

**28th Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 28th July 2013**  
**ON ZIZEK**  
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Slavoj Žižek has emphasized the homogeneity of Wittgenstein's language-game and the form of life with the symbolic order, which Lacan also calls the *big Other*. The decisive step the late Wittgenstein's thinking takes, Žižek writes, is the *assertion* of an "irreducible—albeit imperceptible and ineffable—*gap* separating 'objective certainty' from 'truth.' 'Objective certainty' does not concern 'truth'; on the contrary, it is 'a matter of attitude,' a stance implied by the existing life-form where there is no assurance that 'something *really unheard-of* will not emerge which will undermine 'objective certainty,' upon which our 'sense of reality' is grounded."<sup>1</sup> The function of the form of life and the language-game consists in *not obscuring* the *non-functioning* that the smooth processes taking place on the plane of reality threaten to conceal. For we must distinguish between the reality of certainty that is the cognitive world of these processes—and truth, whose status is non-cognitive. This distinction is irreconcilable. It has the quality of an irreducible conflict.

The dimension of truth – the dimension of the real in the words of Lacan & Žižek – is the dimension of the unfamiliar or uncanny. That there is truth means that knowledge and its certainties are limited. Truth is the name of this limitation. Truth points to the groundless and nameless that is the uncanny. Certainty can exist only in the form of this functional form, or form of life, that approximates the human subject to the chaotic uncanny. That is why we can say of the subject's form of life that it is *logical*. For the logos keeps in touch with the abyss over which it remains held. There are such things as cognition and logic, but they are entrusted to the unknowable and alogical. Philosophy was never anything but the mediation of the immediable: of reason to non-reason, of the finite to the infinite, of being to becoming, of the sayable to the unsayable, of knowledge to unknowing, etc. Wittgenstein's theory of language-games and forms of life insists on the originary embeddedness of any knowledge in contexts that lack an ultimate basis in an absolute system of reference. Descartes bases *certitudo* on a *fundamentum inconcussum*, the *ego cogito*; Wittgenstein, by contrast, declares such a foundation to be inexistent. He does not deny that there is, that there can be knowledge; he shows that cognition and knowledge require a prosthetic faith and a trust that are "corroborated" by experience. Knowledge rests on a form of experiential knowing that engenders conventions as it relies on conventions. What Wittgenstein says *ex negativo* is that no knowledge is absolute. It owes its objectivity to the convention of the language-game, which for its part lacks ultimate foundation. Perhaps we may say of this convention that it is the glue of our realities. A minimum of agreement is the condition of the possibility of certainty, i.e., of reality. For what is reality if not the product of a convention that constitutes *our* knowledge? Hence the plural, the implicit *we* that indicates the community of believers in fact, the community of subjects that trusts in the solidity of its certainties without basing them on an absolute foundation: a community that confirms the inconsistency of its consistencies by acknowledging them to be precarious constructions. I call reality the aggregate of consistencies handed down by tradition, on which even the most recent and the most outlandish evidences rest. How to define an experience that convicts this aggregate of its arbitrariness, of its ontological contingency?



1 Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do. Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2002), 151.