What's False about False Consciousness

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Abstract

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Why do we defend the social conditions responsible for our injustice and exploitation? We are confused when disadvantaged women of color cite personal shortcomings rather than the social system as the source of their precarity. Yet, when social philosophers take up these questions by appealing to the concept of ideology, they turn to structural accounts and dismiss theories of false consciousness outright. Accounts of false consciousness, often understood as an epistemic failing to recognize some features of our inadequate social world, meet with a host of objections. Some argue that ascriptions of false consciousness involve authoritarianism, while others criticize the concept for commitments to an implausible correspondence picture of truth. Meanwhile, dismissal of false consciousness as accounts of ideology have led to the neglect of an important feature of how ideology works: in and through our own agency. False consciousness can help keep in view two important features that have often fallen out of view: that social structures are the result of our collective consent and that social structures are not analyzable without turning to the self-understandings of the participants in these very institutions.

My dissertation offers a new way of addressing issues in ideology critique that account for our agency. By preserving what is still alive in a theory of false consciousness while addressing the long-standing concerns about authoritarianism and correspondence, I re-examine and reconstruct the notion of false consciousness. I closely engage with figures in critical social theory, such as Marx, Lukacs, Habermas, Haslanger, Honneth, and Jaeggi, while considering the import of such discussions for contemporary political discussions. I also discuss the relevance of object relations psychoanalysis for social philosophers. Beyond this, I show that false

consciousness is a damaged way of relating to ourselves, to each other, and to the social world. It is characterized, on my view, by affective investment. This move helps us clarify both the phenomenology of false consciousness and what a viable form of critique could look like. Psychoanalysis offers us a new way of understanding ideology critique by directing us beyond the model of critique as judgment and towards relationality and social change as part of overcoming false consciousness.

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Preface

While economic disparities widen, even the worst off defend the gaps between the rich and poor by appeals to hard work.[1] Women and non-men likewise justify gender roles that aren't serving them. [2] Too often, when faced with injustice and exploitation, we defend the social conditions responsible. Historically, critical theorists have sought a way to account for our inaction in the face of dominating social orders. "What has to be explained," Wilhelm Reich wrote, "is not the fact that the man who is hungry steals or the fact that the man who is exploited strikes, but why the majority of those who are hungry *don't* steal and why the majority of those who are exploited *don't strike."*[3] This question remains for us, too: how are we as social philosophers to explain why people bolster the very social conditions that fail to serve them, even when they aren't being coerced into doing so?

False consciousness is invoked as an answer to this tangle of questions. On most accounts, false consciousness is a set of mistakes we make about ourselves, our social world, or what our true interests are.[4] Our mistakes, while not necessarily conscious, lead us to prop up our existing social order. Perhaps we simply don't understand the conditions that exacerbate income inequality. Or we are wrong about whether certain performances of gender are in our interest. We defend the social conditions that do not serve us, then, out of a failure in our understanding.

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[1] Kelly and Enns, "Inequality and the Dynamics of Public Opinion: The Self-Reinforcing Link Between Economic Inequality and Mass Preferences"; Luttig, "The Structure of Inequality and Americans' Attitudes toward Redistribution"; McCall, *The Undeserving Rich*.

[2] Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism*; Durrheim, Jacobs, and Dixon, "Explaining the Paradoxical Effects of Intergroup Contact."

[3] Reich et al., *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*. For a similar question, see Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness"; Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude*.

[4] For discussions that take up this understanding of false consciousness (whether they reject or defend them), see for instance: Anderson, *Private Government*, xx–xxi; Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness," 26–27; Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory," 170; Eagleton, *Ideology*; Augoustinos, "Ideology, False Consciousness and Psychology," 304–5.

This account of ideology as false consciousness is, to put it mildly, unpopular. [5] Critics take issue with situating ideology as a lack of knowledge. Theories of false consciousness, then, serve as an example of what we are to avoid philosophically when theorizing ideology and our justifying systems that do not serve us. Some argue that ascriptions of false consciousness involves authoritarianism, or the presumption of privileged access to what "true" consciousness amounts to. Others criticize parsing ideology as false consciousness on account of commitments to an implausible correspondence picture of truth or a thoroughgoing rationalism.[6] Even the recent resurgence of interest in ideology has not been able to reclaim critiques of ideology that center around false consciousness. [7]

Notwithstanding these issues, the problem of false consciousness – or so I will argue— remains of contemporary interest. In the face of recent economic and social developments, social scientists attempt to explain phenomena like distorted consciousness, if not in name, then in substance.[8] Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochshild's widely touted *Strangers in Their Own Land*, for instance, argues that we need a way to understand working class political activists in the heart of Louisiana bayou country.[9] While the residents of "cancer country" understand that oil companies have destroyed their homes and habitats, they nevertheless remain ardent defenders of the free-market capitalism that produces such outcomes. Hochschild's book roundly rejects the idea that such cases are best explained by thinking about people who vote against their own interests, jettisoning in the process the most familiar account of false consciousness.

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[5] For rejections of false consciousness, see Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude*; Kelly, "The Unhappy Liberal"; Brown, *Nihilistic Times*, 55; Eagleton, *Ideology*.
[6] See for example: Kelly, "The Unhappy Liberal"; Railton, "Morality, Ideology, and Reflection; or, The Duck Sits Yet"; Lukács, Livingstone, and Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*.
[7] Manne, *Discriminating Sexism*; Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory."
[8] Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*; Jost, *A Theory of System Justification*.
[9] Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*.

Hochschild's argument instead centers around fears of cultural eclipse and economic decline that play into certain affective investments. I will take this insight up as one way of theorizing false consciousness. Hochschild's book suggests the continued relevance of false consciousness even while the concept has long fallen into disuse.

This project seeks to resurrect the concept of false consciousness for social philosophy. My starting point is twofold. On the one hand, I am convinced that false consciousness is a philosophically contentful and generative concept for critical theorists. Social philosophers are right to focus on the injustices that are part of social life today (examples include the way our bosses have more control over our work lives than ever before[10], say, or how redlining affects educational differences across race[11]). All the same, this is not all there is to say about either our social world or how it can be distorted. False consciousness can help us be attentive to the ways that social institutions work in and through us. What's more, false consciousness keeps us attentive to the how pathologies can be both social and at the same time affect us as subjects. On the other hand, however, false consciousness can't simply be taken up without reformulation. Traditional accounts of false consciousness as a failure to grasp our true interests or the way the social world is imagine a world out there which we perceive distortedly. This view of false consciousness, then, commits itself to a correspondence theory of how our perceptions relate to reality. We must also grapple with the ideology critic's presumed privileged access to the true or the good

Renewed discussion of false consciousness as a critical concept requires more than a return. It requires critical reconstruction. In what follows, I attempt such a reconstruction. This involves both articulating what false consciousness is, and transforming the theoretical accounts

[10] Anderson, *Private Government*.
[11] Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*.

of false consciousness in light of the problems I mentioned. The project, in other words, is a reworking of a concept that has become problematic. It is also an attempt to explain why social philosophers would benefit from theorizing ideology as false consciousness and to recover an account of distortion.

On my reading, false consciousness is a distorted way of relating to ourselves, to each other, and to the social world. It is characterized by too much affective investment of a certain kind. False consciousness understood as bad praxis – something elucidated by a turn towards object-relations psychoanalysis can help us avoid critiques that take our social world as fixed. Object-relations psychoanalysis enables us to account for how we can be shaped by our inadequate social conditions in our ways of relating. At the same time, object-relations psychoanalysis attends to how we shape those very conditions. In other words, theories of attachment can help us see how we as subjects are shaped by our social environments in ways that involve something different from a failure to correspond to a social world "out there." What's more, attachment underscores why false consciousness is so resilient.

As I will argue, false consciousness is characterized by a form of distorted relating that involves too much attachment. When critical theorists do think about bad praxis,[12] they mostly do so by theorizing alienation and reification. This means that social philosophers understand damaged ways of human relating by characterizing subjects who are disengaged or who are too little attached to themselves, to others, and to their social world. In doing so, I show that social philosophers have underexplored ways that we can also be too engaged or too much attached to our social order. As I argue, this is precisely what characterizes false consciousness and this has particular relevance for us today.

[12] Jaeggi, *Alienation*; Honneth et al., *Reification*.

This may raise questions about whether concerns about authoritarianism arise again in a new form, given my accounts of inadequate investment or wrong attachment. One might wonder about "proper" or the "right" levels of attachments, or about the use of language of "distortion." Doesn't this require a privileged access—the very kind of privilege I have tried to eschew in theorizing standard accounts? These questions, I suggest, assume a particular model of critique that is far from the only one on offer. In the final chapter, I take up long-standing debates about critique and grounding as well as this concern about the return of authoritarianism. Rather than seeking context-transcendent grounds for critique as a way of justifying diagnoses of false consciousness, I argue that we should rethink the nature of critique itself. Critique of false consciousness involves something more than the model of diagnosis and judgment. Psychoanalysis, I reveal, provides us with such a model.

My project consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 broadly addresses why we need an account of ideology as false consciousness. I show that functional accounts of ideology on their own fail to account for both our agency and for the insights of the practice turn in social theory. Social structures are the result of our collective consent. Accordingly, social institutions are not analyzable without recourse to the self-understanding of us as participants in the very conditions that dominate us. After suggesting how the critical concept of false consciousness can address this phenomena, I examine why social philosophers are nevertheless hesitant to return to it. Objections regarding authoritarianism and correspondence do tell against a particular account of falsity as cognitive or epistemic error; however, they don't tell against false consciousness as such.

In chapter 2, I offer my positive account of false consciousness. False consciousness, I argue, is a damaged way of relating to ourselves, to each other, and to the social world. It is

characterized by too much affective investment or attachment. This account of distorted praxis answers the need for theorizing ideology as false consciousness without falling prey to the correspondence objections. I then address how my account of distorted praxis shares something in common with the critical concepts of alienation and reification, while departing from them in terms of phenomenology. I also expand, in chapter 2, on my account of damaged ways of relating by way of an analogy to object-relations psychoanalysis.

In chapter 3, I take up the concerns around authoritarianism and in particular whether it returns under a new guise, as well as the standing to critique false consciousness. I discuss different forms of the critique, as well as the dilemma critical theorists face: wanting to resolve authoritarianism objections while at the same time striving to avoid too weak normativity. I characterize their attempts to do so as a way of turning to context-transcending grounds. Nevertheless, as I argue in chapter 3, the turn to context-transcendence poses its own problems. Therefore, the search for context-transcending grounds should be avoided. I offer a metaphilosophical argument in this chapter, namely, that the force of the authoritarian objection is connected to a particular account of critique that centers around the critical project as one of diagnosis. Instead, I argue that returning to object relations psychoanalysis, here, can be fruitful for us in thinking about how we can have a false consciousness critique that does not center around diagnosis and insight into one's condition. This in turn helps us avoid the new formulations of the authoritarian objection.

The concept of false consciousness, while it has fallen out of use in philosophy, has long been mobilized in social and political life. In the arguments I consider, false consciousness is about our ways of relating to ourselves, to each other, and to our social world. False consciousness involves a disposition of too much attachment. It is by reframing ideology in terms of affective

investments – not as failures of knowledge but as socially-habituated bad ways of relating – that we come to see what a better version of critique and a better way of relating can look like.

Why We Need False Consciousness

Abstract: While philosophers disagree about how to parse our defense of social institutions that do not serve us, they have since the late 1980s broadly rejected appeals to ideology as false consciousness. Instead, most philosophers explain ideology functionally. They turn to the structures of material and social life as an explanation for how domination is perpetuated. In this chapter, however, I show that functional accounts of ideology alone fail to both account for our agency and for the insights of the practice turn in social theory. Social structures are maintained on account of our collective consent. And, they are not analyzable without recourse to the self-understanding of us as participants in the very social conditions that dominate us. To that end, I maintain the usefulness of an account of ideology as false consciousness. After defending the importance of the critical concept of false consciousness, I examine why social philosophers are nevertheless hesitant to return to it. While objections from authoritarianism and correspondence do tell against a particular account of falsity as cognitive or epistemic error, they don't tell against false consciousness as such. The contemporary upshot is that false consciousness is not just defensible, but also an important, if neglected, critical concept for contemporary social and political philosophy.

1.1 Introduction

In February 1965, James Baldwin debated William F. Buckley Jr. at the Cambridge Union. As is well-known, the topic was the nation's racial history. The American Dream is at the expense of the American Negro," James Baldwin declared, echoing the motion of the debate.[13] What's less well known, is that in his speech, Baldwin characterizes two different ways of thinking about ideology. Ideology on one view Baldwin espouses, is what perpetuates relations of power and domination, and on another, ideology is a kind of distortion. In the speech, Baldwin comes to the defense of ideology as false consciousness, that is, ideology as a kind of distortion.

Baldwin, at the speech's open, first gives an account of the structural and material conditions of exploitation that persist in America. He describes how the American dream – in particular, the quality of life of many people living in the US – depends on unpaid Black labor:

[13] Baldwin and Buckley, "Transcript of the Baldwin versus Buckley Debate at the Cambridge Union," 379.

> Let me put it this way, that from a very literal point of view, the harbors and the ports and the railroads of the country, the economy, especially of the southern states, could not conceivably be what it has become if they had not had—and do not still have, indeed—and for so long, so many generations, cheap labor. I am stating very seriously, and this is not an overstatement, I picked the cotton, and I carried it to market, and I built the railroads, under someone else's whip, for nothing. For nothing.[14]

Baldwin's emphasis here is on the unjust relations of power. He draws our attention to the material and structural conditions that were sustained by appeal to concepts like the American dream. On this account, the economic gain of some results from the expropriated labor of racialized others. This is one way of thinking about ideology in a pejorative sense.[15] What makes a constellation of beliefs, attitudes, dispositions and practices count as ideological involves functional explanation. A form of consciousness is ideological, then, to the extent this constellation both sustains certain social relations of domination and that this form of consciousness exists to perpetuate these relations.

In his speech, however, Baldwin also points to another way of understanding ideology[16], what has often been understood as ideology as false consciousness. This involves thinking about ideology from an agent's perspective. What's needed, he argues, is to understand a "deeper element of a certain awfulness" that "has to do with one's point of view… one's system of reality."[17] The focus here shifts from exploitative social structures, such as chattel slavery and the Jim Crow laws that followed, to the ways that we as subjects relate to them. Baldwin moves us beyond thinking about the function ideologies play. While he acknowledges that ideology

[14] Baldwin and Buckley, 380.
[15] Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, 12–22.
[16] I don't mean to suggest that for Baldwin, these two different accounts of ideology are incompatible. Instead, it's
[17] Baldwin and Buckley, "Transcript of the Baldwin versus Buckley Debate at the Cambridge Union," 379.

sustains relations of domination, and that relations of domination generate ideology, his focus is elsewhere. Baldwin is interested in how ideologies work in and through us as individuals:

> It comes as a great shock around the age of five or six or seven to discover the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to discover that Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, when you were rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians were you![18]

What Baldwin underscores here, is no doubt, a puzzling phenomenon. He admits that the circulation of ideas as concern the American dream do stabilize the very conditions of our domination. But, those ideas don't circulate in some detached or third-personal way. Whatever function ideology serves in maintaining a system of domination, that function is fulfilled partly through us. More concisely, we are both victims of our exploitative social conditions, and at the same time, we also prop up these conditions. How are we, as philosophers, to explain this phenomenon?

Social and political philosophers have largely taken up the first aspect of Baldwin's account of ideology, turning to functional explanations of how ideology sustains domination or how conditions of domination generate ideologies.[19] These discussions, however, often lose Baldwin's emphasis on a related phenomenon: how these ideological functions are performed in and through us. Without an account of false consciousness, though, we risk seeing an important aspect of social ontology, namely, that our social conditions depend on our collective acceptance. This emphasis on how our social order is not natural but something that we create is important for us as critical social philosophers. If we make social conditions through our participation, we

[18] Baldwin and Buckley, 381.
[19] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 75; Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," 24–25; Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory"; Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*; Haslanger, "Culture and Critique," 149–50.

can also understand possibilities for remaking the social. Ideology is not something that happens behind our backs and over our heads, something we participate in only "unknowingly and unintentionally."[20]

Increasingly, it's not just critical theorists who explain inadequate social conditions by appeal to ideology, but Anglo-American analytic political philosophers too.[21] The work of critique for these figures characteristically involves looking at inadequate social institutions and practices and how they buttress unjust social conditions. This might involve, for example, a discussion of how US employers constrain the way we work, what we wear, and increasingly how we conduct our lives after hours, or else the way people with deep commitments to gender parity shore up the patriarchy.[22] The focus here, is on structural and systemic injustice and the functions of our ways of organizing social life serve.

The turn towards analyzing our inadequate social order is an important corrective, as is the turn towards functional explanation. Political philosophy tends towards abstraction from real world relations of power and exploitation.[23] While I do not discard functional explanation, I argue here that these forms of explanation are incomplete. What falls out of view on *purely* functional ways of characterizing ideology is what Baldwin pointed us towards, namely, the way that conditions of domination get entrenched not in some detached way, but instead through us and our propping up of the very same deficient social order. We need a way to account for our own investment in the very social institutions and practices that dominate us.

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[20] Haslanger, "Systemic and Structural Injustice: Is There a Difference?," 1.
[21] Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory"; Haslanger, *Critical Theory and Practice*; Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*; Anderson, *Private Government*.
[22] Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*; Anderson, *Private Government*; Haslanger, "Systemic and Structural Injustice: Is There a Difference?"
[23] For critiques of this form, see: Mills, "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology"; Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*; Waldron, *Political Political Theory*.

Although we need to account for the way domination gets sustained in and through us, social philosophers also roundly reject false consciousness, the very concept that could do this explanatory work. False consciousness — often understood as a person's "false perception" of their social reality or their true interests— is widely considered indefensible. In the 1990s, Terry Eagleton proclaimed that false consciousness was already then a "fairly unpopular notion of ideology."[24] Little has changed in the time since. Wendy Brown, in her recent Tanner lectures, argued that retaining the concept of false consciousness is at odds with effective political critique. Above all, she maintains, "we need to surrender every variation on the notion that only false consciousness keeps the masses from knowing and acting on their true interests in equality and emancipation."[25] Even defenders of the concept of false consciousness, like Steven Lukes, concede that diagnosing false consciousness can seem "highly objectionable."[26]

Appeals to false consciousness, scholars argue, contain some of the most troubling aspects of theories of ideology.[27] The epistemology is unconvincing, positing a correspondence between thought and reality that is insensitive to the ways social reality is something we at once create and are at the same time subject to.[28] In taking up an account of a "false" perception of a person's "true" interests, for instance, ideology critics risk situating false consciousness in illusions or occlusions. But, critics maintain that ideology is not something we find in our perception of the (inadequate) social world, but instead something extant in those social conditions themselves. Or else, false consciousness gets charged with authoritarianism. False consciousness, we might worry, posits a "privileged place, somehow exempted from the turmoils

[24] Eagleton, *Ideology*, 10.
[25] Brown, *Nihilistic Times*, 55.
[26] Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness."
[27] Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude*; Kelly, "The Unhappy Liberal."
[28] Eagleton, *Ideology*, 10.

[sic] of social life, which enables some subject-agent to perceive the very hidden mechanism" that regulates our social order.[29] Forty years after Adorno's account of ideology as "necessary false consciousness," that is, many suggest we turn away from appeals to false consciousness altogether.[30]

The aim of this project, then, is to weed out what is still valuable and alive in the concept of false consciousness. This chapter's contentions are threefold. First, I argue that false consciousness can help social philosophers keep in view an important dimension of ideology, in particular the way that we as subjects as well as our affective investments in the social order are part of what sustains these social orders. Social institutions depend on us to keep existing. And, this insight dovetails with the practice turn in social theory, which argues that we cannot understand social structures or the functions that ideology serves in sustaining relations of domination from a third-person perspective alone. To that end, an account of ideology as false consciousness can help keep the way that we are implicated in view without rendering us liable to these concerns. All the same, we can't merely resurrect a prior understanding of false consciousness. Our account of false consciousness needs to be sensitive to two sets of objections that are worth taking seriously.[31] The first set of concerns relate to a presupposed correspondence theory of truth or else an implausible account of the reflection of social reality—in short, issues of correspondence. The second concerns issues of authoritarianism, or how we can justify our standing to critique a form of consciousness as distorted.[32]

[29] Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 3.
[30] Adorno, "Beitrag Zur Ideologienlehre," 374.
[31] For example of these lines of critique, see: Kelly, "The Unhappy Liberal"; Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude*.
[32] See, most notably: Lukács, *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness*.

The plan for this chapter is as follows. After defending the usefulness of theories of ideology as false consciousness in section 2, I explore standard accounts of the falsity of false consciousness. I also turn to why scholars broadly reject false consciousness despite the concept's explanatory utility (section 3). Here, I briefly address two objections to standard accounts of false consciousness – that of correspondence and that of authoritarianism. While standard accounts of the falsity of false consciousness fail to meet these two objections, a point I make in section 4, I maintain that these objections tell against a certain account of false consciousness. They do not, however, tell against false consciousness as such. Finally, in section 5, I consider an alternate way of characterizing false consciousness, which requires thinking less about falsity and more about distortion.

1.2 What Motivates False Consciousness (Or Why Not Get Rid of It?)

Insofar as social philosophers have largely investigated ideology by thinking about the functions that social and material conditions play in sustaining domination, these coordinates are insufficient for capturing how ideology works in and through us. It is this feature of ideology, namely, the way that we contribute to the conditions that dominate us that has, however, long puzzled philosophers.

For Etienne de La Boetie in his 16th century essay "On Voluntary Servitude," for example, what needs to be explained is:

> how it can happen that so many men, so many villages, so many cities, so many nations sometimes endorse a single tyrant, who has no more power than they collectively which they give him; who has no capacity to harm them except for what they want to ensure from him; who could not inflict any evil on them, if they did not prefer to bear with him rather than challenge him.[33]

[33] La Boétie, "On Voluntary Servitude," 192.

La Boetie, although he does not use the term false consciousness, emphasizes the way that dominating systems function, at least in part in and through our participation. A tyrant's hold on power is not natural. By contrast, the tyrant's power is the result of collective acceptance of the "many men" we find in villages, cities, and nations.[34]A tyrant's power consists partly in the people who are the tyrant's subjects taking up a stance towards the tyrant and the tyrant's rules. In other words, there's something that distinguishes merely abiding by the tyrant's rules (behavior that conforms to the rules in an external way), and our applying these rules (rule-following). Merely conforming to rules is different from rule-following, because the latter involves a kind of acceptance that is particular to us as agents.[35]

Honing in on how ideas about the tyrant's authority function to stabilize the tyrant's power is, accordingly, insufficient. What has to be explained is not just conformity with the tyrant's rules, that is, but something stronger, namely, rule-following. We need an account of how the tyrant's power, a power that manifests in and through rules, is the result of our collective acceptance. Albeit in different terms, La Boetie highlights the explanatory utility of concepts of false consciousness over and above functional accounts of ideology: in helping us to see the relevance of our participation in fulfilling these very functions.[36]

[34] Of course, collective action is complicated. The point for La Boetie, however, is not that we do not in fact manage to overthrow tyranny. He is puzzled that we do not even attempt to do so. In other words, appeal to difficulties in coordination problems that prevent collective action still do not explain that we don't attempt to overthrow tyranny. As discussed in the literature, however, the "acceptance" in question can be quite weak and can amount to merely passive acceptance of the tyrant's rules. For more on these complications of how institutions depend on our acceptance of the rules that constitute them, see for instance: Neuhouser, *Diagnosing Social Pathology*, 119.
[35] See for a discussion on this distinction Neuhouser, 120; Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 5.
[36] I do not here defend functional accounts of ideology against counterarguments. It should suffice for my argument to show that even if we take up functional accounts of ideology, we nevertheless still need an account of ideology as false consciousness.

What La Boetie calls "voluntary servitude" also helps us distinguish ideology (and false consciousness as ideology) from issues of coercion. People don't merely shore up a tyrant's power because they fear retaliation. Of course, we might not protest inadequate social conditions if we suspected that we would face repercussions for doing so. Yet, drawing attention to coercion – rather than explaining the ways ideology works in and through us – is to avoid the concept of ideology altogether. When people obey in the face of force, La Boetie argues, "we should not be surprised" but instead merely "lament the misfortune."[37] What's mysterious and calls for an explanation, then, is that we seem to not just reluctantly accept tyranny, but that we seem to do more: to bolster the very conditions of tyranny by accepting tyranny's constitutive rules. We do, in other words, more than reluctantly accept and participate in the conditions that dominate us. We seem to instead "bring about" these very social conditions.[38]

To explain why we don't oppose our dominating social orders, then, we need more than to appeal to external coercion. Domination, while it may be in some sense heteronomous, involves more than force from the outside.[39] The instruments of our own exploitation appear to be us, ourselves acting collectively[40]:

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[37] La Boétie, "On Voluntary Servitude," 193.
[38] La Boétie, 193.
[39]The sense in which desiring one's own subjection is in some sense heteronomous has been taken up by feminist accounts of relational autonomy. Proceduralist accounts of autonomy that dominate in discussions of agency emphasize content-neutrality, such that an agent is free if their actions and motivations have been subjected to critical reflection. Where this account goes wrong, according to feminists, is in failing to see how agents – even if their actions and motivations meet thresholds of self-reflection and self-legislation– bear traces of oppressive social conditions. Take the example of a woman who sees herself as adequate only if she has children, and subjects these motivations to the right kind of critical reflection. There may be no impediments to this woman identifying with her first-order desires and she may adequately reflect, yet, we may think her actions are in some sense heteronomous given the wa she has formed her desires in the background of heterosexist and patriarchal norms. While I find much promising in these accounts, I only mean to say here that there are important senses in which heteronomy may involve more than just coercion or compulsion and that the background conditions of social life can be relevant to such determinations. See for instance Mackenzie and Stoljar, *Relational Autonomy*.
[40] In other words, the acceptance of any individual person is not what sustains these institutions.

> From where has he [the one who dominates you] taken so many eyes with which he spies on you, unless you give them to him? How does he have so many hands with which to strike you, unless he takes them from you? The feet with which he tramples your cities, where does he get them from, if they are not yours? How does he have any power over you, except through you?[41]

It's our hands and feet and collective acceptance of the tyrant's legitimacy than enables the tyrant to exercise power at all. If there's force, the idea goes, it's not a force that's fully outside of us but a force that is operating in and through us. La Boetie's emphasis on the way debates about ideology and our agency require us to set aside standard theories of coercion is shared by more contemporary feminist philosophers like Kate Manne, too. Manne distinguishes coercion from ideology in writing about the ways we should see the enforcement mechanisms of the patriarchy. Coercion, unlike justification and rationalization of patriarchy, for Manne, do not properly register as ideological at all.[42] This is not to say that coercion is never a part of patriarchy, but to ask about the other (not straightforwardly coercive aspect). Moreover, Manne's taking up ideology as distinct from issues of coercion suggests something else. Even if we explain ideology by reference to the function ideology serves in sustaining domination, we need a way to account for how that function is realized by means of us as agents who take up stances to our social order.

De La Boetie, here too, raises the connection between the first-person perspective in realizing the dominating function of ideology and issues in collective acceptance. He writes that people "permit… their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit they would put an end to their servitude." [43] In other words, it's not just that ideology works in and through us, but also that we

[41] La Boétie, 192.
[42] Manne, *Discriminating Sexism*.
[43] La Boétie, "On Voluntary Servitude," 196.

could stop domination by our social conditions if we simply withdrew our collective assent to our social order.

To clarify the hold of this point—that those who are subject to domination could also avoid domination by withdrawing their consent – we will need to turn to social ontology. By better understanding how social institutions are created and maintained by us, we can better understand why de La Boetie is so puzzled by why those dominated don't oppose inadequate social systems.

Rocks, water, and trees, the thought goes, are different kinds of things from debt and credit, official languages, local governments and statuses like being married or being a citizen.[44] Something can be a rock, even if no one believes it to be a rock. [45]Yet, the same isn't true for social institutions or practices. The attitude we take towards debt and credit, official languages, local governments, and statuses is partly constitutive of those very social entities. That's because social entities have both their origin and their maintenance conditions in collective acceptance. As John Searle puts it, "collective agreement" is "partly constitutive of social reality."[46]

This insight, namely that social institutions don't exist in the same way that other entities do, is a line of thought that Fred Neuhouser traces through Rousseau. He writes about the sense in which social practices and institutions are artificial:

> Social institutions in general are "sustained by participants' ongoing 'authorizing consent' to the conventions (or rules) that define such institutions, where "consent" refers

[44] We might nevertheless think there are different kinds of social entities. Universities and governments might still be different sorts of things from statuses like being married or being in debt, for example. What's important for this account is not that social entities differ from one to another so much as that social entities differ from natural ones in some specific respects.
[45] We needn't accept a hard line between the social and natural sciences, and can admit e.g. the insights of those post-empiricist critics of positivism like Kuhn and Latour here. Instead, we need merely to suggest the maintenance conditions for social entities are different from the maintenance conditions for non-social entities. For more on the issues concerning the alleged neutrality of observation and "givenness" of data in the natural sciences, see, for instance: Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern"; Kuhn, "The Natural and the Human Sciences."
[46] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 89.

> to our acceptance and application of the rules in question. The suggestion, that we all make the rules of patriarchy must be understood, then, as the claim that the widespread acceptance and application of those rules is something we do that *makes* the institutions defined by those rules. [47]

What Neuhouser draws our attention to is the way that social reality is sustained by our collective acceptance, what he calls "authorizing consent." This is a point about what it is for social institutions to exist at all. Our acceptance of and application of patriarchy's rules not only bolsters the authority of the patriarchy, but also qualifies as what it is for the patriarchy to persist as a social institution.

Since our authorizing consent is part of the maintenance conditions of what enables social institutions to exist, on both Neuhouser and Searle's accounts, another important thing follows. When we stop accepting certain social categories or entities, that is, when we withdraw our authorizing consent, these aspects of social reality simply cease to be.

Take, for example, Christa Wolf's description in *City of Angels* of traveling to the US on a passport from the GDR three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.[48] The American border agent is perplexed. How could Wolf have a passport to a country that no longer exists? A scene ensues. The border official calls his supervisors to ask what to do with a valid passport from a non-existent nation. Part of what's surprising about the situation is that even if Wolf's passport hasn't expired, we understand that the status associated with it (being an East German citizen) is no longer possible. The maintenance condition of social entities, this suggests, has something to do with our collective acceptance of them. But how does this all bear on the questions of false consciousness with which we began? Social entities like statuses (being a citizen) and the

[47] Neuhouser, *Diagnosing Social Pathology*, 117.
[48] Wolf, *City of Angels, or, The Overcoat of Dr. Freud.*

institutions that underwrite these statuses (the GDR) continue to exist at least in part on account of our acceptance of these aspects of social life.

If we were to all tear up our passports – or if the states issuing the passports were no longer recognized as states as the example suggests – then we would no longer be citizens of this-or-that country. Or if we all stopped accepting cash as currency at all, it would no longer be legal tender. In other words, our conscious acceptance of and participation in our social conditions is part of the story about how these social conditions are collectively maintained.

We are, the thought goes, sometimes dominated by means of the very social institutions, practices, and statuses that we collectively accept. Social entities like corporate lobbies, for example, or practices like the gendered division of labor or the expropriation of resources from the global South are conditions that dominate us. The same goes for statuses like being "undocumented." But these aspects of social reality would simply cease to exist as aspects of social reality at all but for our continued acceptance.

This is the puzzle that false consciousness turns around. If the social order that dominates us depends on our acceptance and participation to maintain its very existence, why don't we collectively withdraw? Why don't we simply stop accepting a social order that doesn't serve us? We may obey in part because we need to do so in order to survive, and yet, this alone doesn't explain our applying the tyrant's decrees (that is, following the tyrant's rules rather than merely conforming with them). La Boetie's own line of inquiry began with issues of the authority of a tyrant, but the implications are far reaching.

Social institutions and practices, of course, are not only maintained on account of our consent, whether collective or individual. Social institutions and practices are real.[49] To that

[49]We might think about this as a variation on Searle's claim that the social world does not exist independently of us, and yet it has a reality that exceeds us, for instance.

extent they have a life and logic of their own. Once created, we not only collectively constitute social life but are also subject to it. Take the capitalist economy, for instance. We can accept that the capitalist economy once created has certain dynamics that individually, we might never have authorized, such as the imperative to find cheap labor, the drive to expand markets, the push to constantly revise how production happens in order to increase profit. And, as has been well documented, these social entities that we once consented to shape the kinds of subjects we come to be in and through these institutions in ways that we might also have not foreseen. [50] There is, no doubt, much beyond our collective acceptance that explains why social conditions persist.

Nor would any individual's acceptance or participation be necessary for social life to continue as it does. A person can withdraw from the nation-state or the capitalist economy without either collapsing. Nevertheless, collective consent is part of the story as to how dominating social institutions are maintained. To that extent, we might wonder not only about outcomes, such as why the capitalist economy or the gendered division of labor have not collapsed – but also why collective acceptance isn't withheld on a broader scale.

What I have been suggesting, then, is that accounts of false consciousness enable theories of ideology to grapple with these important issues in social ontology. Even if ideology involves functional explanation, these functions are maintained by collective assent. To that end, we still need to say more about why we don't withdraw our acceptance of these social institutions and practices.

Additionally, theories of false consciousness are sensitive to the insights of the practice turn

[50] This insight about the unanticipated relationship between social conditions and subject formation is often more available to Foucault and Foucauldians than to other social philosophers. See, for instance: Foucault and Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics*; Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

in social theory. As Charles Taylor among others have argued, social institutions and practices cannot be understood from a detached standpoint alone.[51] To understand gender as institution, we need to analyze both its constitutive rules and how we as people take up these institutions and rules. More broadly, social life is not explicable without recourse to the self-understandings of those of us who participate in the very same conditions. This insight of the practice turn is, as some commentators have remarked, so widespread in fields like sociology and anthropology as to be "almost hegemonic."[52] To that end, we can no longer reference social and material structures and the way that they are functionally organized without understanding the way that functional organization requires the perspective of us as participants in these institutions and practices. To that end, then, false consciousness – in its ability to account for the perspective of us as agents – is important even for those who defend functional accounts of ideology.

Retaining an account of ideology as false consciousness, then, can help us better explain the phenomena of ideology while keeping in view how we are both made by and make our social structures. We cannot in some neutral, third-personal way alone, characterize the function that social institutions serve in maintaining domination. Instead, social practices need to be apprehended in a way that accounts for the self-understandings of the very participants involved.[53]

This may lead us to inquire about other concepts that turn to agency and the connection between agency and social structures. I do not suggest that my account of false consciousness is the only way this problem can be solved. One might, for example, turn to accounts of subjection

[51] Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man."
[52] Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique," 21.
[53] We might see this as part of the claim that social institutions are "normatively constituted" and to that end cannot be explained purely "from the outside" Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 85–132.

that we find in Foucauldian inheritors such as Judith Butler [54] as a way of bringing together affective investment with issues of agency. Yet, while there is much to be learned from such accounts, these concepts are not central to the discourse of ideology already as false consciousness is. To that end, I will be focusing my efforts on rehabilitating a concept of false consciousness.

False consciousness as a critical concept can help us both understand how the reality of social institutions depends on us, and how false consciousness avoids committing ideology critics to forms of positivism. False consciousness's utility as a critical concept for social philosophy can help us keep in view the relationship between us as agents and the way that ideology works.

1.3 What's False about False Consciousness

I maintain that accounts of ideology as false consciousness help us better explain insights from social ontology and the nature of explanation in social science. This might suggest that social philosophers should simply return to long-standing accounts of false consciousness. Yet, we should not simply take up the received accounts of false consciousness.

1.3.1 Cognitive and Epistemic Falsity

When philosophers write about false consciousness – both critics and defenders – they widely understand the phenomenon as about agents who are wrong about themselves, their social world, or their true interests. The idea, then, is that false consciousness consists in people who have "systematically distorted beliefs about the social order and their own place in it that works

[54] See, for instance: Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 6–10.

systematically against their own interests."[55] This falsity is also understood as socially-caused. I will call this family of views cognitive-epistemic.

We find versions of the position in Raymond Geuss's *Idea of a Critical Theory,* for example, and it's this account that Maeve Cooke and critical sociologist Steven Lukes have found worthy of defense.[56] Figures like Sally Haslanger, too, who do not use the concept of false consciousness explicitly, often combine functionalist accounts of ideology with a focus on ideology's epistemic face. When Haslanger, for instance, draws on ideology as sustaining conditions of domination, she also argues that function occurs in and through "the distortion, occlusion, and misrepresentation of the facts."[57] To that end, I will also be treating this family of views as involving accounts of false consciousness that center around cognitive-epistemic mistakes. While I do not dispute the use

Although there are different ways of parsing the nature of the falsity in false consciousness on cognitive-epistemic views, even the most sophisticated positions under this umbrella remain, taken alone, inadequate. I will, in this section, turn to three versions of cognitive-epistemic view that we find in the literature. On the first view, false consciousness involves a mistake about some set of facts either about the social world or one's interests. On the second view, the mistake concerns second-order errors about the epistemic reasons for our (mistaken) beliefs. And on the final view, the mistake in question results from the specific social and historical arrangements in which we find ourselves. Each view I consider is progressively more sophisticated, and accordingly, better able to answer some objections that I raise. Nonetheless, even the more

[55] Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness," 28.
[56] Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*; Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness"; Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*.
[57] Haslanger, "Culture and Critique," 150.

sophisticated forms of the cognitive and epistemic mistake view still succumb to two sets of concerns.

1.3.2 Mistaken Facts, Mistaken Interests

As I have been suggesting, there are different versions of the cognitive-epistemic mistake view that are widely held. Steven Lukes, for instance, defends a simple version of the position. We can, on Lukes' position, be wrong about either our interests or about some facts that have to do with our social reality. Lukes is no doubt right that we can make these kinds of mistakes and that such mistakes may sometimes be part of what we think of as ideology. And yet, as an account of the primary feature of false consciousness, Lukes' view risks making false consciousness simpler and easier to overcome than social philosophers widely think it is.

Lukes gives the example of a campaign to repeal the estate tax in the US.[58] The American public overwhelmingly supported getting rid of a tax that affected only 2% of the population. Popular support for the initiative appears all the stranger considering that cuts yielded decreased revenue for social services. This lowered revenue in turn yielded the rollback of social services that affected a large portion of the American public. For Lukes, there was a mistake in question. People who opposed the estate tax failed to understand how few Americans would be subject to the law. One of the answers as to what happened was for Lukes, "ignorance of the facts," seeing as almost half of Americans believed that nearly everyone had to pay the tax. [59] If more Americans understood who would *actually* be impacted by the estate tax, that is, they would have acted differently. In other words, for Lukes, at bottom, the kind of falsity in false

[58] Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness," 25–27.
[59] Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness," 25.

consciousness is not particularly mysterious. That is, the mistake that those who supported the estate tax make is a "conceptual and cognitive" one. [60] For Lukes, then, false consciousness inheres in errors that we make about social and political facts in a complex social order. Of course, some of the beliefs that people hold are true and others are false. Lukes writes, that at bottom, the mistake is a mistake about "factual beliefs… susceptible of [*sic*] truth and falsity." [61]

For Lukes, getting wrong how our social and economic policies work can lead us to mistakenly conclude that something is in our interest when it is not. In other words, as Lukes concludes, "it's not always easy to know what your interests are," and mistakes are more common than we might think.[62]

Lukes' position however, has several problems. For one, Lukes may get the order of operations wrong. We might not know how many people would stand to pay estate taxes. But, for Lukes's argument to be convincing, we need to assume that the error about who stands to pay estate taxes precedes the widespread support for the repeal of this tax. But, this is too rationalist an explanation. Lukes contends that first, we form beliefs about whether some policy is in our interest, and then we act on the basis of these beliefs. Psychological research suggests that at least sometimes, things go the other way. Take the phenomenon of motivated reasoning. Sometimes our false beliefs about policies or about what is in our interest follow other psychic investments we have. [63] In other words, we might have psychic commitments to a particular political party, for example, or investments in being the kind of person who has the kind of standing to pay an estate tax, so on and so forth. And our beliefs might follow from these psychic

[60] Lukes, 27.
[61]Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness," 27.
[62] Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness," 27.
[63] Lord, Ross, and Lepper, "Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence"; Tetlock and Levi, "Attribution Bias: On the Inconclusiveness of the Cognition-Motivation Debate."

attachments, rather than vice versa. On this account, our motivation to support the repeal of the estate tax precedes our beliefs, rather than vice versa. And in that case, locating the falsity in the beliefs seems to focus on something epiphenomenal.

Of course, we can concede that sometimes Lukes' explanation *is* operative and that it might contribute to at least part of our behavior. Let's take another historical example. When Thatcher sold off the City of London's public housing stock in the 1980s to tenants, perhaps there was legitimate confusion about whether individual property ownership would be in the interest of residents who became homeowners. Yet, the ongoing legacy of this sell-off of public housing on London's affordability, as well as the property crash of the 1990s, suggests the policy was complex and may have had unintended consequences. Perhaps, it was more complicated than many tenants- turned-homeowners in London initially understood. Some trace London's store of unoccupied apartments that now belong to the superwealthy to this policy.[64] It's not hard to imagine a person who prefers renting in a vibrant neighborhood to owning an apartment on a street that has gone lifeless. I concede that sometimes, we might be wrong about our interests based on a factual belief or even a set of beliefs.

Nevertheless, mistakes such as these are rarely sufficient as an account of false consciousness. Perhaps the London homeowners above would have revised their beliefs if they had sufficient information. Nonetheless, it's unlikely that those who supported the repeal of the estate tax would simply, upon learning new facts about how few people are liable to pay this tax, take on this new information. This appears to treat us as, for the most part, excessively rational agents who are always responsive to the evidence and sometimes make mistakes. By contrast, however, I imagine that if confronted with new information on who would have to pay the task,

[64] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 60–61.

people who supported the estate tax repeal would respond defensively and attempt to retain their commitments. The unforeseen consequences of our mistakes, on Lukes' view, are sufficient for our upholding inadequate social institutions. But if our mistakes are overcome and nonetheless we seek to prop up our institutions, Lukes' explanation appears explanatorily inadequate.

More importantly, though, on this account we risk treating false consciousness as an emergent phenomenon. There is nothing necessary about the connection between the epistemic-cognitive error and the social causation, as the explanation of biking suggests. In other words, Lukes' claim seems to be that misunderstanding who has to pay the estate tax or whether we stand to benefit from a sale of public housing stock is a mistake that we each make individually. These mistakes, for Lukes', are only weakly social, in that they amount to the aggregation of individual mistakes about the estate tax. That is, false consciousness is a phenomenon that we each have as individual people, even if the distortions are widely shared.

We might, however, doubt Lukes' explanatory thesis that we start with individuals and their mistakes about the estate tax and can get good social explanations about the widespread support of the policy from there. Certain mistakes are social, and to that end, explaining such mistakes will require that we do not decompose the social pathology in question into mistakes that individual members make. Durkheim, in his work on suicide, for instance, denies that certain social phenomena (rates of suicide) can be understood by turning to the individual choices of social members (e.g. decisions to commit suicide). [65]On the contrary, Durkheim's contention is that to explain the social phenomenon in question we need to think about patterns of suicide and not just individual suicides. Lukes, in assuming that the social mistake about the estate tax or about who will benefit from selling off public housing stock, is best understood in terms of

[65] Durkheim, *Suicide*.

individuals fails to attend to how these mistakes are intelligible in and through a social matrix. In other words, it is relevant to us as critical theorists how these mistakes are patterned and whether our laws, policies, customs, and social roles have something to do with the mistakes that are made.

1.3.3 Second-Order Mistakes

On an improved account of the cognitive-epistemic mistake view, the problem is not about our first-order beliefs or set of beliefs about our social world or our interests. Instead, the position is meant to be about a disconnect between the beliefs we hold at a first-order and our higher-order reflection on these beliefs.[66] We can find a version of this position in Tommie Shelby:

> To hold a belief with a false consciousness is to hold it while being ignorant of, or self-deceived about, the real motives for why one holds it: the individual who suffers from a false consciousness would like to believe that she accepts a given belief system[67] (solely) because of the epistemic considerations in favor of it, but as a matter of fact, she accepts it primarily because of the influence of noncognitive motives that operate, as Marx was fond of saying "behind her back," that is without her conscious awareness.[68]

What Shelby argues here is that the locus of the mistake in false consciousness is a disconnect. While I might be wrong about how many people stand to benefit from the repeal of the real estate tax, the falsity in question is not getting wrong the particular facts about the policy. It's a mistake that I make about why it is that I retain my particular beliefs. For Shelby, the mistake is not about particular false beliefs or even sets of beliefs. I might hold onto beliefs

[66] While, for instance, this is not explicitly offered as an account of ideology as false consciousness, it is an account of ideology we can find e.g. in Durkheim, *Suicide.*
[67] Shelby here seems to reference both a belief singular as well as a belief system. While we might understand Lukes to be talking about the falsity of a particular belief rather than a set of beliefs, the points about motivated reasoning and epiphenomenalism still apply to sets of beliefs as much as singular beliefs. And, for Shelby what makes false consciousness false for Shelby does not have to do with this distinction.
[68] Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory," 170.

because I think they are well-supported, but in fact, it could be for other reasons: e.g. it might serve some kind of non-cognitive interest of mine. Shelby's position, then, is an improvement on Lukes's position. Shelby, unlike Lukes, allows that my beliefs about my true interests or my beliefs about the estate tax might be motivated by my (non-cognitive) attachments. In the process, then, Shelby does not succumb to the excessive rationalism that Lukes does. Shelby can accommodate, for instance, that we remain attached to the estate tax and that our investments precede our beliefs. He then avoids first line of critique that I leveled about the order of operations.

Shelby gives the example of racial scapegoating as one instance in which one might hold beliefs about our social world for more than cognitive reasons:

> The white working-class racist attacks blacks in a similar subordinate economic position and blames them for problems whose real causes lie elsewhere. But he blames blacks, not because he has good evidence for thinking that they are the source of his difficulties, but because, for example, he cannot bear to face the real causes of his misery[69]…

What Shelby draws our attention to, then, is the way that our psychic investments can precede our mistaken beliefs about the social world, about ourselves, or about our true interests. And yet, it's precisely that our beliefs are based on psychic investments rather than good reasons that mean we're in the grips of false consciousness. In other words, false consciousness consists not only in a mistaken belief[70] but a belief that is held "because of the unconscious influence of non-cognitive motives."[71]

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[69] Shelby, 171.
[70] Shelby suggests in places that we can be subject to false consciousness even if the beliefs in question are epistemically well-supported by evidence. So long as we ourselves don't base our beliefs on the good epistemic grounds, that is, we can be subject to false consciousness.
[71] Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory," 172.

Yet, in spite of Shelby's position being an improvement on Lukes', it is nevertheless inadequate. For one, it risks too rationalist a picture of what people are like. Every time a belief is caused by "non-cognitive" motives and the belief is false, we are liable to the charge of false consciousness. But it risks including too many things under the purview of false consciousness. There are many beliefs I have that I hold for non-cognitive reasons. I might, for instance, be motivated to trust a friend even if I don't have cognitive grounds to do so, because I want to be the kind of person whose presumption of their friends is that they are trustworthy until proven otherwise. This might be true even if my friend is, in fact, untrustworthy.

We might still think Shelby has a way out. Perhaps there are some non-cognitive reasons I have for my beliefs (e.g. that my friend is trustworthy), but these are non-cognitive reasons that upon reflection, I would endorse. But, couldn't Shelby take up an improved version of the view. Perhaps what goes wrong in false consciousness involves non-cognitive reasons that I couldn't reflexively endorse?

The appeal to false consciousness as a failure to find reflexively-endorsable non-cognitive reasons, however, doesn't help Shelby. For one, it is too rationalist. Perhaps I am annoyed at my partner for being late to dinner. Maybe I'm wrong about an embedded assumption—my partner's not really late, and my annoyance, contrary to what I tell myself, is the result of a perceived slight from earlier in the day. I might not reflectively endorse my annoyance at my partner and I might not be able to admit the perceived slight even when confronted with it. My reasons are not reflexively endorsable, on this view. And yet, my failure to apprehend the reasons for my annoyance – in spite of being non-cognitive and reflexively unendorsable—do not seem like the same kind of thing as false consciousness. The disconnect between my beliefs and the reasons that they are held is not social.

Shelby's account of false consciousness as a failure to find reflexively-endorsable non-cognitive reasons for our false beliefs, that is, still treats false consciousness as derivatively social. The mistake involved in scapegoating beliefs, for Shelby, is decomposable into mistakes that people make as individuals, e.g. rather than mistakes that need to be explained by appeal to a social matrix of institutions, laws, policies, roles and discourse (e.g. the segregated history of labor unions in this country, say, or the dog-whistling familiar from political discourse). The mistakes that we make about how or why we hold particular beliefs, then, are mistakes that are explainable at individual levels without reference to social institutions or patterns at all. What we need more attention to, however, are the ways that mistakes are socially patterned. And, how in the social domain, shared mistaken beliefs can be made to be true. [72]

1.3.4 More Socially-Sensitive Mistake Views

I have been arguing that standard accounts of falsity about cognitive or epistemic mistakes seem only derivatively social and as such are inadequate as sources for how we are to think of false consciousness today. I want to consider, now, one more sophisticated mistake-centered view that takes the kind of cognitive and epistemic errors in question to be socially and historically specific. We can find a version of this critique in Marx.

In *The German Ideology*, ideology refers to a philosophical position about the dominion of thought. On this view, we are subject to ideological consciousness when we think that "the world is ruled by ideas, that ideas and concepts are the determining principles."[73] For Marx, here, false consciousness, then, is cognitive-epistemic just as in the case of Lukes and Shelby. False

[72] Haslanger, *Resisting Reality*, chap. 1.
[73] Marx, Engels, and Marx, *The German Ideology*.

consciousness consists in a misunderstanding about what the forces are that propel history. This is meant by the claim that we err about what the "determining principles" are. We go wrong by understanding the progression of history as the unfolding of ideas rather than the development of productive forces, economic relations, and class struggle.

Of course, Marx need not think this mistake is a mistake that we would make for all times or all places. The mistake is meant to be one that we make contingently. In other words, particular social conditions lead us to err in our account of the "determining principles" of history. We make a mistake in thinking that ideas rather than economic relations determine history. But, that's a mistake that we make on account of the particular conditions of capitalist political economy. That is, were we to change the underlying social conditions, we might not make those same mistakes. This account of the socially-sensitive and contingent nature of our mistake, then, dovetails with Horkheimer's insistence that we can't think of something being ideologically false, where the claim about falsity is "valid for all times and for all human beings."[74] Instead, for Horkheimer, we will need some other way of thinking about ideological distortion as specific to social and political critique. To that end, then, we need a way of thinking about the falsity of false consciousness where the mistakes in question have something to do with our way of organizing social and political life.

This position, I am suggesting, is an improvement on the first two positions that we considered. It accounts for the social and historical specificity of the mistakes in question. That is, it's not incidental that we make a mistake about who stands to benefit from the estate tax or who is to blame for the poverty of the white working class. On this view, there is something about the social order in a given place and at a given social and historical moment (e.g. the

[74] Horkheimer, "A New Concept of Ideology?," 141.

realities of tax code changes or selling off of housing stock in the 80s in the US and the UK, for example, or the history of race relations in America), such that certain mistakes are made. And what's more, we can't fully explain the mistakes in question without turning to the social They are not derivatively social, since the mistakes on this view are socially and historically specific.

Nonetheless, even this improved version of the view, I will argue, is – on its own terms inadequate. The objections to this version of the view have to do with challenges from correspondence and authoritarianism, which I will take up in the next section.

1.4 Correspondence and Authoritarianism, or Why False Consciousness is So Unpopular

Thus far, I have been arguing that many views of false consciousness are only incidentally social. Not, so, however, for the last position that I reconstructed about the contingent (socially and historically specific) nature of certain kinds of mistaken beliefs. This position, in its sensitivity to social conditions, looked to be an improvement on other cognitive-epistemic accounts. It might seem, then, that we are in a relatively promising position. If we need the concept of false consciousness to account for our agency, it looks as if we have a contender in one version of the cognitive-epistemic mistake view.

Nonetheless, even this socially-sensitive version of the mistake view on the table, we can't simply accept standard accounts of false consciousness. This has to do with two long-standing lines of critique that critics level against false consciousness. The first concerns correspondence, and the second concerns authoritarianism. I will briefly address these accounts in this section.

While the socially sensitive version of the cognitive-epistemic mistake view succumbs to critiques from correspondence and authoritarianism, this has led many social philosophers to

reject false consciousness outright.[75] But, as I will argue, these objections do not tell against false consciousness as such, but instead a particular version of false consciousness. To that end, my task is to offer an account of false consciousness can meet the challenges raised by these objections.

1.4.1 Correspondence

Let's begin with the idea that false consciousness is (perhaps unwittingly) committed to a correspondence theory of truth. This objection concerns how it is that our forms of consciousness link up to social reality.[76] In judging false consciousness to involve errors, the worry goes, we see beliefs as reflections of a reality outside of us (what Zizek calls the "relationship of 'representation' between thought and reality").[77] But, why should we think that our beliefs can neutrally describe a social world? After all, one of the insights from the pragmatic turn in social theory is that we can't observe the social world in a detached and third-person way. Theories of false consciousness were supposed to help us by avoiding the purported neutrality of social description. Yet, if we treat false consciousness as a matter of mistaken beliefs, it looks as though the positivist stance returns through the backdoor. In other words, we inadvertently – in thinking that we can have false beliefs about a "true" reality – fail to reckon with how our beliefs about say, race, gender, or the economy, partly constitute these social entities.

Our theorizing about the social affects social reality itself, what has been described as a "looping effect." [78] For instance, how we understand social entities like money or universities

[75] Kelly, "The Unhappy Liberal"; Rosen, "On Voluntary Servitude and the Theory of Ideology."
[76]This concern is acknowledged in Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique," 25; Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," 83. Both scholars reference a host of critical theorists who elsewhere address ideology as false consciousness and accusations that false consciousness makes such in commitments (i.e. Althusser, Zizek, Bourdieu)
[77] Žižek, *Mapping Ideology*, 3.
[78] Hacking, "Making Up People."

will, in turn, bear some relation to what these entities are. That is, whatever our theory of false consciousness, it is important that we take account of the fact that we can have a grasp of the social world and yet, that our grasp of the social world also partly constitutes it. As Rahel Jaeggi puts this, ideology involves a structure that is an intertwined and complicated "network of norms, ideas, and practices affecting one another."[79] Accounts of false consciousness can't consist in a mistaken grasp of a social world without accounting for how our grasp of the social world is constitutive of the social. We don't merely grasp social reality; we also make it. This isn't to say that we can't distinguish true from false claims about social reality, but only to say that truth and falsity are sometimes mixed together on both sides of the subject/object divide.

Secondly, sometimes critics offer examples of what counts as ideological distortion where truth and falsity are not easily separable. Saidiya Hartman, for instance, discusses freedom in the post-emancipation US. For Hartman, the discourse of emancipation as an increase in freedom is ideological. But this is not because we make a straightforward mistake and believe something false about emancipation.[80] The phenomenon that she describes is one in which our conception of freedom is both true and simultaneously false. In an important sense, she argues that after emancipation, more ex-slaves really did acquire certain legal freedoms they were previously denied. To that end, there is a sense in which it is true to say that emancipation led to an increase in freedom. The formerly enslaved were in the post-emancipation US considered legal persons. Since former slaves finally received legal recognition, that is, there's a sense in which we are right to say that they became freer. They could now interact with each other in less encumbered ways. They were no longer considered chattel. And yet, at one and the same time, they became by Hartman's own analysis, also unfree in the same moment. The legally-recognized freedom

[79] Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," 83.
[80] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, chap. 4.

that slaves were granted became a source of their unfreedom. At the moment that former slaves were recognized as legal persons, they also became responsible by law for debts that could only accrue to legal persons. Over time, these debt obligations became a source of their unfreedom, leading them into exploitative work conditions.[81] Hartman, on this account, characterizes a form of ideological distortion in talking about emancipation as leading to more freedom. But, on Hartman's view, we can't see this as a form of ideology that involves a straightforward mistake. It is not that in thinking of emancipation as an increase in freedom to the formerly enslaved we hold a false belief instead of a true one. Instead, truth and falsity are mixed: slaves become more free through their recognition as legal persons, and in and through that very recognition, they become liable to new forms of unfreedom. What we should take from Hartman, then, is that thinking of "false beliefs" reflecting a "true reality" goes wrong because truth and falsehood in ideology are often combined in complicated ways.

Even the most sophisticated and socially sensitive versions of cognitive-epistemic views, we might worry, don't account for both the looping effects in social reality as well as the ways ideology sometimes involves mixtures between truth and falsity.

[81]Marx's version of this freedom and equality paradox, which Hartman cites, is a more difficult to tease out although it's often cited. Part of what is complicated about Marx's example of freedom and equality is that the capitalist economy can be said to involve freedom in one respect (employment occurs between people free to form contracts with each other) and unfreedom in another (the nature of the work relations under capitalism means that we're not really free in such relations). Hartman's account of how it is that, after emancipation, the formerly enslaved came to be free as legal persons and, in and through that granting of legal personage, unfree avoids the possibility that we can explain the case away as involving freedom in one sense and unfreedom in another. That is, Hartman provides a concrete example of the entwinement of freedom and unfreedom.

1.4.2 Authoritarianism

Aside from concerns about correspondence that are targeted at the cognitive-epistemic mistake views, there's another familiar line of critique that leads many social philosophers to reject accounts of false consciousness altogether.

According to this line of critique, diagnosing false consciousness is authoritarian. There are several ways that we can understand this critique. On one line of critique, we seem to assume that we as critics know better. As Steven Lukes puts it, there's an objection – especially to Marxian accounts of false consciousness – that concerns an embedded assumption of "superior knowledge."[82] To say that a person is wrong about themselves, their true interests, or the social world, in other words, is to assume that the critic of false consciousness has access to the truth while the person guilty of false consciousness does not. But, to make that assumption is arrogant.[83]

[82] Lukes, "In Defense of "False Consciousness," 19.

[83] At this point, one might ask questions that come from Aristotelian realism: aren't there cases, in other words, where someone in fact knows better than we do about whether or not something is in our good? Say someone you know has been to the cinema, and they've just finished watching a film you're about to see. "You don't want to see the new Almodovar," they say. This can be true, even if I went to the movies wanting to see the Almodovar film. My friend, who already saw that the movie is unwatchable, knows something that I do not. The idea, here, is Aristotelian in that it holds that there might be true or false claims about what is good for a person that are in some sense independent of what I think. Thanks to Katja Vogt for this line of thought. I'll return to this at length in chapter 3. But, suffice it for now to say that even granting that there are such claims about my good that can be true or false, that is not the end of the story. This is for two main reasons. First, critical theory is supposed to include the possibility that those under critique can in some important sense take up the critique as theirs. To appeal directly to these good claims, to that end, might be inadvisable. Perhaps I'm likely to take up my friend's point about the movie, for example, but when we speak about what kind of life is good for me (urban or rural, say, or decisions about whether to study psychoanalysis or philosophy), it seems less plausible that I would simply defer to or take up these good claims as my own. To that end, even assuming realism, that there are certain things that are in our good and others that are not, we need not think that appealing to those claims follows. This gets to the second point. On the view that I am proposing here, one widely shared by critical theorists, our good is at least partly constituted by what we take to be good. Even if there are such facts about what my good consists in, my good, following this thought, partly consists in coming to my own account of what my good is on the basis of my own reasons. Critical theory, then, shares something with liberal theories of autonomy in this motivating thought. To that end, the authoritarianism objection still retains its bite. I will address autonomy and the authoritarianism objection at length in chapter 3.

Critical theorists' perspectives are themselves situated. That is, our knowledge is conditioned by our vantage points that are historically, culturally, and socially specific. As a result, we too are liable to make mistakes. In other words, we don't occupy some neutral external standpoint from which we are able to characterize what counts as an error or what counts as false consciousness at all. But to speak about mistakes, we imply that we can assume a better vantage point than those we critique as mistaken.

This relates too, to failures of self-implication. For one, when we diagnose someone as wrong about themselves, their social world, or their true interests, we don't consider the possibility that we ourselves as critics could be mistaken. But, we might wonder, why are we so sure about this? In sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild's book *Strangers in Their Own Land*, for instance, we meet Mike Schaff, a fierce advocate for environmental deregulation. [84] Schaff goes to rallies outside the Louisiana State Capitol to speak on behalf of oil companies while he himself has been the victim of a giant sinkhole that devoured his home. Hochschild admits that Mike "didn't think the Koch-funded idea machine was duping him."[85] He didn't think that he was wrong about his true interests or his social reality, and in fact wondered about whether Hochschild herself might not be duped by the "Soros-funded machine."[86] The point then, is that just as we occupy some vantage point from which other people are mistaken, so too are there vantage points from which we as critics are ourselves mistaken.

Nor would it be enough to simply say that Hochschild's vantage point is better than Schaff's. For critical theorists in particular, reflection on our positions is central to the practice of critique. Critical theorists have historically distinguished themselves from traditional theorists by situating

[84] Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 3–23.
[85] Hochschild, 14.
[86] Hochschild, 14.

themselves on either side of the subject/object divide.[87] In other words, critics don't get to remain fixed in their position as critics; we have to put ourselves under the lens too.[88] In other words, we can't simply remain subjects of critique characterizing other people as mistaken without also reckoning, in our account of false consciousness, with the possibility that we too could get things wrong. In other words, we may ourselves be liable to the very ideologies we diagnose.

We can glean several related but slightly different problems raised by authoritarianism concerns. False consciousness, for one, seems to situate the critic in a privileged standpoint or position. The critic seems to be better off than the object of critique with respect to what they know or how they understand a social context. And, false consciousness accounts appear inadequately self-implicating. It looks as though the critic offers critique, but is never subject to critique. The objection, then, is that critiques of false consciousness fail for two closely connected reasons. Either critics can't occupy an epistemically privileged standpoint (since their perspectives are themselves partial and situated) or else because critical theorists are unable to see how we ourselves may be liable to the very ideologies we diagnose. These challenges are sometimes run together, as in the case of Ricoeur, writing on ideology. The critic of false consciousness, Ricoeur writes, is "unscathed by the defects which he denounces; ideology is the thought of my adversary, the thought of the other. He does not know it, but I do."[89]

There's also a third line of critique of authoritarianism, one often considered to be more ethical than epistemic. On this view, our ethical commitments in modernity involve the freedom to determine our good for ourselves for our own reasons.[90] Yet, if we say that a person's beliefs

[87] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory."
[88] Ng, "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory," 394.
[89] Ricoeur, "Science and Ideology."
[90] Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*.

are mistaken or that they are subject to false consciousness, it may seem that we do not yet account for the importance of people figuring out their good for themselves.

What I have been suggesting thus far is that there are two main lines of objection to false consciousness that persist today. One line of objection concerns correspondence, and the other, authoritarianism. These objections tell against the cognitive-epistemic account of false consciousness, including the most subtle versions of these views. To that end, we need a positive account of false consciousness that can be sensitive to both concerns while helping us explain how it is that ideology works in and through us.

1.5 Conclusion

As I have been arguing in this chapter, ideology as false consciousness can help us explain the role that we as agents play in maintaining and explaining social life. Nonetheless, standard views about false consciousness are insufficient. The most familiar forms of false consciousness we find in the literature turn around false consciousness as a form of cognitive and epistemic mistake. Even the most socially-sensitive of these mistake views, however, should be rejected. In particular, I have argued, they are liable to two families of objections: those from correspondence, and those from authoritarianism. While these objections have often been marshalled as reasons to reject the critical concept of false consciousness altogether, I suggest that these objections do not tell against false consciousness as such. Certain views of false consciousness, such as false consciousness that turns around distorted praxis, can help us address both sets of objections.

What's Distorted about Ideological Distortion?

Abstract: In this chapter, I offer my positive account of distortion as a damaged way of relating to ourselves, to each other, and to the social world characterized by too much attachment. My account, then, retains an understanding of distorted praxis that we find in discussions of alienation and reification, but requires modification to adequately take up the difference in presentation of false consciousness as compared with these other social pathologies. Seeing distortion as an inadequate form of relating characterized by over-investment has several virtues: it helps us address correspondence objections, explains ideology's resilience, and captures the phenomenology of false consciousness as involving a relation of interestedness rather than disengagement. In this chapter, I also expand on my account of damaged ways of relating through an analogy to object relations in psychoanalysis with a particular focus on attachment.

2.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that social philosophers need an account of ideology as false consciousness. When social philosophers have taken up ideology, however, dominant accounts have centered around functional accounts of the ideology. The appeal to functional explanations alone, I argued, does not account for an insight of the practice turn in social theory. Social structures are both the result of our collective consent and are not analyzable without turning to the self-understanding of the participants in these very institutions and practices. To that end, I suggested that we need to take up the ways ideology is mediated in and through us and that a notion of false consciousness is useful in so doing. I then examined why social philosophers are nevertheless hesitant to rely on the concept of false consciousness. Although the objections we encountered—correspondence and authoritarianism among them – tell against a particular version of false consciousness that centers around cognitive and epistemic mistakes, I showed that they don't count against false consciousness as such.

Thus far, however, I have said comparatively little about what account of falsity social philosophers should prefer. So far, I have not given a positive account of falsity that could meet the objections we encountered in the previous chapter from correspondence and authoritarianism.

At this stage, that is, we are left with a deceptively simple question. If we rejected standard accounts of falsity, what should the social philosopher say about what it is that characterizes ideological consciousness? And how could that understanding of the kind of falsity help us avoid the twin challenges of authoritarianism and correspondence that have long rendered concepts of false consciousness suspect?

In this chapter, I offer my positive account of distortion that answers the need for theorizing ideology as false consciousness without falling prey to the correspondence objections. **False consciousness, I argue, is a damaged way of relating to ourselves, to each other and to the social world that is characterized by too much affective investment or attachment to ourselves, to each other, and to our social world**. [91] This may raise questions about whether

Put otherwise, false consciousness is a particular form of distorted praxis. While this may raise questions about the authoritarianism critique, I argue that the analogy to psychoanalysis and critique can help us address these issues in the following chapter.

It's worth clarifying that I will opt for the term 'distortion' rather than 'falsity.' False and distorted consciousness are often taken to be synonymous in the philosophical literature[92]. Maeve Cooke, for example, begins her defense of ideology critique by defending an account of "false or distorted consciousness" that necessarily maintains and reproduces the modern capitalist system.[93] Robin Celikates, too, has recently used the words "dissimulation and

[91] Speaking about false consciousness as involving too much investment, as I do in what follows, is best thought of not as too much attachment in one or another relation, but as a disposition. This will become clearer when we turn to object relations psychoanalysis and the literature on attachment.
[92] Further examples include Žižek, *Mapping Ideology,* 9 and Rorty, "Feminism, Ideology, Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View," 229.
[93] Cooke, "Resurrecting the Rationality of Ideology Critique," 4.

distortion" to characterize ideological consciousness. [94] My preference for the term distortion avoids the association with cognitive and epistemic mistakes that accounts of falsity call to mind and which we rejected in the previous chapter, and allows that other terms like 'mystification,' that seem to account for something more than falsity, can nevertheless be retained in speaking about ideology.

Not to mention that when social philosophers do take up the idea of distorted praxis as a way of understanding social pathologies, they mostly do so when theorizing alienation and reification. Yet, in this chapter, I argue that while the account of distorted praxis most familiar to social philosophers is found outside of directly addressing issues of ideological false consciousness, it can be useful all the same. Indeed, as I will show, an understanding of distorted praxis can help us avoid the authoritarianism and correspondence critiques, remain sensitive to both the social-material aspects of false consciousness, and explain the resilience of ideological consciousness.

All the same, since we will be retaining an idea of distorted praxis that is familiar from the literature on alienation and reification, some changes will be necessary. While social philosophers have taken up distorted praxis, they have often spelled out damaged ways of human relating by characterizing subjects who are disengaged or too little attached to themselves, to others, and to their social world. In doing so, I show that social philosophers have undertheorized ways that we can also be too engaged or too much attached to our social order, what I am arguing is characteristic of false consciousness.

In short, then, I want to retain the idea of distorted praxis that social philosophers use to characterize alienation and reification, but introduce too much attachment as a way of

[94] Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique," 29.

characterizing what is distinctive about the kind of distortion that inheres in false consciousness. My account of distortion as too much attachment has several virtues beyond connecting the analytics of reification, alienation, and ideology as social pathologies that share an account of distorted praxis. My understanding of distortion as too much attachment also helps us better explain how it is that we can be both subject to and participate in distortion. My view, in so doing, highlights the subjective aspects of false consciousness without locating false consciousness exclusively, as one commentator puts it, "in the head."[95]

My plan for this chapter, then, is as follows. Following this introduction, I turn to historical precedents for thinking about distorted praxis by way of the literature on alienation and reification in section 2. There, I give an account of how it is that the account of distortion we find in theories of alienation and reification can be mobilized to help us reconstruct an account of false consciousness that will avoid the objections from correspondence and authoritarianism we previously encountered. Yet, in section 3, I argue that while distorted praxis can help us retain false consciousness while avoiding the challenges of the previous chapter, current accounts of distorted praxis generate new problems. These explanations inadequately account for the ways that false consciousness presents not as disengagement in how we approach our social order but, by contrast, as too much affective investment. In section 4, I make sense of the distinctive phenomenology of distorted consciousness through claiming that we are too attached to the conditions that give rise to us as selves. In section 5, I explain attachment through a turn to psychoanalysis, and argue that thinking about damaged relations through a psychoanalytic frame can enable us both to remain sensitive to how we are both subject to and participate in distorted

[95] Freyenhagen, "Honneth on Social Pathologies," 136.

consciousness and, at the same time, how false consciousness can be sensitive to the subjective and social or institutional conditions under which we come to be.

2.2 Distortion, Alienation, and Reification

The first part of this chapter, as I have argued, turns around an idea of distorted praxis that we should retain for spelling out how we are to make sense of false consciousness. To better understand what I mean by distortion, it will be helpful to turn to historical precedents.

The primary task of critical theory was to explain, in the words of Amy Allen and Brian O'Connor, "the deformities of everyday life in the modern world that have been so compellingly identified by Karl Marx and Gyorgy Lukacs."[96] Allen and O'Connor draw attention to how Marx and Lukacs offer two different loci for thinking about what goes wrong in the modern world. On the one hand, they argue that we can turn to the ways that the social world is organized, characterizing "the conditions of capitalist production and rationalistic conceptions of social organization." In other words, we can critique the way that capitalism itself works. But these conditions are not only inadequate in and of themselves. Allen and O'Connor draw attention to another site that critical theorists have used for thinking about critique: the "damaged kinds of human relating" [97] that follow from such institutional arrangements. In other words, Marx and Lukacs offer an account of distortion as damaged ways of human relating or inadequate praxis. And, they argue that this distortion is the result of how we are socialized in our particular material and institutional arrangements. In what follows, I will take up this account of distortion – that is, distortion as an impoverished way of relating to ourselves, to each other, and to our

[96] Allen and O'Connor, *Transitional Subjects*, 1.
[97] Allen and O'Connor, 2.

social worlds, where the distortion is itself connected to how we are socialized in and through institutional life.

While the account of distortion that we find in Marx and Lukacs and their commentators, does not explicitly get couched in terms that relate to ideological consciousness, it can nevertheless be useful for us. For one, in recent history, critical social philosophers often discuss the concepts ideology, reification, and alienation together, with some arguing that they are all best understood as pointing us beyond the traditional concerns of political philosophy that are about justice.[98] This is a kind of internal justification for the moves that I am making in this chapter – it is not such a stretch to think that the account of distortion we find in alienation and reification can be useful for our rethinking false consciousness if the three terms are often treated together.

Secondly, several challenges we faced in the last chapter are objections that have been levelled against reification and alienation, and we can learn much from studying the kinds of moves that have been made in response to these objections. In the last 20 years, that is, both the terms alienation and reification have met with a revival. In reviving these critical concepts, social philosophers have taken great pains to avoid issues closely related to the two families of objection we met in the previous chapter from correspondence and authoritarianism. For example, Rahel Jaeggi arrives at her account of alienation as "obstructions in the relations individuals have to themselves and the world[99]" after a discussion of how we must avoid denying the "interpretive sovereignty" of people. That is, the idea that what is good for me will have something to do with my own sense of my good. In setting out alienation as a kind of distorted

[98] Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy"; Neuhouser, *Diagnosing Social Pathology*, chap. 1; Zurn, "Social Pathologies As Second-Order Disorders."
[99] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 34.

praxis, then, Jaeggi attempts to avoid versions of the authoritarianism concern. She suggests that critics of alienation do not need to have privileged insight into the good of other people to take up alienation as an obstacle in the process of relating. I don't mean to adopt her response here. What I am suggesting, however, is that when social philosophers revisit the concepts of alienation and reification, they do so in ways sensitive to concerns that mount against false consciousness, too. Accordingly, there is much to learn from how critical theorists take up distortion in ways that can avoid the pitfalls that some accounts of false consciousness succumb to.

Finally, the forms of distortion we find in alienation and reification were meant to explain how it is that people, even if they suffer in social life, seem "in some sense to accept their lot."[100] When Allen and O'Connor theorize alienation and reification, even briefly, they take up issues of resilience and deep-rootedness, which was part of what accounts of false consciousness were supposed to explain.

Thus far, I've been offering three considerations for why we might turn to notions of distortion at play in alienation and reification to help us rethink what goes wrong in false consciousness. For one, social philosophers have often grouped alienation, reification and ideology together. Additionally, reconstructions of alienation and reification have been sensitive to versions of objections we encountered and we can learn from them. And finally, alienation and reification can help explain a dynamic core to the phenomenon of distorted consciousness: how deep rooted it is.

[100] Allen and O'Connor, *Transitional Subjects*, 1.

2.3 How Alienation and Reification Can Help with Theorizing False Consciousness

In this section, I will draw out one account of alienation we find in the 1844 Marx, and argue that the account of distortion as a damaged way of human relating that we find there can help us avoid the previous chapter's objection from correspondence. It also speaks to our interest in retaining on the one hand, an account of distortion that is socially sensitive and at the same time, takes account of the subjective dimensions of distortion. Then, I will turn to one reading of Lukacs' account of reification. While related to Marx, Lukacs offers additional resources. Reification helps us theorize how distorted praxis both applies to a range of different domains and additionally helps us better characterize the deep-rootedness of distortion.

2.3.1 Alienation's Usefulness for Avoiding Correspondence: 1844 Marx

Marx's account of alienation, I will show, is useful for providing resources for an account of false consciousness to avoid objections from correspondence. And, the early Marx also helps us point to distortion as something other than, and something more than, distortion parsed in terms of mistakes.

Before we can turn concretely to the 1844 Marx's account of alienation in terms of self-realization, it will be helpful to get a bit of background. In Marx's pieces in the *Deutsch-Franzosiche Jahrbucher* in 1843, he offers at least two different critiques of capitalism. On the one hand, Marx points to ways that capitalism goes wrong in light of its workings. In creating a systematically impoverished class, for example, we can see that it produces a result that is on its face liable to a kind of critique.[101] But, Marx argues, capitalism can also go wrong for another reason, one that at first glance looks harder to pin down. Capitalism is flawed, on this view,

[101] Marx and Engels, "Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," 185–86.

when it elicits a way of relating that is incompatible with a flourishing life for human beings. It's this second kind of critique, a critique of distorted praxis, that alienation (*Entfremdung*) is supposed to offer.[102]

When in *On the Jewish Question*, Marx claims that the "supreme practical expression of human self-estrangement [*Selbstentfremdung*]" involves buying and selling, he offers this second kind of critique. [103] Buying and selling isn't bad on its face in the way that creating a systematically impoverished class is. Nonetheless, there is something about it that is distorting. But what does that amount to? Here Marx claims that in civil society, man "acts as a private individual, regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers."[104] Swapping goods isn't wrong as such, but it socializes us into impoverished ways of relating to ourselves and to other people. Specifically, under capitalism, early Marx argues, we relate to ourselves and others in instrumentalized ways.

Let's look at how this is meant to work. For Marx, individual ends can't be realized in community without our recognizing or affirming ourselves as members of that community. Where buying and selling falls short, then, is in how through these activities, we orient ourselves towards individual ends without realizing the social conditions on these ends. This is how we might understand Marx's claim that in capitalist society, agents' communal nature is subordinated to their egoistic nature, that is their nature as private individuals.[105]

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[102] This may help too with parsing a claim that has long puzzled Marx commentators who wonder what Marx could mean when he says, in *Capital*, that buying and selling for profit is "by no means an injury to the seller." (MECW 35: 204) On way of understanding this claim is not by appealing to disconnects between what Marx believes and what he believes that he believes, as GA Cohen argues, but instead, by seeing two different forms of critique here: one that centers around injustice or injury and another that is about a kind of distortion that is not reducible to the former.

[103] Marx and Engels, "On the Jewish Question," 170.

[104] Marx and Engels, 154.

[105] Marx and Engels, 155.

To simplify: I think I can realize my own ends privately when I focus on, for example, buying and selling say, clay pots that I have made. But, what I fail to recognize, for Marx, is the way that my ends do not consist merely in my selling clay pots, but must also include providing you (who needs a pot, or anyway, providing someone who needs a pot) with what you need to attain your ends. When you use the pot that I sold you, then, you contribute to me attaining my end while also attaining your ends. In other words, my ends are not independent of, but bound up with yours. An important feature of my achieving my ends (my self-realization) consists, for Marx, in providing what others need to realize their ends.[106] That is, our ends are not only mutually realizable, but also complementary.

Say that making clay pots is my production activity and accordingly, part of my self-realization. There is another part of my self-realization that consists in wanting someone to use the pot that I have made. If my pot sits in the back of the cupboard collecting dust, in other words, I would have impeded my own self-realization. In other words, part of my self - realization involves me having "created an object corresponding to the need of another human being."[107] That is, I have created a clay pot for someone who needs one, and part of my self-realization is bound up with helping you meet your needs by providing you with this pot.

What I fail to recognize, however, when I buy or sell commodities, is how my self-realization is partly constituted by the self-realization of others. In other words, I lose sight of

[106] The example that is perhaps clearest about the interdependence in ends has to do with the family: my achieving my ends as sibling might partly depend on helping other people (nieces, nephews, fellow siblings) realize their own ends. That is, their ends partly constitute my ends. That this is most apparent, today, in relations in the family, may say less about the family as such than particular ways the family has been constructed in our current social-economic conditions and our inability to imagine more fully what interdependence could look like outside of such relations. For an account of these changes in how the family is constructed, see, for instance: Cooper, *Family Values*.
[107] Marx and Engels, "Comments on James Mill," 462.

how helping someone meet their needs is part of my own self-realization, and how their self-realization will also consist partly in my achieving my own.

What goes wrong for me, then, isn't just a cognitive mistake. It's not that in swapping goods I get something wrong on the one hand about my social world or about my true interests. The distortion occurs at a deeper level: it's in buying and selling that I become oriented to other people through my practical activity. In a given set of social and institutional conditions, that is, I start to relate myself differently from how I relate to other people. My own individual good is paramount, and I don't yet see that the satisfaction of my own good or my own achievement of self-realization is somehow dependent on the self-realization of others.

There are two things to note here that will be important for our thinking about distorted consciousness. It does not capture the phenomenon Marx is addressing to characterize this relationship as me getting something wrong about the nature of my own self-realization or the self-realization of others. From the perspective that I'm reconstructing, it could be that at a certain level, I know that my self-realization is wrapped up with that of others. Yet, if I don't relate to my own self-realization in that way, there might still be distortion involved. We might think, for instance, that I could know that my good is wrapped up with that of other people, but if I send my trash to a landfill that has down the line health consequences for other people, I am not relating to my self-realization as particularly connected to that of others, and am, to that extent, subject to a form of distortion or distorted praxis on the Marxian line. The distortion is about both my modes of relating and the kind of subject I've become such that these modes of relating are deep-rooted. What matters for Marx is that I engage in activities "an important part of whose goals is the satisfaction of your (anyway of some human being's) need."[108] But in my buying and

[108] Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, 184.

selling, through my activities, I come to orient myself to other people's ends in inadequate or impoverished ways.

Nor is Marx offering mere moral critique. It's not just that I do wrong in buying and selling for profit; recall that we started by assuming that buying and selling for profit were not, on the face of it, wrong. Instead, the distortion inheres in our being shaped and shaping in turn the practice of exchanging goods.

We're now in a position to see how the account of alienation as a form of distorted praxis from the 1844 Marx can help us think about false consciousness. In particular, if we retain the idea that the distortion in false consciousness is a form of distorted praxis characterized by impoverished ways of relating to ourselves, to each other or to our social world, as I have been gleaning from Marx, we can avoid the two forms of the correspondence critique we met in the last chapter. To jog our memory, the first form of the correspondence objection was that we can't accept that social reality exists outside of us. After all, social institutions and practices like buying and selling are the result of our collective acceptance. Yet, the worry went, false consciousness is predicated on thinking we merely have a false interpretation of an agent-independent reality. Marx can help us with this worry. If buying and selling are distorting, for Marx, that distortion is not predicated on a kind of false internal reflection of a reality outside of us or otherwise a reality that is in some sense independent of us. By contrast, the distortion for Marx is in how a social practice– exchanging goods—comes to shape and socialize us so that we relate to our self-realization in different ways from the self-realization of others.

Rahel Jaeggi makes a related point when specifying how her account of alienation as about relations of appropriation can avoid correspondence critiques. Appropriation, for Jaeggi, is a "specific relation between self and world, between individuals and objects (whether spiritual or

material)" that emphasizes the ways that something is "not merely passively taken up" but is instead "productively" and "formatively" reworked.[109] As applied to the case that I've been considering from the 1844 Marx, when we're shaped by our social practices like buying and selling for profit, we avoid correspondence critiques by being attentive to how we're not merely passive recipients of the social practices we participate in. In other words, we make social practices our own by transforming what it is to swap goods in and through our participation. To give a concrete example: when someone buys or sells airspace to protect their view of a park, they don't merely reflect or internalize the already fixed ways of buying and selling, holding what it is to do so fixed. They, in participating in exchange, come to define and expand the scope of the social practice itself. Jaeggi's point here is useful in that it underscores how we avoid the correspondence critique. Deformed praxis doesn't involve taking the world as fixed, but seeing how our relations to ourselves, to each other and to the social world are being transformed in and through transformations of both poles of the relations.

That is, Marx's account doesn't require that there be a way that the social world is out there. This account of distortion is predicated on a closer connection between the way we organize social life on the one hand and how we relate to it on the other. I am shaped through practices like buying and selling on account of my participation in these practices, and it is how that participation in turn shapes me and my ways of relating that is the site of distortion.

This takes us to the second form of the correspondence critique we previously met that rejected false consciousness because it was inadequately sensitive to material and social reality. That is, this version of the critique located the falseness of consciousness not in our psychology but in some feature of social reality itself. An account of distortion we can find in Marx's 1844

[109] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 38.

manuscripts can also help us address this critique. Marx offers us an account of distortion that is the result of material and institutional ways of organizing social life: the damaged way of relating to my own self-realization is not idiosyncratic but something that is the result of the ways social and material life are organized, such that I swap goods and services.

2.3.2 Reification's Usefulness for Explaining False Consciousness's Resilience

As I have been suggesting thus far, accounts of distorted praxis that we glean from theories of alienation can be useful for theorizing false consciousness. They can help us avoid the correspondence critiques and by enabling us to say something socially sensitive while still taking into account our agency. In this section, I want to turn to reification, another form of distorted praxis. Reification – while it shares with an account of alienation a way of thinking about damaged ways of relating–helps us address other concerns that plagued thinking about false consciousness. It offers an account of why false consciousness is so resilient. It clarifies both how distortion extends to all spheres of life, on the one hand, and it offers an account of how it is that distortion can work to block future negotiation.

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To see how this works, I will draw on Lukacs' account of reification. I'll begin by way of background on the concept of reification before I turn to how it can be useful in explaining the stability and multi-faceted aspects of the concept.

In "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," Gyorgy Lukacs introduces the concept of reification to explain why in societies dominated by the commodity form, the relation between people "takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity.'[110]" What Lukacs tells us is not that we make a mistake or merely get something wrong. He even tells us that the distortion he is interested in goes beyond "pure epistemology."[111] Instead, the process Lukacs describes is much more stable and deep-rooted than mistakes are. Nor does he merely talk about the way social life is organized materially without thinking about how it is that the social organization of life bears on our stances or attitudes. In other words, Lukacs takes up how there are two distinct ways of understanding the impacts of the commodity exchange: we can turn to the "objective form" of commodity exchange, on the one hand, and at the same time, we can ask about the ways that the objective features of the commodity form play out in terms of the "subjective stance" that corresponds to and constitutes it. That is, participation in the commodity exchange habituates us into damaged ways of relating. Our bad ways of relating, in turn, extend beyond analysis of the commodity form or how commodity exchange works. It is this latter focus, on the distortion in ways of relating subjectively, that will be of interest for us here.

For Lukacs, we're compelled to behave as detached observers rather than as active participants because we are habituated to do so in and through commodity exchange. That is,

[110] Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 83.
[111] Lukács, Livingstone, and Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 140.

reciprocal calculation of the benefits that we might yield and the profits others might glean demands for Lukacs an emotionless stance. And this shift of perspective extends beyond the commodity sphere to all areas of life, since we reduce the merits of our exchange partners or our own talents to things that could be exchanged. This attitude becomes a kind of "second nature" through processing of socialization, developing a stance into a kind of fixed habit and it comes to shape all areas of social life. [112] We start to see all areas of life—areas where unexpected or enriching aspects could be disclosed – as measurable, and calculable. Reification, in turn, becomes a damaged form of praxis that involves mere contemplation and observation, a stance we can characterize as detached and emotionless.

As commodity exchange expands to cover more and more parts of social and institutional life, for Lukacs, the orientation we take up in the swapping of goods becomes the prevailing mode that we use to interact with each other. Our way of relating shifts accordingly. What's important to note here is that we don't merely take up the social world passively, where all of the distortion occurs at the level of the commodity form and our subjective modes of relation are merely a reflection of that (this would take us back to the correspondence critique). For Lukacs, this is an active process that we also are participants in. In other words, the focus is not just distortion at the level of how social life is organized, nor is it solely at the level of our perception of social life. Both poles of this relation are changed in and through the process of relating. This is a point that Axel Honneth, in his work on reconstructing Lukacs' view of reification, draws attention to. Lukacs' emphasis, Honneth argues, is on "the transformations occurring in the subject's own style of acting" or in the behavior of the subject itself that "ultimately affects that subject's entire relation to the surrounding world."[113] In other words, Lukacs is attentive to how

[112] Lukács, Livingstone, and Lukács, 86.
[113] Honneth et al., *Reification*, 24.

the distortion in reification only works in and through us and how we take up a particular way of relating that is inadequate.

But how, then, does Lukacs connect us and our subjective way of relating to our participation in exchange? He writes that the way that we used to relate to other subjects, to our world, and even ourselves qualitatively is replaced by relations marked by profit-oriented calculations or quantitative metrics. We start to see our activity as "a perfectly closed system" which transforms "the basic categories of man's immediate attitude to the world: it reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space."[114] The idea, then, is that the qualitative features of the world that we associate with being people, where new and enriching aspects of existence are revealed, get replaced with more predictable, quantitative evaluations.

To offer an example: imagine that a person thinks about whether they should paint the walls in their home because doing so won't improve their resale value. On a Lukacs-informed view, we see that the qualitative relation we might have had to our home (as a place that we take up and live in) becomes marked by a cool or calculated stance in relation to that same residence, where we think in terms of easily calculable metrics. What goes wrong in this relation is what Lukacs calls a "contemplative stance" in that the way we relate to the world, or in this case, our home, is the result of our having been so deeply habituated by commodity exchange. We act as if our home is only a house that we can swap out for another or as though its value for us doesn't depend on the life we've lived there. The distortion, then, lies in our impoverished ways of relating.

[114] Lukács, Livingstone, and Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 89.

We can see, then, some similarities with the 1844 Marx. Both Marx and Lukacs offer a form of critique that is socially sensitive, in turning to a form of distortion that follows a particular way of organizing social and material reality but is not reducible to it. And that form of distortion has to do with our ways of relating to ourselves, to each other, and to the social world.

Where Lukacs and Marx come apart, then, and what will be helpful for our accounts of false consciousness, is a difference in scope. That is, Lukacs emphasizes how the damaged form of human relating that comes to be on account of commodity exchange extends beyond the sphere that gives rise to it. In other words, if for Marx, buying and selling could affect how we understand our own self-realization or our own good vis-à-vis that of others, that damaged way of human relating we might think, might only bear on how we relate in the economic sphere. For Lukacs, by contrast, the damaged way of human relating, the distortion in question, is going to be far more pervasive and extend to all areas of life.

This is important for us since Lukacs, in particular, offers resources for thinking about the resilience of distortion: distortion is resilient in part because the distortion in question affects all vectors of our relating, and not merely our relations in one sphere. As Axel Honneth characterizes Lukacs, subjects are affected in three distinct ways through their participation in commodity exchange: they perceive their surrounding world "solely as 'things' that one can potentially make a profit[115] on," they "regard each other solely as 'objects' of a profitable transaction," and finally, they see "their own abilities as nothing but supplemental 'resources' in

[115] While Honneth focuses here on the distortion of buying and selling for profit, we might think that Lukacs' point about a distorted stance might apply even if we take up buying and selling without such profit motives in view—for instance, we might think that even without profit in view, we can treat our surrounding world solely as things, regard each other as objects of our own transactions, and see our own abilities as resources for exchange. This distinction is important for the relevance of reification in late capitalism, and in particular what some theorists have seen as a move away from profitability and towards thinking about each other as credit-worthy or not. See, for instance: Feher, *Rated Agency*; Ascher, *Portfolio Society*.

the calculation of profit opportunities."[116] That is, our being shaped in and through commodity exchange isn't local but global, and affects how we form relationships across the board. Given how deeply embedded the distortion is, we might think, it will be more difficult to overcome.

To sharpen the point, let's take an analogy to psychoanalysis. This will help us see how in offering an account of distortion that ranges over a number of cases, Lukacs also aids in characterizing the resilience of distortion. Imagine that I am plagued by a sense that I cannot expect much from others. I might come to my relationships with other people with a measure of distrust. We might think that this serves as my framing understanding of how I am to regard other people in general, rather than a local account of how I relate to one or another person. These framing understandings, in part because of how pervasive they are, are deep-rooted and hard to change. Now, imagine a different case, where my framing conception suggests that people are sometimes trustworthy, and yet, I distrust and expect disappointment from one friendship in particular. We might think it will be comparatively easier for me to change my way of relating (both in general and in particular) than if my framing preconceptions were more global, as in the first case.[117] In other terms, if our framing conception governs a wider domain, it may for that reason be more resilient. What I'm trying to illuminate here is that Lukacs, in pointing to just how wide-ranging damaged modes of relating are, also helps us see why these damaged modes of relating are hard to overcome or are otherwise deep-seated. That is, Lukacs' account of distortion helps us understand why it is that certain distortions are hard to overcome, namely how global these modes of damaged relating are.[118]

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[116] Honneth et al., *Reification*, 22.

[117] For a. nice discussion of how object relations as a school of psychoanalysis moves from a focus on particular individuals or cases to background interpretations which sometimes produce unhappy experiences, see Allen and O'Connor, *Transitional Subjects*, 8.

[118] To that end, we might see Lukacs' point here aligning with more recent theorists of neoliberalism such as Wendy Brown and Michel Feher, who both argue that part of what makes distortions in our ways of

Lukacs' account of distortion not only helps us understand the resilience of distortion, but also gets at distortion's operations. This takes us to the second way that Lukacs' account of distortion can be useful for us in theorizing false consciousness. Lukacs, here, argues that through our participation in commodity exchange, a particular way of relating to our social world becomes so ingrained that it constitutes a "second nature.[119]" Lukacs' claim is that we are socialized in and through commodity exchange. Our habituation into thinking in terms of exchangeability means we perceive the way that things are as mere givens rather than as things whose value depends in part on how we cathect them. This is so even when we're not involved in exchange. That is, our habit of relating in a contemplative mode becomes so deeply entrenched, we take ourselves and our social world as fixed. That is, we see ourselves as beyond the reach of negotiation even while at the same time, we continue to maintain this damaged mode of relating in and through our activity. Distortion, then, is both widespread and puts our praxis or ways of relating outside contexts of contestation. In other words, then, there are two sources of distortion's resilience: that it is widespread and that it, in some way, functions to block further inquiry. In other words, the form of praxis we take up is so entrenched that while we continue to create damaged ways of relating, we also seem at the same time to in relating in these particular ways, put certain phenomena outside of the reach of our renegotiation. [120]

As I've been suggesting, Lukacs' account of the distortion at play in reification can be helpful for our account of distorted consciousness because it offers two ways of thinking about

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relating hard to overcome today is how wide-ranging the neoliberal order of reason is. See Feher, *The Age of Appreciation: Eight Lectures of the Neo-Liberal Condition*; Brown, *Undoing the Demos*.

[119] Lukács, Livingstone, and Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 85.

[120] The analogy from psychoanalysis can help here too, as well as the idea of repression, or that as Jonathan Lear has it, "the mind is active in keeping its own activity outside of conscious awareness." The point, he writes, is "not merely that ideas can operate in the mind outside of conscious awareness; it is that the mind is motivated to keep ideas out of awareness because they are forbidden, rejected." Lear, *Freud*, 6.

the phenomenon of resilience. Recall that in the last chapter, we started with de La Boetie and the puzzling sense that false consciousness is not something that can easily be corrected. Here, we can see two avenues of response to this set of questions. Let's assume we accept accounts of distortion as inadequate ways of relating to ourselves, to each other and to our social world. What are the philosophical pay-offs? For one, if distorted consciousness is widespread and not merely something we find in one or another area, we have a preliminary answer to the question of why ideology is so entrenched. That is, the general nature of the damaged ways of relating offer part of an explanation of why distorted consciousness could be so resilient: namely, the distortion in question reaches through many different spheres of life and relationships. Secondly, Lukacs offers an account of our way of relating being so habituated that it becomes a kind of "second nature." Through socialization in and through the commodity exchange and a society built up around it, our habits become ossified. Moreover, this happens in a way that means renegotiation is less likely. Both help to explain why the distortion in question seems so widespread and also why distorted consciousness is difficult to overcome.

2.4 Distorted Consciousness: A Different Phenomenology

In the last section, I suggested that resurrecting distortion as a damaged way of human relating to ourselves, to each other and to our social world can be instructive for false consciousness. In looking to concepts like alienation and reification, that is, we were able to say something both in response to the correspondence critiques and to find resources to explain the resilience of distortion. Now, in this section, I want to address a question that might arise for some readers given my reflections thus far.

What makes false consciousness distinct from other modes of inadequate or distorted relations? Surely, we can have distorted forms of relating that have nothing to do with social life.

And, more to the point, even granting that there is a distinctive social pathology that involves deficient ways of relating that we can have to ourselves, to each other, and to our social world – even if these ways of relating are both socially caused and at the same time up to us – that still doesn't lead us directly to the concept of false consciousness. After all, Lukacs and Marx offer two other concepts—reification and alienation – as a way of spelling out distortion, and in the last section we have turned to these concepts more directly.

To put the challenge more directly: why do we need false consciousness as a critical concept when we already have alienation and reification? In aiming to save false consciousness, one might be concerned that I have made a bad bargain. Don't I lose what's distinctive about false consciousness? In other words, haven't I rendered distorted consciousness interchangeable with nearby terms like alienation and reification?

Yet, while accounts of alienation and reification do share with false consciousness a particular understanding of distortion as a damaged way of human relating, they don't capture an important phenomenological aspect of ideological consciousness. In specific, what I will argue in this section is that **false consciousness manifests through a kind of affective engagement**,[121] while alienation and reification often manifest as a kind of detachment.

Cases discussed under the banner of false consciousness are characterized by too much attachment. In other words, the cases of false consciousness we turn to are anything but cool and calculating, but present as a defense of and propping up of the social conditions we operate in. To take a concrete example, when a group of mostly Black women who worked as domestic workers in post-apartheid South Africa were asked in face-to-face interviews about their conditions, these women saw themselves as benefitting from symbiotic relationships with their

[121] Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 4–5.

wealthier white employers. This is the case despite the long work hours and unfair and sometimes illegal treatment these workers faced.[122] (Durrheim et al 2014) The workers in question were not disengaged. They actively considered themselves lucky, mentioned "each act of employer 'generosity'" and expressed "a corresponding impulse to 'return the favour' by displaying gratitude, appreciation, hard work and acceptance of existing relations of power and privilege." [123]False consciousness as a term is often invoked to explain the ways that we both actively relate in impoverished ways and that our active taking up of inadequate social conditions is not concealed.[124] It is little surprise, then, that other instances that people describe with reference to terms like ideological false consciousness involve these kinds of active investments.

The writing about alienation, by contrast, emphasizes "a relation of relationlessness," one that is characterized by "indifference" to our ways of relating and an "instrumental" attitude to ourselves, to other people, and to our social world. The phenomena she describes appears rather different from the language around attachment familiar from critiques of ideologically distorted consciousness. So too for reification, which is also characterized through a way of relating that is cold and contemplative. Axel Honneth, drawing on Lukacs, characterizes reification as a damaged way of human relating that we can understand as involving a distant and calculating stance. If our praxis is distorted in reification, the result is that we're "no longer emotionally affected" by what's happening in our surroundings. Instead, we are unmoved, and are mere

[122] Durrheim, Jacobs, and Dixon, "Explaining the Paradoxical Effects of Intergroup Contact."
[123] Durrheim, Jacobs, and Dixon, 160.
[124] Some have argued that reification is also an active relation, only that the engaged stance we take is masked. See for instance, Honneth et al., *Reification*, 36. What I want to suggest is that in false consciousness, whatever critique will look like, it won't amount to revealing an underlying stance of care or engagement underneath seeming disengagement or coldness. That is in part because in false consciousness the affective investment is something legible from the casesthemselves.

observers to the very relationships that we are implicated in: that is, we let events "go by without any inner involvement, merely observing their passing." [125]

Alienation and reification, to be sure, do involve accounts of distortion as damaged ways of human relating. Yet, accounts of these concepts themselves don't explain how it could be that we can relate in bad ways not just by being too disengaged, but also, by also in our being too much invested or attached in ourselves, our social world, or in our ways of relating to other people. In order to make sense of false consciousness, we need an account of distortion as an inadequate way of relating that manifests in too much engagement.

While social philosophers have taken up distortion as damaged ways of relating more recently, I want to suggest they have been overly influenced by the legacy of thinking about distortion in terms of alienation and reification. They tend to characterize damaged ways of relating as about ways that we can be disinvested. This is true even when these social critics don't explicitly draw on the language of alienation and reification as such. Charles Taylor, for example, characterizes our contemporary world as subject to forms of socially-caused distortion as a result of growing secularization and the breakup of "traditional" modes of association. Yet, when he does so, he characterizes the pathology that results from our contemporary ways of living as our "sense of emptiness, flatness or lack of purpose."[126] Hartmut Rosa, too, in his recent work on resonance, argues that we can relate to ourselves, to each other, and to our social world in ways that are better or worse. Yet, his account of impoverished ways of relating often addresses a lack of affect rather than our being too deeply invested. He writes of people for whom the world appears as "bleak, drab, hostile and empty." [127] Elsewhere, his account of how

[125] Honneth et al., 99.
[126] Taylor, "Inescapable Frameworks," 19.
[127] Rosa, *Resonance*, 8.

such people bases of populist support that figures like Erdogan, Orban and Modi garner, say, or women who support gender roles that sustain their own oppression or the widespread US opposition to the estate tax—are described using affect-laden words. The turn to concepts like ressentiment as allied to issues of false consciousness, too, suggest the importance of a different phenomenology than is familiar to critical theorists who locate distortion in alienation and reification.[128] Not only are the examples people turn to described as involving engagement, so too is this present in how commentators understand instances of false consciousness. See, for instance, Terry Eagleton's discussion of false consciousness as a way of thinking about how victims can be made "to invest[129] in their own unhappiness." [130] When psychologist Julian Jost, too, writes about false consciousness, he connects the phenomenon to ways that people defend and justify the social systems in which they live.[131] What both commentators take as the explanandum is that people seem to accept and even appreciate ways of organizing the social world, even when these ways of living together are in other ways bad for them. [132] What is important, for our purposes, is what both Jost and Eagleton take for granted as in need of explanation. They both hold that the kind of distortion in ideologically distorted consciousness involves something different in presentation from detachment. What they both seek to explain is why we justify, bolster, or defend certain ways of relating to ourselves, each other, and to our

[128] Harcourt, "Radical Thought from Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, through Foucault, to the Present"; Brown, *States of Injury*.
[129] While I do not have room to address the use of the language of 'investment' in thinking about false consciousness, I suspect that there is something socially and historically specific about changes in social and economic formations that generates, for example, a move from less engaged or calculating stances in earlier conditions of capitalism (and the focus on commodity exchange) towards more bonded or affect-ladden distortions that are the result of e.g. responsibilized subjects under later forms of capitalism.
[130] Eagleton, *Ideology*, xiii.
[131] Jost, *A Theory of System Justification*.
[132] I won't be defending Jost's account of ways in which false consciousness involves people buying into a social world that is in some ways deficient or defective here, and and will return to the idea of the good implicit in Jost's comments in future section on authoritarianism. Suffice it for now to glean from Jost what we desire from an explanation of false consciousness.

social world. Just as we can go wrong by being too calculating, that is, in not seeing how we are embedded in affect-laden relationships, so too might we be subject to stances that are distorted in another way. False consciousness, then, sets out to explain distortions that involve dispositions that present as too attached.

If distortion in false consciousness involves affective investment, however, alienation and reification, by contrast, are characterized quite differently. The phenomenology of both concepts is often about an absence of affect or at least the appearance of affectlessness.[133] Rahel Jaeggi, in relate to themselves is also characterized as "cold, rigid, dead, [and] numb."[134] As I have been suggesting, even when philosophers don't explicitly characterize distortion in terms of alienation and reification, they tend to inherit a particular phenomenology for thinking about distorted ways we can relate to ourselves, to each other, and to our social world. And that phenomenology involves too little attachment or affective engagement.

These accounts are not wrong so much as incomplete. The phenomenology of distortion – as false consciousness and its critics show – requires making sense of how it is that we can be not only too little engaged or otherwise lack an invested stance towards ourselves, to our social world, and to each other. It also requires attention to how we can be too much involved.[135]

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[133] Some have argued against even these ways of construing e.g. reification and alienation, arguing that apparent detachment could be the result of long-standing emotional investment. See Butler, "Taking Another's View: Ambivalent Implications." What matters for our purposes, however, is that whether or not reification's phenomenology is only apparent disengagement, is that false consciousness isn't typically characterized by event apparent detachment in the way that alienation and reification are.

[134] Rosa, *Resonance*, 9.

[135] It's worth noting that Honneth himself seems to realize the possibility of both relating in cold or calculating ways on the one hand, or in other more engaged ways on the other, yet he doesn't say much about what it would mean to have distorted praxis that goes wrong on account of being too engaged. The pathology he is most interested in is reification that involves a kind of forgetting of an antecedent engaged stance.

Thus far, I have been arguing that reification and alienation don't render false consciousness irrelevant. The account of distortion associated with the former (although such accounts of distortion have sometimes been generalized) focus on disengagement rather than its opposite. And that seems to square badly with how most commentators take up the phenomenology of false consciousness. And yet, I also want to argue that the focus on a kind of distortion that is characterized by too much engagement has stakes beyond those internal to the literature on false consciousness. Put otherwise: given contemporary political and economic formations, we might think that the focus on too little engagement fails to attend to a distinctive way that distorted praxis manifests in our contemporary social arrangements.

Wendy Brown, for instance, takes up a kind of distortion that she characterizes as affecting late-twentieth century emancipatory movements that she calls "wounded attachment."[136] The language here is instructive: the presentation of the distortion is invested rather than detached, and the concept is a way of thinking about how emancipatory projects that attempt to resist domination can at the same time reinscribe this phenomenon.

A concrete example will help, here. In 2010, the US Supreme Court considered a legal case concerning the status of an Arizona state law.[137] By Arizona law, businesses could have their licenses revoked if they knowingly hired immigrants without paperwork. In the days that followed, however, news media reported not just on the Court's holding but also on a shift in language concerning how to refer to immigrants residing in the US without papers. Should it be "illegal immigrants" or, as Justice Sonia Sotomayor penned, "undocumented immigrants?" The term "undocumented" in the years since has become more standard than terms like "illegal"– the Associated Press now recommends this as how we are to refer to people without paperwork in

[136] Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, chap. 3.
[137] US Chamber of Commerce vs Whiting. 563 U.S. 582

the US.[138] This (welcome) shift is partly the result of activist movements[139] as well as books and movies by people critical of US immigration policy that take up "undocumented" instead of less savory alternatives.[140]

Nonetheless, there is a puzzle here. On a Brownian position, we might be rightly politicizing the status of lacking certain immigration documents so as to draw attention to the impoverished conditions of those who reside in the US and fear deportation on account of lacking visas or green cards. However, at the same moment that there is "protest against marginalization or subordination," Brown fears that the newly politicized site of injury – in my example, being "undocumented" -- becomes reinscribed. As Brown puts it, a person who draws on a politicized identity, even if this identity is politicized for good social reasons, can become "attached to its own exclusion … because it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence as identity." [141] The risk, then, is that those who lack papers will be resubordinated by the very discourse that names and politicizes their lack of status (and in so doing, aims at better conditions for such people). In other words, while we can protest our domination, sometimes in doing so we can become attached to the very conditions in and through which we are dominated. More concretely, the term "undocumented" becomes a way to critique the ways that people without documents are marginalized in US life: say in talking about the lack of state benefits afforded to such people. But at the same time, there's a risk that people who rely on the status "undocumented" for political mobilization may reinforce or become attached to the very inadequate conditions – e.g. the US bureaucratic/legal system – that generates their injury in the first instance.

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[138] Froke et al., *The Associated Press Stylebook, 2022-2024*.
[139] Vargas, "Immigration Debate: The Problem with the Word Illegal."
[140] Padilla Peralta, *Undocumented*.
[141] Brown, *States of Injury*, 74.

I want to draw two things from this example. For one, there seems to be a shift from thinking about alienation or reification (which manifests as disengagement) to thinking about attachments. And, secondly, that this turn towards thinking about "problematic investments" [142]is socially and historically specific, as Brown takes up late-twentieth century models of identity politics. I'm inclined to think that the point about distorted ways of relating to ourselves, to each other and to our social world characterized by attachment is not specific to the domain of identity politics but is linked to what Wendy Brown sees as neoliberalism. [143]

Regardless, the language of investment may nonetheless be historically specific. Perhaps over-investment has less to do with identity politics per se than the changes in economic and political conditions of the late twentieth century that give rise to new subjects and new modes of relating.[144]The conjecture, then, is that particular modes of damaged relating (those characterized by too much attachment rather than too little) may be the result of changes in social and economic conditions. More simply, for Brown, distorted praxis characterized by investment rather than disengagement is particularly important today. If that is right, it's not enough to turn to the cold and calculating responses people have as an exhaustive characterization of distortion. We need attention to other, inadequate modes of relating. That is, we need an account of distorted consciousness that takes account of this new phenomenology not just because it falls out of view on earlier accounts of distortion, but also because at least some have seen too much investment in our political order to be on the rise.

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[142] Allen and Mendieta, *Power, Neoliberalism, and the Reinvention of Politics*, 3.
[143] The idea that "aggrieved" or "wounded" subjects are the result of neoliberalism itself is suggested, for instance, in Allen and Mendieta, 10.
[144] Here, Brown draws on thinking about governmentality in Foucault and Senellart, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.

2.5 Making Sense of Too Much Attachment

In sum, I've been arguing thus far that there are two different ways we can parse distortion as an impoverished way of relating. On the one hand, we can think of the blanket category of distorted ways of relating as manifesting in stances of disengagement (alienation and reification) or in too much investment (false consciousness). This might lead us to a worry about how related the terms I have been characterizing as different examples of distorted consciousness really are. Perhaps, we might think, I have been overselling the case for treating the concepts alienation, reification, and false consciousness together.

I want to argue that we can find resources for understanding the connection between these different kinds of distortion through an analogy we already find in the philosophical literature. In particular, that is, critical theorists have taken up reification and alienation by way of an analogy to object-relations psychoanalysis. Axel Honneth, for instance, has drawn on British psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott and his account of play as a way of understanding what goes missing in forms of self-reification. [145] While Amy Allen, in her introduction to an anthology on critical theory and object relations psychoanalysis, takes up alienation and reification explicitly.[146] Returning to object relations psychoanalysis, I will show, will be helpful for us in connecting these three different modes of distortion: false consciousness, alienation, and reification.

[145] Honneth et al., *Reification*, 65.
[146] Allen and O'Connor, *Transitional Subjects*, 1–3.

2.5.1 Psychoanalytic Background Picture

Before we can get to the pay-offs for thinking about how the analogy to object relations psychoanalysis can help us understand the ways that alienation, reification, and false consciousness connect, it will be important to say a few things by way of background.

Object relations psychoanalysis takes as primary an individual's relations with others.[147] Put otherwise, object relations theory departs from Freudian models that were focused on drives, with objects being understood as what drives are directed towards. In other words, objects for (early) Freud were the means by which our drives were satisfied. In early appearances of Freudian drive theory, that is, Freud highlights how our drives operate independently of the objects at which they aim. In "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality," for instance, Freud argues that we have wrongly understood the sexual drive as unified with what it is that we feel attraction towards. Freud separates, then, the sexual instinct from its object. [148]While there can't be a drive without an implied object, the objects of our attraction for Freud are impermanent. The libidinal drive, for instance, is said to move "from one object to another and, from these situations, directing the subject's sexual activity, which leads to the satisfaction, that is, to the partial and temporary extinction, of the libido."[149]

But the Freudian picture grows more complicated when we realize that the objects towards which our drives are directed are not something we can hold fixed, but are themselves partly constructed. In other words, sometimes, the "people" about whom a psychoanalytic patient might speak in session – their friends, parents, lovers – might not be confirmed by other people to behave as the patients have suggested. That is, the objects themselves of our drives and of our

[147] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 9.
[148] Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality.*, 148.
[149] Freud, 217.

fantasies, wishes, and desires are for object relations theorists "at best an amended version of the actual other person[s] involved." [150] In other words, object relations theory begins by assuming that people both have frameworks for understanding what other people are like that may or may not be confirmed by other people. And yet, the way of understanding this is to not think intrapsychically (that is, in thinking about whether or not we have a mistaken view of what other people are like). Instead, for object relations, the focus is on "how the 'object' is perceived through particular framing interpretations." [151]

We can see already here how this analogy is motivated by responding to correspondence-style objections too. That is, in thinking about false consciousness, we needed a way of making sense of distorted relations we could have to the social world without looking to a disconnect between how we are, how our social world is, or the way other people are and our perceptions of them. That is, object relations theory takes up how we both, on the one hand, constitute our "object" world while at the same time shaping ourselves in relation to that very world in and through our relations. Put otherwise, object relations, moves away from drive theory's intrapsychic approach on a single person's perceptions, fantasies, and psychic life. Instead, it focuses on how our own self-relations are impacted in and through our relations with other people.

Now that I have said something by way of background about object relations in general, we can also see how our relations to ourselves and to our social world as well as other people take place in "an average expectable environment" in which we as subjects adapt and develop[152]. As Amy Allen and Brian O'Connor draw attention to, the environment includes different kinds

[150] Greenberg and Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, 10; Allen and O'Connor, *Transitional Subjects*, 8.
[151] Allen and O'Connor, *Transitional Subjects*, 10.
[152] Bacal and Newman, *Theories of Object Relations*, 5.

of conditions for object relation theorists including "the quality of conditions for companionship, recognition, and affirmation from the 'good enough' caregiver, parental tenderness, holding, [and] attachment.' [153] That is, the environment that we are talking about as being the context for our ways of relating will be both material and intersubjective. But, what's important to note is that when these conditions fail, for object relations theorists, so too can our ways of relating. In other words, failures in environment (which includes but is not limited to intersubjective conditions) can lead "to a fragile capacity to negotiate the world, with adaptations often taking the form of a range of psychic defensive postures that deepen the patient's maladaptation." [154]

It is this that idea—namely, that failures in our environment can lead to different adaptations in how we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to our social world --- that I want to draw on. I want to highlight that there is a range of different defense postures or what we might call inadequate ways of relating that might serve as adaptations from significant failure in the provision of environmental conditions. put it sharply, some of those inadequate ways of relating will look like false consciousness and be predicated on a kind of over-investment. Others may more closely resemble alienation or reification and be characterized by disengagement.

I will make this claim by turning to one form of object relations that Allen draws attention to, namely, attachment.

Attachment, as one avenue for thinking about object relations, can help us clarify the connections between false consciousness, alienation and reification. Attachment theory, as formulated by psychoanalyst John Bowlby and developed by Mary Ainsworth, is a theory of human development. Partly intended to explain the consequences of social environments on children during war, Bowlby set out to criticize the idea that infants form attachments or

[153] Allen and O'Connor, *Transitional Subjects*, 9.
[154] Allen and O'Connor, 9.

relations to other simply as a means to getting food or warmth, what's sometimes called secondary-drive theory.[155]The basic picture here involves two moving parts: the generic and individual-difference components.[156] On the one hand, a general understanding spells out something that is true of us as people: namely, that unlike other animals, we are born helpless and dependent on the care of others. We are also dependent on a cooperative environment more broadly. We can imagine, for instance, a parental attempt to give adequate care in the context of a war zone, for instance, as suggesting that the quality of caretaker relations is not the only feature of the environment we need. On the generic side, the attachment system suggests that we form relations to caretakers as a way of navigating this prolonged dependence. Attachment theorists suggest that infants attempt to maintain proximity to their primary caregivers through a range of responses, like vocalizing, clinging, crying, following, approaching, etc. [157]How we relate to our environments, that is, will affect our chances of making it through infancy alive.

But, there's a second component that attachment theorists ask about, namely, how we can understand the differences in ways that children relate to their primary caregivers or to their social conditions. This is particularly interesting to us as theorists of false consciousness as concerns distorted ways of relating that follow from particular sets of social conditions. As the philosopher Edward Harcourt argues, "although all human infants form attachments, not all attachments are alike in quality."-[158]This brings us to the second component of attachment theory, what I've been discussing under the banner of the individual difference component.

[155] Bowlby, "The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds"
[156] Simpson and Belsky, "Attachment Theory within a Modern Evolutionary Framework."
[157] Harcourt, *Attachment and Character*, 2.
[158] Harcourt, "Attachment Theory, Character, and Naturalism," 118.

One of the earliest measures of attachment quality comes by way of Mary Ainsworth's 'Strange Situation." [159]This involved a test intended to show how, in spite of how widespread attachments to our caregivers and to our facilitating conditions more generally, children took up different ways of relating to their environments, some of which were impoverished. Ainsworth's test was administered to a child-parent dyad with the child between 12 and 18 months. In the set-up, a parent enters into an unfamiliar room with an infant and settles the child down along with some toys. Meanwhile, a research assistant enters and starts to play with the infant. After a short time, the parent remarks that they are leaving, exiting for a few minutes, and then comes back. On Ainsworth's reading, three different patterns of behavior can then emerge. On the first, pattern B, the child reacts to the parent's departure with distress and seeks proximity when the parent returns. The child is then comforted by it. This is referred to as secure attachment.

But, for our purposes, what's more important will be the two impoverished patterns of relating that differ markedly. In pattern A, what has been called the insecure-avoidant type of attachment, the child expresses no distress when the parent leaves (although other forms of distress are indicated, such as a heavier breathing and an increased heart rate). The child is relatively indifferent when the parent returns. The child might turn away or look away from the primary caregiver and make little effort to "maintain the contact" when picked up. [160]In pattern C, the insecure-ambivalent type, the infant often clings to a parent before the parent leaves, and expresses acute distress upon the caregiver's departure that seems disproportionate. Upon the parent's return, the child might exhibit furious clinging, "seeking contact, then resisting contact angrily once it is achieved."[161] What Ainsworth notices, then, is that there are two different

[159] Ainsworth, "Attachment and Exploratory Behavior in One-Year Olds in a Strange Situation."
[160] Ainsworth, 112.
[161] Ainsworth, 115.

attachment dispositions that are in some sense inadequate: one that manifests as too much and another that manifests as too little. Both of these seemingly distinct attachment orientations the result, at least in part, from significant failures in a child's environmental context.

2.5.2 Pay-Offs for Understanding Connections between False Consciousness, Alienation, and Reification

Now, I have said a bit by way of background about object relations in general and attachment theory in particular. We are now well placed to see how this analogy can be helpful for thinking about distortion, and in particular the different presentations of distortion that we saw at play in false consciousness on the one hand and reification and alienation on the other. Thus far, I have been arguing that defenders of false consciousness should take up the idea of distortion as inadequate ways of relating, learning from accounts of alienation and reification. Yet, the different phenomenology of alienation, reification, and false consciousness requires the view of distortion as inadequate praxis to be qualified as forms of inadequate praxis characterized by too much investment. This move, however, might have led us to wonder whether distortion, alienation, and reification – in spite of sharing a way of thinking about distortion – bear a meaningful connection at all. What I will suggest here is that our turn to object relations in general, and attachment in particular, will help us see how, despite seemingly different appearances of distortion are related in a more than superficial way.

I will go into more detail in what follows, but the basic idea we gleaned from attachment theory is dual. Children are sometimes disengaged and unresponsive to their social environments and their caretakers. Yet, in other cases, people might be clingy and seem increasingly wedded to

their facilitating conditions. Without the explanations familiar from attachment theory, it might have seemed that there was little unifying these different (impoverished) modes of relating. Yet, all the same, attachment theory suggests that these different forms of relating, in spite of being qualitatively different, share two things in common. First, both inadequate modes of relating are the result of significant failures in a child's environment. In other words, the child's mode of relating (or attachment style) will depend on "the cooperation of the environment" in meaningful ways. [162] We suggested earlier that the environment here might include the quality of recognition, affirmation, or tenderness from a good enough care-giver. When a parent falls into depression following the birth of a second child, for example, the deficiencies in the environment can affect the child's way of relating. But so too will it depend on the cooperation of the environment beyond the caretaker-child dyad: a child's way of relating will also be affected, for instance by deprivations characteristic of wartime, as Bowlby theorized.

And, additionally, attachment theory sees both inadequate ways of relating as the result of adaptations to or habituation in one's environment. This can happen when we imagine different kinds of caretaking environment. Imagine, for instance, a child of cold parents. The thought is that being disengaged will be adaptive because the cold parents might be less irritated and rejecting of a child who does not express their needs in an open way. Or, by contrast, a child who is hyperactivating, might be responding to a situation where they have some experiences of caretaker interest albeit unreliable ones. The idea is that the child of these kinds of parents might go to further lengths to win back parental attention. The idea, then, is that while "all attachment types" are "adaptations to different parental environments," what these adaptations will look like are liable to change. [163] And so too for non-caretaker related environmental conditions. In a war-

[162] Harcourt, *Attachment and Character*, 7.
[163] Harcourt, "Attachment Theory, Character, and Naturalism," 123.

torn context, we might think, a child will do better to be too invested rather than disengaged, as that will enhance survival rates. And if a child spends much time solitary and moving around, we might think adaptation will involve distancing oneself from the social conditions.

We're now in a position to see more clearly the connections between false consciousness, alienation, and reification. On the analogy I have been drawing, what's illuminating about the analogy to attachment is that even if we all take up different ways of relating to ourselves, to our social world, and to each other, we can distinguish different ways of relating in terms of their quality. Impoverished ways of relating can result from serious failures in the environment. Yet, the adaptations in terms of our ways of relating that result from those failures of the environment can look very different. That is, the particular way that the social environment fails will bear on the kinds of inadequate relationships that we might have to ourselves, to each other, and to our social world. And, what's more, these damaged ways of relating can be differentiated one from another in terms of the way they present affectively.

But this was just what we saw with the differences between alienation and reification on the one hand and false consciousness. We can be cool or disengaged in our relations to ourselves, to each other and our social world, but we can also go wrong by being altogether too affectively invested. Both of these modes of relating could be the result of how we are socialized in particular environments, and yet, the specificities of these particular environments will have some bearing on the particular kind of inadequate way of relating we're likely to take up. To be more concrete, the patterns A (de-activating or insecure-avoidant ways of relating) closely resemble the phenomenology of alienation and reification. On the other hand, pattern C (hyperactivating or insecure-resistant styles of relation) more closely resembles the presentation of false consciousness. And yet, we can also see how they are both adaptations to our

environment while not being reducible to these environments. Certain deficient environments could make clinginess or detachment more likely.

In brief, I've been arguing that the analogy to attachment can be helpful in theorizing how false consciousness, alienation, and reification are connected beyond merely being forms of distorted relating. This is all the more relevant to us given the different phenomenological presentations that these concepts have. I've been suggesting that, as with different manifestations of damaged attachment relations (hyperactivating and de-activating) each of which could be the result of inadequacies in environment, so too can we see certain inadequate forms of relating characterized by the concepts of false consciousness as hyperactivating, while alienation and reification are deactivating. Yet, these concepts are united because they are the result of inadequate or impoverished environmental conditions. Put otherwise, while the psychoanalytic theories of attachment are not only about distortions that are in the environment, they provide a way of theorizing how our damaged ways of relating can be generated by the environment in widespread ways.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that ought to take up an account of distortion as damaged ways of relating from accounts of alienation and reification. Doing so, I have suggested, can help us with the correspondence objection we previously encountered in the previous chapter. It can also speak to the resilience of distorted consciousness. Yet, in retaining an account of distortion as an impoverished way of relating, we ought to pay attention to the distinct phenomenology at play in accounts of false consciousness. In particular, while reification and alienation are useful for theorizing distortion, these concepts do not capture the phenomenology of affective

engagement characteristic of false consciousness. In particular, false consciousness involves an affect of being too invested rather than being detached. As such, I suggest that we need to alter our initial working account of distortion. While we should retain distortion as an account of impoverished relation to ourselves, to each other and to our social worlds, we ought to additionally specify that false consciousness is a relation that manifests in the appearance of too much investment. This phenomenological difference might lead us to wonder whether the theories of distortion in reification, alienation, and false consciousness are closely related in the ways that I have been suggesting. Yet, to clarify how these concepts could nevertheless be related, I offered an analogy from object relations theory as concerns attachment.

Critique in Crisis

Abstract: In this chapter, I address concerns that my account of false consciousness – through its discussion of distortion and over-investment – be liable to a new version of authoritarianism concerns. In particular, I take up these issues following from post-Kantian critical theory about how we are to justify normative claims such as those, such as those I make about false consciousness as a damaged way of relating or as about over-investment. Critical theorists attempt to do two things at once: justify critique (and respond to the authoritarianism objections) and also avoid too weak normativity. This leads critical theorists to defend context-transcendent critique. Rather than responding to this concern about authoritarianism directly, I make a broader methodological argument about the nature of critique that does not center insight into one's own condition or diagnosis. I then return to the analogy to psychoanalysis as instructive, here, for an alternate way of theorizing the critique of false consciousness.

3.1 Introduction

False consciousness is a damaged way of relating to ourselves, to each other and to the social world. In the last chapter, I argued that our way of relating to the world can be characterized by too much, just as too little attachment. False consciousness is characterized, specifically, by too much attachment. My account, then, relates to, and differs from, accounts of damaged relating in discussions of alienation and reification. The familiar idea of distorted praxis, on my view, should be modified to account for how false consciousness differs from these other social pathologies.

As I argued in the last chapter, seeing distortion as an inadequate form of relating characterized by over-investment has three virtues. It helps us address the correspondence objections we previously encountered. That is, we don't locate ideology in bad perceptions of agent-independent worlds. Instead, distorted relations show us how we partly constitute social relations. Second, my account explains ideology's resilience. Ideological consciousness is difficult to overcome. That is partly because damaged relating is widespread. And finally, my account captures the phenomenology of false consciousness. False consciousness is interested,

not disengaged. I also expanded on my account of damaged ways of relating through an analogy to object relations psychoanalysis with a particular focus on attachment.

Yet my account raises a specter that has long haunted critical social theorists. The specter concerns how we are in a position to critique false consciousness at all. How can we say that certain ways of relating are distorted or involve too much attachment without succumbing to the very objections I attempted to avoid? Let's turn to an example, which will render the challenge to false consciousness critique clearer. In Nella Larsen's Harlem Renaissance novel *Quicksand*, we learn about a couple: the protagonist, Helga Crane, and her co-teacher James Vayle, to whom she is engaged at the start of the book. Both people teach at Naxos, a boarding school for Black girls in the American South. James and Helga struggle to find their place at the school as new teachers. They are given advice on decorum: they should always be on time, dress modestly and eschew bright colors, and they are to remember their place as laborers lest the supposed advantages they have been afforded as teachers at the institution get rescinded. Naxos is described less as a school than a "machine," which Helga describes as "a show place in the black belt, exemplification of the white man's magnanimity, refutation of the black man's inefficiency."[164]

Helga decides that Naxos endorses an impoverished way of relating through its imposition of conformity. All teachers are supposed to behave in ways that would cultivate admiration from white onlookers and to prove, through their behavior, the respectability of Black folks. Helga resists these strictures. Naxos, for Helga, is "a big knife with cruelly sharp edges ruthlessly cutting all to a pattern, the white man's pattern."[165] Helga rejects both conformity and respectability politics, and feels unattached to Naxos. However, Helga notices is that she differs

[164] Larsen, *Quicksand*, 9.
[165] Larsen, 16.

from her fiancé James in terms of how she relates to their workplace. Where Helga sees herself as unable to shape herself in the mold demanded of Naxos employees, James, by contrast, seems to readily conform. He is characterized, at least early in the novel, by his tendency to acquiesce to both racial uplift discourse and to the Naxos way of life.

In conversations about the school's problems, James leaps to the boarding school's defense. He comes up with excuses for why employees are to dress in rigid ways and why they ought never to be late. Helga finds the rules senseless and quickly leaves the school, disaffected. But, James does not. His strategies for navigating racialization differ from Helga's, and he seems to shape himself increasingly to fit his environment. What's more, there's meant to be something apparently effortless about James's way of relating to Naxos and to the hierarchies at the school. James' mode of behavior frustrates Helga to no end. She jokes about how James has become "completely 'naturalized'" at Naxos, insinuating that his mode of relating has been shaped in ways she finds troubling.

But James seems aware of his changing ways of orienting himself too, and he laughs with Helga about the way he's come to conform. At least initially, James is content with the life that he lives at Naxos.[166] And yet, we sense, that something is off with James's strategy of fully taking on the terms of the institution. He is shaped by Naxos, but does not shape the school in turn. His way of relating seems to foreclose the possibility of enriching and new experiences.

This case, we might think, looks a lot like false consciousness. We can see James's situation as a damaged way of relating to himself, to Helga, and to his social world characterized by too much attachment.

[166] Larsen, 18.

But, we might also wonder at the same time about the authoritarianism critique. How is a critic entitled to the judgment that James's way of relating is unhealthy or that his attachment to Naxos is "too much?" In other words, we might wonder about a deeper conceptual issue. How are we, as critics, in a position to make the kind of evaluative judgments that are a part of my account of false consciousness?

The charge we might fear is the one of authoritarianism, answered earlier but returning in new form: we're doing more than merely describing James's way of relating to Naxos. There is something normative in the view that James's way of relating is impoverished. Yet, in concluding as much, don't we position ourselves differently from James, exempt ourselves from being criticized, and fail to account for James's own perspective on how he should relate to Naxos?

What's important to note here is that the charge of authoritarianism applies to us even if we don't concretely articulate what a good life would look life for James or why he fails to achieve it. As Maeve Cooke has argued, the idea of the good we find in critical social philosophy is often articulated "negatively and must be extrapolated from the critical social theorist's descriptions of what is wrong."[167] In pointing to bad ways of relating or too much attachment, even if we don't say what living well would amount to for James, we still rely on some account of the good or healthy relating. If we as critical theorists need to argue that James's ways of relating are impoverished, that is, we then make such evaluations on the basis of some normative grounds or standards of evaluation.

This holds even if we also add to our analysis that James's ways of relating are socially-caused, as Larsen suggests in her discussions of racial uplift discourse, and even so when we

[167] Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 3.

agree that attributing blame to James would be inappropriate. As Cooke might suggest, even without articulating in advance what a better way of relating might look like for James, the judgment that James' way of relating is distorted or too attached is nevertheless normative. Without an account of our vantage point or our grounds for determining that James's way of relating goes wrong, we are liable to authoritarianism. This in turn, Cooke writes, would render "critical social thinking inconceivable." [168] On her position, the standards that we appeal to require that when making normative judgments, even negative ones, we are required to have "an ethical basis" for our critical diagnoses.[169] In other words, we need a way to articulate why we are entitled to the normative standards we use to characterize James's way of relating.

This is all the more pressing since the concept of false consciousness, we will recall, has fallen out of favor among contemporary critical theorists. This has occurred in part because of the very same concerns about how we justify such normative grounds. Maeve Cooke, in her discussion authoritarianism, for instance, argues that ideology as false consciousness has "lost favor among many contemporary critical social theorists."[170] And, this is because judgments about what counts as false consciousness or as ideology need to proceed "in a non-authoritarian manner."[171]

When we make claims about what counts as too much attachment, even when we only make negative assessments, Cooke suggests that we need to articulate grounds for these normative judgments. What makes criticism different from mere description is that criticism involves judgments: that a way of relating is better or worse, or characterized by the right or wrong amount of attachment. Accordingly, if we suggest that distorted ways of relating are inadequate

[168] Cooke, 3.
[169] Cooke, 3.
[170] Cooke, 12.
[171] Cooke, 4.

and should be different, then, our criticism counts as criticism only in virtue of the embedded normative claims.[172]

In this chapter, I will take up the concerns around the return of authoritarianism and the standing to critique false consciousness. After this brief introduction (section 1), I will offer a discussion of the different forms of the authoritarianism critique in section 1.2. In section 2., I will introduce a dilemma that critical theorists face: they want to resolve authoritarianism objections while at the same time avoiding too weak normativity. I characterize their attempts to do so as a way of turning to context-transcending grounds. But as I argue in section 3, the turn to context-transcendence poses its own problems. Therefore, the search for context-transcending grounds should be avoided. This has to do with the nature of critique itself. In other words, implicit in the idea that the objection that the authoritarianism objection returns in a new form is a particular conception of critique centered around the model of diagnosis and judgment. If we see the discussion of false consciousness offered earlier as an analysis of a phenomena rather than a tool that can help us as critics as we attempt to distinguish distorted and undistorted forms of relating, this criticism loses its bite. In section 4, I argue that returning to psychoanalysis can be fruitful for us in thinking about how we can have a false consciousness critique that does not center around diagnosis and insight into one's condition.

[172] Rahel Jaeggi, for example, in her discussion of the normativity of forms of life moves from thinking that part of what sets critique apart from other ways of mere description of ways of relating has to do with the sense that people can relate in ways that are better or worse, appropriate or inappropriate, successful or unsuccessful. What Jaeggi suggests, then, is that we need an account of the normative standards on the basis of which these evaluation get made. Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 86.

3.1.2 The Authoritarianism Charge Returns

In the first chapter, I characterized the authoritarianism charge against false consciousness as involving several related issues: the charge of self-implication, the charge of privileged position, and the charge of autonomy. Let's return to each of these briefly. Judging a form of consciousness as distorted seems to position us as critics judgment outside the grip of ideology. Ideology, Terry Eagleton famously jibed, is like bad breath: we think only our neighbors suffer from it. [173] What underlies Eagleton's claim is one version of the authoritarianism charge. Critiques of ideologically distorted consciousness, according to this objection, are inadequately self-implicating. What was meant to set critical social theory apart from traditional theory is a rejection of positivism. In other words, when we make assessments that a mode of relating is impoverished, we need such evaluations to apply to us too. We can't simply locate ourselves in a position that is immune to critique, diagnosing others as subject to distorted praxis. We have to offer forms of critique that reflect on our position as critical theorists. Or else, we are not taking up a methodological commitment of critical theory. That is, critical theory was meant to avoid Horkheimer diagnosed as the "one-sidedness" of judgments that position the theorist of social life outside of its own object of study. [174]

Secondly, and closely related to the point about self-implication, is the question of whether the critic can avoid claiming a privileged position when making what are sometimes called "validity claims." [175] We cannot rely on a "uniform and substantive notion of the good" given current social and political conditions.[176] In some societies, where notions of the good are widely shared, that is, we might be able to validate our critical positions according to widely shared

[173] Eagleton, *Ideology*, 85.
[174] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 198.
[175] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 4.
[176] Jaeggi, 12.

ideas of what it means to flourish or what the good amounts to. But such standards are not available in modern, pluralistic societies. [177] If there is no widely shared account of the good that underpins my assessment of what counts as damaged or overinvested, then in making such judgments, I am relying on some other way of shoring up the validity of my normative critique. Perhaps, I am doing so by arguing that I have privileged ethical or epistemic access to what counts as a good way of relating as opposed to a bad one or what counts as the right amount of attachment in one's relations to oneself, to others, and to the social world.

This takes us to the third and related charge that concerns whether evaluations of false consciousness are compatible with our commitments to autonomy. When we call a certain way of relating damaged or involving too much attachment, we seem to give inadequate importance to self-determination. We can't merely call a way of relating incompatible with a person's flourishing or their good. After all, part of what it is to live a flourishing life for me will depend on what I take my good to be. This is all the more important for political philosophers today, who see self-determination as central to our current social life. Joseph Raz, for instance, has argued that personal autonomy's value is a "fact of life," and that our flourishing is wrapped up with our ability to be "successfully autonomous."[178] Raz and others in the Kantian tradition hold that people need to be able to pursue their conceptions of the good on the basis of their own reasons.

This ability to self-determine is important too for critical theorists, who see a concern with autonomy as historically specific. One of the evaluative horizons for people in western modernity, Maeve Cooke argues, has to do with a commitment that "human beings must have reasons for the validity of their perceptions, interpretations and evaluations, and for subjecting

[177] Jaeggi, 12–14.
[178] Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 394.

themselves to laws and political regimes, that they are able to call their own." [179]If the critique of false consciousness is to be sensitive to our social and historical moment, in other words, we need a way for critique to retain autonomy.

Accounts of false consciousness therefore need a response to the concerns that I have been discussing under the banner of authoritarianism. To resurrect the concept of false consciousness, we need a way for critique to implicate the critic. We have to avoid privileged ethical or epistemic vantage points and for ideology critique to take seriously the autonomy of agents being critiqued. As I noted at the outset of the previous section, a number of critical social theorists reject false consciousness on precisely these grounds. [180] And my account is no different. It too must find a way of avoiding the charges of authoritarianism. In offering an account of distorted praxis or too much attachment, we need to avoid claiming a privileged position as we must avoid failures of self-implication. We have to find a way of taking autonomy seriously.

3.2 Critique's Critical Potential

In attempting to answer these related authoritarianism objections, critical theorists come up against yet another concern. Namely, can the concept of 'false consciousness' still retain its bite? Put differently, we can't avoid authoritarianism at the cost of rendering false consciousness critique too weak. Many critical social theorists have responded to this situation by looking for a way to recognize that their normative claims are socially and historically specific, subjective, and partial.[181] At the same time, they want these normative judgments – like those that I make about false consciousness -- to be something more than the "contingent preferences" of the critic.

[179] Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 2.
[180] For a discussion of why false consciousness has been widely rejected by critical theorists, see Cooke, 12.
[181] Cooke, 4; Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique."

In other words, if I say that false consciousness involves a damaged way of relating or praxis characterized by too much attachment, I need such an account both to avoid authoritarianism and to do so in a way that is critical enough to yield transformation. This has often been taken up in versions of the claim that critique should raise "validity claims that go beyond its own frame of reference" in a specific context or practice. [182] After all, the usefulness of false consciousness as a concept inheres in the idea that we relate to other people in damaged ways, that our way of relating causes us suffering, and that we may not even be aware that our ways of relating are impoverished. What critical theorists want, then, is the ability to escape authoritarianism while at the same time ensuring that their evaluative claims about relating in impoverished ways do not reduce to a specific context.

Looking at the social philosophy literature about normativity and critique, it would seem that there is a relatively easy way to settle these debates that we should take up. After all, there is a widely held strategy for how to avoid the family of authoritarianism objections (that is, the objections from self-implication, privileged position, and autonomy) and, at the same time, to avoid the charge of too weak normativity.[183] This strategy turns around seeking context-transcending grounds for critique, or what's sometimes articulated as "context-transcending" validity. [184] On this line of thought, it is possible to justify our normative standards in a more than contingent way. Yet, as I will go on to argue, this is not an adequate way of handling the concerns about authoritarianism.

Say I characterize a way of relating as distorted or too invested. Defenders of context-transcending validity hold that my evaluation, if it is to have critical force, needs to be more than

[182] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 189.
[183] See, for instance: Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique"; Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, chap. 1; Cooke, "Resurrecting the Rationality of Ideology Critique."
[184] Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 20.

a contingent evaluation. In other words, my assessment of a damaged way of relating can't reduce to merely my whims or my particular social and historical location. For instance, say I critique the increasing focus on productivity metrics as meaning people relate to their work in impoverished ways. Critical theorists want that judgment to be able to say that when making such claims, I also mean that our relation to work is worse than it might be in a different society. Critical theorists attempt to locate a vantage point for critique that both takes seriously my subjectivity as well as my historical specificity while also thinking that my evaluative claims have validity across social and historical context. I will say more about this strategy in what follows. Suffice it for now to say that this strategy tries to avoid the Scylla of authoritarianism and the Charybdis of too weak normativity through context-transcendent grounds.

This raises the question, should we as theorists of false consciousness rely on this strategy as well? We talk about false consciousness as about damaged ways of relating. And that way of relating is characterized by too much attachment. But doesn't making these assessments also require escaping too weak normativity through identifying context-transcending grounds for our judgments? Social philosophers do not want to answer the objection from authoritarianism and, in so doing, lose the ability to say that certain ways of relating are genuinely better and others worse- not just for me, but across context and historical location.[185] To return to the example of Larsen's *Quicksand,* critique on this view requires the ability to say that James' way of relating to Naxos is impoverished in a more than contingent way. In other words, context-transcending grounding arguments only appear as necessary as a response to a dialectic; the turn to grounding

[185] For arguments to the effect that we need to avoid the "ethical abstinence" that would be characteristic of attempts to avoid authoritarianism without retaining strong normativity, see for example, Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 7–10; Rosa, *Resonance*, chap. 1.

results when critical theorists attempt to both avoid authoritarianism on the one hand and to avoid too weak normativity on the other.

The turn to context-transcendence holds that we can escape the authoritarianism concern by identifying grounds for the evaluative judgments about distortion or affect. At the same time, we can do so in ways that allow our evaluations to retain their critical force. I will, however, argue against saving false consciousness through identifying context-transcendent grounds for critique.

3.2.2 Weak Normativity

Before saying more about how critical theorists navigate the Scylla of too weak normativity and the Charybdis of authoritarianism, it will be helpful to clarify what positions are identified with being too weakly normative. When critical social theorists argue against too weak normativity, they have in mind a family of positions that deny that we need context-transcendent grounds for critique. That is, according to the "weakly normative" positions, we can engage in the critique— for instance, of false consciousness— without identifying context-transcending grounds for the judgments we make. There are several positions that fall under this umbrella category. They have been called forms of internal criticism[186], radical contextualism[187], conventionalism,[188] or else hermeneutic or culturalist models of critique.[189] While these positions differ one to another, what is salient for now is that these family of views deny the importance of context transcendence. For now, I will make the case with reference to 'internal criticism.'

[186] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, chap. 5.
[187] Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 14.
[188] Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Critique with a Genealogical Reservation: On the Idea of Critique in the Frankfurt School (Translated by Jeff Seitzer)," 43.
[189] Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique." 27

Let's again return to our example of James and his job at Naxos. Of course, we might critique James's situation by turning to James's own understanding of what counts as a distorted way of relating to Naxos. This could serve as an evaluative standard on which we judge James' way of relating as distorted. James might see his own attachment to the Naxos way of doing things as in some sense necessary for keeping his job. He might even think Naxos is a great institution working for racial uplift. But, he might at the same time, harbor more ambivalent attitudes towards the institution.

When Olga teases James about how comfortable he's gotten at his new workplace, for instance, James might worry that he's missing a different way of relating that used to be more familiar to him. Perhaps his former mode of relating in some sense felt freer and better. If that's true, we can look at James's self-understanding and his own sense of what healthy ways of relating to himself, to others, and to Naxos might amount to. We might be able to say that James fails to live up to his professed norms – he's living a less free life than the one he might have had in view when he first arrived at Naxos. To offer this form of internal criticism is to point out disconnects between how James actually relates and the norms he professes about how one should relate to one's self, to one's social world or to other people.

This strategy is what Rahel Jaeggi criticizes under the banner of internal criticism, a strategy that holds that

> although certain ideals and norms belong to the self-understanding of a particular community, they are not actually realized within it, so that the reality of certain practices and institutions is measured against these ideals, which are already contained, but not realized, in the community in question. [190]

[190] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 179.

This way of thinking about criticism is widespread beyond the example I have given of James. When headlines tell us that the G20 spent more than $1 trillion on fossil fuels despite an agreement to reduce public spending on coal, oil, and gas[191], for instance, we seem to offer a form of internal criticism. We draw attention to the gap between professed norms and our ability to live up to these standards. So too when we criticize the American Medical Industry for blocking laws that would require doctors to get trained on the risks of opioid use as at odds with its commitment to doing no harm.[192] These kinds of criticism, while they do involve normative judgments or evaluations, do not introduce new ethical grounds or standards. What the critic relies on in the process of critique are the very normative grounds that are already present before they arrive on the scene. The social critic didn't sign the agreements in Copenhagen because of some sense that reducing fossil fuels is good, nor did the critic come up with the "do no harm" mantra. Those ethical standards which justify critical judgments precede the critic.

The standards or norms that judgments are based on are already "accepted as valid and in the normal course of events." [193] And, as Jaeggi puts it, these judgments "should guide the respective practices but in fact do not do so for various reasons."[194] Internal criticism then amounts to pointing out the gaps between the normative grounds that are already accepted and the failure to realize those normative grounds. What I am suggesting here, then, is that when critical theorists argue against forms of criticism that are too weakly normative, they have in mind forms of criticism such as this.

[191] Niranjan, "G20 Poured More than $1tn on Fossil Fuel Subsidies despite Cop26 Pledges – Report."
[192] McGreal, "How Big Pharma's Money – and Its Politicians – Feed the US Opioid Crisis."
[193] Jaeggi, 181.
[194] Ibid 181.

Internal criticism, it should be noted, widely avoids the related charges of authoritarianism. For one, this form of criticism is self-implicating. If I say that James is too attached to his social world or argue that the G20 should not turn its back on its professed commitments, that is, I am drawing on self-professed standards for critique. And I too have norms or commitments in my way of life and on which I can be criticized. Secondly, these forms of criticism avoid objections from autonomy. In criticizing James according to his self-professed criteria or the American medical establishment according to their own norms for doctoring, I am taking seriously the importance of self-determination. I take James at his word when he says he wants to live more freely. Similarly, members of the AMA decide for themselves what it is to be a medical professional --- not to harm – and they do that by way of self-determination. I use their autonomous determinations as a standard for critique. So too for James and his own self-understanding of living more freely.

Internal critics also avoid the privileged position charge. In forms of internal criticism, critics do not introduce new ethical grounds or standards that they use to make normative judgments. Since the standards precede the critic, we do not need to account for them by reference to the critic's distinctive vantage point. In other words, if I use James's own standards to evaluate him, I am not introducing any new norms for evaluation. As such, the critique that the way that I introduce standards for evaluation situates me in a privileged epistemic or ethical position simply does not apply. As Rahel Jaeggi puts it, "the problem of justifying the standard of criticism does not arise because the validity of this standard is actually already recognized.[195]"

When critical theorists argue against forms of criticism that are too weakly normative, they speak about modes of critique that escape the authoritarian charge. Yet, in spite of the apparent

[195] Ibid 183.

advantages here, social philosophers have mostly rejected internal criticism and other modes of critique that function in related ways. They do so because they fear that internal critique is not normative enough. We might, that is, have resources to critique the G20 after they make climate agreements in Copenhagen, or the American Medical Association's commitments to doing no harm. But, what can internal criticism say about ways of relating to the environment or to patient populations before these agreements are signed or pledges are made? If the G20 made no plans to reduce its contributions to fossil fuels, or if the AMA doesn't care about doing no harm, isn't that bad too? Or to return to the example of *Quicksand*, what if James' socialization into the norms of a society focused on racial uplift so shapes his perspective that he doesn't see anything impoverished about his way of relating?

The worry goes that relying on internal critique will mean that we will have nothing to say in such cases. Rahel Jaeggi, for instance, asks whether internal criticism is "actually *critical"* in spite of being so widespread.[196] In the process, she criticizes the "weakness of its 'normativity'."[197] Without being able to make claims like the ones above, Jaeggi argues, we lose the transformative character of critique. She characterizes internal criticism as distinct from context-transcending forms of criticism primarily through the orientation to not just "restore an existing social order or to reinstate valid norms and ideals," but to "transform them." [198]

If internal criticism is not sufficiently critical, the worry is that we find ourselves in a dilemma. We can avoid authoritarianism charges against false consciousness, but this is a Pyrrhic victory. The cost we pay is giving up critique itself. If we think that James relates to the social world in impoverished ways, we might think for instance, that the experience of

[196] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 186.
[197] Jaeggi, 186.
[198] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 203.

racialization of Black Americans in the Jim Crow era runs deep. This might mean that James would not yet have a foothold from which he could see his own ways of relating as impoverished. And, the worry might be, we need some way that critique would not merely rely on the standards from within a pre-Civil Rights or respectability politics frame. We need a way that critique can yield a transformation of those very standards.

In other words, the social critic might want to say that James' way of relating to Naxos and to himself just is impoverished. And the social critic might, at the same time, want to say that the color line and a certain racial schema goes wrong in part through the ways that it generates bad ways of relating for figures like James. We can see, here, two related arguments that critical theorists advance against forms of internal criticism. Internal criticism, firstly, requires that the ideals or practices are not altogether unredeemable. In other words, we might wonder what would it mean to offer an internal critique from within the racial framework of the pre-Civil Rights era. Secondly, critical theorists worry that, at best, the result of internal criticism is reform rather than transformation. It can only reestablish a kind of coherence between lived reality and ideals. That is, we see that James could get better at living up to his own self-understandings or his normative standards. Internal critique, however, would not yet allow – through critique—for James to have his normative standards or ideals reworked (say, those of a society driven by racial respectability politics).

A view towards transformation is what was meant to be what distinguished critical theory from other forms of social theorizing altogether. [199]We turned to false consciousness critique in the first instance because we hoped that we could break the bad ways of relating we find in false consciousness. But internal critique, the worry goes, is too uncritical. It tends towards

[199] Jaeggi, 203.

what Robin Celikates terms "quietism."[200] Critique risks losing its critical force unless it possesses both the ability to render normative judgments about whether a particular way of relating is bad (independent of whether it is recognized as bad in a particular set of social conditions) and the ability to yield transformation.

3.2.3 Context Transcendence

Turning to context- transcendent grounds for critique, social philosophers attempt to do two things at once. On the one hand, they try to avoid the charge of authoritarianism. They offer a way that a form of relating could be judged to be inadequate or deficient without in the process relying on the critic's own privileged position. Axel Honneth, for instance, addresses this version of the authoritarianism charge when he admits the need to avoid "elitist specialized knowledge" in offering ideology critique by way of searching for context.[201] And, if we can identify context-transcending grounds that justify our forms of critique, then those critical grounds can be used to critique us as critics. At the same time, critical theorists respect autonomy in the process of appealing to critical grounds. By articulating a set of context-transcending grounds, critical theorists appeal to the very reasoning process of those who are being subject to critique. It is our capacity to pursue our own ends that is at stake in autonomy, and by appealing to the grounds for our evaluation – even if they are grounds that critics introduce – they take autonomy seriously. The turn to context-transcending grounds for critique, then, is supposed to help us avoid authoritarianism in all of its versions.

[200] Celikates, "From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique," 30.
[201] Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason*, 44–45.

On the other hand, context-transcending grounds help us ensure that critique is sufficiently normative so that critique can retain its critical force and yield transformation of social reality. These discussions bear directly on our account of false consciousness. To retain an account of false consciousness, that is, social philosophers might look for context-transcending grounds that underwrite the ethical judgments that are a part of my account. That is, they might recommend articulating context-transcending grounds as a way of underwriting false consciousness as a distorted way of relating characterized by too much attachment. This is what would the judgment of distortion or too much attachment "normatively defensible."[202] Without such grounds, we succumb to too weak normativity, just as models of internal criticism do.

We can now better see what the literature would recommend as a strategy here: namely, the turn towards context-transcending grounds for our critical judgments as a way of avoiding the Scylla of authoritarianism and the Charybdis of too weak normativity. Critical theorists like Axel Honneth attempt to identify a footing from within existing social reality and its practices that could ground the evaluative judgments involved in critique.[203] Yet those footholds can't merely be taken up, as in internal critique, without "justifying the normative validity" of these very footholds in some context-transcending way. [204] For critical theorists like Honneth, then, we need a way of linking the internal procedure to some foothold that transcends particular contexts. [205]

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[202] Honneth, 50.
[203] Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Critique with a Genealogical Reservation: On the Idea of Critique in the Frankfurt School (Translated by Jeff Seitzer)."
[204] Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Critique with a Genealogical Reservation: On the Idea of Critique in the Frankfurt School (Translated by Jeff Seitzer)," 8.
[205] There are different ways of proceeding to justify the normative validity of the internal foothold. Some opt for the Left Hegelian account which suggests that human history can be understood as a progressive realization of reason through historical learning processes embodied in forms of social practice. Since in social institutions and practices there are embodiments of social reason, those forms of reason can be used to ground or justify standards of critique. As these accounts of reason unfolding through stagist/ historical learning processes have been sites for critique of where we ought to decolonize Frankfurt School critical theory, I have attempted at least in part to avoid taking up this Left Hegelian strategy here. See for instance Allen, *The End of Progress*.

If we want to make normative claims about what counts as distorted praxis or what counts as too much affect we need a way to justify or ground the evaluative standards or grounds on the basis of which we distinguish false consciousness from healthy praxis. Among defenders of context transcendence, accounts differ as to what could count as adequate normative grounds for critique. As Karen Ng puts it, candidates "have included reason itself (Hegel), labor (Marx), modernist art (Adorno), the drives (Marcuse), communicative action (Habermas), and social recognition (Honneth.)"[206]

The dialectics of immanence and transcendence (which navigate between the virtues of internal criticism while avoiding too weak normativity) are meant to respond to both the authoritarianism concern and too weak normativity. On the one hand, the immanent dimension shares something with the perspective of internal criticism. It does so by rejecting an Archimedean point outside of social practice or reality from which we can offer critique. Instead, it sees that our normative claims are situated. This happens through "taking account of the historicity of knowledge and validity claims, recognizing the subjectivity and partiality of ethical judgments, and acknowledging the possibility that claims to context-transcending validity are perhaps yet one more means of exercising repressive social power."[207] This move in the dialectic—namely, the rejection of a privileged epistemic standpoint, the features of self-implication, and the concern with the capacities for self-determination of those who are being critiqued— answers the charge of authoritarianism. The second piece of the dialectic answers the challenge of too weak normativity through turning to context-transcending grounds. Yet, these grounds are not externally imposed as sources of critique, but are only introduced to justify the footholds that were found in social reality itself. These grounds take us beyond the norms that

[206] Ng, "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory," 395.
[207] Cooke, "Resurrecting the Rationality of Ideology Critique," 4.

are internal to a particular practice or way of relating, and amount to something more than the critic's subjective intentions.[208]

That is, critical theorists look to retain the situated perspective from within a way of relating at a social and historical moment and to account for the subjectivity of the critic. At the same time, they try to locate in such situated perspectives something that points beyond the situated perspective itself. Without such context-transcendence, that is, critical theorists worry that their judgments will be too weakly normative.

Since at this point, my discussion of context-transcendence is still schematic, it will help to look at a concrete example. In a recent book, *Dirty Work*, sociologist Eyal Press looks at the effects of drone operators on the soldiers who control unmanned aerial vehicles. [209]His critique is not external and yet it is context-transcending. Press asks what goes wrong when the risks of war are entirely one-sided. When the drone program was created, Press writes, soldiers were thought to be spared of close-range combat and the violence that ensued. And yet, the change in warfare has meant that increasingly, drone operation involves one-sided risks. In other words, in conventional wars, soldiers aim at enemies who are able to retaliate and fire at them. This is not the case in drone warfare. Press worries that operating drones goes wrong because in the operation of drones, military personnel are deprived of honor. [210]Since drone operators do not assume reciprocal risk in their form of warfare, a quoted military pilot worries, military personnel become assassins rather than warriors. Now, Press might well oppose drone warfare categorically. But, Press avoids appeal to some independent or authoritative conception of the good that underlies condemning drone war outright. Instead, he turns to the standards of the US

[208] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 192.
[209] Press, *Dirty Work*, 97–123.
[210] Press, 116.

military itself – namely, a kind of "warrior ethic" and codes of honor – as the standards on the basis of which drones are worthy of critique. The standard of honor or a warrior ethic comes from within the framework of a drone pilot. And yet, that standard is context-transcendent in the sense that it points to an account of honor or a warrior ethic that is more capacious than many drone pilots might self-consciously accept. We begin with the normative standard (honor or the warrior ethic) from within the drone pilot's way of seeing. Then, we move beyond that pilot's way of seeing or relating and use that to ground a critique that applies to more than just this or that particular drone pilot and their specific understanding of honor. We get a reworking of both the normative standard (that is, what counts as honor) as well as how we are to understand drone warfare. Where immanent critique and internal critique come apart, then, is two-fold. First, already-subscribed to norms (honor) get further determination by way of argumentation that can show how new and as yet unevaluated phenomena can fall under the norm (which has in turn been reconsidered).

By accounting for normative validity, we can begin in and move beyond the drone pilot's partial and subjective perspective. That is where context-transcendence comes in. We can, in other words, move from the immanent moment (the first step of looking at the drone pilot's own self-understanding and identifying resources for critique in the pilot's way of relating), to the transcendent moment. These grounds point us beyond the pilot's perspective itself. That is, we seek grounds located both within James' perspective that can be at once immanent and apply across context.

To generalize, ideologically false consciousness, like other social pathologies for Honneth are the result of a "deficit in social rationality."[211] In the background of Honneth's picture is an

[211] Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy," 22.

idea about how modern capitalism both generates gaps in social rationality while at the same time existing alongside some potential for transformation and critique in social rationality itself. [212] We can see how this would inform a picture of false consciousness. Since ideologically false consciousness is for Honneth a pathology of social reason, if we are to see false consciousness as a bad way of relating or a distorted realization of reason, that distortion is not going to be fully inadequate or fully damaged. Instead, even within our distorted ways of relating or in inadequate social institutions, there is a foothold of social rationality or else, a good way of relating.[213] For instance, even within the distorted military industrial complex, there might be a foothold in some concept of honor as recognition that could be useful for critique. Appeal to social rationality or the good becomes a context-transcending ground. That ground shores up our judgment that a way of relating goes wrong or is distorted. Since the foothold is found within a way of relating in a particular social-institutional landscape, we also avoid the authoritarianism charges. That is, we do not appeal to new standards from without. We take self-determination seriously, and we assume that the foothold also applies to us as critics.

Appeal to context-transcending grounds, then, is meant to help us yield transformation. As Honneth puts it, "the forces that contribute to the overcoming of the social pathology stem from precisely that reason whose actualization is impeded by the form of organization present in capitalist society." [214] We, as critics, also shore up the perspective of intact social rationality or better ways of relating –even amidst bad praxis. By Honneth's lights, people "cannot be

[212] Honneth, 31.
[213] I am using social rationality and better ways of relating here in the same breath, in part because Honneth sees the failures in the social conditions for a good life to result from the aforementioned deficits in social rationality\\. This suggests that social rationality for Honneth is not going to mean that deficits in social rationality are going to be about more than just reason narrowly understood but also the affective, intersubjective, and bodily preconditions that allow for the exercise of reason.
[214] Honneth, "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy," 36.

indifferent about the restriction of their rational capacities," nor can we be indifferent about our own good.[215] This suggests that the standard that is being appealed to – social rationality – is not purely external. The concern with our own rational capacities, for Honneth, is something that we can find from within our own frameworks. What this means is that we, as people, can overcome our distorted praxis or the impediments to social rationality by means of the very capacities that have been damaged. In other words, the turn to context-transcending grounds, while it emerges out of a concern for avoiding too weak normativity on the one hand and authoritarianism on the other, is also a point about how critical theory can yield transformation.

Amy Allen elaborates on this account of critical theory's transformative potential by drawing on Honneth's psychoanalytic model of critique.[216] Psychoanalysis is, on Honneth's account, both immanent and transcendent. When an analyst works with a patient, she begins in the patient's frame and within a patient's way of understanding and relating. But, the analyst also seeks a foothold within the patient's frame that points outside of it. In other words, the analyst seeks context-transcending grounds while working in an immanent fashion. Psychoanalysts presuppose that their patients want to improve their ways of relating, just as critics of false consciousness must also presuppose that they hope to overcome their excessive attachment or bad ways of relating, even if those desires are not at the forefront. This is something that I will problematize in the following section. As Allen characterizes Honneth's position, that is, "just as analysis uses neurotic suffering through the reactivation of the very same rational powers that have been impeded by neurosis, critical theory must cure social pathologies through a reactivation of the rational powers that those social pathologies have impeded."[217] Put

[215] Honneth, 39.
[216] Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 156–57.
[217] Allen, 157.

differently, if we want to overcome false consciousness, we can do this by appealing to our footholds for critique. That is, we mobilize as critics the context-transcending grounds and the interest we have in our own better or more rational ways of relating.

As I have been suggesting, turning to context-transcending grounds--- such as some account of healthy praxis or intact social rationality—is meant to both allow us to avoid both authoritarianism and the charge of too weak normativity. What's more, the turn to context-transcending grounds is also offered as a model for how we are to think about the method of the critique of ideological consciousness. That is, appeal to context-transcending grounds is what points us beyond our damaged ways of relating and towards more rational, better modes of living. We can help James overcome his damaged ways of relating, on this view by pointing to normative understandings of more rational or healthier relations that are already implicit in James's praxis. Given that James is all but indifferent to his own rationality, this mode of critique, the thought goes, will be transformative.

3.3 The Impasse of Seeking Context-transcendent Grounds

To recap, the turn towards context-transcendent grounds in the process of false consciousness critique, then, is meant to do three things: It is supposed to help us avoid the authoritarianism charge, to escape too weak normativity, and to point us towards transformation of bad ways of relating. Yet, as I will argue in this section, the long-standing arguments about context-transcendence that we find in critical theory have led to an impasse. Critics disagree both about what would count as adequate context-transcendent grounds as well as whether we need them at all. The deadlock in which we find ourselves does not point to the falsity of context-transcendence per se. However, these discussions do not bring us closer towards the

transformative power of critical theory, either. This raises the question of whether we should sidestep the long-standing discussions about these very grounds for methodological reasons.

The contemporary literature offers a number of differing accounts as to the best way to understand what it is that could serve as a context-transcending ground for critique. While Honneth and Habermas, for example, agree that such grounds are necessary, they disagree about those grounds themselves. [218] Honneth, for example, turns to recognition and the social conditions on the exercise of rationality, while Habermas turns to reason by way of communicative discourse. When we look across history, too, we see different sources for context-transcendence (e.g. recognition, reason more narrowly construed, the drives). [219] This phenomenon continues into the present day. Many contemporary scholars offer their own accounts of the context-transcending grounds for critique. Maeve Cooke, for example, finds context-transcendent critique, following Laclau, in a universal of the good society that is instantiated in a series of inadequate political particulars.[220] Rahel Jaeggi turns, by contrast, to historical learning processes.[221] Whether or not one or another of these accounts ultimately offers a better explanation of the context-transcending grounds for critique is beside the point for my current purposes. It is the turn to context-transcendence itself that leads us to a stalemate. Defenders of context-transcendence, I am suggesting, have focused too much attention on arguing about whether or not context-transcendent grounds of critique are necessary.

The impasse extends not just to discussions between defenders of context-transcendent grounds but also with their critics. This is evidenced by the now familiar fault lines of the

[218] Honneth, "The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today"; Habermas, *Knowledge & Human Interests*.
[219] Ng, "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory."
[220] Cooke, "Resurrecting the Rationality of Ideology Critique."
[221] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, chap. 10.

Foucault-Habermas debate. A key contention of this debate turns around Habermas's claim that Foucault's critical work "cannot account for its normative foundations." [222] In other words, the debate is about the context-transcendent grounds on the basis of which critique can occur, and whether Foucault's position succumbs to the flaw of being too weakly normative. Habermas argues that context-transcendent grounds are necessary. He offers an account of how it is that such grounds could be found (e.g. in communicative discourse). In other words, defenders of context-transcendence have expended much effort both arguing about what could count as adequate grounds while at the same time identifying shortcomings in critical social theories that do not concern themselves with context-transcendence.

Foucault serves merely as a well-rehearsed example of this charge, although not the only one. Rorty and Walzer get their fair share of attention too.[223] The background of too weak normativity leveled against views that do not take up context-transcendence, then, serves as context for Nancy Fraser's oft-rehearsed claim that what Foucault offers is a mixture of "empirical insights and normative confusions."[224] In response, Foucauldians have attempted to answer Habermas's charge by attempting to clarify the ways in which Foucault could actually meet the charge of being too weakly normative on account of a lack of context-transcending grounds that Habermas himself levels.[225] That is, some scholars of Foucault argue that his model of critique does not rely on some external normative premise that makes reference to context-transcendence, but is adequately normative in and of itself. And there is, even more recently, a

[222]Jürgenc Habermas, Frederick Lawrence, and Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 14. Nachdr, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Pr, 2004), 276.
[223] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 174, 283; Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, 25–26.
[224] Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions."
[225] Allen, "Foucault and Modern Political Philosophy"; Kelly, "Foucault, Habermas, and the Self-Referentiality of Critique."

rejection of these attempts to find in Foucault a model of critique that is normative enough without context transcendence. [226]

The back and forths between Foucauldians and Habermasians are oftens described in the literature as a kind of stalemate. Judith Butler calls it a "discursive impasse" in which stronger normative views war with critical theories that do not require such foundations. [227]Amy Allen speaks about her recent work on the Foucault-Habermas debate as an attempt to break through what is otherwise understood as a "deadlock." [228] What's strangest about the debate, Allen adds, is that "the Habermasians seem to think they have won (the debate), while the Foucauldians act as if they were not even playing."[229] In effect, then, critical theorists exhaust many pages arguing about whether their forms of critique are adequately normative if they are not context-transcendent. And, those who think context-transcending grounds are not required carry on doing what they always have.

This extends too to discussions of false consciousness. We began this chapter with the discussion of how we can claim that certain forms of praxis are inadequate or characterized by a disposition of too much attachment. We sought, in effect, an answer to the authoritarianism charge. But, in answering the authoritarianism charge, a new set of concerns emerged about too weak normativity. This pointed us in the direction of trying to identify context-transcendent grounds, and turning to the dialectic of immanence and transcendence as a way of resolving how we are justified in making claims about what counts as distorted consciousness or not. What I am suggesting is that there's an impasse with respect to whether context-transcendence is necessary

[226] King, "Clarifying the Foucault—Habermas Debate."
[227] Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," 3.
[228]Judith Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," *Kritik*, 2001, 3; Amy Allen, "Discourse, Power, and Subjectivation: The Foucault/Habermas Debate Reconsidered," *The Philosophical Forum* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 1, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9191.2008.00314.x.
[229]Allen, "Discourse, Power, and Subjectivation: The Foucault/Habermas Debate Reconsidered," 1.

for answering the normativity charge and, what's more, surrounding what could serve as adequate context- transcending grounds for critique.

In identifying this impasse, I don't mean to suggest that the conversations around context-transcendence need to be abandoned altogether. What I do want to point out is the stakes of such a stalemate within critical social theory. After all, the stalemate is at odds with our very understanding of critique. In other words, we turned to critique of false consciousness to help us transform an apparent impasse around bad praxis. But if critique itself then leads to a discursive deadlock rather than helping us transform our bad ways of relating, it seems counterproductive. What this suggests, then, is that we should pursue avenues other than debates about context-transcendent grounds as a way of resolving the dilemma concerning too weak normativity and authoritarianism.

As I stated at the beginning of this section, the impasse surrounding context-transcendent grounds raises fundamental questions about the methodology of critical theory. After all, we turn to critique when something in our way of doing things no longer works for us. That is, we experience a kind of crisis in our way of going about things, and it is from this crisis or disruption to our standard ways of relating that the practice of critical theorizing emerges. It requires us to understand how we have ended up where we are. It also requires that we ask different questions about how things could be otherwise. It's this sort of a deadlock that leads us to critique in the first place. My claim, then, is that attending to the widely held connection between critique and crisis gives us reason to avoid normative grounding questions as a way of transforming bad ways of relating including false consciousness. Following such a perspective the impasse surrounding grounding might give us pause. We can view the stalemate about context transcendence as an argument that we need to find different terms we could use to

address authoritarianism while at the same time yielding the kind of transformation that is at issue in critical theory.

This relationship between critique and crisis is widely agreed upon in the critical social philosophy tradition. Seyla Benhabib, for instance, characterizes critique as the result of an open-ended conflict. "'Critique'," she writes, "is the subjective evaluation or decision concerning a conflictual and controversial process."[230] What's meant here is that the conflictual and controversial process that was ongoing is in some sense interrupted by a decision or evaluation of which critique is part. Critique, on this view, is a practice that we engage in when we are at the limits of our normal ways of going forward. Rahel Jaeggi too, shares this view of the close connection between critique and crisis in her work on forms of life. According to Jaeggi, immanent critique, which she defends in her work, begins when the object of critique – of which we are a part – "has succumbed to a crisis of itself." [231] In other words, we do not begin with critique, but we come to critique on account of an internal crisis or problem that suggests criticism is necessary.[232]

For these figures, it's also important to see that critique is not only generated from a crisis, but it also requires that we contribute to that crisis in ways that are different from how we might have been moving up until that crisis moment. Jaeggi agrees with Benhabib that "problems and crisis tendencies" that we come to understand in and through critique "point to structural issues that place the constellation described itself in question (or at any rate systematically inherent in

[230] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 19.
[231] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 191.
[232] To that end, here, we can see how Heidegger's account of technology, namely, that we are most aware of technology when it breaks down or doesn't function as it should looks to be a model of critique on this understanding; something prevents us from moving forward (an impasse or a crisis) and it's on that basis that we can turn to critiquing the technology.

it) and that therefore cannot be resolved within this constellation."[233] What both suggest then is that the connection between critique and crisis is two-fold: on the one hand, that we are driven to critique through crisis, and secondly, that critique is what we are called upon to turn to when we cannot resolve problems within a specific constellation.

The idea here is that we don't begin with a practice of critique. Instead, we see that something about what Adorno calls our 'prevailing language', or our way of going about things is no longer working. [234]In offering a mode of critique, we don't offer considerations that tell against the current way of going about things directly. Instead, we learn that our current ways of operating have been foreclosing other ways of carrying on.

If attempts to answer concerns that accounts of false consciousness are too weakly normative are likely to re-entrench us in an impasse, then this stalemate may itself be an occasion for critique. That is, our understanding of critique itself points us to the importance of moving beyond the specific "discursive impasse" around the normative grounds for critique. In the estimation of Judith Butler, that is, "the very debate in which the strong normative view wars with critical theory may produce precisely that form of discursive impasse from which the necessity and urgency of critique emerges." [235]While Butler makes the claim in thinking about the relationship between critical theory in a more expansive sense than I have been using it here– – and opposes it to stronger normative views (what I have been calling context-transcendence views)—her point is instructive. That is, we have entered into a discursive deadlock, and that requires that we do not proceed by continuing in the way that we have. To do so is at odds with our very commitments to transformation that underlie critique itself.

[233] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 202.
[234] Adorno, "Cultural Criticsm and Society," 30.
[235] Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," 3.

Theories of false consciousness need a way to answer the authoritarianism objection. And, for contemporary critical social theorists, answering authoritarianism has also meant reckoning with claims about too weak normativity. Critical theorists, then, have turned to the foundations of critical theory itself and to context-transcendence as a way of resolving both authoritarianism and too weak normativity. Yet, the discursive deadlock we find around both the need for context-transcendence on the one hand, and what should count as an adequate source, suggest that false consciousness critique needs a different way forward.

3.4 Psychoanalysis and New Models of Critique

In this section, I want to return to the analogy between the method of psychoanalysis and critical theory. Of course, if we are to sidestep discussions around context-transcending grounds, we meet with a new set of challenges. In particular, our account of false consciousness still requires a response to the three formulations of the authoritarianism objection (autonomy, self-implication, and privileged epistemic position). Psychoanalysis, I will argue, offers another way of responding to these three charges. In answering the question about whether my account of false consciousness centers around an understanding of authoritarianism, in other words, these figures see critique as a matter of judgment and rational insight. To critique false consciousness as a form of distorted praxis or characterized by overinvestment, in other words, meets the authoritarian objection if we see critique as being about matters of diagnosis. Yet, there are other models of critique and transformation here that do not center around these particular understandings of critique. And, psychoanalysis can also be useful for critical theorists in another way, namely, by offering an account of transformation beyond that of judgment and rational insight. We might, in other words, draw on an understanding of psychoanalytic method that deviates from thinking about diagnosis and rational insight as a way of refiguring our

understanding of false consciousness critique. Under a refigured understanding of critique that doesn't see in explanatory accounts of false consciousness tools for diagnosis, concerns about authoritarianism in new forms lose their force.

Psychoanalysis and the critique of ideologically distorted consciousness are, for many critical theorists, meant to share important features. Rahel Jaeggi, for instance, argues that the talking cure is a form of immanent critique.[236] In that respect, psychoanalytic method shares something methodologically with her preferred method for the critique of ideologies. According to Jaeggi, immanent critique has the virtues of internal critique while at the same time meeting the condition of context-transcending grounds. For Jaeggi, what the critique of distorted consciousness and psychoanalysis share, then, is that in both "diagnosis is not applied to the analysand from the outside." [237] Instead, psychoanalysis involves beginning with the self-understanding of the patient. The patient already senses that something goes wrong in their way of relating. We might think of this as a crisis. It's only in taking seriously an analysand's subjective perspective and this crisis, for Jaeggi, that psychoanalytic conversation begins. Analysis works by way of a transformation that is the result of a reciprocal relationship involving both patient and analyst. [238]Jaeggi's account sees the method of ideology critique and psychoanalytic working through as related for several reasons: for beginning with the patient's self-understanding, as well as for implicating both the critic and the object of critique.

We can see how this model would be useful for overcoming authoritarianism. Let's begin with the challenge from autonomy and self-determination. Psychoanalysis is meant to address this issue in two distinct ways. Jaeggi gestures at one, namely, the importance of beginning with

[236] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 191.
[237] Jaeggi, 197.
[238] Jaeggi, 197.

the patient's own account of their symptoms. Psychoanalysts do not come to a relationship with a patient with some determinate picture of what counts as relating well for the particular patient in question. Nor do they suggest that patients are experiencing a crisis because the patients are not able to realize what would in fact be good for the patients themselves. Instead, psychoanalytic method often begins with the analysand's account of both what isn't working for the analysands themselves, as well as how these patients experience their symptoms.[239] Of crucial importance is take-up by the analysands themselves. That is, the psychoanalytic conversation's end goal is to make a difference for the analysand's own practical activity. Jonathan Lear, in his work on Freud, argues that psychoanalytic technique focuses on "the problem of *appropriation*: what is involved in people being able to take up their own psychological states in ways that genuinely make them their own."[240] In its investment in whether or not the analysand takes up the critique, psychoanalysis shows that it values self-determination and autonomy. It therefore helps us avoid one version of the authoritarianism charge.

In addition, Jaeggi, gestures at how psychoanalytic method could also resolve the issues of self-implication and the privileged position: specifically, through the reciprocal relationship between both patient and analyst. I will take up this aspect of Jaeggi's claims under the umbrella of transference and countertransference. Transference is in part the process by which the patient's "unconscious wishes and impulses show up in a social situation, most notably the analytic situation."[241] To take an example, imagine a person who has a fantasy that they are constantly disappointing their loved ones and peers, and for whom this fantasy comes to be

[239] See, for instance, a widely used textbook for psychoanalytic practitioners on the importance of a patient's own understanding of their situation in MacWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis*, 49–50.
[240] Lear, *Freud*, 135.
[241] Lear, 257.

extremely resilient in the face of other experiences. Given that the person's framework is incapable of being contradicted, that is, the person who interprets counterexamples through this lens. ("I might have scored the game-winning shot, but I let my teammates down by leaving the game so close until the final minutes.") Working with the transference, in this case, would mean waiting for the patient's conflicts around being a disappointment to become manifest in and through the relationship with the analyst. There are many ways that could play out. The patient might worry inordinately about missing a session or running a couple of minutes late out of fear of letting the analyst down, the patient could sense that their analyst wishes for more decisiveness on the part of the patient, etc. The focus here is on the nature of a patient's feelings as they are transferred to the analyst. And, the relationship is reciprocal, which suggests that what's at issue is not just the patient's feelings in the analytic situation, but also the analyst's for the patient (the countertransference). For example, perhaps the analyst finds herself fantasizing about being the supportive and always accepting substitute for the critical people in the patient's life. That too would be part of the relational dynamic. In other words, we see that the method of psychoanalysis is meant to be self-implicating.

Joel Whitebook sees the focus on countertransference as undermining the dichotomy between the "normal, healthy doctor and the sick patient."[242] Countertransference, or the focus on the analyst's own affective and unconscious responses to what happens in the analytic situation, becomes part of what is under investigation. Turning to both the transference and counter-transference, then, becomes a way of addressing the idea that the analyst is in a privileged position as compared to the analysand. If the focus is less on the analyst as the source of critique, we begin to address the version of the authoritarianism objection that centers around

[242] Whitebook, "Against Interiority," 330.

the privileged epistemic position. The analyst does not occupy a privileged vantage point from which the analyst judges a way of relating to be damaged. Rather, the analyst merely sets up an occasion for patterns of relating to repeat. In that process, what is transferred for Lear is the "repetition of an entire orientation to the world." [243]

Amy Allen, too, sees working with the transference as a way of answering the charge that analysts (like critical theorists) occupy privileged ethical or epistemic positions. She writes

> if we understand transference as bringing into view the analysand's distinctive and idiosyncratic way of experiencing the world and revealing that way to be contingent, thereby opening it up to transformation, then we are no longer subject to the danger of positioning the critical theorist, by analogy, as a charismatic figure to whom social movement actors need to become affectively attached. Instead, to establish something like a transference relationship in the context of critical theory would mean simply to bring into view, through the interaction between critical theorists and social actors, the actors' distinctive, idiosyncratic way of experiencing the world as precisely that: a way of experiencing the world that they themselves have had a hand in constituting.[244]

Allen suggests that in shifting the focus away from the analyst as a source for critique and instead thinking about transference, we have resources to address the authoritarianism charge that is made both against psychoanalysis and against the critique of ideologies. In other words, what underlies the privileged position objection is a sense that the force of critique follows from the analyst's perspective. But, in working with transference and countertransference dynamics, the focus of critique shifts.

If psychoanalytic critique is less about an analyst's perspective on a dynamic than it is about offering the conditions for a (partly) self-constructed worldview to come into being, that is, the authoritarianism objection centering around privileged position has less force. And so too for

[243] Lear, *Freud*, 139.
[244] Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 171.

false consciousness critique. If we think that what matters for critique is less the vantage point of us as critics on whether a way of relating is damaged or inadequate than the ways that we work with people's ways of relating as themselves partly self-constituted and idiosyncratic, then the force of authoritarianism objections against critique of false consciousness weakens.

However, it is at this stage worth an additional clarification about both the method of psychoanalysis and that of critical theory. Many critical theorists focus on the analogy to psychoanalysis as in the first instance about the process of diagnosis on the one hand, and the resolving of diagnoses by way of rational insight. The account of psychoanalysis I have in mind focuses less on both diagnosis and following Lear and Allen, does not locate the transformative potential of psychoanalysis in rational insight. [245] This is important for our critique of false consciousness. As I will be arguing, critical social theorists have focused on how it is that we can assess whether or not something counts as distorted. And they have focused on critique as a process of gaining insight about better ways of relating. However, we should think about transformation as located not primarily in these features of analytic method.

Recall that psychoanalysis, for Jaeggi, is like immanent critique. In both, diagnosis is not applied from outside of the dynamic between patient and analyst (or critic and object of critique). What this picture takes for granted however is a particular understanding of critique as centrally about the diagnosis of distortion. But, we might wonder whether diagnosis itself is so core to psychoanalytic method. The emphasis on diagnosis in psychoanalysis may instead be the result of changes in health insurance reimbursements where a patient only qualifies for treatment if they are diagnosed say as struggling with one or another pathology. To that end, we might think, the focus on diagnostics we see in contemporary psychoanalytic practice may be the result of a

[245] Lear, *Freud*, 135–36; Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 154–83.

particular social and historical moment rather than something central to the practice itself. What's more, diagnosis—and the related practice of an analyst offering interpretations to a patient-— is something that is very often warned against in psychoanalytic method. As Lear puts it,

> It is all too easy for an analyst to say, 'You have an unconscious desire to ---' and the analysand might willingly agree, 'Yes I have an unconscious desire to ---,' and it might even be true that he does have such a desire. The analysand might even grasp all the reasons the analyst has for thinking he has this unconscious desire- and they might well be good reasons. Thus the analysand comes to have a sincere, justified true belief about his own unconscious mental state. And yet this belief cannot make the right kind of therapeutic difference—because it does not connect with the mental activity it purports to name." [246]

What Lear clarifies then, are three important things. First, psychoanalytic method aims at transformation, which Lear calls making 'a therapeutic difference.' Second, Lear's claim is that what makes a therapeutic difference is not the judgment about a person's unconscious desire (the diagnosis). Nor is what makes a therapeutic difference appeal to the grounds or reasons for the diagnosis, nor getting the analysand to reckon with either the diagnosis or the grounds. To that end, then, focusing on diagnosis and the insight into one's diagnosis would be to inadvertently take the focus away from the goal of analysis: a different way of going about things. Lear speaks about this positive program as a way of getting the analysand to acquire "practical understanding." [247]

Psychoanalysis, I have been arguing, does not center around diagnosis, nor does it center around insight into one's diagnosis. However, as Amy Allen has argued, this is how many

[246] Lear, *Freud*, 135–36.
[247] Lear, 50.

critical theorists have understood the relationship between psychoanalysis and critical theory.[248] Habermas writes, for instance, in *Knowledge and Human Interests,* that psychoanalysis

> is critique in the sense that the analytic power to dissolve dogmatic attitudes inheres in analytic insight. Critique terminates in a transformation of the affective-motivational basis, just as it begins with the need for practical transformation. Critique would not have the power to break up false consciousness if it were not impelled by a passion for critique. [249]

What Habermas suggests is that psychoanalysis' end goal is better self-understanding. For Habermas, that involves being able to integrate parts of our history that have been alienated from ourselves. [250]

This is, by Habermas' own account, more than a merely cognitive process. He himself gestures towards the "affective-motivational" basis of dogmatic attitudes. But, what I want to draw attention to here is how what needs to be overcome is a kind of dogmatism which Habermas elsewhere he suggests is at odds with self-knowledge or self-reflection. What overcomes dogmatism, then, is the very same capacity that has been lacking. Psychoanalysis, on Habermas's view, looks to involve two features: on the one hand, it involves a kind of diagnosis (of dogmatism) and, on the other, an overcoming of dogmatism through rational insight. As Amy Allen puts it, while a person has to desire transformation in order to enter the analytic situation, the "transformative work" of psychoanalysis for Habermas "is done by analytic insight." [251]

There are additional reasons to be wary about the usefulness of analytic insight. Rational insight alone may not have the transformative potential that we take it to. "Critique," Allen

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[248] Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 155–61.
[249] Habermas, *Knowledge & Human Interests*, 234.
[250] I am using Habermas's view in Knowledge and its Interests as shorthand; Habermas himself abandons the analogy to psychoanalysis and yet it remains influential for how people think about social philosophy
[251] Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 155.

writes, "can't possibly be effective until we are affectively prepared for it." [252] Just as Lear's imagined analyst goes wrong in thinking that practical mastery over the analysand's situation will come from insight, so too does critical theory's focus on diagnosis and rational insight go wrong when it comes to false consciousness. Overcoming false consciousness and our damaged ways of relating is not going to be the result of someone either telling us that we are subject to false consciousness or convincing us as to why that judgment holds. We should, just as psychoanalysts, be sensitive to the ways that both diagnosis and offering interpretations can be counter-productive. An analyst knows, for example, that calling someone paranoid, even if that is an assessment that is based on good reasons, may not yield good clinical outcomes. As Allen puts it, the same is true for the critique of ideologies itself. Critical theorists attempt to characterize a phenomenon as false consciousness and to overcome bad ways of relating by means of insight, that is, are not necessarily the best way to transformation. "The critical project of offering rational interpretations" — and we might add the project of diagnosis too – "may serve either to deepen a society's resistances to the contents of those insights or to mobilize a society's internal defense mechanisms."[253] What's meant here is that the very same things that were supposed to lead to transformation of bad ways of relating or too much attachment can yield the opposite outcome. That is, to characterize something as a distorted way of relating or as too much attachment could, rather than resulting in transformation, re-entrench the very forms of bad praxis we hoped to unseat.

In other words, in learning from psychoanalysis, we can answer the authoritarianism objections to false consciousness in a surprising way. If psychoanalysis can be a helpful analogy

[252] Allen, 176.
[253] Allen, 176.

that resolves both autonomy and the charge of self-implication, then moving away from judgment and grounds for our judgments can be a way of resolving the privileged position objection to false consciousness critique. In doing so, we might follow Judith Butler's account of "the primary task of critique" as being something more than evaluating "whether its objects – social conditions, practices, forms of knowledge, power, and discourse—are good or bad, valued highly or demeaned."[254] This isn't to say that critique will not involve judgments or insights, just as psychoanalysis is not always without interpretation and diagnosis.[255] Rather, if we shift the focus to better understanding the conditions that generate bad ways of relating or too much attachment instead of the evaluations and insight into these evaluations themselves, then we will better realize the transformative aims of critical theory.

Of course, at this stage, one might wonder about the analogy between psychoanalytic method and *social* critique altogether. The conditions under which psychoanalysis takes place are unlike the conditions of social critique. How can the method, then, of asking about the conditions under which we invest or not be useful to us as social critics? Wouldn't we be better off abandoning the analogy to psychoanalysis?

Jettisoning the insights of psychoanalysis for social critique, however, would be premature. My account of false consciousness is that false consciousness is a distorted way of relating characterized by too much attachment. Psychoanalysis, I have been arguing helps redirect our focus away from diagnosis and towards explanation. That is, we might ask about or theorize the conditions that generate dispositions of overinvestment. To do so is to open for *social* critique and explanation. I have some speculations about what social and political

[254] Butler, "What Is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue," 2.
[255] Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 176.

conditions might be that give rise to overattachment– say, the reduced guarantees of security and protection and the persistent risk of failure that attend late capitalism – though this is to be explored in further work. Suffice it for now to say that the turn towards our historically and socially specific conditions and how they contribute to certain dispositions can be a sight of properly social critique.

To underscore the point, some recent (exemplary) work takes up critique not as judgment but as a way of understanding social conditions that give rise to particular forms of relating. Noelle McAffee's work on Winnicott and fears of losing the unit self, for instance, draws attention to how patterns of relating to our social institutions can be the result of our defending against our anxiety about losing ourselves. But, what's more, she points to the ways that we organize political deliberations as exacerbating both our fears of breakdown and the defensive forms of relating (including overinvestment) that follow. McAffee looks at the ways our social conditions (e.g. our practices of democracy) shape our ways of relating, and to that end offers a kind of critique.

Wendy Brown, too, offers critique on the model I am advancing. When she writes, for instance, writes about how figures on the Left are excessively attached to liberal democracy, she suggests these ways of relating are the result of a perception of how liberal democracy has been destroyed.[256] Brown offers, in her critique, an understanding of the historically specific conditions that generate our investments in social institutions (the destruction or at least perceived destruction of liberal democracy). And, she uses this socially and historically specific analysis to make a point about social institutions. Since we constitute our senses of self as critics on account of our opposition to liberal democracy, for instance, we might, in perceiving its loss,

[256] Brown, *Edgework*, 53.

be tempted to shore up the very institution that we set out to critique. To that end, then, we see how certain changes in social organization (or perceptions thereof) generate ways of relating, and we might ask about how or why these take place.

Psychoanalysis helps us see how what might seemingly be hard to perceive—patterns of relating or ways that we overinvest in our social conditions – could be the result of some deeper coherence. Both Brown and McAffee, then, explain what on the surface could seem idiosyncratic: the Left's attachment to democracy, the way that black and white thinking seems to result from our deliberative practices. And, in turn, they ask about what might underlie such conditions. In the process, that is, they give a "coherent if deeply implicit structure to events that would otherwise appear chaotic and random." [257] If psychoanalysis was meant to tell us about how certain patterns are repeated across different scales of our experience, critical theory, by analogy too could help us better understand the conditions that make our investment more likely.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been arguing that defending the viability of false consciousness as a critical concept requires responding to the charges that authoritarianism returns in new forms. However, many attempts to respond to authoritarianism in social philosophy lead to an impasse. Critical theorists on the one hand, attempt to avoid authoritarianism, while on other, they want to ensure critique is sufficiently normative. Fearing too weak normativity, many critical social philosophers then seek context-transcendent grounds for critique. In this chapter, however, I have argued that while social philosophers should be sensitive to concerns about authoritarianism, the debates about context-transcendence and too weak normativity have

[257] Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 178.

themselves led to a deadlock. This stalemate occasions critique itself, and requires us to find a new way forward rather than simply continuing to operate as we have. I propose, then, that rethinking what counts as critique – again returning to the analogy to psychoanalysis – can help us better understand the very assumptions about what critique looks like that leads to concerns about returns of authoritarianism that emerge from my view. In particular, turning towards less diagnostic and judgment-based accounts of critique that can enable us to sidestep authoritarianism while nevertheless retaining social and political implications.

Conclusion

Accounts of ideology as false consciousness, I have been arguing, can help us remain sensitive to our agency. Yet, what follows form the positions I have developed here as concerns the ways that we as subjects of bad ways of relating take up ourselves, each other and our social world? How do we make sense of our excessive attachments?

My remarks follow from a sense that while not all damaged ways of relating are attributable to social and economic conditions, certain forms of bad praxis predominate at a given time and context. There is among many people today, a growing awareness of our inhabiting changed social conditions. Aside from fears of the future uninhabitability of the planet, there also lingers a fear that young people today occupy a different world from prior generations. They lack a shot at graduating debt-free and finding relative job security, and what

might have seemed like effortless career trajectories seem out of reach, as does reliable housing, modest as that may be, or comfortable retirement. I'm struck, in this, by how we respond to such strategies through means of what Wendy Brown has described as a kind of "entrepreneurial, self-investing and self-promotional" strategy that attempts to reckon with our world of "unpaid internships, a limited social state, unaffordable health care, and gig or contract jobs."[258] What's most striking for me here is the language of investment or attachment, which belies a different way of distorted relating from those familiar to us as social critics. Brown, as she often does, points to how we as subjects are shaped differently in such conditions, with a psychic life that contains different arrangements of vulnerabilities and defenses, attachments and disavowals.

It's for this reason that reworking the concept of false consciousness is called for. False consciousness helps us see how distortion is not something that happens to us in ways disconnected from our investments and attachments. And, it draws attention to how distorted relating manifests specifically today.

In the face of these social conditions and our attachments, as we are aware, that go wrong, there's a temptation to turn to issues of diagnosis. In turn, we seek some foundations for our critique. And yet, perhaps this impulse to seek foundations too is more symptom of a fear of losing measures of security rather than a demand we as all critical theorists should meet. To that end, an attempt at looking more closely at particular deep structures that give rise to us as selves, which historicizing patterns of relating to social and material life, can be a welcome and, dare I say, fruitful, for us as social philosophers.

[258] Allen and Mendieta, *Power, Neoliberalism, and the Reinvention of Politics*, 176.

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