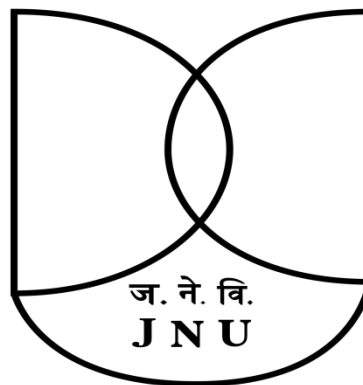


MARXISM, ANTI-HUMANISM AND PHILOSOPHY: A STUDY OF ALTHUSSER'S THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

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To the working class in India

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The work of an author – be it a dissertation or a paper, is, has been, always a work of certain kind of production in a particular history. What writes in the author is an intellectual formation existing within the ensemble of social relations. Yet, the role of supervisor is always pertinent. That is, the supervisor guides and the student think and write. The guidance remains purely within a relationship of a teacher and a disciple. It is in this context that the supervisor actually trains a student in thinking.

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“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatigue climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.”

- Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*

“Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions of its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.”

- Karl Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

“*Habemus enim ideam veram*”

- Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*

Introduction

“Need I add that once we have broken with the religious complicity between Logos and Being; between the Great Book that was, in its very being, the World, and the discourse of the knowledge of the world; between the essence of things and its reading;—once we have broken those tacit pacts in which the men of a still fragile age secured themselves with magical alliances against the precariousness of history and the trembling of their own daring—need I add that, once we have broken these ties, a new conception of discourse at last becomes possible?”

Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital*

1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the relationship between science and ideology in Marxist philosophy through Louis Althusser’s (1918-1990) intervention in Marxism, a French Marxist philosopher and communist militant.¹ The emphasis is to focus upon Marxism as a science and the development of Marxist philosophy in Althusser’s writings. This is because Althusser believes Marxism and its central categories have an epistemological basis in science – historical materialism, class-struggle, praxis, and theory. Althusser explained in an interview that “Marxist Leninist philosophy is one of the two theoretical weapons indispensable to the class struggle of the proletariat.” Althusser further says “Communist militants must assimilate and use the principles of the theory: science and philosophy. The proletarian revolution needs militants who are both scientists (historical materialism) and philosophers (dialectical materialism) to assist in the defense and development of theory.”²

Ever since Daniel Bell contended that ideology had ended, the notion of ideology has remained a constant focus of attention for political theorists. Rather than being caught up in conceptual fragmentation, Althusser raised several questions about the core definition of ideology in the Marxist tradition. However, it can be said that the definitions of ideology today refer not only to

¹ Althusser uses the term militant in context of defeat of the Union of the left to mean those who ‘are demanding an open forum in the party press and genuinely democratic preparation of the Twenty-Third Congress’ see Althusser, Louis, ‘What must change in the party?’ in *New Left Review* I/109, May-June 1978 for more.

² Althusser, Louis, ‘Philosophy as a revolutionary weapon’ in *New Left Review*, I/64, Nov Dec 1970.

parties, groups and isms but also one group, its beliefs and opinions available on social media. The formal measurement of ideology converges on seeing its penetration of the public at large and its influence on democratic politics during elections.

In the 17th century, natural philosophers like Rene Descartes, Francis Bacon, Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton wrote texts that subsequently gave rise to new philosophy. These texts rejected many assumptions found in Aristotelian forms and final causes. Over the centuries, science has been understood broadly as having two distinctive strands, as a body of knowledge and technological marvels. In the mid-20th century, science and ideology were sometimes seen as radically different things so sciences were seen as descriptive while ideology was prescriptive. This separation has been challenged in recent years as transmission of scientific knowledge without reference to truth or external reality was deployed to spread ignorance about acid rain, ozone hole depletion and greenhouse gas emissions. Ignoring this link has led to developing norms that shape aspects of gender, sexuality and race and above all European supremacy through eugenics.

In the 1960s, as Marxist scholars turned to address the challenges of mobilizing the working classes in liberal democracy they had to engage with bourgeois theories of philosophy, sociology and economics. During this period, Marxists battled over Marxism's scientific status as to whether classical Marxism establishes "blind laws of history in analogy to the laws of natural science or does it avoid determinism."³ In this context, Althusser opposed the empiricist model of knowledge production but also asserted the need for a true or scientific knowledge as distinguished from ideology.

My interest in the inquiry for the epistemological basis of science in Marxism comes from the constant tussle ideologies have with science. Unless we have a specific theory of ideology and its functioning; it would be difficult to demarcate the differences between science and ideology. For ideologies constantly feed on sciences.

It is thus an investigation about the demarcation of Marxist philosophy from other kind of ideologies or philosophical deviations and thus, to inquire the 'object' of Marxist theory. With

³Burroway, Michael, 'Marxism as Science: Historical Challenges and Theoretical Growth', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 55, No.6. (Dec., 1990) pp. 775-793.

these questions in mind I began this thesis. This thesis has a strong bearing on locating the ideological philosophical deviations, with which Marxism is often compromised i.e. humanism, empiricism, and economism. In that sense, it is a double project as it envisages the problems and questions within Marxist theory (which gives it an epistemic basis) and sees their application in the political problems of the real world.

The problems in the contemporary society are historical, political and theoretical. The effects of 2007-08 financial crisis are still haunting us. The deep unemployment problem reaching its peak still remains unaddressed. Economic inequality has increased enormously. The rate of wealth accumulation has also accelerated its pace. And more recently, the Corona pandemic has left us in a state of bewilderment, the economic and political death tolls are still unaccounted, let alone the health havocs it has thrown upon us. Among all this need I add to remind that it is the working class or the laboring poor who is hit the worst.

In this pandemic we have seen an increased presence of state and its surveillance mechanisms. It is also a fact that through interpellation pandemic has affirmed the domination of ruling class. Daily doses of ideology have been reinforced for ideology functions in ways of which we are unaware. Among all this, we also see an enormous role of media which simply affirms the prevalence of ideological apparatuses.

Why I got interested in a theme which has already been discussed and comprehensively written about, in Marxian literature, is the first question that I would like to address here. The first theme which comes to my mind is if Marxism claims to be a science of social formation as Althusser has suggested; then how can we read it today? That is, what would reading it today⁴ mean? The proposed study's focus is on Althusser's emphasis on Marxism as a scientific theory and materialist philosophy; it is in no way sympathetic towards vulgar materialism or materialist metaphysics. This is one of the reasons, among many others, that my interest was captured by Louis Althusser's work and contribution. If Marxism is a science and has proper epistemic basis then while understanding "political problems of the day" it would be easily called upon.⁵

⁴ I use the word 'today' to point out 'in the present time'.

⁵ Here Mercer refers to ideological notion of key worker, who were working even in pandemic. See for more, Mercer Samuel, 'The Ideology of Work and the Pandemic in Britain' in *Rethinking Marxism* Dossier, Summer, 2020.

2. Context of the Study

This study proposes to focus on a question that Althusser tries to resolve if we are all formed in ideology, how can a non-ideological view be generated which can deconstruct that ideology?

If ideologies form our world outlook, how do we then perceive the real world? That is, to perceive the real world what could be the epistemic tools? So, how can we have a theory which gives a non-reductive yet a scientific understanding of society?

It is here that my interest was captured by Louis Althusser. But Althusser's own intellectual journey is a struggle to establish Marxism as a science by arguing for an epistemic status of sciences. This struggle was particularly difficult because he shared the complexities in the formulation of ideology with Marx and Engels. Both of them addressed some of his questions in their works such as *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, *Capital*, *Anti-Duhring*, and *Dialectics of Nature*.

The ambitious claim about the significance of ideology underlies not only Althusser's writings but also the party he was closely associated with.

Althusser's relationship with the French Communist Party (hereafter PCF) was "complex and was not undisputed" says Gregory Elliot.⁶ Althusser saw the role of the communist party to organize on the basis of mass participation the class struggles⁷ and he was critical of PCF for shifting the attention away from these concerns. Althusser was critical on two positions of the party: one, the party had removed the term, "the dictatorship of proletariat"⁸ from the party manifesto and second, there was "democratization of the state and the accompanied illusion of peaceful transition which may not lead to an adequate restructuring of state institutions and their character". Althusser was worried that "PCF and existing communist party as Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) may reproduce bourgeois politics."⁹

⁶ Elliot, Gregory, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, Brill, 2006, Boston, pp.7-8.

⁷ See, Althusser's speech to 22nd Congress of PCF at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1977/22nd-congress.htm>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See, Nowak, Jorg, 'Louis Althusser's Critique of Communist Party and the question of Post-revolutionary State', *Rethinking Marxism*, 29:2, pp. 236-237.

Despite the limitations of the communist party of his time, Althusser believed that PCF was the only legitimate organization to lead the revolutionary class struggle. In fact Althusser held very high regard of communist parties in general, for not only organizing working class consciousness but even the to revolutionize the proletariat¹⁰, as he says in the concluding remarks of Twenty-Second Congress of French Communist Party. Even after such an apprehension towards PCF and its leadership Althusser still envisaged the possibility of a return to revolutionary Marxism within the Communist parties in the 1960s. Althusser's project was as Elliot mentions the “renovation of the political practice of the PCF by a restoration/renewal of Marxist theory.”¹¹

Althusser on Revisionism¹²

Towards the 1960s Althusser had been developing an anti-revisionist philosophy which claimed to address the reversal of Marxism, within the PCF. For Althusser the origins of revisionism did not began in 1956 with Khrushchev. Rather, he suggests deeper dominance of revisionism in theory from the “consolidation of power by Stalin in the CPSU.”¹³ Althusser believed that Stalin's theory was reductionist¹⁴, Stalin believed that economism—mechanically relying on economic development alone—would finally lead to socialism. For Althusser, however, class-

¹⁰ In the conclusion to the speech at 22nd Congress, Althusser says ‘the Communist Party is not constituted by individuals with particular opinion and electoral results but *‘on the basis of worker’s and people’s class struggle and of Marxist theory* (it represents one of the forms of their historical fusion)’. Italics original See, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1977/22nd-congress.htm> for more.

¹¹ Elliot, Gregory, Althusser *The Detour of Theory*, Brill, 2006, Boston, p.18.

¹² Revisionism has a wide connotation in Marxist theory: it can mean, from ‘an epistemology which has the knowing subject in a dialectical relationship of analysis and action with the object known’ to ‘bourgeois professorial science’. In Althusser we can find both the senses, see his attacks on economism and empiricism, Althusser Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, pp. 10-11, p.213. For more on Revisionism see Bottomore, Tom *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Blackwell, 1983, Oxford, p. 475. And Lenin V I, *Marxism and Revisionism* in Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1973, Moscow, Volume 15, pages 29-39.

¹³ See ‘Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism online’ <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-6/nmmlc-tr.htm> for more.

¹⁴ The concept of Reductionism has a broad and varied meaning in Marxist theory, here it can mean a deviation from Marxist methodology's two vital elements- a) its holistic orientation – its unwillingness to examine social phenomena in a compartmentalized fashion; and b) its portrayal of collective agent in dialectical relation to their social environment—with economic, political and ideological structures setting limits to collective action, while at the same time collective agents (classes, social movements, etc.) react to these limitations and try to either change or maintain them. In other words, Marxist methodology shows human beings to be both the producers and product of their social world. See for more, Mouzelis, Nicos, ‘Reductionism in Marxist Theory’, *Telos*, 1980, pp.173-185.

struggle itself is the inner dynamic of establishing socialism. Althusser saw Stalin's dismissal of class-struggle in USSR as "evidence of revisionism."¹⁵

Althusser's "left-wing critique"¹⁶ of Stalinism was against both Stalinist dogmatism and Khrushchev critiques of Stalinism.¹⁷ While the former held the economic reductionist view and denied class struggle, the latter espoused the philosophy of men, which was humanist, believed Althusser. Althusser's 'left wing critique' of Stalinism led to confront the burning questions raised by the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956 and the crisis in the international communist movement. The crisis was around philosophic deviations like voluntarism, economism, and humanism within the Communist movement.

Althusser saw a reversal of Marxism from a critical and revolutionary theory to a positive ideology for legitimating the purposes of the existing communist parties. For him to reactivate any revolutionary perspective the revisionist trends had to be attacked.

The revisionist trends were deviating, that is, they were having a reductionist and economist reading of Marx's original teachings. The concerns were centrally around debates on whether socialism or socialist democracy can go in hand with Marxist dialectics that is dialectics of class struggle or is it just in thought, as Hegelian dialectics would argue? Three conceptual and empirical points emerge from this: dictatorship of proletariat is no longer a tendency, to what extent does the mode of production offer what we call motor of history that is, class struggle and, the role of state under socialism. These points can be centrally located in the famous text of Althusser that is, *For Marx* in the preface to English translation.¹⁸

For Althusser the humanist and economist interpretations of Marx were distorted interpretations. The notion that history is a process made by man by overcoming alienation and emphasis on

¹⁵ See 'Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism online' <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-6/nmmlc-tr.htm> for more.

¹⁶ The term 'Left-wing critique' is used by Christine Buci-Glucksmann. For Glucksmann, Althusser's 'left-wing critique of Stalinism' is an ongoing effort to produce an adequate analysis which could register the material effects and distortion of the 'theoretical form' and the historical legacy of Stalinism but would also avoid the traps of humanism and economism.' For more see 'On the Left-Wing Critique of Stalinism', republished by *Viewpoint Magazine*, 1976.

¹⁷ Althusser had problems with the way critique of Stalinist dogmatism was lived as 'liberation'. As Althusser says: 'it lead to profound ideological reaction—liberal and ethical tendency—which spontaneously rediscovered the old philosophical themes of 'freedom', 'man', the 'human person' and 'alienation''. See for more 'To my English readers' in Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 9-15.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.11.

metaphysical essence of man as to what makes history was only a result of Stalinist orthodoxy and elements of Western Marxism. But according to Althusser, in his mature writings Marx had broken from the early phase of humanism to find a theory which gives a scientific understanding of society and history. Althusser held a different view of history. For him, firstly, history is a process without subject or goals and secondly, history is overdetermined by multiple causalities wherein several elements come and act together in a formation. It can be said therefore, while the mode of production is what determines a social form, however to analyse it in isolation would be reductive.¹⁹ Althusser rejected agency on the part that it leads to empiricism of the subject which basically means experience of the subject has a fundamental bearing with structure effect, where the subject is placed. Thus, he held a notion of structural causality to understand a social formation. Further Althusser also tried to argue about the reason behind success of capitalism through a conception of ideology as we shall see. He never understood capitalism as an eternal phenomenon. Even in the 1968²⁰ events in Paris Althusser held the view that petty bourgeois ideology and the movements must be critiqued.

The “humanist and economist” interpretations,²¹ of Marxism were not true to the original teachings²² of Marx is what Althusser believed. For Althusser, the humanist readings, that is, whose terms were reading Marx as proposing philosophical anthropology, were no more than anachronisms and interpolations.²³ These interpolations were manifested in writings of Marxists of his time even in established ones Roger Garaudy, Henri Lefebvre, Jean Paul Sartre, Gregory Lukacs etc. For Althusser the dominant kind of reading was of positing ‘Young Marx’, in the whole of Marxism so much so that the Feuerbachian phase of Marx was always already reconciled in mature Marx. This is amply visible in the opening pages of *For Marx* as well as in the famous essay “On the Young Marx.”²⁴ Althusser considered “Marxist or Socialist Humanism as an *ideological* phenomenon.”²⁵

¹⁹This position has been comprehensively developed in his essay ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’. See for more Althusser, Louis, ‘Contradiction and Overdetermination’ in *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 89-128.

²⁰The 1968 (May’68) movement in France was a civil unrest which subsequently developed in a movement with huge students’ participation, later on joined by workers as well. Althusser found primacy of students than working class as the character of this movement and called it petty bourgeois. See for more ‘Louis Althusser’s Letter on the May Events’ at <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3851-louis-althusser-s-letter-on-the-may-events>.

²¹ Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p.11.

²² By ‘original teachings’ I do not mean Althusser was an essentialist in any sense.

²³ The emphasis on this term is entirely mine; any criticism of this is subject to nuances of my own usage.

²⁴ Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp.51-86.

²⁵Ibid.p.11.

Althusser had a baffling and enduring relationship with PCF. In retrospect, what made PCF difficult to accept Althusser were his lifelong reflections on whether politics and philosophy can be reconciled through the party.

In addition, it can also be maintained that Althusser had heated debate and arguments within the party and its leadership held by Roger Garaudy. Nonetheless, Althusser commitment to the party as it was the only mass working class party remains uncontested. Among all this, needless to say, Althusser's position in the party was fundamentally as a party intellectual who saw party as articulating "working class interests."²⁶ For Althusser leaving PCF would mean isolation of working class hence he sought to change party from within.²⁷ As Ian Birchall²⁸ writes, "organisations remained a legitimate and revolutionary means" for articulation of "majority of conscious and active workers."²⁹ Birchill did not believe this. However French revolutionaries held this widely popular belief.³⁰

Althusser was correct in cautioning about the dangers of 'degree of bureaucratization' that had taken hold in communist parties in general, which had led to restriction on freedoms to criticise and express opinions. However, no matter how marginal and cornered his perspectives on ideology was within the PCF Althusser held the belief that with meticulous articulation between theory and practice labour movement can still be won.³¹

It is in this regard, in the 1960s, Althusser thought that for the rejuvenation of the party Mao Zedong's "concepts and practices" can be of great help.³² His interest in Mao, however, was also theoretical in the context of development of non-reductive theory of social formation. Thus, his ideas can be assessed on their own merits. Althusser borrowed central concepts like contradiction, law of uneven development from Mao through which he developed his most

²⁶ See, 'Althusser's theory of ideology' at <https://isreview.org/issue/99/althussers-theory-ideology> for more

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ian Birchill was a British Marxist Historian and a former member of the Socialist Workers Party.

²⁹ Birchill, Ian, *Sartre against Stalinism*, Bergahn Books, 2004, Oxford, p.155.

³⁰ See, 'Althusser's theory of ideology' at <https://isreview.org/issue/99/althussers-theory-ideology> for more.

³¹ See Tody, Judt, *Marxism and the French Left*, NYU Press, 2011, New York.

³² It is important to note influence of Mao Zedong on Althusser for many categories of Zedong is applied in Althusser's framework. For more on this see his Contradiction and Overdetermination in *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London. pp. 89-116.

seminal notion of “overdetermined contradictions.”³³ In the Preface to the Chinese edition of the selected works of L. Althusser, Etienne Balibar, his student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) from 1960-1965, writes that Althusser’s first encounter with Mao’s thought was with his text *On Contradiction*. Balibar brings us to notice as to how Althusser treated Mao as the inventor of two crucial ideas that form him mark the rupture with the Hegelian heritage of Marxism. First, the idea of complexity of the components of a totality which is irreducible to a single essence and second, the idea that inequality is constitutive of all development or process which means that accentuating contradictions does not lead to an overcoming but rather to displacements and ruptures.

Althusser believed that Marxism as a science could be employed better to achieve an analysis of specific modes of production. Althusser, although no essentialist, believed in renewal of Marxist theory.³⁴ First, concern here then can be located as separation of ideology from science. Second, how ideologies have an effect proper. That is, they seem to be natural. Althusser is concerned fundamentally with how ideologies affect sciences and then how sciences break from ideology. My study of this thesis as Althusser’s theory of ideology is an attempt to understand the relationship of science to ideology and see how Althusser advanced it.

However, this study is limited in the sense that it is a discussion of anti-humanism, epistemological break and theory of ideology, in it is strictly limited to works of Althusser. It can be said that Althusser is not the only one who had concern for epistemological basis of Marxist theory. The concern for epistemology of Marxism is central in writings of Marx and Engels, Gramsci, Lenin, Lukacs, etc. But in Althusser I argue we find a relationship between epistemology of science and its relationship to ideology in Marxian sense. The dissertation thus, aims to give a simplified picture of Althusser’s concerns for epistemological basis of Marxian science.

Although deeply influenced by the communist movements outside France, Althusser was engaged in an inquiry of a more subtle kind. He was trying to recover some of the formulations

³³ Ibid. pp. 101-107.

³⁴ This is one of the important aspect which is significantly emphasized by Norman Geras of what he calls ‘critical and rigorous’ and ‘At the level of exposition’. Geras, Norman, Althusser’s Marxism: An Account and Assessment, *New Left Review*, I/71, January-February, 1972, p.58.

of classical Marxism to articulate a new beginning and experience for politics. His thought can be seen as a result of a response to specific French intellectual and political traditions of reading Marx even though sometimes difficult to cipher³⁵. I will examine the French influence on Althusser in the next section on structuralism.

3. Althusser, Marxism and Structuralism

We cannot undertake a study of Althusser without placing him within the structuralism that was one of the most important modernist movements of the 20th century. Not only did Althusser draw from classical Marxist texts but it can also be said that his contribution is novel particularly in the sense that it rejuvenated historical materialism as a modernist and scientific practice.

Structuralism can be understood as

“An intellectual tendency that seeks to understand and explain social reality in terms of social structure. Structure are defined as the patterns and forms of social relations and combination among a set of constituent social elements or component parts such as position, units, level, regions and locations and social formations. Structuralism tends to proceed on two different analytical levels, as a method of analysis or metaphysical design of social reality. It also tends to approach its subject matter under the auspices of two different meta-theoretical perspectives on social reality: social structure as empirical and historical reality, and social structure as a model or representation of reality. The notions generated by these analytic dimensions accommodates the major theories of structuralism existing today, viz. sociological structuralism, symbolic structuralism, historical structuralism and orthodox structuralism. Major figures relevant to structuralism are Marx, Durkheim, Saussure, Piaget, Levi-Strauss, and Althusser.”³⁶

Althusser’s engagement with the structuralist framework is visible by the terminologies he adopts. This position has been strongly argued by Alison Assiter.³⁷ As Assiter says “Althusser dislikes empiricism and emphasizes ‘totalities’, the ‘*structure a dominante*’, and ‘complex wholes.’”³⁸ And, in fact, the complete set of terminologies to understand a social formation in Althusser had a nuanced bearing on Structuralism. According to Assiter, Althusser uses

³⁵ Lewis, William, *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism*, Lexington Books, 2005, Lanham.

³⁶ Heydebrand, W. *International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2001, pp. 15230-15233.

³⁷ Assiter, Alison, ‘Althusser and Structuralism,’ *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.35, No. 2, 1984, pp. 278-286.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.278.

structuralism to draw the distinction between Hegelian totality and complex social whole in Marx.³⁹

Defining structuralism, Althusser argues that “Structuralism is the name of scientific method.”⁴⁰ In the text *Essays in Self Criticism* (1976), we find Althusser arguing that structuralism, as “philosophical ideology of scientists” which began with the works of Saussure, Levi-Strauss etc.⁴¹ And the content of the concept of structuralism lies precisely in the relationship of real as “effect of combination of elements.”

However, in response to the charge of adopting the structuralist approach in his work, Althusser is more polemical. He argues about the limitation of Structuralism as not being well worked out philosophy and realizes only in “certain definite conditions.”⁴² Structuralism thus cannot simply be called out in its terms if one does not take into account the specifics and most importantly the limits of it that is its demarcation.⁴³

Nicos Poulantzas a student of Althusser developed some of these conceptual tools further in *Political Power and Social Classes* (1975) where he advanced the theory of “state”, “class” and “political class conflict” from classical Marxism whose conceptualization is inspired by Althusser’s concept of “social formation and Overdetermination.”⁴⁴

For Poulantzas, the structure does not exist in simple formation rather there are several levels and instances which are dislocated and possess an uneven development. The role of state is fundamental here as it acts in cohesion. That is, the state acts cohesively amongst the “levels of social formation.”⁴⁵ And this function of state in the last analysis takes the form of “political class domination.”⁴⁶ Further, state’s role is significant here in the sense that it maintains the “unity” of formation wherein predominantly the various “contradictions” condense into “political

³⁹According to Assiter Hegelian totality in Althusser’s view suggest that there are simple internal principles of totality which fulfills itself by negating the other but in Marxian ‘social whole’ the instances and levels are autonomous. See for more Ibid. pp. 278-289.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 77

⁴¹ See Althusser, Louis, *Structuralism in Essays in Self-Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, p. 129.

⁴² Ibid. p.129.

⁴³Althusser here means that Structuralism should not be confused with formalism because both use the concept of ‘combination of effects’. In the former it is concrete while in the latter it is a form.

⁴⁴ Poulantzas, Nicos, *Political Power and Social Classes*, Verso, 1975, London, pp. 53-54.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.44.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p.54.

class domination.”⁴⁷ Hence, we can argue that state is a condensation of political class domination in Poulantzas’ framework. Secondly, the notion of structural determination tends to become replaced by notion of class struggle.

Althusser’s influence on structuralism and Marxism has been critically assessed in the writings of Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess. For they dispute the Althusser’s notion of the mode of production as a transhistorical concept which assumes the major role over and above class struggle. The problem Hirst and Hindess see in Althusser is that he gives double role to economy; one, as an instance in the “combination” and second, “determinant in the last instance in the social formation.”⁴⁸ This emphasis on totalities which is meta-theoretical is seen by them as the both strength and weakness of Althusser’s structuralism. For it emphasizes holism on the one side and discounts the role of subjectivity on the other.

For Hirst and Hindess, the concept of social formation of Althusser has a rationalist epistemological character by its emphasis on structural causality and determination of economy in the last instance.

The connections between forms of economic class relations (relations of production) and forms of organization of production (productive forces) have a rationalist character in social formation. Hirst and Hindess also argue that if we consider social relations in terms of “their conditions of existence” it would be difficult to understand how those conditions derive from concepts of social relations themselves. Certainly it can be said that how can we derive forms of state, of ideological practices and apparatus merely from economic relations.

The approach Hirst and Hindess are interested in precisely lies in how can we conceptualize a mode of production while giving less importance to the “overriding role of productive forces in Marxism.”⁴⁹ And it is here that they problematize Althusser’s concept of totalities in social formation where the economy is assigned a double role and is determinant in the last instance.

Although Structural Marxism was gaining popularity it received a major blow from the British historian E. P. Thompson in *The Making of English Working Class* (1963). E. P. Thompson

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Hirst Paul, Barry Hindess, *Mode of Production and Social formation: An Auto-Critique of Pre-Capitalist modes of Production*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1977, UK, p. 51

⁴⁹ Ibid.p.53.

presented “a view of class as a happening and attacked the liberal and orthodox Marxist views of class as a ‘thing.’”⁵⁰ In this work Thompson comes with an altogether new category which argued that the working class is in making. That is, it is not already there. This was understood as an experiential category. Thompson argues the outstanding fact of the period 1790-1830 was the making of the English working class. For Thompson, it should also be noted that he considered “the working class made itself as much as it was made”. To understand the strength of this remarkable argument it is also important that we note Thompson is involved in understanding how classes are a manifestation of “cultural production.”⁵¹

Thompson’s work marked a great and path breaking contribution in the understanding of working class. In the preface of his book he talks about class as:

“The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into whom men are born—or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms.”⁵²

This is suggestive and distinguishing in the sense of how class is understood as a historical phenomenon and not how orthodox Marxism considers it as a thing or social relation. For Thompson, it must be emphasized that he considered class to be a deeply experiential category and is for him an “agent” of history. It can hence be argued that through Thompson’s seminal work some of the problems in Althusser’s approach towards adopting structuralism were critically assessed.

4. Theoretical Framework: Ideology, Science and Philosophy

The scope of this study incorporates in how we distinguish between science and ideology in Marxist theory. In the sense what are the constitutive elements which make Marxism a science, and demarcate it to having a scientific epistemological status. This thesis categorically underlines the scientific epistemological status of Marxism through Althusser and examines the crucial elements.

⁵⁰Efstathiou Christos, E. P. Thompson’s Concept of Class Formation and its Political Implications: Echoes of Popular Front Radicalism in The Making of the English Working Class, *Contemporary British History*, 2014, Vol. 28, No. 4, p. 404.

⁵¹ Ibid. pp. 406-407

⁵² Thompson, E.P. Preface in *The Making of English Working Class*, Penguin Books, 1991, New Delhi, pp.8-9.

Marx's views on ideology can be found across his writing even though there are few sources where an explicit exposition can be found. Celebrated claim of Marx in German ideology is that "ideas in any given epoch are the ideas of ruling class." To give the content of this phrase it is important that we understand how dominant class rules through showing particular interests as universal interests.

The concern for science, philosophy and ideology has already begun when Marx and Engels are writing *The German Ideology, A Contribution to the critique of Political Economy* and later his most systematic work *Capital*. The opening pages of German Ideology and Critique of Political economy critically underlines how a mode of production is organized through means of production and production relations. These two works by Marx brings to us a systematic scientific study as to how people organize themselves materially. Althusser's work *For Marx* and *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientist* very interestingly underlines the role of Science in Marxist philosophy in the form of theoretical practice and political practice.

It should also be noted that keeping this as a background Althusser proposes to interpret the concept of ideology where interest of one class is shown to be as universal interest.

But to expose such a conception of ideology it was not possible unless Althusser sought to underline the problems in Hegelian problematic by which early Marx was occupied. Referring to Marx, he argues that Hegelian dialectic cannot be only criticized for its form but also for its content. Althusser eventually contends that Marx makes the error in appealing to the idea of dialectic so that human totality is reconciled with its own structure.⁵³ From 1950s Althusser seems to aligning with Lenin's position that historical materialism is a science of history and for that Marxist dialectics must be distinguished from Hegelian dialectics.

Althusser notes Hegelian influence on early Marx very specifically. The Hegelian heritage in Marx according to Althusser could only produce an idealist philosophy. Althusser argues early Marx was deeply influenced by Hegelian idealism and its intellectual tendency. Hegelian

⁵³ Althusser uses the famous phrase of Marx to suggest the difference of dialectic between Hegel and Marx. '*With (Hegel, the dialectic) is standing of its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.*' Althusser adds 'when Marx writes that we must '*discover the rational kernel within mystical shell*' he means the *rational kernel is dialectics itself*, while the *mystical shell is speculative philosophy.*' Engels time honored distinction between method and system precisely implies this.' (Italics original) Althusser argues but this inversion would only be inversion in the sense of dialectic and would leave dialectic untouched. For more see Contradiction and Overdetermination in Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 89-91.

idealism espoused a philosophy of essence of man. Althusser is critical of Hegel on two fronts, one, the teleological assumption of philosophy of history and two, Hegel's sublimation of contradiction in dialectical process.⁵⁴ Whereas the early Marx was occupied with Hegelian problematic it was when he broke from this problematic in the writings of German Ideology and Theses on Feuerbach that Marx could develop a scientific conception of history.⁵⁵

The notion of Marxism as a science of social formation comes from, and I would strongly emphasize, what Althusser calls 'epistemological break.' That is, Marxism has to get rid of Hegelian dialectics. Marxism a scientific doctrine can be a scientific doctrine only when it is free from the perils of humanism and historicism. Although Althusser is often referred to as unnecessarily too much Anti-Hegelian I do not see however Hegelian influence in Marx can build Marxism as a scientific doctrine. While I am making such a claim it must also be emphasized and taken account of that Althusser is heavily rooted in "epistemology of sciences" and even Marx as well for that matter.⁵⁶

Marxist philosophy particularly the writings of Marx and Engels referred to ideology in quite a different sense. For classical Marxists ideology was false consciousness. But in Althusser we find ideology to be a world outlook, and a lived reality. The materiality of ideology for Althusser lies in state apparatuses.

Two main theses in this regard advanced by Althusser are:

1) "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"⁵⁷;

2) "Ideology has a material existence."

With these two theses he changes the way classical Marxism used to understand Marxism as he takes the emphasis away from ideas which were considered illusionary, spiritual, dream, and fantasy in The German Ideology.

⁵⁴ See for more, Liebich Andre, Hegel, Marx and Althusser, *Politics and Society* 9, No. 1 , 1979, pp.89-102.

⁵⁵ See in Introduction Today in Althusser Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1989, London, p.34.

⁵⁶ See *The Poverty of Philosophy* by Karl Marx at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/> and influence of Gaston Bachelard on Louis Althusser.

⁵⁷ Louis, Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Verso, 1971, London.

Althusser argues, ideological apparatuses constitutes ideological subject formation through the apparatuses like, the religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade union, communication, and cultural etc. And the repressive consists of machinery of the government. That is, army, police, courts, prison etc. The crucial difference between both is that while the former is purely ideological the latter uses violence.

Much of contemporary thought in Marxist theory owes its existence to Louis Althusser (1918-1990). I will restrict the recent interest in Althusser to three major streams: first, post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. They borrow the concept of overdetermination in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) from Althusser; second, Althusser's notion of ideology and subject formation has been used by Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti; and third, cultural studies which was inaugurated with the writings of Stuart Hall.

Firstly, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe published *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in 1985. Since then that work has gained much popularity among the intellectual left. The work attempts to register the problems with much of Marxist theory and critiques essentialism (economic reductionism and class primacy). The influence of Althusser is evident when they discuss about the concept of overdetermination which Althusser has developed in his essay "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in *For Marx*. Laclau and Mouffe argue that the concept of overdetermination has a problem only because eventually Althusser gives in to Marxist essentialism that is, by asserting that economy is determinant in the last instance. Therefore Laclau and Mouffe argue that the totality which Althusser points out is disturbed due to the essentialism he assigns and hence if one removes that, it explains what is needed. That is, the totality is symbolic and not real. However, the position adopted by Laclau and Mouffe has been critiqued by William Lewis⁵⁸ and Norman Geras.⁵⁹ Laclau and Mouffe in response to these critiques argue about 'discursive character' of social phenomena, the formation of identities, contingency, antagonism and the problems with economic essentialism of Marxist theory.⁶⁰ The formation of identity does not take place in simplistic obvious form of universality. And it is here

⁵⁸ Lewis, W.S. 'The Under-theorization of Overdetermination in the Political Philosophy of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe' *Studies in Social and Political Thought*, Issue 11 (May 2005), pp. 2-24.

⁵⁹ Geras, Norman. Post Marxism?, *New Left Review*, I/163, May-June 1987 and Ex-Marxism without Substance: Being and Real Reply to Laclau and Mouffe, *New Left Review*, I/169, May-June 1988.

⁶⁰ Laclau and Mouffe responded to the first Geras article in *New Left Review*. Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal. Post Marxism without Apologies, *New Left Review*, I/166 Nov Dec 1987.

that Laclau Mouffe introduces the category of equivalences. I would argue that even today any discussion of Marxist theory is deeply influenced by concepts like ‘overdetermination’ and ‘relative autonomy’ found in Althusser’s work. But I must admit that the debate between Geras and Laclau Mouffe is very rich, heated and interesting: which touches many novel and seminal thoughts of Althusser.⁶¹

Althusser’s Structuralism is a great influence on Cultural studies and Communication and Media studies of Stuart Hall and many others. According to Christian Fuchs, “culture is a system of meaning-making... (Re)producing social relations... co-constructing meanings.”⁶² For Stuart Hall, the two paradigms on which cultural studies are based on the one hand in the works of Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P.Thompson and Althusserian Structuralism on the other.

Hall in his famous *Encoding/Decoding* (1973) essay applies “Marx dialectic of production, circulation and consumption to the means of communication.”⁶³ In this essay the word ‘human’ does not appear even once. The influence of Structural Marxism on Hall is marked by how he does not consider humans as active agent and says it is the ‘systems which communicate.’⁶⁴ For him it is the discourses speak and not the real people. The later Hall still remains influenced by Post-Marxism of Laclau Mouffe and Post-structuralism of Michel Foucault.

Thirdly, for Slavoj Zizek, Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti and many feminists Althusser’s conception of ideology remains a great inspiration. The Anti-humanism of Althusser began with the departure of ‘man’ which was hitherto at the center of social sciences. In that sense post-human with the emphasis on subjectivity and consciousness as process is founded. While in Althusser Ideology has a materiality in apparatuses, in Zizek and others its ‘sublime’. In Althusser subject formation takes place through hailing however in Zizek, Jacques Lacan and Psychoanalysis ideological subjection leaves some remainder. That is how Mladen Dolar argues on the difference between Althusser’s conception of subject and psychoanalysis as for the former

⁶¹ Due to paucity of space I cannot enter into the details of the debate.

⁶²Fuchs, Christian, Revisiting the Althusser/E. P. Thompson-Controversy: Towards a Marxist theory of communication, *Communication and the Public* 2019, Vol. 4(1), pp. 3–20.

⁶³ Ibid. p.5.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

“subject is required to interpellate” while for the latter “subject emerges on failing of ideology.”⁶⁵

There is a new framework of Althusser in his later works which is about aleatory materialism in *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87* (2006) intends to argue ‘the diceyness of the swerve’. The term ‘Swerve’ here meaning an abrupt change. Althusser takes this to re-examine political praxis which is a “perpetual state of disorder and, to use Marxist language, of struggle where the guarantee of victory or any sort of political revolution, even every ‘fixed’ political form of organization rests on an uncertain aleatory foundation.”⁶⁶ The aleatory nature comes from the seeming arbitrariness of this swerve. The specificity of ‘aleatory materialism’ in class struggle and history is also studied in this dissertation.

5. Research Questions

1. Does the discussion on function of ideology and science in Althusser’s theory give us an adequate account of role ideas have in relation to economy and society?
2. Does a scientific alternative to humanist Marxism that Althusser gave have a conceptual and logical advance to the previous interpretations of Marxist theories?
3. Does the distinction made by Althusser between Marxist philosophy and Science result in a different set of principles for understanding Marxism? (example voluntarism; theory and practice)
4. How do we understand the contradictions of capitalism through Althusser’s interpretation of Marxism?
5. How does Althusser’s structuralism help us understand the working of capitalism?

6. Research Methodology

The approach to the proposed work would be critical, analytical and hermeneutical. An intensive study of works of Karl Marx (*The German Ideology 1845, The Communist Manifesto 1848,*

⁶⁵ Dolar, Mladen. Beyond Interpellation, *Qui Parle*, Spring/Summer 1993, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1993), p.78.

⁶⁶See Althusser’s Clinamen: Aleatory Materialism and Revolutionary Politics at https://mediationsjournal.org/articles/Aleatory_Materialism#endref_2 for more.

Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy 1993, *The Poverty of Philosophy* 1955, *Capital Volume I* 1887), Lenin (*State and Revolution* 1917, *Material and Empirico Criticism* 1908), Louis Althusser (*Reading Capital* 1965, *For Marx* 1965, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* 1970, *Essays in Self Criticism* 1975, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & other Essays* 1990, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx* 2007, *Philosophy of the Encounter Later Writings, 1978-87* 2006) as primary literature which throw light on how we understand Marxism as the science of society. Since there was a great influence of Psycho-Analysis on Althusser it would be interesting to look into some sections of *The Interpretation of Dreams* published in 1900 by Sigmund Freud particularly for his notion about symptomatic reading.

Referring to secondary literature would also be insightful and thought provoking. Works of scholars like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* 1985) Ted Benton (*The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism* 1984), Alex Callinicos (*Althusser's Marxism* 1976) E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (*The Althusserian Legacy* 1993) Gregory Elliott (*Althusser: A Critical Reader* 1994), William S. Lewis (*Louis Althusser and the traditions of French Marxism* 2005) works by Norman Geras on Althusser and his debate with Laclau-Mouffe in *New Left Review*, Judith Butler (*The Psychic Life of Power* 1997) critique of Althusser by Rosi Braidotti in (*Sexual Difference theory*), *New Materialism* on materiality of Ideology and subject formation, Etienne Balibar on 'Althusser's object' can be helpful in that regard. Recent development by literary critics like Terry Eagleton *Marxism and Literary Criticism* 1976, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 1983, and Fredric Jameson *The Political Unconscious* 1981, Slavoj Zizek 'The Specter of Ideology' in *Mapping Ideology* 1994 would also be referred. The study remains largely qualitative i.e. extensive study of books, journals and newspaper can be helpful. In addition to this, some surveys and interviews, a slight help of empiricism I would say, would be important in understanding of 'concrete reality' and what accounts to that. However, apart from these, the study remains open to consult, any other material which remain important in pursuit of this research.

7. Outline of the Chapters

The debates which currently envisage Marxist theory, for instance, ideology and its role, the relationship of ideology and sciences, the notion that emphasizes historical materialism as the science of social formation is also considered. Historical materialism as the science and emphasis on social form which distinctively comes in Althusser is also examined. In other words, the contemporary debates in Marxist theory have their genesis in Althusserian thinking is considered specifically.

In Chapter 1, Althusser, Marxism and Anti-Humanism, the study examines Althusser's that claim Marxist Humanism is a bourgeois ideology. In so doing, the thesis investigates the relationship between ideology and science and defends the claim that Marxism for having a scientific basis it must get rid of the concept the essence of man which is an idealist category. It also claims, knowledge as an abstraction by the subject (empiricism) is limited and the thesis argues that those limitations can be understood through Althusser's concept of theoretical practice and Generalities I, II and III.

In the latter section of the chapter the dissertation gives my reading of critiques of Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism.

In Chapter 2 The Epistemological Break in Marx, the thesis argues that 'it is only when Marx broke with Hegelian framework that he was able to have founded a science of history merits examination and gives a defense of this through a reading of concept of epistemological break in Althusser. In so doing, it finds however that the concept of epistemological break is limited as it is not an event but a process.

In the latter part of chapter 2, the study focuses about the central claims of epistemological break in Marx, Contradictions and Overdetermination, structure, and structure in dominance with this it maps out theoretical difference between Hegelian totality and Marxian social whole. It also argues the sense in which philosophy is an intervention in the realm of theory and give my own defense of this claim. Thereafter, the dissertation proposes the importance of reading in Marxist theory taking a cue from Althusser and Spinoza.

In Chapter 3 Althusser on Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus, the thesis examines why a theory of ideology is essential in Marxism; and how Althusser's theory of ideology broke away from classical theories of ideology in Marxist tradition and give my own defense of Althusser's

theory of ideology as non-reductive and anti-sociologism by bolstering the claim that ideologies are auto-intelligible and have effectivity of their own. That is, they are not false representation of reality. Literary criticism as a tool for Marxian analysis and limitations of Althusser's theory of ideology is also examined through Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The conclusion intends to provide summary of three chapters and takes up the influences of Althusser in the development of Aleatory materialism.

Chapter 1

Althusser, Marxism and Anti-Humanism

“It is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes.”

Louis Althusser, *For Marx*

“Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual.

In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.”

Karl Marx, *VI Thesis on Feuerbach*

1.1 Introduction

This chapter tries to understand the problem of socialist humanism in Marxist philosophy. In so doing the chapter discusses the basic premise of Marxist humanism and the specific problems with it. Consequently, the chapter examines why Marxist humanism is undesirable if one seeks to discover epistemic basis of Marxism. In other words, the chapter aims at finding out the problems with Marxist humanism and epistemological concern of Marxism through Louis Althusser’s intervention in Marxist philosophy.

The notion of Marxist humanism can be seen in the writings of early Marx.¹ According to Althusser the writings of early Marx were influenced by Feuerbach and Hegel. Hence, Marx’s

¹ Marxist humanism argued that Marxism is about the active and creative role of men and women in the shaping of history. Instead of adopting determinism and economism in studying Marxism, they wanted to see Marxism as a doctrine of human freedom. To cite evidence for their argument, the humanists referred to Marx’s 1844 manuscripts which was about the full development of human capacities through overcoming alienation.

writings in 1844 manuscript use categories like essence of man. Althusser argues, early Marx before his work of German ideology is still occupied in Feuerbachian Hegelian problematic.²

Althusser attempts to analyze the relationship between Marxism and Marxist humanism by examining the humanist ideology in the early works of Marx and his subsequent break with this ideology in 1845.³ Humanist ideology is characterized by a focus on what Marx calls the essence of man, or what the Marxist-humanists might consider human nature.

The critique of humanism by Althusser lies in the distinction between scientific practice and ideology. In fact Althusser considers all philosophy which espouses humanism as ideological. Interestingly, Althusser, in course of development of difference between science and ideology marks “a dichotomy” within Marxism between “historical and dialectical materialism.”⁴ This dichotomy is very central to Althusserian thought throughout. He adds, that “historical materialism provides concepts for knowledge of history and is therefore a science, dialectical materialism, on the other hand, is a philosophy.”⁵

Althusser situates Marxist humanism a result of writings of early Marx as an ideology that is extrinsic to Marxist philosophy. In replacing humanist ideology Marx was presenting a new set of theoretical postulates organized around class and society but at the same “a new philosophy, infinite in its implications.”⁶ These postulates lead to an epistemological break in Marx’s work in his critique of capitalism. Later, Althusser demonstrates in *Reading Capital*, not only did Marx recognize the role of humanist ideology in his work but also foundational in the classical political economy for Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

² Feuerbachian Hegelian problematic basically means the ideological movement in which Marx was born. For more see ‘On the Young Marx’ in Althusser Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 49-86.

³ Marxist humanism for Althusser is an ideology which exploits masses in the name of man, for the category of ‘man’ is (essentially) an idealist category. That is, Marxist humanism considers the category of freedom to be Universalist but in a class society this category is only for the class which espouses it. This position is absolutely clear in Althusser in ‘Marxism and Humanism’ in *For Marx*, and in ‘Is it simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy’ in *Essays in Self-Criticism* For more see, Althusser Louis, *Marxism and Humanism* in *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp.221-247 and *Essays in self-Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, p.173.

⁴ Althusser puts a great amount of emphasis on dialectical materialism that he calls it ‘vital’ as the development of Marxist philosophy in art, literature and so on depends on dialectical materialism only, *Ibid.* p.94.

⁵ Later on, Althusser says borrowing from German ideology that if all philosophy is ideology how can we distinguish Marxist philosophy from other philosophies, hence for him, philosophy is theory of theoretical practice, for more on ‘philosophy of Marxism’ see my Chapter 2.

⁶ *Ibid.* p.229.

Hence, one can ask at what point in reading Marx and elaborating a Marxist philosophy can one set aside Marxist humanism to theorize Marxist-humanist ideology?⁷ An answer to this question is difficult because of the confusing statements given by Engels on science, idealism and materialism. For Engels characterized the history of philosophy as “a perpetual struggle between idealism and materialism.”⁸

Thus, we can ask does a scientific alternative to humanist Marxism that Althusser gave have a conceptual and logical advance to the previous interpretations of Marxist theories. Does the discussion on the function of ideology and science in Althusser’s theory give us an adequate account of role ideas have in relation to economy and society? Does the distinction made by Althusser between Marxist philosophy and Science result in a different set of principles for understanding Marxism? (For example- voluntarism; theory and practice; class struggle)

Althusser argues in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous philosophy of Scientists* (hence forth PSPS) as well as in *Essays in Self-Criticism* (henceforth ESC), “the disciplines which produce knowledge, as opposed to ideology, are the sciences.”⁹ Further, what can be seen here is Althusser tries to make a distinction between science and ideology by saying that sciences have practice of their own. That once the sciences are established they no longer require other disciplines for their validation. Sciences, so understood have their own protocols through the practice of science itself. Althusser maintains same is true for theory also the validation of theory is internal to the protocols through which they are produced. It is by this mechanism he suggests theory is also practice. However, it should also be noted that his early writings contains a great deal of theoreticism.

Althusser’s point with regard to humanism is primarily that it is ideological.¹⁰ It is here, we should understand what does he mean when he says so? Humanism is ideological precisely in the sense that but deals with “metaphysical essence of man” which further leads to what he calls

⁷ Ibid. p.227.

⁸ For distinction between idealism and materialism see, Nemeth, Thomas. *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Nov., 21, No.4 (Nov., 1980), pp. 363-385.

⁹ See for more Althusser, Louis, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, Verso, 1990, London, pp. 71-72, and *Essays in Self Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, pp. 170-171.

¹⁰ Althusser Louis, *Marxism and Humanism in For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p.229.

“empiricism of the subject.”¹¹ Therefore it must be noted that only when we do away with the “concept of man” it would be possible to attain knowledge of human being.¹² For Althusser it must be maintained that his dismissal of humanism is only because it doesn’t serve any epistemological basis. Drawing from *Theses on Feuerbach* Althusser argues that human essence is an ensemble of social relation and therefore no knowledge is adequate if it only considers essence of man as its object of study for it is reductive.

In opposition to the Marxist-humanists, Althusser believes that Marx’s writings in the post 1845 period broke away from reductive conception of man. For Althusser, Marx established the science of historical materialism by setting aside man and philosophy of man from the historical process and instead focusing on the mode of production in which human beings labor.¹³ I would argue that although this is a rich interpretation by Althusser the complications which ideologies pose to sciences are thorough hence in the later section of the chapter we will focus on ideology, the concept of epistemological break and his idea of theoretical practice.

Humanism fell into decline in the 1970s as Marxists like Althusser, Foucault and proponents of postmodernism challenged the privileging of the human subjectivity and the notion of a real essential self. In recent years for many on the left, socialist humanism promise the possibility of a move beyond the politics of resistance. Inspired by Edward Said who said that humanism is the yearning to show regard for all that is human, there is an attempt to celebrate diversity and difference in current politics. Hence, the objective of the chapter is to also to understand the relevance of this debate for contemporary politics.

In this chapter before outlining Althusser’s concept of science some of his core arguments will be introduced about why Marxism is not humanism. Then I would discuss how his notion of Marxism as the science of society is developed and what the constituents of Marxist philosophy are which make it non-dogmatic and lastly how Althusser’s Marxism is a non-reductionist philosophy. In other words this chapter is a discussion about Marx’s Method. Finally I look at some challenges and give my own defense of Althusser’s reading of science.

¹¹ Althusser says ‘If the essence of man is to be the universal attribute, it is essential that *concrete subject* exist as absolute givens; this implies *empiricism of the subject*.’ Italics original. For more see, Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, London, 1969, p.228.

¹² Ibid. p.243.

¹³ Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, London, 1969, p.227.

1.2 Anti-Humanism: The context of the debate

Althusser's writings on theoretical Anti-humanism, in the text *For Marx*, are set in context of debates of de-Stalinization, the debates on Marxism in 1950s and 1960s, the crisis of International communist movement and the adjustment of French Communist Party (henceforth PCF) to de-Stalinization.¹⁴ Althusser argues that his writings are to be judged as complementary theoretical and political interventions in political conjecture of his times. It was the 20th congress of Communist Party of Soviet Union (henceforth CPSU) which threw him in battle. He further says he would have never written anything were it not the 20th congress of CPSU and Khrushchev critique of Stalinism.¹⁵ The Congress discussed the purges, persecution of enemies and the fear which existed throughout the communist countries. The concern on the one hand was about the "personality cult" of an individual and on the other hand the "rupture that has occurred between Chinese communist party and Soviet Communist Party."¹⁶ Although it is unlikely that Khrushchev envisaged the political upheaval of his secret speech it did allow a major critique and revision of communist doctrines in theory and practice worldwide. Althusser's concern was also, about the implications of critique of Stalinist dogmatism which was termed by Communist intellectuals as liberation.¹⁷ The implications of such a critique gave birth to what Althusser says profound ideological reaction.

These reactions emerged primarily in response to the soviet totalitarian regime and dogmatic interpretation of Marx's writings in Soviet Russia. Thinkers such as Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse tried to combine a concern with social justice and a humanistic understanding of man's needs. As Fromm writes in *Marx's Concept of Man* 1961 Marx "is concerned with the liberation of human beings from a kind of work which destroys their individuals, which transforms them

¹⁴ Elliot, Gregory. *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, Brill Academic Publishers, 2006, Boston, p.2.

¹⁵ Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p.10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.10.

into a thing, and which makes them into the slave of things.”¹⁸ Secondly these humanists emphasized the agential nature of human beings who were working to achieve certain needs and goals. For these reasons we find a debate in Fromm and Marcuse about false and real needs and the role of capitalism in imposing these distinctions.

The liberations celebrated around Khrushchev’s critique of Stalinism¹⁹ were about themes of Marxist Humanism. By the 1950s and 1960s, study groups in opposition to Stalinism emerged to found the Marxist humanist Journal, *Praxis*, 1964. The critique of bureaucracy as a major source of alienation in Soviet socialism gave rise to alternative ways of establishing a truly democratic form of socialism. After Tito’s break from the Soviet Union, the *Praxis* school supported the Yugoslavian effort to build a conception of worker’s control of their workplaces. In the late 1960s as many international scholars including members of the Frankfurt schools gave it to their discussions, Yugoslavian socialism was subject to a similar critique of lack of participation.

In 1957, E.P Thompson wrote an article *Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines* that called for revolt against Stalinism within the international left in the name of a socialist Humanism.²⁰ He argued that the entire communist movement had been dogged by the dogmatism of Soviet Marxism and that even Western Marxism with a focus on ideology and culture had failed to challenge this.

For Althusser, humanist interpretations of Marx’s work were opposed to what Marx, Engels and Lenin fought for both in theory and practice.²¹ But Althusser presented a “left wing critique” of Stalinism²² which was equally critical of Khrushchevism. For what Khrushchev represented of himself was nothing but his popular image of being a champion and a hero of de-Stalinization.²³ That certainly reduced Khrushchev to the same problems which Stalin was accused of cult and personality. Althusser still envisaged the possibility of return to revolutionary Marxism within

¹⁸ Fromm, Erich, *Marx’s Concept of Man*, Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1961, New York, pp. 1-85 and Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, 1964, Boston pp. 3-87.

¹⁹ Althusser says these liberations were specifically about ‘philosophy of man’. That is, ‘man’ became the central category. See ‘To my English readers’ for more, Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p.10

²⁰ Thompson, E.P, ‘Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines’, *The New Reasoner*, 105-143.

²¹ *Ibid.* p.11.

²² For more on this see the Introduction in this Thesis.

²³ Deutscher, Isaac. *The Failure of Khrushchevism, Socialist Register*, Volume 2, 1965, p.11.

the communist parties in 1960s.²⁴ Althusser's project as it is said was the renovation of political practice in PCF by a renewal of Marxist theory. For him at that moment many revisionists in the guise of Marxists, in the name of opposing dogmatism were against Marxism-Leninism only. The requisite alternative was to return to the time before the Stalinist flood, to that revolutionary tendency of Marxism which has been corrupted in the period which bears Stalin's name. What was this revolutionary tendency of Marxism? What makes Althusser so much concerned about it? How it can be redeemed, if it has lost that revolutionary practice? These are the fundamental questions of Althusser's thinking about Marxism, which can only be restored by the intellectual rigor of political and theoretical practice.

I restrict myself to the following primary texts in this chapter for my arguments: Economic and Philosophical Manuscript by Karl Marx, Althusser's For Marx (FM henceforth) Philosophy, Essays in Self Criticism (ESC), Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists (PSPS) and Lenin and Philosophy (LP).²⁵

1.3 Marxism and Althusser on Ideology

As argued above most of the proponents of Marxist humanism rely on Marx's analysis of alienation found in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (henceforth EPM) (1844). The rhetorical emphasis on the truly human potential is found in the writings of Bertell Ollman, John Lewis, Erich Fromm and several other scholars of this period. In these interpretations, for Marx, considered "man is a species-being", for "he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as universal and therefore a free being."²⁶ Marx further argues "universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body—both in as much as "nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity". Marx says in creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being. They also

²⁴ See 'Encyclopedia of Anti-revisionism On-line' at <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-6/nnmlc-tr.htm>.

²⁵ For more see Benton, Ted, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, St. Martin's Press, 1984, New York; Callinicos, Alex, *Althusser's Marxism*, Pluto Press, 1976, London; Gregory Elliot, *The Detour of Theory*, Brill, 1987, Boston; Montag Warren *Althusser and his Contemporaries*, Duke University Press, 2013, Durham; Resch, Paul R, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, University of California Press, 1992, Berkeley.

²⁶ Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Aakar Books, 2016, Delhi, p. 72.

argue that this aspect of nature and practice (or life activity) is central to *EPM*, for man is a species being and conscious being.

Marx had a conception of human nature as he refers to it many times in *EPM* (1844). What is not clear is how he defines this conception. Some of his interpreters argue that Marx conceived of some part of human nature as universal and durable. While David McLellan agrees that Marx refers to alienation throughout his work. McLellan argues that it is one thing to describe alienation and quite another to eulogize communist good life.²⁷ So he disagrees that Marx dwelt upon some future man as claimed by Erich Fromm and Robert C. Tucker who according to McLellan, in taking Marx's Paris Manuscripts, as his central works have seriously misplaced their emphasis. Norman Geras takes a slightly different position, when he interprets the debate on human nature as "either Marx is defining human nature as constant or human nature in a broader sense."²⁸ Geras concludes with fair probabilities of multiple interpretations saying "in its reality the nature of man is conditioned by, manifested in, the ensemble of social relation."²⁹

I would now like to point out the distinction in the way ideology has been understood in Marx and Althusser. In the twentieth century the term ideology acquired a particular association with the tradition of Marxism. It was the medium through which people articulated the relationship between the culture realms with the class struggle and means of production. The latter for Engels particularly was the motor of history as it was necessary to produce the material needs that are required to maintain existence. The superstructure was a mere reflection of the economic basis and hence ideas can never transcend their connection to the material base.

In Marx, ideology is defined as false consciousness. In *The German Ideology*, Marx declares, that how material production is determinant of everything from morality religion to thinking as these elements have no history. What Marx emphasizes here is "material intercourse" upon

²⁷ For more See McLellan, David, *Marxism after Marx*, MacMillan, 1979, London; Tucker, Robert C., *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, Cambridge University Press, 1961, New York; Geras, Norman, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*, Verso, 1983, London. For a clearer argument of David McLellan see, Chapter 6, Mcleish, Alastair, 'Where Marxist Humanism went wrong', in Bates, David, etal. Eds., *Marxism, Religion and Ideology Themes from David McLellan*, Routledge, 2015, London.

²⁸ Geras, Norman, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*. Verso, 1983, London, p.37.

²⁹ Ibid.pp.37-58.

which is premised the formation of ideas and human thinking.³⁰ So he denies the autonomy of ideas in these passages.

Ideologies function, according to Althusser, as hiding the real knowledge though ideologies have intelligibility of their own (that is, ideologies are auto-intelligible) and second they help in reproduction of conditions of production (through the materiality ideology has in ideological and repressive state apparatuses). Marx in *The German Ideology* specifically argues that “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is first directly interwoven by with the material activity and material intercourse of men, the language of real life.”³¹ In Marx we find ideology being placed in terms of certain features of social structure the division between mental and material labor and the division of society between classes³² and hence ideologies serve on the dominant order. As Marx’s famous phrase goes, “the ruling ideas in every epoch are ideas of ruling class.” For Marx, ideologies are illusion, dream, and fantasies. They are false representation of reality.³³

Althusser as I will discuss below developed a theory according to which ideology ensures the coherence of the superstructure. He made this term broader than a mere political or sociological sense of the term. For Althusser the ideological state apparatus keep the state, class structures and the conditions of material production intact.

I will also clarify that Althusser combined elements of psychoanalytical theory (subject formation) with Saussure’s structuralism which are not the main focus of this chapter. For us what matters is that Althusser designates ideology not a narrow set of political ideas but as a system of representation that forms individuals into social subjects who internalize a picture of their social world and their place in it.³⁴

Ideologies are all-encompassing, they are imperative for the reproduction of the conditions of production. Ideologies subject masses and functions from above yet remain a contradiction to the

³⁰ Marx, Karl, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p. 3, p.6.

³¹ Ibid.p.3.

³² McCarthy, Timothy. ‘Marx and the problem of Ideology’, *Social Science*, Autumn 1979, Vol. 54, No. 4, p. 204.

³³ Althusser’s critique of theory of ideology in classical Marxism is sharp and novel, for Althusser does not attach truth or falsity to ideology and for him ideologies have a materiality. This position is critically advanced by Paul Hirst as well. See Hirst Paul, *On Law and Ideology*, MacMillan, 1979, London. Also, for more on this problem, see Chapter 3 in this thesis.

³⁴ Lentricchia, Frank, McLaughlin, Thomas, James Kavanagh Eds., Ideology in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995.pp. 306-320.

practical activity of masses. It is because the practical activity of masses constitutes class struggle. Ideologies always prevent the revolutionary character developing in working class from the practical activity they are do. Theoretically to establish it as a fact the underlying knowledge that sets apart Marxism, as a scientific philosophy of society against other philosophies is its conception of class struggle. Ideology for Althusser is important when we try to understand ideology in contradiction to science and the relationship ideologies have in the development of sciences. It is also important because what sets Marxist theory apart from other theories is its non-ideological element in the development of science of history that is historical materialism.

Althusser argues Marx held the position that “every social formation constitutes an organic totality.”³⁵ This basically means that whatever are the instances in a social formation that is political economic ideological, all of them come together and form a totality. What should interest us here is if that is the case what role ideologies have in that social formation or the organic totality? The answer lies in thinking about that ideological instance coheres with other instances and are indispensable for social formation so much so that they themselves represent themselves as an objective reality. How does this “objective reality”³⁶ and “social function of ideology” then present itself?³⁷ Ideologies represent a form of social consciousness determined by social formations of the existent mode of production. Ideologies thus contain a world outlook in it, to borrow from Althusser. This world outlook serves the purpose of representing the concerns of the life of men. And thus according to Althusser ideologies are fundamentally pervasive and determinant such that they endow themselves as absolute givens and unequivocally natural.³⁸ They have an effectivity and invariably concern with the life of men. They not only represent a world within themselves but they are the world. Yet these representations are not true knowledge of the world they represent.

The functioning and operation of ideology occurs through its permeability in men’s activities, including his economic and political practice. The rootedness of ideology is so deep in the acts and deeds of individuals that it is “indistinguishable from their lived experience and every

³⁵ See Althusser, Louis. *Ideology and Ideological state apparatus, Lenin and Philosophy and Other essays*. New Left Books, 1971, London, p. 134.

³⁶ To me this is in profound distinction with Marx’s sense of ideology, in which ideologies are merely an ‘illusion’.

³⁷ Althusser, Louis, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, Verso, 1997, London, p.23.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.24.

unmediated analysis of the lived is profoundly marked by the themes of ideological obviousness.”³⁹ This obviousness must mark a point of break for the sciences to invent itself.

Ideological maintenance requires subject formation and reproduction of social relations,⁴⁰ with the reproduction of conditions of production, which are indispensable for a social formation. The role of ideology is central to reproduction of social relations each time with production. As Marx said “a social formation which did not produce the conditions of production at the same time as it is produced would not last a year”⁴¹ and its determination comes from the dominant mode of production and production relations therein, which are to be preserved and reproduced, for production to be reproduced. Thus, two things must happen, first the re-production of means of production and second, reproduction of labor power. It is here that ideologies are assigned their role according to Althusser.

The reproduction of means of production and labor power should not be seen just at level of firm as Althusser also points out but at the level of “structure.”⁴² In Marx, too we find this formulation. As Marx says:

“[I]n the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.”⁴³

This definite form of social consciousness must be maintained through ideology for the reproduction of conditions of production.

For Althusser, here comes the role of state. State through its mechanisms establishes the dominant ideology and then has to reproduce through two senses ideological state apparatus and

³⁹ Ibid.p.25.

⁴⁰ Since ideologies as social consciousness are manifestation of social relations, in a class society.

⁴¹ Althusser, Louis, ‘Ideology and Ideological state apparatus’ in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other essays*. New Left Books. 1971, London, p. 127.

⁴² For Althusser, what happens at the firm is simply an effect. By structure, Althusser means ‘structure-in dominance’ where economy is determinant in the last instance. Structure is a complex unity of all instances, the instances have autonomy of their own (political economic ideological) which forms a ‘social whole’. See Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New Left Books. 1971, London, p. 129.

⁴³ Marx, Karl. Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1859.p. 4.

repressive state apparatus. We as a human being exist in these structures in the operationalization of these apparatuses. Marx did not say much on the operability of these state apparatuses or in other words on the role of state ensuring 'reproduction of definite form of consciousness', which Althusser spotted. Marx thought it is given or already located in economy that is the production process; thus, determined by mode of production and hence once established the reproduction of social relations is given in the economy. To Althusser, the social consciousness of the 'subject' is always subjectivised or interpellated through ideological state apparatus.⁴⁴ Althusser says, we "always already exist as subject."⁴⁵ The maintenance of dominant ideology that is the ideology of ruling class takes place through state apparatuses in a class society. And if it is successful, even in its variety and contradiction, which is almost always the case, it functions in helping the maintenance of dominant ideology and serves the social order of the present day.

1.4 Althusser's Critique of Anti-humanism

Although this is a vast area, in this section I wish to concentrate on Althusser's arguments on 'theoretical anti-humanism'. Althusser's attack on anti-humanism is novel and has three elements, essentialism, ideology, and universalism. Marxist essentialism which entails economy determines the superstructure is challenged. Secondly, Marxist humanism which argues for freedom for all even in a class society is critiqued. Thirdly, the Universalist philosophy of man in a class society is challenged.

Althusser understood the limitation of Marxist humanist positions and critiqued it. In so doing Althusser's main objective in expanding these arguments is to establish an interpretation of Marxism from firstly the point of the view of form, i.e. the epistemology of Marxism and the content i.e. the scientific nature of Marxism. From these aspects two I will draw out how Althusser is concerned with theory and a theory of science of social formation.

According to Althusser, there are shifts in Marx's writings. Althusser developed the distinction between the early works of the Young Marx and the more sophisticated political economy of the

⁴⁴ For more on Interpellation and subject formation see Chapter 3 in this thesis.

⁴⁵ Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and Ideological state apparatus', *Lenin and Philosophy and Other essays*. New Left Books. 1971, London, p. 172.

Mature Marx in order to highlight how the ability to theorize class struggle and society was possible only on the critique of humanist ideology as an absolute precondition.⁴⁶ Althusser argued that whilst the mature political economy of Marx critiqued capitalism through particular concepts which allowed him to think about the primacy of class struggle in the capitalist mode of production, the works of the ‘Young Marx’ were much less theoretical in that sense and were still pre-occupied in Hegelian-Feuerbachian framework.

In the writings of *The German Ideology*, Marx turns away from the humanism espoused by Hegel and Feuerbach and invents a science constituent of system of concepts as “social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructure, ideologies, determination in the last instance by the economy, specific determination of the other levels, etc.”⁴⁷ According to Althusser, by disassociating with all humanistic philosophies as ideologies, Marx had made a scientific discovery.

For Althusser, these philosophical structures can be identified in many pre-Marxist philosophies, particularly the empiricist-idealist ones of Locke and Kant. The crucial point about these disparate philosophies is that the terms presented and their relations portray a Universalist nature of human beings.

Thus, Althusser says when “Marx’s displaced the old couple individuals/human essence with the theory of history by new concepts (forces of production, relations of production, etc.)” he was, in fact, simultaneously proposing “a new conception of philosophy.”⁴⁸ While Marx’s theoretical anti-humanism destroyed the myth of a universal and essential human nature, this destruction only goes as far as theoretical practice can allow. This is because as Althusser argues the knowledge of a theoretical truth about the nature of a thing does not entail the dissolution of that thing. For this reason, Marx did not believe that money, as a social relation, could be swept away by recognition of its true nature because the appearance [is] its very being, as necessary as the “existing mode of production.”⁴⁹ The same is true for the existence of ideologies.

⁴⁶ See Louis, Althusser, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p. 229.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 230.

As Althusser points out, ideology can never be dissipated by the knowledge of it. Althusser is point that Marx too held the same position. The reason being the structure of existence of ideologies, its conditions of possibility itself becomes a problem of author's empiricism.⁵⁰

Althusser defined ideologies as the “imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”⁵¹ In Althusser's writings, the concept of ideology can be seen to have two different (but not unrelated) positions.⁵² In later works – particularly in his theorization of the role of the state under capitalism – ideology was conceptualized by Althusser as a set of ideas and cues through which the capitalist state interpellates individuals into their role as subjects. In a capitalist society the institutions and apparatuses are such that they assign the role the individuals are expected to have. In other words the experiences of the roles in a society are already given in structure that is they (the roles) themselves are structure effect. In two major works Althusser comprehensively underlines the problem with ideologies both in theory and practice as to how they are an obstacle.⁵³ In theory, ideology provides the scientist with a false representation of that which they are seeking to produce knowledge of. As Althusser argues the object of study itself is blocked by ideologies. Ideologies have what can be simply called here as ‘recognition effect’ which hinders the knowledge to construct its object. It is thus a more theoretical conceptualization of ideology which is needed which this thesis attempts to do. As a Marxist philosopher, it is in this way that humanism serves as an ideological problem for Althusser. Humanism is a problem insofar as it serves as a theoretical obstacle in discourses of social science, behind which the realities of class struggle and its allegories in capitalist society are hidden. Where humanism emerges in theory, it has the ideological effect of removing class struggle from view by reducing structural social phenomena down to mere relations between concrete individuals.

In this way, humanism does not serve as an adequate basis for the construction of a critique of capitalist society: on the contrary, it provides the precise ideological covering behind which class

⁵⁰ By ‘author's empiricism’ Althusser means that the knowledge of ideology cannot be a condition of dissipation of ideology. The question becomes how can ideologies be transcended then? This point is further developed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁵¹ Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New Left Books. 1971, London, p. 165.

⁵² Montag Warren, *Althusser and his contemporaries: Philosophy's Perpetual War*, Duke University Press, 2013, Durham, p.10.

⁵³ See Althusser's *For Marx* 1969 and *Reading Capital* 1970, Verso, London.

exploitation is repeatedly hidden and justified.⁵⁴ As Althusser wrote, the bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century exploited the masses under the guise of categories of humanist ideologies like freedom, reason and equality by affirming them of Universalist nature. Humanism as an ideology provides individuals with the specular relation between themselves and their material conditions of existence. Reproduced across various discourses of knowledge – discourses whose formation accompanied the formation of capitalist social relations themselves – humanist ideology mystifies the class character of various social phenomena, representing these phenomena in more humanist forms at every turn. For example, rather than presenting labour and work as an activity in class exploitation, bourgeois political economy mystifies the class character of the social phenomenon of work, hiding the material conditions of work behind humanist appeals to the supernatural and transcendent qualities and aspect of human labor. In fact, the bourgeoisie never speaks of the conditions of the labor which it exploits every day. It can thus be argued that the dominant class exploits and appropriates the working class through control and ideology. The humanist ideology precisely allows all of this both empirically and ideologically. In order to demonstrate the ideological qualities of humanism in this way, Althusser developed his most influential – and indeed, most controversial – theory, that of the epistemological break between the works of ‘young’ and ‘mature’ Marx.

1.5 Althusser’s Theory of Ideology:⁵⁵ A Materialist Understanding

Althusser in the essay, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ (hereafter ISAs) in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, argues for a materialist conception of ideology.⁵⁶ The materialist conception of ideology precisely means that ideologies are real. That is they are not imaginary or illusionary. The novelty of Althusser’s conception of ideology lies in its non rationalistic nature. Among the theses which Althusser develops in the ISAs essay one is Ideology is not false consciousness. If we examine this we would know how ideologies are understood in Althusser and second how they are a break from the classical conception of

⁵⁴ This is precisely because humanism is primarily based on idealist, empiricist problematic. In Marxist theory, what makes it a science is materialism. Hence, there is a sharp distinction between materialism and idealism. For more see Marxism and Humanism in *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 221-246.

⁵⁵ Chapter 3 in this thesis deals with Althusser’s theory of ideology in detail.

⁵⁶ Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other essays*. New Left Books. 1971, London, p. 165.

ideology as Classical Marxism held. Althusser does not consider ideologies to be false it is because they have effectivity. Simply put, how can something be false if it has effects? Hence, we can say that to pose ideologies in rationalist problematic would be a falsely posed question.

It should also be noted that the role of state in the ISAs is of fundamental importance. It is because for Althusser state plays a key role for the “reproduction of conditions of production.” This precisely means that state ensures those conditions through ideological and repressive apparatuses. Althusser names a number of such institutions—family, school, army, prison church and so on. What is striking about these apparatuses is they also reproductions social relations of domination.

In this way, it should be clear by now that ISAs are fundamental to “reproduce capitalist social relations.”⁵⁷ Through these theorizations and conceptions of ISAs Althusser remained a great influence outside France. It is also because ultimately “mode of economic production” among all this remains a core conception for they only govern the “production relations” in a social formation.⁵⁸ That is production relations are given in economy are reproduced through ISAs in a social formation.

Further, it must also be emphasised that family as a basic unit through the sexual division of labour of labour is remarkably and strikingly a fundamental site for reproduction of relations. It is only in this context that “social reproduction theory” by Lise Vogel and Martha E. Gimenez⁵⁹, two prominent feminist who take Althusser’s theory of ideology decisive. Vogel and Gimenez with Judith Butler attribute to Althusser of providing a theory of ideology which is non-reductive and explanatory for reproduction of relations of production. It is in this regard family and many other institutions become a site in this mechanism of ideological reproduction.⁶⁰

One would also bear witness to the fact that in Althusser we see production relations are emphasized more than productive forces. This is in contrast to what Marx’s Preface to *A*

⁵⁷ As for Althusser the superstructure has relate autonomy with the base see Althusser, Louis. *Ideology and Ideological state apparatus, Lenin and Philosophy and Other essays*. New Left Books, 1971, London, p.135.

⁵⁸Ibid. p.135.

⁵⁹ Gimenez, E. Martha. Capitalism and the oppression of Women: Marx Revisited, *Science and Society*, Volume 69, No.1, Jan 2005, pp. 11-32.

⁶⁰ Butler, Judith. *Conscience Doth makes Subjects of Us All in The Psychic Life of Power Theories in subjection*, Stanford University Press, 1997, California, pp. 106-131.

Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy argues where productive forces too have their determination in a social formation.

Many scholars like Gilbert Achcar have taken inspiration from Althusser's work of theory of ideology to try to understand the "nature and cause" of the Arab uprisings of 2011–2013.⁶¹

But now, it must be clear that Althusser's critique of humanism is based on the fact that humanism is a bourgeois ideology. Althusser raised many questions pertaining to vitality of class struggle and how Marxist humanism compromises the most pertinent aspect of capitalism which is class struggle. It was only in the wake of non emphasis and evasion of central category of class struggle that Althusser offered a critique of Marxist humanism. More remarkably and indeed, Althusser's theory of ideology offers a profound explanation of how capitalist social relations are reproduced in order to serve the interests of dominant class.

Among all this it must also be kept in mind that when Althusser is seeing the problems in humanism he is in fact struggling with his own interlocutors within the PCF. Althusser argues that PCF was in theoretical vacuum when he joined the party. Hence, his critiques and contributions must be seen with due regard to what he calls what the "conjuncture" had thrown upon him in the Introduction for the English readers in *For Marx*.

With the notion of epistemological break Althusser conceptualized perhaps the most controversial claim in the Marxist tradition that it was only when Marx broke with the problematic of Hegel and Feuerbach that Marx was able to found a science of history. We should therefore now return to that novel concept.

1.6 Althusser on the epistemological break⁶²

The relationship between Hegel and Marx is a complex and unsettled relation and is often disputed.⁶³ Althusser argues that there is a break in epistemology of Marx⁶⁴ and that with the

⁶¹ See Achcar Gilbert and Matta Nanda. Gilbert Achcar 'On the Arab Upheaval- Facts and Fiction', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 18:1, 2016, pp. 1-15.

⁶² For more on Epistemological Break see Chapter 2 in this thesis.

break Marx began with a new problematic⁶⁵ in his writings from *The German Ideology*. According to Althusser, Epistemological break lead Marx to have found a new philosophy and a new science infinite in its implication.

For Althusser, thus, historical materialism is a science of social formation. Althusser argues “dialectical materialism or Marxist philosophy is a scientific discipline different from historical materialism.”⁶⁶ Since these two are very important and fundamental concepts in Marxist theory it is important that we spend some time on it.

Firstly one must bear in mind that Historical Materialism (hereafter HM) and dialectical materialism (hereafter DM) are completely distinct concepts yet related. The relationship of HM and DM lies in DM.⁶⁷ Althusser argues that HM is a science of history. What does this mean? It basically means that the object of HM is mode of production, social formation, class struggle and so on. Now, what is scientific in this? Althusser clarifies in an essay in the text *History and Imperialism* that there cannot be laws in human sciences the way we have in natural sciences “laws of nature”, but there are *invariants* in human sciences. It is precisely these invariants which take hold to form a society. Now, for Althusser DM is “history of process of achieving knowledge.”⁶⁸ What could this basically mean? It means that DM is the relationship between the object of knowledge and real object which is to be known. Therefore, it must be noted here that DM contains those specifics out of which knowledge is produced. For Althusser those specific conditions are practice or say theoretical practice.

But Althusser is very precise here to understand the relation between knowledge and non-knowledge. More importantly, to have notion of knowledge is a question pertinent to what are the element which constitutes non-knowledge. For Althusser it is ideologies. Althusser does not stop here to know what non-knowledge is that is what an ideology is we must have a theory of it.

⁶³ For the relationship between Hegel and Marx see MacGregor, David, *The communist Ideal in Hegel and Marx*, Routledge, 1984, London ; Fraser Ian, and Burns, Tony, Eds. An historical survey of the Hegel – Marx connection in *The Hegel-Marx Connection*, MacMillan, 2000, London.

⁶⁴ Althusser argues that Hegelian influence on Marx is deeply ideological. See *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 49-86.

⁶⁵ See Althusser’s *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p. 165.

⁶⁶ Althusser, Louis, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists*, Verso, 1990, London, pp. 6-9.

⁶⁷ This is in my point of view one of the most important and indeed interesting question in Marxist theory. But due to reasons of space I cannot enter into its details here.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

It is in this context I argue that a theory of ideology is indispensable to Marxian sciences.⁶⁹ And this development has fundamental bearing as how we understand Science in Marx, through his conception of historical materialism.

To begin with Althusser is inclined to see science purely as theory and as a mere thought process. At various places Althusser asserts that logic and mathematics are sciences.⁷⁰ This is different from the accepted definitions of science in which logic and mathematics are seen as based on criteria of proof and advances in knowledge decided by rules set up within the disciplines whereas science also include reference to experimental data.

According to Althusser, what is peculiar about Marxist philosophy is it presents itself into two forms a theory which expresses the rational system of its theoretical concepts; and a method which expresses the relation the theory maintains with its object in its application to that object. In the later paragraphs of *PSPS* he argues

“materialism expresses the effective conditions of the practice that produces knowledge specifically (1) the distinction between the real and its knowledge (distinction of reality), correlative of a correspondence (adequacy) between knowledge and its object (correspondence of knowledge); and (2) the primacy of the real over its knowledge, or the primacy of being over thought. But here, none the less, these are not eternal principles. And as they are not it can be said that it is dialectical: dialectics, which expresses this relation that theory maintains with its object expresses this relation not as a relation of two simply distinct terms but a relation within the process of transformation, thus of real production.”⁷¹

I would like to spend some time discussing this quote as it is of paramount importance for our understanding of materialism. Materialism according to Althusser is effectivity of conditions for practice as Althusser treats practice and production as an act of transformation and hence real. Thus, for him the dialectics represents or is itself the process of this transformation and hence is the real of production. Again, it must be noted that Althusser treats the real of production as the index of materialism, and even materialist dialectics.

The process of birth of science involves many risks. They are to be rescued from ideologies which act on them even retroactively. In the same vein, HM which is a science must be made immune

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 8.

⁷⁰ Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, New Left Books, 1971, London, p.39.

⁷¹ Ibid. p.9.

from ideologies which constantly feed on them. It can only be possible when we ensure the autonomy of practice that is scientific practice.

It is in this regard Althusser argues borrowing from Lenin argued that DM ensures the adequacy to recognize that HM must not succumb to ideologies. The role of DM in the immune of HM from ideologies is thus indispensable.⁷² This gives us a hint towards how inextricable is the link between science and ideology and thus with it we can ask what is it that makes science by ripping off ideology from it? This question ultimately brings us to nature and constituent elements of science and here Marxist philosophy as science.

For to understand the peculiarities of how science is constituted, in a way determines, how any knowledge is produced in science. And since Marxism for Althusser is pure science it has to be dealt carefully, that is, science must be dealt with the protocols of theoretical practice. Theoretical labor in the form of practice becomes the index of objectivity in sciences as we shall see.

Althusser on Essays in Self Criticism: Contradictions and Critiques

In one of his texts, *Essays in Self-Criticism* (ESC) Althusser revises his many of the positions with respect to him being charged of theoreticism. Theoreticism basically meant that his conceptions were deeply determined by theory. He understood that among all this notion of theoretical practices and Marxist philosophy being a theory of theoretical practice what was missing was the real of class struggle. It was in this regard he argued in the form of proposition that philosophy is class struggle in the realm of theory.

From there onwards this has been a much elaborated and worked out definition. Althusser's claim that philosophy is class struggle in the realm of theory is drawn from Gramsci's position that "philosophy is fundamentally political."

Althusser held the view that even Marx could not break fully with ideology and most importantly bourgeois ideology which were in their heyday in his time.⁷³

⁷² Ibid. p.13.

⁷³ Ibid. p.120.

In his defense, Althusser developed the idea of the autonomy of science and philosophy from ideology that lies precisely in the conception of theoretical practice. But it is not free from numerous and manifold self-contradictions.⁷⁴ What are these contradictions and how they are manifested?

To answer this question we have to understand the larger questions which Althusser is dealing with. The project in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* according to William Lewis is that “Marxism is a science among other sciences and that all sciences produce objective knowledge of reality that is autonomous of cultural or ideological influences.”⁷⁵ It must also be noted that Althusser was always wary of ideology hence argued that philosophy should be in the “service of sciences.”⁷⁶ Yet again, Althusser remained equivocal about his position that sciences are autonomous and produce a real knowledge of the world.⁷⁷

These are often put as challenges to Althusser’s reading of Marxism, here we need to look at charges of inconsistency, So, in this section I would like to address the critiques and my clarifications of Althusser his own arguments with respect to that.

Althusser argues that a gross misreading takes place if we ignore that a break comes as soon as one reaches in reading Marx, his famous text *The German Ideology* (which at the same time is also a precursor to transformation of philosophy settling the account, but more on that in next chapter) and even in *Theses on Feuerbach* which according to Althusser was settling the account with hitherto existing bourgeois philosophy. This is the break from where Marx does not think in terms of essence of man and finally, there is a change of categories in his most profound text *Capital*.

Still, there lies a gap. A gap, as Althusser points out in theory or working of this practical state that is, the theory of theoretical practice. For Althusser the social totality consists in human practice. As he says all human activity consists in practice. As he explains further Marx’s contribution was novel in so far as he replaced “the old postulates [for essence and subjects]... by a historico-dialectical materialism of praxis that is, by a theory of different specific levels of

⁷⁴ Lewis, S. Williams. ‘Knowledge versus “Knowledge”’: Louis Althusser on the Autonomy of Science and Philosophy from Ideology’, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, 2006, p.456.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.456.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 457.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 457

human practice (economic practice, political practice, ideological practice, scientific practice) in their characteristic articulations, based on specific articulation of unity of human society.”⁷⁸

The knowledge which sciences produce have their own internal criteria for verification. Sciences in this regard contain a practice which is internal to it. For in sciences, as Althusser argues proof and demonstration are said to be internal to each science.’ Now sciences is devoid of external check it is because they are decided by sciences own problematic. It becomes more profound as Althusser says:

“The production of knowledge which is peculiar to theoretical [scientific] practice constitutes a process that takes places entirely in thought, just as we say *mutatis mutandis* that the process of economic production takes place entirely in economy.”

The role of philosophy then is as a guide in the practice of sciences, the internal coherency of sciences. This role which philosophy is capable of pursuing is what according to Althusser the theory of theoretical practice is. HM then is science of history and Marxist philosophy is DM. However, we should also bear in mind that to many critics who were contemporary of Althusser said that Althusser is presenting a theoretist and conventionalist notion of sciences.

To retain autonomy of theory and theoretical practice in Marxist philosophy Althusser fought lifelong. His works in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* is a testimony to that. This was significant for there were numerous readings which would hamper the autonomy of Marxist theory-dogmatism, economic reductionism, humanism, and historicism. Thus, for Althusser this autonomy would “allow [theory] to develop in alliance with political and other practices without betraying its own needs” and without becoming a “slave to tactical political interests.”⁷⁹ This was crucial as the proponents of Marxism particularly humanist ones were attempting to shun away the element of science from it. It should also be taken into account that Althusser believed that in Marxism the relationship between theory and practice is of paramount importance it is in this regard the objectivity of HM must be emphasized as it is a tool for political action.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p.229.

⁷⁹ Althusser, Louis. *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, Verso, 1990, London. p. 208.

⁸⁰ Lewis, S. Williams. Knowledge versus “Knowledge”: Louis Althusser on the Autonomy of Science and Philosophy from Ideology, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, 2006, p.460.

Robert Paul Resch argues that Althusser's intellectual journey as a Marxist theorist is marked by "conventionalist view of science" and his "realist and materialist ontology."⁸¹ However not much has been elaborated as to what in Althusser is conventionalist view of science. What remains ultimately is Althusser's profound implication of theoreticism has been critiqued and his conventionalist view is often put to revision. This leads to on the one hand maintaining the position that reality itself provides an external check on science findings and two revision of conventionalism but at the same time what is lost is epistemic truth for science.⁸²

When it is a discussion of relationship between science and ideology through Althusser's epistemological break it is important to bring an essay of Balibar.⁸³ Balibar in his essay however disputes Althusser's notion of epistemological break and calls it as figuration. Apart from that, Althusser's singularity for him, all philosophy is political, but it is so only in the 'last instance,' as class struggle in the specific element of theory. One must therefore wonder what happens when discourse attempts to bring to light that normally invisible determination does not philosophy, as such, disappear?' In the identification of philosophy with its own 'political' determination, must not a difference survive, or reconstitute itself continuously, in order for philosophy still to be philosophical in its practice, thus in reality political in its effects, and not reduced to a political concept of philosophy.

The ideological break in Althusser, according to Balibar, is a theoretical fiction, that is, it is often seen as metaphorically, enabling him to displace the play of traditional philosophical oppositions ended up clearly recognizing that he was doing philosophy in the sense that he, too, was constructing a philosophical object (like the cogito or the contract). For Balibar the epistemological break is the figuration, in the abstract imaginative space proper to the philosopher, of the most salient properties of the concept, or of conceptual knowledge, in particular its conflictual relation to ideology, that is, to anything that is thought and that is given to itself in the form of a consciousness. This recognition coincides very precisely with the moment when Althusser begins (begins again) to consider the break as a metaphor, consistent

⁸¹Resch, R. Paul. *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, University of California Press, 1992, Berkeley, p.160.

⁸² Lewis, S. Williams. Knowledge versus "Knowledge": Louis Althusser on the Autonomy of Science and Philosophy from Ideology, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture and Society*, 2006, p.463.

⁸³ In this essay Balibar discusses the problems with Althusser's epistemological break, Etienne et al. Althusser's Object, *Social Text*, 1994, p. 157.

with the play of other metaphors that exist in philosophy. Balibar argues all these philosophical objects are also metaphorical objects, or rather, they are constructed from metaphors, verbal or perceptual, and whose meaning is taken seriously and made autonomous. The point being Althusser's philosophical category of epistemological break is a theoretical construct so as help us periodize the work of Marx.

1.7 Developing the idea of Theoretical Practice

For Althusser as we discussed above when ideologies and production encompass everything, that is, ideologies form an organic totality and have effectivity of their own, how then real knowledge of the world is possible? It is here that we see the notion of theoretical practice which is a scientific practice can be helpful.

The conception of theoretical practice lies at the center of Althusser's philosophy. It is because theoretical practice as a scientific practice is autonomous. What is so dear to Althusser is nothing but 'Theory'⁸⁴ (Theory with capital 'T'), and here most importantly Marxist theory.⁸⁵ The question of theory is to be seen as the 'autonomy' of it so as to draw a line from a general body of knowledge to ideology, of whose development he discusses as 'Generalities.'⁸⁶

This section deals with what is so significant about theoretical practice as such and the specificities of it. That is, how is theoretical practice as Althusser sees its development, a knowledge system which is non-ideological and is a critique of bourgeois social science particularly empiricism and humanism.⁸⁷ Althusser argues that everything is production, thus, knowledge is a production.⁸⁸ For Althusser theory is a practice amongst the other (social political

⁸⁴ See Benton, Ted, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, St. Martin's Press, 1984, New York, p.49 and 'Epistemological Blues' in Callinicos, Alex, *Althusser's Marxism*, Pluto Press, 1976, London, pp. 72-88.

⁸⁵ See Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p. 162.

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 183-189.

⁸⁷ The problem with empiricism and humanism is they take the initial object or raw material of theoretical practice to be reality itself. For more see Geras Norman, 'Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment,' *New Left Review*, I/71, January-February, 1972.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

ideological) practices.⁸⁹ For Althusser, the process of knowledge formation takes place entirely in thought *mutatis mutandis* like economic production takes place entirely in economy.

Marxist theoretical practice as Althusser points out has a strong bearing on ‘specific practice which acts on its own object and ends in its own product a knowledge.’⁹⁰ For Althusser, all philosophy is merely ideological. If it is true how do we see the role of philosophy in Marxism? For Althusser, it has to guide theoretical practice hence he calls it theory of theoretical practice.

Marx argues, in the Afterword to the second edition of *Capital* that there is a difference between his and Hegel’s method which for Althusser was really important to distinguish.⁹¹ Marx did not speak of the difference of his method with Hegel except in that famous inversion. However, it is said Marx writings in *Capital* contain a method.⁹²

Noting the difference between Hegelian and Marxian dialectic, what is going to be said explains the process of theoretical practice. I will construct below some of the arguments found in Althusser by taking up Generality I and Generality II.

Althusser’s concern here is the specificity of the Marxist dialectic. In Althusserian vocabulary it begins with—“first generality (which he calls Generality I) constitutes the raw material that the science’s theoretical practice will transform into specified ‘concepts’, that is, into that other ‘concrete’ generality (which I shall call Generality III) which is a knowledge.”⁹³ To understand the generalities which Althusser argues has to be seen in its rigor as the concepts are given a strict meaning. In Generality I, one begins not with something objectively given but on something which is ‘general’ in contrast to illusion and aberrations. The science work on Generality I and transform it towards Generality III and through this knowledge in sciences is

⁸⁹ For Althusser knowledge by the subject simply by abstraction of the object cannot be true knowledge such knowledge is itself ‘knowledge effect’ of an existing ‘social totality’. For more see Glucksmann, Andre A ventriloquist Structuralism, *New Left Review*, 1/72, March-April, 1972.

⁹⁰ Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p. 173

⁹¹ Marx says ‘[M]y dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of ‘the Idea’, he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgus of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of ‘the Idea.’ With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human minds, and translated into forms of thought.’ See Marx, Karl, Afterword to the Second edition of *Capital*, Progress Publishers, 1887, Moscow. p.14.

⁹² Marx further adds ‘With him (Hegel) it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell’ Ibid. p.15.

⁹³ Althusser, Louis. On the materialist dialectic, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p.183.

produced.⁹⁴ The important question here is what is it that works? Generality II is what constitutes concept of theory or this transformation. Also, the transformation from Generality I to Generality III is where ‘abstract’ becomes ‘concrete’ and this all takes place entirely in knowledge.⁹⁵ It can be argued that Althusser develops his notion of Generality I and Generality III from Marx’s distinction to Hegel’s method. That is, ‘the correct scientific method’ is to start with the abstract and produce concrete in thought. This distinction is what distinguishes, according to Althusser, Marx from Hegel and Althusser calls it a ‘break’. And for Althusser this break is not an illusion.⁹⁶

It is also important here to underline, for Althusser, the production of knowledge strikingly differs in Marxist theory and it has larger theoretical implication in distinctiveness of Marxism as a theory, from Hegelianism.⁹⁷ Althusser based his argument on Marx’s discontinuity with Hegel not only on a science philosophy dichotomy, but on a ‘specification of the difference between the (simple and universal) Hegelian and the (complex and specific) Marxist dialectic.’⁹⁸ Hegel’s (continuous- homogeneous) historical time was distinguished from Marx’s notion of specifically determined, complex structural unity. Important though such criticism of the mystified Hegelian dialectic is, however, it can also be suggested that Althusser fails in the last resort to identify the scientific- dialectical method in Marx. At least in part this was due to his view of science, history, and ideology as simple practices, timeless and eternal.

1.8 Contemporary Critiques

For Althusser, the language of humanism was precisely the language of capitalism and capitalist exploitation. Althusser argued that humanism provided the logic and justification for the exploitation of the working class, providing the bourgeoisie with a useful taxonomy beneath which to mystify the cruelty of class domination. As Althusser wrote, humanism ‘serves those

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.185.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p.185.

⁹⁶ See *Essays in Self Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, pp. 107-119, for more.

⁹⁷ I cannot enter into details of this proposition for the reasons of space but I would like to add this is one of the most import features when we see Marx’s distinction from Hegel at the level of method. For more see Michael Gordy, ‘Reading Althusser: Time and Social Whole’, *History and Theory*, Vol. 22, No. , (Feb., 1983), pp. 1-21.

⁹⁸ Fraser, John, ‘Louis Althusser on Science, Marxism and Politics’, *Science and Society*, Vol.40, No. 4 (Winter, 1976/1977), pp. 438-464.

whose interest it is to talk about ‘man’ and not about the masses, classes and the class struggle.’ This use of the critique of humanism in thinking about class – and work as a reflection of class struggle – will be of particular use for the development of this thesis and its argument. In what follows, the chapter critically explores Althusser’s critique of humanism and some of those who have engaged with it in order to isolate the useful concepts from this critique and justify their position in this thesis.

For Rosi Braidotti a feminist the Althusser’s critique of humanism opened a challenge to a humanistic world where man was at the centre of everything. Althusser’s theoretical humanism is the bedrock for the foundation of an analysis where human subject is no longer a reductively sole criterion for “historical progress.”⁹⁹

Braidotti explains that her theory involves issues of gender or of sexual difference in connection with the recognition and difference. Further being a theorist of Nomadism Braidotti argues for “rethinking the bodily root of subjectivity.”¹⁰⁰

Balibar in the essay ‘Althusser’s Object’ points out the limitation of Althusser’s epistemological break which while being processing inside philosophy was particularly held by “non-philosophy, politics, communism”, for instance which determined it.¹⁰¹

Jameson argued that Althusserian anti-humanism has “thematized the attack on metaphysics – in a kind of search-and-destroy offensive which tracked its enemy into the most unlikely corners, with often deadly results, challenging the notion that the (bourgeois) ideal of human nature was somehow eternal and permanently defined the species as such.”¹⁰² For Zizek, Althusser’s contribution to philosophy demarcates the real break with how subjectivity was considered theoretically, as Althusser already précised to the view that to get out of ideology is an idea “ideological” par excellence.¹⁰³ Whilst Althusser and his work have therefore enjoyed serious and sustained criticism, the continued salience of his critique of humanism in these popular contributions is indicative of its explanatory force in the context of emerging social

⁹⁹ See Braidotti’s interview in Dolphijn, Rick and Tuin der, Iris Van Eds., *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, Open Humanities Press, London, 2012. pp. 19-37.

¹⁰⁰ Nomadism believes in how bodies or matter matters, for more see, Ibid. p. 33.

¹⁰¹ Balibar, Etienne et al. ‘Althusser’s Object’, *Social Text*, 1994. pp. 158-188.

¹⁰² See Jameson in Zizek, Slavoj Ed, *An American Utopia*, Verso, 2016, London, p.70.

¹⁰³ See ‘Introduction’ in Zizek, Slavoj. *Mapping Ideology*, Verso, 1994, London, pp.1-34.

developments. Moreover, it is Althusser specifically who teaches his readers how to deploy the critique of humanism in the context of capitalism and class struggle. It is in this way that the re-visiting of Althusser's critique is here justified. As a Marxist philosopher, Althusser argued that the precise philosophical method which allows Marxism to make sense of class struggle and its expression in the various social relations of society (especially those of work) emanates primarily from the critique of humanist ideology. By re-visiting the works of Marx, Althusser demonstrates how Marx's dissection of the capitalist mode of production is firmly anchored in both an implicit and explicit critique of humanism, where ideological assumptions around human subjectivity are left behind in favor of a 'scientific' analysis of society, social relations and social structures. 'It is against the general background of this history,' so Althusser wrote in his essay on *The Humanist Controversy*, 'that we can bring out our carefully considered reasons for defending the thesis of Marx's theoretical anti-humanism.'¹⁰⁴

Now we are in a position to answer the three questions we posed when we began this study. The conceptual and logical advance which Althusser's theory of ideology poses can be seen in his account of theoretical practice and autonomy of the sciences. Secondly, Althusser's theory of Anti-Humanism, locating in Marx in post 1845 writings gives a clear picture of Marxism as a scientific theory with totally different postulates. And finally, Althusser's emphasis on relative autonomy of superstructure gives a profound account of role of ideologies, their effectivity and makes Marxism a non-reductive philosophy.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the focus of study was, Althusser's approach reinterprets the classic texts of Marxism that have discussed the approach to society in order to change it. Althusser's framework of theoretical anti-humanism on the one hand serves a tool for development of Marxism as a scientific practice and at the same time provides groundwork for the emphasis on class-struggle. With Marx it is the method and approach of studying social reality that Althusser poses to change. For not only does he present a peculiar notion of science and what its criteria of truth are, but he attempts to understand its relations to practice and develops the notion of

¹⁰⁴ Althusser, Louis, *The Humanist Controversy and Other writings*, Verso, 2003. p. 232.

theoretical practice. I have argued that Althusser relies on a lot of Lenin's contribution which are quite implicit to Marxist philosophy but his own arguments rely on a major assertion of an epistemological break in Marx's writings.

The materiality of ideology for Althusser arises from an anti-reductionist critique of the classical Marxist tradition theories of ideology. In discussing the ideology of the capitalist state Althusser distinguishes between ideological and repressive state apparatus which function to perpetuate the domination of the ruling class. The debate on science is linked to the concept of ideology.

The 'theory of theoretical practice' or 'the Science of sciences' is what this chapter in the second section tried to discuss in detail. In Althusser notion of science, Marxist theory makes it clear that Marxist philosophy did turn speculative philosophy upside down.¹⁰⁵ The problem then was there in the form of gap between theory and practice and Althusser's understanding of theoretical practice tried to fill it. The notion of theoretical practice with its tools, that is, Generalities (II and III) attempted to explain the break, from Hegel to Marx, in the form of starting from abstract to concrete-in-thought. In so doing this chapter dealt with many problems underlining the core of Marxist philosophy, the epistemological break among the most important of them. The theoretical intervention in that political conjuncture was simply the need of the time. For Marxism had to be saved from the perils of humanism, economism, historicism, and revisionism. But Althusser was not an essentialist neither a foundationalist. For Althusser what was always significant was autonomy of theory and science as they only progresses by breaking from the pre-history of it. Hence, one has to only do justice to Althusser by reading him in the way he argued of reading.¹⁰⁶ And that for the same reason makes him contemporary of us. For more on the concept of reading in Althusser some other day.

¹⁰⁵ For more on 'the upturning of speculative philosophy' refer *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1932.

¹⁰⁶ See *Reading Capital* where Althusser makes clear of how Marx and more so Marxist philosophy be read. Althusser, Louis. Verso, 2009, pp.11-75.

Chapter 2

The Epistemological Break in Marx

“In a word- You cannot abolish [*aufheben*] philosophy without making it a reality.”

Karl Marx, *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*

“But for the moment, everything is in play between the rigor of a single thought and thematic system of an ideological field.”

Louis Althusser, *For Marx*

“... [I] should say that what is at stake in this double rupture, first with Hegel, then with Feuerbach is the very meaning of the word *philosophy*. What can Marxist ‘*philosophy*’ be in contrast to classical models of philosophy?”

Louis Althusser, *For Marx*

2. Introduction

The chapter attempts to analyze the philosophical category epistemological break¹ in Marx as argued by Althusser. In so doing the chapter discusses the theoretical foundations and epistemic and political implications of epistemological break. That is, the chapter tries to understand the category of “epistemological break” and impact of this break² in Marxist philosophy. The focus of this chapter hence is to examine the concepts invented by the impact of epistemological break, for it believes the theoretical meaning of the concept of epistemological break, is the guiding thread for an epistemic understanding of Marxian theory.

¹ Althusser gives an explicit definition of epistemology in a footnote in his text *Essays in Self-Criticism* where he says ‘epistemology literally means the theory of conditions and the forms of scientific practice and of its history in different concrete sciences’. See Althusser Louis, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, p. 124.

² See the notion of epistemological break, difference between Young and Mature Marx in Althusser, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 49-86, pp. 161-218, pp. 219-248.

In chapter 1, I argued that Althusser tried to defend the concept of Marxism as a science against certain ideological tendencies in the PCF and in other Marxists who refuse the very idea that sciences are non-ideological and hence “bourgeois.”³ I argued that for Althusser scientific practice is always critical since it plays an important role in the field of ideology by provoking struggles in theory that impacts the domain of politics through philosophy.

Althusser argues that there is an epistemological break in the writings of Karl Marx, in short that there is an incompatibility between the writings of early Marx and mature Marx and the works of Marx thus cannot be considered as a single whole. According to Althusser, this break was so crucial that he says Marx would not have founded a science of history had it not been Marx “settling the account with erstwhile philosophical conscience.”⁴ Althusser dates the break in Marx from the works of *The German Ideology*. The context of this debate was Althusser’s claim that Marx founded a science of history only when Marx got rid of Hegelian concepts.

As we saw in the previous chapter, according to Althusser ideologies have an intelligibility of their own, if this is the case then, how do we read philosophy of Marxism? How could Marxist philosophy distinguish other philosophies?⁵ If philosophy is ideology in generic sense, how can we demarcate a Marxist philosophy?

Althusser’s response to these questions is by referring to the discovery of a ‘continent of knowledge’ by Marx. Marx founded not only a new science but also opened up according to Althusser’s metaphor, a “third continent of human knowledge” an achievement, he said, was comparable to the creation of mathematics by Greeks and of physics by Galileo. According to Althusser by opening this continent, Marx firstly, broke radically with existing philosophies of history (Feuerbach and Hegelian dialectic), and secondly, he engaged with a reading of political

³ See Althusser Louis, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, pp. 116-118.

⁴ Althusser’s remark about break in epistemology of Marx led to debates within PCF. Roger Garaudy a party member and an interlocutor of Althusser within the party responded by saying ‘to underestimate Hegelian heritage in Marx in not only his youthful works but also in *Capital* is to call forth a risk’; for G. Mury ‘human practice and the dialectics of human practice constitutes motor of history and to blur it with overdetermination would be to obscure the essence of *Capital* itself.’ But Althusser maintained his position of there being a break in the epistemology of Marx with minor revisions. For more see Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*, 1969, Verso, pp. 163-164.

⁵ See Benton, Ted *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984, New York, pp.47-49.

economy that further founded a new science of history. These two attempts had great significance for the constitution of a science.⁶

According to Althusser, what makes “Marx’s or Darwin’s or Galileo’s thought” precisely the “object” they constructed for their investigation.⁷ It is precisely because Marx or Galileo did not merely do any empirical investigation but constructed an object for their study. William Lewis argues that the objects which these scientists constructed must be used for further investigation. Comparable to what Galileo discovered which made him father of modern physics; Marx too discovered a system of concepts which have deep epistemic basis.

Hence in Marxism too, the objects which it studies like “mode of production, relations of production, social formation” and so on are specific objects with theoretical meaning. These concepts provide us with a theory of history. For Althusser, Marxism is not simply a political doctrine but a method of analysis, a theoretical domain of a fundamental investigation of social formation.

Althusser explicitly defined epistemological break for the first time in the Introduction of *For Marx* (1965). He says in 1845, Marx shifted terrains, and in shifting problematic, he asks other questions, he passed to the destruction of the earlier problematic of Feuerbach’s concept of ‘man and subject of history’ through a formulation of the historical process as mode of production, and the politico-ideological superstructure.

Althusser indicates the radical novelty that marks the incompleteness of Marx’s work which he himself could not elude or ignore but which compels us to rethink in terms which Marx thought as inadequate, such as ‘ideology as illusion of consciousness’. In 1845, it would seem then that Marx ‘crossed the border’ that separates ideology from science, but he crossed it ‘forever.’⁸

When Althusser reads Marx he finds an element of problem in his works. The problem is that there is a difference in how the concepts appear in early Marx to that of mature Marx. The problem then precisely in the ideological movement in which Marx is writing and Althusser calls

⁶ Althusser, Louis, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx*, New Left Books, 1972, London, p. 166.

⁷ See Lewis in an interview ‘The Rise and Fall of Louis Althusser’ at <https://www.3-16am.co.uk/articles/the-fall-and-rise-of-louis-althusser>

⁸ Balibar, Etienne et al, ‘Althusser’s Object’, *Social Text*, No.39 (Summer, 1994), pp. 161-162.

it that the early Marx was occupied and was involved in Hegelian Feuerbachian problematic. Only when Marx broke with that ideology of Hegel and Feuerbach that he was able to have found a science of history.

It is here that I take up the study of Marx's break with hitherto existing traditions and founding of the third continent of scientific knowledge the continent of history. Althusser's approach to Marxism was, among other things, to extract Marxist theory from the writings of Marx. In so intervening, which was theoretical, the aim was to draw a line of demarcation as he says in *For Marx* "between Marxist theory and forms of philosophical subjectivism which have compromised it or threatened it above all, empiricism and its variants, classical and modern pragmatism, voluntarism, historicism, etc."⁹ What is the problem Althusser sees with empiricism, positivism, and historicism and so on? If these are really the problems which must be thought about in Marxism, in what way Althusser's approach is different and what understanding in terms of coherence does it offer?

As we saw in the previous chapter according to Norman Geras, Althusser's dismissal of empiricism and humanism is based precisely on the fact that empiricism and humanism take raw material of theoretical practice as knowledge. That is, the mere abstraction of object by the subject is knowledge for empiricists and humanists. For them the knowledge of reality is conceived as the part of the reality and its only difference from the reality of which it is knowledge is that it is merely part of it.¹⁰ In so doing empiricist reduce thought of object to the real object. However, as Andre Glucksmann says Althusser maintains order of knowledge (thought process) apart from order of reality (process of the real).¹¹

By taking up the above two positions, it can be argued that Althusser has a concern of an epistemology in Marxism wherein one can break away from empiricist and humanist positions and pursue a knowledge which is free from these philosophical deviations. The problem which Althusser sees with empiricism, idealism and humanism is that they do not provide an adequate

⁹ Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p. 12.

¹⁰ Geras Norman, 'Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment', *New Left Review*, I/71, January-February, 1972, p. 63.

¹¹ Althusser maintains autonomy of theory. For more see Glucksmann, Andre, 'A ventriloquist Structuralism', *New Left Review*, I/72, March-April, 1972, p.73.

basis for the study of object of Marxist theory. In other words, these methods of study are reductive, and entail a constituted subject and givenness of the object.

With these problems, Althusser hence raised the fundamental question “What is Marxist philosophy? Has it any theoretical right to existence? And if it does exist in principle, how can its specificity be defined?”¹² This to me, in so far as Marxism is concerned, can be considered the most significant question ever posed when we deal with philosophy of Marxism from the writings of Marx. And this question is fundamental in two ways, first, it underlines how we understand Marx’s philosophy, that is, how we are supposed to read it, how we read the content of it and second, what makes it worth of a theory, that is, does it underline a theory and if it does, how and where can we locate it? For, it is “theory which guides philosophy, and makes it capable of changing its traditional practice.”¹³ Consequently, one is then reminded of how this formulation leads to Marx’s method, for in sum, everything this question signifies is Marxist epistemology.¹⁸³ That is, an epistemology whose object is to be properly demarcated.

The question about Marxist epistemology cannot be answered without looking at three dimensions. One, the relationship of Marxist philosophy to pre-Marxist idealist philosophies, two, the problematic¹⁴ of the Young Marx, and three, the change of problematic in mature Marx.¹⁵ In so far, these three deal with three different phases of Marx, as Althusser calls it, it can be said there are punctuations or breaks in philosophy of Marx.

Althusser’s proposal of what we call as epistemological break in his famous work *For Marx*(1969) and his revisions in the text *Essays in Self-Criticism*(1976) will be considered thoroughly. The aspect which Althusser underlines in the text *For Marx* is that there a change of problematic from early Marx to mature Marx. In the text, *Essays in Self Criticism* he revises his position by saying that the earlier texts contained a great deal of theoreticism.

¹² Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p. 31.

¹³ Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, New Left Books, 1971, p.32

¹⁴ For more on the concept of problematic see the essay ‘On the Young Marx’ in Althusser’s *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 49-86.

¹⁵ Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 49-86.

Although these questions open up a vast area I will limit myself with the question of epistemology in Marxism and the philosophy which Marxism underlines in Althusser's reading. I limit myself with questions which are posed strictly by Althusser and thus I will restrict myself to two major interpretations of Althusser's epistemology. First, William S. Lewis *Louis Althusser and the Tradition of French Marxism* (2005) who argues that this break was based on a selective reading of Marx and was a response to humanist idealist interpretation in French communist Party by members like Roger Garaudy, Henri Lefebvre and Auguste Cornu and second by D. Atkinson "The anatomy of Knowledge: Althusser's Epistemology and its Consequence"(1984), where the primary focus is on the relationship between philosophy of Marxism and a theory of knowledge. I will also rely on E. Balibar's two essays "From Bachelard to Althusser: the concept of 'epistemological break'" (1978) and "Althusser's Object" (1994) for an interpretation as to discern a philosophy of science which is capable of discussing and recognizing the scientific character of historical materialism.¹⁶

From my understanding, Althusser uses many methodological categories when he reads Marx. Those categories are mostly derived from, or rooted in, epistemological writings in context of history of sciences, and epistemology of sciences. The category of epistemological break is a significant concept as one encounter the centrality of Althusser's rendering of Marxist philosophy. Althusser argues "the notion of settling the account which began from writings of *The German Ideology* must only be considered as declaration which is yet to be examined and this examination calls for a theory and method."¹⁷ It is in this context that the understanding and operationalization of epistemological break's examination, requires a theory of history of theoretical formations in general and for that Althusser borrows two concepts which I find worth mentioning. One is the concept of "problematic"¹⁸ which he borrows from Jacques Martin and another is "epistemological break" which he borrows from Gaston Bachelard. It is because for Althusser early Marx is operating in a different problematic than the mature Marx. While taking up the study in this section, we will briefly look at both these concepts. These two concepts offer us great help in understanding the location of the break in Marx through Althusser.

¹⁶ Balibar, Etienne, 'From Bachelard to Althusser: the concept of 'epistemological break'', *Economy and Society*, Volume 7, Number 3, August 1978, p.207 and Balibar, Etienne et al 'Althusser's Object' in *Social Text*, Summer, 1994, No. 39 (Summer, 1994), pp. 157-188.

¹⁷ See Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 21-39.

¹⁸ See for more Geras Norman, Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment, *New Left Review*, 1/71, January-February, 1972 and Glucksmann, Andre A ventriloquist Structuralism, *New Left Review*, 1/72, March-April, 1972.

I will argue that Althusser's attempt to ground Marxism's scientific character was by the reference to the shortcomings from the readings and misinterpretations prevailing in the French Communist Party. Althusser sought to challenge those interpretations and believed that true philosophy of Marx can be established only by referring to the writings after the break.

2.1 Althusser on Epistemological Break

Althusser uses the concept of epistemological break to periodize the works of Marx. For Althusser epistemological break distinguishes the object of study in Marxist philosophy. The break represents the distinction between the object of study of early Marx to that of mature Marx. It can be argued therefore that for Althusser epistemological break is both biographical as well as theoretical fact.

An outline of the periodization of Marx's works as Althusser presented with reference to epistemological break can be seen as under:

“1840-1844: the Early Works

1845: the Works of the Break

1845-57: the Transitional Works

1857-83: the Mature Works”

Althusser argues of the unequivocal epistemological break in works of Marx beginning from the writings of *The German Ideology* (1845) and “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845).

The importance of epistemological break lies by and large in its distinction between ideology and science.¹⁹ That is, for Althusser early Marx was operating in ideological movement of Feuerbach and Hegel, later Marx founded a science of history and this was only possible by breaking away from ideological problematic of Feuerbach and Hegel. But to suggest of the ideological problematic in early Marx is also, indeed, to illustrate the clear distinction between science of mature Marx and ideology of early Marx. Let us pose a question here “How can one exactly

¹⁹ I would like to point out the distinction between ideology and science; particularly in French epistemology (particularly of Bachelard and Canguilhem) pertains to sciences having a ‘scientific object’ and history of sciences.

distinguish between science and ideology in Marx”? And where or by what principle can one draw a demarcation between science and ideology?’

Althusser answers this question by outlining an epistemology of mature Marx taking cue from Bachelard. According to Bachelard, the object of sciences is constructed theoretically. That is, the objects of science are not given. Althusser taking up Bachelard’s claim tries to argue that mature Marx constructed an object which we can see in Marx’s writings from *The German Ideology*. What are those objects? Althusser names it as, historical materialism with its concepts like mode of production, class struggle, surplus value and so on. With founding this science of history Marx also founded a philosophy that is dialectical materialism but before taking up investigation of historical materialism and its philosophy dialectical materialism, let us see take up a nuanced reading of various aspects of epistemological break.

According to William Lewis Althusser had deep problems with the prevailing interpretation of Marx within the Party. Party members at PCF represented the view that core of Marx’s philosophy lies in Humanist Marx. Such humanist interpretations would include ‘objective idealistic’ readings of Marx such as Lefebvre’s, Cornu’s, and Garaudy’s that hold that history is the journey of the human spirit to end its alienation. These misrepresentations according to Althusser occluded what was truly original of Marx. It was in this context that Althusser sought to intervene to draw a line of demarcation between true theoretical bases and pre-Marxist idealist notions.

For Althusser “Marx’s revolutionary contribution was to replace the old postulates [of essence and subject]... by a historico dialectical materialism of praxis.”²⁰ That is by a theory of “practice”. For Althusser however in a selective reading it was only possible for Marx to develop a theory of human practice comprising a social totality after he had broken from his early period.

According to Balibar, the term epistemological break by Althusser must be seen at two levels. First, in the sense Bachelard invokes this concept; second Althusser’s borrowing of this concept and its use in the reading of Marx. And finally, in consequence we can say what kind of science and its relationship with ideology does the break entail. Therefore, it can be argued

²⁰Lewis William *Louis Althusser and the Tradition of French Marxism*, Lexington Books, 2005, Lanham, p. 164.

epistemological break serves a crucial point to understand the foundation of Marx's scientific conception of historical materialism.

With the term, epistemological break Althusser makes two assertions. The first is that in Marx's writings there is a fundamental break in the early Marx and mature Marx. What needs to be shown is whether in this break there is an advance in understanding of Marxist philosophy and Marxist practice. The second assertion questions the prevailing Stalinist tendencies within communist parties like PCF. Certain fundamental assumptions like the social revolution that will transform the world according to a predetermined law rely upon economic determinism. This assumption about revolutions following a materialist dialectic could not be seriously pursued any more for Althusser as Marx himself did not advocate or write about it. As Althusser explains, Marx's radical achievement lies only in the fact that he saw society as an combinatory of articulation of specific but different practices. Thirdly, Althusser argues that while writing the volumes of *Capital*, Marx was too involved in scientific research on capitalism and not on the philosophical framework. The challenge for Althusser is to read Marx's texts with a hermeneutic attuned to the problematic of the text.

Althusser claims that he has problem with empiricism because empiricism conceives of experience of human subject as the adequate condition for knowledge. But to what extent can we rely on Althusser's claims that Marx was not an empiricist? That is, how do we concede to the problems of empiricism?

The development of Marxist philosophy where the subject is supposed to know object just by experience viz. German rationalist or British empiricism are mistaken according to Althusser because they believe history is made by man through alienation and hence once day in communism they will be able to overcome alienation. Such approach to Marxism Althusser sees as empiricist; and he find even Marx too holding onto such a view.

The concept of epistemological break and the origin of the term go back to Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) in his work *The Formation of the Scientific Mind* (2002).²¹ Although this is really a vast area which concerns philosophy of sciences, epistemology and philosophy I would limit

²¹ Balibar argues Bachelardian epistemology consists in what Canguilhem has called 'epistemological obstacle'. See Balibar, Etienne, 'From Bachelard to Althusser: the concept of 'epistemological break'', *Economy and Society*, Volume 7, Number 3, August 1978, p.208.

myself to how Balibar interprets these aspects in Althusser and the role it plays in understanding Marxist philosophy, as Althusser uses it.

The concern which Althusser had, as Balibar points out about epistemological break was either to import a Marxist point of view into epistemology or to “renovate” Marxism with the help of “epistemological categories.”²² For Althusser, in fact, it is on this epistemology only that the development of Marxism as both science of social formations and a philosophy can take place. This is because Althusser believed there is a scientific character in Marx’s conception of historical materialism. The Bachelard’s influence on Althusser is specifically in constructing an epistemological sense to Marxism.²³

Bachelard’s argument, clarifies Balibar, is about certain modifications of “epistemological break” even though Althusser claims to have inherited from him. Balibar says that Bachelard strictly deals with the idea of a “historical discontinuity.”²⁴ It is arguably not a simple discontinuity as we perceive it rather it is “complex mechanism of difference which is always inscribed at several levels in the system of several activities and corresponding intellectual forms.”²⁵ Hence for Balibar the break is not of a nature of simplistic discontinuity rather it is severely complex.

Balibar takes up two aspects of Bachelard’s epistemology to understand Althusser; the first is the division between common knowledge and scientific knowledge and the second is the difference between “lapsed” history of a science and “stratified” history of a science. Balibar maintains that there is a primacy of epistemology over history of sciences.

For Balibar, what constitutes scientific thought is not abstraction per se but realization of abstraction in concrete. Thus, the idea of sensation, or opinion which is represented as an illusion

²² Balibar argues Althusser held a concern of ‘what type of philosophy of sciences is capable of discussing, recognizing and providing the scientific character of historical materialism’. Hence, it is here we can see the purpose of importing a Marxist point of view in epistemology or renovating Marxism with epistemological categories. See Balibar, Etienne, ‘From Bachelard to Althusser: the concept of ‘epistemological break’’, *Economy and Society*, Volume 7, Number 3, August 1978, p. 207.

²³ Althusser has mentioned about going back to Bachelard in *Essays in Self Criticism* in order to borrow or install an epistemology to Marxism which was essential for providing a proper line of demarcation of Marxist philosophy. See footnote 19 in Althusser, Louis, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, p. 124.

²⁴ By historical discontinuity Balibar means a certain form of breaking, rupture, separation. It is used by Balibar to argue Bachelard’s critique of myths of empiricism which suggest progressive continuity of knowledge, particularly ‘forms of speculative empiricism of eternal reason.’ Ibid. pp. 208-209.

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 210-211.

from the time of Plato, and pre-scientific knowledge, need to be opposed to develop scientific knowledge. Perhaps a significant aspect Balibar argues that the concept is produced by a theoretical system and is not separated from that theoretical system that produces it. However there is a break. It is in this regard it can be argued that the difference between alchemy and chemistry precisely of the fact that the former was ideology and latter is science must be seen as a break. For Bachelard, scientific knowledge must go through an epistemological obstacle or the moment of ‘rupture’ that divides science from its pre-scientific past.

According to Balibar, the ‘rupture’ used by Bachelard is not about the already defined domain of knowledge as if we know what there is to be known or before posing the question itself about knowledge.²⁶ Of course, it remains specifically tied to knowledge, but it is only effectively realized in technological application to knowledge itself. For Bachelard, science advances by rejecting previous doctrines and practices but also reinterpreting the past in order to be assimilated by the current prevailing doctrines. This reinterpretation is called a rationalization of past doctrines by Bachelard. But Bachelard’s view of science seems to ignore narratives not taken into account by current scientific doctrines or those that could link present science with doctrines which have lapsed.

In the late 1960s another exponent of a history of science was Canguilhem who felt that the application of such a view of science would make it difficult to construct narratives in science of concepts not currently acceptable. He would include in the history of science attempts that were not in league with represent doctrines but proceeded from rationality. Scholars have argued that Althusser borrows some of their ideas while simultaneously transforming the meaning and theoretical function of some of these categories. So Althusser does not mechanically or systematically apply the philosophical terms epistemological break to Marx.

Balibar has argued that Althusser appeals to Bachelard’s work to produce a solution to the problematic of demarcation. The appeal to discontinuity is in order to drive a wedge between science and ideology and then to produce a theory of that difference so that there is ‘strict separation of the theoretical from the real object of its science of history.’

²⁶ See Balibar, Etienne, ‘From Bachelard to Althusser: the concept of ‘epistemological break’’, *Economy and Society*, Volume 7, Number 3, August 1978, p. 211.

The epistemological break must also be understood, according to Balibar, as a complex mechanism inscribed at various levels in the system. This argument is comparable to Althusser's regard to Marx, as Althusser says "[B]ut for the moment, everything is in play between rigor of a single thought and thematic system of an ideological field. Their relation is this beginning and this beginning has no end."²⁷ It is here Balibar argues that the conception of break cannot be judged on isolation but with respect to other concepts.

If we consider Althusser's proposition that there is an epistemological break in Marx, one must, as Balibar points out, find out the object of epistemological break. That is, in what way can one situate the concept of epistemological break in Althusser when Althusser applies this concept to Marx?

Balibar answers by saying that Althusser's inauguration of epistemological break incorporates a topographical understanding in Marxist philosophy.²⁸ That is, Althusser wanted to construct a theoretical object, a form of knowledge, which can show a general incompatibility between the thoughts of early and mature Marx. Epistemological break hence is 'Althusser's object' in recognizing the difference.

For Balibar, the concept of epistemological break by Althusser can be understood to be designated at many works. In studying them Balibar takes a survey of Althusser's work and points out five such moments. According to Balibar the break is accounted even before Althusser actually names it. Balibar tries to understand the theoretical construct of the break. To pose the argument it would be important to see the crucial aspects of these five moments. The first record of manufacture of the break comes with Althusser's notion of theoretical practice. Hence, the work of *For Marx* can be considered as application of fundamental schema of break to Marx himself.²⁹

In the second and third moment the break is identified, named and is no longer isolated. That is, the break is integral to whole series of other determination of theoretical practice and transforms a preexisting abstraction through three Generalities. The break is generalized and operates in

²⁷ By 'single thought and thematic system' Althusser simply means constant tussle of ideological problematic of Hegel and Feuerbach in Marx. See Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p. 64.

²⁸ See Balibar, Etienne et al, 'Althusser's Object', *Social Text*, No.39 (Summer, 1994), pp. 159-161.

²⁹ As, in Althusser's work *Politics and History* the influence of Montesquieu can be easily noted. The terms like 'shift in terrain', 'discovery of continent' is used by Montesquieu himself. Ibid. p.162.

more overarching sense. This moment coincides with *Reading Capital* and can be seen to be producing an immanence theoretical revolution. The critique of ideological obviousness through science can be termed as crucial aspect of this moment.

Fourth moment registers a correction of the break wherein Althusser self-criticizes the break. This moment coincides with Althusser's works like *Philosophy and Spontaneous Philosophy of Scientists, Lenin and Philosophy* and *Essays in Self-Criticism*. Here Althusser refers to break as no longer a theoretical concept but as a metaphor in order to suggest incompatibility of problematic of early Marx and mature Marx.³⁰ Fifth moment refers to disappearance of the break. Its usage is neither as concept nor as metaphor. It is here that the notion of topography that Althusser develops in a full-fledged manner. Through this understanding of topography as a site of reformulation of dialectics Althusser critiques Hegel. Althusser argues, in Hegel there is no topography and everything is ultimately restored to the unity of the single Idea, which is a merely a phenomenon.³¹

By taking up these five moments, following three arguments can be made. First, the meaning of the break, in the last analysis, is to understand the difference between Hegel and Marx. The concept of topographical understanding of Marx's philosophy suggests that there is a difference in the framework of Hegel and Marx. Secondly, the notion of break is to critique ideological obviousness through a practice of science through theoretical practice. Thirdly, according to Balibar the break registers an immense theoretical revolution in Marx.

However, in his later years Althusser withdraws his materialist philosophy from the debate on epistemology and from theories of knowledge. He accuses himself of excessive theorizations. In his texts on self-criticism he argues that 'philosophy, is in the last instance, class struggle in theory' leading many of his contemporaries to argue that this theory of philosophy is a clear shift away from Bachelardian epistemology. His engagement with Bachelard results, according to Alain Badiou, in a kind of de-epistemologisation of philosophy which basically means in later works particularly in *Philosophy and spontaneous philosophy of Scientists* and *Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser remodeled his conception of philosophy as class struggle in the realm of theory and no longer as the theory of theoretical practice.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 170.

³¹ Ibid. pp. 174-175.

The contradictions and difficulties of Althusser's attempts to ground a philosophy of Marx on these grounds also sometimes has been seen as an attempt to rescue Marxism from the mystification of the Hegelian dialectic. Althusser in his later writings broke with the principles of Spinoza's radical immanence to introduce the idea of class struggle. There was no idea of inner negativity and contradiction in Spinoza's thought so he had to move away.

Atkinson in an article "The Anatomy of Knowledge: Althusser's Epistemology and its Consequences" (1984) takes up a study of two aspects in Althusser, the epistemology and ontology. Atkinson argues, Althusser's epistemology as comprising of theoretical practice and three Generalities and the ontology comprising of the notion of structural causality. Atkinson sees problems with Althusser's epistemology and critiques it. For Atkinson Althusser's epistemology is limited at many levels. First, Althusser's critique of empiricism and the notion of autonomy of the theoretical practice lead to a conception of knowledge which entails infinite circularity. Althusser critiques empiricism and idealism on the point that both take up demarcating essential and inessential from the object and claim the essence as a complete knowledge. For Althusser in so doing empiricism and idealism is reductionist. That is, the former reduces thought to object and the later object to thought.³²

Atkinson says, Althusser's system offers a solution to this. Althusser retains autonomy of theorizing from the real object and hence calls the process of knowledge formation takes up entirely in thought like *mutatis mutandis* the process of economic production takes places entirely in economy. For Althusser the real object is outside knowledge. The relationship real object holds with knowledge is that of 'knowledge relation'. Again, the knowledge relation to real object is further another knowledge relation and this goes on till infinitum. It is here Atkinson says Althusser's schema leads to infinite circularity. For Atkinson this whole process of circularity can be stopped if Althusser admits that there can be knowledge by abstraction through subject. Atkinson's calls this as the problem of Generality I and Solipsism.

Secondly, according to Atkinson, Althusser confuses between different types of statements. That is, there can be a statement which can be verified by observation and there are statements which can only verified by theory. Althusser's confuses between former and the latter. Thirdly, the

³² See Atkinson D, in an article 'The Anatomy of Knowledge: Althusser's Epistemology and its Consequences', *Philosophical Papers*, 1984, 13:2, pp. 2-4.

distinction between ideology and science in Althusser's epistemology remains undemarcated. Althusser does not offer a framework where one can find a criterion for his claim of distinction between science and ideology.

With these problems, Atkinson rejects Althusser's epistemology, particularly the notion of Generalities but maintains the notion of ontology that is the concept of structural causality, for the notion of structural causality gives a non-reductive reading of social formation. But even when the problems Atkinson registers in Althusser's epistemology one witnesses Atkinson considers Althusser's structuralism a breakthrough.³³ Furthermore, Atkinson maintains that Althusser's notion of structural causality still remains relevant because it offers a coherent understand of social whole through the conception of practice and overdetermination.

After taking up Balibar's notion of 'object of Althusser' we are in a position to answer Atkinson's question about how to register the difference between ideology and science. Althusser may answer as Balibar suggests through first and second moments. That is, through the notion of shift in terrain and transformation in philosophy. That is through theoretical practice. However, in assigning strict criteria for the distinction between science and ideology one must avoid surrendering to positivism or scientism which Althusser himself critiqued in Introduction to the text *For Marx*.

Finally, a similar epistemic question can be posed relating to Althusser's epistemological break. Althusser invokes this question by asking, can scientific change or discontinuity have consequences for the relationship between subject and object? Can we distinguish between unchanging real objects outside the scientific process and the cognitive process within science as a function of scientific practice?

This question can be answered through a nuanced reading of Atkinson and Balibar. One can argue discontinuity in a form of rupture leads to transformation of object itself.³⁴ The theoretical object of topographical understanding in Marx through instances and practices precisely fits here. The transformation of object of study in Marx from man to infrastructure and superstructure, human practices can be seen as a discovery of new objects. Moreover, theoretical

³³ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁴ It is because scientific objects according to Bachelard are not given but they are constructed. Bachelard's influence on Althusser can be easily seen here.

practice, as a practice of transformation of abstract to the concrete in thought can be referred to as a mediation of unchanging real object to the cognitive process.

To sum up the discussion on epistemological break would also amount to discuss its effects as what Balibar calls it after the event. Thus it can be argued, the change in problematic in Marx is precisely a change of terrain in Marxist philosophy. It can be argued that epistemological break in Marx is a result of Marx's own theoretical practice.

As a result, Althusser's emphasis on epistemological break can be seen in two ways. First, it is fundamentally about shift in class position in the writings of Marx. According to Althusser it was none other than proletariat's class position which led Marx to write *Capital*. Secondly, epistemological break proves to be a point from where Marx sought of explaining the philosophical category of man which is a consequence of structure of society in the form of practices. Thus, epistemological break offers a point of departure in Marx and from that point onwards Marx is no more concerned with ideological problematic of Hegel and Feuerbach. Here, again it can be said that there is a difference in analysis of social reality of man to Marxist humanism because it is in this difference only lies Althusser's doctrine of epistemological break.

Social reality of man, real humanism of man is a different question than Marxist humanism and for Althusser Marxism is not humanism.³⁵ Althusser's theoretical anti-humanism espouses strict denial of category of man. For in social production and reproduction, men are simply agents or bearers of production relations and hence they are always-already subject to structure in dominance.

2.2 The concept of 'Problematic'³⁶ and its role in understanding Epistemological Break

It is now the time to turn towards another concept of Althusser which would help us understand the problem of knowledge and its relation with object. Althusser uses the concept of 'problematic' to understand the tension between young Marx and mature Marx. Althusser

³⁵ See 'Marxism and Humanism' in Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 221-247.

³⁶ To lay out a definitive meaning to the concept of problematic one might refer to Althusser as he says 'what actually distinguishes the concept of problematic from the subjectivist concept of idealist interpretation of the development of ideologies is that it brings out within the thought the objective internal reference to particular themes the system of questions commanding the answers given by the ideology.' Two aspects can be noted here, first with the notion of problematic ideological obviousness is ruled out and second, while ideologies command in some sense the answers the real however enjoys its autonomy. For more see Althusser Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 66-67.

applies the concept of 'problematic' to Marx to situate the break in the epistemology of Marx. The concept of 'problematic' according to Althusser refers to a structured form of discourse which governs the knowledge relation to the object. Althusser here sees a problem with epistemologies like empiricist and idealist who assume that the meaning of the text is easily and directly accessible to the subject. What subject sees itself is structured by the field of problematic its object and problems.

Problematic thus constitutes a mechanism which governs the knowledge relation between object of knowledge and real object. Althusser applies this concept to argue that from *German ideology* onwards Marx broke with the idealist and empiricist problematic espoused by Hegel and Feuerbach. Since epistemological break registers a shift in the way the concepts are referred in Marx's later texts it can be argued that Marx shifted his terrain and shifted it forever.

Now what role did the concept of epistemological break play in understanding of Marx? According to Althusser epistemological break provided the Marxist philosophy with a new object. The object was mode of production, relations of production, class struggle and the relationship between theory and practice.

For Althusser it was with the break that Marx represented a true philosophy. Althusser considers the work of *Capital* as characterizing the epitome of Marxist philosophy. With taking up epistemological break as the precursor and concepts from Marx's later writings Althusser tried to say that the problem with traditional Marxism was it saw theory and practice as two distinct phenomena however as Marx himself suggested in *German Ideology* that no human activity can be separated off from the ensemble of forces that produce it.³⁷

Althusser starting from the position that human life consists in practice and that all human activity consists in production and reproduction of social life argues that Marx made it possible to now think of and analyze these practices in specificity and their relation to social totality. For Althusser Marx's *Capital* is such an analysis, that is an analysis of social formation comprising of practices forming a totality.

³⁷ Lewis, William, *Louis Althusser and the Tradition of French Marxism*, Lexington Books, 2005, Lanham, pp. 166-177.

With these formulations Althusser claimed that early phase of Marx dominated by Hegel and Feuerbach enslaved the scientific aspect of Marxism. With these proposition and emphasis on *Capital* Althusser tried to answer the line of demarcation and the distinction of Marxist philosophy.

As we began this chapter I argued about epistemological break as the guiding thread for the Marxist science. Hence the effectivity of break must be examined. It is here we must take up the study of science of history and its relation to Marxist philosophy.

For Althusser Marx's invention a continent of history was at the same time a transformation of philosophy. Althusser here refers to a relationship of historical materialism that is science of history to that of dialectical materialism that is Marxist philosophy. For Althusser Marxian immense theoretical revolution lies in founding of historical materialism (hereafter HM) and a transformation of philosophy dialectical materialism (hereafter DM).

Althusser in the essay "Marx's Relation to Hegel" in *Politics and History* discusses Marx's founding a science of history. Althusser develops five theses in accordance to justify his position about Marx's immense theoretical revolution. We must therefore construct the main argument of that essay and examine Althusser's exposition of difference between Hegel and Marx. However, Althusser also considers revision to his some of his theoretic tendencies which we would examine in coming sections.

According to Althusser Marxist philosophy contains a theory of science of history (HM) and a philosophy of that science (DM), the foundation of both lies in the same moment. For Althusser it could only have been possible by breaking away from hitherto existing philosophies. The core aspect to be challenged by Marx was Hegel's philosophy and the dialectics.

The distinction of Marx's method from that of Hegel lies specifically in the notion of dialectics. Althusser refers to the Preface of the second edition of *Capital* wherein Marx says 'With Hegel it is standing on its head it must be turned upside down if you want to discover the rational kernel within mystical shell'. In other words, Marx refers to inverting the Hegelian dialectics.

But Althusser says, in inverting Hegel not only the sense but even the structure must also be inverted. What could it possibly mean to invert the structure of dialectics? Althusser answers by

saying that the rational kernel must be extracted. But this extraction is not simple it is rather “demystification” of dialectics.³⁸ This demystification of dialectic takes place by a critique of ideological problematic of Hegel and Feuerbach by Marx and founding of historical materialism.

Alain Badiou in *The Adventure of French Philosophy* (2012) discusses about relationship of Hegel and Marx and the epistemology of HM and its relation to DM at length. For Badiou, Althusser’s work consists in characterizing first of all variants of vulgar Marxism. From this, according to Badiou Althusser tries to formulate a conception of Marxism wherein one can situate its proper object that is, Marxian scientific object.³⁹ This scientific object produced by epistemological break cannot be easily and totally distinguished with DM rather it is part of DM. Thus, dialectical materialism as a philosophy is a guiding thread to HM.

2.3 Ideology and Science in Althusser

As we have already seen that Althusser’s notion of epistemological break in Marx was to claim that Marxist philosophy is a science. That is Marxist philosophy has a proper object which it studies. The problem which ideologies possess in Althusser is effectively that of constant tussle and perpetual struggle with the sciences. Therefore to argue a strict line of demarcation between science and ideology is itself a wrongly posed question.

Furthermore, for Althusser to seek for an external guarantee of the truth of sciences is itself a question based on false premise. It is because any ‘epistemology that sees the relation between object of knowledge and real object as a problematic one, i.e. that regards knowledge itself as a problem is simply ideological and to be rejected for that reason.’⁴⁰ Althusser being a thinker of immanence believes that the criterion for the truth of sciences is produced by its own protocol.

Althusser bolsters his claim, that there is an epistemological break in Marx, by suggesting that the difference between science and ideology cannot be seen in rationalist term. The problem with

³⁸ Althusser, Louis, ‘Marx’s Relation to Hegel’ in *Politics and History: Montesquieu Rousseau Hegel and Marx* translated by Ben Brewster, New Left Books, 1972, London, p. 172.

³⁹ Badiou, Alain, ‘The (Re) commencement of Dialectical Materialism’ in *The Adventure of French Philosophy* translated by Bruno Bosteels, Verso, 2012, London, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Geras, Norman, ‘Althusser’s Marxism: An Account and Assessment’, *New Left Review*, I/71, January-February, 1972, p. 68.

rationalism was precisely that it took ideology as an error. However, for Althusser drawing from Spinoza argues that “what is true is sign both of itself and of what is false, and recognition of error (of partial truths) depends on starting from what is true.”⁴¹ It means that the rationalist understanding of ideology slips into truth and error couple of ideology. For Althusser this is the precise problem with rationalism that it treats ideology as an error and shuns away with the effectivity of ideology. That is, the effect of science can only be seen from the other side that is after the break or after the displacement.

Here, I would also like to refer to the influence of Spinoza on Althusser. It is important to note this influence also because for Althusser the real heir of Marx is not Hegel but Spinoza. Spinoza’s influence on Althusser is significant in two respects. One, in Spinoza we see a clear difference between true and imaginary. For Spinoza there is nothing beyond and everything is: ‘is’. Spinoza says in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* “The right way to interpret Scripture is exactly the same as the right way to interpret nature.”⁴² For Spinoza underlines a relation between history and nature and discusses its exposition in reading.⁴³ Further only if whatever the scripture says and the internal of the truth of the scripture be considered one can easily pass on in interpretation but that should not discount the history of the text.⁴⁴ It is clear that for Spinoza the history of the text at work becomes important. This fact clearly shows the difference in unequivocal terms of reading in Spinoza and hence gives a clue of Althusser’s detour to interpret the real. This detour was essential for Althusser in order to understand Marx what Althusser could not by directly reading Marx. Thus we can also argue a method of reading is inevitable in Marxist philosophy.

Following the above four section one can argue now the specificity of Marxist theory. The specificity hence is constituted by epistemological break which generated many new categories with epistemic value in Marx. Borrowing from Althusser itself one can argue history is made by

⁴¹ What Althusser maintains is that the sciences contains its own notion of truth and error is perceived by internal protocols of truth only.

⁴² Spinoza Benedict (or Baruch), *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Jonathan Bennett 2017, p. 61.

⁴³ For Spinoza ‘[T]o interpret nature put together a history of nature, taking this as the data from which we infer the definitions of natural things. And what is needed to interpret Scripture is to prepare a straightforward history of Scripture, taking this as the data and premises from which we validly infer what the biblical authors meant’. For more see Spinoza Benedict (or Baruch), *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Jonathan Bennett 2017, p. 61.

⁴⁴ Spinoza adds ‘[W]hen we are interpreting Scripture and sorting out its contents, if our only premises or data are drawn from Scripture itself and its history, we can go forward with no risk of error, and we’ll be able to discuss the things that surpass our grasp as safely as those we know by the natural light’. Ibid. p. 61.

class struggle, there is no subject of history, philosophy is an intervention and philosophy is class struggle in the realm of theory. In sum it can now be argued that Marxism is a theory of science of social formations and this theoretical element is constituted by break in epistemology of Marx.

2.4 Althusser's revisions on Epistemological Break

Althusser in his later writing *Essays in Self-Criticism*(1976) revises the notion of epistemological break and admits that earlier writings on the same contain a great deal of theoreticism. Althusser however still maintains his position that there is a break.

Althusser maintains that, his exposition on the philosophical category of epistemological break was to assert the primacy of science in Marxism against deviations of bourgeois ideologies. He admits that his earlier writings particularly in *For Marx* he considered this break in a theoreticist and rationalist term. Thereby, in this rationalist speculative drama as he mentions the notion of class struggle was absent. It was also because Althusser defined Marxist philosophy as guiding theoretical practice thus he called it 'Theory of theoretical practice'. Althusser's great deal of theoreticism in his earlier writings was leading towards idealist rationalist impression where although the notion of scientism was there but the notion of class struggle was missing. It was only because of the essential characterization, epistemologically, Althusser held of Marxist philosophy as 'theory of theoretical practice'.

To justify the claims Althusser argues that one can look upon the function of conceptions in the writings of Marx from *The German Ideology* onwards. To bolster the claims he argues early Marx deals with conceptions like essence of man, alienation is changed now in the mature Marx as mode of production, relation of production, productive forces, social classes rooted in unity of productive forces and relations of production, ruling class oppressed class and so on.⁴⁵

By taking up Lenin's position that '[W]ithout an objectively/ revolutionary/theory there can be no objectively/revolutionary/movement.'⁴⁶Althusser argues that science is the index of objectivity of theory, the combination of terms revolutionary and science. What can be seen here

⁴⁵ Althusser, Louis, 'The Break' in *Essays in Self-Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, pp. 108-109.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.116

is Althusser broadens the notion of science from mere theory or positivism by locating a revolutionary objective element in Marxian science which was indispensable for revolutionary liberation of proletariat.

2.5 The limits of Epistemological Break

Although the concept of epistemological break is often seen as a crucial concept while studying the Marxist philosophy many scholars argue that Althusser's claim is based on selective reading of Marx. It can be said that Althusser's periodization of Marx can be a suitable criteria to understand the actual object of Marxist theory however it possess certain limitations.

According to Paul Patton, Althusser's epistemology possesses a 'contradiction'. On the one hand it talks about autonomy of theoretical practice while on the other hand it can be seen that theoretical practice is not totally independent on other practices of social formation.⁴⁷

Atkinson argues, that Althusser's epistemology particularly Generality and theoretical practice falls into the trap to solipsism and relativism. By solipsism what Atkinson mean is that Althusser fails to distinguish between different kind of statements and knowledge. The purely factual empirically verifiable statements like The battle of Waterloo took place in 1815 can be distinguished from interpretative ideological or theoretical statements Men have a free will. The problem of relativism can be seen as the fact that Althusser does not specify wherein the 'truth' of Marxist theory lies. And by the taking up the problem of relativism in Althusser, Atkinson says, Althusser's schema misses a proper demarcation criterion between ideology and science.⁴⁸

William Lewis argues that there is a constant playing of conventionalism and idealism in Althusser's epistemology. Lewis notes this with respect to Althusser's claim that "the process of knowledge formation takes places entirely in thought."

Many other challenges have recently emerged. Challenges to Althusser's rendering of Marxist philosophy which argues that there is a break in epistemology of Marx is at many level; one, his

⁴⁷ Patton, Paul, 'Althusser's Epistemology: the limits of the theory of theoretical practice', *Radical Philosophy*, Spring 1978, p. 15.

⁴⁸ See Atkinson D, 'The Anatomy of Knowledge: Althusser's Epistemology and its Consequences', *Philosophical Papers*, 1984, 13:2, p. 4.

conception of epistemological break is criticized for being an epistemic violence; two, his structuralism leaves little space for agency; three, his conception of break itself is founded on other theories of epistemology of sciences (particularly conventional school).

For many Althusser's reading of Marx while taking up many external assessment and tools, particularly Bachelardian influence may not be faithful to internal consistency of Marxian and would do an epistemic violence. It is in these terms David Neilson accuses Althusser of epistemic violence. And suggest Althusser that Marx "be read on his own terms."⁴⁹ Neilson argues that the break from Hegelian influence in Marx had already taken place since Marx's writing in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript 1844*. However, as I read Althusser, I find it he is quite nuanced in arguing about the place of break in Marx and the fact that distinguishes idealist-anthropological phase of Marx from anti-humanist, scientific phase: *Capital*. In the same vein, Althusser is very strict here; he says, such a scientific understanding of *Capital* can only be grasped by "reading."⁵⁰

Althusser's notion of "history being a process without subject" is criticized for not taking account of experience and human nature which is bearer of its own agency.⁵¹ Again I would argue this is a gross misreading of Althusser. For Althusser, structure-in-dominance is ever-pre-given and subject formation is inscribed through ideological state apparatus, it is here that possibility of 'agency' is being ruled out.

Perrie Bourdieu a French Sociologist was critical of Althusser on many grounds but more particularly on the fact that Althusser's influence soon became 'Althusserianism' which soon acquired "priestly monopoly" on how to read *Capital*. But it can be easily seen that Althusser's concept of symptomatic reading and emphasis on Marx of *Capital* has precisely larger goal. One, the theoretical anti-humanism and two constructing and object for the further development of Marxist theory.

⁴⁹ Peters, A. Michael, Neilson David & Jackson Liz, Post-Marxism, humanism and (post)structuralism: Educational philosophy and theory, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2020, p.4.

⁵⁰ For more on Reading in Althusser as well as in Jacques Derrida see Assiter Alison, Althusser and Structuralism, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol.35, No.2, (Jun., 1984), pp. 286-289.

⁵¹ Peters, A. Michael, Neilson David & Jackson Liz, Post-Marxism, humanism and (post)structuralism: Educational philosophy and theory, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 2020, pp.4-5.

Needless to say, Althusser long before many postmodernist and poststructuralist argued how Capital represents an altogether different philosophy “infinite in its possibilities.” Althusser never says Capital to read as something containing pure truth but symptomatically so as to carve out a “theory of history”. In reading Capital Althusser goes on to develop several essays emerging out of what he calls “We read Capital as Philosophers.”

Thus it must be kept in mind that Althusser’s emphasis on later Marx is only for the fact Marx invented science of history by critique of Bourgeois Political economy.

Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to argue about the philosophical category of epistemological break. I argued that according to Althusser asserts that epistemological break is an important concept because it draws a line of demarcation between the problematic of early Marx and mature Marx. According to him the problematic of early Marx was ideological and that of mature Marx was scientific.

Althusser borrowed the concept of epistemological break from Bachelard maintaining the objects of sciences are constructed. That is they are not given. Althusser argues that Marxist theory also contains a well-defined object which is there in mature work of Marx *Capital*. The object includes mode of production, forces of production, relation of production, class struggle and so on.

In studying the break we took up two major interpretations of William Lewis and Atkinson and one interpretation of Etienne Balibar. While the former maintains that the break was based on Althusser’s own struggle within the PCF for its humanist interpretations of Marxist writings which Althusser found misleading and revisionist. For Atkinson Althusser’s epistemology particularly his notion of Theoretical practice and Generalities contains problems of solipsism, relativism and idealism.

Balibar, who was a student of Althusser, considered the category of epistemological break as Althusser’s Object. That is, through this concept Althusser tried to argue general incompatibility between early Marx and mature Marx. The epistemological break according to Balibar provides

us with a topographical understanding by critiquing Hegelian dialectics. Thus it can be argued that Althusser by trying to introduce the concept of break tried to demarcate the object of Marxist philosophy from other philosophies.

With taking up these three interpretations I tried to show the relevance of epistemological break as a philosophical category to distinguish Marxist philosophy and specify its object. There can of course be limitations of Althusser's epistemology and his assertion of epistemological break but it can definitely be said that epistemological break shows us that there is great departure from early idealist Marx. To sum up it can be said that Althusser's philosophical category of epistemological break however limited still helps us situate a line of demarcation between Early Marx and mature Marx. And finally we can say it helps us, indeed, effectively to see the object of Marxism.

Chapter 3

Althusser on Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus

“*So ideology is as such an organic part of every social totality. It is as if human societies could not survive without these specific formations, these systems of representations (at various levels), their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life.*”

Louis Althusser, *For Marx*

“Men ‘live’ their ideologies as Cartesian ‘saw’ or did not see – if he was not looking at it – the moon two hundred paces away: *not at all as the form of their consciousness, but as an object of their ‘world’ – as their ‘world’ itself.*”

Louis Althusser, *For Marx*

3. Introduction

In this chapter I examine Althusser’s theory of ideology. One of the reasons that Althusser finds it important to formulate a theory of ideology is that he maintains historical materialism as a science of history already contains a theory of ideology within itself. In other words, Marxism as a science of social formation possesses a theory of ideology within itself.¹ It is because among the instances which make a social formation, ideologies have their effectivity. And this, at the

¹ Althusser says ‘On the fact that the science founded by Marx is the science of the history of social formations. Because of this it gives, for the first time, a scientific content to the concept of ideology. Ideologies are not pure illusions (Error), but bodies of representations existing in institutions and practices: they figure in the superstructure, and are rooted in class struggle. If the science founded by Marx shows up the theoretical conceptions of its own prehistory as ideological, it is therefore not simply to denounce them as false...it is because they were the theoretical detachments of practical ideologies which performed necessary functions in the reproduction of the relations of production of a given class society.’ Through this I wanted to make it clear, the sense that Althusser has when he says a theory of ideology is indispensable to Marxist theory since Marxism is a science of social formation. For more see, Althusser, Louis, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, New Left Books, 1976, London, pp. 155-156.

same time, also constitutes to the structural aspect, that is, among all the determinations of ‘structure in dominance’² ideologies have their intelligibility.

Since ideologies permeate everything, ideologies have their determination in structure in dominance, we will also examine how they permeate and how can one transcend ideology.

I would also like to add that in Althusser the concern towards ideological deviations runs throughout and Althusser argues strongly about it, in and among, all of his important and major works. However given the limited objective of this thesis I will restrict myself to only some works, among many others, which are given more attention in Louis Althusser, the essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation),’ in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*.

To return to Althusser’s theory of ideology today in fact then would have two fold purpose first, an emphasis on science in the epistemic sense of the word and the mechanisms which produce a science, this also at the same time pertains to the question of epistemology (the object of study for Marxist theory, theoretical practice, Generalities and so on for that matter) and two, to specify and posit a theory of ideology (which would help us understand the contradiction and reproduction of capitalism).

In this context, in the first two chapters in this thesis, I attempted to address the answer to the first question and here I attempt to address the second question. If Marxism is a science of social formation (or society) then a theory of ideology is inevitable to understand the determinants of a social formation. It is because among the instances which makes a social formation ideologies play an effective role. That is, ideologies have a proper place assigned, though complex, within a social formation.

The chapter deals with the conception of ideology as Althusser argued in his famous essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus” (hereafter ISAs). Picking up the conception of ideology from that essay we will see, the implications both political and ideological it has vis-à-vis reproduction of capitalism. I begin with three questions first, why a ‘theory of ideology’ is

² I use the term ‘structure in dominance’ the way it has been used by Althusser in the essay ‘On the Materialist Dialectic’ that is, structure in dominance constituting of a complex unity of all determinations. A social formation is thus a structure in dominance. For more see, Althusser Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp. 200-213.

indispensable to Marxist theory; second, ISAs essay central arguments and third, in what way the psychoanalytical understanding of ideology differs from Althusserian and lastly, the problems with Althusser's theory of ideology.

In the previous two chapters I have dealt with ideology but there we saw its relationship with sciences and the problems therein (viz. humanism, empiricism, historicism etc.). In other words the ideological distortions with Marxist science; which resulted in deviations like humanism, empiricism, historicism and economism. As Paul Hirst, a British post-Marxist says that Althusser's challenge to classical theories of ideology is a part of a broader "rejection of humanism and historicism", which basically means Althusser's attempt to formulate a theory of ideology, was to critique these deviations within Marxist theory.³

Hirst sees a primacy of economy in Althusser's framework of a theory of ideology.⁴ But in Althusser as we find a great emphasis on 'social formation' which argues about determinations within a social formation and their correspondence to each other, thus it can be argued that Hirst's observation is mistaken. However, Hirst offers us a great understanding of ideology by critiquing empiricism which for him is a structure effect.

Here, our approach is different from Hirst in the sense that in this chapter, I will chart out how ideology is inscribed in the materiality of practices and how through the materiality of practices the reproduction of capitalism takes place.

That is, we would see how ideologies play their part within a social formation. In this regard, I would also partly rely on the essay "Contradiction and Overdetermination" from *For Marx*, for we are discussing here the effectivity of ideologies in a social formation. As Stuart Hall suggests, in Althusser, we find 'Marx's "totality" – as essentially a complex structure, not a simple one.'⁵ This conceptualization of totality as complex structure helps us to understand the effectivity of superstructure. Stuart argues, for Althusser ideologies have materiality inscribed in it and operate

³ Hirst, Q Paul. 'Althusser and the theory of ideology', *Economy and Society*, 5:4, 1976, p.385.

⁴ A primacy of economy because when Althusser says 'reproduction of conditions of production' it basically suggests that that reproduction of conditions is given in the economy itself. This position, according to Hirst is already taken up by Marx in capital Volume II. For more see, Hirst, Paul. *On Law and Ideology*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, London, pp.45-46.

⁵ Stuart Hall adds 'Althusser persuaded me, and I remain persuaded' which can also be suggestive of Althusser's novelty of the concept of Marx's totality as a complex one. For more see Hall Stuart, 'Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and Post-structuralist Debates' in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 1985, p. 91.

through practices. In Althusser, these practices have double articulation. That is, through the structure in which they are inscribed and through the effect of the structure. I would, thus, use Hall's interpretation to argue that in Althusser the theory of ideology explains the contradictions and reproduction of capitalism. That is, ISAs essay in addition to Contradiction and Overdetermination can help us understand the contradiction and reproduction of a capitalist social formation.

From my understanding, taking up "Contradiction and Overdetermination" and "ISAs essay" it can be argued that Althusser's work constitutes a decisive moment in the problem of theory of ideology within Marxist theory. It is because the theory of ideology in Althusser cannot be read in isolation. It has to be read in context of a social formation and structure in dominance. With this, Althusser conceptualizes ideology as a 'universal' element of society operating on its own materiality: ideology, hence, is not a simple error, false consciousness or misrepresentation but rather a system of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts). Through this notion of universality and materiality as we can see Althusser gave the theory of ideology a wider connotation in Marxist theory.

From my point of view, it is important that we take two aspects of Althusser's theory of ideology which are central in the understanding of 'universal element of society operating in its own materiality'. The notion of materiality is of great use to us as we shall see. It is significant to spend some time on this aspect of Althusser because it gives us a plausible theory of universality of ideology or I would prefer to call totalizing effect of ideology in structure in dominance.

First, Althusser's theory of ideology takes up a general theory of signifier drawing from Lacanian influence which "could provide a general theory for the unconscious but warns that general theory of signifier should be distinguished from regional theory of language."⁶ This basically means Althusser wants to construct a theory of systems of representation through a general theory of signifiers which could help us understand ideology and interpellation.

⁶ This position (Althusser's theory of ideology comprising of linguistic and non-linguistic signifiers) has been properly argued by Kang, for more see, Kang D Kyong, 'Language and Ideology: Althusser's theory of Ideology' in *Language Sciences*, Volume 70, November, 2018, p. 68.

Second, ideologies are imaginary social relations and relations to the conditions of production. Ideologies thus, are no pure illusion but an “imaginary relation to the real conditions of existence.”

As the chapter progresses these two positions will also be examined and elaborated.

Drawing on Althusser’s *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (2014) I argue a theory of ideology is crucial in the thesis that I am presenting in two senses one, in actual terms, in a capitalist social formation, the social relations are a manifestation of material relations (since, economy is determinant in the last instance), that is, class relations are maintained ideologically. Secondly, ideologies play a dominant role in providing maintenance and reproduction of relations of production assigned in a social formation. The role of state apparatus is central in reproducing the ruling ideology. Hence, it can be argued that Althusser’s conception of ISAs offer a great advance in the theory of ideology to understand the reproduction of Capitalism.

With this, I will schematize, how we understand the centrality of state and ideological subject formation. Formulating this systematically is really very important at this juncture to understand not only the developments in Marxist theory (particularly pertaining to the relationship of state and ideology vis-à-vis primacy of economy) but also for the famous overturning (or let us use the Althusserian word understanding ‘social whole’ in Marxist theory) of orthodox Marxism’s base-superstructure model which discounts if not undermines the role of state in maintenance of dominant ideology. In Althusser, this awareness is significant for the reader and let me emphasize it again it has three implications; first, the primacy of base and that the superstructure follows base is no longer the tendency, that is, there is no hierarchy of instances; second, following from first point only the notion of social whole which is central to reproduction of conditions of production;⁷ third, economy remains a determinant but in the last instance. As the chapter progresses, these three distinguished but interrelated points, will also be considered thoroughly.

Firstly, let us briefly discuss the famous overturning. It is important to discuss this overturning to understand the role and place of infrastructure within a social formation. That is, to understand the overturning of base superstructure schema in orthodox Marxism would help us understand

⁷ Althusser, Louis, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays*, Monthly Review Press, 1971, London, p.134.

the notion of social formation and its determinations. In Althusser we find that there is no division or fixed hierarchy between infrastructure or base (economy) and superstructure (ideology, politics, legal relations). Since Althusser has a conception of ‘social whole’ and is interested in social formation he does away with the base superstructure schema of orthodox Marxism.⁸ However, economy still remains determinant but in the last instance. This understanding of superstructure having effectivity of its own critiques the assumptions of classical Marxism.⁹

The question then is how ideology and ideological state apparatus help in reproduction of capitalism. In Althusser as we have already seen in Chapter 1, ideology does not exist as false consciousness unlike what it has been argued in orthodox Marxism. Judith Butler, Paul Hirst, Slavoj Zizek and Terry Eagleton make it absolutely clear and strongly emphasized that Althusser rejects the position of ideology as ‘false consciousness’ hitherto held in classical Marxist theories. As we can note according to Butler Althusser conception of ideology as materiality of practices is a blow to “ontological dualisms” which understood economy and superstructure as two different topographies.¹⁰ It can therefore be argued that the effectivity of ideology arises from materiality of practices inscribed in ideology.

For Althusser the existence of ideology is in its materiality. That is, it is the materiality of ideology which is embedded in state apparatuses which makes us subjects. However, Althusser also maintains that there lies a relative autonomy of instances (political, economic, and ideological) that is, relative autonomy of the political and all instances together form a complex whole. That is, instances have relative autonomy but one instance determines the other. Through this I argue that Althusser critiques basic assumptions of classical Marxism which is about fixed hierarchy of base-superstructure. It is here, in Althusser, we find the critique of descriptive conception of state as seen by orthodox Marxism.¹¹

⁸ This position is clear in Marxist theory from ‘Engels’s letter to Bloch’, 1890. For more see Appendix to Contradiction and Overdetermination in Althusser, Louis, *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, pp.117-128. Furthermore, this can also be partly explained by the influence Structuralism had on Althusser.

⁹ Classical Marxism maintained a fixed hierarchy of instances with its primacy of base (economy) and superstructure following it, this problem is also referred as economism.

¹⁰ Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power Theories in Subjection*, Stanford University Press, 1997, California, p.122.

¹¹ Althusser argues the classical Marxist tradition failed to distinguish between state power and state apparatus. This distinction to Althusser is very important as it points out the expanded and overarching inscription of state.

3.1 Problems with Ideology in Classical Marxism

Althusser's essay 'Ideology and Ideological state Apparatus' begins with a pertinent question 'the reproduction of conditions of production' but it says little about why this question interests Althusser.

Althusser does this having seen the struggle between Marxist theory and its deviations and hence critiques the 'theory of ideology' prevalent in Classical Marxism. According to Paul Hirst, the critique of ideology was a significant aspect to challenge the economism prevalent within Marxist theory in rationalist forms. Under the guise of term "False consciousness", considered as a very popular jargon in Marxism became a verbatim of pardoning all the difficulties of Marxist politics.¹² One can argue the notion of ideology as false consciousness is certainly misleading. It is because through the thesis of false consciousness one can evade the effectivity of ideology in relations of production.

Althusser's framework of ideology hence is not only great advance from classical Marxist theories but a break in certain form. The sections forthcoming in this chapter will elaborate on this problem.

The Marxian concept of ideology is rather simplistic. Marx in his text *The German Ideology* refers ideology as pure illusion, false consciousness.¹³ For Marx, ideologies are distorted version of reality hence are like an illusion, dream, fantasy etc. Such a claim of Marx is based on the fact that 'ideologies inevitably support the class relation.' Since for Marx the language of real life is established in the 'material intercourse', 'sensuous-activity', in other words, objective, what ideologies represent is other than this. But then, here arises a problem. Can objective knowledge be possible in such a case?¹⁴ That is, then according to Marx objective knowledge can only be possible in a classless society. This problem is resolved in Althusser theory of ideology for which ideologies simply are a 'lived' relation in a society. The question of rationality of ideology is a question I leave it for now.

¹² Hirst, Paul. *On Law and Ideology*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, London, pp.13-14.

¹³ Marx, Karl, Engels, Fredrich. *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, 1968, Moscow, p.7.

¹⁴ This is, as it seems to me a brilliant problem raised by Timothy McCarthy. For more see McCarthy, Timothy. Marx and the problem of Ideology, *Social Science*, Autumn 1979, pp.204-209.

Ideology in Marxist tradition from Marx onwards has gained great emphasis. The concept of commodity fetishism in *Capital* Volume one which is elaborated and explained by Gregory Lukacs in *History and Class Consciousness* as the concept of ‘reification’ with great rigor can be said to be an example emphasizing the diversity the concept of ideology has. Not only this, the term Antonio Gramsci employed ‘hegemony’ is also a pertinent concept in Marxist theory. The argument is, Marxist theory is comprehensively rich with various conceptions of ideology since its inception, in thinkers like Marx and Engels, Gramsci, Lukacs, Adorno, Althusser, Eagleton, Jameson¹⁵ etc.

The fundamental element which distinguishes Althusser’s conception of ideology is the determinacy he gives it of ‘material existence’ and ‘ahistorical character’ with its ‘socio-practico’ functioning.

In Marxist tradition, particularly classical Marxism state has been dealt as an ‘instrument’ in the hands of dominant class. Orthodox Marxism having been governed by principles of economic determinism did not see state as a factor for ‘maintenance of dominant ideology’ through ideological state apparatus. In other words classical Marxism’s economic determinism fails to see the role of state and ideology as autonomous and not derived from economy.

Here, I would like to point out that there is an intricate relationship and even emphasis on ‘state’ in Althusser’s conception of ideology. Althusser believes that Marxist tradition is strict on State.¹⁶ That is, whatever are the writings of Marx; they are not extensive and then do not give enough emphasis to state except in the form of mere a descriptive theory.¹⁷ Marx’s writings suppose state merely ‘as managing committee’ of Bourgeoisie as Marx mentioned in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. According to Marx the state is ‘The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.’¹⁸ Hence, one can say

¹⁵ See Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Routledge, 1989, New York, pp. 1-15, 35-50.

¹⁶ Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New Left Books, 1971, London, p. 137.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.138.

¹⁸ Marx, Karl Engels Fredrick. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969, p.15.

that in the writings of Marx one cannot find much attention given to the state, whatever is there remains only at the level of description.¹⁹

Since we find in Althusser state is as Marxists classics argue is ‘state apparatus’ and there is a distinction between state power and state apparatus, it is an important distinction in Althusser’s characterization of ‘ideological state apparatus’. It is because, state apparatus, for Althusser, incorporates a vast mechanism of repression of which proletariat has paid for this experience with blood.²⁰ These state apparatuses as Althusser argues execute and intervene in ‘the interest of ruling classes’. The concept of state as state apparatus thus refers to a number of institutions and offices which represent and maintain the ruling ideology.

Althusser distinction between what is called state power and state apparatus can also be seen as a ‘functional’ role of state only assigned in the interest of ruling class. Hence, state apparatus has no meaning without state power argues Althusser.²¹ Although this is a vast area²², I would only focus on how Althusser read state in Marxist theory and his development of a theory of ideology.

3.2 Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus in Althusser

To understand the whole schema of how ideology is understood in Althusser and what centrality state apparatus has it would be important that we discuss the essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus’ briefly. The essay has primarily three arguments. First, it problematizes the understanding of state that is present in writings of Marx and Engels (particularly in *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*) which understood state as merely instrument in the hands of bourgeois class. Second, it critiques the sense ideology has in writings of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* and gives his own account of ideology

¹⁹ This is one of question among many others which intrigues me that why Marx did not write anything systematic on State. This to me does not seem accidental unlike him not writing on dialectics.

²⁰ Ibid. p.137.

²¹ Ibid. p.140.

²² In the sense that it comprises of debate between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas on ‘Relative Autonomy of state’ in 1970s in *New Left Review*, for more see, Miliband Ralph, Marx and the state, *The Socialist Register*, 1965; *State in Capitalist Society*, Basic Books, 1969, New York; The Capitalist State: Reply to Nicos Poulantzas, *New Left Review*, I/59, Jan Feb 1970; Poulantzas, Nicos The Problem with Capitalist State, *New Left Review*, I/58, Nov Dec 1969; The Capitalist State: A reply to Miliband and Laclau, *New Left Review*, I/95, Jan Feb, 1976.

through Freud.²³ The elements which it critiques in the understanding of ideology from classical theories are two “one, that ideology is a false representation of the real; and two, that ideology is a distorted reflection in consciousness of real social relations.”²⁴ Three, Althusser gives an understanding of elements of his theory of ideology by two hypotheses: Thesis I, “Ideology represents the imaginary relationships of individuals to their real conditions of existence”. Thesis II, “Ideology has a material existence.”

Two important questions emerge from his schema. One, if we exists *always already* as subjects why state is required (that is, what role law plays)? And two, does the reproduction of conditions of production nothing to do with economy and the role it has been assigned in a social formation?

It is these two questions which I argue are the elementary foundations of Althusser’s development of theory of ideology.

With these two questions in mind we will also see the role interpellation and subject formation has to play in Althusser’s account of ideology and the problems with it. These two questions are addressed when Althusser says his notion of ideology has centrality of state and is constituted of materiality. In other words, the elements i.e. ideas, representations etc. of which ideologies are made up of do not have simply ideal or spiritual existence but have material existence.

Since Althusser is posing these questions with specificity to Marxist theory and is posed with the problem ‘reproduction of the conditions of production’ we will see what role at the level of functionality ‘economy’ has to play.²⁵

It is important here to raise this question of difference between ideological and repressive apparatus. Althusser names ideological apparatuses constitutes ideological subject formation through the apparatuses like, the religious, educational, family, legal, political, trade union, communication, cultural etc. The repressive consists of government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons, etc.

²³The impression of Freud in Althusser is mostly, if not always, implicit. That is, he does not mention what influences he draws apart from applying them in his own projects.

²⁴ See Hirst, Q Paul ‘Althusser and the theory of ideology’, *Economy and Society*, 5:4, 1976, p.385.

²⁵ Since Althusser begins the essay by ‘reproduction of conditions of production and a (mis)reading of Capital Vol. II’, as Hirst argues, I too with him, prefer to see this problems in that context. That is, what relation ideology has with ‘reproduction of labor power’ in a definite and specific social formation?

The crucial difference between both is that the latter uses violence while the former is purely ideological.

It is important here to argue here that not only the further development in the theories of ideology has often neglected the relationship of ideology, state apparatus vis-à-vis economy but also that not much emphasis has been put on this part. In other words, they have mostly been post-Marxist.²⁶

3.3 Towards a Theory of Ideology in Althusser

When one reads ISAs essay one finds, the embeddedness of ideology is so much from state apparatuses to mass media to construction of a discourse that it is important that we formulate a theory of ideology from Althusser's the point of view. According to Paul Hirst "Louis Althusser's work is the primary means by which these problems, inadequately signaled under the notion of 'ideology', have been thought through."²⁷ Hirst basically means that it was only Althusser who began to seriously think about the problem of ideology in Marxism.

The question with which Althusser begins the essay is the reproduction of condition of production. That is, reproduction of productive forces means of production and relations of production. How does this take place? It can be said that the role of state enters here in order to assign the functions which apparatuses entail. That is, by equipping with the 'know-how' state reproduces labor power for the reproduction of productive forces. And by so doing state ensures the reproduction of productive forces. As state is 'state apparatus' *par excellence* it exists to maintain the relations of production through the functional role it has.

However, Stuart Hall, a British-Jamaican sociologist holds the view, relying on 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' essay, which would seem equally plausible here, that it is double articulation between 'structure' and 'practice' which are result of previously existing practices helps in maintaining the structure in dominance. It can thus be argued that structures are result of

²⁶ I find this to be an interesting problem in recent developments of Marxist theory.

²⁷ Hirst, Paul. *On Law and Ideology*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, London, p.1.

previously existing practices. For Hall, 'practice is how structure is actively reproduced.'²⁸ Taking up this position two arguments can be made, and both arguments would help us understand reproduction of social formation. Hall, by giving a notion of double articulation actually gives an anti-reductionist theory of ideology. Secondly, the relationship between practice and structure as corresponding each other explains how a social formation remains intact.

Now, to understand the role of ideology in subject formation we must understand that we are *always-already* subjects. A simple hailing can lead to subject formation or interpellation. Althusser maintains here that a general theory of signifier in language helps in interpellation (that is, as Althusser gives an example, calling the name- Peter! And Peter turns back). For Althusser, in this sense we are already inscribed in ideology and subjectivised into it.

Althusser's theory of ideology consists of two elements; first, it says ideologies have no history, and second, it is an imaginary relationship to the real conditions of existence and it has material existence.

Paul Q. Hirst critiques Althusser by suggesting that the role which Althusser sees in state apparatus for ideological formations is already inscribed in functional role of state and the branch of economy. Hence to Hirst, Althusser's schema of ideological interpellation is not free from primacy of economy in it. Let us see Hirst's critique of Althusser in detail.

Firstly, Hirst sees Althusser's theory of ideology a great advancement from classical theories of ideology. He finds Althusser's 'theory of ideology' as anti-reductionist and critiques sociologism i.e. reducing subjects to class position.²⁹

To say that ideology is a 'distorted representation of reality', a view, which classical Marxism held, puts it to be an empiricist knowledge where the subject tries to know the exterior i.e. object, though, falsely. That is, it fails to know, hence, 'false' consciousness, the term used by classical Marxism. It is then suggestive of the fact that knowledge here is empiricist and experiential. Thus, it says 'Ideology is a knowledge derived from experience.'³⁰ In an understanding like this

²⁸ For more see, Hall, Stuart, 'Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and Post-structuralist Debates' in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 1985, p. 96.

²⁹ Hirst, Q Paul, 'Althusser and the theory of ideology', *Economy and Society*, 5:4, 1976, p.385.

³⁰ Hirst, Paul. *On Law and Ideology*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, London, p.23.

it can be said that 'the experiences the subject has, are mediated by the social position of the subject.'³¹ It can then be said that ideology is the structure of reality itself and social relations mediate them through subject's experience. Finally, it is the social formation which is the determinant then of the subject's experience. Here, then according to Hirst we are falling prey to reductionist and sociologist understanding of ideology.

But more significantly, there is something peculiar happening here. In this understanding of ideology one can say "the practice of interpretation is derived from the subject's social position because ideology is a form of misrepresentation of the real determined by the position of the subject in the real."³² Here, real becomes the determinant of ideology. Again Hirst says "we can see here that the reality or truth of ideology is outside it in the prior determination or the creation of a system of places. It follows that reductionism is a legitimate mode of analysis."³³

There are two variant representative of the above mentioned problem first is, historicism and second is, structuralism.

For historicism particularly Lukacs' in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) argues it is the subject of history embodied in class position which knows. That is, there is no knowledge which is 'disembodied' or 'purely objective'. "The subject transcends alienation in revolutionary praxis and therefore transcends the limits of point of view, so that knowledge through the experience of this class subject is adequate to the totality it experiences."³⁴ Hence, knowledge can only be through 'subject' of history.

Secondly, structuralism argues that there are structures of places which have experience effects and those experience effects create what we call knowledge. It does not conceive of any 'true subject' which can know history because there can be no true knowledge through the experience of subject. Hirst argues, borrowing from Althusser that all knowledge by a subject is empiricist and therefore inadequate, ideological.

Now, the second aspect which Hirst sees in Althusser theory of ideology and which is a strong break from classical Marxism is ideology has a material existence. That is, it is not phantasmic,

³¹ Ibid. p.24.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. p.25.

³⁴ Ibid. p.26.

ideal or spiritual. This is a rigorous proposition and I will elaborate on this (at the cost of repetition).

It can be said that Althusser returns to the classic problem of idealism-materialism duality and tries to ‘displace the opposition or couple, ideas: matter’. As we already know a great deal of the orthodox Marxist theory of ideology is the theoretical residue of a fight between idealist and materialist philosophies of history. For Althusser ideas are real since they are always inscribed in social practices and are expressed in objective social forms (languages, rituals, etc.).³⁵This invocation is significant in two senses because it rejects ‘matter- idea’ duality and it critiques ‘philosophical materialism’.

Hirst argues, for Althusser, ideology is an instance of social totality, they are social relations and are as real as economy itself. In Hirst interpretation the concept of overdetermination has strong bearing on Althusser’s notion of “social totality”. In other words, the social totality in Althusser is made up of many instances existing in a hierarchy but they have different weight in the totality. One determines the other and gets determined by the other. And this multiple-mutual determination is what according to Hirst is concept of overdetermination. Althusser argues that “historical materialism conceives of the social totality as a hierarchy of instances and these are as real as one another; they merely have different relative weights in determining the whole. This thesis of being determined and determining is what Althusser means by the concept of over determination.” To sum up it can be said that Althusser’s thesis that ideology is not superficial is a critique of certain kind of materialist conception of history where ideas have a superficial role or are epiphenomenal.

Now, the third thesis and most misunderstood thesis ideology has no history. How can something have no history? Althusser believes that being a communist, politics is not universal. And the sense here is, since he is a communist and believes that the domination of man by man gives way to administration of things that is, in a communist society, the political will disappear. It is the nature of structure of all social totalities that he argues so. Hirst says,

“There will never be a totality in which the human subjects who live in social relations can comprehend them through experience [only] because social totalities do not exist in a form which is accessible to human experience.

³⁵ Ibid. p.28.

For him the subject is related to the totality through [only] an ‘imaginary’ relation (emphasis mine). This ‘imaginary’ relation of subjects to their conditions of existence is the foundation of ideology.”³⁶

From my point of view it is worth discussing this quote. For Althusser the human experiences in a social totality are not fully transparent to each other. It is also because “they are imaginary relations”. With ideologies, in Althusser’s perspective, purely intersubjective relationship is not possible.

But another question which can be posed here with the same deal of sincerity is can there be an end to ideology? Or when will imaginary relations of subjects to their real conditions of existence end?

It can be said that the answer lies in the fact that ideologies will end when we arrive in a purely intersubjective relationship, that is, in a communist society. Let us see how.

The notion that ideologies end presupposes that we know the actual social relations i.e. true consciousness of social relations and in turn they could be known to us in experience. The answer of such a question, which is, when a situation like that would arrive, is already given in Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. Therein Marx speaks of ‘the social relations of communism purely in terms of spontaneous human intersubjectivity.’³⁷ Hence, one can argue, taking up from *1844 Manuscripts* that the ideologies which Althusser argues in his essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus’ can only come to an end, in actuality, in a communist society.

Then how to understand class interest and class struggle vis-à-vis ideologies? Are not ideologies grounded in that sense? This is the question we began with and it is here we attempt to resolve this.

Ideological struggle can be an approach which at the same time is anti-reductionist and non-sociologist. But ideological struggle is merely a struggle for the relationship imaginary has to the real conditions of existence. It is undoubtedly non reductionist and non-economist but it does not solve anything. At best, it gets puzzled, on the very symptoms it is based upon. That is, we are on altogether different terrain now. Ideological struggle to be autonomous is merely suggestive that

³⁶ Ibid. p.29.

³⁷ Ibid. pp.30-32.

we have left the ‘real struggle’ which is class struggle. In other words, real as opposed to ideological, which is symbolic. This brings me to another question how does ideological struggle relate to structural problems which suggests class interest prevails in a structure-in-dominance. The imaginary relation which one ‘lives’ as a real condition of existence leads to a living of myself in the form of ‘as if’. And this ‘as if’ is simply my lived relationship in the social which is a ‘relation’ to my condition of existence which is in the imaginary. It gets into that gross business of recognition-mis-recognition like Galileo’s pendulum. This problem is solved when we see Marxism as a ‘science’ of social formation. That is, this science knows ideology to be ideological. This Marxist science has an opening, a break. Ideologies are recognitions which have a closure. But let us leave this problem for a while and we would get back to it.

On the concept of Interpellation and Subject formation

The concept of interpellation has got great reception now, which was at the center of Althusser’s theory of ideology since Althusser invented his theory. To begin with, we will be to answer two questions, both theoretical one, what does the term ‘interpellation’ mean in Althusser, and two, how does it operate? In other words, what function ‘interpellation’ has pertaining to subject formation?

Interpellation can be understood as a process through which a subject is constituted through a pre-given structure. It takes place through language (hailing a name- Peter! And Peter turns around, for instance), theology (kneel down and you will believe or repeat these words and you will start believing etc.), baptism and so on. What this mechanism fundamentally does is constitutes our identity and to use a Lacanian term, in so doing it reflects of what I am. It is, hence, a ‘mirror-reflection’ of mine to *myself*. It is thus constitution of identity, conscience and a definite recognition.

The function it has is formation of identity, giving recognition and subject formation. It is from here it starts to function and it does through the ‘ideological apparatuses’ which we have argued in detail. It assigns a job, know-how, a skill through apparatuses of the state³⁸ to the subject and produces the effects: the reproduction of conditions of production.

³⁸This has to be understood in relationship with the number of apparatuses: both ideological and political I have already above mentioned in the section ‘Ideology and Ideological state apparatus in Althusser’.

It is important to underline the fact that Althusser sees these functions of interpellation with respect to ‘reproduction of labor power’ and that how ideologies help to perform that. It is here that we see the constituted power of Ideological apparatuses and Subject formation, that is, subjects qua Subjects (with capital ‘S’), that the complete schema of ideological state apparatus functions in Althusser.

Along with that, let us elaborate our specific understanding of interpellation, subject formation and subjectivity through Judith Butler. Butler captures Althusser understanding of ideology quite extraordinarily. And I would argue, it is the later part which she focuses the most.³⁹ She goes straight to the heart of the matter interpellation and subject formation, that is, she evades the question with which Althusser began quite comfortably.

She argues that the theory of interpellation where “that which is a subject is hailed and he or she accepts the “terms” by which they are hailed. For her ‘interpellation is not an event’ but certain way of staging the call.”⁴⁰ The subject formation takes place only upon acceptance of guilt and that turning back on oneself constitutes the movement of conscience. For Butler this entire staging takes place as a consequence of language yet remains within in discourse. “Baptism (the famous example by Althusser) exemplifies the linguistic means by which subject is compelled into social being.”⁴¹ It should also be noted that for Butler the structure of language still remains a point of means through which subject is hailed. But this aspect can be juxtaposed to Althusser’s position of “Kneel down and you will believe.”

Hence, it can be argued that whatever is the means of interpellation it remains an important category in Althusser’s theory of ideology.

3.4 Developments in the theory of Ideology: Slavoj Zizek, Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson

³⁹By the later part I mean Althusser’s theory of ideology can be read in two parts. One, where ‘state’ and ‘reproduction of condition of production’ is a question; and another wherein ‘interpellation’ and ‘subject formation’ takes places. To me both the questions seem quite distinct yet interconnected. However, this problem I leave it for now.

⁴⁰Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power Theories in Subjection*, Stanford University Press, 1997, California, pp. 106-107.

⁴¹ Ibid. pp.110-111.

The development in the concept and theory of ideology by Slavoj Žižek and Terry Eagleton is critical of Althusser and the same time expands it. For Žižek, who sees Althusser to be only focusing on ideology from the external that is, from apparatuses, is limiting. There is something significantly internal to the ideology for the effects it produces. Žižek develops a theory of ideology by critiquing Althusser's one seems to be far more superior but in reality remains within 'Hegelian ideological vertigo'. In Žižek too, ideology has a materiality and it has to do be subjects' imaginary relationship to real conditions of existence but in Žižek that seems to provide a natural world. It then becomes that ideologies become a part of reality itself, they get inscribed in reality. Such is the interaction of our world with ideologies that we find home in it. The effect of ideology in our everyday world is so much that Žižek calls it 'the specter of ideology'.

Terry Eagleton finds it difficult to give a definition to ideology. For him ideologies constitute a variety of meanings and it is precisely this variety which makes ideologies far more mystical and esoteric speaking in terms of their role and functioning.⁴² Such is the resistance of ideologies towards ascriptiveness, is precisely what it is which makes them so mystical. Nevertheless, Eagleton gives a very succinct yet elaborate account of ideologies with privileged position to Althusser's theory of ideology.

Eagleton argues for Althusser, "one can speak of descriptions or representations of the world as being either true or false; but ideology is not for him at root a matter of such descriptions at all, and criteria of truth and falsehood are thus largely irrelevant to it."⁴³ Eagleton here is pointing out the same problematic of classical Marxism of ideology through with which Althusser broke for developing his "materialist theory of ideology." Thus one can argue by taking up Eagleton's position that for Althusser ideologies simply represent the way I live my relation with the society as a whole.

Eagleton sees "there is no doubt that Althusser strikes a lethal blow at any purely rationalistic theory of ideology - at the notion that it consists simply of a collection of distorting representations of reality and empirically false propositions. On the contrary, ideology for Althusser alludes in the main to our affective, unconscious relations with the world, to the ways

⁴²Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology An Introduction*, Verso, 1991, London, pp.1-4.

⁴³Ibid.18.

in which we are pre-reflectively bound up in social reality.”⁴⁴ To sum up it can be argued that this even settles the account with Marxian sense of ideology, which we saw in writings of Marx and Engels particularly *The German Ideology* which takes up a rationalistic sense about truth and falsity claims of ideology. In Althusser hence, the world of ideology has auto-intelligibility of its own.

Literary Criticism

It would be unfair if I do not underline the systematic work with seminal questions which has been done by Marxist literary theory and criticism in understanding the ‘theory of ideology’. Marxist literary criticism as Terry Eagleton argues “analyses literature in terms of historical conditions which produce it; and it needs, similarly, to be aware of its own historical conditions.”⁴⁵ Through this definition I argue that any literary production is not free from historical and material conditions which produce it.

One can even argue if Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of practice of transforming them, why here talk about literary criticism? Eagleton answers by saying because “Marxist criticism of [literary theory] is part of larger body of theoretical analysis which aims to understand ideologies– the ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times.”⁴⁶ Eagleton sees literature as a mode through which ideologies can be disseminated and therefore he calls it literary mode of production.

For Eagleton the “Author is a producer” This is an essay by Benjamin wherein, as Eagleton argues, he suggests that apart from books, literature being a source of knowledge they are at the same time production. That is, “Art as production.”⁴⁷ “A writer”, Marx comments in *Theories of Surplus Value* (1862-63), “is a worker not in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publisher, in so far as he is working for a wage”⁴⁸, adds Eagleton. It is clear that the author with herself carries the social form and conditions of production and thus, it can be argued that one of the chief tasks of Marxist philosophy today is literary criticism.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵ Eagleton, Terry. Preface in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Routledge, 1989, New York, pp. xi-xii.

⁴⁶ Ibid. pp.xii-xiii.

⁴⁷ See Ibid. pp.55-70.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.56.

Among the current developments in conceptions of ideology the psychoanalytic conception has gained some currency. It can be said that the psychoanalytic conception of ideology is an advance from the Althusser's conception of ideology. In Althusser's conception of ideology we saw how ideology interpellates. Dolar considers the best way to return to Althusser would be to see Althusser's relationship to psychoanalysis with a Lacanian framework.

To understand this Dolar begins with the concept of clean cut. By clean cut he means that element of exteriority of apparatuses and interiority of subjectivization. Dolar's question then is "how exactly materiality entails subjectivization?"⁴⁹ That is, if we are already subjects would not that we be blinded by materiality, argues Dolar.

To put it in the simplest way, there is a part of the individual that cannot successfully pass into the subject, an element of 'pre-ideological' and 'presubjective' *materia prima* that comes to haunt subjectivity once it is constituted as such. The fact is that the passage is never clean. According to Dolar, in psychoanalytic theory of ideology "there is always an element which remains to be subjectivised." Hence, for Althusser, "the subject is what makes ideology work; for psychoanalysis, the subject emerges where ideology fails."⁵⁰ Herein we see a precise critique of Althusser through psychoanalysis.

It can be argued here that even when consider some limitations of Althusser's theory yet it still offers a great advance to understand a social formation and reproduction of capitalism. It also at the same time gives us an understanding of intelligible role of ideologies in the form of lived experience.

Hirst's *On Law and Ideology*(1979) argues quite precisely of how sciences transcend this imaginary relation that the subject lives to the real condition of existence. Thus, it is worth noting what he offers.

For Hirst, Althusser's so much strong emphasis on many phrases⁵¹ throughout is not accidental.⁵² They are 'history as a process without subjects or goals', Marxism is not historicism and so on,

⁴⁹ Dolar, Mladen. Beyond Interpellation, *Qui Parle* , Spring/Summer 1993, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1993), p.77.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 78.

⁵¹ Hirst, Paul. *On Law and Ideology*, The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, London, pp. 1-40.

⁵² This is the sense which I got and is strictly based on my reading of Hirst's '*On Law and Ideology*'.

are particularly based on the claim that science transcends the ideological subject formation or it is science only which knows to transcend. That is, sciences do this through an opening, a rupture. While ideologies are tactfully about recognition and closure, sciences are about opening.

Marxism, hence, as science of society, according to Hirst can impact fully transcend ideology and this is why, Marxism remains, and will always be a scientific doctrine. This does not amount to saying Marxism to an essentialist doctrine on the contrary being a science it has capacity of opening and breaks. Althusser's critique of all the deviations with such a strong language is throughout and not accidental. It is through this opening which sciences have, we find Althusser returning to the real purity and truth of Marxist theory. Althusser so strongly says in the essay 'On the Young Marx' in *For Marx* 'Marx sacrificed man for science of history'.

Finally, then our motto today must be *From Capital to 1844 Manuscripts*. That is, from science of society we can get a clue to a purely inter subjective society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued how Althusser develops his theory of ideology to explain reproduction of capitalism and the contradictions therein. In so doing I relied upon Stuart hall's approach that relied on 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' to build a theory of ideology in the form of form of double articulation between structure and practice. Althusser's ISAs essay helped us understand the role of state apparatus in reproduction of capitalism. The key component of Althusser's theory of ideology is its 'material determination' and 'socio practical functioning'. Althusser maintained that Marxism as a science of social formation already contains the place of ideology within a social formation. That ideologies are inscribed in practices and ideologies are not illusion thus the central arguments were Althusser's critique of classical conception of ideology and his development of theory of ideology which properly explains the reproduction of capitalism as well as how capitalism maintains its class struggle; and two, ideology can only be transcended by science that is through, breaks, ruptures and openings.

Through these two arguments we can say the task of day for a Marxist and Communist party is to understand the scientific theoretical element in Marxist theory and try to apply it to social movements what so ever they are.

A theory of ideology as Althusser argues is particularly significant in two ways one, as Althusser critiques class reductionism and sociologism; it is important that we see how women movements, anti-caste movements can relate itself through Marxist categories like ideological struggle. In the same movement Althusser's structuralism and conception of totality makes Marxism an anti-reductionist theory preventing it from bourgeois and idealist deviations like humanism, empiricism and so on.

Hence, lastly how do we see Althusser's influence in understanding ideologies and social movements? The answer lies in to what extent one locates the epistemic value of scientific doctrines of Marxist theory with 'autonomy of sciences' through 'theoretical practice' and I argue that these are the only tenets which can lead to emancipation of working classes and to that extent Althusser's theory of ideology is relevant even today. It is also because if Marxism as Althusser claims it to be a science of social formation then all the instances (economic, political, ideological, and religious) has effectivity and determination. Althusser's 'theory of Ideology' is a bold attempt to understand effectivity of instances and their determination.

Conclusion: Althusser's Legacy

In this thesis I argued about the relationship between science and ideology in Marxist philosophy through Louis Althusser's intervention. In so doing the thesis tried to understand, demarcate and evaluate the epistemic basis of Marxist philosophy and thereby examine philosophical deviation within Marxism. Humanism, Empiricism, Idealism and Historicism can be seen as those philosophical deviations which compromised Marxism to attain a full and adequate epistemic status. Althusser argues that in the project of reading Marx, turning to Bachelard was only to look for epistemological status of Marxist philosophy.

The exact problem with humanism, empiricism, idealism and historicism is precisely that they are reductive and they assume knowledge to be given. To put it theoretically that is in terms of Althusser's epistemology it can be said that humanism, empiricism and historicism take the raw material of theoretical practice as knowledge and idealism reduces real to thought.¹ It is with these limitations Althusser proposes "Knowledge as production", "theory is also a *practice*", "the production of knowledge takes place entirely in thought." By so suggesting Althusser maintains the autonomy of theoretical practice. For Althusser it is precisely the scientific practice that is autonomous and critical.

It is in this context of Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s, and the problems with its philosophical deviations, that Althusser develops his breakthrough concept of 'theoretical anti-humanism.'² In

¹ The problems Althusser has with empiricism and idealism are brilliantly argued in D Atkinson, Norman Geras, Andre Glucksmann, Alex Callinicos and Ted Benton. For more see Atkinson D, 'The Anatomy of Knowledge: Althusser's Epistemology and its Consequences', *Philosophical Papers*, 13: 2, 1-18, 1984; Geras Norman, 'Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment', *New Left Review*, I/71, Jan/Feb, 1972; Glucksmann Andre, 'A Ventriloquist Structuralism', *New Left Review*, I/72, March/April, 1972; Callinicos Alex, *Althusser's Marxism*, Pluto Press, 1976, London; Benton Ted, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*, Macmillan, 1984, London.

² There are many breakthrough concepts in Althusser. I call them breakthrough concepts because they enable us to understand a social reality with altogether 'different meaning'. And these concepts are methodological *par excellence*. With altogether different meaning all I want to point out is that in Althusser the concepts are not used in 'ideological obviousness'. Such concepts, although borrowed yet novel, are, can be the concept of 'Overdetermination', 'structure in dominance', 'problematic', 'epistemological break', 'Ideological state apparatus', 'reproduction of the conditions of production' and so on. For a better clarification it is important that I take an example. Let us take the concept of 'epistemological break' in Althusser. At the outset it may seem that this concept discusses a break in epistemology of Marx that is a general incompatibility between early and mature Marx. But this is not all. And more importantly, Althusser uses this term to also express that mature Marx is actually involved in developing a system of concepts which would explain a social formation and its determinants. For Althusser with

the Chapter 1 of this thesis, I dwell in what it means in Althusser when he argues about theoretical anti-humanism. There I argued that Marxist humanism is undesirable if one seeks to discover epistemic basis of Marxism. It is because humanism bases itself on ‘essence of man’ and to cite their evidences they rely on *Marx’s 1844 Manuscripts*. But according to Althusser this humanist Marx is the early Marx who could not yet break from the ideological problematic of Hegel and Feuerbach.

According to Althusser, Marx in his writings from *Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology* broke with ideological problematic of Fichte, Hegel and Feuerbach. In my Chapter 2, I have examined the philosophical category of epistemological break in detail. In so doing I argued that whatever be the limitations³ of Althusser’s conception that there is an epistemological break in Marx nevertheless the conception offers a great understanding to periodize Marx. Althusser argues it is only through the epistemological break that Marx invented a “continent of history” and a philosophy infinite in its implication. Epistemological break however cannot be considered as singular event but rather as a process. Althusser in the later writings (*Essays in Self-Criticism*) acknowledges that he dealt the notion of break in his earlier work (*For Marx*) in deeply theoretic terms.

But to understand epistemological break is to understand general incompatibility between early and mature Marx. And it cannot be done if one discounts another significant concept in Althusser that is the concept of ‘problematic’. While reading *For Marx* one finds this concept is actually a methodological breakthrough. Let us see how.

The concept of problematic can explain how a new knowledge is produced. According to Althusser a philosopher too is born somewhere and begins to think. As no one has control on one’s beginning all beginnings are contingent. Marx was born and began to think in the ideological context of Hegel and Feuerbach. The concept of problematic suggests that firstly a question must be posed of the questions.

the break the mature Marx is no longer the same, as mature Marx has broken from the ideological problematic of Hegel and Feuerbach. For more see Chapter 2 in this thesis.

³ By limitations I mean that Althusser understood the break in purely rationalist term. It is also argued that the break is a process and not an event. Althusser duly recognizes these limitations as he writes in *Essays in self-Criticism* than the positions held in *For Marx*. Even considering these limitations the break offers a great advance to understand the difference in object of Marxist theory.

Following from break, Althusser argues in the essay 'Marxism and Humanism' in *For Marx* that Marx broke with every theory that based history and politics on essence of man. For Althusser, Marx 1845 onwards discovered a new science with totally different 'system' of concepts as 'concept of social formation, mode of production, relation of production, superstructure, ideology, determination in the last instance by economy, determination by other levels' etc.⁴

It is important that we spend some time discussing this. It is important because these lines explain the theoretical revolution invented by Marx in the sense that they demarcate the object of study for Marxist theory. And it is through this theoretical revolution we got the specifics of the 'object of study' for Marxist theory. As Althusser argues for mature Marx, it is no longer the question of essence of man but mode of production and social formation of whom man is a point of arrival.

David Maruzzella in a recently published article 'The two Bachelards of Althusser' puts it more succinctly by saying that "These men [real men] are thus the point of arrival of an analysis that begins with the social relations of existing mode of production, class relations, and the class struggle."⁵ In my reading, what Maruzzella points out taking a cue from Althusser is that Marx particularly after the break deals with different question altogether.⁶ Althusser uses Bachelard to pose this question more specifically. That is, he borrows the concept of 'epistemological break' from Bachelard and 'problematic' from Jacques Martin to show the difference between early Marx and mature Marx. These two concepts in Althusser can be said to offering a theoretical index in the reading of Marx. Althusser hence points out borrowing from Bachelard that in sciences nothing is given everything is constructed. It is in the same way that, Marx too constructed an object of study and it is particularly this object (mode of production, social formation etc.) of study which Marx should be credited of and it is mature Marx who arrives at this object of study.

But these advances by Althusser also came from struggles of his intellectual career. Althusser was, deeply involved with the French Communist Party (hereafter PCF) and often used to comment on the misreading around the humanist Marx and early Marx which was considered to

⁴ Althusser, Louis, 'Marxism and Humanism' in *For Marx*, Verso, 1969, London, p.227.

⁵ Maruzzella, David, 'the two bachelards of Louis Althusser' in *Parrhesia*, 2019, pp.181-182.

⁶ Althusser is very precise here as he notes that Marx in *The German Ideology* says 'Not only in their answers but in their very question there was mystification'.

be part of whole Marx. Althusser sheer and critical engagement within the PCF led Althusser to come up with novel responses. As one reads Althusser's seminal text *For Marx* one notices that in the footnotes Althusser makes a great deal of references to the members of PCF. It can therefore be argued that the chief interlocutors of Althusser were mostly from the PCF. The point being Althusser's project particularly the essays in *For Marx* cannot be read without taking into account the problems of interpretation PCF members held with respect to writings of Marx.

As I suggested above that Althusser argues mature Marx broke with ideological problematic of Hegel and Feuerbach. But then what is ideology and how it effects? Ideologies are forms of recognition with closure. Whereas sciences have an epistemological basis and have breaks. In Althusser ideologies are not false consciousness, illusion, error, spiritual etc. as classical Marxism believed. Ideologies have a material existence and have no history. In so arguing Althusser advances the theory of Ideology in Marxism. According to Althusser, Marxism as a science of social formation already contains a theory of ideologies. It is also because among the instances which form a social formation ideologies play an effective role as ideologies have intelligibility of their own. Therefore it can be argued that the way classical Marxism shuns away with characterizing ideology as false consciousness as false consciousness needs examination.

Althusser's advancement of theory of ideology in Marxism can be seen as a breakthrough to understand the contradictions of capitalism. In offering an explanation of reproduction of Capitalism one can argue even Althusser's as early work as *For Marx* is quite accurate.

It is in the context of explaining the contradiction and reproduction of capitalism that the Chapter 3 in this thesis takes up the study. The chapter argues that through structure and practices capitalism is being reproduced and the contradiction in capitalism is ideologically reproduced. And it is in this regard it argues that Althusser's conception of ideology explains it meticulously.

The chapter also takes up the study of recent developments of ideology particularly in Lacanian psychoanalysis. It does so to see the problems with and limitations of Althusser's conception of ideology. But it finds that Althusser's analysis of ideology nevertheless offers a great help to understand a social formation and reproduction of Capitalism.

While discussing Anti-humanism, epistemological break and reproduction of Capitalism in three Chapters, where do we situate Althusser's work today? That is, how do we place him in the present context?

In this regard, it would be unfair if I do not discuss the most significant concept of 'Aleatory materialism' which argues about arbitrariness of the swerve. By arbitrariness of the swerve Althusser actually means that 'what exists does not necessarily have to be' and that "the world is not an accomplished fact (*fait accompli*)."⁷ According to Althusser, there is a diceyness to the nature of things. These positions are developed in Althusser through an interpretation of Epicurus, Spinoza, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Heidegger and Marx.⁷ Through reading this, two arguments can be made about Althusser's materialism. First, it is chiefly distinct from traditional notions of materialism which argue primacy of philosophical category of matter over thought. And second, it gives a radical explanation of present state of things. In sum, it can be argued that 'Aleatory materialism' offers a meticulous explanation of development of society and history that is non-teleological, non-linear and arbitrary.

But this is not all. Althusser's structuralism offers a great advance to understand the reproduction of capitalism. As Stuart Hall, taking a cue from the essay 'Contradiction and Overdetermination' puts it so well that structure is produced in practices and practices are produced in structures. As Althusser too puts it succinctly "everything is accomplished in advance; *the structure precedes its elements and reproduces them in order to reproduce the structure.*"⁸ It can hence be argued that Althusser's structural Marxism quite adequately explains the successful reproduction of capitalism in post war period.

Hence, through this thesis, two fundamental questions are being answered. First, through Althusser we find an adequate account of role ideas have in relation to economy and society, and the scientific alternative to humanist Marx which Althusser gave have a rigorous conceptual and logical advance and 'theoretical anti-humanism' precisely demarcates the object of Marxist theory. In other words according to Althusser, Marxism actually studies mode of production, social formation, class struggle and so on than 'essence of man'. Of course essence of man is

⁷ Due to limits of space I cannot go into detail here. However, the reader can refer 'The Underground Current of Materialism of the Encounter' in Althusser, Louis, *The Philosophy of Encounter: Later Writings 1978-87*, Verso, 2006, London.

⁸ Italics original, Ibid. p.200.

what *1844 Manuscripts* by early Marx is involved in studying but it does not have proper epistemological basis. It is only *Capital* which according to Althusser contains a science of history.

Second, the contradiction of capitalism is very specifically and adequately explained through Althusser's theory of ideology which are non-reductive and anti-sociologist. Through Althusser we learned that Marxism as a science of social formation already contains a theory of ideology. It explains the effectivity and role ideologies have in a social formation. Furthermore, the theses in context of explaining the theory of ideology are significantly adequate. That is, an ideology having a material existence explains the generic mutation and deep pervasiveness of ideologies. That ideologies have no history places it so pertinently as to how ideologies are closure to the present. That is, ideologies have very impactful 'recognition effect'. They form the 'world outlook' of men. To put it more pointedly ideologies form men's *world* itself.

But there is a way out of these ideologies. Sciences with proper epistemic basis break with ideologies. Sciences are autonomous and have an immense critical function which helps the way out of ideologies.

Undoubtedly, through these two answers we can simply understand the breakthrough Althusser's reading in the present context offers. It actually offers an object proper to Marxism and explains adequately the contradictions of capitalism. In this way it can be argued that Althusser offered a great deal of conceptual and logical advance to Marxian thought.

So how do we situate Althusser's legacy today? Or is not that Althusser's still thinks with us that is he alive with us, so how can we conclude his legacy so early? Let us not dispute this word and use it to our convenience, even if that would be our practical excuse.

I see three most important aspects currently which still remains as a problem. First, as Balibar notes, Althusser offers the most significant axis to think about communist politics in the current political conjuncture. Second, as Callinicos notes with Althusser we learnt to understand the difference between Hegel and Marx. To Callinicos, Althusser is also the person who had offered perhaps most important concepts to endow us better understanding of Marxist theory, "contradiction and overdetermination", "epistemological break", "theoretical practice", the difference between 'Hegelian totality' and "Marxian social whole" to name a few. And lastly, as

borrowing from Maria Turchetto one can argue that Althusser's project of "reading Capital" offers a great epistemological contribution to philosophy.⁹

Further, it is also important to suggest some important development and questions pertaining to, invoked by, Althusser's theoretical contribution.

Althusser remains a great influence on post-structuralist science and technology studies (STS).¹⁰ Althusser's concept of 'epistemological break' and the difference between Hegelian and Marxian conception of totality is used and adopted by post-structuralist STS. Post-structuralist STS find Althusser understands 'totality' as anti-subjectivist, anti-humanist and anti-historicist and hence for them it is of great importance for innovatively reframing anti-humanism. In so far as post-structuralist STS uses these concepts in their research and project it can be argued that they are greatly indebted to Althusser's work.

Finally, of course, from my understanding, the notion of "problematic", social formation, that "Marx invented a science of history", "history is a process without subject", "critique of historical time", and many more concepts like these are yet to be explored and studied. These concepts and theorizations do contain a lot of potential which is still unexamined. But more on that some other day, in some other piece.

⁹ Althusser's contemporary influences has been properly studied and examined in the work *The Althusserian Legacy* particularly in chapters 1, 3, 4 and 6. For more see Kaplan, E. Ann and Sprinkler Michael (Eds.), *The Althusserian Legacy*, Verso, 1993, London.

¹⁰ For more on this aspect see, Soderberg, Johan, 'The Genealogy of "Empirical Post-structuralist" STS, Retold in Two Conjunctures: The Legacy of Hegel and Althusser', *Science as Culture*, 26:2, pp. 185-208.

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