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Class Struggle in Theory: the position of enunciation of philosophy and the Hegel/Spinoza debate

Abstract: *The present work is an attempt to discuss the limits of Louis Althusser's philosophical project. These limits are highlighted through a discussion of Hegel and Spinoza, which is in a sense the very thrust of Althusser's work.*

Keywords: *Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Althusser, Class struggle.*

Resumen: *Este trabajo intenta discutir los límites del proyecto filosófico de Louis Althusser. Estos límites son resaltados mediante una discusión de Hegel y Spinoza, la cual es en cierto sentido el mismo impulso fundamental de la obra althusseriana.*

Palabras clave: *Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Althusser, Lucha de clases.*

I want to begin with an obvious statement: Althusser is both a communist and a philosopher, within the same register of thought. This relation between communism and philosophy is a relation of tension. In a certain sense, his whole work can be understood within the span of this tension. One of his main aims was to push the readings and debates of/on Marx onto a philosophical terrain. In doing so, Althusser faced a major obstacle, or rather a problem: that is, Hegel. But, I shall discuss this later.

Over two decades ago, in a discussion of Althusser's work and project, Étienne Balibar, argued that it will take another generation to give a more objective account of this. Last year¹ was

the centenary of Louis Althusser's birth, which, in continuation with the anniversary of the publication of *Reading Capital* and *For Marx*, was used as an occasion to account for Althusser's work in the present situation. Indeed, it was a good moment or occasion to return to his work once again and rethink its potentials, limits and contradictions.

What do we think of when we think of Louis Althusser? What is in Althusser's philosophical project, which historical determination of his work remains with us today?

Althusser's philosophy, as Balibar has elaborated, is grounded on the formula 'premises without conclusions' and 'conclusions without premises', which has temporary effects. But this is precisely where Althusser's greatest lesson lies: that as materialists, it is idealistic to create philosophical systems that would somehow endure the corrosion of time. It is this kind of intervention that is the point of materialist philosophy, not its lasting effects in idealist systems of philosophy. Intervention is what changes the coordinates of a certain situation. Its effects can be traced directly in the material world, and not in ideal systems. In other words, what is at stake for Althusser's understanding of philosophy is not 'its demonstrative discourse or its discourse of legitimation'; rather it is defined by the position it occupies within the already occupied positions in a philosophical battlefield, 'for or against such-and-such an existing philosophical position, or support for a new philosophical position.'

The question is therefore as follows: how can we conceptualise Althusser's project? This is



what this paper seeks to do. If there is no Althusserian systematic philosophy, nor an Althusserian School, doesn't his philosophy stand for the philosopher who immediately disappears in his effects? In this sense, Althusser is a vanishing mediator par excellence. Althusser's theory cannot be fully grasped, or understood.

In Althusser's understanding, philosophy thinks only the Marxist-Leninist politics. In other words, this relation can be articulated as follows: philosophy is preoccupied, in the last instance, not with thinking about the present as such (description), but with intervening negatively, through demarcations, in it (prescriptively). It is this specificity that Althusser has in mind when he designates philosophy as a class struggle in the realm of theory. And class struggle in the realm of theory is what this paper is concerned with.

But, before that, I want to say something about relation of philosophy to ideology, according to Althusser. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that his project of 'return to Marx' is, in the last instance, an ideological project. In fact, we should read his statement that 'philosophy is the highest form of theorisation of ideology' in this light. Marxism, or rather the work of Marx on the critique of political economy can be approached philosophically only following an ideological premise. One of the greatest contributions of Althusser is the thesis according to which 'all human beings are ideological animals.' One cannot live outside of ideology, because men 'can only live and act under the domination of ideas, those of their own practice or the practices dominating their own practice.'

Therefore, every claim to be outside of ideology is the ultimate ideological position.

Althusser's main concern: how to understand and rethink the potentials of Marxist theory with regard to communist politics? As many have argued, Althusser had no doubt until the end of his life that communism was the correct name for the liberation of mankind from all forms of exploitations and oppressions. His concern was not to question the notion of communism itself, but the way communism was conceptualised or understood within different orientations of Marxism and their respective ideologies. It is

from this perspective that we should read his thesis from *Lenin and Philosophy*:

to turn to the past of the Marxist Worker's Movement, we can call by their real names the theoretical deviations which have led to the great historical defeats for the proletariat, that of the Second International, to mention only one. 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. (Althusser 1971, 45)

This is the task he set himself: to correct Marxism by providing the correct philosophical theory and by struggling against the political deviations, which in the last instance, are philosophical. The struggle against these deviations was carried out from the communist position in philosophy.

However, here we should be careful not to reduce his specific and singular contribution to a conjuncture which no longer exists. His interventions should not be reduced to a purely academic philosophical work either. What distinguishes Althusser's intervention is his faithfulness to Marxism itself. But, does Althusser fully theorise the political consequences of his philosophical interventions? Further, it seems to me that Althusser left many theses developed only as a tendency. Also, it appears that there is a discrepancy between his ambitions in outlining the philosophy *for* Marx, and the amount of published work during his lifetime. Although, perhaps the posthumous publications exceed the amount of those published during his life.

However, Althusser was very clear in his position that there is no such a thing as a pure communist politics, or pure Marxist theory. Consequently, there was no pure philosophy for Marx, in the sense of purifying Marx's work from ideological mystifications or distortions. The function of philosophy is not to theorise the results of the break of Marxism from ideology, but to theorise the theoretical conceptual apparatus which makes Marx's theory intelligible.

Balibar once wrote that ‘the most fundamental of all these aporias, the one which in fact governs the whole fate of Marxism (as Althusser had perfectly understood and shown), being the aporia of the concept of ideology’ (Balibar 1995, 159). From this standpoint, I want to continue with elaborating how, in my opinion, the class struggle operates in theory.

According to Althusser, philosophy exists only through occupying territories, conquering positions in the field that is always-already occupied by an adversary. Occupying a philosophical position means at the same time drawing lines of demarcation from the other philosophical positions, which operate within a thick field of philosophical battles. This thesis holds true not only for Althusser, but also for a large part of the French philosophy whose aim, beginning from the 1960s onwards, was an attempt to demarcate itself from Hegel. Althusser, who in his youth devoted a long study to Hegel, in his doctoral defence, declared: ‘I have turned the weapon of Spinoza against Hegel’ (Althusser, quoted in Anonymous, 1975, 44).

Althusser’s position can be summed up as following: in his analysis of the social formation, history and politics, Marx’s true predecessor is not Hegel’s dialectical method, which was saturated with metaphysics and idealism, as well as with a teleological conception and understanding of history. It was Spinoza’s monism which according to Althusser was the genuine ancestor of Marx’s work. According to this line of thought, against Hegel’s monstrosity, Spinoza is the anti-teleological and materialist thinker, who resonates very closely with Marx’s work, and especially with his ‘mature’ writings. In other words, for this approach, the philosophical foundations that permit us to fully understand Marx are those of Spinoza’s materialism.

For many decades now, if not ever since Hegel, the opposition between Hegel and Spinoza constitutes the philosophical battlefield. In many crucial aspects, the battle between the two philosophers and the position one takes within this battle, determines the philosophical and political paradigm one takes.

This battle determines also the way we approach and read Marx, insofar as that reading

is a *philosophical reading*. Thus, the Althusserian question on *how to read Marx* is once again emerging as a crucial determinant of the way we approach his work and especially the critique of political economy. The thrust of the present paper can be formulated as follows: the current crisis of Marxism, which in a sense goes back to the beginning of Marxism itself, is not only a result of the weakness of its sociological analyses, or constant defeats in the political dimension –the crisis of Marxism is more a result of the weakness of the philosophical substrate of Marxism, that is, *dialectical materialism*. Reorienting ourselves in thinking, that is, by means of rethinking the dialectical materialism *for Marx*, we can open up the space for orienting and recuperating the Communist hypothesis, which can help break away with the impasses of the contemporary capitalism. The question thus is: what is at stake in the ‘crisis of Marxism’ and why the debate between Hegel and Spinoza could possibly change the terms of the crisis itself? Differently put, why does this debate affect Marxism as such?

Marx’s Hegel

The traditional understanding of Marx’s Hegelian roots bears on two fronts: on the one hand, the political theory of the proletariat and, the logic of Capital, on the other. The first case is usually associated with Marx’s early works, and his operation of ‘inverting’ Hegelian dialectics, whereas the second concerns his ‘mature’ work and the operator is the famous ‘extraction’ of the rational kernel out of its “mystic shell” (Marx 1982, 103).

Politically, Marx’s Hegelianism would be recognisable in the way the universal and the particular are bound together in his understanding of the proletariat. Is there a necessary link between the general direction and organization of society and the existence of a particular subset of this same society? The Hegelian theory of the concrete universal –of something which stands for the whole *within* the whole, even more so than the abstract apprehension of its totality– was fully deployed in Hegel’s work both

in his understanding of Christianity as well as in his ontology, where the relation between a concept's extension and its exception turns out to be the relation between the concept's *formal* and *concrete* existences. In his social theory, however, Hegel took a more "formalist" perspective by considering the concrete establishment of social rules by the State, the means to regulate the interaction between private volitions in civil society, to be the expression and realisation of the very concept of volition, and hence to stand for the concrete universal of society as such. This view, in which historical existence was as real as the rational existence of the State, was then subverted by Marx, who—in line with the materialist turn of his time—recognised an impasse in Hegel's deployment of the articulation between civil society and State. Rather than taking the State to serve as the concrete measure for the concept of what humanity is at a given historical moment, Marx took up Feuerbach's theory of generic being to say that it is in the very concrete activity of labour that men make their essence objective. This is a process which is extrinsically and formally deviated and deformed by the State laws of property, alienating workers from the participation and realization in their historical existence.

For the young Marx, then, it was not a matter of doing away with Hegel so much as pointing out that the logic of concrete universality, if properly followed through, should not lead us to recognise the State as 'march of God in the world' (Hegel 1991, 279, §258), but rather to recognise that there is a social class whose concrete existence stands in for the existence of society as a whole. In their debasement, the poor working class did not only speak of the true consequences of a society based on private property, but they also incarnated the very same properties which the upcoming bourgeoisie sought to champion: if one wanted to defend the rights of a man with no particular identity, no particular nation, regardless of his possessions and social standing, one would find this very 'abstract man' walking down the streets, 'abstracted' due to his social conditions from his identity, nation, social standing and means of living.

Even though Marx's theory of class would get increasingly complex throughout his investigations, the idea that one can orient social change by a compass that is guided by a particular social class—that is, that history endows situated sub-sets of society with a different power of action—has direct links with the Hegelian theory of negativity and concrete universality. These are links that Marx would never let go. To criticise his Hegelianism, or at least to probe how necessary it is to spouse it in order to uphold other parts of his theory, is to touch upon the question of class composition, political agency and the relation between the tactical support of the working class and the strategic vision of a new society.

But Marx's Hegelianism is also very much at stake in his mature critique of political economy, especially as it is presented in *Capital*. If his early work was based on a critique of Hegel's idealism—prompting the need to 'invert' the logical grounding, from the immaterial realm of laws to the material problem of survival and work—when it came to the logic of capitalism itself, the stakes could no longer be conceived in this way, for the logic of value, albeit not reducible to that of property, was equally removed from the material. If Marx's early work on economy was primarily concerned with explaining alienation, the production of disparities by intervention of unjust property rules, in *Capital* the problem is quite distinct: here the enigma, the form of value, is rather that of equivalence. How can different objects be equated in the market? *And how can profit be produced while keeping to this rule of equivalence?* This is where Hegel's *Science of Logic* became an important aid, because it was not a matter of showing that 'below' the equal treatment of juridical subjects by laws there was the unequal treatment of economic subjects. Instead, it was the matter of showing that the generalisation of a real form of equality, with no exceptions, produced, out of its own functioning, a short-circuit that allowed for asymmetrical power relations and the accumulation of value.

In Marx's mature conception, the logic of value does not lead to pauperisation solely because it is constructed on top of a class of dispossessed workers - instead, in its very functioning, in its 'levelling' of the field of

value, capitalism creates the conditions for surplus extraction. This argument, running sometimes against our usual understanding, implies that local trades of labour force-commodity for money are not unfair –people are paid the market price for their labour, like the price of any commodity– which is something that goes against the regular theory of power which usually underlines the theories of action and the denunciation of exploitation by socialist movements. Nonetheless, by using Hegel's dialectical theory, Marx could simultaneously maintain that capitalism introduced a new sort of freedom and equality in the world and that this very process had produced its opposite effect –while not needing to espouse a two-faced social theory, with the logic of equivalence being applied at one level of economic life and a logic of power relations underlying it, as a separate domain.

This is, then, a second point of intervention: disentangling Marx from Hegel at this point could also mean disentangling the presentation of the logic of capitalist exploitation from such an 'autonomous' view of pauperisation, which many think downplay the role of direct power relations in the presentation of capitalist immiseration.

Finally, at the point of contact of these two uses of Hegel in Marx's work, there is a third thesis, that of the historical teleology of communism, which many –Althusser included– considered the most dangerous collateral effect of Marx's reliance of Hegelian dialectics. Binding together the thesis on the proletariat (derived from the logic of concrete universality) and the thesis on the logic of capitalist exploitation (derived from the logic of speculative identity), Marx would also import into his political and historical theory the idea that capitalism produces its own gravediggers. That the conditions of capitalist exploitation not only single out a class that stands for the whole, but that this singling out is connected with its increasing centrality as the productive forces of society – so that, at some point, capitalism would have itself set the conditions for its overcoming.

This thesis touches both on the critique of political economy and on the political vision of the Left –a Left that trusts capitalist development to deliver the conditions for its abolishment will definitely behave differently than one that

does not; just as a Left that has a transcendental trust on the proletariat might behave differently towards other fronts of struggle today. So, the question of 'Hegel versus Spinoza' tends to be a question about these essential points of Marx's thinking. We can see this in the way that Hegelianism is usually treated by the defenders of the Spinozan Marx as a sign of traditional Marxism, the philosophical ideology of orthodoxy and the justification of its historical failures. Spinozism, on the other hand, is seen by Hegelian Marxists as an attempt to find a new justification for letting go of the essential categories of class and class exploitation in favour of the already established fronts of struggle today.

Political Hegel

However, underlying this debate, there is another set of questions, pointing to a more subtle problem: why does Marx require a philosophical substratum? What is it in revolutionary political thinking that seems to require, to convoke even, the help of abstract philosophers? After all, one could criticize Marx's Hegelianism in the name of a 'pure' political thinking, not necessarily in the name of a different philosophical orientation. Plus, the idea that certain political proposals would mean something totally different were they not backed up by some philosophical perspective seems to contradict the very materialist principle that orients itself by the concrete historical conjunctures rather than by some abstract general principle.

When considered under this light, the question 'Hegel or Spinoza?'² could be approached in a new way. If it is true that Marxism bears some strange relation to philosophy, if it requires the maintenance of some relation to it –inversions, subversions, extractions, etc.– then an interesting question to ask would be: which philosophical perspective, Hegelian or Spinozist, best accounts for this immanent relation between politics and philosophy that parasitises Marx's thinking?

Most of the Spinozist arguments for a 'new Marx' work with the following strategy: we recognise that Marx interacts with Hegel more than with any other philosopher, then we criticise

this as being a contextual problem (a fruit of the prominence of Hegel in those times) and not really bearing on Marx's central ideas, which we then show to match in a much more adequate way the central ideas of Spinoza. Marx's scientificity, his theory of voluntary servitude and power relations, his concept of necessity, etc. –all of this would betray his exterior Hegelian presentation, pointing towards a deeper commitment to the Spinozist tradition. Note that this is not the only way to approach Marx, though: one could have, instead, criticised the Hegelian influences, while accepting them to be authentic and crucial, and then shown that a *better* Marxism, more adequate to our times, could be provided by this alternative philosophical underpinning. We would leave Marx as a Hegelian thinker, for all its worth, and become, ourselves, Spinozist Marxists. But for some reason this is not the main strategy taken by these commentators.

One of the possible reasons for this is that if one takes Marx's interlocution with Hegel seriously, then the question that we must answer is what in Hegel's work was so politically useful that led Marx to refer to him? This is not a question of philosophical importance, but of political one. We can accept that Marx turned all of Hegel's theses upside down, that he dismantled Hegel's system and his theory of the State – but all of this only makes the question even more pressing: what is it that survived after all this dismemberment, why not abandon the reference altogether? The reason why this would be problematic for Spinozists is that, by accepting it, we would already be doing a *Hegelian analysis of Marx's inheritance of Hegel*. The idea that a formal thinking can find its true basis outside of itself –that the extension of a concept is realised in the case that is its exception, its negation– is the Hegelian move *par excellence*. Of course, this proposal is something that Marx himself spells out, when he talks about the realisation of philosophy by means of the proletariat. But let us say that this thesis is extrinsic to his actual political theory, and that it is part of this exterior shell that doesn't really contribute to the important kernel of his work, which only shines through when we consider it from a Spinozist lens. Still, the very idea that Marx did not know

which philosophical project was presupposed in his work, and that while he thought he was 'realising philosophy' by following Hegel into the political realm, *he was in fact doing what he desired, but not what he wanted* –that is, realising a 'practical philosophy', but not the one of Hegel, but of Spinoza– is nothing but a perfect example of what Hegel's dialectical logic does. Now, what is the position of new Hegelian Marxists today? That is, not the Marxists who merely accept the references to Hegel in Marx's work, but who worry about the role of dialectics in the interiority of Marx's work? They do not defend that Marx was 'truly' and 'authentically' Hegelian: in fact, the curious thing about the arguments proposed by philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek is that *they agree with the critiques put forward by the Spinozist Marxists*, as is best exemplified by Althusser's work –the rejection of teleology, the complexification of class analysis, the acceptance that political agency is not ahistorically determined– but they *disagree that Marx held these views due to Hegel*. In fact, it is where *Marx quotes Hegel that he is at his least Hegelian*. To 'be Hegelian', in this line of argumentation, does not mean to agree with Hegel, but to let go of philosophy and accept the absolute separation of political and economical thinking from the abstract and extrinsic references to philosophy. Similarly to how Žižek reads Lacan –arguing that the psychoanalyst only became Hegelian when he dropped the references to Hegel, and began to think in a Hegelian way about non-Hegelian themes– we find here a defence of Hegel which in no way means a defence of the political import of Hegel's philosophy. The very appearance of a proof of his Hegelianism –let us say, a text by Marx claiming the centrality of Hegel to his whole project– would in fact show that Marx was *not* Hegelian, as this reliance on abstract mediations is as far from the immanent self-deployment of the concept as one can get. This brief consideration of the structure of arguments can seem a bit of a joke,³ but it nonetheless helps us to set the problem in the correct terms. As Althusser constantly reminded us, the role of philosophy for politics is not to guide action or to intervene on the theory of politics, but precisely to prevent ideology from closing up the space

for indetermination in political activity. Both Spinozist and Hegelian Marxists agree on this point, with one distinction: for Spinozists, this division between philosophy and politics can be set out from within philosophy itself – and since Spinoza did produce a theory of knowledge more akin to this process, it would be a better fit for Marxism – while Hegelians call this process thinking itself, and require *every* field to work out their own self-splitting by themselves: it is political thinking itself which must rethink its own presuppositions, rework its limitations and let the useless theoretical representation of its practice behind. Another way of putting this distinction is to say that, while agreeing on the task at hand, Spinozists see this as philosophy's role, while Hegelians claim this to be a process that philosophy has no bearing on –the owl of Minerva comes much later. So, insofar as the debate between the two philosophical positions is *staged philosophically*, Spinozists will always have the upper hand –the formulation of the problem in philosophical terms is already what grants them “victory”– while Hegelians will always find a better argument by letting philosophy go, assuming its uselessness, and pushing political thinking to account for its own abstract commitments, since this gesture itself has the structure of a Hegelian moment.

Class Struggle in Spinoza and Hegel

The question Hegel versus Spinoza is interesting only for politics, in so far as both are trying to argue, in different ways, that there is indetermination, and therefore place for political creativity within Marx's work. Spinozists critique Hegelians for saying in Hegel's ideas there is a teleological argument, an inner logic. Whereas Hegelians claim that Spinozists are trying to philosophically interpret something which is supposed to be autonomous –which is politics. Therefore, the whole problem can be formulated as: from where does one state the autonomy of politics, political economy and political movements? Should one state this autonomy philosophically– to have a philosophical theory of the autonomy and therefore to critique teleology,

the concrete universality as some kind of an infrastructure of social agency philosophically, or to hold with the Hegelians, whose position is that we are philosophically correct in not solving this problem and letting it be solved by politics itself. This means that political work is to critique politics. Dialectics in politics is to have the next movement (be by capital itself or be by the political movements) which is within politics its own immanence. Therefore, it is a break with its own transcendental limit. It is in these terms that this problem should be reformulated. The question is not so much that of interpreting Marx, as much as it is a matter of locating the question on: from where does one stage the autonomy of Marxist politics. This is in fact a class issue, not in the sense of what one says about class, but *where from* one speaks about politics. This is so because Spinozists and Hegelians are both philosophers. Are we in our own particular class positions, say, within philosophy departments, in a position to participate in political struggle by saying that it is supposed to be autonomous, or is this something which should be said *from within* a political movement? The catch is that even though Hegelians seem almighty, speaking from the perspective/position of Absolute Knowledge, they hold in fact the position which states that we are not in a position to claim or defend the autonomy of politics – only politics can do that. Whereas, Spinozists, who explicitly try to be more on the side of autonomy, self-creativity, etc, stage this from within a non-political perspective. So, theirs is a philosophical theory of the non-philosophical, whereas the Hegelians state that this can be done only non-philosophically within politics. Only politics can defend itself.

Even though at the letter of what is being said, the Spinozists' argument sounds like they are trying to free/liberate politics from teleological necessary historical version of Marxism, in fact because they are doing this from within philosophy, they are reaffirming it. So explicitly they are for autonomy, and implicitly they maintain that politics needs a philosophical interpretation. On the other hand, Hegelians are explicitly giving philosophical interpretations, they are philosophically talking about dialectics, certain laws of dynamics, things that necessarily

divide themselves, but implicitly they are saying that the task of this division falls on politics itself. They are explicitly talking about, let us call it, dependence of philosophy and politics, but implicitly in their very positioning they are truly recognising the autonomy.

For Althusser, the problem with Hegel was that he could not find place for the subjectivity without a subject:

For Hegel, who criticized all theses of subjectivity, nevertheless found a place for the Subject, not only in the form of the “becoming-Subject of Substance” (by which he “reproaches” Spinoza for “wrongly” taking things no further than Substance), but in the interiority of the Telos of the process without a subject, which by virtue of the negation of the negation, realizes the designs and destiny of the Idea. (Althusser 1976, 136)

The first conclusion to draw is, thus: that the two above-mentioned theses not only inform his philosophical project but also make it inconsistent. In a sense, ‘process without a subject’ opens up a double space firstly for rethinking the theory of the subject in Marxist philosophy, and secondly for rethinking the relation between Marx and Hegel in a non-teleological fashion. However, at the same time, Althusser abruptly closes up this possibility by qualifying the subject as an idealist concept. It is worth noting that his thesis on the process without a subject, which is intended to elaborate an anti-Hegelian position comes as close as possible to the very Hegelian conception of the subject qua substance. For Hegel, Substance does not exist; it is only a retroactive presupposition of the Subject. Substance comes into existence only as a result of the Subject, and it is for this conceptual reason that it is enunciated as predecessor of the Subject. In this regard, the idea that Substance is an organic whole is an illusion, precisely because when the Subject presupposes the Substance, it presupposes it as split, a cut. If the Substance would ontologically precede the Subject, then we would have a Substance which has Spinozist attributes, but not a Subject. However, can we keep this line of argumentation *à propos* the Althusserian

concept of the process without a subject? If we hold this position, then we are in the pre-Kantian universe. The Hegelian approach assumes that this understanding of Substance is dogmatic religious metaphysics, because being/Substance is posited as a totality, as indivisible One. This totality can be accounted for, as such, only in the fantasy (that is, Kantian antinomies of Reason). Here for Hegel, it is impossible to think of the Substance that will become a Subject, because it is always-already a Subject (‘not only as a Substance, but also as a Subject’): it exists only with/in the Subject and without the former Substance, hence is simply a nothing. In this instance, we have to be precise: when Hegel talks about Substance and Subject, he is practically talking about the Absolute: it is the Absolute which is not *only* a Substance, but *also* a Subject. And the “absolute is essentially its result.” As Hegel himself put it in his critique to Spinoza, with him the “substance is not determined as self-differentiating”, which is to say: not as a subject.

So, to conclude, it is interesting to draw a line of comparison between Žižek and Althusser, as two Marxists who engaged in the art of critique of ideology. Žižek argues that today’s global capitalism functions differently from the time when Althusser theorised the concept of ideology. In psychoanalytic terms, again elaborated very often and to details by Žižek, the change in the structure of ideology consists of the shift from the prohibitive, authority Law, to the permissive and hedonist superego injunction. What are the consequences of this, which at the same time, point out the contemporary limits of Althusser’s theory of the critique of ideology? According to Žižek, we cannot adequately think critically our conjuncture using Spinoza’s immanentism. But how should we read this?

According to Žižek’s thesis, capitalism appears as if there is no transcendence - as if the causal interaction of parts/affections at ground level are all there is to it, with power always emerging as a restrictive force, extraneous to the flow of productive life. Just like Hardt and Negri argued throughout their work, but especially in *Multitude* (Hardt & Negri, 2004) social life is a creative, immanent thing, property is an alien force to it, because social life, in its being,

has no transcendental limit, that is always external. However, there is a crucial difference to which we should be attentive: this is how capitalism appears, and not how it works, because its logic has presuppositions and internal limits. It is because of this that the appearance of global capitalism is Spinozist. But, even though the *appearance* is Spinozist, on a critical stance we can reveal the Hegelian (and Kantian) sub-structure of the functioning of the late global capitalism.

In his critique, Žižek argued that Althusser's thesis of 'process without a subject', aimed to be the opposite of Hegelian 'Subject-Substance', as a teleological conceptualisation of a "process-with-a-subject." The former was conceptualised as a materialist dialectical thesis. Žižek's stance is that Hegel's dialectical process is the most radical version of a 'process without a subject', more radical than Althusser's own conceptualisation of it. But, if Althusser's opposition between Marx and Hegel is nothing but a misunderstanding, why mention it? Why not simply pass on it silently? And to really conclude, on a spontaneous point: to avoid Althusser's criticism of Hegel, one would have to show why capitalism is or equals Hegelianism. Or perhaps worse: Hegelianism as capitalism is actually not entirely true. If this was so, then one could easily assume Althusser criticises a totalising system, one instantiation of which is capitalism, and thus Marx seeks to detotalise it. The key resides in the following: the Hegelian dialectical process conceived as 'without a subject' means exactly the same thesis as Hegel's 'the Absolute must be grasped not only as Substance, but also as Subject.' The thesis of Substance-Subject is not about a mega-Subject, controlling the dialectical process. For Žižek, Hegelian system is the "plane without a pilot", in which no agent is needed to push or direct it.

In this sense, Althusser's failure consists on his inability 'to think [...] a capitalist universe "structured like the Spinozian absolute," i.e., the re-emergence of Spinoza as the paradigmatic thinker of late capitalism.' Put differently, the 'global consumerist capitalism is in its basic structure Spinozian, not Kantian: it actually appears as a flow of absolute immanence in which multiple effects proliferate, with no cuts

of negativity/castration interrupting this flow' (Žižek, 2017, 201).

This is why, Žižek argues that it is difficult to find a more 'arrogant' philosopher than Spinoza, 'whose *Ethics* claims to reveal the inner working of God-Nature – if nothing else, it can be shown that here Spinoza is much more "arrogant" than Hegel' (Žižek 2017, 10). It is due to this, among other dimensions, that the limits of Althusser's project become visible.⁴

Notes

1. Editor's note: this paper was submitted in 2019.
2. The classic study of Pierre Macherey *Spinoza or Hegel* (2011) should be mentioned here. Macherey takes a partisan position in defense of Spinoza, against what he (and the entire Althusser's group) consider to be Hegel's misreading of Spinoza, or even more, his inability to grasp Spinoza's system. In this sense, Macherey posits Spinoza's system as a critique *avant la lettre* to that of Hegel.
3. The turning around of Marx not being a Hegelian as precondition for reading him as Hegelian, and why does this not work with any anti-Hegelian, but specifically with Marx is a topic which cannot be fully and systematically elaborated in the format of this article, thus remains to be done elsewhere.
4. In his "Mr. Cogito tells of the temptation of Spinoza", the poet Zbigniew Herbert aims at the same path as Žižek. This beautiful poem is an ironical 'examination' of Spinoza's work, (Herbert, 2007, 314-316).

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