

System Justification Theory: A half-critical psychology?

Thomas Dohmen

Abstract

System Justification Theory (SJT) researches the foundations of highly relevant societal issues: the defense of a destructive status quo ‘from below’, the ‘inertia’ to take action against injustices and threats to human livelihoods.

At first glance, there are various parallels between SJT and German Critical Psychology (GCP¹, Reimer & Markard, 2013; C. Tolman, 2013) regarding scientific interest and fundamental considerations of the social psychological subject matter: Individuals are considered to be actively and motivationally involved in the legitimation and reproduction of (domination- or exploitation-) systems that are partly to their own disadvantage. Both approaches want to contribute to emancipatory solutions of societal conflicts. To this end, both refer to Marxist analyses, among others. The SJT tries to synthesize “social theory in the Marxian tradition” and “experimental social psychology” (J. T. Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 314). GCP, on the other hand, seeks to develop its methodology for empirical research based on Marxist concepts, which leads away from the ‘mainstream’ of experimental psychology.

In my discussion of SJT I want to show with the help of GCP in which respect the synthesis does not succeed: SJT oscillates between two unintegrated psychologies which are not clearly distinguished by SJT-proponents:

1. The first (more theoretical) psychology can conceive complex nexuses and has a ‘historical intuition’ that is at least partially aware of the dependence of its own object of research on historical/political balances of power.
- 2) The ‘second’ psychology has a methodology based on fallibilism and therefore tends to more strictly falsifiable (and thereby less complex) hypotheses. Overall, it clearly holds the upper hand in the scientific approach of SJT.

This split results in ambiguities in theoretical concepts and empirical research that I will try to outline. Nevertheless, SJT raises crucial questions about the obstacles to solutions of societal crises. Its theorizing and research are worth discussing. My paper aims to raise possible lines of thought for this discussion.

¹ In German this approach is referred to as Kritische Psychologie (written with a capital K)

Keywords

System Justification Theory, false consciousness, objective interests, Critical Psychology, reinterpretation, analytical concepts and empirical concepts, theorizing in psychology, reason discourse

Introduction

Theoretical understandings of the research subject: parallels in SJT and critical psychology

System Justification Theory researches the foundations of highly relevant social issues: the defense of a destructive status quo, the ‘inertia’ to take action against injustices and threats to human livelihood.

At first glance, there are several parallels between the perspectives of SJT and GCP: individuals are seen as actively involved in the legitimation and reproduction of a (domination- or exploitation-) system that is (at least in relevant aspects) to their own disadvantage; and they do this driven by their own ‘motivation’. To address this, both refer to Marxist analyses from which they derive a notion of *objective* social interests and conflicts of related interest groups (e.g., Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 199; Jost, 1995, p. 400; Jost et al., 2019, p. 386). SJT and GCP investigate the benefits and individual costs of violating one's objective interests. Both approaches strive to contribute to emancipatory solutions of societal conflicts. These societal conflicts do, on the flipside, also represent (potentially unrecognized) problems on the level of the individual conduct of life, thereby constituting psychological problems in the narrower sense.

Theoretical aspirations of SJT

SJT aspires to bring together and integrate two “theoretical traditions”: “one coming from philosophy and social theory in the intellectual heritage of Karl Marx [...] and the other coming from social psychologists such as Kurt Lewin, Gordon Allport, Henri Tajfel [...]” (Jost, 2019, p. 264)².

Jost originally set out with the SJT to make the concepts of false consciousness and ideology, borrowed from Marxist social science, fruitful for experimental social psychology. The concept of false consciousness enabled Jost and Banaji to adopt the interpretive perspective of the first publication within SJT (1994). Here an explanation for negative, consensual stereotypes was provided: Disadvantaged people actively shared negative stereotypes about

² Jost locates SJT in an impressive family tree of theories (J. T. Jost, 2019; J. T. Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). On the Marxist side there are e.g. Marx, Gramsci, Lukaczs, Adorno, Elster on the social psychological Lewin, Festinger, Lerner, Tajfel. Rather than a reference of the sources from which SJT was systematically derived, this family tree indicates, where in one way or another one can find similarities in perspective, terminology or scientific approach.

themselves. This was explained as driven by the purpose of consolidating the status quo and thereby simultaneously their own disadvantage. According to this interpretation, this is a case of *outgroup favoritism*. The article succeeds in pointing out a phenomenon that can plausibly be considered an instance of false consciousness and cannot be explained by Social Identity Theory (SIT), whose research data are reinterpreted by Jost and Banaji. SIT concentrates mainly on a positive orientation towards one's own group (ingroup favoritism)³, but not on the favoritism of an outgroup. SJT postulates, in addition to the scope of SIT, the system level as a distinct psychological level of reference. Motives and emotions, which are not confined to the continuum individual-group, refer to it. In this framework the concept of false consciousness allows SJT to think of a contradictory behavior that tends to be (group) self-esteem-damaging but *at the same time motivated*.

With the concept of false consciousness SJT addresses a blankspace in experimental social psychology: the deceptiveness and self-deception of people is a common object of research. The fact, however, that in the concrete world these are related to social interests, which can be judged on a scientific basis, must seem impertinent to mainstream social science and its ways of thinking that aim at alleged neutrality. With its definition of this concept, the SJT decides to consider the abolition of oppression and discrimination as a scientific task that is related to 'scientific truth', as opposed to being purely normative and thus unscientific. The SJT's understanding and concept of social interest is, contrary to an everyday understanding, independent of the interest being consciously adopted or even agreed with; it is an *objective* interest deriving from social positions in societal structures shaped by inequality. Based on its emancipation-oriented orientation towards the subject of its research, SJT decides to consider the objective interests of disadvantaged groups as theoretically important. SJT does so despite the fact that group interests are often unrecognized by group members themselves and are not immediately useful for predicting or measuring behavior, even according to SJT (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012).

Thus, the SJT quite boldly brings certain aspects into the mainstream debate that have been banished from there due to a false sense of neutrality and a constricting methodological approach.

In its further development, SJT addresses system-stabilizing biases using implicit measures to capture self-deprecation. It examines the extent to which this provides psychological relief to the disadvantaged. It investigates which situational factors elicit System Justification (SJ). It examines various motivational foundations related to SJ (see below). It postulates social psychological models of action that intend to show tendencies to overcome the status quo (activism, collective action).

³ SIT investigates, among other things, how situations (and perceived qualities of overarching systems) shape individual group behavior, specifically identification with groups and thereby individual concept of the (group-)self. Of great importance is the relation of ingroup vs. outgroup. It is one of the key theories in mainstream social psychology, cf. Schnur in this volume.

On a theoretical level, Jost explicitly does not classify the SJT as a competitor to SIT, which conducts research on similar issues. SJT is concerned with supplementing and suggesting corrections (J. T. Jost, 2011).

Thematic areas of application of SJT include environmental awareness, various forms of discrimination, protest motivation, nationalism and anti-racism, conservatism research, utopian thinking.

My approach to the subject matter: reinterpretation, critical review

My discussion of the SJT is guided and informed by the approach of reinterpretation with the concepts of GCP, as conceptualized by Markard (1994). My basic questions and concerns are, first, delineation and immanent critique of SJT based on its own aspirations: How coherently does the integration of different theories succeed? What is made possible by this attempt at integration? Second, discussion with the help of GCP-concepts: what are the scope and limits of SJT viewed through the lense of critical psychology's understanding of the nexus of the individual and society?

Why this approach? Deviating from the common approach in psychology, I assume with GCP that it is important to *analyze* concepts or constructs. GCP argues this is necessary because, among other things, concepts are a *prerequisite for* empirical research. One the one hand, theoretical concepts influence what becomes observable in the first place and, on the other hand, they determine how the observed can be interpreted (cf. Markard, 2015, pp. 168). Accordingly, concepts are a *necessary* foreknowledge. Therefore, it should be understood decidedly as a scientific task in psychology to clearly explicate and clarify theoretical concepts. From this point of view, taking terminology from everyday language and tacit knowledge or keeping conceptual understandings merely implicit, is not a scientifically sound approach. However, this is partly a common approach of psychological concept formation (cf. Kessler & Fritsche, 2018, p. 15; Markard, 1991).

Critical psychology develops basic psychological concepts through interdisciplinary, i.e. the so-called *empirical-historical analysis*⁴. The basis of this method are studies in evolutionary and social history. Here the assumption applies that the developmentally earlier (in the sense of phylogenetically or historically earlier) is the *conceptually more general*. I.e. a minimal definition (e.g. of emotion) is not obtained from the overlapping areas of different definition attempts. It is rather determined by the phenomenon's earliest developmental precursor as reconstructed by historical analysis of the human psychophylogenesis. GCP further analyzes the historical process of interaction in which the individual and society both have evolved and how, within this historical process, said precursors of psychological functions have further developed qualitatively, finally constituting the human psyche in its specificity.

⁴ GCP distinguishes between *historical empiricism* and *actual empiricism*. The former refers to its method of conceptualization, which is based on historical reconstructions of the development of mental functions. The latter refers to research with people in the present and corresponds more or less to the common understanding of empirical research. For detailed accounts see Holzkamp, 1985; and in English Tolman, 2013.

Thereby a foundation of psychology and its basic concepts is proposed (in detail: Holzkamp's *Grundlegung der Psychologie* [Foundation of Psychology] 1985)⁵.

In this progression of historical analysis, the mediation relationship between the individual and society in the current 'state of development' of capitalist societies is deliberated. GCP analyzes this on the basis of Marxist social theory. It provides an elaborate repertoire of concepts to psychologically grasp the relationship between individual and society. GCP makes a proposal as to what is *essential* about the subject matter of psychology (specifically regarding humans, Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 513). In its application the GCP is intended to help analyze "experience and action" regarding "the extent to which certain social demands and constraints are [covertly or unconsciously; TD] expressed in them" (Markard, 2012, p. 67⁶).

On this basis, other psychological theories can also be examined as to what extent they do justice to the essential aspects as understood by GCP. For this purpose, a *reinterpretation* in critical-psychological terminology is carried out. Its aim is the explication of the epistemological substance ("Erkenntnisgehalt", Markard, 1994, p. 126) of the examined approach. In my text, the reinterpretation elements will be used to give a new perspective for a reflection on SJT (cf. Dohmen, 2021).

SJT does not exist systematically *as a coherent body of theory*. Theoretical concepts, as well as their function and relations among each other, and other apriori assumptions are scattered among: review articles that rather additively summarize research results, discussion sections of study publications, and debate papers disputing with other approaches. Also, Jost's first monograph on SJT, entitled "A Theory of System Justification", published in July 2020, does not contain a 'theory section' in the narrow sense. Here, too, the theoretical concepts of SJT are mainly to be found in the context of reviews of various, own research projects. They remain unintegrated within the book⁷.

It was therefore necessary to compare and relate statements of the SJT, to explicate implicit assumptions⁸ and to confront this with self-portrayals of the SJT.

It is not clear which statements are to be regarded as theoretically pertinent and which, for example, stem more from the 'political intuition' of individual authors (especially Jost's). Nevertheless, in order to appropriately receive the theoretical thrust of the SJT, I think it is essential to consider several of these theoretical statements by Jost and colleagues as a substantial part of the SJT. They are statements about the foundations of theoretical concepts, statements that clarify the (historical) scope of the SJT, contain demarcations and lines of

⁵ This distinguishes it from evolutionary psychological considerations, which do not focus on this process of qualitative further development

⁶ Quotes from German texts were translated into English by me.

⁷ E.g., the fourth chapter on prejudice is mainly based on Jost & Banaji (1994) and Jost (1995), whose ideas on false consciousness were later modified and simplified to facilitate operationalization (see Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 322). This is, however, not taken into account in this book chapter.

⁸ Accordingly, my engagement with the SJT has, if you will, a partly hermeneutic quality: I had to try and make implicit things explicit. This reflects some ambiguity of the SJT itself. On the other hand, this explicative approach is partly speculative and a potential attack surface of my work.

connection to other approaches, and statements in the vein of social theory and, to a certain extent, political statements within the framework of SJT.

To trace what SJT does, it is necessary to distinguish different 'conceptual qualities': Drawing on ideas of German Critical Psychology, I have tried to trace the internal hierarchy of concepts of SJT by distinguishing *categories*, *analytical concepts*, furthermore *single-theoretic assumptions* ("einzeltheoretische Annahmen" (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 28), e.g., regarding how the subjects of analytical concepts are interrelated) and *descriptive concepts* ("Beschreibungsbegriffe" *ibid.*, p. 513). *Categories* are the overarching basic concepts of an approach⁹, which constitute it and structure how it empirically approaches the world. They determine which aspects of the "infinite fullness of aspects of reality" (*ibid.*, p. 509) are prioritized, what constitutes their essence, their 'intrinsic logic', and how they must be researched accordingly. From the point of view of GCP, there is no theory without constituting categories, whether or not they are made explicit.

Crucial in this context is the *quality* of analytical concepts. They do not serve the purpose of assigning observed phenomena under an 'umbrella term' (i.e. descriptive concepts). Analytical concepts in psychology are a "means to identify the essence of psychical phenomena and to be able to grasp the variety on the level of outward appearance as their different manifestations"¹⁰, (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 327). Another facet of this idea is that aspects that are analytically distinguishable may, 'in fact', not occur separately in the empirical material and are also not clearly separable (e.g., emotion and cognition).

A: Theoretical SJT

In section A, I will outline aspects of the "theoretical half" of SJT and its problematic transition to the "empirical half."

***False consciousness* in SJT as a category and analytical concepts derived from it: the lack of conceptual clarity in SJT**

In the early stages of STJ Jost (1995) defined false consciousness based on two criteria: "the holding of [1] *false or inaccurate beliefs* that are [2] *contrary to one's own social interest* and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the

⁹ Or of the single scientific discipline. Holzkamp's *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (Foundation of Psychology) aspires to work out the categories of the discipline of psychology thereby clarifying its subject. Where single scientific disciplines are fragmented in themselves (quasi pre-paradigmatic), however, the fragments have their own categories, whose scientific dignity obviously has to be discussed because of said fragmentation.

¹⁰ My lay translation of this short quote may give the false impression of a flowery language related to a spiritual search for a 'true essence' and 'deeper meaning' that can be found in certain areas of psychology. Holzkamp's writing style is, to the contrary, very meticulous and technical. The theoretical point of reference here is rather an epistemological differentiation of essence and appearance that is expressed in an exemplary quote by Marx: "But all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (Marx, 2010, p. 592).

disadvantaged position of the self or the group” (p. 400; emphasis and brackets: TD). The aspect of factual falsity [1] is later deliberately dropped (cf. Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 322). For Jost, the concept has the following directed function against oppression, i.e., it is not ‘neutral’: “The concept of false consciousness [...] helps to identify inaccurate beliefs of subordinates which serve to perpetuate their social, economic, or sexual domination” (1995, p. 400). Oppression is a characteristic of the status quo, or “historically situated, enduring systems of inequality and exploitation” as Jost and colleagues say (Jost et al., 2019, p. 384)¹¹. Jost thinks of false consciousness as being ‘generated’ by interaction of “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes (2019, p. 265). Top-down processes in this sense are, for example, the impact of the dominance and pervasiveness of published opinion siding with the interests of social elites: “elite communication” (ibid.). This elite communication, he argues, addresses ‘conformist needs’ in people. The focus of SJT, however, is on bottom-up processes; meaning a motivational readiness that, in a sense, ‘seeks’ to realize itself in a conformist fashion (ibid.).

Beyond the semantic definitions given above, false consciousness is a crucial concept for the *epistemological interest* of SJT (i.e. being a tool for emancipation) and the internal structure of the theory. As a *category* (see above), it prompts investigation of cases in which people harm their own interests through their very own subjectively motivated behavior which stabilizes societal conditions to their disadvantage. Finding out how this motivated legitimization of ‘the system’ comes about (the eponymous *System Justification*) is what sparks the interest of SJT. Only the quality of *false consciousness* and the associated ‘self-harm’ make *system justification* an urgently relevant topic that concerns social emancipation.

Below I will demonstrate how the concept of false consciousness, as a *category*, structures the arrangement of SJT’s theoretical concepts at lower levels of abstraction. In the course of my discussion, it will also be shown that a certain understanding of the concepts of *justification* and *group status* necessarily implies that they are in fact analytical concepts. Their analytical quality is, however, not systematically understood in SJT’s theorizing.

A theoretical perspective unfolded from the concept of false consciousness

A starting point to come to grips with the internal structure of SJT is the reconstruction of the way the concept of system justification relates to the category of false consciousness.

The concept of system justification, respectively system justification motivation, is central to SJT. Jost gives the following definition: “System justification is the social psychological process whereby an individual perceives, understands, and explains an existing situation or arrangement in a way that legitimizes and maintains the status quo” (Jost, 2020, p. 83).

¹¹ The quotes are also meant to illustrate the emancipatory impetus found in some remarks in SJT publications.

The extent of SJ (or SJ motivation) varies by *situation* and *individual disposition* according to SJT.

Situational factors include threat to the system, dependence on the system, perceived inevitability of the system, and long existence of the system (cf. Jost, 2020, p. 64).

Important individual dispositions are, first, the individual “chronic” disposition of the SJ-relevant motivational foundation¹²: i.e. a) epistemic motives: reducing ambiguities in understanding; b) existential motives: security; c) relational motives: securing social relations and experiencing shared reality (cf. Jost 2019, p. 275). Second, political orientation. Political orientation according to SJT is, however, to be conceived of as motivated cognition and therefore not independent of said motivational foundations (Jost et al., 2017). For a digest of studies exploring the impact of situation and disposition on SJ see Jost 2019, pp. 268.

SJT embeds SJ in a domain spanning phenomena of socially motivated cognition. These have been explored by various social psychological theories with different emphases. With regard to these theories, SJT sees itself as a complement and extension:

Analogous to system justification, “ego-justification” (EJ) defends the behavior and position of the self; it captures “the need to develop and maintain a favorable self-image and to feel valid, justified, and legitimate as an individual actor” (Jost, 2020, p. 102). This is, for instance, attributed to the focus of *cognitive dissonance theory*. “Group-justification” (GJ) defends the interests of one's social group (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 2f.). It refers to the “desire to develop and maintain favorable images of one's own group¹³ and to defend and justify the actions of fellow in-group members” (Jost, 2020, p. 102). This is regarded as the subject matter at the center of *SIT*.

For members of privileged groups favored by the system, it can be assumed that justifying the system is also in their favor on the group and ego level. For members of marginalized groups, on the other hand, ‘psychical processing’ of a situation resulting in SJ affirms a system that disadvantages the group members at the ego or group level: here SJ, GJ, and EJ are not in harmony. These disharmonious aspects represent a ‘dissection’ of false consciousness into motivational forces and counterforces on different psychical levels of reference. Together they constitute a motivational contradiction. The levels of justification (ego/group/system) are supposed to make it possible for SJT to map the tension of ‘individual justification’ (J. T. Jost, 2011 p. 230): By disaggregating the ‘contradictory’ false consciousness into EJ, GJ, and SJ (and group status), it

¹² This is subject to possible internal differentiations ‘within’ the various needs: “It is conceivable that distinctive operationalizations of epistemic, existential, and relational needs—such as needs for certainty vs. control, fear vs. anxiety (or even conscious vs. nonconscious sources of anxiety), and belongingness vs. shared reality—may produce different effects on ideological endorsement.” (Hennes et al., 2012, p. 682); and ambiguities about how the different needs regarding SJ are related (ibid.).

¹³ At this point, the SJT perspective on groups and group justification still *seems* to be in line with SIT. In the course of my discussion it should become clear that this is, in fact, not the case when SJT addresses objective group interests. The selection of “one's own group” can be flexible, but not every group can be the bearer of a social interest as theorized by SJT (see below).

should become psychologically conceivable *without contradiction*. This should ultimately make it possible to translate what seems contradictory into empirical research that requires unambiguity.

Against the background of this dissection into different aspects (EJ, GJ, SJ), which is intended to amount to a sort of 'theoretical operationalization', *false consciousness* can be understood as a *mediation category* ("*Vermittlungskategorie*" in German (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 192): as such, it is intended to address the intersection/mediation of objective and subjective tensions and contradictions. SJ (or SJ-motivation) and GJ are the concepts which in SJT concern the subjective side of this relation; interest and group status concern the objective side.

At this point the following must be emphasized: *these* justification concepts that conceptualize false consciousness can only be understood as *analytical definitions* of an action/motivation directed exclusively at one pole: SJ → system interest; GJ → group interest. They are not identical with *empirical actions* that actually, among other things, justify the system or the group in the real world.

Explicating implicit conceptual qualities: disambiguation of multiple justification concepts in SJT.

I argue that there are actually several, different concepts of justification in SJT. They are, however, treated as if they were one unified concept. These differing concepts are not explicitly elaborated, but are implied in various definitions or conceptual constellations (e.g. the relation between false consciousness and justification).

According to my analysis, SJT uses justification concepts in an analytical function any time it is dealing with false consciousness as a violation of objective interests. This applies especially to the assumption that system interest and group interest are in principle incompatible for the marginalized, which is why SJ has negative consequences for them. In this analytical function, these justification concepts serve to reflect the opposite poles of an objective contradiction (vs. classify empirically present behavior). In the context of false consciousness, the Justification concepts *SJ* and *GJ* are linked to the respective interests (i.e.: conformism and support of the system vs. representing group interests against the system). Only in this way can SJT assume that SJ takes place *without* "self-interest or group-interest" (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 339). It is, however, not made clear exactly how abstract this statement is. Before anything else this statement makes sense if one understands group interest vs. system interest (and GJ vs. SJ coupled to it) as analytical poles in which these interests are addressed in 'purest form' and ultimate consequence. In this context, gradual 'mixed forms' are not conceptually valid (see figure 1).

Empirically, however, interests or actions directed at interests do not occur separately and in 'pure form' - they are located 'between' the ideal types spelled out by the analytical poles. Therefore, the statement that SJ is undertaken without "self-interest or group-interest" (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 339) is not

readily applicable to empirical reality. Moreover, it is also not readily possible to determine interests in a concrete and positive way and to know in advance whether attempts to pursue them will be successful. There is the possibility of pursuing interests that are mistaken for one's own (group) interests. This is not considered GJ in the narrow (analytic) sense in SJT analytic justification concepts. This is due to the fact that GJ in the narrow sense *excludes* false consciousness.

Thus, these 'pointed' *analytical* concepts cannot be utilized to clearly classify *empirically present* actions that relate to group and system interests whilst retaining their original meaning and purpose. The idea of pursuing one's own group interest *in the final analysis* is an *analytical* 'determination of direction'. The pursuit of one's own group interest in concrete and practical terms, on the other hand, is complex, demanding, and involves challenges in understanding the world and acting in it. A necessary condition is to identify oneself as a group member of the 'correct group' in the first place.

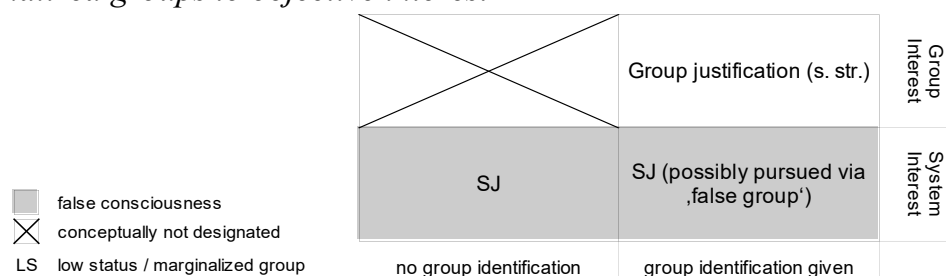
SJT attempts (however not theoretically or methodologically explicated) to take the leap from an analytical level to the empirical: for low group status, the analytical is equated with the empirical, consequently SJ would 'measure' false consciousness in the case of the disadvantaged. From the above analysis, it is understandable that this entails difficulties. First, the coupling of objective interest and particular motive quality 'in pure form' as conceived in the concept of false consciousness is primarily an analytic pole. Second, it is unclear how individual actions and statements are 'psychically founded and composited' and how exactly they relate to which interest. Where *justification* is to be operationalized and measured, this ambiguity of actions and statements with respect to interests cannot be so easily realized. A consideration in Jost and colleagues (2017) points in this direction: Contradictory tendencies from EJ, GJ, and SJ would potentially generate a tense relationship at any moment: "political actors may be motivated by a complicated mix of system-justifying and system-challenging concerns, depending (at least in part) upon the social system that is in question" (p. e19). The very same result of action can thus be influenced in many ways. It could be contradictory in its reference to interests; i.e. the ultimately futile attempt to pursue group interests of marginalized people and system interests at the same time. An action result could also be only a snapshot of a process that is moved by opposing motivational forces. On the basis of the superficial appearance, the 'motivational composition' is not necessarily clear. Judging from this view, statements about the system that are supposed to determine the 'extent of SJ' in SJ likert scales (e.g. "Economic positions are legitimate reflections of people's achievements"; Jost & Thompson, 2000, p. 225), can be further investigated regarding their respective individually different motivational bases. Further below I will elaborate on the issue of individually distinct motivational bases from a perspective of GCP-explanations of the psychological relevance of *reasons for action*.

An example for the conflation of analytical and 'empirical' concept is Osborne, Jost, and colleagues (2019) where ethnic minority group identification is used as a proxy for GJ (e.g., "Being a member of my ethnic group is an

important part of how I see myself”, p. 248). This is done in a constellation where the authors expect GJ to oppose SJ and be a predictor of protest. The reference of GJ to interests is defined on the categorical level and thus forms the basis of the hypothesis of the contradiction between GJ and SJ. However, in its empirical implementation as group identification, the reference to interests is unclear. Empirically, there is a wide range of ‘group actions’ that are not, or only supposedly, in line with group interests. Moreover, their distance to the group interests may vary. This transfer to empiricism is imprecise because the premises of the analytical concepts represent polarities and constellations that are *means of analysis*. They do not immediately describe the phenomena of reality.

Figure 1

The relationship of group justification (GJ) and system justification (SJ) among marginalized groups to objective interest



Annotation. The figure uses *group identification* as an auxiliary construct to clarify the relationships between the concepts. Group identification is *conceptually presupposed* for GJ actions (but not for the existence of group membership and objective interests). A relevant range of ‘group actions’ emerges that do not, or only on a surface level, correspond to group interests (bottom right, SJ). This encompasses a wide range of different actions with varying distance to the group interest.

Abandoned trains of thought in SJT

There are some relevant theoretical implications and desiderata that are inherent in explanations of SJT but have not yet been pursued. These have the tendency to lead away from the methodological approach of the psychological mainstream even more openly.

‘False groups’ – fruitful implication of SJT for analysis & problem for empirical research?

Where SJ, GJ, EJ theorize false consciousness, the group level in SJT is not identical with the group level in SIT: it only addresses groups that meaningfully imply social status (this is not the case, for example, with a conservative party in which workers are organized with multi-millionaires or even billionaires). In this narrow sense, ‘group’ is not a descriptive term, but corresponds closely to the concept of interest. The advantage of this narrow understanding is: *subjective* group identification can thusly also be analyzed as a mechanism of SJ and as false consciousness. Jost shows this exemplarily for national identification (cf. 2019, p. 281). With SIT, one would instead rather grasp national identification as group-ego and assume a corresponding (extended) self-interest.

SJT does not have an *explicit* concept of ‘false groups’ yet. The ‘non-false’ groups with ‘clear status’, in turn, are also not clearly empirically determinable (who belongs to them? What is the concrete group interest?). False and non-false groups are in this respect also *analytical ideas*. A ‘status-mixed’ group constituted by ‘values’ cannot be unambiguously classified ‘as a group’ in this sense. This is because the group members of the status-mixed group would have different, objective group interests. Thus, the SJT considers e.g. the ‘group membership’ of working class conservatives in conservative parties, at least partly, as an expression of false consciousness rather than as group membership in the strict sense (since they would tend to cut their own flesh e.g. by conservative social policy)¹⁴. Where SJT theorizes false consciousness, conservatives (liberals, etc.) are therefore not an ‘actual’ group. Conservatism is subsequently seen as an individual political ideology (with strong implications for attitudes to the status quo) – even though it remains unquestioned that it instigates ‘group practice’.

Here, a group has a clear status and interest that could be pursued with GJ only in the *analytical sense*.

According to SJT, the group interest of marginalized groups is only determined negatively as ‘directed against the system’ and against their own disadvantage. Positive attempts at definitions are (necessarily) abstract: Jost and colleagues (2019), for example, regard objective interest merely as “what is in the rational self-interest of a given social group” (p. 386). Jost, Hennes, and Lavine (2013, pp. 856, 863) and Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004, p. 884) understand interest primarily as immediate economic (self-)interest.

Jost and colleagues note in a more recent publication (2019, p. 389) that individuals are themselves ‘status mixed’. They may be discriminated against with respect to multiple social dimensions (e.g. gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity...) and privileged with respect to others.

¹⁴ Jost explains these pitfalls of the group level impressively with the example that in the USA poverty is a relevant factor that ‘motivates’ people to join the armed forces. This is romanticized, he argues, when it is framed as the pursuit of self-interest at the level of the nation's own group (2019, p. 281). In this example, the nation an aspect of social reality, as well as reference point of false consciousness. The concept of false consciousness allows SJT to capture this simultaneity.

Focussing on a ‘narrow set of questions’, however, it seems more easily possible to discern a single criterion that uniquely defines a marginalized group. For example, Osborne, Jost, and colleagues (2019), in order to substantiate their *general* model of protest prediction, examine a problem in which a *particular* status group has a group interest that is specifically directed against that problem: racial discrimination ‘produces’ ethnic minorities as a marginalized group. Here too, however, there may be relevant ‘internal’ group distinctions that may impede action towards the common interest; e.g., class differences. In its empirical research, SJT uses the logic of ‘narrow questions’ to enable assignment to a low-status. However, in its theoretical statements, SJT speaks of “low-status and high-status groups” (Osborne, Jost, et al., 2019, p. 264) in a general sense without this limitation.

Authors of SJT are well aware that groups beyond these status groups practically ‘exist’, such as conservative political groups (with group processes). The concept of false consciousness does not structure all theory parts of SJT. Where SJT is concerned with political attitudes variously related to SJ, it acts differently. Here, SJT also thinks of political attitudes as constituting groups in a broader sense. E.g., there is research with left wing activists as test subjects of a field experiment (J. T. Jost et al., 2012). Their group identification is raised as a predictor of protest, their ‘social status composition’ is not taken into account. They are primarily interesting as specimens who are critical of ‘the system’ and participate in protests. Also, protest as a *group activity*, which does not require shared status in the narrow sense, can be of interest as the dependent variable in SJT research. *False consciousness* is less central to SJT’s conception of said empirical phenomena. The area of interest is rather the predictive quality of individual SJ; in Osborne, Jost, and others (2019), for example, as a mediator of protest activity.

False needs?

The chronic and situational expression of relational, existential, and epistemic needs are an aspect in SJT to explain how the status quo is legitimized ‘from below’. Here the question arises why conservatism has advantages in satisfying said needs subjectively though not necessarily objectively (Jost et al., 2017 p. e9; also Hennes et al., 2012). This also results from the fact that conservatism is focused on clear, simple rules and traditions (Jost et al., 2017). This advantage also exists when conservatism is not hegemonic (it’s structural hegemony would currently, however, be the rule).

There are passages in papers where it is taken into consideration that, for example, self-deception can be the prerequisite for satisfying one’s need for security with conservative positions: “even if conservative politicians are themselves responsible for increasing levels of threat” (Jost & Hunyady, 2005 p. 264).

Unlike to its discussion of consciousness SJT (so far) does not draw an explicit connection from the basic need level to objective interests. One could,

however, think about ‘motivated need constitution and need accentuation’ analogously to motivated cognition. Then one could ask where something is falsely declared to be a need or where one is deceived about one's own needs (being aware that this perspective could also take problematic paths).

Integrating an analysis of societal structures

At various points, Jost has pointed out the need for analyses of societal structures within the framework of social psychological theory (Jost & Kruglanski, 2002, p. 180; Jost, 2020, pp. 30, 83):

What is needed is a sophisticated social psychological understanding of what Bourdieu [...] characterized as “the dialectical relationship between the objective structures and the cognitive and motivating structures which they produce and which tend to reproduce them” (Jost, 2011, p. 252).

SJT has not yet complied with this.

From German Critical Psychology's reference to Marx, it could be learned that societal structures ‘suggest’ objective thought forms (stereotypical ways of thinking about societal relations if you will) that are themselves ‘false’ (e.g. the “fetishism of commodities”, cf. Marx, 2015, pp. 47). *False consciousness* could therefore present itself as an entangled relationship between motivated cognition, on the one hand, and an objective epistemic problem regarding the comprehension of societal processes and one's own interests, on the other hand. Accordingly, possibilities of action and thought ‘embedded’ in societal structures (in their societal mediatedness) should be analyzed in a specific research step. Regarding the question of SJT, this would also imply: analysis of the specific and non-specific determinants of the respective systems, their suggestiveness (in the above sense) and the system-immanent possibilities for action; furthermore, analysis of the integration of a system into the overarching societal system. This would have to be put into relation with an interesting consideration of SJT: To what extent are objectively different structures/systems (or ‘subsystems’) reacted to with identical ‘psychical modes of reaction’; defended as status quo; or mistakenly considered to be an independent system? Interrelating these aspects could help explore societal prerequisites for the application of interventions that SJT has speculated about.

B: ‘Empirical’ SJT

Section B deals with aspects of the more ‘empirically oriented’ part of SJT.

Integration of Marx and Mainstream: Incompatible understandings of science?

In addition to finding conceptual inspiration, John T. Jost also refers to Marx in order to elaborate on the theory of science. In a 2007 article with Lawrence J. Jost, he presents a fallibilism-oriented social psychology as the only valid empirical research:

Marx's own intellectual development led him to abandon 'pure' or 'speculative' philosophy in favor of a search for empirically grounded forms of investigation that resemble those of today's 'mainstream' sociology and psychology. (L. J. Jost & Jost, 2007 p. 299)

Jost & Jost find it ironic that the "critical psychology movement" would instead be purely philosophical; merely a negative critique of psychology that does not practice positive, empirical science (p. 299). Elsewhere, however, they concede that Marx did not simply adopt "a strictly positivist conception of science" (ibid., pp. 315). Their initial argument does not include this concession. The criticism of speculative, metaphysical approaches may be justified. But it is merely negative and does not speak specifically in favor of the authors' own approach.

Jost and Jost neglect Marx's *empiricism directed towards conceptualization* and object analysis and its methodological foundation. German Critical Psychology, on the other hand, attaches great importance to it (cf. Markard, 2017) which, in turn, leads to a different foundation of empirical research. The result of the object analysis of critical psychology and its methodological implications is in a nutshell¹⁵: Societal *conditions* are *possibilities (and impediments)* to act from the standpoint of the subject. Individuals are not determined in their concrete action. They rather must develop in these conditions, relate to the conditions, participate in them and produce them in order to exist. In doing so, they reproduce and change these conditions (albeit to varying degrees, some of which may be barely noticeable). Rather than of "stimulus" or "environment" GCP speaks of a historically collectively produced, meaningful, societal world when dealing with psychological issues at a decidedly human level. The individuals' *objective* possibilities to act¹⁶ are subjectively perceived and appropriated as *premises* of each individual's own action. According to GCP, individuals act within this 'framework' of objective possibilities to act in a way that is subjectively grounded or based on "subjective reasons for action" (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 47). "Based on subjective reasons" in this sense does not mean 'rational' or conscious (but can be made conscious; Holzkamp, 1986, pp. 227). Instead, it designates a certain 'mode' of *mediatedness* ("Vermitteltheit") between the individual and the world that is qualitatively distinct from the notion that the environment or stimuli *condition* behavior, that behavior is the *effect* of stimuli (in the sense of a stimulus-response relation). This mediation level ("Vermittlungsebene") of reasonable action, according to GCP, is the standard

¹⁵ For more details see Holzkamp, 1985; and also Markard, 2012; in English e.g. Holzkamp, 1992; C. Tolman, 2013, but currently there are more key texts in translation.

¹⁶ In this context, for Critical Psychology, there is the *psychological* necessity of an analysis of social conditions, noted above as a desideratum of SJT. In terms of GCP: analysis of meaning structures.

basis of societally mediated individual existence. Therefore, GCP regards the associated so-called “reason discourse” (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 47) as the linguistic basis of psychological theory that is required to formulate theory and hypotheses addressing specifically human psychology. In the instead common “conditioning discourse” (ibid.) and its empirical discussion, crucial factors are neglected: *subjective determination* (vs. objective determinacy) and the *mediatedness of individual action (through reason and objective possibilities for action)* with the societal process.

Misinterpreting reasons for action in social psychology & the reason discourse as a medium of psychological theories.

From the perspective of Critical Psychology, a fundamental critique of social psychology by Klaus Holzkamp can be applied to the ‘empirical half’ of SJT: the misinterpreting of reasons for action (Holzkamp, 1986; 2013). According to this critique, social psychology errs when it assumes contingent, testable effects of the world on human action as an if-then statements. Furthermore, the theoretical considerations of social psychology would, in actuality, even if only *implicitly*, presuppose subjective reasons for actions¹⁷ as the relation between ‘stimuli’. As a consequence, according to Holzkamp's argumentation, the hypotheses of such theories do not deal with contingent conditionalities. Instead, they ‘only’ deal with an *example of* a connection between a) individual interpretations of the possibilities to act in a societally embedded situation (premises) and b) subjective reasons for action. Holzkamp calls these connections of premises and reasons “reason pattern” (1986, p. 221; 2013 p. 50). Reason patterns, he argues, are the standard mode of mediatedness of the world and individual actions in human psychology.

What this can mean for theorizing (i.e., also interpreting data) is illustrated by the example below.

Reason patterns in a study on “System-Sanctioned Change”.

In the study by Feygina, Jost, and Goldsmith (2010), correlational and experimental questionnaire studies are conducted that address attitudes towards a) the climate crisis and b) possible counter measures. In particular, a focus is placed on whether climate action is seen as a threat to the existing “system”, which would be in line with a typical reaction of SJ. The concept of *system sanctioned change*, however, attempts to frame the introduction of stronger climate action (i.e. societal change) as being in accordance with the (spirit of the) status quo. In the questionnaire of the experimental group, this idea is

¹⁷ Motivated cognition can often easily be reformulated as grounded in subjective reasons. Because it is also categorically based on the fact that a certain thought (in the social context) is formed on a certain motive or need basis: *In order to achieve something*, something is thought and done.

implemented in such a way that climate protection/environmental protection is framed as patriotic. The authors try to find out whether this can cancel out the known effects of SJ on climate change denialism and opinions on environmental behavior.

The examined context of the study can be reformulated in the reason discourse. The interpretation of the study is: *if reframing, then acceptance*. However, the research hypotheses actually implies that a certain reaction will be shown to be *subjectively reasonable*: *if* pro-environmental statements subjectively fit their own political opinion and purposes (e.g. patriotism)¹⁸, *then* they *reasonably* (!) experience stronger approval. A contrary case would be theoretically and subjectively unsound.¹⁹ This is why the empirical relation could not be grasped by contingent if-then statements. It is rather be represented by “linguistic-implicative (i.e. in the widest sense, “definitional”) statements” (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 51). The consequence of this for psychological methodology is that the relation of world and psyche cannot be comprehended in the “conditioning discourse” (ibid., p. 47), that is, of effect. Thus, effect can no longer be *tested*. Consequentially, the premise of scientific procedure of fallibilistic theory production that is based on testing would be called into question by the implicit theory common in social psychology. Assuming that reason patterns are adequate, empiricism deals with analyzing exemplary cases of ‘application’ of theories instead of testing them. Reason patterns are nevertheless not obvious, not even to the subject that acts based on them. Their reconstruction is demanding and needs a certain amount of scientific (psychological) knowledge.

In the context of the experiment, one could also further investigate how questionnaire items themselves are interpreted in the first place and why people answer in the way they do. Since the reason discourse formulates a specific ‘mode of mediatedness’ for psychology, this approach would go beyond a social psychology of the experiment.

In SJT, this study and its idea of reframing is cited several times when discussing SJT-based intervention options (J. T. Jost, 2015, 2016, 2020; J. T. Jost et al., 2015, 2018). My discussion of the study gives an idea why the application of its results might be problematic. A further reservation towards this: the study was not an “applied experiment”²⁰ by conventional measures. Thus, no statement

¹⁸ More general: If subjects adopt the manipulation as premise of their actions, in the way intended by the researchers

¹⁹ If the study were to show that national framing tends to have no consequences, this would not contribute to the verification of the original hypothesis. It would ‘only’ not have found an example of it. E.g., because the concerns about short-term national competitiveness were too serious for the manipulation to be convincing (this style of thinking that is also used in exhaustion attempts is indicative of the reason discourse applying). If both reason patterns were found with different frequency, the more frequent pattern would not disprove the less frequent. They would be two examples of reason patterns that are not necessarily in competition.

²⁰ An experiment (or correlation study) tests the theory. Only the theory, not directly the case studied in the experiment, serves to interpret and process the real world (Mook, 1983, S. 380; Wilson et al., 2010). This is also described by Douglas M. Mook in 1983 in his widely cited methodological essay “In Defense Of External Invalidity”. He distinguishes, first, the experiments that do not want or need to be externally valid. They serve the purpose of finding conditions that can show that a theory does not (always) hold. Second, he speaks of “applied experiments” (p. 380): “The experimental setting resembles, or is a special

about the “real world” is substantiated with it. The preconditions of application and transfer were not investigated and hardly discussed²¹.

Outside of the need to found a contingent relationship for a journal, the reframing-approach can also be viewed more circumspectly:

“There is a danger here of playing word games, avoiding the ‘real’ issues, and postponing necessary sacrifices, but-from a practical perspective-it would be foolish to ignore powerful forces of ideological defensiveness [TD: i.e. SJ] [...]” (Jost, 2020, p. 246)

Concretizing Reason patterns in the context of SJT

Empirical studies could deal with the problem unfolded above by concretizing their objects of research as reason patterns. This possibility is hinted at in a rare qualitative study in the context of SJT by Godfrey and Wolf (2016). Here, the complexity and contradictoriness of individual attitudes toward the status quo are revealed. The empirical data flesh out this contradictoriness in exemplary ways: poor ethnic minority women name structural causes of poverty yet blame the poor themselves; sometimes in the same train of thought (ibid., p. 99). The more precise subjective backgrounds remain speculative because the data is only interpreted by the researchers ‘from the outside’. Nevertheless, the study provides relevant impulses for SJT. And it does so precisely by providing indications of *possibly given/available* reason patterns.

The contradictoriness and changeability in individual consciousness could, for example, indicate that the complementary relationship of SJT and SIT (and other theories, see e.g. Jost 2019, p. 285) could be conceived of and researched as interchangeable modes *within* individual subjectivity in the very same situation. The reason discourse provides an obvious basis for this, but one that leads away from current methodological paradigms and brings with it new methodological problems different from those already faced by (social) psychology.

C: Misunderstandings in the reception of SJT

What sets apart SJT from other approaches is mainstream social psychology is that SJT allows itself some ‘degrees of freedom’ to incorporate theories on politics and history that partly shape the formulation of hypotheses and interpretations in SJT. Accordingly, SJT formulates some *historically-relative hypotheses* instead of *universal statements that are strictly falsifiable*. In the

case of, a real-life setting in which one wants to know what to do” (ibid.). These specifically try to address the transfer to real-world situations.

²¹ Whether such a framing would be socially effective is, for example, a question of power relations: in acute social conflict situations, in which environmental protection is possibly also an established enemy stereotype, the reframing attempts of moderate reformers are probably quickly seen through as an attempt at manipulation. In the debate within the SJT, which is mainly focused on empirical research, this discussion given here is a gap, even if I assume that authors of the SJT are easily capable of filling it.

‘mainstream’ reception of SJT several misunderstandings happened because more narrowly fallibilistically oriented colleagues or competitors tend to have difficulties with understanding these ‘degrees of freedom’ when engaging in debate with the SJT.

This can be seen in the discussion of the “strong” SJ hypothesis (J. T. Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003). It states that disadvantaged groups legitimize the system to a greater extent than dominant groups. According to cognitive dissonance, they thereby psychically compensate for the fact that they gain little material advantage from their SJ. According to Jost et al., however, group- and self-related motives usually stand in the way of this phenomenon. This means it will *not always* manifest itself. Their study should only *demonstrate* that the effect is *possible* (ibid. p. 17). The hypothesis was partly assumed by proponents of other theories to be theoretically central for SJT. Thus, an attempt was made to refute SJT as a whole by challenging this hypothesis in the sense of a competition of theories. The theoretical classification by the SJT was not taken into account (J. T. Jost, 2019, p. 282).

An explicit historicization of the subject of SJT is illustrated by Jost and Banaji’s statement that “One potential trigger [sic!] of the system-justification response might be the absence of a revolutionary ‘class consciousness’” (1994, p. 16)

In the debate on conservatism as motivated cognition (started by J. T. Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003), the critique of SJT again failed to consider the theoretical elaborations. Instead, it referred solely to a narrowly understood, formalist core definition of conservatism: pro inequality and contra change. This made restorative, reactionary movements appear to Greenberg and Jonas (2003) as ‘*pro change* conservatives’ and thus counter-examples. They miss that Jost, Glaser et al. (implicitly) assumed a scope that takes into account historical power relations and developmental trends (2003). Thereby revealing the *restorative* and in this sense ‘pro-(old)-system’ character of these movements.

Other than that, the given historical relativity in the definition of conservatism points to a limitation regarding the settling of this question with a simple, falsifiable hypothesis and ensuing empirical evidence. Such an attempt produces an empiricist misunderstanding: the observation that conservatives are more inclined (in a historically contextualized way) to SJ is in fact a *definitional relation* that is treated as if it were empirically open. But supposed conservatives who deviate substantially from this relation would only evidence their idiosyncratic definition of conservativeness.

It is certainly of interest to investigate how (e.g. motives, interests, etc.) conservatism arises and exists, which manifestations and nuances and developmental potentials it has. But: In such politically charged areas one will not be able to reconcile scientific neutrality, the non-binding nature of freedom of opinion and political ideological criticism, as the SJT sometimes tries to do. Political arguments cannot be settled with the ‘neutral’ scientific proof that conservatism is somehow wrong, narrow-minded or stupid. Jost in a way implies this himself: he attributes the social scientific question of whether leftists are not equally rigid and conformist as rightists to a neoconservative intervention in

social science (Jost, 2006, p. 667). The existence and relevance of the question in scientific discourse is thus dependent on the power of certain political interests-groups to intervene – it is as Holzkamp put it “the ideational aspect of societal class struggles” (1985, p. 31).

Discussion: Two types of theory, partly blurring

According to my analysis, SJT consists of a fallibilist psychology and a more social science-based psychology and social theory.

The former tends towards more clearly falsifiable hypotheses. Methodologically, it clearly holds the upper hand within SJT. ‘Alternative’ methodological approaches are prematurely rejected in SJT (L. J. Jost & Jost, 2007). The results produced here that are discussed regarding their application are too simplistic; e.g., ‘system sanctioned change’ (Feygina et al., 2010). Nevertheless, SJT raises crucial questions about the obstacles to responses to societal crisis and its results are worth discussing; especially in the context of efforts trying to further the (thus far insufficient) theoretical synthesis.

However, the SJT's hypothesis formulation sometimes fails to be fallibilistic. On the one hand due to a common tendency that wants to confirm hypotheses rather than to reject them. On the other hand, this can be explained by a historical and analytical ‘intuition’ of the research subject pushing through from the ‘theoretical half’ of the theory (see below). This results in existential hypotheses with a historical expiration date: according to SJT, whether and how strongly disadvantaged groups react with SJ is also an expression of societal power relations that cannot (be) clearly determined. SJ can *simultaneously* have both a palliative function and be self-damaging. Whether something is a system or group is context dependent; whether a group(-identity) is primarily a case of false consciousness is up for debate. This ‘blurring’ allows SJT to retain theoretically complex relations and concepts and a ‘sense of historicity’ to some extent, and to ask interesting questions. However, this blurring poses challenges to operationalization that more rigorous mainstream methodologists misunderstand.

The second, ‘more theoretical theory’ considers more complex relations and has an inkling that its own object of research depends on historical power relations. It relates to (not easily measurable) objective interests and uses concepts that have an analytical function rather than one of operationalization and measurement. These ‘second theory’ aspects are exceptional for a mainstream psychological theory. However, they are not sufficiently explicated.

The unclear relation between the two halves causes theoretical problems resulting in unnoticed duplications of the conceptual terminology: SJ can be understood as *analytical* concretization of false consciousness in SJT; then reflecting different levels/qualities of interest reference and their contradictory interrelation (even within individual actions). Where SJT treats SJ *as a measurable variable*, however, SJ loses the clear reference to objective interests. This unresolved difference between ‘analytical SJ’ and ‘SJ as a variable’ leads to

unclear statements. For example, the thesis that SJ cannot be motivated by genuine self-interest in marginalized people is understandable on a categorical level, but less understandable in relation to empirically present actions.

It is also clear to the theoretical half that there is a problem of intervention capability for the other (empirical) half. With its proposals of discourse intervention, it cannot reach the historical scale in the experiment. This scale, however, would be the prerequisite of societal change becoming a realistic possibility of collective practice (i.e. not merely symbolic). How to transfer present results to other historical circumstances remains an unresolved challenge.

Insofar as one agrees that relevant aspects (or, as I have assumed, with false consciousness even a constituent category) of SJT are located in the ‘second half’, SJT has a problem in its communicability. This is because these aspects are not explicated clearly enough. I assume that the perspective of GCP could help SJT reflect on its approach to its subject matter in terms of its own epistemic intention. At the same time, GCP also poses a challenge that makes it difficult to remain in the psychological mainstream.

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