

# Review of: "Significance and its role in the historical constitution and transformation of social reality. A conceptual approach from enactive cognition"

Tim Prentki

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is a thorough, scholarly, theoretical essay investigating the 4E enactive cognition paradigm as a means of accounting for the production of subjective meanings that emerge from action. The thrust of the argument presents a biological/psychological lineage of subjectivity as an antidote to the constructionist view of culture as the primary determinant of social reality. The thesis states that the cognition-action relationship, although always subjective, can occur in participation. However, the core of the enactivist position is grounded in individual action as producer of social reality: 'actions of individuals give rise to, establish, and transform social structures' and further 'cognition as a sensory-motor bodily action'. There is, therefore, no separation between body, mind, and environment in enactive cognition. Agency is the counterweight to the biological determinism which the author asserts has held sway historically in academic circles.

The essay offers an important antidote to the current dominance of identity politics and to fixed notions of the subject. However, the author is occasionally lured into essentialist statements such as the oxymoronic: 'an autonomous structure of intersubjective meaning' and the near nonsensical 'real reality of the world'. In relation to the social construction of reality, the enactive thesis is grounded in Marxism despite its Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian overlays.

At times the essay comes close to being unreadable due to its unwavering insistence on being purely theoretical. The reader would have been greatly helped by some concrete examples of the application of the theory to contemporary experience. For instance, one wonders how the statement that identity 'allows individuals to manage their lives in their living environment' might resonate with the thousands being slaughtered in Gaza at this moment.

The other limitation concerns the use of the term intersubjective which is in danger of being placed as a binary alternative to subjective. Research into the neuroscience of the human brain over the last twenty years and, in particular, the discovery of so-called mirror neurons suggests that our subjectivity is formed out of intersubjective transactions which begin prenatally and continue throughout our lives. This suggests that the very act of cognition is intersubjective. In which case, the thesis being advanced here might need to be adapted.