

## *Honneth's New Critical Theory of Recognition*

Axel Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* represents at once an intriguing and revealing turn in the post-Habermasian tradition of the Frankfurt School, an important and original development in critical social theory more generally understood, and an ambitious and stimulating, if still inadequate, effort at grounding these theoretical ideas empirically.<sup>1</sup>

*The Struggle for Recognition* is revealing because it shows the extraordinary contemporary influence of Hegelian and communitarian thinking on the most influential neo-Kantian trends in critical social philosophy. It is important and original because Honneth not only connects these movements to one another but offers, following in the footsteps of the later Habermas but going well beyond him, a way to synthesize them conceptually. It is ambitious and stimulating because Honneth not only has a clear grasp of the need for empirical grounding and a wide knowledge of contemporary social science but a sensitivity that extends beyond economic institutions to psychology, law, social movements and culture.

Because many readers will be unfamiliar with Honneth's specifically philosophical vocabulary, it seems important to frame his effort in a more general way before discussing his argument in detail. Honneth should be seen as responding to the intellectual crisis that has beset radical and progressive politics since the decline of New Left theory and activism in the early 1970s. In that earlier period, theorists struggled to revise and reframe traditional Marxism in a manner that dealt with the 'subjective' and only indirectly class-related issues that marked student and youth rebellions, racial protests and uprisings, anti-war movements, and the emergence of gender and environmental politics. It seems clear, in retrospect at least, that by linking social activism so closely to what they viewed as new infrastructural strains in society, these neo-Marxist approaches to late capitalism, post-industrialism, and the new class fundamentally overestimated the rebellious and progressive nature of social protest and vastly underestimated not only the political elasticity but also the moral significance of contemporary democracy, no matter how 'bourgeois.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson Polity Press, Cambridge 1995, ISBN 07456 18383, £39.50 HB, £12.95 PB.

<sup>2</sup> More than any other major theorist, Alain Touraine's theorizing from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s embodied the effort to engage New Left social movements on their own

These scientific and political defects were exposed with devastating effect when the progressive social movements in which much radical theory had been invested so dramatically declined. Since then, the intellectual vacuum in critical thought has been filled with everything from postmodernism to theories of identity and difference. The problem with such approaches is that they leave out history, or, to be more precise, they leave out the historical possibility of, and the moral necessity for, a fundamentally different and better future for human life. For, even while contemporary critical theories of society must reject Marx's *ouvrierisme*, they must retain his abiding sense that the future can and should be fundamentally better than the present and the past. This possibility must be asserted, moreover, in something other than a merely hortatory way. Its moral status should be philosophically justified and its empirical status should be coherently explained. What is refreshing and significant about Honneth is that, even while he completely eschews the structuralism of Marxist theory and the revolutionism of New Left thought, he once again takes up these great tasks of the critical tradition. In so doing, his work establishes a bridge between the neo-Marxist theorizing of the 1960s and early 1970s and the politically engaged theories of contemporary activists, which too often seem as if they are captured by the ideologies of contemporary movements rather than seeking objectively to explain them.

Honneth engages in both a philosophical and a sociological polemic. Philosophically, he writes against the chasm that has been erected between moral and ethical thought. Emphasizing 'justice', the Kantian tradition has produced theories of abstract fairness that focus on procedural guarantees like due process, individual rights in the democratic state, the expansion of universalistic rationality, and morality in the 'weak' sense of negative liberty. Rawls's early development of the trans-historical notion of 'justice as fairness' and Habermas's early development of the normative ideal of transparent communication on the basis of 'universal pragmatics' are the most elaborate and influential contemporary examples of such a neo-Kantian approach. In reaction to such theorizing, which has been called 'externalist,' there has emerged over the last decade an increasingly strong 'internalist' approach that, drawing upon Aristotle and Hegel to argue against Kant, calls for reinstating the importance of 'ethical' as against purely 'moral' criteria. In defining the ethical, contemporary thinkers like Charles Taylor, Bernard Williams, and Michael Walzer follow Hegel and Aristotle by placing emphasis on the 'good' rather than only the 'just' life and rooting it in communal rather than abstract organization, concrete rather than universal normative criteria, and substantive rather than procedural values which highlight difference and uniqueness over generality and similarity.

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terms. Touraine developed a genuinely new theory of how fundamental contradictions in post-industrial society would create revolutionary movements coalescing in a new, universalizing class struggle against capitalism. This entire theoretical project collapsed a decade ago with the decline of progressive social movements. By emphasizing concepts like democracy and legality, Touraine's new writings—*Critique de la Modernité* (1972) and *Qu'est-ce que la Démocratie?* (1994)—effectively refute his earlier work. For an extended discussion of Touraine in this regard, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Collective Action, Culture and Civil Society: Secularizing, Updating, Inverting, Revising, and Displacing the Classical Model of Social Movements', in Jon Clark and Marco Diani, eds, *Alain Touraine*. London 1996, pp. 205–33.

## Philosophy and Empirical Thinking

Honneth joins an important new development in philosophy by wanting to close the gap between these two socially engaged and critical schools of thought. What particularly distinguishes his own effort, and reaffirms its clear linkage with earlier work in the Frankfurt School tradition, is his welcome insistence that this philosophical bridge must be extended to make a deep connection between philosophical criticism and the most sophisticated contemporary empirical thinking about contemporary societies.

Honneth is trained in social science as well as in philosophy, and he links his critique of abstract, neo-Kantian justice theories to an empirical attack on social scientific approaches that theorize oppression and emancipation primarily in distributive terms that focus on economic equality and inequality alone. Arguing that 'social theory's fixation on the dimension of interests has... thoroughly obscured our view of the societal significance of moral feelings', Honneth incisively suggests that 'the collective interest behind a conflict does not have to be seen as something ultimate or original but may rather have been constituted within a horizon of moral experience that admits of normative claims' (p. 166). Following the critical path established by Parsons's sociological theory, Honneth traces the origins of this unfortunate line of mechanistic and reductionist social scientific thinking back to Hobbes.<sup>3</sup> From there, he traces the baleful effects of this orientation forward to the quasiutilitarianism of Marx's systematic writings (as compared to his historical writings, which Honneth lauds); to the Chicago School's purely 'ecological'—spatial and economic—treatment of ethnic conflict; to explanations of group mobility that focus exclusively on the availability of instrumental means like symbolic capital<sup>4</sup> and to social movement models that emphasize 'resource mobilization' alone. While Honneth's synthetic philosophical ambition is clear and, as we will see, his alternative forcefully spelled out, he does not make any explicit synthetic statement about the alternative sociological theory his ideas imply. Still, the empirical traditions he draws upon push in the same direction if in different ways. They include psychoanalytic object-relations theory; models of status and legal position that emphasize citizenship as compared to naked state power; and approaches that incorporate the cultural and communicative dimensions of cooperation, conflict, and social movements. In the latter regard, he draws particular attention to the importance of E.P. Thompson's work, describing it as having provided the impetus for a reorientation of historical studies by which 'the utilitarian presuppositions of the earlier tradition could be replaced by normative premises'. Framing the lessons of Thompson's work philosophically, Honneth writes that 'what counts as an unbearable

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<sup>3</sup> This appropriation of Parsons by a left theorist may still seem surprising despite the pioneering labours of Habermas and others in the 1980s. Yet the manner in which the early Parsons provided a model that critiqued reification and affirmed solidarity and moral responsibility has also fundamentally informed David Lockwood's recent work *Solidarity and Schism: The Problem of Disorder in Durkheim and Marxist Sociology*, New York 1992.

<sup>4</sup> In terms of this Bourdieuan concept of symbolic capital and Bourdieu's theoretical framework more generally, Honneth has written one of the single best critical pieces. See 'The Fragmented World of Symbolic Forms: Reflections on Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 3, 1986, pp. 55-66.

level of economic provision is to be measured in terms of the moral expectations that people consensually bring to the organization of the community' (ibid.).

The desire to synthesize Kantian and Hegelian traditions, and to combine this with an empirical alternative to what Parsons called the Hobbesian error in social theory, has, of course, always also been Habermas's goal. But Honneth, who was Habermas's student and is now the successor to his Chair in philosophy at Frankfurt, argues that Habermas's emphasis on undistorted communication and universal pragmatics is too cognitivist, rationalistic, and abstract—too Kantian, in short—to serve as a master term, much less an empirical goal. In its place, Honneth wishes to emphasize 'recognition'.<sup>5</sup>

Honneth justifies this philosophically by going back, as indeed did Habermas before him, to the young Hegel's Jena lectures, which thematized recognition as an egalitarian blending of love and esteem. In sociological terms, Honneth justifies his emphasis on recognition via a long and highly original interpretation of George Herbert Mead. Honneth takes his initial lead from Habermas's important insight about the centrality of intersubjectivity in the American social psychologist's work. However, he goes on to demonstrate something extraordinarily interesting about the manner in which Mead ontologized individuality. Honneth shows that when Mead insisted that the restless and non-conforming 'I' always differentiated itself from the socialized 'me', representing existing society's 'generalized other,' he linked this individualization to the self's construction of an imaginary world of idealized others who would, in principle, supply psychological and social recognition of the ego's individuating, non-conforming act. Finally, Honneth justifies his emphasis on recognition empirically, citing common linguistic usage. 'In the self-descriptions of those who see themselves as having been wrongly treated by others,' he observes (p. 131), 'the moral categories that play a dominant role are those—such as "insult" or "humiliation"—that refer to forms of disrespect, that is, to the denial of recognition.' This apparently simple and obvious insight is, in fact, an extremely acute observation. Unfortunately very few other critical theorists have accurately assessed its important theoretical consequences.

On the theoretical grounds of classical philosophy and sociology and the empirical grounds of ordinary language, then, Honneth calls for critical theory to focus on a term that has a decidedly subjective, non-economic, psychological, and cultural character. He suggests, for example, that denying recognition hurts people 'not simply because it harms subjects or restricts their freedom to act'—the Hobbesian and Kantian claims respectively—but also 'because it injures them *with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively*' (ibid., italics added). With this Hegelian term, then, Honneth gives greater texture to the normative ideal of critical social theory: recognition suggests not

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5. For an extended justification of his proposal to replace Habermas's emphasis on communication with the concept of recognition, see Honneth, 'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect,' *Constellations*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1994), pp. 255–69.

just abstract justice or equality but 'self-realization,' the 'settled ethos of a particular life world,' the 'good life' (p. 172).

### The Categorical Imperative to Recognition

Yet, by putting recognition rather than communication or equality at the centre of his philosophical-empirical model, Honneth does not see himself as taking the side of anti-Kantian ideas. To the contrary, he believes that if recognition is theorized appropriately it can bridge the classical oppositions in philosophical and sociological thought. Thus, while Honneth acknowledges that 'our approach departs from the Kantian tradition in that it is concerned not solely with the moral autonomy of human beings but also with the conditions for their self-realization,' he insists that, 'in contrast to those movements that distance themselves from Kant, this concept of the good should not be conceived as the expression of substantive values that constitute the ethos of a concrete tradition-based community [but rather] with the structural elements of ethical life, which...can be normatively extracted from the plurality of all particular forms of life [thereby leading to] the most general norms possible' (pp. 172–3). Honneth believes that there is a kind of categorical imperative for recognition. In their desire to achieve recognition for themselves, people must give recognition to others. In this process, actors will, without realizing it, develop general categories, and corresponding institutions, that justify recognition. These categories and institutions will have simultaneously a particular, subjective reference and a universal, objective reach. Efforts to achieve happiness and the good life perforce involve movements towards universalization and, vice versa, movements towards universal justice are inevitably rooted in local communities of culturally shared identities and interests.

So far, so good. This is an ambitious and much-needed effort to extend the bridges that are being built between neo-Kantian approaches to critical thinking and the remarkable upsurge of critical hermeneutic theorizing that has emerged from such socially-engaged thinkers as Taylor, Williams, and Walzer. Yet, while enormously helpful, *The Struggle for Recognition* remains problematic in certain critical respects. Its sociological models are affected by residues of an evolutionary approach to morality and history. This developmental bias coincides with what can be called, in philosophical terms, an overly 'anthropological' emphasis, one which makes Honneth less sensitive than he should be to what Austen and Habermas have called the 'illocutionary'—linguistic and symbolic—dimensions of contemporary institutions and conflicts. As a result, we believe, in its present form, Honneth's critical theory can fully encompass neither the contingencies of actual historical outcomes nor the complex moral and institutional textures necessary to achieve the 'good and just' life.

These problems begin to emerge when Honneth tries to operationalize recognition by parsing it into three subcategories, specifying it on the level of the personality ('self-confidence'), social organization ('self-respect'), and culture ('self-esteem'). Each of these categories defines an ideal end-state of social development, a set of equilibria points for social and moral progress that are anthropological in the sense that they consti-

tute social and moral arguments—like those of Marx's early manuscripts—produced by a theory of human needs. For each level, Honneth points to a set of social restrictions that frustrate a human need, denying recognition and as a result creating social pathology and conflict. By so doing, he can produce theoretically informed suggestions for progressive social action and change.

But so tightly linking human needs, social structures and pathologies is too neat. Conceptualizing self-confidence, for example, Honneth employs object-relations theories that underline the importance of 'good enough mothering', by parents and other socializing agents, in providing actors with the 'basic trust' necessary for establishing friendship and independence. Being denied the recognition that such mothering represents, Honneth writes, results in pathologies like criminal aggression and violence. It seems to us, however, that this is an overly simplistic way of thinking about the motivational aspects even of interpersonal problems. As Anna Freud first pointed out, and as subsequent ego psychology convincingly demonstrated, even 'well brought up' and 'secure' persons have complex and fragmented cognitive and affective structures which continuously employ defensive mechanisms like splitting, projection, denial, and neutralization. This means that, even within 'healthy' adults, the potential for violent and aggressive interpersonal relations always remains. 'Confident' people can be, and have been, anti-Semitic, racist and misogynist. Equally important, however, is the fact that unconfident, insecure, badly brought up persons can act in ways that give others esteem and recognition. They can be brought to do so by the structures of the symbolic and organizational environments within which they act.

What is missing from Honneth's model is the concept of mediations. Confidence is a psychological medium but it should not, for the purposes of social theory, be conceived as an individually or even interactionally generated one. To the contrary, confidence, and its lack, can be articulated *culturally* and regulated *institutionally*; it is not only or even primarily the result of socializing institutions. For example, in her influential book, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Nancy Chodorow demonstrated how misogynist socializing structures created within girls and women strong and supposedly debilitating dependency needs. How did it come about that these same girls and young women created the active, autonomous and self-confident, and often very 'aggressive', women's movement of the 1960s? What Chodorow missed was the mediation vis-à-vis female psychological structures provided by surrounding cultural ideals (which increasingly emphasized highly universal and neutral conceptions of freedom) and by surrounding social structures (such as increased participation in the labour market and extended legal guarantees) which provided learning opportunities for transforming personal feelings of inadequacy into healthy, confident, and assertive *public* behaviour.

### Illocutionary Force

As a social movement, in other words, actors in the women's movement found psychological gratifications—self-confidence and recognition—

in the interactional and cultural structures that were institutionally available in the public sphere. Because they were 'gratified' in this way, they could act with 'illocutionary' force to redefine these structures in more universal and gender-sensitive terms. Drawing on Austen and Searle, Habermas introduced the term 'illocutionary' into political and moral discourse in order to emphasize the consensus-building capacities of speech acts. In contrast to the coercive, instrumental, and asymmetrical dimensions of perlocutionary speech ('if you vote for me, I will have the power to give you special attention'), illocutionary statements have their effect only if speakers and hearers assume symmetry and strive for mutual understanding ('vote for me because I represent your needs and values'). In this sense, insofar as the women's movement succeeded in changing the gender consciousness, and later the institutions, of contemporary women and men, it can be said to have exerted an illocutionary force. Women empowered themselves by the performative effectiveness of their claims to recognition, not by the psychological effectiveness of such claims. For example, women often publicly re-presented their lives, via feminist autobiographies, interviews, movies, novels, and television. In these public reconstructions, women symbolized themselves as bearers of pain, discrimination, isolation, and misunderstanding. Insofar as these public interventions succeeded in gaining legitimacy—in generating sympathetic understanding and agreement among wide sectors of the public—women came to be regarded as universal figures, as the 'bearers of life,' and they received public solidarity, consolation, and recognition. In gaining such recognition, they empowered themselves by reversing the self-defeating image of woman as victim. Representing themselves as strong rather than weak, they became validated and gained power as citizens and public actors.<sup>6</sup>

The subsequent psychological—confidence-related—effect of the women's movement must be understood in the same kind of mediated, illocutionary, and cultural way. Insofar as it succeeded in establishing new cultural categories of moral human beings, more gender-neutral normative guidelines for interactional and institutional behaviour, and more egalitarian and inclusive economic rewards and legal punishments, feminism has made it possible for 'insecure' women to be treated in ways that increase their self-confidence and recognition.

We have similar reservations about Honneth's treatment of the second form of recognition, which he calls self-respect. Honneth connects self-respect not to the psychological but the social organizational level of recognition, and he understands organization primarily in terms of the broadening of citizenship rights. Arguing, quite rightly, that self-respect can be produced by legal obligations demanding that others respect one's

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<sup>6</sup> This discussion of illocutionary force, while indebted to Habermas's moral appropriation of the concept, implies at the same time a fundamental modification of it. As we have employed the concept here, drawing on Lara's forthcoming work, it points to the importance in successful illocutionary utterances of creating effective aesthetic symbols—in sociological terms, collective representations—a process that entails interpenetrating the moral 'validity sphere' with the aesthetic. It is precisely this necessity that Lara has emphasized in her interpretation of Albrecht Wellmer's important recent work. See Maria Pia Lara, 'Albrecht Wellmer: Between Validity Spheres', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 2 (1995), pp. 1-22.

moral autonomy, he produces a developmental model that concentrates on showing how law has become ever more abstract and generalized, and how its normative reach has continually been extended. He demonstrates that law was integral to the transformation of hierarchically organized estates into horizontally defined citizen communities, and that the extension and generalization of law was later central to the political and social enlargement of these earlier civil rights that Marshall and Parsons described.

Despite the importance of drawing attention to the significance of legal development, we believe that Honneth's argument is seriously weakened by the unmediated, anthropological linkage he makes between self-respect and legal institutions. In historical terms, increasing legal generalization and abstraction does not necessarily mean extending recognition of autonomy. Apartheid laws were imposed during South African modernity, in the 1940s; the Nuremberg laws emerged in the midst of what had been considered an expansion of German modernity in the 1920s and early 1930s; laws severely reducing the social benefits of citizenship have been proposed with increasing frequency in this decade.

It is clear that legal generality and abstractness do not, in themselves, signal recognition for moral autonomy or its diminution. We would argue, to the contrary, that the moral capacity of different groups of actors is crystallized by social movements that intervene in the public sphere in an illocutionary way. These can just as often be movements of the Right as of the Left. Once public moral identities are symbolically constructed, the moral majority specifies them in terms of legal codes and enforceable mandates. Honneth has ignored the fact that illocutionary—linguistic and symbolic—forces always mediate the relationship between psychological motivations, interactional gestures, and social organization. As a result, he has conflated the recognition of moral capacity with the growth of legal regulation per se. This is not even to raise the whole problem of the relation between procedural, universalist law—the only kind that Honneth addresses—and legal norms that seek to enforce substantive rationality through category-specific protections, the 'partialist' legal position that some multiculturalists have suggested is necessary if complex societies are to respect differences in gender and ethnicity.

### **Particular and Universal Communities**

In his discussions of the third, culturally-related type of recognition—self-esteem—and of the role that social movements play in the struggle for recognition generally understood, Honneth moves closer to illuminating the symbolic, illocutionary mediations in complex societies. Esteem, he writes, comes from the actor's ability to participate in an intersubjectively shared value horizon, in a true community of values. For this reason, he suggests, it is the cultural self-understanding of society that provides the criteria for establishing self-esteem. There is, however, a crucial and unacknowledged ambiguity in this discussion. On the one hand, Honneth suggests that mere participation in a shared value, or ethical, community can provide recognition. On the other, he acknowledges that for this recognition to be moral, or just, it must



involve, not simply symbolic participation in a tightly bounded community but also in the community of society, a relatively universal community. In the latter sense, it is 'the climate of public attention' (p. 127) that becomes critical, not simply the communal sharing of values per se.

This distinction is not merely academic. The failure to make it explicit, and to relate different forms of communalization systematically to different outcomes in the culturally coded struggle for esteem, would seem to be a significant omission in moral and empirical terms. The problem presents itself because esteem is, in fact, often provided within the particularistic, self-affirming boundaries of segmented communities which experience themselves as downwardly mobile, as having recently become peripheral to ongoing, public concerns. In this situation, demands for recognition that appear subjectively legitimate to social actors, which emerge, indeed, from their concrete forms of ethical life, are deeply suspect in moral terms. Based on deep resentments, they can easily become demands for domination, for the subordination of the values of other groups to those that appear 'naturally' to be affirmed in one's own.

Honneth seems theoretically able to finesse such a possibility—to avoid theorizing the darker possibilities that the search for esteem might imply—because of the ambiguity in the reference to 'community'. This optimism is reinforced by what appears to be an implicit commitment on his part to a new form of the categorical imperative, one that predicts mutual valuation from the anthropological force of human need: "Solidarity" can be understood as an interactive relationship in which subjects mutually sympathize with their various ways of life because, among themselves, they esteem each other symmetrically' (p. 128). Yes, solidarity *can* be understood in this way, but will it be so understood empirically? Honneth simply admonishes, 'only to the degree to which I actively care about the development of the other's characteristic (which seem foreign to me) can our shared goals be realized' (p. 129). This submerged developmental commitment to an anthropological imperative makes Honneth seem overly confident that the struggle for recognition will lead to progressive social change. Honneth wants his synthesis of Kantian and hermeneutical approaches to provide a model that cuts across recent debates about 'identity politics.' In contrast, for example, to such critical recent interventions as Todd Gitlin's, *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, Honneth has tried to develop a model that can demonstrate how demands for the recognition of authentic identities are not incompatible with universalizing claims. While we heartily agree with this more optimistic understanding of the potential of multiculturalism, we do not believe that Honneth's model is sufficiently mediated to allow him philosophically to justify or sociologically to explain this claim.

### The Texture of Recognition

It is important to make this criticism very carefully, in a balanced way. By emphasizing the particularity and subjectivity of recognition, and by recognizing its sociological contingency, Honneth has gone well beyond the Kantian formula that simply describes solidarity as 'the other side of justice.' Drawing from the Hegelian and classical traditions, his model conceptualizes the possibility of maintaining solidarity

as a moral criterion while avoiding the proceduralism of the neo-Kantian tradition, still evident in Habermas's work, that conceives the impartiality of solidarity in a very abstract way. In our view, however, Honneth still does not go far enough. It is not enough simply to say that solidarity is not an empty space and that groups are included and excluded on the basis of recognition. The term recognition must become more textured, and it can become so only if it is amplified by including in it a concept like symbolic representation. Solidarity never contains only one possibility. It is always partial, multi-layered, and incomplete, because recognition in a moral and ethical sense is filtered by the intermingled representational structures of various social groups. In opposition to the partially institutionalized values of 'modernity' or 'post-conventional morality'—Honneth uses these terms interchangeably to describe the potentially universal tendencies of contemporary societal communities—core groups establish hierarchical valuations that justify subordinating groups by identifying them as dependent, irrational, libidinous, as, in sum, civically incompetent. These institutionalized languages of disrespect exist in tense inter-relationships with the self-images of excluded groups and with the 'properly civil' normative language of democratic society. For groups to gain esteem and recognition under these circumstances means a lot more than demanding it, and more than justifying this demand on the basis of an anthropological reciprocity. It means entering with illocutionary force into the convoluted, interlarded language of public life, with such creative rhetorical power and non-institutionalized resources that one's own and other's identities seem to require a reconstructed narrative of the social, one that is coded in much more democratic, egalitarian, and humanitarian terms.

In his analysis of social movements, Honneth approaches just this kind of understanding in a very interesting way. 'There must be a semantic bridge', he writes, 'between the impersonal aspirations of a social movement and their participants' private experience of injury, a bridge that is sturdy enough to enable the development of collective identity' (p. 163). But in trying to explain how such a semantic bridge can be constructed, Honneth moves, once again, directly from an anthropological emphasis on emotional needs to historical practices of resistance, emancipation, and enlarged participation:

In the context of the emotional responses associated with shame, the experience of being disrespected can become the motivational impetus for a struggle for recognition. For it is only by regaining the possibility of active conduct that individuals can dispel the state of emotional tension into which they are forced as a result of humiliation. *But what makes it possible for the praxis thus opened up to take the form of political resistance is the opportunity for moral insight inherent in these negative emotions, as their cognitive content.* (p. 138, italics added)

The *opportunity* for moral insight may be inherent in the experience of shame, but, as the history of reactionary social movements that have marked the twentieth century indicates, grasping a moral content in response to feeling publicly and privately shamed is not particularly likely in an empirical sense. Institutionalized social resources and public rhetorics mediate between shame, its cognition, and any illocutionary responses which might be made. Moreover, even if the response to shame

does take the form of constructing a collective identity and injecting it into the public sphere—'a practical process in which individual experiences of disrespect are read as typical for an entire group' (p. 162)—there is no necessary sense in which this is a good thing from a moral point of view. Such interventions have often led to the creation of social structures and languages that create a self-righteous facade of legitimacy for the exclusion and domination of others.

Axel Honneth is certainly aware of such possibilities, for it is his singular achievement in *The Struggle for Recognition* to have created a model not only for evaluating such possibilities morally and ethically but for explaining them empirically. This is the marvellous ambition of the Frankfurt approach to critical social theory. As the most important recent representative of this school, Honneth has achieved this ambition brilliantly. From the foundations of Habermas, he has struck out decisively in new directions, taking much more seriously the subjectivity of moral textures and the need to approach them through empirical and not only philosophical reasoning. In so doing, Honneth has opened a new chapter in critical theory. Despite the inadequacies that remain in this account, one can only await his future contributions with keen anticipation.