What underlies all the above is the distinction Althusser makes between “Ideology in general” and “particular ideologies”. By the first notion he means more or less the “general nature”, namely the structure and function, of Ideology. This results in the idea that “ideology has no history”, by which , as he himself notes, he means something very different from what this same phrase of the *German Ideology* means . In Althusser this phrase means, not that ideology does not have its own history, as in Marx-Engels, but that its general nature is outside history.

Besides, as for the function of Ideology in general, we have the position that it is a necessary condition for practice, and also a means for the reproduction of social cohesion.

Althusser’s crucial problem is to connect these positions with the fundamental for Marxism position on the importance of social contradictions and of the class struggle. He tries to make this connection by holding that in class societies the general function of Ideology is overdetermined by the securing of class domination.

The problems involved in his idea that the dominated classes have science as their weapon, whereas Ideology in general serves the interests of the dominating classes.

Many critics accuse his conception of the general function of Ideology for not leaving room for protest, even manipulatable, on the part of the dominated classes, and, consequently, argue that his declarations on the priority of class struggle ultimately have only a rhetorical, superficial character.

Back on the analysis of the distortion lying at the heart of Ideology, namely of the indissoluble link between the “lived” and the “imaginary”: this has to do with his “theoretical anti-humanism”, namely his attack on the idea of the “subject”.

This distortion consists in the fact that Ideology “interpellates” or “hails” us as “subjects”. This interpellation, we should note, does not happen at a certain point in the course of our lives. Also, what Ideology does in not to form the specific contents we have as subjects, but something far more fundamental: to constitute us as subjects, namely selves with unity and identity, who are supposed to be masters of themselves and agents, and who perceive of themselves on such terms.

Granted that this seems as something self-evident, we have here the more general remark of Althusser that ideology is the domain of the self-evident, taken for granted “truths”. In this respect, he sees ideology as stamped by a the naturalizing mechanism .

His remark, on the basis of the contradictory sense of the term “subject”, that subjectivation (becoming a subject) means also subjection (being subjected to)

The influence by Spinoza and Lacan (the objection that his thesis on the eternal character of ideology is connected to a Lacanian anthropology).

The remark that the idea that we are subjects is something not true from the standpoint of science, but all the same it is not exactly an “illusion”; it is a necessary fallacy , indispensable for societies and for undertaking action, and that science cannot undo it

The criticism (by Eagleton and others) that his position on our subjectivation via ideology is too monovalent and that , notwithstanding his rhetorical statements, it ignores class struggle -which turns us back to his central problem.

The other pillar of his position on the “objectivity of ideology”: its material existence, that is his attack to what he calls “ideology of the idea” (the text where he refers to Pascal’s “formula”)

His theory of the “Ideological State Apparatuses” which complements the Marxist theory of the state: which are these apparatuses, how they relate to what he calls “practices”, to which kind of apparatuses he juxtaposes them and why, and which is their relationship to the dominant ideology.

The criticism by Eagleton and others to this aspect of his thought, however fertile and insightful it is considered to be.

An overall assessment of Althusser: his theory is the most comprehensive and systematic theorizing on ideology within Marxism, and its interest lies above all in that it tries to sketch a “materialism of the superstructure”, as well as in that it encounters the problem of the ideological distortions even in a classless society. However, it has serious limits which have mostly to do with his “theoretical anti-humanism”.