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THOMAS NEMETH

ALTHUSSER'S ANTI-HUMANISM AND SOVIET PHILOSOPHY

In the comparatively short time since the publication in the early Sixties of the essays making up the collection entitled *Pour Marx* Althusser's fame as a Marxist philosopher has spread far and wide. Although he has refused to be labeled a structuralist, more often than not his name is mentioned along with those of Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and Foucault. Within the orbit of Marxist philosophy Althusser has earned for himself a reputation as an unflinching opponent of Hegelian, historicist and humanist interpretations of Marx and Marxism. To his ardent followers he is the one philosopher who remains true to, and seeks to uncover and develop, 'orthodox' Marxism. To his equally ardent opponents Althusser is just short of a dogmatic Stalinist, who cloaks his tirades with a maze of terminological obscurantism while urging others to demonstrate an equally high level of supposed rigor. To this last group Althusser stands guilty at least of advocating a reactionary, positivist Marxism, if not of committing all conceivable errors of pre-Kantian philosophy. To the former group, however, he stands in the best of that tradition ranging from the Marx of *Capital* to the Lenin of *State and Revolution* and *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

Undoubtedly Althusser's influence within France, and in particular within French Marxist circles, is tremendous. Regardless of whether one is sympathetic to his ideas Althusser has drawn renewed attention to the mature Marx, a period of Marx's life which in recent years was almost entirely forgotten by philosophers in favor of the early Marx. Althusser's inspiration, moreover, lies behind many of the already numerous recent French Marxist philosophical tracts. Surprisingly, Althusser has earned also for himself a notable following in English-speaking countries, particularly among British and Australian New Left circles. Without a doubt those hostile to Althusser's thinking see this as yet another example of the Anglo-Saxon affinity for positivism. Given this widespread reception of Althusser's work it is not so remarkable, then, that we can find even in the Soviet Union today a cautious recognition and critique of his ideas.

Although they pay deferential respect to a loyal Communist and Marxist

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who is undeviating in his militant espousal of Soviet policy aims, the Soviet philosophers do not shy away from criticizing him. In brief, their penultimate objections to Althusser's stance are that: (1) it simply refuses to recognize a historicist and a humanist *dimension* in Marx's own thought, and (2) it is unable to account satisfactorily for the historical transition from one society to another. Although they fail to express themselves quite so bluntly the Soviets see Althusser as guilty of expunging from Marxism those very elements which are needed for activity, for making a revolution. His thought, in the end, falls victim to statism and fatalism.

Among the best known of Althusser's ideas is that of a supposed epistemological break between the young and the old Marx. Yet this problem is one best left for the historian of ideas or the intellectual biographer. The central focus here will be on Althusser's critique of humanism, expounded first in *Pour Marx*, and which received further theoretical grounding in his subsequent works.

1. ALTHUSSER'S CRITIQUE OF THEORETICAL HUMANISM

The grounding of Althusser's critique of humanism lies not as one would at first think in some traditional Marxist opposition to the entire ethical problematic. Rather, Althusser claims his opposition has an epistemological foundation. In this context he draws a distinction between science and ideology, including under the latter humanism and, in fact, the entire realm of philosophy. Interestingly Althusser, in accordance with this distinction, makes a dichotomy within Marxism between historical and dialectical materialism, a dichotomy originally propounded by Plekhanov but whose origin Althusser conveniently overlooks and instead attributes to Marx and Engels themselves. Of course the Soviet philosophers, also making such a distinction between historical and dialectical materialism, do not object to Althusser's point as such but to what he makes of it, as we will see later. The basis of their criticism is Althusser's assertion that historical materialism provides concepts for *knowledge* of history and is therefore a science. Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, being a philosophy, is unable to prove itself, i.e., the tenets of which it is composed, and is therefore an ideology. We have here, then, the interesting result that unlike many at the time of the Second International, including the neo-Kantian inclined Marxists who linked the drive for socialism to a moral imperative, Althusser makes socialism into a 'scientific' concept.[1]

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Although Althusser at one point declares that the Marx of *The German Ideology* held philosophy to be a 'dream', it is unclear whether this represents Althusser's own position.[2] Owing to the highly polemical nature of his writings – a feature which the Soviets clearly recognize[3] – Althusser often makes sweeping statements, which are later qualified, as well as ambiguous. He writes:

> Philosophy, like religion and ethics, is only ideology; it has no history, everything which seems to happen in it really happens outside it, in the only real history, the history of the material life of men. Science is then the real itself, known by the action which reveals it by destroying the ideologies that veil it: foremost among these ideologies is philosophy.[4]

Presumably this means that science grasps or knows the real world, a world existing independent of the knowing subject and which is veiled or disguised by ideologies. Inasmuch as science has an object which it can know, this knowledge can increase, thereby allowing the possibility for it to have a history. Our knowledge of the world can always increase, and so science has the potential for having an infinite history. Philosophy, on the other hand, having no object of its own, cannot prove anything and hence cannot increase our knowledge of an object. It has no history, or if it does have one, it is a completely and utterly uneventful history. Here we have Althusser, the Marxist philosopher, claiming that philosophy yields no knowledge. In fact *in principle* it cannot yield knowledge. How far Althusser has here descended from the Olympian heights assigned to philosophy by, for example, the German Idealists and by Husserl, who thought that the sciences could only attain rationality *after* philosophy has been rigorously established!

Undoubtedly Engels characterized the history of philosophy as a perpetual struggle between idealism and materialism. Althusser, recognizing this claim, uses it to bolster his case that philosophy has no object.[5] But what happens to materialism in the Althusserian view? Does it also succumb to being labeled a mere ideological conception? Interestingly enough, Althusser, like Lenin before him, maintains that every science is necessarily materialistic, since it is a question of knowing nature just as it is. And nature is, of course, simply material. Being a science, historical materialism is also necessarily materialistic. Terminologically speaking the science of history simply must be historical materialism. That the science of history is the same as the 'historical materialism' which Marx and Engels discovered is something Althusser nowhere attempts to demonstrate. In any case, the implicit materialism of

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historical materialism does not constitute a philosophical proof for the materialist, as opposed to the idealist, position. Philosophically, remember, we cannot prove anything (in the sense of establishing knowledge). Dialectical materialism can be no more proved than can idealism. Furthermore, Althusser attributes this position to Lenin. In fact Althusser attributes to Lenin the original explicit distinction in question, i.e., between a philosophical and a scientific conception of matter. The latter changes with the evolution of "scientific *knowledge*".[6] Inasmuch, however, as the philosophical notion of matter is not the concept of any science it does not evolve but remains fixed and unchanged in time.

> The meaning of the philosophical category of matter does not change, since it does not apply to any object of science, but affirms the *objectivity* of all scientific knowledge of an object. The category of *matter* cannot change. It is 'absolute'.[7]

Unlike the philosophical conception, the scientific conception of matter will always continue to develop, since our knowledge of the universe will never be complete. It is precisely in this sharp separation of philosophy from science that Althusser sees his own opposition to both empiricism and positivism. Although again he is none too clear, it would appear that for Althusser the former accords to philosophy the ability to attain knowledge and, hence, that philosophy is, or, at least, can be, a science. The latter, positivism, takes a different tack and accords no role whatever to philosophy. Let us examine each of these two critiques in greater detail and thereby clarify Althusser's stand with respect to the proper, and the improper, function of humanism.

2. ALTHUSSER'S EPISTEMOLOGY

Althusser groups most epistemologies under the label of empiricism, including those which are idealist. Empiricist epistemology, he tells us, consists basically in abstracting from an object, claimed as real, its essence, i.e., that universal which all similar objects also possess and which in principle is invariable in those objects. Hence, the essence is ideal.[8] Furthermore, this process of abstracting the essence from the object is precisely what the empiricists contend is the process of knowing. "Knowledge is an abstraction, in the strict sense, i.e., an extraction of the essence from the real which contains it, a separation of the essence from the real which contains it and keeps it in hiding."[9] If the

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essence, which is contained in the real, is what makes the object what it is, then the remainder of the object is non-essential and so, with respect to the epistemological endeavor, inessential. We have the result that the real component of the object is to be excluded and eliminated from the epistemological standpoint. Although we started with a realism of the object, empiricism moves quickly to an at least covert idealist position – covert in that it nevertheless maintains this essence to be the only *genuinely* real. For the empiricist this essence of the object is the sought-for object of knowledge. We know an object when we have abstracted its essence. Inasmuch, however, as we have refused to identify this essence with the whole of the object we have in this way established a dichotomy between the object of knowledge and the real object. The empiricist, though, refuses to recognize the dichotomy as such ontologically. He continues to hold that there is but one real object and that the essence is part of it.

Althusser objects to this half-hearted dichotomy. The real object and the object of knowledge are not one and the same. The former is ontologically real, i.e., it exists apart from the subject and thus also apart from the process of knowledge. While the real object has a real genesis, i.e., a historical, material succession of events produces it, the object of knowledge has a genesis lying entirely within the sphere of knowledge. This latter genesis is also constituted by a succession of events, but the order of the events is not the same in the two cases. The categories responsible for the production of the two different objects are not in the same order, even though there is a sense in which we can say that the categories of thought 'reproduce' the categories of the real.[10] The function which the categories of the real serve in the genesis of the real object dictates their place in that genesis. Similarly, the function which the categories of thought play in the genesis of the object of knowledge dictates their place in this genesis. Yet the place assigned to each category of thought is not the same as that of the corresponding category of the real. In other words, each can have a different historical genesis. Naturally Althusser attributes these distinctions to Marx while yet absolving himself and Marx of any trace of idealism. After all, such a view of the real object takes pains to show precisely how the real object is *not* ideal. Thought is a system all its own. It has its own peculiar structure, raw material and means of production. It also has different relations to the other structures of society than does the real which that thought reproduces.

Objecting especially to the Kantian heritage in epistemology, which seeks,

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the a priori grounds of the possibility of knowledge, Althusser pursues the 'mechanism' in thought which yields the cognitive grasping of the real object. As he himself states, the fundamental question in epistemology is: "by what mechanism does the process of knowledge, which takes place entirely in thought, produce the cognitive appropriation of its real object, which exists outside thought in the real world?"[11] It is precisely the *Kantian* formulation, which would have us seek the invariable way in which thought grasps the real object, that keeps us trapped within the sphere of ideology.

The disciplines which produce knowledge, as opposed to ideology, are the sciences. Each science has a practice. Once a science is established it no longer has need for support or validation of the knowledge it yields from the outside, i.e., other disciplines. In other words, science does not need philosophy, or even another science, to pass judgment on it before it can be credited with discovering truths. The strict use of the science's own practices is itself the criterion for whether that science yields knowledge. Science provides its own criterion for determining the veracity of its product. Veracity is not something which stands above and beyond the scientific practice itself. What holds here for science holds also for theory in general. That is, theory has its own practice, which in turn has its own criterion for determining the veracity of its products. Marx's science of historical materialism, for example, provides its own criterion by which it is judged. As with, say, the theory of the molecular composition of substances, Marx's theory is true, and *that* is why it correctly explains observations, not vice versa. Once these sciences are established as sciences we can be sure that their results provide truths about the world provided we have adhered strictly to the scientific procedure. Should we obtain an incredible conclusion, we first check to see whether we have performed the experiment, or whatever it be, correctly, i.e., according to the established standards of the science. Unfortunately Althusser fails to provide us with an explanation of how a science becomes established in the first place. Yet only by means of such an explanation would we have a clear idea of the relationship between science and philosophy.

Inasmuch as the genesis of the real object is not the same as that of the object of thought in knowledge, we would expect Althusser to exclude science and knowledge in general from the superstructure. This is precisely what we do find upon proceeding farther in *Reading Capital*. There Althusser criticizes Gramsci for having included science. Althusser contends that only ideology and the politico-legal system compose the superstructure, as seen by

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Marx. In this way philosophy, which has no object, fails to produce knowledge and is thus ideological and so superstructural.[12] On the other hand this does not mean that all ideology is mere illusion. Quite the contrary, even an ideological conception represents a set of existing relations. But unlike a scientific concept we cannot through an ideological concept obtain knowledge of what it represents. The latter has no epistemological, or as Althusser expresses it, 'theoretical function'. Along with Gramsci Althusser accords to ideology an indispensable role, a 'practico-social function', within the social whole.[13] This statement will be no less true in the future Communist society. All societies need an ethics and a way of looking on the world as a whole. But this must not mislead us into thinking that ideology is composed of explicit, conscious concepts. For the most part ideologies are neither conscious nor concepts but unconscious structures which influence how we think in a subtle way. In a class-dominated society ideologies help to keep the ruling class in their dominant position and thus work to the benefit of some at the expense of the vast majority of people. In the Communist society, on the other hand, ideology works to the advantage of all men. Likewise, philosophy will always be philosophy even though under Communism it will serve a new function of relating men to their "conditions of existence".[14] Althusser again here fails to specify in a more demanding manner what this function is and how it can be performed.

As with everything superstructural philosophy is ultimately an expression of politics. Here is the basis of Althusser's approval of the Leninist conception of party-mindedness. As Althusser says:

> Philosophy is a certain continuation of politics, in a certain domain, *vis-à-vis* a certain reality. Philosophy represents politics in the domain of theory, or to be more precise: *with the sciences* – and, vice versa, philosophy represents scientificity in politics, with the classes engaged in the class struggle.[15]

The philosophical debate between idealism and materialism is the expression in theoretical terms of the struggle between the proletariat and the capitalist bourgeoisie.

Althusser's point with regard to humanism is primarily that it is ideological. But underlying this claim is the view that regardless of how we construe the concept of man it is unscientific. In claiming that there is a universal essence of man, an essence which each of us possesses, at least in principle, one falls into an idealism of the essence. Concomitantly, such an idealism implies that

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this essence lies in concrete subjects, i.e., human beings, who are absolutely given to the observer. In other words, we see that an idealism of the human essence implies an empiricism of the human subject.[16] Knowledge of real men cannot be had through humanism but only "on condition that we do completely without the *theoretical services* of the concept of man".[17]

Althusser does not deny that humanism, like any ideology, has *some* function or role to play in society but only that it has no epistemological role. Genuine knowledge of the ensemble of social relations requires us to do without any reductionism to man in general. Of course one can easily enough read Marx's early writings and find there elements of a theory of human nature. But the important point for Althusser is to see that Marx more and more realized the errors in this approach. One can even find lingering hints here and there in *Capital*. Theoretical humanism, however, is foreign to the mature Marx's problematic.[18]

3. THE SOVIET CRITIQUE

While contemporary Soviet philosophers present a wide range of criticisms of Althusser's ideas they do not hesitate to indicate what they consider are its strong points. As we will see later, this is particularly the case with Džioev. The Soviets are, nevertheless, willing to go along with most Western critics and brand Althusser as a structuralist, or at least of attempting to incorporate the structural-functional approach into Marxism. The Soviets, generally, urge caution on the part of Althusser in the use and importance which he attributes to this approach. Too often, they say, have structuralists proceeded along lines which preclude the dialectic and which in the end lead to the quiet substitution of structuralism for Marxism. As S. I. Popov writes in his *Socialism and Humanism:*

> Marxism, as is known, does not deny the correctness of the structural-functional approach within the limits of the general dialectic of the materialistic conception of development. But it is impossible to absolutize structural methods, opposing them to the dialectic. It is impossible to substitute structuralism for Marxism.[19]

V. E. Kozlovskij struck the same note in his talk at a conference in Moscow on structuralism in March 1969 organized by the Academy of Social Sciences of the CC CPSU. Kozlovskij there claimed that certain structuralists, whom he did not name, exaggerate the meaning and use of their method: "the base-

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less nature of the pretensions made by representatives of the structural method for its universal meaning and use".[20] Even a brief examination of the structural method will show that it is inapplicable to all philosophical problems.

Popov is willing to agree with Althusser that Marxism is a scientific doctrine, but this scientificity is not just confined to historical materialism. The various anthropological revisions of Marxism which base themselves primarily on a selective reading of the early Marx incorrectly conclude that Marxist humanism is not scientific. Althusser, however, is equally wrong in claiming there is an incompatibility between science and humanism. Marx's proletarian humanism is, as well, a scientific humanism, a humanism which "not only does not die away in *Capital* and the other mature works of Marx but, on the contrary, receives in them its authentic scientific substantiation".[21]

Likewise, E. A. Samarskaja attacks Althusser's denial of the scientificity of dialectical materialism: "Althusser is incorrect when he ascribes the property of a scientific theory only to historical materialism. Dialectical and historical materialism rest on the same principles".[22]

Althusser's relegation of dialectical materialism to the sphere of ideology means that it, and thus philosophical materialism as well, is in principle incapable of being proved one way or the other. Samarskaja stands in direct opposition to such a thesis. For the latter, philosophical materialism is constantly being proved by the discoveries of the natural sciences and by man's economic practice. To support *his* case Althusser claims that Lenin held that the philosophical categories, in particular that of 'matter', never change while the scientific concept of matter does change in accordance with the progress of science. In reply Samarskaja effectively shows that Althusser has not read Lenin very carefully on this point. "Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* showed that changes in natural-scientific notions of matter cannot shake the materialist's philosophical thesis about 'objective reality, existing independent of our consciousness and reflecting it'. But Lenin never maintained that philosophical categories have a wholly absolute character. On the contrary, referring to Engels, Lenin in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* writes that materialism inevitably changes its form with each scientific discovery".[23]

Samarskaja, in reply to Althusser, makes another telling point in questioning how philosophy, if it is not science, can yet represent scientificity in politics.[24] Furthermore, if Althusser is correct, how can Marxist philosophy

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be a weapon in the hands of the proletariat?[25] The genuine Marxist position is that there is no stronger weapon than the truth itself. Marxist philosophy is just such a weapon, because it is true. The proletariat, in Althusser's scheme, would have to wage war with one of its most powerful weapons being a mere chimera. Here Althusser's stance comes squarely into contradiction with the vast majority of Marxists. Although we will have more to say about Samarskaja shortly, we should point out here that she ends her perceptive article in a conciliatory manner. While Althusser has simplified the correlation between science and ideology by dissolving it, his studies have valuably served to focus renewed attention on this problem. Although it is a pity that Althusser had not proceeded basing himself on the already attained achievements of Marxism, his investigations have proved to be of continuing interest. Althusser notwithstanding,

> the constant development of Marxism in connection with the progress of the sciences and changes of the historical situation in general shows the dynamic character of the connections in it between the scientific and the ideological, of their mutual penetration, enrichment and improvement.[26]

Another Soviet philosopher, M. N. Greckij, raises questions concerning Althusser's conception of ideology. In his piece 'The Discussion of Marxist Humanism in France', Greckij does not dispute with Althusser the thesis that ideologies, in some sense, will continue to survive even in socialism alongside so-called scientific world-views. But the former does take issue with Althusser's understanding of the term 'ideology', saying that it represents a revision of the now-established Marxist sense of the term. Greckij is none too clear in his own supposedly genuine Marxist definition of ideology. But it is clear that he thinks ideology, as understood by Althusser, is hardly if at all distinguishable from any form of social consciousness. Rather than anything else Althusser's conception of ideology would have it be a mere psychological concept.

The second point which Greckij raises is more intriguing inasmuch as it cuts across Althusser's sharp separation of science from ideology. Greckij claims that the genuinely Marxist sense of ideology encompasses within it the class, or party, approach, i.e., an ideology is the "system of ideas of a definite class, and the degree of its scientificity depends on the degree of the progressiveness of the given class in the given historical moment".[27] Despite the inherent ambiguity of this definition it clearly reveals the Soviet view concerning the historicity of scientificity. That is, in opposition to Althusser

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Greckij maintains that the scientific quality of ideas, including ideologies, is related to their position vis-à-vis the forces acting in history. Once again we see a Soviet philosopher unwilling to accept the rigid separation of science from ideology, that an ideology can have no degree of scientificity. Given the Soviet, or at least Greckij's, definition of ideology, we can see how even if humanism were conceded to be an ideological concept, it would still be possible to speak of a scientific humanism. Such a scientific humanism would be one which linked the interests of mankind in general to the progressive forces in history, viz., the proletarian movement. Not surprisingly this is the general Soviet position.

If it makes sense to speak of a scientific humanism, i.e., to say that the divorce of science from humanism is not nearly as sharp as Althusser asserts it is, one might then expect, reciprocally, that genuine theory and science can be humanistic as well. This is in fact precisely what we find Greckij claiming, and it is the basis for the Soviet claim that Marxism can be both a science and a humanism. In Greckij's opinion, Althusser's view on the theoretical status of humanism "leads to an obvious contradiction between theory, which is erroneously proclaimed 'non-humanistic', and humanistic practice".[28] Unfortunately Greckij fails to point out precisely what is the contradiction which he sees arising. He, nevertheless, makes clear the implication of his position that: "In the meantime the question of the 'theoretical status' of humanism is by no means a purely theoretical question".[29] On the contrary, it must be properly situated in the discussions concerning the role of the individual and of society, the scientificity of ethics and ideology, etc.

In his presentation at the 1969 conference on structuralism Greckij in effect warned the participants of the only seemingly Marxist appearance of Althusser's views. While at first glance Althusser's treatment of the relation of the individual to social relations appears to be orthodox, it actually leads to the dissolution of man in these relations.[30] Greckij also discussed the question of the role of the individual in society in his *Filosofskie Nauki* article. He there addressed himself to Althusser's contention that humanism, being an ideology, has no object of knowledge of its own. Greckij replies that if we understand Marxism, as Althusser does, as the study of society which leaves no independent role whatever to the individual person, yes it does *not* have its own object of knowledge. For then Marxism, in studying social relations and the regularities in the changes of these relations, would also include in this study the individual's role in these changes. Humanism, as a separate

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subject, would have no place left in theory. On the other hand, if we grant within the limits of the Marxist study of society a relative independence to the individual, whose essence is not merely the given social relations, humanism has an object of its own.

> In that case the relation of this or that social phenomenon to this human essence . . . does not completely and entirely amount to the question of the harmoniousness or contradictoriness of the social structure. In that case it makes sense to talk about contradictions between a personality and society and about their resolution.[31]

By according a relative independence to the individual within the framework of society and studying the regularities in the independent development of the individual, which dialectically interacts with the regularities of society's development, we have a humanism with its own object of knowledge. Such a humanism, moreover, does not stand in opposition to historical materialism.

Other Soviet philosophers take up the question of the role of the individual in society and in history. Samarskaja, for example, finds that:

> Althusser in fact does not touch on questions of the creative role of the scientist in scientific progress. . . . In Althusser's conceptions there remains the unilluminated question concerning the influence of the scientist's personality on the progress of knowledge. Is this one of the consequences of Althusser's conceptions or is it simply a question which he has so far not worked on?[32]

Samarskaja is willing to give Althusser the benefit of the doubt and give him the chance to formulate his position on this matter in the future. Samarskaja, nevertheless, thinks that:

> everyone must assume that there is a definite connection between his denial of the subject-object model of knowledge, the definition of knowledge as a structural process and a unilateral stress on the influence of the historical structure of knowledge on perceiving individuals.[33]

Regardless of what stance Althusser will take in the future concerning the role of the scientist, he has already, in Samarskaja's opinion, pronounced his incorrect conclusion that people are neither essential in understanding society nor the active agents in history. Althusser sees any view which accords a role to the free, creative activity of individuals as simply ideological and non-scientific.

Still another Soviet philosopher, T. A. Saxarova, recognizes Althusser's inability to deal adequately with the role of the individual in history. Yet

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Saxarova goes on to diagnose correctly the root cause of Althusser's failure. While he proclaims historical materialism to be the science of history Althusser's own account of historical materialism leaves little, if any, room for the dynamic of history. Althusser misunderstands the interaction between social structures and social practices which in the end leaves no room at all for history. As Saxarova writes:

> Althusser himself, however, fails to reveal an adequate conception of history. He cannot present the problem of history on the basis of a correct understanding of the relations between social structures and social practices. Considering people merely as a support of the productive relations, Althusser underestimates the role of the subjective factor in history and in fact throws overboard history itself.[34]

In an otherwise not very distinguished article the Roumanian philosopher O. Kecan criticizes Althusser's Western critics for failing to engage in a "theoretical discussion of Althusser's central conceptions, in particular losing sight of his position concerning the ideological status of humanism".[35] Whether or not this is a correct charge against the Western critics, we can readily see it is not so with the Soviet philosophers. Yet, on the other hand, the Soviets seldom turn their attention to a specific analysis of Althusser's more strictly epistemological views. Saxarova is one exception to this case. According to Saxarova Althusser is incorrect when he asserts that theoretical political economy must be related to an equally theoretical history. Althusser's exclusion of concrete history lies behind his anti-historicist stance.

> From Althusser's point of view history figures in *Capital* as the subject of theory, as an abstract, conceptual object, and not a concrete-real subject. This is why the only correct and genuinely scientific subject is the relation not between theoretical political economy and concrete history, but between theoretical political economy and theoretical history. This leads Althusser to the paradoxical assertion that from the theoretical point of view Marxism is an anti-historicism.[36]

Althusser's concern with general regularities in structures leads him to neglect Marx's dialectical synthesis of the logical and the historical. Such a position can find its basis in Marx only if one selectively picks out of context some of Marx's expressions. Althusser simply "does not recognize that the novelty and fecundity of Marx's scientific method consists precisely in the dialectical synthesis of the logical and the historical".[37] Althusser in wishing to stress the logical aspect of Marx's method calls it an anti-historicism, but it is also necessary to see that the actual, objective relations, which are the subject of structural analysis, have a real content.

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If in the analysis of capitalism Marx starts from the logical, from the general structure of capitalist society, this structure was not merely an abstract one in general but the structure of a specific historical formation. In *Capital*, in particular, it is the formation of capitalist society in the second half of the 19th century.[38]

Saxarova is willing to agree with Althusser that there is a difference between concrete reality and ideas, between the real subject and the object of knowledge. For the former, however, there is a dialectical connection between them, an interpenetration of theory and practice. In Althusser's scheme theory becomes radically divorced from practice, and one or the other is relegated to the realm of the unscientific. Such a proposal cannot but raise the ire of many a Marxist. As Saxarova writes:

One can agree with Althusser that it is completely legitimate to establish scientific knowledge on the conceptualization of the real and, therefore, to distinguish the real subject from the object of knowledge, concrete reality from ideas. But it is impossible at that to break the dialectical tie between the idea of reality and reality as such itself, since that would then break the essential interpenetration of theory and practice.[39]

In his address at the conference on structuralism Kozlovskij pointed out many differences between the dialectical and the structuralist methods towards several problems. Among these he notes, in a similar vein to that of Saxarova, that the two methods lead to quite different positions with respect to the causal connection between ideas and reality, between the infrastructure and the superstructure and between the economic base and social consciousness, viz., ideology. Diminishing the importance of the connections, and with it the conflicts arising, between the infrastructure and the superstructure, some structuralists go so far as to deny outright any link between the two. Nevertheless despite the fact that Kozlovskij himself wrote the report on the conference which appeared in *Filosofskie Nauki*, it fails to show how, or even if, he backed up his observations further.

In order that the reader may obtain a more accurate appraisal of the quality of Soviet literature on Althusser we should point out that not all pieces show the same level of penetration as even those which we have so far discussed. Kecan's article in particular is mostly confined to presenting Western criticisms and opinions on issues raised by Althusser's work. Kecan does manage to express his approval of a theoretical humanism within the confines of Marxism but completely fails to demonstrate in any way how this is possible in the face of Althusser's pronouncements. Kecan, nevertheless, manages to say with respect to Althusser that: "This reconsideration [of the

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idea of humanism – TN], however, is not always accompanied with a profound analysis possibly owing to his intentionally sensational analysis".[40]

Among the more startling statements is that made by G. M. Gak at the Moscow conference where he asserted that structuralism seems like an attempt to combine Marxism with the philosophy of Mach or existentialist anthropology.[41] Now while a case can be made for labeling Althusser a positivist, one can hardly imagine a philosopher whose outlook is more at variance with the existentialists. Whereas existentialism is primarily a philosophical anthropology, i.e., a philosophy concerned with the role of the individual in the world, Althusser's philosophy seeks to squelch all such talk and eradicate all traces of it from within Marxism. We should also note that all too often mention was made at the conference of the 'structural-functional method' as if Althusser, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan and Parsons all shared the same methodological approach.

Having dealt with the worst, we can now turn to the philosophically most interesting treatment of Althusser in the Soviet literature which is by O. I. Džioev in his *Materialist Conception of History and Bourgeois Philosophy*. Džioev agrees with Althusser that all too often the views of Hegel and Marx have been examined without sufficient attention to the total character of their systems. This has been notably the case in studies of the relationship between Hegel and Marx. Although both make use of a dialectic the Marxist dialectic differs from the Hegelian one not merely in its materialist character. Džioev agrees with Althusser that we cannot simply put the Hegelian dialectic on its feet and thereby have a rationally interpreted Hegelianism. On the contrary, Hegel's dialectic is inseparable from his idealist system. Although Hegel's system is a monism, Marxism is no less a monism.

Džioev, along with the other Soviet philosophers, also raises the problem of the logical vis-à-vis the historical method. Džioev claims that Althusser correctly views the method at work in *Capital* as a logical method. And since the distinction of the logical from the historical method is not often seen, Althusser has some justification for stressing it. Marx himself showed that the logical and the historical could not completely coincide. But there are different sides to this problem. Sometimes, though seldom, the problem of their interrelation is a problem of the relation between consciousness and reality. Much more often do we find the interrelation of the logical and the historical as the problem of the interrelation of two methods of knowledge. Being different methods for obtaining knowledge of reality, one cannot refute the

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other. The logic of a fixed, existing subject cannot in itself refute the logic of a becoming, historical subject. "History has its own logic and only thanks to this can it have its own independent meaning".[42] Consequently Althusser incorrectly sees an opposition of Marxism to historicism. Admittedly historicism is just one side of the complete picture. The absolute historicist is, of course, just as incorrect in maintaining the reduction of logic to history. But Althusser's ideas go to the other extreme and cannot account for the transition from one socio-economic system to another. It is precisely in solving this problem that historicism is of use to and within Marxism. On the other hand, "the denial of historicism produces insoluble difficulties for Althusser and his followers in conceiving this transition".[43]

In Džioev's account the Althusserians explain the transition from one system to another in the following way. Each society has and produces its own interwoven structure. Yet each sphere and level within society has a certain independence which is marked by a definite type of time, or temporality. The transition from one social structure to another[44] is not the consequence of the smooth functioning of any one side of society but, rather, is the result of what Althusser calls 'dislocations'.[45] A dislocation arises when some element of the structure exists before and independently of another. Presumably dislocations exist at all times and not simply during the period of transition. But whereas in stable periods the dislocations act in collusion, in the transitional periods the various dislocated elements of society collide. Since such a period is characterized by the simultaneous existence of various means of production no single concept will ever be satisfactory for the examination of that period. Džioev tells us that the Althusserians claim there is a more general synchrony, i.e., more general concept, than that for one mode of production. But the foundation for the so-called more general synchrony, in fact for the whole transitional movement, remains unclear. Džioev himself contends that Althusser's view of the transition as the consequence of colliding heterogeneous social processes means rejecting any form of necessity operative in the transition. Independently of Džioev's account we know that Althusser cannot account for it in terms of the actions of individual human beings. How then can Althusser explain the transition except through some contingent mechanism?

Džioev's point above is well-taken. Althusser stands in sharp opposition to what he regards as a lingering Hegelian influence on the thought of Marx, even the mature Marx. To see a necessity at work in the contingent circum-

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stances is a flirtation with idealism, since under this conception we are obliged to collapse the distinction between theory and what is known. In the consequently resulting monism the concept of necessity is held as primary thereby making the empirical existence of things ideal or spiritual.

It may be helpful here to point out that despite his overall correct portrayal of Althusser's teaching, Džioev fails to note the sense in which Althusser can speak of necessity. The concept of 'necessity' can be used in the designation of knowledge. For example, in speaking of the knowledge of a determinate object, say, the economy, we can talk of economic necessity. We can also speak of economic laws as operating necessarily in a certain manner. Notwithstanding this, however, we cannot transfer, as it were, this necessity to the role of the individual in society, "for to do so is to compare the knowledge of one definite object with the empirical existence of another!"[46]

Džioev finds the foundation for Althusser's anti-historicism in the latter's rejection of what Althusser calls "a unique linear time". By virtue of his substitution of temporalities, each of which is linked to a level of social formation, for unique linear time Althusser comes close to structuralism. In Džioev's opinion Althusser exaggerates the distinction between the laws of a functioning social system and those of the transition. Recognition and knowledge of the laws of the transition are impossible without the active participation of people. But we still can speak of historical necessity which has its foundation in the society's developmental needs.

For Džioev the question of the role of the individual in history is simply not a mere empirical one. No Althusserian disagrees with the empirical fact that the working class is composed of individuals, that individuals man the machines in the capitalist as well as socialist factories. The contention that people are not the subjects of history must be of another sort. To Džioev the fundamental dispute here hinges on whether social and historical laws operate with fatal inevitability. Undoubtedly concrete human actions lie behind the changes in society. But are these actions dictated in some fashion? Are people merely the blind tools of history? Our answers to these questions will determine how we respond to the Althusserian position in general. On these questions Džioev attempts to strike a balance between what he regards as the structuralist stance, or at least its logical consequence, and radical voluntarism. Man is the subject, but not an unqualified one, of history. We must not ignore the limits to human activity in history and, concomitantly, the limits to the consideration of man as the subject of history. These limits, however, are not

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of some spiritual origin but are set by man himself as well as by his products. Different spheres of society have their own definite internal regularities, which are determined in part by the very nature of the sphere. Thus we see that even if we regard man as the subject of history, we need not accept without qualification the position that regularities in any particular sphere, including history, must necessarily be a reflection of regularities set by man himself. But just as it is impossible to reduce social and historical regularities to regularities in human behavior, so too is it impossible to reduce them to the functioning of impersonal structures. Džioev repeats again, what we have seen as a common Soviet charge, that if people only did what structures required of them, there would never be a socialist revolution. It is by ignoring this all-important 'leap' on the part of the workers that the structuralists are able to reject the position that man is the subject of history.

Džioev recognizes that while Althusser rejects *theoretical* humanism, he considers himself a *practical* humanist. This separation of the two spheres has its foundation in the Althusserian distinction between science and ideology, with values belonging to the sphere of ideology. As usually understood, scientific judgments are those which express a fact concerning objective reality; value judgments are those which express the relation of the subject to what is expressed in factual or scientific judgments. If this is an accurate portrayal of Althusser's position on these judgments, then to that extent it has validity. Nevertheless, the factual judgment and the value judgment are not absolutely contradictory. Each has definite criteria, and there is a sense in which values have objectivity and truthfulness.[47] Although Džioev fails to provide a more demanding account of just how values can possibly have truthfulness, the consequence with respect to Althusser's position is clear. Althusser's practical humanism can, even if he will not admit it, have a theoretical, and indeed scientific, foundation.

Hopefully one of the main intentions behind the present examination of the Soviet critique of Althusser is now in sight. Of course we are interested in the Soviet position for its own sake, for what it reveals about contemporary Soviet philosophical thought. But there is another intention behind the present inquiry. In *Reading Capital*, as well as allusions elsewhere, Althusser, in effect, questions the Marxism of Gramsci, i.e., not so much whether it is correct as such as whether Gramsci's views are genuinely Marxist. Althusser does this under the purported guise of an examination of Gramsci's interpretation of dialectical materialism only.[48] The thrust of that examination,

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however, is quite clear. Now the merits, or lack thereof, of that analysis is not our concern at present. The point is simply that just as Althusser questions Gramsci's worthiness to the Marxist label so too can we, via the Soviet critique, question Althusser's worthiness to the self-characterization as a *Marxist* philosopher. Assuming the thoroughly genuine Marxist character of the Soviet position and also assuming the validity of the Soviet critique discussed here we must conclude that among the *non-Marxist* 'elements' of Althusser's stance are the following: the science/ideology dichotomy in general (i.e., as that dichotomy is made in Althusser), the claim that dialectical materialism is not a science, does not yield knowledge and is not provable, the opposition to the concept of a historical dialectic, part of which is that of the 'negation of the negation', the opposition to theoretical humanism in general as well as to the humanism of the mature Marx, the claim that philosophical categories have an entirely absolute character, the conception of ideology devoid of historical reference and his rejection of a unique linear time. Admittedly some of these items could fall under the heading of others. On the other hand, there may be still more than these. Nevertheless, the question remains the same. With the exclusion of dialectical materialism, a role for the revolutionary individual(s) and the historical dialectic, indeed for historical movement itself, what is left of Marxism in Althusser's position except a concern for determining the relationship between the infrastructure and what Althusser terms 'ideology', something with which many 'bourgeois' sociologists of knowledge are also concerned? More often than not Althusser is satisfied with saying *that* Marx held some view instead of *demonstrating* that he held it. Naturally it would be wrong to think that the Soviets have an exclusive hold on orthodox Marxism. But upon a more careful examination we see that the confrontation is not between two groups which agree as to basic principles but differ on specifics, on the consequences or implementation of the shared principles. The differences between the Soviets and the Althusserians, on the contrary, involve basic disagreements concerning principles. From the Soviet perspective Althusser and his followers seek to shed vast areas of Marxism. Not only would it, so to speak, be cut in half with the exclusion of dialectical materialism, but the remaining half, historical materialism, would be left devoid of history!

Nowhere do the Soviet philosophers themselves outrightly accuse Althusser of espousing non-Marxist views. Given the nature of their criticisms this may be a bit surprising. Certainly other admitted non-Marxists are labeled

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bourgeois and idealistic thinkers for their refusal, in Soviet eyes, to deal adequately with the role of history, the dialectic and individual initiative. Why, then, does Althusser receive special treatment? Of course we can only give a speculative answer to this question. Almost surely it has its basis in Althusser's continued loyal political stand on such issues as, for example, 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Should this stand ever change we may be able to test our hypothesis empirically. Should Althusser ever move politically away from the Soviet position we may notice a quite different tone at the conclusion of the Soviet philosophical critiques.

4. ALTHUSSER'S EPISTEMOLOGY RECONSIDERED

The question of with what justification one can label Althusser a Marxist is best left for the convinced Marxists. It is of great importance to recognize that among contemporary philosophical schools only Marxists question each other's worthiness to the Marxist label. Analytic philosophers, for example, do not go around questioning whether so and so should rightly call himself an analytic philosopher. As philosophers, regardless of personal persuasion, we are, or should be, engaged in conceiving, elaborating and criticizing our own ideas as well as those of other philosophers. Oftentimes criticism of others' ideas helps us to formulate our own. To a large degree one's standing as a philosopher is measured by how his philosophy fares in the face of the criticism from others and by its rigor, penetration and insight into the philosophical problems it raises. How does Althusser fare in this respect? Does he stand on the shoulders of giants while yet perceiving their weaknesses?

Althusser attempts to elaborate a Marxist epistemology, the epistemology found in a 'reading' of *Capital* as well as other mature writings of Marx. We here only wish to raise the question of Althusser's Marxism, not answer it. Althusser's standing as an epistemologist, on the other hand, is a matter in which the entire philosophical community can, if it wishes, engage without justifiable charges of partisanship. His rejection of humanism and historicism, he admits, is based on his epistemological conceptions. Thus, since he has directed so much of his energy against these twin 'evils' we would expect him to have devoted quite a bit of attention to epistemological questions and especially to showing how his position corrects the errors found in traditional positions.

Amazingly Althusser sees Kant's critical philosophy as logically leading

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to Hegel's absolute idealism pure and simple. In what other way can we explain Althusser's fear that any concession to idealism leads to the elimination of the real object? Yet when we look at the materialism of Althusser's 'historical materialism' we find the position which more accurately could be called realism. His writings present no proof, and indeed even admit no proof is possible, that *everything* in the universe is *material*. Despite his protest to the contrary it is difficult to see how his 'materialist' ontology would be fundamentally irreconcilable with some forms of neo-Kantianism.

Larger questions, however, need answering. How do we *know* that the world is real? How can we even speak of the process of knowledge as involving a 'mechanism'? How would we *know* if and when our thought cognitively grasps the real object? What is the origin of our concepts? If their origin is explained in anything other than conceptual terms, the dichotomy between the ideal and the real is fused, at least at some point, thereby lapsing into an empiricism. Furthermore, the historical genesis of concepts would also have to be explained in terms of another time dimension than the real time in which we live our lives, for otherwise we would lapse into a reductionism to a unique linear time. What then is this 'other' time in which concepts originate? These are just some, but by no means all, of the unilluminated aspects of Althusser's philosophy. Earlier we saw what Althusser regards as the fundamental question in epistemology. Unfortunately Althusser fails to provide even the answer to his own question.

Louvain

NOTES

[1] Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster, London, New Left Books, 1977, p. 233.
[2] Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971, p. 37.
[3] See, for example, E. A. Samarskaja, 'Sootnošenie nauki, ideologii i filosofii v traktovke L. Al'tjusera', *FN* 1971, 3, 138.
[4] Althusser, 'Lenin', *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[6] Although this is the manner in which Althusser expresses himself the expression 'scientific knowledge' is either redundant, inasmuch as all genuine knowledge is scientific, or Althusser is himself not entirely convinced of his exclusion of the possibility of other types of knowledge.

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[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.
[8] Althusser, 'For', *op. cit.*, p. 228.
[9] Louis Althusser, Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. by Ben Brewster, London, New Left Books, 1970, p. 36.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 41.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 56. Emphasis deleted.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 133.
[13] Althusser, 'For', *op. cit.*, p. 231.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 236.
[15] Althusser, 'Lenin', *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[16] Althusser, 'For', *op. cit.*, p. 228.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 243.
[18] Althusser, 'Reading', *op. cit.*, p. 143.
[19] S. I. Popov, *Socializm i gumanizm*, M., Politizdat, 1974, p. 55.
[20] V. E. Kozlovskij, 'Strukturalizm i dialektičeskij materializm', *FN* 1970, 1, 177.
[21] Popov, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[22] Samarskaja, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 144.
[24] Althusser, 'Lenin', *op. cit.*, p. 65.
[25] Samarskaja, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 145.
[27] M. N. Greckij, 'Diskussija vo Francii o marksistskom gumanizme', *FN* 1966, 4, 130.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 129.
[29] *Ibid.*, p. 129.
[30] Kozlovskij, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
[31] Greckij, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
[32] Samarskaja, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 142.
[34] T. A. Saxarova, 'Francuzskie marksisty o "Kapitale" K. Marksa', *VF* 1967, 9, 94.
[35] O. Kecan, 'Gumanizm i trudnosti obuslovlennye teoretičeskoj neodnoznačnost' ju etogo ponjatija', *VF* 1970, 5, 117.
[36] Saxarova, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 95.
[38] *Ibid.*, p. 95.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 98. Despite her strong criticisms Saxarova, like so many other Soviet philosophers, at the end draws back from the, to the Western eye, expected charge that Althusser's conceptions are dangerously revisionistic, if at all Marxist. Instead Saxarova simply says that the French Marxist's analyses of *Capital* have played a "positive role in the deeper understanding and resolution of the philosophical problems advanced by Marx". *Ibid.*, p. 99.
[40] Kecan, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
[41] Kozlovskij, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
[42] O. I. Džioev, *Materialističeskoe ponimanie istorii i buržuaznaja filosofija*, Tbilisi, Izd. 'Mecniereba', 1974, p. 99.
[43] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
[44] Correctly, Džioev should say here "from one mode of production to another". Cf. Althusser, 'Reading', *op. cit.*, p. 108f.

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[45] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[47] Džioev, *op. cit.*, pp. 112–113.
[48] See Althusser, 'Reading', *op. cit.*, pp. 126–135.

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