

Ideology today

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The repulsive anti-intellectualist relatives whom one cannot always avoid during holidays, often attack me with common provocations like „What could you as a philosopher tell me about the cup of coffee I am just tasting?“ However, once, when a thrifty relative of mine brought to my son the Kinder Surprise egg and then asked me with a patronizing ironic smile „So what would be your philosophical comment on this egg?“, he got a surprise of his lifetime – a detailed long answer.

Kinder Surprise, one of the most popular chocolate products on sale all around Central Europe, are empty egg shells made of chocolate and wrapped up in lively-colored paper; after one unwraps the egg and cracks the chocolate shell open, one finds in it a small plastic toy (or small parts from which a toy is to be set together). A child who buys this chocolate egg often nervously unwraps it and just breaks the chocolate, not bothering to eat it, worrying only about the toy in the center – is such a chocolate-lover not a perfect case of Lacan's motto »I love you, but, inexplicably, I love something in you more than yourself, and, therefore, I destroy you«? And, effectively, is this toy not l'objet petit a at its purest, the small object filling in the central void of our desire, the hidden treasure, agalma, in the center of the thing we desire?

This material (»real«) void in the center, of course, stands for the structural (»formal«) gap on account of which no product is »really THAT,« no product leaves up to the expectation it arises. In other words, the small plastic toy is not simply different than chocolate (the product we bought); while materially different, it fills in the gap in chocolate itself, i.e. it is on the same surface as the chocolate. As we know already from Marx, commodity is a mysterious entity full of theological caprices, a particular object satisfying a particular need, but at the same time the promise of »something more,« of an unfathomable enjoyment whose true location is fantasy – and all publicity addresses this fantasmatic space (»If you

drink X, it will not be just a drink, but also ...«). And the plastic toy is the result of a risky strategy to directly materialize, render visible, this mysterious excess: »If you eat our chocolate, you will not just eat a chocolate, but also... have a (totally useless) plastic toy.« The Kinder egg thus provides the formula for all the products which promise »more« (»buy a DVD player and get 5 DVD's for free,« or, in an even more direct form, more of the same - »buy this toothpaste and get one third more for free«), not to mention the standard trick with the Coke bottle (»look on the inside of the metal cover and you may find that you are the winner of one of the prizes, from another free Coke to a brand new car«): the function of this »more« is to fill in the lack of a »less,« to compensate for the fact that, by definition, a merchandise never delivers on its (fantasmatic) promise. In other words, the ultimate »true« merchandise would be the one which would not need any supplement, the one which would simply fully deliver what it promises – »you get what you paid for, neither less nor more.«[1]

This reference to the void in the middle of a desert, the void enveloped by a desert, has a long history.[2] In the Elizabethan England, with the rise of modern subjectivity, the difference emerged between the »substantial« food (meat) eaten in the great banquet hall and the sweet deserts eaten in the separate small room while the tables were cleared (»voided«) in the banquet hall – so the small room in which these deserts were consummated was called »void.« Consequently, the deserts themselves were referred to as »voids,« and, furthermore, in their form, they imitated the shape of the void – sugar cakes in the shape of, usually, an animal, empty in its inside. The emphasis was on the contrast between the »substantial« meal in the large banquet hall and the insubstantial, ornamental, desert in the »void«: the »void« was a »like-meat,« a fake, a pure appearance – say, a sugar peacock which looked like the peacock without being one (the key part of the ritual of consuming it was to violently crack the

surface to reveal the void inside). This was the early modern version of today's decaffeinated coffee or artificial sweeteners, the first example of the food deprived of its substance, so that, eating it, one was in a way »eating nothing.« And the further key feature is that this »void« was the space of deploying the »private« subjectivity as opposed to the »public« space of the banquet hall: the "void" was consummated in a place where one withdrew after the public ceremony of the official meal; in this separate place, one was allowed to drop the official masks and let oneself to the relaxed exchange of rumors, impressions, opinions, and confessions, in their entire scope from the trivial to the most intimate. The opposition between the substantial »real thing« and the trifling ornamental appearance which envelopped only the void thus overlapped with the opposition between substance and subject – no wonder that, in the same period, the »void« also functioned as an allusion to the subject itself, the Void beneath the deceptive appearance of social masks. This, perhaps, is the first, culinary, version of Hegel's famous motto according to which, one should conceive the Absolute „not only as Substance, but also as Subject“: you should eat not only meat and bread, but also good deserts...

Should we not link this use of »void« to the fact that, at exactly the same historic moment, at the dawn of modernity, »zero« as a number was invented – a fact, as Brian Rotman pointed out, linked to the expansion of the commodity exchange, of the production of commodities into the hegemonic form of production, so that the link between void and commodity is here from the beginning.[3] In his classic analysis of the Greek vase in »Das Ding,« to which Lacan also refers in his Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Heidegger also emphasizes how the vase as an emblematic Thing is formed around a central void, i.e., serves as the container of a void[4] – one is thus tempted to read together the Greek vase and the Kinder chocolate egg as designating the two moment of the Thing in the history of the West, the sacred Thing at its dawn, and the ridiculous merchandise at its end: Kinder egg is our vase today... Perhaps, then, the ultimate image condensing the entire »history of the West« would be that of the ancient Greeks offering to gods in the vase... a Kinder egg plastic toy. One should

effectively follow here the procedure, practiced by Adorno and Horkheimer in their Dialectics of Enlightenment, of condensing the entire development of the Western civilization into one simple line – from prehistorical magic manipulation to technological manipulation, or from the Greek vase to Kinder egg. (((Along these lines, the thing to bear in mind is that the Ancient Greek dawn of philosophy occurred at the same time (and place) as the first rise of commodity production and exchange – one of the stories about Thales, the first philosopher, is that, to prove his versatility in »real life,« he got rich on the market, and then returned to his philosophy... The double meaning of the term »speculation« (metaphysical and financial) is thus operative from the very beginning.))) So, perhaps, one should risk the hypothesis that, historically, the Greek vase to which Heidegger refers already was a commodity, and that it was this fact which accounted for the void in its center, which gives to this void its true resonance - it is as a commodity that a thing is not only itself, but points »beyond itself« to another dimension inscribed into the thing itself as the central void. Following Beistegui's indications about the secret hegemony of the notion of oikos as closed »house« economy in Heidegger, i.e., about Heidegger's ignorance of the market conditions, of how the market always-already displaces the closed oikos,[5] one could thus say that the vase as das Ding is the ultimate proof of this fact.

No wonder, then, that there is a homology between the Kinder egg, today's »void,« and the abundance of commodities which offer us »X without X,« deprived of its substance (coffee without caffeine, sweetener without sugar, beer without alcohol, etc.): in both cases, we seem to get the surface form deprived of its core. However, more fundamentally, as the reference to the Elizabethan »void« indicates, is not there a clear structural homology between this structure of the commodity and the structure of the bourgeois subject? Do subjects – precisely insofar as they are the subjects of universal Human Rights - also not function as these Kinder chocolate eggs? In France, it is still possible to buy a desert with the racist name »la tete du negre /the nigger's head/«: a ball-like chocolate cake empty in its interior (»like the stupid nigger's head«) – the Kinder egg fills in this void. The lesson of it is that we ALL have »nigger's

heads,« with a hole in the centre - would the humanist-universalist reply to the *tete du negre*, his attempt to deny that we all have »nigger's heads,« not be precisely something like a Kinder egg? As humanist ideologists would have put it: we may be indefinitely different, some of us are black, others white, some tall, other small, some women, other men, some rich, others poor, etc.etc. – yet, deep inside us, there is the same moral equivalent of the plastic toy, the same *je ne sais quoi*, an elusive X which somehow accounts for the dignity shared by all humans – to quote Francis Fukuyama:

»What the demand for equality of recognition implies is that when we strip all of a person's contingent and accidental characteristics away, there remains some essential human quality underneath that is worthy of a certain minimal level of respect – call it Factor X. Skin, color, looks, social class and wealth, gender, cultural background, and even one's natural talents are all accidents of birth relegated to the class of nonessential characteristics. /.../ But in the political realm we are required to respect people equally on the basis of their possession of Factor X.«[6]

In contrast to transcendental philosophers who emphasize that this Factor X is a sort of »symbolic fiction« with no counterpart in the reality of an individual, Fukuyama heroically locates it into our »human nature,« into our unique genetic inheritance. And, effectively, is genome not the ultimate figure of the plastic toy hidden deep within our human chocolate skin? So it can be a white chocolate, a standard milk chocolate, a dark one, with or without nuts or raisins – inside it, there is always the same plastic toy (in contrast to the Kinder eggs which are the same on the outside, while each has a different toy hidden inside). And, to cut a long story short, what Fukuyama is afraid of is that, if we mess too much into the production of the chocolate egg, we might generate an egg without the plastic toy inside – how? Fukuyama is quite right to emphasize that it is crucial that we experience our »natural« properties as a matter of contingency and luck: if my neighbor is more beautiful or intelligent than me, it is because he was lucky to be born

like that, and even his parents could not have planned it that way. The philosophical paradox is that if we take away this element of lucky chance, if our »natural« properties become controlled and regulated by biogenetic and other scientific manipulations, we lose the Factor X.

Of course, the hidden plastic toy can also be given a specific ideological twist – say, the idea that, after one gets rid of the chocolate in all its ethnic variations, one always encounters an American (even if the toy is in all probability made in China). This mysterious X, the inner treasure of our being, can also reveal itself as an alien intruder, an excremental monstrosity even. The anal association is here fully justified: the immediate appearance of the Inner is formless shit.[7] The small child who gives his shit as a present is in a way giving the immediate equivalent of his Factor X. Freud's well-known identification of excrement as the primordial form of gift, of an innermost object that the small child gives to his/her parents, is thus not as naive as it may appear: the often overlooked point is that this piece of myself offered to the Other radically oscillates between the Sublime and - not the Ridiculous, but, precisely - the excremental. This is the reason why, for Lacan, one of the features which distinguishes man from animals is that, with humans, the disposal of shit becomes a problem: not because it has a bad smell, but because it came out from our innermost. We are ashamed of shit because, in it, we expose/externalize our innermost intimacy. Animals do not have a problem with it because they do not have an "interior" like humans. One should refer here to Otto Weininger, who designated volcanic lava as "the shit of the earth." [8] It comes from inside the body, and this inside is evil, criminal: "The Inner of the body is very criminal." [9] Here we encounter the same speculative ambiguity as with penis, organ of urination and procreativity: when our innermost is directly externalized, the result is disgusting. This externalized shit is precisely the equivalent of the alien monster that colonizes the human body, penetrating it and dominating it from within, and which, at the climactic moment of a science-fiction horror movie, breaks out of the body through the mouth or directly through the chest. Perhaps even more exemplary than Ridley Scott's *Alien* is here Jack Sholder's *Hidden*, in which the worm-like alien creature forced out of the body at

the film's end directly evokes anal associations (a gigantic piece of shit, since the alien compels humans penetrated by It to eat voraciously and belch in an embarrassing disgusting way).[10]

How does Israel, one of the most militarized societies in the world, succeed in rendering this aspect practically invisible and presenting itself as a tolerant secular liberal society?[11] The ideological presentation of the figure of the Israeli soldier is crucial here; it parasitizes on the more general ideological self-perception of the Israeli individual as ragged, vulgar even, but a warm and considerate human being. We can see here how the very distance towards our ideological identity, the reference to the fact that »beneath the mask of our public identity, there is a warm and frail human being with its weaknesses,« is the fundamental problem of ideology. And the same goes for the Israeli soldier: he is efficient, ready to accomplish the necessary dirty work on the very edge (or even beyond) legality, because this surface conceals a profoundly ethical, sentimental even, person... It is for this reason that the image of the crying soldier plays such an important role in Israel: a soldier who is ruthlessly efficient, but nonetheless occasionally breaks down crying at the acts he is compelled to perform. In psychoanalytic terms, what we have here is the oscillation between the two sides of objet petit a, shit and the precious agalma, the hidden treasure: beneath the excremental surface (vulgar insensitivity, gluttony, stealing shovels and ashtrays from hotels, etc. – all the clichés about Israelis propagated by the Israeli jokes), there is a sensitive core of gold. In terms of our Kinder chocolate example, this means that the chocolate brown shit is here at the outside, enveloping the precious treasure hidden by it.

The Factor X does not only guarantee the underlying identity of different subjects, but also the continuing identity of the same subject. Twenty years ago, National Geographic published the famous photo of a young Afghani woman with fierce bright yellow eyes; in 2001, the same woman was identified in Afghanistan – although her face was changed, worn out from difficult life and heavy work, her intense eyes were instantly recognizable as the factor of continuity. However, two decades ago, the German Leftist weekly journal Stern made a rather

cruel experiment which in a way empirically undermined this thesis: it paid a couple of destitute homeless man and woman who allowed themselves to be thoroughly washed, shaved and then delivered to the top designers and hairdressers; in one of its issues, the journal then published two parallel large photos of each person, in his/her destitute homeless habit, dirty and with unshaved faces, and dressed up by a top designer. The result was effectively uncanny: although it was clear that we are dealing with the same person, the effect of the different dress etc. was that this belief of ours that, beneath the different appearance, there is one and the same person was shaken. It is not only the appearance which was different: the deeply disturbing effect of this change of appearances was that we, the spectators, somehow perceived a different personality beneath the appearances... Stern was bombarded by writers' letters accusing the journal of violating the homeless persons' dignity, of humiliating them, submitting them to a cruel joke – however, what was undermined by this experiment was precisely the belief in Factor X, in the kernel of identity which accounts for our dignity and persists through the change of appearances. In short, this experiment in a way empirically demonstrated that we all have a »nigger's head,« that the core of our subjectivity is a void filled in by appearances.

So let us return to the scene of a small kid violently tearing apart and discarding the chocolate ball in order to get at the plastic toy – is he not the emblem of so-called »totalitarianism« which also wants to get rid of the »inessential« historical contingent coating in order to liberate the »essence« of man? Is not the ultimate »totalitarian« vision that of a New Man arising out of the debris of the violent annihilation of the old corrupted humanity? Paradoxically, then, liberalism and »totalitarianism« share the belief into Factor X, the plastic toy in the midst of the human chocolate coating... The problematic point of this Factor X which makes us equal in spite of our differences is clear: beneath the deep humanist insight that, »deep into ourselves, we are all equal, the same vulnerable humans,« is the cynical statement »why bother to fight against surface differences when, deeply, we already ARE equal?« - like the proverbial millionaire who pathetically discovers that he shares the same

passions, fears and loves with a destitute beggar.

Perhaps the most seductive strategie with regard to this Factor X is one of the favored intellectuals' exercises throughout the XXth century, namely the urge to »catastrophize« the situation: whatever the actual situation, it HAD to be denounced as »catastrophic,« and the better it appeared, the more it solicited this exercise – in this way, irrespective of our “merely ontic” differences, we all participate in the same ontological catastrophe. Heidegger denounced the present age as that of the highest »danger,« the epoch of accomplished nihilism; Adorno and Horkheimer saw in it the culmination of the »dialectic of enlightenment« in the »administered world«; up to Giorgio Agamben, who defines the XXth century concentration camps as the »truth« of the entire Western political project. Recall the figure of Horkheimer in the West Germany of the 50s: while denouncing the »eclipse of reason« in the modern Western society of consumption, he AT THE SAME TIME defended this same society as the lone island of freedom in the sea of totalitarianisms and corrupted dictatorships all around the globe. It was as if Winston Churchill's old ironic quip about democracy as the worst possible political regime, and all other regimes worse than it, was here repeated in a serious form: Western »administered society« is barbarism in the guise of civilization, the highest point of alienation, the disintegration of the autonomous individual, etc.etc. – however, all other socio-political regimes are worse, so that, comparatively, one nonetheless has to support it... One is thus tempted to propose a radical reading of this syndrome: what if what the unfortunate intellectuals cannot bear is the fact that they lead a life which is basically happy, safe and comfortable, so that, in order to justify their higher calling, they HAVE to construct a scenario of radical catastrophe? And, effectively, Adorno and Horkheimer are here strangely close to Heidegger:

»The most violent 'catastrophes' in nature and in the cosmos are nothing in the order of Unheimlichkeit in comparison with that Unheimlichkeit which man is in himself, and which, insofar as man is placed in the midst of beings as such and stands for beings,

consists in forgetting being, so that for him das Heimische becomes empty erring, which he fills up with his dealings. The Unheimlichkeit of the Unheimlichkeit lies in that man, in his very essence, is a katastrophe – a reversal that turns him away from the genuine essence. Man is the only catastrophe in the midst of beings.«[12]

The first thing which cannot but strike a philosopher's eye here is the implicate reference to the Kantian Sublime: in the same way that, for Kant, the most violent outbursts in nature are nothing in comparison with the power of the moral Law, for Heidegger, the most violent catastrophes in nature and social life are nothing in comparison with the catastrophe which is man himself – or, as Heidegger would have put it in his other main rhetorical figure, the essence of catastrophe has nothing to do with ontic catastrophes, since the essence of catastrophe is the catastrophe of the essence itself, its withdrawal, its forgetting by man. (Does this include holocaust? Is it possible to claim, in a non-obscene way, that holocaust is nothing in comparison with the catastrophe of the forgetting of being?) The (ambiguous) difference is that while, for Kant, natural violence renders palpable in a negative way the sublime dimension of the moral Law, for Heidegger, the other term of the comparison is the catastrophe that is man himself. The further ambiguous point is that Kant sees a positive aspect of the experience of the catastrophic natural outbursts: in witnessing them, we experience in a negative way the incomparable sublime grandeur of the moral Law, while in Heidegger, it is not clear that we need the threat (or fact) of an actual ontic catastrophe in order to experience in a negative way the true catastrophe that pertains to human essence as such. (Is this difference linked to the fact that, in the experience of the Kantian Sublime, the subject assumes the role of the observer perceiving the excessive natural violence from a safe distance, not being directly threatened by it, while this distance is lacking in Heidegger?)

It is easy to make fun of Heidegger here – there is, however, a »rational kernel« in his formulations. Although Adorno and Horkheimer would dismiss these formulations with scathing laughter, are they not caught in the same predicament? When they delineate the contours of the

emerging late-capitalist »administered world /verwaltete Welt/«, they are presenting it as coinciding with barbarism, as the point at which civilization itself returns to barbarism, as a kind of negative telos of the whole progress of Enlightenment, as the Nietzschean kingdom of the Last Men: »One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night: but one has a regard for health. 'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink.«[13] However, at the same time, they nonetheless warn against the more direct »ontic« catastrophies (different forms of terror, etc.). The liberal-democratic society of Last Men is thus literally the worst possible, the only problem being that all other societies are worst, so that the choice appears as the one between Bad and Worse. The ambiguity is here irreducible: on the one hand, the »administered world« is the final catastrophic outcome of the Enlightenment; on the other hand, the »normal« run of our societies is continually threatened by catastrophies, from war and terror to ecological outbreaks, so that while one should fight these »ontic« catastrophies, one should simultaneously bear in mind that the ultimate catastrophe is the very »normal« run of the »administered world« in the absence of any »ontic« catastrophe.[14] The aporia is here genuine: the solution of this ambiguity through some kind of pseudo-Hegelian »infinite judgement« asserting the ultimate coincidence between the subjects of the late capitalist consumerist society and the victims of the holocaust (»Last Men are Muslims«) clearly does not work. The problem is that there is no pathetic identification possible with the Muslims (the living dead of the concentration camps) – one cannot say »We are all Muslims« in the same way ten years ago we often heard the phrase »We all live in Sarajevo,« things went too far in Auschwitz. (And, in the opposite direction, it would also be ridiculous to assert one's solidarity with 9/11 by claiming »We are all New Yorkers!« – millions in the Third World would say »Yes!«...)

How, then, are we to deal with actual ethical catastrophies? When, two decades ago, Helmut Kohl, in order to designate the predicament of those Germans born too late to be involved in the holocaust, used the phrase »the mercy of the late birth /die Gnade des spaeten Geburt/,« many

commentators rejected this formulation as a sign of moral ambiguity and opportunism, signalling that today's German can dismiss the holocaust as simply outside the scope of their responsibility. However, Kohl's formulation does touch a paradoxical nerve of morality baptized by Bernard Williams »moral luck.«[15] Williams evokes the case of a painter ironically called »Gauguin« who left his wife and children and moved to Tahiti in order to fully develop there his artistic genius – was he morally justified in doing this or not? Williams' answer is that we can only answer this question IN RETROSPECT, after we learn the final outcome of his risky decision: did he develop into a painting genius or not? As Jean-Pierre Dupuy pointed out,[16] we encounter the same dilemma apropos of the urgency to do something about today's threat of different ecological catastrophies: either we take this threat seriously and decide today to do things which, if the catastrophe will not occur, will appear ridiculous, or we do nothing and lose everything in the case of the catastrophe, the worst case being the choice an a middle ground, of taking a limited amount of measures – in this case, we will fail whatever will occur (that is to say, the problem is that there is no middle ground with regard to the ecological catastrophe: either it will occur or it will not occur). Such a predicament would horrify a radical Kantian: it renders the moral value of an act dependent on thoroughly »pathological« conditions, i.e., on its utterly contingent outcome – in short, when I make a difficult decision which involves an ethical deadlock, I can only say: »If I lucky, my present act WILL HAVE BEEN ethical!« However, is not such a »pathological« support of our ethical stance an a priori necessity – not only in the common sense that, if we (most of us, at least) are to retain our ethical composure, we should have the luck of not being exposed to excessive pressures of temptations (a large majority of us would commit the worst betrayal when tortured in a horrifyingly cruel way). When, in our daily lives, we retain our ethical pride and dignity, we act under the protection of the FICTION that we would remain faithful to the ethical stance also under harsh conditions; the point here is not that we should mistrust ourselves and doubt our ethical stance, but, rather, that we should adopt the attitude of the Philosopher Alonzo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, who advises the two deceived lovers: »Trust women, but do

not expose them to too many temptations!«

It is easy to discern how our sense of dignity relies on the disavowal of the »pathological« facts of which we are well aware, but nonetheless we suspend their symbolic efficiency. Imagine a dignified leader: if he is caught by camera in an »undignified« situation (crying, throwing up...), this can ruin his career, although such situations are parts of the daily life of all of us. At a slightly different level, recall the high art of the skilled politicians who know how to make themselves absent when a humiliating decision was to be made; in this way, they are able to leave intact the unconscious belief of their followers in their omnipotence, sustaining the illusion that, if they were not accidentally prevented from being there, they would have been able to save the day. Or, at a more personal level, imagine a young couple on their first date, the boy trying to impress the girl, and then they encounter a strong bullying male who harasses the girl and humiliates the boy who is afraid to frontally oppose the intruder; such an incident can ruin the entire relationship - the boy will avoid ever seeing the girl again, since she will forever remind him of his humiliation.

However, beyond the Brechtian fact that »morality is for those who are lucky enough of being able to afford it,« there is a more radical gray zone best exemplified by the figure of Musulmanen (»Muslims«) from the Nazi concentration camps: they are the "zero-level" of humanity, a kind of "living dead" who even cease to react to the basic animal stimuli, who do not defend themselves when attacked, who gradually even lose thirst and hunger, eating and drinking more out of a blind habit than on account of some elementary animal need. For this reason, they are the point of the Real without symbolic Truth, i.e., there is no way to "symbolize" their predicament, to organize it into a meaningful life-narrative. However, it is easy to perceive the danger of these descriptions: they inadvertently reproduce and thus attest the very "dehumanization" imposed on them by the Nazis. Which is why one should insist more than ever on their humanity, without forgetting that they are in a way dehumanized, deprived of the essential features of humanity: the line that separates the "normal" human dignity and engagement from the Muslim's "inhuman"

indifference is inherent to "humanity," which means that there is a kind of inhuman traumatic kernel or gap in the very midst of "humanity" itself - to put it in Lacanian terms, the Muslims are "human" in an estimate way. What this means is that, as Agamben was right to emphasize, the "normal" rules of ethics are suspended here: we cannot simply deplore their fate, regretting that they are deprived of the basic human dignity, since to be "decent," to retain "dignity," in front of a Muslim is in itself an act of utter indecency. One cannot simply ignore the Muslim: any ethical stance that does not confront the horrifying paradox of the Muslim is by definition unethical, an obscene travesty of ethics - and once we effectively confront the Muslim, notions like "dignity" are somehow deprived of their substance. In other words, "Muslim" is not simply the "lowest" in the hierarchy of ethical types ("they not only have no dignity, they even lost their animal vitality and egotism"), but the zero-level which renders the whole hierarchy meaningless. Not to take into account this paradox is to participate in the same cynicism that the Nazis themselves practiced when they first brutally reduced the Jews to the subhuman level and then presented this image as the proof of their subhumanity - they extrapolated to the extreme the standard procedure of humiliation, in which I, say, take the belt of the trousers of a dignified person, thus forcing him to hold his trousers by his hands, and then mock him as undignified... In this precise sense, our moral dignity is ultimately always a fake: it depends on our being lucky to avoid the fate of the Muslim. This fact, perhaps, also accounts for the "irrational" feeling of guilt which haunted the survivors of the Nazi camps: what the survivors were compelled to confront at its purest was not the utter contingency of survival, but, more radically, the utter contingency of our retaining the moral dignity, the most precious kernel of our personality, according to Kant.

This, perhaps, is also the principal lesson of the XXth century concerning ethics: one should abandon all ethical arrogance and humbly accept the luck to be able to act ethically. Or, to put it in theological terms: far from being opposed, autonomy and grace are intertwined, i.e., we are blessed by grace when we are able to act autonomously as ethical agents. And we have to rely on the same mixture of grace

and courage when facing the PROSPECT of a catastrophe. In his »Two Sources of Morality and Religion,« Henri Bergson describes the strange sensations he experienced on August 4 1914, when war was declared between France and Germany: »In spite of my turmoil, and although a war, even a victorious one, appeared to me as a catastrophe, I experienced what /William/ James spoke about, a feeling of admiration for the facility of the passage from the abstract to the concret: who would have thought that such a formidable event can emerge in reality with so little fuss?«[17] Crucial is here the modality of the break between before and after: before its outburst, the war appeared to Bergson »simultaneously probable and impossible: a complex and contradictory notion which persisted to the end«[18]; after its outburst, it all of a sudden become real AND possible, and the paradox resides in this retroactive appearance of probability:

»I never pretended that one can insert reality into the past and thus work backwards in time. However, one can without any doubt insert there the possible, or, rather, at every moment, the possible insert itself there. Insofar as unpredictable and new reality creates itself, its image reflects itself behind itself in the indefinite past: this new reality finds itself all the time having been possible; but it is only at the precise moment of its actual emergence that it begins to always have been, and this is why I say that its possibility, which does not precede its reality, will have preceded it once this reality emerges.«[19]

The encounter of the real as impossible is thus always missed: either it is experienced as impossible but not real (the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe which, however probable we know it is, we do not believe it will effectively occur and thus dismiss it as impossible), or as real but no longer impossible (once the catastrophe occurs, it is »renormalized,« perceived as part of the normal run of things, as always-already having been possible). And, as Jean-Pierre Dupuy makes it clear, the gap which makes these paradoxes possible is the one between knowledge and belief: we KNOW the catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not BELIEVE it will really

happen.[20]

What such experiences show is the limitation of the ordinary »historical« notion of time: at each moment of time, there are multiple possibilities waiting to be realized; once one of them actualizes itself, others are cancelled. The supreme case of such an agent of the historical time is the Leibnizean God who created the best possible world: before creation, he had in his mind the entire panoply of possible worlds, and his decision consisted in choosing the best one among these options. Here, the possibility precedes choice: the choice is a choice among possibilities. What is unthinkable within this horizon of linear historical evolution is the notion of a choice/act which retroactively opens up its own possibility: the idea that the emergence of a radically New retroactively changes the past – of course, not the actual past (we are not in science fiction), but the past possibilities, or, to put it in more formal terms, the value of the modal propositions about the past – exactly what happens in the case described by Bergson. [21] Dupuy's point is that, if we are to confront properly the threat of a (cosmic or environmental) catastrophe, we need to break out of this »historical« notion of temporality: we have to introduce a new notion of time. Dupuy calls this time the »time of a project,« of a closed circuit between the past and the future: the future is causally produced by our acts in the past, while the way we act is determined by our anticipation of the future and our reaction to this anticipation. This circuit, of course, generates the host of the well-known paradoxes of self-realizing prophecy etc.: if we expect X to occur and act accordingly, X will effectively occur. More interesting are the negative versions: if we expect/predict X (a catastrophe) and act against it, to prevent it, the outcome will be the same if the catastrophe effectively occurs or does not occur. If it occurs, our preventive acts will be dismissed as irrelevant (»you cannot fight destiny«); if it does not occur, it will be the same, i.e., since the catastrophe (into which we did not believe, in spite of our knowledge) was perceived as impossible, our preventive acts will be again dismissed irrelevant (recall the aftermath of the Millenium Bug!). Is, then, this second option the only choice to follow as a rational strategy? One paints the prospect of a catastrophe and then one acts to prevent it, with the hope that the very success of our

preventive acts will render the prospect which prompted us to act ridiculous and irrelevant – one should heroically assume the role of excessive panic-monger in order to save humanity... However, the circle is not totally closed: back in the 1970s, Bernard Brodie pointed the way out of this deadlock of the closed circle apropos the strategy of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) in the old War:

»It is a strange paradox of our time that one of the crucial factors which make the /nuclear/ dissuasion effectively function, and function so well, is the underlying fear that, in a really serious crisis, it can fail. In such circumstances, one does not play with fate. If we were absolutely certain that the nuclear dissuasion is one hundred per cent efficient in its role of protecting us against a nuclear assault, then its dissuasive value against a conventional war would have dropped to close to zero.«[22]

The paradox is here a very precise one: the MAD strategy works not because it is perfect, but on account of its very imperfection. That is to say, a perfect strategy (if one sides nukes the other, the other will automatically respond, and both sides will thus be destroyed) has a fatal flaw: what if the attacking side counts on the fact that, even after its first strike, the opponent continues to act as a rational agent? His choice is now: with his country mostly destroyed, he can either strike back, thus causing total catastrophe, the end of humanity, or NOT STRIKE BACK, thus enabling the survival of humanity and thereby at least the possibility of a later revival of his own country? A rational agent would chose the second option... What makes the strategy efficient is the very fact that we cannot ever be sure that it will work perfectly: what if a situation spirals out of control for a variety of easily imaginable reasons (from the »irrational« aggressivity of the one part to simple technological failures or miscommunications)? It is because of this permanent threat that both sides do not want to come even too close to the prospect of MAD, so they avoid even conventional war: if the strategy were perfect, it would, on the opposite, endorse the attitude »Let's fight a full conventional war, since we both know that no side will

risk the fateful step towards a nuclear strike!« So the actual constellation of MAD is not »If we follow the MAD strategy, the nuclear catastrophe will not take place,« but: »If we follow the MAD strategy, the nuclear catastrophe will not take place, expect for some imprevisible incident.« And the same goes today for the prospect of the ecological catastrophe: if we do nothing, it will occur, and if we do all we can do, it will not occur, expect for some imprevisible accident. This »imprevisible factor e« is precisely the remainder of the Real which disturbs the perfect self-closure of the »time of the project« – if we write this time as a circle, it is a cut which prevents the full closure of the circle (exactly the way Lacan writes l'objet petit a). What confirms this paradoxical status of e is that, in it, possibility and impossibility, positive and negative, coincide: it renders the strategy of prevention effective precisely insofar as it hinders its full efficiency.

It is thus crucial not to perceive this »catastrophist strategy« in the old terms of linear historical causality: it does not work because today, we are faced with multiple possibilities of future, and, within this multitude, we chose the option to act as to prevent a catastrophe. Since the catastrophe cannot be »domesticated« as just another possibility, the only option is to posit it as real: »one has to inscribe the catastrophe into the future in a much more radical way. One has to render it unavoidable.«[23]

What one should introduce here is the notion of minimal »alienation« constitutive of the symbolic order and of the social field as such: although I KNOW very well that the future fate of me and the society in which I live causally depends on the present activity of millions of individuals like me, I nonetheless BELIEVE in destiny, i.e. I believe that the future is run by an anonymous power independent of the will and acts of any individual. »Alienation« consists in the minimal »objectivization« on account of which I abstract from my active role and perceive historical process as an »objective« process which follows its path independently of my plans. (At a different level, the same goes for the individual agent on the market: while fully aware that the price of a product on the market depends (also) on his acts, his selling and buying, he nonetheless holds the price of a product there for fixed, perceiving it as a

given quantity to which he then reacts.) The point, of course, is that these two levels intersect: in the present, I do not act blindly, but I react to the prospect of what the future will be.

This paradox designates the symbolic order as the order of virtuality: although it is an order which has no existence „in itself,“ independently of individuals who relate to it, i.e., as Hegel put it apropos of the social substance, although it is actual only in the acts of the individuals, it is nonetheless their SUBSTANCE, the objective In-itself of their social existence. This is how one should understand the Hegelian „In- and For-Itself“: while it is In-itself, existing independently of the subject, it is „posited“ as independent by the subject, i.e., it exists independently of the subject only insofar as the subject acknowledges it as such, only insofar as the subject relates to it as independent. For this reason, far from signalling a simple „alienation,“ the reign of the dead spectres over living subjects, this “autonomization” is coexistent with ethics: people sacrifice their lives for this virtuality. Dupuy is therefore right to emphasize that one should reject here the simplistic Marxist »critique« which aims at »sublating« this alienation, transforming society into a self-transparent body within which individuals directly realize their collective projects, without the detour of »destiny« (the position attributed to the Lukacs of History and Class Consciousness): a minimum of »alienation« is the very condition of the symbolic order as such.

One should thus invert the existentialist commonplace according to which, when we are engaged in a present historical process, we perceive it as full of possibilities and ourselves as agents free to choose among them, while, for a retroactive view, the same process appears as fully determined and necessary, with no opening for alternatives: it is, on the contrary, the engaged agents who perceive themselves as caught in a Destiny, merely reacting to it, while, retroactively, from the standpoint of later observation, we can discern alternatives in the past, possibilities of the events taking a different path. (And is the paradox of Predestination – the fact that the theology of predestination legitimized the frantic activity of capitalism – not the ultimate confirmation of this paradox?) This is how Dupuy proposes to confront the catastrophe: we should first perceive it as

our fate, as unavoidable, and then, projecting ourself into it, adopting its standpoint, we should retroactively insert into its past (the past of the future) counterfactual possibilities (»If we were to do that and that, the catastrophe we are in now would not have occurred!«) upon which we then act today. And is not a supreme case of the reversal of positive into negative destiny the shift from the classical historical materialism into the attitude of Adorno's and Horkheimer's »dialectic of Enlightenment«? While the traditional Marxism enjoined us to engage ourselves and act in order to bring about the necessity (of Communism), Adorno and Horkheimer projected themselves into the final catastrophic outcome perceived as fixed (the advent of the »administered society« of total manipulation and end of subjectivity) in order to solicit us to act against this outcome in our present.

Such a strategy is the very opposite of the USA attitude in the “war on terror,” that of avoiding the threat by preventively striking at potential enemies. In Spielberg's Minority Report, criminals are arrested even before they commit their crime, since three humans who, through monstrous scientific experiments, acquired the capacity to foresee the future, can exactly predict their acts – is a parallel not clear with the new Cheney doctrine, which proclaims the policy of attacking a state or enemy force even before this state develops the means to pose a threat to the US, i.e., already at the point when it MIGHT develop into such a threat?[24] And, to pursue the homology even further, was Gerhard Schroeder's disagreement with the US plans to preventively attack Iraq not precisely a kind of real-life “minority report,” signaling his disagreement with the way others saw the future? The state in which we live now, in the “war on terror,” is the one of the endlessly suspended terrorist threat: the Catastrophe (the new terrorist attack) is taken for granted, yet endlessly postponed. Whatever will actually happen, even if it will be a much more horrible attack than that of 9/11, will not yet be “that.” And it is crucial here that we accomplish the “transcendental” turn: the true catastrophe ALREADY IS this live under the shadow of the permanent threat of a catastrophe.

Terry Eagleton recently drew attention to the two opposed modes of tragedy: the big, spectacular catastrophic Event, the abrupt

irruption from some other world, and the dreary persistence of a hopeless condition, the blighted existence which goes on indefinitely, life as one long emergency.[25] This is the difference between the big First World catastrophies like September 11 and the dreary permanent catastrophe of, say, Palestinians in the West Bank. The first mode of tragedy, the figure against the "normal" background, is characteristic of the First World, while in much of the Third World, catastrophe designates the all-present background itself.

And this is how the September 11 catastrophe effectively functioned: as a catastrophic figure which made us, in the West, aware of the blissful background of our happiness, AND of the necessity to defend it against the foreigners' onslaught... in short, it functioned exactly according to Chesterton's principle of Conditional Joy: to the question "Why this catastrophe? Why couldn't we be happy all the time?", the answer is "And why should we be happy all the remaining time?" September 11 served as a proof that we are happy and that others ENVY us this happiness. Along these lines, one should thus risk the thesis that, far from shattering the US from its ideological sleep, September 11 was used as a sedative enabling the hegemonic ideology to "renormalize" itself: the period after the Vietnam war was one long sustained trauma for the hegemonic ideology – it had to defend itself against critical doubts, the gnawing worms was continuously at work and couldn't be simply suppressed, every return to innocence was immediately experienced as a fake... until September 11, when US was a victim and thus allowed to reassert the innocence of its mission. In short, far from awakening us, September 11 served to put us to sleep again, to continue our dream after the nightmare of the last decades.

The ultimate irony is here that, in order to restore the innocence of the American patriotism, the conservative US establishment mobilized the key ingredient of the Politically Correct ideology which it officially despises: the logic of victimization. Relying on the idea that authority is conferred (only on) those who speak from the position of the VICTIM, it relied on the implicit reasoning: "We are now victims, and it is this fact that legitimizes us to speak (and act) from the position of authority." So

when, today, we hear the slogan that the liberal dream of the 1990s is over, that, with the attacks on the WTC, we were violently thrown back into the real world, that the easy intellectual games are over, we should remember that such a call to confront the harsh reality is ideology at its purest. Today's "American, awaken!" is a distant call of Hitler's "Deutschland, erwache!", which, as Adorno wrote long ago, meant its exact opposite.

However, this regained innocence of the American patriotism is only one of the versions of the standard procedure of liberals when confronted with a violent conflict: the adoption of the safe distance from which all sides which participate in the conflict are equally condemned, since "no one's hands are pure." One can always play this game, which offers the player a double gain: that of retaining his moral superiority over those ("ultimately all the same") involved in the struggle, as well as that of being able to avoid the difficult task of engaging oneself, of analyzing the constellation and taking sides in it. In recent years, it is as if the post-World-War-II anti-Fascist pact is slowly cracking: from historians-revisionists to New Right populists, taboos are falling down... Paradoxically, those who undermine this pact refer to the very liberal universalized logic of victimization: sure, there were victims of Fascism, but what about other victims of the post-WWII expulsions? What about the Germans evicted from their homes in Czechoslovakia in 1945? Do they also not have some right to (financial) compensation?[26] THIS weird conjunction of money and victimization is one of the forms (perhaps even the "truth") of money fetishism today: while one accentuates that holocaust was the absolute crime, everyone negotiates about appropriate FINANCIAL recompensations for it... One of the great topoi of the "deconstructionist" critique of ideology is that notion of the autonomous free and responsible subject is a legal fiction whose function is to construct an agent to whom the responsibility for socially unacceptable acts can be attributed, thus obfuscating the need for a closer analysis of concrete social circumstances which give rise to phenomena perceived as deplorable. When an unemployed African-American who suffered a series of humiliations and failures steals in order to feed his family or explodes in an uncontrollable violence, is it not cynical to evoke his responsibility as an

autonomous moral agent? However, the old rule about ideology holds here also: the symmetrical inversion of an ideological proposition is no less ideological – are we not dealing today with the opposite tendency of putting the blame (and thus legal responsibility) on external agencies? Here is the Associated Press item from July 26 2002:

“Obesity Cited in Fast Food Suit. A man sued four leading fast food chains, claiming he became obese and suffered from other serious health problems from eating their fatty cuisine. Caesar Barber, 56, filed a lawsuit Wednesday in Bronx Supreme Court, naming McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken. "They said '100 percent beef.' I thought that meant it was good for you," Barber told Newsday. "I thought the food was OK. Those people in the advertisements don't really tell you what's in the food. It's all fat, fat and more fat. Now I'm obese." Barber, who weighs 272 pounds, had heart attacks in 1996 and 1999 and has diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. He said he ate fast food for decades, believing it was good for him until his doctor cautioned him otherwise.”

The underlying message of this complaint is clear: I am in it for nothing, it is not me, I am just a passive victim of circumstances, the responsibility is not mine – and since it is not me, there HAS to be another legally responsible for my misfortune. This is also what is wrong with the so-called False Memory Syndrome: the compulsive endeavor to ground present psychic troubles in some past real experience of sexual molestation. Again, the true stake of this operation is the subject's refusal to accept responsibility for his sexual investments: if the cause of my disorders is the traumatic experience of harassment, then my own fantasmatic investment in my sexual imbroglio is secondary and ultimately irrelevant.

The question is here: how far can we go along this path? Pretty far, according to recent news. Is it not significant that when the holocaust is lately mentioned in the media, the news as a rule concern financial compensation, the amount the victims or

their descendants should get from the legal successors of the perpetrators. And, since Jews are the wronged group par excellence, no wonder that other wronged groups are also making similar claims – see the following AP item from August 17 2002:

“Rally for Slave Reparations - Hundreds of blacks rallied in front of the Capitol on Saturday to demand slavery reparations, saying that compensation is long overdue for the ills of that institution. "It seems that America owes black people a lot for what we have endured," Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan told the crowd. "We cannot settle for some little jive token. We need millions of acres of land that black people can build. We're not begging white people, we are just demanding what is justly ours.”

And would it not be quite logical to envision, along the same lines, the end of class struggle: after long and arduous negotiations, representatives of the working class and of the global capital should reach an agreement on how much the working class should get as compensation for the surplus-value appropriated by capitalists in the course of history? So, if there seems to be a price for everything, why should we not go to the very end and demand from God Himself a payment for botching up the job of creation and thus causing our misery? And what if, perhaps, He already paid this price by sacrificing his only son, Christ? It is a sign of our times that this option was already considered in a work of fiction: in *The Man Who Sued God*, a new Australian comedy from 2002, Billy Connolly plays the owner of a seaside caravan park whose boat is destroyed in a freak storm; his insurance people tell him it's an act of God and refuse to pay up. Enter a sharp-witted lawyer (Judy Davis) who comes up with a clever argument: If God destroyed his boat, why not sue God in the form of his representatives here on earth - the churches. Such a lawsuit puts the church leaders in a tight spot: if they deny that they are God's representatives on earth, they all lose their jobs; they can't assert that God does not exist because that would also destroy organised religion, and, furthermore, if God does not exist, what happens to the escape route of the "Act of God" clause that lets so many insurance

sharks off the hook?

This *reductio ad absurdum* also makes it clear what is fundamentally wrong with this logic: it is not too radical, but not radical enough. The true task is not to get compensation from those responsible, but to deprive them of the position which makes them responsible. Instead of asking for compensation from God (or the ruling class or...), one should ask the question: do we really need God? What this means is something much more radical than it may appear: there is no one to turn to, to address, to bear witness TO, no one to receive our plea or lament. This position is extremely difficult to sustain: in modern music, only Webern was able to sustain this inexistence of the Other: even Schoenberg was still composing for a future ideal listener, while Webern accepted that there is NO »proper« listener.

Contrary to all appearances, this is what happens in psychoanalysis: the treatment is over when the patient assumes the non-existence of the big Other. The ideal addressee of our speech, the ideal listener, is the psychoanalyst, the very opposite of the Master figure which guarantees meaning; what happens at the end of the analysis, with the dissolution of transference, i.e., the fall of the »subject supposed to know,« is that the patient accepts the absence of such a guarantee. No wonder that psychoanalysis subverts the very principle of reimbursement: the price the patient pays for the treatment is by definition capricious, »unjust,« with no equivalence possible between it and the services rendered for it. This is also why psychoanalysis is profoundly anti-Levinasian: there is no face-to-face encounter between the patient and the analyst, since the patient lies on the couch and the analyst sits behind him - analysis penetrates the deepest mysteries of the subject by by-passing the face. This avoiding of the face-to-face enables the patient to »lose his face« and blurt out the most embarrassing details. In this precise sense, face is a fetish: while it appears to point towards the imperfect vulnerable abyss of the person behind the object-body, it conceals the obscene real core of the subject.

Is, then, Christianity here not the very opposite of psychoanalysis? Does it not stand for this logic of reimbursement

brought to its extreme: God himself pays the price for all our sins? Which is why any attempt to paint the Christian God as an undemanding entity of pure mercy whose message is »I don't want anything from you!«, miserably fails – one should not forget that these, exactly, are the words used by the Priest to designate the out in Kafka's Trial: »The court wants nothing from you.« When the falsely innocent Christ-like figure of pure suffering and sacrifice for our good tells us »I don't want anything from you!«, we can be sure that this statement conceals a qualification »... expect YOUR SOUL ITSELF.« When somebody insists that he wants nothing that we have, it simply means that he has his eyes on what we ARE, on the very core of our being. Or, to go to the more anecdotal level, is it not clear that when, in a lover's quarrel, a woman answers the man's desperate »But what do you want from me?« with »Nothing!«, this means its exact opposite, a demand for total surrender beyond any negotiated settlement?[27] „Do not look into the mouth of a horse given to you as a gift“ – is this precisely not what one SHOULD do in order to discern if one is dealing with a true gift or with a secretly instrumentalized one? You are given a present, yet a close look quickly tells you that this „free“ gift is aimed at putting you in a position of permanent debt – and, perhaps, this holds especially for the notion of gift in the recent theological turn of deconstruction, from Derrida to Marion.

At the very core of Christianity, there is another dimension. When Christ dies, what dies with him is the secret hope discernible in »Father, why have you forsaken me?«, the hope that there IS a father who abandoned me. The »Holy Spirit« is the community deprived of its support in the big Other. The point of Christianity as the religion of atheism is not the vulgar humanist one that the becoming-man-of-God reveals that man is the secret of God (Feuerbach et al); it rather attacks the religious hard core which survives even in humanism, up to Stalinism with its believe in the History as the »big Other« which decides on the »objective meaning« of our deeds.

In what is perhaps the highest example of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, it is possible today to redeem this core of Christianity only in the gesture of abandoning the shell of its institutional organization (and, even more,

of its specific religious experience). The gap is here irreducible: either one drops the religious form OR maintains the form, but loses the essence. Therein resides the ultimate heroic gesture that awaits

Christianity: in order to save its treasure, it has to sacrifice itself, like Christ who had to die so that Christianity emerged.

NOTES

[1] No wonder, then, that these eggs are now prohibited in the US and have to be smuggled from Canada (and sold at a triple price): behind the official pretext (they solicit you to buy another object, not the one publicized), it is easy to discern the deeper reason – these eggs display to openly the inherent structure of a commodity.

[2] See Chapter 4 („Consuming the Void“) in Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics*, Chicago: Chicago University Press 1991.

[3] See Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing*, London: MacMillan 1987.

[4] See Martin Heidegger, „Das Ding,“ in *Vortraege und Aufsetze*, Pfullingen: Neske 1954.

[5] See Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, London: Routledge 1998.

[6] Francis Fukuyama, , *Our Posthuman Future*, London: Profile Books 2002, p. 149-150.

[7]. See Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*, Cambridge (Ma): The MIT Press 2000.

[8]. Otto Weininger, *Ueber die letzten Dinge*, Muenchen: Matthes und Seitz Verlag 1997, p. 187.

[9]. *Op.cit.*, p. 188.

[10]. There is, of course, also the opposite way to exploit the example of Kinder eggs: why not focus on the fact that the chocolate cover is always the same, while the toy in the middle is always different (which is why the name of the product is »Kinder Surprise«) – is this not how it is with human beings? We may look similar, but inside, there is a mystery of our psyche, each of us hides an inner wealth of abyssal proportions. Also, one could use the fact that the plastic toy is to be composed of small part – in the same way we are supposed to form our ego.

[11] In what follows, I rely on a conversation with Noam Yuran, Tel Aviv.

[12] Martin Heidegger, „Hoelderlin’s Hymne ‚Der Ister‘,“ *Gesamtausgabe* 53, Frankfurt: Klostermann 1984, p. 94.

[13] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, quoted from *The Portable Nietzsche*, New York: Viking 1968, p. 130.

[14] Interestingly enough, the same goes for Heidegger’s critique of psychoanalysis: what cannot but attract our attention are the two levels at which it operates. On the one hand, there is the easy philosophical game of transcendental dismissal (which can even be accompanied by a patronizing admission of its use for the medical purposes): “Although psychoanalysis can be of clinical use, it remains an ontic science grounded in the physicalist and biologist naïve presuppositions characteristic of the end of XIXth century.” On the other hand, there are concrete rebuttals, concrete attempts to demonstrate its insufficiency – say, how Freud, by focusing all too fast on the unconscious causal chain, misses the point of the phenomenon he is interpreting, etc. How are these two procedures related? Is the second one just an unnecessary surplus or a necessary supplement, an implicit admission that the direct philosophical rejection is not sufficient? Do we not find here, at a different level, reproduced the ambiguity of the notion of catastrophe, at the same time an ontological fact which always-already occurred AND an ontic threat?

[15] See Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981.

[16] See Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé*, Paris: Editions du Seuil 2002, p. 124-126.

[17] Henri Bergson, *Oeuvres*, Paris: PUF 1991, p. 1110-1111.

[18] Bergson, *ibid.*

[19] Bergson, *op.cit.*, p. 1340.

[20] Dupuy, *op.cit.*, p. 142-3.

[21] There is, of course, also an ideological way of projecting/inserting possibilities into the past. The attitude of many a libertarian Leftist about the disintegration of Yugoslavia is: "The full sovereignty of the ex-Yugoslav republics may be a legitimate goal in itself, but what is worth the price – hundreds of thousands dead, destruction...?" What is false here is that the actual choice in the late 1980s is silently reformulated, as if it was: "Either disintegration of Yugoslavia into separate states – OR the continuation of the old Tito's Yugoslavia." With the advent to power of Milosevic, the old Yugoslavia was over, so the only THIRD way with regard to the alternative "Sovereign republics or Serboslavia" was, in a true political AT, to reinvent thoroughly a new Yugoslav project, for which there was no ability and will in any of the parts of Yugoslavia.

[22] Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics*, New York: Macmillan 1973, p. 430-431, quoted from Dupuy, *op.cit.*, p. 208-209.

[23] Dupuy, *op.cit.*, p. 164.

[24] The difference between the Cold War enemy and today's terrorist used to justify America's right to preemptive strikes is the alleged "irrationality" of the terrorist: while Communists were cold rational calculators who cared for their own survival, fundamentalist terrorists are irrational fanatics ready to blow up entire world... Here, more than ever, one should insist that (as Hegel would have put it) such a figure of the "irrational" enemy is a "reflexive determination" of American's own self-adopted position of the sole hegemonic world power.

[25] See Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence*, Oxford: Blackwell 2003.

[26] And does the same not hold also for anti-abortion campaigns? Do they also not participate in the liberal logic of global victimization, extending it also to the unborn?

[27] *The Polish Wedding*, a nice melodrama about love life complications in a Detroit working class Polish family, contains a scene which turns around this formula and thus spills out its truth: when Claire Danes' exasperated boyfriend asks her „What do you want from me?“, she answers „I want everything!“ and calmly walks away from him.