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## ŽIŽEK ON ÜBERWINDUNG, OR TRAUMATIC AND ABYSMAL INTERSECTIONS

Jan Gresil de los Santos KAHAMBING\*

### Abstract

It is the concern of this paper to present three important associations that indicate the coupling of trauma and abyss for Žižek's idea of *Überwindung* or overcoming. Its fundamental function, following Nietzsche, is to posit a radical or paradoxical task of *thinking*. It should be noted that the understanding of these associations works not entirely the same as parallels of one grand constitution in the end. Rather, the associations are routes, short-circuits, and therefore merely entry-exit points with necessarily no connection from the start but may start to assemble themselves afterward to retroactively energize the paradox of thinking. The three association points are the following: first and foremost, on the unclear pathway relationship of trauma and abyss from sporadic vantage points; second, on matters of belief and Žižek's own critique of morality; and lastly, the constitution of freedom which is an essential element of overcoming.

**Keywords:** *Überwindung*, Belief, Freedom, Trauma, Abyss, Žižek, Nietzsche.

### 1. INTRODUCTION: ŽIŽEK'S POSITION, NIETZSCHE, TRAUMA, & ABYSS

What is Žižek's position on *Überwindung* or overcoming? Or generally speaking, what is Žižek's position? This is one of the most commonplace attack against the work of Žižek: his detractors often alert readers or any audience of the man to spot the substance, to give a clear order of a choice to substantiate a position or to give a proposal for action rather than read Lacan. This is Chomsky's criticism of Žižek (Chomsky, 2012):

What you're referring to is what's called "theory." And when I said I'm not interested in theory, what I meant is, I'm not interested in posturing—using fancy terms like polysyllables and pretending you have a theory when you have no theory whatsoever...See if you can find that when the fancy words are decoded. I can't. So I'm not interested in that kind of posturing. Žižek is an extreme example of it. I don't see anything about what he's saying.

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\* Research Coordinator for the Social Sciences, Political Science, and Values Education, Social Science Unit, College of Arts and Sciences, Leyte Normal University



In a most forward sense, Will Self in their debate (Žižek and Self, 2017) also pushed Žižek into answering the frame of action - a prescriptive rather than just a descriptive analysis of what is going on: 'What I want to understand, because we are meant to go "learn, learn, learn" ... I want to understand how to fit your favorite theorists - Hegel, Lacan, Marx to some extent, Freud to some extent - how am I to fit them into my "learning" so that I am going to understand what the fuck I should do about the shit we're in [audience laughs] ... and that's what I'm not quite getting from you, man.' However, the moment critics pose themselves precisely on this stance, they have already fallen in the auspices of mystification also. That is to say, Žižek's answer is already the question they are asking, and that the question is already in itself embedded as an answer. Concerning Self, Žižek reiterates the importance of Lacan in spotting paradoxes in the current age and that it is too complex to simply propose a clear order of action. Instead, Žižek proposes an inversion of Marx's famous thesis 11 ("Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world; the point is to change it") by stating its opposite: 'The first task today is precisely not to succumb to the temptation to act, to intervene directly and change things (which then inevitably ends in a cul-de-sac of debilitating impossibility: "What can one do against global Capital?"), but to question the hegemonic ideological coordinates (Žižek, 2008).' This is for him the task and paradox of *thinking* while avoiding the moderate Robespierrean pacifist position of succumbing to "a revolution without a revolution." That is to say, that thinking is always thinking with paradoxes, which are and can be radically possibilities. Concerning Chomsky, Žižek (2013) replies how Chomsky

goes on and on in the same vein, repeating how he doesn't see anything to what I'm saying, how he cannot discern in my texts any traces of rational examination of facts, how my work displays empty posturing not to be taken seriously, etc. A weird statement, measured by his professed standards of respect for empirical facts and rational argumentation: there are no citations (which, in this case, can be excused, since we are dealing with a radio interview), but also not even the vaguest mentions of any of my ideas. Did he decode any of my "fancy words" and indicate how what one gets is "something you can explain in five minutes to a twelve-year-old"? There are no political references in his first attack (and in this domain, as far as I can see, I much more often than not agree with him). I did a couple of short political books on 9/11 (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real*), on the war in Iraq (*Iraq: the Borrowed Kettle*), on the 2008 financial meltdown (*First as Tragedy, then as Farce*), which appear to me written in a quite accessible way and dealing with quite a lot of facts—do they also contain nothing but empty posturing? In short, is Chomsky in his thorough dismissal of my work not doing exactly what he is accusing me of: clinging to the empty posture of total rejection with no further ado?

Žižek therefore certainly does not theorize out of a vacuum. His thoughts are grounded on the material conditions of time, which includes the paradoxes that are associated with overcoming under the coordinates which exist within the present constellation of events. This, however, can be prodded as a nihilistic condition à la Nietzsche. If there is anything that Nietzsche insists in the future that is today, and is spectrally bound in Žižek's writings, it is that again, today's state of affairs are becoming more nihilistic with the insertions of abysmal moments. It is in this sense that Nietzsche grounds his ideas too in the form of a paradox: what overcoming entails for a man in the future to happen, happens paradoxically in the abyss of the abyss, that is, that it happens on the loneliest of loneliness moments. Remhof (2018) claims, concerning Nietzsche's ideas, that 'facing the eternal recurrence from a state of profound loneliness both motivates self-transformation and contributes toward helping us succeed at that project.' Because nihilism is only a 'transitional stage,' what it ignites is an incessant motive of overcoming or *Überwindung*. But there is a problem in this continuous charge of overcoming because it can be deemed as a vicious cycle, which is to say that the last man's way of treating life by avoiding suffering and going to fiction can also fit here an overcoming. Žižek recognizes this in the way the Christian ideal works but this is insufficient and can fit well with the description of Nietzsche's abyss. Žižek discusses how Christianity becomes a traumatic break into this vicious cycle of overcoming:

As Badiou emphasizes, Paul comes unexpectedly close here to his great detractor Nietzsche, whose problem was also that of how we can break out of the vicious cycle of a morbid, self-mortifying denial of Life: the Christian "way of the Spirit" is for Nietzsche precisely the magic rupture, the New Beginning which delivers us from this morbidly debilitating deadlock and enables us to open ourselves to the Eternal Life of Love without Sin (i.e., without the Law and the guilt induced by the Law) (Žižek, 2010, p. 98).



What this traumatic break means for Žižek is that it operates away from the abyss rather than seek their compatibility. Psychoanalysis can aid in determining the traumatic tensions to one's life, which can be an impetus for overcoming, but it may veer towards a different kind of overcoming, one that is of the last man like his fictional way and avoidance of harsh truths of reality. Says Žižek:

If there is an ethicopolitical lesson to be learned from psychoanalysis, it consists of the insight that the great calamities of our century (from the Holocaust to the Stalinist *desastre*) resulted not from our succumbing to the morbid attraction of this Void but, on the contrary, from our endeavoring to avoid confronting it and to impose the direct rule of Truth and/or Goodness (Žižek, 2000, p. 190).

From to overcome this, one must confront the paradoxes of thinking that are engendered from the relationship between trauma and the abyss. I argue that this is *Überwindung*, a going beyond through thinking with paradoxes.

## 2. TRAUMATIC ABYSS, ABYSMAL TRAUMA: INTERSECTIONS

How can one go over overcoming and direct an association that can connect the abyss and trauma? The first intersection can be distinguished when one has to ground trauma with an abysmal experience. As such, Wernik shows in *Nietzsche Trauma and Overcoming: The Psychology of the Psychologist* (2018) how overcoming can occur in a personal abyss while promoting artistic and ideal activities. He shows how Nietzsche 'teaches coping with pain and suffering, based on his life experience, with lessons from the school of war, the wisdom of reinterpretation, and artistic activity. His three themes of the Superman, Eternal Recurrence, and the Will to Power, the heart of his philosophy and psychology, are understood in a new light, in relation to his personal suffering and overcoming (Wernik, 2018).' Kohler too in his *Zarathustra's Secret* (2002) thinks of Nietzsche in his interior life. Hollingdale (1999) aligns with this idea when he contextualizes Nietzsche's thoughts to his social dispositions while Nehamas (1985) reads Nietzsche's life as literature. As such, trauma intersects with the abyss when it gives it a jolt for overcoming - it would be activating personal tragedy to work. To show how this is radical, one can spot the paradox that personal suffering is always embedded within a social disposition. That is to say, that there is a passive abyss, and for this to be active, trauma - as that which is charged in the environs of the subject - is needed for there to be overcoming. In this sense, the abyss is associated with trauma as they provide overcoming for the subject.

For the second intersection, a radical possibility can spring from the idea that the trauma that jolts does not only pertain to the passivity of personal tragedy - a deadening deadlock - such as a traumatic end e.g. a shock of failure, or a shattering experience that leads to the realization that life is meaningless. The paradox is that in this heartbreaking or crestfallen situation, the trauma that then mixes up with the abyss further opens up radical possibilities. For instance, in Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, what makes the book concerned with the characteristic of cheerful wisdom? Wisdom in this sense is traumatic - it points to a radical shift of understanding inasmuch as it shocks the monotonous hermeneutic of daily life. Therein lies Ramadanovic's *From Haunting to Trauma* explanation: 'the science is gay in the sense that certain possibilities open up in spite of the trauma - the shattering of thought in time (Ramadanovic, 2001).'

The third intersection lies in the paradoxical constitution of a combined traumatic and abysmal experience. It was Nietzsche who said, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger (Nietzsche, 1997b, I, 8)." But in reality, an actual paradox shows: 'something that does not kill us can leave us seriously traumatized. When you go through a life-shattering experience, a very scary or tragic event, it can leave you with serious depression or anxiety issues - or even post-traumatic stress disorder (Goldsmith, 2014).'

Goldsmith then in his 'Nietzsche was wrong; trauma lingers' (2014) emphasizes how some instances can make trauma spring out of the recesses of, rather than an external jolt to, the abyss. The constitution is that *there is trauma already in the abyss* and it awakens in a certain radical way: the more abysmal the experience is, the more traumatic it is.

What is needed is perhaps not only to acknowledge how tragedy is short-lived but to expend tragedy as if it creates its own deadlock - that is: not short-lived tragic life but short-circuited life. The same can be applied to trauma: trauma is not the accidental feature of one's life awakened by the experiences of the past. The very kernel that sustains the motive of trauma must not be historicist in a sense of its being tied to memory, but that its jolting must be awakened in its activity so that trauma becomes a product of *active forgetting*.

Here, one can remember Nietzsche in meditating on the animal's enviable ability to forget (Nietzsche, 1997c, II, 1). Psychoanalysis in Freud and Lacan can back a problematic obsession with memory (cf. Brunner, 1995, p. 156-165; Rabate, 2003, p. 25-34). To counter such obsession, man must overcome this



through the paradox of *active forgetting*. One does this when ‘inhibiting capacity, [...] temporary shutting of the doors and windows of consciousness, [...] and making room for the new (Nietzsche, 1996b, II, 1).’ One can take from Nietzsche here the fundamental problem of overcoming. He says that it is not easy to forget because there is pain: ‘the worse mankind’s memory was, the more frightening its customs appear; the harshness of punishment codes, in particular (Nietzsche, 1996b, II, 3).’ Forgetfulness means ‘strength, a form of robust health (Nietzsche, 1996b, II, 1).’ Man cannot memorialize everything (cf. Nietzsche, 1976a, 126). In *active forgetting*, the abyss is coupled with trauma for overcoming in the sense of putting tragedy into work. Active forgetting allows for the abyss to be active as a traumatic jolt for itself.

### 3. BELIEF: ON HORSESHOES, LEMONADES, AND SANTA CLAUS

What this active forgetting implies further is an abysmal traumatic event which further constitutes a radical possibility. The area in which this takes place lies at a special intersection of Žižek and Nietzsche in matters of belief. Here, the counter-acting stages for Žižek, or to critique morality for him in Nietzsche’s terms, paradoxically means also that one has to undergo the stage of the Christian position. Žižek puts himself a paradoxical position of being a ‘Christian atheist’ with the understanding that one can only become an atheist if one undergoes the process of Christianization. In the same manner, trauma, which has a link closer to the Christian disturbance of one’s lifeworld, needs an abyss that must cater to the meaninglessness of the Christian position. Against the ‘four horsemen of atheism or non-apocalypse (Hoffman, 2014)’, namely, Stephen Fry, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, who clamor and decry quite violently against not just Christianity but religion as a whole, Žižek’s atheism and thereby his critique of the moral order that is grounded on a religious vantage point is not an external attack that criticizes religion as an object of belief. On a deeper level, Žižek’s overcoming – here as a critique of morality – dives into the whole process of Christianity, attacks its inventor, St. Paul, and suspends the integrity of the whole belief system. Belief in this sense is *fragile* because it easily connects with Pfaller’s notion of interpassivity (2017). Žižek’s famous and repeated example concerning the fragility of belief is his anecdote about Niels Bohr, the rival of Einstein.

He narrates how once, in a biography of Niels Bohr, a friend visited him in Copenhagen and noticed a horseshoe at his doorstep, which means in Europe as a superstitious item that is supposed to keep out the evil spirits. The friend was then shocked and asked Niels Bohr ‘my god! I thought you are a scientist, why do you believe in this kind of superstitious crap.’ Bohr replied, ‘of course not! I’m not crazy’. And the friend retorted, ‘then why is it there?’ Ultimately, Niels Bohr gave the correct answer: ‘I also do not believe in it; I have it there because I was told that it works even if one does not believe in it!’ (Žižek, 2006). This is why belief is fragile – it functions even if no one really does believe in it: an inherent abyss is lurking in its background. In this sense, Žižek explicates its fragility in the sense of letting belief work without one’s belief: for instance, Žižek says that leaving the Buddhist praying wheel to circulate is still belief when one believes in its function while one is watching pornography and at the same time drinking lemonade.

In this sense, Žižek also made use of Santa Claus and how he is a perfect example of belief’s fragility. If one would ask the parents ‘do you believe in Santa Claus?’ the reply is an obvious ‘of course not! We buy the presents’; but if one, in turn, would ask the children ‘do you believe in Santa Claus?’, the reply is nothing different as ‘of course not! But we pretend to believe so that we can receive the presents!’ Yet the belief still functions. Nietzsche here can elucidate again his point how Christianity is an example of the abyss: when Christianity simply justifies its rituals and lifestyle through the importance of *believing*. What Žižek adds to this abyss is the insertion of trauma. Žižek’s work *On Belief* (2001b) elucidates how the Judeo-Christian experience is ‘grounded in a *traumatic* encounter of a radical Otherness (p. 107; Italics).’ It offers a reinvention of self.

What is then the significance of belief as to the intersecting point of trauma and abyss to constitute an overcoming position? The rhetorical point here is: aren’t the two precisely paradoxical in matters of belief? Belief is abysmal in its fragility and yet it is a traumatic encounter that may possibly change one’s lifeworld: Isn’t belief traumatic where, in a certain way, paradoxically that is, the abyss can very much be jolting?

For instance, in relation to the process of transhumanism towards a posthuman, the idea of belief’s fragility as both traumatic and abysmal can direct a radical possibility for overcoming. The question here is: what is stopping the traumatic evolution of technological advances? The rejoinder is that trauma is insufficient because it lacks the abyss. This precisely means that science, for a long time – although it has stripped off its initial grounding for meaning as seen in the early accounts of positivism – still lacks the very function of the abyss, especially a Nietzschean version of it, namely, that it has not yet functioned as a





critique of morality or, in Nietzsche's words, beyond good and evil. Bioethics, nanoethics, machine ethics – all the ethical arguments that are stopping technology from reaching its true potential that may traumatize a whole millennium of moral reasoning precisely hinder the fact that, once trauma is coupled with abyss, a new kind of species will soon emerge.

#### 4. FREEDOM: ON RED INKS, *CHOIX FORCÉ*, AND PREDESTINATION

The final important association of trauma and abyss that shares Nietzsche's and Žižek's point on *Überwindung* lies in the highly paradoxical space of freedom. This is crucial because overcoming's most essential characteristic is being a free spirit. The next question then is: how will this space of freedom open up the *event* of overcoming? Already in Žižek's *The Abyss of Freedom* (1997), he reiterated how an event announces a break in the normal course of reality. This course of freedom that caters to a radical break for an event was already keenly observed by Nietzsche. To explicate how the intersecting point of belief is transported to the intersecting point of freedom concerning the relationship of trauma and abyss, Nietzsche says:

These deniers and outsiders of today, these absolutists in a single respect – in their claim to intellectual hygiene – these hard, severe, abstemious, heroic spirits, who constitute the pride of our [modern] age, all these pale atheists, anti-Christians, immoralists, nihilists, these spiritual sceptics, ephectics [who withhold their judgments on any issue], hectic ones . . . ; these last idealists of knowledge, these men in whom intellectual conscience is alone embodied and dwells today – they believe themselves to be free from the very ascetic ideal, these free, very free spirits: yet if I may reveal to them what they themselves cannot see – for they are too close to themselves. . . . These men are far from free spirits; for they still believe in truth! . . . It is in their belief in truth that they are more inflexible and absolute than anyone else. (Nietzsche, 1998)

The area of freedom for Nietzsche is already contested as a space for paradoxes. Meaning to say, Žižek's point coincides in the assertion that to be anti-Christian, one has to undergo being a Christian, or that to be free, one must break from the *belief* of being free – hence the transport of belief to freedom. Isn't this also a potent inversion of the Kierkegaardian stages of life (1959; 1967), so that Kierkegaard, the religious side opposing the secular existentialism of Nietzsche, becomes secular also? That is to say, that if Kierkegaard delineates the stages of life from being carefree and hedonistic towards being religious (hence, "aesthetic-ethical-religious"), in this paradoxical inversion, isn't freedom the exact opposite of this movement: one starts with being religious, then one is stripped off of religious chains into thinking of a naturalistic ethical chain without religious connotations, down to the aesthetics of existence that is the space for freedom? What Žižek and Nietzsche then share in common in the understanding of the free spirit is not only that it contains inherently a paradox of freedom but also that, as a radical possibility, only in freedom can one see the glaring relationship of abyss and trauma at the same time. That is to say, that freedom is both abysmal and traumatic and only in this coupling can one envision a paradoxical kind of overcoming. Nietzsche's Zarathustra speaks of great events grounded on freedom from unlearned belief, coupled with the abysmal quietest changes as the traumatic reinvention of new values:

"Freedom," you all most like to bellow: but I have unlearned belief in "great events" whenever there is much bellowing and smoke about them. And believe me, friend Infernal-racket! The greatest events – they are not our noisiest but our stillest hours. The world revolves, not around the inventors of new noises, but around the inventors of new values; it revolves inaudibly. And just confess! Little was ever found to have happened when your noise and smoke dispersed. What did it matter that a town had been mummified and that a statue lay in the mud! (Nietzsche, 1969).

Similarly, Žižek connects to this in a deductive point that can be only be described as an 'abyss of freedom.' In a joke that he reiterates in his talks, Žižek explains how in today's freedom, there lies the abyss of being unfree and that to be free means to go over the paradoxes of this freedom that is traumatic.

In an old joke from the defunct German Democratic Republic, a German worker gets a job in Siberia; aware of how all mail will be read by censors, he tells his friends: "Let's establish a code: if a letter you will get from me is written in ordinary blue ink, it is true; if it is written in red ink, it is false." After a month, his friends get the first letter, written in blue ink: "Everything is wonderful here: stores are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, movie theaters show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair – the only thing unavailable is *red ink*." And is this not our situation



till now? We have all the freedoms one wants – the only thing missing is the “red ink”: we “feel free” because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom. What this lack of red ink means is that, today, all the main terms we use to designate the present conflict – “war on terror,” “democracy and freedom,” “human rights,” etc. – are false terms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think it. The task today is to give the protesters red ink (Žižek, 2002, p. 1).

The radical idea is that the name of this red ink is *trauma*: there is abyss in the inability to articulate one’s unfreedom, but it is missing something that can complete what the task of thinking is looking for today. This further means that because abyss and trauma are not enough on their own, only in the coupling of both can one see a radical possibility or paradoxical constitution of overcoming. It is paradoxical because, for Žižek, this coupling functions in the coordinates of a ‘forced choice.’ The paradoxical question is of course: Why is there freedom in a forced choice? Žižek’s lecture on *The Freedom of a Forced Choice* (2014b) tackles, among others, the theological aspects of this paradox which quite inverts his earlier position of a forced choice that still functions within the Christian position. To explain this position first before proceeding to its radicality later on, one has to inevitably put here a point from Žižek’s most celebrated work *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) regarding forced choice.

A few months ago, a Yugoslav student was called to regular military service. In Yugoslavia, at the beginning of military service, there is a certain ritual: every new soldier must solemnly swear that he is willing to serve his country and to defend it even if it means losing his life, and so on – the usual patriotic stuff. After the public ceremony, everybody must sign the solemn document. The young soldier simply refused to sign, saying that an oath depends upon free choice, that it is a matter of free decision, and he, from his free choice, did not want to give his signature to the oath. But, he was quick to add, if any of the officers present was prepared to give him a formal order to sign the oath, he would of course be prepared to do so. The perplexed officers explained to him that because the oath depended upon his free decision (an oath obtained by force is valueless), they could not give him such an order, but that, on the other hand, if he still refused to give his signature, he would be prosecuted for refusing to do his duty and condemned to prison. . .

In the subject’s relationship to the community to which he belongs, there is always such a paradoxical point of *choix forcé* – at this point, the community is saying to the subject: you have freedom to choose, but on condition that you choose the right thing; you have, for example, the freedom to choose to sign or not to sign the oath, on condition that you choose rightly – that is, to sign it. If you make the wrong choice, you lose freedom of choice itself. And it is by no means accidental that this paradox arises at the level of the subject’s relationship to the community to which he belongs: the situation of the forced choice consists in the fact that the subject must freely choose the community to which he belongs, independent of his choice – *he must choose what is already given to him* (Žižek, 1989, p. 185-186).

The understanding here is that this is close to the Christian position of freedom: do good, go to paradise; do bad, go to hell – and yet this called ‘free will.’ This position is what Žižek is already willing to forego because this is mere abyss and it still needs a certain trauma to be radicalized. To restate his recent position on freedom: ‘we are free to constantly re-invent our sexual identities, to change not only our job or our professional trajectory but even our innermost subjective features like our sexual orientation. However, *the scope of these freedoms is strictly prescribed by the coordinates of the existing system* (Žižek, 2018a, p. 8; Italics mine).’ How does one traumatize or radicalize this? How can one give the red ink for this position? It is best to explore the abyss of this predicament before proceeding to add trauma to it.

First, what does the blue ink write at this juncture? Žižek explains the unfreedom of today’s present constellation. In science, researchers are already normalizing and bug-fixing what is called Brain-to-Brain interface or BBI (cf. Jiang, et.al, 2018) from the early experiments (Yoo, et.al, 2013) that Žižek was then aware about. The idea then was that in BBI, one can control another person by suggesting ideas through brain waves. The brain-to-brain link works precisely on this planting of an idea that will be translated by the person on the other side of the link as an action: if the linked person suggests the other to jump, the other person will jump; if the suggestion is to roll over, the other person will rollover. There are of course ethical issues to this practice (Hildt, 2015; Trimper, et.al., 2014) but the ‘horror’ lies in the philosophical question asked to the subject of the experiment: when one is under BBI, how will one experience the experiment? Will



the subject still experience that he/she is being controlled when jumping or rolling over, or will he/she now think that he/she is freely doing the acts? For Žižek, the answer is already scary as it sounds when this question was responded by the subject, who replies with an insistence that he/she still thinks that he/she is free. In other words, the subject is free but he/she does not know his/her un-freedom. This is the abysmal part of freedom, the very inability to articulate one's unfree position in otherwise seemingly free space. In literature, this points to how Dostoevsky strikingly draws the idea that "we surrender our freedom to the ones who feed us" (cf. Dostoevsky, 1937): our boss, our family, our managers. Meaning to say, that the coordinates of one's freedom are only as good as the conditions which define such coordinates. In this nihilistic abyss, or in this paradoxical area of a 'forced choice,' how can one still posit the very notion of freedom itself? How can one be free in a condition where the impetus to be free is already a forced notion?

Herein lies the theological point that opens the radical possibility of *Überwindung* in freedom, which Žižek recognizes from Jameson, as the traumatic insertion into the abyss – the theological concept of predestination. The crazy reading is that the theological notion of predestination, which seems to suggest already a deadlock, is more philosophical when it opens a radical possible space for freedom. There are two important versions of this concept – the Christian one and the Protestant one.

The Protestant version of predestination works as an election: only the elect can go to paradise, regardless of their acts when they were still alive. Thus, one's predestined life meant that even if a person is doing charity for a lifetime or helping others with love, peace, and so on – if one is not predestined to be part of the elect, the person will still face eternal damnation. Consequently, if a person is part of the elect, even if what the person does in earthly life is to commit crimes, rape women, and rob banks, the person by virtue of being elected will still go to paradise – because the person's life is already 'predestined.'

The Catholic version works again simply out of merit: do good, and you will be predestined to go to paradise; do evil, and you will be predestined to go to hell – which is thereby a reclusion into a predetermination of actions. This Catholic version, of course, becomes complicated with the inclusion of grace (which is unmerited), reconciliation, and the boundless mercy/love of God. Here comes the philosophical question: in both concepts of predestination, which implies being part and parcel of a 'forced choice,' which of the two can create the space for freedom? The surprising and anti-climactic answer is the Protestant one. The ultimate reason is that within the Protestant version – where one's life is already predestined from the beginning, whether the predestined path of the elect or the damned – the radical position of *Überwindung* for freedom lies in the assertion that yes, there is a seemingly hardcore predestination in it, but there is also paradoxically an inability to know which predestined path the person belongs to. Žižek then is well aware that as all good Protestants know, even if one's life is already predestined, freedom means that one still has to instigate action rather than remain passive and wait for the already-destined eschatological judgment – because one does not know if one is elected or damned. If one is in a position where one does not know one is going in one's predestined path, every choice one makes becomes a radically free choice.

What all this boils down to is: this must not already come as a surprise since it is well known that the Protestant version and revision of Catholicism is the radical position of Christianity, radicalized by Luther and later on by Calvin and the Jansenists. In this space, which Žižek associates with Frederick Jameson, the radicality of the Protestant freedom is best highlighted. Only this is frame can one posit the paradox of being a free spirit. In this sense, freedom means that, because everything is predestined but because the predestination is unknown, one is free to create the spaces for this very freedom. That is to say, that freedom does not simply mean to make petty choices – such as whether one likes a chocolate cake over a vanilla cake – but freedom means that because "we are in a position where we don't know where we are, we have the ability to choose our fate." Only, again, in this paradox can the abyss be traumatized, to constitute what is for Žižek, *Überwindung*.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Žižek notion of *Überwindung* can well be presented as a paradoxical constitution of reality. This paper exposes the paradoxes as well as the radical positions that are confronted in the task of thinking. The notion of overcoming as a form of thinking paradoxes is explicated in the various intersections of trauma and abyss with the help of Nietzsche. Specific explorations of the relationship between both trauma and abyss or Žižek and Nietzsche make it possible for sparks of clarity, though faint, to emerge within the short-circuiting discussions of belief and freedom. There is a sense in which both belief and freedom create a lot of sporadic paradoxical points and how they, in the end, open up spaces for thinking as a form of *Überwindung*.



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