

## Research Article

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# False Consciousness and the Socially Extended Mind

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**Abstract:** In this paper I present a problem for the Marxist idea of false consciousness, namely how it is vulnerable to accusations of dogmatism. I will argue that the concept must be further developed if it is to provide a plausible tool for systematic social analysis. In the second half of the paper I will show how this could be done if the account of false consciousness incorporates Shaun Gallagher's theory of the socially extended mind. This is a theory that explores how the mind expands towards external objects and systems. I will conclude that it helps to reinstate false consciousness as a reliable tool for the analysis of cognitive dynamics within power structures.

**Keywords:** False consciousness; social mind extension; enactive cognition; externalism; social analysis

## Introduction

In this paper I will present a problem for the Marxist notion of “false consciousness”. This concept concerns the effects of ideology on individual consciousness, and particularly the ways in which human beings within a society incorporate and reproduce power structures that are not necessarily to their personal benefit. First, I show how false consciousness poses problems for its own systematic framework, and for presenting an account of cognition and knowledge as it actually manifests itself within a set of power structures. This issue must be resolved if false consciousness is to be retained as a useful tool for the analysis of the effect of material power structures on the individual mind. I then go on to briefly elaborate how a possible solution should be approached if false consciousness is to retain its value as a concept. In the final part of this paper, I develop my own solution based on this approach by elaborating on false consciousness as a concept in light of Shaun Gallagher's theory of the socially extended mind, which explores how the mind expands towards external objects and systems. I conclude that this elaboration of false consciousness is capable of presenting an account that fulfils the criteria for a successful solution to the problem stated at the beginning of this paper.<sup>1</sup>

## The Problem With False Consciousness

### The Origin of False Consciousness

The idea of false consciousness emerged as a reply to Wilhelm Reich's puzzlement with the fact that people do not actively resist exploitation (1933, 53). Although this worry dates back to Plato (book V, 459c-d), it became of particular concern to post-Marxist theory, as capitalism seemed to persevere even in times of economic crisis, and the experiments of social change of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century turned out to be repressive

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rather than emancipatory (Benhabib 1994, 66). Marx never used the term “false consciousness” as such, but the idea is rooted in his materialist ontology (Eagleton 1991, 70). Marx argues that the material foundations of society, i.e. the available material goods, how they are distributed, and who they are controlled by, provide the foundation of social practice, and that social practice is crucial to idea formation. He rejects the thought that ideas exist over and above the material realm of human agency (Balibar 1995, 71). This inevitably means that ideas developed in a society serve to uphold the same power structure as the system of material distribution. Following on from this line of reasoning, the idea of false consciousness is concerned with how this feedback loop between idea production, belief systems and power structures affects individual minds (Marcuse 1964, 145). A belief is subject to false consciousness if, irrespective of the knowledge of the believer, it serves to uphold a specific distributional power structure which operates outside our direct control. As a result, the theory of false consciousness provides an answer to Reich’s question; people are not always in the epistemic position to directly perceive what is in their own interest, thus the exploited do not realise that it is the current system that represses them.

It is important to notice that for a belief to be an instance of false consciousness it does not *necessarily* need to be propositionally false; it is a sufficient condition that the beliefs are held because this would be instrumental for the reinforcement of a specific power structure, and that this is detached from the agent’s personal reasons for holding this belief. The truth condition of the proposition is irrelevant. Coincidentally, the content of the belief is more *likely* to be false as it is not purposefully formed from evidence about the world *as it is*. The dynamics by which we come to form beliefs pervasively follow the logic of structures that aim to reinforce themselves.

As an illustration, this does not necessarily mean that all forms of scientific discovery must be undermined *as such*, but Marx questions *why* some forms of research and not others are prioritised, *how* the findings of the research interrelates with a prevailing belief system, and *what* kind of function this belief system has within the power structures of society. For instance, the belief that milk is healthy might contain a true proposition, but one might question why we hold this belief specifically, instead of beliefs about other things with similar health benefits. If it turns out that we ultimately believe that milk is healthy because the dairy industry benefits from us holding this belief, this must be an instance of false consciousness. Moreover, whether we hold the belief on these grounds is largely obscure to us, due to our socially situated perspective as epistemic agents. This perspective is skewed by the fact that the very mechanism of idea production, the way we access evidence and form beliefs about the world, follows a specific power dynamic.

At this point it is important to notice that the person who is subject to false consciousness is not simply making epistemic mistakes, or is intrinsically less skilled at making sense of epistemic evidence. The distortion is externally imposed.

Moreover, false consciousness is not a case of intentional knowledge control instigated by the ruling classes, as is the case with propaganda. This is because false consciousness is a by-product of the fact that idea production is inseparable from physical production in a given society. If material production serves a hierarchy of unjust material distribution, so does idea production.

## Issues with False Consciousness

However, false consciousness is not an unproblematic concept. It has been criticised for not recognising the actual complexity and multiplicity of culture and knowledge *within* societies where capitalism is the pervasive mode of distribution. It seems incommensurable with the existence of dissidence and the fragmentation of the actual political landscape (Eagleton 1991, xxi). It cannot explain the existence of political activism that aims to counteract the effects of a given power structure.

In the remainder of this essay I will therefore aim to refine the concept of false consciousness such that it manages to account for the actual diversity that takes place within a society, while explaining why people so often are complicit in their own exploitation and oppression. The aim is to do this within a Marxist framework, which provides a systematic account capable of explaining not only singular cases of deception, but also the broader social tendency. It is important to salvage the theory of false consciousness as a tool

for social analysis, as the dynamics it highlights have been repeatedly demonstrated in sociological studies. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu found that

there are many things people accept without knowing. [...] When you ask a sample of individuals what are the main social factors of achievement at school, the further you go down the social scale the more they believe in natural talents or gifts – the more they believe that those who are successful are naturally endowed with intellectual capacities. And the more they accept their own exclusion, the more they believe they are stupid (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994, 269).

This account of class identity as mirrored in belief in innatism seems to fit the exact idea of what false consciousness is: a mechanism that unintentionally reinforces an existing social hierarchy at the level of ideas and self-understanding. This is not a case of false consciousness *merely* because the belief at hand is factually false, but because it shows how belief changes with social perspective in a way that serves to uphold the existing power structure, irrespective of the truth condition of the belief at hand. The concept of false consciousness should therefore not be discarded as a whole; rather what is needed in order to answer the critics is a more fine-grained conception of its mechanisms. In this light, the Marxist account of idea production must be further developed.

### Praxis as grounding Justified Beliefs

Given that false consciousness is a belief held for the purpose of reinforcing a given power structure, it is necessary to discuss the account of *right* grounds for knowledge that follows from this view. How are beliefs produced in a way that reflects how the world actually unfolds itself for us?

Marx's materialism is at the core of his account of how the external world should be understood to impact knowledge acquisition, and it explains how idea production parallels material production. Refuting Hegel's idealism, Marx argues that everything is essentially material, meaning that the ontologically foundational is not the idea, but the subject having the idea (Marx 1843, pt.2a). This subject is a foundationally material being that acquires knowledge about the external world through its existence at the level of objects. This does not mean that subjectivity itself is essentially material, but that it supervenes on the physical world (Marx 1845, 144). An account of adequate knowledge is therefore found in the Marxist concept of *praxis*, namely the unification of theory and practice. Theory is to be understood as any belief informing the decision about which action to perform. Practice is the action itself. Only beliefs informed by a practice are appropriately justified (Marx 1844: ch. 6, XXIII). The concept of praxis is thus founded on the idea that human beings in equal part mould and are moulded by the external world. This is what allows propositions about the external world to have meaning in a way that reflects the way the world is for us. The mechanisms behind false consciousness are based on an inadequate connection between theory and practice. In false consciousness, beliefs are held in order to prompt a desired action, namely actions that comply with and reinforce a material power structure. False consciousness is therefore the reverse of appropriate knowledge acquisition, which is the formation of a belief based on the grounds of autonomous activity.

The implication of such a conception of knowledge in a capitalist system, where labour division is the key to economic efficiency, is that the working classes are effectively expelled from the realm of general knowledge by only being allowed to take part in minute operations of the production of the whole product. Their epistemic perspective is physically restricted. This is what Marx calls alienation from the means of production (Blunden 1999, A1). Moreover, false consciousness will be perpetuated in any society that distinguishes between manual and mental labour, as theory and practice are efficiently kept apart (Marx and Engels 1846, 72). Religious, legal and bureaucratic institutions are at the centre of this mental production as well as being founded on the pre-existing set of material power structures (Marx 1846, 4).

- The issue at hand is therefore how a theory of false consciousness is compatible with how we
- i. account for the fragmentation of epistemic stances within social groups subject to the same power dynamics, and thus
  - ii. also account for activism towards social change that aims to counteract the material dynamics of capitalist society.

# False Consciousness From the Perspective of Philosophy of Mind

## Requirements for a Solution

A more nuanced account of the role that external power structures play in individual idea production, and how this individual idea production helps reinforce these external power structures, is required in order to resolve the above issue. Moreover, this solution must explain how false consciousness is not merely imposed on the individual, but automatically endorsed upon encounters with the external world. This must be investigated if the pervasiveness and efficacy of the concept is to be accounted for. Finally, although false consciousness is to come from within the subject itself, a solution must show how this is not inherent to human epistemic abilities and access to self-knowledge, such that emancipation can be accounted for as genuinely possible.

I will examine whether a framework from philosophy of mind could provide an additional structure that accommodates all these requirements, as it considers the same explanatory gap between mind and world as the theory of false consciousness. While false consciousness focuses on the ways in which the world imposes itself on to the mind, philosophy of mind is preoccupied with how the mind relates to the world. Although these are two different domains of philosophical discourse, it is not problematic to say that they concern the same relation as seen from different perspectives, and can therefore inform each other. This provides me with the tools to examine the idea of false consciousness both on the grand (political) scale where ideology is produced, and the implication of ideology on the smaller scale of individual minds. This will allow me to pinpoint the level of cognition at which false consciousness operates, to what extent it is a necessary part of the human psyche, and what impact it could have on epistemic capacities and self-knowledge.

The kind of theory within philosophy of mind that could sufficiently refine the concept of false consciousness would be a theory that accounts for the ways the external world plays a role in determining mental states, and how these mental states again could serve the purpose of reinforcing external power structures. Traditional externalism about mental content, functional mind extension, and enactive mind extension are all views that could fit this description. I will show that only enactive mind extension is capable of providing a sufficiently fine-grained account of false consciousness such that multiplicity and political counterculture could be accounted for.

## Content Externalism

Content externalism aims to show how external, environmental factors directly determine our mental content. Hilary Putnam's "Twin Earth" example demonstrates this. He imagines earth and the planet twin earth, which are identical in most respects, including language. The major differences in linguistic meaning depend on the material peculiarities of the planets themselves. For instance, what is referred to as water is identical in appearance on both planets, but consists of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules on earth, and an XYZ molecular structure on twin earth. The molecular structure of water is not generally known in either place. Thus, when people speak of water it is irrelevant whether they know about the relevant molecular structure. Irrespective of this, Putnam argues that when two psychologically identical people, one on each planet, talk about water, they talk about essentially different things. The meaning of water as it functions in our mental content is entirely contingent on what "water" essentially is. This has nothing to do with the epistemic status of the speaker of the word (Putnam 1975, 584).

Moreover, meaning is *socially* contingent, and depends on the division of linguistic labour within a society where some people are scientists and decide the meaning of things like water, gold, beech or arthritis, whereas other people merely need to refer back to these definitions in order for their words to have meaning. This is why it is possible for a person to talk meaningfully about water without knowing what water *essentially* means. It is the social environment, not internal cognitive structures or experiences, which determines the meaning of any given proposition (Burge 1979, 600).

Externalism is therefore capable of giving some account of false consciousness based on this theory of content production. The linguistic division of labour could be such that meaning is generally dictated to suit a specific power structure. This means that all beliefs would be formed on false grounds, since all meaning serves to reinforce this structure. It therefore explains how our beliefs become instances of false consciousness without being consciously created this way, as the agent's intentions do not affect the way words acquire meaning. Bourdieu's example of belief in innatism can be analysed on these terms; being far down on the socio-economic scale is *defined* as equivalent to being less talented on this account. The meaning of the belief has been created in order to make people compliant to the existing social order.

However, there are several problems with this version of false consciousness. First, content externalism would enforce that the belief in the correspondence between social position and innate abilities would be accepted overall in the linguistic community, since this is the meaning to which "lower social standing" is generally attributed. This is not the case according to Bourdieu's study; the belief in this correspondence was only held at the lower socio-economic levels of a society. Secondly, externalism does not account for false consciousness in terms of general power structures, but in a deliberate dissemination of false consciousness by agents who control the determination of meaning within a society. Thus false consciousness bears closer resemblance to a propaganda mechanism than a default by-product of a given material power structure. Thirdly, content externalism does not provide an inadequate extension of the theory of false consciousness, as it is too crude to explain how belief could ever be accessible on the *right* grounds. I therefore reject content externalism as a plausible extension of the theory of false consciousness. I will therefore look towards theories that claim that not only meaning, but the mind itself, is determined outside the confines of the brain.

## The Extended Mind

Such an account is mainly attributed Andy Clark and David Chalmers, who famously claim that in certain interactions with the external world "the human organism is linked with an external entity in a two-way interaction, creating a *coupled system* that can be seen as a cognitive system in its own right" (Clark & Chalmers 1998, 8). The essence of this argument is summed up by what Clark and Chalmers call the parity principle. If a process in the world works in a way that we would count as a cognitive process if it happened in the head, this external process should also count as a cognitive process (Clark & Chalmers 2002, 644). This principle is illustrated through the example of Inga who has normal mental capacities and Otto who has severe Alzheimer's disease but writes down all the things he knows and learns in a notebook. For Otto, the notebook serves as an external memory, responsible for founding beliefs which he may or may not choose to act upon, in much the same way as the latent memory stored in a mind like Inga's. When Otto and Inga both want to go to the Museum of Modern Art, their cognitive processes seem identical, with the single difference that Otto consults his notebook in order to know how to get from A to B, whereas Inga retrieves the same information from memory (Clark and Chalmers 2002, 647). They should therefore be treated as the same cognitive process.

With the extended mind view, cognition can happen in a way such that the external becomes a part of this cognitive process. This means that it is possible for the individual agent to produce beliefs by incorporating external factors in the cognitive process, such that these beliefs still have the same status as beliefs that the individual would form without any external influence whatsoever.

It is here possible to account for false consciousness as a result of this direct coupling with the external world. If the parity principle holds, this means that belief can be produced through the coupling of the mind not only with innocuous objects which do not alter the content of the belief itself, which is the case with the notebook, beliefs could also couple with external ideological structures. The coupling of internal and external structures means that the external structures could guide idea production such that the ideas produced could be made to reinforce a given power structure. Bourdieu's example can thus be explained through the coupling of the individual's cognitive structures with external power structures, for instance, the coupling with various social norms and institutions that function as cornerstones of a given social structure. The belief of the individual would depend on the social structures encountered.

However, this account of false consciousness is yet too vague to provide a sufficient elaboration of false consciousness. A further specification can be developed based on the responses given to a worry about the extended mind view raised by Rob Rupert. The worry, known as the “cognitive bloat”, accuses extended mind theories of inflating the mental to the border of the insignificant (2004). Cognition could happen so far from the individual mind that it seems absurd to talk about these cognitive processes actually adhering to any specific mind. This is a worry that must be addressed by advocates of the extended mind view. If all cognition at all times could be a part of an external structure and happen at a level remote from the individual agency that it couples with, it becomes difficult to discern how emancipation from false consciousness could come from within any individual agent. It leads to a view of individuals as just a part of a larger cognitive network where individual agency is reduced, to the extent that it threatens any possibility of emancipation from this social structure.

A solution to the cognitive bloat must therefore be to qualify how extension to the external world could only happen if there is a way the individual holds a sense of ownership over this extension. There are two alternative accounts that fill this condition; Andy Clark’s functional vehicle view and Shaun Gallagher’s enactive view. I will examine both, and conclude that only Gallagher’s enactive view is capable of presenting a potential solution to the issue at hand.

## The Functional Vehicle View

Andy Clark’s functional vehicle view presents four restrictions to the original extended mind thesis. The mind can only extend to external objects if it is reliably invoked, automatically endorsed, accessible when required, and has been consciously endorsed in the past (Clark 2008, 79). Thus the mind can only extend to vehicles of belief, since this is the sole aspect of the mind that fits all the criteria. A vehicle is a material object that plays a role in enabling a system to have a mental state. It could be any kind of internal or external function (Clark 2008, 76).

The mind therefore cannot extend its own structures to external ideological structures because a structure cannot be consciously endorsed. Otto’s notebook, on the other hand, is such a vehicle, since it is reliably invoked and accessible when required (he carries it with him at all times), while being automatically endorsed because he knows that at some point, he personally acquired these beliefs. With this view, *belief* is not produced through coupling with the external world, rather the external plays the role solely as a vehicle for already existent cognitive content.

This leads to a problem for an account of false consciousness in terms of mind extension. Since the mind only extends to vehicles, it simply does not account for the production of belief at all, leaving it incapable to account for the mechanisms behind false consciousness. The only way in which false consciousness could be explained on this view would be through the distribution of vehicles within a given material power structure. This could for instance lead to a lack of access to research equipment, or a lack of notebooks for people with memory loss for that matter, meaning that access to certain types of belief would be restricted. But this would only diminish the set of possible beliefs in a society; it would not account for whether and when the beliefs actually held are instances of false consciousness.

## The Enactively Extended Mind

Shaun Gallagher’s enactive view of the extended mind incorporates the foundation of Clark and Chalmers’ original extended mind view, namely the parity principle. Gallagher claims that if this principle is the foundation of the extended mind view, the restriction of the theory to vehicles only must be *ad hoc* (Gallagher 2013, 2). Vehicles are only a subset of all cognitive structures that would work on the parity principle, meaning that a restriction of the extended mind to the vehicle view would exclude possible cognitive coupling with external structures that *must* be invoked for central concepts in a society to acquire meaning. This is altogether counterintuitive, granted the acceptance of the parity principle.

To illustrate his point, Gallagher introduces the example of the legal system, which is what he calls a “mental institution”. It can be argued that such institutions could play a similar role in cognition to, for instance, a calculator, which is generally accepted on Clark and Chalmers’ view. When engaging with the legal system it provides external structures that take the role of cognitive structures, shaping how to think about a subject. When the mind extends to the legal system, it extends to a whole set of rigid social practices and norms, encompassing books, buildings, behaviour, people, and a network of specific cognitive procedures. When engaging with a legal issue, there is simply no way that it can be understood in cognition without the use of the structures provided by a specific legal system in a specific society.

Aiming to retain the force of the parity principle, Gallagher therefore introduces a different kind of restriction to his theory as a response to the cognitive bloat. For cognition to truly belong to an individual it is necessary to look at the *mechanisms* of the given account of ownership. As a result, Gallagher adapts a Lockean theory of ownership through labour as a restriction as to when and how the individual mind extends. Although Locke’s account originally is a theory of physical labour, Gallagher understands idea production as the kind of labour that would be applicable (Gallagher 2013, 7). The Lockean theory of labour states that when a person X is mixing his labour with an external object in order to transform it, the object transformed by X’s labour becomes a part of X’s property (Locke 1690, §27). The mind therefore only extends to the external world if it is *actively* engaged with the individual’s production of ideas. The cognition happening outside the individual’s head only truly belongs to the individual if mental labour is applied in order to produce ideas. For example, the mind only extends to the legal system in cases where legal structures play a role in the formation of a new idea.

If someone stole my bike, my mind would extend to the legal system insofar as I would create the idea of *theft* in relation to my acknowledging that someone else took my bike without my consent. This idea of theft has meaning in virtue of instigating the appropriate set of behaviours that the concept entails: reporting to the police; instigating an official investigation; and a trial against the thief, eventually resulting in fines or imprisonment. In a society without a legal system, the fact that my bike was taken without consent does not mean anything other than just that. The concept of theft does not have any specific meaning because it does not entail an appropriate set of behaviours that it could instigate. This illustrates Gallagher’s argument that certain concepts would be meaningless if they did not invoke these cognitive external structures.

Therefore, for the Lockean theory of ownership to be united with a theory of mind extension, Gallagher suggests that the parity principle should not hold functionally, but enactively (Gallagher 2013, 2). Enactive knowledge is knowledge acquired through action, and is therefore shaped by the external and internal structures that guide this action (Wilson & Foglia 2011). Consequently, as with the example of bike theft, when the mind extends to the external world, the external world becomes a part of our cognitive structures that shape how the external world is engaged with, and therefore also the ideas produced as a result of this engagement. A belief therefore acquires meaning from the actions that shaped it, and the actions it could lead to, as resonated in the concept of *praxis*.

## Enactive Mind Extension and False Consciousness

It is here possible to show how enactive mind extension could provide an elaboration of false consciousness. The organisation of the external world provides structures that the mind could couple with, and therefore guides both action and production of new ideas. Since all external structures are restrictive in some sense, they delineate both the active space of the agent, and consequently the enactive space of cognition. Moreover, actively coupling with external structures when producing ideas means that these structures control idea production directly. In virtue of this, the structures are enabled to take part in idea production for the sake of instigating actions that comply with these structures. Since the ideas produced will only have meaning based on the set of actions they result in, this account also provides an idea of how false consciousness directly reinforces a given social hierarchy.

Bourdieu’s example of a belief in innatism as an instance of false consciousness can here be explained along similar lines to the broader account of the extended mind and false consciousness as given before

the introduction of cognitive bloat as a worry, while allowing for physical restriction itself (through lack of resources) to play a role in the given epistemic space of a social group.

This is a subset of classic false consciousness commitment claiming that liberal society prompts us to believe that opportunity is available to anyone who tries hard enough, and that any failure is the fault of the individual. Other such commitments that have been attributed to a liberal outlook can also easily be accounted for by the enactivist. For instance, the belief that capitalism is a natural force can be explained by the fact that we engage with social structures that treat capitalism *as if* it was a natural force that should be left entirely to its own dynamic development. The way we engage with social and material objects form the beliefs we hold about them. Often, these beliefs are held on the wrong grounds simply because we are unclear about the origin of this behaviour. Although capitalism is man-made, once it is given priority over other forms of social organization, the mere fact that it is deregulated makes us relate to it in our agencies *as if* it was a natural force. In return, the belief that capitalism is a natural force reinforces our treatment of it as if it was one. The enactivist account thus perfectly coheres with the Marxist concept of praxis as virtuous belief formation; our belief in capitalism as a natural force is held in order to prompt a desired action. It is not a belief formed on the basis of autonomous agency. It is therefore held on the wrong grounds, and must be a case of false consciousness.

Another important feature of the enactivist account is that it provides a general theory of human cognition, while also accounting for how this cognition can be manipulated in virtue of its own faculties. For this theory to be able to produce a plausible conceptual extension of false consciousness, it is important to remember that all ideological structures are structures that could prompt enactive mind extension, whereas not all structures that could be coupled with enactively are necessarily ideological. This means that enactive mind extension as an account of human cognition is not a problem for false consciousness *per se* – the problem exists at the level of unfavourable, external power structures. This account therefore addresses the crux of false consciousness, which should not be seen as an account of how ideology forces itself on people, but “how can there be an animal which represses itself” (Brown 1959, 9).

The enactive mind view is thus the most apt elaboration of the theory of false consciousness, as it provides a specific account of how and when extension towards the external world could result in a case of false consciousness. The mind couples with external structures insofar as they provide a way to act and behave, and belief is based on this. For instance, in the case of building a fence, the mind does not extend to the fence insofar as it is a fence, although it *could* extend to the process of building a fence insofar as its function; how and where it is built, comply to a specific social practice or norm (Gallagher 2013, 8). Therefore, every aspect of the external world can stand in relation to a given social power structure, and all such norms and conditions can become part of the individual mind through the practices that they dictate.

As a result, this account of false consciousness is strong enough to sufficiently account for the pervasiveness of the concept. However, does this entail that the possibility for emancipation must be excluded? It seems intuitively desirable to assert that beliefs that invoke the legal system *must* result in cases of false consciousness, in virtue of its nature as a social institution, and therefore as the centre of ideological production as defined by Marx. Moreover, it also seems desirable to distinguish this kind of false consciousness from the false consciousness that *could* result from the process of building a fence. How can the extended mind theory provide a differentiation between these cases, and does this provide an apt explanation of political dissent?

## The Solution

### The Range of False Consciousness

Based on the desired distinction between false consciousness as the necessary result of mind extending to institutions, and the false consciousness that possibly arises from the process of building a fence, it seems appropriate to introduce a scale from non-ideological idea production to strict ideological idea production where the ideas created gain meaning because they instigate a specific action.



The clearest distinction between the process of building a fence and the process of engaging with the legal system is how they relate to the production of meaning. Whereas Gallagher argues that words like “theft” would be meaningless if they did not refer to the various social practices that were entailed by the word, the same would not be the case for concepts such as “fence”. A fence constructed without regards to specific social norms could still meaningfully be a fence. Although most fences stand in a clear relation to the society they were built in, such as garden fences, which primarily serve as a symbolic delineation of property, this does not mean that “fence” as a concept would be meaningless to a hermit who builds a fence around her shelter in order to keep wild animals from coming in. However, on this account, “fence” only has meaning *as it is created by, and organises someone’s agency*. This is what makes the difference between “fence” and a random stack of rocks to the hermit, and this is also why merely decorative garden fences have a specific meaning to us, according to Gallagher. They play a role in how we understand, organise and structure our lives, be it practically or symbolically.

“Theft”, on the other hand, would be a meaningless concept to this hermit, since it will not invoke any specific action or behaviour outside a given social structure. This example illustrates a crucial distinction between necessary production of false consciousness and at least a possible access to meaning outside the social hierarchy. Given an enactive account of meaning as dependent on the actions a belief invokes, this distinction can be explored further.

The external cognitive structures that the mind couples with dictate the way in which the external world gains meaning, in virtue of shaping how the external world is engaged with. This also means that autonomous agency must be agency where internal cognitive structures are not completely dominated by the external structures that the mind couples with. For instance, mind extension towards the legal system does not allow for autonomous belief formation, because the legal structures are not open to alternative cognitive processes. On the other hand, the process of building a fence would only produce false consciousness insofar as the social norm is followed and reinforced. Obviously, the political significance of this belief formation might be minimal, and it is also possible to be fully aware of the fact that one is following the social norm for the sake of following the social norm, and still happily comply with it. This is not the issue at stake. The significant point, as stated in the example about the hermit, is that it is *possible* to develop a belief about fences without any reference to the socially normative, solely through the mere action of building one, while also retaining the account of enactive belief formation in conjunction with the theory of false consciousness.

The key question is therefore whether it is possible for an agent within a society to actually divorce a practice from a social norm, such that belief could be formed autonomously. It follows that I will need to explore how and when belief production that is not *necessarily* tied to external power structures could be cases of genuine belief, and contrast this with the strong case where meaning is necessarily given by such a power structure.

## False Consciousness and Context Dependency

A weaker sense of false consciousness would be instances of idea production that generate meaning that does not *in all possible contexts* reinforce the ideological structure. Whether false consciousness is generated in the process of building a fence is contingent on social norms and situations. This contingency, present in the weaker sense of false consciousness, is context dependent. Some context dependency also exists in the strong sense of false consciousness, where the production of meaning itself is contingent on the kind of society it takes place in, but the weak account also allows for meaning to be context dependent *within* a society. The strictness of some social norms can depend on such small-scale contexts. For instance, the structure that leads to idea production in a family setting might lead to the production of ideas for the sake of the idea, and not for the sake of reinforcing either the familial structure, or a larger social hierarchy. The meaning of “fence” in a children’s game might not lead to agency that reinforces ideological structures.

However, although the weak case allows us to hold beliefs for the right reasons, it does not explain our epistemic access to whether our ideas are held for these reasons. It might not be clear to us whether the

children's game reflects already existing social dynamics, and thus serves to reinforce these. Therefore, although this discussion of meaning provides an answer to *when* belief can be founded on the right grounds, it does not account for whether this allows for emancipation through access to genuine belief, since knowledge about this genuineness is largely inaccessible to the agent.

In order to solve this problem, it is necessary to deduce cases of enactive idea formation where the subject knowingly holds the produced belief on the right grounds. For instance, one such belief could be "I believe it is nice to sit in the cool shade of the tree in my garden". This is a belief that has been acquired enactively through the action of sitting under a tree in a garden, and it is a belief that also prompts further actions, like repeated sitting under the tree in the garden. It is a belief that suits only my personal tastes, and has been acquired for no specific reason other than that it is a place for me to sit. The fact that I have a garden, or the fact that I have a tree in it might be embedded in a row of social norms, but my belief about what it is *like* to sit under this tree is entirely subjective. It might be in someone's interest that people generally like to sit under shady trees in gardens, but my belief about my preferences for sitting under the tree in my garden can only have come about through the fact that I sat under the tree in the garden and realised that I liked it. This cannot be a case of false consciousness because it is a belief about the external world acquired through action, not a belief about the external world that is acquired *for the sake of* prompting this action.

This is a particularly isolated case, and might not in itself lead to a realisation about the unfairness of a social structure and therefore a desire and will for emancipation. However, such beliefs can create a building block for alternative enactive structures that are developed for no particular reason other than for the sake of the beliefs themselves. For instance, I might meet another person that has the same belief about the comfort of sitting in the shade of a tree in the garden. Based on this mutual interest we might be able to create a small social context founded on this appreciation and nothing else.

Through this social context, other norms and codes might arise as a result of our beliefs about the external world and the role it plays within this context. The beliefs that arise from this context are beliefs that *could* serve as instances of false consciousness, but not necessarily so. Despite this possibility, since these beliefs arise through the enactive structures of this smaller context, they hold no specific purpose. Moreover, the subject that holds this belief is aware of the fact that this belief is held on the right grounds, because the subject is aware that the context that gave rise to this belief was developed entirely from appropriately justified belief such as the belief about the pleasantness of sitting in the cool shade of a tree.

It is here possible to imagine that the budding alternative social structures that arise from this context could eventually be the source of enactively developed ideas critical to the larger power structures of a society. In their shared experience, the small community of tree lovers might, for instance, develop social values different to the ones they would have held had they merely been part of a larger community with a different kind of social hierarchy.

## False Consciousness Sufficiently Elaborated

The possibility of knowingly creating small pockets of alternative contexts, founded on appropriately justified basic beliefs *within* a larger social power structure, could lead to idea production that within this context would not be a case of false consciousness such that this would be knowable to the subject that produced these ideas. This possibility is therefore capable of providing a solution to the issues at hand, as the enactive extended mind view provides an account of false consciousness as being pervasive and strict, at the same time as it creates a window for political counterculture.

This window is nevertheless small, as any closed social context embedded within a larger society will bear traces of these overarching power structures. To intentionally create a vacuum from the beliefs acquired and held in society in general seems in itself like an unlikely feat. Nevertheless, the aim at this point is merely to show how the possibility of emancipation does not have to be altogether excluded. Moreover, the existence of alternative enactive structures, even when they are only partly founded on genuine foundational beliefs, will provide an account of the actual plurality of beliefs and actions within

a capitalist system, at the same time as it explains why this plurality has not led to a great drive towards overturning a distributive system that works against the interest of most people.

This solution fulfils all the conditions stated at the beginning of the third part of this essay; it shows how external power structures play a role in individual idea production, and how the production of these ideas again reinforce the power structure from which they were developed. It accounts for how false consciousness arises in the same way as any other belief held by the individual, instead of being a belief externally imposed through, for instance, propaganda. Moreover, it provides an account of how false consciousness is not inherent to the human epistemic abilities as such, and is only the result of external power structures. The enactive extended mind theory allows for a more diverse picture of minds, ideas and ideology while retaining a theory of false consciousness as both strict and necessary on direct encounters with the ideological structure.

## Conclusion

I have shown through this discussion that Shaun Gallagher provides an apt elaboration to the Marxist concept of false consciousness. Moreover, Gallagher's theory of the socially extended mind is capable of fulfilling the conditions needed in order to sufficiently fine grain the concept of false consciousness, retaining its analytic purpose while providing a potential account of social change. The force of this account is that false consciousness is accounted for as created by the thinking agent herself, without posing a threat to her epistemic capacities as such. False consciousness is maintained as strict but not immutable, and through retaining human agency at the core of creation, this means that human beings are, to a certain degree, in charge of change and development.

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