

Against the Pauline Temptation **Post-Marxism and the Jewish Question**

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§1. Introduction

Two perennial tensions of the socialist tradition converge toward uneasy resolution in “post-Marxist” political theory. Primary is the tension between class struggle and the politics of identity, between the rival primacies of base and superstructure. Secondary is the tension between secularism and theology, or between the methodology of socialism-as-science and the eschatological hopes of socialism-as-doctrine. These tensions are braided together; the resolution of one necessarily entails a resolution of the other. Of interest to me here is a theologically-inflected assertion of class primacy prevalent in the “messianic turn” in continental philosophy. A pursuit common to two key theorists of the turn, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, is the reconciliation of the identity-class tension by way of Pauline political theology. Citing the famous dictum “neither Jew nor Greek,” these messianic authors anticipate an immanent/imminent eschatological break, after which a new universality will render questions of politicized identity moot. By granting the socialist project a messianic character, they intend to resolve with finality not just the national question, the woman question, etc., but the archetypal *Identity Question* in all its iterations.

I emphasize Badiou and Žižek in the discussion below because it is precisely their readings and applications of Paul which prove troubling.¹ This paper is not intended as a critique of left-wing messianism in general, but a critique of specific maneuvers through which Pauline eschatology is mobilized to subsume identity claims under a Christo-European universal. Not only is this Pauline temptation Eurocentric (Žižek, of course, readily concedes this much²), it is also terribly familiar. It

¹ Agamben’s writings on Paul merit mention, but don’t quite get at the nexus of theoretical problems I want to address.

² See Slavoj Žižek, “A Leftist Plea for ‘Eurocentrism,’” *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1998).

is, in many ways, a simple recolor of one of European Marxism's longest-standing embarrassments: an inability to accommodate or theorize social difference at a sub-national register. This becomes clearest when we examine the Pauline temptation and its earlier iterations from that most maligned subject position—the Jew.

I consider the vantage of the Jew a particularly useful site of inquiry not only because of Marxism's extensive and checkered history on the Jewish question, but because of the ambiguous and liminal status of the Jew himself. Vacillating between insider and outsider, between parvenu and pariah, the Jew complicates the usual rubrics of inclusion and exclusion, difference and sameness. The Jew may be excluded in the most dramatic and violent fashion just after the most generous expressions of inclusion. (It is, after all, the paradox of the Holocaust that it could occur only once Jews were at their highest level of assimilation into German civic life. Not difference but uncanny *sameness* seemed to draw the most violent reaction.) It is my intention in the following discussion to critique Badiou and Žižek's appraisals of Paul from the standpoint of the Jewish question, not to the end of rejecting radical eschatology outright, but rather suggesting alternate avenues.

The argument proceeds in three steps. First, I position Laclau's radical democratic populism³ as a backdrop and foil for Žižek and Badiou, not because the authors are writing in strict opposition to Laclau (Badiou hardly mentions him), but because it will help us situate the "Pauline temptation" both conceptually and historically. Second, I elaborate on the theoretical problems Žižek and Badiou contend Pauline eschatology can solve. Third, and finally, I reposition the Pauline solution within a historical tendency of Marxist responses to the Jewish question to betray an assimilationist impulse.

³ I am aware that Laclau's shift toward a populist project entailed a decreased emphasis on the radical democratic component of his political theory. For the sake of expedience, I will be slurring over this shift somewhat and treating Laclau's arguments regarding social heterogeneity in *On Populist Reason* (2005) as roughly coextensive with those on the same topic in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000), as I believe they are in many respects. I readily admit that this does some violence to Laclau's theoretical apparatus.

§2. Did Somebody Say “Populism?”

Ernesto Laclau’s allergy to the traditional Marxist formulation of class struggle culminating in proletarian revolution is well-known. Along with his frequent collaborator Chantal Mouffe, Laclau has generally staked his rejection of the classical Marxist categories and trajectories on a more basic rejection of social homogeneity. In order for an emancipatory mission like Marx’s to remain solvent in the contemporary political environment, Laclau and Mouffe wrote in 1987, the mythical *telos* of a “transparent and homogeneous society,” in which all social contradictions would be finally resolved, “must be resolutely abandoned.”⁴ In the fall of the Berlin Wall a mere two years later, and the final collapse of the Soviet Union a mere two years after that, the post-Marxist hypothesis seemed to find its confirmation. Classical Marxism, with its prime movers of history and grand turns of the dialectic, had produced an empire that ossified and crumbled a mere seventy years after its birth. Was Laclau’s disavowal of the “homogenous proletarian mass” that “present[s] its own ‘partial’ emancipation as equivalent to the emancipation of society as a whole” not justified?⁵

In his landmark treatise on populism, Laclau insists that the political horizon of the twenty-first century is not class struggle. Laclau rejects not only an understanding of class structure as the “base” from which political questions arise, but *any* invocation of cohesive class agency. In a cursory engagement with Rancière, Laclau dismisses even a revised, supernumerary concept of the *proletariat* as the “part of no part,” the exploited and excluded social surplus—a general “subject of wrong.”⁶ If Rancière attempts to reconceive the proletariat in strictly subjective terms, he nonetheless cannot entirely resist “sociological concessions,” cannot help but periodically tie his “part of no part” to a corresponding of an empirically identifiable “objective” class.⁷ Laclau finds this lingering affinity for

⁴ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, “Post-Marxism without Apologies,” *The New Left Review* I/166 (1987), 106.

⁵ Ernesto Laclau, “Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics,” in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2000), 45-7.

⁶ Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 248.

⁷ *Ibid.*

an emancipatory class subject unhelpful for a radical politics. In the classical Marxist conception, the precondition of “proletarian victory” is “social homogeneity,” wholly at odds with the democratic project of recognizing and accepting the “irreducible heterogeneity” of social life.⁸ For Laclau, then, the concept of proletarian agency, no matter how revised, cannot be tidily divorced from historical materialist teleology. To conceive of the proletariat in any remotely conventional sense is to endow it with an essential socioeconomic character and historical mission. One *can* bring the proletariat and its mission into the twenty-first century, but only with a viscous coat of nineteenth-century residue. Thus, if one wants to develop a conception of political action suitable for postmodernity—a view that acknowledges the variety and contingency of, as well as the indissoluble tensions around power arrangements—one would be wise to abandon the emphasis on class struggle entirely.

Having jettisoned this Marxist baggage, one is free to theorize organization by “the people” in new, more flexible ways. Laclau sets about schematizing the logics of an archetypal “populism,” following the emergence of a nebulous “people” through the formation of a “chain of equivalences” across a “plurality of demands.”⁹ The key selling point of this approach is that it does not assume the existence of a discrete, empirical class with an essential historical mission (e.g. the proletariat), but instead allows for a variety of contingent identities around which a large group of people *might* organize. Laclau’s theory of radical democratic populism focuses on the general dynamics of popular organization rather than a preordained program that a discrete historical actor must and will follow. The Laclavian schema of political organization can thus apply much more broadly than its Marxist counterpart, though this is both a blessing and a curse. While it broadens the conceptual horizon to accommodate modalities of struggle that do not center class, the ultimate contentlessness of Laclau’s generic “people” impedes prediction of and substantive response to populism’s retrograde iterations,

⁸ Ibid. It is not entirely clear where *specifically* Laclau gets the idea that social homogeneity is a precondition for proletarian agency. He tends to repeat it as a commonplace.

⁹ Ibid., 73-74.

one of which is fascism. Laclau does recognize fascism as a populism, and notes in the final pages of *On Populist Reason* that fascism must be regarded as an inherent possibility in contemporary political life.¹⁰ Aside from this admission, however, Laclau offers no real tools for predicting or responding to the emergence of fascism. He primarily offers tools for explicating it after the fact. This is, to risk understatement, a bit unsatisfying.

Enter Slavoj Žižek, who delivers a critique of Laclau's populism situated in the geopolitical context of mid-2000s Western Europe. Žižek's point of entry is the (then-recent) refusal on the part of voters in France and The Netherlands to ratify the European Union Constitution. This "French and Dutch *no*" operates as a "floating signifier."¹¹ Žižek's use of this term is deliberate. The concept of the floating signifier is integral to Laclau's explication of populism (it is the "people's" status as such that makes the generation of popular identity via an equivalential chain of demands possible). The horizon of political contestation from this point forward is the content and function of this "no," the political ambiguities of the European Union, and globalization more generally, allowing both left and right to claim the refusal of ratification as a victory.¹² In the contestation over the meaning of this "no," we can observe the logics of Laclavian populism playing out in real time. The refusal surfaces as a generic, inaugural demand around which various groups can coalesce, and over which they can compete. The question is which element(s) of this *mélange* can most effectively use the "no" to generate an equivalential chain and favorable popular identity.

Though this circumstance appears to affirm Laclau's descriptive account of the genesis of populist movements, Žižek resolutely counters that this does not warrant the dismissal of class struggle. Rather, the right-populist claim to the "no," ensconced as it is within vulgar anti-immigrant sentiment, reflects a "mystification" of the class character of globalization and the "displacement" of

¹⁰ Ibid., 249-50.

¹¹ Slavoj Žižek, "Against the Populist Temptation," *Critical Inquiry* 32 (2006), 551.

¹² Ibid., 572.

class pressures to racial-national anxieties.¹³ On this point, Žižek’s critique is essentially just Marxist conventional wisdom. The displacement he references is an iteration of the old German socialist aphorism, “Anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools.” Where structural analysis is lacking or actively impeded, a national enemy, alien to the system in some fundamental sense, receives the assignation of culprit. Where Žižek’s challenge to Laclau becomes interesting is in the next turn of his argument: this identification of an external enemy is an essential part of *any* populist politics—not just its retrograde or reactionary forms. The generic “people,” in all its particular manifestations, is necessarily constructed in opposition an alien threat. Populists cannot recognize fundamental flaws within the system, but only identify “intruder[s] who [corrupt] it.”¹⁴ The issue with populism, then, is not that it *does not* center class, but that it *cannot*. To the extent that the populist addresses systemic economic problems, he conceives of them as aberrations owing to the presence of a disruptive agent, “whose annihilation would restore balance and justice.”¹⁵ The generic *demand* that constitutes the basic unit of populist movements for Laclau is superficial, and its frustration is quite easily pinned on an ethnic enemy within or without (the immigrant, the foreigner, the Jew, etc.). In his effort to accommodate the heterogeneity of social life and the contingency of political arrangements and interest groups, Laclau unwittingly sacrifices precisely that systemic analysis which is most effective in dispelling easy racist “solutions” to economic problems.

In this sense, Laclau’s populism is likely take one of two forms: the “right-populist” or the “liberal-multiculturalist.”¹⁶ The former is noxious (racist, xenophobic, etc.) pinning all social ills on a malignant ethnic, national, or religious group that must be excised from the body politic. The latter attempts to counter the former’s toxicity in a superficial, if “brightly colored,”¹⁷ fashion, affirming

¹³ Ibid., 552.

¹⁴ Ibid., 555.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 572.

¹⁷ Ibid., 574.

the heterogeneity of the body politic as part of the popular identity and disparaging the right-populist's prejudices without addressing their material roots. That the latter, milquetoast project is the "best case" scenario for Laclavian populism speaks volumes for Žižek.¹⁸ In de-centering class struggle in order to accommodate social heterogeneity and historical contingency, Laclau abandons it altogether. The essential material mission of socialism thus disappears, and a continually shifting alien agent is left to take the fall for the spasms of the capitalist system.

The problem that arises in this kind of radical democratic populist politics is twofold. First, the systematic critique of capital is sacrificed, and economic crises are not addressed at the proper register but perpetually displaced onto particular agents. Second, the effort to preserve particularity and social heterogeneity by de-centering class struggle actually leaves particular groups with a history of marginalization *more* vulnerable. Because economic disruptions are perpetually displaced onto the register of identity conflicts, historically maligned identity groups become easy scapegoats. The need emerges for a systematic political analysis that decisively forecloses the easy, frequently prejudicial displacement of subjectively felt economic crises onto the supra-economic plane. Such an analysis must be universal *without* assuming homogeneity, either the machinations of "abstract" capital or the composition of the social world from which capital extracts.¹⁹

§3. Pauline Universalism as Solution

Fortunately, Slavoj Žižek has just such a solution at the ready, a solution he shares with Alain Badiou: the kind of "universal singularity" exemplified by Paul the Apostle.²⁰ In Žižek's view, Paul

¹⁸ One can easily argue, of course, that this reading of Laclau is uncharitable, but for the purposes of the argument here (establishing the problem that Pauline universalism ostensibly fixes), I will treat Žižek's account as accurate.

¹⁹ Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundations of Universalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13. Badiou seems to refer to "abstract" capital in the Marxist sense of *chaotic* abstraction—the initial positing of a universal that precedes the breaking down to and reconstruction from singulars necessary for the abstraction to be useful. See Marx's chapter "The Method of Political Economy" in the *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage, 1973).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

deserves to be admired as a “proto-Leninist militant fighting different ‘deviations.’”²¹ According to Badiou, Paul was the first to articulate the essence of Mao’s “mass line:” encoding the demands of particular social groups within a universal schema.²² These appraisals of Paul receive their support in large part from the authors’ readings of Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (KJV).

Though I ultimately intend to resist both of their positions, the ways in which Žižek and Badiou arrive at communist readings of this and related verses deserve careful explication. Both authors attempt to address the broad question of social heterogeneity—at a time of escalating identitarian tensions—in a manner that reconciles particularity with universal emancipation through an adapted Pauline eschatological framework.

For Žižek, Pauline universalism is reliably analogous to communist universalism in both theoretical and practical terms. It seems a commonplace to him that early Christianity posed a substantive threat to the Roman empire “precisely on account of its *universal* appeal,” its ability to undermine the particular imperial claim to right rule.²³ In Žižek’s view, it is this kind of subversive universality that the communist Left should model if it is to constitute itself as a significant political force. Paul’s “proto-Leninist” praxis provides an optimal model not only in this articulation of a unified universalism to oppose empire, moreover, but also in its innovation over the originator of its foundational doctrine—that is, Christ. “In the same way [that] ... Marx needed Lenin’s ‘betrayal’ in order to enact the first Marxist revolution,” Žižek maintains, “Christ needed Paul’s ‘betrayal’ ... for Christianity to emerge as a universal Church.”²⁴ Paul thus stands for the practical affirmation of a

²¹ Slavoj Žižek, “A Leftist Plea for ‘Eurocentrism,’” *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1998), 1002.

²² Alain Badiou, *Polemics* (London: Verso, 2006), 189.

²³ Žižek, “Eurocentrism,” 1007. Italics in original.

²⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 176.

new universality as well as the creation of a new organizational orthodoxy to bring this universal into being. In the twenty-first century European context, this is precisely what the Left needs.

This quasi-Pauline, practical orientation toward universalism also entails a theoretical improvement over the politics of identity. Marching in lockstep with the textbook critique, Žižek contends that the politics of identity is fundamentally depoliticizing, flippantly summarizing it as an exercise in cataloguing and administratively remedying the ills that befall “African American single unemployed lesbian mothers.”²⁵ This exercise refuses politicization by taxonomically categorizing social life into groups and subgroups, then viewing the dynamics of marginalization affecting said groups as isolated, empirical facts to be accounted for and addressed in a rational-bureaucratic manner. In order to restore the gesture of “*politicization* proper,” the Left must assert a universal with which individuals identify their own specific situation. Individuals and groups must be encouraged to project their “specific wrong [onto] ... the universal wrong” of exploitation *qua* exploitation.²⁶ The communist universal, then, onto which particular groups may project their specific injuries and desires is a “proletarian” one in the “supernumerary” sense of *proletariat*: it is embodied by all the excluded, exploited, and marginalized.²⁷

The theoretical improvement here over the liberal, particularistic approach consists in an insistence on *excess* and a concomitant resistance to the classification and quantification of social life. It is regarding this point that I am most sympathetic to Žižek’s argument. The textbook objection to identity politics is perfectly warranted. To sort all persons into a totalizing framework of empirically defined, taxonomical categories is indeed depoliticizing and inadequate in both analysis and practice. It reduces questions of material struggle into questions of best practices and outcome optimization. It obfuscates the origins of deprivation and exploitation, treating these social wrongs as empirical

²⁵ Žižek, “Eurocentrism,” 1001-2.

²⁶ Ibid., 1002. Italics in original.

²⁷ Žižek, *Lost Causes*, 285.

givens—at worst, a natural evil—best rectified by a board of technocratic experts. It should offend even liberal individualist sensibilities, forcibly confining within a typology aggregates of individuals who are always necessarily in excess of any typology.²⁸ And the list goes on.

One question arises here. If the object is simply a critique of identity politics—or of the kind of populism that “enchains” heterogeneous identity claims without offering a unifying, universalistic direction²⁹—why is it necessary to consult Paul the Apostle? The answer, as alluded to above, lies in Paul’s navigation of different particularisms. For both Žižek and Badiou, Paul is the first political thinker to truly recognize the necessarily *negative* demand of a proper universalism without abdicating engagement with the actually existing social world. Hence the significance of Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, in which he simultaneously affirms particularisms (“Jew” and “Greek”) from the vantage of the material world and denies them from the vantage of the divine. One must engage with the existing world—*hic Rhodus, hic salta*—but one cannot map its logics and categories onto the universal without reducing the *ought* to the *is* and abandoning the emancipatory project. Žižek elaborates:

*To put it in Alain Badiou’s terms, it is crucial here not to translate the terms of this struggle, set in motion by the violent and contingent assertion of the new universal truth, in to the terms of the order of positive Being with its groups and subgroups, conceiving of it as the struggle between [discrete] social entities defined by a series of positive characteristics.*³⁰

Notably, Žižek continues on to proclaim that this mistake was also the “‘mistake’ of Stalinism,” in which class was reduced to a mere empirical measure and thereby emptied of its subjective content.³¹ The emancipatory agency of the proletariat is not guaranteed by the objective existence of a class-in-itself any more than the emancipatory agency of the African American single unemployed lesbian mother is guaranteed by her empirical categorization as such. Identitarian classifications need not be

²⁸ See Badiou’s dismissal of “liberal truisms” in *Saint Paul*: “That there are intertwined histories, different cultures and, more generally, differences already abundant in one and the ‘same’ individual,” in other words, that identitarian typologies offend individuality on some level, “is not the issue, whatever certain disingenuous simpletons may want us to think” (11).

²⁹ Žižek, “Populist Temptation,” 553.

³⁰ Žižek, “Eurocentrism,” 1002-3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1003.

hand-waved away, but neither can they be relied upon to motivate and guide radical political action. Paul relays a kind of primordial formulation of this lesson, along with a veritable how-to guide for respecting claims to identity and injury by particular groups in the present without sacrificing a long-term vision of universal emancipation. Laclau's critique of Marxism as positing a homogenous social class whose particular interests stand in for the universal appears as a misrepresentation. In Žižek and Badiou's overlapping schemata, the proletariat and/or general emancipatory subject exists not at the level of empirical identification, but at the level of subjective excess. This is, in Žižek's terms, a terrain beyond settled frameworks of inclusion/exclusion, the exclusive domain of the authentic *act*, on which the content of the universal is perpetually renegotiated.³²

Paul's navigation of existing social particularities prefigures this Marxist-universalist move that breaks through settled political ontologies and escapes onto the terrain of universality. Badiou suggests as much in his treatment of Galatians 3:28, in which he contends that Paul identifies two competing "regimes of discourse" through which the "subjective positions" of "Jew" and "Greek" become legible.³³ Paul's goal here is, predictably enough, to transcend these limiting particulars and discover universality in God (neither Athens nor Jerusalem, and so forth). The "Jewish discourse" of law and exception, of divine decree and miraculous prophecy, rather than opposing the "Greek discourse" of "cosmic totality," really complements it.³⁴ The former resists assimilation to the latter as the latter attempts to impose its schema on the former. Because each of these discourses is mired in intractable conflict with the other, neither can be truly universal. Insofar as the Jewish and Greek discourses emphasize totalities and their ruptures, laws and their exceptions, they present themselves as "*discourses of the Father*," which must be confronted by "*a discourse of the Son* ... detached from every

³² Slavoj Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!" in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, 102, 126-27.

³³ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

particularism.”³⁵ This universalistic *detachment* requires we make central not general principles, not a broader identity content, but the Event itself. The Event, both singular and archetypal, is a pure monad. It cannot be divided, predicted, or schematized. It exists in relation to nothing but itself. Escaping the trap of particularity thus requires that we coalesce not around any shared identity predicate, but around an Event. For Paul, the crucial Event is, of course, the resurrection of Christ.³⁶

It is through these kinds of “universal singularities” (for Žižek, a universal terrain shaped by the continual collision of singularities, and for Badiou, a universality shaped in relation to a purely singular Event—the two are not mutually exclusive) that the authors find an escape from populist deadlock. Beyond the zero-sum game in which identity groups vie for a limited supply of resources and institutional legitimacy³⁷ lies a terrain of authentic political action, which can only be reached by genuinely universalizing gestures. While Žižek and Badiou attempt to formulate just these kinds of gestures in their appraisals of Saint Paul, it remains to be seen whether they are successful. To test the capacity of a Pauline universalism to revitalize the communist tradition while providing a viable alternative to identity politics, we can turn to a perennial identity issue in the Marxist tradition: the Jewish question.

§4. Saint Paul and the Jewish Question

Even among Marxists, Marx’s “On the Jewish Question” remains a contentious text. It is interpreted either *charitably*, as a trenchant critique of political emancipation and secularism, signaling a progressive stage in Marx’s departure from the Young Hegelians; or *uncharitably*, as a “self-hateful” piece that suggests Marx, at least briefly, “cave[d] in” to Young Hegelian anti-Semitism.³⁸ Advocates

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Jesus ... died on the cross and was resurrected. The rest, all the rest, is of no real importance” (ibid., 33).

³⁷ Badiou’s formulation. See ibid., 13.

³⁸ Marshall Berman, *Adventures in Marxism* (London: Verso, 1999), 94.

of both readings tend to point to the same passages from the controversial second part of the essay. There, Marx detects in Judaism “a general *anti-social* element of the *present time*,” he claims that money and “huckstering” constitute the “*empirical* essence of Judaism;” and he suggests Judaism’s abolition is a desirable, even necessary, social goal.³⁹ All in rapid succession, we might add! The uncharitable reading finds obvious support in these statements. If one takes these sentiments at face value, it is natural to conclude that Marx was consumed with Jewish self-hatred.

Still, there are authors who, not entirely without success, attempt to salvage these parts of “On the Jewish Question,” to attenuate the sting of its more malignant passages. Following Léon Rozitchner, Bruno Bosteels suggests that Marx’s more reprehensible contentions are intended as ironic paraphrases of Bruno Bauer, to whom the essay responds. Marx’s anti-Semitism is therefore really a Swiftian exaggeration Bauer’s anti-Semitism pointing toward the fundamental inadequacy of Bauer’s analysis. In this reading, Marx rejects Bauer’s Young Hegelian argument for secularism on the basis that it “cannot suffice,” as secularization does not truly address “the Christian core of the modern state.”⁴⁰ The real point of the essay, then, is that the Jews cannot be emancipated “without putting Christianity into question.”⁴¹ This reading is not wholly implausible. An ironic paraphrase of Bauer could account for the disturbing rhetorical shift that Marshall Berman identifies between the first and second parts of “On the Jewish Question.”⁴² This interpretation puts us in the precarious position, though, of presuming that beneath the Roman numeral II, Marx no longer means anything he says. Resorting to this kind of divination of authorial intent betrays some degree of hermeneutic desperation.

³⁹ Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in vol. 3 of *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), 170.

⁴⁰ Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America* (London: Verso, 2012), 122.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴² Berman, *Adventures*, 94-95. Part I of the essay is “one of the best things Marx ever wrote,” whereas Part II is, as quoted above, shockingly “self-hateful.”

Alternatively, we can suppose that Marx *does* earnestly mean his more disturbing statements in “On the Jewish Question,” but that they do not qualify as genuinely anti-Semitic once properly contextualized. Gopal Balakrishnan, for instance, contends that the accusations of “anti-sociality” and “huckstering” serve to identify Judaism with “the revolutionary course of bourgeois society,” and that they ought to be read in the light of Marx’s later, enthusiastic descriptions in the *Manifesto* of the bourgeoisie’s productive innovations.⁴³ This reading does not help matters much, however, since the revolutionary course of bourgeois society ultimately necessitates its own negation. To identify it with Judaism, then, is still to denounce Judaism’s perceived excesses and call for Judaism’s abolition. (Emancipation of mankind still requires emancipation from Judaism.) At best, an identification of “the Jews” with the bourgeoisie suggests Marx’s painful ambivalence toward his own lineage. In this reading, Judaism is a historical necessity, but a strictly *transitory* one. It must manifest, then it must be transcended, along with all other forms of bourgeois particularity. If Balakrishnan’s reading is more plausible than Bosteels’s, it is also more damning.

That said, in the end, much of the debate over how to read “On the Jewish Question” boils down to one question: “Was Marx a self-hating Jew?” Investigation into this question does not strike me as especially interesting or necessary. The simple answer is, “Yes, obviously.” Given that he was a Jew living in nineteenth century Europe, born to Protestant convert parents and called “Moor” by his friends, it would be rather astounding if our friend Karl were *not* self-hating. I do not intend to dispute Marx’s internalized anti-Semitism. But neither do I think highlighting “self-hating” passages from “On the Jewish Question” yields much in the way of analysis. Pointing out isolated, unsavory sentences is a reductive approach. The presence of anti-Semitism in some of Marx’s writing, and in a non-negligible portion of the later Marxist tradition, is a genuine problem, and one that extends far beyond Marx’s unfortunate usage of words like *huckstering*.

⁴³ Gopal Balakrishnan, “The Abolitionist—I,” *New Left Review* 90 (2014): 121-22.

If we absolutely must seize upon one specific remark from “On the Jewish Question,” the best candidate would likely be Marx’s ever-popular statement that “the *emancipation of the Jews* is the emancipation of mankind from *Judaism*.”⁴⁴ It is this line that, when taken at face value, indicates an aggressively assimilationist impulse behind the Marxist project of universal human emancipation. It seems to suggest that “the Jews” are only oppressed because they continue to present themselves as Jews. Or, to phrase the issue more generally, it implies that human emancipation requires a final dissolution of particularities, especially *marginalized* particularities, into a homogenous universal, *à la* Laclau’s aforementioned concern. We may conclude, then, that though the Marx of “On the Jewish Question” refuses the liberal rubric of political emancipation, he cannot totally escape the liberal temptation toward assimilation. There exists in Marx a tinge of what Sartre once called “democratic anti-Semitism:” Marx is “hostile to the Jew to the extent that the latter thinks of himself as a Jew.”⁴⁵ Marx therefore condemns the liberal “reduction of man . . . to an *egoistic, independent* individual” as well as to an “abstract citizen,” yet he turns around and doles out the same prescription as the liberal democrat.⁴⁶ The Jew is to be shorn of his religious and communitarian identity in order to assimilate not to the universality of the liberal subject, but to the universality of the socially integrated species-being. It is when *this* brand of homogenizing universality is realized that “human emancipation [will] have been accomplished.”⁴⁷

The assimilationist impulse on display here assumes a variety of concrete forms in the later Marxist tradition. Generally, Marxist tracts advocating assimilation followed the example set by Marx in “On the Jewish Question,” in that they were heavily informed by specific national contexts, and were usually *critical responses* to anti-Semitism rather than *affirmations* of it. Karl Kautsky, for instance,

⁴⁴ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 170.

⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George Becker (New York: Schocken, 1948), 57.

⁴⁶ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 168.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

when confronted with the rise of racial anti-Semitism in Germany, took up scientific racist analysis himself. In *Race and Judaism*, Kautsky maintained that Jews' apparent "racial" distinctness from their countrymen was due only to their *social* distinctness. In his careful explication of Kautsky's views on the Jewish question, Jack Jacobs stresses that central to Kautsky's argument was the contention that "there were no longer sharply defined physical traits that were ... exclusively Jewish and could be considered racial."⁴⁸ Centuries of intermarriage and conversions into and out of Judaism had led to the effective "disintegration" of the Jews as a distinct racial category.⁴⁹ To the extent that Jews still seemed "other" to the rest of the German population, it was due to the legacy of ghettoization and forced exclusion from civic life. Assimilation of the Jews, Kautsky concluded, was key to ensuring the continued diminution of their unique, pseudo-racial traits.

After Kautsky, it only seems natural to turn to Lenin, whose assimilationist tendencies were particularly pronounced in his opposition to the Jewish Labor Bund. Lenin's adversarial relationship to the Bund is far too protracted and complex to chronicle in much detail here, so I will content myself with gesturing to a few theoretical and polemical highlights. While Lenin's position on the national question was famously supportive of the particular struggles of oppressed and minority nations, he did not engage with claims to Jewish particularity on a national register. Jewish identity did not register as a properly national, but as "cultural-national." Jews occupied the liminal space between the discrete and legible unit of "nation" and the more diffuse, subnational unit of "culture." The Bund, working within this liminal space, advocated a program of "cultural-national autonomy," which, according to Lenin, could only divide the proletariat, arrest class consciousness, and appear as "opportunist" and "absolutely impermissible" from a revolutionary standpoint.⁵⁰ In Lenin's eyes,

⁴⁸ Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and "the Jewish Question" After Marx* (New York: NYU Press, 1992), 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, "'Cultural-National' Autonomy," in *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, ed. Hyman Lumer (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 88.

cultural-national particularism led the Jewish segments of the class conscious proletariat down “the false path ... of isolation” from their working brethren in Russia. The Bund would need to come into proper concert with the other revolutionary parties, or simply be dismantled, in order to enable Jewish workers to “*move towards fusion*” with the rest of the proletariat.⁵¹ Opposition to the Bund here is rooted in the assumption of either/or dialectics between isolation and fusion, cultural specificity and class unity, particularity and universality. In each of these polarized oppositions, the latter option is obviously considered preferable. The point of socialist revolution is for the proletariat, as a class-for-itself, to move toward the abolition of class and the universal emancipation of humanity. At his historical moment, Lenin seemed to conceive of particular boundaries on proletarian universality at the level of the nation, but not below it. If the national proletariat is not unified and, to an extent, *homogenized*, this process cannot occur. For Lenin, the dissolution of particularity within *but not outside* the nation is a precondition for the dissolution of class and the success of the revolution.

In his introduction to the anthology *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, Hyman Lumer offers the quintessential apologia for the later Soviet Union’s more aggressively assimilationist attitude toward its Jewish population. One passage in particular is worth quoting at length:

The result of Lenin’s policy on the Jewish question was, as is well known, a flourishing of Jewish culture in the years following the revolution. Schools, newspapers, magazines, books and theaters in the Yiddish language multiplied. In addition, Birobidjan in eastern Siberia was declared a Jewish Autonomous Region for those Jews who might wish to establish a community of their own. But the liberation of the Russian Jews led to precisely what Lenin had predicted: a rapid development of the process of assimilation. ... In the latest census only some 17 per cent of Soviet Jews claimed Yiddish as their mother tongue. The demand for Yiddish-language cultural institutions has greatly dwindled. And the Jewish religion, like others, is fast dying out. ... Does this mean that Jewish culture is disappearing? Not at all. On the contrary, the best of it is becoming a part of the total Soviet cultural heritage.⁵²

Lumer, it should be noted, served as the National Educational Director of the C.P.U.S.A., and he wrote the above passage in 1974. Between its puzzlingly laudatory reference to Birobidzhan and its

⁵¹ Lenin, “The Position of the Bund in the Party,” in *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, 51.

⁵² Hyman Lumer, introduction to *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, 14-15.

rallying cry around “Soviet cultural heritage,” the passage has not dated well. As with much Leninist writing before 1989, the fidelity to actually existing socialism in Lumer’s texts is often distracting.

Still, it is because of this commitment to the Soviet Union that Lumer offers us such a valuable insight into Marxism-Leninism’s assimilatory project. The enthusiastic tone of the above excerpt is disconcerting, but typical. The declining use of Yiddish and the “dying out” of Jewish religious practice are treated as confirmations of Lenin’s scientific predictions as well as progressive social achievements. All the same, Jewish culture is not disappearing, but rather merging into Soviet culture—or, “the best of it” is, anyway. Lumer implicitly casts this as the particular dissolving into the universal, the transcendence of cultural specificity by way of class unity. Yet Marxist-Leninist universalism circa 1974 (the time of Lumer’s writing) is virtually inexpressible except in terms of Soviet nationalism. So, in some sense contrary to Lenin’s predictions, the Soviet project did not transcend the issue of “cultural-national autonomy” *en route* to unifying the proletariat across all borders, but ultimately stagnated at the stage of assimilating its own “cultural-national” minorities. National particularity simply consumed its cultural subsidiaries.⁵³

If we grant the Jewish question the status of an archetypal *Identity Question* (the Jews comprise an ethnic, cultural and religious minority all at once without ascending to the register of nationhood), we can grasp in a more concrete form the Laclavian concern of homogenization. If the proletariat’s mission is universal, yet this universality is particularized in proper dialectical fashion, and historically said particularization has occurred at the register of the nation-state, then there seems rich potential for proletarian projects to demand assimilation of subnational groups to the national totality.⁵⁴ My contention here is that this problem is real, it needs to be addressed, and it is quite emphatically not addressed by the Pauline universalism of Žižek and Badiou.

⁵³ There were, of course, an assortment of extenuating factors, but a history of the Soviet Union is not the object here.

⁵⁴ I readily acknowledge that I am forcing Laclau’s concerns into a quasi-Hegelian framework, but this violence to Laclau’s position is useful in squaring him with Žižek (in their discussions, the authors often talk past one another).

This inadequacy of the Pauline approach becomes clear upon inspection of the Žižek and Badiou's respective approaches to the Jewish question. Both authors make central some form of projection of the particular onto the universal, be it the alignment of particular group injuries onto the universal proletarian exploitation, or the interpretation of particular subjectivity from the vantage of a universal Event. The projection that Žižek advocates, in which a member of a marginalized group can place their particular struggle at the heart the universal, becomes immediately suspect the moment a Jew does it. For Badiou, similarly, to project the Jewish experience onto the universal is to posit the word *Jew*, unforgivably, as a “transcendental signifier,” a “name beyond ordinary names.”⁵⁵ Not unlike Marx or Kautsky, Badiou delivers a critique of anti-Semitism that harbors its own anti-Semitic elements. Badiou's critique of anti-Semitism is simultaneously a critique of Jewish claims to universalism, for he considers the two deeply intertwined. He contends that the assignation of any exceptional or central status to Jewish suffering and, by extension, Jewish *identity* is both misguided and dangerous in its consequences. Most objectionably for Badiou, this exceptionalism has produced the Israeli colonial project, which, despite its fixation on the trauma of the Shoah, has missed “the real lesson to be drawn from Nazism:” that “the intrusion of any identity predicate into a central role for the determination of a politics leads to disaster.”⁵⁶ Thus, once the Jew endeavors to perform the maneuver of aligning his particularity with the universal, he perverts this universality into something malignant. The universal to which the Jew's “identitarian protest” relates is necessarily a chaotic abstraction.⁵⁷

Badiou's argument vis-à-vis Israel is worth dissecting. In Badiou's view, the state of Israel has missed the “real lesson” of the Holocaust in two separate but interrelated senses. First, Israel has not truly registered the toxicity of ethno-nationalism, as evidenced by the Jewish identity predicate's

⁵⁵ Badiou, *Polemics*, 160.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁷ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 13. For a note on false universality as a chaotic abstraction, refer back to footnote 20.

“intrusion” into “a central role” in Israeli politics. Jewishness in Israel is granted a status comparable to “Aryanness” in Nazi Germany, with qualitatively similar destructive consequences. Second, Israel has not registered that the exceptional status it assigns to the signifier *Jew* itself poses anti-Semitic dangers. Was it not the Nazis, after all, who found the Jews most exceptional, in a sinister sense? To affirm Jewish exceptionalism in a favorable capacity is therefore also to occasion the affirmation of Jewish exceptionalism in an *anti-Semitic capacity*. The crude analogy between Israel and Nazi Germany seems, for Badiou, unavoidable.

I want to make clear at this point that I am not interested in simply calling Badiou an anti-Semite. True, it is not terribly difficult to find anti-Semitic canards in Badiou’s writing, but neither is it terribly interesting. Leon Wieseltier demonstrates this in a short 2010 piece, in which he dedicates two paragraphs to cataloguing Badiou’s deployments of anti-Semitic tropes before he appears to get bored and terminates his article.⁵⁸ It may be worth cataloguing that in *Saint Paul*, for instance, Badiou conjures Jews as Christ-killers, who see in Jesus “nothing but weakness, abjection, and contemptible peripeteia;”⁵⁹ that he affirms Paul’s complaint that Judaism is a religion of the flesh, of the “earthly vessel,” and therefore vulgar;⁶⁰ and the like. But I draw attention to Badiou’s identification of Israel as the pinnacle of wrong-headed identitarianism not simply to note the profound distastefulness of his chosen analogies. Rather, I want to point to the analytical sleight-of-hand that underlies Badiou’s argument, which becomes especially obvious as he contrasts the Jews with the French.

Badiou holds that Jewish signifier is exceptional insofar as the Jew is believed transcendental and eternal, unbound by historical contingency. This is what distinguishes it from other identitarian signifiers like *French*, which “assume the total contingency of their historical constitution.”⁶¹ France,

⁵⁸ Leon Wieseltier, “Non-Event,” *The New Republic*, June 30, 2010.

⁵⁹ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

throughout its history, has folded into its identity numerous points of monarchic and republican rupture, resulting over time in an open, universalist disposition. In this curious little ontological shell game, then, Badiou proposes that French Catholic universalism is the correct universalism because it is continually contested. Jewishness, meanwhile, is merely a site of social stagnation and identitarian conformity—hence the Jewish universal being necessarily “abstract” and “homogenous.” Jewish particularity, if it is not to inhibit social progress, must acquiesce to its own dissolution into another particularity, one more fit to claim the universalist mantle. By Kautsky, the Jews were instructed to become more German. By Lenin, the Jews were instructed to become more Soviet. Yet these pushes for assimilation were conducted in the name of the eventual emancipation of all humanity. Badiou, meanwhile, sounds more like an anti-Dreyfusard than a Leninist as he instructs the Jews to become more French and, ideally, more Christian. Only through repeated “points of rupture” with tradition can “Jewish communitarianism” can generate a kind of “creative universalism” akin to the French Catholic type.⁶² And this is, of course, the truly liberatory form of universalism. In a socialist analysis of the trajectory of Israeli politics, perhaps a fruitful comparison could have been drawn between the Zionist colonization of Palestine and, say, the French colonization of Algeria. But fortunately, as Badiou illustrates, French identitarianism is nothing like Jewish identitarianism, and so one need not bother with such an inconvenient investigation. Badiou kills two birds with one stone: he condemns Israel while exonerating France.

Let us return to Badiou’s point on “ruptures” creating a universalistic tendency. As we have seen, Badiou reformulates Paul’s eschatology in the language of the Event, casting the effacement of any distinction between Greek and Jew as a postevental truth that structures the Kingdom of God. In Badiou’s reading, Paul is a proto-Maoist following the “mass line,” behaving as a Jew among Jews and a Gentile among Gentiles. Paul masterfully “travers[es] ... opinions and customs,” nonetheless

⁶² Ibid., 162.

keeping in mind that they mark differences to be transcended in the postevental Kingdom.⁶³ Paul recognizes and validates social particularities, and especially Jewish particularity, only in the realm of the profane. Paul refuses, quite rightly in Badiou's estimation, to sacrifice "postevental universality to Jewish particularity."⁶⁴ The postevental universality must be decidedly *Christian*, of course, in both Paul's and our political situation. For all his insistence that the Pauline tradition is *not* anti-Semitic, Badiou gleefully affirms the long-standing anti-Semitic expectation that the teachings of Paul will enable us to transcend Judaism, along with other vulgar and sectarian particularities.

This is roughly the function of Pauline universalism in Žižek's articulation as well. Granted, Žižek is more accommodating of Jewish claims to universality than Badiou. He even suggests that "perhaps, [the] Jewish struggle *is* our central struggle today: the struggle between fidelity to the Messianic impulse" and the impulse to preserve "one's particular identity."⁶⁵ Yet again, however, we see that the Jew's claim to the universal is premised on his eventual non-being as a Jew. If the Jew wishes to truly embrace the universal, and the messianic emancipation of all of humanity, he must willingly dissolve himself into the Pauline, "Eurocentric" universal. For all of Žižek's talk of the *authentic* universal being premised on a continual renegotiation of its content, the Christo-European essence of his universalism appears incontestable. European Christendom is the present site of the universal's concretization, and a recognition of this is mandatory.

Along these lines, Žižek casts Christianity's supersession of Judaism in quasi-Hegelian terms, asking, "Apropos of Christianity as 'revealed religion,' we should ... ask the inevitable stupid question: what is actually revealed in it?"⁶⁶ The answer: divine impotence. The "perverse" revelation of Christianity is that God Himself is bound by the same purposeless laws of the material world as

⁶³ Ibid., 190.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 193.

⁶⁵ Žižek, *Lost Causes*, 6. Italics added.

⁶⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 127.

we are. God cannot unilaterally intervene in the world to prevent the suffering of the righteous. Indeed, as illustrated in the Christ narrative, He cannot prevent His *own* suffering. Whereas Judaism allows God to mask his impotence with “pure boasting,” as in the final chapters of Job, Christianity lays this impotence bare at the core of its theology: “the gap that separates the suffering, desperate man (Job) from God is transposed onto God Himself.”⁶⁷ Here, the thrust of Žižek’s argument is fairly conventional. Indeed, the idea that Christianity transcends Judaism by offering an immediate relationship between the individual and the divine borders on cliché. The next stage in the argument, in which Christianity accomplishes this by dispensing with tribal particularity and asserting a unity of abstract “man” and God, is similarly familiar. Paul’s doctrine reconciles “Otherness” and “Sameness” by identifying the divine with the profane, God with man, and by locating the righteous remnant not in a favored tribe, but in all of humanity.⁶⁸ Žižek does little to critically interrogate the supposition of Christian exceptionalism. He merely situates it in reference to Derrida, Levinas, Benjamin, and other giants of twentieth-century continental thought.

Naturally, this rhetorical situation entails a series of questions on the temporal character of the messianic Event in both Judaism and Christianity. Here the difference is critical: in Judaism, the messianic Event is forever consigned to the future. It is a “promise which will never become fully present and actualized,” whereas in Christianity, “the [messianic] Event has already taken place.”⁶⁹ The messianic promise was fulfilled through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the incipient unity of God and man, yet “the gap which sustained the messianic promise” remains.⁷⁰ If Judaism places us in a permanently pre-Evental world, Christianity places us in a post-Evental one. As such, the shift in the temporality of the messianic from Judaism to Christianity necessitates a shift in the

⁶⁷ Ibid., 124-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁹ Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, 140-1.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 141.

logic of identity. Once again, if the post-Evental world demands a new universality premised on the identity of all persons with the divine—a God who knows no particularities—and the present world *is* that post-Evental world, then that singular universality demands realization *now*. Hence Žižek’s frank dismissal of “every politics which grounds itself in the reference to some substantial (ethnic, religious ...) particularity” as necessarily “reactionary:” it demands a return to the pre-Evental world of substantive particulars.⁷¹

On the topic of temporality, I am tempted to, as it were, defend Hegel from Žižek and note that the discussion of “revealed religion” in the *Phenomenology* (the text Žižek cites explicitly) indicates little preference for Christianity over Judaism, and suggests no straightforward *aufhebung* of the latter by the former. The chronology of the “Religion” chapter is famously disordered, and many elements of Jewish theology appear only *after* essential elements of Christian theology—the Fall emerges in the religious consciousness following the unity of God and man in Christ, for instance.⁷² I admit this is a pedantic point, but insofar as Žižek claims to draw on this chapter, he straitjackets the Hegel of the *Phenomenology* within the rigidly stageist confines of Hegel’s later *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, in which a notion of Christianity transcending Judaism makes itself felt unambiguously. Transposing the views of the later Hegel onto the early Hegel, as Žižek appears to do, has certain ramifications. Consider, as a kind of parallel, Susan Buck-Morss’s elucidation of the contrast between Hegel’s treatments of slavery in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. While the former betrays sympathies to the Haitian Revolution, the latter “endorse[s] gradualism” in abolition, indicating a clear “retreat from revolutionary radicalism.”⁷³ Hegel became more “erudite,” in Buck-Morss’s telling, but this erudition entailed a degree of conceptual rigidity and Eurocentrism. Buck-Morss suggests that, in hewing to nineteenth century German academic convention, Hegel “in fact

⁷¹ Ibid., 132-3.

⁷² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), §760.

⁷³ Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (2000), 858.

[became] dumber” and “more bigoted,” flattening his dialectical progression of the World-Spirit into a crude progression from Oriental mysticism and unfreedom to Occidental rationality and agency.⁷⁴ Similarly, the overcoming of Judaism by Christianity fits neatly into the mature Hegel’s conceptual schema, but it is much harder to justify it through reference to the fluid poetics of the *Phenomenology*. Žižek’s Hegel in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* is not Hegel the bright-eyed young lecturer, but Hegel the wizened old racist.

The distinctions in their theoretical apparatuses aside, then, Žižek and Badiou both posit a straightforward supersession of Judaism by Christianity, a progressive step from tribal particularity to properly messianic universalism. The authors, as noted above, posit different models of universal singularity: for Žižek, the “singular” character comes from a perpetual collision of and contestation between different singularities, whereas for Badiou it resides in the radical self-containment of the Event which forms the universal’s basis. Likewise, as noted in other scholarship, they have different conceptions of the subject: Žižek does not base his subject in relation to the Event as Badiou does, and Badiou resists Žižek’s “Lacanian ontologization of the subject” in turn.⁷⁵ Yet in spite of these theoretical oppositions, they articulate highly similar resolutions of the archetypal *Identity Question* by way of Pauline eschatology. When considered from the vantage of the Jewish question, and situated in the trajectory of the Marxist tradition on that topic, disquieting resonances emerge in the work of both authors. This rejuvenated Pauline universalism resonates not just with the assimilatory impulse present in core authors of the socialist tradition, but with a more general (and by no means radical or emancipatory) historical teleology that posits European Christendom as a necessary step on the way to absolute freedom.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 863-4.

⁷⁵ Ken Jackson, “The Great Temptation of ‘Religion:’ Why Badiou Has Been So Important to Žižek,” *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 1/2 (2007), 8.

§5. Concluding Remarks

It seems evident after these reflections that Žižek and Badiou's accounts of Paul do not offer a way out of the identitarian or populist traps. Though emphases on universal human emancipation, systematic analysis, and class struggle may be warranted, the effort to reprioritize them by way of Pauline eschatology is a dry hole. Not only does such an effort fail to remedy the falterings of the earlier socialist tradition on the Jewish question, they periodically take steps backward, miring the communist project in the specificity of European Christendom. While Žižek and Badiou endeavor to posit a vital, active universality, rich with contingency and contestation, they tend toward positing instead the precise kind of universality they claim to despise. Their concrete universal is a stationary European one with which particular groups must align if we are all to progress to the next historical stage. It does injustice not just to the particularities they invoke sardonically (whether the “cultural-marginal-homeopathic-media-friendly transsexual”⁷⁶ or the “African American single unemployed lesbian mother”⁷⁷), but at times, as in the case of Žižek's quasi-Hegelianism, even the *very intellectual traditions* they aim to revive. The Pauline temptation cannot escape the crude, assimilatory impulse at its core. Its answer to homogenous universals is a homogenous universal of its own.

⁷⁶ Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 13.

⁷⁷ Žižek, “Eurocentrism,” 1001.

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