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Althusser and Wittgenstein: Ideology and Therapeutic Analysis of Language

Pedro Diego Karczmarczyk

This paper focuses on the convergence of the positions of Wittgenstein and Althusser. The discussion on the political implications of Wittgenstein's thought has revolved around the possibility (or impossibility) of taking his ideas as standpoints for a critical view of the social dimension, its legitimacy, reach, and strength. However, translating Wittgenstein's thoughts into an Althusserian materialistic position leads to an understanding of the critiques within the former's work that does not hinge on their warranty as a point of view but on the effects of deconstructing the philosophical discourse, which seeks to unify and to arrange hierarchically the evidences (certainties) constitutive of the different language games in which the social is displayed. The paper concludes with some remarks on the distinction—borrowed from Wittgenstein and Althusser—between philosophy as an ideological-theoretical practice and as a critical-theoretical practice.

Key Words: Ideology, Language Games, Materialism, Meaning, Subjectivity

This paper deals with a convergence and mutual support between the positions of Wittgenstein and Althusser. Comparing them will enable us to see some of the political implications of Wittgenstein's thought in a different light. So far, the discussion among conservative, relativistic, democratic, and critical readings of Wittgenstein has been organized around the possibility (or impossibility) of constituting critical standpoints on the factual state of the social, on its legitimacy, scope, force, and so on.¹ However, assimilating Wittgenstein into an Althusserian materialistic position leads to understanding social critique in a way that avoids the necessity of exhibiting the philosophical soundness of their grounds (of their warranty as a point of view). This critique focuses, instead, on the consequences of deconstructing the already given philosophical discourse that seeks to unify and to arrange hierarchically the evidences (certainties) that constitute the different language games in which the social is displayed.

In what follows, then, I will first present the reconceptualization of ideology performed in Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, paying special attention to the outside-inside dialectic (between structure or practice and the

1. Panoramic views can be found in Heyes (2003, 1–13), Kitching (2002, 1–19), and Pitkin (1993, chap. 14). This debate has followed similar lines to the discussion on the possibility and scope of an ideological criticism; see Barth (1976, chap. 6) and Eagleton (1991, chap. 3).

imaginary). Second, I will consider Wittgenstein's later ideas and examine interpretations by Rush Rhees and Saul Kripke that outline a "non-official" Wittgenstein uncomfortable with phenomena like "meaning blindness" and "aspect seeing," phenomena close in spirit to the Althusserian field of the imaginary. Finally, I will trace a distinction between philosophy as an ideological-theoretical practice and philosophy as a critical-theoretical practice.

Althusser's Reformulation of the Problematic of Ideology

Althusser's theory of ideology (advanced in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses") resulted in a drastic break with the classical problematic of ideology. According to the classical view, ideological criticism requires analyzing the cause of ideological representations. This has mainly been understood as the task of identifying the factor distorting an ideological representation in order to compare it with a putatively undistorted representation of social reality. Several proposals have followed this line of thought: from the Enlightenment theory of the "Beautiful Lies" of priests or despots to the Hegelian-Feuerbachian theory by the "young Marx," where the alienated (imaginary) representation of the real conditions of existence is a consequence of the fact that the reproduction of man's conditions of existence takes place through a negation of human essence (alienated labor) (see Althusser 1971, 153–4).

Althusser's reformulation locates this notion of ideology within the frame of another discussion (*problématique*). Rather than asking what causes the distortion of ideological representations, he instead ponders the cause of the distortion *reflected* in ideological representations. Ideology so conceived does not appear to be, as is usually thought, like a surrealist picture, an imaginary deformation of reality, but rather like a faithful representation of an intrinsically surreal reality.

Therefore, ideology is not "an imaginary representation of conditions of existence" but rather, as Althusser (1971, 153) states in his first thesis, "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." For Althusser, then, ideology is a second-order relation: that is, a relation representing a relation. This relation, he emphasizes, "is at the centre of every ideological, i.e. imaginary, representation of the real world. It is this relation that contains the 'cause' which has to explain the imaginary distortion of the ideological representation of the real world" (154). That is to say, the imaginary relationship of individuals with their conditions of existence is the object represented by *every* ideology.

In order to better understand the difference between Althusser's perspective and the classical view, it is important to stress that Althusser talks about causality in a metaphoric sense (154–5). Consequently, the point of these remarks is not merely to state the empirical fact that all known ideology contains imaginary relations between individuals and their conditions of existence but is rather to make a conceptual point, showing the relevance of the imaginary relation in the *constitution of individuals* as subjects. To see the conceptual character of Althusser's remarks more clearly, let us consider another fragment: "Why is the representation given to individuals of their (individual) relation to the social relations which governs their conditions of existence

and their collective and individual life *necessarily* an imaginary relation?" (155, emphasis added). Both the necessary character of the imaginary relation and the conceptual status of Althusser's remarks will become clearer at the end of this section.

The first thesis, rejecting that the distortive element is located mainly in the process of representation, is negative. The second is positive: it throws light on the reality of the imaginary relation between individuals and their conditions of existence. It states: "Ideology has a material existence" (155).

In other words, this thesis claims that the imaginary relation between individuals and their conditions of existence consists in a materialistic way in the rituals in which individuals are enrolled, their material actions inserted into material practices within an ideological apparatus. This materialistic development receives a later specification in Althusser's central thesis concerning ideology: "*Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*" (159; emphasis in the original).

Interpellation can be thought of as the social ritual that puts "the category of subject" to work (162). Through this ritual individuals are constituted as subjects. Hence, interpellation is the game of calling or hailing individuals who, by reacting, recognize themselves as those to whom the calls were directed. Althusser insists on the fact that ideology "'recruits' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by the very precise operation which I have called *interpellation or hailing*" (163).

The exhaustiveness of this ideological recruitment allows us to reinterpret Althusser's characterization of these imaginary transpositions as a *necessary* feature of ideology. In a nutshell, the "ideological representation of ideology" (157) starts with a subject that acts according to conscious ideas. If it happens that all subjects act in a similar way, this fact is (ideologically) explained by stating that all of their consciousnesses contain basically the same ideas. For the same reason, if a person's actions differ from the expected, then it is understood that this person believes something else, has *other* ideas. This view gives explanatory priority to ideas, assuming that they produce consequences in social practices, whereas in the scientific elucidation of the category of subject or the ritual of interpellation, the causal order of efficacy is reversed. Althusser illustrates this change with the following Pascalian thought: "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe" (158). That is to say, it is practice that determines ideas and not the other way around.²

From a different but closely related angle, it should be noted that Althusser's remarks on ideology are framed by reflecting on the problem of the reproduction of relations of production. Althusser concludes that ideology fixes individuals to the positions assigned to them by the sociotechnical division of labor in production, exploitation, repression, ideologization, and so forth (170).

2. In a text published posthumously in 1995, Althusser explains that the point of accounting "ideology in general" was to explain, while avoiding any idealistic conception of the efficacy of ideas, how ideology can produce the "prodigious" effect of making both things and people "work by themselves" (see Althusser 1995, 124).

Consequently, the question on the necessary character of the imaginary transposition in the relation between individuals and their conditions of existence receives an answer that can be articulated in two parts. On the one side, taking individuals into consideration, the imaginary transposition is necessary because there is no other option for individuals but to answer according to the requirements attached to the category of subject. This is not to say that individuals are confronted with an option to which they eventually surrender but that those who cannot find imaginary consistency (unity and necessity) in order to react confidently and without hesitation to the requirements of the ideological apparatuses—which is a condition for their “recruitment” or constitution as subjects—will not be able to participate in any social game. On the other side, taking the social constitution into account, the imaginary transposition proves to be equally necessary because there is no other alternative for societies but to fix or *subject* individuals to specific spheres of activities. In other words, there is no other option for social formation but to recruit individuals as subjects.

Wittgenstein’s Therapeutic Philosophy and the Constitution of Speakers

Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* develops a peculiar philosophical proposal. Wittgenstein does not conceive philosophy as a piece of doctrine—as a series of theses, definitions, hypotheses, or laws—but rather as an activity. This can be clearly appreciated in the analogy by which he characterizes this activity: for him, philosophy is a form of therapy. The illness with which philosophical activity has to deal is nothing but philosophy in the traditional sense (i.e., philosophy as a piece of doctrine). However, Wittgenstein only rarely examines the particular conceptions of one or another philosopher. Instead, he focuses on what he calls “pictures”: general views where our fundamental attitudes concerning certain topics are reflected. These pictures condense our orientations to pose questions as well as the answers we find satisfactory. Pictures are rough conceptual devices, susceptible of being refined in different ways.³ In any case, Wittgenstein believes that when we perceive the inadequacy of a picture, we stop being dominated by the temptation of refining it in one way or another. In other words, a picture establishes the way in which things “must or have to be” (Wittgenstein 2003b, sec. 66) in such a way that, while we are captivated under its spell, the picture’s difficulties and flaws seem to be just minor puzzles easily resolved in a way predetermined by the picture itself.

At the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein presents a fragment of the Augustinian *Confessions* as one of these pictures: the fragment where Augustine remembers his acquisition of language. From this fragment emerges a picture of how language works and of what it is for words to have meaning. Wittgenstein sums it up in this way: “These words, it seems to me, give us a particular

3. The Augustinian picture can be recognized in highly sophisticated conceptions, such as Frege’s semantic theory and Russell’s and Wittgenstein’s logical atomism. See Glock (1996, 41–5).

picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names. In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands” (2003b, sec. 1). According to Augustine, semantic understanding consists of grasping the right connection between things and words in such a way that, once understanding is achieved (the grasping of the connection), the difficulty of learning is seen as merely practical and external to understanding. In fact, this difficulty consists only in becoming accustomed to pronouncing adequately the sounds required to interact in the social world. In Augustine’s words: “As I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires” (*Confessions* 1:8, quoted in 2003b, sec. 1).

Now, it is worth emphasizing that, in the Augustinian conception, understanding and action are thought of as conceptually detachable. This becomes clear when attention is paid to the way in which Augustine recalls the steps he took when learning language. He claims to remember understanding in the first place the meanings of some words and later acquiring the necessary training to pronounce the words to express the meanings previously understood. In other words, in the Augustinian picture, understanding and action are conceived as externally related, bearing a contingent relationship to one another, both linked in such a way that they should be thought (even if related) as mutually independent.

The Wittgensteinian analysis of pictures combines two movements. On the one hand is an interrelated movement of *diagnosis* and *criticism* where Wittgenstein tries to find the elements from which the described picture of language emerges and becomes plausible (*diagnosis*) and, having identified these elements, where he moves to undermine the plausibility of the picture by pointing at its ensuing absurd consequences (*criticism*). On the other hand is a moment of *reconstruction* or *grammatical elucidation* in which Wittgenstein tries to help persons captivated by a picture, those who are “il” of philosophical problems, to become aware of what they already know, pointing out that when they try to represent this “already possessed knowledge,” they reveal that they in fact do not know it, in a certain sense (2003b, sec. 89).

The conception of language contained in Augustine’s remarks, the main target in the starting section of *Philosophical Investigations*, has received several labels. I will dub it the *traditional mentalist* paradigm. With this I want to refer to the different ways in which philosophy has historically tried to find an ontology and an epistemology capable of dealing with some peculiarities of our linguistic behavior. There is a feature of this behavior that is especially relevant here: *we usually don’t have doubts concerning the meanings of our expressions*. For instance, we do not usually doubt the meaning of sentences like, “There is a gold mountain on the Uruguayan beach,” even when the truth-value of it is legitimately open to doubt. In more traditional terms, what we are dealing with here is the classical distinction between the a priori character of semantic questions and the a posteriori character of factual questions. The most common philosophical way of accounting for this difference is by providing a justificatory ontology whereby there should be a domain

of meaning (ideas, concepts, mental images, and so on) to which the speaker has immediate and privileged access. Consequently, a number of philosophers have provided an account of the a priori character of meaning and understanding in which speakers have special and immediate knowledge of this field in a way that whatever seems such-and-such for them will indeed be so. This endows speakers with a certain knowledge whose nature is expressed in the a priori character of the “knowledge of meaning.” The traditional mentalist conception is an example of this strategy.

Let us consider now Wittgenstein’s critique of this view. Wittgenstein claims that this strategy—elucidating the knowledge of meaning in terms of an ontology that has to play a justificatory role toward the a priori character of the knowledge of meaning—gives rise to recalcitrant paradoxes and perplexities. The most accessible way of presenting the Wittgensteinian critique of this model is by examining his analysis of ostensive definitions.

An ostensive definition is the kind of explanation we make when we pronounce the word to be defined while simultaneously pointing at the object referred to by the term. Take as an example the clause, “This is an X” (while the speaker points to the object). Wittgenstein’s analysis shows that these definitions do not exclude the possibility of misunderstanding. For instance, if the teacher points to a leaf while saying, “This is a leaf,” the pupil can misunderstand the explanation and might henceforth collect green objects of any kind and pronounce “leaf” while feeling this is correct. Two points should be stressed here. On the one hand, this situation evidences the pupil’s misunderstanding of the meaning of “leaf,” about which Wittgenstein indicates: “And how he ‘takes’ the definition is seen in the use that he makes of the word defined” (2003b, sec. 29). On the other hand, reflection on this example will lead to the same conclusion at which Wittgenstein arrived, that “an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in every case” (sec. 28; emphasis in original).

But the Wittgensteinian critique does not conclude here; it further examines the strong inclination to consider that when a pupil misunderstands, something else of decisive importance must have happened apart from the pupil’s actions. This additional event is conceived as something taking place in the mind: the fact that “leaf” is interpreted as *green* is conceived as a mental event from which subsequent actions derive (even wrong actions). Addressing this point, Wittgenstein concludes from their indeterminacy that ostensive definitions successfully define an expression only for those who are already familiar with the role of the defined word in the language game, as when someone knows that a defined word is an object-word but does not know to which particular object it refers. However, after this remark Wittgenstein warns us not to forget that “all sorts of problems attach to the words ‘to know’ or ‘to be clear.’” At stake here is the status of the knowledge of meaning: “One has already to know (or be able to do) something in order to be capable of asking a thing’s name. But what does one have to know?” (sec. 30).

We have now to turn to Wittgenstein’s final critique and to the temptation, at the core of the Augustinian picture, to derive the application—the material actions performed by an individual in a language game—from ideas and mental states. On the one hand, Wittgenstein shows that these ideas and mental states, which we refer to as the “ontology of understanding,” *are not sufficient conditions of understanding*. That is to say, the putative mental states (or mental acts, which equal the putative

underlying ontology identified with understanding) can occur in any particular situation without it being a case of understanding. On the other hand, Wittgenstein shows that the putative states (or acts) of understanding *aren't necessary conditions*: the underlying ontology can be absent and the case can be, notwithstanding, a genuine case of understanding. The following fragment illustrates both points:

What really comes before our mind when we *understand* a word?—Isn't it something like a picture? Can't it *be* a picture?

Well, suppose that a picture does come before your mind when you hear the word “cube”, say the drawing of a cube. In what sense can this picture fit or fail to fit a use of the word “cube”?—Perhaps you say: “It's quite simple;—if that picture occurs to me and I point to a triangular prism for instance, and say it is a cube, then this use of the word doesn't fit the picture.”—But doesn't it fit? I have purposely so chosen the example that it is quite easy to imagine a *method of projection* according to which the picture does fit after all. (sec. 139; emphasis in original)

The structure of this example undermines internally the traditional mentalist picture. The example exhibits well enough its constitutive elements: First, it exhibits the underlying ontology of understanding (the picture of the cube) playing the role of distinguishing one understanding from another (if another picture came to mind, then it would be a different understanding). Second, judging is understood as something that can be immediately read through the comparison between the meaning (the picture) and the situation to which the meaning is to be applied. And a third element, perhaps not so apparent in the example, is that the evidence would play the role of a rational guarantee (application being an exercise of deduction from the meaning) represented in an example of the kind we are considering as an “experience of fit” (see Wittgenstein 1998, 87).

The example undermines the model by examining two applications of the picture of a cube that we would feel at first equally inclined to consider as proper applications of it. In the next section, Wittgenstein indicates that the consequence of the example helps us realize that “there are other processes, besides the one we originally thought of, which we should sometimes be prepared to call ‘applying the picture of a cube’” (2003b, sec. 139–40). That is to say, there are two different (incompatible) applications; the application to an object with a cubic shape and the application to a triangular prism could fit one and the very same experience originally identified as the experience of understanding the meaning of “cube.”

The traditional mentalist view is untenable because it unavoidably generates a duplicity of criteria in potential contradiction with each other. This problem is nothing but a consequence of, at the very beginning, considering understanding (mental state) and application (judgment) as terms independent of each other. However, we can extract a moral from all this: if the state we identified at the beginning as the understanding of “cube” (the “coming of the picture of a cube before our minds”) gives place to an application that contradicts the identification we have made (the application to a triangular prism that Wittgenstein considers, for instance), shall we continue saying that this is the state of understanding such and

such? Wittgenstein's answer is clear: for him, application is the basic criterion of understanding. "What is essential is to see that the same thing can come before our minds when we hear the word and the application still be different. Has it the same meaning both times? I think we shall say not" (sec. 140).

Moreover, Wittgenstein's insistence on application as the prior criterion of understanding implies a further consequence: we attribute understanding through agreement in judgments. He indirectly suggests that the absence of such agreement is a criterion to reject understanding: that an additional explanation "is necessary in the ostensive definition depends on whether without it the other person takes the definition otherwise than I wish" (sec. 29). Later, he is even more explicit: "Now, however, let us suppose that after some efforts on the teacher's part he continues the series correctly, that is, *as we do it*" (sec. 145; emphasis added).

His remarks on this double criteria imply an antireductionist argument, inasmuch as any reductionist proposal disregards the prior character of application—by definition it tries to find something more basic (or deeper) than application—and because of that unavoidably leads to the puzzling problem of the double criteria, which as shown will always be decided in favor of application.

The Wittgensteinian approach, as I have presented it, leaves some questions unanswered. There is the question of the break with the traditional view of meanings as sources of application and his insistence on the necessity of agreement in judgments. This also seems to abolish the internal relationships recognized as a crucial feature of the link between the rule (the meaning) and its cases (applications)—that is to say, the internal relationship between understanding and the understood. When developing the series of even numbers, the relation between 1002 as the successor of 1001 is not a contingent relationship; it is not a question of observing the behavior of another in the community to see whether it is the successor of 1001 or not. Nevertheless, this seems to be a consequence of Wittgenstein's approach, as he himself recognizes: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so" (2003b, sec. 242).

To solve this question we have to pay attention to an apparently paradoxical feature of Wittgenstein's way of exposition: the fact that these arguments collide with his incredulity at the very moment he decides to speak in the first person. Because of this, the same arguments have to be presented once and again (the understanding of ostensive explanations, the understanding of mathematical series, the relationship between the will and actions, the seeing of aspects of a thing, to name a few). It is worth mentioning here that K. T. Fann (1969, 106–7; and see Cavell 1976, 70–1) compares the rhetorical articulation of the *Philosophical Investigations* to a "confession," thus related in a sense to the Augustinian *Confessions*. This means that the entire work is dominated by a dialogue between the voices of "temptation" and of "correction." The voice of temptation appears characteristically in the first person, as in the following case:

"But how can it be? When I say I understand the rule of a series, I am surely not saying so because I have found out that up to now I have applied the algebraic formula in such-and-such a way! In my own case at all events

I surely know that I mean such-and-such a series; it doesn't matter how far I have actually developed it."—Your idea, then, is that you know the application of the rule of the series quite apart from remembering actual applications to particular numbers. And you will perhaps say: "Of course! For the series is infinite and the bit of it that I can have developed finite." (Wittgenstein 2003b, sec. 147)

Note that the exchange between these voices does not end up in a plain contradiction. When the voice of temptation points out that it understands without appealing to reminders of actual applications and independently of the past applications of the algebraic formula, the voice of correction does not contradict it directly; correction does not reply that temptation is wrong in its claim, that it is not able to know which is the right answer until checking the behavior of others in its community. There is a deep reason for this: the voice of temptation, besides its lack of justification as a theoretical vision, expresses one of the requirements that constitute someone a speaker of a language, one of the requirements without which what we know as language would cease to exist. In short, the dialogue we are examining has to be kept in a delicate equilibrium; if the voice of temptation were to be replaced by the voice of correction, language would collapse because it is impossible to build up a language upon propositional or theoretical knowledge. The voice of temptation, although unjustified from a theoretical point of view, is not wrong from a semantic standpoint. "To use a word without a justification (*Rechtfertigung*) does not mean to use it without right (*Unrecht*)" (2003b, sec. 289).

Wittgenstein developed this aspect further by asking himself whether, in some way, the persistent need to advance the same kinds of arguments observed in the *Investigations*, due to the untiring capacity of the mentalist view to be reformulated, is not a constitutive part of the issue. This leads him to ask: "Are you not really a behaviorist in disguise? Aren't you at bottom really saying that everything except human behavior is a fiction?"—If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a grammatical fiction" (sec. 307). According to Rush Rhees in the preface to *The Blue and Brown Books*, this was the uneasiness that gave impulse to the theoretical developments between these earlier works and the *Investigations*. Rhees (1998) stresses Wittgenstein's growing discomfort regarding the conception of thinking as "operating with signs" already expressed in the "Blue Book" (see Wittgenstein 1998, 6, 15). This discomfort leads Wittgenstein to consider issues such as "aspect-seeing," "meaning and colour blindness," and "tone-deafness." The point at stake is what difference would it make to someone who is not able to refer the perception of the meaning of an ambiguous expression to definite moments and durations? Or "does the perception of meaning fall outside the use of language?" This is the crucial question because, "So long as there are such difficulties, people will still think that there must be something like an interpretation. They will still think that if it is language then it must mean something to me" (Rhees 1998, xiv; emphasis in the original).

Saul Kripke (2002, 47n29) made an important contribution to this problem. He explored the tension between an "official" Wittgenstein who recognizes that there could be someone meaning-blind, operating however with words as we do, and a Wittgenstein à la Rhees who worries that "he may be in danger of replacing the

classical picture by an overly mechanistic one, though certainly he still repudiates any idea that a certain qualitative experience is what constitutes my using words with a certain meaning.”

This qualitative aspect, although not constitutive, is also not a mere ornament. Kripke asks whether we can imagine forms of life different from ours, for instance, whether we can imagine beings that, receiving an instruction similar to the one we receive for addition, eventually grasp a function of the kind *quus* instead of *plus*.⁴ Kripke answers that there seems to be no reason of principle against this possibility, though he adds, “What it seems may be unintelligible to us is how an intelligent creature could get the very training we have for the addition function and yet grasp the appropriate function in a *quus*-like way. If such a position were really completely intelligible to us, would we find it so inevitable to apply the plus function as we do? Yet this inevitability is an essential part of Wittgenstein’s own solution to his problem” (98n78).

The imaginary abandonment to the unity and necessity found in the learning of language, which seems to warrant the performance of the speaker, is a primitive and necessary datum of Wittgenstein’s grammatical elucidation. It is important to stress that these remarks on the experience of meaning do not imply undoing the trodden path because this experience is not recovered as establishing what understanding would consist in. These remarks are better understood as the exploration of a different ground where these experiences find a place in the mastery of the techniques at stake in several language games: a place that is not constitutive but constituted. This enables us to find, in the very center of each language game, what in Althusserian lingo we would call an imaginary relation between speakers and their conditions of existence as speakers (i.e., with the whole practice of language games).

It is useful to clarify this point in order to throw some light on the similarities between Wittgenstein and Althusser. We could say that, in Wittgenstein’s case, “individuals became speakers by virtue of the functioning of the category of meaning.” By this we understand the ritual (the language game) of semantic claims. The key sentences in this language game are categorical (“John adds” and “I add”) and conditional (“If John learnt the addition, remembers his intentions, and wishes to accord to them, then, if he is confronted with a problem as ‘57 + 68’ he will answer 125” [see Kripke 2002, 94–5]).

The interpreter who in my opinion has best clarified the logic of the ritual of semantic assertions is Saul Kripke. According to Kripke (2002, 73) Wittgenstein’s critique of the traditional mentalist view and of other proposals of underlying ontology causes Wittgenstein to replace the dominating question of this account, “‘What must be the case for this [semantic] sentence to be true?’ with two others. First, ‘Under what conditions may this form of words be appropriately asserted (or denied)?’; second, given an answer to the first question, ‘What is the role and the utility, in our lives, of our practice of asserting (or denying) these words under these conditions?’”

4. Where *quus* is a mathematical function that is the same as addition when applied to arguments within the present limits of the practice of addition but that always delivers a result of five when practiced beyond those limits.

Let us see what clues we can collect from studying the conditions under which semantic claims can be legitimately asserted. In a pedagogical relation, a categorical statement is attributed on the basis of agreement between answers given by the pupil and those of the teacher. The attribution of a semantic categorical statement has the shape of a “rite of passage” (like the rite of passage from puberty to adulthood) through which pupil or teacher receives a new social status. Now, one of the conditions that the teacher will pay attention to when making a categorical statement such as “John adds” is the practical security of John in continuing the series. In other words, the absence of doubts and hesitations works as a criterion for the teacher when attributing the status of “adder” to a pupil. From a different perspective, once the teacher endows the pupil with the status of adder, once the required tests have been passed, the pupil is now allowed to feel confident enough to take as correct the answers given without more justification than the adder status. However, despite this authorization, others can still correct the pupil.

Let us see now how the conditional “meaning statements” work. Where the traditional mentalist view is committed to the idea that “it is because we understand the same concept that we behave in the same way (giving the same answer for a problem of addition, for instance),” the emphasis is given to the antecedent of the conditional mentioned above (“we understand”). Hence, therapeutic elucidation implies a change in the emphasis, pointing to the priority of practice, making in this way room for the priority of application considered above. In the therapeutic analysis, this takes the shape of a contraposed conditional, which in our case would be that “if we don’t act in the same way (repeatedly) then we don’t (say we) understand the same concept.” What goes between parentheses in this formulation indicates that it does not work in an algorithmic but in an approximated way (i.e., it is often sufficient that X didn’t act as we expected for us to say that X does not follow our rule, etc.). It is clear that here is a space of indeterminacy and therefore of dispute which can be thought of as one of the battlefields of ideological struggle.⁵

The ritual of semantic statements, the working of the category of meaning, is the ritual through which we attribute, keep, or refuse a social status. The goal of this is to classify individuals according to the task they can or cannot perform. At this point of the argument, Wittgenstein’s resemblance to Althusser should be evident.

To conclude this section, we should note that what we have characterized as the “voice of temptation” is a necessary feature of our linguistic practices. Practical security, the absence of doubts and hesitations when using a symbolic expression, is a criterion we use for making semantic statements, as is the case in the following: “S/he adds,” “S/he knows/doesn’t know what a signpost is,” et cetera.

5. See Althusser’s (1971, 169) remark on “bad subjects” (see also Montag 2003, 119). In accordance with Althusser’s increasing interest in “social movements,” this issue developed up to the point of recognizing the possibility of counterhegemonic subjects (see Althusser 2005, 75).

Conclusion

We have presented with detail some similarities between Wittgenstein and Althusser, stressing in the Austrian's philosophy the essential moments of the Algerian's: the rejection of the category of subject as an origin for discourse, exhibited in a materialistic analysis concerning the primacy of the practice that constitutes the subject; the recognition of the imaginary abandonment of the subject as a mediation of the efficacy of the structure; and the link between the constitution of the subject and the dimension of power, distinguishable features of a "philosophy of the subjection of the subject" (Marí 1984, 14). At this point we may wonder: What does this analogy mean? What use can we make of it?

In an interesting study on the relationship of Wittgenstein's thought to the main epistemological trends in the first half of the twentieth century, Dominique Lecourt suggested that, from *Philosophical Investigations* (written in 1945) to *On Certainty* (1951), Wittgenstein's philosophy suffered a transformation in its understanding of the language game of philosophy: namely, if the *Investigations* stressed the illusory character of the language game of philosophy, *On Certainty* recognized the materiality and the real effects of this illusion game. According to Lecourt, Wittgenstein began to understand that philosophy is not merely "language on holiday" but a language game that performs its own work, whose effects can be registered in the very system of language games where words such as "knowledge," "verification," "experience," and so on, have their origins (Lecourt 1984, 212).

From this standpoint my remarks following Kripke become particularly relevant. I claimed that philosophical semantics takes the form of a "justificatory ontology" that should warrant the practice of language. Now we can consider that this form enables the practice of philosophy to impose philosophical perspectives on other practices where attributions of "meaning," "understanding," and so on, take place. The ultimate consequence of this imposition is, according to what we have indicated, whether an individual belongs or not to a given language game.

In *On Certainty*, which picks up on some remarks of G. E. Moore, Wittgenstein (2003a, sec. 10, 52, 56–7, 213, 377, 401) highlights that some propositions shaped as empirical belong to the logic of language games. The status of "logical proposition" is not ascribed by virtue of Moore's, Wittgenstein's, or someone else's decision. It is not an option for speakers to accept or to refuse these propositions. The fact that they cannot be doubted does not follow from either the propositions themselves or from anything else that speakers can find in their own minds, such as the inconceivability of alternatives. Instead, these propositions work as criteria for understanding the meanings of words in such a way that someone who questions the meanings would become unintelligible and would be excluded from the language game. Doubting one of these propositions involves consequences radically different from those involved in doubting a genuine empirical proposition (sec. 67–75, 155, 195, 572).

Although pertaining to logic, there is nothing rigidly atemporal in these propositions. In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein (2003b, sec. 79) already indicated the fluctuation of scientific definitions: "The fluctuation of scientific definitions: what today counts as an observed concomitant of a phenomenon will tomorrow be used to

define it.” In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein (2003a, sec. 96) further claims: “It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.”

Althusser’s rejection of the problem of traditional epistemology—where the question of warranties of knowledge and science leads to the philosophical notion of *subject*, conceived in terms of *substance* (existing by itself) and of *condition of possibility* (of the contact or encounter between thought and reality)—enabled a reconceptualization of the notion of ideology far away from the task of looking for philosophical warrants for the criticism of ideology. In turn, Althusser’s view on ideology opened the possibility of considering the constitution of subjects through a practice that sets at work the category of the subject. This does not imply a plain vanishing of the warranties but the recognition of their consequences within different practices (see Althusser and Balibar 1973, 69–70). As Wittgenstein (2003b, sec. 65) similarly remarks, there is not a unitary notion of language, not one practice of language, but several language games, different practices with similitude and divergence among them and that overlap in several ways, irreducible to a general concept. Consequently, the talk about *the* practice or *the* warranty is itself a particular discursive practice, generating effects over other practices. When I pointed to Althusser’s theory of ideology, I suggested the possibility of interpreting a nonfigurative picture as a figurative representation of a paradoxical reality. I stressed that the deformation was not mainly a question of representation. But this second-order representation, the “ideology of ideology” (traditional philosophy), is also *a practice* (ideological then), which as such involves its imaginary abandonment (to the requirement established by practice: finding unity and necessity). We can also now appreciate the effects of this second-order practice with its different degrees of influence over all other practices (see Althusser 2005, 45; 1970, 7).

Wittgenstein’s remarks on the fluctuation between hard and fluid propositions or between scientific definitions and empirical concomitants suggest that, if in the functioning of language games there is always something that is out of question, then there is nothing that on principle must always and in all circumstances be out of question. In other words, the warrants we are considering do not warrant as much as they intend to.

We have now a clear indication with which to understand better the intervention of theoretical practice (ideological) upon ground practices. Philosophy, as an ideological practice, produces projects of unification of practice. Philosophy gives voice to warrants—which are always already operating in the imaginary relation between individuals and the reality of their practices in different fields—and tries to unify them: that is to say, subsume them under unitary philosophical categories that reinforce the blockage already at work in practice through imaginary abandonment to the warranties that each practice requires (the “grammatical fiction”; see Wittgenstein 2003b, sec. 307).

To conclude this paper, I want to note that there is an interesting reconfiguration of philosophy as criticism to which Wittgenstein contributes substantially. What is at stake here is not the reconfiguration of philosophy as a criticism on the paths of

warranties, the swampy field where so many times the criticism of ideology has gotten stuck (see Eagleton 1991, chap. 3–4). On the contrary, a critical philosophy in this new sense takes on the task of registering the differences among practices against the imaginary concealing of those practices behind ideology. Consequently, critical philosophy has to deal with the remnants of the old ways of unifying practices and with the several branches of science, each one of which develops its own techniques of proof for its statements, all of these techniques being good candidates after which to model unitary philosophical warranties. Finally, critical philosophy faces different social practices and the contradictions that emerge out of as well as inside of each practice or language game. To summarize, a philosophy that works against the imaginary concealing of practices in ideology stumbles upon the very life of politics.

It could therefore be argued that our position has been overcome. It is possible to insist on the caducity of the category of ideology because the widespread knowledge of the mechanisms of domination implies that these mechanisms are performed without any illusions. A philosophical version of this position is the so-called “cynical reason” (see Žižek 1989, 28). However, cynical reason is a theoretical practice and, inasmuch as it produces warranties such as social marginalization viewed as an insoluble problem, it is also an ideological practice. But, as we have seen through Althusser and Wittgenstein, the illusions that structure our relation to reality—deeply hidden in their evidence—are unconscious. That is to say, the warranties philosophically articulated by cynical reason are related to the imaginary abandonment required by its very practice.

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