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Reflections of a Rotten Nature: Hegel, Lacan, and Material Negativity

As I have underscored repeatedly in past texts,¹ Jacques Lacan, despite his reputation as an avid anti-naturalist, has no qualms whatsoever about leaning upon certain ideas of nature as components of his theoretical apparatus.² Although adamantly opposed to the introduction of a crudely reductive biologism as a grounding paradigm for psychoanalysis, he is not, for all that, categorically dismissive of the life sciences. Once in a while, he even permits himself, like Freud, to voice hopes of eventual biological confirmations of analytic theories.³ To take just one illustration of this known to anyone familiar with Lacanianism, Lacan's concept of "need" (*besoin*), as per the need-demand-desire triad, is bound up with the biological facticity of protracted infantile *Hilflosigkeit*, an anatomical and physiological "fact" of immense import for psychical ontogeny in the eyes of both Freud and Lacan.⁴ Arising immediately from the very start of the human

¹ Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008, pp. 269–287; Adrian Johnston, "Slavoj Žižek's Hegelian Reformation: Giving a Hearing to *The Parallax View*," *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, vol. 37, no. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 3–20; Adrian Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature: Hegel, Freud, Lacan, and Negativity Materialized," *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, Clayton Crockett, and Creston Davis, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, pp. 159–179.

² Jacques Lacan, "The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power," *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006, p. 514; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXI: Les non-dupes errent, 1973–1974*, unpublished typescript, session of May 21st, 1974; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII: Le sinthome, 1975–1976*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005, p. 12; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV: L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre, 1976–1977*, unpublished typescript, sessions of April 19th, 1977, May 17th, 1977.

³ Jacques Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, no. 34, 1953, pp. 13–15; Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Écrits*, p. 78; Jacques Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," *Écrits*, p. 92.

⁴ *SE* 1: 318; *SE* 20: 154–155, 167; *SE* 21: 17–19, 30; Jacques Lacan, "Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu: Essai d'analyse d'une fonction en psychologie," *Autres écrits*, ed.

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organism's existence as a bodily being, need is the contingent-yet-*a priori* base of the Lacanian libidinal economy, a crucial impetus necessary for propelling the neonate into the combined arms of Imaginary others and Symbolic Others. Only thereby, thanks to helpless neediness as a natural condition of possibility, is the transition to the complex dialectical mediations of demand and desire prompted. Even though Imaginary-Symbolic imprinting and overwriting (partially) denaturalizes need – Lacan's talk of "denaturalization" automatically implies the prior existence of certain natural things as origins or sources⁵ – the resulting denaturalized subjectivity (\$) remains, to phrase this in a Lacanian style, "not without" (*pas sans*) a rapport with nature in the guise of its bio-material body. Or, in alternate phrasing, the never successfully denaturalized subject is stuck perpetually struggling with stubbornly indigestible bits and fragments of an incompletely and unevenly domesticated corpo-Real.⁶

In a companion piece to the present essay,⁷ I highlight the numerous instances in which Lacan, with however many caveats and qualifications, utilizes the notion of the organic in its biological sense. Therein, I argue that Lacan's references to this notion – these cluster around his recurrent embellishments on the mirror stage – suggest the concept of a non-organicity that would be different from the merely inorganic as dealt with by the physics and chemistry of the non-living. On the basis of this reading of Lacan, I hence distinguish between the

Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001, pp. 33–35; Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," p. 76, 78; Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," p. 92; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation, 1958–1959*, unpublished typescript, session of November 12th, 1958; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VIII: Le transfert, 1960–1961*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001 [seconde édition corrigée], p. 427.

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⁵ Jacques Lacan, "Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality," *Écrits*, p. 616; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IV: La relation d'objet, 1956–1957*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1994, p. 254; Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, p. 176.

⁶ Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005, pp. xxxvii, 262–271, 340–341; Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pp. xxiii, 60, 63–66, 80–81, 113, 286; Adrian Johnston, "Misfelt Feelings: Unconscious Affect Between Psychoanalysis, Neuroscience, and Philosophy," in Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life: Merging Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neurobiology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013 [forthcoming]. Adrian Johnston, "Drive Between Brain and Subject: An Immanent Critique of Lacanian Neuro-psychoanalysis," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 2013, special issue: "Annual Murray Spindel Conference: Freudian Future(s)" [forthcoming].

⁷ Johnston, "Drive Between Brain and Subject".

inorganic and the “anorganic,” with the latter being a Hegelian-type negation of the organic as itself, according to Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, a “negation” *als Aufhebung* of the inorganic (i.e., a dialectical/speculative negation of negation disobeying the rule of double negation in classical, bivalent logic as non-dialectical/speculative).⁸

In terms of the Hegelian *Realphilosophie* of *Natur und Geist*, I would contend that Lacanian anorganicity, “in the organic more than the organic itself” (as the Lacan of the eleventh seminar might put it), furnishes a link missing between the end of the *Philosophy of Nature*, with its “Organics” culminating with the animal organism, and the beginning of the *Philosophy of Spirit*, with its “Anthropology” starting with the soul of human nature in its most rudimentary states. Prior to his mature *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel, in his 1805–1806 *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, famously describes humans as “the night of the world,” as horrifying monstrosities embodying the nocturnal abyss of a midnight madness eclipsing the familiar faces of nature.⁹ After passing through a delineation of the organic and the anorganic *à la* Lacan, I will circumnavigate back to the claims in this paragraph by showing how anorganicity, as a more-than-organic transcendence nonetheless immanent to the organic, simultaneously conjoins and disjoins the natural kingdoms of animal organisms and the spiritual/minded regions of human subjects. If the latter are “the night of the world,” unnatural perversions of nature, the darkness of this negativity is made possible by a pre/non-human “night of the living world” internal to inhuman nature itself (as I argue in a separate text, Hegel’s repeated invocations of a “weakness” or “impotence” [*Ohnmacht*] of nature can be deciphered in light of what I am sketching here¹⁰).

Lacan’s 1949 *écrit* on the mirror stage is perhaps the single best known and most widely read piece of his extensive *oeuvre*. Closer to the time of the regrettably

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⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, §336, pp. 270–272, §337, pp. 273–277, §350, pp. 351–352.

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophie des Geistes, Jenaer Systementwürfe III: Naturphilosophie und Philosophie des Geistes*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1987, p. 172.

¹⁰ Adrian Johnston, “The Voiding of Weak Nature: The Transcendental Materialist Kernels of Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 103–157; Hege, *Philosophy of Nature*, §250, pp. 23–24, §370, p. 416, 423; G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree, New York: Dover Publications, 1956, p. 65, 80.

lost text on which this *écrit* is based, the lengthy entry in the *Encyclopédie française* on “The Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual” – this 1938 essay provides the best available indications of the contents of Lacan’s original presentation of the mirror stage at the International Psychoanalytic Association conference in Marienbad in 1936 – already aims to get back behind the reflective surfaces of the moment of identification with the *Gestalt* of the *imago*. Therein, Lacan refers to “libidinal conditions” underlying the onset of the mirror stage properly speaking.¹¹ A few pages later, he points to “the vital insufficiency of man at his origins”¹² (specifically, the human being’s ontogenetic origins, his/her default “natural” condition as thrown into the world by conception and birth). The canonical 1949 framing of this stage explicitly connects these two points in “The Family Complexes” by describing a “libidinal dynamism” (*dynamisme libidinal*) having to do with the infant’s “motor impotence and nursling dependence.”¹³

In 1948’s “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” another key text as regards the mirror stage, Lacan offers formulations pertaining to biology and the organic consistent with both “The Family Complexes” and “The Mirror Stage.” As he explains:

What I have called the ‘mirror stage’ is of interest because it manifests the affective dynamism (*dynamisme affectif*) by which the subject primordially identifies with the visual gestalt of his own body. In comparison with the still very profound lack of coordination of his own motor functioning, that gestalt is an ideal unity, a salutary imago. Its value is heightened by all the early distress resulting from the child’s intra-organic and relational discordance (*la discordance intra-organique et relationnelle*) during the first six months of life, when he bears the neurological and humoral signs of a physiological prematurity at birth (*les signes, neurologiques et humoraux, d’une prématuration natale physiologique*).¹⁴

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¹¹ Lacan, “*Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu*,” p. 41.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, “*Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique*,” *Écrits*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 94. Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” p. 76.

¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, “*L’agressivité en psychanalyse*,” *Écrits*, p. 113; Lacan, “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” p. 92.

Between this *écrit* and that on the mirror stage, the adjectives “affective” and “libidinal” alternately modify, in 1948 and 1949 respectively, the “dynamism” serving as a pre-condition for the advent of this founding event of ego-level identification, with all its denaturalizing consequences (as “a gestalt” with “formative effects on an organism”¹⁵) for the future vicissitudes of the human creature. Almost certainly, Lacan, apropos this topic at least, considers these adjectives to be roughly equivalent insofar as the dynamizing push of the young subject-to-be into the seductive pull of the mirror’s virtual reality is a force generated by the combined powers of the libidinal (i.e., motivations) and the affective (i.e., emotions). As the above quotation proceeds to stipulate, certain emotions (specifically the “distress” of negative ones such as fear, anger, anxiety, envy, jealousy, hatred, rage, and the like) motivate the child to invest itself in the “gestalt” of “an ideal unity, a salutary imago.” Furthermore, Lacan undeniably situates this dual catalytic configuration of the affective/emotional and the libidinal/motivational as an effect or outgrowth of ontogenetically primordial biological factors, namely, as the preceding quoted passage has it, “the child’s intra-organic and relational discordance during the first six months of life, when he bears the neurological and humoral signs of a physiological prematurity at birth.”

Subsequent moments within “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis” underscore the ground-zero status of such bio-material conditions. A few pages after the immediately prior block quotation, another paragraph adds:

A specific satisfaction, based on the integration of an original organic chaos (*un désarroi organique originel*), corresponds to the *Urbild* of this formation, alienating as it may be due to its function of rendering foreign. This satisfaction must be conceived of in the dimension of a vital dehiscence (*une déhiscence vitale*) constitutive of man and makes unthinkable the idea of an environment that is preformed for him; it is a “negative” libido that enables the Heraclitean notion of Discord – which the Epehsean held to be prior to harmony – to shine once more.¹⁶

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This is reiterated in the mirror stage *écrit*:

¹⁵ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” p. 77.

¹⁶ Lacan, “*L’agressivité en psychanalyse*,” p. 116; Lacan, “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” p. 94.

In man... this relationship to nature is altered by a certain dehiscence at the very heart of the organism, a primordial Discord (*une certaine déhiscence de l'organisme en son sein... une Discorde primordiale*) betrayed by the signs of malaise and motor unco-ordination of the neonatal months. The objective (*objective*) notions of the anatomical incompleteness (*inachèvement*) of the pyramidal tracts and of certain humoral residues of the maternal organism in the newborn confirm my view that we find in man a veritable *specific prematurity of birth*.¹⁷

Taking these two extremely similar passages from the same period in the late 1940s together, Lacan posits an “objective incompleteness” (i.e., an actual absence in biological reality of completeness *qua* harmony, synthesis, etc.) as a primary negative *Urgrund* of ontogenetic subject formation. In terms of anatomy, physiology, and neurology (i.e., the three life-scientific dimensions mentioned explicitly by Lacan), the biology of the newborn human “organism” – this “original,” “primordial” foundation of bio-material facticity is, as Lacan puts it in 1949, “prior to... social determination,”¹⁸ “prior to... social dialectic” as “an organic inadequacy of his [man’s] natural reality” (*une insuffisance organique de sa réalité naturelle*)¹⁹ – entails prematurational helplessness, among other conditions. The neonate’s discombobulated dependence is precisely a lack of anatomical, physiological, and neurological maturation sufficient for it to survive without the sustained, substantial assistance of significantly older conspecifics (who bring with them enveloping Imaginary-Symbolic realities into which they hurl this fragile, vulnerable little being). In “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” the *écrit* encapsulating the essentials of Lacan’s third seminar on *The Psychoses* (1955–1956), the “specific prematurity of birth in man” is directly equated with the baby’s “fragmented body” (*corps morcelé*), a natural reality throwing the young child into the mirror stage and its “counter-natural features” (*contre-nature*).²⁰ Additionally, one should note

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¹⁷ Lacan, “*Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique*,” p. 96; Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” p. 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁹ Lacan, “*Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique*,” p. 96; Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” p. 77.

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, “*D’une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose*,” *Écrits*, p. 552; Jacques Lacan, “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” *Écrits*, p. 461.

here the self-subverting dialectical character of a nature that aids and abets its own effacement by “counter-nature,” namely, a natural auto-denaturalization peculiar to the (species-)being (*Gattungswesen*) of humanity.²¹ Much later, in his twenty-fourth seminar, Lacan again utilizes the phrase “*contre-nature*.”²² Likewise, in his 1958 *écrit* “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power,” he speaks of “*antiphysis*.”²³ I soon will return to these themes below.

As I observed earlier, the hybrid constellations of affective emotions and libidinal motivations making the immature subject-to-be interested in and receptive to the mediations of external identifications are provoked by the state of *Hilflosigkeit*, itself a brute (and brutal) biological fact. And, this initial bodily state is anorganic in my precise sense, in that Lacan qualifies it as an “intra-organic discordance,” “an original organic chaos” situated “at the very heart of the organism” (in Lacan’s first foray into the English language, the 1951 paper “Some Reflections on the Ego” presenting the mirror stage to the members of the British Psycho-Analytical Society, he similarly underlines an “organic disturbance and discord”²⁴). In other words, what is at stake here is an immanent dialectical/speculative negation of the organic that nevertheless is not simply a reversion to the inorganic, namely, a disruption of organicity arising from within its own (dis)organization (with the words “organ,” “organic,” and “organism” being etymologically tied to the idea of “organization”).²⁵ The human organism’s preliminary default lack of organic organization (i.e., coordination, integration, wholeness, and the like) is a privative/negative cause, one with ontological standing as both real and material, necessary for helping to set in motion the trajectory running from natural substance to more-than-natural subjectivity (I will clarify and defend my use of this sort of [quasi-]naturalist and Hegelian language subsequently). At one point in 1955’s “The Freudian Thing,” Lacan’s realist materialism and carefully qualified naturalism surface when he describes

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²¹ Adrian Johnston, “This is orthodox Marxism: The Shared Materialist *Weltanschauung* of Marx and Engels,” *Quaderni materialisti*, 2012, special issue: “On Sebastiano Timpanaro” [forthcoming]; Adrian Johnston, “From Scientific Socialism to Socialist Science: *Naturdialektik* Then and Now,” *Communism, A New Beginning?*, ed. Slavoj Žižek, London: Verso, 2013 [forthcoming]; Adrian Johnston, *A Weak Nature Alone: Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume Two*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press [under review].

²² Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV*, session of April 19th, 1977.

²³ Lacan, “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principles of Its Power,” p. 514.

²⁴ Lacan, “Some Reflections on the Ego,” p. 15.

²⁵ Johnston, “Drive Between Brain and Subject”.

the distinguishing anorganicity of the human organism as “the congenital gap presented by man’s real being in his natural relations” (*la béance congénitale que présente l’être réel de l’homme dans ses relations naturelles*).²⁶ Consistent with my concept of the anorganic,²⁷ Lacan, at the same moment in this *écrit* when he affirms a materialist quasi-naturalism, simultaneously breaks with the scientific *Weltanschauung* of organicism generally holding sway in biology and its branches by deriding “the organism’s pseudo-totality” (*la pseudo-totalité de l’organisme*)²⁸ – hence Lacan’s repeated warnings against picturing humans, their bodies included, as sums or wholes (akin to Aristotelian souls).²⁹

In the first sentence of the last paragraph of “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan speaks of a “formidable crack” (*formidable lézarde*) in the human being that “goes right to the very depths of his being” (*jusqu’au fond de l’être*).³⁰ Just a few years later in a glossing of the mirror stage in “*Le mythe individuel du névrosé, ou Poésie et vérité dans la névrose*” (1952), he again talks about “the original chaos of all the motor and affective functions of the first six months after birth” (*le désarroi originel de toutes les fonctions motrices et affectives qui est celui des six premiers mois après la naissance*), “a profound insufficiency” (*une profonde insuffisance*), and “a crack, an original tearing, a dereliction” (*une*

²⁶ Jacques Lacan, “*La chose freudienne ou Sens du retour à Freud en psychanalyse*,” *Écrits*, p. 415; Jacques Lacan, “The Freudian Thing or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis,” *Écrits*, p. 346.

²⁷ Johnston, “Drive Between Brain and Subject”.

²⁸ Lacan, “*La chose freudienne ou Sens du retour à Freud en psychanalyse*,” *Écrits*, p. 415. Lacan, “The Freudian Thing or the Meaning of the Return to Freud in Psychoanalysis,” *Écrits*, p. 346.

²⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X: L’angoisse, 1962–1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004, pp. 253–254; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XII: Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse, 1964–1965*, unpublished typescript, session of March 10th, 1965; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIV: La logique du fantasme, 1966–1967*, unpublished typescript, session of June 7th, 1967. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Bruce Fink, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998, pp. 109–110; Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXI*, session of November 20th, 1973; Jacques Lacan, “Television,” trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, *Television/A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990, p. 6; Jacques Lacan, “Aristotle’s Dream,” trans. Lorenzo Chiesa, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 11, no. 3, December 2006, pp. 83–84.

³⁰ Lacan, “*L’agressivité en psychanalyse*,” p. 124. Lacan, “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis,” p. 101.

fêlure... un déchirement originel... une dérégulation).³¹ And, in a 1955 session of his second seminar on *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (1954–1955), the mirror stage is grounded in humans' biological inclination toward a transcendence of their biology by virtue of a "biological gap" (*béance biologique*) internal and inherent to their very being.³² Near the close of this session, Lacan unfurls a thread of continuity between Freud's radical revision of analytic drive theory in 1920's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (in which ferocious clashes originating within the Id between *Eros* and the *Todestrieb* split human beings right down to their bare bones and raw flesh) and the riven bio-material roots of human subjectivity.³³

As is common knowledge amongst Lacan's readers, the phrase "body-in-pieces" (*corps morcelé*) is how, from the mid-1930s through the mid-1950s, he tends to designate much of what is summarized in the preceding.³⁴ However, what is not so well appreciated is that Lacan does not restrict this phrase's significance to that of a label for an exclusively phenomenological description of the neonate's experience of his/her lived embodiment. Although, as conceded earlier, a phenomenology of embodied emotions and motivations indeed is part of what Lacan's ontogenetic narratives associate with the anatomical, physiological, and neurological prematuration of newborns, his metapsychological theories of the interlinked emergences of ego and subject ultimately rest, when all is said and done, on the objective grounds of bio-material (i.e., non-phenomenological) bases (and, these grounds would have to be Real for Lacan to the extent that, as seen, they precede the Symbolic of socio-linguistic mediation as well as the Imaginary of experiential phenomena). A quite striking indication of this is to

³¹ Jacques Lacan, "Le mythe individuel du névrosé, ou Poésie et vérité dans la névrose," *Le mythe individuel du névrosé*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007, p. 46.

³² Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre II: Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978, p. 371; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988, pp. 322–323.

³³ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, p. 326.

³⁴ Lacan, "Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu," pp. 33–35, 41–42; Lacan, "Some Reflections on the Ego," p. 13, 15; Jacques Lacan, "On My Antecedents," *Écrits*, p. 55; Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," p. 76, 78; Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis," p. 92; Lacan, "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," p. 461; Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VI*, session of January 7th, 1959.

be found in black and white within the pages of the renowned 1949 mirror stage *écrit* itself.³⁵ Virtually unseen beneath the noses of this text's countless readers complacently assuming Lacan to be a certain sort of uncompromising anti-naturalist thoroughly hostile toward the life sciences, he directly and explicitly connects the body-in-pieces to "the cerebral cortex" of "the central nervous system," depicting this brain region as what "psychosurgical operations will lead us to regard as the intra-organic mirror"³⁶ (with this amounting to a prediction of the eventual discovery, almost fifty years later, of the serendipitously christened "mirror neurons"³⁷). In other words, Lacan does not limit himself to an analytic phenomenology divorced from, or even opposed to, biology and its branches (such as anatomy, physiology, and neurology). Instead, he ambitiously contests the spontaneous organicist picture-thinking of the life sciences on their own scientific terrain, with his *corps morcelé* incarnating, among other things, an intra-scientific critique of pseudo-scientific imaginings of fictitious syntheses and totalities.³⁸

The themes I am subsuming under the heading of the anorganic persist into Lacan's work of the late 1950s and 1960s. Two essays in the *Écrits*, "Remarks on Daniel Lagache's Presentation: 'Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure'" (1960) and "On My Antecedents" (1966), contain contents relevant to the present discussion. In his response to Lagache, Lacan walks a fine line between the natural and the non-natural:

It is... worth recalling that, from the outset, Freud did not attribute *the slightest reality* as a differentiated apparatus in the organism to any of the systems in either of his topographies. For people forget to draw therefrom the corollary that, by the same token, he forbade us to force any of these systems back into the fantasized reality of any sort of "totality" of the organism (*la réalité fantasmée d'une quelconque « totalité » de l'organisme*). In short, the structure of which I am speaking has nothing to do with

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³⁵ Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature," pp. 164–170; Johnston, "Drive Between Brain and Subject".

³⁶ Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," p. 78.

³⁷ Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*, trans. Frances Anderson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. xi-xii; Johnston, "The Weakness of Nature," p. 164–170; Johnston, "Drive Between Brain and Subject".

³⁸ Johnston, "Drive Between Brain and Subject".

the idea of the “structure of the organism,” as supported by the most soundly based facts in *Gestalt* theory. Not that structure, in the strict sense of the term, does not take advantage of gaps in the organic *Gestalt* to submit it to itself (*Non que la structure au sens propre ne profite des béances de la Gestalt organique pour se l'asservir*). But on the basis of their conjunctions, whether they prove to be based on fission or fissures, a heterogeneity between two orders appears, which we will be less tempted to mask if we grasp its principle.³⁹

Lacan’s familiar anti-naturalist refrains obviously are audible at the start of this quotation in his interpretive insistence on the independence of Freud’s topographies (whether the first or the second) *vis-à-vis* the anatomy and physiology of the human body as a piece of nature falling under the explanatory jurisdiction of the natural sciences. Consistent with his self-appointed role as the lone orthodox Freudian of his time, Lacan portrays his own notion of “structure” (materialized by symbolic orders as the “objective spirit” of external socio-linguistic arrangements) as testifying to an all-too-rare fidelity to this Freud in particular. However, in the preceding quotation, Lacan’s position is much more subtle and nuanced than that of a straightforward, unqualified anti-naturalism. And, this delicately maintained stance pivots around the matter of how to conceive of the theme of the organic in relation to real human organisms. The second sentence of this passage from the *écrit* on Lagache prohibits interfacing components of analytic metapsychology specifically with “the fantasized reality of any sort of ‘totality’ of the organism.” That is to say, Lacan here worries more about scientism (i.e., the imagined One-Alls of organicism as proto-conceptual picture thinking) than science (i.e., the actual biology of flesh-and-blood human animals) in terms of potential perils posed to the theory and practice of analysis. In the immediately following sentence, he vehemently underscores that, “the structure of which I am speaking has nothing to do with the idea of the ‘structure of the organism.’” Here, the etymology of the word “organism” should be recalled. Insofar as its etymological origins signify “organization,” the phrase “structure of the organism” arguably is a pleonasm synonymous with “‘totality’ of the organism.” Hence, Lacan’s denial of metapsychological ties to the natural body target precisely this *corps* as *non-morcelé qua* totalized or structured in the sense of organically organized, namely, as envisioned under the influence of

³⁹ Jacques Lacan, “*Remarque sur le rapport de Daniel Lagache: ‘Psychanalyse et structure de la personnalité’*,” *Écrits*, p. 650; Jacques Lacan, “Remarks on Daniel Lagache’s Presentation: ‘Psychoanalysis and Personality Structure,’” *Écrits*, p. 545.

organicism, with its lop-sided emphases on motifs of balance, harmony, wholeness, and the like. Organicists would count amongst those whom Lacan, in his contemporaneous *écrit* “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality,” curtly dismisses in their implicit claims for themselves of “a messianic access to decisive chemisms” (*un accès messianique à des chimismes décisifs*), with “decisive chemisms” partly alluding to the eighteenth-century motif of “elective affinities.”⁴⁰ His later 1970s-era reflections on the non-existent *rapport sexuel* (as an elective affinity between the sexes) similarly are extrapolated into an indictment of envisionings of Nature-with-a-capital-N as a Yin-Yang-style cosmic dance of complementary pairs mirroring (often unconscious) fantasies about masculinity and femininity.⁴¹

The subsequent fourth sentence of this excerpt from Lacan’s response to Lagache (“Not that structure, in the strict sense of the term, does not take advantage of gaps in the organic *Gestalt* to submit it to itself”) promptly reinforces this anorganic thrust in that it appeals to the fractured and fragmented body-in-pieces as a biological condition of possibility for denaturalizing/more-than-natural structure getting a grip on the anorganic “first nature” of the human organism (i.e., for the signifiers of the big Other overwriting the real bodily being of the *parlêtre*-to-be). In his contemporaneous eighth seminar on *Transference* (1960-1961), Lacan echoes the claim made by this sentence, indicating that the combined material and phenomenal features of the *corps morcelé* establish necessary conditions for ego and subject formation. In resonance with intuitions long ago articulated by Schelling and Hegel,⁴² he stipulates:

In effect, if one starts from the notion of original narcissism, perfect as regards libidinal investment, if one conceives of the primordial object as primordially included by the subject in the narcissistic sphere, as a primitive monad of enjoyment (*jouissance*),

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⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan, “*Propos directifs pour un Congrès sur la sexualité féminine*,” *Écrits*, p. 726; Lacan, “Guiding Remarks for a Convention on Female Sexuality,” p. 611.

⁴¹ Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VIII*, p. 117; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969–1970*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Russell Grigg, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007, p. 33; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVIII: D’un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant, 1971*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007, pp. 65–71; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XIX: Le savoir du psychanalyste, 1971–1972*, unpublished typescript, session of March 3rd, 1972; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, pp. 41–43.

⁴² Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pp. 212–213.

with which is identified... the infant nursling (*nourrisson*), one has difficulty seeing what would be able to lead to a subjective way out (*une sortie subjective*)...⁴³

Put differently, without the absences and lacks built into the bio-material foundations of human nature in the form of the neonate's helpless anorganic *corps*, nothing would motivate an exit (i.e., "a subjective way out") from what would be an initial (i.e., "primordial") state of blissful, self-enclosed idiocy, an infantile paradise of perfectly and completely satisfying oceanic oneness (i.e., "the narcissistic sphere," "a primitive monad of enjoyment"). The newborn's body is inclined to open up to the impressions and intrusions of mediations imposed by others and Others – the immature child is prodded down the path of both acquiring an ego as well as becoming a subject – thanks to natural deficits Lacan connects to the *corps morcelé*.

The fifth and final sentence of the above block quotation from the Lagache *écrit* ("But on the basis of their conjunctions, whether they prove to be based on fission or fissures, a heterogeneity between two orders appears, which we will be less tempted to mask if we grasp its principle") deploys a dialectical/speculative conjunction of continuity (i.e., "conjunctions") and discontinuity (i.e., "heterogeneity"). The "two orders" to which Lacan refers are those of the endogenous body, as natural but anorganic, and exogenous structure, as non-natural but relying upon exploitable anorganic spots of receptive weakness in the child's living flesh. The dual dimensions of *phusis* and *antiphusis* collide at loci of paradoxical connection-in-disconnection which Lacan, in his later teachings, sometimes struggles to illustrate through recourse to select figures drawn from topology and knot theory.⁴⁴ They are enabled to meet up by and in the clearing of incomplete (human) nature, namely, through the anorganic cracks of negativities (whether the materials of a deficiently functional organism or the phenomena of negative affects) pervading the barred corpo-Real of the *corps morcelé*.

⁴³ Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VIII*, p. 410.

⁴⁴ Adrian Johnston, "Turning the Sciences Inside Out: Revisiting Lacan's 'Science and Truth,'" *Concept and Form, Volume Two: Interviews and Essays on the Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, ed. Peter Hallward and Knox Peden, London: Verso, 2012 [forthcoming]; François Ansermet, "Des neurosciences aux logosciences," *Qui sont vos psychanalystes?*, ed. Nathalie Georges, Jacques-Alain Miller, and Nathalie Marchaisson, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002, p. 382.

Turning to “On My Antecedents,” written by Lacan specifically for the publication of the *Écrits*, he therein revisits much of the analytic landscape surveyed here. His remarks in these veins are worth quoting in full. Addressing the mirror stage (i.e., “this phase”) as irreducible to “Gestalt theory and phenomenology,”⁴⁵ he elaborates:

Must this phase be reduced to a biological crisis (*une crise biologique*)? The dynamic of this phase, as I outline it, is based on diachronic effects: the delayed coordination of the nervous system (*retard de la coordination nerveuse*) related to man’s prematurity at birth, and the formal anticipation of its resolution. But to presume the existence of a harmony that is contradicted by many facts of ethology (*une harmonie que contredisant bien des faits de l’éthologie animale*) is tantamount to dupey. It masks the crux of a function of lack (*manque*) with the question of the place that this function can assume in a causal chain. Now, far from imagining eliminating it from it, I currently consider such a function to be the very origin of causalist noesis, which goes so far as to mistake it for its crossing into reality [*passage au réel*]. But to consider it effective due to its imaginary discordance is to still leave too much room for the presumption of birth. This function involves a more critical lack, its cover being the secret to the subject’s jubilation (*la jubilation du sujet*).⁴⁶

At this juncture, there should be little doubt that, although Lacan wishes to avoid reducing the analytic account of psychical ontogeny to its material underpinnings at the level of biology and its branches, his anti-reductivism is far from pushing him to the opposite extreme pole of an idealist or dualist denial of the relevance of these fields for analytic theories of emergent egos and subjects. The first two sentences quoted above make this abundantly clear. Furthermore, the ethology Lacan has in mind in the third sentence of this passage is that of the human animal in particular. Given “the delayed coordination of the nervous system related to man’s prematurity at birth, and the formal anticipation of its resolution” (i.e., the *Hilflosigkeit* of the *corps morcelé* as a factual biological real[ity]), the life sciences themselves problematize and invalidate the assumptions and suppositions of organicism as a non-scientific constellation of images and ideas frequently accompanying these same sciences (“But to presume the existence of a harmony that is contradicted by many facts of ethology is tanta-

⁴⁵ Lacan, “On My Antecedents,” p. 55.

⁴⁶ Jacques Lacan, “*Des nos antécédents*,” *Écrits*, pp. 69–70; Lacan, “On My Antecedents,” p. 55.

mount to dupery”). Lacan’s critique of organicist picture-thinking in biology is immanent and intra-scientific, rather than external and anti-scientific.

Taking the fourth and fifth sentences together (i.e., the third paragraph of this quotation from “On My Antecedents”), Lacan here seems to be confronting science insofar as it does not (yet) include psychoanalysis (to refer to a question Lacan raises during the same period of his teaching in the mid-1960s: “What would a science be that included psychoanalysis?”⁴⁷). Lacan’s main complaint in this confrontation appears to be the metaphysical bias of the modern sciences against the actual material efficacy of absences and lacks, a bias enshrined in what he refers to above as their “causalist noesis” (i.e., how they think the fundamental, science-grounding concept of causality); he diagnoses their constitutive blindness to fissures, gaps, negativities, and so on. At best, these empirical, experimental disciplines manage to register the tangible effects present in the material real (“to mistake it [the crux of a function of lack] for its crossing into reality”) of what Lacan recognizes as causally efficacious non-presences (i.e., absences relative to here-and-now physical bodies and their presently observable interactions). Post-Baconian/Galilean scientificity, with its questionable *apriori* positivist presentism, tends to demand “eliminating” the “function of lack.” Opposing this, Lacan tears aside the veils of a pseudo-scientific organicism tacitly leaning on non-empirical presentist presumptions “contradicted by many facts of ethology.” He does so through assigning a precise biological materialization of *manque-comme-cause* (i.e., the absence of sufficient harmony and maturation intrinsic to the anorganic bodily being of the newborn human organism) a crucial load-bearing position in the analytic architecture of his theoretical apparatus. As realist, materialist, and quasi-naturalist, this *manque-comme-cause* is also *manque-comme-être* (to modify Lacan’s *manque-à-être*).

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The last two sentences of the preceding quoted passage further reinforce my reading of Lacan as spelled out in this intervention. The sixth (“But to consider

⁴⁷ Jacques Lacan, “*Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse: Compte rendu du séminaire 1964*,” *Autres écrits*, p. 187; Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977, p. 7; Johnston, “Turning the Sciences Inside Out”; Adrian Johnston, *The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy: Prolegomena to Any Future Materialism, Volume One*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013 [forthcoming].

it effective due to its imaginary discordance is to still leave too much room for the presumption of birth”) undeniably warns against reducing the model of the body-in-pieces from the mirror stage to being merely a phenomenological description of neonatal experiences of negative affects and the intentions they motivate. Twentieth-century phenomenology proceeds from Husserlian resistance to the sweeping expansions of the rapidly advancing natural sciences and continues with Heideggerian rubbishing and bemoaning of their relevance. Lacan’s refusal of biologicistic reductivism by no means drives him into the company of such phenomenological and/or existentialist neo-romantics. In fact, here, he insists that limiting the *corps morcelé* to being a non-biological experience of embodiment separate and distinct from the biological body implicitly concedes to the latter a wholeness and unity that the very biology of the human organism indicates it does not enjoy. That is to say, for Lacan, finding disharmony solely within the sphere of the subjective states described by phenomenology strongly hints at a presupposition to the effect that the objective material real in and of itself is harmonious (i.e., “the presumption of birth” as an assumption that the neonate’s biological body, by ostensible contrast with its fragmented embodied experience, is at least an organic-*qua*-organized organism). In this context, Lacan’s observations insinuate that, as regards modern science, phenomenology and its offshoots are simultaneously too radical (in their anti-naturalist turnings away from the sciences) and not radical enough (in these turnings away, conceding “too much” to the fields thus abandoned). Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, promises the initiation of the pursuit of an immanent critique of modern science through which this amazingly powerful edifice can be transformed significantly without, for all that, being indefensibly neglected or untenably dismissed.

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In the seventh and final sentence of the prior quotation from “On My Antecedents” (“This function involves a more critical lack, its cover being the secret to the subject’s jubilation”), the “more critical lack” to which Lacan refers is that of the bio-material real(ity) of the *corps morcelé* independent of any and every phenomenal experience of emotions or motivations. Admittedly, not all of the affects included in Lacan’s narrations of the mirror stage are negative. The primary positive feeling manifest in this stage is the “jubilation” (the 1949

écrit speaks of a “jubilant assumption” [*assomption jubilatoire*]⁴⁸) expressed by the joyful, playful quality of the infant’s “*Aha-Erlebnis*” moment of recognizing its reflection.⁴⁹ In 1966, Lacan emphasizes that this upsurge of enthusiasm is symptomatic of the eclipsing and obfuscation (i.e., “its cover”) of the body-in-pieces *qua* barred corpo-Real by the “mirages” and “phantoms” of the register of the Imaginary.⁵⁰ Preferences for the fictions of organic harmony bear indirect witness to aversions for the facts of anorganic disharmony.

Thus far, I have illuminated a consistent red thread of interrelated thoughts running uninterrupted through Lacan’s intellectual itinerary from the 1930s to the 1970s. I can begin bringing my anorganicist interpretation of Lacan to a close with a final reference to the *écrit* on the mirror stage. Therein, he states:

These reflections lead me to recognize in the spatial capture manifested by the mirror stage, the effect in man, even prior to this social dialectic, of an organic inadequacy of his natural reality – assuming we can give some meaning to the word “nature.”⁵¹

My hunch is that Lacan’s hesitations apropos talking about “nature” have to do with his awareness of just how overloaded this word is with fantasmatic and propagandistic baggage. The Imaginary projections of a conflict-averse organicism place every appeal to anything “natural” under the threat of immediate (mis)appropriation by those dreaming of unreal onenesses, namely, those having faith in non-existent big Others that would not be barred. Very much in line with this early concern of his, the Lacan of the 1970s characterizes nature as “not one” (*pas une*).⁵² In terms of the human organism, this not-oneness amounts to an affirmation of its anorganicity. During the same period, he similarly urges reconceptualizing the very notion of “nature” as strangely unnatural insofar as this reconception markedly deviates from long-standing imaginings regarding nature.⁵³ In jarring dissonance with the pleasant, soothing associations with

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⁴⁸ Lacan, “*Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu’elle nous est révélée dans l’expérience psychanalytique*,” p. 94; Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” p. 76.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵² Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIII*, p. 12.

⁵³ Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXI*, session of May 21st, 1974; Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV*, session of May 17th, 1977.

which (w)holistic fantasizings dress up all things said to be natural, the late Lacan, in a 1977 session of his twenty-fourth seminar (*L'insu que sait de l'une-bévue s'aile à mourre* [1976-1977]), depicts nature as a "rotteness" (*pourriture*) out of which oozes culture *qua antiphusis*.⁵⁴ The exemplar of this wounded nature from which denaturalizations "bubble forth" (*bouillonner*)⁵⁵ is nothing other than human nature as materialized by the incomplete *corps morcelé* first theorized by Lacan in the 1930s.

Earlier, I claimed that Lacan's anorganic barred corpo-Real of the body-in-pieces provides a link perhaps missing between the Hegelian philosophies of nature and spirit/mind (*Geist*). I hence asserted that it would be both possible and productive to insert my anorganicist recasting of a certain Lacan back into Hegel's *Realphilosophie*. Fortuitously, Lacan himself, in his 1955 *écrit* "Variations on the Standard Treatment," hints at this. Elaborating on the "experiences" transpiring in the mirror stage (including those of a kind already described in Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* in connection with the "master/slave dialectic"⁵⁶), he maintains:

But if these experiences – which can be seen in animals too at many moments in their instinctual cycles, and especially in the preliminary displays of the reproductive cycle, with all the lures and aberrations these experiences involve – in fact open onto this signification in order to durably structure the human subject, it is because they receive this signification from the tension stemming from the impotence (*impuissance*) proper to the prematurity of birth, by which naturalists characterize the specificity of man's anatomical development – a fact that helps us grasp the dehiscence from natural harmony (*cette déhiscence de l'harmonie naturelle*), required by Hegel to serve as the fruitful illness, life's happy fault, in which man, distinguishing himself from his essence, discovers his existence (*la maladie féconde, la faute heureuse de la vie, où l'homme, à se distinguer de son essence, découvre son existence*).⁵⁷

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Characteristically, Lacan does not bother to furnish his readers with specific citations from Hegel's works. But, considering his indebtedness to Alexandre

⁵⁴ Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XXIV*, session of May 17th, 1977.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jacques Lacan, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," *Écrits*, p. 286.

⁵⁷ Jacques Lacan, "Variantes de la cure-type," *Écrits*, p. 345; Lacan, "Variations on the Standard Treatment," p. 286.

Kojève's version of the *Phenomenology* and his explicit mention of the dialectic between master and slave on the same page of the *Écrits*, Lacan probably is thinking here of the portions of this 1807 text's section on "Self-Consciousness" preceding the sub-section addressing "lordship and bondage" proper; in the opening pages of this section, Hegel portrays natural desiring life as plagued by monotonous dissatisfactions and futile struggles.⁵⁸ That noted, Lacan's choice of the noun "impotence" (*impuissance*) fortuitously echoes Hegel's motif of the impotence (*Ohnmacht*) of nature.⁵⁹ For both authors, a natural clearing is held open for the arising of more-than-natural transcendences-in-immanence thanks to material nature's "weakness" (Hegel) and "rotteness" (Lacan). At the end of the above quotation, Lacan's allusion to Sartrean existentialism (itself influenced by the Kojévian Hegel) indicates that, from a Lacanian perspective, there indeed is an essence that precedes existence (to contradict Sartre⁶⁰). But, this essential (and yet not-One/non-All) nature is not all that natural in any standard naturalist, positivist, and/or presentist senses (the senses Sartre presumes as regards talk of essences in conjunction with the natural sciences). In fact, it is pervaded by negativities both materially real and experientially palpable, hence driving the initially biological being beyond a biology it finds unbearable ("man, distinguishing himself from his essence, discovers his existence").

Despite my solidarity with the facets of Lacan's thinking I have unpacked above guided by the idea of the anorganic, I consider his accounts of the emergences of ego and subject to suffer from a major shortcoming: their exclusively ontogenetic status. As I illustrate and criticize elsewhere, Lacan, wavering between epistemological and ontological justifications, strictly prohibits phylogenetic hypotheses and investigations as illegitimate and out of bounds, at least within the limits of psychoanalysis proper as he conceives it. In my critique of Lacan's forbidding of inquiries into phylogeny, I point out how this highly contentious circumscription of the scope of analytic thought leads Lacan – he self-identifies as an atheist and, following Freud, considers psychoanalytic theory and prac-

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⁵⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 104–111.

⁵⁹ Johnston, "The Voiding of Weak Nature".

⁶⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* [trans. Philip Mairet], London: Methuen, 1948, p. 27–28, 42–43.

tice to be atheistic in a number of ways⁶¹ – into having direct recourse to Biblical and Christian references. More specifically, in line with his ban on raising queries regarding the historical origins of language and connected social structures, he permits himself an affirmation of the statement “In the beginning was the Word”⁶² and overtly portrays the advent of the symbolic order, a creative genesis obfuscated and mystified by the Lacanian law against all things phylogenetic, as the descent of the “Holy Spirit” down into the world.⁶³ For any atheist materialist, Lacan included, this should be deeply troubling.⁶⁴

Dovetailing with this side of the Lacanianism with which I take issue, Jacques-Alain Miller proclaims that, “nothingness enters reality through language.”⁶⁵ My preceding expositions in this intervention show that such a thesis does not actually fit Lacan himself overall, especially considering the latter’s realist and materialist depictions of negativities manifest in core concepts of his like the body-in-pieces. However, this stated, Miller’s proclamation indeed is able to prop itself up against select sides of Lacan’s teachings. What Miller and the version of Lacan he relies on represent is, I contend, a dogma particularly widespread in Continental European philosophy/theory, infected as these intellectual traditions have been and still remain with various idealist, romanticist, and negative theological tendencies both avowed and disavowed. Modifying a turn of phrase from American Analytic philosopher Wilfrid Sellars’ seminal 1956 essay “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” I consider the most suitable label for this dogma “the myth of the non-given.”

⁶¹ Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre X*, pp. 357–358; Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI: D’un Autre à l’autre, 1968–1969*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006, pp. 280–281; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII*, p. 119.

⁶² Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Dennis Porter, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992, pp. 213–214; Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre VIII*, p. 12; Jacques Lacan, “Discours de Rome,” *Autres écrits*, p. 135; Jacques Lacan, “Du symbole, et de sa fonction religieuse,” *Le mythe individuel du névrosé, ou poésie et vérité dans la névrose*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007, p. 60.

⁶³ Lacan, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre IV*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ Adrian Johnston, “On Deep History and Lacan,” *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, 2012, special issue: “Lacan and Philosophy: The New Generation”, ed. Lorenzo Chiesa [forthcoming]; Johnston, *The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*.

⁶⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller, “Language: Much Ado About What?,” *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, ed. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan and Mark Bracher, New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 32.

This myth lurks at the basis of each and every appeal to an unexplained factual givenness of the non-given *qua* absence, lack, negativity, and so on. Apropos a theory of subjectivity (which is my focus in this context), its supporting background presence is borne witness to by dogmatic invocations of an irreducible, unanalyzable Nothingness as the primordial privative cause of the subject (or even as the subject itself). No matter how seemingly sophisticated and intricate the jargonistic gesticulating, these invocations boil down, when all is said and done, to vulgar foot stamping and fist banging.

As regards the myth of the non-given in relation to certain theories of subjectivity, a bond of complicity is established between them at the dawn of Renaissance humanism with its founding document, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's 1486 oration "On the Dignity of Man." Therein, Pico della Mirandola describes human beings, as distinct from all other creatures and creations, as specially endowed by God with a strange, peculiar natureless nature, an inner absence of form unlike that to be found anywhere else in the abundant, overflowing fullness of the rest of the formed world. Through top-down divine fiat alone, an abyssal groundlessness of pure negativity becomes the metaphysical spark of humans in their crown-of-creation dignity; a rock-bottom emptiness of otherworldly provenance is the privative *Ur*-cause of humanity's distinctiveness.⁶⁶

Jumping ahead to the past century, ostensibly irreligious minds continue to propagate, without critical modifications, permutations of Pico della Mirandola's mythical, theological story of uniquely-human voidedness. In the Continental Europe of the previous one-hundred years generally and in France particularly, atheists and non-atheists, humanists and anti-humanists, and partisans of a range of other apparently incommensurable or incompatible theoretical orientations faithfully reproduce this narrative with varying degrees of self-awareness. Even when decoupled from the Christian framework of "On the Dignity of Man," assertions of an *ex nihilo*, always-already-there absence, lack, nothingness, void, etc. at and as the heart of subjectivity perpetuate the religious vices of dogmatism, mystification, and obscurantism. Through dependence on the myth of the non-given, those putting forward

⁶⁶ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "On the Dignity of Man," *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, Paul J.W. Miller, and Douglas Carmichael, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998, pp. 4-7, 10-11.

these assertions either rest on positings of *apriori* metaphysical “unexplained explainers” or capriciously balk at thinking their way through to the underlying foundations of their positions.

Lacan and Lacanians, insofar as they staunchly refuse to contemplate the lengthier stretches of human and natural histories (as in phylogenesis and evolution) anyone with sound scientific sensibilities presumes gave rise to contemporary humanity, evince belief in a mythical givenness of negativity as non-given. Apart from the idealist and anti-naturalist variants of Lacanianism against which I have argued, even on the most sympathetic materialist, quasi-naturalist reading of Lacan (which I tried to offer), he continues to be guilty of investment in this myth. Within his purely ontogenetic picture, the infant’s *corps morcelé* is referred to as if it were the ultimate givenness of a ground-zero origin incapable of further explanation (save for ahistorical, idealist talk about big Others as eternally pre-existing, phylogenetically inexplicable symbolic orders into which conception and birth throws children⁶⁷). Severed from its natural connections with phylogenetic and evolutionary histories, the pre-rationally helpless body-in-pieces of ontogeny darkens into being an opaque bedrock of false, fictional absoluteness. The myth of the non-given hides itself poorly in the cracks and gaps of this barred corpo-Real. If these specters of negativities are not to be exorcized completely after being flushed out of these nooks and crannies within bodies, what is to be done with them? How are they to be rightly situated? To be crystal clear, I do not intend to overturn Lacan’s rich dissections of embodiment. Instead, I merely aim to demonstrate that his reflections on these matters are indefensibly incomplete and in need of substantial supplementary supports of sorts with which he likely would not be comfortable (about which I will say more shortly).

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Other figures culpable of providing philosophical refuge and cover for a mysticism of negativity are not hard to identify. Apart from Lacan, his existentialist contemporaries Heidegger, with his unfathomable sendings and ecstatic clearings of Being, and Sartre, with his unnaturally essenceless existences, are obvious examples (for reasons I go into at length on other occasions,⁶⁸ I

⁶⁷ Johnston, “On Deep History and Lacan”; Johnston, *The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*.

⁶⁸ Johnston, “The Voiding of Weak Nature”; Johnston, “This is orthodox Marxism”; Johnston, “From Scientific Socialism to Socialist Science”; Johnston, *A Weak Nature Alone*.

do not consider Hegel and Marx, despite possible appearances to the contrary, culpable of repeating or resting upon appeals to mystical negativities in the manners I am objecting to in this setting). Flashing forward to today, Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben are two living philosophers influenced by these predecessors and, under such influences, embellishing upon the myth of the non-given (Slavoj Žižek too sometimes flirts with the danger of continued fidelity to the idol of this mysterious Nothingness⁶⁹). Agamben's human being is a "man without content," a de-essentialized openness (as first glimpsed by Pico della Mirandola, to whom Agamben waves) whose always-second "nature" is continually subjected to ongoing constructions and reconstructions putting to work its unworkable, inexhaustible potentialities.⁷⁰ Similarly, Badiou's human being is a "voided animal" to be thought by a new "inhumanism" combining Sartre's humanism and the anti-humanism of Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault. Badiou equally praises these four French forerunners of his for their unflinching opposition to "a bad Darwin," although he has yet to indicate whether, for him, there is such a thing as a "good Darwin" and, if so, what he would look like and what relevance, if any, he would have for Badiouian philosophy. In short, unlike all other animals, Badiou's voided animal cannot be addressed by naturalism, purportedly calling instead for anti-naturalist (one might be tempted to say "supernaturalist") engagements.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, pp. 186–190; Adrian Johnston, "Naturalism or anti-naturalism? No, thanks—both are worse!": Science, Materialism, and Slavoj Žižek," *La Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 2012, special issue: "On Slavoj Žižek" [forthcoming]; Adrian Johnston, "A Critique of Natural Economy: Quantum Physics with Žižek," *Žižek Now*, ed. Jamil Khader and Molly Rothenberg, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012 [forthcoming]. Adrian Johnston, *Adventures in Transcendental Materialism: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013 [forthcoming].

⁷⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, pp. 65–72; Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, pp. 16, 21–22, 26, 29–30; Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011, pp. 245–246, 251.

⁷¹ Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, pp. 174–177. Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano, London: Continuum, 2009, p. 114; Adrian Johnston, "What Matter(s) in Ontology: Alain Badiou, the Hebb-Event, and Materialism Split from Within," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 13, no. 1, April 2008, pp. 27–49. Johnston, *The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*.

The surfacing of Darwin's name at this juncture is fortuitous and fitting. Apart from Kant and Hegel as its twin fountainheads, the vast bulk of what has come to be known as "Continental philosophy" springs from the (un)holy trinity of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud (*à la* Paul Ricoeur's three great "hermeneuts of suspicion"⁷²). In my estimation, the almost blanket neglect of Darwin by these philosophical orientations leveraged to the authority of this triumvirate of his approximate contemporaries is symptomatic of a swarm of intellectual and ideological problems plaguing various strains of Continental philosophy and its offshoots (in the concluding paragraphs of this piece, I will restrict myself to highlighting selectively and in passing a few of the biggest difficulties these aversions to Darwin and naturalism generate for the kinds of theories of subjectivity dealt with above). Ironically, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, unlike so many of their self-proclaimed successors, do not downplay or ignore Darwin's immense significance.

Whereas the majority of Continental philosophers of the past century underestimate the far-reaching radicality of the Darwinian revolution, a sizable number of Analytic philosophers tend to the opposite extreme of overestimating it (along with Hegel, the figure of Darwin marks a fork of fundamental divergence between the Continental and Analytic traditions). Although I have reservations about hyperbole in Daniel Dennett's trumpeting of Darwinian evolutionary theory as a "universal acid,"⁷³ I readily acknowledge the incredible potency and magnitude of the Darwin-event (to employ Badiou's language in a fashion he himself probably would not). My wager is that dispelling the myth of the non-given while nonetheless preserving its insistence on an intimate rapport between subjectivity and negativity – as should be obvious by now, my antipathy toward mystical varieties of lack(s) by no means entails my sympathy toward lack-denying positivisms, presentisms, organicisms, or anything else in these scientific veins – demands evolutionary-phylogenetic explanations of the natural emergences of the denaturalized/more-than-natural negativities inherent to existent subjects *qua* subjectivity proper (i.e., as

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⁷² Paul Ricoeur, "Consciousness and the Unconscious", trans. Willis Domingo, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, London: Continuum, 2004, p. 97; Paul Ricoeur, "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture", trans. Willis Domingo, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 143–147.

⁷³ Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life*, New York: Touchstone, 1995, pp. 61–84, 521.

irreducible to garden variety, pseudo-scientific naturalisms). For any philosophical or psychoanalytic system reconciled with the natural sciences and allied with (historical/dialectical) materialism, a rapprochement with Darwin's ideas is requisite.⁷⁴

With respect to the Lacan discussed at length earlier in this intervention, a non-mystical, thoroughly materialist account (one that refrains from conjuring up anything along the lines of the Holy Spirit) of the historical genesis of the ontogenetic ground-zero of the bio-material body-in-pieces needs the help of Darwin and his evolutionary-theoretic heirs. Without accepting such assistance, Lacanianism leaves itself divided from within by an unsustainable self-contradiction in which it is split between ontogenetic atheism and phylogenetic theism. On this matter, a choice formally configured as a Badiouian "point" (i.e., a decision between two irreconcilable alternatives with no third way available) thrusts itself forward⁷⁵: In the terms of heavy-handed American popular culture wars bumper sticker sloganeering, this is a choice between the Jesus fish and the Darwin amphibian.

Also related to the concocted controversies surrounding evolution in America's absurd culture wars, neuroscientist David Linden lays out an elegantly simple and utterly devastating argument against anti-Darwinian proponents of so-called "intelligent design."⁷⁶ In his 2007 book *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God*, he represents the human central nervous system as a "kludge" – "The brain is... a kludge... a design that is inefficient, inelegant, and unfathomable, but that nevertheless works."⁷⁷ Linden stresses that the human brain is, in fact, unintelligently designed insofar as it is the contingent by-product of countless uncoordinated evolutionary accidents in which, again and again, the relatively newer is

⁷⁴ Johnston, "This is orthodox Marxism"; Johnston, "From Scientific Socialism to Socialist Science"; Johnston, *A Weak Nature Alone*.

⁷⁵ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, pp. 399–401, 403–424.

⁷⁶ David J. Linden, *The Accidental Mind: How Brain Evolution Has Given Us Love, Memory, Dreams, and God*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 235–246.

⁷⁷ Linden, *The Accidental Mind*, p. 6.

tossed into an intricate but sloppy mix with the comparatively older.⁷⁸ Hence, this organ of organs is “poorly organized,” “a cobbled-together mess.”⁷⁹

The human central nervous system would have to be “Exhibit A” for those of America’s culture warriors who still to this day desire to re-prosecute the 1925 Scopes trial. As is common knowledge, the anti-evolution advocates of intelligent design rest their case on the move of emphasizing the complexity of organic beings and maintaining that such complexity is inexplicable on the basis of the blind, random mechanisms proposed by Darwinian models of evolutionary processes. They believe Darwin and his followers to be fatally unable to answer questions as to how highly functional and seamlessly organized organisms could arise from the unguided chaos of a physical universe of contingencies without teleologies. The human brain, if anything, would be the pinnacle of such stunning sophistication in the natural world; its networked assemblies of astronomical numbers of neurons and synapses come together to generate and sustain seemingly miraculous mindedness and everything this brings with it.

Linden’s concise neuroscientific refutation of intelligent design consists of an additional move beyond just establishing the anorganic “kludginess” of the anatomy and physiology of the central nervous system. This by itself already would be enough, since a demonstrable lack of functionality, organization, and so on – partisans of intelligent design manifestly assume the brain to be thoroughly organic *qua* cohesive, coordinated, frictionless, integrated, etc. – is sufficient to cast reasonable doubts on the claim that an intelligent designer intentionally built a marvelously elaborate and synchronized material seat suited for his human subjects. The further step Linden takes in driving home his critique is to assert, on the basis of ample supporting evidence, that the brain is endowed with its wondrous mind-making powers celebrated by proponents and critics of

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⁷⁸ Adrian Johnston, “The Misfeeling of What Happens: Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Damasio, and a Materialist Account of Affects,” *Subjectivity*, vol. 3, no. 1, April 2010, special issue: “Žižek and Political Subjectivity”, ed. Derek Hook and Calum Neill, pp. 89–92; Adrian Johnston, “Second Natures in Dappled Worlds: John McDowell, Nancy Cartwright, and Hegelian-Lacanian Materialism,” *Umbr(a): The Worst*, ed. Matthew Rigilano and Kyle Fetter, Buffalo: Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture, State University of New York at Buffalo, 2011, p. 76; Johnston, “Naturalism or anti-naturalism? No, thanks—both are worse!”; Johnston, “A Critique of Natural Economy”; Johnston, “Misfelt Feelings”; Johnston, *The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*.

⁷⁹ Linden, *The Accidental Mind*, pp. 2–3, 5–7, 21–24, 26, 245–246.

evolution alike specifically by virtue of its kludginess resulting from an absence of intelligent design:

The transcendent aspects of our human experience, the things that touch our emotional and cognitive core, were not given to us by a Great Engineer. These are not the latest design features of an impeccably crafted brain. Rather, at every turn, brain design has been a kludge, a workaround, a jumble, a pastiche. The things we hold highest in our human experience... result from a particular agglomeration of ad hoc solutions that have been piled on through millions of years of evolutionary history. It's not that we have fundamentally human thoughts and feelings *despite* the kludgy design of the brain as molded by the twists and turns of evolutionary history. Rather, we have them precisely *because* of that history.⁸⁰

In Linden's hands, the kludge model of the central nervous system – this is equivalent to, in my terms, an anorganic barring of the corpo-Real of the brain in particular – elevates the lack/deficit of overarching harmony or synthesis therein to the ontological status of a privative cause at the level of bio-material being in and of itself. This perspicuous line of argumentation transforms the example of the human brain into a Trojan horse in relation to advocates of intelligent design; Linden turns the star piece of evidence appealed to in their case into the very thing refuting it most decisively. Furthermore, Linden's remarks in the above quotation can be read as subtly hinting at an implication of even greater radicality: The absence of God is the ultimate negative *Ur*-cause in a physical universe internally producing and containing human beings and their subjectivities (a thesis compatible with the One-less, detotalized ontologies of Lacan, Badiou, and Žižek, among others).⁸¹

The key principle behind anorganicity, with kludginess being one of its manifestations, can be stated through an inversion of a cliché: More is less (rather than, as the saying goes, “less is more”). For instance, the kludgy *corps morcelé*, shot through and permeated with antagonisms, conflicts, deficiencies, fissures, gaps, splits, and the like, is not a materialization of the factual (non-)givenness of a

⁸⁰ Linden, *The Accidental Mind*, pp. 245–246.

⁸¹ Adrian Johnston, “Conflicted Matter: Jacques Lacan and the Challenge of Secularizing Materialism,” *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, No. 19, Spring 2008, pp. 166–188; Johnston, “The Weakness of Nature,” pp. 175–176; Johnston, *The Outcome of Contemporary French Philosophy*.

mysterious Void. The myth of the non-given, with its mystical, metaphysical version of negativity, proceeds on the basis of a less-is-more logic, with the “less” of a primal Nothingness giving rise to the “more” of really-existing subjects. By contrast, my anorganic approach, substituting for this type of myth a non-mystical, physical version of negativity, proceeds on the basis of a more-is-less logic, with the “more” of a contingent, non-teleological accumulation of material bits and pieces giving rise to the “less” of discrepancies and discordances within and between these fragments (as indicated earlier, I adhere to crucial aspects of the letter of Lacan’s teachings in positing such materially generated disharmonies as necessary objective conditions for the eventual emergence of full-fledged subjectivities). As per the more-is-less principle of the anorganic, surpluses of positivity, as unplanned, uncoordinated agglomerations of mute, idiotic entities and events, dialectically tip over into deficits of negativity. Put in terms familiar to government bureaucrats, computer programmers, and tax lawyers, with the increasing complexity of organic systems, as with all systems (such as political institutions, software codes, and bodies of laws), comes a proportional increase in the number of bugs and loopholes immanently generated within and through systemic complexity itself. In Lacanian parlance, both Symbolic and Real systems can and do succumb to (self-)barring.⁸²

Lacan’s crucial concept of the body-in-pieces and other ideas of his related to this concept, once plugged into the theoretical framework of transcendental materialism and its anorganicism, go from being dogmatically asserted givens always-already there out of thin air to becoming psychoanalytic and philosophical touchstones anchored in solid, science-consistent materialist thinking. Likewise, as regards the threshold between *Naturphilosophie* and *Philosophie des Geistes* in the more-than-logical *Realphilosophie* of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*, the dialectical dynamics of anorganicism permit speculating that the movement from animal to human organisms transpires when growth in the natural complexity of the animal organism crosses a certain tipping point. Past this point, animal organicism *qua* harmonious organization short-circuits itself in acquiring a critical mass of inner incompatibilities between its parts, thereby igniting the bursting forth of anorganic structures and phenomena. The “more” of animal complexity leads to the “less” of the negativities lying at the base of human

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⁸² Johnston, *Žižek’s Ontology*, pp. 167–177; Johnston, “Drive Between Brain and Subject”.

being *qua* minded/spiritual humanity; the plus of positive natural additions transitions to the minus of denaturalizing subtractions.

The French biologist and Nobel laureate Jacques Monod, in his 1970 book *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, provides an indispensable refutation of an all-too-widespread misconstrual of evolution in biology. Therein, he incisively observes that, “*evolution is not a property of living beings*, since it stems from the very *imperfections* of the conservative mechanism which indeed constitutes their unique privilege.”⁸³ In other words, evolution does not unfold as a smooth, continuous succession of fluid flowerings in which unbroken sequences of clockwork living spheres blossom one out of another with placid balanced beauty, as imagined in the fantasies of organicist (w) holism. Instead, evolutionary changes happen if and when any number of things go terribly wrong for organisms in relation to their bottom-line strivings to perpetuate themselves as individuals and species (as in genetic mutations, environmental catastrophes, and so on – instances on the scale of phylogenesis of what Lacan, citing Hegel, calls “the fruitful illness, life’s happy fault” on the scale of ontogeny). Hence, Monod justifiably concludes that evolution is antithetic to life – obviously, he undoes the standard equivocation between evolutionary and living processes – insofar as occurrences of evolution are moments when life as it is gets traumatically disorganized and truncated. He also later states that, “the accelerating pace of cultural evolution was to split completely away from that of the genome.”⁸⁴ However, the anti-natural revolution of the immanent material genesis (as both phylogenetic and ontogenetic) of, in Hegelian locution, *Geist* out of *Natur* is nevertheless a trajectory internal to evolution in Monod’s broadened sense. What is more, a precise parallel can be drawn between Hegel’s treatment of war as a spiritual event with Monod’s treatment of evolution as a natural event. For Hegel, periods of pleasing tranquility (i.e., peaceful “happiness”) are historical “blank pages” of socio-cultural “stagnation” punctuated by bracing, make-or-break episodes of disruption in the form of violent conflagrations.⁸⁵ For Monod, evolution is to life what war is to peace for Hegel.

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⁸³ Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971, p. 116.

⁸⁴ Monod, *Chance and Necessity*, p. 162.

⁸⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood; trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, §324, p. 361; Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, pp. 26–27.

If human beings are animal organisms “sick unto death,” this fateful derailment of the natural into the more-than-natural occurs by virtue of the real dialectical dynamics of the anorganic as the self-induced sickening of nature itself, a nature already weak and rotten on its own prior to its further de/in-completing of itself through belching out humanity. Avatars of the myth of the non-given instantiate the gesture of adding a supernatural Nothing so as to explain away this enigmatic denaturalized transcendence that is nonetheless puzzlingly immanent to the natural world. An advocate of transcendental materialist anorganicism risks the step of subtracting from the natural world what these worshippers of a mystical negativity presumptively attribute to it such that they then feel compelled to have faith in a rigid, brittle anti-naturalism threatened by the advances of the natural sciences.⁸⁶ Interfacing the anorganic logic of the more-is-less principle with the life sciences and evolutionary theory is the key to a material rather than mystical negativity, itself a cornerstone of a viable, non-reductive materialism.

⁸⁶ Johnston, “Second Natures in Dappled Worlds,” p. 76; Johnston, *A Weak Nature Alone*.