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**Disorder in Heaven and on Earth: Heaven in Disorder Slavoj Žižek.**  
OR Books, New York and London, 2021. pp. 240.

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# Review Essay

## ***Disorder in Heaven and on Earth***

### ***Heaven in Disorder***

Slavoj Žižek. OR Books, New York and London, 2021. pp. 240.

Edward Sankowski\* and Betty J. Harris†

#### INTRODUCTION

This essay examines three main aspects of Slavoj Žižek’s book. Beyond interpretation, we also aim for a constructive account of what novel insights might emerge from critically examining Žižek’s efforts in this book. (1) One aspect of his text is his continuing insistence on the goal of a newly re-conceived Communism, so named, e.g., in remarks about ecological threats (65) and in the concluding section, “Why I Am Still A Communist” (212; 218). Žižek’s goal is Communism, but supposedly not the authoritarian variety of communism that emerged in the twentieth century (213). In Žižek’s view, Communism must be invented to deal with contemporary problems attributable to global capitalism (2).

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Another important aspect of his text is his emphasis on ecology as a central issue in our time. Climate change looms especially large among ecological issues in his outlook. He tries to connect Communism with valid demands in the name of ecology (3). In this book, Žižek assembles his own journalism, and responds to variegated journalistic writings by others, in order to convey his views. It is worth interpreting why and how he does this (rather than using other possible expressive means) in order to convey his views about (1) and (2), or other subjects.

While understanding (1)–(3) are crucial necessary conditions to understand the book, our essay must necessarily omit discussion of many remarks, themes, etc. in this complex book.

## 2—KEY POLITICAL WORDS

Žižek's central longstanding normative theoretical problem should be set in historical context. A central problem in much of Žižek's work (before, and continuing in this book) is that he is ethically and politically challenging global capitalism. However, he acknowledges that he cannot imagine the end of capitalism and what a preferable alternative could be. We note that an alternative would apparently require both a definition of the goal and an account of how to get there. He invokes the name of Communism as referring to a desirable goal, while renouncing twentieth century authoritarian communism. He also implies dissatisfaction with some supposedly communist European-based ideologies. Even his friend Alain Badiou comes in for criticism as well as some critical correction. Badiou is said to err in suggesting that “nomadic proletarians” are the proletariat of today (68-69; 94-96). Felix Guattari and Toni Negri are charged with conveying a message, in *Communists Like Us*, that underestimates the need for radical change, in Žižek's view in a way similar to some “democratic socialists” (40).

One further major sign of this renunciation of authoritarian communism is Žižek's repeated criticism of contemporary Chinese “communism,” which in his view has actually become authoritarian “capitalism.” We analysts writing this essay think that China is not well categorized simply as communist or as capitalist; the old dichotomy needs to be overcome.

Whatever the way in which we might choose to categorize contemporary China, Žižek criticizes “communist” China for an alleged tendency. “China discreetly plays on the solidarity of those in power all around the world against the rebellious populace...China's

message here is that beneath all the ideological and geopolitical tensions, all states share the same basic interest in holding onto power”(12).

We should add that overcoming capitalism, whether in China or elsewhere, need not in our view obviously require Žižekian Communism, or at least that appears to be a possibility that Žižek does not take seriously, possibly because of his addiction to the once exhaustive-seeming dichotomy of capitalism and communism.

In the Introduction, Žižek differs from Mao Zedong’s wording in a clue to the outlook of this book, with its title. Mao said: “There is great disorder under heaven; the situation is excellent.” Our situation is according to Žižek not excellent, there is disorder in and not just under heaven. Our symbolic universe, (apparently for Žižek metaphorically heaven, expressed above all in language), is in disorder. For Žižek, divisions of heaven exist that are distinguishable in different countries. In the U.S., a division between the political alt-right and the liberal-democratic establishment is said to be central.

Despite the opening disavowal for the present situation of Mao’s wording, as related to the book title, elsewhere Žižek praises Mao to some extent, referring to his “great” text, *On Contradiction* (156). However, Žižek rejects both what he considers contemporary Chinese authoritarian capitalism and one U.S. tendency of liberal pseudo-democracy (as distinct from either Bernie Sanders or incipient neo-fascism, presumably).

Are there lessons that Žižek thinks (relevant to his own societal goal) could be learned from flawed contemporary U.S. “democracy”? Analogously to learning lessons from a flawed China, it might be possible to learn something about a projected desirable future (in Žižek’s terms) for the U.S. and other societies. Problematic societal phenomena in the U.S. might help us understand how to further genuine progress. The story about U.S. politics is, unsurprisingly, complicated on Žižek’s view. As to the contemporary U.S., notably, Žižek is very unhappy about Joe Biden. “I’ve written before that Biden is Trump with a human face... We are now at such a low point that getting a president who will not change anything is the most we can hope for” (107). Žižek clearly approves (at least provisionally) of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, so-called AOC. Žižek’s approval of AOC is more ambivalent. There is a passage in which he seems to agree with a self-avowed leftist who (implausibly, we think) attributes anti-socialist, insufficiently critical pro-Biden wrong views to AOC (152–58). For the most part, Žižek regrets the marginalization of Sanders and (for Žižek, more ambivalently) AOC. But we should note his qualified view about AOC in relation to engagement with Biden’s program and the

Democratic Party (164–65). In some of these attitudes, Žižek hardly seems to represent a politics plausibly called Communism, unless he is covertly hoping for more radical change after these comparatively mildly progressive but admirable social democrats do their work. It may be that he has this hope: see his remark about a saying of Max Horkheimer. “What both sides (ES/BH: AOC and opposing self-styled more radical Democratic Socialists) miss is the proper dialectical unity of theory and practice in which theory not only justifies particular measures but also legitimizes us to intervene ‘blindly’ in a non-transparent situation, making us aware that the situation may change in an unpredictable way through our intervention. As Max Horkheimer said decades ago, the motto of the true radical Left should be: ‘Pessimism in theory, optimism in practice’” (164–65).

There are other signs in Žižek of a willingness to settle as of now for normative positions that are “progressive” but hardly plausibly called Communist: there is in Žižek respectful reference to Robert Reich (a progressive who is in fact an advocate for a reformed capitalism (105). There is sympathy, even veneration for Julian Assange: (“Here’s to You, Julian Assange!”) (146–47) Etc.

Žižek, as aforementioned, stresses the centrality of language in our “symbolic universe” (2). While we analysts in this essay about Žižek would not deny the importance of language, Žižek’s remarks here may point to a weakness in his approach, his overemphasizing the invocation of Communism in various places, including the concluding section. The word will not erase the movement in Žižek’s advocacy toward agreement with left-liberal positions that continue to approve of “capitalism” (e.g., Robert Reich). Indeed, Žižek’s respect for the “democratic socialist” Sanders is also telling. Arguably Sanders is more of an FDR Democrat than a socialist in the traditional sense in what he advocates (as Žižek knows).

Perhaps Žižek, like many other social theorists and political agents with very various ideologies, puts too much emphasis on particular political words (and their related vocabularies): for Žižek, “Communism,” for Thomas Piketty, “socialism,” for Francis Fukuyama, “liberalism” and “democracy,” for Xi Jinping, “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” for Bernie Sanders, “democratic socialism,” for many U.S. right-wingers, “communism,” as the enemy. (Trump, e.g., has called Kamala Harris a communist: 101). We note that other right-wingers attack “cultural Marxism,” “Critical Race Theory.” etc. The key words are frequently so vague and ambiguous even when indispensable that they pose problems for moving forward in theory and practice. Ideologues, especially but not

exclusively reactionaries, will use language, even the most sacred words, to advance their goals.

Žižek has a long section on the left's recent triumph in an election in Chile, and its stress on "dignity," though he acknowledges that the dictator Pinochet could use the same word. In this case it is part of an array of terms that for now go along with these leftist Chilean practical planned measures. As part of the discussion, Žižek stresses the importance of new "master-signifiers": he cites Lacan, on the importance of a new signifier in order to effect political change. "The true task is to impose a new order, and this process begins with new signifiers. Without new signifiers, there is no social change" (37). If so, why does Žižek repeat an old not a new signifier: "Communism," a focus even at the very end of the book, as if that is a summary conclusion? He, somewhat like right-wing propagandists, but of course with a different orientation, is addicted to the old signifier of "Communism/communism." Another point to note about his discussion of the Chilean situation is his reference to Ernesto Laclau on the importance of Master-Signifiers, and Laclau's highlighting the example of ecology (33–34). We will address the importance of ecological themes at other junctures in this essay. For now, let us note that according to Žižek, what matters is "not only which Master-Signifier will predominate but how this Master-Signifier will organize the entire political space" (33).

### 3—WHY "COMMUNISM"?

It seems to us that a part of Žižek's project is also very European (as detectable in his often intemperate rejection of criticisms of Eurocentrism, e.g., "A European Manifesto" (172–75)). He is attempting to bring together the challenges of the political, economic, and cultural divisions between Western and Central/Eastern Europe. In this respect the current atrocities by Russia in Ukraine (beyond the timespan or commentary of this book) are a reminder that Central and Eastern Europe have never been adequately integrated (conceptually, normatively, or practically) with what is called Western Europe. Nonetheless, Žižek apparently puts special emphasis on the values of the European tradition. For Žižek, this is Europe as an integral whole, not as a collection of sovereign nation-states. Žižek does not explore the possibility that Putin may be contemplating a goal of Russia as a Eurasian power, allied with China, a quite different strategy which would be opposed to the idea of Russia as primarily a part of Europe.

In a very recent journalistic piece (written after the book that is our focus in this essay) about the Russia-Ukraine war, Žižek addresses topics with a notable bearing on the relationships between the “free west” and Russia. As part of his discussion, for example, he criticizes Dostoevsky for his alleged dichotomizing of the West and Russia. See <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/may/23/we-must-stop-letting-russia-define-the-terms-of-the-ukraine-crisis> where Žižek expresses, in addition to sarcasm about the “free west,” and questioning of “European liberalism,” a sarcastic disavowal of Dostoevsky. Žižek refers to “Dostoevsky, who provided the ‘deepest’ expression of the opposition between Europe and Russia: individualism versus collective spirit, materialist hedonism versus the spirit of sacrifice.” For Žižek, it seems that this alleged cultural split undermines awareness of European integrity. Žižek does not explore the possibility that Putin may be aiming at a strengthened Russian role in a Russian-Asian power bloc.

The contemporary economic anthropologist Chris Hann, of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, has done especially interesting work with a focus on Eurasia (and other regions), and also on post-communist societies, e.g., those notably influenced by Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism. Žižek’s tendency to focus (mainly though not exclusively) on certain European values, which he tends to celebrate as such, as universal, can be contrasted with Hann’s work, which investigates continuities of Europe and Asia.

Let us resume commenting on Žižek’s aspirational critique and improvement of the Marxist tradition. In a piece initially about a Houthi rebel drone attack (i.e., from Yemen) on Saudi Arabia, which he considers a non-game-changer, Žižek refers to Hong Kong protests, a lead-in to his remarks about the ecological Marxism of some Beijing protests (which we discuss in a later section of this essay). He hints that the Hong Kong protests were originally authentically progressive, arising in poorer neighborhoods, but eventually were co-opted. “The Hong Kong protests first erupted in poor districts; the rich were prospering under Chinese control. Then a new voice was heard.” The new voice in Žižek’s account invoked U.S. values of liberty and democracy, asked for liberation by Trump, and was represented in person especially notably by a banker. “Every serious analysis of the Hong Kong protests has to focus on how a social protest, potentially a true game changer, was recuperated into the standard narrative of the democratic revolt against totalitarian rule” (6–7).

#### 4—ŽIŽEK ON ECOLOGY AS ONE MAJOR THEME CONNECTING HISTORICAL LEFTISM WITH RENEWED COMMUNISM

We recommend interpretive emphasis on a trend in the multiple topics taken up in the book. Žižek seems to us to be (apparently fitfully) following up on his tendency to focus on a thoughtfully leftist ecology (environmentalism) as part of proto-Communism in the book. Two previous books on the pandemic as well as earlier writings, suggest that increasingly, Žižek thinks of ecological catastrophe as the main framing issue of our time, more urgent and basic even than the pandemic. The pandemic might, (we analysts writing this essay think), be regarded as a sub-topic in the broader environmental field. But climate change in his view is a much more dangerous problem than the pandemic. On his view, we should collectively think and act, assert ourselves in an emancipatory project which requires that we must embrace a new type of Communism, in light of ecology. The details however are still elusive, and the devil is in the details.

In a previous book, no doubt among other places, Žižek prefigured his emphasis on the link between a new Communism and ecology. See, e.g., *Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbors-Against the Double Blackmail*, 2016. Particularly in the concluding section, 11, “What Is to be Done?,” Žižek writes about connections between the idea of “the commons,” and the objectionable “enclosing of the commons” characterizing privatization, and the movement of populations. In his way of thinking, the commons is the mode of communism, and enclosing or privatization the mode of capitalism. After outlining different sorts of commons, Žižek writes:

What the struggle to defend these commons share is an awareness of the destructive potential that may be unleashed if the capitalist logic of enclosing the commons is allowed free reign, perhaps resulting in the self-annihilation of humanity itself is this reference to “commons” that justifies the resuscitation of the notion of Communism: it enables us to see the progressive “enclosure” of the commons as a process of proletarianization of those who are thereby excluded from their own substance. (See especially 111–112; more generally 11–18)

This is sketchy on details, but gives some indications of how Žižek is conceiving the connections between ecology and Communism.



In *Heaven and Disorder*, “The Amazon is Burning—So What?,” is a relatively short section in the book. There, Žižek concludes:

“...(W)hat we can do is at least get our priorities straight and admit the absurdity of our geopolitical war games when the very planet for which wars are fought is under threat. The ridiculous game of Europe blaming Brazil and Brazil blaming Europe has to stop. Ecological threats make it clear that the era of sovereign nation-states is approaching its end. A strong global agency is needed with the power to coordinate the necessary measures. And does not the need for such an agency point in the direction of what we once called ‘Communism’?” (65)

One obvious question to pose to Žižek here is why and how the hypothetical needed global agency should be said to point to Communism. Another question is why his exhortation is not utopian; he objects to Piketty’s different sort of utopianism (mistaking the Piketty of Capital and Ideology as working within capitalism) in another setting (217). Yet another question is how Žižek’s views here can be reconciled with his later indignation at Russia invading what is often referred to as the sovereign nation of Ukraine. What we mean is that Žižek here is both committed to rejecting national sovereignty as a value, and affirming it as a value in the case of Ukraine.

In the last entry, as the book is ending, Žižek quotes with approval an objection to the re-normalization of ecological catastrophe. He suggests that the catastrophe has already happened, but the only way out is for the left (against competition on the right) to “translate the brewing discontent into a viable program of change.” This makes it seem that Communism has yet to be re-invented, not that Žižek himself can yet give a coherent account of what that can be. “...I take Communism not as a solution to our woes, but as (still) the best name that enables us to grasp properly the problems we face today and to envisage a way out” (218). Žižek claims, in the last entry, that the book has supplied multiple reasons for aspiring to a new Communism (indeed that all of its reasons have supposedly pointed in this direction), but it is not clear how that is so. The book is more multi-faceted than that.

For Žižek, the 1989 revolutions were not, as Jürgen Habermas may have implied, “catch-up revolutions,” aiming at gaining what the western Europeans already possessed.

Zizek interprets contemporary protests such as the French *gilets jaunes* (yellow jackets) protests as not a catch-up phenomenon. Those protests, by the way, emerged from environmental problems, and Macron's imposition of costs on the less affluent for a solution to over-use of fossil fuels. In many other cases (Hong Kong, etc.) we observe something other than mere catch-up revolutions. He thinks that the contemporary co-optation of protests by the populist right shows that in 1989 there was a change aimed at more than "liberal-capitalist normality." (Why he thinks contemporary populist right protests show that about 1989 is not clear, but needs evidence and argument.) There is in his view widespread dissatisfaction with capitalist normality, and "the big task of the Left" should be "to translate the brewing discontent into a viable program of change" (216). Other examples, actual and hypothetical, suggest that there is indeed brewing discontent about capitalist normality. Besides ecology, there is brewing discontent about racism partially exploding anew after the murder of George Floyd, or the January 6 U.S. insurrection, or mass shootings in the U.S. (as part of a U.S. politics captured by weapons manufacturers and their allies). Whether ecological or other discontents are at issue, however, Žižek does not provide such a "translation" in assembling this book's contents and publishing this book. Rather, besides his prominent references to ecological catastrophe, he ends with Hegelian generalities. If we choose Communism, he says, we will recognize that we had to choose it, out of both freedom and necessity. Žižek does seem to claim that the earlier sections in the book have been assembling reasons that lead to this very general Hegelian/Marxist conclusion.

### 5—MORE ON ŽIŽEK AND ECOLOGY

We wish to suggest that dealing adequately with ecological/environmental issues requires a recognition that what are typically currently called markets always supervene on transactional activities among humans, transactions that impose consequences on those not directly voluntarily involved in or consenting to the market transactions. These are the neo-classical economists' negative externalities. For example, fossil fuel industries thrive on transactions that impose climate change and its consequences on everyone, like it or not, consenting to it or not. These consequences must be communicated vividly to everyone who, dazzled by ideology in the negative sense, does not appreciate them. Possibly one way out of submitting to endorsement of that conception of markets (and its consequences) is to contribute to publicizing a way out of living and quite possibly dying with

contemporary market ideology. This way out may or may not be called Communism, or Socialism, but it does repudiate one currently influential ideal and concomitant practices of a “market society.”

It should be added that Žižek’s interests in ecology do not mean that he is favorable about a supposedly non-anthropocentric “deep ecology”; he denounces this as hypocritical (69). For Žižek, “When we worry about the environment, we worry about our own environment. We want to secure the quality and security of our lives.” He compares the deep ecology posture to that of the “white anti-Eurocentric liberals,” so despised by Žižek. We have doubts about all this, and specifically about the ridicule of environmentalist care for non-human nature, which we are inclined to think can in some forms without hypocrisy extend beyond states of “our own environment.” This assertion of ours does not endorse or reject deep ecology, which would require a separate discussion.

Žižek’s ecological interests intersect with his critique of Chinese “capitalism.” He happens to comment briefly but pungently on a crackdown in China on students who in his account have taken Marxism too seriously from the viewpoint of “the new hard line of Xi Jinping.” The leftist students had in this account formed links with workers, and criticized exploitation of workers around Beijing (7). In challenging authoritarian as well as liberal capitalism, the students attracted negative attention from the government. But despite the professed moral of the story, the reference to Mainland China here is in some ways perplexing. Invoking Marx did not (so far as this account records) lead to invention and follow-through about a renewed and emancipatory Marxist Communist agenda. Rather, a putatively Marxist regime was prepared to act against the also putatively Marxist but oppositional students. That does not appear to support a position implying hopes that invoking the name of Communism is likely to have a fundamentally freedom-enhancing effect. Maybe more interesting about this oddly placed patch of Žižek’s text is that the worker exploitation around Beijing is mentioned to have involved environmentally problematic working conditions. What that might suggest is that an environmentalist perspective can encourage a fundamental re-thinking. That would be Marxism supplemented and probably corrected in light of integrating attention to ecological threats. But that is not salient in Žižek’s brief description here.

Also unclear is how the invocation of Communism is to deal with the splintering of supposedly Marxist positions. This splintering as such does not discredit Marxism in particular. Consider the splintering of liberalism, which encompasses a range from right-

wing libertarianism to moderate social democracy to Chomskyan left-wing anarchism (bitterly critical of capitalism). But it does pose a question how to separate a genuine and currently apt Marxism from other stances. Žižek is trying to offer such a separation. Admittedly, there may be no very general answer to this, but only concrete analysis of concrete situations, as implied in Žižek's shout-out to Lenin on what is to be done (3), as well as informed specifically targeted polemics against the main pseudo-Marxist imposters (which may have been what Lenin had in mind).

What the foregoing suggestion about Žižek's qualified environmentalist turn does not capture as part of Žižek's view may be important. We leave that open. His commentaries on the past of left activism (sometimes disastrous and sometimes freedom-enhancing in a tentative way) and the frequently brutal present of a market driven society often include hints about how in his view a genuinely emancipatory transition might go. To repeat: at present, as Žižek himself would evidently admit, he may have hints to offer but he has no comprehensive vision of an alternative to global capitalism. Some of these hints are presumably to be found in his discussions in the various sections of this volume. Admittedly, some of the sections may include reflections that are distractions from his main themes, even when perceptive and suggestive.

We add that there may be types of empirical information about societal changes that could pose interesting questions for Žižek's combination of Communism and ecology. In the recent elections in France, for example, a coalition has been tentatively formed including (among other elements) French communists, socialists, and greens. Where might that lead? How might it reflect on the prospects for Žižek's Communist/ecological normative merger? We do not explore this further here, but it may be relevant for evaluating Žižek's philosophical strategy.

## **6—PHILOSOPHY AND JOURNALISM**

About Žižek's book, some obvious questions arise about the structure and type of items included in the book. This concerns the increasing affinities of some philosophy with journalism (or perhaps better put, journalistic contexts and outlets). Corresponding social scientific work, and learned professional performances such as legal pronouncements or some medical pronouncements, (e.g., consider our exhausting proliferation of statements about the pandemic) have long had a public-facing journalistic dimension that contemporary academic philosophy (particularly in the "Anglo-American," "analytic"

tradition, where public philosophy has been comparatively neglected) would do well to emulate and join forces with. Such emulation (by other philosophers, more narrowly academic than Žižek) will, for some philosophers, take time and effort. Some will never make it. As challenging to construe as some of Žižek's work is, it is a positive practical stimulus to combining philosophy and social/psychological theory (in his case, psychoanalytically framed) with journalistic work and placement in journalistic outlets. Writing and publishing in this way encourages further journalistic public-facing dialogues that may further extra-textual progressive collective political activism.

### **7—METHODOLOGY: JOURNALISTIC PARTICULARS AND PHILOSOPHICALLY GENERAL THEORY**

We started with the preceding observations about philosophy and journalism because they may suggest that in reading this book, more synoptic, general, theoretical philosophy can also serve to guide selective attention to content of particular journalistic performances. Moreover, going in the other direction, more particular episodically reactive journalistic prose or streaming media appearances can expand the topics and resources of theoretical philosophy.

Thus, from this perspective, this book may indeed contain some merely occasional pieces written by Žižek in moments away from his more extended theoretical flights. But this book may also aim to exemplify and justify a methodology for some activities of social and political philosophy.

The book consists of numerous short pieces, as well as some longer full-essay scale writings. There is a sometimes dizzying variety of subjects: Kurds and geopolitics, the assassination of an Iranian general, a political shift towards the left in Chile, (and Žižek devotes hopeful and respectful attention, at some length, to Chile's recent positive changes), Bolivian democratic politics, Joe Biden, Donald Trump, a construal of a lamentation by Christ, the pandemic, climate change, the musical group Rammstein, "and so on," a phrase Žižek often intersperses in his prose and speech. "And so on" suggests both the endless stream of events and personalities, sometimes apparently disparate and disconnected but often yielding insights when subjected to integrating discussion. The stream of events is often disruptive, it goes on and on and deserves mulling over and commentary. That is a distinctive methodology in political philosophy. The academic disciplines of philosophy and anthropology, we believe, can gain from including writing

of short commentaries and interventions (long or short) about variegated contemporary issues and socio-political phenomena along the lines of Žižek's efforts included in this book. Perhaps more important, political theory as a socially interventionist phenomenon, not solely a mere academic subject, can gain. Presumably Žižek hopes for his work to generate discussion, not solely for its own sake, but to promote progressive collective actions.

There are products of other philosophically oriented activists in recent times that evidence a need for philosophy to do something akin to this. One established example is Vandana Shiva. Some such recent philosophers, such as Jason Stanley (particularly as regards his currently often intervening on Twitter, but also in interviews, including appearances on YouTube, etc.) are very different in disciplinary orientation and activist profile from Žižek. So too there are longer-standing ventures into journalistic contexts, such as those by the much more politically moderate Peter Singer, accepting of the supposed unavoidability of capitalism as he is. Žižek also can be construed as dealing with ideas that might be at home in social scientific and related disciplines or their real-world expressions, such as anthropology, political science, and history. Those disciplines have a history and current practices of occasional, compact, timely commentaries comparable to Žižek's perhaps more idiosyncratic and more wide-ranging performances. So there are figures such as Juan Cole, Robert Reich, and so on. A recent book of journalistic pieces by interdisciplinary economist Thomas Piketty, *Time for Socialism*, is a notable example that might be compared (journalistically and ideologically, as well as in its re-invocation of a political word, "socialism") with Žižek's *Heaven in Disorder*. Piketty has, indeed, as already noted, been briefly referred to or commented on by Žižek in this book (121; 216–217). Žižek appears to underestimate the practical critical edge of Piketty's ideological orientation. Žižek demotes Piketty to the category of leftist utopian. It should be added that obviously the availability of internet resources and outlets has done much to contribute to what we are increasingly noticing about such writings in philosophy and social science (each combining their efforts with journalistic resources). Žižek has numerous references in this book to online sources such as those put out by *The Guardian*, *CNN*, *Associated Press*, *USA Today*, etc. Rapid-fire assaults and bombardment stem not only from events, but from contemporary communications media, which both assault us and imply obligations to pay attention (but to what, given the multiplicity of communications?).

### **8—IMPOSING SENSE ON THIS UNRULY BOOK**

Given our comments on quasi-journalistic aspects of this book, we might for the sake of this essay divide the entries in this book into two categories. One is what seem to us the stage-setting Introduction and the politically more sharply conceptually salient, whether short or long. Thus: “Introduction: Is the Situation Still Excellent?” and comparably salient subsequent sections such as “Radical Change, Not Sympathy”; “Limits of Democracy”; “The Courage of Covid Hopelessness”; “The ‘Great Reset’? Yes Please—But a Real One!”; “Class Struggle Against Classism”; “Three Ethical Stances”; “Paris Commune at 150”; “Why I Am Still a Communist.” Taken together, these comprise about a quarter of the thirty-seven entries in the volume. A second category includes some of the salient pieces, but specifically comprises the longer-form examples among them. Thus: “The ‘Great Reset’? Yes Please—But a Real One!”; “Class Struggle Against Classism”; “Three Ethical Stances”; “Paris Commune at 150”; “Why I Am Still a Communist.” It might be tempting, but we think it would be mistaken, to focus primarily let alone exclusively on the longer-form entries. The short pieces are often responses to bewildering contemporary rapid-fire events, bombardment by exogenous impressions (as well as our own endogenously generated memories, fantasies, and thoughts) which we and Žižek are constantly experiencing. Some of these short pieces will stand on their own, while others may eventually generate larger-scale and holistically combined investigations. And admittedly, some of the entries will be forgettable. But indeed, sometimes a short piece will contain very important passages, as in the first section after the Introduction, titled about a Houthi drone attack on Saudi Arabia, but much more importantly about some Hong Kong and Beijing protests, or the section on the Amazon burning, as previously discussed.

### **9—CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

We interpret Žižek’s work in this book as representing his hoped-for continuation and critique of selected leftist traditions connecting with ongoing dialogues and activism about the contemporary global situation.

This particular philosopher and cultural analyst/critic has historical sympathies for some protagonists and societal aspects of the history of the left, and specifically communism. He can gibe at the deservedly ruined Fukayama-type picture of liberal democracy and markets as the end of history. Žižek as it were laughs bitterly at Fukuyama, claiming that rather than 1989 leading to Fukayama’s “end of history,” we seem to have

already entered into the end of history in the sense of a global catastrophe. (Very recently, Fukuyama is back with a defense of his version of liberalism, in *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, 2022, yet another book title styled after Freud). Žižek may mean primarily catastrophic climate change, or nuclear annihilation, recently back in the realm of definite possibility with Russia's nuclear threats as related to the invasion of and war in Ukraine (which came after the publication of this book). This time, the nuclear or other threats, including most of all ecological threats, are presented not by a red menace, but by an extreme form of dictatorial, tyrannical, oligarchic capitalism (and one dependent on fossil fuel financing), which in the case of Russia certainly developed rather than Fukuyama's "liberal democracy" from the early 1990s to the present. (These remarks about Russia are not taken from Žižek's book, but are offered by us, the current essayists). Earlier, Žižek claims that the large majority of Eastern Europeans in 1989 and subsequently did not want capitalism, but something consistent with socialist ideology. What those living at present have gotten has not been entirely agreeable, and often amounts to toxic and anti-democratic developments in some places previously deemed by some analysts as capitalist/democratic success stories: e.g., the current "illiberal democracy" of Viktor Orbán's Hungary.

What we get in the journalistically shaped contents of this book is expressive of and critical about our fragmented, globalized, technology-driven, propagandized consciousness, and our unconscious. By placement of these sections in a volume, Žižek is trying for exploration of some basic issues, but also encouraging seeing new connections in the manifold of our experiences and given our divergent vocabularies. He must hope that this mode of communication will contribute to the formation of positive collective agency.