MORAL SENSE AND OBJECTIVE INTERESTS:

FACING THE PROBLEM OF FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

by

Michelle-Kristina V. Switzer

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Philosophy
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Michelle-Kristina V. Switzer (2000)
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.
The purpose of this thesis is to defend the philosophical grounds of the claim that we have interests—even fundamental interests—about which we may err in a systematic and pernicious, yet avoidable manner, thanks to ever more predominant social delusions. Against those who have declared it dead, the thesis calls for a revitalization of the critical or pejorative sense of ideology. It aims to make sense of the core hypothesis of the Frankfurt School’s theory of ideology: in oppressive societies, those who control the bulk of economic resources wield the most powerful influence over the collective imagination of its citizens. Whatever their origin, the persistent occurrence of our errors about interests—mistakes about the way the world is, about what kinds of things are valuable for us or what kinds of pursuits we ought to have, or about what we have it in our means to pursue—is explained by the functional role they play in maintaining what would, were it not for those errors, be recognized as oppressive social, economic, and political institutions.

I argue that only an objective theory of interests has the power to address the most insidious form of false consciousness, what I call the problem of Missing Interests—where an individual mistakes her fundamental aims, because ideological delusion deeply informs her sense of herself, her self-identity. Dismissing the worry that we run the risk of committing rampant atrocities in the name of the value judgments that underlie theories of objective
interests, I argue that we blind ourselves to assaults on autonomy already committed if we eschew the power only an objective account of interests has to describe individuals as wronged in being deprived of truer selves. We can make good sense of this by looking back to the ancient view in which rationality and virtue are intimately related.
This thesis is dedicated to those in my life who are compelled by their circumstances to keep one eye on the good, and the other on those who would prey on them for having the wisdom and courage to pursue it. It is written in the hope that one day those like them, those with the soulful generosity of my grandpapa Jozef, will be able to concentrate their attentions on what fascinates them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their enduring guidance, and for managing it with humor and kindness, I would like to thank my supervisor Frank Cunningham, and advisor André Gombay. Special thanks to Danny Goldstick for his willingness to help me in the late stages, with prolific and productive comments.

I would like to thank Calvin Normore and Rodney Watkins for their enthusiasm and encouragement when I was new to Philosophy, and Lynda Lange, Wayne Sumner, and especially David Dyzenhaus for their guidance in the early stages of my graduate career. While writing the thesis I was pleased to find corroboration in the work of Susan Babbitt whose Impossible Dreams I much admire. To all the others who enriched my understanding of issues in social philosophy, including Cheryl Cline, Elan Ohayon, and Andrew Kernohan, I am thankful.

To my philosophical companion, Alan Hausman, who has been a constant sounding board throughout, I am most deeply indebted. And to Randall Keen, for having the beauty to offer his patient encouragement, good judgment and support when the toil threatened to overwhelm. Merci maman, pour la sacrifice qui m’a permis le luxe de mes choix.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION
I. The Phenomena 1
II. Truer Consciousness: Common Interests 5
III. The Politics of False Consciousness 8
IV. First Solutions 10

## CHAPTER ONE: INTERESTS MISCONCEIVED
I. Three Ways to Misconceive Interests 13
   Example One: the Reds 14
   Example Two: the Whites 15
   Example Three: the Blues 16
   Not Fate 17

II. The Function of Ideological False Consciousness: Pacification of Discontent 18
   Competing Explanations Rejected 21
   *Ordinary Chance Error Explanation* 21
   *Human Nature Explanation* 22

III. Two Means of Incapacitation Working Together: Force and Manipulation 24
   Fatalism 25
   False Blame 28
   Missing Interests 29
   Different Modes and Combinations 30
   Missing Interests Distinguished 32

IV. The Project 33

## CHAPTER TWO: IMMUNE TO REASON
Introduction: How We Fail to Recognize the Error of Our Ways 36

I. Ideology 40
   What is Ideology? 41
   *Distinguishing ‘Ideology’ in the Critical Sense*
      ‘Ideology’ in the Critical Sense: Advantages 44
      Sectarianism 44
      On Epistemic Responsibility 46
      Recovered Memories or Ground Lost? 46
      Ideological Bedfellows 50
   Why ‘False Consciousness’? 51
   Distortion: Epistemic, Functional, Genetic 52
      The Epistemic and the Sociological (Functional) Sense 52
      The Genetic Approach Rejected 54
   Pacification as a Structural Function 55
      The One-Dimensional Individual 55
      The Manufacture of Consent by the Media 57
   Why the Resistance to Ideology? 58
II. Ideology Internalized

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misinformed</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masked Alternatives</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willful Blindness</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-willful Deadening of Imagination</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Force</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preservation of Investment in Identity</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestibility</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptual Infection</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories of Perception: The Aspect of Familiarity</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiar Categories: The Example of Non-Persons</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorization Without Reflection</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misplaced Affective Responses</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories and Development</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misperceiving Our Fellows</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER THREE: THE NATURE OF INTERESTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: What is at Issue?</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. The Subjectivist Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pure Subjectivism</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic Subjectivism</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctively Subjective</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherentist Subjectivism</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>False Consciousness Distinguished from Self-Deception</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Put to the Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interests: Another Look</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing Interests: A Test Case for Subjectivism</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Cases of Missing Interests</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anorexic</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Deferential Wife</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. Towards an Alternative to the Mentalistic View of Interests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response to the Coherentist Subjectivist</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Possibility of Reassessing Priorities</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionable Foundations</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Anorexic</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Deferential Wife</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responses to the Coherentist Rejoinder</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosing the Structural Problem</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to the Authentic Subjectivist</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion: Where Now? 159
INTRODUCTION

I. The Phenomena

Human beings are the kinds of beings that make mistakes. As fallible creatures it is inevitable that we make mistakes about the way the world is, about what kinds of things are valuable for us or what kinds of pursuits we ought to have, or, even if we do not err about these more basic things, about what we have in our means to pursue. That is to say, individuals may be mistaken about what is, what is good—both for themselves and for others—and what is possible. Yet some of our mistakes about these things are not ordinary chance accidents of our fallible (finite) nature. Some have an importantly different character given their socio-political context. In a way not true of ordinary errors, they are not adventitious; whatever their origin, their persistent occurrence is explained by the fact that they play a functional role vis-à-vis certain kinds of social, economic, and political institutions, hereafter social institutions. Some of our mistakes about what is, what is good, and what is possible, facilitate our participation in social institutions with which we would not, were it not for those errors, choose to cooperate. It is in virtue of their relationship to a mistaken view of human interests—that is, to a mistaken view of what is good for us and how we ought to live—that certain beliefs, attitudes, dispositions play this facilitating role. They either comprise or imply a conception of human interests which makes it seem natural that we behave within the dictates of such institutions. And it is because they play this role that we make these mistakes.

False consciousness is the term reserved for these kinds of phenomena. It comprises not only specific beliefs, but deeper misconceptions and commitments, including misplaced affective responses and habits of action, character traits, even failures to believe, which enable
individuals to conceive of the world in such a way that they are willing (some only reluctantly) to behave within what would otherwise be recognized as oppressive arrangements—complex power relations in which dominant individuals and institutions have the unjustifiable and illegitimate authority ("moral," legal or political) to control the way subordinate individuals lead their lives. Any beliefs, attitudes, or dispositions—what Raymond Geuss terms forms of consciousness—that comprise or contribute to mistakes about human interests which sustain otherwise non-viable social institutions, and which persist precisely because they do so, constitute false consciousness. There are two points to note about this characterization. First, in the right context even a true belief may bear direct relation to a false belief that distorts its significance or meaning, and in virtue of such, invokes false consciousness. Second, while it is not true that every institution which works against human interests is non-viable without false consciousness—as some rely simply on brute force—the theoretical concern of this thesis is with those institutions which depend for their perpetuation on human beings acting consistently but unwittingly against their own interests.

We have interests of which we are unaware—unaware because it serves the purposes of a powerful few that we persistently fail to recognize and to act on them. It is this aspect of our social existence that I explore in this thesis.

Far from being the inevitable result of our nature, the insidious mistakes that comprise false consciousness are the predictable and avoidable consequences of complex and varying factors involving one's socio-economic position, psychology, and lack of access to information. They are the manifestations of the systematic altering of our thinking by ideologies—functionally-contorted views of the world, cultural practices and the like. As a rule, the actual interests of the many are thwarted so that the desires (but not, on the view of human beings
envisioned here, the true interests of a select few may be satisfied. Ideologies conceal and distort this fact and others like it, permitting us to adopt a false view of our interests. The patterns of thinking they comprise, conceal or purport to justify what would otherwise be recognized as oppression; they are propagated by the very oppressive social, political, and economic arrangements they maintain.

This is not to say that control over what we take to be in our interests must be effected by a powerful few consciously conspiring with one another to manufacture and disseminate to the masses a doctrine of false interests. If a conspiracy is a group of people planning together a course of joint action at variance with what they avow publicly (because it would not be looked upon favorably), then there can be little doubt that conspiratorial manipulation sometimes takes place. Yet it is important to recognize a distinct phenomenon fostering states of consciousness (i.e. views of the world, ourselves, what is valuable, our interests) at odds with our true interests. The very structure of our social institutions and practices, of the relations between our social/cultural and our political life, gives rise to distorted views of interests.

Unfortunately, for reasons it is important to recognize, analysis of structural ideology lends itself to language easily misunderstood as conspiratorial. First, ideology functions to support oppression as well as if it were deliberately engineered; to recognize this is to identify societies as self-maintaining, evolving systems. Second, limitations of vocabulary make it difficult to capture the nature of ideology without implying design. (Think, for example, of how we talk about bacteria learning to become resistant to antibiotics.) Unless otherwise indicated, then, ideology should not be understood as implying a deliberate, self-aware manipulator or designer. Rather, the term should evoke the systematicity of structures of institutions that facilitate conformity with its particular organization, insofar as such structures
impose certain constraints or demands on consciousness and behavior. The views of interests supposed to be true in our culture(s) emerge as dominant because they are consistent with, or purport to justify, its social, economic and political organization. It is the fact that ideological views of the world and of ourselves are implicit in our very cultural practices that permits us to behave quite unreflectively within the confines of institutions governing societal arrangements that are not in our interests. In ideologically distorted circumstances, we systematically fail correctly to assess our own nature and thus to recognize our (true) interests.

While our participation in societal arrangements makes them what they are, it is a mistaken view of interests which leads us to participate within them, and to hold tenaciously to them. It is in virtue of the connection between the content and the social context of forms of consciousness, between the way one conceives the world and the way one acts in it, that false consciousness modifies behavior in accordance with the demands of societies structured by domination and subordination relations. The phenomena are insidiously self-perpetuating; while false forms of consciousness support oppressive structures, such structures foster those very forms of consciousness. Ideology—an emergent, not necessarily conspiratorial process—is the life-force of oppressive societies that do not rely simply on brute force.

The sense in which false consciousness can be understood as non-adventitious then, is that the errors about interests that it comprises are not merely (or not importantly) the result of the fallibility of any given individual. They are rather the expected result first, of our nature as creatures with emotions who seek out and act on reasons, and second, of their ready availability to any particular individual (in the form of cultural beliefs or ways of life). Ideology distorts our character—rational, emotional, moral. It is only because our normal cognitive abilities, when subject to the distorting effect of ideology, cause us to behave in perverted yet
patterned ways, that ideology and false consciousness can serve the supportive role for oppressive social institutions they do.

II. True Consciousness and Common Interests

Morally and politically speaking, we are most interested in the false consciousness of the oppressed—because it brings them direct and painful suffering, and because change is more likely to come from the underprivileged. Yet theoretically speaking, the false consciousness of oppressors is equally important—both in order to provide an adequate description of the phenomenon, and to justify a prescription for change. (Nothing said so far implies that only the objects and not the subjects of coercion may suffer false consciousness.) There is good theoretical reason to deny that oppressors and their beneficiaries have a true interest in exploitation and oppression.

It is important to reflect on two features of false consciousness with respect to this issue of its scope—what is an issue of common interests. First, it is likely that many individuals living in oppressive societies suffer from false forms of consciousness to some degree, because resisting it requires tremendous skill and energy. Second, many of us play a variety of social roles so that in one role we may participate in practices which oppress others, reaping the narrow benefits of so doing, while in another we are oppressed. Putting these two features together, recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon, we should see that to limit false consciousness to the oppressed is to assume an artificially narrow view of the phenomenon. Such a view would require the assumption that a basic conflict of interests exists not only between individuals but within individuals, as a necessary, irremediable part of our experience. (To reject this view is not, of course, to deny that there is practical conflict involved in the pursuit of the good—conflict due to the constraints imposed by the natural limitations of time and
energy.) Only a unified theory of false consciousness of the kind I will defend can promise not only a more hopeful resolution of tensions between individuals, but the grounds for an account of more authentic, more harmoniously integrated, selves.

It is a central aim of this thesis to demonstrate to egalitarian-minded liberals and other progressives that it is imperative that all those interested in overcoming illegitimate relations of domination unify their diverse theories of oppression, in order to focus a political objective: to provide a unified vision as an alternative to the blinding dominant ideologies. At the culmination of the argument to that effect, I aim to motivate the potential of a very old idea to do just that. The idea is arguably evident in the feminist focus on caring relationships, in the environmentalist respect for the natural world, or in revitalized interest in the role of character in ancient virtue ethics. The idea is that morality, properly conceived, comprises not only harms to others, but to oneself.

Despite some of the benefits, especially short-term, that an oppressor’s life-style brings, the life-styles themselves involve the wanton destruction of what has intrinsic value, conflicting of necessity with the true interests of other members of the moral community. They thereby impede the oppressor’s creative social engagement, stifling his development as a person. The false consciousness of oppressors serves to underwrite, and not to thwart, their desires, at least in the short-term; yet in failing to acknowledge a fundamental interest in a more autonomous lifestyle, one chosen from a wider range of options, oppressors “suffer” the fate of living a life of inferior quality. In addition, not unlike the oppressed, oppressors and their beneficiaries develop false, ultimately unsatisfiable needs in the place of their true interests, reveling in the narrow “satisfaction” available in advanced capitalist societies. The moral life, Aristotle recognized, is not, as Plato optimistically supposed, sufficient for a good life. Yet there is
much to be gained from attending to the Ancient view that development of our capacity to recognize and to act on better possibilities for ourselves, including better moral possibilities, is a necessary condition of our flourishing—particularly in light of developments in understanding our evolutionary history.

On the view defended here then, ideologies do not reflect any true interests despite the fact that, in order to fulfill their function, they must accurately reflect the means adequate to the oppressors' perceived aims. False consciousness involves the wrongful adaptation of one's own interests to the accepted interests of the dominant class, whether qua oppressed or qua oppressor.

The fact that a descriptively adequate and prescriptively potent account of the phenomenon has it that false consciousness plagues oppressors and oppressed alike, renders vivid the fact that false consciousness involves mistaking fundamental, yet complex interests in the components of, and the means to, a fulfilling life-style—in true companionship, interesting and rewarding work, and the like, as well as the self-disciplined freedom those presuppose.

Preliminary Characterization

Terry Eagleton claims that "[w]hat persuades men and women to mistake each other from time to time for gods or vermin is ideology." We might say then, that whether dominated or dominant, false consciousness involves identifying with the so-called "interests" of the oppressor because one has come to see him as a god, and identifying oneself as against the interests of the oppressed because one has come to see them as vermin. Either way, one fails to identify and thus to act on the only kinds of interests that can provide creatures like us genuine satisfaction.
This elementary characterization captures the core sense of false consciousness: the false interests one derives from ideological beliefs and behavioral patterns contrary to—insofar as they promote domination and instill subordination—the true interests of human beings qua persons.

III. The Politics of False Consciousness

Ideology is insidious precisely because it owes its existence to the institutions in which individuals organize themselves, evolving out of the patterns of organizations themselves, and yet functioning independently of individual sponsors. Then, once uncritically internalized in those who suffer false consciousness, it is propounded by them. Thus, as long as those patterns of organization persist, new converts are perpetually transformed—both by ideology, and by its enforcement via pressure and “rewards” from those who have already internalized it. The chicken and the egg problem is that with ideologies to help sustain them, those patterns may persist for a very long time. The question is how to develop a theory of false consciousness which is politically efficacious—suggesting a way to provide for pursuit of our true interests.

While individuals may at first (assuming they have the chance) resent barriers to their freedom, with time they may come to accept and eventually even to depend on continued restrictions on their lives. The problem of false consciousness so construed becomes evident when we consider that individual human beings are not born into a cultural vacuum, but into existing socio-political practices. The period of development from childhood to adulthood can occasion the development of a consciousness or view of interests, and a character manifested as behavioral dispositions, adaptive to circumstances oppressive of individual freedom and autonomy. Though the extent of adaptation will vary from individual to individual, where
experience of non-oppressive ways of life is lacking, opportunities to imagine and to develop a
truer consciousness are few. In learning about the world around them, young minds may come
to believe that it must be the way it is, and perhaps as a result, that the way it is must be good
or as good as it can get. They may, in other words, associate the actual with the possible, or
with the good, or both. The learning process itself—when subject to ideological constraints—
thereby provides the occasion for pacification. All too often, after one has developed a skewed
view of the world and its possibilities, and corresponding character traits, ill-acquired and ill-
considered beliefs and tastes persist—largely unchanged—through adulthood. If we forget
Rousseau's admonition that the ease with which children learn is their ruin, we condemn them
to adopt our evil ways.

Liberation from restrictions on freedom then, requires not only ridding ourselves of
the institutions that realize and maintain subordination, but, what is much more difficult,
freeing ourselves from the acquired taste for subservience. Thus the phenomenon of false
consciousness presents a pernicious and recalcitrant political problem: how to rid ourselves of
institutions harmful to us but on which we have nonetheless become, to varying degrees,
habitually and psychologically dependent. The question of how to change the predilections of
people with subservience-habituated identities is daunting. Since they involve not mere beliefs
but overall mind sets, not only ways of viewing the world and one's place in it but ways of
engaging it, overcoming them is not simply a matter of ridding oneself and others of false
beliefs. It is a matter of encouraging less than fully autonomous individuals to want to become
fully autonomous. The question then becomes what is it to provide ourselves with the means to do so?
IV. First Solutions

The argument of this thesis is that in order to have any hope of adequately answering these questions, we must take a certain path. The first and fundamental step in that direction is to take false consciousness seriously, to distinguish a viable conception of it, divorced from the intractable theoretical problems of its historical associates. It is our only hope of driving a wedge between the rock and hard place into which questions of autonomy push us. An adequate ethical—not to mention political—theory is impossible if the problem of false consciousness is not recognized as a genuine one. Put simply, it is no solution to the problem to deny it. It is illegitimate, as William Connolly says, to settle the matter by definitional fiat—to reject the possibility that people can be mistaken about their interests by denying that there is any such thing as an unarticulated interest. Once the illegitimacy of rejecting that possibility is admitted, as Charles Taylor points out, we are forced to address the issue of whether a view of freedom adequate to the internal impediments of false consciousness is realizable, or fully realizable, only within a certain form of society. That question cannot be evaded, he insists, "by a philistine definition of freedom which relegates [such questions] by fiat to the limbo of metaphysical pseudo-questions." The very real moral and political problems that false consciousness present will not go away by denying its philosophical existence. Denying its existence only serves to prevent us from attempting answers to the ever-pressing question about the nature of a good society.

The project of the thesis is to make room for a conception of false consciousness which ascribes interests to individuals on the basis of the kind of creatures they are, and which do not make them dependent for their existence on recognition by any particular individual. This is the only way to capture the fact that the constraining and painful circumstances of oppression cause not only psychological suffering but harms to the self, to the development of
Hierarchical structures foisted upon us—oppressed and oppressors alike—force us to deny by ignoring the persistent demands of our needs, and to suppress by numbing the effects of their non-satisfaction. I defend a conception of false consciousness which assumes two things. First, it assumes the moral and political illegitimacy of “letting” people (as they are) be “happy” unless they actually desire the kinds of things which we have good reason to believe can be truly satisfying. (From this it does not necessarily follow that an institution ought to have the power to force individuals to act against their desires.) Second, it assumes that our sociability forces us to make collective decisions about what those things are, because we must, of necessity, judge what are and what are not legitimate claims on ourselves and our society. These two assumptions, in the end, come to the same.

To preview: Chapter 1 outlines the phenomena of false consciousness, the kinds of mistakes that it comprises, the ways in which individuals may misconceive their interests, setting up the problem of the thesis: ideological harms to the self. Chapter 2 explains false consciousness as a structural feature of oppressive social institutions whose ideologies exploit our rational, emotional, and moral inclinations, pervert the natural aims of our needs, and thereby subdue us. Chapter 3, on the nature of interests, addresses directly the issue of the relationship between the two senses of interest—either as the actual concerns of individuals or as what fosters their well-being. I will argue that interests are independent of individual desires or preferences by showing that positions which deny the distinction—disavowing commitment to a particular view of human beings and their interests—are either implicitly so committed, or simply untenable. The putative risk of forcing one’s view on others who disagree, the fear of paternalism, is therefore just as much a worry for these positions as it is for mine, and more dangerously so in their case because it is hidden. Having disarmed, in the first half of the last chapter, the primary objections to an objective interest account of false consciousness, what
remains for the final sections is to lay out a promising avenue for its development. To defend a concept of false consciousness is quite obviously to imagine a view of the kind of creatures we are. The favored option must do justice to a brute fact about our existence: we are creatures capable of perpetual, creative development. Outlining the contours of an objectivism which does not make interests dependent on what any particular individual thinks, I will sketch what emerges as the best candidate for an adequate theory of interests for creatures like us—a view based on the intrinsic value of the exercise of rational capacities guided by appropriate emotions.


2 I have chosen social institutions as short-hand to emphasize the extent to which our economic and political institutions can largely determine the organization of our social interactions. Implicit is a challenge to the distinction between the public and the private realms committing me to denying that certain political institutions which purport to be neutral with respect to social practices really are. The import of this claim will emerge in the discussion of paternalism in Chapter 3.


4 The term true interest is used in the thesis to mean a genuine or an authentic interest, as contrasted with what is mistakenly taken to be an interest, a false interest.


CHAPTER ONE

INTERESTS MISCONCEIVED

There may be as many ways to suffer false consciousness as there are individuals. Yet the errors that comprise false consciousness are all of a special kind. The aim of this chapter is to dispel the idea that there is no such thing as false consciousness, to dispel the misconception that what are described as cases of false consciousness are either rational responses to unfortunate but inescapable circumstances, or, if genuine errors, mere miscalculations. Ideological errors are not what we think of as ordinary errors. Whatever their origins, the social mechanisms of their reinforcement are systematic and functional for institutions that impede the satisfaction of human interests. The ideological belief structures which maintain oppressive institutions fall into three basic kinds. In order to isolate each kind, I will present three hypothetical examples so that we may consider each in its pure form. In real life however, we discover them in complex combination. Although some combinations differ in the way they are produced and reinforced, for the sake of explanatory simplicity I will not treat them as separate categories. Instead, I will sketch the essential features of false consciousness only to isolate the specific project of this thesis—an account of false consciousness adequate to the third and most troublesome kind outlined below.

I. Three Ways to Misconceive Interests

Imagine then, an isolated world inhabited by beings who require a certain plant, Vie, for their subsistence. We might say that their circumstances are such that, or make it such that, they have an interest in Vie. The three groups on this world—the Reds, the Whites and
the Blues—each, though in different ways, err systematically about their interest in the plant \( V'ie \), causing them to act against their interests.

**Example One: the Reds**

One group on the island, the Reds, desire quite naturally to consume the plant, \( V'ie \); they enjoy cultivating it and preparing it in meals and even recognize—to some degree—that it is necessary for them to flourish. Or rather they would enjoy cultivating and preparing it if it were not for the fact that they are woefully unable to grow more than a few scrawny plants. Although the Reds are aware of their interest in \( V'ie \), they are impeded in their pursuit of that interest. Furthermore, they believe that there is nothing that they can do to change their fate. Since they recognize their interest in \( V'ie \), they believe that they are simply doomed to extinction. The reason they feel hopeless is that they consider the obstacles to overcoming their plight to be overwhelming. Indeed, there are obstacles. \( V'ie \) is generally scarce and, though there is a group that is remarkably successful at growing it, they have always hoarded their harvests for themselves, refusing to share with other groups and fiercely defending their territory.

At issue is the Reds’ perception that there is nothing they can do either to improve their methods of cultivating of the plant, or to alter the political structure that denies them access to the harvest of the prosperous group. The successful growers believe that their special talents, cultivated by a few esteemed elders, are what ensure them abundant crops. The Reds do not wholeheartedly accept this explanation. They are more inclined to believe that the affluent group just has the good luck of inhabiting the right territory, and that unfortunately as Reds, they simply lack the resources to challenge the others. Some Reds believe that it is not
worth challenging the powerful affluent, since they doubt their own ability to grow the plant successfully.

What the Reds do not realize is that it is the very belief that they are doomed, if persistent, that will prove to be the proximate cause of their demise, not their lack of resources. It is not true, contra their society’s ideology, that they are without resources to change their circumstances. They have the ability to ally with other groups also in need of Vie to organize their collective resources in an attempt to alter the territorial divisions that preclude them from realizing their common interest in Vie and to arrange cooperatively for distribution of Vie according to need. The affluent group has been successful, not because of any special wisdom or capabilities, but, as the Reds believe, because their territory is well-suited to Vie. The affluent group retains control of Vie because their threats have gone unchallenged; their threats have gone unchallenged because groups like the Reds fail to recognize their organizational potential as a resource. That failure is reinforced and perpetuated by the Reds’ misperception that they are doomed.

Example Two: the Whites

Another group, the Whites, also quite naturally desire the plant despite having trouble cultivating it. They do not, however, believe that they are doomed to go without it for the reason the Reds do. Rather, they believe that their plight is the fault of the Reds whom they detest for causing their plight. They believe that this other group has wrongly and unfairly tried to sap the resources of the successful growers. The result, the Whites believe, is that the prosperous group has little Vie left to share with the Whites, and, thanks to unfair encroachments on the their holdings, even less inclination.
Yet contra their society's beliefs, the plight of the Whites is not the fault of the group they blame. On the contrary, as with the Reds, it is their mistaken beliefs which ultimately perpetuate their suffering. The Whites' view that the Reds are to blame for their condition prevents them from considering the possibility of joining in cooperative action with others (like the Reds) in need of *Vie* to change their collective situation. Far from contributing to the suffering of the Whites, some of the members of the group wrongly blamed, the Reds, are trying to organize the kind of cooperative action that would genuinely benefit the Whites as well as the Reds.

The Reds err in assessing the potential in their situation and the Whites err in assessing the nature of the situation itself. Both mistake the means to realizing their interest in *Vie*.

**Example Three: the Blues**

The mistake made by the third group on the island, the Blues, is quite different; it is more fundamental. Unlike the Reds and the Whites, the Blues do not desire *Vie*, or if they do, it is counteracted by their other desires and fears. The Blues believe—as part of their cultural rituals—that the plant is bad or sinful for Blues; as a result, they abstain from consuming it. Historically, the only Blue people who ever pursued it were themselves bad and sinful—or so it is thought. (Incidentally, the Reds and the Whites share the view that the Blues are somehow different so that *Vie* is bad for the Blues while good for the Reds and the Whites. Curiously, similarities between all three groups does little to dispel their ideological views about what is entailed by their differences—differences which a visitor to the island would think are less significant.) Since *Vie*'s devaluation is so much a part of the culture and has been for so long, it is easy for members of the group simply to fail to consider consuming it. Furthermore, any Blue who—rejecting her culture's rituals—considers consuming the plant, faces the impact
of being ostracized and the risk of violence from other Blues who do not recognize that abstaining from consuming *Vie* is what is bad for them. Their mistake is in mistaking what is good for them. It is a direct and fundamental error.

**Not Fate**

Not recognizing and therefore not acting on a basic interest whose realization is necessary for their continued survival, not recognizing, in other words, what their well-being consists of, the Reds, Whites and Blues are doomed. They are not doomed because they each happen to mistake their interests—in both the intrinsic value of *Vie* and the instrumental value of the means to *Vie*. Rather, each member of each group is influenced into making a mistake in a visibly-patterned and predictable way by their own culture's way of thinking; together the mistakes assure the persistence of their unhappy situations.

Implicit in this characterization of the problem is the view that people's "interests" in the sense of their actual concerns, are distinct from their *true* interests in the sense of what is actually best for them and what is actually conducive to their living the best possible lives. The things people actually value and are motivated to pursue, are not always the things that they ought to value and perhaps pursue—because they are in fact valuable for them. Nor are the things they disvalue and are motivated to avoid, the things that they ought to disvalue and thus avoid—because they are not in fact valuable for them. Since the account of false consciousness defended here is premised on the above distinction, the term *interest* is meant to refer to an individual's actual, if not perceived well-being, to refer, in other words to *true* interests; the exception will come in discussion of a competing view of the nature of interests in Chapter 3.
The fact that the three kinds of mistakes about interests made in the set of hypothetical examples actually happen in the real world, and that we can point to the institutions which rely on them, should lead us to recognize that neither false consciousness nor the oppression which it helps to sustain need be permanent features of social existence. We have no reason to suppose that the type of social organization that gives rise to the patterns just discussed is necessitated by something in the nature(s) of these creatures. This raises the following question: How is such ill-fate possible and how can it be avoided? The study of ideology and of false consciousness are attempts to provide answers.

II. The Function of Ideological False Consciousness: Pacification of Discontent

Oppressive institutions, those which require relationships of unjustified domination, are coercive. Since to be the object of coercion is unpleasant, a coercive relationship, if it is to persist, must counter the threat posed by dissatisfaction: namely, its potential to motivate resistance to, or even outright rebellion against, illegitimate authority. One way to deal with such a threat is to crush the threat outright by physically incapacitating any and all freedom-loving individuals. Force, in the form of imposition of legal institutions coupled with the threat of violence for non-compliance, is a means to getting people to behave a certain way—by making it physically difficult for them to do otherwise. The other possibility involves undermining the threat by suppression of the desire to rebel. This may or may not be effected by conscious manipulation. Individuals are either intentionally manipulated, or their perceptions are distorted by structural constraints, so that they unwittingly accept wrongful infringements on their freedom. Their taste for the elements of freedom—if not for freedom itself—may be soured, lost, or in the worst cases, destroyed. In other words, coercion is exercised both on bodies by brute physical force and on minds by distortion of states of
consciousness. The latter is the function of ideological false consciousness: to pacify the population by socially conditioning thought. While ideologies may not be necessary for oppressive institutions to prevail—since the exercise of brute force against any expression of discontent may suffice—it may well be more effective to keep discontent to a minimum, particularly in the case of long-term, large-scale domination.

Ideological false consciousness weakens—to varying degrees—the threat that discontents pose, sometimes even to the point of incapacitation. “Mind control” is a more efficient tool of domination than “body control”—at least by itself, especially in the long term—because it is the means by which individuals come quite literally to invest themselves, their selves, in their own oppression. The malcontents’ thoughts may be conditioned so that, as the Reds do, they “accept” as inevitable their dissatisfaction at not being able to fulfill their basic need for Vix, so that, as the Whites do, they mistake the real cause of their dissatisfaction at not being able to fulfill their need for Vix, so that when incapacitated, as the Blues are, they do not feel dissatisfied. In the first kind of case, the source of discontent is made to appear natural. Even in the second, those falsely blamed are likely conceived of as at fault, because of something in their nature. In the third kind of case, individuals do not feel discontent about their social condition, believing it to be natural.

Behavior in accordance with what is (mistakenly) perceived as natural seems rational. If, for example, the dissatisfaction of the Reds really was inevitable, it would indeed be irrational to act as if it were not; hence the commonly laid charge that higher hopes are “utopian”. The feeling of inevitability, naturalness, or reasonableness is what alleviates or masks discontent—whether masking the real cause of felt frustration, or numbing the feelings of frustration themselves. It is only from the vantage point of more adequate information and increased
understanding (which often requires less oppressive circumstances) that the proper distinctions can be made; it is only from that vantage point that such behavior can be described as irrational and such “contentment” can be described as false. We must distinguish, in other words, two levels of rationality. From the point of view of inadequate information, behavior may appear rational, when in fact, given distinctions that more adequate information makes it possible to recognize, the same behavior is properly described as irrational.

This characterization captures the essence of the concepts of ideology and false consciousness propounded by Anarchists, theorists in the Marxist tradition and members of the Frankfurt School, and presupposed by much of feminist thought: the most effective oppressor is the one who manages his subjects by persuading them to identify with his power rather than by simply imposing his power on them by brute physical force. Ideology can be thought of as the public content of social conditioning—what provides an illusory legitimization of domination—and false consciousness as its internalization. False consciousness, manifested as false interests, is the locus of the perpetuation of ideology. The behavior generated by false consciousness reinforces the authority of dominant ideologies. Those who suffer false consciousness take on the dominant ideology as their own worldview or way of life. They thereby wrongly come to identify the supposed interests of the dominant as their own, to identify with those “interests,” to have an “interest” in what is in fact their own oppression. Thus, according to Terry Eagleton:

The study of ideology is among other things an inquiry into the ways in which people may come to invest in their own unhappiness. It is because being oppressed sometimes brings with it some slim bonuses that we are occasionally prepared to put up with it. The most efficient oppressor is the one who persuades his underlings to love, desire and identify with his power; and thus any practice of political emancipation thus involves that most difficult of all forms of liberation, freeing ourselves from ourselves.
A theory of ideology explains how social and cultural practices and views of the world constitute the breeding grounds for the mistakes about interests that comprise false consciousness. Such explanations do not require attributions of widespread irrationality. As Marx’s famous metaphor in The German Ideology puts it, ideology is a representation of the world “upside-down”: since it does in some sense reflect the society, albeit in a distorted fashion, its adoption is not puzzling. So while the theory of ideology does not suppose natural incompetence, it describes individuals in a given society as subject to particular kinds of blindness functional for the perpetuation of their society’s organization and its oppressive character.

Victims of false consciousness need not be convinced by dominant ideologies before they behave accordingly. First, a good part of the adoption of an ideological consciousness may take part during the formative years of childhood. Second, it may well be that restrictions on behavior are taken, without question, to reflect what is right, so that people confine their action to permitted behavior without reflection. Acceptance of ideological boundaries may be so ingrained that the behavior is pursued without consideration of alternatives, without deliberation.

**Competing Explanations**

*Ordinary Chance Error Explanation*

The naive skeptical contention that mistakes analogous to those made in the hypothetical examples above are just ordinary chance accidents, is implausible. It does not just so happen that the Reds, Whites or Blues fail to recognize their means to or interest in *Vie*. They are influenced by the distorting effects of ideologies into mistaking or misidentifying them. It is because they are misled or perhaps even compelled by ideology, because their
rational faculties are capitalized on, that these creatures are doomed. The fact that real errors of these kinds are not only systematic within an individual consciousness, but are systematic between individuals, is evidence of this. Ideological errors are made not merely by individuals on individual occasions, but in observable and predictable patterns, both within an individual consciousness and by groups of individuals. In other words, they come in mutually supporting sets. (Explanation of how this happens comes in Chapter 2.) What we might call the Ordinary Chance Error Explanation blatantly violates the evidence.

**Human Nature Explanation**

As implausible is the alternative explanation, call it the Human Nature Explanation, which recognizes the patterns but claims that the direction of causation is the opposite: “it is the fact that people make those sorts of errors,” it might be claimed, “that gives rise to the forms of societal organization we have.” Of course this is true—in one sense, but it is a trivial one: false consciousness would not serve the function it does unless it was true that certain false beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions sustain certain forms of organization. The Human Nature explanation ignores part of the phenomenon, namely, the socio-political context of these beliefs, values, practices—their suspicious epistemic or functional character, and perhaps their genesis. (This is explained in Chapter 2.) As a result, it mistakenly reverses the order of explanation. It is because certain belief and value systems fulfill a supportive role vis à vis a particular form of organization, and only because they fulfill that function that they persist (and even, in some cases, exist). It is not true that the falsehoods are the sorts of errors people would make, at least not systematically and perennially, if it were not for their facilitating role. *False consciousness* is not, for example, about the tendency of human beings to let their desires run wild, unfettered by reason—though as Plato surmised, this may play a role. Rather, it is precisely because the forms of consciousness involved in false consciousness are necessary for
the continued existence of certain forms of social organization that they develop in the specific form they do, are nurtured, and are protected.

The Human Nature Explanation could only be reasonably defended if it could be demonstrated that such errors are inherent to, rather than perversions of, our nature. But the patterns that show the connection between political structures and the systematic errors we call false consciousness arguably reveal that the latter involve the perversion of and not a reflection of our true rational and emotional, morally-sensitive natures, and they do so because they facilitate our exploitation. (I will argue the point in Chapters 2 and 4.) While it is true that false consciousness is only possible because we have a nature which permits it, it is only if we shut off analysis too abruptly that this fact can be confused with the claim that our nature necessitates the behavior in question. Recall Eagleton’s remark that: “[i]t is because being oppressed sometimes brings with it some slim bonuses that we are occasionally prepared to put up with it.” Typically, the core error involved in false consciousness is in overestimating one’s supposed short-term or instrumental interests in such slim bonuses. This can be true even if one does not give calculations about such bonuses much thought—even if one engages in such behavior more or less automatically. Those bonuses are the “satisfactions” of what are false needs—needs because they demand satisfaction, false because they are either not of a kind that can be satisfied, or their being brought to fruition is ultimately unsatisfying.

False needs do not appear ex nihilo in the individual or in the society’s cultural ideology. Rather, to invoke a Platonic idea, explored more recently by Freud, what I am calling false needs are largely the result of the non-satisfaction of true needs.\(^5\) Skepticism about the particular theories of Plato and Freud does nothing to alter a criterion of adequacy of any moral or political theory: it must account for the fact that needs, if unsatisfied, have
consequences, not only for the physical well-being of the individual narrowly construed, but more broadly speaking, for the individual's mental well-being, and for entire societies as a consequence. Given the confusion between the fleeting, illusory satisfaction of false needs, precipitated by the vividness of the short-term as contrasted with the vagueness of the long-term and true interests, the behavior of victims of false consciousness seems at least minimally reasonable or right to them. But a theory of false consciousness can reveal this missing distinction, exposing the behavior as in fact irrational.

III. Two Means of Incapacitation Compounded: Force and Ideology

The two forms of coercion—on the body and on the mind—work together in potent combination. The distorting power of ideology, the power of nearly imperceptible threats to the well-being of one's consciousness, is maintained by the perception of behavioral guides and implicit threat of force for non-compliance—whether threats to one's physical well-being, or the threat of ostracism. The range of possible choices open to individuals in coercive societies may be imposed not only by the nature of the social roles available to each individual, that is, by force, but by ideological attitudes towards that force. For ideological attitudes towards such social confines typically include a distorted perception of their nature and power. And yet it is the accuracy of the perception of the society's behavioral boundaries that is the "grain of truth" which permits individuals to mistake those boundaries as natural and insurmountable.

Since the impact of force and of ideology on our lives are often not clearly distinguishable, the explanation of the life force of false consciousness is complicated. A serious obstacle to their adequate delineation is comprehending the intricate relationship between the two means of incapacitation. The process of persuasion which enables the false
identification of one's interests falls into roughly three basic kinds: the Reds suffer Fatalism, the Whites suffer False Blame, and the Blues suffer Missing Interests (frequently accompanied by surrogate false needs). Depending on the kind, ideological distortion and the exercise or threat of force work together in different ways to ensure behavior in accordance with the societal structures. In the case of the Blues for example, ideological distortion ensures that the population deems the plant evil; but the threat of force, in this case its illegality, guarantees that even if ideology breaks down, individuals will behave as if it had not.

Whatever particular form coercion takes, constrained beings, not surprisingly, choose the slow death over imminent death. They strive to numb their pain in whatever small, fleeting, or destructive pleasures they can. When directly forced, they do so knowingly, when under the influence of ideological distortion, unknowingly and to varying degrees.

Fatalism

Fatalism, the view that one is doomed to remain subservient, requires perception of an explicit threat to one's well-being. Fatalists correctly perceive the exercise of force on their lives in the form of restricted opportunities. What they mistake its extent or power. Fatalists are those who wrongly accept without reflection, or perhaps who have even been wrongly convinced, that they have no choice but to concede to the interests of the powerful and to forfeit their own—of which they are painfully aware. The ideological element involved in Fatalism, in other words, requires (at least implicitly) the perception of force, at the same time that it distorts its significance. Insofar as the fatalist wrongly perceives the degree to which his choices are constrained—because, thanks to ideology, he underestimates the potential of his own choices to shape his life and self-development—he is a victim of ideological distortion.
It is certainly not true that any case of yielding to a threat is the wrong thing to do. Sometimes, particularly in the case of violence, it may be necessary or prudent. These are not cases of ideological Fatalism, and thus are not cases of false consciousness. The Fatalism relevant to false consciousness is one in which the individual should have persevered in the pursuit of his interests despite the risks to his person. The fatalist has not been conditioned, convinced by specious argument, or otherwise influenced, into thinking that he has an interest in being subservient. He recognizes and identifies (at least minimally) with his true interest in being autonomous. The problem is instead that he has been conditioned to think that he can never act on his true interests because the means to realizing them will remain forever out of reach. Oppressive societal structures organized by ideology foster environments which atomize individuals, keeping them separated from one another both physically and psychologically—whether by lack of community gathering places, or lack of time, or lack of information about others. Those who suffer Fatalism suffer acutely the psychological effects of this state of affairs. Cut off from cooperative engagement with others, not surprisingly, they feel powerless. The fatalist may or may not explicitly recognize that he feels the way he does as a result of his isolation; but even if he does, he errs in thinking it an insurmountable condition. He fails to see the way to alleviate his isolation and to eliminate the restrictions that occasion it, to achieve greater autonomy as part of an organized and cooperative response.

The case of the fatalist shows that ideology need not convey an explicit threat of violence but typically will communicate that the way things are is not amenable to change, that the way things are is the way they must be. The fatalist \textit{qua} member of a group of persons fulfilling a particular social role, exists in constrained choice circumstances. The fatalist \textit{qua} individual, perceiving but overestimating an implicit threat behind any attempt to behave
differently, is not merely physically forced into collaborative behavior by the structure of those roles, but persuaded or shaped into it by accepting their definition.

One is shaped by ideology to the extent that one is (wrongly) coaxed into behaving as the powerful demand when there are other options. Correlatively, to the extent that one fails to be so influenced, one is not affected by ideology. Since the fatalist recognizes at a certain level that he is coerced by force, he is simultaneously influenced and not influenced by ideology. Though he is mistaken about interests related to his basic ones—the means to it, or even its relative importance—he does not misperceive his basic interests (narrowly construed) for he does not identify them as those of the powerful. In this respect, he is not a victim of ideology. Yet to the extent that he wrongly judges that he must nonetheless behave in accordance with the demands of the powerful, he is a victim of ideology. For, though only in a limited respect, he thereby de facto identifies with the interests of the powerful, adopting a way of life in accordance with their demands, when he could be part of creating other options.

While it is clearly true in one respect that he is incapacitated, it is not in another. There is a risk to his pursuing his true interests, but not necessarily an insurmountable one. This is how it is possible for it to appear reasonable for him to succumb despite the fact that, examined more closely, his behavior is irrational. The fatalist misjudges the importance of his short-term security with respect to his long-term interest in not being oppressed. While his behavior may seem rational in the short-term, when his long-term interests are also taken into consideration, his behavior is irrational. Though his immediate safety does indeed have value, he errs in overestimating its value as compared to that of his autonomy. His mistake might be in overestimating the threat, or it might be in underestimating the value of freedom, or most likely, some combination thereof.
Force appeals to its object by convincing him or her that there is no choice but to behave as the menacing agent desires. The distortion of one's perceived interests by ideology, by contrast, is a process that appeals to its object by persuading him or her that it is the right thing to behave in the desired way. Though it looks to the fatalist as if he has no choice, insofar as ideology constitutes the precipitating cause of his believing that the right thing to do is to succumb—that the right thing is to behave as if he has no choice—he is under the influence of its distorting powers. The basis of the distinction between a correct perception of threat and a case of fatalism then, is not, as it first appears, that one involves an error. Rather, the form in which they each involve the mental states of the object of coercion differs. In one case the person threatened does not have a choice, that is, a (reasonable) alternative, and realizes that, and in the other case, a choice—or the means to exercising it—has been successfully concealed by ideology. Hence the former is a case of force, the latter of ideological distortion.

False Blame

False Blame is the kind of false consciousness in which, as with Fatalism, individuals correctly perceive their suffering as such, recognizing the exercise of force (in the form of constrained choice circumstances) on their lives. But unlike Fatalism, the mistake a victim of False Blame makes is to attribute the cause of his condition to people other than the ones truly and directly, or primarily, responsible. Typically, those falsely blamed are also oppressed but are, in virtue of some morally irrelevant feature—racial or ethnic, sexual (whether gender or preference), class or caste—unlike those who blame them, and thus easily made the subject-matter of ideology. The choices of the victims of False Blame, like those of the victims of Fatalism, are forcibly restricted by the structure of oppressive society. But insofar as victims of false blame are themselves enlisted in making a mistake about the nature of that force—
mistaking its real cause, the ideological nature of their assessments, again like that of victims of Fatalism, further restricts their choices.

The case of False Blame exemplifies how ideological distortion feeds off the particular kind of restricted circumstances in which its victims live. It is because victims of False Blame can remain ignorant of those they falsely blame that their false consciousness occurs. It is the fact that individuals are separated—physically, socio-economically, culturally, psychologically—that provides the opportunity for them to misconceive and thus wrongly blame one another. Thus, as with Fatalism, False Blame is precipitated by the atomization of individuals in oppressive societies maintained by ideology, a condition imposed—or forced—on them. Victims of False Blame are not forced into believing as they do, but have their consciousness distorted by ideologies which, supposedly legitimately, provide scapegoats. Without experience to contradict inaccurate perception of others as evil, the ideologically constructed scapegoats persist as such.

**Missing Interests**

The psychological methods of persuasion involved in the final kind of false consciousness, by contrast, rely more blatantly on ideological elements other than distortions in the perception of force. Victims of this most entrenched form of false consciousness may be influenced without even implicit awareness of the exercise or threat of force. This is not to say that force does not play a role in their condition, but that awareness of it does not play much of a role in their consciousness. The exercise of force in the form of constrained circumstances or restricted choices, though real, is not readily perceptible from the perspective of its victims. The case of Missing Interests is distinguished from the others because its victims may feel “contented” in a way the victims of the other kinds do not. Its victim adopts
the interests of the dominant, though, lacking the requisite awareness, she does not conceive of her interests as such. Nonetheless her perceived interests are those consistent with the desires of the dominant. Her transformed "interests" are the means to the desires of the dominant, functioning as false needs. She fails to recognize them as such thanks to ideology. Her false consciousness is more fundamental than (pristine) cases of Fatalism and False Blame in that it involves her very basic conceptions of the world and her place in it. It is possible that her sense of self is transformed to the point that the only fundamental true interests she recognizes are those necessary for her immediate physical survival—if those.

**Different Modes and Combinations**

The three kinds of false consciousness modify individuals to varying degrees. Not only does the particular form and intensity of false consciousness vary, as may the manner in which it arises, but these different forms often arise in combination as do their different modes. Furthermore, false consciousness admits of degrees because individuals are differently susceptible to the myriad influences of ideology, depending on the particular pressures ideological structures put on them, and on the non-ideological resources available to them. This is a significant contributor to the complexity of the phenomena.

Cases of false consciousness may be distinguished not only by the kind of error, but by the way in which they manifest themselves—their mode. One of the most important themes running through historical theories of false consciousness, as Michael Rosen insists in *On Voluntary Servitude*, is sensitivity to the ways in which consciousness goes beyond simply attempting to depict the state of the world or to satisfy the greatest possible number of a given set of desires. He extracts from the historical literature which tries to make room for other aspects of consciousness, three possible modes of false consciousness.10 *Cognitive* false
false consciousness comprises disorders of the system of beliefs, attitudes or perceptions by which we perceive, judge and reflect upon nature, society and ourselves. The White false blamer, for example, might be described as misjudging both the workings of his society, and the impact of the Reds, on its failure to provide Vie. Practical false consciousness comprises disorders in the way we respond to and act within the world—whether it involve desires and the will, values, ends or norms, or the emotions. The Red fatalist, for example, might be described as failing to act appropriately on what he recognizes as his interests, lacking the will because of an overly fatigued emotional response to the difficulty in acquiring it. Finally, what Rosen terms Distortions of Identity, comprise deformations of a subject. The Blue may be described as missing her interest in Vie because what she might have been absent ideological influences is so radically different than her ideologically-identified self, that the latter cannot imagine desiring Vie (at least all things—other desires and fears—considered).

While the last of the three modes is essential to characterizing Missing Interests, the practical and cognitive modes might well be involved in any case of false consciousness. Furthermore, we can easily imagine combinations of the different forms of false consciousness. Not infrequently, for example, one who thinks ill of those he wrongly blames for his condition also has an inadequate sense of himself. His suffering False Blame is bolstered by simultaneously suffering—to some degree—from Missing Interests.

Combinations like these do not just happen to go together. Just as each kind of false consciousness is not an ordinary accident, but fulfills an ideological function, so do their combinations—by mutually sustaining one another. It is the insecurity of a victim of Missing Interests that predisposes him to look for other individuals on whom he can "look down." His lack of confidence in himself fosters an unarticulated desire to seek confidence in the form
of feeling superior to others. For this reason he is constitutionally disposed to accept the ideology that tells him that others are inferior. His need to feel more confident however, is not ultimately satisfied by this kind of artificial attempt to satisfy it “from the outside”—from something other than his own projects. As a result, his need to boost his ego persists, reproducing his harmful behavioral patterns. By supplying scapegoats, ideology simultaneously enables False Blame by providing him with someone to wrongly blame for his situation, and provides “inferiors” who feed his insatiable need quota victim of Missing Interests. Thus his false consciousness perpetuates itself. The fact that it admits of degrees and combinations is a good part of what makes it so intractable.

**Missing Interests Distinguished**

We should not confuse these kinds of combinations, however, with conflation of the different kinds of false consciousness. As we have seen, for example, Fatalism involves a different kind of mistake from Missing Interests. The gap involved in Fatalism is not so much between acknowledged and true interests, as it is between acknowledgment of true interests and acting on them. The fatalist errs less in misrepresenting the world, as in misrepresenting his role in it. Though we could, of course, reconstruct this case as one involving an unacknowledged interest in acting on one's true interests despite obstacles to doing so, and though this is a possible portrayal of the problem, it still makes more sense to treat Fatalism as a distinct kind from Missing Interests. All cases of false consciousness involve false interests and the failure to acknowledged true interests. Fatalism has an essentially different character from Missing Interests: it is a less entrenched form of false consciousness because its victim has not internalized the dominant ideology to such an extent that he has completely transformed himself—to the point of satisfaction with subservience.
If this difference is only a matter of degree, it is a significant degree. Even if we choose to describe his mistake as comprising a false interest in collaboration, his error is in failing to recognize the relationship between his cooperation with his oppressors and his fundamental interests. His error is not in mistaking the essence of that basic interest. The interest he fails to recognize is merely instrumental to the fundamental interests he does acknowledge. Consequently, his on-going dissatisfaction remains a potential threat to the stability of the circumstances that oppress him in a way that cannot be true of one who suffers from unacknowledged (fundamental) interests. A fatalist, for example, may be less likely to resist a strong movement to change existing structures—though he may, especially initially, remain a passive by-stander—than one who has come to identify with those structures—one who has invested himself in them and who may even be willing to kill or die for them. The fatalist's false consciousness may be cured more readily by providing him with appropriate information and resources. Though his false consciousness is an ideologically altered mind set, it is less modified than that of a victim of Missing Interests.

IV. The Project

The focus of the thesis will be on the category of Missing Interests. While all three kinds described involve ideological distortion of consciousness, this kind involves a more radical transformation of the victim's self. It is for this reason that, as we will see in Chapter 3, some theorists are particularly skeptical of ascription of this kind of false consciousness. They argue that there cannot be any grounds on which to criticize an alleged victim's articulated interests as mistaken if those interests cohere with her sense of herself. If I can motivate this most entrenched and radical form of false consciousness, I will have thereby motivated the possibility of the ideological distortion of consciousness involved in all three of its forms.
Furthermore, if false consciousness admits of degrees, motivating Missing Interests will help stress the importance in thinking about false consciousness, of the possibilities we fail to imagine for ourselves.

My aim will be to defend the claim that Missing Interests is an important category of false consciousness, one which involves the illicit replacement of true needs with false needs. While the "mere" dire circumstances of one's life partly explains Missing Interests, their absence is also partly explained by the fraudulent promise of satisfaction of what are in fact false needs. The argument rests, quite obviously, on the view that satisfaction involves more than a simple pleasurable feeling.

To preview: I aim in this thesis to make room for the view that while slaves or masters may feel happy with themselves (though they would not describe themselves as slaves and masters respectively, or fully recognize the connotations of the concepts if they did), they cannot be happy, or, perhaps more accurately well-off, in the sense of leading a good life. This does not mean that ascription of false consciousness is made in virtue of some standard wholly independent of individual human beings. In the spirit of Plato, albeit modified, and more recently of Freud, all persons have, as living things, undeniable interests which cannot fail to reveal the consequences of their non-satisfaction somewhere in the individual's consciousness. What it does mean is that identifying interests is not a subjective matter, that is, something which can simply be left up to the individual as he or she exists now, to discover by introspection (plus proper reasoning). The argument to that effect is the subject of the third chapter. The subject of the final chapter is to motivate a non-mysterious alternative. The mechanisms of ideology are at this point still mysterious; their analysis is the subject of the next chapter.
1 I do not mean that such errors are not statistically ordinary, for they may well be. Rather I use ordinary for lack of a better term to distinguish ideological errors which persist because they are functional for oppressive structures from those which would inevitably arise, even absent the existence of ideologies, simply because our knowledge is finite.

2 Unless otherwise indicated, I intend domination to mean unjustifiable domination.


4 For this reason Crispin Wright’s objection that moral realism requires attribution of inadequate reasoning capacities on the part of those who do not share the realist’s values, seems out of place. See Crispin Wright, “Truth in Ethics” in *Truth in Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), pp. 1-34.

5 I use true need here instead of real because false needs are real in the ontological sense and I am using the terms true and false in the normative sense.

6 This categorization is borrowed from Frank Cunningham’s, differing with respect to the latter category which, borrowing from de Mandeville, he calls *Cheerful and Content*. I prefer the term *Missing Interests* to categorize more or less the same cases, because while its victim may not question her “lot in life,” it may or may not be the case that she is content for she may simply know nothing but misery. See Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 246-267.

7 This is not to imply that group solidarity of the sort defended by anti-individualistic communitarians may not contribute to false consciousness as well. But even the false consciousness of white separatists, for example, may ultimately rest on a lack of understanding of those from whom they choose to separate themselves.

8 It might be argued that even in cases where the individual is not deceived, correctly assesses all the available evidence, and finds the risk is likely insurmountable, it is sometimes in his interest to take it nonetheless. A high risk of death may be a better option than a life of torture whether tortured or torturer.

9 Cunningham argues that false consciousness admits of degrees. See *Democratic Theory*, Ch. 10.

CHAPTER TWO

IMMUNE TO REASON

That the mass bleeds, that it is being robbed and exploited, I know as well as the vote-baiters. But I insist that not the handful of parasites, but the mass itself is responsible for this horrible state of affairs. It clings to its masters, loves the whip, and is the first to cry Crucify! the moment a protesting voice is raised against the sacredness of capitalistic authority or any other decayed institution. Yet how long would authority and private property exist, if not for the willingness of the mass to become policemen, jailers, and hangmen.¹

Emma Goldman

Introduction: How We Fail to Recognize the Error of Our Ways

To claim that individuals are deluded about their world and themselves, it's potential and theirs, or what is valuable in each, is quite different from claiming that they are mistaken (on any particular occasion) about any of these things. Theories of false consciousness suppose and purport to explain the former stronger and more complex claim. There can be no disputing the fact that we cannot do what is in our best interests if we are in the dark about key information that would affect our decisions. The robust theory of false consciousness defended here, drawing on the core idea in the historical tradition of theories of ideology, aims to make sense of the idea that we come to wish to be in the state which results from being in the dark, that we mistake our interests not simply due to misinformation, but to ideological influences on aspects of mental life more generally, including our value-structures. An adequate theory of false consciousness thus concerns itself with more than simply our beliefs about interests, but with our motivational structures and our very characters.

I will explicate here the functioning of the phenomena outlined in Chapter 1: that we err about our interests not only occasionally, but systematically, not as the result of natural or
inborn, but of socially-constructed limitations on understanding. The theory of ideology purports to explain how those limitations arise and persist so that the mistakes about interests that comprise false consciousness maintain and reproduce a society’s structure of domination. Again, this is the salient feature of false consciousness—while we need not suppose that errors arise only because they function to support domination, we must suppose that they flourish in an oppressive, exploitative society precisely because they fill that function. It is the investment—the idea that we come to wish to be in the state which results from being misinformed or of having our emotions and desires affected in ways we do not recognize—that explains the reproduction of oppressive social orders. The subject of this chapter is those processes of investment.

The aim of the thesis is to make room for a concept of false consciousness consistent with a view of us as having broad interests in the conditions necessary for the many and potentially all to pursue good lives. That, I am supposing, entails a basic interest in a society which makes accessible a level of education necessary for the pursuit of meaningful work, which fosters not mere tolerance but respect for others—because the conditions which permit individuals to thrive are in place—and which treads lightly on the earth. The processes of investment outlined in this chapter should be understood as addressing the issue of why the many obey the few, even against their interests, when the balance of force is on their side. But it is important to note that the treatment of the issue here should not be understood simply as a matter of mere self-interest, narrowly construed. It should be understood as comprising the issue of why the many adopt the values of the few, disrespecting others and our planet, when their value is plain to see. In other words the intended target is not only what has traditionally concerned theorists of ideology, namely, the capitalist state (though it certainly includes that), but also sexist and racist ideologies, as well as the devaluation of the natural world fostered, like
the others, by that facet of capitalist ideology which so esteems profit, competition and consumption.

Let us begin with a preliminary sketch of the answer developed in this chapter. There are two basic kinds of natural limits on the degree of understanding—of the world, of oneself and others—that may be reached by any individual at any given historical moment: one, the level of scientific understanding (broadly construed) that it has, up until that point in time, been possible for humankind to accumulate, and two, the individual’s own level of cognitive development. (We are to assume that neither of these are themselves the result of ideological restrictions as discussed below.) A well-reasoned course of action which is chosen while in possession of all of the relevant available evidence and which turns out to bring one harm nonetheless (for reasons which ex hypothesi could not have been known) is not a case of false consciousness. Similarly, a simple lack of cognitive capacities necessary to reason through the relevant available information—as in the case of a learning impairment—is not a case of false consciousness. Though unfortunate, such cases are just unavoidable mistakes that arise due to the imperfect resources available at any given time to finite creatures like ourselves, or to flawed capacities.

The errors that constitute false consciousness, by contrast, are the result of being regularly misinformed, of the habit of valuing what is valued by one’s peers or superiors, and of becoming accustomed to the kinds of things one “chooses” to pursue as a result. A clue to understanding how ideology represents an artificial, that is, socially-constructed limitation on understanding and not a natural one is revealed in the fact of its persistence. There is nothing in the nature of ordinary mistakes (especially those concerning practical matters) which makes their deleterious consequences impossible or even very difficult to detect. Furthermore,
individuals will typically try to avoid making the same mistake twice once it has been detected. Recognizing error is, after all, the way to greater understanding. Yet victims of false consciousness accept forms of political domination despite the fact that they are oppressive; they acquiesce in practices which—from a non-ideological perspective—are quite clearly destructive of human flourishing. The question to be explained then is why, despite the detrimental effect of accepting, retaining, or adopting ideological views, individuals hold tenaciously to them, blinding themselves to contrary evidence even when it is accessible.

This is the subject of the present chapter. Ideological distortions—views, beliefs, values, dispositions, and the like—owe their persistence to their insulation from the scrutiny of reason. While mere ordinary mistakes are quite consistent with a doxastically responsible approach to inquiry, or critical thinking, ideological distortions are not. An ideally critical approach to the world would leave each and every belief and value subject to challenge. By contrast, ideological approaches to the world are extraordinarily resistant to contrary evidence, somehow managing to disguise the destructive consequences of their adoption. Part of the explanation for this is that we do not think much about them. They appear as familiar and even ordinary features of our day-to-day experience, arising in mutually supporting patterns of related beliefs, attitudes, desires and practices. These patterns of related errors arise both within an individual consciousness, as a worldview that includes behavioral dispositions, and between individuals as shared worldviews and socio-cultural practices. This striking feature of ideological false consciousness is its systematicity. Yet to describe ideologies as systematic is just to state the fact of their persist.ence. It is not to explain it. Recognition of the possibility of social conditioning and analysis of its functioning is what will explain the longevity of the ill-adapted forms of consciousness that comprise false consciousness.
It is because the forms of consciousness that comprise false consciousness are the result of systematic deprivation of available information and of harmful social conditioning that they are described as *false*, and not merely as mistaken. To suffer false consciousness is to be systematically deceived about one's interests. This is the sense in which its victims are deluded. Though it lives in the minds of particular individuals, false consciousness is a social, and not an individual delusion. That is to say, the source of delusion is importantly external, not merely internal; or perhaps more accurately, the ultimate origin of delusion is external. To ascribe false consciousness to an individual then, is manifestly not to ascribe mental incompetence.

The first step in understanding the phenomenon requires awareness of the grounds on which forms of consciousness may be described as ideological: their relationship to the truth, or their political function may be suspect. What is important in making philosophical sense of false consciousness is analysis of the *structure* of ideology—what it means to say that ideology plays a supportive role vis à vis systems of political domination, to say that they are functional for oppressive societies, and to identify the mechanisms by which they are said to reproduce themselves.² Philosophical analysis of ideology must also name the susceptible features of human psychology.³ Thus, while Part I provides a sketch of the basic features of ideology, Part II provides an hypothesized account of those features of our mental life which make it possible for forms of consciousness—beliefs, attitudes, dispositions—to become resistant to reason.

I. Ideology

This chapter then, is devoted to analyzing the psycho-social process of our inculcation with false interests. Ideology, we said, can be thought of as the public content of social conditioning—what provides an illusory legitimization of domination—and false consciousness as its internalization. Though the distinction between false consciousness and
ideology is somewhat artificial, the focus of Part I is on the latter—what we might call the external element, the sociological element by which a society sustains a distorted view of itself as valuable, of its values as the values. The aim of this discussion is to extract the valuable core of historical approaches to ideology, capturing the spirit of the tradition. What permits internalization of ideology as false consciousness is the subject of Part II.

What is Ideology?

Ideologies are, as a first approximation, views of the world, cultural practices or the like which conceal or distort what would otherwise be recognized as beneficial to well-being, or which purportedly justify circumstances which we would otherwise recognize as detrimental to our well-being. They persist because they render impotent the evidence against them. A good part of the explanation of the behavior of the hungry man who does not steal, or of the exploited woman who does not strike, is painfully simple: the hungry and the exploited fear the force that will be inflicted on them if they strive to satisfy their interests. It is in the nature of pain to cause people to avoid it. But since these individuals will suffer from the failure to satisfy their needs nonetheless, the question remains: why do they not take measures to reduce the risks necessary to seek out the means to satisfying their genuine needs and interests? The answer is that ideologies provide an alternative: they provide the opportunity for individuals to ignore and thereby to deny the force of their needs and to misconstrue their interests. It is also in the nature of pain that those who suffer do what they can in the immediate situation to numb it. Adopting an ideological consciousness promises to numb the discomfort that comes with failing to satisfy one's interests in flourishing or with witnessing the suffering of others in that state.
The problem, of course, should now be clear. Actions in line with such a consciousness have negative consequences not apparent to those who engage in them, and this fact is not fortuitous—there is a significant reason why such actions have the unintended consequences they do. They pacify discontent. Hence Michael Rosen's claim that the view that oppressive societies may persist as self-maintaining and historically evolving systems characterizes the historical theory of ideology.

_Distinguishing 'Ideology' in the Critical Sense_

The sense of ideology supposed here is quite obviously pejorative. The valuable historical use of the term is a critical one, one which corresponds to the project of demonstrating to agents in a society that they are deluded about their position, their society or their interests. Raymond Geuss distinguishes the critical sense from two other historical uses of the term, rejected below. A descriptive sense corresponds to anthropology, or the empirical studies of human groups. A positive sense, emphasizing the value of cultural membership, corresponds to the endeavor to discover what kind of socio-cultural system or what worldview would be most appropriate for a given group. The difficulties that accompany these latter historical senses of the term—descriptive and positive respectively—should not prompt rejection of a critical sense, which freed from the others, has the power to motivate a plausible theory of false consciousness.

_Ideology_ should not be understood merely as something one finds—a description of what people actually believe or value, and how they actually behave as part of their social practices. Obviously, investigation of what people actually believe furnishes the relevant empirical facts about a given culture or society necessary to diagnose false consciousness. But since the concept of false consciousness must be sharp enough to sort out those elements which, upon
analysis, either impede or foster a proper appreciation of interests, it would be a mistake to include within the concept of ideology even that which fosters a proper appreciation of interests; for that would render the concept of false consciousness politically toothless.

Nor should ideology be understood as something to be constructed, created, or invented—as beliefs, values, practices, worldviews conducive to a true appreciation of human interests. Discovery that a cultural practice or worldview is consistent with human flourishing does not give us reason to conceive of it as a building block in the construction of a "positive ideology." Such a project is ill-conceived and should be rejected in order to avoid the implication that the political aim of a theory of false consciousness is to replace a bad ideology with a good one. Of course the aim is to replace a distorted view of the world with a truer view of it, its values and its possibilities. But imposition from the outside of a truer view of our world and of ourselves is incompatible with respect for autonomy, with respect for the individual’s capacity to judge for herself. Given that we are working under the constant barrage of ideological illusions, we must strive to abstract their implications out of our assessments of our world, ourselves, and what is valuable in them. We must transcend, by act of imagination, our oppressive circumstances in order to make appropriate, normatively coherent judgments. But this is not to say that we ought to conceive of truer consciousness as constructing a true or truer ideology; for to do so is to view emancipation as adopting a static worldview. A truer consciousness, by contrast, is one engaged in an on-going process of imagination, evaluation, and discovery, what we should think of as spontaneous and animated.

In short, what people actually believe, value and pursue is either ideological in the critical sense or it is not ideological—in the latter case, either because it is consistent with accurate perception of interests, or, if not, because it is what I have termed an ordinary error.6
Restricting *ideology* to its pejorative or critical sense serves first to underscore the ability of all agents, individually and collectively, to think for themselves and the moral responsibility they have as a consequence to their *selves* to exercise that ability; and second, to emphasize that the pursuit of a truer consciousness is an *activity* and not a subscription to a socially prescribed, more or less static, worldview. Members of the moral community have the capacity individually and collectively to develop themselves and their cultures for the better. A truer consciousness is one which is fit to make decisions for itself about the moral responsibilities this fact generates—to itself as well as to others, including the environment—as the circumstances that necessitate choices arise. Absent complex circumstances of which ideological illusions imposing ignorance are an example, a truer consciousness will, I am supposing, come quite readily. (This is a controversial claim which I will explore in the last chapter. For now I trust the reader will at least agree that most people prefer humaneness over inhumanity, tending towards non-aggression and cooperation when circumstances permit.) Given the vision of a morally fit truer consciousness—the space for which I am trying to make room—an ideology could never serve even as a temporary means to hoist individuals out of their false consciousness; for it is at odds with the conditions necessary for an *exercised developmental* consciousness.

*Ideology* in the Critical Sense: Advantages

The potential political advantages of this revision of historical approaches to ideology cannot be underestimated.

Sectarianism

A restriction of *ideology* to pejorative usage will help avoid what history shows us is an obviously tempting slide into sectarianism. It is not an exaggeration to say that in-fighting is a prime contributor to the impotence of progressive social movements. (The staggering number
of examples and corresponding ‘-isms’ are depressing—whether disputes between anarchists and Marxists, between Marxists and feminists, between feminists and those fighting racial oppression or lesbian theorists, between ethic and racial minorities, between gay and lesbian theorists, or resistance of any of those to theorists concerned with non-human animals and the environment, or again, resistance of those concerned with non-human animals to those concerned with environmental racism; not to mention disputes within each, as well as many others.) While some degree of disagreement between thinking agents is not only inevitable but obviously desirable, there can be no doubt that unqualified attachment to one’s preferred dogma ultimately makes such disagreement unmanageable and intractable, dividing those with common interests. We do not need to deny that a workers party will have a conception of interests superior to the dominant ideological ones (as will feminists, gay and lesbian activists, environmentalists, race theorists, etc.) to recognize the risk of falling into complacency that comes with believing that such groups have a true enough theory of the world and our place in it that we need look no further, that we need question and challenge no longer.7

The danger, in other words, is that a view of the world and well-intentioned support for it, if unexamined by each individual on each and every occasion of assent, inevitably takes on a life of its own independently of its relation to the truth. It thereby becomes ideological in the pejorative sense. The stifling of dialogue that results between groups professing interest in overcoming oppression has disastrous effects for progress. There can be no doubt that the backlashes that motivate dogmatism are real. Yet if they are not fought afresh, the stale and deceptive ideas that inevitably result will be seized upon by opponents to discredit not only the particular project of a single anti-oppression group, but of the emancipatory project as a whole.
On Epistemic Responsibility

This rejection of the very idea of a positive ideology reflects the view that moral agents have a responsibility to exercise their agency in the pursuit of truth. Such a view is defended in Robert Paul Wolff's *In Defense of Anarchism*. Wolff offers a Kantian deduction of the incompatibility of political authority and autonomy. Authority, distinguished from power (or the ability to compel compliance), is the *right* to command, and correlative, the right to be obeyed. Yet an autonomous person is one who is self-legislating, who gives laws to him- or herself. Why is there a conflict? There is a conflict because “[taking responsibility involves attempting to determine what one ought to do, and that, as philosophers since Aristotle have recognized, lays upon one the additional burdens of gaining knowledge, reflecting on motives, predicting outcomes, criticizing principles, and so forth.”[emphasis added] An autonomous person then, cannot obey laws *simply because they are laws*. He may listen to the advice of others, but he makes it her own, Wolff points out, by determining for himself whether it is good advice.

He may learn from others about his moral obligation, but only in the sense that a mathematician learns from other mathematicians—namely by hearing from them arguments whose validity he recognizes even though he did not think of them himself. He does not learn in the sense that one learns from an explorer, by accepting as true his accounts of things one cannot see for oneself. The responsible person recognizes that he or she is bound by moral constraints but insists that he or she alone is ultimately the judge of those constraints. The connotations of ideology are then at odds with the concept of autonomy.

Recovered Memories? or Ground Lost?

A poignant, highly controversial, and timely example will illustrate the point that no ideology can provide tenets in advance of, and in the place of, autonomous individuals judging for themselves from within the particular features of the situations in which they find
themselves. (This is, after all, the core insight of the feminist insistence on situatedness, albeit too often confused—sometimes even by its proponents—as entailing relativism. The problem is not with the insight, but arises when it is characterized as particularism and offered as an alternative to, instead of an interpretation of universalism in ethics.) That example is the position of many academic feminists on the issue of repressed memories. While some, including many well-intentioned feminists, claim that victims of long-term childhood sexual abuse not infrequently repress memories of that abuse and only later, as adults, come (typically with the aid of a therapist) to recover those memories, others deny that memory works in the way the aforementioned theorists allege. While the former group accuse the later of participating in the undeniable "backlash" against feminism, others warn that it is the former group that are modern-day inquisitors.

The problem is not simply—what will be taken for granted here—that those who protest the importance of uncovering repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse do so despite a lack of empirical evidence for and theoretical explanation of the scenario they imagine is real. The ultimate calamity is that progress made in addressing the real and grave problems which feminists have fought so tirelessly to overcome—violence against women and children, sexual abuse, and the like—is eroded. A misguided hysteria eclipses what could be democratic, effective, reasonable solutions to those problems for they have at least identifiable facilitating conditions, if not specific causes. Hysteria about wildly fantastic memories of what is imagined abuse (some even of satanic rituals—for which, again, there is no empirical evidence) serves an important ideological function. That function is to focus the public's attention on what is characterized as inexplicable and as individual evil—and for both of those reasons as evil with no (sane) remedy—and thereby to divert attention from the undeniably
real social problems of women, the working poor and the indigent. Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker make this case in the brave and poignant Satan's Silence.¹⁸

The evil allegedly perpetrated is inexplicable because the questions of socio-psychological pressures are absent from discussion; thoughtful treatment of social issues does not make for "good" talk shows. With social issues set aside the alternative remaining is to think that these (alleged) abuse cases are the work of incomprehensible deformed perverts, or, to think that if there are explanations, they must lie within the individual perpetrator, in his or her psychological problems narrowly conceived, in his or her specific family history, or in his or her lack of religious faith.

One element in this potent ideological brew is the focus of our society on the importance of one's past experience to one's identity or one's sense of self. As Elizabeth Loftus puts it:

The central question—"Who am I?"—has been reduced by modern psychotherapy to "How did I get this way?" To understand who we are and why we are the way we are, many therapists encourage us to go back to our childhoods and find out what happened to us there. If we are in pain, we are told there must be a cause; if we cannot locate the cause, we have not looked deep enough. And on goes the search to find the truth of our lives in the memories we have and the memories we have lost.¹⁹

Or, as Ian Hacking does:

One feature of the modern sensibility is dazzling in its implausibility: the idea that what has been forgotten is what forms our character, our personality, our soul.²⁰

This backward-looking quest for identity in our culture combines with undeniably complex material pressures on feminists including a cleverly-orchestrated backlash against feminism, with pressures of working-women obliged to entrust their children to day-care centers while
stretching themselves to their emotional if not their physical limits, with the suspicions of middle-class families leaving children with members of what in our class-divided society are mistrusted have-nots, to create a potent mix which, when it makes contact with New Age irrationalism in one of the most religious fundamentalist countries in the world, pressures some feminists to cling dogmatically to the idea that women who claim abuse must under all circumstances be believed—even if the therapist suggested the idea and even if that therapist stands to profit considerably from the woman’s need for treatment and even if the very possibility of recovering memories only years later cannot be coherently explicated.

These forces combine to diminish the autonomy of individual victims of psychological abuse inflicted by therapists (some well-intentioned feminists, some money-grubbing charlatans). But equally importantly, they diminish the autonomy of those real victims of our social problems—abuse victims, the working poor, the indigent; for their real problems are eclipsed by the fire-works.

While there are myriad and complexly-related factors sustaining the phenomenon just presented, we must be careful not to feed ideological forces working against progressive aims by latching uncritically onto any means of eradicating even something as obviously bad and harmful as sexual violence. The idea that an ideology—positively construed as a temporary tool to hoist ourselves out of our oppressive consciousness—would necessarily whither away once consciousness was raised, like the allegedly self-effacing transitional Marxist state, is implausible. The history of sectarianism is evidence that dogma, like the transitional state, becomes the problem as it takes on a life of its own.21
Ideological Bed-fellows

A further advantage of restricting ideology to its critical sense is to help avoid the flip-side of sectarianism—the phenomena of would-be progressive groups too-readily making political bed-fellows of anti-progressives. Opposed interests are not uncommonly mistaken for shared ones. Their proponents believe that such “shared” interests just happen to be differently motivated, when their similarity is so superficial as to be mere illusion. It is only because one’s view of the world has become dogmatic, because one has ceased to reflect—because one has permitted what originally was perhaps a reasonably well-thought out idea to take on a life of its own—that well-intentioned people can be blinded into such misconceived liaisons so obviously, absent the deceiving influence of such dogma, not in their or any one else’s interests.22

This is not, of course, to deny that it may be reasonable to make alliances with one political enemy to defeat another, stronger and more dangerous enemy in dire circumstances such as war. It is merely to suggest that when a progressive group latches onto a fixed vision holding it up as the vision, it is more likely to make an unreasonable calculation about the means necessary to further that vision—by underestimating the relationship between the intrinsic and the instrumental value of those means. Such an unholy union is another important element in the ideological brew that is the repressed memory movement—“an unprecedented alliance of Christian Fundamentalism, New Age irrationalism, and political correctness.”23 The example of the alliance of prominent North American academic pro-censorship, anti-pornography feminists with pro-censorship, anti-feminists is by now a familiar example of the same.24
The only way to think our way out of false consciousness is to adhere steadfastly to a critical view of the world. That demands constant scrutiny and openness to possible revision. The connotations of ideology are the contrary. This does not mean that engaging in the activity of imagining and developing an alternative view of ourselves and our world more consistent with our real needs and interests is not a worthwhile project. Indeed that is the undertaking of which this thesis purports to be a tiny part. But ideology does not describe what must always be a process in which each and every agent must perpetually engage rather than passively undergo, a process which we might simply call 'thinking for oneself'.

Why False Consciousness?

That said, we may proceed to analyzing the features of ideology, hereafter in the pejorative or critical sense. To begin, it is important to consider the choice of the historically-loaded term false consciousness as that which describe states of internalized ideology.

Ideological beliefs may literally be false. But more importantly, ideological forms of consciousness may also be "false" in the extended sense that they foster false beliefs, false values, false needs, or harmful dispositions. Eagleton's response to Antonio Gramsci's challenge to theories of false consciousness, namely that many statements which are ideological are obviously true, is to claim that ideology is not principally about truth but about use. This seems right if we understand a statement's use or function as being faulty in virtue of its ability to move people to act against their true interests. True statements can be misleading. They may tell only part of a story, they may misdirect one's attention, or the like. The grounds for describing some true beliefs as ideological is the role they play in causing us to misperceive genuine interests.
Yet one might still wonder: if ideology does not have any necessary connection to false beliefs and if some instances of false consciousness do not have much to do with beliefs—what is especially true of Missing Interests—why describe the phenomena as false consciousness at all? If it does not have essentially to do with false belief, then why false consciousness? And if it does not have to do with the actual beliefs of an individual, why false consciousness? One might object that while it makes sense to describe self-deception as a false state of consciousness because that phenomenon has to do with seemingly contradictory and therefore false beliefs, it does not make sense with respect to the kind of phenomena under discussion. There are two reasons to think that it does. First, the phenomena under discussion have essentially to do with failures to have the right perspective concerning one's interests. Essential reference is thus made to the adequacy of the state of an agent's consciousness. Second, the falsity of the state of that consciousness, while often, though not necessarily involving false beliefs, is a function of what I am calling its "normative incoherence"—its inability in principle to bring creatures like us genuine, and not merely illusory, satisfaction.26 The existence of ideological beliefs which are true does nothing to undermine the claim that false consciousness has essentially to do with false beliefs or attitudes about human interests.

**Distortion: Epistemic, Functional, Genetic**

*The Epistemic and the Functional (Sociological) Sense*

Forms of consciousness should be thought of as ideological in virtue of some defects in the attitudes towards interests that are explicitly advocated or implicitly fostered—defects that typically involve the masking of facts about the nature of social conflicts and the distorting of human values. The historical epistemological approach looks at how ideology manifests itself as illusion, mystification and distortion. A form of consciousness may be criticized on epistemic grounds if the constituent beliefs lack the support of available empirical evidence, or
if beliefs of different type—descriptive and normative, for example—are confused. The historical sociological approach looks at how ideology pertains to the function of ideas within social life. A form of consciousness may be criticized on functional grounds if it plays a role in supporting, stabilizing, or legitimizing hegemonic (dominant) social institutions or practices, in “masking social contradictions” (roughly, social conflicts that must be concealed in order for them to continue to exist), or in serving the perceived interests of oppressors. The former is epistemological insofar as it is concerned with true and false cognition; the latter sociological insofar as it is primarily concerned not with the truth or falsity of beliefs, but with their relation to the structures of the society.

A reasonable approach to these historical analyses of ideology is to treat them as emphasizing its different features. The epistemological sense emphasizes the role of rationality, of belief and value systems, of what Eagleton calls signification practices which operate essentially by distortion and deception. The sociological or functional approach focuses on how the structures or institutions of society are organized so that the signifying practices can play the distorting and deceptive functions they do. The insistence that mistakes about interests ground all criticisms of ideological forms of consciousness might seem to entail the primacy of the epistemological approach. But a functional understanding of how it comes to be that human beings systematically mistake their interests is essential if we are to avoid positing a grand conspiracy.

It is important to notice that the claim that false consciousness remains a critically important concept which presupposes a useful sense of ideology extracted from the historical literature, does not assume the viability of the specifically Marxist analyses (from which the concepts derive) of the relationship between societal structures and signifying practices. Thus,
the seemingly intractable problems with historical materialism are side-stepped. The conception of ideology sketched above is consistent with the spirit of Marxist analyses of ideology—assuming, quite obviously, some mechanisms that explain their relationship—but does not require much of its theoretical underpinnings, particularly those concerning determinism. (I will take up and respond to a recent and important objection to the historical theory of ideology pertaining to this claim at the end of Part I.)

*The Genetic Approach Rejected*

Traditionally, the cognitive distortion in false consciousness is also said possibly to be *genetic.* A form of consciousness may be criticized on genetic grounds "by virtue of some facts about its origin, genesis, or history, about how it arises or comes to be acquired or held by agents, or in virtue of the motives agents have for adopting and acting on it." The problematic nature of the genetic approach demands special attention which I will digress a moment to give. The different origins of ideological forms of consciousness—from outdated science (or religion), to wishful thinking—may serve as clues to weeding out suspicious beliefs. But to claim anything more than that such forms of consciousness *tend* (statistically) to be untrustworthy, would be to conflate the 'context of discovery' with the 'context of justification', thereby committing the genetic fallacy. Geuss offers an alternative understanding of the genetic approach in order to avoid this problem. He suggests that *ideology* in the genetic sense must be a "form of consciousness [which] is false in that it requires ignorance or false belief on the part of the agents of their true motives for accepting it." (Notice that this is true even of instances of false consciousness which have to do with a simple lack of information. When beliefs are distorted, the motivations of its victims are affected as a consequence.) Yet necessary ignorance of motives should be taken as *evidence* of an ideological form of consciousness rather than as what *constitutes* its falsity. It is a good indication that something is
not in someone’s interest that they must be deceived about their motive for thinking that it is, but, I will argue, it is not in virtue of that fact that the interest is false. That would be to embrace an epistemological criterion of identity for human interests of the sort adopted by the subjectivist position I will criticize in Chapter 3.

**Pacification as a Structural Function**

Investigation of how an idea first came to be, the question which Marx attempted to address, is not as directly interesting from a political point of view as why, once it does make its appearance, it has the fortune of thriving. This section explores how certain socio-economic environments foster ideological forms of consciousness. *Ideology* as illusion, mystification, distortion depends for its flourishing upon the relations its constituent ideas bear or can be made to bear to societal structures. There is, however, no reason to think that the mistakes involved flourish because only oppressors consciously set out to construct and disseminate worldviews which will appear to justify their power. We need not assume, in other words, that the form ideological “persuasion” takes is simply conspiratorial. (There can be no doubt however, that oppressors do promote ideologies at their disposal.) Rather, ideological worldviews foster their own emergence and entrenchment, so to speak. The core idea that the originators of the concepts of ideology and false consciousness sought to explain is how an ideological worldview emerges out of the social arrangements it supports.

*The One-Dimensional Individual*

Herbert Marcuse, for example, explains how false consciousness is an emergent process by showing how the social “space” for any thought and behavior with a critical dimension or potential to “transcend” the existing society, is whittled away by the dominant ideology. Ideology, for Marcuse, has primarily to do with the exclusive association of rationality and the society’s actually existing values: the way things are, and only the way things
are, is considered reasonable. In capitalist society the fundamental value is technology or the tools of the production of wealth. (Technology does not, for Marcuse, refer essentially to the production of products.) The signification practices consistent with that system of production, those which profess or imply a justification of technology, are the practices which emerge as dominant in capitalist culture. The result of the association of value with technology is a limit on what is expressible within the society. Only “one-dimensional thought”—thought which conforms to the society's technology—is deemed rational. Any critical thought—thought critical of technology—is rejected outright as irrational and is therefore practically inexpressible within that society. Efficiency, for example, is so highly valued in technological society that anything which cannot be thought of in its terms or whose efficiency cannot be calculated, is not considered rational. To take a related example, the fetishism for the new and the young that plague modern day society flourish because they encourage consumption. What is revealed by these examples is that the phenomena under consideration is not just a matter of positively valuing what is consistent with the dominant structure of society, but is also a matter of negatively valuing whatever has the unfortunate accident of conflicting with the structure. Social conformity is brought about by restricting thought and limiting values in these ways.

Marcuse thereby defends a view of ideology as the meanings in a society’s conception of itself which promote the interests of the dominant social powers by determining the range of acceptable ways of life and their relative importance for a society. His fundamental insight is essential for understanding false consciousness: by restricting the kind of thought any member of the society may express, individuals lose the language to express critical thought, and having lost that, all but the exceptional eventually lose their ability even to think critically. Hence the emergence of what Marcuse calls “one-dimensional man”. The one-dimensional individual is the individual who has developed (almost) exclusively those interests which accord with the
dominant technological rationality. Since they are determined by external powers over which the individual has no control, are superimposed by particular social interests in his repression, in short, since they are not his own, his interests are false. And so Marcuse explains—without appeal to conspiracy—how false consciousness evolves out of the domination of "technological rationality". Put differently, technological rationality enables us to miss our interests in flourishing as multi-dimensional, more fully "human" beings.

The Manufacture of Consent by the Media

More recently, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman have provided an institutional—as opposed to a mere conspiratorial—analysis of large-scale acquiescence to oppression. They analyze how the organization of the mass media as an institution "is highly functional for established power and responsive to the needs of the government and major power groups." They show, much like Marcuse, that the "manufacture of consent" is the result of a certain arrangement of media institutions, controlled not conspiratorially, but structurally, by a very few powerful political and financial institutions. The structure of the media institutions forms a series of filters of information which determine what is newsworthy. Since what surfaces as "information" supports established power, the media functions to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. The distortion of the consciousness of its consumers that ensues constitutes a manufacture of their "consent" to that structure of institutions, and to the stunted life-styles and human beings it supports and which support it. What Chomsky and Herman have shown then, is that while propagandizing may involve conspiracy in the form of coordination of activities or in the form of censorship, it does not require that kind of conscious deceptive coordination.
None of this, of course, precludes the possibility of conspiracies to foster one's own interests at the expense of others, nor their contribution to false consciousness. In fact, there is plenty of empirical evidence of plans for the realization of interests obviously known to be contrary to those of other individuals. But these plans need not be coordinated by the various power holders. The arrangements of institutions (such as corporate ownership of the media) achieve that largely on their own. The point is that we do not have to rely on discovering "master plans" to explain false consciousness. Rather we discover features of social institutions (in which power holders operate) that give rise to it.

**Why the Resistance to ideology?**

The persistence of skepticism about the phenomenon of ideology itself is curious. Despite the apparent validation provided by Chomsky and Herman of the core Frankfurt School's conception of ideology, their analysis remains largely ignored—more curiously, even by prominent defenders of the theory of ideology. This is astonishing since Chomsky and Herman's analysis of the media provides what critics worry is lacking in the theory of ideology, namely a mechanism that would explain the relationship between the signification practices of a culture and its socio-economic structure: private, corporate ownership and control of information. While not the only mechanism, it is a fundamental one. One might expect that the explanation for this neglect is that philosophers concerned with theory pay little attention to empirical studies; and yet the problem many theorists consider intractable is precisely this empirical one.

Take for example, Rosen's recent attack on the theory of ideology in *On Voluntary Servitude*. Rosen's thesis is that the historical theory of ideology cannot provide any support for what he agrees is a much needed theory of false consciousness because the historical
Marxist treatment of the social determination of ideas faces an intractable problem stemming from what was inherited from Hegel. Rosen begins with the observation that the development of a scientific view of the world is not simply a matter of accumulating facts and expanding explanations, but rather in deciding that certain things are not in need of or susceptible to explanation. The problem with the historical theory of ideology lies with the standards of evidence that would be required to vindicate its tenets: one, that societies are systems which sustain themselves in ways that cannot be understood simply from a common-sense individualistic perspective, and two, that unequal societies are preserved not (simply) by coercion but by a form of false consciousness. If these tenets cannot be explained, he contends, we must either reject them or accept, as do opponents of the Enlightenment, that the methodology of the social sciences cannot be that of the natural sciences. Rosen argues that because Marx’s theory of history, even as defended by G.A. Cohen,\textsuperscript{36} fails to provide a defense of that part of Marx’s account most relevant to the theory of ideology, namely, the functional interpretation of the relationship between base and superstructure, it reveals “the great distance that exists between the methodological assumptions and standards of evidence that rule in physical sciences and in evolutionary biology and what would be required to vindicate Marx’s claims.”\textsuperscript{37}

The issue is with the first tenet of the theory of ideology. The supposition that ideology and society are something to be explained systematically, Rosen contends, could not be explained once Marx purged his theory of a Hegelian \textit{Zeitgeist}. Hegel had a Providential view of history as containing an unfolding series of unintended consequences. But Marx’s attempt to provide an objective scientific argument as a replacement for this theological element failed to produce a mechanism in the place of the theological one. Without footing in empirical evidence, so the argument goes, Marx was left with only a metaphor of society as an organism.
Several points are important by way of response. Even if one thinks that Marx offered little more than the famous camera obscura metaphor of ideology as reflecting while distorting reality, that is not the issue. Darwin’s theory of evolution preceded the archeological evidence, the theory of genetics and the evidence for the latter that vindicated it. The issue is rather whether we now have a theoretical understanding of ideology’s functioning. Yet Rosen’s charge must be directed not at the historical analysis of how it is that ideology sustains society over any given period of time (in this case in capitalist society), but at the claim that capitalism’s demise is inevitable. Perhaps the latter is something for which there is no evidence—if it is supposed to be more than the trivial claim that every institution and political system, like every individual eventually dies. Yet it is important to note that the theory advanced here need not concern itself with textual interpretation of the stronger claim that historical materialism is alleged to make about the nature of capitalism. For unlike Cohen’s work, the attempt to motivate the continued viability of the concept of false consciousness here is not an attempt to advance Marxist theory. Thus the valuable critical sense of ideology can be divorced from an extraneous determinist theory of history to which it has historically been taken to correspond.

What the theory put forth here requires in common with the historical theory of ideology is evidence that there is some mechanism or mechanisms to explain any particular attribution of false consciousness, that whenever it is appropriate to claim false consciousness and ideological forces are at work, there will be some identifiable mechanism. But if one cannot be found, all that follows is that no epistemological basis for an ascription of false consciousness has been found for that case.

So where is the problem? Chomsky and Herman’s analysis of the control of information alone explains a good deal of how ideology functions. Jon Elster wonders, with good reason, why Rosen seems to assume that there should be a single answer to the
question. Why, in other words, should we assume that there is only one mechanism explaining even the myriad kinds, let alone particular cases of false consciousness? The causal factors that give rise to false consciousness are neither necessary, nor sufficient to cause one to mistake one's interests though they may on any particular occasion prove sufficient to do so. This is partly a function of the great variation in what we might call the "initial conditions," conditions which include not only what we might call the external factors, such as lack of information, but what factors internal to a victim's consciousness, those involving the complex psychology and rational capacities of conscious beings. There are different mechanisms at play on different occasions.

The demand for a single monolithic mechanism is misguided. Since the aim is not to advance Marxist theory but rather to delineate a viable concept of false consciousness, there is no need to try as Marx did to make sense of ideology in the context of some sort of rigid determinism with respect to human action. Thus Part II of this chapter surveys some of the possible mechanisms of ideology including features of human psychology which make us susceptible to the other mechanisms. There is, furthermore, a wealth of accounts not touched upon here which provide explication of the mechanisms at work in fostering ideological false consciousness, the vast range of feminist theories being one prominent example.

Having stepped aside of Rosen's primary objection to appeal to the concept of ideology in a theory of false consciousness, there remains an additional issue concerning what he calls the Rationalism of Enlightenment thinking, admittedly the dominant position in Western thought: the view that the good for human beings consists of exercising and, if possible, increasing the individual's discretionary powers of conscious choice and voluntary action and using them to select between those desires that are (and are not) truly desirable.
The problem, Rosen contends, is that this misses how far questions of rationality arise in relation to what is not voluntary: attitudes, dispositions, experiences and memories. He gestures at Benjamin for an alternative to Rationalism's conception of the self and its experience.

This criticism is not developed in Rosen's book, nor is a Benjaminian alternative, but the idea that false consciousness involves what is not voluntary is an important one. Yet without entering into debate about the proper understanding of Rationalism, it can be argued that the account of false consciousness developed in this thesis is broad enough to capture non-voluntary elements. A central claim of the thesis is that too often we have an interest in being different people, in having radically different characters than the ideological ones now prevalent. The crux of the argument in Chapter 3 is that alternative theories of interests cannot make sense of the idea that ideology can and does involve harms to the self. The crux of the argument in Chapter 4 is that despite the adjustment required to expand our notion of harm to account for that fundamental problem, we have the theoretical resources to do so if we combine a historical insight in moral theory with some contemporary insights in moral, social and environmental theory.

II. Ideology Internalized

Part I sketched the way belief and value systems are said to be ideological—in virtue of the mistakes about interests they comprise, imply or foster, and the way they are said to sustain and reproduce themselves. This brings us to discussion of what it is about creatures like us that permits ideology to be internalized and thus to go undetected by so many. Even if the claim can be motivated that individuals make systematic mistakes about their interests thanks
in part to the consistency of ideologies—thanks both to the internal coherence of the varying mistakes that comprise a worldview and to their external correspondence with the society’s institutions—a proper analysis of the phenomena must address the obvious question about its persistence.

Why do individuals so rarely notice or recognize evidence contrary to dominant ideologies? The consistency of ideologies may only provide part of the answer since we must allow the possibility that in many cases there are some “cracks” in ideological conditioning that would permit a glimpse of the light of reason. (Otherwise we really would have to assume conspiracies of the grandest and most thorough scale, not to mention a view of the extreme plasticity and/or gullibility of human beings—for we would have to suppose that human beings could learn to adapt to, and/or embrace any ideological environment. Furthermore, concealing all gaps between reality and the way it is purported to be is impossible.) Why do individuals too often not see the cracks in the logic of the views they and others hold? If we assume that we could recognize our interests under non-ideological circumstances, then even under artificial, ideologically manipulated circumstances we should still possess some ability to scrutinize our forms of consciousness. How is it then, that once victims of false consciousness fall into error, their ability to see their way out of it is dismantled? Why, instead of resisting ideology, are individuals motivated to resist reason?

The answer requires understanding that the life force of ideologies is the way they play off of the natural inclinations of creatures like us. It is the way these inclinations are engaged that permits us to have a stake in our own false consciousness. A look at how our rational and
emotional inclinations normally function can give us a clue to discovering how they can come
to fail to work to our benefit.

We are purposeful creatures who discover, seek out, and act on reasons. We have the
capacity to sort out features of a situation, judging—often by instinct, whether innate or
acquired—what is permissible, what is obligatory or what is impermissible. Ideology relies on
this normal trait, duping its victim into believing that a given bit or pattern of behavior is
something one has reason to pursue and into pursuing it, when, unbeknownst to the victim,
the behavior constitutes participation—both direct and indirect—in oppression. Thus, victims
of ideological distortion are led to believe that something is rational because ideology makes it
appear to be, though it is in fact, given the proper distinctions, irrational.

The abuse of reason disguised as its proper use is, as Marcuse tried to show, a
fundamental device of the ideologies which facilitate our participation in exploitation and
oppression—whether because we are unable to identify our behavior as such, to recognize an
alternative range of behavior available to us, or to imagine that we have been deprived of
alternatives. Ideology thereby determines the kinds of choices that may be articulated and
hence—barring extraordinary imagination—acted upon within that society. Victims of false
consciousness think their beliefs and behavior are guided by genuine free value-judgments and
choices when in fact they have been artificially restricted, or what may come to the same in
severe cases of Missing Interests, when their capacity for choice has been dismantled. This is
most obvious in the case of Missing Interests whose victim has lost the capacity to conceive of,
and thus to value, the contents of her (genuine) interests. As a consequence she does not
desire their pursuit. In the most extreme cases, she loses her very desire to decide for herself.
Yet it is also evident in the case of False Blame. The individual falsely thinks he is deciding for himself that another is inferior or to blame for his own miseries, when in fact that misperception is largely determined by ideology. It is true even of the fatalist whose choice to “give up” is largely determined by disguised external forces despite his correctly perceiving the restricted range of choices that do not have considerable costs available to him. The objects of coercion are thereby maneuvered into being the tools of their own coercion.

It is helpful to think of false consciousness as a sort of “infection”. For a good part of resistance to theories of false consciousness stems not only from the assumption that they would necessarily justify totalitarianism—an objection that will be rebuffed in Chapter 3—but from the common misunderstanding that attributions of false consciousness are attributions of mental incompetence. False consciousness should be seen instead as something of which we are all, qua emotional/rational, purposeful creatures, susceptible and which any one of us can resist only to the extent that the requisite resources—conceptual as well as material—are available to us. (Recognizing that false consciousness admits of degrees makes it easier to see this.)

A related point reveals the benefit of conceiving of false consciousness this way. Since we reflect to varying degrees about the kinds of reasons we pursue, or believe worthy of pursuit, ideological “infection” of our reasons can occur not only with respect to our conscious, reflective pursuits, but with respect to our spontaneous or habitual not so reflective ones. Not only can ideological values and ways of life become part of a victim’s considered identity, but of his or her instinctive identity—including the non-voluntary aspects of experience Rosen credits Benjamin with addressing. By this I mean that ideologies can affect
our emotional perceptions, thereby misdirecting our moral instinct and perverting what would be, absent such influence, our normal responses. In more extreme cases, ideologies can so challenge the normal perception-response correlations that the individual is driven to alter the instincts themselves. Ideological conditioning is most ingrained in cases where it comprises goals or objectives pursued in behavior which is not only habitual, but prompted without reflection; for behavior in which one engages with little or no reflection is particularly immune to critical scrutiny. Opportunities for scrutinizing such behavior, for comparing alternatives, simply do not present themselves absent a crisis which forces one to reflect on that behavior.

What follows is a survey of possible components of the working of ideological conditioning, particular combinations of which explain particular failures to recognize one's behavior, motivations, values as ideological or even as problematic. The explanations contrast with one another in the degree of awareness of the forces moving them that victims of false consciousness are assumed to have (which does not mean awareness of their ideological character). False consciousness construed as having primarily to do with a lack of information constitutes an external impediment to the exercise of rational capacities for which the individual bears little responsibility. Yet such errors may be bolstered by willful blindness which presupposes, much like mauvais foi or self-deception, that the motivations of its victim play a crucial role. The contribution of such motivations introduces an internal impediment to proper use of one's reasoning capacities and thus raises the issue of responsibility for scrutinizing them.

But ideology does not only limit and distort information, with varying degrees of help from its victims. To be very effective ideology, must also shape our emotional and affective
responses and consequently distort our moral sensibilities, for it is these that ultimately govern our behavior. Failures of motivation are an important part of false consciousness, as much of what is inculcated are value-structures. The account of false consciousness defended here—designed to account for Missing Interests—force us to address what it is about the nature of our psychology which permits false consciousness to take hold of forms of consciousness. When it takes hold of the very ways in which we conceive of our world, it is not so much an impediment to, but a malfunctioning of, reasoning capacities. Not surprisingly, as with the other basic philosophical troubles into which questions of false consciousness land us, a proper analysis of the phenomena likely lies somewhere in the muddled mess of impediments to and malfunctioning of our rational nature. Let us now consider each kind of explanation in turn.

**Misinformed**

Ideological restriction of individual choice is largely a function of a lack of information. As Aldous Huxley wrote in *Brave New World*, practices which run counter to the social structure may be purposefully left out of the dominant ideology:

> Great is the truth, but still greater, from a practical point of view, is silence about truth. By simply not mentioning certain subjects, by lowering what Mr. Churchill calls an ‘iron curtain’ between the masses and such facts or arguments as the local political bosses regard as undesirable, totalitarian propagandists have influenced opinion much more effectively than they could have done by the most eloquent denunciations, the most compelling of logical rebuttals.19

If Chomsky and Herman’s empirical analysis of the structures of the media creating what they call *filters of information* is fundamentally right, then the philosophical analysis of much of false consciousness is quite simple. Individuals mistake their interests because they simply lack the factual information about contemporary and historical events and, as a consequence, about the real possibilities necessary to make judgments about interests. Lacking adequate information about alternatives to their ideological views, they fail to scrutinize them. The range of reasons...
from which they choose is thus artificially restricted; for their errors are the result not of a lack of scientific understanding at a given historical moment, but of the fact that the accurate information which does exist, is hidden. There need be nothing wrong with an individual's reasoning capacity *per se*. Rather it is the input which is deficient: the misinformed victim of false consciousness has simply been deprived of a vital resource. Hence this form of ideology constitutes an external impediment to the exercise of reasoning capacities.

Since a lack of information does not involve the actual reasoning capacities of its victim, false consciousness is, at its core, a much simpler phenomenon than, say, self-deception which is typically taken to involve—in some sense—both believing something and not believing it. Greater dissemination of information, real freedom and autonomy of the press, would dramatically improve our plight. People would have the facts relevant to taking political action that would improve our collective situation. It is because the functioning of an individual's rational faculties bears little responsibility for the ill-formed nature of the individual's consciousness, that if cases of false consciousness due simply to misinformation existed in pure form, they would be less entrenched than others.

It is likely, however, that errors due to misinformation arise in combination with the other elements involving the functioning of the rational faculties. If false consciousness is a mutually reinforcing process, mis- or non-information represents an initial stage of deception for which its victims are not responsible, and reinforcement of deception, the subsequent stage for which its victims may bear some degree of responsibility. Even limited misinformation is likely to skew at least some of one's desires. More extensive misinformation is not only sure to distort desires, but may affect the basic categories by which we conceive of the world. Nonetheless, to the extent that one's false consciousness is due to a lack of information, it is
less entrenched than either mistakes which engage one's motivations, or those which are rooted in the categories of cognition. This is because the misinformed recognize the reasons which move them; they are simply unaware that what they perceive to be the range of motivating reasons has been artificially restricted. By contrast, victims of ideologically contaminated motivations or categories of cognition are more importantly deceived about the reasons that move them.

**Masked Alternatives**

While misinformation about the way oppressive societies actually function—the harms inflicted on others around the globe by Western Corporate Capitalism, for example, from exploitative work conditions to silent environmental poisons—explains a great deal of false consciousness, it does not explain it all. Despite the mutually supporting effect of compounded kinds of false consciousness, it is safe to assume that ideological structures are fallible like everything else. If we are to assume that it is possible that ideologies break down at certain points then their internalization should have gaps. There will be occasions on which the inconsistencies of a given ideology or interacting set of ideologies will or ought to become evident. Deficient information cannot *by itself* explain the failure of individuals to discover them. This raises the obvious question of why individuals do not take advantage of such opportunities to scrutinize the representations of the world they get with deficient information.

Omission in ideology is bolstered, as Huxley also says, by the following phenomenon. Practices counter to the dominant structure(s) which would furnish a framework by which to scrutinize them, *if* part of the signification practices, are deemed crazy or evil—either because they have been judged to be immoral or because they are considered to be dangerous. With respect to alternative practices that are deemed dangerous, the connection is explicit; with
respect to those deemed immoral, the connection is only implicit. Social conformity is brought about by these two basic types of ideological rejection of alternatives. Though ideology functions in complex ways, in all of its variations, silencing and damning are its essential elements. Ideology renders certain kinds of choices nearly impossible, not by making them illegal but by making them practically speaking, unrealizable or even inexpressible. Certain choices are unrealizable because they are difficult to bring about practically speaking, because they cannot be expressed socially from within the dominant ideologies—either because invisible or because viewed as evil, insane or just plain silly. The ideological limitation of the imaginative "space" of the individual does not foster desires to look beyond the system's boundaries. This was Marcuse's point.

The claim that ideology misinforms and motivates resistance to alternative reasons that would inspire better ways of life tells us more about the structure and function of ideology that permits false consciousness. But the explanation of blindness to alternatives requires us to consider not only how ideology functions as an external constraint on the exercise of rational faculties, but how it becomes an internal impediment to their exercise when it enlists and distorts emotional perceptions and affective responses. It raises questions, in other words, about the kind of reasons which motivate creatures like us, moving us into the territory of the features of our psychology that permit ideology to function.

**Willful Blindness**

The fact that ideologies place an evil mask on alternatives requires us to suppose an element of complicity on the part of its victims, but a minimally willful one: first, that they are moved to avoid things of which they are fearful; and second, that they are moved by some moral sensitivity to do what they consider to be right and to avoid what they believe is evil. It
is normal that human beings are moved in these ways; they are not blameworthy for being so moved. It is only when they have occasion but fail to reflect on the content of what moves them, to examine their reasons, that they bear some culpability.

Let us consider then two possible explanations of false consciousness as involving some sort of willful blindness, of false consciousness as importantly *motivated*. If either is defensible, victims of false consciousness play an active, albeit generally unwitting role in their own pacification. Furthermore, to the extent that they fail to scrutinize the causes, justification, coherence of their beliefs and desires, that is, to the extent that they are "doxastically negligent," they bear some responsibility for the state of their consciousness. The concern here is not with the degree of their culpability but rather with what it is about a psychology like ours that provides the occasion for ideological distortion—with what it is about elements of false consciousness over which we have some control that exacerbate those for which we bear little responsibility. What motives might encourage this negligence—if it is negligence—properly speaking? An answer will provide an important part of the explanation of the self-maintaining nature of ideological delusion.

*Non-Willful Deadening of Imagination*

Before turning to accounts of those motives however, it is important to make note of the fact that in some cases the explanation for a person's not scrutinizing their view of the world is that they lack the developed capacity to do so. Individuals who have no concept of what constitutes a good reason in the first place can have no grounds by which to judge competing views, let alone motivation to do so. Such individuals make easy targets for blind acceptance of a dominant ideology. The reprehensible lack of a decent education for all but a privileged few explains such cases. If individuals are deprived of basic reading skills and
exposure to arguments in their schooling, and if they are unfortunate enough to lack exposure to reasoning skills from their elders or elsewhere, they are deprived of the opportunity to motivate employment of their as yet unexercised reasoning capacities.

Consider, as an example, the stimulation of imagination in story telling. Stories—written or oral—are not merely enjoyable in themselves, they are also a means to enriching one's experience of our world. The familiarity with different possibilities they provide is the means by which an individual can attain a fuller understanding of the complexities that make up our lived experience. Human beings who are deprived of or seriously limited in their exposure to this kind of stimulation can hardly be held responsible for their failure to exercise capacities which they do not know—in any meaningful way—they have. (In advanced capitalist societies many children whose parents enjoy a certain amount of wealth spend a great deal of time watching video games and the like, while their poorer counterparts spend time learning the ways of the street, neither being turned onto the conceptual resources a broader culture has to offer.) Whereas in the case of ideology as misinformation the victim's reasoning capacities themselves play no causal role, in this kind of case, though the victim bears no moral responsibility, the actual functioning—malfunctioning or under-functioning—of their rational faculties is causally responsible for the flawed state of their consciousness. Whereas in the case of misinformation, the actual reasoning "mechanism" is not part of the problem, in this case, the internal malfunctioning or under-functioning of reasoning capacities is what explains the false consciousness.

Fear of Force

In cases where an individual's reason is not so completely incapacitated, part of the explanation of "ideological infection" must be that the sanctions against the very act of
examining the dominant view encourage blindness to alternatives that one has the ability to recognize. This is true whatever the degree and precise psychological explanation of the forfeiture of doxastic responsibility. We caught a glimpse of ideology providing motivation to willful blindness in the discussion of masked alternatives. While it would not make sense to say that individuals do not think about things they are expressly forbidden to think about, to say that one can be forced not to think about something, we can make sense of the claim that individuals are manipulated into ignoring subjects invested with connotations that provoke fear. It is in this latter sense that they are forbidden subjects. When a practice is deemed evil, for example, individuals are manipulated into not looking at it because they believe it worthy of fear. The threat must be perceptible—at least implicitly—in order to motivate people to avoid behaving in ways which would actualize it. Yet it may only be quasi-perceptible, for sometimes if it were transparent its lack of justification would be transparent as well. Instead of being led to fear the sanctions that would come with looking at—let alone for—evidence contrary to ideological beliefs, individuals, fearing the content of the evidence itself, never look at it. The fear such beliefs provoke can become so automatic that individuals do not think it is the right thing to fear it, they just do. The behavior that results from such beliefs becomes pre-reflective, spontaneous. In other words, these individuals are manipulated down to their very instincts.

Furthermore, even if an individual somehow manages to recognize such an extra-ideological possibility, she has little hope of realizing it. For those around her, having adopted the ideology, will be threatened by her—because they have learned to hate and to fear her behavior or the behavior or attitudes she advocates—and will respond as creatures who believe themselves to be at risk do: unreflectively and violently. In ideologically restricted societies, the common response to difference is marginalization. Those who might attempt something
outside societal norms are isolated from their community—from both its social and its economic resources. Even partial awareness of this phenomenon will motivate many individuals not to appear different. Such methods of ideological distortion are enforced; if one fails to be persuaded, the oppressor will be put in a position where he must resort to the first option—brute force—in order to retain power. Thus quasi-perceptible threats maintain ideology at its periphery.

What the Willful Blindness explanation supposes, as does the Masked Alternatives explanation, is that human beings have some sort of self-preservation instinct which lends itself to a particular kind of ideological exploitation—one in which individuals may be moved by their fears to stifle the exercise of their own reasoning capacities. These are the same reasoning capacities which, if properly used, would move them to combat courageously the not invincible source of their fears.

Preservation of Investment in Identity

Unfortunately, the possibilities so far considered may only explain part of the story. Individuals may be motivated by fear of a different sort—fear of having to change something of significance, the way they live perhaps. Such individuals may be willfully blind to evidence that there is something wrong with their view of the world because they have made such a significant investment in that view—work, emotions, children, friends, etc. We might say that such motives constitute a perversion of a self-preservation instinct. If a racist were to scrutinize genuinely his belief that his prejudice is justified for example, he would discover that the beliefs he holds dear are in fact evil and unfounded. This should have significant consequences for his life. He might have to give up his friends or take up the arduous, even dangerous task of trying to convince them of their errors. Such an individual may be
motivated by fear of such consequences to refuse to consider evidence that contradicts his racist beliefs. We can suppose similar kinds of consequences for those who have internalized ideological beliefs about themselves. If they examine their ideological character, they would have to abandon subservient, but familiar, roles. In both kinds of cases, affecting oppressed and oppressors alike, individuals are motivated, not (or not only) for self-preservation reasons in a more or less innocuous way, but in a way even less admirable than that involved in willful blindness fueled by the threat of force: they are motivated by the costs in energy and commitments it would require to shed their ideological identities.

Yet even without appeal to the finer details of human psychology we can say something of significance about how our natural aims are distorted to our detriment: it is the *momentum* of our natural inclinations and the predictable behavior they generate which permits the consistency in error to which ideological illusion owes its life. Our behavioral dispositions gain momentum from the constant force our natural inclinations exert on us. When those drives are fed ideological reasons—in constant supply for the reasons Marcuse and Chomsky describe—they drive us to act consistently against more genuine interests. To make the same point, slightly differently, in order to be effective ideologies must make at least some minimal sense of people's experience; hence the metaphor of the *camera obscura*. Jon Elster says that although ideologies shape the wants and desires of those subjected to them, they must also engage the wants and desires that people already have. The structure of false forms of consciousness must be broad enough, and internally consistent enough, to disguise an ideological view as a justified one. But in order for ideologies to prompt our internalization of them, in order for them to be *engaging*, they must be fit to adopt the power of our drives in that they must allow one to construct a plausible identity.⁴⁰
The aim of the section after the next is to lay out the contours of the phenomena where ideology is most firmly internalized in its victim’s identity. Analysis of its philosophical ramifications will come in later chapters, where I will claim that it is because individuals must be able to fashion *coherent* ideological identities for ideology to pull off its function successfully that an account of true interests must make reference to considerations external to what are consistent yet false identities. But first we ought to pause to notice the implications of the empirical evidence on suggestibility and certainty regarding misinformation.

**Suggestibility**

It is worth reflecting on possible implications with respect to false consciousness of Loftus’ research on memory introduced in the example of recovered memories. Her studies suggest a psychological predisposition which explains the possibility of ideology as a powerful social force: far from questioning authority, people defer to it and here is the key—without discerning its existence. A related result of Loftus’ research regarding suggestibility is as intriguing as it is startling. The self-described levels of certainty of subjects questioned about events viewed on video, both events actually witnessed and fabricated events, were actually higher in the cases of misinformation. Here we see that “not seeing is believing”? Not only do psychologically healthy individuals (to all appearances) imaginatively fill in gaps in memory, and not only are they willing to override their own experience when an authority suggests something which contravenes that experience, “adjusting” their memories accordingly, but, what is even more disturbing, they are more certain of the accuracy of their memories when they involve fictions.

One might wonder whether we lust for the simplicity and coherence that a fabrication, unlike real-life, provides. We might wonder whether the fascination with satanic ritual abuse
century after century, for example, reflects a search for a simplification of our fears: a one-dimensional, purely evil, enemy seems to make sense of a world daunting in its complexity and consequent confusion. If we do indeed have a tendency, at least in the forms into which we are currently socialized, not only to defer to authority but to adopt its perspective more confidently than one based on our own perceptions, we ought to bear in mind this feature of our psychology.

**Perceptual Infection**

So far we have considered how ideology distorts information and perverts the motivations of individuals so that they come to have a stake in perpetuating their misinformation. Let us now look at how ideology distorts what I have called our instinctive identity, involving not only the ways the world moves us, our motivational structures, but, even more basically, the way we conceive of the world, or, our cognitive structures. (Let *instinctive identity* connote what is revealed by one's pre-reflective cognitive dispositions.) It is not that something about the internal workings of our mind is engaged to keep hidden a non-ideological view of the world (as in the case of the motivational structures enlisted in willful blindness). Rather, it is that an ideological worldview is internalized as part of the content of the internal workings of the mind. (Recall that this categorization is not meant to describe competing explanations; rather the more or less external constraints likely work in various combinations with the internalized ones, explaining the tenacity of ideological views.) The focus in this section is not on internal constraints where one fails to think about some things. It is instead on internal constraints where one misconceives the things one does think about, where one's affective responses to what one perceives is not what it would be absent the internalized ideological values.
The survival advantage of ideological errors is that evidence against them arises infrequently thanks to their external systematicity, and, that when it does, thanks to the systematicity of their internalization, we do not often see it as it is. In this section we will consider how ideological infection of the ways in which we conceive of the world and the skewing of corresponding affective responses permit evidence contrary to ideologies to go unnoticed.

In so doing, I will attempt to make sense of the idea that one can misperceive affects, or, more accurately, that one can experience misplaced affects. Insistence on the importance of affective responses is, as it was for Rosen, what fuels Louis Althusser’s challenge to purely rationalistic theories of ideology. Althusser advises a shift from cognitive to affective theories of ideology on the grounds that ideology has essentially to do with our affective, and perhaps pre-reflective relations with the world, or, with how reality striking us in the form of apparently spontaneous experience. While he is right that ideology is not merely a matter of descriptions or of representations, there is no reason to accept the kind of radical divorce of the affective from the cognitive that he presupposes. Yet there can be little doubt that a criteria of adequacy for any theory of ideology must include this affective element. The account of false consciousness defended here aims to do just that. I will argue in subsequent chapters that only a mind-independent conception of human interests can adequately accomplish the task. (Mind-independent here means independent of what any particular person believes, not, quite obviously, independent of the existence of minded creatures.) What follows is a sketch of a cognitive explanation (broadly construed) of how our normal affective responses might be infected by ideology; it is one which does not push the question of its functioning “under the rug” as historical accounts in terms of the unconscious would seem to do.
Categories of Perception: The Aspect of Familiarity

To see how ideology might become part of the internal workings of the mind, as opposed to a mere impediment to their appropriate functioning, let us look more closely at how we instinctively conceive of the world, representing objects and states of affairs. As philosophers in both the contemporary analytic and the continental tradition as well their historical predecessors have argued—from Kant and Hegel to Feyerabend and Wittgenstein—perception is intentional. Consider a feature of consciousness relevant to this point which, as John Searle points out, is quite amazing when we pause to think about it: that our conscious experience is structured under an aspect of familiarity. We represent objects and states of affairs under an aspect. Those aspects require categories. We impose familiar categories on the structure of our experiences so that unfamiliar objects are seen under familiar categories. We see an unfamiliar object, for example, as a person, or as a woman. Such categories are what provide the very possibility of our experience.

The point to be drawn from this issue in philosophy of mind with respect to false consciousness is that we must take seriously the possibility that categories such as these are susceptible to the influence of ideology—their content may be ideological at their development. Individuals faced with an unknown object see it in light of past experience and the corresponding categories of understanding already adopted. But if that experience is ideologically structured as a result of material conditions (the organization of a society’s institutions), and if the individual has more or less uncritically accepted the value-structures including norms of behavior dictated by that structure, then new input will be tainted by the familiar but ideological categories of experience. This includes information which would, under other circumstances, be recognized as providing a challenge to those very ideological views. Far from being recognized as evidence that contradicts one’s worldview, or even quasi-
recognized as in cases of willful blindness, its inherent challenging character may remain invisible.

The aspect of familiarity which governs our experience then, helps explain why it is that, once one has adopted an ideological view as part of the way one conceives of the world, what would normally be recognized as evidence of its inadequacy, falsity, or immorality, goes unrecognized. Even if an individual comes across what is in fact evidence of the defective nature of his or her views, it may not be recognized as such because the victim of false consciousness lacks the necessary non-ideological categories with which to match up such evidence. These cases differ from those of willful blindness in that the individual’s motivation need not be engaged to prevent the individual from looking at challenging evidence. Quite differently, the individual whose categories of experience have been infected can stare such evidence in the face but not see it as such.

Familiar Categories: The Example of Non-Persons

Some examples are in order. The misconceptions that might be internalized as familiar categories cover a range as wide as our experience. Such misconceptions comprise: one, the (mis)use to which concepts are put in a given ideological context, that is, the (mis)applications deemed appropriate; two, the (ill-suited) connotations given to concepts not inherently ideological; and three, ideological concepts themselves. I will focus on but one kind to illustrate the point, namely, the myriad examples of misconceptions of persons as varying kinds of deformed, diminished, or in the extreme, non-persons: racist connotations given to savage, heterosexist, lesbo- and homophobic connotations given to pervert, class-based concepts such as welfare bum, sexist concepts such as whore, and other vermin-concepts and connotations. There is a risk in choosing this kind of example rather than another—that is giving the impression
that the model of false consciousness is the pathological mind; for an adequate theory of false consciousness must explain how it is that ordinary people make systematic errors about their own and others’ interests. The reason for choosing this kind of example nonetheless is that it clearly reveals the relationship between ideological belief and value on the one hand, and behavior on the other—or, between the signification practices of a culture and the social roles that make up its socio-economic structure. (Recall that an account of that relationship is what Rosen is so skeptical about).

What is important about the “appropriate” uses of, or “apt” connotations of certain (non-ideological) concepts in ideological contexts, is the richness of their content—as it is for ideological concepts themselves. To “understand” that someone falls within the class of savage, pervert, or whore is to comprehend a range of ways in which that individual deserves to be treated; it is to be moved to treat them in the prescribed way. In other words these categories have, as part of their content, prescriptions for behavior towards individuals falling under the category in question. The social roles those patterns constitute—social roles, after all, do not have any reality apart from individuals behaving within prescribed patterns—explain how the socio-economic structure maintains itself. The link between the categories and the behavior are the affective responses provoked by the internalized ideological connotations and/or concepts. To say that such categories may be internalized as part of the way one perceives the world, then, is also to say that they impel behavioral dispositions or that they are part of one’s character. Thanks to the general consistency of ideological belief and value systems, and to their being systematically held in the population, these various misconceptions and misapplications are related in ways which permit individuals to develop “webs” of ideological errors quite resistant to reason. These kinds of categories, ingrained as behavioral traits shared by significant numbers of people, are what facilitate political structures built on division
between race, ethnicity or nationality, gender or sexual orientation, class or caste. Racial
apartheid and the sexual division of labor are but two of the grossest examples.

These categories of experience do not only impel the behavior of those acting *qua*
 oppressors, but those acting *qua* oppressed. It explains how, for example, the racism of many
ordinary first-world residents facilitates their complicity in the first-world oppression of third-
world—because, by thinking "*they* do not require a living wage of the kind *we* do, because *their*
way of living is completely different from ours," we blind ourselves to the moral price of our
having available and consuming the goods they toil in drudgery to produce. But, ideological
categorization also explains how the sexism of women facilitates their own oppression because,
adopting ideological goals for themselves which are unattainable—as in the beauty myth, the
view that the value of a woman lies (primarily) in her beauty—they necessarily fall short of
them, inevitably suffering from inadequate self-esteem and all the consequences thereof. The
prevalence of ideological categories of experience pressures the subjects of such
misconceptions and misapplications (the oppressed) to come to see themselves in ways
distorted by the way they are treated. This is true even if they do not entirely accept the
ideological misconception and/or misapplication which drive that ill-treatment. Possibilities
include seeing oneself as in some way inferior, undeserving, or just unlucky, or failing to
consider oneself as other than appropriate to the way one is treated. One need not see oneself
as a savage to think that, as one who is perceived as such, there is no possibility of altering
one's unhappy lot. One need not see oneself as a savage to fail to think of oneself as deserving
a different lot. The more subtle presence of ideological content in the categories of an
oppressed consciousness is no less potent for that.
Categorization Without Reflection

Yet unless we are to assume that learning is simply impossible, we need an explanation of what it is that permits the victim of false consciousness repeatedly to categorize potentially threatening evidence in a way which renders it critically impotent? Why is it, for example, that a victim of false consciousness classifies homosexuals under the familiar ideological category of *pervert* rather than simply under the equally familiar category of *person*? We have already considered the possibility that the kind of motivational structures discussed above may encourage such an individual to be willfully blind to what is entailed by respect for another’s personhood, engaging their desires to perpetuate the short-term if ephemeral benefits derived from seeing, and therefore treating—while feeling justified—another as a *pervert, savage, bum*, etc. A welcome alternative is that such an individual *does* recognize another as a *person* despite living in ideological circumstances in which it is also “appropriate” to categorize that person according to some ideological concept or to some ideologically ill-suited connotation of a non-ideological concept, and is forced, as a result, to scrutinize the discrepancy. Assuming willful blindness is impotent, it is occasions such as these that provide the opportunity to shed one’s false consciousness.

But the possibility under consideration here is that an individual will not even reflect as he or she categorizes along internalized ideological lines. An individual in the kind of case discussed above for example, may unreflectively categorize someone according to internalized ideological categories which paint that individual as somehow mal-formed, and thereby efface—from a social point of view—respect for his or her personhood. This possibility is as distressing as the first since both enable the resistance of ideological delusion to reason. In the case of willful blindness, the force of the individual’s motivational structure is enlisted to
maintain deception. In the case of unreflective ideological categorization, occasions for noticing deception do not, in an important sense, even present themselves.

Our conscious life is not made up simply of beliefs which are the result of considered reflective judgment. We must recognize that a great part of it is made up of affective responses to stimuli acquired pre-reflectively, responses exhibiting categories which I have suggested may be susceptible to ideological infection. The more sophisticated our beliefs about something become, the more we "just do". My proposal is that what theorists of false consciousness have seen is that sometimes what we "just see" and "just do" is processed by our minds according to the dictates of ideological concepts ingrained as categories of experience, often early in life. Once we have developed the habit of categorizing according to ideological concepts, we may do so non- or pre-reflectively and may continue to do so until it becomes, for whatever reason, impossible to do so. The explanation of this habit is that once people develop a way of thinking they tend to like to use it. The less imaginative or resourceful we have to be in coming up with new ways of thinking, the easier it is for us to tackle the time-consuming chores of day-to-day living. In order to make it through the day, we press into use that which is familiar and available. At some moments, those ways of thinking will not be up to the task at hand. One might think that individuals would be forced at such moments to develop new ways of thinking. But this is true only where there is not another, easy, alternative, namely, to borrow ways of thinking. The tendency to adopt those ways of thinking that wrap things up in a neat package—a tendency which makes day-to-day living possible—is thus ripe for ideologies which, purportedly explaining one's experience of the world, are fit to play that role. This phenomenon is reflected in the results of Loftus' research.
The problem with appropriating another's way of thinking as one's own is, of course, the risk of accepting uncritically something which is faulty. To be fit for adoption, ideology must hide its faulty nature. The faulty consequences of ideological reasoning must be much more likely to go unnoticed than say, for example, those of buying a defective used car. The car's faults are there for all to see when it breaks down. But societal institutions and ideology are related in a structured way which permits the faulty nature of ideological reasoning to go undetected. For ideologies are consistent with the arrangements of social institutions that foster their outlooks. Their association, that is, the practical efficacy of an ideological outlook in a society structured by relations of domination, diminishes the tensions between one's (ideological) views and the way the world really is. Thus, individuals who have internalized ideological categories can apply their "understanding" to their (in fact ideological) environment without counter-evidence jolting their consciousness.

The relative lack of dissonance is due to the possibility of consistent application of (mutually) consistent ideological categories. Though ideological concepts do not admit of correct applications—since the concepts themselves are faulty—they do admit of consistent application within a given ideological framework. During the time that the theory of phlogiston was employed, the concept was understood to have things to which it correctly applied and things to which it did not, even though, as we now know, there is no such thing. Similarly, ideological concepts have their own commonly accepted criteria of application even though they in fact have no true applications. The possibility of consistent ideological applications is significant; it allows its victims the narrow satisfaction that comes with appreciation that one has correctly applied the concept of a kind to a particular phenomenon. This is a factor in what makes ideological understanding seem quite natural to its victim. Since consistent application of ideological understanding corresponds to the ideology-fostering
material structure of the victim's environment, there is little to jar his consciousness enough to provoke him to examine his faulty categories.

**Misplaced Affective Responses**

I have said that ideological categorizations are possible thanks to their coherence with the structure of societal institutions in which one is socialized. Internally consistent ideologies thrive, in other words, as long as external pressures are minimized. Yet we might still wonder why something inside us does not tell us something is amiss, why our reason and emotions do not balk nonetheless. My conjecture is that ideological categorizations gain their force from illicit attachments to the affective responses of genuine desires and needs. (This is to anticipate the position on human nature I will attempt to motivate in Chapter 4. The reader may accept the argument of the thesis to the effect that a viable concept of false consciousness must fit together with some concept of human nature—the core of the argument comes in Chapter 3—without accepting the account I envision.)

The conjecture here is that ideological categorizations may become the means of expression of non-ideological drives, giving ideological habits have the air of natural legitimacy. In line with Elster's claim that ideology must engage at least some of the desires and wants we already have in order to tempt us into ideological behavior and with Eagleton's claim that we only engage in destructive behavior because we accept the slim bonuses that come with compliance, such a hypothesis suggests that ideological categorizations are driven by the misdirected force of natural impulses. We can imagine, for example, that sexist concepts of women internalized in the categories of experience of the sexist, embezzle the affect of normal sexual desire. When that desire has been divorced from proper concepts of human beings—their bodily functions, mutual pleasure, consent, respect and the like—as it has in the sexist, the
desire finds its expression in terms of internalized ideological concepts of women. Similarly, we can imagine that sexist categories internalized instead by a woman, may lead her to seek her self-worth under ideological categories and lead her to seek her acceptance in ways ultimately unhealthy for her. When that desire has been separated from proper concepts of desert, it is free to link up with the woman's ideological concept of herself.

This is to take seriously Freud's claim that our mental instincts are also bodily instincts and, as such, exert a force on our consciousness which demands satisfaction, that is, an outlet. Though the psychical element constitutes the instinct proper, instincts, he thinks, are a psychic representative of a somatic state of the body.45 This intimate connection to instances of somatic stimulation furnishes instincts with energy. The pressure of an instinct is its very essence. Psychological harm at the hands of these instinctual needs, if unsatisfied, is imminent. We need not accept the tenets of Freudian psychology to recognize the value of his insight—that our instincts put pressure on our consciousness to satisfy them, and that if unsatisfied by the usual objects of their desires, they seek satisfaction elsewhere.

If the conjecture that ideological categorizations which become the means of expression of non-ideological drives take place habitually and without reflection is right-headed, it would help to explain how ideological errors go undetected. It would be harder for them to go undetected in the case of the woman because, we would have to speculate, the contents of her ideological consciousness smuggle affects from a greater distance, if you will. Instead of substituting sexual satisfactions—perverse for genuine—as the sexist does, the woman must substitute kinds of satisfactions—seeking satisfaction not from the kinds of things which can provide autonomous persons with a healthy sense of self-worth, but with the kind of things which seem to provide a dependent, ill-developed person a way of seeing herself as
having value. Such a gap would open up greater opportunity for cognitive dissonance, as would her much diminished chances for sexual satisfaction. As a result, the woman is under great pressure to deny the force of her instincts—that is, if she is to avoid experiencing the kind of cognitive dissonance that would provoke her to scrutinize her ideological view of herself.

Ideology inhabiting the categories of experience might thus gain life by stealing the affective response of one's drives once artificially severed from the proper concept(s) of their object(s). True desires and needs might gain substitute "satisfaction" as their normal affective responses now perverted seek satisfaction by ideological means.

*Categories and Development*

The possibility of this kind of ideological infection of categories of cognition, though lamentable, should not be surprising when we think carefully about the developmental nature of our cognitive powers. We are temporal creatures who learn patterns of behavior as we develop views of our world and our place in it, adjusting them over time as we acquire new experiences. It should not be surprising that an important—though by no means exclusive—aspect of that process should be the interpretation of new experiences in terms of the understanding of old. Unfortunately, if the old has been misunderstood in the kind of internally consistent way that Elster says ideologies must facilitate, new experiences are readily interpreted in light of the old deficient understanding. Thus, far from increasing understanding, the new "information" that comes with new experience will all too often be rendered critically impotent, serving only to solidify the old, established ideological consciousness.
We might say that it is an unhappy accident of the structure of mental capacities—namely, our ability to recognize familiar objects—that it lends itself to a harmful brand of conservativism. The function of that structure is beneficial to us, furnishing the very possibility of our comprehension of new phenomena. But that beneficial function is perverted when the original “understanding” has not been freely developed in light of evidence, but artificially “manufactured” in ideological circumstances. It thus serves as reinforcement instead of fostering growth. This is not to deny that other features of our nature such as curiosity may provoke the opposite tendency. Nor is it to claim that the aspect of familiarity which structures our cognitive experience must work in this perniciously conservative manner. The claim is rather that it can work in this manner when the occasions on which one would recognize the ill-fit of new experiences to the old have been minimized. In other words, ideology can pervert a feature of cognition which would normally allow us to learn, into a tool by which the power of the learning process is misdirected. Furthermore, just as willful blindness plays a role with respect to motivated blindness to information when an incongruity arises, so we can suppose analogously that it plays a role with respect to affective responses.

The functioning of ideology in our heads is not so mysterious, I think, when we take seriously these features of our conscious life. Ideology may infect the categories by which we approach the world, and become part of the “just see” or the “just do” of our experience. The fact that much of ideology is ingrained in such dispositions—cognitive as well as behavioral, the fact that much of it does not involve beliefs upon which we critically reflect, explains how its functioning can so persistently remain invisible to its victims. Once we adopt ideological categories, typically learned as children, they become part of the way we conceive of, and
therefore habitually, even spontaneously, engage the world. More controversially, we might say that the misdirection of our affective responses renders impotent what would be the countervailing force of our rationality and emotions; the fact that individuals think they have reason to behave as they do, gives them a false sense of satisfaction. The apparent satisfaction of having justified one's behavior helps to explain why the victim of false consciousness is not driven to consider alternative views. Thus, when supposed justifications for ideological behavior cohere with wider mistaken worldviews which have been internalized as part of one's character, they pass undetected, generating behavior which has become particularly resistant to reason.

We are biological computers, not silicone ones, as Searle never tires of reminding us. Thus we do not simply reprogram ourselves by replacing a false belief with a true one. Since we are not cold calculators of information, the replacement of a false belief by a true one does not necessarily have beneficial "system-wide" ramifications. Addition of a true belief is no guarantee that its implications will be recognized, and it is thus no guarantee that any of the related ideological beliefs will be relinquished, making it unlikely that the "ideological web" of forms of consciousness will be dismantled. We are engaged biological creatures with patterns of thinking which, thanks to the heat of our emotional investments, have momentum. When their energy is tapped, it fuels ideological behavior. To take our biological existence seriously then, is to recognize that false consciousness takes advantage of "inertial momentum" to our detriment.

Misperceiving Our Fellows

The rational and emotional capacities which govern our behavior are, amongst other things, tools for discovering the moral authority of other human beings with respect to varying
kinds and ranges of circumstances. But if our emotionally-guided perceptions can be systematically distorted by ideology, then instead of fulfilling their proper function, providing us good reason to trust or distrust one another with authority over the particulars of some circumstance, they may facilitate systematic misperception of trustworthiness or the lack thereof. An ideological consciousness wrongly places trust in and admiration for those (mis)perceived as “gods,” but who are really oppressors, and wrongly distrusts those (mis)perceived as “vermin,” but who are really oppressed. Those who (wrongly) underestimate or who have never considered their own potential for autonomous, moral self-reflection and action have internalized ideology to their immediate detriment. They underestimate the boundaries of their sphere of (moral) authority, and, as a result, abdicate responsibility for decisions which in fact fall within that sphere, but which they believe lie outside it. Correspondingly, those with an oppressor’s ideological consciousness overestimate the bounds of their moral authority, making decisions which are detrimental to others and of shallow benefit to themselves.

These systematic over- and under-estimations of authority, competence or trustworthiness explain the functioning of ideologies such as sexism, racism, homophobia, ageism, and the like. Underestimation of non-human animals no doubt goes some way to explaining speciesism as well, as underestimation of self-worth correlated with an overestimation of the virtue of property no doubt explains much of the drive to consumerism. Such ideologies are what permit individuals to treat what are really persons as non- or quasi- or deformed persons, typically without reflecting much about that behavior. Around these ideological forms of consciousness, whose victims qua oppressed come to see themselves as inadequate (Eagleton’s vermin), and qua oppressors as superior (Eagleton’s gods), entire societal structures are built; for it is these concepts which govern our interaction with one
another. Degradation is the element shared by these various ideologies and is the means by which our interaction is governed. To degrade is to humiliate but it is also to demote—to deny individuals their actual moral authority because one mistakes or ignores their competence or trustworthiness. (It is interesting to note that one can feel humiliated at the recognition that one's moral authority is being denied.)

These over- and underestimations may be faulted as ideological not only insofar as they conflict with the available evidence or distort moral perceptions, but insofar as they contribute to mistaking either the interests of others or of oneself. They may be ideological, in other words, in the epistemic sense or in the functional sense. The fact that the function of the degrading element of various ideologies is to usurp the authority of the individuals that fall under a given set of ideological concepts does nothing to diminish the fact that the aims of the particular individuals who have internalized such concepts are typically otherwise—to humiliate, to increase one's estimation of oneself, to enact "god's will" or the like. Ignorant of the genesis of their false forms of consciousness, and of the consequences of their holding and acting on them, victims of false consciousness unknowingly participate in oppression. At the level—so to speak—of ideology, is the suggestion that some people's moral authority is, in virtue of their nature, impoverished; yet at the level of false consciousness, individuals who, strikingly unaware of their role in the process, enact that demotion, thereby maintain the dominance of the powerful.

The argument of this chapter is that analyzing the phenomena of Missing Interests requires analyzing corruption of the rational faculties, regardless of the role Fatalism and False Blame may also play. The phenomena of Missing Interests would seem to allow for kinds of false consciousness even more entrenched than the motivated irrationality of willful blindness.
Less entrenched forms of false consciousness, such as those produced by misinformation, lend themselves to simpler analysis—one which does not require finding fault with the actual workings of an individual’s rational faculties. It is because the more entrenched kinds discussed in the previous section do require such criticism that their analysis must make reference to interests not only of which their victims may be unaware (for that is true in all cases of false consciousness) but which do not depend for their existence on being any actual state of awareness—whether commitments, beliefs, or desires—on the part of their victims. Or so I will contend.

Correlatively, ideological distortion of cognitive features of the mind will be little swayed by more adequate information alone. Since blindness to alternatives, when caused simply by the camouflaging feature of ideology, constitutes external incapacitation of our rational faculties, it admits of a relatively straightforward solution—more adequate information. Cases of willful blindness represent some sort of hybrid of external and internal incapacitation; not only are alternatives not in plain view thanks to external impediments, but the internal workings of one’s motivational structure are enlisted to keep them out of sight. Thus their remedy requires not only the removal of external impediments to the proper exercise of reason but the realignment of internal ones. Similarly, affective responses must be engaged to have any hope of altering corresponding faulty cognitive structures. We might say that overcoming any case of false consciousness which involves this cognitive element—perhaps most if not all to some degree—is not primarily a matter of recognizing more of the facts, but of being able to recognize the import of the facts. Grasping the truth is not merely a matter of having facts passively reported, but of having the actual capacity to be actively engaged, or moved by them. Thus false forms of consciousness in which an individual has invested herself are unlikely to change until circumstances threaten or force a choice which requires such engagement—a
choice which threatens huge costs at continued protection of the investment in an ideological identity. It takes human animals time and effort to restructure their desires and to retune to their benefit, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions upon which they rarely if ever reflect.

This is the essential insight of Susan Babbitt's *Impossible Dreams*. Individuals habitually denied authority may only snap out of their false consciousness in circumstances which demand that they take authority. It is only in finding themselves compelled to choose a course of action that they come to recognize their ability to do so. In other words, individuals may only recognize their responsibility as they take responsibility. The circumstances of resistance to oppression provide the occasion for oppressed individuals to reflect on behavior which until then has just been part of their (ideological) character. Yet in order for an individual whose autonomy and moral status has been systematically denied to make the appropriate choices, she must have, in Babbitt's terms, "impossible dreams" of dignity and of self-respect.

Reconsider the creatures doomed in the Introduction. Suppose that, like ordinary human beings, they are guided by emotion in seeking reasons for their behavior, and that as social creatures, they naturally tend to trust the reasons provided by their culture so that they do not bother to attempt what they have been socialized by their culture to believe is the impossible, as in the case of the Reds; or so that they do not trust those whom they believe want to harm them, as in the case of the Whites, or finally so that they do not pursue something they believe will bring them harm (or something they have simply never considered), as with the Blues. Our recognition that the great pressure to invest in their respective ideologies is real, does not commit us to imagining that all members of each group uncritically accept their society's ideology. Let us suppose, for example, that some of the Blues recognize their interest in Vie. These Blues may have had little success in convincing their
group to change their policy with respect to the plant because they might be vilified by other Blues who, uncritically believing the plant evil, believe that the dissenters are evil themselves. We can suppose that any Whites who realize that the true cause of their plight was not the blamed group would be similarly ignored; since the Whites vehemently believe that the blamed group deserves their hatred, they would consider any dissenters to be traitors. Similarly for those amongst the Reds who recognize alternative options. The obstacle all dissenters to dominant ideologies face is, in short, that the believers mistake their interests and so misplace their (moral) authority. The investment in ideological forms of consciousness that permits believers to think they do the right thing in treating as evil what they mistakenly deem to be evil people only drives them further away from the possibility of recognizing their true interest in Vie.

The natural, beneficial tendency of these creatures to seek out and act on reasons is perverted so that harmful behavior is made to seem rational. Similarly for the tendency to trust what is familiar, when its normal function—to foster understanding and cooperation as a tool of survival—is exploited (whether intentionally or structurally) so that these beings are deceived into cooperating in their destruction or degradation, failing to perceive and thus to act on their true interests. Thus while natural inclinations are not in and of themselves ultimately responsible—either in the case of our imagined creatures or in that of ordinary human beings—it is because such inclinations are manipulated into tools of exploitation by ideology that false consciousness is so insidious: manipulated behavior is made to appear inevitable, natural or right. This, finally, is what makes it possible for human beings to fail their fellows and themselves in any variety of roles, qua oppressor—as soldiers, police, jailers, executioners, or other— or qua oppressed.


3 The ethics component, providing a theory of interests and suggesting concomitant organizational structures, is the subject of Chapter 4.


5 Geuss cites as an example Lenin’s What is to be Done? in The Lenin Anthology, ed. R. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975); Raymond Geuss, A Theory of Ideology pp. 22-3.

6 This covers both those elements of a culture which are consistent with accurate perception of interests and what I have termed ordinary errors.

7 For a sane characterization of alternative epistemologies which admit that social causation can have both positive and negative epistemic effects and which thus avoid epistemological relativism, see Charles Mills, “Alternative Epistemologies” in Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race (New York: Cornell, 1998), pp. 21-39.


15 Loftus has discredited the claim that severe trauma brings into effect a defense mechanism like repression, so that individuals who have hitherto shown no symptoms can “in a flash” rediscover their past trauma. The possibility of a “flashback,” a flawless image of the past, presupposes a model of memory—the video-recorder model—which violates the empirical evidence that memory is malleable.

16 Though this has gone unnoticed even by prominent critics of the repressed memory movement, the concept of repression, on whose connotations the recovery movement draws, is intimately—indeed inextricably—connected with a very particular kind of object in need of repression; Freudian repression has a dynamic object, namely desires under the impact of instincts. There is, therefore, no theoretical basis for the claim that repression involves defense against a static memory. Furthermore, on the Freudian picture the dynamic nature of the mental system of which repression is a part—in particular, its threatening character—furnishes an explanation for seeking out desires as the object of repression. Without such a dynamic account, the recovery picture lacks theoretical justification for seeking out memories as the object of repression. Consequently, the content

17See Lawrence Wright, Remembering Satan, p. 197-8. “Ritual abuse cases have much in common; indeed, this is often taken as proof of the existence of a single, all-powerful, satanic network. It can also be interpreted as evidence of the common fantasy life that has been a feature of our culture for centuries. The elements of sodomy, incest, pedophilia, cannibalism, and the ritual use of human blood appear to be universal elements of demonology in all cultures. As for why the satanic-ritual hysteria would appear again in our century, one can point to the rise of fundamentalist religions, the social anxiety about the loss of traditional values, and political uncertainty following the collapse of international communism.”


21Notice that the conception of ideology appealed to here should alleviate considerably fears that the theory of false consciousness which relies on it, must justify dangerous paternalism. For the very grounds of rejecting the coherence of a positive sense of ideology is respect for a robust individual autonomy, and the space for individuals to make decisions for themselves such respect presupposes. The response to the paternalism objection comes in Chapter 3.

22Again the examples I have in mind here are depressing in their abundance. My favorite horror is the abandonment by those concerned with class issues of an important group, whose oppression, like that of the poor, is unceasing, namely, women. The former bear responsibility for further marginalizing feminism, some of whose proponents seek support absent elsewhere from the religious and conservative right on issues of sexuality—from censorship of pornography to witch-hunts for child-abusing day-care workers.


26The desire for retribution, or for “closure” after a tragedy may be an example of something which can only bring the illusion of satisfaction. Though this is a controversial claim, we have reason to believe that the only thing which could satisfy the desire impelling individuals to seek retribution is often impossible—e.g. having their loved ones or fellow citizens back in life. The excruciating torment of recognizing the impossibility of alleviating that grief explains why individuals and societies would tend seek satisfaction for it nonetheless—though not under that description—in the form of retribution. Retribution, so construed, is a normatively incoherent “interest” insofar as the satisfaction it promises is in principle empty.


28Terry Eagleton, Ideology, p. 3 & pp. 29-30.

29Raymond Geuss, A Theory of Ideology. Members of the Frankfurt School criticize a form of consciousness either “because it incorporates beliefs which are false, or because it functions in a reprehensible way, or because it has a tainted origin.” p. 21. Geuss says that “although one or another of these three modes of criticism may be basic, interesting theories of ideology will be ones which assert some connection between two or more of the three modes.” p. 13 & p. 22.


33Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 1.


41 Gail Goodman and Betty Bottoms, in a study for the National Institute of Child Abuse and Neglect found no evidence of satanic ritual abuse, only fundamentalism therapists who believe in it.

42 Louis Althusser, For Marx (London: Verso Editions, 1989) cited in Terry Eagleton, Ideology, pp. 18-21. For Althusser ideology is a matter of the way I “live” my relations to society as a whole; it is not a question of truth or falsehood. He thus advises a shift from cognitive to affective theories of ideology. But as Eagleton points out, this does not solve the truth/falsity issue with respect to ideology because “I can be as mistaken about my feelings as I can be about anything else.”

43 I am grateful to Frank Cunningham for pointing out the range of philosophers who have made the point.


CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE OF INTERESTS

Introduction: What Is at Issue?

A feature common to Fatalism, False Blame and Missing Interests is that its victims somehow make a mistake of considerable significance to their well-being or their good. To attribute false consciousness, in other words, is to claim that its victims mistake what would make their lives go well or badly. Typically this is to ascribe objective interests—interests an individual has quite independently of whether she recognizes or can articulate them. This is the view I aim to defend. Yet many liberal theorists would deny the coherence of such attributions. The most adamant might deny the very possibility of false consciousness on the grounds that it simply makes no sense to attribute interests to another, insisting that the only legitimate attributions of interests are self-attributions. On this view, interests have to do with the actual feelings or concerns—desires, intentions, values, aspirations and the means to them—of an individual subject. (Subject refers to a “unique and enduring center of consciousness,” what we often think of as a person.) Interests so conceived are, by their nature, thoroughly subjective; they exist only as actually experienced by an individual subject.

By contrast, an objective theory of interests supposes that individual subjects have interests in the possible components of a good life and the means to them, that we have such interests independently of what any one of us may think, and that our having them is a function of our nature—of our being creatures of a certain kind or kinds. (The brand of objectivism with respect to interests I want to defend is non-reductionist; it does not claim to reduce value to the promotion of proper human functioning. The reference to human nature
is thus to the content of morality, not its nature.) The objectivist conception of interest is similar to the concept of need in that both are—in some yet to be specified sense— independent of the concerns, likes, and dislikes of particular individuals. If one is suffering from scurvy, one needs fresh fruit or some other source of vitamins whether or not one thinks one does. Yet we must be careful not to overstate the point. The terms are not synonymous, and it is conflation of the two that contributes to the misapprehension that attributions of objective interests are too rigid, too detached from the inclinations of particular individuals, and consequently objectionable. And notice that not all needs are interests. While it makes sense to categorize addictions, for example, as needs—since the consequences of their non-satisfaction are real—harmful addictions are not, in the ordinary sense of the term, in one’s interests. Thus the categories of need and of (objective) interest are not coextensive; the relevant similarity is their mind-independence.

We might think then, that interests, objectively conceived, are beneficial needs. Interests are like beneficial needs in that either their non-satisfaction has consequences detrimental to the individual or their satisfaction contributes to the well-being of the subject. But not all interests are beneficial needs. Interests, objectively conceived, comprise not only essential needs—needs essential for a good life, but also the kinds of things which, though they can contribute to, are not essential for, every good life. A theory of objective interests delineates the range of things that can serve as the components of a good life, some of which are essential, some of which are not. This allows the individual the authority to decide which of those non-essential goods to pursue and how to combine them—not to mention the authority to debate with fellow citizens about the contents of that range. A theory of objective interests thereby leaves room for the individual to decide how to construct the details of her good (life). Thus, I contend, it can capture what the subjectivist with respect to interests is after. It is the
misguided assumption that objective interests are only of the former sort—that attributions of objective interests are attributions of need irrespective of the particularity of the individual—that leads subjectivist critics to reject the position as infringing intolerably on the autonomy of the individual to decide for herself in what her interests consist.

Nonetheless the subjectivist conception of interests represents an important challenge to the objectivist conception of interests and hence to any account of false consciousness that relies on such a view. By addressing this "subjectivist challenge," I will attempt in this chapter to show that only with an objective theory of interests is there any hope of adequately accounting for false consciousness. A strictly subjectivist theory of interests—which must deny the very possibility of false consciousness because it eliminates the gap between (true) interests and perceived interests—is for that very reason, simply untenable. Thus, the more sophisticated subjectivist positions do not allow that any expressed desire or preference of an individual is in that individual's interest. Yet if an objective interests account is flexible enough to allow that not all interests are essential needs, and if a subjective interests account places a limit on what articulated values or aspirations, expressed desires, preferences or the like count as interests, we might wonder if there is any real difference between the two positions. This is the principal issue taken up by this chapter.

To begin, consider what the opponents take their differences to be. Though a sophisticated subjectivist position is compatible with some conception of false consciousness, the objectivist contends that it must be a limited one since the only grounds permitted for attributing a mistake about interests to a subject are subjective ones. As a result, the ascription of false consciousness must either: 1) make essential reference to some interest recognized by the subject; or, 2) deny that the interests allegedly espoused by the subject really are subjectively
held. The objectivist worries that these two conditions rule out the possibility that the subject can make a genuine mistake about his or her interests. Yet the subjectivist worry is precisely that the objectivist position would seem to have no such limitation—that by opening a gap between the individual and her interests, the objectivist opens the way for justifications of paternalist action in the name of the individual's alleged true interests. While the subjectivist's worry is that the objectivist position is dangerously open, the objectivist's worry is just the opposite: that the subjectivist's position is dangerously restrictive, and thus inherently conservative. For the subjectivist allows no justification for condemning certain circumstances as oppressing an individual if her oppression has been sufficiently internalized. As such it cannot ground a theory of false consciousness rich enough to cover cases of the most entrenched kind of false consciousness—what I have termed Missing Interests.

I will attempt to take the subjectivist's challenge seriously while arguing that a more sophisticated subjectivism, if defensible, must make appeal to extra-subjective considerations. I lay out a couple of subjectivist theories of interests in Part I, set up test cases in Part II and criticize the positions in Part III. In holding to the core of what we might call the Pure Subjectivist position, more sophisticated subjectivisms, I will claim, are either unsound or they violate that core by making tacit reference to objective interests. In other words, subjectivist resources alone are not sufficient to pick out the genuinely subjective interests from the set of an individual's articulated or introspectively-available interests. If my argument is successful in revealing the implicit commitment of a sophisticated subjectivist account of interests to objective considerations, they do not avoid the potential dangers they attribute to objective interest theory. Having shown that appeal to some objective interests is necessary, the task left for Chapter 4 will be to outline the requirements for an objective interest theory adequate to our nature and thus to the phenomenon of false consciousness. Taking the subjectivist
challenge seriously means that a defensible objective interest account will have to ground interests in a way that does not appear arbitrary. A plausible theory of the nature of interests, in other words, must address the issue of how individuals properly come to recognize interests— their own and others.

II. The Subjectivist Challenge

Pure Subjectivism

The essence of subjectivism is roughly this: to say that something is good or bad for a person is really just to say that the subject expresses approval or disapproval, is positively or negatively disposed towards the thing in question. To say that interests are subjective, in the philosophical sense, is, amongst other things, to say that they are mind-dependent. A subjectivist theory of interests makes much of the observation that human beings, as conscious creatures, each have a unique perspective or subjective point of view which is especially important with respect to one's interests. The individual subject is in a unique position to judge how something is for her, since it is she, and she alone, who experiences it. As a result, the subjectivist argues, only the subject can judge whether something is good for her. Since only the subject can fully judge how something affects her as an individual, how something is for her, we ought to respect that unique subjective perspective. A pure subjectivist account of interests requires taking the resultant assessment at face value. In other words, it requires taking what any individual desires to be her interests. The virtue of this view is that it embodies liberal respect for self-determination—it is the individual who ought to decide how to lead her own life.

Yet this position is simply implausible. Not surprisingly, subjectivism so construed has no philosophical defenders—at least of which I am aware. Not only do we ordinarily think of
evaluations of a person's good as something about which she can be mistaken—something a pure subjectivist account of interests would make impossible—we are just not willing to admit that certain kinds of behavior are or could really be in anyone's interest. Substantially self-destructive behavior, self-mutilation, say, is just one example.

A related issue—what the objectivist with respect to ethics sees as a problem—is that a subjective account of interests would make disagreement about the good impossible. Whereas assessments of the good seem to be the kind of thing about which people can at least appear to disagree, generally speaking one cannot dispute that another judges as they do. Pure Subjectivism with respect to interests would require that we give up grounds for substantial disagreement about what is good. The room left for moral theory is simply to determine what is right given the good as reported by particular subjects.

Recognizing at least the first problem if not the second, the sophisticated subjectivist with respect to interests admits some cases of mistaken interests, thereby allowing the possibility of false consciousness, but only those cases which can be analyzed in subjectivist terms. What can this mean? There are different possibilities, but they have in common the idea that the suspect interests may not—in some sense—really be the subject's own. In order to understand what this means we need to take a closer look at subjectivism.

**Authentic Subjectivism**

One subjectivist option attempts to avoid the counter-intuitive consequences of subjectivism in its pure form—the consequence that a subject can never be wrong about her interests—while preserving the core of that position, by appeal to the very logic of subjectivism. Subjectivism demands respect for the unique perspective an individual has on her own life, on her own assessment of how it is going for her,
according to her own priorities. Since the grounds for claiming that we must respect her perspective is that she is in a unique position to decide how her life is going for her, they are only secure if there is good reason to accept that her professed assessments are in fact her own. The Authentic Subjectivist option denies that it must admit as interests the professed desires, preferences, wants, aspirations of an individual in putative cases of false consciousness, and does so on the grounds that such desires and the like are not really subjective—or not subjective in the relevant sense. Of course the lack of subjectivity of some desires, wants, preferences is not sufficient for them to constitute false consciousness. The point here is simply that Authentic Subjectivism makes room for articulated interests that are not genuinely subjective, thus allowing for the possibility that some of those constitute false consciousness.

There are two general reasons an articulated interest might not be a true interest. First, to be a genuine desire of the subject, a desire must be the subject’s own; but desires that are not formed autonomously are not, on this view, properly described as the desires of the subject. Thus, although an autonomous subject cannot mistake her own priorities, not all subjects are autonomous subjects. The latter may mistake their priorities in the sense that they mistake the priorities of others as their own. Second, even when a subject is autonomous, his assessments about how to pursue his ends are not properly characterized as bona fide subjective interests when they are based on misinformation that he would deem relevant to those assessments. Hence we might call the position which insists that while interests are indeed reducible to subjective desires and the like, only those chosen by a sufficiently informed, autonomous subject count as bona fide (subjective) interests, Authentic Subjectivism.

Wayne Sumner is a contemporary defender of this kind of position. In his new book *Welfare, Happiness and Ethics*, Sumner defends welfarism, or the view that welfare or well-being
provides the foundations of ethics, that nothing but welfare matters for ethics. "Ethics has ultimately to do with ensuring that lives go well, or at least that they not go badly." In arguing for the subjectivity of welfare, the view that the nature of well-being is subjective, Sumner says: "[s]ince the prudential value of my life is its value for me, it seems reasonable to expect that the attitudes or inclinations which will figure in a constitutive account of my well-being will be mine." He thinks prudential value differs from other allegedly subjective properties—properties which, we are to suppose, also depend for their existence on their being experienced by a subject—in one important respect. Properties such as color, for example, have an external reference point—namely, normal human beings (or similar creatures) whose perceptual apparatus is "in good working order." Yet prudential properties such as beneficial and harmful, he thinks, contain relativizing indexicals which connect welfare with some psychological processes in the individual subject. What Sumner wants to deny, of course, is that prudential value has as a reference point the values, choices, or pursuits of normal human beings whose emotional apparatus is in good working order; a claim an objectivist might want to make. Implicit in his claim is the view that there simply is no analog in the case of prudential value to the perceptual apparatus for color. The question of how we recognize value is thus an important issue for both subjectivism and objectivism. The project of this chapter bears on that issue since the aim of Part III is to show that sophisticated subjectivism does not ultimately avoid the metaphysical issues about value claimed to be the bane of objectivism.

What distinguishes subjectivism from rival objective theories of welfare then, is that subjectivists make being well-off depend logically on having a favorable attitude towards one's life whereas objectivists deny the dependency. Sumner's sophisticated subjectivism, for
example, rejects the claim of Pure Subjectivism, to the effect that a favorable attitude is *sufficient* for something to be in one's interests. The crucial difference between objectivism and sophisticated subjectivism is rather the latter's claim that a favorable attitude is a *necessary* condition of something being in one's interests. "[T]he two categories are therefore both mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive." Whether the sophisticated subjectivist can maintain this distinguishing feature is part of the issue I will address in the second part of this chapter.

The endorsement requirement—the condition that a favorable attitude is necessary for something to be in one's interests—grounds the Authentic Subjectivist's account of mistaken interests and hence any subjectivist account of false consciousness. The insistence of Pure Subjectivism that we show respect for each individual's subjective perspective by accepting their assessments of their own interests at face value rests on the assumption that each individual always has the capacity to make such assessments. Authentic Subjectivism makes what follows from this assumption explicit: namely, that unless it is fair to assume that a subject's capacity to do so is operative, or functioning properly, that is, unless it is fair to assume that a particular subject makes his own judgments, there is no reason to think any particular preference of his reflects any interest of his own. For without the assumption that the subject has both a developed point of view and one that is operative, there can be no claim that any expressed preference reflects the subject's point of view. The Authentic Subjectivist shows that the insistence that a subject's well-being is logically dependent on his or her attitudes of favor and disfavor, requires that the attitudes be the subject's own. Furthermore, if the authority of the subject's perspective derives from her privileged epistemic status with respect to her own mental states, then it matters whether the subject has been misinformed.
Yet the problem of false consciousness is precisely that its victims appear to have internalized a perspective which is not their own, that their reasons are—in some important sense—not their own. To ascribe false consciousness is to claim that its victims accept uncritically the reasons they derive from some external source, without understanding for themselves the nature or force of those reasons, thereby permitting them to err about their true interests. Their capacity to make their own assessments is inhibited, and remains so as long as that alien perspective remains internalized. While it may look as if the subject’s capacity is operative so long as she seems—both to herself and to others—to act on reasons she articulates as her own, if those reasons are not really her own, then “her” perspective is in fact an alien one. In such cases, there just is no subjective perspective in the sense required by the logic of subjectivism. While it may look at first glance as if an individual is the judge of her own interests, it may become obvious upon closer inspection that she has internalized an other’s judgment. A person who claims to enjoy engaging in activities we normally think of as harmful or degrading, for example, may have non-autonomously adopted the interests imposed on her by those who would profit from her harm or degradation. When they have been adopted non-autonomously, such interests are not, despite appearances, really her subjective interests; and not because they are not really interests (as the objectivist argues) but because they are not really the subject’s.

The requirement that an individual’s assessment of her well-being be authentic, and therefore autonomous, falls out of Sumner’s account of welfare. He addresses the problem of false consciousness, or as he puts it, of social conditioning as it is defined by Amartya Sen:
A person who has had a life of misfortune, with very little opportunities, and rather little hope, may be more easily reconciled to deprivations than others reared in more fortunate and affluent circumstances. The metric of happiness may, therefore, distort the extent of deprivation, in a specific and biased way. The hopeless beggar, the precarious landless labourer, the dominated housewife, the hardened unemployed or the over-exhausted coolie may all take pleasures in small mercies, and manage to suppress intense suffering for the necessity of continuing survival, but it would be ethically deeply mistaken to attach a correspondingly small value to the loss of their well-being because of this survival strategy.

"The problem," Sumner claims, "is not that their values are objectively mistaken but that they have never had the opportunity to form their own values at all. They do not lack enlightenment, or insight into the Platonic form of the good; they lack autonomy." Understanding Sumner's authenticity requirement—the autonomy constraint as well as the information constraint—requires understanding how his account of welfare differs from its historical predecessors, hedonism and desire-theory.

Classical hedonism equates welfare with happiness, and reduces happiness to pleasure (and the absence of pain). But because pleasure and pain are by nature mental, the hedonist view of welfare lacks reference to the world outside the subject's mental states, and as such, does not escape the problem with Pure Subjectivism. The alternative, desire theory, popular in this century, equates welfare, not with pleasure, but with the satisfaction of those desires of an individual which are sufficiently considered or informed. Yet despite the attempt to remedy the problems created by the lack of reference to the world outside the subject's mental states, Sumner rejects this version on the grounds that it "loses all connection with the subject's experience of the conditions of his life." In other words, according to Sumner, it goes too far in trying to avoid the problem with Pure Subjectivism, and fails, as a result, to capture its essence.
Sumner's alternative, welfare as authentic happiness, is a new kind of hedonism—one which introduces a state-of-the-world element into the account of welfare while preserving a mental state account of happiness. Whereas happiness, or life satisfaction, one's response to (some or all of) the circumstances of one's life, is a state of mind, a proper account of welfare, according to Sumner, requires some reference to the actual conditions of one's life. The question of how a subject responds to the conditions of her life as she sees it and the question of how that life is going for her are thus distinct. By divorcing the two, Sumner allows a state-of-the-world constraint on a subject's assessment of her welfare. While happiness remains a feeling, a psychological state about which one cannot be mistaken, welfare, though essentially related to one's attitudes, is also a function of the individual's epistemic position in the world. Authentic Subjectivism thus promises to avoid the untenable consequence of Pure Subjectivism—that an individual's assessment of her welfare is not defeasible—while still preserving the authority of the subjective perspective.

The question is: how can there be a state-of-the-world constraint on welfare consistent with the "individual sovereignty which characterizes a subjective theory"? The Authentic Subjectivist's answer is to claim that an individual's assessment of their own welfare is authoritative only when it meets two conditions. First, the individual must have made their assessment based on information sufficient for them to judge accurately according to their own priorities. Second, the priorities by which they test those particular assessments, their basic beliefs and values, must be ones upon which the individual can and has critically reflected. These are the conditions of authentic choice. For the Authentic Subjectivist, $A$ is a subjective interest of a subject $S$ only if $S$ is an autonomous subject and $S$ endorses $A$ for $S$ and $S$ would continue to endorse $A$ for $S$ even with new information about $A$. 
As a remedy for factual errors Sumner considers the appropriateness for a subjective theory of a few different epistemic conditions. He rejects a truth requirement—which would require that one's assessments be free from factual error—as presumptuous. A consistent subjectivist theory, he thinks, must be open to the possibility that an individual can rightly consider himself to have been well-off in the past even while mistaken about some fact at that time. A justifiability requirement fares better in so far as it allows "meaning brought to our lives by assumptions that, although false, were at least reasonable under the circumstances," but, it is still rejected as presumptuous "in reserving well-being exclusively for the rational". Sumner favors instead an information requirement, to the effect that more information is relevant when it would make a difference to the subject's affective response to her life, given her priorities. This allows a subjectivist to attribute errors about interests when espoused interests conflict with the subject's own priorities without having to claim that they fail to cohere with some external, objective standard. Though on such a view a subject cannot be mistaken about whether she feels happy, she can, on good subjectivist grounds, be mistaken about whether her life is going according to her own priorities. Unlike desire theory, the revamped hedonism claims that new information about the actual state of the world affects an individual's welfare only when he takes it to impact on how his life is going. Thus Sumner's information constraint remains truer to the essence of subjectivism than the best alternative.

With respect to the question of the malleability of people's standards of self-assessment or the malleability of their priorities, Sumner rejects a value requirement—a counterpart to a truth or reality requirement with respect to factual errors—as not only presumptuous but questionable in presupposing an evaluative analogue to empirical truth or reality. He invokes instead an autonomy requirement for authenticity that anticipates a synthesis of the two contemporary dominant treatments of autonomy. The first approach, often expressed in terms
of a hierarchy of desires or preferences, counts values as an individual's own if she has identified with them. But then the question arises as to whether the standards by which she judges are themselves autonomous. The second approach which insists that values and desires are autonomous only if they were formed under "normal" and not "manipulative" conditions, is thus a necessary supplement to the first. "Roughly speaking, an autonomy-preserving socialization process will be one which does not erode the individual's capacity for critical assessment of his values, including the very values promoted by that process itself."\(^{17}\) The demand that every individual have the freedom to reflect critically on his basic priorities is meant to ensure that each individual has adequate expectations, including about himself, and thus an autonomous perspective, as required by the logic of subjectivism. If we know that an individual has had the opportunity to critically reflect on her priorities, then we have reason to respect her considered desires as her own. Whatever an adequate view of autonomy turns out to be, Sumner insists that a subject's assessments be treated as defeasible—authoritative unless there is evidence that "they have been influenced by autonomy-subverting mechanisms of social conditioning, such as indoctrination, programming, brainwashing, role scripting, and the like."\(^{18}\)

When our intuitions make us suspect that an individual could not truly, that is, authentically, endorse the interest he or she claims to—as in the case of an individual who chooses what is commonly considered to be self-degrading behavior—the Authentic Subjectivist requires that we scrutinize the epistemological conditions under which assessments of interests are made in order to determine whether they are unlikely to have provided the occasion for autonomous choice. We must determine whether \(S\) really is an autonomous subject and whether she has been misinformed or deceived in a way that she would believe negatively impacts her autonomy. In the case of a woman engaging in degrading behavior, for
example, the Authentic Subjectivist predicts that her interest in degradation is not really a subjective interest because her "choice" is likely to have been constrained by circumstances—perhaps she takes it is as the only option other than poverty or death open to her.

The Authentic Subjectivist makes clear that any subjectivist position must admit on subjectivist grounds that when there is no truly subjective perspective (operative) which could be the source of the individual's desires, there is no reason to respect those desires—because there is no reason to accept those desires as the subject's. The logic of subjectivism permits, indeed requires, ascription of error about interests to persons whose articulated interests are not really chosen by them, but have been imposed on them—by external pressures. Authentic Subjectivism thus remains true to the core intuition of Pure Subjectivism, by showing that when properly understood, far from denying the possibility of false consciousness, that intuition actually requires a conception of socially conditioned error.

_Distinctively Subjective_

The Authentic Subjectivist's insistence that an individual's self-assessment be authentic brings the position closer to that of the objectivist whose political aim in adopting a theory of objective interests is to amass the theoretical resources necessary to criticize the pernicious effects of social conditioning. Yet although both address the problem of inauthentic interests, there are significant differences between the two. It will be useful at this point to look more closely at the general formulation of the objectivist position (from Chapter 1): "while slaves or masters may feel happy with themselves (though they would not describe themselves as slaves and masters respectively, or fully recognize the connotations of the concepts if they did), they cannot be happy, or, perhaps more accurately well-off, in the sense of leading a good life." The first point of difference is terminological. Sumner reserves the term _happiness_, as have
utilitarians (and many other philosophers) since Bentham and Mill, to denote a pleasurable feeling. By contrast the objectivist position I aim to motivate in Chapter 4 will reserve happiness not for a pleasurable feeling, but for the long-term, non-fleeting satisfaction one experiences with leading a good life. Happiness, unlike joy or pleasure, supposes that one is leading a good life and experiencing the satisfactions thereof. This intentionally leaves open the possibility (of what I believe to be true) that there can be no genuine happiness in a life that is not well led, only the illusion of happiness, no matter how accustomed an individual becomes to oppressive circumstances. For instance, no matter how content an oppressed individual appears, she is deprived of genuine happiness since she is denied nonetheless—of the opportunity to enjoy a good life. (Even though no attempt will be made to establish this point definitively, it should not be ruled out simply by choice of vocabulary.)

The objectivist claims that there are certain kinds of things, least controversially, being a slave, in which an individual may never have a true interest, no matter what her own priorities, because their intrinsic value is bad. In cases where objectivist attributions of error are more controversial, the subjectivist position seems to have an advantage over the perceived arbitrariness of its rival; since the subjectivist attributes error only on subjective grounds, it does not have to enter into debate about intrinsic value. The subjectivist excludes as inauthentic or non-autonomous cases such as the contented slave, and perhaps more controversial cases of suspected false consciousness, but only on subjectivist grounds. The intended consequence of the autonomy constraint of the Authentic Subjectivist is thus much the same as the position on genuine happiness of the objectivist account of interests I envision, except that the objectivist anticipates the need to ground it in value theory. The subjectivist, instead of engaging in theories of the good life, appeals to respect for the individual as an individual to ground the claim of the autonomy constraint, to the effect that an individual who is deprived of her own
perspective is deprived of an autonomous life. If the Authentic Subjectivist can make the claim without appeal to value theory, it will have a distinct advantage over the objectivist. Hence the argument of Part III that it cannot.

There is another important difference between the positions which we should pause to take note of, reflected by the terminological difference. On the objectivist view of interests I aim to motivate, the pleasurable feeling utilitarians would have us call *happiness* can be illusory. Not in the sense that one does not genuinely experience a pleasurable feeling, when, for example, one satisfies a false need—for such satisfaction enables the deception that it is a true need precisely because a pleasurable feeling is involved. The sense in which satisfaction of a false need is illusory for the objectivist is not that it is without *some* pleasure, but rather that the pleasure purports to evince more than it is. It professes to be a feeling of genuine satisfaction—with one’s life, or with a component or components thereof—when it is not.

The importance of preserving, as the objectivist does, a notion of *happiness* which is wedded to that of the good life, a genuinely satisfying life, is as follows. Without the claim that there is some such objective component to happiness, yet one which is intrinsically related to its subjective component, a feeling of satisfaction or pleasure, the objectivist will have difficulty reconciling its central tenet about the objectivity of value with a plausible doctrine of moral motivation. The objectivist must be able to reconcile the fact that value and motivation can come apart—as individuals are sometimes motivated to do things not in their interests—with the claim that there is (in non-ideological circumstances) a connection. An objectivist account of false needs based on a distinction between a fleeting *feeling* of happiness and genuine happiness preserves the intimate connection between the perception of intrinsic value and moral motivation. Without an account of false needs as impersonators of a sort, an objectivist
cannot obviously claim simultaneously that value, by its nature, attracts or repels, gives us reasons for action, and yet that creatures with essentially the same psychological structure can fail to have the appropriate response. The first basic commitment of a theory of objective interests with respect to a theory of human nature is thus that human beings as a kind are both capable of recognizing, and being motivated by intrinsic value.

Put differently, the objectivist, though professing a gap between false and true happiness, must presuppose an intricate relation between the two in order that objectivist attributions of false consciousness do not turn out to make its victims' mistakes unreasonable. As Marcuse argued, irrational behavior is made to appear rational. The point is crucial because unless the kinds of error involved in false consciousness are reasonable, the connection between what has value, how people recognize it, and how they are motivated by it, would seem to be quite tenuous. The fact, in other words, that false needs present themselves as true needs, allows the possibility that the good motivates and yet is subject to illusion. (In Chapter 4 I will take up this issue in greater detail suggesting that if an individual's true needs are not substantially satisfied, something else must take up the pressure of their non-satisfaction. Individuals, though motivated by some of their true interests, mistake the pleasure they derive from false needs for the satisfaction of their true interests.) In short, the objectivism I aim to motivate presupposes that people are motivated to pursue the good; they mistake it, but they are not indifferent to it.

This question of reconciling value and moral motivation is a problem that the Pure Subjectivist account simply does not face. According to Pure Subjectivism an individual's interests just are what motivate her; an individual is motivated to pursue her interests because they interest her. It is precisely because of the apparent motivational force of values that
subjectivists have sought their psychological source not in perception or cognition, as the
objectivist does, but in some mode of affect.\textsuperscript{19} Sophisticated subjectivisms have this in
common: nothing is an interest for an individual unless it is somehow ultimately tied to the
actual motivational structure of that particular individual. Since motivation is at the heart of the
subjectivist treatment of happiness as some sort of affect, the relationship between moral
judgment and motivation is for the subjectivist a non-issue.

The purported strengths of the Authentic Subjectivist position are these. First, it
promises to address the especially problematic cases for subjectivism, alleged cases of false
consciousness, by appeal to the logic of subjectivism, thereby avoiding appeal to objectivist
value theory. Second, \textit{qua} subjectivism it has a built-in account of moral motivation. I will
now consider a rival sophisticated subjectivist position that purports to have those same
virtues, though the first is differently achieved.

\textbf{Coherentist Subjectivism}

An alternative sophisticated subjectivist position attempts to preserve the core intuition
of Pure Subjectivism while admitting the possibility of false consciousness, not by appeal to the
conditions of authentic choice, but by appeal to the coherence of a subject's interests,
expressed as values, aspirations, desires, or preferences. The position I will call Coherentist
Subjectivism holds that we can ascribe false consciousness to individuals concerning beliefs or
preferences solely on the basis of their failing to cohere with the individuals self-ascribed
fundamental aims.

We encountered briefly in the last section one variation of this view—a version of the
sophisticated kind of desire theory rejected by Sumner. A distinction is made between basic
wants or desires on the one hand, and considered desires or preferences and basic aims on the
other. The latter are those of the former sort which have been judged by the subject to cohere with his own standards, with his own values and ends. The distinction between the desires and the like which ought to be rejected for failing to cohere with others that are not to be rejected, and those latter preferences, is made on the basis of "levels" of subjective value. So-called second-level values or preferences are privileged because they are considered in a way that the first-level ones are not. They are those to which the subject is supposedly more "attached" because they are those that meet the standards with which the subject has identified herself. Thus a mistake about certain of a subject's first-level desires may be ascribed despite her attachment to them, but only because they conflict with higher level ends to which the subject is presumed to be more attached. This kind of subjectivist position thereby allows room for ascription of false consciousness, limited to lower-level desires, to beliefs about their satisfaction and that of the individual's basic ends.

In his recent book on Democratic Theory, James Hyland defends such a position. Targeting Steven Lukes' objectivist analysis of false consciousness, Hyland accepts the existence of false consciousness but contends that to rescue the concept, it must be divorced from the problems that he claims plague objectivist conceptions of interests. Insisting that we must abandon the idea that we can establish an objective set of real interests "independently of the whole of a person's consciousness, preferences and values," Hyland writes:

This does not lead to the complete collapse of the notion of interest into specific de facto preference. A person's preference and value structures will be organised both hierarchically and in accordance with principles of importance and priority, possibly in a manner not immediately open to self-conscious introspection. This, and the possibility of inadequate and false understanding of the world, allows plenty of room for the possible incompatibility between the fulfilment of specific preferences and that which is in a person's interest. The concept of interest that is being applied here is the notion of that which is maximally in accordance with the whole range of a person's more fundamental preferences and values."
Since the subject is more "attached" to her more considered interests, the limitation of attributions of false consciousness to mistakes concerning beliefs about the means to or desires inconsistent with the subject realizing her higher-level interests, remains true to the spirit of the subjectivist intuition. Hyland's insistence, for example, that interests be established, not independently from the whole of a subject's consciousness, but by reference to her fundamental (subjective) interests, remains true to the insistence of Pure Subjectivism that a subject's interests must be determined from her own perspective. Furthermore, determinations of false consciousness can be made by looking to see whether certain beliefs which bear some empirically verifiable relation to beliefs about more fundamental interests, fail to cohere with them.

A belief, supposedly mistaken, may be or be part of an individual's false consciousness if it is inconsistent with the satisfaction of the individual's reflected aspirations, preferences or desires; this whether or not the subject recognizes the relationship of the (false) beliefs to his articulated second-level interests. An inconsistent belief or a first-level want is not deemed bad simpliciter, or even bad for a particular subject—that is, bad for objective reasons. Rather, a first-level desire may be bad as an instrumental means to a subject's higher aim(s), or because its satisfaction is incompatible with satisfaction of the subject's higher aims. Beliefs (related to these kinds of states of affairs) are bad insofar as they permit the individual to misunderstand what are the components of a good life according to their own standards. Thus, false consciousness is not ascribed, on this view, in virtue of the (objective) normative content of interests. Rather, false consciousness is ascribed in virtue of empirically determinable content about interests—consequently 'x is bad for S' is interpreted as meaning that either x is discovered not to be a means to y, or satisfaction of x is discovered to be inconsistent with satisfaction of y, where y is a fundamental, reflected aim of S.
Like the Authentic Subjectivist, the Coherentist Subjectivist argues for the rejection of some preferences as, despite appearances, not genuinely subjectively held interests. But whereas the Authentic Subjectivist position may question the subjectivity of all of the articulated interests of any particular subject who is constrained by autonomy-thwarting conditions of choice, the Coherentist Subjectivist questions only the subset of interests of a given subject which do not cohere with their more basic interests. With respect to factual errors, the situation is the opposite. Whereas the Coherentist position, depending on the variety, may allow that any false beliefs that do not cohere with basic interests constitute false consciousness, the Authentic Subjectivist position allows only those false beliefs which would cause the subject to alter her assessment as possibly constituting false consciousness. The lack of genuine subjectivity on the Coherentist picture is determined not by looking at the conditions of choice but at their consistency; for inconsistency is an indication that the subject cannot, without deception or error, really identify with some expressed want. The two positions are similar in privileging some articulated interests over others on the basis of their subjectivity; but whereas the Authentic Subjectivist appeals to the logic of subjectivity, it is more accurate to describe the Coherentist Subjectivist as appealing to the level of subjectivity.

It is precisely this difference that seems to give Authentic Subjectivism more radical potential for criticizing an individual’s articulated interests. For Authentic Subjectivism aims to ensure, not merely that a subject’s judgments be reasonably informed, but that their standards of judgment really are their own. The Coherentist, by contrast, has no grounds to criticize the foundation upon which other (allegedly problematic) elements of the individual’s consciousness may rest, namely, her basic aims and aspirations. But the Coherentist Subjectivist can simply bite the subjectivist bullet, claiming that this is a virtue of its superior commitment to respect for the individual’s perspective. Thus, I will try in Part III to show that
even the criticisms of non-foundational interests allowed by Coherentist Subjectivism violate the logic of subjectivism. The remaining question, also addressed in Part III, is whether the Authentic Subjectivist really can handle cases of Missing Interests, as it purports to, without appeal to objective considerations. The version of Coherentist Subjectivism I will address now, puts an interesting twist on these options.

Another version of what I think is aptly described as Coherentist Subjectivism, is motivated, not so much by the philosophical aim of being thoroughly subjectivist as by the political aim of avoiding what is said to be the dangerous consequence of non-subjectivist positions, namely, a theoretical justification of political paternalism. The position to which I am referring is that of Frank Cunningham whose primary concern, like Hyland's, is Democratic Theory. He aims to account for false consciousness without risking the anti-democratic consequences assumed by liberals to follow from the objectivism of the concept's traditional Marxist and other socialist defenders. His subjectivism, like many other versions, reflects respect for the fact of pluralism, the fact that, as he puts it, "actual people are not members of no sex, race, nationality, any more than they are women of no class or members of some nation with no sex." "Moreover," he adds, "whatever priorities different people have, such that impediments to certain aspirations are felt as more oppressive to them than impediments to other aspirations, they each interact daily with people who have different priorities." Thus in the place of an objectivist account of false consciousness which begins with the "non-pluralistic pursuit of fixed aspirations," Cunningham advocates an individualistic, pluralistic account which though rationalistic, is practical. That means a democratic conception of false consciousness which begins with the felt aspirations of
individual people in their particularity, and which recognizes that "beliefs supportive of oppression are most effectively challenged in the very process of taking action against . . . oppression."  

On what basis is false consciousness ascribed on such a view? The answer: on the basis of false beliefs that sustain one's own oppression, namely "those beliefs held by people whose own continuing oppression is partly maintained by their holding them and only if the beliefs are sufficiently widespread and motivating of social practice to be a part of a society's political culture."  

The application of this attribution to cases of the first two kinds of false consciousness, as laid out in Chapter 1 following Cunningham's characterization, Fatalism and False Blame, is the clearest. A worker who falsely believes herself to deserve her rank, or a male worker who believes women's incursion is the cause of job insecurity are, on this view, cases of false consciousness insofar as their beliefs contribute to their own oppression. The male worker's belief, for example, perpetuates the division of the working classes, and thus perpetuates the oppression of male workers; it is ultimately this fact that he thereby perpetuates his own oppression which grounds the claim that his belief constitutes false consciousness.

The choice of treatment of this position as a version of Coherence Subjectivism stems from its refusal to attribute error about ultimate aims or aspirations to the individual, only attributions of mistakes about beliefs that fail to cohere with such ultimate aims. The reason: implied in the belief of the fatalist and in the belief of the false blamer above is the perception on the part of the individual that she, in the first case, and he, in the second, is oppressed, and the desire on both their parts not to be. For to be resigned to one's fate, or to resent another's contribution to it, is to recognize accurately at least one aspect of it, namely, that it is unpleasant and regrettable. From this it follows that Cunningham need not impute some
fundamental desire not to be oppressed to the individuals in question. The fundamental wish
(in the case of the fatalist) and perhaps aspiration (in the case of the false blamer) is already
implied in the logic of the oppression-sustaining beliefs in question. Thus, we can categorize
such beliefs as false consciousness, not merely because as a matter of empirical fact they
contribute to the fatalist's and to the false blamer's oppression, but because they fail to cohere
with the implicitly expressed fundamental desires of each individual (not to be oppressed). On
such a reading, Cunningham's position preserves what is taken to be a virtue of subjectivism in
general, namely, an account of how each of the false beliefs in question in each case serve to
oppress particular individuals by reference to their particular attitudes.

Yet the kind of false consciousness at issue in this thesis, accounts of which are most
controversial, are those where it is precisely the subject's fundamental aspirations that are in
question—suspected of being inauthentic. Cunningham addresses the problem explicitly,
referring to the problem as that of individuals who are "cheerful and content" in their
oppression. The term comes from an early defender of laissez-faire capitalism, Bernard de
Mandeville and refers to those "conditioned to have aspirations which can be satisfied within
the system, even though the result is what some one with alternative aspirations will regard as a
drone-like or unnecessarily arduous existence." He writes:

[In] a free nation where slaves are not allowed of, the surest wealth consists in a
multitude of laborious poor, [and to] make the society happy and people easy
under the meanest circumstances, it is requisite that great numbers of them
should be ignorant as well as poor. Knowledge both enlarges and multiplies
our desires, and the fewer things a man wishes for, the more easily his
necessities may be supplied. The welfare and felicity therefore of every state
and kingdom required that the knowledge of the working poor should be
confined within the verge of their occupations and never extended . . . beyond
what relates to their calling. The more a shepherd, a plowman or any other
peasant knows of the world and the things that are foreign to his labour or
employment, the less fit he will be to go through the fatigues and hardships of
it with cheerfulness and content.24
On Cunningham's account however "lamentable [it is] that some people have aspirations that can be satisfied by leading a life many would consider intolerable" and however morally reprehensible it is "that some try to engineer such a state of affairs," cases where someone is entirely cheerful and content in his or her life cannot be counted as cases of oppression. This follows from his definition of oppression. For Cunningham oppression "refers to the unjustified thwarting of people's aspirations which is 'systematic'—that is, ongoing and pervasive across categories of people . . . in such a way that this cannot be explained by reference to accident, such as the accident of a powerful people happening to be possessed of ill will." Thus if an individual fails to aspire to any state of affairs significantly different from his or her own, there are no grounds to describe him or her as oppressed.

We should not be shocked by such a result. First, because Cunningham thinks that pure forms of such cases are rare if they exist at all, and second, because he thinks that a great number of cases of what I would describe as Missing Interests can be accounted for otherwise. The alternative is revealed in the following passage, as is its relation to his treatment of the other two types of false consciousness:

"Persons are rarely completely contented through manipulation. Such a person would have to lack both the power to imagine alternative life prospects and contradictory wants. These circumstances are especially unlikely in present societies which raise false hopes and create desires that cannot be satisfied. It is also important to note that there is a difference between satisfaction and resignation. These are confused when fatalistic attitudes lead to making the best of what is perceived as an inevitably bad situation and to expressing 'satisfaction' that at least one has succeeded in doing this." Cunningham here picks up on the fact that there are "cracks" in ideological conditioning so that he can describe the "cheerful and content" as suffering false consciousness. In Chapter 2, I claimed that it is unreasonable to suppose that ideologies could be complete; there would have to be a single, universal ideology uniformly promulgated by a conspiracy of the tightest
and highest order for this to be true. But if there are cracks in ideology and thus cracks in ideology internalized as false consciousness, then—Cunningham presumably thinks—there are inevitably some non-ideological beliefs and desires to which a subject's ideological beliefs and desires will fail to cohere. Though Cunningham does not use such language, his aim is clearly, even in these kind of cases, to find a subjective element on which to ground attributions of false consciousness. Whereas I have characterized false needs as illicitly existing in the place of missing (true or objective) interests that ideology has helped to displace, Cunningham characterizes false needs as revealing fatalism. Cases which appear to reflect satisfaction likely reflect resignation.

There are two potential strengths to Cunningham's position. First, those cases falling under the category of Missing Interests that can be captured as cases of Fatalism are accounted for without appeal to the kind of robust value realism presupposed by the objective analysis of interests. Thus, it avoids the alleged weakness of objectivist theories. Second, this account differs subtly from the earlier version of Coherentist Subjectivism in a way that appears to be a virtue. Recall that the Authentic Subjectivist position is designed in part to avoid the problem that the earlier Coherentist Subjectivism faces, namely, that it lacks subjective grounds for questioning the foundational aims of the individual, aims whose authenticity can subjectivity we have reason to doubt. Cunningham's analysis of false beliefs that constitute False Blame or Fatalism is done, I suggested, in terms of their failure to cohere with an implicit desire not to be oppressed. Since there is little reason to think that fundamental desire could be inauthentic, his position may also avoid the problem facing other Coherentist positions. The issue with respect to his position then is whether there is reason to think that other foundational aims of an individual that may constitute false consciousness would escape its analysis. If many of what I have termed cases of Missing Interests can indeed be captured by his account of fatalism, the
worry that his position is, like the alternative Coherentist position, too narrow to capture the most engrained cases of false consciousness is, if not eliminated, at least significantly diminished.

Having outlined the sophisticated subjectivist alternatives to objectivism, the task of the remainder of the chapter is to construct an objectivist response. To begin, I will attempt to shed light on the debate about the nature of interests by explaining what a fundamentally flawed interpretation of the concept of false consciousness has in common with a Coherentist Subjectivist account of interests, namely, that the phenomenon of mistaking interests has primarily or essentially to do with a divided consciousness.

*False Consciousness Distinguished from Self-Deception*

Some versions of a Coherentist view of interests would seem to lend themselves to an interpretation of false consciousness as a kind of self-deception. An individual might be said to deceive herself about the compatibility of some of her desires with the goals for her life. For some readers the term *false consciousness* itself will have connotations of a consciousness at odds with itself, a consciousness which at some level recognizes its true interests despite not recognizing them at another, a self-deceived consciousness of sorts. Whether or not some element of self-deception is involved in cases of false consciousness is not relevant to the issue of the adequacy of subjectivism—for it is consistent with Objectivism as well as Subjectivism. As I claimed in Chapter 2, there is little doubt that, if not full-blown self-deception, at least willful blindness plays a role in maintaining false consciousness at its periphery so to speak, by enabling an individual to fail to consider evidence that threatens to expose the ideological nature of her consciousness. What is relevant to our discussion is the claim that false consciousness is just a kind of self-deception. It is important to reject such a view definitively
because it would conflate what is an inherently political concept with one that is not, and thus foster confusion.

The stronger claim—the claim that false consciousness is simply a kind of self-deception—is untenable because it lacks appeal to states of the world, to something beyond the state of an individual’s consciousness, to something beyond the “self,” as the source of the problem. The problem is not merely that false consciousness as self-deception does not allow for cases of false consciousness due simply to systematic misinformation which do not involve radical division of the subject’s consciousness. (This is not to deny that the lack of satisfaction of one’s natural instincts due to misinformation may put pressure on consciousness creating false needs, but simply to make room for cases of false consciousness which are not that deep—those that involve false beliefs but do reach the level of basic desires.) The essential problem is rather that, like the Human Nature Explanation rejected in Chapter 1, an account of self-deception places the burden of responsibility for the error about interests on the subject herself—a view incompatible with an analysis of socio-political factors distinguishing false consciousness from other errors about interests. It is simply a mistake to think that self-deception could explain false consciousness—even though it may be involved in some cases. Since a theory of false consciousness can be defended without essential appeal to self-deception, the philosophical conundrums that the concept of self-deception provoke, can be side-stepped, and so I shall.

Yet the temptation to see false consciousness as self-deception is instructive. The distinction between the phenomena of self-deception and of false consciousness is revelatory of the insurmountable difficulty with a subjectivist account of interests. (Recall that it was the fact that the state-of-the-world feature of desire theory is not tied to the subject’s assessment
that led Sumner to reject it in favor of a state-of-the-world feature that is so constrained. On his account, mistaken beliefs are only relevant to a subject's well-being if the would change her assessment of her well-being in light of them.) Although Sumner is right to reject alternative sophisticated subjectivism as inferior to his own qua subjectivism, I believe that such alternatives have gone in the objectivist direction for a good reason. For, I want now to suggest, Authentic and Coherentist Subjectivisms suffer the same problem in so far as they make the subject an essential if not exclusive focus (as in the view of false consciousness as self-deception). It is precisely the attempt to capture the spirit of liberalism by tying interests to subjective consciousness that is the problem. Thus, no end of modifications or variations on the theme will suffice.

Common to all subjectivist positions is the view that the falsity of a subject's consciousness is ultimately determined by reference to the interests held—in some manner or another—by the subject. Some subjective interest constitutes the standard by which ascription of false consciousness is made. According to the Coherentist position, as with the Self-Deception view, the "falsity" of false consciousness is a function of the state of consciousness being against itself. Attaining truer consciousness on these views is a matter of relieving this tension within the subjective consciousness. The Authentic Subjectivist, though not requiring an interest actually held by a subject for an ascription of false consciousness, accomplishes the task of grounding interests in the perspective of the subject nonetheless—by denying that, in some cases, individuals who suffer false consciousness really have a perspective on the interests they claim to have. All of these versions of subjectivism are mentalistic, ultimately grounding interests in the individual's subjective consciousness. The view that interests have essentially to do with the attitudes of a subject, that the nature of interests, properly understood, is attitudinal, I will term the Mentalistic View of interests.
In the next section, I will appeal to the case of Missing Interests to set up the argument of the subsequent section in support of my general contention that a superior conception of false consciousness is one which does not attempt to tie interests to the mental states of particular individuals, but rather permits its ascription simply in terms of the misperception of interests. This is to resist reduction of the concept of false consciousness not only to that of self-deception, but to any version of the Mentalistic View. As part of my general project against subjectivism, I will use the term false consciousness in a broader sense, one which does not require, for an individual to have an interest, that she must recognize that interest at any level.

III. Put to the Test

The remainder of this chapter is devoted to criticizing the Mentalistic view of interests. I will begin by motivating—briefly—a distinction between interests and mental attitudes like desire or preference. I will then introduce concrete examples of the kind of false consciousness I have called Missing Interests in order to examine more closely some of the circumstances which give rise to this kind of misidentification of one’s interests. The point will be to examine its specific features in order to establish a set of criteria for an adequate conception of false consciousness, criteria which will permit us to choose between the competing conceptions—the Subjectivist and Mentalistic and the Objectivist. I will reject, or perhaps more accurately co-opt, the prominent subjectivist options by arguing that they are either implausible as demonstrated by their failure to explain the examples, or are committed to some form of Objectivism. The force of the positive project of Chapter 4—a defense of an alternative to the Mentalistic View—depends in large measure on the success of the following criticism of the view.
Interests: Another Look

To begin, there is no *prima facie* reason to think that interests are the sort of thing that must be acknowledged, let alone articulated. The Reds, Whites and Blues are the kinds of creatures that require Vie. If they lack Vie, whether or not they desire it, or think they need it, they die. They have an interest in Vie because Vie is necessary for their well-being. Similarly, in the case of human beings, it is uncontroversial to claim that people have an interest in the means of subsistence. To say that we are capable of assessing our interests is not, for the objectivist as it is for the subjectivist, to say that we “make up” our own interests; it is not to say that our desires define all that is valuable for us. While the subjectivist defends a constructivist view of interests of sorts—where, crudely put, we have interests because we form them—the objectivist defends a view where under normal, non-ideological circumstances, we are capable of recognizing interests we have in virtue of some facts about us. The project of this chapter is to argue against the subjectivist *cum* constructivist view of interests.

To see that interests are indeed the kind of thing that may be independent of desires, wants, or preferences, we should look to the fact that their individuation conditions differ. David Wiggins has persuasively motivated a distinction between *vital interests* conceived of as needs on the one hand and interests conceived of as preferences on the other. 28 (The concept of interest is for him broader than need since he categorizes needs as vital interests.) Wiggins shows that at least some interests, vital interests, must be independent of preferences. The difference is this: unlike desire or want, need is not evidently an intentional verb. Whereas I might want *x* but not something identical to it, I can be said to need *y* if I need anything identical with it. 29 Or, since needs for Wiggins are vital interests, whereas I might want *x* but not something identical to it, I can only be said to have a vital interest in *y* if I have a vital
interest in anything identical to it. Thus, Wiggins shows that our ordinary use of the term need is distinct from that of preference or want or desire. It would not make sense to say that I prefer x if I do not know that I do. (This is true even if there are such things as unconscious desires because the desire must be somehow knowable by the individual.) That certain beneficial needs are interests, is an objective matter, independent of any individual's recognition of them.

The issue, however, is obviously much more complex when it comes to interests in the broader sense. The view of interests defended here includes not only needs essential for a good life but also things which, though of a kind that can contribute to a good life, are not essential for every good life. A theory of objective interests thus delineates the range of things that can serve as the components of a good life, some of which are essential, some of which are not. That the means of subsistence are in the interests of human subjects is commonly assumed to be quite uncontroversial, even trivial. The subjectivist presumably assumes that to presuppose the existence of such needs is compatible with subjectivism because it does not require appeal to supposedly mysterious metaphysical entities—objective goods. It is supposed to be obvious that human subjects have an interest in food, shelter, water in a way that it is not supposed to be obvious that human subjects have an interest in projects or activities that some find fulfilling. Yet I have chosen the examples that follow precisely to challenge what is said to follow from the obviousness of such assumptions, in order to support the following thesis: either we admit value into our ontology, or we give up the idea that even uncontroversial needs or basic interests really are anything more than mere wants. Interests come as a package: either we have them independently of our recognizing them, or they are all constructions, that is, relative to individual desire.
Missing Interests: A Test Case for Subjectivism

A human being's interest in the means of subsistence seems a solid example of an interest which its subjects possess independently of their recognizing it. One might grant that this is indeed a need and therefore a true interest, but deny that people can be mistaken about such obvious fundamental interests as those in food or in shelter. Furthermore, even if it is possible to make individual mistakes about such interests, one might think it even less likely that such mistakes could be facilitated by a political ideology. Hence, the objection would go, the question of false consciousness seems out of place.

Two Cases of Missing Interests

1. The Anorexic

What then of the anorexic? While anorexic girls and young women do not want to eat, we certainly want to say that they have an interest, just like anybody else does, in the proper nourishment that a healthy diet provides. We simply do not find it plausible to respect the anorexic's desire to be thin if she risks grave damage to her own health and ultimately death. We think it justifiable to intervene because we believe that she has an interest in eating despite her desires to the contrary. To ascribe such an interest then does not require her endorsement of it. An interest in eating originates in being the kind of creature that requires nourishment. In this ordinary sense of the term, she has an interest in proper nourishment independently of her recognition of it or her endorsement of its value for her.

Yet even if it is possible for someone to mistake such a fundamental interest, for such a case to be relevant to our discussion, it must be plausible to describe an anorexic as suffering false consciousness. To do so she must not only fail to acknowledge an interest, however basic, but the nature of her mistake must be ideological. Hence we must address the remaining question of whether the contributory cause of such a fundamental mistake could be a social
ideology. While we may not be able to answer such a question definitively, there is considerable evidence for an answer in the affirmative.

Over ninety percent of those who suffer from anorexia nervosa are female. Thus, whether anorexia is a social disease or simply a physiological one, there must be some explanation for the fact that it overwhelmingly involves women. Since scientists lack a definitive, purely physiological explanation, we should consider as a possible explanation that it is a social disease. The first factor to take into consideration is intense social pressure emphasizing the desirability of extreme thinness in women. Feminist criticisms of the "beauty myth" blame it for encouraging women to strive to be extremely thin. Furthermore, the medical establishment acknowledges that such social influences encourage the dieting process. Add to that the not implausible claim that girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to such ideology both in virtue of their young age and in virtue of their gender. The teenage years are those years in which one begins to develop a sense of oneself. In our society one does so under the force of very specific social pressures. Part of the power of peer pressure is the sense of immediacy it produces: define yourself now as we do or remain an outsider, alone and vulnerable. Thus, in the short term, it may be easier—socially, psychologically and physically—to develop a sense of self that is consistent with the aims of one's peers, rather than to develop one which differs from theirs. Those are, after all, the two options.

Furthermore, if the vast feminist literature has shown anything, it has shown that those whose gender is female are limited in the conceptions of self they may adopt in societies with sexist ideologies. That fact, feminists have insisted, constitutes a good part of their oppression. (Variations amongst different feminists are not relevant to this claim.) To be a woman, a
"good" specimen of woman, is to be sexually attractive, and hence at this stage in our (affluent Western) society, thin. We can imagine that these kind of social factors are complimented by psychological factors such as a fear of sexuality in a society ripe with ideologies about the evils and wonders of sex, explaining how someone could fail to appreciate or identify her true interest in nourishment. Pursuit of her false interest in being thin, an aim with which she is strongly pressured to identify herself, permits her to err about her other interests.

Though by no means definitive, the above picture gives us reason to think that a proper explanation of how an anorexic comes to mistake her interests may very well lie not only at the psychological level of the individual but also at the social level. On such a view her illness should be understood not as a private one, but as an individual manifestation of a greater social problem. If this is accurate, we may describe her as suffering, in this case very directly and in the short-term, from false consciousness: the anorexic's false, inauthentic, irrational "interest" in being thin requires, and thus precipitates, the suppression of her true missing interest in nourishment, not to mention her interests in things other than self-sculpture.

It is possible however, that scientists will discover that anorexia is a disorder caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain which is not related to social pressure but which for some reason disproportionately affects the female brain. Anorexia would then be properly described as a mental illness whose proximate cause is biological. If so, then while the anorexia example still reveals that interests are distinct from their recognition, the illness is not properly characterized as a social one, and thus it is not a case of false consciousness. Even if the alternative is not likely the true explanation, we will now examine a different example of the same sort, so that the point about Missing Interests does not rest on the plausibility of one kind of case.
2. The Deferential Wife

The classic case of the same kind in the philosophical literature comes from Thomas Hill: the deferential wife who defines herself in terms of being subordinate to her husband. She does not defer to her husband begrudgingly, as so many women do, because, perceiving the restricted nature of her range of choices, she feels that she does not have a choice but to do so. Hence, this is not a case of fatalism. Nor is it not a case of false consciousness at all as would be true if she chose subservient action in response to the correct perception of a threat—in its most common form, the abusive husband. (In cases of immediate threat, deference is sometimes the right course of action.) The case of the deferential wife is not like this. She (apparently) happily defers to her husband because her sense of self consists in seeing herself as serving him as a good housewife should. It is believing that she has done so successfully that makes her feel satisfied. Hill uses this example to argue that although it would make her miserable if she ceased to be subservient to her husband, and thus would at that level seem to be irrational we still want to describe her as having a rational interest in becoming a fully self-respecting autonomous person. In my terms this is her missing interest.

Like the anorexic, she has an interest of which she is unaware, and, like her, the false interest is the barrier to her recognizing her true one(s). This is a key feature of what I have categorized as cases of Missing Interests. It is key to establishing the very possibility of this kind of entrenched false consciousness. For motivating that possibility requires an explanation of how an individual could fail to recognize or appreciate a fundamental interest. That an individual can have mistaken (factual) beliefs that negatively affect her assessment of the means to satisfying her basic aspirations is obvious, and a fact desire theorists make much of. That an individual can fail to reflect on a simple want, fail critically to reflect on its nature and thus on its compatibility with her basic aims is, if not obvious, readily believed. But the claim that an
individual can fail to recognize a fundamental (objective) interest, aim, aspiration as such is only plausible if we can understand what she would mistake it for.

In the case of the deferential wife, it is not, as we might expect, that she fails to have a basic aspiration to lead an autonomous life because she fails to form a project of her own. On the contrary, the problem is that she has a project, but a "false" one—serving her husband. The point here is that it is the existence of such a false interest that keeps hidden from the subject the fact that she does not have a project of her own. A basic desire for subservience, indeed a fundamental aspiration to serve, plainly makes it hard to recognize an interest in autonomy. The claim is not merely that one has false interests, but that one has false interests—typically, in the case of Missing Interests, a fairly consistent set—which are related in such a way to one's true interests (often as contradictory) that the identification with the former precludes the possibility of recognizing the latter. Hence my claim in Chapter 2 that while at the level of more adequate information the victim of false consciousness engages in behavior that can itself be described as irrational, at the level of understanding available to the victim, her behavior appears, and is from that distorted perspective, quite rational.

IV. Towards an Alternative to the Mentalistic View of Interests

I will now attempt to argue that both versions of sophisticated subjectivism can account for the above putative cases of false consciousness only by introducing an element of normative evaluation, a commitment they both claim to avoid. Moral value cannot be reduced to mental attitudes if such a reduction must appeal to the very values it purports to explain. Even more, I want to claim that the problem is not merely with these kinds of cases—what the subjectivist might claim are simply limiting cases. The category of cases I have termed Missing
Interests are revealing of a greater structural problem with subjectivism, namely, its mentalistic treatment of interests.

Response to the Coherentist Subjectivist

I have attributed to the Coherentist the view that some desires (and related beliefs) constitute false consciousness in virtue of not cohering with those desires which are also the subject's fundamental aims. This requires privileging some desires as those which really are the subject's interests. Doing so on purely subjectivist grounds is workable only if it is possible to have a thorough-going subjectivist account of interests. Unfortunately, I want now to claim, the move—though a natural extension of a view that relates interests to desires—is not one that can in fact be made simply on subjective grounds. The move is natural in this sense. Since there is a virtually limitless range of possible states of affairs for which one could have a desire, a theory which connects interests with desires must somehow restrict the range of desires with which they may be identified; it would simply be implausible, not to mention uninteresting to claim that just any desire a subject has is in his interest. Thus, a reasonable solution to the problem would seem to be to restrict interests to the subject's fundamental desires or aspirations.

Despite the initial plausibility of this move however, it is not one which the subjectivist has the grounds to make. The argument to that effect centers on a question which so far has been left unanswered, namely, how the subjective grounds in any particular case are to be established—how, in other words, the allegedly real subjective interests are to be identified. This is not to conflate the criteria of identity of interests with their criteria of identification; the former is a metaphysical issue and the latter an epistemological one. Rather, in arguing that the Coherentist cannot identify genuinely subjective interests without reference to normative standards, I aim to turn on its head a common subjectivist challenge to the objectivist: "if
there are such entities as objective interests, how could we ever know them?” The subjectivist cannot identify interests with desires if their identification relies on the kind of value judgments that are supposed to be explained in terms of a subject’s desiring. An allegedly basic virtue of the subjectivist position is that it avoids the epistemological question the objectivist faces. Yet in departing from the full set of a subject’s desires to a privileged set that allegedly constitutes their genuinely subjective interests, the sophisticated subjectivist of the Coherentist stripe cannot justifiably claim that virtue.

In order to justify privileging a subset of articulated interests as a subject’s fundamental interests the Coherentist presumably has two basic kinds of choices: to rely on the individual’s report of which of her interests are ranked as basic ends, or to assume that it will be fairly obvious judging from behavior which expressed desires represent the basic ends of the individual and which do not. Either way, in order plausibly to ground interests in the subject’s perspective, identification of that perspective cannot stray far from the subject’s articulated aims. But that constraint presents a problem. A subjectivist position that does not diverge from a subject’s expressed interests at all violates our intuitions because it has no means of criticizing the quality of the life of either the anorexic or the deferential wife. Yet even if we agree that those intuitions—which motivate the objectivist project in ethics—should not alone decide the issue, the subjectivist position itself is destabilized once it diverges from the subject’s expressed interests.

Determining what modified set of incoherence-resolving desires constitutes her fundamental (subjective) interests, must assume interests which there is little if any ground to claim are subjective, that is, really held by the subject. Furthermore, even if picking out a subject’s fundamental interests can be done without presupposing extra-subjective judgments,
even to privilege what are obviously a subject's expressed fundamental interests at a given moment would seem to violate what follows from the logic of subjectivism, namely, that the subject should be the one to decide when it is appropriate to revise her assessments. In substantiating this charge I aim to reveal the deeper structural problem with the "mentalism" of subjectivism.

My objection cannot simply be that the whole of a subject's desires might be a "bad lot" in which case even a revised coherent set would be a bad lot, perhaps even a worse lot! This would be straightforwardly to beg the question against the subjectivist. Rather, I will claim that privileging a certain set of a subject's articulated desires, as basic or fundamental interests—in order to avoid the consequence that what others perceive to be intolerable states of affairs may be in a individual's interest—illicitly imports an extra-subjective view of what the individual's interests must be. Coherentist Subjectivism faces the following conundrum. In diverging from the subject's actual set of articulated interests it runs the risk of losing its subjectivist grounds because in order to remain true to some subset of that set, it relies on an implicit appeal to extra-subjective considerations. The Coherentist Subjectivist's move away from Pure Subjectivism thus puts it on a slippery slope to objectivism.

The Possibility of Reassessment of Priorities

Let us suppose that, taking an individual's assessment of her ends as given, it is possible to show as a matter of empirical fact that some course of action does not serve as a means to some others. This would make it possible for a Coherentist to attribute a mistake about interests to that individual if he did not recognize the inconsistency of satisfaction of a desire for that course of action with satisfaction of his more basic aims. On such a view individuals are fallible with respect to recognizing the compatibility of their desires with their self-ascribed
ends, yet infallible with respect to judging the value or relative importance of their ends. By preserving the subjectivity of value, the Coherentist thereby remains true to Pure Subjectivism. The idea is to preserve respect for the subjective perspective by claiming that when it has cast its reflective gaze, so to speak, on a felt want, the assessment it generates is authoritative. It is only because so-called lower level desires have not been subjected to that reflective gaze, have not been evaluated (as fundamental aspirations have), that their value may be assessed from the outside. The Coherentist position seems thereby to preserve respect for the autonomy of the individual by allowing attributions of error only with respect to things over which the subject has failed to exercise autonomous critical reflection.

Yet in order to claim that it is possible to mistake the compatibility of a desire \( x \) with \( y \), where \( y \) is a considered fundamental aim, and still deny that it is possible for the subject to mistake the value of \( y \), the Coherentist seems forced to assume not only that the subject’s attachment to her interest \( y \) is stable in a way that her attachment to other desires (like \( x \)) is not, but that individuals are always indifferent to the possible means to exercising their interests. For the Coherentist claim that a particular subject may be mistaken about the consistency of some of her desires with her more basic aims implies that she ought to adopt alternative means to those aims; otherwise the position would be rather uninteresting. But even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that imputing normative errors is an unacceptable intrusion on the subject’s “autonomy of assessment,” and concern ourselves only with allegedly empirical errors, it seems implausible to assume that one’s attachment to one’s fundamental ends is impervious to new information even if the end in question has been, until then, essential to the subject’s identity.
Suppose the subject were to discover that \( x \) is not in fact a means to \( y \), that \( x \) is incompatible—by its nature—with \( y \). She might well reject \( x \), as the Coherentist must suppose. It might well be rational for her to reject \( x \) assuming she maintains her interest in \( y \). But should we assume that the subject would *necessarily* continue to consider \( y \) a fundamental interest, and to reject \( x \)? While the subject may originally have developed a taste for \( x \), thinking it was compatible with \( y \), having acquired that taste for \( x \), it is certainly possible that she would continue to identify subjectively with \( x \), despite learning of its incompatibility with \( y \). And not merely because of a weakness of will; the strength of attachment to \( x \), coupled with new information, might cause her to reassess her attitude towards \( y \) and revise her priorities. The subject may develop an attachment to the activity or life-style involved in \( x \) that the Coherentist would have to treat as mere means. Thus we simply have no reason to assume that with new information the subject would necessarily continue to be subjectively attached to what was, prior to her greater understanding, a fundamental aim.

The claim that she *should* be more subjectively attached to \( y \) is, of course, not open to the Coherentist subjectivist since that position disavows the claims that ends are rationally evaluable in this way. Furthermore, it would be question-begging to say that at the time the subject identifies with \( y \), her desire for \( x \) constitutes false consciousness. This is so even if we ignore the oddity of a position which would have false consciousness be a fleeting state one fell in and out of. It would not even make sense for the reasons given above—since the attachment to \( y \), the subjectivist foundations, is precisely what is in question.

Why, one might ask, does the Coherentist need to claim that the subject would necessarily remain committed to the originally expressed interest-as-end? The answer is that without that assumption there is no Coherentist grounding for critiquing \( x \) in the first place. It
was only because \( y \) was taken to be a genuine subjective interest, that \( x \), possessing an inferior degree of the subjective "attachment element," could allegedly be deemed a mistake for failing to cohere with it. It is \( y \) which served as the grounding for the ascription of false consciousness vis à vis \( x \). Since \textit{ex hypothesi} the subject actually identifies with incompatible interests, if an objective judgment as to which she \textit{ought} to identify with is to be avoided, the subjectivist must provide some subjective reasons to privilege one interest over another. If a subject's basic aim is privileged in virtue of his endorsement (in word or deed) of it, oddly, we find we must assume that reflection cannot impact on his desires in such a way that he re-evaluates his heretofore subjectively endorsed interest-as-end, and rejects it. For that possibility would disintegrate the foundation for the attributed error.

The Coherentist attempt to extend the (subjective) attachment that subject's have to their fundamental aspirations to their real, if unrecognized means, seems at first glance quite reasonable. But it looks less reasonable, even on grounds the subjectivist should recognize, if the subject’s assessment of her priorities must be fixed so that they are impervious to greater information—when, for example, she discovers that they are incompatible with until then lower-level wants.

The alternative is to allow reassessment of priorities by identifying an individual’s interests with what she \textit{would} identify as her priorities given more adequate information. This option gives up on holding constant the value of an espoused end as articulated at a given moment. Instead, it treats the fundamental aspirations or ends counterfactually—as what the subject \textit{would} want under more ideal conditions. But while such a move enables the Coherentist to escape the above problem, it invites another. For in giving up the firm subjective grounding of the subject's own report, it runs the risk of losing subjectivist
grounding altogether. Yet if respect for the individual’s perspective requires allowing the subject the autonomy to revise her priorities in light of new information and understanding, then as long as there is the possibility of greater understanding, the possibility of reassessment must be allowed. The position thus slides quickly into the view that a subject’s interests are those he would choose under ideal conditions of full and complete information and properly functioning rational faculties. Such positions may still be subjectivist in holding to the view that the subject’s endorsement remains a necessary, albeit counterfactual, condition of something being in one’s interest. But they have strayed far from respect for the actual subject’s perspective; and yet it was respect for each person in their individual particularity that allegedly gave subjectivism an edge over objectivism.

If the subjectivist position is forced to admit that the epistemological question of how we identify interests can come apart from the question of analysis of their identity conditions, it already gives up its purported advantage over objectivism. If it also has to answer the epistemological question, it too faces the paternalism charge. (We will return to this issue in Chapter 4.)

It would seem that the Coherentist is forced either unjustifiably to hold current priorities as fixed—for the reasons given above—or it collapses into the view that an individual’s subjective perspective is authoritative only so long as he is ideally rational. Yet if the subjectivist objection to objectivist views of interests is that they risk being too rigid, identification of genuinely subjective interests with something approaching a single ideally consistent and rational plan, suffers the same fate.

The problem stems from the separation of questions of what is ultimately valuable for an individual on the one hand, from questions about information relevant to issues of ultimate
value on the other. If the position takes the individual's currently articulated ends as given—in order to attribute mistakes concerning matters of information relevant to the satisfaction of those ends—then it cannot allow that the subject would, if apprised of the same information, revise her ends. It must erroneously assume that awareness of the factual error would never impact upon the value judgment. But this move would appear unjustifiable on subjectivist grounds for it would violate the raison d'être of the position—namely, respect for the subject's perspective. The position cannot allow, as it should on subjectivist grounds, the individual the final authority, or continual authority over her priorities, even if it seems to allow her the initial authority. The problem is the rigid gap posited between questions of fact and questions of value, where revision of (non-basic) interests in light of mistakes involving facts rest on the stability of a given value.

This problem and the one discussed in the next section are mere symptoms of a greater problem with subjectivist theories of interests. The subjectivist qua liberal attempt to tie interests necessarily to some mental state of the individual is fundamentally ill-conceived. Cast in this light, the problems under discussion here would appear to be insurmountable since they result from the basic form of the position.

Questionable Foundations

The problem we have considered so far is how it is possible, taking the subject's supposed ends at face value, to justify on subjectivist grounds attachment to those ends sufficient to outlast new information about what other pursuits it rules out. There is another problem pertaining to justifying identification of fundamental interests, namely, how it could be that what many would consider to be intolerable circumstances could be in someone's interest, let alone be their fundamental interest. An examination of our test cases, the point of which was
to motivate the real possibility that an individual's fundamental aims can themselves be the product of adverse social conditioning will reveal that an account of interests which begins with supposed fundamental aims, is of necessity, blind to cases where the alleged false consciousness concerns the subject's basic aspirations.

One way Coherentist positions have attempted to deal with these so-called limiting cases is to argue that the individuals in question have even more basic interests than, in the case of the anorexic, being thin, and in the case of the deferential wife, furthering her husband's projects. The more basic interests, it is claimed, provide subjectivist foundations for critiquing the aims it is reasonable to fear are the result of pernicious social conditioning. Yet unless Coherentist Subjectivism illicitly assumes a view of at least basic common sense objective interests, I will claim that it has no grounds for privileging the supposedly more fundamental (subjective) interests as the interests subjectively held by the subject. Thus, it cannot treat the anorexic or the deferential wife as mistaking their interests, let alone as suffering false consciousness. Consider the two conditions Hyland claims would be necessary to ascribe error about fundamental interests:

In an extreme case it could even be empirically established that the totality of a person's substantive values and preferences were contrary to fundamental interests. For this to be possible two things would have to be established; firstly, that the person in question had a second-level value lying in the general goal of living a life that would be experienced as fulfilling, enriching and productive of happiness and contentment. And secondly, that the complete achievement of the first-level substantive goals and preferences would not, in fact, bring about the desired fulfillment and contentment. 33

I will address the case of the anorexic to expose the problem with the first condition, and the case of the deferential wife to show the problem with the second.
The Anorexic

It seems reasonable to suppose that the anorexic, unless suicidal, will have a general goal of leading a good life. And since it is not hard to show that starving to death makes pursuing anything at all not merely difficult but impossible, there is no question of an anorexic achieving the desired fulfillment and contentment to which, we are to suppose, she considers being thin a means. The problem in the case of the anorexic is thus not with Hyland’s second condition—with establishing that serious damage to one’s health, or death, is incompatible with pursuing what one perceives to be a good life. The problem is rather with treating the anorexic’s desire to be thin as anything but her fundamental aim. Yet the Coherentist would have to deny this in order to be able to capture it as a case of false consciousness.

If we judge from her behavior, being thin is her fundamental goal. After all, she pursues it faithfully at the expense of her health, despite the consequences to her physical well-being. This makes it implausible to claim that she has a more considered subjective interest in being healthy which could serve as the grounds for critiquing her desire to be “unnaturally” thin. Indeed, judging from her report and her behavior, she thinks of being thin as necessary for her well-being and behaves accordingly. From her perspective, being thin is a necessary condition of her leading a fulfilled and contented life. What grounds can there be then, for claiming that her desire to be very thin is a mistake? It cannot be in virtue of being inconsistent with her desire to lead a fulfilling life as conceived by her. It would seem that on subjectivist grounds, the anorexic’s attachment to her goal of being thin justifies, if anything, the opposite conclusion—namely, a rejection of any desire inconsistent with her being thin.

Since being thin is such a consuming desire for the anorexic, we cannot criticize it as a mistaken means to, or as not cohering with, her interest in happiness (or any other interest we
might plug in), on the grounds that the latter is more strongly felt, or more basic. We cannot, because from her subjective perspective, being thin is what matters to her fundamentally; it is her fundamental subjective interest. The problem for a Coherentist attempt to explain her situation as one of false consciousness is that there do not seem to be any subjective grounds for arguing that her desires are incoherent or that her interest in being thin is less important to her than that of being healthy. It will not work to reply that at some level the interest in being healthy is reflected in another desire; to say, for example, that the anorexic has other desires which require living and so she must implicitly desire to eat—in virtue of those other desires—since eating and living are necessary to their realization. This reply, while plausible from an Objectivist perspective, is not open to the Coherentist because the tragedy of anorexia nervosa is precisely that the victim’s desire to be thin is so much more powerful than her other desires that its non-satisfiability (even emaciated she sees herself as fat), if unchecked, will result in her fatality.

If it seems reasonable to suppose that an individual simply could not have such a strong desire to be thin, then notice how far the Coherentist Subjectivist has slipped from Pure Subjectivism down the slope to Objectivism. That supposition manifests the view that it would by so odd for an ordinary person to lack a higher-level interest in leading a fulfilling life that we have to assume something has gone wrong with the subject’s ability to assess her own interests, if this, presumably universal one, is lacking. (This, of course, is the move that the Authentic Subjectivist will make.) Since a subjectivist cannot impute such a higher-level interest to a subject independently of their endorsement, if Coherentism is to attribute false consciousness to the anorexic, it must do so illicitly. Since we do not have good reason to think that the subject herself privileges any desire over the desire to be thin, the attempt by the Coherentist to privilege a more basic interest with which that desire is incompatible, must
assume a commonly held and therefore easily imperceptible view about her having other fundamental interests.

It is important to notice that the challenge to the Coherentist attempt to find a more basic interest than the desire to be thin, one which would provide the grounds for criticism of the latter, does not need to assume that ideological conditioning in this case is complete, that the subject's ideological consciousness must be “air tight”. Cunningham, as we saw, seizes on the gaps in ideological consciousness to try to capture many cases of what I have termed Missing Interests, his “cheerful and content,” as cases of fatalism. My claim against the Coherentist does not require that ideologies or their internalization be perfectly consistent. It supposes instead that such cracks are not visible to the subject. Hence the claim that the Coherentist must illicitly assume common sense beliefs about how subjectively attached a person must be, for example, to her desires for more fulfilling components of a good life. The point of the claim that the anorexic pursues her aim of being thin at the expense of everything else is that there are no grounds, judging from her point of view, for claiming that she is more attached to any other aim.

The Deferential Wife

The case of the Deferential Wife is analogous. The deferential wife has no “goal of living a life that would be experienced as fulfilling, enriching and productive of happiness and contentment” to which we have reason to suppose she is more strongly committed than her desire to serve her husband’s needs. For the deferential wife believes that satisfying the needs and desires of her husband, working to satisfy his projects, is what it is for her to pursue a fulfilling life. As with the anorexic, the first of Hyland’s conditions does not provide the
grounds to criticize her fundamental subjective desire to serve and thus seemingly is without the force necessary to capture cases of Missing Interests.

The second condition is equally inadequate. In order to describe the case of the deferential wife as one of false consciousness, it would have to be established, according to the second condition, that deferring in servitude to someone else's aims cannot in fact satisfy the wife's general goal of leading a fulfilling life. But whereas it is plausible to think that the anorexic's goal of being thin is incompatible with such a general goal (because it presents such a basic, practical obstacle), it is not plausible in the case of the deferential wife—not, that is, without reference to the objective value (disvalue) of a life of servitude. For there are no subjective grounds for claiming that servitude cannot be fulfilling for a subject who claims to find it so as a result of supposedly considered judgment. Hyland's second condition is indicative of how subjectivisms tend—of their own momentum—towards objectivism. In the attempt to find interests allegedly more basic than the problematic ones, the Coherentist position is forced to ascribe very general interests in the means to "fulfillment and contentment," formulations of which are so general they seem to permit a vast range for a theory of objective interests.

I have tried to show that picking out on subjective grounds desires which constitute the subject's basic interests and with which other desires must be made to cohere, seems unworkable. The point of the test cases is to show that there are plausible candidates for false consciousness which we have no subjective grounds for describing as such. Even to favor the subject's current priorities is to favor them on extra-subjective grounds; it is implicitly to assume those interests ought to continue to outweigh any that conflict with them. Yet to favor any interest over either the anorexic's subjective interest in being thin or the deferential wife's
subjective interest in servitude can only be to illicitly assume extra-subjectively of each that she must value the former interest more. Appeal to objective interests will thus be required even to say that an individual's subjective interests do not cohere, sometimes even to say that she mistakes the means to a basic interest.

Responses to a Coherentist Rejoinder

The Coherentist might contend that while it is true that they must appeal to something more than individual subjective considerations to capture these putative cases of false consciousness, that appeal is minimal for it involves appeal only to those interests that are uncontroversial because universally accepted. Such inter-subjectively shared "values" do not, the Coherentist would claim, require acceptance of the mysterious metaphysical entities that appeal to objective interests are alleged to be. Unfortunately, empirically, it is simply false that there are these kinds of uncontroversial interests. In many times and places, appeals for autonomy for women, (as, more generally, for all individuals), or even to health (of women, the indigent, etc.) are not uncontroversial. These are far from distant or insignificant controversies. Take the case of the political agenda of groups on the religious right, such as the Promise Keepers. Their insistence that men must take back the leadership role they have abdicated to their wives is surely incompatible with describing Hill's Deferential Wife as suffering false consciousness.

A recent popular article entitled "The Joy of Starving: A Defense of Skinniness" would have us believe that anorexia is just another lifestyle choice. The unnamed author appeals to nothing less than the value of autonomy. The autonomy of "self-starvers," she argues, ought to be respected and anorexia should not be categorized as a disease. She points out that not only are other decisions concerning the physical alteration of an individual's body
for aesthetic purposes respected as completely private, but that interference with the actual structure of our bodies—liposuction, silicone and collagen implants—has become a societal norm. Pointing to other examples of harmful behavior, the author claims that the motive behind self-starvation is misunderstood. It is not only motivated by a desire to look skinny, but by the promise of an elusive high, the same high pursued in starvation as part of ritual and religious practices to induce hallucination. Should we respect the autonomy of a considered judgment to starve oneself? The author’s defense of anorexia is considered and motivated and thus cannot simply be dismissed.

The point here is that if even as supposedly a basic interest as the need for nourishment can, in the right circumstances, become a controversial claim, there can be no appeal to basic inter-subjectively shared interests to handle fundamental errors about interests that characterize cases of Missing Interests.

In addition, there are two conceptual responses an Objectivist can make to the move to appeal only to basic uncontroversial values. The first is to point out that, since once one of a kind is admitted, there is no parsimony advantage to admitting some objective interests while denying others. Thus, the Coherentist rejoinder is without force. The second response, building on the first, is the same as the one I will raise against the Authentic Subjectivist. To avoid attributions of objective interests to particular individuals by assuming inter-subjective interests, the positions either remain true to the spirit of subjectivism by unjustifiably assuming the moral authority of even an overwhelming majority, or, grant the core of objectivism, namely, that interests are distinct from our recognition of them.
Diagnosing the Structural Problem

The problems discussed above are mere symptoms of a greater problem with subjectivist theories of interests. The willingness of sophisticated subjectivists to depart from Pure Subjectivism, to admit that a subject’s interests diverge from the set of her articulated wants, desires, preferences, raises this question: how much can they differ without giving up subjectivist grounding? My claim has been that determining how much is enough but not too much cannot be done on purely subjective grounds. While privileging an expressed interest at a given time-slice seems arbitrary, and so even on the grounds that one ought to respect that individual’s point of view (i.e. that individual’s character at that time), allowing the possibility of reassessment means that the position loses its grip qua subjectivist. The attempt to retain a subjective anchor, so to speak, while attempting to meet the challenge of providing the theoretical space to describe as oppressed those whose conceptions and values have been distorted by ideologies, is thus unstable.

The two related problems discussed above—the problem of reassessment and the problem of questionable foundations—reveal why it is that a subjectivist qua liberal attempt to tie interests to some mental state of the individual is fundamentally ill-conceived. The issue has to do with the view of the “self”. It is not that subjectivism is worse off than any other ethical theory in having to give an account of the self, but rather that despite its pretensions, it is no better off. It requires what it claims to eschew, namely, a substantive, value-laden view of the individual subject or self. (In the next section, I will make the same charge against the Authentic Subjectivist.) The attempt to reduce interests to some mental attitude on the part of the subject is an attempt to account for interests without having to address the question of what a person should be, questions about the nature of the self. Yet the point of both problems discussed above is that any such reduction—other than the simple one effected by Pure
Subjectivism—cannot avoid presupposing and thereby privileging some *normative view* of the self.

That this is a problem even for subjectivist positions which—accepting the slide to objectivism—allow for reassessment, is revealed in Susan Babbitt's criticism (based on feminist and anti-racist political theory) of Peter Railton's liberal account of objectified subjective interests. Though his account claims to being objectivist, it still counts as subjectivist according to our working definition, for it invokes the endorsement requirement—to the effect that a subject's endorsement is necessary for something to be in her interest. That the problem at hand is true even of such “hybrid” positions reveals that it is generated by the very structure of liberal subjectivism.

Railton is concerned to defend a liberal account of interests that can adequately account for the problem of pernicious social conditioning. Thus he aims to allow for radical criticism of a subject's perceived interests and desires. He argues that an individual's good is determined by asking what an idealized version of that particular individual—one with “unlimited cognitive and imaginative powers and full factual and nomological information about his physical and psychological capacities, circumstances, histories, and so on”—would want for the actual (present) individual. To that extent the position is objectivist. Yet what is good for a particular individual, however the idealized version of her decides, must be something *she*, the present individual, would want, something *she* would find compelling. Since an individual's good is tied to her idiosyncratic desires and interests in this way, it can plausibly claim to satisfy liberal intuitions. Yet the concern here is not, as we have already considered, that the position risks losing subjectivist grounds because it diverges too much from the actual
individual. It is rather that even in trying to retain those grounds, the position unjustifiably limits the range of the subject’s possible interests. Unjustifiable on what grounds?

Consider. Railton’s position allows that an individual’s interests can diverge from currently articulated interests, but, like other sophisticated subjectivisms, only within a certain range. Other accounts that allow for vivid imagining—such as Rawls’ and Brandt’s—are always interpreted from the subject’s initial perspective. Railton’s position seems to have more radical potential than their standard view of rationality since it makes room for the role of understanding that is acquired experientially. That extension would seem to allow the position to admit the relevance of personal change to the acquiring of more adequate understanding. Railton recognizes that sometimes a subject’s desires evolve not as a result of deliberation, but as a result of the feedback associations of unreflective experimentation. (Notice that this would seem to address Rosen’s worry about what he thinks is Rationalism’s exclusive focus on what is voluntary.) This permits Railton to include in the idealizations not only changes in an individual’s wants in light of ideal information, but changes in the standards of the initial individual in light of her idealized version experiencing the realization of some of her possible choices. The latter feature is essential for the case of Missing Interests. Railton’s position thus promises the power to address what the standard versions could not, namely, the problem that one’s fundamental values or standards may be negatively affected by social conditioning. For, Babbitt claims, it is “the acquiring of more adequate standards through personal experience and change that explains a person’s being able to properly interpret her experience.”

Yet despite the apparent potential for radical criticism gained by Railton’s inclusion of the knowledge the present individual would gain by her idealized version acting out possible options, his idealization, in remaining true to subjectivism, must arbitrarily limit the range of
standards that can be revised. For he is, *qua* subjectivist, committed to restricting that range to those values the individual at the initial time-slice cares about, that is, to *her* imaginative space at present; this because her endorsement of her idealized self's assessments is required for something to be in her interest. Insofar as Railton's position is true to subjectivism, by retaining the privilege of the distinctive perspective of the present individual, it rules out what Babbitt calls transformations of the self or, to use the language I will adopt in Chapter 4, transformations in fundamental character traits. It does not allow that it can be in an individual's interest to become something which her present self cannot imagine becoming. By favoring certain "selves" as possibly in the interests of the individual—those selves the current self can imagine being or becoming—it prejudges without argument, the range of possible individuals she ought to be. Hence the charge that the subjectivist position is inherently conservative: it rules out not only the possibility that a transformation of an individual's basic values can be in her interests, but, even more dangerously, that a transformation in society's basic values can be in her interests.

Such privileging is clearly arbitrary and objectionable from an objectivist perspective. But perhaps it is so even from the subjectivist perspective—to the extent that we can still differentiate such a perspective. For presumably it is unjustifiable, if one is concerned with respect for an individual, to disallow the possibility that the subject could decide to become a different person, or find herself a different person and consider herself to be better off for it.

The problem is the implicit assumption that the range of possible choices the *actual* individual could comprehend—even in light of experience in addition to adequate information—is wide enough to justify limiting an individual's possible interests to it. Here is the tension. If the endorsement requirement is really doing work, it must limit that range to
the imaginative space of the initial individual; but that limitation is arbitrary. Yet if the idealization does the work Railton wants it to, it does so only because it illicitly presupposes that the actual individual is capable of comprehending what a developed, autonomous self can; in that case the endorsement requirement, the endorsement of the actual individual, is not doing any work. The charge might seem odd given that his criterion for the idealized version of the individual is that she have unlimited cognitive and imaginative powers as well as full factual information about her condition. The explanation for this is that the problem lies not with the idealization, but with the constraint that the endorsement of the actual individual is required. Railton faces this dilemma. Either he assumes that the actual individual has the same comprehension abilities as an ideally developed, autonomous self, in which case he gives up the subjectivist endorsement requirement, or he must suppose that being presented with full information, including information about possibilities, is sufficient for understanding. For it is not clear how the individual in question is supposed to be capable of appreciating what her idealized version with unlimited cognitive and imaginative powers is capable of judging.

What Railton tries but fails to capture, and what Babbitt emphasizes, are the conditions necessary for an individual to be able to imagine fundamental values sufficiently different from his current values and thus to envision the right kind of choices for himself. “In the absence of certain kinds of conditions or at least the capacity to exercise radical moral imagination, some possibilities are not thinkable at all; they cannot make sense.” Thus Babbitt claims:

[I]f a person’s good is defined in terms of the information she would gather through the living out of options she currently cares about, it is hard to see how it would accommodate the rationality of the kinds of actions and choices the Deferential Wife would have to take to acquire the right kinds of desires and interests. The problem is that in some cases, people don’t possess or even care to possess the relevant sorts of desires.
The allowance for experiential knowledge is an important step in that direction, but the endorsement constraint renders it impotent to deal with cases in which the imaginative capacities are seriously hampered by ideology. What Railton neglects is the role of actual experience and education in understanding. His idealized thought experiment seems to assume that it is sufficient to plunk someone in circumstances of greater information or even an experience machine for them to have the conceptual understanding necessary to interpret it; but this is to ignore how understanding grows out of experience and education.

The question is not simply about acquiring the right desires but about the process that may be necessary for an individual to come to an understanding that makes their value apparent, understanding gained through experience and other education. The point goes further than the limits of imagination. Sometimes it is not even enough to be in alternative circumstances to be able to comprehend, let alone to judge them. Consider for example, the difficulty in imagining a unicorn if one is unacquainted with horns and horses. That difficulty is not necessarily alleviated simply by being presented with one if one does not have the experience and education sufficient to comprehend what one is seeing.

With respect to the problem of Missing Interests then, Railton’s position fares no better than standard accounts, because like theirs, his account still treats rationality in terms of predefined ends, those comprehensible by the individual at the initial time-slice. Though Railton allows some possibility of a change of ends, he does so only within the range of ends predefined by the level of understanding and limits of experience of that individual. By remaining true to subjectivism then, he cannot allow that the initial individual’s perspective itself is fundamentally flawed, nor that she can have an interest in having radically different experiences, and education. He is without grounds to claim, for example, that a slave has an
interest in being free if she has never had the taste of freedom necessary to understand what it means to make decisions for herself. Yet Babbitt's fundamental and essential insight, drawing on feminist literature emphasizing the importance of personal development, is that oppressed individuals in particular may have an interest not in realizing, but in transforming their fundamental values and aims. "Education, certain kinds of travel and many personal relationships get chosen for what they will contribute to a person's capacity to choose rather than for what they contribute to the achieving of predetermined ends."

Babbitt’s concern is with the limited range of possibilities that members of oppressed groups can imagine for themselves, but the point can be extended to those who oppress—concerning both the range of possibilities they imagine for themselves, as well as those they can imagine for those whom they oppress.

The aim of morality properly conceived is not the liberal subjectivist one, reduced to a focus on what the right thing to do is given our particular ends; moral thinking includes that, but also involves becoming the right kind of person. Yet that project is ruled out by the very structure of subjectivist treatments of interests. The attempt to argue that a subject's interests are relatively different from the articulated interests of the individual, and yet relevantly similar, is misconceived. It is not only unstable but objectionable in its view of cognition and motivation, and in its consequent lack of respect for human potential. A subject's endorsement, while no doubt ideal, cannot be even a necessary condition of something being in her interest if we are to avoid unjustifiably ruling out an interest in developing the right kind of aims in autonomy and flourishing for the anorexic, the deferential wife, and anyone who—though perhaps not content in their oppression—has been denied the opportunity to imagine the right kind of possibilities for him or herself.
In what remains, I will attempt to show that the Authentic Subjectivist position does not escape this charge since the problem—a subject’s endorsement being a necessary condition of something being in one’s interest—defines subjectivism.

**Response to the Authentic Subjectivist**

It is awareness that privileging some of a subject’s desires requires appeal to extrsubjunctive consideration that motivates Sumner to attempt a different strategy in the form of Authentic Subjectivism. His position even anticipates the problem of privileging the subject’s assessment of her interests at a given time by claiming that even new information is only relevant to assessing an interest if the subject at a later time would amend her assessment in light of it. But although the Authentic Subjectivist position does not suffer the two particular problems raised against the Coherentist Subjectivist, I will now argue that it suffers from the same general problem raised against that position. As I have just claimed, the general problem is a structural feature of the liberal subjectivist attempt to tie interests to the mental states of the individual in the attempt to account for why it is that those interests are hers.

The only way to limit the range of an individual’s expressed interests as those which count as her genuine subjective interests, is somehow to smuggle in value judgments. Whether Coherentist or Authentic Subjectivist that appeal is implicit, and because it assumes what fits our intuitions, it goes unnoticed. While the Coherentist option would require tacit appeal to objective interests to pick out those of an individual’s espoused interests that are genuine interests, the Authentic option, I will now argue, requires tacit appeal to objective interests to pick out the conditions necessary for autonomous determination of one’s interests. Even to suspect certain cases, and not others, as ones in which it is feared that the individual has internalized others’ interests, is often already to assume “normal” desires corresponding to
"normal" interests. But what are "normal" desires and interests if not those we have judged extra-subjectively to be within the range of the possible components of a good life for creatures like us? Why question the anorexic's desire to be thin, for example, unless we implicitly assume an interest in nourishment or some other interest independently of her self-professed interests?

One might think that this way of posing these questions is unfair to the Authentic Subjectivist because it reverses the order of analysis. It is not that the Authentic Subjectivist suspects individual cases because of some extra-subjective feature of the expressed desires, but because the conditions of choice look as if desires formed under them are unlikely to be autonomous. But the same problem arises even if the order of suspicion is reversed: to judge certain conditions as those which are necessary for autonomous choice is to assume a substantive view of an autonomous self.

Recall Sumner's conditions of authentic choice. First, the individual's assessment must be based on information sufficient for him to judge accurately according to his own priorities. Second, the priorities by which he tests those particular assessments, his basic beliefs and values, must be ones upon which the individual can and has critically reflected. Sumner avoids the problem of reassessment by insisting that $A$ is a subjective interest of a subject $S$ if and only if $S$ endorses $A$ for $S$ and would continue to endorse $A$ for $S$ even with new information about $A$. He avoids the problem of blindness to the effects of social conditioning on an individual's basic values by insisting that $A$ is a subjective interest of a subject $S$ only if $S$ is an autonomous subject when $S$ endorses $A$. Sumner's account is developed explicitly as an alternative to hybrid attempts to deal with the problem of distinguishing ideological standards from authentic ones. Such positions are subjectivist insofar as they preserve the endorsement requirement,
but they are objectivist in adding the requirement that for something to be in someone's interests, it must be independently valuable. Though the problem of ideological standards of evaluation could be avoided by stipulating the proper standards by which individuals ought to judge their lives, as hybrid approaches do, Sumner aims to remain true to subjectivism by resisting such value judgments. The question is whether his autonomy requirement must smuggle in such standards nonetheless.

Sumner recognizes the possibility that it does. The analogy between welfare and secondary qualities threatens the following problem. Subjective analyses of perceptual properties such as color are subject to the objection that they illicitly import objective criteria by stipulating who are to count as standard observers and what are to count as normal conditions. The worry is that a subjective analysis of welfare must suffer the same fate.

On the account we have developed, welfare consists not merely in happiness but in happiness as experienced by informed and autonomous subjects. When does a subject count as informed and autonomous? When what she experiences as satisfying, or endorses as a part of her life, really is prudentially valuable for her. But then being valuable is logically prior to being endorsed as valuable, in which case the latter cannot provide an explication of the former.

Though Sumner does not opt to take up a defense of his position against this objection, he suggests that it can be so defended because "[t]he demand that the self-evaluations be authentic flows from the logic of a subjective theory, which grounds an individual's well-being on her (positive and negative) attitudes." The specifications of who is to count as a 'standard observer' and what is to count as 'normal conditions' are therefore entailed in this case by the nature of subjectivity itself. Although I will not take issue with the claim that the autonomy condition is entailed by the logic of subjectivity, it cannot constitute a defense of the position against the claim that it tacitly appeals to objective value. The problem is that the autonomy condition construed merely as an epistemic notion cannot do the work Sumner expects of it,
and yet if it does the work he claims it does, it is only because the condition implicitly involves substantive appeal to values, including the value of certain "selves" or characters over others.

Consider how it could be determined whether the choice of anorexia as a valuable lifestyle is the result of what Sumner called "autonomy-subverting mechanisms of social conditioning, such as indoctrination, programming, brainwashing, role scripting, and the like." Sumner claimed that an individual's ability to critically reflect even on the values promoted by her socialization process is a good indication that her assessment is autonomous. But the point of the anorexia example is that its defense as a lifestyle choice passes that test. The committed anorexic's argument repudiating the characterization of anorexia as a disease involves, by all appearances, critical reflection on both the consequences of self-starvation and its value. We cannot dismiss it on the grounds that the author is simply ill-informed about the negative consequences of self-starvation; she recognizes the bruising, fuzzy hair growth, and effects on metabolisms. Nor does she fail to appreciate why others would not value it positively; it is recognition of that fact which prompts her to draw the analogy to other projects and activities people pursue which have negative health consequences. Does the fact that she has reflected on the values promoted by her socialization, give us reason to be persuaded that her assessment of her interest in self-starvation is autonomous? Perhaps we ought to bite the subjectivist bullet and accept that a girl or woman can decide that of the options available to her in our (Western affluent) society, being thin to and past the point of starvation, risking permanent health problems, even death, is a worthwhile project for her.

That is the position the Authentic Subjectivist is forced to take. Unless, that is, he can dig deeper and find some reason to question the choice conditions under which the anorexic author makes her assessment. But that is what appears impossible to imply on subjective
grounds. The problem is that Sumner's account does not merely require a subject as an experiencer of pleasure and pain. It also requires, as did Railton's, a subject as an authoritative judge of that experience and its (myriad) consequences. But either the standards for such authority are merely that she critically reflect on her values by comparing them to some other values, in which case the autonomy condition is too minimal to account for the false consciousness of the anorexic and other cases of Missing Interests, or it is substantive enough to handle such cases, but only because it sets some specific values as the standards of comparison, thereby importing extra-subjective value judgments. The Authentic Subjectivist cannot dismiss the anorexic's defense on the grounds that she has not reflected sufficiently— for she has tested her choices and values against those of others and against herself. (Notice that it would not help to require appeal to values outside of one's national culture since to do so would only invite comparison to other examples of women deforming themselves— footbinding, cliterodectomies. Even worse the issue of the degree to which such practices are voluntary could be used as further support of anorexia as a lifestyle choice, ignoring the issue about how voluntary her own actions are.) Her assessment cannot be dismissed, that is, unless—what is unjustifiable on subjectivist grounds—we presuppose that her standards of assessment are inadequate. Only the objectivist allows herself the grounds to claim outright, that bodies sculpted by liposuction, collagen, breast implants and the like, for example, are not adequate standards. To judge the extent to which conditions of choice are conducive of autonomy is, I would suggest, to engage in reflective equilibrium of sorts with our intuitions about what kinds of interests we imagine would be generated by autonomous conditions of choice; but, it is to judge against the background of conceptions of the good. To judge whether a particular individual is in a position adequate to assess her interests is thus to presuppose a view of the kinds of things a competent deliberator would choose.
The problem is revealed in Sumner’s own language. He says that the point of the autonomy condition is to rule out trivial, demeaning or exploitative lifestyles. On the one hand he claims that “we have plenty of good empirical reasons for thinking that, say, a life of servility or subservience is rarely embraced under conditions of full information and autonomy; in fact, the ways in which the conditions of such a life compromise and subvert autonomy form our principal objection against it.” Yet on the other, he says that we should not assume that a career in the sex trade, for example, manifests an insufficient degree of autonomy. Implicit in these remark is Sumner’s judgment that a career in the sex trade is not a life of servility or subservience. (Though the latter remark leaves open the possibility that such a choice may not be fully autonomous, it cannot be a life of subservience or its claim to autonomy would have been ruled out for “good empirical reasons”.) While Sumner might make a valuable point by reminding feminists that they cannot simply assume that a choice of a life in the sex trade is necessarily non-autonomous, he cannot, on good subjectivist grounds, just assume that it is not a life of servitude. Sumner’s own language, revealed in the value-judgment-loaded concept of servitude shows that we cannot help but make value judgments in assessing whether a subject or her choices are autonomous. Though the objectivist position defended here will also claim that “we have good empirical reasons...,” it does not pretend that such observation is independent of a normative understanding of the circumstances observed.

The above charge is a species of a kind launched against other versions of ethical naturalism. Jean Hampton makes the point that what is wrong with “no-nonsense” moral theory, with an ethical naturalism that claims to “refer to no queer objects,” “to attribute no strange powers to human reason,” and “to be entirely consistent with a physicalist metaphysics” is “that the plausibility of [the] approach depends upon the covert importation of the very metaphysical nonsense it claims to eschew.” She uses Hobbes as an example to
argue against contractarian naturalism; but the charge is the same as the one I have just directed at the consequentialist naturalism of Authentic Subjectivism. The problem is with the attempted reduction, not its particular form.

The evidence that assessment of an individual's interests is inescapably normative, Hampton argues, is that we must appeal to a substantive view of the self to distinguish someone who is irrational or "out of their mind" from someone who is not. "[O]ur concepts of health and madness are shot through with norms: to judge someone as sick or well, sane or mad, is to judge him using an ideal as one's yardstick. Hence we cannot use these concepts to select which of our desires is value-defining without importing the normativity we had hoped the desires themselves would explain."52 The same point applies to distinguishing autonomous conditions of choice from autonomy-thwarting conditions. To say that someone who is feverish is not really himself "and so we must discount the preferences he has in his diseased state insofar as they are not really his preferences" is to "make the judgment that his 'real' self is the one we associate with what we take to be a normal body chemistry". But that, Hampton claims, presupposes acceptance of an ideal of a physiologically and psychologically normal human being: implied is the view that the altered state is not only bad for him but obscures the "real" him.53 To the subjectivist rejoinder which claims that value defining preferences have to be generated in a certain physiological way, Hampton simply denies that there is a plausible non-normative reason for linking value only with one kind of desire-generation mechanism. "It looks for all the world as if that linkage rests upon an implicit judgment that this mechanism is 'better' than the 'sick' one, and thus presupposes a normative evaluation."54 The naturalist reduction of value that subjectivism attempts appears plausible only because common sense moral judgments illicily define the range within which identification of an individual's wants with his interests does not seem unreasonable.
One might think that the Authentic Subjectivist can claim that the position only makes appeal to inter-subjectively held values. But again the point of the anorexia example is that neither the Coherentist nor the Authentic Subjectivist can appeal to inter-subjective value to ground their subjectivism because they cannot assume even an interest in nourishment or health as universal. One might still wonder whether the approach, though failing at the level of particular values, might work at the more general level of the conditions of autonomous choice. But the problem is the same, if not worse. If we cannot assume universal assent to one basic value, we are unlikely to find universal assent to the conditions which are to generate all or even most values, given that, as I have just argued, doing so requires balancing against a conception of the good.

The Authentic Subjectivist position aimed to avoid the problems of having to privilege certain of a subject's interests in order to handle cases of pernicious social conditioning by forcing the boundaries of the theory to bear the weight of ruling out the possibility of an authentic non-autonomous interest. But whether the illicit importation of value judgments takes place within the range of interests (as with Coherentism) or at its foundations (as with Authentic Subjectivism), the problem is the same. The attempt to rule out the problem of social conditioning at the limits, at the level of choice conditions, is simply to mask commitment to certain values, albeit basic and thus often commonly shared ones. The attempt to tie the interests of an individual to her mental states in the case of the Authentic Subjectivist relies for its plausibility (assuming it does capture the anorexic and the deferential wife as mistaking interests, and does not simply bite the subjectivist bullet in those cases) on the fact that such identification takes place after all questionable identifications have been ruled out—at the level of the foundations of the theory, the conditions of choice.
We are now in a position to see how Authentic Subjectivism suffers the same general problem as Coherentist Subjectivism by looking at the how the problem with Sumner's theory compares to that of Railton. Railton's position appears arbitrarily to rule out autonomy-enriching transformations that experience and education make possible, with respect to a subject's interests. The only way out of this conundrum would be to build such transformation into what the idealized individual would experience. But then, in order to ensure that the initial individual would endorse the choices of the idealized individual, it would have to assume that the phenomenological feel of experiencing certain goods is universal, thereby undermining its subjectivism. Sumner's account avoids the problem only because it applies only to those subjects who are capable of deciding autonomously, those already experienced (to some sufficient degree) and educated. It thereby undercuts the need to make room for such transformations. But there is a deeper point about the Authentic Subjectivist position.

The blindness of Railton's position to the possibility that a transformation of self can be in an individual's interest, Babbitt argued, is to privilege unjustifiably the range of possible selves that may be in a particular individual's interest to those imaginable from within the conceptual space of a society's dominant ideologies; the range of selves that turn out to be in a subject's possible interests is only as wide as her social conditioning allows. This explains the claim that the subjective position is inherently conservative. Babbitt motivates the need for a theory of interests which would justify a wider range of selves by pointing out that we do not scrutinize what we assume is "normal"; we are not in a position to reflect on what we take for granted. Nor can we reflect on what we cannot comprehend because we lack the appropriate concepts or education.
Yet if Railton's position wrongly assumes the range of possible choices the actual individual could imagine is wide enough, Sumner must similarly assume that the range of things by which a subject judges her basic values in that process of critical reflection which is supposed to be the evidence of the autonomy of her assessment, is sufficiently wide. That is, if he just supposes that the individual compares his or her basic aims with any other aims, he is assuming the choice range is wide enough. That is one horn of the dilemma Sumner faces: to remain true to subjectivism at the expense of unjustifiably favoring certain conceptions of the good life—just those considered. But there is no better subjectivist alternative. The Authentic Subjectivist position cannot stipulate the relevant aspects on which the subject must have reflected. For in picking out the things a subject would have to scrutinize, Sumner would have to presuppose à la Hampton, what is normal. If his position demands only the minimum reflection, the defender of anorexia turns out to be autonomous and not suffering from false consciousness. The position suffers the same fate as Railton's—unjustifiably privileging the status quo, i.e. the selves and thus ideologies currently dominant in the society. Yet if he is to avoid that problem, he must assume some view of the good. That is the other horn of the dilemma. My claim is not that someone would have to scrutinize their fundamental beliefs and values from outside any tradition—I need not assume that is possible—but that judging our standards involves a battle of substantive views of what is valuable.

Insofar as Railton's position remains true to subjectivism, it is blind to the problem of Missing Interests. Sumner's position has the power to address the problem only at the level where it gives up subjectivism, with the conditions of autonomous choice. The logic of subjectivism, the insistence that assessment of an individual's interests be her own, ultimately requires appeal to objective interests to ensure that those interests are hers—not someone else's wrongly internalized. Since the subjectivist analysis of interests has mistaken what might be
evidence of what makes something better for an individual with what makes it better, it must smuggle in an implicit view of the latter, an implicit view of better lives.

IV. Conclusion: Where now?

What then of the endorsement requirement—the requirement that an individual's endorsement is necessary for something to be in her interests—which we took to be the distinguishing feature of subjectivism? One might think that if Sumner's position demonstrates that the autonomy constraint flows out of the logic of subjectivism, the endorsement requirement is preserved intact. But although Sumner does objectivism a favor by showing that respect for the individual motivates the objectivist position as well, there can be no requirement that a person's endorsement is necessary for the reason the category of Missing Interests is meant to demonstrate. Respect for an individual requires, and often, perhaps even typically does in oppressive ideological societies, respect for what she ought to become but has so far been denied the opportunity of becoming—autonomous. Autonomous, not merely in the sense of pursuing her goals, but in the sense of pursuing goals within the range of possible good lives for human beings.

The difficulties for the subjectivist position have been presented as *ad hominem* arguments—once sophisticated subjectivism departs from Pure Subjectivism it must appeal to objectivism. The point of the criticism is to claim that sophisticated subjectivism does not in fact provide a middle ground between Pure Subjectivism and Objectivism. In a nutshell, it is because the subjectivist conception of interests ties interests to the mental states of the individual that it is unable to shirk itself of a trivial but absurd consequence: that having lost the capacity to recognize and articulate the fact, a person lobotomized cannot be described as oppressed. If individuals are, as modern sophisticated subjectivists admit, shaped by their
social/cultural environment in autonomy-thwarting ways, the issue for ethical and political theory is not simply what we as individuals want, but also what kind of persons, characters we can and ought to want to be. The problem of false consciousness thus reveals that the difficulties with subjectivism are structural. We must bite the Pure Subjectivist bullet and accept the consequence that, as Thrasyvamus argued, might makes right, or we bite the objectivist bullet and accept that interests are a function of objective values. There is, I have argued, no other option.

Those who choose the latter must ask counterfactually, if autonomous, if free, what kind of things would people choose. The issue, of course, is what that means. This aim of the final chapter is to outline the kind of account that I believe has the resources to address that issue.

---

1 Frank Cunningham's position which I will address below is a notable exception. See Democratic Theory (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), Ch. 10, pp. 236-267. In it Cunningham spells out a conception of false consciousness which attempts to avoid appeal to objective interests.


3 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, Ch. 6, pp. 138-183.

4 The exception is perhaps an economic view which equates welfare with revealed preferences. See L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, pp. 113-122.


6 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, p. 20.

7 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, p. 37.

8 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, p. 38.


10 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, p. 166.


12 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, p. 130.

23 Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory*, p. 255.
26 Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory*, p. 204.
27 Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory*, p. 257.
29 David Wiggins, p. 6.
33 David Hyland, *Democratic Theory*, p. 204.
39 Susan Babbitt, *Impossible Dreams*, p. 64.
41 Susan Babbitt, *Impossible Dreams*, p. 68.
44 That problem is not particular to Babbitt’s targets, but that it applies to the kind of argument is evidenced by Andrew Kernohan’s criticism of Ronald Dworkin’s version of the endorsement requirement, what Dworkin calls the *constitutive view*. See Kernohan, *Liberalism, Equality and Cultural Oppression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 30-5.
Kemohan cites the example of an atheist homeless person taken, against his will, to a religious shelter. Kemohan points out that while the best life would require that the person endorse going to the shelter, he is still better off not being exposed to the elements. See also Dworkin, "Foundations of Liberal Equality" in The Tanner Lectures on Human Values (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), p. 50.


47 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, p. 171.

48 L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics, p. 182.


CHAPTER FOUR

INTERESTS OF OUR NATURE

[W]e can and must realise now—that whatever the immoral acts of isolated men may be, the moral sense of mankind will perforce instinctively live in humanity so long as the human species does not enter a period of decay; that actions contrary to a moral sense derived from this natural source must of necessity produce reaction in all others, just as mechanical action produces a reaction in the physical world; that in this necessary reaction of men against the anti-sociable actions of some of them, lies the force which preserves the moral sense and the moral habits in human societies, as it preserves sociability and a certain habit of self-restraint in all sociable animals; that, finally, this force is infinitely more powerful than the orders of any religion, or any law-makers.

Peter Kropotkin

Introduction: Two Visions of Our Social Nature

Morality is what makes non-coercive cooperative life possible. The question is what form we think that cooperation can and ought to take. Is the hope for something more than conflict management to be dismissed as an unreachable utopian ideal? Does that hope itself foster a reprehensible desire to paternalistically determine the ways others may lead their lives? The way we answer these questions will depend on the assumptions we make about human beings and their interests. The more we think that the interests of human beings diverge, the more we will think that the question of how a just society would or should be organized is a question of how to manage competing interests fairly. Yet the more we think that human beings have essentially or ultimately the same kinds of interests, the more optimistic we will be about the possibility of a society structured in a way which fosters so-called common interests.

Roughly speaking, the former view represents the subjectivist account of interests, the latter, the objectivist account. The subjectivist charges that the objectivist does not allow for
variety in human interests and hence would justify paternalist imposition of a unitary vision of the human good. Yet, as I attempted to show in the last chapter, the issue concerning what respect for an individual’s perspective entails—what drives subjectivist theories of interests—is parasitic on the prior question of what constitutes an autonomous perspective, where that includes a view of at least the boundaries of human nature. But if that argument is right-headed, since commitment to a view of human nature and hence to a substantive view of the self is implied in any view of what it is to respect individual autonomy, the putative risk of imposing a view of human interests on others is a worry for any theory of interests. A sophisticated subjectivist theory of interests thus cannot legitimately claim as the raison d’être of subjectivism that it constitutes an alternative to an objective interest theory which justifies paternalism.

The point of dispute reflects an old debate about the relationship between liberty and equality; the issue is how substantive the notion of equality ought to be. The liberal appeal to respect the liberty of each individual to determine his own particular ends has moral force only if it is interpreted as a commitment to equality. (This is to accept what William Kymlicka, following Ronald Dworkin, claims our modern sensibility demands, namely, that the test of any viable modern political theory is that it better explains egalitarianism than the alternatives.)

The objectivist charge that in the context of ideological societies subjectivism is inherently conservative, is based on the claim that it has anti-egalitarian consequences, that its laissez-faire approach to interests commits it to disrespects genuine autonomy. A consequence of the subjectivist’s interpretation of the liberal respect for the individual is that what is even a basic good for one may not be a good for all. It is thus impossible on a consistent subjective interest account to describe someone apparently contented in their oppression, someone
whose fundamental aims are ideological—what I have called a victim of Missing Interests—as mistaking their good. The reason is that if she fails to demand her fair share of a putative basic good, there are no subjectivist grounds for claiming she has been wronged in having been encouraged not to. The subjectivist position, the objectivist contends, turns out to be only nominally egalitarian.

The subjectivist position is pushed in this direction—to a conception of cooperation limited to management of the competing desires of different individuals—by the fear that the alternative involves commitment to a fixed idea of human nature. But rejection of the objectivist alternative on those grounds is too hasty. A more robust conception of cooperation—of individuals cooperating in the pursuit of a range of common goods—need not suppose an objectionably fixed view of human nature. Rather, the objectivist claims, it is because we have evolved as creatures with a unique ethology, as cultural creatures, that we must not only self-consciously reflect on what our history has made us, but recognize our responsibility to shape our future selves. If we do not (explicitly) judge the kinds of things that may be in any individual's interests, we cannot autonomously shape the communities and societies which in turn shape us and our perceived interests and concerns.

While an objectivist position does indeed presuppose a limit on the range of possible human interests, to claim that that range is constrained by considerations of equality and its relationship to autonomy is not to impute a view of human nature any more fixed than the subjectivist alternative. It is simply to address the issue head on, as to whether, in Charles Taylor's words, a view of freedom adequate to the internal impediments that false consciousness presents is realizable, or fully realizable only within a certain form of society. It is the subjectivist alternative that assumes an objectionably narrow view of human nature,
wrongly justifying the limitation of human interests to those currently imaginable, thereby stifling moral progress. For it treats many of what the objectivist would call interests as mere matters of taste if individuals fail to identify themselves with them. The subjectivist charge against the objectivist is thus turned on its head.

Yet because the objectivist does insist that a proper view of the range of human interests—one which does not ignore our sociality—is what must justify shaping the institutions and hence the lives of members of society, I analyze the charge that objectivism entails paternalism in Part I of this chapter, showing how the debate about the relation between liberty and equality sheds light on the issue. The essence of that argument is that if we do not choose the shape of our communities, they will be shaped nonetheless and to our detriment—by the influence of the powerful into structures of exploitation and oppression.

A related objection to an objective interest account of the concept of false consciousness is to explain how we may come to know the interests of a truer consciousness: if there were such things as objective interests independent of our recognition of them, how would we know them? The inadequacy of the subjectivist's search for an answer in something in the subject, demonstrates the inevitability of tackling the question as an on-going problem of practical ethics. The force of this second major objection, having dispelled the paternalism objection—at least as an objection—is considerably weakened. For if the worry about paternalism is quelled, the worry about inevitable mistakes in our theorizing about the self and human interests in a democratic context is to that extent diminished.

Having defused the force of the central fear of and challenge to a theory of objective interests in Part I, the aim of Part II is to specify a constraint on a satisfactory account of
objective interests, and to suggest an avenue for development of such an account. The purpose of the latter half of this chapter is to sketch the form a theory of objective interests capable of justifying the conditions of autonomy consistent with genuine equality might take. Its aim is not to provide an elaborate account of objective interests but to elucidate the nature of the objectivism I advocate, including a view of the rational, autonomous self. Drawing out the implications of the inadequacies of the alternative in order to illuminate a criterion of adequacy for an objectivist account of false consciousness, I will distinguish the position from those with which it might be confused in order to defend that criterion. The purpose is to draw out the features of an objectivist account of interests adequate to diagnose and suggest a remedy for the problem of Missing Interests.

So far the argument of the thesis has been that a viable concept of false consciousness can be rescued from the historical legacy of the Theory of Ideology and that such a concept is adequate to the phenomena to which it purports to apply only if it is coupled with an objectivist theory of interests. The structure of a view of interests which allows that—in the face of formidable ideological pressure—one can mistake even basic ends, requires appeal to a view of human nature in order to distinguish fundamental errors as such. The reader can accept that argument, including the response against objections of Part I of this Chapter, without accepting the alternative I single out in Part II in the attempt to motivate the potential of a robust moral realism—one that includes a theory of objective goods—for progressive politics. Yet given the lack of an alternative that would avoid two major issues—paternalism (or its equivalent) and knowledge of the good—and given the resources of a formidable contender in Western moral theory to make good sense of it, I will suggest that we should not hesitate to harness the power of the following view of ourselves in emancipatory struggles.
A plausible conception of false consciousness is committed to a normative view of the self which assumes one basic feature of human nature, namely, that we have evolved as creatures with a moral faculty—or so I will suggest. It is, we may suppose, what permits us to autonomously guide our choice of character and hence our actions, making sense not only of our addiction to ideological norms, but of the possibility of our freeing ourselves from them. It is what makes it possible for us to determine ourselves and our lives in light of goods in this world and in its possible worlds. Appeal to this feature of our nature is thus meant both to ground the descriptive adequacy of the theory of ideology—it is because we have this sense that it can be deformed to our detriment, and to provide the prescriptive force of the theory of false consciousness—it is because we have this sense that we can turn our attention to honing it to our benefit.

I. Autonomy Requires Sustenance

To take the problem of false consciousness seriously—or at least the nature of human interests in general—is to recognize that autonomy has conditions, or perhaps more accurately, preconditions. It is to acknowledge that the arrangement of social institutions which rely on ideology for their stability impacts significantly not only on the range of actions permitted, but on the range of perceived options. Thus, a theory must endorse a robust autonomy or it does not justify autonomy at all. The examples of the Anorexic and of the Deferential Wife were raised to make the point. Without invoking a substantive view of an autonomous self, one whose limits are defined not by the prospects in current society but by the valuable possibilities our nature permits us to imagine, the consistent subjectivist was forced to treat as autonomous assessments of interests, these extreme cases of non-autonomy. Only an objectivist account has the power to distinguish non-arbitrarily those whose categories of conception or whose
affective responses have been distorted by ideology, those who would benefit from experiences and education radically different from what they have up until now been acquainted with, those whose rational and emotional capacities have been turned against them, from those whose perspectives are autonomous. Only an objectivist account has the power to describe cases of Missing Interests as the result of the internalization of ideology all the way down to pre-reflective level.

**Paternalism and Its Institutional Equivalent**

Yet the charge of paternalism, given the historical examples of totalitarianism and consequently the fear of it in liberal theory, merits consideration. The subjectivist charge that an objectivist conception of false consciousness slides easily into justification of paternalism reflects the fear that a such a position would prescribe a unified normative account of human interests and thereby justify its imposition upon individuals even against their will. Yet the objectivist contends that since the subjectivist's commitment to a view of the self is only implicit, and is thus hidden from the scrutiny of democratic debate, the worry about illicitly justifying an imposition of the view of the good life of the dominant few on others is arguably even graver for the subjectivist.

Babbitt makes the point with reference to Cuban education which, over nearly forty years, has attempted "to teach young people values, to instruct students in what sort of persons they should be, not just morally but also personally and politically". In response to the worry of liberal democrats that this constitutes a threat to individuality and to autonomy, she writes:
In both the North America and the Cuban contexts, a national-social identity is imposed on people so that some possibilities are conceivable and doable and others are not. And in both cases, a moral vision is imposed according to which some directions of thought and action become meaningless, even unimaginable. The difference is that in the Cuban context, the imposition of moral vision is acknowledged and discussed. In liberal democratic traditions, it is not acknowledged, or at least it is not acknowledged as individually and politically important. Worse than this, though, there is a risk that in liberal democratic traditions, the arbitrary imposition of a particular moral vision cannot be effectively addressed: To the extent that individuality is assumed to consist in living one’s life “from the inside” with true beliefs, any attempt to bring about the changes to norms and values required for the pursuit of real autonomy by most social members is already regarded as a threat to autonomy. The practical danger of the kind of view of individual rationality and interests I have been discussing and criticizing is that the right sorts of questions regarding autonomy—questions about moral vision, its discovery and development—cannot even be raised.4

Babbitt’s purpose is not to address the question of how appropriately values and meanings are addressed in the Cuban situation but rather to allay the worry that the universalistic character of value judgments about interests risks taking for granted the dubious moral commitments of certain traditions. “[T]o the extent that differences relevant to criticizing such traditions depend on moral judgments about that tradition, universalistic statements—statements depending on assumptions about universal human goods—are also involved in emancipatory struggle against such traditions.”5 Hence, positions that eschew the universalistic character of value judgments about interests make the discovery and development of conditions of genuine autonomy virtually impossible.

For if, as the argument of Chapter 3 attempted to show, the subjectivist alternative is ultimately as committed to value judgments as is the objectivist position, the question then becomes which of the value commitments (of the competing accounts) threaten autonomy. It is the subjectivist position’s avowed blindness to the content of value judgments about interests that puts it at risk of justifying what is in fact the illegitimate imposition of a view of the good on others. By somehow tying interests to the perspective of the actual individual as
she currently sees herself, subjectivism cannot help but favor conceptions of the good dominant or realizable within the confines of the ideologies of an individual's society. For although subjectivist positions also endorse the considered aims of any individual who is capable of imagining possibilities for herself beyond the confines of the ideologies dominant in her society, they must, if consistently subjectivist, also endorse the aims of those who are not in a position so to do. Insofar as subjectivist accounts of interests endorse conceptions of the self consistent with dominant ideologies, they endorse ideological restriction of the range of choices of the individuals living in that society. The only reason it is not always evident that a subjectivist account of interests endorses the imposition of a view of the individual's good that is not her own, is that such accounts justify an institutional distortion of choices that have already been imposed. That commitment threatens autonomy.

While the term paternalism is normally reserved for thwarting of autonomy due to a form of direct coercion, the issue, what is objectionable, is the same whether autonomy is thwarted by intentional coercion or by the power structure of oppressive institutions. The point of Chapters 1 and 2 was to establish the claim that force is not the only kind of encroachment upon autonomy—though it is often the only recognized encroachment. The ideological distortion that is false consciousness is an insidious undermining of autonomy. Whether ideology is internalized due to misinformation, masked alternatives, fear, deadening of the imagination, the need to preserve the investment in what is (but is not recognized as) one's ideological identity, or because some or all of those factors have altered the individual's categories of conception, the individual's state of consciousness has not been determined autonomously. The relevant similarity between coercion and the ideological restriction of choices which a subjectivist position illicitly justifies, is that a view of interests is imposed from
outside. Thus ideological restriction of choices is inconsistent with the liberal requirement that “my life only goes better if I am leading it from the inside”. The difference is that whereas straightforward coercion initially leaves the individual’s extant preference-structure alone, ideological restriction of the individual’s range of choices depends upon the restriction being unknown to the individual chooser. That is what makes the latter harder to assess, but it is no less real for that fact. Although these two forms of interference with autonomy remain distinct, since it is the interference with autonomy that is objectionable, the danger of the institutional equivalent of paternalism should equally demand the liberal egalitarian’s consideration and caution. Even if there is reason to restrict the term paternalism to the conscious attempt to impose on others, we must address the theoretical implications brought by recognizing the power of institutions to impose harmful ways of life on individuals. It is because the paternalism charge directed at objectivists by subjectivists is future-regarding—the charge being that supposed non-ideological values of objectivist theory will be imposed if the theory is adopted—that it obscures the objectivist fear that subjectivism justifies ideological views of the good which have already been (and continue to be) imposed without our noticing.

Two Concepts of Liberty

What underlies the illusion that there is an alternative to admitting the objectivity of interests, and the deception that it is possible to escape the risks of getting it wrong, is the mistaken assumption that a meaningful distinction can be made between leaving a range in which individuals are free, and providing for freedom, between leaving them the space to determine their lives autonomously and providing them with the means of self-determination. The premise of the paternalism objection is, in other words, that there is an alternative to a robust view of liberty which provides for and prescribes ways of life, namely, liberty simply as the absence of explicit coercion. But if a distinction between liberty and its pre-conditions
cannot reasonably be maintained, a view I will now defend, the distinction between the two views of liberty collapses, leaving the paternalism objection without foundation. For it is only on the understanding of liberty strictly as freedom from coercion that it makes sense to see any “imposition” of ways of life as objectionable. Again, it is because the subjectivist does not recognize that there is no alternative to advocating a view of human nature and of the self, that they do so implicitly and therefore run the risk of remaining blind to the institutional equivalent of paternalism.

In a famous debate with Isaiah Berlin, C. B. Macpherson argued against the view of liberty as freedom from force and coercion, making the point that if one offers an account of liberty which does not include an account of its preconditions, then the thing one is giving an account of is not liberty at all.9 If Macpherson is right, Berlin’s conception of liberty is blind to impediments to liberty, and thus, as I argued of subjectivist positions of interests, fails to secure what it claims to esteem so highly.

For Berlin, non-interference or negative liberty serves our interests as fully human creatures insofar as it provides the necessary range in which we are free to choose and act on our own interests and plans of life. “[M]y conduct derives an irreplaceable value from the sole fact that it is my own, and not imposed upon me.”9 This issue of how much I am governed and over what I am master concerns what would seem to be a complementary issue: ‘by whom am I governed?’ or ‘who is master?’ Yet Berlin takes the latter to reflect a competing conception of liberty, namely positive liberty or liberty as self-mastery, which he thinks must lead to paternalism. The reason he gives is that historically, positive liberty came to be identified with reason, a higher nature, the real, ideal, or autonomous self, so that to be free in this view is to make choices consistent with the general will or the common good.10 Yet the
ideal of never seeking incompatible ends, Berlin claims, seeks to dehumanize men. It is an insult to the individual’s conception of herself as a human being determined to make her own life in accordance with her own (not necessarily rational or benevolent) purposes, and above all, to her entitlement to be recognized by others. Thus, he thinks, socialized forms of freedom as self-realization became totalitarian; and so a doctrine of freedom evolves into a doctrine of authority. Berlin’s view of what he terms negative liberty is thus motivated by the fear that the alternative risks justifying a despotic paternalism whose nature consists in the fact that it offends the individual’s conception of him or herself as a human being.

Negative liberty, Berlin thinks, is consistent with what he takes to be the fact of a pluralism of values, of incompatibility of ends, and is as such a truer and more human ideal. His defense of liberty emphasizes not only the importance of subjectivity, of a “life led from the inside,” but that whatever justification one might have for overriding that subjectivity—such as knowing the individual’s needs better than she does—acting on that justification would be counter-productive. For in trying to meet an individual’s interests for her, one would destroy her sense of self, making her permanently unable (barring some counter indoctrination) to pursue her interests, since she would cease to see herself as having the ability to make judgments about her own interests. The crucial claim for our purposes is that if an individual is not recognized by others as a fully independent human being, she may doubt her claim to being so.

And yet, as Macpherson points out, Berlin cannot rely on negative liberty to serve the purpose of providing the range in which we are free to choose and act on our own interests and plans of life because it neglects or at least understates the role of impediments to liberty. Liberty which does not provide individuals access to the means of life and labor becomes the
cloak for unindividualist, corporate, imperial, 'free-enterprise'. It unjustifiably ignores the fact that relations of dominance or subservience diminish the area in which the subservient cannot be pushed around. The undesirability of having to make decisions for someone is thus beside the point. The pertinent issue is rather that an individual who has been denied the means of life and labor is not really free. In other words, without an account of positive liberty, Berlin loses the grounds for defending negative liberty. “There must be interference,” Macpherson argues, “to protect me from interference.”

Berlin’s failure to accept that some intervention is necessary to protect the free choice range is a result, Macpherson claims, of his failure to distinguish between the proper sense of positive liberty as self-direction or self-mastery, and the perversion of that sense of self-mastery, externally enforced “self-mastery”. Only the latter dangerous paternalistic sense would have it that we ought to impose “rational” freedom on those said to be not fully rational. While negative liberty is indeed distinct from the latter perverted sense of positive liberty, it is not independent of the former proper sense which, Macpherson suggests, is better characterized as developmental liberty. Macpherson suggests that Berlin’s view of negative liberty which he describes as “mechanical and inertial,” should be thought of instead as immunity from the extractive power of others, or what he terms counter-extractive liberty. That refinement makes it clear that the central point about liberty is whether the liberties allowed or guaranteed by a society increase or decrease the net aggregate liberty, by preventing or permitting the extraction of benefit by some from others. Macpherson’s egalitarian conceptions of counter-extractive and of developmental liberty in the place of the old negative and positive liberty thus emphasize that protecting liberty is a matter of providing the societal conditions necessary to protect every individual’s means to pursue the good life.
Implications for a Theory of Interests

The important insight to gain from Macpherson is that in any good society, there must be constraints. Thus, it does not make sense to advance a paternalism charge against any theory which explicitly tries to justify them, instead of—what I have claimed is the alternative—implicitly endorsing those already in place and those fostered by those already in place without an attempt at justification. Macpherson concentrates his argument at the level of the economic preconditions of freedom. My claim in the last chapter to the effect that there is no alternative for a plausible theory of interests but to advance a substantive theory of the self is to run the same kind of argument at the level of the objectively valuable nature of interests. The problem for the liberal view of liberty thus mirrors that of the liberal subjectivist view of interests. The respect for subjectivity and individuality that is central to the liberal project requires conditions conducive to both the development of genuinely autonomous perspectives and the means to exercise the resultant choices. The need for conditions which would provide for the development of genuinely autonomous perspectives (revealing the problem with the subjectivist conception of interests), is exposed by the fact of fundamental mistakes about interests, such as those that constitute the kind of false consciousness I have termed Missing Interests. The need for conditions which would constitute the means to exercise autonomous choices (revealing the problem with the liberal conception of liberty) is exposed instead by the kind of conditions that foster false consciousness—the unequal distribution of resources. It is, after all, often because one's liberty to pursue one's choices is severely restricted that one adjusts one's view of one's own interests, one's choices, one's consciousness, accordingly.
The Paternalism Charge Disarmed

The Myth of State Neutrality

The analysis of the subjectivist position on interests in Chapter 3 reveals the fatal flaw of interpreting a liberal respect for the individual as requiring that his or her perspective be treated as primitive or foundational: that in deflating ontology into epistemology, it loses the "chooser" because it has reduced her to her choices. While asking what an individual would choose were she fully informed et cetera, may be a means of identifying her interests, the fact that she would choose certain things under specified ideal conditions C does not explain why they are in her interest or what it is in virtue of which she has those interests. The conflation of the two kinds of criteria and the consequent reduction of the chooser to her choices is what fuels the charge by Marxists, feminists, and communitarians that liberalism treats individuals as atoms in competition. Yet it is not, as some of these critics suppose, methodological individualism, but issues surrounding state neutrality that provokes such treatment. State neutrality is meant to protect the "cultural marketplace of ideas" in which individuals are free to form their own conceptions of the good life. But just as private realm cannot be neatly divided off of the public sphere as feminists have long insisted, so the social space for a contest of ideas cannot be so disjoined. This was the point of the argument in Chapter 2: the cultural marketplace is subject to the pressures of the state and the powers that be so that, as Marcuse and Chomsky show, it would be miraculous if values critical of the state survived (even with liberal protections). Hence the space for a self to imagine a non-ideological, autonomous identity, is whittled away.
Two Kinds of Examples

The Collapse of the Moral into the Legal Realm

One of the manifestations of this phenomenon is the way in which the cultural marketplace of ideas suffers from a lethal ideological conflation of the moral and the legal, a deflation of the moral into the legal. The state and the powers that be influence the ideas dominant in our culture so that, facilitating capitalist free-enterprise, the concept of a good citizen is over-shadowed by that of a consumer. Many of what are actually morally-evaluable character traits, actions, states of affairs are seen instead as mere lifestyle choices or tastes. This encroachment on the moral realm arises despite the fact that the alleged need for state neutrality is premised on the idea that individuals are proponents of value. Since a consumer, unlike a citizen, has few if any responsibilities, only tastes, it becomes possible for citizens who see themselves as mere consumers to assume that the social realm over which the state is neutral is comprised of matters of (moral) insignificance. The alleged justification for state neutrality notwithstanding, when this particular ideological influence operates undetected, people may tacitly assume that the range of things that are not illegal must be morally permissible. Instead of a vital battle of well-developed reason in the cultural marketplace, issues which are not treated as official matters of the state or within the public domain may be treated as morally neutral—that is, lacking non-relative value—mere questions of individual taste.

Sadly, even those critical of dominant ideologies sometimes seem to make this slip in their assumption that the means of combating ideology is to outlaw its manifestations, instead of proclaiming its immorality. The case of feminists who advocate censorship of pornography is one prominent example. Rather than focusing on the viability of an alternative vision of the good life, and on persuasion by argument, they have focused on outlawing the
manifestations of a sexist vision—as if acknowledging that the vehicle for moral condemnation is legal sanction. If even critics place their confidence in the legal realm at the expense of reviving the moral realm, confusion of state neutrality on any given issue with its moral insignificance may persist. And so what are actually morally-evaluable states will continue to masquerade as mere “lifestyle choices”.

The Collapse of Social Problems into Individual Problems

Yet at the same time, blindness to the respects in which the state is in fact non-neutral, to the ideological influence of the state and the powers that be, presents another insidious impediment to autonomy. Social problems are not seen as such; mistaken for the problems of particular individuals, their causes must of necessity remain mysterious. Blindness to the antecedent social causes of such problems creates the need to find wild, panicked explanations for the inherent evil that belies the behavior of individuals who exhibit them. Hence the Repressed Memory example in Chapter 2, of the hysteria which has followed the much needed attention feminists brought to the issue of sexual abuse of children. Oblivious to the true interests of human beings, and thus to the consequences of their non-satisfaction, indeed their non-satisfiability in the society in which we live, to the pressures and frustrations imposed upon individuals living within the rigid confines of the ideological roles allowed them in an oppressive society, it becomes possible to assume that those who crack under the pressure must be monsters by nature, and thus possible to fail to recognize them for what they are—monsters of our creation. From that impoverished perspective, it is a small step to have one’s attention diverted from “mundane” cases of (genuine) abuse to the wild, unfounded conspiratorial theories of pop culture—at the limit, satanic ritual abuse, alien visitation and the like. The tragedy is that if egalitarian liberals and other progressives were not so timid in embracing the task of ascertaining the makeup of human interests, we would have the means
to understand the causes of our social dysfunctions and thus the possibility of comprehending their remedy.

Both of the phenomena I have just discussed—the collapse of the moral into the legal and blindness to the social nature of social problems—owe their perpetuation to an ill-directed fear of paternalism and consequent blindness to the relation between ideological cultural ideas and the structure of institutions of which they are the perilous consequence. The sovereignty of the autonomous moral agent is diminished or incapacitated in the first phenomenon because its perceived domain is severely contracted, in the second, because it is shifted from reality to fantasy. In a society rife with radical imbalances of social power, official “neutrality,” instead of fostering lively debate about ideas, promotes an incapacitation of the capability of contemplative, reflective individuals to judge the merits of conceptions of the good life.

*The Possibility of Wrongful Encumbrance: A Fact of Life*

The aim of this discussion has not been to pin the paternalism charge or its institutional equivalent on the subjectivists; that would obscure the issue as much as their charge against the objectivist has. The point is rather that the charge against the objectivist is a red herring. While the danger of wrongly imposing one's view of the good on others is always real, it is not ultimately a *theoretical* problem, and thus not a concern peculiar to the objective interest theory I defend. That danger, though very real, is in one important sense, a fact of our existence. If it were not for one persistent feature of our existence we would have little need for morality: as social animals we cannot fail to impact on others and hence to shape the lifestyles available to those around us. We make decisions individually and collectively on a daily basis that impact on the well-being and thinking of others, that affect our individual characters
and the character of our social institutions, and which thereby deeply influence what kind of selves can exist, and which of those can thrive. Yet living, let alone flourishing, would be impossible if we were required to gain prior consent from every moral agent affected before acting; furthermore, consent from moral patients such as young children, is impossible. Thus, moral agency, because by nature an engagement, involves the risk that one wrongly imposes a (mistaken) view of the good on another if one miscalculates in what respecting autonomy consists. We must recognize the dangers both in particular cases and in general. It should be a concern for all ethical and socio-political theorists and political activists, as it should be for every individual in every-day decision-making.

Morality makes cooperative life possible because it provides us the standards by which we judge the impact and appropriateness of our character traits and actions—standards by which we deliberate about that in which respecting autonomy or another's good, in any given case, consists—and by which we judge the impact and appropriateness of our institutions. If functioning well, it is, with information and understanding, what helps us to avoid wrongfully imposing a mistaken view of the good. Yet when functioning properly, its particular judgments cannot finally be decided in advance of the agent's assessment of the particular choice circumstances in which she finds herself. Moral agents must make use of some criteria to assess a particular choice circumstance, criteria upon which they may have reflected at an earlier date; yet part of what it is to be a moral agent is to judge which criteria are applicable or appropriate in a given situation. Thus the worry that a theory of objective interests slides into sanctioning state paternalism is confused. The point of dispute with the subjectivist is rather the objectivist's insistence that an adequate theory requires that we keep explicit judgments
about what respecting autonomy requires—in general and on any particular occasion—instead of treating it as a procedural matter.

Sometimes respect for autonomy and well-being will indeed entail allowing an individual the space to make his own mistakes; sometimes it will entail taking action, even coercive action, to prevent imminent and substantial harm. Respecting the anorexic’s autonomy may require coercive measures to prevent irreparable harm to a precondition of any good life, namely, minimally decent health. Yet respecting the Deferential Wife’s autonomy more likely requires that she have a situation conducive to her transforming her interests herself. It is simply a mistake to assume that claiming something is in someone’s interests necessarily entails that it would be good to coerce that person into it or into pursuing it. Such assessments cannot be made in advance of the judgment of a moral agent in the particular situations that give rise to the need to make them—the requirements of respect for the autonomy of particular anorexics and of particular deferential wives will differ from case to case. Nevertheless, genuine respect for autonomy is substantive, not, as the liberal subjectivist seems to suppose, procedural.

Given the connection between moral action and the risk of harmful imposition, the theoretical attempt to severely limit the range of the former, in order to escape the latter worries—as the subjectivist has—should not be surprising. But there is no escaping the risk of bad judgment; we can find solace only in striving to make better judgments, both individually and collectively.

What objective interest theory necessarily will endorse is changing the conditions that give rise to individuals misperceiving their interests. The focus of an account of objective
interests adequate to the problem of false consciousness should be to justify restructuring institutions, not individuals per se. What then of the charge that such a position is tantamount to paternalism with respect to an entire society? The response is first to accept the charge in one sense—pointing to inevitability of its institutional equivalent if we deny that our institutions and corresponding social roles shape our conceptions of ourselves. The second is to offer its prescriptions to the scrutiny of competing egalitarian viewpoints. The issue is whether we reflect on that shaping.

The danger of miscalculating in what autonomy consists cannot be avoided simply by adopting a hands off, laissez-faire approach to individuals and the decisions they make for themselves because, considered collectively, our decisions impact dramatically on the range of options open to others. One individual’s decision to walk across a path in a meadow would seem of little consequence. But the impact on the environment of hundreds of individuals doing the same impacts significantly upon the ability of others and of future generations to enjoy the natural beauty of that environment. What the objectivist insists upon is that we scrutinize the value judgments about interests that subjectivists would have us think are mere “tastes”.

Since wrongly imposing a view of the good or of the range of good lives is always a risk—hence the rejection of a positive sense of ideology—the project for a progressive movement is to imagine and design dynamic institutions that will arguably allow for the best ways of life while at the same time, because genuinely democratic, admitting of restructuring. We can know a great deal in advance—such as the need for a genuinely free press—yet because of our dynamic yet finite nature, the project is an ongoing process. Ensuring that the best ways of life will always be provided for is possible only if, as autonomy requires,
individuals exist in conditions conducive to their making judgments for themselves. Yet in arguing for conditions of autonomous choice we must explicitly admit that, to the extent that such conditions can influence the range of goods an individual may endorse, to respect autonomy and its conditions is inescapably to advocate certain ways of life.

How Can We Know Our Truer Interests?

We are now in a position to defuse a related challenge: if there were such things as objective interests independent of our recognition of them, how would we know them? An appeal of the subjectivist alternative was that it seemed to offer a ready answer to the question of how we know in what our interests consist. The subjectivist has collapsed the ontological question of the nature of interests into the epistemological question of how we know them; interests are (with elaborate qualification) what we say or think or feel they are. The question of how we know them—given their essential relationship to desire—thus hardly seemed a question for the subjectivist. Yet the above response to the paternalism objection, building on the argument of Chapter 3, demonstrates that the subjectivist alternative does not escape the epistemological question; since any viable theory of interests is committed to value judgments, the question of how we know which ones are right, persists. The subjectivist’s failure to circumvent the issue demonstrates quite simply the inevitability of tackling it as an on-going problem of theoretical and practical ethics.

The objectivist points to the fact that we can develop theories about ourselves, just as we do other things in the world. We can say something about the method by which we are to discover truer interests which will not be radically different from the alternative: it is to engage the proposed account of human nature and the possibilities it delimits for an autonomous self in a kind of reflective equilibrium with people’s expressed preferences. This should not be
surprising. For while I have argued against the alternative subjective account of interests as an attempt to determine their criteria of identity, interpreted as criteria of identification they are more plausible. The criteria of identity for human interests, the objectivist claims, lie in the relationships of features of human beings to each other, to their environment and its possibilities. In the ideal—where, at a minimum, the individual is not constrained in her imagination by ideological circumstances—they are identified by the particular individuals bearing such relations.

Yet the epistemological worry reflects something more—a desire for indisputable grounds which could be appealed to in the face of disagreement, what the subjectivist had hoped the subject’s (ultimate) assessment would provide. An objectivist account of interests does not pretend to offer something to play that role. Nonetheless it is important to recognize that even though the judgments about our truer interests will be disputed at least as long as we live in a society structured by ideology, it is harder to dispute claims that certain things cannot be in someone’s interest. For political as well as epistemological reasons, we should begin there. Part of theorizing about ourselves must involve looking for what I have called false needs—those needs that provide alternative but unhealthy outlets for natural instincts; these will, in turn, furnish clues to recognizing our missing interests. Counter-cultural, progressive analyses provide a fruitful source of possible candidates. Instead of permitting progressive theories to be marginalized even from each other, if they are brought to bear on each other in an attempt to make them consistent, we can diagnose our false needs and thereby approach our truer interests.

We have theories that tell us why some scenarios would be better than what we now have. The epistemological worry about how we know our interests would seem overblown.
Since the paternalism objection would seem to be beside the point, there is no reason to fear that we could not revise our plans. Even more, the problem of the institutional equivalent of paternalism gives us every reason to fear the consequences of failing even to attempt such plans. If the conditions we imagine are conducive to autonomy really are, then the character of alleged impediments will become evident as the effects of their systematic use are revealed, the lack of need for them clear. The focus should thus be on building the infrastructure for a workable society, not on outlawing its impediments. It is not up to one individual to judge what is good (for him) from his perspective. It is up to all of us to judge from all sorts of different perspectives, with one constraint—that we endeavor to extract a consistent vision from putative egalitarian theories. Such an account will constitute a formidable response to Kymlicka's Dworkinian challenge—to provide the best egalitarian theory. The advantage of such a vision over liberal subjectivist alternatives is that the appeal to human nature is explicit and thus, if compelling, is so because it has the force of greater reason. The onus is on those who would dispute the prescriptions of such a progressive vision to better explain the phenomenon of alleged false consciousness and to offer a superior vision.

That we have recently come to ignore our capacity to theorize about the good life is reflected in the collapsing of the moral into the legal—what underlies the paternalism worry. Yet if we continue to ignore that capacity we will not be able to distinguish the value of what we have lost—continuing to see what are social problems as the inevitable curse of an evil nature or fate—not the value of what has been and can be gained by thinking about the good life, namely, moral progress in our institutions and in ourselves. Determined by our ignorance, we will ensure that our young and future generations will not fare well. Not only does the objectivist theory of interests provide the necessary theoretical constraints for diagnosing the
problem and suggesting a remedy, but it is the only view that would have the grounds to claim, if tragically, future generations never learn this, that they were wronged in their inheritance, they were wronged in never having had the opportunity to see and do things differently, to enjoy a better quality of life.

The next section considers how we can know the possibilities that our nature lays out without thinking that we are determined by a unique human nature. The objectivism I defend does not yearn for rigid biological determinacy just as it does not yearn for historical determinism. It supposes instead that individuals can know what is good in and for our nature and that we can make the most of it. Recognizing this, we can determine the course of our nature; it need not blindly determine ours. Yet we cannot determine its course if we are blind to its common temperaments. Hence the claim in the Introduction to the thesis that on an adequate theory of objective interests, fundamental ends apply to human beings *qua* human beings, not, for example, *qua* members of a class. An essential common feature of that humanity, I will finally explain, is our capacity to recognize the value of flourishing within a society that makes moral sense.

III. Making Room for the Genuinely Autonomous Self

Recognizing that there is no alternative but to acknowledge the risk of fostering non-autonomous ways of life, let us now approach directly the issue of what a successful objective interest account of false consciousness, one consistent with the social conditions of robust autonomy, might look like. Using as a key the inadequacy of the state-of-the-mind alternative to deal with mistakes about basic aims, including what I have called cases of Missing Interests,
the first section draws out the consequence of the argument of Chapter 3: a necessary criterion for an adequate theory of interests is that it be a state-of-the-world account. That settled, I will outline the sort of account of objective interests I envision as most promising. I will explain the nature and function of the commitment of such an account to a theory of human nature. Perfectionism, a moral theory based explicitly on human nature, promises the most fruitful account of interests, thanks in part to its vision of autonomy and rationality. Theorizing about how features of creatures like ourselves fit with other states-of-the-world as an objectivist account does, must, I suggest, presuppose one basic fact of human nature: namely, that we have evolved as creatures with a capacity for moral evaluation, with a tendency (even though sometimes outweighed) to altruism and cooperation, what I call a *moral sense*. That claim sets up the final section of this chapter in which I conjecture as to how if indeed we have a moral faculty, its rational and emotional constituents are threatened by ideology, suggesting a possible unseen benefit for creatures like us of a virtuous character.

Once again, the reader can accept the primary argument of the thesis, including the defense against objections of an objective interest conception of false consciousness, (through Part I of this chapter), without accepting the kind of account I think will prove most fruitful. Yet having rejected an alternative to, and defused objections against any genuinely objectivist account of interests, there is no reason to resist the great potential of the kind of objectivism envisioned below, or of some variety thereof.

**On the Need for a Worldly Vision of Interests**

The subjectivist is motivated by a well-intentioned but, I have argued, ill-conceived version of the liberal creed, making it structurally unfit to describe the victim of Missing Interests as having an impoverished self and hence of having an interest in having a better
character, a better self-identity. The subjectivist stance is empirically inadequate, ignoring not only the pervasiveness, but the depth of ideological thinking. Since false consciousness is not a phenomenon that afflicts only a very few, it cannot be dismissed as a mere limiting case. Since it is something which can involve not merely mistaking means to ends, but an individual's very project, it cannot be accounted for in terms of those very aims and values.

To put the point differently, the subjectivist interpretation of the liberal respect for the individual, despite its claims to the contrary, ignores an important consequence of the fact we are biological and social creatures, not angels or mere calculating machines, whose mental life is just that—alive, and as such, subject to the demands of its drives. As a result of the period of development through childhood, the growing patterns of the early stages of that life, the history of the individual's drives clashing with the world, the form their satisfaction is compelled to take, have powerful repercussions for the fundamental aims and values, and hence the well-being of the organism over its life-time. Freud's essential insight—that causally speaking the character of the child is the parent of the character of the adult she becomes—cannot be ignored. For that reason, to focus on the experience of the adult to the exclusion of her character's parent, her social conditioning, is to ignore the real experience of human beings.

What form must a view of interests more adequate to our nature than this empyreal subjectivist liberal vision of egalitarianism take? Though it is not my purpose here either to reject or to defend an alternative view of liberalism, we can say that any liberalism adequate to the task must be a comprehensive and not a political liberalism. It must, in other words, be one which does not shun its moral commitment to autonomy as an ideal not only in political life but as part of what it is for an individual to have a good life more generally.18 That issue
aside, we can defend egalitarian institutions not simply on the unduly simplified basis that each person's point of view counts equally and so those of the downtrodden must be counted, but quite straightforwardly and unwaveringly on the basis of the superior quality of an egalitarian perspective. Such a perspective is superior morally-speaking when its vision of the world and one's place in the world does not, as do the views of the dominant, require thwarting the autonomy of any individual—of one's own or another's—or the nonessential destruction of what has intrinsic value. It is superior epistemologically-speaking when it reflects a holistic understanding of the functioning of institutions, their arrangement and concomitant social roles.

The fact that people must be systematically misinformed in ideologically organized societies in order for them to behave in a way which is in fact at odds with genuine autonomy is surely formidable evidence in favor of such criteria. The vast progressive literature has such a perspective to offer, one which can be justified on the grounds that a Millian competent judge would choose its vision: one who has experienced both the advantages and disadvantages of the perspectives available from an oppressed social role as well as those available from an oppressor's perspective would choose a life-style respectful of intrinsic value, recognizing it as truly autonomous, as a genuinely good life.

The inadequacy of the subjectivist's embodiment of the liberal egalitarian vision means that we must explore the potential of an alternative egalitarian vision if we are to avoid the precipitous slide into relativism that threatens.

_A State-of-the-World Account of Interests_

What are the features of a viable alternative? The problem with the subjectivist account of interests provides a straightforward clue to a basic adequacy condition for a theory
of interests. It is the fact that the rejected alternative was essentially a state-of-the-mind theory that caused a problem. Neither the attempt to appeal to the consistency of a state-of-mind, nor the attempt to add state-of-the-world qualifications had the power to acknowledge the wrong suffered by an adult in having been deprived of opportunities for better character formation during childhood. The lesson to draw from this, is that a fundamental constraint on a theory of interests is that it make essential reference to what it is about creatures like us and our relations both to states-of-the-world and to possible states-of-the-world, that make features of these states good for us.

**Advantages**

Having distinguished a state-of-the-world account of interests from the paternalism issue that has obscured it, its advantages become clear.

*Comparable Cases Treated Comparably*

One advantage of a state-of-the-world account is that it handles relevantly similar cases in the same way. In its desire to account for what makes a given state of affairs good or bad for a particular individual, subjectivism has the consequence that the same state of affairs can be good for one individual and not good, and perhaps even bad for another. In and of itself, this does not seem an implausible result. Even stronger, it is no doubt true of a great range of things, namely, the possible but non-essential components of a good life, that the kind of account of objective interests I advocate, delineates. It seems reasonable to claim that people have a range of different tastes. What one person finds palatable, another may be quite indifferent to, even repelled by. Or can they? When we look at morally-evaluable states of affairs, the lifestyles that some individuals find intolerable for example, the question seems not nearly as simple as subjectivism would have it. While subjectivists such as Sumner consider it a
virtue of the theory that it is consistent with wide variations over different cultures, they must address the challenge of the argument of Chapter 3 to the effect that such a position appears, quite insidiously, to provide a justification for Western inattention to oppression worldwide, and indeed to our contribution to it. For if the range of interests of human beings is assumed to vary immensely on such an account, and if mistakes about interests involving basic aims cannot be captured, then it becomes possible to absolve oneself of responsibility for having a lifestyle vastly richer in resources and freedom than the overwhelming majority of the world's population. As mentioned earlier, it becomes too easy to assume that the Third World poor do not need or deserve our comforts (not just clean water but job security, affordable and accessible health care, education, access to information) because their lifestyle aims are different.

It is reasonable to suppose instead, that what would make it possible for two different ideally informed individuals whose affective responses were properly attuned to their environment to have different reactions to a given state of affairs would be attention to different features of it. One person might value a state of affairs differently than another person does, in the sense that some of its features are more important to her than to others, given her current projects or fascinations. This explains the distinction between possible but non-essential components of a good life, and the necessary components of a good life. If we recognize this distinction there is no reason to suppose that human beings with their emotional and rational capacities intact, and free of the influence of ideological distortion, will have intractable disagreements about fundamental value.

Only with the assumption that human beings can and do appreciate intrinsic value will it be possible for progressives to justify liberation from existing social roles—for feminists, to
take one example, to justify their prescription of androgynous social roles. For without that assumption, there can be no resolution of the disagreement between the Deferential Wife and the feminist, and thus no justification of the conditions necessary for genuine autonomy for "women" and "men." Moral progress in social institutions is not achieved by waiting for a majority to want those conditions. Instead visionaries like Emma Goldman, who, while embracing autonomy despite circumstances of the time that make it very difficult, open up opportunities for others to act on such possibilities themselves and to recognize their value as a result. Progressives can justify their positions with the promise, in keeping with Mill's concept of a competent judge, that an overwhelming majority will embrace those conditions once they experience them, or, at a minimum, depending on each individual's capacity for change, that they will be embraced as what is best for future generations.

True to Our Experience of Moral Deliberation

A further advantage of a state-of-the-world account of interests is that, unlike a state-of-the-mind account, it does not require an error theory to explain how it is that we appear to make judgments about what is valuable in the world for us and for others, if that is not what we are really doing. A state-of-the-mind account of interests, while intended as a liberal expression of respect for the perspective of each and every individual, actually reflects much less confidence in the capacities of human beings than does a state-of-the-world theory. The conflation of criteria of identification of interests into their criteria of identity leaves a state-of-the-mind theory without an account of what it is in virtue of which \( x \) is good for \( S \)—that is, without a role for the reason or grounds on which \( S \) or others decides that \( x \) is good for her. The theory would have it that we are simply moved towards the objects of our desires or fascinations as if for no reason at all, as if—an unpalatable result—driven by inexplicable forces. For unless there is something in the world that constitutes the contents of our
judgments, our judgments about interests simply involve introspecting to determine what our own wants are. Not only does this commit the subjectivist view to illicit appeal to pre-existing drives with very specific contents that determine our behavior, but it commits the subjectivist to explaining the fact that it seems to us not that we are judging whether some psychological state is valuable for us but whether something in the world is.

There is, of course, an alternative interpretation that would make a subjectivist account of interests compatible with the apparent fact of judgment about things in the world and not merely our own mental states. Yet such an interpretation would make the position indistinguishable from an objectivist account. That alternative is to interpret the position as motivated either by the view that the individual is generally in the best position to know in what his interests consist, or by the view that politically it is most prudent to treat individuals as if that is true. But then the objectivist will agree—though not without qualification. With respect to the former claim that the individual is in the best position to know, the objectivist will emphasize that it is not in general the case that individuals living under ideological conditions are in the best epistemological position to judge their own interests. With respect to the latter claim, the objectivist will emphasize that it is an empirical question whether acting as if they are, is politically the most prudent; again, in light of the problem of the institutional equivalent of paternalism, it may not be in many cases.

In contrast to a state-of-the-mind theory, a state-of-the-world account has it that there are values in the world, and not merely valuable psychological states, about which we are capable of making elaborate and subtle judgment. Interests are like needs in this sense—they are independent of the specific concerns, likes, dislikes of particular individuals, having to do instead with the relationship between features of the world and features of creatures like us. A
theory of objective interests, premised on the existence of intrinsic value as a feature of the universe and our capacity to make judgments about it, is required if we are to justify our criticisms of existing social institutions. For only by theorizing about what it is about features of our world and features of ourselves, that make certain of our interactions with it better than others, is it possible to provide the grounds for those criticisms, namely, that other social institutions would be better. I will now turn to characterizing what this means in terms of the general character of its commitment to human nature.

The Nature of Commitment to Human Nature

Commitment to one feature of human nature, I want now to suggest, is a presupposition of respect for the individual's perspective that liberalism endeavors so passionately to advance: our evolved capacity for moral evaluation, with a tendency to altruism and cooperation. The explicit appeal to this inherent capacity underlies a view that well-nurtured children will blossom into self-determining adults who, empowered to make their own choices, will form a healthy, well-ordered global society in which all of its (robustly autonomous) members may thrive. It is what motivates the prescription that progressive counter-culturalists and liberals ought to make explicit appeal to objective interests in the battle with the erroneous and unfoundable view of human nature as inherently sinful, zealously defended by social conservatives. For it is their ill-gotten success and not our nature that prevents us from realizing the hope of such a vibrant society.

Conjecture: If the structure of society fosters ideologies which stifle our inclination towards altruism, and promote our inclination towards self-preservation, many of us, following the path of least resistance, will develop a character minimally consistent with the former, more concordant with the latter. One tendency of this ideological identity is that it will have
us not think about many of the genuine goods we cannot enjoy under current constraints, or not think of them as such, explaining the fact of Missing Interests. An adequate objectivism, I am supposing, is committed to two, sometimes conflicting features of human nature—a tendency to concern ourselves with the well-being of others and a tendency to concern ourselves with our own, a tendency to altruism and a tendency to self-preservation. What is the nature and purpose of this appeal?

A viable concept of *false consciousness* requires, first, an idea about our world and our cultures, and second, an idea about ourselves. (The former was the subject of Part I of Chapter 2 and its influence on us the subject of Part II). The project here is to elaborate on the commitment to what we can be absent that pernicious influence: “We ought to look at our nature to determine how we can make the best of it.” What underlies this claim is the assumption that value is a feature of the world and that the force of our obligation to cultivate it stems from that value coupled with our capacity to protect, promote, respect it.

The supposition that we have such a capacity draws on Kropotkin’s claim that we have evolved as creatures who operate with an instinct towards mutual aid. Against those who would interpret Darwinian theory as justifying competition at the social level between individuals or “races” of individuals, Kropotkin argues that while we compete with other *species* for survival, cooperation amongst the members of a species works to its advantage. That claim has been borne out by modern Population Genetics. Complex mathematical models tracking gene transfer under rigidly controlled conditions reveal that altruistic male animals are more likely to have their genes passed on, because they will have greater opportunities than their non-altruistic counterparts. Such appeal to our capacity for cooperation contrasts sharply with Hobbesian attempts, such as David Gauthier’s Contractarian Liberalism, to
develop a theory of how cooperation can be in our individual self-interest. Whereas for Gauthier, there is no such thing as moral knowledge and so cooperation can only be justified, as it was for Hobbes, on the grounds of self-interest, the objectivist account of interests and cognitivist view of morality envisioned here would have it that we ought to pursue the good for its own sake, not necessarily for our own sake, narrowly conceived. And we should, simply because it is good and we can.

The conjecture about a moral sense need not be committed to any specific content to human nature any more controversial than the two tendencies I have mentioned—altruism and self-preservation. Sociobiologist Michael Ruse thinks that the form that our moral sense takes is quite specific. I am not so sure. Against those who would argue that it is unreasonable to think that we are capable of cultivating our cooperative tendencies and of determining the course of our more selfish tendencies—at least their sometimes pernicious outcomes—we can say something much more simple. The view of human nature appealed to so far assumes only what I believe it is hard to deny: that while we are sometimes cooperative and sometimes competitive creatures, all but the deranged and perhaps the severely mentally disabled have the capacity to be moved to befriend, to encourage, and to support others. That is sufficient to establish the possibility that we can learn, as Doris Lessing begs us, to reflect on and thus to direct the force of our drives in healthy, beneficial ways. We have the ability, with work and thought, to govern ourselves. If we know that our evolved inclination towards cooperative (social) behavior lets us cooperate in our own oppression, we can use our evolved faculty of reason to prevent the former from happening.

Appeal to our moral faculty has a two-fold purpose. First, it constitutes the claim to descriptive or empirical adequacy of the theory of false consciousness. Such appeal explains
the very possibility of false consciousness; it is our engrained tendency to cooperate that allows us to collaborate in illusions that harm us. Even apparent counter-examples—ideological appeals to the selfishness of the racist or the sexist, for example—rely on the apparent acceptability of the norms prescribed. Second, such appeal fuels the prescriptions of the theory. The presupposition that we have a moral faculty is what makes it possible to claim that we have within us the power to shape our societies and ourselves in a cooperative effort consistent with robust autonomy for all.

That presupposition is not only consistent with the liberal creed, emphasized but distorted by the subjectivist, that human nature is not fixed and uniform, but dynamic and variant, but with what objectivists concerned with overcoming oppression insist is our power to alter and shape our individual and collective characters—a power which, if unrecognized, is what makes us susceptible to having it shaped to our disadvantage.

_A Commitment Common to Us All_

The appeal to the faculty or faculties that give us the power to shape ourselves is again meant to be applicable to any human being who mistakes his or her interests due to ideology—whether oppressed or oppressor. Notice that if oppressors were said to have genuine and essential interests in the kinds of things they pursue, we would have to accept competition as a necessary feature of our social existence; the only question for political philosophy would be to address how to fairly manage that competition. If the value of what members of our society consider to be good must be left unquestioned, the fair-minded can only attempt to decide how best to provide everyone a fair shot at attaining the supposed goods. Yet that would only be a worthy enterprise if what are deemed “goods” really are good. While the material benefits the rich and powerful enjoy are undeniable, and while a
certain level of material assets are necessary for a good life, an adequate theory of false consciousness cannot fail to address the possibility that attaining them at the expense of being immoral can diminish the quality of a life. The rich and powerful often do not have the fortune of acquaintance with the genuine caring interaction exhibited by those amongst the indigent who are not so out of touch with the possibilities of their nature. Even if they do, those who oppress and who reap the short-term benefits of exploitation typically do not enjoy the true satisfaction that comes with the regular exercise of a good will because the social roles they are forced to fulfill if they are to reap those benefits do not allow it. To state the point contentiously, material and political privilege is an impediment to authenticity.

One who thinks this implausible or who finds it inconceivable to deny that oppressors can have a genuine interest in oppressing might argue that oppression can nonetheless be condemned on the grounds that the interests of the oppressed outweigh the interests of those they oppress. But the possible grounds of such a claim are themselves implausible. Either, it must be claimed, it is because the oppressed simply outnumber oppressors that the interests of the former should outweigh those of the latter; or, it is because the interests themselves of the oppressed, because of some superior quality, somehow outweigh those of the oppressors. While the latter invites judgments about the quality of interests as contentious as the denial that one can have a genuine objective interest in being an oppressor or benefactor, the former tactic illegitimately ignores deep issues regarding the tyranny of the majority, and does so precisely because it does not invite those qualitative questions. (The so-called interests of the oppressors cannot be discounted simply because they are outnumbered; some reference to the nature of their interests is required.)
To claim that an oppressor not only gains material wealth but immense social power by being so is undeniable. That is not in dispute. But to make the claim that some of these benefits have not only instrumental but even intrinsic value does not yet address the issue of whether the lifestyles they presuppose can be in anyone's true or genuine interests. To understand the claim here that they cannot, consider the case of the sadist and the masochist where masochism is understood in the philosophical sense as one who seeks harms to herself, not as one who takes pleasure in intense sensations. Prima facie it would be odd to say that that while the masochist cannot have a genuine interest in submitting herself to the will of another, a sadist can genuinely have it in his interest to harm another. It would be odd to claim that while masochism would not be chosen by a genuinely autonomous person, sadism might well be. If it is clear, as philosophers of our day tend to think, that the masochist acts irrationally, why is it not equally clear that the sadist acts irrationally? If we only do wrong to ourselves unwittingly, why not think we only do wrong to others unwittingly? The apparent grounds for thinking that the masochist makes a fundamental error about her interests in a way the sadist does not, would seem to be the view that human beings are only ever motivated by their own self-interest. For that assumption could explain how the masochist errs about in what her self-interest consists, while the sadist does not. Yet, assuming we are talking about conscious motives, the claim is patently false. What seems to lie behind the view that there is a difference then, is the assumption that Psychological Egoism is true. And yet that position too is demonstrably false. For it relies for its apparent plausibility on the claim that if I want to carry out an action, that is, if my action is voluntary, it must ipso facto be the pleasure it brings me so to do that constitutes the reason motivating me. Once we recognize the conflation of the distinction between what motivates an action and that action's being voluntary, Psychological Egoism crumbles.25
In the space that remains, then, I will suggest that we reinvestigate the ancient view that our interests are determined by a nature—on a modern adaptation, a nature common to us all—in which the rational capacities of that nature and a virtuous character go together.

Perfectionism: A Vigorous Alternative

So far in discussing the view of the self, we have said that an adequate account of interests must make essential reference to states-of-the-world including our evolutionary history. Having made explicit what I believe is a necessary presupposition of any plausible commitment to the kind of creatures we are, we must now turn to considering what kinds of relations to our environment broadly construed are in the interests of those kinds of creatures. We need, in other words, to consider more carefully what it would be to say that those relations are autonomous. The aim is to flesh out the claim that human interests are, at root, a function of the relations of creatures, cultural by design, to a social as well as physical environment. I will suggest that Perfectionism, the view that morality consists in promoting certain intrinsically valuable states of humans, offers a promising strategy.

A Robust Autonomy

_Autonomy_ is the state of being self-directing. The concept thus assumes the ability to reevaluate and to revise if necessary one’s fundamental ends. Yet if we are to make sense of this understanding of _autonomy_, a common account of it will not do. _Autonomy_, according to Gerald Dworkin, is a “second-order capacity of persons to reflect critically upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, and so forth and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences.”

(Higher-order preferences are understood to be preferences about preferences.) But the argument against the Coherentist Subjectivist in Chapter 3 showed that such an account is, as stated, insufficient to describe as inautonomous
cases of Missing Interests where preferences about preferences, fundamental aims, are precisely what is in question. The question then, is what conception of autonomy is adequate to an objective theory of interests powerful enough to capture such cases as cases of false consciousness.

Perfectionism, recognized as offering a formidable alternative to moralities based on subjectivist accounts of interests, offers an answer to that question. Its very structure is well-suited to the task. Its advantage is this: since it is centered on an ideal of the good life defined in terms of human nature, it includes self-regarding duties. As such, it has the power to address ideological harms to the self. In the face of the current tendency in philosophy to treat morality as pertaining only to actions that affect others, Thomas Hurka has recently tried to revive Perfectionist ethics and politics in his Perfectionism, defending Aristotelian Perfectionism as the most promising pure form. The one which picks out plausible features of human nature is the one whose ideal calls for the development of whatever properties are essential to humans and conditioned on their being living things.27 In the Aristotelian view, one ought to promote certain intrinsically valuable states of human beings, such as knowledge, achievement, and friendship. The good consists in the exercise of inner states of character—of our rational capacities to attain knowledge and to pursue complex long-term intentions.

What is it to say that those inner states of character are autonomous? While a plausible view of the good must treat autonomy only as one good among others, the position of autonomy amongst the list of other perfections can be justified on Aristotelian Perfectionist grounds if it “show[s] that autonomy develops human nature by exercising sophisticated rationality.” Viewing autonomy as valuable simply as an exercise in reason is insufficient; since “deliberation is an intellectual activity that does not require options actually to be open,” a
slave who imagined various options for herself would turn out to be autonomous. Thus, Hurka suggests a concept of *deliberate autonomy* as “free choice from a wide range of options that reflects practical reasoning about them.” This conception of autonomy realizes deliberative rationality, but does so in a more than an intellectual way because what it comprises are not beliefs, available even to a slave, but intentions realized in the world.\(^{24}\)

The general structure of Perfectionism so construed thereby permits a view of autonomy powerful enough to diagnose Missing Interests. It captures what Rosen looks for in Benjamin and what Railton did not manage to attain, namely, grounding a view of interests on the understanding that comes only with lived experience and education.

Notice how this notion of *autonomy* fits with the response to the paternalism objection in Part I. If the good consists, as it does for Perfectionists including Plato and Aristotle, in a certain inner state of character, then it cannot be imposed from without. Thus, as Hurka points out, “[t]he liberal commitment to liberty need not rest on agnosticism about the good or on the view that only free choice is good. It can be grounded in a deep fact about human perfection: that each person’s achievement of it must be largely her own.”\(^{25}\) What Perfectionism provides are the grounds to justify developing conditions under which individuals can autonomously develop those states of character. The theory is not only well-suited to the interests of progressives in bettering the condition of human beings narrowly conceived, but more broadly to address environmental concerns; for, though the idea has yet to be developed, the ideal of Perfectionism can be generalized to apply to all living things, whose good, like ours, consists in developing their nature.\(^{30}\)
What the View Envisioned Is Not

It is important to notice that the suggestion that Perfectionism is a moral theory rich enough to support a viable conception of *false consciousness* does not suppose—what would make the account viciously circular—that we ought to act in accord with our moral sense, because our tendency towards altruism is *morally* good. Though critics sometimes interpret socio-biologists or evolutionary ethicists like Kropotkin this way, a more plausible interpretation of Kropotkin’s argument is that because we have the tendency towards mutual aid and *because that tendency is a perfectible feature of our nature, a perfection*, it is wrong to hinder it. The appeal to our tendency towards altruism is thus offered as a descriptive claim about our nature, intended to support the place of altruism—however it turns out to be best conceived—on the list of perfections. Against the objection that Perfectionism cannot be a free-standing morality because it is circular, Hurka points out that there would only be a problem if the theory employed *morally* evaluative content to identify morally important properties of humans. But since he rejects the moralism of Aristotle, understood as the view that human beings are necessarily virtuous, the Perfectionist claim that the morally right act is one which promotes valuable aspects of our nature, need not appeal to a *morally* evaluative concept of *nature*. Thus, we need not rule out as possible good lives the oppressor’s lifestyle or that of the sadist, nor the lifestyles of the oppressed or that of the masochist, *because they are immoral*. Rather, Perfectionism has the power to ground the claim that to pursue them is immoral *because they are ill-suited to perfecting our nature*.

One might think that the means to avoiding the above issue invites another problem. For if we were essentially cruel, cruelty would be a perfection. (For this reason Hurka argues that those unwilling to accept this consequence of the pure form of the theory must at least accept that Perfectionism must play a large role in any pluralist moral theory.) Yet because
such creatures are remote from our experience, because we have no reason to believe that we are creatures who, with “free choice from a wide range of options that reflects practical reasoning about them,” will choose to act cruelly, this consequence of Pure Perfectionism does not present a problem. Suppose, for example, that we have evidence that male aggression is an evolutionary trait. As long as we have the power to provide an outlet that is conducive to flourishing instead of a threat to it, one respectful of autonomy, there is no reason to think there is a problem. For even if aggression were a perfection, as long as it is not violence or cruelty that is an essence of our nature, then even Pure Perfectionism need not have counterintuitive results.

Rationality Properly Conceived

This brings us to the question of rationality. We need now to look back at the original framework of the problem to understand the conception of rationality required. False consciousness, we said, perpetuates itself not simply thanks to rampant misinformation, but even in light of evidence to the contrary. On some views of rationality such a phenomenon must remain mysterious, the blatant irrationality of people who hold views in the face of evidence to the contrary inexplicable. For if rationality pertains only to belief, there are no grounds to explain why someone would ever believe that for which they do not have evidence. Yet, as I suggested in Chapter 2, it would be insufficient to explain the self-perpetuating nature of ideological false consciousness to suppose that it is simply a function of inadequate or insufficient information. The phenomenon is also a function of our attachment to being in the state that results from being systematically misinformed. We must make sense, I have argued, of the idea that individuals can have an emotional investment in their false states of consciousness. The point of claiming that an adequate moral theory is one whose commitment to human nature is explicit and supported, as it is in Perfectionism, is this: such
appeal is necessary to account for how it is that ideology enlists our natural drives and, while distorting their natural aims, how it is that it compels our complicity in our own false consciousness. Given an ideological worldview, some belief or behavior that constitutes or reflects false consciousness may, from the perspective of those basic ends, appear to be reasonable. An adequate account of rationality, while maintaining that it is still irrational in fact, must be capable of accounting for this. Only if the error can be explained will a remedy be revealed.

Jean-Paul Sartre recognized this phenomenon of investment in error. Though he may be faulted for grossly underestimating the difficulty of the task, he must be credited in his treatment of mauvaise foi, or bad faith, with recognition of the need for individuals to revolutionize themselves, to embrace very different ends, in order to overcome it. A proper conception of rationality, one in line with a robust autonomy fit to describe victims of Missing Interests as inautonomous, must not be a mere instrumental rationality of the sort assumed, for example, in Prisoner’s Dilemma examples. Rationality, properly understood, pertains to ends as well as means. An account of rationality with room for evaluation of ends is one which has it that emotion and belief are intricately related, where belief is a function of emotion and conversely. Martha Nussbaum defends Aristotle’s view of rationality as such.
Aristotle, like Plato, believes that emotions are individuated not simply by the way they feel, but, more importantly, by the kinds of judgments or beliefs that are internal to each. A typical Aristotelian emotion is defined as a composite of a feeling of either pleasure or pain and a particular type of belief about the world. Anger, for example, is a composite of painful feeling with the belief that one has been wronged. The feeling and the belief are not just incidentally linked: the belief is the ground of the feeling. If it were found by the agent to be false, the feeling would not persist; or, if it did, it would no longer persist as a constituent in that emotion. If I discover that an imagined slight did not really take place, I can expect my painful angry feelings to go away; if some irritation remains, I will think of it as residual irrational irritation or excitation, not as anger. It is part of this same view that emotions may be assessed as either rational or irrational, 'true' or 'false', depending upon the nature of their grounding beliefs. If my anger is based upon a hastily adopted false belief concerning a wrong done to me, it may be criticized as both irrational and 'false'.

What Aristotle provides is a way of accounting for rationality not simply in terms of belief and evidence for that belief, but in terms of appropriate emotional responses. The phenomenon (described in Chapter 2) of misplaced affective responses associated with false needs can thus be diagnosed by a theory employing such a conception of rationality on the grounds that the emotional responses are inappropriate. The emotional response to what is, but what is not recognized as a false need, may well be reasonable given false beliefs about the end involved. What may explain the persistence of attachment to that end in the face of evidence pointing to the falsity of the relevant beliefs is what is built around the original emotional attachment. Such investment is most likely when the emotions is comprises are not the result of deliberation over a sufficiently wide range of options, when they involve non-autonomous judgments, resting ultimately on mistaken beliefs about one's nature and its potential. Such investment is most likely to persist, in other words, when it is a part of a whole web of emotions prompted by ideological errors against which there may be less apparent evidence.
The “Distancing Effect” Takes Its Toll

I want now to motivate an objective view of human interests and its concomitant radical conception of false consciousness by way of motivating the very possibility of a false identity, that is one, which suffers the kind of false consciousness I have termed Missing Interests. The object of this discussion is to motivate the claim that it is not only possible but also understandable, expected, even predictable, that individuals would develop even fundamental ideological interests in the place of truer ones. The point of the discussion below is to offer a conjecture as to what it is about human nature that would explain why individuals with that nature, will, under the pressures of an ideological society, fail properly to recognize even their basic interests.

My project is to motivate a particular species of an old idea concerning human nature—that the immoral person harms himself in behaving immorally, not exclusively, but essentially. Borrowing from some of the recent literature on trust, I will re-explore the old idea that the harm involved in deceit, its wrongness, has essentially to do with harm to the deceiver. Andre Gombay defends this internalist position—internal because it locates the wrong of lying in something internal to the agent—against the modern externalist view that the wrongness of deceit lies in the harm it brings to the dupe.37 The internalist view of deceit is a relative of the idea that the immoral person harms himself in acting immorally, that morality is in some essential respect self-regarding. Our modern sensibilities make it implausible for us to suppose that immoral persons harm only themselves in acting immorally. Yet there is something of interest and importance to the claim that there is a real harm a person does to himself in failing to treat persons as they ought to be treated. While acting in accordance with morality is surely not a sufficient condition for leading a good life, it is arguably a necessary one (at least for a best life).
Despite the apparent difficulty of the task of making sense of this idea, it will be a worthwhile endeavor if we can realize its fruitful potential for modern day social movements. For with the supposition that we as humans have a moral faculty—and that because we do, acting morally is a necessary condition of a good life—we can make sense of a false identity. If the pressure to conform to immoral standards of behavior in an ideological society clashes with our innate tendency to conform to the demands of morality, we are presented with a choice: we can ignore those demands until it becomes second nature so to do (something facilitated by socialization through the developmental years of childhood) or, as the following account conjectures, we are forced to go without the dispositions that facilitate quotidian interaction. The aim here is to motivate the possibility of a false identity, a form of false consciousness I have categorized as Missing Interests, and, having rejected theories which would have it that such a phenomenon is inconceivable, thereby to motivate the reintroduction of an avowedly evaluative theory of objective interests into progressive politics.

The force of Gombay's point can be summed up as follows. While the consequences of speaking a falsehood might bring just as much harm as telling a lie, we do not morally condemn someone who unknowingly and non-negligently reports a falsehood as we do the deceiver. The fact that in order to distinguish the two, we must make reference back to the internal state of the agent, is, therefore, reason for thinking that the wrongness of deceit lies there. Hence the supposition that it lies in corruptive consequences to the agent.

The harm, Gombay alleges, is that it is the fate of deceivers to grow distant from those whom they deceive. In what follows I will explore my hypothesis as to why it might be true that, as Gombay assumes, this "distancing effect" is a fact of human nature. One might think that while it might be true of those who value truth-telling, that itself gives us no reason
whatsoever to suppose it is true of anyone else: “It may be a fact about you that you grow distant from those you deceive” the critic would say, “but that is only because you value truth-telling.” “Not surprisingly, you feel yourself growing distant from those you deceive. But that gives us no reason to assume that someone who does not value honesty and truth-telling would be so affected.” This, of course, is just to raise the subjectivist challenge: what reason do we have to think that what I have termed the “distancing effect” is true for all human beings in virtue of their nature?

**Moral Sacrifice**

Investigating the question of whether people experience an emotional or psychological distancing (and, as a consequence, a behavioral one) from those they deceive, cannot simply be a question of tallying subjective reports. Thus the possibility that people can misperceive or misunderstand such internal states raises conceptual issues which must for now remain open. Although we may be able to muster up some evidence for this purported fact about human nature, it is not one that, at least for now, we can straightforwardly test.

Thus I will proceed by theorizing as to what might explain the fact, if there is such a fact, that the distancing effect is the inevitable result of deceiving, the inevitable result, perhaps, of our moral psychology. In order to set up that hypothesis let us now examine what I think is an interesting and welcome consequence of the internalist position that the harm of deceit lies in the harm to the deceiver: namely, that to be put in a position where one is forced to lie, is to sacrifice one’s self.

Imagine then a homosexual who remains “in the closet” with respect to his family. We should not imagine that he fails to recognize or appreciate his own sexuality, nor that he fails to recognize that non-heterosexuals are oppressed in our society as in many others. We
need not even suppose that he fails to recognize the importance of taking the shorter-term risks of "coming out" for the longer-term gain of increased societal acceptance of non-traditional values. Instead, suppose that he finds himself in circumstances where, though not compelled in the strong sense of having his agency incapacitated, he is faced with compelling moral reasons for hiding his homosexuality—reasons which outweigh both the normal presumption in favor of truth-telling, and the political advantages of his coming out. Let us stipulate that coming out to family members would unduly endanger his or another innocent's life. (I leave this option open in order to resist reduction to a simple calculation of self-interest.) We might imagine that coming out to his mother, who is not an adept deceiver, would put her at risk of leaking the information to the father, who, we imagine further, our closet homosexual has good reason to believe capable of an extremely violent reaction. Unfortunately for those in similar circumstances, this is hardly a wildly fantastic scenario.

Now let us think about our closet homosexual's relationship with his mother. Let us assume that the relationship is otherwise normal—in the normative if not the statistical sense of involving mutual affection. While his sexuality might not be the defining feature of his life or his identity, it is fair to suppose that the related lifestyle is an important component of both—of who he is and how he approaches the world, of his fundamental aims and basic worldview. Given this, being compelled to hide his sexuality from his mother, to hide this component of his "self" from her, as we have supposed he is, he feels distanced from her.

What the internalist position—the view that the harm of lying lies in harm to the deceiver—provides, is the possibility of accounting for the loss our compelled closet homosexual experiences. Since ex hypothesi the deception in which our closet homosexual engages is justifiable, the right thing to do in the circumstances, the distancing he experiences
cannot be a simple function of guilt. One might object that while the homosexual has no rational reason to feel guilt, nothing to feel guilty about, he does nonetheless—suffering a sort of residual guilt, or guilt without an object. “That,” the objector might contend, “is sufficient to explain the distancing effect.” But, although the phenomenon of “residual guilt” is important, we have no good reason to suppose that it must be operative here.

If guilt does not explain the distancing in this case, we might suppose alternatively that it is the result of regret. But if we understand regret as a relatively considered sentiment, this still does not quite get it right. The distancing may be instead an effect of something of which the subject is only barely aware—a quasi-differentiated feeling of regret experienced perhaps, as I will suggest, when one’s psychology becomes unhinged, so to speak, from its moral nature.

A virtue of the internalist view of the nature of lying is that it gives a name to that experience and thereby opens the way for an account of moral sacrifice. While someone who makes a moral sacrifice may retain his integrity, for he does what he must in the circumstances in which he finds himself, what impartiality would require or at least permit others in the same position to do, he suffers a loss of authenticity—the circumstances in which he finds himself impose undue constraints on his choice of ends so that he cannot be true to himself. Though he is self-determining within such constraints, he is not autonomous in a robust sense because those constraints prevent him from determining himself as he would absent them. To return to our example, the closet homosexual is not what he would be in a culture not merely tolerant, but supportive of homosexuality.

**A Sacrifice of Spontaneity**

Do I mean to suggest that the distancing effect is the result of the psychological strain of concentrating on keeping the deceit hidden? The answer is ‘no’. Although keeping up a
deceit requires mental work, there is something more, and something more significant, needed to explain the distancing effect. The fact that keeping up deceit is a deliberate, perpetual activity provides a clue. Gombay's view is that the harm of deceit is not in the breakdown of social relations; rather, that breakdown is a consequence of the harm of deceit, where that harm is internal to the agent. Now my conjectured explanation: the harm, i.e. the distancing effect, is the psychological consequence of the impairment of the individual's capacity for moral action, where that impairment is a loss of spontaneity. The distancing effect is, in other words, a consequence of not being able to act out of one's character, of being compelled instead to judge every act or adopt an ideological character. While a lack of spontaneity does impede social relations, that harm is derivative of the incapacitation of the moral agent—wherein lies its essential harm.

A moral character which is intact may be compelled by the behavioral constraints imposed by ideological circumstances to sacrifice its dispositions. A robust autonomy would permit an individual to keep her non-ideological character-based dispositions and behavior in sync. A robust autonomy, I am supposing, involves not a liberty of indifference but a liberty of spontaneity—the freedom to choose the more compelling option.

By spontaneity, I mean to evoke the idea that—except in exceptionally complicated circumstances—we simply perceive the dictates of basic morally assessable behavior, and act accordingly, more or less automatically, that our character traits permit us to assess the circumstances, as I claimed in Part II of Chapter 2, according to our engrained categories of conception, unless a situation is sufficiently complex to merit the contrasting concept of deliberative calculation. The reason that keeping up the deliberate, perpetual activity of deceit is a strain then, is that the more one deceives, the more one impairs one's natural tendency and
ability to engage without conscious calculation, other beings in the world, in morally appropriate ways. The problem with deceit then, is not so much the mental work required to keep it up, as it is what the need for all that work points to—that one has increasingly become more like a calculating robot than a sophisticated biological sensing machine in a cultural environment conducive to its proper, healthy functioning.

I am assuming that in perceiving the facts of a given situation, "normally" functioning human beings perceive the good and are motivated to pursue it. In the course of ordinary human interaction, they need not engage in a long deliberative calculation of relative benefits and harms before deciding to act. While the truth-teller finds it natural to engage other human beings spontaneously, the more one deceives, the more contrived becomes one's behavior because the more calculated it must be. Our closet homosexual does not lie and deceive and go on his merry way once he realizes that it is right or in his best interests to do so, as a robot or computer might, continuing to behave as before. Rather, he suffers a loss, and that loss is an impairment of his natural capacity for spontaneous, free engagement with the valuable things or states of affairs he finds in the world. This loss derives from the situation's demanding that he not be himself, in a crucial and important respect—in this case a more spontaneous relationship with his mother. In this sense, he suffers a blow to his authenticity.

Developmentalism

What reason do we have to accept the speculation that biological human beings have needs which they may, under adverse circumstances, not recognize? What advantage does this view offer over the subjectivist mentalistic picture of interests modeled on desire? The objectivist account of interests has the potential advantage of explaining what feminist and other challengers to (some versions of) liberalism have insisted is our developmental nature.
They demand conceptions of the self rich enough to make sense of this nature. Theorists such as Annette Baier, to take one example, argue that an adequate moral theory must capture the significance of our development into adulthood from childhood.\textsuperscript{39} Victoria McGeer, goes a step further in emphasizing the significance of the developmental aspect of our adult selves in relationships.\textsuperscript{40} This feminist methodology is fruitful for what I have argued are the constraints of the project at hand. The appeal to a developmental nature, one not fixed by a pre-determined content, explicitly addresses the core of the Freudian challenge—that if we do not try to understand that developmental nature we will be determined by it—as he pessimistically thought in his later years we were doomed to be.

This insistence on our developmental nature constitutes a challenge to any view which privileges any given time-slice and which thereby illicitly privileges ideological characters. Privileging what we could be, the feminist alternative avoids having to arbitrarily privilege what we are. Furthermore, it is a challenge which, in its focus on how people become the particular individuals they do, purports to capture what the subjectivist wanted in the first place, namely, respect for persons in their individual particularity.

The aim of this section is to reveal the deep methodological implications of taking the "developmental perspective," which, as McGeer points out, are that we need to think more attentively about the agent herself. "For once adults are viewed as developing out of an infant state—hence, in an interpersonal world that has been structured and restructured by their changing affective attitudes—it is no longer possible to ignore how their own developing psychological condition affects their relationships with others."\textsuperscript{41} "[The] continuous dynamic involvement with another demands from the agent a quality of \textit{reflective responsiveness}."\textsuperscript{42} My conjecture is that while trust fosters the spontaneity necessary for reflective responsiveness,
deceit requires fragmentation of that responsiveness, rendering it less effective. Fragmentation, I hazard to guess, is the result of having to keep in one's consciousness the artificial confines—if you will—of deceit, so that possible modes of interaction on any given occasion must be calculated instead of evolving naturally. Calculations are explicit in a way which contrasts sharply with Baier's vision of trust as something which grows up slowly and imperceptibly, which comes in varying degrees of self-consciousness, which one rarely makes one's mind up to do. With this much of the externalist view, we can agree. As Sissela Bok puts it: "trust is the atmosphere in which we interact with one another, but of which we are hardly aware, like the air we breathe, until it is lacking."43

If there is something to this conjecture about impediments to a character free to act on a liberty of spontaneity, free to act out of its dispositions, my prescription for a unified progressive vision is to charge itself with discerning conditions conducive to trust for a community conducive to our acting out of our rich characters. Until we do so, not only is the closet homosexual's thriving stifled, but also as a result of his loss, we as a society lose the value that he would contribute to vital cultural flourishing. A theory of objective interests so conceived has the power to capture how we each have an interest individually in the flourishing of the collective. The moral to draw from the view that human beings are in a constant process of evolution is that the more hindered their interaction with one another, the more limited their evolution and the more limited our evolution as a culture; hence the perpetuation of the stifling of the development of individual characters. If we suppose that interaction with one another is important for our individual development, the more trustful, spontaneous, and cooperative our interactions, the richer our evolving selves will become. A person who, at some level or in some sense recognizes this, as does our closet homosexual,
will experience the distancing effect on his psychology of having his spontaneous nature inhibited. He will feel the loss in authenticity. The infrequent deceiver will recognize this effect better than will the seasoned deceiver. But she who fails to recognize this distancing effect misses out on the richer self she could be nonetheless.

Now, I hope, we can better understand Hill’s deferential wife. An individual living in a society which values women in terms of what they can do for men, and who knows her value is otherwise, is inevitably compelled to deceive, as was the homosexual. The deferential wife is one who embraces these forces so that they shape her (ideological) character, rather than engaging a non-ideological character in perpetual battle with them. She gives up her “self” altogether, a casualty in the struggle against the forces that would have her fragment, forces that have whittled away her authenticity. Hence the “false identity” of her remains. The above is a hypothesis about how our natural social instincts—morally attuned—can, under significant constraints, pressure us into ideological identities. We are pressured into adopting character traits consistent with those around us because otherwise we must deliberate each time we take a course of action.

It bears repeating that what is envisioned here is not that being a good person is sufficient for a good life, but that it is necessary. The moral person who is oppressed is very much deprived in being denied the external means to developing a good character leading a good life. The claim is rather that, while the oppressor has access to such means, his immoral character is not suited to working them into a good life. The hypothesis that one is harmed in an ideological society because one is deprived of the development of a better character, I hope, captures the spirit of what Nussbaum argues is Aristotle’s view of the fragility of goodness: misfortunes out of one’s control may nonetheless impact on one’s ability to be a good person.
Consider her treatment of Euripides' Hecuba. Though capable of remaining firm in the face of adversity, when she finally loses her young daughter to murder at the hands of a trusted friend, she is moved by the “bankruptcy of trust” to solitary, power-seeking revenge. We pity her, says Nussbaum, because circumstances deprived her of all the human relationships that had given meaning and value to her life so that she can no longer be a moral person. A perfectionist view of interests, whose explicit appeal to human nature does not let us forget either our capabilities or our limitations as living things, shows that the possibility of our living a good life is contingent both on our having a good will and on our circumstances.

Ideological circumstances of domination and subordination make it very difficult to meet both conditions. A unified progressive project which employs a conception of false consciousness based on objective interests—at least as a regulative if not a full-blown perfectionist ideal—has the potential to discover conditions of robust autonomy in which characters are free to engage spontaneously and imaginatively.

Conclusion

If we are to live peacefully with others, few of whom we will know well enough to be friends, we must nonetheless be able to decide together how to organize our societies. That is the essence of democratic theory. The very fact of our social existence requires that if we are to determine the shape our interactions take, we must respect each other's decision-making procedures. But if we are to do that we must have a shared set of values—substantive, not merely procedural. There is, in other words, no such thing as the kind of “management” of conflict that the liberal subjectivist envisions, consistent with the values of liberty and equality, nor contra decision theory rationality without values.
Since human beings act on reasons and since they act even on bad reasons, then unless we can come to substantial agreement to prevent it, they will behave as creatures like us do when threatened: unreflectively and at the expense of our flourishing. Thus, either we set ourselves the project of determining what kind of people we ought to be, what kind of characters we should have, and of teaching our children those ways, or they will be molded by the powers that be. We can do that despite our ideological setting, by reading ideology backwards, so to speak—from our false to our true interests. We can, in other words, interpret the meanings to which critical theorists pay so much attention without drawing relativist conclusions. Beginning with the commitment to the view that reason sets us free, we set ourselves on the project of drawing out the implications of egalitarianism. We have lost our nerve in defending what has intrinsic value. Many environmentalists, not unlikely because they surround themselves with it and shun its paltry and contemptible substitutes, have found the nerve to defend the intrinsic value of our world. We should follow their example.

---


7 For this reason Andrew Kornohan argues that a liberal state committed to the moral equality of persons must address the problem, as he calls it, of cultural pollution—egalitarian social meanings imperceptibly harming fundamental interests in self-respect and knowledge of the good. See Andrew Kornohan, *Liberalism, Equality, and Cultural Opposition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).


11 Isaiah Berlin, "Freedom: Negative or Positive?" p. iii.
13 Isaiah Berlin, "Freedom: Negative or Positive?" p. 171.
20 Peter Kropotkin Evolution and Environment, p. 34.
28 Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism, p. 148-151.
29 Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism, p. 153.
30 Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism, p. 6.
31 Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism, pp. 18-19.
32 Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism, p. 22. The worry is the implication that if essentially cruel beings existed, then development of cruelty in them would be intrinsically good. But since such beings are remote from our experience, Hurka points to the attraction of the general ideal.
35 Martha Nussbaum, p. 383.
36 See also Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism, p. 34.


CONCLUSION

I. What the Objectivist Theory of False Consciousness Is

I set out to defend a theory of false consciousness that is politically efficacious—one which suggests a way to provide for pursuit of our true interests. The claim that we have interests—even fundamental interests—about which we may err in a systematic and pernicious yet avoidable manner, is premised on the possibility of a social delusion. The theory of false consciousness I defend relies on the core hypothesis of the Frankfurt School’s theory of ideology: in many oppressive societies those who control the bulk of economic resources wield the most powerful influence over the collective imagination of the society. Though not limited to this particular manifestation of the phenomena, in our society, and increasingly around the globe, ideological illusion is the effect of a complex set of factors centered on the following. First, a powerful few owners of the mass media control information and tastes—a phenomena aptly named the ‘Culture Trust’. Second, thoughts consistent with the vision of the ‘Culture Trust’ ring true to those living within our institutions because their structure provides outlets for biological instincts which, because they are not satisfied in ways conducive to our interests, find alternative release in detrimental ways that, with habit, come to seem natural. The first, top-down component of this account of social delusion explains how ideologies perpetuate domination by the powerful; the latter bottom-up component explains how it is that people can come to mistake even their fundamental interests in a systematic ways. Arguably the single most insidious feature of the social delusion that arises with the capitalist monopoly on culture is that the concept of the good citizen is eclipsed by that of the willing, eager, and law-abiding consumer, neither good nor bad, a mere bundle of preferences.
The claim that alternative theories of interests to the kind of objectivism I defend are inadequate to this problem is premised on the possibility that the phenomenon I characterized as Missing Interests is real—that an individual's fundamental aims may be ideological so that ideological delusion deeply informs her sense of herself, her self-identity. The objectivist claim to have theoretical justification for criticizing the inclinations of people with such subservience-sensitized identities, those who have become immune to reason, worries critics who fear that we run the risk of committing rampant atrocities in the name of value judgments we cannot verify. Yet, I have argued, we blind ourselves to assaults on autonomy already committed if we eschew the power only an objective account of interests has to describe individuals as wronged in being deprived of truer selves.

While I have made no attempt to answer the radical value skeptic—for I do not believe that argument can settle such an issue—addressing those unwilling to embrace nihilism, I have tried to show that we cannot seek authentication of ascribed interests by appeal only to the desires or preferences (however modified) of selves who have been wronged in their very creation—what from an objective interests standpoint looks like the most oppressive conditioning. Given the inadequacy of an alternative, the objectivist interest theory of false consciousness begins with the premise that value is a real feature of the universe. Morality, it supposes, is a feature of the universe that emerges out of the capacity of certain creatures in it to deliberate before taking action, to recognize possibilities—including the value of their possible characters—and to make the choice to act on the better of them. Its force is a function of the values in the world—specifically, in its possible worlds. The only authority to which we can appeal is that of the rationality of our common moral sense.
The fundamental prescription of the theory of false consciousness is thus to act on the possibility of improving our individual and social characters by changing the character of our institutions. To do so we must include the concept of a good citizen in the construction of egalitarian political theory, with explicit awareness that much of moral deliberation concerns the development of good persons. A necessary step in ridding ourselves of institutions harmful to us but on which we have become habitually and psychologically dependent then, in ridding ourselves of the taste for subservient lifestyles, is to recognize that a good society is not one which simply adjudicates between competing preferences, bypassing the immense complexity of deliberation about what it means to respect a person’s interests. Perhaps appropriate for angels, such a model is woefully ill-suited to the situation of creatures who develop into potentially competent judges of their interests only after a long period of socialization—a period of growth during which many develop dispositions, character traits and preferences consistent with a society founded on exploitation. Instead, by injecting debate about authentic interests back into political theorizing, members of various social movements can constructively engage in dialogue with each other with the common purpose of setting up the conditions of more autonomous choice for our children, and, depending on the extent that we are capable of transformation, for ourselves.

The mistaken assumption that even to advocate ways of life runs the risk of totalitarianism is itself harmful. It collapses the space for a vital ethics in which individuals strive to understand the social consequences of their possible choices and to judge how they ought to act accordingly, as it robs us of the opportunity and the responsibility to critically reflect on our “tastes”. It thereby whittles away the domain of the autonomous perspective so that the autonomous perspective itself is atrophied. Far from being incompatible with self-
determination, recognition that the question of our interests is an objective matter is what prompts us to determine ourselves, to self-determination. Only by subjecting to rational scrutiny the behavioral and character traits, dispositions and tastes acquired during socialization into an oppressive society, may we broaden the horizons of our moral consideration and thereby evolve into better persons and better societies.

II. What the Objectivist Theory of False Consciousness is Not

The fact that the theory of ideology explains how false consciousness is a social and not simply an individual delusion means that there is no need to ascribe some sort of fundamental irrationality to the individuals said to suffer it. While acting against one's interests is irrational at one level, those said to suffer false consciousness behave rationally at the more superficial ideological level—that is, given the limitations of their ideologically constrained imaginative space, from the point of view of the background assumptions of ideology, their choices and behavior are rational. The apparent rationality of behaving in a manner at odds with one's interests is what explains the error. Thus the moral realism entailed by the theory of false consciousness I defend can easily rebut the charge that realists must suppose that one party in a moral disagreement must be constitutionally unfit. 2 Though the conclusions of his reasoning are unsound because they are based on ideological assumptions, given the faulty nature of such assumptions, there is no need to impute any deficiency to the cognitive structure by which a victim of false consciousness arrives at his view. Furthermore, the theory of ideology diffuses the charge that widespread moral disagreement is evidence that morality is an illusion; for if much of that disagreement is the result of ideological error, then the appearance of ultimate moral disagreement is itself illusory.
While it may not persuade the value skeptic, the appeal to our moral sense, a feature of our emotional and rational capacities, and our capacity for cooperation, the facet of our nature Kropotkin calls the principle of mutual aid, is invoked in recognition of the fact that a peaceful, cooperative social organization is within our grasp. The theory of false consciousness supposes that we have the capacity to shape our world for the better (within the constraints of nature), and the obligation to do so—because we can. The theory of false consciousness need not suppose that we are not also capable of injurious competition. But if we know, as Dorris Lessing says we do in *The Prisons We Choose to Live Inside*, that we are disposed to behave badly under certain circumstances, then we can take measures to avoid doing so, and thereby free ourselves of injurious dispositions.³

Liberal Egalitarians and other Progressives need not fear that appeal to our nature risks justifying anti-progressive claims. For no claim is made that something is good simply in virtue of being in our nature. And, if we have in our nature instincts whose non-satisfaction or even whose satisfaction can lead to bad consequences, then we must look for outlets, or alternative outlets in the latter case, for those urges. The fact that the theory makes substantive claims about human nature does not differentiate it from any other political theory, all of which, I have argued, must implicitly do so.

We must not proceed as if our theories will never have anything to tell us about ourselves for political theory, practical in nature, cannot await a final answer. We know enough about ourselves to understand the functioning of ideology. The appeal to the moral sense of a biological creature allows for the possibility of ideology taking root in consciousness. It is because we seek reasons for our actions that we follow the norms prescribed by our society’s ideology unless we have the opportunity to recognize norms outside it. And, I
speculate, it is because ideological norms play off the momentum of our natural inclinations that we find them persuasive. The force of habit apparent in our psychological and behavioral dispositions makes it clear why attaining a truer consciousness is not simply a matter of more information and rational persuasion—though that is a significant part—but of making it possible for individuals to change their behavioral patterns and character traits. Hence, the prescription of the thesis: to unify diverse progressive political theories around the question of what it is for a human being to flourish as a means to developing the theoretical justification for altering the structures of society to those which are more conducive to autonomous choice.

III. The Practical Potential of the Objectivist Theory of False Consciousness

The claim that we ought to reinvestigate the idea that morality is fundamentally about the development of good persons—of ourselves and of others—is one which I believe lies behind the diverse criticisms of liberalism's complex relationship with value neutrality. It lies behind feminist emphasis on empathy and relatedness, behind their criticisms of the public/private distinction, behind the communitarian and group rights theorists' insistence that we require a community with shared values in order to thrive, in order to be autonomous. And, I hazard to guess, it is implicit, if unrecognized, in environmentalist discussions of obligations to future generations. Focusing on the subject of the good life has the potential to unify the advancements made in the revitalized area of virtue theory, by feminists, by the emphasis on character, in the concern for the nurturing of diverse oppressed cultures whether racial, ethnic or sexual, and in the concern for our obligations to a world which does not yet exist.

As evidence, I will simply mention two problems which I think make it clear that we must attempt to make consistent the various views of the good life advocated in different
progressive theories. The first example is from discussions of the rights of groups to have their cultures preserved; the second is from environmental theory. Each faces a potentially devastating objection that can only be answered by defending certain ways of life as better than others.

Increased attention has been brought to bear on the question of the rights of individuals to have their culture preserved in light of pressure from a dominant culture. To understand the force of such claims, we need to accept that when a group of people with a shared culture are extinguished, in addition to the wrongful deaths of their particular members, a wrong is committed in whatever precipitates the loss of valuable cultural practices. The claim that we must preserve a culture cannot be defended simply on the grounds that the individual members of a given culture have the right to have their cultural practices preserved, because, say, they constitute an important part of the identity of each of those individuals. The reason is that without the added proviso that (where appropriate) the identity in question is good, such an argument would justify the perpetuation of oppressive historical practices—the fundamental problem with traditional, as opposed to utopian, communitarianism—as well as the creation of morally objectionable communities. The only way to distinguish some of the claims of aboriginal peoples from those of white supremacists, neo-Nazis or Muslims who require the subjugation of women for their cultural identity—just to name a few—is to judge the moral permissibility of their practices. The claim that culture is an important constituent of personal identity, while true, does not, by itself, have the moral force to justify the preservation of any particular culture. Only the value of a given practice has that force.

The point I wish to make about the environmentalist concern with our obligations to future generations has essentially the same structure. From a moral point of view, it would
seem arbitrary to concern ourselves exclusively with the fate of existing individuals. For our environmental policies not only impact upon babies being born with every passing minute, but will impact upon those who will be born well into the future. Yet, critics charge, we cannot have obligations to things whose characteristics we know nothing about. A reasonable response would be to claim that we know enough about their basic needs for clean air and water to know in what our obligations consist. Yet there is something to the objection which this response misses. We cannot speak of particular future individuals to whom obligations are owed, since the very policies we adopt—population policies, for example—will determine what particular individuals will come to exist. What is perhaps implicit in the original objection not addressed by the response, is that it matters whether or not the generations to which we are alleged to have obligations will be fascists, akin to, say, the Borg, Star Trek's genetically engineered killing half-machine-half-humans. Recognition of the impact of our decisions on the very character of future generations makes it clear that our obligations in this matter consist primarily in bringing about a generation of good persons; the means to so doing is to ensure that conditions for their becoming such are in place. The fact that this may seem obvious perhaps explains why it is never made explicit.

The point of raising these examples, and of drawing attention to the aforementioned theories, is to suggest that they reveal—implicitly or explicitly—the need to shift our thinking about morality from a focus on preferences of (roughly-speaking) actually existing individuals to thinking about creating the right kind of person.

IV. In Conclusion

Implicit in my defense of a revitalized objective interest conception of false consciousness is the presupposition that there is no moral difference between failing to
provide someone with the conditions of autonomy—insofar as it is possible to do so—and violating autonomy by force. Morality is not limited to the actions that we do in fact take, but comprises as well actions that we have in our power to take. We have the power to reshape our institutions, and thus ourselves. A theory of objective interests does not let us ignore our responsibility to act on it.

The central claim has been that we have it in our power to use reasoning about the good life to effect change including the creation of circumstances that will change our affective responses. The fear of intolerance has so far prompted us to stifle the power we have to defeat it, namely appeal to reasonable argument. Tolerance of intolerance in a society in which the intolerant wield tremendous power over the imaginations of its members does not make for a good society. It stifles moral dissidents and thus impedes moral progress. The way to combat dangerous claims of alleged universal “value” is by appeal to other values; it is, quite simply, to make a better case for the truth. The typical way to do that in the case of “values” which, we are to suppose, wrongly deny respect for the personhood of some specific individuals or group of individuals, for example, is to show that there are no relevant distinctions to be made between the individuals in question and what are already seen to be respect-worthy persons. If social philosophy embraces intrinsic value, we have the remedy for our predicament at hand.

Queer theorists, environmentalists, race theorists, other feminists, and all other egalitarian theorists must engage each others’ claims and revise their own positions according to the dictates of an imperative task: to advocate a social way of life compatible with the truer interests of each individual—existing and future. The enemies of egalitarianism are having a debate about the good life without us. Hence their dramatic success in portraying friends of
egalitarianism as villains. The objectivist with respect to interests has faith in the power of each individual’s judgment. But that power can only be realized if we understand one basic constraint. Given that our identities are those of our stifled imaginations, our only trustworthy judgments are those that result from our striving to imagine what it would be like not to have the ideological habits we do, to be affected by non-ideological structures, to imagine what we would choose if we were not under their influence. We must do this in order to conceive of what we ought to become. With that vision, egalitarians have truth on their side. This is an argument that can be won.

1 Tom Frank, “Dark Age: Why Johnny Can’t Dissent” in The Baffler (No. 6, Chicago, IL, 1995), pp. 5-16, 175-192.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Goodman, Gail and Bottoms, Betty Study for the National Institute of Child Abuse and Neglect.


Herman, Judith L., and Harvey, Mary R., “The False Memory Debate: Social Science or Social Backlash?” in Insights/Harvard Mental Health Letter (Vol. 9, No.10, April, 4-6, 1993), pp. 4-6.


Lessing, Doris *The Prisons We Choose to Live Inside* (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1986).


Loftus *Memory* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1980).


Warren, Mary Anne "Future Generations" in *And Justice for All*, eds. Tom Regan and Donald VanDeVeer (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1982).


