**LOUIS ALTHUSSER**

**T**he current of “structuralism” to which Althusser’s Marxism is connected. His self-critical admitting that he was “tainted” by this ideology. However, his insistent position that Marxism is “theoretical anti-humanism”. Analysis of this concept: the science of history, which, for him, Marxism constitutes, shows that history is a “process without a subject” .

The open issue whether in his self-criticisms Althusser substantially changes his former positions.

An introductory remark on his conception of ideology: it is the most systematic and extensive conception of the problem within Marxism, which has been more generally very influential. It tries to address the gaps and the questions left open in the trajectory of the concept, and more specifically to reconcile its negative conception with the neutral/ positive one.

The negative conception of ideology in his thought concerns the epistemological plane: the concept of the “epistemological break” and the absolute opposition between science and ideology, and along with it truth-falsity.

The concessions to positivism that can be detected here. Althusser’s effort to rescue the autonomy of science within the “superstructure”, and to affirm Marxism as a science and indeed a model for social sciences.

The “theoretically closed” character of ideology and its being political adaptive and manipulatable. Another difference between them: ideology is centered upon the idea of the “subject”, whereas science always tries to dislodge it.

The notion of the “epistemological break” as a tool to understand the course of Marxian thought (the dichotomy between the “young” Marx of ideology and the “mature” Marx of science)

Althusser’s self-criticism on the concept of the “epistemological break” as regards Marx’s work, and the critical remarks that notwithstanding this self-criticism , he does not leave behind some basic former assumptions.

The other aspect of his conception of ideology in the same works, namely before his revisioning of the “epistemological break”: the neutral-positive conception of ideology, connected to the socio-practical plane. Althusser’s attack against the conception of ideology as “false consciousness”, a conception which he detects in the *German Ideology*.

Here we have the Althusserian version of the polemics against the economistic understanding of Marx: the three levels of every social formation (economy, politics, ideology), his emphasis upon the “determination in the last instance” (he draws it from Engels) and his idea of “overdetermination”. Thus, his position on the objectivity, necessity but also universality of ideology.

The analysis of this thesis: the affirmation of the “materiality” of ideology, which we shall deal with later on. Also, the position that ideology is not exactly a “subjective” or human creation, because first of all it is not a matter of consciousness. What is crucial in its understanding are its unconscious aspects. This furthermore means that we should see it as a “lived relationship”: ideology does not consist in something that we “believe” in but something that we “live” in.

Eagleton’s analysis that Althusser’s conception of ideology as “lived relationship” leads up to the idea that science and ideology refer to different levels and hence they are not comparable and cannot by assessed on the same criteria. However, he remarks Althusser’s oscillations on the matter, because with the notion of the “epistemological break” he seems to do what he tells us we should not do. Also, Eagleton’s criticism that there is a kind of positivist assumptions underlying Althusser’s idea that the question of truth and falsity is not involved at all in the level of lived experience, emotions, will, values.

All in all, and regardless of these oscillations, Althusser does connect ideology to a certain kind of falsity, or rather distortion, and this is related to the notion of the “imaginary” which he sees as closely linked to the “lived”. Thus, the old conception of ideology as a “distorted representation” of reality is replaced by a conception according to which distortion regards the “imaginary”-“lived” relationship that people have with this reality, and ideology is thought to represent exactly this relationship.

This position is connected to the one on the universal character of ideology. Ideology is inherent to all societies. The distortion it contains would exist even in a classless society.