or brutally correct, marking a serious need for clarification. I will begin with Alenka Zupančič's "light philosophical side dish,"[42] which is ultimately not overly light after all, since it is true that things often and surprisingly only show their true face when looked at with a sideways glance, with a biased and one-sided perspective. Her text represents a multifaceted register of different types of how to end things, and of how to avoid doing so. And, this obviously hits the mark spot on.

Zupančič conceives of the ideology of freedom that I attack as being derived from an inversion of Kant's famous "you must, therefore you can" into "you can, therefore you must." Such an inversion problematically assumes freedom to be an always already given capacity to act in this or that way. Not only does this mean that we always can act freely, it also furnishes the assumed given capacity with a super-egoic dimension (with an—ethical—obligation). With ownership comes responsibility. Against this background, she draws critical attention to the series of "as if" imperatives that I propose at the end of each chapter of *Abolishing Freedom* as a concentrated point of orientation, as

condensation of the previous elaborations. Examples of this are: "Act as if the apocalypse has already happened!," "act as if you are an inexistent woman!" and the like. Immediately these slogans—or, more precisely, provisory moral rules—sound Kantian. And they thus seem to come with Kantian problems, as not only Zupančič but also, from a different perspective, Aaron Schuster (to whose comments I will return below) remarks. What is at stake here is not a matter of general philosophical classification (are those slogans rather Platonist or Kantian or Freudian, etc.?). Rather the potential suspicion is that they are Kantian in essence, and this means that the rationalist fatalist may be confronted with pitfalls like those that arose from the formulations of the Kantian imperative.

To be more concrete: If I want to stop smoking—this is Zupančič's example—"how do I actually get to act as if I have already stopped?"[43] How do I practically apply rationalist, comic fatalism? Or, in a more technical language: what generates the *Triebfeder*, the actual incitement that makes me comply with and adopt any of these "as if" imperatives; what makes me act as if I already stopped smoking? Because when I do act as if I had already stopped, I will actually have stopped (and hence there is no "as if"). As soon as the "as if" becomes practically effective it disappears. To reformulate the criticism that I see implied in Zupančič's question: Ruda, are you not committing a *petitio principii*? You are assuming that we can apply these imperatives and thus you are taking the very position that you want to attack, notably you think that we always already can do what you ask us to do and that there is thus now an ethical obligation derivable from it. In short, the resource for my attack is the very position I attack. And if this were not the case, how to explain the practical effectivity of any of those at first sight purely theoretical imperatives? What is it that makes the adaptation of this orientational principle (practically) effective? Furthermore, and here things get worse, the political and practical implications of this will ultimately identify me as a Vaihingerian interpreter of Kant, that is, as someone whose position is fully adaptable by the capitalist framework, by the very comprehension of freedom I set out to criticize. If my position were Vaihingerian then it would be always already hijacked in advance by the very dynamic I attempt to abolish. But am I a Vaihingerian?[44]

Well, the expectable answer is: no, I am not. But I can only argue for this by making things worse, three times. Why? 1) Because I endorse the idea that what I am suggesting is precisely *not* immediately practically effective, but rather makes a particular formal(ist) point. This is why all "as if" imperatives I use do border on the absurd or, more precisely, on what cannot but appear impossible, and try to give it a form. They *seem* in this sense to be *free* of positive content (without being prohibitions). And 2) this seems to make things even worse, since in many contemporary debates Kant's, especially ethical, position is often considered to be problematically formalist.[45] But, as already the early Hegel criticized Kant, the problem is rather that his position is never formal enough but secretly imbued with content.[46] My argument for using the form of the imperatives is ultimately Hegelian in the following sense: the "as if" imperatives I chose do have a particular content, notably specific negations of content, or more precisely: specific contents that appear impossible as orientational maxims, that affirm

points that appear impossible to follow. The reason for this is that the "as if" slogans I use are all situation-specific—I derive them from the history of philosophy for a time in which freedom became a signifier of disorientation (and thus of obscure and obscured oppression). The aim is to thereby bring out a transhistorical validity in the philosophical positions I discuss in the book (for times when freedom became a signifier of oppression). In different terms: it is not the "act as if you were already X" form that is the crux of my argument, but the specific X it is about.

As soon as we transform the specific X or abstract from it, it seems to me, we transform the nature of the slogans. I am here emphasizing the situation-specific indication of points of impossibility, because I do not contend, and argue in the book, that these slogans form the ultimate corpus of a universally applicable ethics or would offer the basic coordinates of a general theory of action. These are rather provisory and moral rules that seek to locate what appears to be specifically impossible in times Badiou refers to as intervallic [*temps intervallaire*]—times, in which reactionary and obscure ideologies appropriate (or dismiss and attack) whatever signifier might once have had an emancipatory potential.[47]

But I do also agree with the libidinal economic subtext of this question, notably: does knowing that we are not free practically help us to leave behind our attachment to the very form of freedom that we want to believe in? Since sometimes it is precisely knowing something to be the case that makes it difficult to practically realize it. Does what *Abolishing* Freedom attempts to do have the power to effectively change the belief that we know not to be true? These questions problematize whether the slogans do assume there to be a subject that already knows and is willing to follow them. But is this so—for if the subject would be ready to follow them, why would it need the slogans? Also, my position does not seem to account for the very structure of fetishistic disavowal at work in the contemporary practices of freedom (i.e., it therefore does not prove sufficiently apt to counter the "ideology of freedom"). And of course, there is a gamble here. *Abolishing Freedom* seeks to take up the split constitutive of the economic grammar of fetishistic disavowal (I know very well, but all the same) and attempts to forcefully exaggerate a point of impossibility—or truth—in the very knowledge that fetishistic disavowal brackets, so that from this point, the disavowing brackets might explode. It emphasizes the actual impossibility—taking up the classical distinction of potential and actual infinity, I do not emphasize potential but actual impossibility—at the root of any true concept of freedom. Freedom is nothing we could ever have at our disposal, could ever own. The orientational slogans in their respective ways articulate and emphasize this actual impossibility (which is why it is quite difficult, actually impossible to just follow them).

In this spirit, *Abolishing Freedom* presents a provisory morality composed of concrete universal "as ifs" for times in which "freedom" became a signifier, if not of direct oppression, at least of disorientation, a buzzword. And therefore, I agree: "we do not arrive at concrete freedom simply by rejecting/abolishing the abstract freedom"—something *Abolishing Freedom* did not mean to claim in any way—"but by saying *no* to

a concrete existence of abstract freedom," notably to the problematic form of freedom as given (and/or natural) capacity in its different manifestations.[48] But we say "no" to this concrete existence of freedom in the form of a series of concrete universal, impossible provisory orientational rules. For, what unites all of them—and this is not an arbitrary feature—is that they, in Lutheran spirit, confront anyone willing to follow them with the impossibility of doing so. This impossibility seems to me to be quite different from the impossibility I encounter when I am trying to stop smoking (even though this may also appear to me to be undoable as long as I am still smoking). The crucial difference lies in the fact that the moral provisory rules are essentially concrete and universal, necessary, yet impossible at the same time. One must follow them—they are necessary to break with the problematic concept of freedom—yet one can't (which is how they make us aware that freedom is nothing we have at our disposal): they articulate points of impossibility. We must act accordingly, we cannot act accordingly, we will act accordingly. This is *not* another version of a—Levinasian—impossible-demand story (that would tell us that at the ground of any ethics there lies a demand of an Other that is so primordially other that we will never be able to meet what she/he/it demands from us no matter what we do). Rather—and this is what makes them concretely universal—these demands are related to a concrete situation wherein a specific understanding of freedom, abstract freedom, dominates that needs to be negated (that is: freedom as capacity).[49] In this sense, the specific grounding of the argument and its designated target is essential for the constitution of these slogans.[50]

In complete accordance with Zupančič's claim that the problem inherent to the problematic understandings of freedom cannot be translated into a simple opposition between potentiality and actuality of freedom, my argument is thus that finding a point of impossibility might provide a provisional orientation—precisely because it does not (immediately) translate into practice, yet it is not simply non-sensical, either. It might force us to think (freedom differently). The "as if" rules are therefore localization-attempts of points of impossibility starting from which one might begin dismantling the metaphysical assumption of givenness of freedom. So, it is not about ending (or stopping) in general, but rather about the concrete problem that the metaphysics of the givenness of freedom poses.[51] In this sense, the slogans are Kantian only insofar as Kant was a Lutheran. But ultimately, they are rather Hegelian, in the sense in which Hegel uses an "as if" at the very end of the *Phenomenology*—in the section on absolute knowing—where he claims that: "Spirit has to start afresh," and apparently from its own resources, "to bring itself to maturity *as if*, for it, all that preceded were lost and it had learned nothing..."—which itself has quite a fatalist ring to it.[52] Spirit in Hegel can rejuvenate itself, can only constitute itself as spirit, when it engages in a practice of active forgetting. How do we commence to actively forget? It is a paradoxical task, as the more we try, the more we fail. Active forgetting is also not in our power. It is obviously an impossible task, yet at the same time absolutely necessary. Necessary for what? To conceive of what it means to start anew (or at all). In short, this means that in the *Phenomenology* we not only unlearn all we take for granted or take to be given but also have to learn that we are not simply able to unlearn. This means to reach a point where it is as if we learned nothing (that could for example and actually incite us to follow one

of the provisory slogans); but this fundamental unlearning, a peculiar release or kenosis, is the self-annihilating yet necessary precondition for a commencement of the freedom of thought (depicted in the subsequent *Logic* and springing from a kind of unconscious decision).[53] More practically speaking, you can only be a communist if you—act as if you—learned nothing from the history of failures of communism (even though at the same time you must have learned enough not to repeat the same mistakes—one must be ready to create mistakes of a whole new kind).

For Hegel, such an "as if" is inscribed into the very constitution of subjectivity (i.e., absolute knowing) that confronts us with what we previously would have deemed impossible (or even continue to do so). Hegel takes up and modifies the Lutheran conception of the function of God's commandments that, according to Luther, is able to make us aware and conscious of our own incapacity and thus deprived status—and one might herein even see an anamnestic function of almost Platonic, but slightly more materialist form. The commandments are able to do so because they constantly confront us with something that is impossible to realize and that we nonetheless do have to follow. But they do not, as in Calvinism, which herein is perfectly adaptable by capitalism, encourage us constantly to try better or feel guilty no matter what we do anyhow.[54] They confront us with our own impotence and raise it to a point of impossibility—an impossibility that in the end for Hegel, who here is more radical than Luther, is constituted when there is a coincidence of two incapacities: not only our own but also God's, i.e., the Other's. And raising an impotence to a point of impossibility is one definition of psychoanalytic cure.

There is thus a distinction between formally possible and impossible "as ifs"—and if truth clearly has the structure of fiction, the question is, which kind of fiction are we dealing with? The "as if" of fatalism must be an impossible one. Yet, an impossibility in this pointed sense comes with an historical index. Which is why I fully endorse the slogan that Zupančič adds to my list of orientation guidelines, notably: the world will surely end, but it won't be the end of our troubles.[55] The end is not—and maybe never—a solution, otherwise comic fatalism could claim to be more than just provisory. Some ends actually might make things even worse—Wolfgang Streeck has recently formulated an argument along these lines: capitalism might actually be approaching and bringing about its own catastrophic end, but this will not open up the path to socialism, communism, or emancipation. Rather, this will lead to a universalization of the "zonages" (Badiou), of zones in which we no longer find any legitimized political agents but, rather, encounter temporarily stable, aggregate forms of more or less violent administration that do not obey or act according to any universalizable principles or rules.[56]

Being aware of this fact, neither comic fatalism nor any of its "as if" orientational rules is able to offer in advance solutions for the concrete problems we encounter when we start acting. But comic fatalism, by forcing us to think points of impossibility, allows us to start conceiving of an appropriate conception of action, including its starting points—without giving us guidelines or incentives to act. Comic fatalism rather allows us to

make a difference (between real action and pseudo-actions derived from an ideological misunderstanding of freedom) by locating potential impossible sites for action. The collected rules of orientation thus do not form a practical manual but present a collection of points of impossibility that we might start turning into a line (of demarcation—that enables us to discriminate all the problematic ways in which we should not conceive of freedom and its realization). It is in this very sense that the whole book describes itself as preparatory; it makes its points and seeks to help to draw a line. It thereby does not directly solve our troubles but does delineate how not to. And this is more than nothing. We do not know what to do, but the situation may change when we become ready to admit this—which is far more difficult to do than one would like to believe (and actually might help to make the move from knowledge as part of the problem to ignorance as part of the solution).[57]

This does not commit me to defending the idea that comic fatalism is all about interpretation, but it endorses the idea that we first have to dash our conception of the world and our place within it to pieces.[58] It commits me to the claim that to conceive of any form of change, one of the conceptual fundaments of change, freedom, must be fundamentally revisited. For freedom must hold: where there was freedom as capacity, there shall become freedom as result. The comic move of fatalism consists, in a first step, in losing what we don't have (freedom) so that we get what we never wanted; we become able to do what appears impossible when we are forced to. Its wit lies in confronting us with the abyss of unfreedom, so that we are forced to see that it is (only through working with and through the) impossible (that we might be able) to continue.[59]

To add another remark in passing: Raising the question of how to adopt an "as if" orientation that at the same time you know you are unable to realize, because it appears impossible to adopt practically anyway, in my understanding, closely connects the question of the very constitution of a *Triebfeder* to the concept of courage.[60] For example, it takes courage to admit that one does not know what to do and courage is always courage to do something that appears impossible. But this might be a very valid starting point (and actually is more than just saying that one does not know what to do—simply because politically the majority still pretends that they somehow know what to do or at least know someone who knows) and if we know that we do not know what to do, this is more than nothing. Courage is, to my mind, the concept that allows for an answer to how that which does seem impossible to ever become practically effective becomes, through the mediation of subjects, practically effective. Although this is not something *Abolishing Freedom* dealt with, it is a question that could not be more central to the overall project. I assume one must develop the idea of a courage to be a fatalist.[61] And this is a point that has already been convincingly argued for by Zupančič.[62] I will in the near future follow her on this path.[63]

Part III. The Significance of the Grotesque: On Andrew Cutrofello's "But Wait—It Gets

Worse"

Andrew Cutrofello's reply is so pointed that I will ruin its beauty by even commenting on it. So, let me do this as painlessly as possible (I will certainly make it worse now). Cutrofello's idea not only of confronting comic fatalism with Schopenhauer's pessimism, but also of testing it vis-à-vis the most problematic of all cases (Oedipus!) is impressive, and I have almost nothing to add to the argument, which Cutrofello makes better than I ever could have. His systematic elaboration of the distinction between pessimism and comic fatalism also highlights the very difference I sought to make here in another way by discussing Sorel's pessimism and its implied potentially emancipatory politics. Unfortunately, I can only express my deep appreciation for the concise description of the contemporary situation, the beautiful point about the "*Hic Wormis, hic status*,"[64] and for precisely outlining that by accepting the worst as that which already happened one attempts to prevent the worst from happening without opting for any kind of optimism, as paradoxical and/or comic as this maneuver will appear. Cutrofello shows why comic fatalism is not an empty thought experiment; his rendering of the different logical outcomes of the Oedipus story is hilarious and brilliant, and, in addition, he incisively demonstrates—by revivifying the important lesson of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*—why the farce that we are experiencing today is certainly not funny, but why—and this has for a long time been Zupančič's point—comedy might nonetheless be (part of) its remedy.[65]

When Cutrofello stresses that "farcical leaders are no laughing matter,"[66] he strikingly revivifies a point Michel Foucault once made and that, to the best of my knowledge, has rarely been developed systematically, or hardly been taken as seriously as it should be. The point is that the "grotesque character of someone like Mussolini was absolutely inherent to the mechanism of power. Power provided itself with an image in which power derived from someone who was theatrically got up and depicted as a clown or a buffoon."[67] Power that presents itself in all its obscenity cannot be criticized in the way in which one would have criticized power that at least pretended to be civil or at least less obscene. If you elect someone because he claims that he can solve a garbage crisis in a mob-governed city because he has good mob-contacts, you cannot criticize him afterward for having mob contacts and being a corrupt politician—this was the reason you opted for him in the first place. If you elect someone because you want him to bring turmoil that will shake a system that you perceive as being wrecked by rich people and if the guy you elected brings turmoil, *inter alia* by lying and cheating, this is nothing you can criticize him for (which is why these criticisms then ultimately prove to be powerless and futile). If someone makes his political career by emphasizing that there is a kind of class struggle in politics and he wins, you cannot afterward be surprised that there are no neutral facts anymore, but that everything in politics has become part of the class struggle in which there are no neutral positions—and obviously, even the reference to class struggle can function in a reactionary and obscure way.[68]

This kind of paradoxical transparent opacity or opaque transparency of the corrupt element constitutive of many contemporary forms of political sovereignty then demands

a new (or at least different) mode of the critique of ideology. A new mode that cannot center on pointing out the discrepancy between what is and what should have been or was promised. It rather must directly address, if one permits this Hegelian rendering, appearance as appearance and it must deal with the problem that we know what is the case (the situation appears transparent) and nonetheless this knowledge does not help in changing it (the practical effectivity of this knowledge is suspended and, again, it even blocks its own realization). Comic fatalism certainly does not provide an answer to how to do this, but it certainly provides a potential contribution to how one might conceive of this task of ideology critique today (contributing to the much needed active forgetting), by being able to conceive of transparency (or metaphorically of nudity) as just another disguise.[69]

Part IV. Fatalism and the Anthropocene: On Mark Pingree's "Geohistorical Materialism"

Against this background, Mark Pingree presents me, for several reasons, with a greater challenge. This is not because he criticizes my overall project, but rather because his critical reconstruction takes shape through an interpretation of the contemporary world that I take issue with. To elaborate this in more detail: Pingree rightly identifies me as someone thinking in the shadow of Hegel, but he believes that Hegel's thinking cannot help us anymore because we are today "living in the shadow" of the Anthropocene.[70] The latter is a name for the insight that a certain way of thinking is historically invalidated, notably all the positions that are pre-anthropocenic. I am thinking in the wrong shadow and am thereby oblivious to actual historical transformation, even if the "Anthropocene" is supposed to represent the end of the human concept of history and even if such an end is also and precisely what is at stake in *Abolishing Freedom*. In and with the Anthropocene we have to accept that there is no reason in history anymore; what was contended before by all great rationalist is outdated. Modern rationalism is pre-anthropocenic. There is no reason in history because reason is a human concept and we are living in an age where things are way more out of control than any human, including any kind of fatalist, could ever have imagined. We are facing not only a limit of human sovereignty of a totally new kind but also an out-of-jointness that goes beyond all previous deconstructive radicality. Fatalism is for Pingree, therefore, still too optimist, because it is fatalism for subjects, so to speak—it is as if I were to Pingree a more disappointing version of what Sorel has been to me.[71]

But here problems occur: if the critique is that *Abolishing Freedom* is supposedly not sufficiently materialist or realist—since comic fatalism is a position unfit for the Anthropocene—this attack is even more trenchant when the fatalist maneuver is understood as if it were nothing but an attempt to again assure ourselves of our powers. Fatalism in Pingree's reading is an expression of the (metaphysical and outdated) assumption that if we, human beings, were to realize our own involvement in and with the situation that we want to change (because it is problematic, since it is upheld by a misconception of freedom), we will ultimately be able to do so. Fatalism is thus

ultimately an optimist position expressing the unbroken belief in our capacity to determine our own fate and that of our world—in short: a belief in what people over centuries called freedom. It pretends to attack a problematic concept of freedom (as capacity) but ends up endorsing if not the same then one that is as problematic (freedom as the human capacity to determine history). My position thus attempts excavating a forgotten subject (not only of fatalism but also ultimately of history). And indeed, *Abolishing Freedom* describes itself an attempted philosophical preparation for a (practical or theoretical elaboration of a) real concept of freedom. Does this condemn me to a form of anthropocentric, pre-anthropocenic humanist idealism? To defending the very concept I attack?

Unsurprisingly, I do not think so. I think the Anthropocene is a conceptual cannon that sometimes fires too broadly in too many directions at once, which is why its apparent clarity can at times produce conceptual obscurity. Here it is so, because Pingree's reply reads at points as if he ignored the fact that I am tackling a very specific problem. This problem arises from what I take to be an ideological misconception of freedom (as capacity)—producing what I call *ontic indifference*, which describes the fact that the potential or capacity that freedom is supposed to be remains indifferent to (the very form of) its actualization—that is linked to a specific form of the organization of society (in very short: capitalism, as I indicate by starting with its pre-history in Luther) against which I am playing out an *ontological indifference* (i.e., the idea that there is nothing, not even nothing we could cling to or that is *a priori* on our side, etc.). Working through this *ontico-ontological indifference*, we do not simply become aware that in the end we are the ones we were waiting for (which is part of Pingree's critique of my position). We become aware that we might only become the ones we are waiting for if we transform our understanding of who, what, and how we are, accept the painful fact that it is absolutely impossible that there will ever be the ones we are waiting for, and thus stop waiting. Only if something impossible happens, this could create the very conditions for us to become those who we are waiting for. But this is impossible. So, this is not precisely endorsing the principle of hope. Nor is it immanently about indicating a possible futurity (as Pingree claims with Claire Colebrook). It is rather about accepting to be fucked—indeed: always already, but this also means: forever. It is impossible that this will ever change. More concretely, this means that there is no chance that there will ever be (again) any future or politics worthy of its name, or any form or even attempt of emancipation. To affirm this impossibility is the only starting point beyond delusion, and as far as possible from any optimism (and thus any claim to futurity).[72]

To claim that this condition—that there is and will never be any politics or any collective political subject—is drastically altered because of tectonic shifts in the understanding of the relation between human beings and the planet does not so drastically change the framework or coloration of the image I painted, leaving aside all colors—except for grey maybe. Because how precisely can it get worse? The problem here is not only the attempt to crack (or rather smash) the problematic walnut of misconceived human freedom with the conceptual sledgehammer of the Anthropocene; rather the problem lies in Pingree's claim that my argument is incompatible with what for the

understanding of human freedom the Anthropocene stands for. As Peter Sloterdijk has argued, the Anthropocene implies that we have to realize that we are essentially helpless: “everything suggests we ought to understand the term ‘Anthropocene’ as an expression that only makes sense within an apocalyptic logical framework.”[73] For Sloterdijk, the revelation linked to it is that we have to become aware that we are astronauts on a cosmic ship that we not only do not know how to steer but for which even the manual is missing. Well, is this not precisely a version of why the worst already happened?[74] And are not a number of beliefs circulating that are effectively working as defense mechanisms against this insight (the idea that science and technology will come to save us; or taxation, or Greta Thunberg; or recycling; or a return to nature, to a stable balance, natural rhythms, etc.)? The strong claim of the Anthropocene—nature is no stable background of our actions—and comic fatalism do not seem overly incompatible to me.

Pingree might here again intervene and emphasize that I seem to ignore the important difference between the human world and the earth as geological entity—the first being the anthropocentric space of human action and intention, the latter providing the material ground for the former. The Anthropocene is a coming to the fore—an excavation—of the earth that forces upon us a radical dehierarchization: we are as much agents on this planet as are what we have perceived as objects or as not even that (like geological forces, etc.). This is already the case because ultimately we are forced to acknowledge that we are non-autonomous, too.[75] This means that we are just another animal species among many, interacting in an environment that is not very welcoming, that we have already ruined, and that we moreover are not even in control of. And for Pingree comic fatalism misses the outreach of this claim. For him, *Abolishing Freedom* is still indulging in a kind of ideology critique directed against misconceptions of freedom and their practical effectivity—and therein Pingree identifies a primacy of the subject[76]—which is a symptom of the metaphysical belief that only subjects can change the world (but who, at least after the invention of psychoanalysis, thinks that a subject is in charge and the real doer behind the deed anyhow?). The proper lesson of the Anthropocene for him forbids this belief and should lead to a transformation not only of our ontology and of the nature-culture divide (there is essentially no divide) but thereby also to a new relation to or conception of nature. For Pingree, Latour does a better job at this than I do: “for Latour autonomy *is* abolished *by the intrusion of the object*, that is, by a ‘nature’ which is no longer natural.”[77] But does this dispense with the task of ideology critique? Finally, there are real problems and no ideology (recall: this is what any crisis brings out). But if this were so, problems could not be greater. For, why bother at all with pre-anthropocenic thinkers (who do not get it)? Why bother with the wrongs of comic fatalism and its too-subjective bias (if they did not yet experience the intrusion of the object, they at some point will)? Or worse: why are there still pre-anthropocenic thinkers at all? Should they not have been converted to a transformed self-understanding? Are they too stupid to see it (and how could one be too stupid)? Is there an ideology-bias? Do they know but do not want to believe what they know?

If the Latour argument is supposed to hold up, does this mean that there are only some blessed with the insight into the equality between subject and object, those who experience the intrusion of the object? Shall the others wait? Does an intrusion of the object force us—automatically—to admit that objects and subjects are equal? Might we not need to be converted by a form of ideology critique? You see where I am going.... Notably, where it becomes clear that the debate about the Anthropocene is clearly historically over-determined by the particular economic and cultural system we are living in, in short, by the particularity of capitalism (for example, class struggle[78] and capitalism's notion of freedom)—a symptom of this is that we are not automatically converted by an intrusive object experience as if being hit by a stone.[79] We do not leave the terrain of *Abolishing Freedom*.[80]

The philosophical implications of Pingree's critique can also be made explicit in a different way: mankind has reached a historical moment where any logic (of negation) has reached its limit and endpoint. The Anthropocene marks the end of (human) intelligibility. This is the case because the uncontrolled and unforeseen effects of our actions confront us with a situation where we have to realize that we never were the subjects of our and the earth's history; we were rather one of many agents in an agential collective that we were ignorant of before. We unknowingly tampered with the true subject of history, that is, with all the hidden, non-rational, non-conceptual, geological and objective forces that we mobilized when we, for example, inadvertently produced climate change. The Anthropocene is the name for a time wherein a material condition that, even if it may have been brought to the fore by a logic of negation (depicting the workings of human action) at first, and may thus seem to be describable in dialectical terms, negates any logic of negation. Yet, this "negation" is itself not logical but "material." Such material manifestation of the end of thinking, logic, and negation "immobilizes the dialectic... by asserting... that the worst is *actually happening*."[81] The Anthropocene in this description is not an impossible event; it is the worst actually happening (in the present) or more precisely actualizing itself.[82] We have to realize it was possible all along. And if we really understand that we changed the climate and transformed the material workings of the earth, mankind is thus not simply a biological but also a geological agent. And here we materially encounter the supposed end and limit of dialectics.[83] We no longer produce consequences that differ from what we intended to achieve (the simplified structure of Hegel's concept of action), we rather encounter the unintendable (which escapes rational analysability altogether).[84] So, does a rationalist fatalist have anything to say to this end (of dialectics—apart from the obvious insight that all dialectics is a dialectics of the end of dialectics, as I extensively argued)? The problem is linked to the insight that sometimes the (supposed) "apocalypse becomes the new normal."[85]

Any rationalist fatalist will cheer about Dipesh Chakrabarty's rendering of this, notably that the Anthropocene fundamentally transforms our conception of what we are able to take as given—in this sense not even earth is a stable and unchangeable given, since for comic fatalism the critique and refutation of the given is a—crucial part of any—critique and rejection of the present and of everything that exists.[86] Yet, it is precisely here that

the problem with (*inter alia*) Pingree's position becomes conceivable. In general, there is a danger of introducing even more givenness (and thus metaphysics) through the supposed cancellation of givenness. Take the case of human beings as geological agents who are producing totally unintended results that are absolutely beyond their control. Does this not mean that in this very act humans are bringing to the fore a previously obfuscated dimension of givenness (of all the geological non-human forces, etc.)?[87] If the Anthropocene brings to the fore a previously hidden but nonetheless present dimension—and then we would be dealing with another logic of an all too possible "always already"—it is the epoch of the activation and actualization of an already existing potential;[88] it names the age of the awakening of the real and material subject, *subiectum*, i.e., ground-layer, of all earthly existence. The Anthropocene in this rendering at least is the earth as Aristotelian subject. After the human subject, we get the anonymous, material, planetary super-subject, be it vibrant, geological or non-human in its manifold forms (and could there ever be anything more anthropocentric than this fantasy wherein we deny ourselves?—as if imagining what happens at one's own funeral). It is in charge of our future as much as it is our present. It is a subject that does not subject us, but rather diminishes all our (metaphysical) hopes of ever again being subjects, yet strangely seems to have inherited many if not all of the features that previously were attributed to *the* subject.[89]

The Anthropocene in this rendering paradoxically entails subjectivizing the non-human (which is also an old fetishistic practice). Yet the main new feature of many positions that defend such a reading is that this new subject is a non-unified one. It is inherently heterogeneous, multiple, vibrant, etc. But a critique of the given (primacy of the subject) that introduces an even more given (if givenness knows grades)—even if inherently multiple and dynamic and messy[90]—ground layer as ultra-subject does not succeed all too well in its critique of the given.[91] Fatalism rejects any reference to an always already constituted *sujet supposé de l'histoire,*[92] supposed subject of history, be it human or non-human.[93] Deprived and cured of any belief in the myth of the givenness of freedom, a rationalist fatalist is also rather allergic to the myth of the givenness of a *subiectum*.[94] This is not the expression of a "passion for abolition"[95]—but a demand of reason itself, freeing freedom from all guises of its mythical givenness.

A hysterical shaking up of all given foundations—even of hysteria—and certainly its un-/de-, or af-form[96] must be historically appropriate—which is why *Abolishing Freedom* sought to formulate a provisory morality; a manual for what one might describe as "hystorization"[97] of freedom—and maybe it is here that one should recall that Chakrabarty himself argued that what is needed more than ever is something he also deemed at the same time absolutely impossible: a new historical subject, mankind as species.[98] Yet, maybe the only option here is to take such an impossible landmark as starting point. As Alenka Zupančič has shown elsewhere, already Maurice Blanchot formulated the argument that the first time mankind as species became thinkable was when it faced the threat of the atomic bomb and thus of collective annihilation—so when it seemed impossible for mankind to survive.[99] Taking what appears as impossible as certainty might actually be the only certainty there is.[100] To oppose such impossibility

with a "*The apocalypse is happening!*,"[101] right now, is to forget an important conceptual claim made by many, including most famously Kant: the end of all things cannot appear as a moment within time and history, otherwise it would be the end of all things except time and history and thus it would not be the end of all things. The sense of urgency that is displayed in the assumption that it is happening now either means we are dealing with a category mistake or what is happening is not really apocalyptic (it might nonetheless be very bad, obviously.)

For Kant the insight that the end of all things, the apocalypse, cannot be an element of the present framework of things (otherwise it would be part of the things and not their end) meant that it is not only difficult to conceive of it because it challenges the ways in which we understand ourselves and necessitates that we have to come up with a new and different form of how to relate to earth and to ourselves. For Kant it was quite difficult to conceive because conceptually it confronts us with something that is unthinkable (since for Kant thought has a temporal structure). It confronts us with something that is impossible to think. Yet, he also emphasized that if we want to understand who and what we are and our relation to the space of our actions, we must think it; we thus must think the impossible *qua* impossible. And it is in this very sense that *Abolishing Freedom* is Kantian or, to put it differently, why Zupančič's addition to the canon of provisory moral slogans is applicable here: "*The world will surely end, but it won't be the end of our troubles*."[102]

Part V. Excrementalism? From Hobbes to Maradona: On Andrew Pendakis' "Dialectics of Determinism"

This is the point where I'd like to turn to the reply of Andrew Pendakis, who painted a charming tableau of conceptual snares and pitfalls that he identifies in my position and that are set up to make fatalism comically stumble, fall and break its neck, I guess. I will try to fail the best I can in responding to some of the issues he brings up. The first and quite crucial one concerns the genealogy of the situation in and against which *Abolishing Freedom* argues for the use of fatalism. I—in an intentionally exaggerated mimicry of Heidegger—present Aristotle (and Aristotelianism, especially in its contemporary and unconscious variants) as the main culprit of a profound and influential misunderstanding of freedom whose name is indifference. Pendakis sees Hobbes at the very origin of what he refers to, not, as Dupuy once did, as "supermarket-freedom," but nicely as "metaphysics of the shopper."[103] To slightly raise the stakes in this battle of genealogies, I want to add four remarks of clarification:

1. I do not think it is a coincidence that Descartes was the first within the history of modern philosophy—the first because he was its inaugurator—to offer an analysis of indifference as what he identified as the "lowest grade of freedom," an empty form of freedom in which freedom is practically (in both senses of the term) absent; the state of the lowest actuality of freedom.[104] Descartes—already an antagonist of Aristoteles's

philosophy because from a certain point on he faced the problem that in the Netherlands all philosophies except that of Aristotle, including his own, were prohibited by the Utrecht senate[105]—saw "indifference" as an outcome *inter alia* of Suárez's position, which sought to mediate between Scotus and Ockham by recourse to Aquinas.[106] Whatever this means in detail, Descartes identified therein an attempt to formulate an actualized, contemporary version of Aristotelianism. The historical and economico-political situation Descartes was thinking in—so, the starkly developing capitalism—was obviously so compatible with classical and updated Aristotelianism that it is difficult not to assume that there must be some relation, to put it in most direct and reductive terms: between economic base and anthropological and cosmological discourses in the super-structure.[107] Descartes identified Aristotelianism as one of the main ideological schools of thought that stand in the way not only of certainty—by being dogmatically metaphysical—but (thereby) also of freedom.[108]

2. Recently Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback has pointedly observed that capitalism resembles the Aristotelian unmoved mover around whom everything turns, but which—like the Aristotelian God—is so self-satisfied that it does not move a single bit.[109] If capitalism in this sense can be called structurally Aristotelian—and even if this might be a reification of Aristotle—does it truly sound so off to suspect Aristotelianism of being (almost, if this additional exaggeration makes any sense, metaphysically) capitalist?

3. But it is not only Descartes (and Schuback) who attacks Aristotle and Aristotelianism as positions that imply a problematic conception not only of the cosmos and of human beings within it but also of freedom. It is also, before Descartes, Luther. The aim of the first chapter of *Abolishing Freedom*—a reconstruction of the conceptual stakes and coordinates of the harsh debate between Erasmus and Luther—is thus threefold: it is not only, firstly, to demonstrate that ultimately it is a debate about the very concept of freedom (in religion) but, secondly, that this debate is able to shed a light on Max Weber's famous reading of the protestant ethics and its function within the formation of the spirit of capitalism, notably—as Weber clearly saw—that Luther is *not* the culprit of formulating the ethical framework of capitalism, but that this is rather Calvin (who believed that there can be earthly signs that give us an indication regarding our salvational stati). Yet, Luther attacked Erasmus precisely for turning religion into capitalism and the philosophical name behind this transformation—thus what is attacked in Luther's attack on Erasmus—is scholasticism, and this means—in a very abbreviated manner again—Aristotelianism.[110] As Luther already argued in 1517 in the 97 theses that constitute his "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology": "Virtually the entire *Ethics* of Aristotle is the worst enemy of grace"; "It is an error to say that no man can become a theologian without Aristotle… Indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle"; or: "Even the more useful definitions of Aristotle seem to beg the question."[111] What is Aristotelian in Erasmus (as in many Scholastics)? An oblivion of difference, an assumption of continuity and cooperation; in short: an ontological belief or a belief in ontological cooperativity (and sameness) between man and God. But God is—*pace* Joan Osborne—*not* one of us, obeying the same ethical orientations and norms. Aristotelians replace real and absolute difference

with an ideology of continuity and measurement—since how to measure without continuity?[112]—and thereby produce an obfuscation of real difference. If Luther is fundamentally anti-Aristotelian, how could Kant and Hegel not be? Did Hegel not famously state: "We Lutherans—I am one and I want to remain one—only have this original belief"?[113] This is the overall background against which I believe to be justified to construct an "Aristotle / Aristotelianism" as the emblematic epitome of the practically influential ideology of freedom.[114]

4. Almost twenty years ago, Giorgio Agamben, endowed with the rare gift of turning around whole traditions of thought with a—quite laborious—stroke of the pen, presented a reading of Hobbes that not only opposes that of Pendakis but also thereby brings Hobbes much closer to the fatalistic rationalist project of *Abolishing Freedom* than one might have anticipated.[115] Starting from a detailed analysis of the political implication of the representative frontispiece of Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Agamben raises a question that was raised once before by Carl Schmitt, notably why the book is called *Leviathan* after all? Contrary to those who argued that Hobbes was simply unaware of the negative connotations of this name, Schmitt claimed it was rather an expression of "the English sense of humour"—so there is some kind of comic dimension to this book—for which Hobbes at the same time paid quite a high price (very unintended comic fatalism, if you wish). Because with the title he conjured a kind of "heartless demon who will deliver him into the hands of his enemies."[116] Schmitt here refers to all the interpretations that identify the Leviathan with the Antichrist. Agamben's stroke of genius now lies in bringing together this eschatological perspective on the Leviathan wherein it was identified with the "man of *anomia*," the outlaw or the lawless, by the Church fathers, with the third part of Hobbes' book. This part is rarely taken account in renderings of Hobbes, because it is entitled "Of a Christian Common-Wealth" and does not fit the prominent image of Hobbes as thinker of the modern conservative state.[117] Agamben's point is the following: if the third book of the Leviathan entails the principles of Hobbes' "Christian politics,"[118] and if therefore Hobbes' political theology of the modern state must be read eschatologically, it comes in handy that there is a crucial reference in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, in which he describes a dramatic eschatological battle between the Messiah and someone who is referred to as "man of lawlessness," as "the son of destruction."[119] So, Hobbes—as a Christian politician—must have known this.

This means that Hobbes' state "cannot in any way have the function of a power that restrains and holds back the end of time," as the standard reading of Hobbes suggests; rather it "coincides with the very eschatological beast which must be annihilated at the end of time."[120] What does this mean? It means that Hobbes' theory of the state that became a modern paradigm is actually profoundly different from what was assumed by the moderns. It does not give us a normative account of a stable state against the incoherent mob from which it is formed; it rather indicates that we have reached the end of times and that the final battle is not simply—as with Sorel—at the horizon, but that we are already fighting it. Worse, we are in it, but we are not even aware that we are or should be fighting it, and therefore we are losing it, since we have even become

unable to identify our enemy—the state—and therefore also unable to identify what we do—fight. The apocalypse for Agamben's Hobbes already happened, and for Agamben no one noticed it until now (Agamben did). The beauty of this reading is that it turns Hobbes into a surprising ally of fatalism: he announced the coming apocalypse or rather identified the end of time, the final battle; but the apocalypse was so unexpectedly bad that it went unrecognized. And worse: its promulgation was taken to be the normative philosophical theory of the very state that the announcer identified as the first and last rider of the apocalypse. And it is precisely this move that ultimately brought about the apocalypse. In Agamben's rendering, the apocalypse was not even recognized as apocalypse, and this was the apocalypse—a diagnosis reminiscent of Heidegger's diagnosis of nihilism. Agamben's Hobbes does seem to pass the entrance exam for the camp of modern comic fatalism.[121] And it should come as no surprise that from within the history of what is often referred to as political philosophy, Hobbes is maybe one of most radical anti-Aristotelian thinkers in modern history.

Let me move on: Pendakis remarks in passing that *Abolishing Freedom* unfolds "a fully executed fatalist theology"—but it is important to specify that this remark is only adequate when it is also noted what precisely this means.[122] Borrowing this methodological move not only from Žižek but already from Hegel, the book attempts less to develop a systematic fatalist theology than to show how a theological transformation that deserves to be called fatalist (Luther) offers a prism through which one can read a common trait of modern rationalism that allows us to systematically connect thinkers from Descartes through Hegel to Freud (and others).[123] This is not to say that the development of modern rationalism corresponds to a history of the secularization of theological fatalism. Rather modern philosophical rationalism takes its form by traversing the theological framework and its basic coordinates whereby in the end even god must admit that she never existed in the first place. Modern rationalist fatalism enables us to conceive of a truly atheist philosophy (that does not fall back behind the conceptual heights of religion). The account of the formation of this philosophy does in its course deal with "history"—even if Pendakis critically remarks that I am almost isolating the history I am constructing from any real history. As I already argued above, the history of rationalist philosophy stands in a close relationship to capitalism, and the former reacts to forms of a problematic expatiated ideology of freedom and through and in this battle takes its shape.[124] In this context, Pendakis refers to Lenin, who seems to embody the virtues of criticizing problematic notions of freedom, yet he also always did not seem to opt for any claim to political predestination (and I think it is important to note that we are here leaving the rather purely conceptual and philosophical territory of *Abolishing Freedom*).

But I can happily take Pendakis up on this reference. One should, to my mind, not forget that it is Lenin who expands Marx's critique of "political indifferentism"[125] to a larger scale by arguing that people are getting practically habitualized to indifferentism by signifiers of disorientation that he addresses as "phrases."[126] Phrases are part of a linguistic opium for the masses implemented by the "*watchdogs* of capitalism";[127] an opium that is composed—in Lenin's view—of signifiers like "freedom," "equality," or,

famously, "social democracy."[128] The constant use of such signifiers—especially in the framework of a parliamentary democracy—is practically disorienting and can produce indifference. Why? Because there is no freedom and equality in capitalism—and social democracy from a certain moment on became a name precisely for what is neither really social nor democratic (which is why Lenin was convinced that it was right to rename the Russian social democratic party). This is to say, when we speak of "freedom" within a capitalist framework this very signifier is determined by others, for example, by the concatenation with "equality, property, and Bentham" (as Marx's famous adage goes)—"Bentham" giving the series its specific determination. Thereby the important question to raise is always, as one can learn from Lenin: what kind of freedom and for whom?[129] Precisely because "freedom" does not have a transhistorical or uncontroversial meaning—it is rather an empty signifier that may serve for all kinds of problematic practices as a reference point. In this vein, Lenin almost directly repeats an argument one can already find in Luther, who attacked Erasmus for using the term "free will" in a way that it was just an "empty name," "a mere dialectical fiction."[130] Luther replied to this by defending predestination—even if this meant risking to plunge the world into theological and political disorder (the turmoil brought to the streets by his attack on the church; a political reference I make quite explicit in *Abolishing Freedom*).[131]

Lenin's suggestion is first of all to avoid using these signifiers as long as we are still living in socio-economic and political conditions within which these words cannot mean what we think they do (or should). So, his absolutely explicit claim is: let us not use the signifier "freedom" as long as we are still living in capitalist relations of production (and its respective modes of state government, even if some—democracy—can make us forget this insight). Let's not pretend to be free—as this is what capitalism is about. And could one therefore not also see Lenin's defence of dictatorship (of the proletariat)—a word that was for him not at all problematic but a "big" word, which precisely therefore should not be overused—a politico-ideological antidote to the problematic notions of freedom that abound in capitalism?[132] And this becomes even clearer if one recalls that for Lenin it is not simply a choice of "freedom" against dictatorship, but rather that it is either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie that hides behind "freedom" and "equality" or the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is thus no freedom to choose between freedom and dictatorship. And is this not structurally comparable to the philosophical argument of comic fatalism?

Abolishing Freedom in this sense could be said to repeat a Leninist move. In profaning Lutheran, not foundations but rather, abysses, it seeks to exorcize all that which needs exorcizing not to make an illusory and practically problematic use of "freedom"—and it identifies what characterizes such a use (freedom as given in the form of natural property that is supposed to be already actual and real as potential). One could here even recall Lenin's famous 1917 defence of the *political* "freedom of secession" (of Armenia, etc.) and claim that *Abolishing Freedom* attempts a philosophical reformulation of it for the sake of a critique of freedom: a philosophical freedom of secession even from freedom.[133] This is what Nietzsche called the "great emancipation"

or "uncoupling (*Losslösung*)"—a detachment, uncoupling, and a secession in this case from the (bourgeois) myth of the givenness of freedom (as natural capacity).[134]

But Pendakis here raises an important question, namely how is the ideology of freedom experienced? He suggests that it is not in the form of a given natural capacity but in the form of a feeling. And I have nothing to object but think it is important to clarify what this means. On the one hand, there is certainly a kind of widespread politics and ideology of feeling—that was already criticized by Hegel a long time ago. The problem with it is that it comes with a questionable form of auto-justification (if I feel free, I must be free, how else could I feel free; if I feel hurt, I must be hurt, etc.). And it is problematic already because feelings—this is their conceptual catch—suspend conceptual universalizability—or in more trivial terms: objectivity—because they emphasize the very form of individual (and merely subjective) experience.[135] But it is important to add that these feelings (or more precisely: the understanding of what feelings are) are nonetheless objective expressions of a general form of belief (or of problematic epistemic assumptions). They are for example the expression of the idea that the truth of myself is only (or mainly) accessible by myself and that this truth cannot be articulated in a manner that is appropriately understood by others (through language, for example). This is why I do not see any contradiction between the claim that contemporary capitalism organizes its reign through the feeling of freedom and the idea that this felt freedom is a way in which individuals experience and represent (to themselves and others) the dominant understanding and ideology of freedom, i.e., the myth of the givenness of freedom as natural capacity.

It is against this background that one can understand why Descartes, whose *Passions of the Soul* introduces into modern philosophy the idea that fate and fatalism has an emancipatory potential, argues that the latter fulfils a strategic conceptual function. Notably, it is supposed to force us out of a situation where we think, act, and live under the predominance of feelings and passions (that have an effect on our capacity to determine ourselves; that thus determine our ways of determining ourselves). Being determined by passions leads into a problematic heteronomous practice wherein we constantly stand in a relation of hope and fear—feelings that for Descartes express that we accept not to be the determining instance (and are essentially lacking a relation to the present, since through this hope and fear we are fundamentally oriented toward the future). Fatalism has the task of leading us out of this passive determination to a form of thinking, acting, and living wherein we loosen the grip of the dictatorship of the emotions and start to experience a different kind of heteronomy (of predestination) that forces us not into dependency but potentially into freedom. Descartes' claim is that if feelings (even of freedom) determine us, we are ultimately reduced to our bodily existence and hence are particles in the physics of emotions, which is upheld by a peculiar metaphysics of everybody, a fetishism of freedom: I do not know that I do not will freely (I thus do not know what I do), but I nevertheless do it (because I act as if I were free). Against this, Descartes seeks to split physics as well as metaphysics in two: fatalism is the crowbar made for it (acting as if we were not free). Now, and this is crucial, fatalism also brings with it its own affective product that Descartes describes as

passions produced by the soul itself, i.e., the organ of thought. We thus also split the passions in two, so that there are passions and passions, to speak with Lenin. What are those other passions? The whole history of modern rationalist fatalism from its theological prehistory in Luther to Hegel knows a clear answer: what is produced here is anxiety (and despair). A clearly different kind of "feeling" (of freedom). I will return to this—but anxiety shatters all certainty and thereby becomes the only certainty. Now, here Pendakis raises another important question: Does the emphasis on despair, anxiety and strange heteronomous determination of the very core of our freedom turn *Abolishing Freedom* into what he, with Adorno, calls death metaphysics (of an almost Heideggerian cunning)? Am I giving (ontological) precedence to misery and pain, as if I replace humanist existentialism with an exaggerated excrementalism?

Obviously, I am emphasizing the excremental status of human beings in Luther and endorsing that there is less than nothing that we can cling to—anxiety being its index. But for Pendakis the problem with this is that he takes it to be not dialectical enough. Why? Because it deliberately seeks to avoid what Žižek coined the Hölderlin paradigm of political and philosophical thought, epitomized in the slogan "where the danger is, there also grows saving power."[136] Before answering this charge, let me note in passing that I would like to suggest to lift the burden from Hölderlin's back (Heidegger put it there) and re-coin this into the (Stefan) George paradigm of thought. It can also be nicely epitomized in one verse from the latter's "The Star of the Covenant": "Don't fear fissures fractures wounds scratches // The magic that decomposes recomposes."[137] The bottom line of both formulas is that it first must get really bad, so that when we traverse the horror we realize that this is just the precondition for things to finally turn out splendid again.[138] *Abolishing Freedom* is deemed not dialectical enough for two reasons: first, it does not really embrace the George paradigm of political and philosophical thought, meaning: it does not say enough about the conversion of the absence of—abolished—freedom into a new kind of freedom. And second, it avoids another option for how to construct the argument in a more dialectical manner, namely, even if the worst already happened, not everything is doomed. There are "cigarette(s)," "walking," "philosophy" (even though the book challenges this), "Sex. Coffee."[139]

If there is no dialectical twist to all the misery (and this is the Heideggerian cunning), does one not need to avoid totalizing the worst? Can the worst be totalized? Is everything bad? Can there be a totality of the worst? The worst totality (ever)? Must this not mean that if the worst totality is really the worst it contains a crack, and thus that Pendakis' second option converts internally into the first one? To rephrase: after Pingree charged me with being a closet optimist, Pendakis charges me with being too much of a fatalist (and therefore not dialectical enough). The worst unity of opposites.

The answer to the last questions is directly tackled in the book, first, in my reading of Luther and by emphasizing the necessary contingency of grace. This is to say there is only reason for despair and anxiety—as this is the more rational and realist outlook, acknowledging that we will never be able to save ourselves—unless something that is totally beyond my control—and I know that this is the case—happens. So, there is only a

conversion from the worst to something else if contingently there is a conversion from the worst to something else. There is no ground, guarantee or structural necessity (not even possibility) for it to happen. Knowing it does not help, yet it is better knowing (or believing it) than not. Confronting the worst is not simply a scare tactic that will force us into (remembering) freedom. The apocalypse does not help; in some sense it is useless. Secondly, this argument is becoming more complex in my reading of Hegel and through what I take him to demonstrate in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. If philosophy's task in Hegel is to think the worst—for reasons developed in the book—the *Phenomenology* (as introduction to the philosophical system) demonstrates how spirit cannot assume (and follow) the very insight it cannot avoid. It constantly invents new ways, new defense mechanisms against the absolutely rational and necessary insight. This is why the worst can be qualified with Hegel as at the same time necessary and impossible to assume (which is one way of saying: it is real).

So, what is all the horror, misery, anxiety and despair good for if it was not good for anything (as it cannot even ever be fully assumed)?[140] The answer is twofold. First, anxiety and despair as such clearly do not bring any salvation. But they shake all supposedly stable assumptions and foundations, all self-certainty and relaxed forms of self-critique, as they shatter even the self. This is similar to what Hegel describes in his *Phenomenology*—the pathway of despair, as he called it—notably how spirit "wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself."[141] The precondition for beginning his project was for Hegel to attain this form of dismemberment. Yet, there is automatism of the precondition, so to speak: the worst about anxiety is, again, that it does not necessarily lead us anywhere (which is why timing and the right dose are of the essence). It is necessary rather to see how impossible it is to move at all. But it thereby generates a peculiar abyssal orientation. It fights reigning disorientation (linked to the signifier "freedom") with a more profound disorientation that provides a negative orientation, namely of how to avoid the previously unidentified disorientation.[142] This is to say that there is no tiny messiah hidden deep inside a pile of misery and excrement. If anything she would right now not be any better off than we are.[143] Assuming that the worst already happened is nothing but a precondition of freedom. This means it is not yet freedom. And what is the worst about the worst is that there is no path from the worst to freedom. It does not automatically convert into anything, not without a supplement, at least. Zupančič is right: the worst, the apocalypse, does not solve any of our troubles or problems. Maybe the worst about the worst is that it is both necessary and useless to think it. These are obvious structural similarities of the worst with philosophy, itself quite a useless activity—and it thus does not seem to be a mere coincidence that this futile form of practice repeatedly conceives of the worst. Uselessness squared.

Does this make me into a necrophilic mystic or ontologist of misery? As I suggested, despair or anxiety indicate a breaking up and away of all foundation. Anxiety is thus not only the name of some momentous horror but it is an index of a subjectivization of the insight that there is no necessity for things being the way they are. It indexes that there is no there is—even though this insight is subjectively destituting.[144] Anxiety and despair

are less about an ontology of misery than indexes of impossibility (of knowledge and thereby an inscription of the distinction between knowledge and truth). In short, the maneuver of *Abolishing Freedom* is from this perspective not to praise suffering but rather to emphasize the fact and its related affect, the (non-objective, but subjectivized) *af-fact* that that there is no there is.[145] This is not turning the abominable into the new cool. Rather fatalism "about the nature, scope and seriousness of our problems can be far more productive than complacent optimism. If necessity is the mother of invention, fear is its grandmother. Be afraid."[146] Be anxious! To break free from disorientation and problematic forms of freedom, Luther's recommendation was: love what makes you anxious. And this still seems valid. Not only does anxiety express that we encounter the impossible but also that we cannot avoid it; at least if we want to have an idea of how profound any change would have to be to count as change at all.

The impossible is thus not a refashioned pile of misery. Rather it says something about the understanding of human beings that is at stake in *Abolishing Freedom*. For humans are neither simply natural nor simply non-natural (cultural) beings. There is something profoundly un-natural about them—not an additional quality, but something that even peculiarly derails what appears natural.[147] Human nature is out of joint. Rationalist fatalism therefore does not simply embrace an excremental anthropology but rather endorses the claim that what is specific about human beings is something strangely inhuman. Rationalist fatalism is a comic inhumanism. This is because it argues that humans are able not only to confront but sometimes even to do the impossible, that which exceeds all that is humanly possible.[148] Thereby it is set up against the omnipresence of all too human humanisms (here aligning itself with theoretical anti-humanism) and against the all too subtle, nuanced, invisible, and therefore almost omnipresent forms of naturalization.[149] Yet, it might be worthy to note again what Pendakis only remarks in passing and what Pingree missed entirely: the fatalism of *Abolishing Freedom* is structurally comic. And this is not simply a matter of style but of (dialectical) formatting. Tragic, nihilist, or existentialist fatalism relates to comic fatalism as what Nietzsche called passive nihilism relates to active nihilism. Why is the latter comic? Because "at the core of even the most frivolous comedies lies a heart of darkness," "a distant vestige of primordial fear" from which we are led to a "thinly disguised re-enactment of the rebirth of the world," as Segal describes some crucial features of comedy in general.[150] Comedy is a way of bringing and forcing out, of dealing with this fundamental kind of anxiety that is linked to the creation of a world.

Do I therefore, as Pendakis suspects, become ignorant of the sufferings of real slaves? Does the fatalist attack on freedom as a human natural capacity sit rather uneasy with all those cases where people are plainly and simply, "really," unfree? Am I "ontologizing" a historical fact (that freedom is considered to be a natural capacity) and turn it thereby into just another requisite of an endless comedy of human errors (as if existentialism with some amusement instead of absurdity)?[151] To my mind, this is a misunderstanding. Firstly, because I am attacking a specific form of oppression. This form works through a difference between what is presented and we even experience as freedom and what freedom actually is. But when it is not about this specific difference, this obviously

changes everything. It would be strange, conceptually unnecessary, and wrong to claim that oppression always and only operates through this difference. Because over-generalizing the claim would be problematic, which is why I do not over-generalize it. Let me turn this argument around: Did anyone defending slavery or slave-ownership ever really flirt with using the argument about fatalism that is similar to the one *Abolishing Freedom* defends? No, the slave owner did not even need fatalism. Sometimes slavery is just slavery. But certainly, there are different forms of slavery (wage-slavery, for example). And sometimes defenders of what appears to be slavery are just defenders of slavery. It is indeed important not to confuse this with the fatalism strategy I defend. It should now become clear why I am also not endorsing the claim that human beings are ultimately slaves (of their passions, social conditions, or a fate they did not choose or the like). My claim is quite explicitly that such a claim is *per se* problematic. Which is why I dispute that there is such a thing as a human condition as well as the idea that there is anything one could unhappily or happily cling to. If any defender of slavery would also like to be a contender of the kind of comic fatalism *Abolishing Freedom* defends there is a problem: slavery was and is often defended through reference to a given natural or naturalized hierarchy, and *Abolishing Freedom* rejects all forms of givenness and ideas of a given nature.[152]

In this sense, it seeks to avoid "ontologizing" anything, not even nothing (as the end of the book makes explicit). The claim that there is no human condition (as there is no there is) raises awareness of a specific ideological situation wherein the defence of a supposedly natural human capacity—freedom—serves as the inverse of what it claims (and thinks) to be doing, precisely by emphasizing what one might take to be an emancipatory givenness. Pendakis clearly sees that in my rejection of Aristotle I am also rejecting free-will-liberalism, but whereas he argues that liberalism took a distance to Aristotle when and because it identified him as defender of natural slavery, I would argue that it is rather Plato who had and still has a quite bad (political and philosophical) reputation, especially with liberal thinkers, and that it is often precisely Aristotle, the logician of practice, who, despite his defence of slavery and the inequality, say, between men and women, proved and proves to be astoundingly compatible with a whole variety of different systems of thought reaching from Soviet Communist philosophy (where Plato was often viewed as the idealist aristocrat and everything that was wrong with pre-Marxian philosophy) to contemporary pragmatism and neo-naturalism (where he is identified as the absolute maestro of life-forms and their inherent normativity). This is why Aristotelianism is what *Abolishing Freedom* identifies as a specific ideological frame that gained particular traction throughout the historical unfolding of capitalism. In modernity it works as oppression by means of freedom, through the imaginary redoubling (or representation) of freedom in the form of a natural capacity (that is: through ontic indifference). Against this, *Abolishing Freedom* mobilizes modern philosophy to formulate a contemporary provisory morality. And indeed, as in Descartes, this is an attempt which is strictly speaking philosophical and not theoretical in the sense that Pendakis uses the term "theory" ("the science of the gap or difference between philosophy and history").[153]

But, the philosophical provisory morality that attempts to combat the reign of ontic indifference—of the ideology of freedom—does not thereby turn into a mere thought- or ontological experiment. It should be clear that it must be linked to the time and social organization in which this specific ideology of freedom reigns. This is to say, it is linked to the history of capitalism and understanding of freedom constitutive for it.[154] Yet, the perspective of the book is not that of a critique of political economy—since it is not an attempt to understand and criticize capitalism from within—but it rather seeks to gather conceptual means offered by modern philosophy to counter the ideology of freedom. It is an attempt, if you wish, to attack the enemy not at its weakest but at its strongest link (or at one of its strongest). This is why *Abolishing Freedom* develops its proposal from a reconstruction of the history of modern philosophy in a Hegelian fashion, namely as a systematic unfolding of the conceptual tool that is deemed effective to abolish the dominant concept of freedom.[155] Modern rationalism proves not only that one is always right to rebel against reactionary understandings of freedom but also that reactionaries sometimes present themselves as defenders of freedom. Especially against them, modern rationalism organizes the rebellion through fatalism. I am thus happy to accept the description of my position as a "philosophy of the barricade"—a barricade against a certain kind of freedom and its mythical constitution. To be clear, this is not activism. But I do not therefore advocate passive resignation; rather it takes a lot of work to beat one's inner reactionary out of oneself. And this is just one reason why sometimes it is important to think and not to act. Fatalism asserts that we also must become pitiless censors of ourselves, of our attachment to Aristotelianism.[156]

This is also why the comic form is important: the book, as the reader will know, ends by negating its own position of enunciation—claiming that there is also no philosophy, since the position that allows for the radical attack on the ideology of freedom can itself not be transcendentalized. Nothing provides us with the certainty that there is philosophy (as in philosophical thinking, it also is not simply a given). With this move, we return to Hegel's observation on the proper form of presentation of the absolute, notably to what he says about the speculative sentence. It is a sentence that we read and, when passing from subject to predicate—and at first we cannot but assume that this is the stable form this proposition obeys—we are forced to confront a first disorientation: something of what we presumed to be the stable, unchanging subject returns, to our surprise, in the predicate, whereby not only the predicate as well as the subject proves to be different from what we took them to be, but we also do not know where we are; we thought we moved (from subject to predicate) but did not. Searching for a new halting point, we return for Hegel to the subject (of the sentence), but we encounter that, because it moved into the predicate, it actually is so fundamentally transformed that there is only an abyss, an absence. This therefore drives us to the predicate again, which thereby is as abyssal as the subject (as the subject repeats in the predicate). This back-forward stuckness-movement, as Hegel suggests, is the proper object of thought—an object we can only encounter in passing from one to the other. *Abolishing Freedom* seeks to repeats this gesture in its axiom that there is no there is. It takes neither history nor theory or philosophy as a given. Yet, if it might truly be the case that what is left

when not even nothing is left provides a "tiny enclave" of consistent thought for Pendakis, my only fear is that we will not be able to inhabit it for too long.[157]

When I was imagining the interior of this enclave, it made me think of a joke, reportedly told by the former football star Diego Maradona. The joke was supposedly not even created as a joke but is something that supposedly took place when Maradona was brought to a mental institution. After a while in the institution he irritatedly exclaimed: "Here we have one who believes he is Napoleon, someone else thinks he is Robinson Crusoe. And they think I am crazy for saying that I am Maradona." Somehow, I imagine the enclave of comic fatalism to be similar to the position of Maradona in this anecdote, which is actually the worst of those described. It is worse than the others not simply because he is seeing through the structure of the institution and yet is determined by it, but because he unwillingly seems to be pointing out the madness of assuming the idea that anyone can safely assume that she or he is her- or himself. In a way, if *Abolishing Freedom* is philosophy, it is one that seeks to take this into account, and thereby seeks to follow the "imperative... to...: Disband!" the last bit of givenness, even of its own form and assumed identity, creating not simply an unstable non-ground, rather a kind of whirlpool that might (also not) prove to be the precondition for a transformation.[158]

Part VI. Ending the Long March: On Aaron Schuster's "I'm a Fatalist, But not by Choice"

To end this long march through the wonderful counter-provocations against *Abolishing Freedom*, I will now finally turn to Aaron Schuster's amicable and comradely response. It is a true thorn in my side, as it offers in many respects a more pointed and succinct rendering of the most significant parts of my arguments than I was able to do myself. What could be worse. Well, maybe that I find myself mostly in absolute agreement with the better versions of my arguments: I am not trying to add to the general "apocalyptic mood of the present but [rather aim at] puncturing a hole in its self-satisfied complacency"[159]—somehow similar to a psychoanalytic intervention, as Schuster says, or similar to a Hegelian conceptualization, which—and in Hegel this is often good news—can only commence when the day has turned to dusk and everything else turned to dust, too. Schuster is perspicacious when it comes to filtering out the multi-headed moving target of my attack, noting that what is at stake is also—as I remarked some pages ago—the institutional and overall power and influence of contemporary Aristotelianism and especially Aristotelian Hegelianism. It is a target because often it attempts to re-naturalize not only Hegel but also, with him, all kinds of practices and the relevant capacities necessary to participate in them.[160] Schuster succinctly characterizes the implicit concept of freedom I am alluding to as one in which "I am most free... when I have 'no choice'." He adds the important qualification that I endorse not any kind of fatalism, but what I call a "fatalism without fate,"[161] a "necessity without a master plan."[162] He elucidates it not only by pitting it against a "fatalism with fate" (Schuster's term), the classical Greek style tragedy, for example (or for Sorelian-type forms of radical transformation). And I also agree that the book thereby attempted to provide a

potential "Protestant genealogy of psychoanalysis"[163] and also of the major tenets in German Idealism. I do not want to go into the pointed and marvellous reconstruction of the different chapters that Schuster presents—I would literally make things worse—but I want to emphasize that he is again right to point out that "subjectivity is the worst," as it comes with a derailment that exceeds any given measure.[164] For indeed, what comic fatalism seeks to repeat on a conceptual level is precisely the derailment that formally is the gesture of subjectivization, the form of becoming a subject.

This also makes palpable why through Schuster's suggestive reading of the idea of a gradual production of thought while speaking, Kleist actually becomes an ally of comic fatalism. If one seeks a trivial empirical proof of comic fatalism, as he recommends, just start talking. I take Schuster to claim: "Speaking is fatalism (without fate)."[165] This adage should be read in line with Hegel's "the spirit is a bone" and brings together what at first might seem to be the highest and the lowest. It expresses a fully a-theological conception of fatalism (as if an a-theological version of Christianity): it is the very loss of any redemptive perspective that is constitutive of any real faith or thinking. For if thinking survives speaking—its own proper fall, the fall into words in which it can never express itself appropriately, since it always says too little or too much or loses itself and finds itself again somewhere else—maybe thinking is therefore constitutively post-apocalyptic[166] (language then being, not the apocalypse, but literally the sign of the apocalypse).[167] Yet, as already remarked, comic fatalism is "a philosophy of the interregnum" and thus does not propose a general theory of language or of human beings, etc.[168] It is neither just a non-philosophical reflection (because it is fundamentally conditioned by its time and reflects on it, as does any philosophy, and it can do so only if it conceives of the end of this very time—and therefore is not simply limited to the time whose end it tries to think); yet because of that time it is also clearly timely and a strictly particularized philosophy (although, as is any philosophical position, with a universal claim). As Schuster states, it attempts to repeat Luther's gesture, but I would add, this repetition is undertaken by employing the conceptual means of modern rationalism, and it is thus undertaken outside of a theological framework.

Schuster's response would certainly be too good to be true if he would not also raise some delicate points that do either need further development or are more than difficult to answer. Sometimes from the too good to be true to the worst, it takes only one step. He opens up two larger conceptual hellholes by emphasizing two discussions that are present only in the background of *Abolishing Freedom*. The first abyss opens up within the frame of a discussion between Badiou and Žižek. One might say that at stake here is the precise status of what is a subject, since Žižek critiqued Badiou for neglecting to introduce (something of) the subject that must precede any kind of subjectivation through an event; otherwise we could not account for why there could be subjectivation in the first place, a symptom of which the former sees in Badiou's reference to the "human animal" that is supposed to provide the material from which to make a subject.[169] Therein we thus encounter a return of the repressed, a material proto-subject before the subject. For a proper elaboration of what this material resource is—this

something that grounds any materialist position—Žižek introduces the concept of the death drive that names the inconsistency not only of something but even of nothing and is thus what in a dialectical sense precedes the very constitution of material being (even though this is a retroactive statement).[170]

Badiou, on the other hand, perceives this as a problematic symptom of an unacknowledged philosophical orientation: in my understanding, the problem he therein identifies is that with the death drive it is assumed that there is something given and, more specifically, something of the subject. And this is a problem for Badiou even if this is something that is given in a purely negative way, notably as self-relating negativity. Why is this a problem? Not simply because one thereby seems to commit to a transcendental claim, notably that (something of) the subject is the always already existing condition of possibility of transformation. Rather because if one seeks to avoid transcendental philosophy in one's rendering of this something of the subject (death-drive) one nonetheless for Badiou takes this something to define the very being of the subject that is (or more precisely: at a later stage of one's ontology will be) constitutive of history. Therefore he assumes one cannot but claim that it is ultimately the "*being*" of *the* subject that authorizes any change and thus claims that there is a primacy of being over (history) or an event. Badiou seeks to turn this around and assert a primacy of the event and with it the "*evental*" emergence of *a* subject. What is Badiou's problem with the other option? It sounds too much like Heidegger for him (and here I do not want to argue whether this is an appropriate interpretation—one should only remark that the perpetual self-cancellation / revivification that is specific of the death drive gives Heidegger's position at least quite a spin). Was not Heidegger a harsh critic of any (metaphysical) grounding of historical transformation in a *subiectum*, in a subject at the ground? But if we transform the idea of the subject as ground—and thus follow Heidegger's critique—and if we take the subject to have a *being* that precedes the event, for Badiou we afterward seem to defend a history of that very being (which is why Badiou even goes so far as to believe that the death drive is ultimately a version of Heidegger's being toward death, because it negates one's own finitude—the subject as ground—to open up the perspective of a history of being).[171]

I do not want to enter this intricate debate here and now. Partly, because I think I already pointed out a possible way out of this dilemma elsewhere. Suffice it here to say, and as Schuster recognizes, my attempt to mediate between these two interpretations was to introduce what I refer to as the "philosophical subject."[172] What is a philosophical subject? Philosophy is a discourse that only has any proper meaning for Badiou if it does not deal only with itself. This means it seeks to grasp what is thought in practices outside of itself (Badiou calls these conditions). There is thought in the practices outside of philosophy when something is happening and subjects emerge who think (and create truths). Philosophy re-thinks what has been thought, which is why it thinks "truths," so that it can also think the compossibility of different forms of thought (and formulate a concept of "truth"). But subjects can disappear and so can their fields of practice (the conditions). As there are longer periods of times in which nothing fundamentally

transformative—or particularly interesting—happens. Sometimes, there is no new thought.

To put this more directly: obviously, profound political revolutions are rare (as are revolutionary subjects). Yet, what does philosophy think when it attempts to think in a time where there are no active subjects and thus no conditions?[173] The answer is twofold: it thinks what was thought when there was an active thought process (or more than one) and does so to understand how and why it (or they) disappeared, what kind of specific impossibilities it created for itself and where it failed better than others did before. This allows philosophy to generate a concept of history and to identify the historically specific situation wherein it thinks. Philosophy does so, secondly, to give the one claim that—according to Badiou—defines the core of its discourse an historically specific form and articulation, notably the claim that "there are truths." In such an historical context, this claim is rendered as: there can be subjects because there have been subjects. Philosophy in this way—reminding us in a Platonic sense of what we already know—recalls the very possibility of subjectivization in times in which subjectivization seems impossible. But thereby it does not directly subjectivize anyone. It rather forces one to acknowledge, it forces into knowledge, this impossible possibility and thus confronts us with what we take to be impossible. Philosophy thus does not take the position of any particular subject (be it political or otherwise) nor does it become a meta-subject; rather it takes the position of the very form of subjectivization, by reminding us of what will happen if there were an event; by upholding the position of the act of splitting that is constitutive of any subject, it puts itself in a position to remind us that there can be a barring of thought. Philosophy does thus not subjectivize, but it can in intermediary times take the very form of subjectivization (i.e., of splitting, of barring) as form of its own discourse. And this is one of the reasons why I also take this to be the position from which *Abolishing Freedom* is articulated, which again leads to an utter agreement between Schuster and myself.

But Schuster opens up a second context of debate. Herein he is concerned with how my argument relates to that of Lacan. In Schuster's reading, Lacan shows that without knowing it neurotics—and this is a symptom of modernity—actually all believe in a fatalism without fate. The symptom of this is that they have so much trouble making a choice, i.e., that they are often or mostly undecided or indifferent. And I do agree that indifference, indecision, and fatalism are closely connected. Actually, in a prequel to *Abolishing Freedom*, which does not yet exist in English, I take up a claim that appears in Lacan's "Science and Truth." Therein, in a context that perfectly fits Schuster's description, Lacan refers to a mostly unknown and rarely mentioned theological thinker, namely Hugues Félicité Robert de Lamennais, who from 1817 to 1823 published several volumes that addressed the problem of indifference—a problem he saw as an "endemic symptom of modernity"[174]—particularly with regard to questions of faith and religion (the title of these volumes was "Essay on indifference in matters of religion").[175] I do not want to reconstruct Lacan's argument here in any greater detail, but in this text he raises the following question: "Who among you will write an essay worthy of Lamennais in political matters?"[176] *Abolishing Freedom* sought to at least gather some key elements to

prepare such an essay, an essay not in political but rather more generally in practical matters. The step that, as indicated before, I try to make is one that leads from ontic to ontological indifference, from ontic indifference as symptom of a problematic concept of freedom to ontological indifference as an instrument against the former. I would thus argue that my argument about the problematic notion of freedom is compatible with Lacan's argument (that is also: people are driven nuts because they believe they have it—freedom—but they do not know how it is supposed to manifest and thus prove unable to decide), and that the comic fatalism without fate is not one of its components but one of its antidotes.[177]

Schuster ends with a difficult question. What if, he asks, I am trying to make the best of this comic fatalism of the worst? And maybe it is part of the worst that this is quite difficult to say. It is certainly better to assume the worst than not to; it is also better to know the worst than not to; it is also better to expect the worst than not to. To respond as briefly as possible, maybe traversing the worst could actually be a solid precondition, not for the best, but for what Plato already called the good. The good can in this sense only arise from the worst. Maybe this could be said to be a preparation for the disappointment of returning to the cave and finding the others do not want to leave, do not even want to hear about the (new) idea. Maybe this disappointment, depicted in Plato's famous allegory, should be integrated into the canon of thinking the worst; because the others do not want to see the good, they take what they have to be the best. And it gets worse: to make them even see the good, one has to force them out of the cave, has to force them out so that they see for themselves and become independent. The good is thus not always already there, it is not a given nor an always available option, but something has to happen for it to become a possibility, for one to be able to or be made to see it. How could one prepare for the good? By assuming the worst. It might be interesting in this context to revisit Nietzsche's concept, not of active nihilism, but of the "gay science" (its gayness, which is not simple happiness, might actually point in the direction of this good that is strangely better than the best). This might allow us once again to use Julien Gracq's wonderful label (he used it *apropos* of Marx's *18th Brumaire*) of "a *gaya scienza* of the apocalypse."[178] Since ultimately, if anything, this is precisely what *Abolishing Freedom* tried to be.

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[1] Martin Luther, "Concerning Christian Liberty"; https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1911/1911-h/1911-h.htm (accessed April 2020).
[2] Slavoj Žižek, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight: Power in the Era of Post-Human Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2018), 239.
[3] These responses were published in: *Provocations* 1 (2016-2017). I am truly grateful to Andrew Cutrofello, Andrew Pendakis, Mark Pingree, Aaron Schuster, and Alenka Zupančič for their replies. I will try and limit the injustice I will do to their texts in my fully one-sided and partially ignorant

reconstructions to a maximal minimum. I do also sincerely thank Nathan Gorelick, Marco Abel, and Roland Végső for their not endless but truly infinite patience with me.

[4] The worst is a *fundamentum inconcussum* because it is the concussion of every fundament (potentially even of itself); it is a fundament in-concussion.

[5] See Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1: 1913-1926 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 236-252.

[6] Mussolini liked Sorel and considered himself a disciple of the latter—but only as long as he remained a (rather unread and naïve) Marxist. This changed from 1911 onward.

[7] Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). All further page references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

[8] The first constitutes a new (political and) legal system, the second is used to defend it. For law therefore to be lawful, this fact must be warded off. Law needs violence to preserve itself and seeks to violently make people forget the violence at its foundation. Any violent transformation of the law falls into the same trap: it can only destroy the system by repeating the very same dynamics. How to break this circle? Benjamin's answer is by means of a different type of violence that does not constitute a novel system, but that rather destitutes it; a violence that does not posit [*setzen*] a new law [*Gesetz*], but effectuates the appalling, degrading, horrifying [*entsetzend*] de- or dis-position [*Entsetzung*] of law itself. In detecting this way out, Benjamin believes "that Sorel touches not merely on a cultural-historical but also on a metaphysical truth" (Benjamin, "Critique", 249).

[9] Sorel's vision is apocalyptic in the sense that Lawrence once assigned to the imagery of the apocalypse: "If it is imagery, it is imagery which cannot be imagined" (D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* [London: Penguin 1974], 7).

[10] To be fair, Sorel can rely on the famous passage from the *Manifesto* where Marx himself talks about "times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour [*Entscheidung*]" (Karl Marx and Frederik Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/; accessed April 2020.

[11] It is important to remark here that this is a different critique than the critique that one finds in Rousseau—civilization as such is problematic—or pre-Marxian left-wing Rousseauism, as in Fourier—mankind did embark on an essentially problematic journey and progress is rather decay. For the latter, see Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 16-48.

[12] Georges Sorel, *The Illusions of Progress* (Berkeley / London: University of California Press, 1969), 152. One may see this as Sorel's version of Schmitt's famous thesis that liberalism replaced politics with ethics (and economics). See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). Here, liberalism replaced (practical) orientation with optimist disorientation. This analysis may have some contemporary value.

[13] Even though optimism (as a general belief system) is a result of the bourgeois belief in progress and progress is an invention of the eighteenth century, for Sorel there were already individual optimists before there was generalized bourgeois optimism. In a charmingly evil way, he writes for example that "Socrates was at times optimistic to an unbearable degree" (Sorel, *Reflections*, 8). He develops this idea in his early text (with an almost Badiousian title): Georges Sorel, *Le Procés de Socrate* (Paris: Akan, 1889). Optimism is an historical invention but can be retroactively recognized in the history before its invention (obviously only after its invention).

[14] Even today, pessimism is mostly taken to be "a philosophy of personal conduct," i.e., a version of individualism; see Joshua Foa Dienstag, *Pessimism: Philosophy, Ethic, Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

[15] When the former irrational (science) fiction (of reality) became reality and the formerly crazy wishes appeared realist, i.e., to be (potentially) satisfiable.

[16] Sorel refers to this as the incorrect use of the term pessimism (*Reflections*, 9). For a historical account of some resuscitation attempts, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[17] Althusser will argue that there occurs a shift within the general constellation of ideological state apparatuses, a move from the predominance of the church to that of the educational system, both trying to ensure the reign of the bourgeoisie (Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," *On Ideology* [London: Verso, 2008], 27 and *passim*). Sorel also indicates this shift.
[18] A little later Protestantism also made its pact with capitalism and gave birth to Calvinism—and the latter even made it seem as if it were identical to original Protestantism, i.e., Lutheranism (which it was not); see Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), chapter 1; and Felix Ensslin, *Entbehrung des Absoluten: Luther mit Lacan* (unpublished manuscript, 2009). Here, Sorel seems to be in line with Luther—and with Lenin's later hostility to Max Weber's famous thesis—in assuming that bourgeois ideology is fundamentally not protestant but at first essentially Catholic (even if then obviously later Calvinist).
[19] To make this more explicit: the idea of institutions of re-education is (for Sorel) primarily a bourgeois and not a leftist invention.
[20] For this see Frank Ruda, *Indifferenz und Wiederholung*. *Freiheit in der Moderne* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2018).
[21] It is overall remarkable that in some of his reflections Sorel is close to Freud. For example, similar to Freud's determination of the dream as a specific form of wish-fulfilment, for Sorel parliamentary democracy is a compromise solution where one gets a kind of hallucinatory fulfilment of one's desire for equality and freedom that—and this is the main problem—disguises itself as the real thing. Yet, Sorel's inspiration came from Eduard von Hartmann who wrote a book in 1869 called the *Philosophy of the Unconscious* in which he defended a pessimism along the lines of Schopenhauer (a thinker who Freud also esteemed highly).
[22] In an again almost Heideggerian fashion Sorel believes that at the Greek origins of Western culture and thought there lies a thought (tragedy) that has been (forcibly) forgotten and we need to return to it (by converting to pessimism)—as if the motto is: where there is no rescue, there lies the rescue.
[23] For the productive nature of complaining and its link to subjectivity, see Aaron Schuster, *The Trouble with Pleasure: Deleuze and Psychoanalysis* (Cambridge: MIT Press. 2016), esp. chapter 1.
[24] One might here even identify an almost Hegelian insight (which is the point of view from which he writes his *Philosophy of Right*): as soon as one can grasp a social and historical situation in its conceptual entirety this is an index that it is already past, gone, and about to collapse. Sorel transforms this into the following position: if a social-political state (of a situation) is still forcefully intact, what one can do is to create the fiction that it is already gone.
[25] This is why for Sorel in the Christian tradition Jesus had to die. And also why "in primitive Christianity we find a fully developed and completely armed pessimism" (*Reflections*, 13).
[26] To address an obvious counter-argument directly: if any kind of myth of the given has to be avoided, is there not also a myth of the non-given (as Adrian Johnston pointedly remarked)? In my understanding, myths of the non-given are ultimately myths of the given (as they take the non-givenness as given and thus must indeed be rejected); see Adrian Johnston, "Reflections of a Rotten Nature: Hegel, Lacan, and Material Negativity," *Filozofski Vestnik* 33.2 (2012), 23-52.
[27] This is a formula coined by Aaron Schuster in *The Trouble with Pleasure* (4 and *passim*).
[28] Andrew Cutrofello, "But Wait—It Gets Worse: On Frank Ruda's *Abolishing Freedom*," *Provocations* 1 (2017), 10; https://www.provocationsbooks.com/2017/01/31/1-2cutrofello/.
[29] A common-sense reproach to contemporary brain science is that, independent from what this science tells us about us being determined in multiple ways, we nevertheless experience all our conduct as self-determined and free. Surprisingly, it is precisely on this level of experience that we encounter the ideology

of freedom. One should not trust what you immediately cannot but believe (and sometimes one must trust what one would not believe twice).
[30] Alain Badiou, "Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art," *Lacanian Ink 22*; http://www.lacan.com/issue22.php; accessed April 2020.
[31] Paul Celan, "Wurfscheibe," *Lichtzwang* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 86.
[32] Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* depicts from within the processes at work in such an unbinding whose maximal form is, as is well-known, absolute knowing. I have developed this in detail elsewhere. The political implication of this becomes apparent if one recalls Badiou's claim that the "*the State is not founded upon the social bond*, *which it would express, but rather upon un-binding*, *which it prohibits*" (Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* [London: Continuum, 2006], 109).
[33] Obviously, the danger of such preparation is that one goes on endlessly, unless, of course, as comic fatalism claims, the end did already take place.
[34] Instructive here is the absolute fatalism, or if you prefer, realism—often critically denounced as apocalypticism—of Mike Davis; see, for example: Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2007).
[35] Eugene Thacker, *Cosmic Pessimism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 3.
[36] For further critical thoughts on the "Hölderlin paradigm" of emancipation, see Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil: Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2015), 344 and *passim*.
[37] Fatalism aims at *the real of the imaginary* (that enchains us into a certain conception of freedom), whereas Sorel aims at mythically *imagining the real*. For this also see Alenka Zupančič's *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan* (London: Verso, 2012).
[38] This entails that if there ever could be a past that is of any use for the present, it must be constructed as *part* of a newly construed present. But "only a person who has the power to tear themselves loose from themselves […] is capable of creating a past for themselves," as Schelling already knew; see F.W.F. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason M. Wirth (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 42. Otherwise, comic fatalism is in line with Hegel's claim that "we must not expect to find the questions of our consciousness and the interests of the present world responded to by the ancients" (G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995], 45).
[39] I say this in awareness of two facts: 1. that Sorel himself might have come up with a different strategy were he to have lived in our present condition; 2. irrespective of any consideration whether taking Sorel as an impossible reader of Heidegger implies a productive interpretation of Heidegger, since one could also take into account Heidegger's (tragically) fatalist slogan that only a God can save us because it implies that, without us acknowledging it, (things are so irreparably damaged that) we are already dead and who else would have the power to resurrect us (even though God does not yet exist)—late Heidegger is in this respect like the philosophical version of the movie *The Sixth Sense*.
[40] Even though this may have immediate repercussions for the broader discussion if what needs to be done is an exit of the "Neolithic age" or not. See Alain Badiou, "On the Russian October Revolution of 1917," in *Crisis and Critique*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, 12-23; https://crisiscritique.org/2017/november/Alain%20Badiou.pdf; accessed August 2020.
[41] See Werner Hamacher, "Afformative, Strike," *Cardozo Law Review* 13 (1991-1992), 1133-1158.
[42] Alenka Zupančič, "The End," *Provocations* Issue 1 (2016); https://www.provocationsbooks.com/2016/10/31/the-end/.
[43] Ibid., 2.
[44] Hans Vaihinger wrote his famous, nowadays mostly unread, book in 1911; see Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of As If* (London: Routledge, 2008). One problem with his position is that it problematically psychologizes Kant so that "the idea of freedom and freedom itself are transformed into a fiction and as such, as an 'As If', they necessarily lose the absolute validity they ought to have (Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-65* [London: Polity, 2006], 244).
[45] A possible rendering of this is the following: because the categorical imperative is too formal and does not tell us concretely what we must do in this or that situation, whatever content we choose, we are

radically responsible for it—this is Kant's anti-Eichmannian twist—yet this obviously increases the super-egoic pressure even more, so that the more we obey the categorical imperative, the more it demands from us; the more we obey, the guiltier we become.

[46] Hegel argues that if I choose a particular maxim that does not contradict the formal framework of Kant's imperative, this may nonetheless lead to contradictory consequences. His example of such a maxim is: Always help the poor! This does comply with Kant's form of the imperative, yet if this maxim becomes a universal law, poverty will be abolished and the maxim itself will become meaningless. This is to say that there is content inscribed into what appears to be just a formal principle; see G. W. F. Hegel, *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 80.

[47] See, for example, Alain Badiou, "Épilogue," *Autour de* Logiques des mondes *d'Alain Badiou*, ed. David Rabouin, Oliver Feltham, Lissa Lincoln (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2011), 188.

[48] Zupančič, "The End," 6.

[49] As Cutrofello rightly points out: each of these imperatives exhibits a strategy of "*Reculez pour mieux sauter*" ("But Wait," 14)—and in precisely this aspect they are *de facto* close to the structure of the "enlightened catastrophism" of Jean-Pierre Dupuy; see Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Pour un catastrophisme eclairé: Quand l'impossible est certain* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

[50] Again put differently: It is a provisory morality for intermediary times—of freedom as signifier of disorientation—and not a transcendental argument about the structure of freedom as such, and to me this seems to be a crucial difference. Lenin, for example, nicely argued that "freedom" and "equality" should only be referred to when a fundamental revolution of the basic coordinates of society will have taken place. As long as this did not happen, these signifiers cannot but have a deceptive effect on people: "if freedom runs counter to the emancipation of labour from the yoke of capital, it is a deception," a "freedom on paper, but not in fact." This is why "their 'freedom' must be abolished, or curtailed" (V.I. Lenin, "First All-Russia Congress on Adult Education," *Collected Works*, Vol. 29 [Moscow: Progress, 1972], 351 and *passim*).

[51] In this sense, a book on the dominant problematic renderings of "equality" would look quite different.

[52] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 492; my emphasis.

[53] Cf. Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018).

[54] For this, see also the brief chapter on Calvin in Ernst Bloch, *Thomas Münzer: Als Theologe der Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 135 and *passim*.

[55] Zupančič, "The End," 9.

[56] Cf. Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2017).

[57] In another text Zupančič makes this point beautifully by claiming that "apocalypse is already here [...] The problem is that, for the most part, we haven't yet accepted that this change is already operative—we still think of the world as pre-apocalyptic, we are expecting the catastrophe, are afraid of it, and hope that perhaps it won't happen" (Alenka Zupančič, "The Apocalypse is (still) disappointing", in: *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, 10 & 11 [2017-18], 26). She also convincingly claims: "'the courage of the hopeless,'" the courage to admit that we don't have a solution and that there is none visible on the horizon. Instead, we would quite literally 'rather die' than admit this" (ibid). In a similar vein, Adorno once stated that one should conceive of subjectivity as an error—the error to exist at all—but we would rather die before we would be ready to admit this.

[58] For this argument, see again Comay and Ruda, *The Dash*.

[59] As Žižek put it: "I am free when I 'feel like a slave'—that is to say, the feeling of being enslaved already bears witness to the fact that, in the core of my subjectivity, I am free; only when my position of enunciation is that of a free subject can I experience my servitude as an abomination. Thus we have here two versions of the Möbius strip reversal: if we follow capitalist freedom to the end it turns into the very

form of servitude, and if we want to break away from capitalist *servitude volontaire* our assertion of freedom again has to assume the form of its opposite, of voluntarily serving a Cause" (Žižek, *Like a Thief in Broad Daylight*, 239).
[60] Žižek has also pointed in this direction; see Slavoj Žižek, *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously* (London: Penguin, 2018).
[61] This is linked to Heidegger's claim that to make the move into a proper anxiety, one needs "the courage to be anxious"; but this is also a modification of Tillich's claim that it takes "courage to be." I will argue, it takes courage to see that not even being is a given.
[62] See again, Zupančič, "The Apocalypse is (still) disappointing," 26 and *passim*.
[63] One of my reference points for this project will be—again: can it get any worse?—Heidegger, who formulated a complex theory of courage [*Mut*] that has not yet been systematically reconstructed (to the best of my knowledge) —although Brecht, Danton, Lenin, Nietzsche, Hegel and others will also play a major role.
[64] Cutrofello, "But Wait—It Gets Worse," 14.
[65] Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).
[66] Cutrofello, "But Wait—It Gets Worse," 14.
[67] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003), 13.
[68] I will develop the concept of the grotesque sovereign in a reading of Marx's *18th Brumaire* in the near future.
[69] See Alenka Zupančič "Power in the Closet (And Its Coming Out)," May 21, 2015, Kingston University London, mp3 recording; https://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2015/05/alenka-zupancic-power-in-the-closet-and-its-coming-out/ accessed April 2020.
[70] Mark Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism: Philosophy and the End after the End," *Provocations* 1 (2017), 19; https://www.provocationsbooks.com/2017/02/20/geohistorical-materialism/.
[71] Pingree could read the well-known argument of Anders along these same lines, notably that "we are apocalyptic only so we can be wrong"; see Günther Anders, *Endzeit und Zeitende—Gedanken über die atomare Situation* (Munich: Beck, 1972), 26. And one should add that Anders's figure of thought remains essentially poetic. For a more formal interpretation of this, which is closer to my argument, see Jean-Pierre Dupuy, "Nuclear Deterrence and the Metaphysics of Time," *Problemi International* 2.2 (2018), 25-55.
[72] As much as hope is—as I have argued—mostly reactionary, so, too, is the claim and reference to the future a mostly reactionary claim.
[73] Peter Sloterdijk, "The Anthropocene: Process-State at the Edge of Geohistory?," *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 330. And Sloterdijk therefore—absolutely compatible with comic fatalism—refers to the German poet Friedrich Grabbe who claimed in 1836 (five years after the death of Hegel): "Nothing but despair can yet rescue us!" (ibid., 338). Can it get any more Lutheran?
[74] Another way of putting it: "The Anthropocene is the Apocalypse, in both the etymological and eschatological senses. Interesting times indeed" (Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, trans. Rodrigo Nunes [Malden: Polity, 2017], 22).
[75] The argument against (this conception of) autonomy is obviously crucial for *Abolishing Freedom*. Pingree confusingly describes the point above with Latour such that what is needed is a "Hegel without Absolute Spirit; Marx without dialectics"—to steal a witticism from Mladen Dolar, does the latter not sound like moving from a dialectic in standstill to standstill without dialectic? Hegel without absolute spirit supposedly means that in the Anthropocene art, religion and philosophy become useless, as they are unable to tell us anything about the objective and natural world. We are, in Hegel's terms, then stuck within objective spirit and nature and there is no time or use for art, religion philosophy. But does this mean anything else than "Don't think! The worst is happening now! So, act!"—a slogan which is indeed a

manifestation of the problems that *Abolishing Freedom* tries to tackle. For more on Marx, see John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); or Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System* (New York: Monthly Review, Press 2016); see Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism," 21. The reader should also be reminded of Badiou's actualization of Marx's early claim about religion and take into account that "ecology is the new opium of the masses!" It is important that it is an opium of (and not simply for) the masses (which raises the stakes in evaluating the current climate movements).

[76] And in a sense, different from Pingree's intention, he is right; I am trying to think a preparation of that for which one cannot prepare by conceiving of a subject that does not exist. Such a paradoxical subject that philosophy seeks to install in "eventless" times, I called elsewhere an "anticipated subject." See Frank Ruda, *For Badiou: Idealism without Idealism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015). To be precise: such a subject is impossible, and it will thus never ever come into being… unless it does.

[77] Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism," 21.

[78] This is why, for example, Latour symptomatically speaks—not of class struggle, but—of a war between those who are on the side of the object-experience (Terrans) and those who are not (metaphysically disoriented humans); see Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (London: Polity, 2017).

[79] The old saying that it is easier to imagine the end of all life on this planet than the end of capitalism proves here to be very tellingly true.

[80] On another note: already in 1845 Marx and Engels remarked that "nature, the nature that precedes human history… no longer exists anywhere" (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (London: Lewis & Wishart, 2010), 40. And is it really a surprise that in a time in which Marx's theory is *de facto* more true than ever (and thereby really shows all its limitations, so there is again only bad news), when capitalism appears as nature, we start talking in theoretical discourses about anonymous, pre-subjective forces that are at work everywhere and determine the life of our planet?

[81] Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism," 20.

[82] I frequently state that comic fatalism is a preparation for something for which one cannot prepare, i.e., for an event. An easier rebuttal would thus have been to minimize my claim and state that comic fatalism only applies for this kind of preparation (which is one reason why it seems obvious to me that I am in no way obligated to deny climate change, yet climate change is not an event of the kind that I am describing with Luther, Hegel or Badiou). Another way of responding to this is to point out that it seems rather obvious to me that the current climate disaster is a result of a problematic assumption of the myth of givenness (not of climate stability, but of freedom and sovereign control of the consequences of our actions) and hence does endorse my critical take on misconceptions of freedom.

[83] Unless, as an easy, yet risky answer might run, one is an Engelsian, since then there is a "dialectic of nature"; see *Engel's Dialectics of Nature and other texts on Science: A Reader* (London: Pluto Press, 1995).

[84] In this sense, the Anthropocene is also supposed to confront us with a dimension about which psychoanalysis does not have to say anything anymore, as we are leaving even the domain of the unknowingly intended.

[85] P. Krugman, "Apocalypse Becomes the New Normal," *New York Times*, January 2, 2020.

[86] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (December 2009), 197-222.

[87] Obviously one could avoid this problem if we were—in whatever way—responsible for the constitution of these agents; but then they would obviously also be dialectically related to our actions. And this obviously could not simply mean that we are fully in control and could just turn everything back to "normal."

[88] I here counter Pingree's claim that the "always already"—a logic that I do not (!) endorse in all cases—loses its emancipatory edge in the Anthropocene; see Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism," 20.

[89] One could strengthen this critique by introducing a dialectical concept of nature (one without dialectics in nature) that one can find in Hegel's philosophy of nature. Its basic feature would be that it is a production of spirit attempting to imagine the absence of itself and then forgetting about being the one who produced it, whereby spirit is actually absent from its own imagination of its own absence. I will develop this more systematically in the future. For first remarks in this direction, see Frank Ruda, "A Squinting Gaze on the Parallax between Spirit and Nature," in Dominik Finkelde, Christoph Menke, Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Parallax*: *The Dependence of Reality on its Subjective Constitution* (London: Bloomsbury 2020).
[90] See Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 68.
[91] In fact, it introduces: 1. a primacy of the multiple over the two of dialectics (and such multiplicity, as one can learn from Spinoza to Deleuze, is ultimately always a hidden form of the One—its principle is: "PLURALISM = MONISM") (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], 20); and 2. thus re-introduces a very classical ontological—actually: onto-theological—framework as what is supposed to be apt to confront the new epoch.
[92] Alain Badiou, *Qu'est-ce que j'entends par Marxisme? Une conférence donnée par Alain Badiou au séminaire étudiants Lecture de Marx* (Paris: Les éditions sociales, 2016), 24.
[93] And is not the ultimate danger, less that cognitive capitalism appropriates the subjective destitution constitutive of comic fatalism (see Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism," 23), but that the Anthropocene is nothing but what was called the Capitalocene wherein these sub- or non-human processes are identified with, or media and expressions of, market mechanisms (that are increasingly addressed as much in religious terms—"the markets were not satisfied"—as in natural ones—the earthquake as a frequently used metaphor for financial uproar)?
[94] It is this claim that might prove as an important "tipping point of (in)action"; see Danowski and de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 45.
[95] Deleuze and Guattari*, A Thousand Plateaus*, 229.
[96] Hamacher, "Afformative, Strike."
[97] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1981), ix.
[98] Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," 220. Here it is important to remark that against Chakrabarty's pessimism, Latour sees it as his "duty to be optimistic"—a claim which should be read against the background of Sorel's elaborations above. See Bruno Latour, "Antropólogo Frances Bruno Latour Fala sobre Natureza e Politica, Interview with Fernando Eichenberg," *O Globo*, December 28, 2013; https://blogs.oglobo.globo.com/prosa/post/antropologo-frances-bruno-latour-fala-sobre-natureza-politica-519316.html; accessed April 2020.
[99] See Zupančič, "The Apocalypse is (still) disappointing."
[100] And therefore I think one should oppose dreams of regressing to previous—more naturally embedded—forms of life and their ontologies (from cultures that even experienced their own end of the world before). This version of a literally new "down to earth" politics and its respective ontology seems to be hardly able to avoid many of the traps linked to problematic readings of authenticity and essentialism, alternate modernity, etc. But ultimately it shares with Sorel the great Heideggerian temptation to return to what appears to be lost with the advent of modernity or civilization or the west (in whatever scope or name one prefers); see again Danowski and de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, 120 and passim.
[101] Pingree, "Geohistorical Materialism," 24.
[102] Zupančič, "The End," 9. One might add here a line of thought that Mladen Dolar developed vis-à-vis Shakespeare, Hegel, and Beckett, notably that as long as we can say "this is the worst," this is not the worst (see Mladen Dolar, "The Endgame of Aesthetics: From Hegel to Beckett," *Problemi International* 3.3 [2019], 202)—which is quite similar to the story about the origin of Anna Akhmatova's poems (retold by Agamben), notably that she was waiting for months in line outside the Leningrad prison in the 1930s and when asked by some other women "Can you speak of this?," she answered, "Yes, I can" (see Giorgio

Agamben, "On Potentiality," *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. And trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999], 177. This is one way of pointing out what it means to avoid a category mistake. And does it not make things worse if we cannot even say that this is the worst?
[103] Andrew Pendakis, "Dialectics of Determinism. Echoes of Necessity in Hobbes, Hegel, Marx and Ruda," *Provocations* 1 (2017), 27; https://www.provocationsbooks.com/2017/07/11/dialectics-of-determinism/.
[104] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40.
[105] See Gustave Cohen, *Écrivains français en Hollande dans la première moitié du XVII siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1920), 357–602.
[106] Instructive on this is: Gilles Olivo, "L'efficience en cause: Suarez, Descartes et le question de la causalité," *Descartes et le Moyen Âge: Actes du colloque organisé à la Sorbonne du 4 au 7 juin 1996*, ed. Joël Biard and Roshdi Rashed (Paris: J. Vrin, 1997), 91-105.
[107] I do have to agree that Descartes also articulates his argument in opposition to Hobbes. Yet, to my mind the Aristotle reference is more crucial, as should become clear through the next point(s). On the relation between Aristotle and Hobbes, see Frank Ruda, "Wer denkt asozial? Von Aristoteles zu Hobbes," *Das soziale Band*, ed. Thomas Bedorf and Steffen Hermann (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2016), 143–163.
[108] There is also a clear reference in Descartes to Franciscus Gormarus, an anti-Aristotelian theologian.
[109] See Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, "Penser, esquisser: la limite illimitée entre philosophie et littérature," *Limite-illimité, questions au Présent* (Paris: Cécile defaut, 2012), 227-249.
[110] There is a further charge to my genealogy and especially to me siding with Luther here, notably that I am endorsing not the revolutionary Müntzer but rather the reactionary anti-Peasant movement bourgeois thinker Luther. To clarify this just in passing: yes, the late Luther is a reactionary (and even an anti-Semitic) thinker, but it should be clear that 1) the peasant movement is hardly imaginable without a link to the Lutheran reformation, and 2) the early Luther and his quite drastic attack on the Catholic Church should not too swiftly be identified with his later reactionary servility. But 3) and most importantly: What if Luther has a point when attacking Müntzer and the peasant movement? It would be a longer debate to consider—as Felix Ensslin once has argued—if one can read Luther's reaction vis-à-vis the peasant revolt as a critique *avant la lettre* of what later Badiou would describe as a defining feature of the twentieth century, namely a destructive "passion for the real" against which—as I clearly indicate in *Abolishing Freedom*—one should endorse a subtractive theology (and its respective subtractive passion for the real); see Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Malden: Polity 2007).
[111] See Martin Luther, "Disputation against Scholastic Theology," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 39 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1970), 9-16. Therein Luther *inter alia* attacks Biel, who defended that Aristotle is a necessary point of reference for any thinker of the Church—in an only slightly exaggerated sense, Protestantism formed when Luther sought to get Aristotle—and what he stood for—out of faith.
[112] One should recall here that Sorel also made an argument that the bourgeoisie installs an oblivion of the true tragic nature of life and thereby forcefully seeks to make everyone forget real difference (between what I want and what I get). Bourgeois politics has always been about continuity. There certainly can be a different concept of measure, but this is another discussion.
[113] *Briefe von und an Hegel*, ed. V.J. Hoffmeister and F. Nicolin, Vol 4. (Hamburg: Meiner, 1981), 60.
[114] It hardly seems necessary to remind anyone of the influence of Aristotle in contemporary—institutionally influential and powerful—philosophy, at least in the west (a state of affairs that is absolutely different for Plato).
[115] See Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, trans. Nicholas Heron (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).
[116] Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 84.
[117] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 255-416.

[118] Ibid., 255-260.
[119] See Agamben, *Stasis*, 65.
[120] Ibid., 66.
[121] It is comic because things went so bad—take into account Hobbes' contemporary reputation—it explodes the tragic form.
[122] Pendakis, "Dialectics of Determinism," 31.
[123] One thing that links these thinkers together is the claim that a certain misunderstanding of freedom (indifference) reduces human beings to a peculiar form of animality that is produced in the act of reduction. Fatalism (the use of the concept of fate) is—in its different guises—a conceptual weapon against indifference. This is later even instructive for Marx. For this see Ruda, *Indifferenz und Wiederholung*.
[124] Obviously, I am not claiming that one is able to reduce the whole formation of modern rationalist philosophy to a kind of unchanging class struggle about the concept of freedom. There are historical events (of a political nature, for example) that clearly have an important impact on philosophical inventions and transformations. Yet, the intricacies of the function of the concept of predestination and fate in their concatenation with the concept of freedom in modern rationalism can be systematically understood when read within the proposed framework.
[125] Karl Marx, "Political Indifferentism, "Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), 392-97.
[126] For his critique of indifferentism, see for example V.I. Lenin, "The Socialist Party and Non-Party Revolutionism," *Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), 75-82.
[127] V.I. Lenin, "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," *Collected Works*, Vol. 23 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 110.
[128] V.I. Lenin, "From a Publicist's Diary," *Collected Works*, Vol. 25 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 301.
[129] With some trivialization one could also rephrase this by saying: capitalism does not only rely on an empty signifier such as "freedom" and also not only on a particular "filling" of this empty signifier that constitutes what Laclau and Mouffe described as a logic of difference (freedom thereby deciphering itself socially as freedom of commerce and the market, of opinion and the press, etc.) but also on what they called a chain of equivalence whereby if "freedom," for example, is threatened all the particular differences become equivalences of one another. Lenin's (Marxist) point being that it is never neutral in what precise chain of equivalence a signifier stands.
[130] See Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom*, 30f.
[131] Luther's reply against Erasmus' moderate political gesture was a Maoist one *avant la lettre*: there is great disorder under heaven, the situation is excellent (because if we are unclear on the most important questions—of faith—why and how should the world hinder us combatting about them; and why should we worry about the world as long as what truly matters is unclear). For this, see also Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Revolution: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 155-178.
[132] V.I. Lenin, "The Immediate Task of Soviet Government," *Collected Works*, Vol. 27 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 265.
[133] V.I. Lenin, "The Tasks of the Revolution," *Collected Works*, Vol. 26 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 62.
[134] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All-Too-Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. Helen Zimmern (Edinburgh: Foulis, 1910), 4.
[135] Hegel's critique of feeling is basically if you cannot say what you feel—because it is so deep and incommunicable—you properly do not know what you feel and hence do not feel it either. So, feelings produce a depth illusion. Yet, this account is certainly complicated by the fact that we cannot simply say what we mean (and intend to say), because we always say more or less—but it means that the truth of ourselves is, for Hegel, rather out there and not, never, inside of ourselves.
[136] See for example Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil*, 344ff.

[137] "Bangt nicht vor rissen brüchen wunden schrammen // Der zauber der zerstückelt stellt neu zusammen" (Stefan George, "Bangt nicht vor rissen brüchen wunden schrammen"; http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/George,+Stefan/Gesamtausgabe+der+Werke/Der+Stern+des+Bundes/Erstes+Buch/%5BBangt+nicht+vor+rissen+br%C3%BCchen+wunden+schrammen%5D; accessed April 2020.
[138] The slightly trivialized Rocky Balboa version of this is: first the pain, then the success; another would be: from here on things can only get better (which is mostly an illusion).
[139] Pendakis, "Dialectics of Determinism," 39. When I read this quite amusing part of Pendakis' reply, I had a spontaneous Kantian reflex thinking: at least some things on this list are simply agreeable and thus, if Kant was not totally wrong, it lacks a proper universal dimension. And who would disagree that even if the worst already happened, some stuff is still agreeable? But, and this is the implication of Kant's distinction, the agreeable is what humans share with animals (they share it specifically because the agreeable only concerns man as animal)—and this must mean that one way of generalizing the misconception of freedom that I oppose is even to generalize the agreeable (and this is precisely what Plato does when he describes the state of pigs. For this, see Gilles Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs: The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies* (London: Urbanomic, 2014).
[140] Despair is Luther's and Hegel's name for an affect that is salvationally (Luther) or conceptually (Hegel) necessary.
[141] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 19.
[142] Rationalist fatalism is thus not closet optimism, because it actually attempts to exorcize the myth of givenness of freedom and does not produce a new anchor. It is not negative dialectics, even though Adorno can certainly be an ally for some of the way. He might then help point out the fact that there is no (given) way out of a totally messed up situation and each individual and particular experience which seems to entail the potential of a way out is actually immediately integrated into this very system, whereby even the assumption that there could be a non-contaminated element within it—cigarettes, philosophy, etc.—must be given up. The obvious difference between comic fatalism and negative dialectics, though, is that the former is quite simply not tragic, whereas the latter is. Comic fatalism attempts to detect points of impossibility to which it can cling no matter what.
[143] Lula is supposed to have said once when someone addressed corruption charges against him that if Jesus would return and come to Brazil, even he would immediately make a pact with devil (or Judas). The point does not so much attest to the unavoidable omnipresence of corruption in today's politics, but rather problematizes the fantasy of a pure (never violent, always clean) form of emancipation or salvation. The latter is itself rather metaphysical; yet it would be equally problematic to assume that thereby one is simply condemned to never finding true emancipation or always needing to give in to corruption. There is never any purity of emancipation that would not itself be practically generated.
[144] This bears similarity to Luther, for whom God's laws confront us with our own incapacity and as soon as we try to follow them without being able to, we not only encounter the fact that we are unable to do so, but we also generate a knowledge of an impossibility. This strange knowledge—which is not objective knowledge—is expressed in anxiety (and might be an indication of why Hegel believed the pathway of despair leads to what he called absolute knowing).
[145] I write *af-fact* following Hamacher's reflection on the term "afformative" in "Afformative, Strike."
[146] Steven Shapin, "Libel on the Human Race," *London Review of Books* 36.11 (June 4, 2014), 29. I leave aside the distinction between fear and anxiety here.
[147] On this see Alenka Zupančič, *What is Sex?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).
[148] Already at the very beginning of modern philosophy, Descartes argues that what is properly human about human beings, notably that they think, even though they are embodied beings, necessitates them to think what is impossible to think (God) as only this is properly thinking (and thus human). In a different but similar vein Varlam Shalamov reports from his time in a Stalinist gulag a scene where prisoners were forced to work under horrible conditions; and when even horses started to collapse, the prisoners continued to work. Shalamov could not help but think that this provided proof that human beings are

physically stronger than any animal could ever be. This peculiar kind of other "physicality" is linked to what I refer to above as inhuman.
[149] This alliance can also be read as an alliance with a negative dialectical position. As Adorno clearly stated, "[s]elf-righteous humanity [...] only intensifies the inhuman state of affairs" (Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973], 67).
[150] Erich Segal, *The Death of Comedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 13.
[151] Pendakis, "Dialectics of Determinism," 34.
[152] This might make palpable why what I address as "ideology of freedom" reduces human beings to their animal bodies. I have shown elsewhere in what sense Marx can be read as providing a systematic account of how to understand the reduction of human beings to their bodies—a thesis that one finds from Descartes through Kant to Marx and Badiou. He describes it as a productive ideological operation constitutive of capitalism (which is also why we are still talking about wage-slavery): it is productive because the animal body to whose needs human beings are reduced is ideologically produced in the very act of reduction. This is an effect of the indifference specific to capitalism. For this, see Slavoj Žižek, Frank Ruda, Agon Hamza, *Reading Marx* (London: Polity, 2018). As Pendakis clearly remarks, the subject is not identical to the body, but this does not also mean it is something that would therefore simply be immaterial (and not manifest); it is nothing but its effects (Pendakis, "Dialectics of Determinism," 34f). This is why I agree with Descartes that humans are embodiments of the un-relation between the physically determined body (nature) and the not-physical freedom (un-nature)—a un-relation between an un-being and being—which introduces a split perspective into physics.
[153] Pendakis, "Dialectics of Determinism," 39f.
[154] The precise way in which the assumption of freedom as property and possession is constitutive for liberalism and the disastrous political implications of this are systematically formulated in Christoph Menke, "Im Schatten der Verfassung. Die Voraussetzungen des Liberalismus"; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AE_vnScsmA; accessed April 2020.
[155] It is obviously Hegelian, because I claim that all the thinkers I refer to articulate the same idea, which is then elaborated in an increasingly systematic and, if one wishes, radical manner.
[156] I am even happier to read that Pendakis agrees with me ontologically. Yet, it still remains to be developed if fatalism could at all be an ontology (and if so, what kind) or is constitutively transitory (as the self-negating contradiction at its core) and strategic (opposing reactionary ideologies) because it is rather determined by at least one non-philosophical form of practice, notably politics (since the ideology of freedom is present everywhere but seems to have a footing in the political sphere)—or if one has to say more on this point (Pendakis, "Dialectics of Determinism," 37). Also, it would be a discussion whether Aristotelianism can be avoided.
[157] Ibid., 40.
[158] This is how Badiou described the fundamental maneuver of Lacan; see Alain Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 131.
[159] Aaron Schuster, "I am a Fatalist, But Not By Choice: On Frank Ruda's *Abolishing Freedom*," *Provocations* 1 (2017); https://www.provocationsbooks.com/2017/09/11/im-a-fatalist-but-not-by-choice/; 43.
[160] Instructive on this point is the debate McDowell had for several years with Dreyfus, because it presents us with the choice between two deeply flawed positions. On this see Frank Ruda, "The Battle of Myths" (forthcoming).
[161] Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom*, 106.
[162] Schuster, "I am a Fatalist," 46.
[163] Ibid., 47.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., 49.
[166] This is one of the arguments once brilliantly developed by Mladen Dolar; see "Si fractus illabatur orbis, impavidum ferient ruinae"; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liDeHZh4qJg; accessed April 2020.

[167] Things obviously get more complicated when we are talking not about speaking but about formalization (as in mathematics). For the present purpose, I only indicate this crucial difference.
[168] Schuster, "I am a Fatalist," 49.
[169] Schuster is right to point out that this is an intricate debate. It is *inter alia* intricate because to properly begin mapping the terrain would necessitate to take into account that 1) for Badiou there is no neutral ontology, which must imply 2) that there is no neutral anthropology and thus that 3) any account of a subjectivizable body must be read from a particular and engaged *subjective* perspective. Such a perspective can only be that of the event. But as any event is only an event through the consequences it yields, there must be a subject to produce these very consequences. In the beginning there is no subject but an event—which will only have been an event if a subject will have emerged as a result of it and unfolded its consequences. So, the question is: what is the subjectivizable body of the "first" event, the subject of the first event ever? I think there is an answer (as there is no "first" event, but this would demand a much longer elaboration).
[170] That in the beginning there is neither something nor nothing, but "less than nothing." What this means is elaborated in Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2013).
[171] All this is getting even more complicated because when Badiou invited Žižek to his seminar (when the latter's *Less Than Nothing* was translated into French, with a preface by Badiou) at one point in their discussion Žižek brought up the question: what for him enables identification of an event as event, as there must be something that precedes the subject, Badiou agreed and claimed he calls this something "courage." It is a longer argument that I will develop elsewhere how one can understand this answer, if this solves the problem(s), and what the relation between courage and death-drive might be, if there is any.
[172] Ruda, *For Badiou*, 117ff.
[173] Obviously, not all conditions (dis)appear at once. There can be active artistic processes, when there are no active political ones. Badiou makes this point *inter alia* in Alain Badiou and Fabien Tarby, *La philosophie et l'évènement* (Paris: Germina, 2010).
[174] Paul Laurent Assoun, "De Freud à Lacan: le sujet du politique," *Cités* 16 (2003/04), 20.
[175] Félicité Robert de Lamennais, *Essai sur l'indifference en matière de religion*, Vol. 1 (Paris: 1821).
[176] Lacan's text was previously presented as a lecture, and Lacan thus directly addressed his audience; see Jacques Lacan, "Science and Truth," *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 729.
[177] And again here Schuster makes pointed observations about the comic nature of fatalism without fate.
[178] Julien Gracq, *Lettrines* (Paris: José Corti, 1967), 70. As the reader might know, this is how Gracq describes Marx's *18th Brumaire*—which from this perspective also develops quite a comic fatalist ring to it (as Cutrofello incisively remarked).