

Reviews

Author's Reply to Review: Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism

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In his review of my book *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism*, Hristos Verikukis offers some very insightful criticisms. Particularly helpful, I think, are his comments regarding the work's attempted reconstruction of Althusser's philosophy of science. Though these criticisms are much appreciated, by focussing his review on what I write about Althusser's philosophy of science, Verikukis misses the book's argument as a whole. In addition to causing him to write off the majority of the text as "unrelated to the [book's] core claims" (Verikukis 85), this selective attention also leads him to misread the work in both its details and its conclusions. Similarly, this focus comes at the expense of evaluating how well the book fulfills some of the other tasks it set out to do such as placing Althusser's thought in its context and providing a representative history of the relations between Marxism-Leninism and Western Marxism in the 20th century.

Before turning to Verikukis's insightful critique of my reconstruction of Althusser's philosophy of science, it would perhaps help to say a bit about the structure of the book as a whole and the way in which this structure supports its argument. On the basis of one favourable reference given in a very specific context, Verikukis identifies me as the "disciple" of Roy Bhaskar. However, if I am anyone's disciple, it is not of a transcendental realist, but of a historically and culturally immanent one: John Dewey. Indeed, it is Dewey's method of "intelligence" or the "inquiry into the conditions and consequences of a value object" (Dewey 1958 390-391) that informs my own method. If we take the "value object" that my book is concerned with to be the con-

stellation of values associated with Marxist philosophy, then my book's argumentative structure can be seen as analogous to Dewey's attempt in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* to reconstruct philosophy as a whole by (a) reflecting on its evolution, (b) analyzing its present problems, and (c) proposing a "reconstructed" philosophy suitable for today's needs (Dewey 2004 xii-xxv). Though I do not mention Dewey explicitly, this methodology is made explicit in the book's introduction and special attention is given to why, for this critical method to work, one must engage in an extensive historical analysis of Marxist values (Lewis 2005 17-18). Contrary to Verikukis' contention, this moment of my argument is not historicist: nowhere do I invoke the spectre of historical determinism. In fact, I argue against such determinisms (Lewis 203-5). Further, in order to make this method fruitful in terms of the reconstruction that is its goal, it is necessary to do exactly the kind of historical work for which the review first praises me and then maintains is extraneous to my argument (Verikukis 82, 85).

Though one might get a very different idea of what Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism is about from reading Verikukis' review, its focus is not Marxist philosophy of science. This is not to say that Marxist philosophy of science is not important to its argument. However, reflections on this subject emerge out of and compliment reflections on the relations among international and domestic politics, political philosophy, economics, and the general French intellectual milieu. Failing to recognize the overall way in which the book is structured and, in particular, missing the way in which the genealogical

and critical reflections are to be taken (that is, as reflections on the production and reception of values and these values' current conduciveness to producing future goods), Verikukis zeroes in on my reconstruction of Althusser's philosophy of science and this philosophy's relation to politics. As these are important elements in my argument, the reviewer is quite right to identify places where the book is obscure and my arguments underexplained and I have no problem with this move. Indeed, he is perspicacious in his recognition that my discussion of Althusser's philosophy of science, its revisions, and its import are under-discussed and in his general claim that this discussion lacks the level of precision necessary to its object. More particularly, he is right to maintain that my failure to explain what I mean by science's "external check" on ideology leaves my argument for Althusser's realism quite obscure (83). Further, his assertion is correct that my reconstruction would have benefited greatly from incorporating the work of Suchtig and Baltas (Verikukis 82).

These criticisms acknowledged, it should also be noted that, in his zeal to critique my reconstruction of Althusser's philosophy of science, Verikukis is sometimes not the most careful or charitable reader. As noted above, this approach and attitude are evidenced in his disregard for the book's argument as a whole but they are also apparent in the specific critiques he makes about the book's aporiae. To give one example: Verikukis charges that I fail to explain Althusser's empiricism when, in fact, I take pains to give his specific definition and to reference its use (Lewis 2005 165-6). To give another, he maintains that I provide no textual evidence to support my claim that Althusser changed his view of science. In fact, with the aid of

close readings and with the support of secondary sources, the book provides extensive evidence for the claim that Althusser changed his views about science and about the relationship of science to other material practices (Lewis 2005 191-97, 208-10).

Even if his review is incorrect in many of its details and even if Verikukis misses the argumentative structure of the book as a whole, there is no doubt that Verikukis's main assertion is correct: Althusser's philosophy of science and my reconstruction of it needs to be more developed. Therefore, I hope it will please him that, in my recent work, I am attempting to do just this. As the critiques he provided have made this work stronger than it otherwise would have been, I thank Mr. Verikukis for his insights and I especially thank *New Proposals* for publishing his review.

References

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