

# Humanity, That Sickness: Louis Althusser and The Helpless- ness of Psychoa- nalysis

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### Abstract:

The fiftieth anniversary of the publications of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* indeed calls for celebrations of Althusser's accomplishments, a Marxist legacy endowed by the opening years of the twenty-first century with renewed timeliness and urgency. However, celebrating Althusser on this occasion should involve not only returning to the (in)famous anti-humanist author of these 1965 works centered on claims regarding Marx's alleged "epistemological break" of 1845—it also should involve revisiting lesser-known moments in Althusser's extended *oeuvre* and, in so doing, recovering other Althusserians than the best-known one of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. Herein, I engage in the latter mode of honoring Althusser. Specifically, I scrutinize his shifting, ambivalent relations with Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Doing so enables me to (re)construct an Althusserian (or quasi-Althusserian) version of dialectical and historical materialisms in which philosophical anthropology *à la* Hegel and Marx, analysis *à la* Freud and Lacan, and various branches of biology, all on equal footing with each other, cooperate so as to yield a compatibilism both uncompromisingly materialist and, at the same time, thoroughly anti-reductionist.

### Keywords:

Hegel, Marx, Freud, Lacan, Althusser, materialism, psychoanalysis

Already in 1947, a young Louis Althusser draws attention to specific peculiar features of G.W.F. Hegel's philosophical anthropology. In "Man, That Night," a review of the published version of Alexandre Kojève's legendary 1930s lectures on Hegel then just released in print, Althusser, following Kojève himself,<sup>1</sup> highlights a now-familiar moment in the 1805-1806 *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, namely, the one when Hegel speaks of the "human being" as "this night, this empty nothing," "a night that becomes awful (*furchtbar*)."<sup>2</sup> Introducing this particular Hegelian passage, Althusser opens his review thusly:

The profoundest themes of the Romantic nocturne haunt Hegel's thinking. Yet Night is not, in Hegel, the blind peace of the darkness

1 Kojève 1947, pp. 574-575

2 Hegel 1987, p. 172

through which discrete entities make their solitary way, separated from one another for all eternity. It is, by the grace of man, the birth of Light. Before Nietzsche—and with what rigour—Hegel saw in man a sick animal who neither dies nor recovers (*cet animal malade qui ne meurt ni ne guérit*), but stubbornly insists on living on in a nature terrified of him (*mais s'entête à vivre dans une nature effarée*). The animal kingdom reabsorbs its monsters, the economy its crises: man alone is a triumphant error who makes his aberration the law of the world. At the level of nature, man is an absurdity, a gap in being (*un trou dans l'être*), an 'empty nothing,' a 'Night.'<sup>3</sup>

Twenty years later, in 1967's "The Humanist Controversy," a better-known, older Althusser similarly states, "a definition of the essence of Man in Hegel... makes man a 'sick animal,' not a labouring animal."<sup>4</sup> Of course, this post-1965 remark is of a piece with Althusser's efforts to defend and reinforce his (in)famous thesis apropos Karl Marx's alleged 1845 "epistemological break" with Feuerbach and, behind the latter, with Hegel too. As I later will argue here, for Hegel, Marx, and Althusser (as well as Jacques Lacan), there are implicit and explicit links between both this "sickness" and this "laboring" as equally distinctive, perhaps even co-constitutive, of human beings.

Contemporaneously with "The Humanist Controversy," in "Notes sur la philosophie" (1967-1968), Althusser hesitantly floats the interpretive hypothesis that "a certain anthropological Hegelianism" perhaps continues to haunt the mature Marx of *Capital*.<sup>5</sup> This somewhat tempers the contrast between Hegelian and Marxian anthropologies underscored in "The Humanist Controversy." Moreover, it might not be straightforwardly critical of this Marx; as I have shown elsewhere, Althusser throughout his career is far from categorically hostile to Hegel, finding much in Hegel's philosophy of value for historical, dialectical, and aleatory materialisms.<sup>6</sup>

As is common knowledge, Lacan, in terms of both his construal of Hegelian philosophy as well as many other features of his own teaching, is profoundly marked by his youthful encounter with Kojève (Lacan having attended those 1930s seminars being reviewed in book form by Althusser

3 Althusser 1994a, p. 239; Althusser 1997, p. 170

4 Althusser 2003, p. 250

5 Althusser 1995, p. 321

6 Johnston 2015a [forthcoming]; Johnston 2016a [forthcoming]

in 1947). For better or worse, Lacan's Hegel, whenever the French psychoanalyst mentions the German philosopher by name, usually is Kojève's, namely, the author of the 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* propounding a proto-existentialist and proto-Marxist philosophical anthropology centered on tensions between positions of mastery and slavery. However, not only does Lacan, sometimes intentionally/explicitly and sometimes unintentionally/implicitly, manage to do more interpretive justice to Hegel's thinking than Kojève—he dramatically develops and extends the implications of the intuitions of the Jena-period, pre-*Phenomenology* Hegel quoted by both Kojève and Althusser. Having detailed these Lacanian developments and extensions at length on other occasions,<sup>7</sup> I herein both will be somewhat selective in my references to Lacan as well as will rely upon the evidence and arguments put forward by me on these just-mentioned separate occasions. In what ensues, my focus will be more on Althusser and Althusser's engagements (not unrelated to each other) with Hegelian philosophy and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Returning to this intervention's starting point with Althusser's equation of the nocturnal with the sick in Hegel's early *Realphilosophie*, another fragment from the latter's pre-1807 Jena phase is especially striking. In the incomplete manuscripts of his 1803/1804 *Das System der spekulativen Philosophie*, Hegel identifies organic illness as the pivotal mediator facilitating the transition from animal *Natur* to human *Geist*—"With sickness, the animal exceeds the limit of its nature; but, the sickness of the animal is the becoming of the spirit" (*Mit der Krankheit überschreitet das Tier die Grenze seiner Natur; aber die Krankheit des Tiers ist das Werden des Geistes*).<sup>8</sup> A few scholars of German idealism, including Althusser's and Lacan's friend Jean Hyppolite, mention this thesis of the young Hegel.<sup>9</sup> But, it is not directly referenced by Kojève or Althusser. However, in the 1955 *écrit* "Variations on the Standard Treatment," Lacan perhaps obliquely gestures at this when he speaks of "the dehiscence from natural harmony (*cette déhiscence de l'harmonie naturelle*), required by Hegel to serve as the fruitful illness, life's happy fault, in which man, distinguishing himself from his essence, discovers his existence (*la*

7 Johnston 2008, pp. 269-287; Johnston 2011, pp. 159-179; Johnston 2012, pp. 23-52; Johnston 2016b [forthcoming]

8 Hegel 1986, p. 179

9 Hyppolite 1969, pp. 160-161; Breidbach 1982, p. 326; Harris 1983, pp. 101, 113, 450, 460, 467, 506; Harris 1997, pp. 500, 521, 524

*maladie féconde, la faute heureuse de la vie, où l'homme, à se distinguer de son essence, découvre son existence*)<sup>10</sup> (I am not sure whether Lacan actually had first-hand familiarity with the fragments constituting Hegel's 1803/1804 *Das System der spekulativen Philosophie*, although he may have been made aware of this material thanks to Hyppolite). As will subsequently prove to be significant for my line of thought here, Lacan associates this Hegelian "fruitful illness" specifically with the Freud-emphasized biological fact of human beings' developmental-ontogenetic *Hilflosigkeit*, their species-distinctive prolonged prematurational helplessness (a condition Lacan fleshes out under the heading of his concept of the "body-in-pieces" [*corps morcelé*]).<sup>11</sup> I will come back to all of this in the final third of this piece.

For Hegel himself, in line with certain notions shared amongst his contemporaries (such as F.W.J. Schelling), organic illness essentially involves the rebellion of part against whole. That is to say, disease occurs when an organ malfunctions and runs amok such as to disrupt the functional unity of the organism to which it belongs. Hegelian sickness is the consequence of an organ becoming "anorganic," namely, coming to assert its independence, so to speak, from the larger organic whole.

Yet, as the mature Hegel's philosophical "Anthropology" (i.e., the stretch of his *Realphilosophie* immediately succeeding, within the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, the culmination of *Naturphilosophie* in "Organics") makes clear (for instance, in its well-known discussion of "habit"), intra-organic imbalancing, the becoming-uneven of the organism's parts in relation to each other and the whole, comes to fashion and characterize the distinctively human as denaturalized and more-than-animalistic.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, insofar as "sickness" involves certain of an organism's organs lop-sidedly enjoying excessive priority/prominence, the Hegelian philosophical-anthropological doctrine of the peculiarly human soul (*Seele*) indeed depicts humanity as, at its zero-level, sick animality. The human being is, at its roots, the animal that has fallen ill *qua* lost the organic unity of its natural body—hence the justness of Lacan's above-mentioned linking of Hegelian humanizing-*qua*-deanimalizing *Krankheit* with Freudian *Hilflosigkeit* and the body-in-pieces.

But, apart from Althusser's already-cited 1947 and 1967 references

10 Lacan 1966, p. 345; Lacan 2006, p. 286

11 Johnston 2012, pp. 23-52

12 Hegel 1971, §378 [p. 3], §381 [pp. 8, 13-15], §388 [p. 29], §391 [pp. 35-36], §392 [p. 38], §409-410 [pp. 139-147], §412 [pp. 151-152]

to Hegel's human being as a sick animal, what more, if anything, does Althusserian Marxism have to do with Hegel, Freud, Lacan, and the cluster of interrelated topics I have introduced here thus far (such as nature-and-culture, animal-and-human, humanization as denaturalization/deanimalization, helplessness, and laboring)? As will be seen below shortly, the Althusser who refers to animality-fallen-ill furnishes the beginnings of an ensemble of intertwined red threads allowing for a guided re-traversal of his intellectual itinerary (the very re-traversal I will pursue in what follows). In particular, Althusser's engagements with Freudianism generally and Lacan's version of it especially, re-examined in light of the Hegelian motif of the sick animal taken up by both Lacan and Althusser, promise to facilitate Marxism and psychoanalysis mutually illuminating and but-tressing each other.

Moreover, my revisitation of the Althusserian corpus from the early 1960s through the mid-1980s, one oriented by features of Hegelian philosophy and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, concludes by bringing to the fore a surprising incarnation of the late Althusser, an Althusser contemporaneous with and related to, but not fully visible within, the "aleatory materialism of the encounter" now quite familiar to his readers. That is, I will end by sketching nothing other than an Althusserian theory of freedom, of a radically autonomous, instead of heteronomously subjected, subject. This little-noticed Althusser should be startling to all those who, not without good reasons, associate him with an uncompromising determinism resulting from his syntheses of Spinozism, Marxism, and structuralism during the 1960s.

Already in Althusser's 1963-1964 seminar on Lacan at the École Normale Supérieure (ENS), he identifies Lacan's "great discovery" as a recasting of the ontogenesis of the socialized, acculturated "human subject" out of "the biological little human being." This recasting is one in which, as Althusser has it, "culture" (as the Lacanian symbolic order into which the neonate is thrown even before the moment of physical birth) precedes and induces each and every ontogenetic movement from "biology" to "culture," rather than culture being the entirely secondary outgrowth and after-effect of biology.<sup>13</sup> 1964's "Freud and Lacan" likewise subsequently declares:

That is, no doubt, the most original part of Lacan's work: his discovery. Lacan has shown that the passage from (in the limit case, pure) biological existence to human existence (the child of man) is effected

13 Althusser 1996a, p. 91; Johnston 2015a

under the Law of the Order that I will call the Law of Culture and that this Law of Culture can be conflated in its *formal* essence with the order of language.<sup>14</sup>

This just-quoted 1964 echo of a precise moment in the preceding 1963-1964 seminar occurs early on in the third section of “Freud and Lacan.” The prior second section, which begins by asking, “What is the *object* of psychoanalysis?,”<sup>15</sup> eloquently (and rather poignantly) foreshadows this point about Lacan’s “discovery.” Therein, Althusser portrays the familial unit, with its analytically disclosed structures and dynamics (i.e., its Oedipal “complexes”), as the key site and/or agency in and through which “culture” catalyzes and oversees the young child’s transition from biology to culture, from animality to subjectivity. The family, as itself an entity straddling several lines between the natural and the social, is responsible for pulling the infant up and over these very borders.<sup>16</sup>

Also in the second section of “Freud and Lacan,” Althusser succinctly and deftly differentiates psychoanalysis from an array of other disciplines in relation to which it recurrently is at risk of losing some or all of its unique disciplinary distinctiveness (in *Reading Capital*, Althusser again underscores this distinctive specificity of analysis and its object<sup>17</sup>). With its field-specific object the unconscious, itself the consequent product of the repressed ordeals of Oedipal socio-cultural deanimalization and subjectification, analysis is, first of all, irreducible to the life sciences. Whereas biology deals with nature, analysis deals with the transitions and borderlines between nature and non-nature/more-than-nature.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, just as the liminal status of psychoanalysis and its unconscious blocks any absorption of analysis into the natural sciences, so too does it prevent wholly and comfortably including analysis amongst the “human sciences” (i.e., the humanities and social sciences). Insofar as analytic ontogenesis straddles and moves across the frontiers between the natural and the human, it is as irreducible to anthropology, history, psychology, or sociology (the human sciences mentioned by Althusser

14 Althusser 1996b, p. 25

15 Ibid., p. 22

16 Ibid., pp. 22-23

17 Althusser 2009, p. 173

18 Althusser 1996b, p. 23

here) as it is to, for instance, biology and neurology.<sup>19</sup>

To refer back to the end of the prior block quotation, Althusser italicizes the word “*formal*” in his rendition of Lacan’s account of the socio-symbolic/linguistic constitution of the analytic unconscious. This emphasized adjective signals a qualification to Althusser’s admiration—Lacan receives more emphatic praise in this vein a year later in *Reading Capital*<sup>20</sup>—of the Lacanian appreciation and foregrounding of language in psychoanalysis. As the sizable bulk of 1966’s “Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse” soon suggests, Althusser believes that Lacanian analysis, left to its own devices, is confined to formalism; only as a “regional theory” of the “general theory” of historical materialism does Lacan’s theory of the unconscious avoid being purely formal (and, hence, idealist *qua* anti-materialist).<sup>21</sup> Lacan (at least the middle-period one of the 1950s-era “return to Freud”) is being contentiously accused of insufficient materialist credentials.

Particularly due to Althusser’s “flirtation” with structuralism in his best-known works of the mid-1960s,<sup>22</sup> it might seem odd to certain readers—it perhaps even appears to them to be a case of the proverbial pot calling the kettle black—to find Althusser objecting to Lacan’s purported formalist tendencies. Does not the Marxist share with Lacan not only certain structuralist inclinations (however heterodox), but also, closely related to structuralism’s sensibilities, a French neo-rationalist epistemology and perspective on the sciences past and present indebted to the likes of Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem, and Alexandre Koyré? For the time being, I will put aside serious and legitimate questions regarding the accuracy or inaccuracy of Althusser’s characterizations of Lacan’s alleged formalist leanings. That said, Althusser himself, despite certain widespread perceptions of him as “formalizing” Marxism via structuralism and neo-rationalism, recurrently protests against formalisms in (philosophy of) science generally and the human sciences (including Marxist historical/dialectical materialism as well as psychoanalysis) specifically. In “*Du côté de la philosophie*” (the fifth lesson of the 1967 ENS seminar series “Philosophy Course for Scientists”), Althusser harshly condemns neo-positivism for its transubstantiation of

19 Ibid., p. 23

20 Althusser 2009, p. 16

21 Althusser 2003, pp. 38-84

22 Althusser 1976, p. 126

all particular material objects into the abstract logical form of any object whatever.<sup>23</sup> “Elements of Self-Criticism,” in its qualified partial confession of “coquetting” with structuralism, stringently denies that Marx, including the one of *Reading Capital* and *For Marx*, is a “*formalist*.”<sup>24</sup> And, in the posthumously just-published book-length manuscript *Être marxiste en philosophie*, Althusser pointedly repudiates the Galilean-Cartesian formalist line of twentieth-century French epistemology and history of science by insisting that mathematized physics cannot be reduced to pure mathematics alone<sup>25</sup> (this makes for strange bedfellows, given that the eighteenth-century giant of early-modern British empiricism, David Hume, already warns against this very reduction<sup>26</sup>).

In a later text on psychoanalysis, 1976’s “The Discovery of Dr. Freud” (i.e., the essay at the center of “The Tbilisi Affair”), Althusser explicitly contrasts Freud’s naturalism (allied with the empirical, experimental sciences of nature, especially biology and its branches) with Lacan’s formalism (allied with mathematics and logic, particularly topology as well as game and knot theories) to the detriment of the latter.<sup>27</sup> He states:

Freud... always compared himself to a researcher in the *natural* sciences—notto a mathematician or a logician, as Lacan likes to do—and he was 100 percent right. He even compared himself so well to a researcher in the natural sciences that he was convinced—and he never stopped saying as much—that one day psychoanalysis would be united with neurology, biochemistry, and chemistry. For Freud knew that his discovery could become *the object of a natural science* (I recall here that Marx says that historical materialism ought to be considered for what it is, a ‘natural science,’ for history is part of nature, since nothing else exists in the world except nature). Nonetheless, Freud also knew that one does not *decree* that a discovery *has become* a science. He knew that certain objective conditions must be satisfied for that transformation of a discovery of nature to be possible. He knew that those conditions were not extant in his day. I will add that they are not present in our day but that there exist serious hopes stemming from recent developments in the neuro-

23 Althusser 1995, p. 287

24 Althusser 1976, pp. 126-131

25 Althusser 2015, p. 86

26 Hume 1993, pp. 19-20

27 Johnston 2013a, pp. 39-58

bio-chemistry of the human body and brain, on the one hand (an aspect anticipated by Freud), and from historical materialism, on the other (an aspect that Freud could not intuit). Experience shows that a discovery becomes a science only when it can establish *theoretical links* between its own discovery and other existing sciences.<sup>28</sup>

For Althusser, Lacan is not the (one-and-only) truly orthodox Freudian he so adamantly and repeatedly claims to be. Furthermore, Althusser’s underscoring here of the naturalist inclinations consistently exhibited by Freud is of a piece with his contemporaneous crediting of Freud’s “discovery” (i.e., the new “science,” or *science-à-venir*, of psychoanalysis) with advancing the causes of atheism, (dialectical) materialism, and even freedom.<sup>29</sup> Also noteworthy in this passage is Althusser’s somewhat unexpected (given his [in]famous mid-1960s thesis of the Bachelardian-style 1845 “epistemological break” in Marx’s itinerary) favorable invocation of the naturalism Marx first formulates in the 1844 Paris *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*—one in which human history is immanent to natural history, the former being a twisted permutation of the latter.<sup>30</sup>

Other features of the preceding block quotation call for, and promise to reward, careful unpacking in this context (although it will be a little while before I return to Althusser’s hopes, expressed in this same quotation, regarding the eventual dual supplementation of analysis by biology and Marxist materialism). To begin with, Althusser therein proposes that, sometimes, a young science-to-be (such as psychoanalysis) must wait patiently for future developments in other scientific fields before it can become a science proper by eventually forging appropriate “*theoretical links*” between itself and these subsequent advances in other sciences. Prior to this moment in “The Discovery of Dr. Freud,” the article “Freud and Lacan” depicts Lacan’s establishment of connections between Freudian analysis and post-Freudian structural linguistics as just such an appropriate forging of theoretical links, a maneuver replacing Freud’s recourse to and reliance upon pre-Freudian, nineteenth-century physics.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in both the 1966 correspondence with René Diatkine as well as 1980 addendum to a public intervention at a gathering triggered

28 Althusser 1996b, p 97

29 Ibid., p.90; *ibid.*, p.107; Althusser, 1996b, p. 107; Althusser 2015, pp. 82, 297

30 Marx 1992, pp. 355, 389-390; Johnston 2015a; 2016c

31 Althusser 1996b, p. 24

by Lacan's controversial dissolution of the *École freudienne de Paris*, Althusser accurately corrects the erroneous image of Lacan as a linguistic reductionist, doing so by rightly underscoring the weight of the "like" (*comme*), to be contrasted with other prepositions such as "by," in "the unconscious is structured like a language" (*l'inconscient est structuré comme un langage*).<sup>32</sup> In 1964 (and, perhaps, 1980 too), Althusser is much more favorably disposed towards Lacanianism, with the latter's linguistic, structuralist, and formalist inclinations, than in 1976. But, *circa* 1976, he prefers Freud's biological, empirical-scientific, and naturalist inclinations instead.

In *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* (1977-1978), Althusser, promptly on the heels of "The Discovery of Dr. Freud," exhibits a genuine ambivalence *vis-à-vis* Lacan as regards the scientific status (or lack thereof) of psychoanalysis. On a prior occasion, in a footnote to one of Althusser's contributions to *Reading Capital* ("The Object of *Capital*"), he emphasizes the importance of fighting to secure the scientific uniqueness and self-sufficiency of psychoanalysis as founded on the basis of Freud's distinctive discovery of the unconscious:

...Freud's 'object' is a radically new object with respect to the 'object' of the psychological or philosophical ideologies of his predecessors. Freud's object is the *unconscious*, which has nothing to do with the objects of all the varieties of modern psychology, although the latter can be multiplied at will! It is even possible to see the number one task of every new discipline as that of *thinking* the specific difference of the new object which it *discovers*, distinguishing it rigorously from the old object and constructing the peculiar concepts required to think it. It is in this basic theoretical work that a science wins its effective right to autonomy in open combat (*C'est dans ce travail théorique fondamental qu'une science nouvelle conquiert de haute lutte son droit effectif à l'autonomie*).<sup>33</sup>

Subsequently, *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* evinces sympathy for Lacan's endeavors along these very lines. In the late 1970s, Althusser opines:

Was it better to place, as Lacan does today in France, the accent on the real autonomy of analytic theory, thereby running the risk of its provisional scientific isolation, but also the risk of its solitude? This second

32 Ibid., pp. 64, 70; Ibid., pp. 136-137

33 Althusser 2008, p. 362; Althusser 2009, p. 173

attitude appears the more just, at least for the moment. It is sometimes necessary to leave a theory in a state of prudent scientific *incompleteness*, without anticipating the discoveries of neighboring sciences.

Experience also shows, in effect, that one does not decree the completion of a science.<sup>34</sup>

He continues:

The experience of the history of analytic theory demonstrates, in any case, that objective abstractions, not ideological, but not yet scientific, can and must subsist in this state, to the extent that neighboring sciences have not attained a point of maturity such that it permits the reunification of neighboring scientific 'continents.'

In the same way that time is needed to lead the class struggle to its conclusion, time also is necessary in order to lead to the constitution of a science as science. Moreover, it is not certain that analytic theory can don the form of a science properly speaking.<sup>35</sup>

In a footnote to the second sentence of the first of these two block quotations, G.M. Goshgarian provides the original version of this sentence from an earlier draft of Althusser's manuscript:

This second attitude appears the more just, even if Lacan did not resist the temptation to complete philosophically that which Freud had taken the jealous care of always leaving in a prudent state of scientific incompleteness, not wanting to anticipate the discoveries of neighboring sciences.<sup>36</sup>

Taking these three passages from *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* together, Althusser, apropos the Lacanian version of Freudian psychoanalysis specifically, presents a mixed picture of Lacan's endeavors in relation to Freud's purported (proto-)science. To begin with, whereas Lacan is positively credited in 1964 with a timely and justified theoretical linkage of analysis to structural linguistics, he here, in 1977-1978, is assessed differently along two distinct lines.

On the one hand, and as seen in the first of the three prior block

34 Althusser 2014a, p. 296

35 Ibid., pp. 296-297

36 Ibid., p. 296

quotations, Althusser, consistent with his above-quoted take on Freud in *Reading Capital*, approvingly portrays Lacan as bravely maintaining the disciplinary sovereignty and self-sufficiency of psychoanalysis while waiting patiently for pertinent future scientific breakthroughs in an unforeseeable interdisciplinary landscape yet to materialize. This Althusser, inconsistently in relation to some of his earlier claims cited by me previously, does not depict Lacan as partnering analysis with any other particular scientific discipline (whether linguistics, mathematics, and/or logic). On the other hand, and as revealed by the older manuscript fragment footnoted by Goshgarian (i.e., the third block quotation immediately above), the Althusser of this period nonetheless mildly rebukes Lacan for allegedly trying prematurely to finalize the Freudian framework through recourse to the tradition and discipline of philosophy.

The last sentence of the second of the preceding three block quotations (“Moreover, it is not certain that analytic theory can don the form of a science properly speaking”) happens to dovetail, whether the Althusser of *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* is aware of this or not, with Lacan’s own contemporaneous conclusions regarding the scientificity (or, rather, non-scientificity) of analysis.<sup>37</sup> Foreshadowed by moments in his twelfth, twentieth, and twenty-first seminars (*Problèmes cruciaux pour la psychanalyse* [1964-1965], *Encore* [1972-1973], and *Les non-dupes errent* [1973-1974]),<sup>38</sup> the very late Lacan of the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth seminars (*L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre* [1976-1977] and *Le moment de conclure* [1977-1978]), at exactly the time of Althusser’s writing of *Initiation*, concludes that, when all is said and done, psychoanalysis is not a science.<sup>39</sup> Analysis remains, instead, a somewhat nonsensical art, namely, “a babbling practice” (*une pratique de bavardage*), as the title of the published opening session of the unpublished *Seminar XXV* has it. This final verdict of Lacan’s renounces not only his 1950s-era scientific ambitions for analysis *vis-à-vis* structural linguistics—it abruptly breaks with and repudiates Lacan’s then very-recent efforts at rendering analytic theory and practice scientific via a program of thoroughgoing logico-mathematical-style formalization (i.e., the increasing recourse to “mathemes” and turns to topology distinctive of Lacan’s intellectual trajectory during the early-to-mid 1970s). As does Althusser

37 Johnston 2013a, pp. 40-41, 58

38 Lacan 1964; Lacan 1998, p. 117; Lacan, 1973

39 Lacan 1977a; Lacan 1977b

explicitly, this last Lacanian verdict implicitly leaves open the potential-yet-unforeseeable becoming-scientific of psychoanalysis through possible extra-analytic developments *à venir* in the sciences.

A few pages later in *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes*, at the end of the same chapter (the fourteenth, entitled “Psychoanalytic Practice” [*La pratique analytique*]) of this manuscript in which the three block quotations above are situated, Althusser again addresses the issue of analysis’s openness, a receptivity uncertainly tactical or strategic, in the face of the unpredictable scientific future. He muses:

A day perhaps will arrive where one will be able to surpass the current stage of this indicative putting-into-relation, but which remains without result, when new discoveries will intervene in the apparently ‘neighboring’ sciences (neurophysiology? the theory of familial structure and ideology?). But one cannot anticipate these future developments without running great risks, confronted, in vain, by Reich in his time, and pursued today by the proponents of a spontaneist leftism.<sup>40</sup>

Althusser then adds:

If a science wants to safeguard its independence and just simply last, it should accept sometimes living for a very long time, and perhaps indefinitely, in the solitude of its own defined abstractions, without wanting to confound them with the abstractions of other existent sciences.<sup>41</sup>

With the warning about “spontaneist leftism” issued by the last sentence of the first quotation, I suspect that Althusser has in mind, as descendants of Wilhelm Reich, both Frankfurt School Freudo-Marxism *à la* Herbert Marcuse as well as, closer in time and place, the libidinal anarchism of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s anti-Oedipalism. Moreover, this same quotation echoes the hopes voiced in “The Discovery of Dr. Freud,” ones quoted by me previously, that the two disciplines of biology (here, “neurophysiology”) and Marxist materialism (here, “the theory of familial structure and ideology”) might sooner or later produce “new discoveries”—with these future breakthroughs in psychoanalysis’s disciplinary “neighbors” permitting the establishment of “theoretical links” between them and analysis. Incidentally, “The Discovery of Dr. Freud” already

40 Althusser 2014a, p. 303

41 Ibid.

credits Freud with an awareness, ostensibly exceeding that of Lacan, of familial, moral, and religious “ideological state apparatuses,”<sup>42</sup> a credit re-extended in the manuscript *Sur la reproduction*.<sup>43</sup> I will come back to these anticipations momentarily.

As the preceding clearly shows, Althusser, between 1963 and 1980, puts forward a series of disparate, and sometimes contradictory, assertions apropos Lacan and Lacan’s handling of analysis’s scientific, interdisciplinary standing: Lacan justifiably connects Freudian psychoanalysis with Saussurian structural linguistics; Lacan unjustifiably connects Freudian psychoanalysis with pure mathematics and formal logic; Lacan rightly recasts the relations between biological nature and cultural nurture; Lacan wrongly neglects biology altogether; Lacan appropriately and patiently maintains the disciplinary sovereignty of analysis; Lacan inappropriately and impatiently fills out analysis with philosophy (and/or mathematics and logic). This tangle of mismatched threads aside, a more recurrent, unchanging refrain of Althusser’s with respect to Freudian psychoanalysis is audible across the same years of his thinking and writing: For the time being (*circa* the 1960s and 1970s), it is advisable for analysis to maintain itself in its own intradisciplinary independence while awaiting potential, but far from necessary and guaranteed, advances yet-to-come in adjacent fields, particularly the life sciences and historical/dialectical materialism. In line with his stress on these interdisciplinary possibilities being unforeseeable and unpredictable contingencies, Althusser cautions that analytic theorists and practitioners may have to wait for a long time indeed, perhaps indefinitely, before such further biological and materialist breakthroughs come to pass (if they ever do). A deleted paragraph from the manuscript *Être marxiste en philosophie* echoes these points.<sup>44</sup>

My own ongoing work, unfurling under the banner of “transcendental materialism,” involves a wager that the time Althusser projects into an uncertain future has arrived now (especially with developments in the life sciences over the course of the past few decades). In a companion piece to the present intervention, I assemble a systematic account of dialectical and historical materialisms out of Althusser’s myriad, variegated assessments of them—an account revealing the indebtedness of my fashions

42 Althusser 1996b, pp. 98-99

43 Althusser 2014b, pp. 192-193

44 Althusser 2015, p. 87

of interfacing biology and Marxism to some of his recastings of these materialisms.<sup>45</sup> Herein, my focus obviously is on what Althusser has to say regarding Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis (along with some references to Hegel’s philosophy). And, here again, certain Althusserian inspirations for my endeavors (in this case, those triangulating analysis, the life sciences, and a Hegelian Marxism) become visible. However, before I intensify this visibility, several more of Althusser’s explorations of the just-mentioned disciplinary intersections deserve mention and examination.

Beginning with the life sciences—as I show in the aforementioned companion piece to the present essay, a certain biological naturalism indeed has a place in Althusser’s versions of historical and/or dialectical materialism<sup>46</sup>—Althusser indicates that psychoanalysis is related to these fields without being reducible to them, without having its own disciplinary/scientific autonomy compromised. For instance, in a lengthy footnote to “Freud and Lacan,” he remarks:

Desire (*Le désir*), a fundamental category of the unconscious, is understandable in its specificity only as the idiosyncratic meaning of the discourse of the human subject’s unconscious (*le sens singulier du discours de l’inconscient du sujet humain*): the meaning that emerges in and through the ‘play’ of the signifying chain of which the discourse of the unconscious is composed. As such, ‘desire’ is marked by the structure that commands human development. As such, desire is radically distinct from organic ‘need’ (*«besoin» organique*), which is biological in essence. Between organic need and unconscious desire, there is no essential continuity—any more than there exists an essential continuity between the biological existence of man and his historical existence. Desire is determined in its equivocal being (its lack in being [*«manque-à-être»*], Lacan says) by the structure of the order (*la structure de l’Ordre*) imposing on it its mark and consigning it to an existence without place, the existence of repression (*refoulement*), to its resources and its disappointments.

One does not gain access to the specific reality of desire by starting from organic need, any more than one gains access to the specific reality of historical existence by starting from the biological existence of ‘man.’ On the contrary, just as it is the categories of history that allow one to define the specificity of the historical existence of man, includ-

45 Johnston 2015a

46 Ibid.



ing such apparently purely biological determinations as his ‘needs’ or demographic phenomena, by distinguishing his historical existence from a purely biological existence, so the essential categories of the unconscious are what allow one to apprehend and define the very meaning of desire by distinguishing it from the biological realities underlying (*supportent*) it (exactly as biological existence underlies and supports historical existence) but without either *constituting* it or *determining* it.<sup>47</sup>

Obviously, the majority of this passage consists in Althusser underscoring the distance Lacan takes from certain sorts of scientific, ideological biologisms and naturalisms shaping non-Lacanian sectors of the post-Freudian psychoanalytic world. However, as I have suggested elsewhere, Lacan’s non-naturalism is not tantamount to the garden-variety kinds of anti-naturalism widespread in Continental European and European-inspired philosophy/theory.<sup>48</sup> In Lacanian metapsychology, the role of the “need” (*besoin*), as per the need-demand-desire triad, to which Althusser refers indicates as much.<sup>49</sup>

That said, it should be noted that the last sentence of the preceding quotation reveals Althusser’s concession that both Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist historical materialism in fact are “supported” by an “underlying” biological-natural base, although their respective objects of discipline-specific investigation (i.e., libidinal and political economies) are irreducible and (relatively) autonomous with respect to this shared base.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Althusser himself, with his version(s) of historical/dialectical materialism(s), ultimately admits that, in the larger scheme of things, cultural history both arises from and breaks with natural history—that is, human societies and subjects embody the immanent transcendences of a self-denaturalizing nature.<sup>51</sup> Tacitly in line with the Hegelian speculative-dialectical logic of quantity and quality so dear to much of the Marxist tradition, the discontinuities Althusser emphasizes in the above-quoted footnote from “Freud and Lacan”—these are the ruptures/gulfs between both “organic need and unconscious desire” as

47 Althusser 1993, pp. 41-42; Althusser 1996b, p. 177-178

48 Johnston 2012, pp. 23-52; Johnston 2013b, pp. 48-84; Johnston 2015d, pp. 141-170; Johnston 2016c

49 Johnston 2013c

50 Althusser 2015, pp. 272-273

51 Johnston 2015a

well as “the biological existence of man and his historical existence”—are not absolute. Instead, these discontinuities are “leaps” both, one, originally produced in and out of nature by the accidents of evolutionary processes and, two, subsequently facilitated within human phylogenies and ontogenies by the cooperation of organic/biological forces and factors.

Althusser’s correspondence with Diatkine voices a similar stance as regards the relations (or lack thereof) between psychoanalysis and biology. In Althusser’s first letter of July 18, 1966, he declares:

Those who make the slightest theoretical concession to biology, to ethology, are *lost* for any *theoretical* reflection concerning psychoanalysis: they lapse quite quickly, if they are analysts, into *psychology* (or into culturalism, which is the ‘psychology’ of societies), psychology, that is, the *site* of the *worst* ideological confusions and ideological perversions of our time. Understand me well: I do not mean that they cannot furnish interesting *elements* of a clinical-practical-empirical order—indeed, occasionally of a theoretical order—but these are only *elements* that must be confiscated (*dérober*) from them since the logic of their system inevitably leads them to a *theoretical impasse*, down a path on which those who follow them can only go astray.<sup>52</sup>

The verb “*dérober*” (translated here as “confiscated”) also could be translated as “purloined,” “robbed,” “snatched,” or “stolen.” Hence, Althusser is suggesting that some of the biological resources latched onto by lapsed, straying analysts of crude ideological naturalistic inclinations must not be left to them, abandoned along with the pseudo-analytic vulgar naturalism so forcefully repudiated in this passage from Althusser’s correspondence. Like Lacan, Althusser rejects biologism/scientism in analysis without, for all that, denying the relevance of science generally and the life sciences specifically for analytic theory and practice. Thus, Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist historical/dialectical materialism both should “confiscate” (i.e., annex, expropriate, etc.) from pseudo-analytic naturalisms certain of the biological “elements” these psychologistic ideologies (i.e., “the *worst* ideological confusions and ideological perversions of our time”) inadequately contain. Of course, in the background of all this is the Althusserian distinction between science and ideology.

Later, in *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes*, Althusser distinguishes between scientific and Freudian challenges

52 Althusser 1993, pp. 35-36

to modern bourgeois ideological constructions of human nature and subjects (constructions in which humans feature as self-interested individuals who are transparent to themselves and know their own interests). Specifically, he warns against reducing Freud's innovations along these lines to variations on the older naturalistic-materialist theme that humans have brains and bodies that govern their minds without their physically generated minds fully knowing this corporeal governance.<sup>53</sup> For this style of materialism, long pre-dating not only Freudian psychoanalysis, but also Marxian historical materialism, conscious thinking is "unconscious" (*qua* ignorant, unknowing) of the extra-mental causes and influences producing and shaping it. What is "unconscious" from this perspective is a determining Outside external to self-aware cognition, a non-conscious, unthinking Beyond transcendent in relation to minded subjectivity. But, as Althusser rightly states in conformity with an insistence (one shared with Lacan) on the originality of Freud's discovery of the unconscious, "Freud did not speak of this 'outside'; he spoke of an outside *inside thought itself*."<sup>54</sup> One could say that, in good Lacanian fashion, Althusser here is contrasting the external non-consciousness of "contemplative materialism" (appropriately borrowing a phrase from the first of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach") with the "extimate"<sup>55</sup> (i.e., internally external, intimately foreign) unconscious proper to Freudian psychoanalysis.

I suspect it is no accident that Althusser feels compelled in this instance explicitly to contrast Freud's contributions with the tradition of materialisms inspired by the natural sciences. As he well knows and even occasionally underscores (as revealed above), Freud himself emerges out of the nineteenth-century psycho-physicalist current of this materialist tradition (through his medical education in neurology) and consistently swears fidelity to the scientific *Weltanschauung*<sup>56</sup> (with Althusser, as I highlighted earlier, playing off this Freud against Lacan to the detriment of the latter). Moreover, some of Althusser's reflections as regards the peculiar Freudian concept of *Trieb* (drive, *pulsion*) testify to his awareness of the complex mixture of proximity and distance between psychoanalysis and biology: ...*drive*... is quite an interesting concept, for

53 Althusser 2014a, pp. 287-288

54 Ibid., p. 288

55 Lacan 1992, p. 139; Lacan 2006, pp. 224-225, 249

56 SE 22: 158-182

Freud never managed to give a satisfying definition of it, which did not prevent the concept from 'functioning' quite suitably within metapsychological 'theory' and in practice. Why this impossibility in defining it? Not because of its imprecision but because of the impossibility of thinking its precision theoretically. This concept seeks its definition in an impossible difference with instinct, that is, with a biological reality (*une réalité d'ordre biologique*). I say impossible since for Freud, the drive (*Trieb*) is profoundly bound to a biological reality, even though it is distinct from it. Freud extricates himself by saying that the drive (which is always sexual) is like a 'representative' of the somatic within the psychical (*un «représentant» envoyé par le somatique dans le psychique*), is 'a limit concept between the somatic and the psychical.' That indication is precise, but at the same time one sees that, to think it, Freud is forced to resort to a metaphor ('representative') or to think not the thing but the concept itself! ('a limit concept between the somatic and the psychical'), which clearly amounts to acknowledging the impossibility of thinking scientifically the object that is nonetheless designated with great clarity. It is, moreover, quite remarkable that the region beyond this 'limit' designates biological reality, from which will surely come, in conjunction with the reality known by historical materialism, the discoveries that will one day allow the elaboration of the scientific theory of the unconscious.<sup>57</sup>

Althusser's references here are first and foremost to Freud's metapsychological paper on "Drives and Their Vicissitudes," whose opening pages indeed involve Freud himself openly avowing both the difficulty of defining the drive as a stable, precise concept and the tentative, provisional status of his efforts to do so.<sup>58</sup> In particular, Althusser has the following well-known paragraph from that 1915 essay in mind:

If now we apply ourselves to considering mental life from a *biological* point of view, an 'instinct' (*der 'Trieb'*) appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic (*als ein Grenzbegriff zwischen Seelischem und Somatischem*), as the psychical representative (*als psychischer Repräsentant*) of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.<sup>59</sup>

57 Althusser 1993, pp. 217-218; Althusser 1996b, pp. 102-103

58 SE 14: 117-122

59 GW 10: 214; SE 14: 121-122

The “biological” is one of several disciplinary “points of view” from which Freud scrutinizes what is at stake in the structures and dynamics covered by the hypothetical metapsychological concept of *Trieb als Trieb überhaupt und an sich* (i.e., *pulsion comme pulsion tout court et en soi*, drive as drive overall and in itself). What is more, this “*Grenzbegriff*” (border[line] concept or, as Althusser has it above, “limit concept”), given its multifaceted interdisciplinary liminality, is simultaneously both/and as well as neither/nor in relation to distinctions between, on the one hand, body, soma, nature, biology, and the like and, on the other hand, mind, psyche, nurture, society, history, and so on. Consequently, Freud indicates that, in order satisfactorily to theorize drive(s) in general, psychoanalysis requires a number of partnerships with and borrowings from other disciplines (especially the life sciences as well as certain of the social sciences and humanities too).

A few features of Althusser's just-quoted remarks apropos the Freudian *Trieb* as a border/limit concept warrant mention before I proceed further. To begin with, Althusser, here and elsewhere, admirably avoids lapsing into a Continentalist and pseudo-Lacanian revisionist tendency attempting to downplay and sideline the naturalist aspects and moments within Freud's corpus. In other words, his appreciation of Freud is not interpretively blinkered by the ideological anti-naturalism and anti-scientism to be found in various guises throughout twentieth-century Continental philosophy/theory generally, including within many currents of Lacanianism (itself not to be confused with Lacan's own thinking). Instead, Althusser rightly insists upon a non-reductive relationship, but a relationship all the same, between more-than-biological drives and biological instincts (“for Freud, the drive (*Trieb*) is profoundly bound to a biological reality, even though it is distinct from it”). He knows very well that many Continentalists' anti-naturalisms and anti-scientisms, especially amongst phenomenologists and existentialists, are nothing more than anti-materialist idealisms equally anathema to both Marxism and Freudianism properly understood.<sup>60</sup>

Additionally, Althusser is correct about the metaphorical status of Freud's talk of the “representative” function of *Trieb*. The paragraph from “Drives and Their Vicissitudes” I quoted a moment ago does not employ the German word “*Vorstellung*,” itself typically translated as (ideational) “representative” or “representation.” *Vorstellung à la* Freud

60 .....  
Johnston 2015a

could be said to have an exact and non-metaphorical standing as a precise metapsychological concept. Althusser likely would admit (at least a certain Althusser on particular occasions) that the Lacanian recasting of Freudian *Vortstellungen* as “signifiers” amounts to a further clarification and sharpening of this analytic concept (or set of concepts). The German word translated as “representative” in the above quotation from “Drives and Their Vicissitudes” instead is “*Repräsentant*” in the senses of “ambassador,” “attaché,” “delegate,” “deputy,” “emissary,” “envoy,” “mouth-piece,” “proxy,” “spokesperson,” “stand-in,” “substitute,” “surrogate,” etc. All of these senses utilize the intersubjective relationship between the represented person(s) and the representative person(s) as a metaphor describing the (partially) intrasubjective rapport between the bodily and the mental.

Finally, Althusser, at the end of the prior quotation from “The Discovery of Dr. Freud,” once more, as in other instances, mentions the same pair of potential disciplinary supplements/supports for psychoanalysis: biology and Marxist materialism (“the region beyond this ‘limit’ designates biological reality, from which will surely come, in conjunction with the reality known by historical materialism, the discoveries that will one day allow the elaboration of the scientific theory of the unconscious”). Here again, Althusser treats Freudian analysis as a potential science that has the possibility of becoming an actual science if and when unpredictable advances transpire within the life sciences and Marxism and, then, between these disciplines and analysis itself. He repeatedly invests hope in the theoretical and practical promises of a future alliance between psychoanalysis, biology, and historical/dialectical materialism.

As regards Marxism and psychoanalysis, Althusser, as I underscored earlier, credits Freud with implicitly being a spontaneous historical/dialectical materialist already aware, *avant la lettre*, of the breadth and depth of the influences of Althusserian ISAs. A deleted line in the original manuscript of *Initiation à la philosophie pour les non-philosophes* similarly suggests that, “one could compare profitably the Freudian topography with the Marxist topography of the base and the superstructure.”<sup>61</sup> But, whereas the Althusser of the late 1970s portrays Marxism and psychoanalysis as more or less equal partners and correspondingly preserves a degree of self-sufficient sovereignty for analysis on its own, the better-known Althusser of the mid 1960s adamantly contends that analysis must secure a solid disciplinary-scientific standing

61 .....  
Althusser 2014a, p. 292

precisely through being grounded on and by historical materialism (a project he appears to endorse up through the early-to-mid 1970s). In the 1969 “Note to the English Edition of ‘Freud and Lacan,’” he maintains as much.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, as already remarked, the entirety of “Three Notes on the Theory of Discourse” (1966) is devoted to arguing that analysis can and should be a regional theory tethered to and anchored by the foundational general theory of historical materialism.

As I mentioned a while ago, the Althusser of *Être marxiste en philosophie* proposes, in a deleted paragraph of that manuscript, that analysis has to remain proximate to but still unmoored from both biology and Marxist materialism for the historical time being. However, right on the heels of this (omitted) proposal and in the un-deleted, non-omitted main body of his text, he indicts any and every philosophy of science in which one particular science is lop-sidedly and unjustifiably elevated into a universal theory of everything, an all-encompassing metaphysics both ontological and epistemological, as being philosophically idealist.<sup>63</sup> Could this not be read as an implicit self-criticism of, among other things, the earlier Althusserian program of reducing the rapport between historical materialism and psychoanalysis to a one-sided relationship in which the former unilaterally enjoys total hegemony, precedence, priority, ultimacy, and the like *vis-à-vis* the latter?

In my companion piece to the present text,<sup>64</sup> I carry out an immanent critique of Althusser’s renditions of historical/dialectical materialism having, as one of its consequences, a rebalancing of the rapport between such materialism and psychoanalysis. Therein, I contend that multiple key materialist moments in the Lacanian *oeuvre* from the 1930s through the 1970s—these moments appear to go unrecognized by Althusser and are missing from his account of Lacan’s “great discovery” regarding the relations between biological nature and cultural nurture—furnish ideas regarding the bio-material conditions of possibility for the effective existence of the socio-historical mediation of human beings, an existence whose reality is absolutely central to the entire edifice of Marxist materialism itself. To resort to a hybrid of Hegelian and Lacanian terminology that allows for a circumnavigation back to the start of this intervention, these specifically organic possibility conditions are the

62 Althusser 1996b, p. 32

63 Althusser 2015, p. 88

64 Johnston 2015a

symptoms of the “barred Real” of a “weak/rotten nature,” more exactly, of the sick, nocturnal human animal, a creature born into the body-in-pieces (*corps morcelé*) of a prolonged prematurational helplessness (*Hilflosigkeit*), depicted by Hegel, Kojève, Lacan, and Althusser himself alike.

At this point, I feel it appropriate to shift attention towards the very late Althusser of the 1980s. Of course, this particular period of Althusser’s career has become best known for its recasting of Marxism as an “aleatory materialism” (un)grounded upon the modality of contingency as its *Ur*-category. Indeed, a certain amount of scholarly ink has been spilled around the manuscript entitled “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter.” However, although this specific Althusser is, as will be seen shortly, relevant to my purposes in what follows, the comparatively less attended-to Althusser of the mid-1980s in dialogue with Fernanda Navarro (through both correspondence as well as the published interviews entitled “Philosophy and Marxism”) is the figure who is most crucial for my argumentative agenda herein. He has some surprises in store for many who think they already know him well.

In a letter dated July 10, 1984 to Navarro from their “Correspondence about ‘Philosophy and Marxism,’” Althusser makes a reference to Protagoras. He remarks:

...Protagoras’ myth... explains the origin of humankind and human societies; it is a lovely (*très beau*) materialist myth—unlike animals, people are ‘born naked,’ so that they have to work and invent arts and techniques to survive (*subsister*).<sup>65</sup>

Althusser obviously has in mind the moment in Plato’s *Protagoras* when the dialogue’s namesake rehearses a mythical narrative (“the human race was naked, unshod, unbedded, and unarmed”) cross-resonating with speculations articulated in various ways by certain other atomistic, materialistic thinkers of antiquity, thinkers equally dear to both (the young) Marx and (the old) Althusser<sup>66</sup> (as well as being echoed much later by the founding document of Renaissance humanism, namely, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s 1486 oration “On the Dignity of Man”<sup>67</sup>). Furthermore, this “materialist myth” represents a possible point of convergence—one could say it even functions as a *point de capiton à la* Lacan—between the

65 Althusser 1994b, p. 95; Althusser 2006, p. 216

66 Plato 1997, 321c-322a [p. 757]; Marx 2006, pp. 108, 112-114, 116

67 Mirandola 1998, pp. 4-5; Colletti 1979, pp. 234, 238-241, 243-246; Johnston 2014, pp. 159-160

life sciences, Marxist materialism, and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis (i.e., the three disciplines Althusser hopes will link up productively with each other in the future).

In terms of analysis, and putting aside Freud's occasional phylogenetic speculations along with Lacan's criticisms of them,<sup>68</sup> human beings indeed are "born naked" in the sense of being initially thrown into existence as helpless by virtue of anatomical and physiological underdevelopment. Coupled with the natural-material "nakedness" of epigenetics and neuroplasticity—this biological nudity is tantamount to natural pre-programming for non/more-than-natural reprogramming or naturally determined underdetermination by nature, particularly as receptive openings, vacancies unfilled by the innateness of hard-wired endogenous instincts, for the exogenous education/formation of acquired drives and desires—this original ontogenetic condition (as Hegel's organic *Krankheit*, Freud's infantile *Hilflosigkeit*, and Lacan's *corps morcelé* as "*la maladie féconde, la faute heureuse de la vie*") issues forth in a number of fateful, momentous consequences. The young subject-to-be is pushed and pulled into the overdetermining embraces of specific significant o/Others as well as cultural-linguistic sociality in general. The child's libidinal economy comes to be thoroughly permeated and structured by the enveloping mediating matrices into which it is propelled and drawn starting from its original state of abject dependency and distressful fragmentation. Another prematuration even more protracted than that of the helplessness characteristic of very early life—this would be sexual prematuration, thanks to which genital-centric sexuality is forced to emerge and accommodate itself within fields already occupied by the forces and factors of prepubescent "polymorphous perversity"<sup>69</sup>—contributes to the thereafter insurmountable Real of the non-existent *rapport sexuel*, the irremediable absence of any nature-given complementary partnership between the sexes. For all of these (and other) always-already-inflicted natural wounds, socio-symbolic crutches, exoskeletons, prostheses, remedies, and supplements are called upon for compensation and amelioration. Specific connections between the life sciences and analytic metapsychology disclose at least this much, if not more.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile for me to turn back momentarily to an earlier Althusser so as to segue from the psychoanalytic to the

68 Johnston 2013a, pp. 59-77

69 Johnston 2016b

materialist implications of his 1984 invocation of Plato's *Protagoras*. In Althusser's second letter to Diatkine of August 22, 1966, he writes:

I believe you will agree with the very general principle that *absence* possesses a certain efficacy on the condition, to be sure, that it be not absence in general, nothingness (*le néant*), or any other Heideggerian 'openness' («*ouvert*») but a *determinate* absence (*absence déterminée*) playing a role in the space of its absence.

This is undoubtedly important for the problem of the irruption (*sur-gissement*) of the unconscious.<sup>70</sup>

In the very best of Marxist materialist fashions (as well as in a good Hegelian manner too, whether the author of these 1966 lines consciously intends so or not), Althusser insists on conceiving negativity (in this instance, "absence") as "determinate" *qua* precise and specific, as anti-mystically pinpointed (or, at least, pinpointable) with rigorous theoretical exactitude. Without coming anywhere close to lapsing into flat-footed scientific positivism, he fiercely rejects its opposite extreme at the same time, dismissing the misty, amorphous negativity of idealisms, spiritualisms, and romanticisms (i.e., indeterminate, as opposed to determinate, absence) as part and parcel of intellectually bankrupt and ideologically insidious obscurantism (i.e., "absence in general, nothingness (*le néant*), or any other Heideggerian 'openness' («*ouvert*»)”—as I have argued elsewhere, certain contemporary figures, such as Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, and Slavoj Žižek, explicitly posit [Agamben as a Heideggerian] or flirt with [Badiou and Žižek as dialectical materialists] this sort of "openness" appropriately criticized by Althusser-the-dialectical-materialist<sup>71</sup>). Incidentally, several of my own Hegel-and-Marx-inspired, psychoanalysis-related speculations apropos negativity and "privative causality" (i.e., Althusser's absence-as-efficacious) resonate sympathetically with this admirable Althusserian line of thought.<sup>72</sup>

Before directly addressing the Marxist dimensions of "Protagoras' materialist myth," and so as to facilitate the transition to the topic of Althusserian materialism, further specifications as regards the role(s) of "determinate absence" in psychoanalysis are necessary. Freudian-Lacanian analysis, especially when viewed with crucial facets of Hegelianism

70 Althusser 1993, p. 91; Althusser 1996b, pp. 60-61

71 Johnston 2012, pp. 23-52

72 Ibid., pp. 23-52; Johnston 2013d, p. 95; Johnston 2015b; Johnston 2016e; Johnston 2016c

visible in the background, depends upon the positing of several such absences: the factual, ground-zero absence of self-sufficiency (as the prolonged prematurational helplessness marking the first stretch of human ontogeny); the bio-material absence of harmonious, synthesized organic integration and coordination (as the sick animal of Hegel's *Ohnmacht der Natur*, Freud's conflicted id at war with itself, Lacan's material-structural-phenomenological *corps morcelé*, and my anorganic, as neither inorganic nor organic, body-and-brain-in-pieces<sup>73</sup>); and, the evolved givenness of the absence of any inflexibly fixed and fundamentally imperative foundation of naturally innate and irresistible instincts (as Hegel's plasticity of habits, Freud's "objectless" drives, Lacan's radicalization of this Freud in conjunction with such Lacanian concepts as need, demand, desire, *das Ding*, *objet petit a*, *jouissance*, fantasy, etc., and my "splitting" of *Trieb*). As the young Althusser of 1947 quoted at the outset of this intervention puts this with respect to Hegel, "At the level of nature, man is an absurdity, a gap in being (*un trou dans l'être*), an 'empty nothing,' a 'Night'"—with this nocturnal emptiness to be understood here as associated with determinate absence. Furthermore, Althusser, throughout his mature thinking, is well aware of just how pivotal these privative causes—they indeed amount to highly specific and specified negativities quite different from the vague, hazy Nothing(ness) of Heideggerianism and similar sorts of pseudo-profound, negative-theological mysticisms—are for the meta-psychological foundations of the entire edifice of theoretical and practical analysis. Similarly, he is absolutely accurate in maintaining that these determinate absences are "undoubtedly important for the problem of the irruption (*surgissement*) of the unconscious."

On the basis of the preceding, I would suggest at this point that the aforementioned determinate absences as privative causes theorized within the overlap between the (post-)Darwinian life sciences and Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis also are essential ingredients for a historical/dialectical materialist account of "the problem of the irruption" of properly human history out of evolutionary natural history. This suggestion gestures at the three-way intersection Althusser himself repeatedly brings into view between biology, analysis, and materialism. As I argue in this intervention's companion piece, a veritable plethora of moments in Althusser's corpus, ones less well known than those (in)famously insisting on the 1845 "epistemological break," involve qualified historical/dia-

73 Johnston 2012, pp. 23-52; Johnston 2013b, pp. 48-84; Johnston 2015d, pp. 141-170; Johnston 2016b; Johnston 2016e; Johnston 2016c

lectical materialist acceptances on his part of Marx's characterization of "human nature" as social laboring.<sup>74</sup> For both Marx and this relatively unfamiliar Althusser, bio-material being makes it such that humans are thrown into existence destined for sociality and labor as their entwined twin fates.

As I indicated before, the helplessness of infant and child, for Freud, helps explain why human minds are inherently inclined toward being profoundly influenced and thoroughly (pre)occupied with various and sundry others both known and unknown. Couched in Lacan's vocabulary, this *Hilfflosigkeit* propels the nascent *sujet à venir* into the arms of alterity Imaginary (others as inter-subjective alter-egos), Symbolic (Others as trans-subjective socio-linguistic orders), and Real (Others as enigmatic Things). Early on in an individual's life history, this ontogenetically primordial condition forcefully impresses upon his/her soma and psyche marks of, for instance, compliance, cooperation, dependence, submission, and subjection. Succinctly stated, early helplessness, at the ontogenetic level, contributes to human nature leading naturally into the dominance of nurture over nature—with Lacan seeing this as a pivotal possibility condition for what the Althusser of the mid-1960s praises as Lacan's "great discovery" regarding the (retro)action of "culture" on "biology." In Marxian terms, the *Hilfflosigkeit* disclosed by both biology and psychoanalysis helps further elucidate why sociality is an inevitable basic feature of human nature (as naturally social).

Of course, historical materialism (again with Hegel as a forerunner) adds to this, at what would be the Freudian phylogenetic level, a further emphasis on collective, in addition to individual, helplessness. Perhaps one might even go so far as to run the risk of recourse to Ernst Haeckel's "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny": As with gradual decrease in the *Hilfflosigkeit* of the individual as he/she ontogenetically takes shape, the human species as a whole, over the course of both its evolutionary and non-evolutionary histories, phylogenetically has moved from being relatively more to relatively less powerless in the face of at least certain challenges posed by surrounding physical, chemical, and organic natural forces and factors. For Hegel and Marx alike, and to cut a very long story very short, the meeting of basic human needs in the teeth of such challenges requires not only laboring, but laboring socially—with the resultant Hegelian "systems of needs" and/or Marxian "divisions of labor" generating and perpetuating modes of permanent helplessness in terms

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of the lifelong dependencies of socially laboring persons upon each other. The combination of individual (as per a synthesis of psychoanalysis and human developmental biology) and collective (as per a synthesis of historical/dialectical materialism and evolutionary theory) *Hilflosigkeit* compels humans to live as socially laboring beings. But, what is more, this compounded helplessness, involving the privatively causal determinate absences I enumerated three paragraphs above, is part of what makes possible the self-denaturalizing essence(lessness) of “human nature,” this nature’s endogenous openness to being overwritten and reworked exogenously by sociality and laboring in ways charted by both Freudian-Lacanian analysis and Marxian materialism.<sup>75</sup>

However, as regards Althusser’s relations with historical materialism specifically (rather than psychoanalysis), more than just individual and collective *Hilflosigkeit* is involved in the congenital nudity into which humans, according to the Protagorean-Platonic myth invoked by Althusser, are hurled at birth. Admittedly, the great French Marxist himself does not explicitly reason in detail along the lines I am about to advance. Nonetheless, on the basis of evidence and arguments put forward by me in the complement to the present intervention,<sup>76</sup> I strongly believe that the caveats and clarifications I am about to articulate are entirely in the spirit of a certain Althusserianism, even if absent from the black-and-white letter of Althusser’s writings themselves.

To start spelling out these caveats and clarifications, I would claim that Althusser’s Protagoras-inspired materialist “nakedness” includes, in addition to distinctively human varieties of helplessness, the absences both of, one, conflict-free, intra-organic unity as well as of, two, fixed, inflexible predetermination via natural preprogramming. The first absence is crucial to a dialectical materialist Mao Tse-Tung, the author of 1937’s “On Contradiction,” quietly adored by Althusser despite his reluctance publicly to avow this love while remaining a card-carrying member of a Moscow-controlled Parti communiste français.<sup>77</sup> The second absence, arguably essential to Althusser’s renowned/notorious insistence on an anti-Feuerbachian repudiation of the very idea of “human nature” (*als Gattungswesen*) by Marx starting in 1845, is something that life-

75 Hegel 1979, pp. 167-168; Marx 1992, pp. 326-331, 350, 389-390; Marx & Engels 1970, p. 42; Marx 1977, pp. 250-251, 259; Marx 1977, pp. 389-390; Marx 1993, pp. 84, 243, 323, 496; Marx 1976, pp. 1021-1022, 1053, 1068; Marx 1977, p. 521

76 Johnston 2015a

77 Mao 2007, pp. 67-102; Althusser 2005, pp. 87-128; Johnston 2013a, pp. 23-28

scientific discoveries involving epigenetics and neuroplasticity, discoveries largely postdating Althusser’s death, enable to be recast from an anti-naturalist anti-humanism into a naturalism of a self-denaturalizing and more-than-naturally-mediated human “nature.”<sup>78</sup> Incidentally, contemporary biological considerations regarding the evolution, anatomy, and physiology of the human central nervous system have led to models of the brain as a “kludge,”<sup>79</sup> thus naturalistically reinforcing the first type of absence too. These two determinate absences can be identified as the related factors of anorganicity (as Hegel’s sick animal of weak nature, Freud’s internally divided id, Lacan’s body-in-pieces, my split drives, and the kludgy brain-in-pieces) and receptivity (as Hegelian *Plastizität*, Marxian *Elastizität*, and their subsequent materialist and psychoanalytic permutations) respectively. Taken together, anorganicity and receptivity should be posited as the twin presuppositions (more precisely, the privative causes) cooperatively making possible the full transformative power of Marxian *praxis*. How so?

Marx’s account of practice *qua* labor clearly assumes a distinctively human openness to transformative mediations. In fact, his historical materialism hinges on this. For Marx, *praxis* as laboring gets properly human history (as distinct from natural history generally as well as the “histories” of non-human animal species specifically) up and running insofar as it sets in motion an ongoing, oscillating dynamic of mutual modifications between the subjects and objects of labor. That is to say, laboring subjects change themselves in the processes of changing the objects upon which they labor, with thus-changed subjects further changing these and other objects... and so on and on in this circuit of reciprocal, back-and-forth influences and alterations. But, obviously, Marx takes it for granted that humans, in their peculiar subjective being, naturally are highly receptive to and largely constituted by the external matrices of mediation furnished by the objective realities of their surrounding environments, milieus, circumstances, etc.—including those features of these objective realities that are themselves externalizations of laboring subjects’ prior activities (i.e., objective realities both natural and social).<sup>80</sup>

78 Johnston 2015a

79 Linden 2007, pp. 2-3, 5-7, 21-24, 26, 245-246; Marcus 2008, pp. 6-16, 161-163; Johnston 2012, pp. 23-52; Johnston 2013b, pp. 48-84; Johnston 2013e, pp. 175-176; Johnston 2013a, p. 75; Johnston 2014a, pp. 142, 146, 181-182; Johnston 2016c

80 Johnston 2016a

Theorized together at the intersections of Hegelian *Realphilosophie*, Freudian-Lacanian metapsychology, and contemporary (neuro)biology, the related variables of anorganic negativity and receptive malleability permit, expressed in Hegelese, positing Marx's just-noted presuppositions. These two variables bio-materially co-constitute humanity's plastic nature (for dialectical materialism, inner antagonisms within a thing, such as those characteristic of the anorganicity of the human animal, indeed contribute to that thing's receptiveness to being changed at the hands of external influences). Hence, Marx's historical materialism, as grounded on his theory of labor-as-*praxis*, is itself in turn to be grounded on contributions coming conjointly from philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the life sciences (rather than, as per the Althusser of the mid-1960s, historical materialism being the general Theory-with-a-capital-T of "theoretical practice," the foundational *Ur*-discipline as a Marxist queen of the sciences<sup>81</sup>). But, what about helplessness as per both the life sciences and psychoanalysis, given my earlier stress upon this?

Integrating both *Hilflosigkeit* and *Plastizität*, I now would maintain that neither the former nor the latter on its own automatically is enough to result in the social laboring central to historical materialism and, hence, to Althusser too. One easily can imagine, on the one hand, living beings who are, in varying ways and/or at varying moments, helpless without being plastic and, on the other hand, living beings who are plastic without, in any way and/or at any moment, being helpless. In the hypothetical case of helplessness-without-plasticity, reliances upon exogenous others do not leave transformative traces upon an endogenous nature simply due to this nature's unreceptive, impermeable rigidity; moreover, a non-plastic being will not allow in general for its proper essence to be fundamentally mediated and modified by its enveloping environs. Correlatively but conversely, in the hypothetical case of plasticity-without-helplessness, the being lacking *Hilflosigkeit* is not irresistibly compelled to be profoundly influenced by relations with others; this being's self-sufficiency (i.e., non-helplessness) makes it less likely that ties with conspecifics will be privileged in terms of the mediations and modifications reflected in this being's plastic nature, its essenceless essence (perhaps like a chameleon, its being will take on the colors of its inanimate surroundings, but not those of its fellows).

However, viewed under the lights of biology and psychoanalysis as combined in and through a certain philosophical anthropology, hu-

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man beings are both helpless and plastic. What is more, *Hilflosigkeit* and *Plastizität* conspire so as to result in human nature amounting to a nature that necessarily inclines itself towards (self-)denaturalization via social laboring. Individual and collective helplessnesses dictate both: one, different dependencies, lasting lifetimes and spanning generations, of persons upon each other (i.e., sociality); as well as, two, struggles large and small, shared and singular, to meet needs, wants, and the like (i.e., laboring). And, thanks to varying types and degrees of plasticity, humans again and again are broadly and deeply transformed in and through their social laboring dictated by their helplessnesses.

As seen, Althusser, on a number of occasions, sees fit to praise Freud as a spontaneous (proto-)historical materialist. In particular, he justifiably construes Freud's multiple reflections on the family and *Kultur* as anticipating his later Marxist conceptualizations of superstructural ISAs and their subjectification-effects. There is much to be said in favor of Althusser's sense that, given Freudian and Lacanian emphases on psychical susceptibility to socio-symbolic constructions and reconstructions, historical materialism's theoretical formulations apropos both infrastructural and superstructural dimensions and dynamics are not without significant implications for analysis itself.

But, as also seen here, there is a different Althusser who, on a number of other occasions, goes so far as to propose performing a Marxist annexation of psychoanalysis in which analysis is relegated to being a subsidiary sub-domain of historical materialism. This particular Althusser perceives such materialism and analysis as in a one-way, hierarchical relationship between general/grounding and regional/grounded theories respectively. Based on everything I already have put in place in this intervention, I feel it safe now bluntly and briefly to claim that this one-sidedness of a certain Althusserian interfacing of Marxism with Freudianism and Lacanianism can and should be replaced with a two-way, de-hierarchized rapport between these two frameworks (a suggestion already made by one of Althusser's enemies, namely, Jean-Paul Sartre, who pleads for something along these lines in his later *Search for a Method* introducing the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*<sup>82</sup>). Other Althusserians I have foregrounded in both this essay and its companion piece likely would agree with me.<sup>83</sup>

82 Sartre 1968, pp. 60-65

83 Johnston 2015a



Yet, is there not a fundamental sticking point, a bone in the throat, of the rapprochement I am negotiating between historical/dialectical materialism and psychoanalysis? Specifically, does not Freudian-Lacanian analysis insist upon the idiosyncrasy, peculiarity, and singularity, if not also autonomy and self-relatedness, of minded persons in fashions anathema to Marxism generally and Althusserianism especially? Are not Marx and Althusser vehement anti-individualists committed to a die-hard socio-economic determinism absorbing and dissolving individual subjects into trans-individual structures?

I will put aside here questions as to whether Marx himself is an anti-individualist and a determinist in these manners. Suffice it for the time being to say that I consider such depictions of Marx's thought to be grotesque oversimplifications. However, as for Althusser, this is an issue with regards to which his mid-1980s correspondence and interviews with Navarro contain significant stipulations diametrically opposed to the freedom-denying, subject-squelching tenets typically attributed to him. This set of exchanges is contemporaneous with Althusser's pivot towards an aleatory materialism of the encounter, a materialism palpably at odds with the necessitarian monism of a Spinozistic-structuralist rendition of Marxism. Hence, the text of the interviews "Philosophy and Marxism" reiterates, in line with "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter,"<sup>84</sup> that doing full justice to Marx's enduring legacy requires forging an anti-determinist historical/dialectical materialism favoring the unpredictable contingency of events (as aleatory encounters) over the predictable necessity of laws (as non-aleatory teleologies).<sup>85</sup> This much already is indicated in "The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter" and will be relatively unsurprising for anyone already familiar with this aleatory materialist Althusser apart from the dialogues with Navarro.

But, Althusser's conversations with Navarro go further along these lines in ways that promise to be comparatively more surprising. At the end of a brief letter of January 7, 1985, Althusser writes:

Of course there are... 'possibilities' within social determination, if only because there are several different orders of social determination and because this creates a *play*—of gaps, blank spaces, or margins (*des lacunes, des blancs, des marges*) in which the subject may find his path de-

84 Ibid.; Johnston 2016a

85 Althusser 2006, pp. 254-256, 261-262

termined or not determined by social constraints; but this non-determination is an effect, a sub-effect (*sous-effet*), of determination, of determinations; what I called not only overdetermination (*sur-détermination*), but underdetermination (*sous-détermination*).... Do you see what I mean?<sup>86</sup>

He expands upon these proposals in a missive to Navarro dated April 8, 1986:

The interpellation of the individual as subject, which makes him an ideological subject, is realized not on the basis of a *single* ideology, but of *several ideologies* at once, under which the individual *lives* and *acts* [*agit*] his practice. These ideologies may be very 'local,' such as a subject in his *family* and at *work*, in his immediate relations with his family and friends or his peers (*ses proches ou semblables*); or they may be broader, 'local' in the broad sense, either 'regional' or 'national.'

Such ideologies are, for the most part, always initially inherited from the past, the tradition. What results is a *play and a space* (un jeu et un espace) of multiple interpellations in which the subject is caught up (*est pris*), but which (as contradictory play and as space) constitutes the 'freedom' (*la «liberté»*) of the individual subject, who is *simultaneously* interpellated by several ideologies that are neither of the same kind nor at the same level; this multiplicity explains the '*free*' *development of the positions adopted by the subject-individual* (l'évolution «libre» des prises de position de l'individu-sujet). Thus the individual has at his disposal a 'play of manoeuvre' [*jeu de manœuvre*] between several positions, between which he can 'develop' («*évoluer*»), or even, if you insist, 'choose' («*choisir*»), determine his course [*se déterminer*], although this determination is itself determined, but in the play of the plurality of interpellations... The theory of the ISAs is therefore quite the contrary (*tout le contraire*) of a determinist theory in the superficial sense (*au sens plat du terme*).<sup>87</sup>

The manuscript *Sur la reproduction* already contains an acknowledgement that a complex plurality of ideologies, ideological apparatuses, and interpellations always are operative simultaneously within any given social

86 Althusser 1994a, p. 121; Althusser, 2006, p. 236

87 Althusser 1994a, pp.127-128; Althusser 2006, 241-242

structure.<sup>88</sup> Therein, Althusser even refers to “choice” (*choisir*), albeit with what sounds like a bit of a sarcastic sneer.<sup>89</sup>

However, more sincerely and less sneeringly, the above-quoted Althusser of the mid-1980s, consistent with his contemporaneous turn to an aleatory materialism as the proper “philosophy of Marxism,”<sup>90</sup> begins sketching an account of freedom nonetheless compatible with the more deterministic dimensions of his Marxism. The very late Althusser’s compatibilism might be another symptom of him perhaps becoming the student of his former student Badiou.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, what fairly could be described as Badiou’s similar compatibilism involves, for him, avowed reckonings with Sartre, Althusser, and Lacan. Badiou depicts Sartre as the voluntarist, Althusser as the determinist, and Lacan as the compatibilist in this triad of his twentieth-century French “masters.”<sup>92</sup> But, Badiou’s triangulation of these three figures is misleading. Although he is correct about Lacan being a compatibilist throughout his intellectual itinerary, he obscures the compatibilism not only of the mature Sartre (as per the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*), but also that of the older Althusser (as per both “The Underground Current of the Materialism of the Encounter” and “Philosophy and Marxism”).

Althusser’s reputation, even amongst some of those who knew and know him quite well, as an unflinching, die-hard determinist is based not only on works of the mid-1960s such as *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*, but also on the celebrated essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (and the larger, unfinished manuscript from which it is drawn). One would not be unjustified in believing that the inventor of the theory of ISAs espouses an uncompromising determinism, given that the word “subject” is employed by this author in the sense of that which is heteronomously subjected to ideological interpellation (an employment diametrically opposing the modern philosophical meaning of “subject” as that which autonomously determines itself in its self-grounding/grounded spontaneity).<sup>93</sup> Yet, in the material quoted above from his back-and-forth with Navarro, Althusser returns to a qualified notion of free subjectivity

88 Althusser 2014b, pp. 199-200

89 Althusser 2011, p. 232; Althusser 2014b, p. 200

90 Althusser 2015, p.260

91 Badiou 2005, p. 250; Johnston 2009, p. 136

92 Johnston 2009, pp. 62-63; Johnston 2013a, pp.103-104, 107-109, 166, 176

93 Althusser 2014, pp. 187-201, 227-228, 230, 236, 261-266

not by renouncing his prior investigations into the infrastructural and superstructural functions of ISAs and their interpellations, but precisely by further nuancing and extending the ramifications of structural complexities already gestured at in *Sur la reproduction*.

These specific late-Althusserian nuances and extensions are foreshadowed by Aristotle (with his discussion of reflective deliberation in “Book 3, Chapter 3, §10” of the *Nicomachean Ethics*<sup>94</sup>) and Hegel (in terms of, for example, malfunctions and breakdowns in *Sittlichkeit* as collective objective spirit prompting the separate self-assertion of *Moralität* as individual subjective spirit, a drama exemplified by the tragedies to which Antigone and Socrates succumb<sup>95</sup>) as well as Lacan. With references to these latter three thinkers (i.e., Aristotle, Hegel, and Lacan), I put forward, in my 2008 book *Zizek’s Ontology*, the concept of “inverse interpellation”<sup>96</sup> (to which I recur in a 2013 article<sup>97</sup>). However, what I fail to acknowledge there, with my narrow focus strictly on “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (i.e., Althusser’s thinking *circa* 1970), is that Althusser himself subsequently, in the mid-1980s, performs this inversion of interpellation; admittedly, what he proposes in the two block quotations above from his correspondence with Navarro is exactly what I describe in *Žižek’s Ontology*, via Aristotle, Hegel, and Lacan, as inverse interpellation. *Mea culpa*. With reference to an article by Mladen Dolar, it would be entirely fair to say that Althusser himself ends up, shortly before his death, going “beyond interpellation.”<sup>98</sup>

However, this “beyond” is arrived at in and through, rather than apart from, interpellation(s), as Althusser clearly indicates in the above-quoted passages revisiting the classic account of interpellation over a decade after its original formulation. To be more precise, Althusser’s stipulations conveyed to Navarro directly imply a dialectical logic (that of “more is less”<sup>99</sup>) in which the “more”/“surplus” of “overdetermination” (*sur-détermination*) itself immanently generates out of itself the “less”/“deficit” of “underdetermination” (*sous-détermination*), in which an excessively complex “plurality of interpellations” short-circuit each

94 Aristotle 1999, Book 3, Chapter 3, §10 [pg. 35]

95 Hegel 1977, pp. 119-122, 266-289; Hegel 1955, pp. 407-410, 412, 443-447

96 Johnston 2008, pp. 112-113

97 Johnston 2013d, p. 96

98 Dolar 1993, pp. 75-96

99 Johnston 2012, pp. 23-52; Johnston 2013, pp. 91-99

other so as to produce a (temporary, rare) nullification of any and every subjection-inducing interpellation. In such (exceptional) circumstances, the thus-created absence of interpellation, to reconnect with some lines I quoted earlier from Althusser's second letter to Diatkine (August 22, 1966), functions as a "determinate absence" *qua* privative cause causing the emergence of a "free subject-individual" (instead of an unfree subject-effect). A specific, particular set of "gaps, blank spaces, or margins" can, and sometimes does, ignite the "irruption" of "a *play and a space*," "a 'play of manoeuvre,'" within which indetermination, "freedom," and "choice" are able to come to be and operate. Obviously, this is the exact converse of "normal" interpellation in which an ISA as a determinate presence positively causes, via interpellation, the "subject" *qua* heteronomous subjugation by and subjection to an ideology. Furthermore, and appropriately worded in a Hegelian style—this is appropriate by virtue of the fundamentally dialectical nature of Althusser's compatibilism—the distinction between determinism and non-determinism is, for this Althusser, internal to determinism itself ("this non-determination is an effect, a sub-effect, of determination, of determinations," "he can 'develop,' or even, if you insist, 'choose,' determine his course [*se déterminer*], although this determination is itself determined, but in the play of the plurality of interpellations").

My main complaint with respect to this very late Althusser is simple but serious. The primary problem I see with his conception of free subjectivity already is visible in the material from the Navarro correspondence just discussed. But, it is most glaringly explicit at a certain moment in the interviews with her ("Philosophy and Marxism"). Therein, Althusser declares:

...if Epicurus' atoms, raining down in the void parallel to each other, encounter one another, it is so that we will recognize—in the swerve (*déviaton*) produced by the clinamen—the existence of human freedom in the world of necessity itself (*l'existence de la liberté humaine dans le monde même de la nécessité*).<sup>100</sup>

This bluntly encapsulates an equivocation between the simple absence of determinism (i.e., Althusser's "non-determination," "underdetermination," "swerve," and "clinamen") with the full-blown presence of freedom.

100 Althusser 1994b, p. 42; Althusser 2006, p. 262

But, as I have insisted repeatedly on a number of other occasions,<sup>101</sup> mere indetermination is not robust self-determination. This is far from denying the importance of a rigorous theoretical establishment of indeterminism, a systematic philosophical debunking of determinism. Indeed, such an establishment/debunking is a necessary prerequisite for any account of autonomous subjectivity, especially if one is a self-respecting materialist worthy of the name. Nonetheless, what is necessary is not, by itself, immediately sufficient.

To conclude by tying together the entirety of this intervention with its companion text,<sup>102</sup> the (self-dehumanizing and self-denaturalizing) human beings of a certain Althusserian historical/dialectical materialism could be described, in this materialism's intentional and unintentional resonances with both Hegelian philosophy as well as Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis, as a mass of sick, perverted primates fallen ill at birth. The earth of the anthropocene is the accidental by-product of weak-natural evolution, namely, the deviations and swerves of a natural-historical clinamen without aims, ends, or goals (i.e., *sans teloi, ohne Warum*). The young Sartre's non-materialist-*qua*-anti-naturalist existentialism speaks of a single "condemnation to freedom" as distinctly characteristic of human subjects. The older Althusser, between the lines of his sadly scattered and tragically interrupted final texts, shows those who still read him with the care he continues to deserve a humanity delivered to the edge of the abyss of autonomy, the midnight madness of that night shining out from the glassy black pupils of each and every human visage, by two negligent parents: the barred Real of an underdetermining weak/rotten nature and the equally barred Symbolic of a likewise underdetermining socio-cultural nurture. These last insights of the mature Althusser deserve to be made lasting. Twenty-first-century materialism is under an obligation to adopt these orphans as its own.

101 Johnston 2013d, pp. 96-97; Johnston 2013f; Johnston 2014b; Johnston 2014c, pp. 208-209; Johnston, 2015c, pp. 134-135; Johnston 2015b; Johnston 2016c

102 Johnston 2015a

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