

The function of philosophy and the crisis of Marxism

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to reconstruct the function of philosophy in the times of the crisis. It aims to do so by drawing primarily from the work of Louis Althusser. By reconstructing Althusser's theses in our predicament, this article sets in the defence of philosophy against the current anti-intellectual trends. From this perspective this article also aims at drawing lines of demarcations between the current positions within the political Left.

Keywords:

Althusser, philosophy, Marxism, crisis, class struggle, ideology, Christianity.

Un concept ne s'abandonne pas comme un chien
– Althusser

What is the function of philosophy today? Can we talk about a philosophical thinking, whose primary function relies not only on theorisation as interpretation of the existing social order, but in the sense of marking or creating a point of rupture with the positive order of being? In other words, what is the duty of a critical philosopher: to simply interpret and provide an analysis of what is going on today in politics, economy, culture, sciences; or is his duty to break with the existing social fantasy, and its constitutive "chain," and reorient ourselves in thought, with regard to the fundamental fantasy? To formulate this in a more simplified way: the duty of philosophy is to reorient ourselves beyond the current coordinates of our world as it is.

Let's begin with Louis Althusser, whose definitions of philosophy signify the shifts of his philosophical trajectory.¹ Althusser's first definition of philosophy was formulated under the epistemological horizon: *philosophy is a theory of theoretical practice*. It is important to argue that the triad that constitutes the problematic points of

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¹ Althusser of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* was operating under Bachelard's formula of the epistemological break. He would later abandon these premises, but nevertheless, his project was operating under the premises of a 'rupture' between his different philosophical periods. As Balibar put it: "The is an epistemological break, in Marx or elsewhere...perhaps nowhere else than in Althusser himself", Balibar 1994: 157

Althusser's project – which he is in a perpetual struggle with – are Hegel², Christianity and epistemology. To a certain degree, these are the fields in which Althusser began his life as a philosopher. For now, we will be content in arguing that after his “epistemological period” Althusser continuously struggled in providing a different conception of philosophy, as an attempt to de-epistemologise it by providing an ontological framework, which culminates in his ‘late writings’. His posthumous works bear witness to the fact that Althusser became aware that materialism could not be only epistemologically upheld, but, rather, needs an ontological framework as its grounding. In other words, every materialism is dependent on ontological grounds, which will determine the nature of the former. Althusser's de-epistemologisation of philosophy, which in my view begins with his distancing from the above-mentioned definition and conception of philosophy, can be read also as the beginning of his attempt to create an ontological framework, which much later on, will culminate in his “aleatory materialist” period.³ In his “self-criticism period”, however, Althusser proposes a different formula, “philosophy is, in the last instance, class struggle in the field of theory,”⁴ which will remain his final conception of philosophy.

Let us try to get the matters straight, at least in a provisional level,⁵ especially with regard to the inconspicuous words “in the last instance.” According to Althusser, because of “its abstraction, its rationality and its system,” philosophy is indexed in the “field of theory,” that is to say, philosophy is a theoretical⁶ discipline, but it exists in a specific set of conditions. We shall not go into this now, but it is important to note that these conditions are: politics and science. In other words, these are the material conditions of life, and of the production of knowledge. Therefore, philosophy maintains an intimate relation with the *ideologies* that express a given class tendency. From this, we can move towards

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² I want to argue that despite his abandonment of Hegel, Althusser, nevertheless, couldn't succeed in abandoning the Hegelian problematic *tout court*. The spectre of Hegel remains in and plays an important role in the work of Althusser. I shall not address this issue in this paper.

³ Althusser's translator G.M. Goshgarian argues that “Althusser presents the materialism of the encounter under another name in a March 1976 lecture, ‘The Transformation of Philosophy’”, Goshgarian 2006: xvi. One of the main questions with regard to Althusser's late period is, whether the previous phases of his philosophical project can be read from the lenses of “aleatory materialism.”

⁴ Althusser 2008: 67

⁵ I develop this in length on my dissertation thesis (unpublished manuscript).

⁶ For an analysis of Althusser's formulation of the theory, see Badiou, 2013

a provisional Althusserian-informed definition of ideology. Ideology is an oddish mixture of notions derived from science, with specific class interests; therefore, it is an oddish mix of the two conditions of philosophy. The class tendencies of *ideologies* are always *practical ideologies*.⁷ Taking all this into account, the “last instance” becomes clearer: it designates “determination in the last instance.” That is, ‘in the last instance’ refers to the material and determinant support, out of which the effective resources of philosophy derive. Philosophy, albeit autonomous in the last instance, as Althusser would put it, is defined by marking a division, or a position, in relation to its very non-philosophical substratum.

Let us go on, and try to examine this position through the opus of Althusser himself. If ‘philosophy is a class struggle in the field of theory,’ then this means that the philosopher, insofar as s/he is a Marxist, must “occupy a proletarian class position in philosophy,” in which the “political difficulty is *determinant* in the last instance.”⁸ Let's leave this aside for the time being. Althusser is very careful to over-emphasise that philosophy is *not* simply a class struggle in theory, but it is such *only* in the last instance. He evokes Lenin, who has distinguished between three forms of struggle: the political, economic and theoretical form. These struggles have to be carried out by the proletariat, and “when it is fought out in the political field, the concentrated class struggle is called philosophy.”⁹ The complication begins here: his insistence that philosophy as a class struggle, in the domain of theory, produces effects in social practices (political, economic, ideological, scientific, etc). This is a pure military, or combative character, of Althusser's conception of philosophy. Not only in its character, but it has a militaristic nature in its function as such. Philosophy intervenes theoretically in different social practices, but mostly and predominantly in the scientific and political practices. Two complementary theses should be put forward here:

Philosophy intervenes politically, in theoretical form, which is to say that it “never intervenes directly, but only by way of ideology;”¹⁰ and

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⁷ It is worth mentioning that Althusser distinguishes between *practical* and *theoretical* ideologies. The latter are always “in the last instance “detachments” of the practical ideologies in the theoretical field”, Althusser 2008: 67-68/3n, Althusser 1990: 83.

⁸ Althusser 2001: 3

⁹ *Ibid.*,: 68

¹⁰ Althusser 2006: 254

in doing so, The decisive moment for Marxism is that “it represents a position in philosophy”.

Even though the implications of these two theses are far-reaching, and indeed too complicated to be elaborated in a paper of this length I will limit myself, however, to its basic effects both in politics and in philosophy. With this in mind, we can argue that philosophy, as a discipline, doesn't engage directly in a class struggle as such; in the sense that it is neither the object of the class struggle, nor it is its agent in any sense of the word. The paradoxical position of Althusser is that, although philosophy *is* class struggle, it is so *only in the last instance*, which means that, it has a specific function within the class struggle: that of drawing lines of demarcations, registering the effects of political struggle through giving them the proper name, et cetera. To make the first encapsulation of this, in a schematic way, we could say that: 1) both philosophy and ideology are conditioned by science and politics, and 2) philosophy only intervenes through ideology. This puts us in a position to ask a few crucial questions:

What is the difference between what philosophy and ideology take from these conditions, especially since the relation between the two is not always clearly demarcated, and

What does it mean to intervene on ideology in a non-ideological way?

These two questions require a long elaboration, which cannot be done in the format of this paper, so we will provide only a few preliminary and provisional theses. Here we encounter a problem, which is presented in the form of the distinction between intervention, division and delimitation. Is philosophy a matter of delimiting a boundary, after which all we get is ideology, or is the field it divides not necessarily divided between the scientific and ideological? In this sense, is it possible to conceive of the relation between science and ideology in another way than that of a boundary? Here, we can argue that since science is full of holes and true problems, it is ideology that covers them up. But, it is only through the philosophical intervention that these problems appear as problematic points. Yes, this is another view. It is also very important to analyse the extent to which this very concept is ideological in itself. That is to say, to which extend – if at all – the conviction that philosophy demarcates between what is ideological

and scientific, is ideological itself. Finally, if and when we divide the scientific from the ideological, we have to face yet another problem: what have we done politically? In other words, how is it that, by affecting one of its conditions, philosophy also affects the other? The fact that ideology “binds” the two conditions (what we have called as an “oddish” mix) holds the key to the explanation of this whole phenomenon.

But, let us move further. Philosophy is not interested in the so-called real life, or any political development as such.¹¹ It is interested, and it only registers, therefore it only thinks about the results and the effects of, emancipatory politics, its successes, as well as its failures. In Althusser's understanding, philosophy thinks only the Marxist-Leninist politics. In other words, this relation can be articulated as following: philosophy is preoccupied, in the last instance, not with thinking the present as such (description), but with intervening negatively, through demarcations, in it (prescriptive). It is this that Althusser has in mind when he designates philosophy as a class struggle in the realm of theory. This provides yet another complication. According to him, in the capitalist social formation, class struggle is the name of politics. And this is very important for Althusser's conception of philosophy. But, we should remember that politics is one of the two conditions of philosophy. Althusser adds: philosophy does exist in those situations in which social classes and sciences exist.¹² In other words, philosophy is strictly conditioned by the existence of class struggle, carried out in political domain and scientific discoveries.¹³ The non-philosophical conditions of philosophy in the Althusserian project, thus, are: science and politics, which in different periods of his project, take different positions. First, we have the primacy of science, whereas in Althusser's 'Maoist period', politics takes the primacy (“put politics in the commanding post”). However, elsewhere, Althusser insists that one condition cannot overtake the other one:

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11 Although, Althusser used to say that “Are we not always in exceptional situations?”, Althusser 1969: 104

12 Althusser 2014: 13

13 However, in late period of his work, in his famous interview with Fernanda Navaro, when Althusser was asked about 'what does philosophy do', he responded as following: “It may seem that philosophy inhabits a separate, remote world. Yet it acts, in a very special way: *at a distance*. It acts, by way of the ideologies, on real, concrete practices - for example, on cultural practices such as the sciences, politics, the arts and even psychoanalysis” Althusser 2006: 280. Here it is very important to recall Alain Badiou's four truth procedures as conditions of philosophy.

The rightist deviation suppresses philosophy: only science is left (positivism). The leftist deviation suppresses science: only philosophy is left (subjectivism). There are 'exceptions' to this (cases of 'inversion'), but they 'confirm' the rule.¹⁴

Let us take the theoretical deviations in theory, which are of interest of this paper. According to Althusser, theoretical deviations in politics are always of philosophical character: "these deviations are called economism, evolutionism, voluntarism, humanism, empiricism, dogmatism, etc. Basically, these deviations are *philosophical* deviations, and were denounced as philosophical deviations by the great workers' leaders, starting with Engels and Lenin."¹⁵ How should we understand this, from the perspective of his definition of philosophy? The way we should read Althusser's formula, thus, can be elaborated as following:

Class struggle exists apart from, and independently of, philosophy, but its effects can be named, marked and classified only by philosophy.

Although philosophy is, in the last instance, a class struggle in the field of theory, it doesn't take an active part in class struggle, but it produces theoretical effects in politics.

Philosophy states propositions are *Theses*,¹⁶ which should be understood as positions; that is to say, philosophy operates by stating dogmatic propositions that, once stated, take the form of the *Theses*.

By operating through *Theses*, which are positions, philosophy's function *in the* class struggle becomes clear: it takes the proletarian class position, in the realm of theory. Philosophy has an intervening aspect, by which Althusser means intervening through demarcating between "the ideological of the ideologies on the one hand, and the scientific of the sciences on the other."¹⁷ In this sense, philosophy exists and operates, or rather its place is in between the practices in which it intervenes (scientific, ideological, political) and the results or effects of its intervention.

Drawing from all this, we can argue that, for Althusser himself,

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14 Althusser 2001: 3

15 Althusser 2001: 26

16 Althusser 1990: 74

17 *Ibid.*, 83.

philosophy is constituted in its intervention. That is to say, philosophy is constituted through theoretical intervention, *by the means of ideology*, in certain realities, by producing effects in those domains, which retroactively condition the transformation of philosophy itself.

Marking divisions

There is such a thing as a genuine philosophical laughter. It is usually caused by the word "communication", or debate. Deleuze was certainly right to argue that philosophy "has a horror of discussions. It always has something else to do. Debate is unbearable to it, but not because it is too sure of itself. On the contrary, it is its uncertainties that take it down other, more solitary paths."¹⁸ Or, as he puts it elsewhere, philosophy is not about dialogue, but it is about constructing a problem, a problem-position.¹⁹ Constructing a problem-position is, in itself, a position which divides. Althusser argues that it is science that unites without any division, but philosophy divides, and the unification can come only by division. Therefore, "there is no such thing as philosophical communication, no such thing as philosophical discussion."²⁰ In this regard, every philosophical premise is that a true idea doesn't unite, but it divides.

In a nutshell, these can be said to be the two primary functions of philosophy, as conceived by Althusser; namely: philosophy intervenes precisely not in every-day life, but rather with regard to the determination in last instance; and since it has an intervening character, it maintains an authoritarian relations with regard to its (non-philosophical) conditions. Hence, dialogue, debate and other democratic categories are foreign to philosophy, if not enemies.

At this point, we should make a leap forward in this direction. We all know Hegel's famous sentence on the owl of Minerva that takes off at dusk – the famous paragraph which has been appropriated by the *common-sense philosophy*, as Althusser would have said. It is more often quoted than it is read, as is too often the case with Hegel's philosophy in general. According to Hegel, philosophy performs its function only too late; that is to say, philosophy appears when "actuality has gone through

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18 Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 29

19 Deleuze 1987: 1

20 Althusser 2001: 13

its formative process.”²¹Philosophy intervenes when and where the figure of consciousness has grown old. In Hegel’s words:

This lesson of the concept is necessarily also apparent from history, namely that it is only when actuality has reached maturity that the ideal appears opposite the real and reconstructs this real world, which it has grasped in its substance, in the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy; the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.²²

These two positions are not contradictory: if philosophy is a discipline whose working hours begin after everything else is at sleep, it is also dependent on what happens in the social field during the day.

However, Althusser himself wouldn’t agree with this assessment. He would argue that:

A philosophy does not make its appearance in the world as Minerva appeared to the society of Gods and men. It only exists in so far as it occupies a position, and it only occupies this position in so far as it has conquered it in the thick of an already occupied world.²³

The problem is that Althusser is repeating Hegel’s words. Hegel does not advocate the position of a beautiful soul, which is to say, a philosopher who occupies a position of an observer. If philosophy starts off at night, it does so only after a long day of experiments in different social domains. It introduces new divisions in the social fields, by which it is immanently conditioned. Along this line, in the same passage, Hegel explicitly says that philosophy should not propose anything to its conditions, the ‘experiments’ are done within the conditions, not extrinsically, with any sort of positive philosophical character. It should be noted that he also complained about Fichte mingling in political, and Plato with love. But, this is altogether another history. However, it brings

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21 Hegel 1991: 23

22 Hegel 1991: 23

23 Althusser 1990: 205

us to a crucial thesis: *Philosophy has not always existed*.²⁴

The existence and transformation of Philosophy seem to bear a close relation to the *conjunction* of important events in the class relations and the state, on the one hand, and the history of the sciences on the other.²⁵

Here we encounter an obvious dichotomy: temporal versus structural. We have the conception of philosophy that intervenes *theoretically* in the existing conjunctures, as well as the other conception, of a philosopher as a night-time warden. The initial solution could be formulated as following: in Althusser’s world, philosophy intervenes late at night, after a long day of class struggle, of scientific discoveries. Here, we are again confronted with the question of the transformation of philosophy, a question with which Althusser was confronted throughout his philosophical career. In 1976, Althusser presented a paper entitled *The Transformation of Philosophy*,²⁶ which in my view, should be read alongside his *Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy*.²⁷

New, and profound, scientific discoveries and new, major events or modifications in the relations of and of the class struggle, produce such profound effects that they necessitate the transformation of the philosophy as such. The latter is not dependent on the inspiration of an author, or his/her epiphany. How should a philosopher, who is also a Marxist, continue his/her job? Althusser wrote that “Marxism - Marxist theory and Marxist philosophy - forms part of our culture does not mean that it is integrated into it. On the contrary, Marxism (dis)functions in our culture, as an element and force of division.”²⁸ The situation with Marxism today is far more problematic. It is not only that Marxism represents the toxic element, not only in our cultures, but also in philosophy and theory generally. In accordance with Althusser’s thesis, we should propose another conception of Marxism and understand it as a major force of division not only in our cultures, but also in all social domains as such (politics, science, ideologies, etc.). The complications

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24 Althusser 2014: 17

25 Ibid.

26 Althusser 1990: 241-266

27 Ibid., 203-240

28 Althusser 1999: 243

streaming out of this can be formulated in a few theses. The impression that we can get is that philosophy's conditions *divide* philosophy; that is to say that the novelties of a certain time change philosophy, which in turn, intervenes on the fields which condition it. However, it is precisely this "virtuous circle" aspect that made Althusser ever so worried about revisionisms, because revisionism uses the same circuit, but rather than using the novelties in the conditions to divide philosophy, which, renewed by these cuts, then cuts through the ideological dimension of what conditioned it. Further, revisionism uses its conditions to "fix" philosophy, and a unified philosophy to 'fix' the gaps in its conditions. But, the circuit is the same (from conditions to philosophy, and back to conditions), and this is a reason why revisionisms are always a threat!

How to begin with a critique

Althusser's early writings constitute the immanent tension between religion (or, Roman-Catholic Church) and Marxism, which, in his later work, will be replaced with the tension between philosophy and Marxism (or, Communism). The story is well known: Althusser was a devoted Catholic. His intellectual course begins with Catholicism, under the influence of his friend Jean Guilton, a Catholic priest who was, perhaps, the most important person in Althusser's intellectual formation. Althusser remained a Catholic for the rest of his life, even after joining the French Communist Party. What did change, was his relation to the Church, which he "abandoned in 1947 or thereabouts." However, he maintained a kind of fidelity to Catholicism: at the moment of apostasy, Althusser did not reject God or Christianity,²⁹ but rejected the Church. This is a rather unknown Althusser, much less explored or studied, and all too often repressed, even by the most fanatical partisans of Althusser. However, not many can deny that significant theological factors appear in his later work. What is of crucial interest here is the abruptness of his turn from the theological works to the first orthodox Marxist texts, which, in the later period, is almost the dialectical Other of what seems to be a continuation even after abandonment. In this regard, Roland Boer is right to argue that "if the thesis on Hegel and 'The International of Decent Feelings' are unabashedly theological, then 'A Matter of Fact' and 'On Conjugal Obscenity' fall clearly into

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²⁹ Louis Althusser: l'approdo al comunismo, available online at: <http://www.filosofia.rai.it/articoli/louis-althusser-lapprodo-al-comunismo/5318/default.aspx>

ecclesiology."³⁰

The abandonment of Church poses an important and also an interesting, theoretical moment: Althusser became a "Communist because he was a Catholic":

I did not change faith, I found that.... it is possible to say that I remained Christian deep down, I don't go to church, but what does the church stand for/mean today? You don't ask people to go to church these days, don't u?

I remained a catholic, i.e. a universalist, internationalist, no? I thought that in the communist party there were means more adequate to realize the universal fraternity³¹

What Althusser says here is that, in his conviction, Communism is Christianity realised with different means. This is *the* crucial point, because it poses two important philosophical and political implications: 1) the status, and the role, of Church in the struggle for emancipation, and 2) the materialism in, and of, Christianity. But, even a more important aspect to Althusser's Christian writings is, as Stanislas Breton points out, that "without his catholic education during his youth movements, it is possible and probable that Althusser, and not only him, would have never reached the 'path of thinking', and we add: Marxist thinking."³² In this sense, Breton's analysis, and Boer's thesis that "Althusser's expulsion of the Church

from his life and work enabled the Church to permeate all of his work,"³³ – should be read together. Christianity, or more precisely Catholicism, is the 'condition of possibility' for Althusser to engage with, and become, a Marxist, while at the same time it constitutes an obstacle that has to be overcome. But, before overcoming it, Roman-Catholicism provided the framework for the universal emancipation. That is to say, the alliance between Christianity and Marxism offer the conceptual and political framework for universal emancipation.

This is the problematic that haunts Althusser in the beginning of

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³⁰ Boer 2009: 110

³¹ Althusser: l'approdo al comunismo

³² Breton 1997: 155

³³ Boer 2009: 108a

his philosophical life.

However, the most important question regarding Althusser's philosophical project is that of Hegel: why did he abandon Hegel, and became a Spinozist? The first thesis concerns the philosophical and political conjuncture in the post-war France. According to Althusser, "the fact that, for the last two decades, Hegel has had his place in French bourgeois philosophy is not a matter to be treated lightly."³⁴ The philosophical conjuncture in France, or "extraordinary philosophical chauvinism" or as Althusser characterised it, was dominated by phenomenologists, *Lebensphilosophie*, and a bourgeois appropriation of Hegel. The return to Hegel, in the post-war period, took a specific form:

Great Return to Hegel is simply a desperate attempt to combat Marx, cast in the specific form that revisionism takes in imperialism's final crisis: *a revisionism of a fascist type*.³⁵

Politically, the post-war reaction was at its highest. Philosophical chauvinism was accompanied by political provincialism, or revisionism. The systematic political critique was alienated into the usual moralistic blackmailing terms. In fact, the political revisionism was centred on the category of *fear*, as developed by the central figures of post-war writings: Camus, Malraux, Marcel, and others. By employing the notion of fear to analyse the political situation in France, they became Fukuyama-ists *avant la lettre*.

Against all these currents, in which the philosophical categories were used as a warrant for the most reactionary elements in the post-war situation, Althusser seeks refuge in the philosophy of Spinoza. In the post-war predicament, in which the philosophical currents were dominated by a bourgeois appropriation of Hegel and phenomenologists (Marxists or not), Spinozism was indeed perceived as a liberator from that reactionary conjuncture, and being a Spinozist in philosophy was perceived as a liberating experience. We should remember that one of his main enemies, both philosophically and politically, was Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the author of a *Phenomenology of Perception*, together with Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Nevertheless, before arriving at this point, Althusser was a Hegelian, and this can be seen in his Thesis, and other essays, from that period.

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34 Althusser 2014:177

35 Ibid., 189

Taking all this into account, what characterises Althusser's early period is:

His full identification with Christianity and an attempt to create an alliance between Roman-Catholicism and Marxism;

An underlying Hegelian framework, albeit a humanist Hegel, is present in his work, culminating in his Masters thesis and *The Return to Hegel*;

A constant attempt to dissolve his theoretical alliances and build a new philosophical framework for his philosophical project, which culminates with abandonment of Christianity and Hegel.

The shift in Althusser's position is evident: from identifying with Christianity, and referring to himself as a Christian ("we Christians..."), he switches to dismissing religion as a "practical ideology."³⁶ On another level, he switches from an interesting defence of Hegel against the fascist revisionism, to dismissing Hegel as the philosophical rationalisation of the existing state of things. In the midst of these conceptual shifts, he is continuously faced with the perplexing question: how to begin with a Critique? In the whole of his oeuvre, we can distinguish between its Christian and scientific perspective. Differently put, Althusser's critique is grounded first on Christian universality, or more precisely, based on his mastery of attempting to ground the critique in its Universalist Catholic fashion, Althusser opens up the space for two decisive moves in his philosophical and political life: a) paradoxically (or not so much), it was Christianity that enabled him to reject/abandon the Roman-Catholic Church, and b) it enables him to rethink Marxism in universal terms.

Broadly put, the principal question with regard to religion, and its relation to Marxism, is not whether they can they co-exist together, without submitting one to another: the tradition of *Liberation Theology* has proven to us that it is possible to suture Marxism and Christianity. However, the main question is, is it possible to be a materialist (or, a Marxist) without going through religious opus. Or, even better: is it possible to be a materialist (and in this case, a Marxist) by abandoning religion as an idealist enterprise?

With regard to Althusser's early writings, one should complement Boer's distinction of his work, by arguing that the structure

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36 See also Althusser 2014: 194-197

of Althusser's theological writings can be compared to Marx's famous statement:

the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.³⁷

This structure of this thesis is materialised in Althusser's own theological writings: his criticism of fear, the proletariat of fear or of the human condition, the status and the structure of Church, etc. Along with its critique of ideology, in these essays one can (and should) seek to reconstruct the already existing materialist tendencies in Althusser's work³⁸. Thus, in *On the Materialist Dialectic*, he writes that

Instead of the ideological myth of a philosophy of origins and its organic concepts, Marxism establishes in principle the recognition of the givenness of the complex structure of any concrete 'object', a structure which governs both the development of the object and the development of the theoretical practice which produces the knowledge of it. There is no longer any original essence, only an ever-pre-givenness, however far knowledge delves into its past.³⁹

The safest path to follow, with regard to this, would be to analyse this from the perspective of his 'aleatory materialist' period, by employing concepts of the void, encounter, etc. in his *On Genesis*, Althusser already talks about "the schema of the "theory of the encounter" or theory of "conjunction," which is meant to replace the ideological (religious) category of genesis, there is a place for what can

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37 Marx 2008: 10

38 A strange encounter can be traced with Feuerbach, the embodiment of theoretical humanism, whom Althusser translated and studied thoroughly. In his *The Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach argues that the best way to pursue the query of the essence of Christianity is through embracing the idea that God has created the world *ex nihilo*. According to him, this non-essentialist thesis, expresses the value of this world for the Christian consciousness. Feuerbach argues that if "creation is a product of the Will", which is not the "will of the reason, but the will of imagination", that is to say, the subjective Will, then the world as it is, carries the value of nothingness. "Thus, writes Feuerbach, the nothingness of the world expresses the power of the will.", Feuerbach 2008: 85, see Hamza 2015 (forthcoming)

39 Althusser 2005: 198-9

be called linear genealogies.⁴⁰ In other words, according to him, the structure can be thought only as an effect of 'conjunction', and each element that comes to be combined in the conjunction of (a given) the structure (i.e. water, swimming, drowning), are in itself, a product or rather an effect as such. In other words, Althusser here is talking about the structure without a cause, which will remain a major problem in his entire philosophical and political project. That is to say, how, and whether, it is possible to think the rupture or the historical revolution within the "limits" of the structure, or the transformation of the social, political, ideological structure as such. Here, Althusser is positioning himself against Hegel, especially with his concept of "expressive causality."⁴¹ The importance of pointing this out relies on the attention we should pay to Althusser's own development of his critical theory in the context of religion/theology. Here we can say that his intervention is a good example of what we meant before by the function of philosophy.

In *The International of Decent Feelings*, Althusser sets himself to polemicise against Christian apocalyptic readings of the (then) contemporary texts that attempted to read the predicament of the beginning of the Cold War. The fear of atomic bombs as a consequence of the Cold War was indeed real, but "proletarianization" of the people ("we are all victims") from all classes of the social whole didn't convince Althusser. The Marxist side of Althusser comes to say that such a generalisation of the "proletariat" as a class in the general population is, in fact, a negation of the specificity of the proletarian class position, as well as the specific contradiction of the political, economic, and ideological struggle of the proletariat against dominating classes. The threat of the atomic bomb cannot be used as an excuse of the every day exploitation of the proletarians and the other poor.⁴² In the same text, Althusser polemicises against the then-prevailing discourses on the equality of all the people in front of their misery, guilt, poverty and the alienation of the human condition. All the subjects, despite their class position, equally experience this. According to Althusser, this discourse replaces the recognition of our equality before God, with our equality before our fear of death, atomic threats, etc. In Althusser's perspective, this position is anti-Christian on two levels. It favours idolatry (our

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40 Althusser 2012: 1

41 For a critique of Althusser's critique of Hegel, see, especially, Žižek 1993: 135-140

42 Althusser 2014: 31

death equals us with God), and it fails to recognise the existence of the proletariat, whose emancipation cannot be accomplished by re-appropriating the products of human labour, which has been encapsulated by the feeling of fear.

Doesn't this hold true today with regard to ecological catastrophes, new forms of exclusion, new forms of (neo)imperial and (neo)colonial administrations, racisms, and other forms of exploitation? We should forget our social status and our class position, suspend the class identification, so they tell us, because the threats we are facing are real and serious. The ruling ideology tells us that, against all the threats, humanity should unify against the secondary divisions which might endanger the future of humanity. The usual response to a philosopher who brings up the question of a class struggle is a 'reminder' of a terrorist or ecological threats, accompanied by the evocation of "humanity" as a whole. Althusser was faced with a similar overload of "humanist cry".

And, against all the odds of humanity as a totality, Althusser writes that "we have only one recourse left, they bluntly tell us, in the face of catastrophe: an holy alliance against destiny."⁴³ In the aftermath of World War II, it was fashionable to read in the apocalyptic manner the situation through signs,

"the war itself becomes both sin and God's wrathful punishment, the concentration camps are the Last Judgment, the Moscow trials are the Passion, the atomic bomb is the will of God, and the equality of death before the bomb is equivalent to equality before God"⁴⁴

Against this, Althusser takes a Marxist, as well as theological, position, as Boer rightly argues. The notions of the "proletariat of fear" and the "proletariat of the human condition," are the new names that attempt to reduce, and then replace, the old proletariat by the new. The widespread idea that all the people are threatened by the fear of the atomic bomb would equate them with Marx's, and the Marxist, notion of the exploited majority. The attempt to encompass everyone – people of all social classes – into the proletariat of wear or human condition,

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43 Ibid.p.23

44 Boer 2007:471

is a masterful endeavour of ideological manipulation by the people of the ruling class to obliterate the political and economic nature of the proletariat, and therefore the class struggle. The fear, as a psychological condition, does not change the status of the exploitation that takes place every day, and the poverty that comes as a consequence. In the same place, Althusser argues against the newly emerging prophets and their preaching on what he calls as "moralizing socialism".⁴⁵ When he warns against the prophets, he takes a clearly Christian position, that is, the struggle against idolatry:

This false end of the world is teeming with false prophets who announce false Christ's and treat an event as the Advent. But Christ has taught us that we must beware of false prophets, and also that they will reappear as the Last Days draw nigh. The paradox is plain: the end that is close for every Christian is not the end of the false prophets of history.⁴⁶

This paragraph is obviously drawn from the Bible, or more precisely from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the gospel according to Saint Luke, verse 21:5-6 states "and as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down", whereas Matthew, in verse 24:5-8, says that "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: ... and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." In a complete harmony with warnings of Mark and Luke,⁴⁷ Althusser, from a firm Christian position against the idolatry, takes this form: "when we merely invoke the Lord, we serve, not the Lord we invoke, but another whom we do not."⁴⁸ In short, this is the tension that arises in Althusser's position between that of a Marxist and a Christian Catholic. In this regard, Althusser's position is "divided into two": 1) as a Christian, he struggles against idolatry and false prophets

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45 Althusser 2014: 31

46 Ibid., :28

47 But this would hold for Saint Paul as well, who warned "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth." (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

48 Ibid, p.30.

(epitomised in the concept of the “fear”) and 2) as a Marxist, he struggles against the “moralizing socialism” which is represented in the discourse of “socialism without a class struggle”. In his double-position of a Marxist and Catholic, there is a clear tension, which is rendered visible in the relation of the proletariat and the class struggle, on which Boer is right to argue that:

is not Althusser’s Marxist argument (concern with the proletariat) in conflict with his Christian argument (idolatry must be avoided)? The problem is that, although he says his position is a properly Christian one free from idolatry, putting one’s trust in the proletariat become precisely the idolatry he identified earlier. The tension between class and idolatry in this essay is a specific example of the deeper one between Christian and Marxist positions.⁴⁹

Drawing from this, we can argue that Althusser’s early Christian texts render palpable the constitutive and immanent tension between theology and religion. It should be said that here we are extracting a “genealogy” of Althusser’s theory of idea as division. But, before getting into this, I want to recapitulate Althusser’s idea as developed in his writings. The distinction between the proletariat of fear, and human condition versus the laboring proletariat, can also be explained through the background of the lines from Matthew: “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). Jesus Christ, here, is at his Maoist best: the true idea does not unite, but it divides. That is to say, the true radical idea does not unite the people, but it sets up a violent line of demarcation between the people and its enemies. The unity of the people, despite their class position, is the dream of every fascist. To formulate this in a Maoist fashion, we should not opt for the unification of the social whole (under the name of the *proletarian of human condition* or *fear*, after World War II; whereas, today it applies for the terrorist threats, ecological catastrophes, etc), but for drawing lines of demarcations, between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions among the people. This is the true effect of the radical idea.

Class division and its constitution

One of the main preoccupations of the contemporary Left is that of

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49 Boer 2007: 471

the unification of the masses, classes, or people, as such. Recall the beginning of the on-going financial crisis in which, apart from articulating and theorising the fatal consequences of the crisis, the Left was almost equally concerned about the fact that the society is split into two or more parts. If we rely on Althusser’s conception of philosophy as a division, we should read it from a Žižekian perspective; that is to say, it means that a philosopher, should by definition, take sides. In other words, when the philosopher registers the effects of the class struggle, he does not occupy the position of the *beautiful soul*, deciding from a distance what is worthy of thinking and what is not, but he/she is engaged in the given struggles. What philosophy, or a Marxist philosopher, does when he is engaged in a class struggle, is that they register what is, as such, universal in that very struggle. A good reference here is Badiou’s “Idea of communism,” by which he means that it is a matter of elevating the singular dimension of politics to the universal level which would allow others, not clearly affected by that political project, to see the demarcation that such politics produces in the world, between the truth and the state.⁵⁰ Therefore, the universal validity of a struggle and practical engagement are not, in the final instance, mutually exclusive: as Žižek continuously repeats, the access to objective truth cannot be reached if one adopts a position outside of the struggle. According to him, the great dialectical paradox is that, it is only through an engaged position that one can access the universal truth.

How are we to understand this? Hegel argues that, in order to have a dialectical understanding of an object, we need to demonstrate the opposite determinations of the very object that we analyse, in order to seize the opposed moments in their unity. In doing so, we demonstrate that every Whole is a unity of its opposed determinations.⁵¹ Hegel’s statement that “the True is the whole”⁵² should be read together with (at least one) other statement, this time from the end of his *Phenomenology*, where he writes that “the self- knowing Spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself, or its limit.”⁵³ For Hegel, knowing one’s

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50 For more on this and comparison with Žižek’s conception of communism, see Hamza 2014 (forthcoming).

51 For instance, see Žižek 2012: 292-304; McGowan 2013: 31-37

52 Hegel 1977: 11

53 Ibid., 492.

limit equals self-sacrifice, which is “the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*.”⁵⁴ How should we read this, bearing in mind that the Absolute Knowledge is the very concept that turned Hegel into the enemy of almost the entire post-Hegelian era? In a Žižekian-inspired move, we can argue that Hegel’s Absolute stands for the exact opposite of its standard understanding. The Absolute Knowing is not a stage in which the social, political, and other, antagonisms are obliterated; thus, there is a harmonious social whole, a happy and organic functioning of a given community:

the Hegelian totality is not the ideal of an organic Whole, but a critical notion – to locate a phenomenon in its totality does not mean to see the hidden harmony of the Whole, but to include in a system all its ‘symptoms;’ antagonisms, and inconsistencies as integral parts.⁵⁵

It is this excess that should be counted as intrinsic, constitutive of the Whole, which will allow us to recognise and account for that which the Absolute is supposed to enclose: the antagonisms which are inherent of the social order itself. This is the fundamental lesson of Hegel’s notion of totality: no matter how advanced a given social order is, it cannot overcome its inherent antagonisms that are structurally necessary. For Hegel, the achievement of the Absolute is in fact the recognition of the inevitability of antagonisms as such. Taking this into account, how can we read the classes, and the class struggle in general? In other words, is it possible to account for them separately? According to Althusser, it is not, because “the class struggle and the existence of classes are one and the same thing.”⁵⁶ For Althusser, the class division does not come later, but it is the class struggle which constitutes the division into classes. The exploitation of one class by another is already a class struggle, the minimum for the constitution of classes as such. And this is a central thesis in Althusser’s understanding of contradictions: class struggle precedes classes, which also implies that the class struggle is not a product of classes which previously existed in the social field. Following this, we should abandon the positivist

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54 Ibid.

55 Žižek 2012: 378

56 Althusser 2008: 82

understanding of classes, as positive and social groups, which exists independently of the class struggle.⁵⁷ We should understand class struggle as a historical form of the contradiction, which, by being inscribed in the mode of production, “divides classes into classes.” In other words, classes are constituted a posteriori, as a result of the class struggle.⁵⁸ Philosophically, “it affirms the *primacy of contradiction* over the *terms* of the contradiction.” Political implications of this thesis are also radical: we are pushed to accept a radical political and theoretical thesis: *society doesn’t exist*, “as a positive order of being.”⁵⁹ Althusser condemns the theoretical notion of ‘society’ as non-scientific:

This term is in fact fraught with moral, religious and legal overtones; in short, it is an ideological notion, that must be replaced by a scientific concept: the concept of ‘social formation’⁶⁰

In this regard, there are political consequences that have to be drawn. Far from being a Thatcherite position, the Thesis that ‘society doesn’t exist’ affirms the class struggle as a central category of any politics of emancipation. For Althusser, who followed Marx very closely in this respect, class struggle is the name for politics, which prevents the (all too often liberal) conception of classes as parts of a positive social body, and at the same time, in a Hegelian fashion, by being “categories of the real of a political struggle which cuts across the entire social body, preventing its “totalization.””⁶¹ The two (apparently) antagonistic positions that we have to accept are those that capitalism designates our horizon, and yet it is antagonistic in its nature. It is important to emphasise that Althusser is not as naïve as some of critics have argued, unaware of the (importance) of the “critique of value.” His position is just that, only from a perspective that is engaged with the class struggle, we can even discern the true objects of the critique

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57 An important aspect to be noted is that class struggle is always already there in every class society. With the violent turn of the class struggle, they become more apparent in the world.

58 Stanislas Breton makes an important analysis on the continuity in Althusser’s work, namely on the class struggle, primacy of relations of productions, and on aleatory materialism, see Breton 1993: 421.

59 Žižek 2011: 198

60 Althusser 2014: 19

61 Žižek 2011: 198

of political economy. He inverted the order: it is not that an economic analysis will really *convince* us of class struggle, it is the class struggle that demarcates the position from which the critique of political economy should be made. This also connects us back to the point on the influence of Christianity in his thought, not only the Bible passage about the sword (division), but also with another verse from the Bible: "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me." (Isaiah 65:1; which is, the engagement).

Piketty-style Leftism

In the last part of this paper, I will use Piketty precisely as an example of what it means to analyse value and capital without an a priori engagement with class struggle as a "metaeconomic" hypothesis. In his *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx argues that

In the crises of the world market, the contradictions and antagonisms of bourgeois production are strikingly revealed. Instead of investigating the nature of the conflicting elements which erupt in the catastrophe, the apologists content themselves with denying the catastrophe itself and insisting, in the face of their regular and periodic recurrence, that if production were carried on according to the textbooks, crises would never occur. Thus the apologetics consist in the falsification of the simplest economic relations, and particularly in clinging to the concept of unity in the face of contradiction⁶²

Aren't we facing the same situation in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, in which the apologetics of capitalism put the blame not on the structural necessity of existing relations of productions to create crisis, but rather blame the irresponsible managers. Crises are the most important feature needed for the capitalist reproduction to take place. It is in the course of the crises that the inherent instabilities, antagonisms, and different forms of oppression and domination are reshaped, take a new form, and by which capitalism attempts to provide a new vision of itself for its future. In this regard, crises are not only inevitable, but as Marx has repeated many times, they are necessary for the inner contradictions of capitalism (accumulation) to be temporarily pacified. The crisis of capitalism is not, by itself, the potential for the beginning of

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62 Marx, 1969: 500

something new, nor does it offer the perspective of the new vision of a different society. To formulate this in Badiou's terms, the crisis is not, by itself, a new figure in the situation. Or even better, crisis cannot be said to be *a priori* to an eventual site.

What we witness now, as the crisis goes on, is the attempt to revivify itself, albeit it is all too early to be able to account or predict what form and shape it will take. As David Harvey put it, "the manner of exit from one crisis contains within itself the seeds of crisis to come."⁶³ Since the crisis exploded, we are witnessing a proliferation of diagnoses and proposals for solving the crisis, and its effects.

If we take all this into account, which is the ultimate horizon of today's Left, is it radical or not?

The publication of Thomas Piketty's *Capital for the Twenty-First Century* caused a storm in all ideological and political camps. Obviously, Piketty touched a weak point of the entire field in which the antagonistic ideological tendencies and orientations co-exists. The first problem with Piketty's book is that we are giving him too much credit and attention, by elevating his book to an undeserved level. In this sense, the reaction of the Left to his book is too symptomatic, in at least two levels. First, it is, as if by titling his book as he did, he attempted to re-write Marx's *Capital* for our century, which among the Marxists caused an outburst of anger. In fact, it is all too clear that this was not Piketty's intention at all.⁶⁴ Second, Piketty's book renders visible the limits of the contemporary Left, in the sense that we externalising our failure (in this case, to re-write Marx's *Capital*) into somebody who didn't even have that intention. We are all too often caught up in 'trendy' events, which leave no mark, or have no effect on, our project of emancipation. The best service that we, from the Left, could have done to the book is to have treated it as it deserves: an interesting Keynesian-informed book, which will turn into oblivion in a rather short period of time. Yet, Piketty deserves some attention not for what he has written, or what he stands for, but for the troubles he has caused. Hegel writes that "behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless we go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which

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63 Harvey 2014: X

64 Piketty himself admitted that he has never really read Marx: "I never managed really to read it [Das Kapital]... *the Communist Manifesto* of 1848 is a short and strong piece. *Das Kapital*, I think, is very difficult to read and for me it was not very influential", Piketty 2014

can be seen.”⁶⁵ If we apply this to Piketty, the result is too obvious: there is nothing so mysterious about his work, it is always-already there; a Keynesian whose main point is to reform capitalism so that we give it a more human face. For example, in a Rawlsian manner, he argues that “inequality is not necessarily a bad in itself: the key question is to decide whether it is justified, whether there are reasons for it.”⁶⁶ He makes his point even clearer by arguing that

I have no interest in denouncing inequality or capitalism per se - especially since social inequalities are not in themselves a problem as long as they are justified, that is, ‘founded only upon common utility,’ as article I of the 1798 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen proclaims.⁶⁷

The horizon in which he operates is that of existing order. Further, Piketty is the best embodiment of what Žižek calls *utopia*. His project is utopian, not because of its solution (high progressive tax, etc.), but because its proposed measures cannot be applied in our world:

imagine a government doing this, Piketty is aware it needs to be done globally. Because if you do it in one country, then capital moves elsewhere. This is another aspect of his utopianism, my claim is that if you imagine a world organization where the measure proposed by Piketty can effectively be enacted, then the problems are already solved. Then already you have a total political reorganization, you have a global power which effectively can control capital, we already won.⁶⁸

If we want to push Piketty-ism a step further, we should also analyse the political situation of the Left in Europe. The victory of the Right, and the rise of neo-fascist parties in the European Parliamentary elections, is the best sign of the path towards which we are heading. But, what we should be concerned about is the weakness of the Left, which enabled the empowerment of the Right, and our terrible defeat. The ultimate problem of the Left today, is that it cannot dream beyond

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65 Hegel 1977: 103

66 Piketty 2014: 19

67 Ibid., 31.

68 Žižek 2014.

capitalism as its terminal perspective. Politically, at least in Europe, the Left obviously cannot go further than a reformist political project, which functions under the name of Syriza. We are all aware of Syriza’s right turn, but what is more problematic than this,⁶⁹ is the disappearance of the word ‘capitalism’ from their vocabulary. But, this is not only a Syriza-phenomenon: most of the Left has abandoned the word capitalism, and instead we all like to talk about neoliberalism.⁷⁰ Badiou used to say that, the notion of democracy seems to be the organiser of consensus in our societies. However, with the new dynamics of global capitalism, democracy and capitalism do not seem to be any longer the ‘ideal couple.’ Today it can be said that democracy has been replaced by another notion, that of neoliberalism, which seems to have overtaken the function played by democracy, albeit in a different form. Although the two situate on different levels, paradoxically they play the same role. According to Badiou, there are (at least) two conceptions of democracies today: 1) the form of the State; that is to say, a State with its elections, its representatives, constitution, government, etc.; and 2) the other conception is that of the form of a popular or collective action: direct democracy, marches, riots, etc. While the first one is a norm, or an objective fact, the latter is more of a means for political engagement. In Badiou’s terminology, democracy is not a political truth in itself, but one of the means for finding or exploring it. Further, for Badiou, democracy functions as a structuring principle of what he refers to as “the West.” However, going back to the previous argument, Žižek maintains that capitalism no longer needs democracy, but capitalism it is moving towards a new mode of functioning; what he calls capitalism with Asian values, i.e. authoritarian state plus capitalism. In this sense, democracy is no longer the organiser of our consensus.⁷¹ Here comes

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69 In a rather generous reading of their right turn, we can perhaps account it for a ‘tactical retreatment’ due to existing currents, etc.

70 Among a few others, it is Žižek and Badiou that didn’t succumb to the ‘trendy’ current of ‘theorising’ neoliberalism and forgetting about capitalism.

71 In her *The Communist Horizon*, Jodi Dean argues that the call for democracy is the correct move only in some particular historical settings, such as the French or Haitian revolution, or the political fight that lead to October Revolution. However, Dean argues that democracy is the right name for anti-colonial and anti-imperial political struggles, as well as in the opposition to authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, according to Dean, the emphasis on democracy, in our contemporary parliamentary democracies, equals defending of the status quo, “a call for more of the same”. In other words, “democracy is our ambient milieu, the hegemonic form of contemporary politics”. However, what Dean doesn’t seem to take into account is that at least until a couple of years ago, democracy has been appropriated by the neo-imperial administrators. Many neoimperial administrations have been installed in different countries precisely under the

neoliberalism, as an ideological proposition, which albeit differently from Badiou's conception of democracy today, neo-liberalism still regulates our political and ideological field, precisely by providing it with a level of consistency. We all love to hate it - all the ideological camps, from the far right to the far left, liberals, etc. The crucial point is to note that neoliberalism in fact does not have a stable or fixed meaning: it serves as a unifying or quilting point which establishes a consistent space within which different and antagonistic ideologies can oppose each other inconsequentially, fighting over who provides the best critique for a menace they themselves have defined.

What is the alternative to this? In their *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argue that "virtually, no one, with the exception of a few allegedly archaic Marxists (an 'endangered species'), referred to capitalism any longer. The term was simply stuck from vocabulary of politicians, trade unionists, writers and journalists."⁷² However, today's "archaic Marxists" do not like the word "capitalism" very much; instead, we all like to talk about the calamities caused by neoliberalism, as well as to engage in a struggle against it. A hypothetically naïve question should be posed: if our struggle is successful and we manage to crash neoliberalism, what do we get as a result? A Piketty-style capitalism, socialism, or...?⁷³ We don't seem to have an answer to this question. Neoliberalism is no longer a critical notion, but an ideological category. If, by an elementary and provisional definition, by ideology, we understand the misrepresented reality, or posing the wrong questions for a real problem, then we should argue that neoliberalism serves both as an ideological mystification of our real and actual problems (i.e. exploitation, different forms of domination, etc.) and a sign that we are engaged on what Žižek would call a 'false struggle.'

In this regard, if by the name Syriza we understand the name of the radical European Left, the prospect looks highly pessimistic. Their rightist turn should be read as a defeat and surrender before the global capitalism. Piketty and Syriza should be read together, the former

banner of "democratisation." Dean: 2012: 57-8. For more on critique of democracy, see Hamza 2013: 73-103

⁷² Boltanski & Chiapello 2005: ix

⁷³ It is interesting to evoke Harvey, who says that it is "one thing to be transgressive about sexuality, religion, social mores, and artistic and architectural conventions, but quite another to be transgressive in relation to the institutions and practices of capitalist domination that actually penetrate deeply into cultural institutions." Harvey 2012 :110

being both the theoretical base and supplement for Syriza's "practical" political activity. Perhaps, Althusser was all too right when he wrote that Marxism is perpetually in a state of a crisis. Following him, we should argue that our main task is to articulate a philosophical framework which would enable us to really fathom our predicament. And in doing so, first of all we should call things by their names: we should go back to the times when the Left conceived capitalism as its enemy (and not the periods or phases within capitalism as such).

Žižek once wrote that when there is no hope, there are principles to follow. This applies more than ever to our situation. We should locate the contradictions of our situation in the totality of capitalism as such. That is to say, we should see the principal problem in capitalism itself and not in its 'symptoms', as it were. This is the precondition of any attempt to overcome capitalism, if that is still what the Left stands for.

So, where does philosophy stand in all the crises of our situation? It might be strange for some of us to think of a Marxist philosopher, who never gave up on philosophy, but defended it against what we should call the "practical turn" of the 60's, which is becoming the predominant mode of the Left today as well. In the contemporary reign of 'interdisciplinarity' in the human sciences, along with Althusser we should argue that "in the majority of cases, the slogan of interdisciplinarity is a slogan that today expresses an *ideological* proposition" and that philosophy is "neither an disciplinary theory nor the theory of disciplinarity"⁷⁴ Against the *ideological propositions* of interdisciplinary practices and 'concrete actions', we need to reaffirm the primacy of thinking over the practices. He argued that the crisis of Marxism is not a characteristic only of Marxist theory or of organisations and political practices inspired by the former, but it is the crisis of Marxist theory and Marxist politics. However, from the philosophical point of view, the political crisis of Marxism points to its theoretical crisis. Here we see the intellectual character of politics (as thinking), and of philosophy as the site of registering its effects. Commenting on Marx's Eleventh Thesis, Althusser asked: "does this sentence promise a new *philosophy*? I do not think so. Philosophy will not be suppressed: philosophy will remain philosophy."⁷⁵

Hegel wrote that abstract theoretical work brings more to the world

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⁷⁴ Althusser 1990: 79.

⁷⁵ Althsser 2001 :42

than any practical one, because when we succeed in revolutionising the world of ideas, actuality cannot remain the same.

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