



Recognition and Justice: Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice

Author(s): Axel Honneth

Source: *Acta Sociologica*, Vol. 47, No. 4, Recognition, Redistribution, and Justice (Dec., 2004), pp. 351-364

Published by: Sage Publications, Ltd.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4195049>

Accessed: 20-04-2016 04:49 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Sage Publications, Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Acta Sociologica*

Recognition and Justice

Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice

Axel Honneth

Johann Wolfgang Goethe University and the Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

abstract: In this article, Axel Honneth outlines a plural theory of justice. In developing his argument he takes his departure not in the classic elimination of 'inequality', but in the avoidance of 'humiliation' or 'disrespect'. He is convinced that an appropriate point of departure for a recognition-theoretical conception of justice must show that the experience of social injustice is always measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate. Throughout the article, Honneth makes strong reservations about Nancy Fraser's approach, where 'recognition' and 'redistribution' are separated into two conceptual totalities with the single goal of 'participatory equality'. On the contrary, he suggests having a more elaborate concept of identity formation, so that participating in the public realm means participating without shame, capable of unfurling his or her own personality's potential in an unforced manner and of thus developing a personal identity. From this standpoint Honneth points to three differentiated spheres of recognition that must be obtained if the individual is to obtain a personal identity, namely love, equal treatment in law and social esteem.

keywords: dignity ♦ justice ♦ recognition ♦ redistribution ♦ self-realization

Introduction

Anyone who has followed attentively the development of political philosophy in recent years will have been able to witness a theoretical process in which, along with central concepts, normative orientations too have gradually transformed. Through to the late 1980s the dominance of Marxism in Europe and the broad influence of Rawls in the USA had ensured that there could be no doubt as to the guiding principle of a normative theory of political order. Notwithstanding all differences in detail, there was agreement in calling for the elimination of such social or economic inequalities as could not be justified with reasonable arguments. For some time now this influential idea of justice, which can be comprehended politically as an expression of the social democratic epoch, seems to have been replaced by a new idea, one with political effects that are initially much less unambiguous. Here it is no longer the elimination of inequality that appears to represent the normative aim, but the avoidance of humiliation or disrespect; 'equal distribution' or 'equality of goods' no longer form its central categories, but 'dignity' or 'respect'. Put in terms of catchwords, in a way that might well rapidly attain paradigmatic significance, Nancy Fraser has called this transformation process a transition from the idea of 'redistribution' to the notion of 'recognition'. Whereas the first term is linked with a vision of justice that aims to establish social equality through the

redistribution of goods guaranteeing liberty, the second term defines the conditions of a just society through the aim of recognizing the individual dignity of all individuals. Albert O. Hirschman has something similar in mind in suggesting a categorial distinction intended to mark a central tendency of our current political culture. His suggestion is, namely, that social disputes today are increasingly assuming the character of 'indivisible' conflicts, which, in contrast to 'divisible' conflicts, relate to goods the character of which excludes distribution according to considerations of equality.

Two alternative interpretations, which in a certain manner take opposing observations as their point of departure, today offer themselves as an explanation of this change in normative orientations. On the one hand, the turn to concepts like 'dignity' or 'recognition' can be grasped as the result of political disillusionment that set in the moment the prospects of extending social equality began to disappear with the international triumphal march of conservative parties and the dismantling of welfare-state programmes. The thesis would be, namely, that no sooner were the demands for economic redistribution seen to be unrealizable in the long term than the reduced, merely negative notions of eliminating humiliation and disrespect prevailed instead. On the other hand, however, an explanation can be imagined that grasps the increasing orientation towards such ideas not as the result of political disillusionment but, conversely, as a consequence of increased moral sensibility. This second thesis would be that, having become aware of the political status of the experience of social or cultural disrespect through a series of social movements, we have in the meantime become conscious of the fact that the recognition of human dignity comprises a central principle of social justice. If we proceed from this second thesis, for which there is currently a body of empirical evidence, we also arrive at new conclusions with regard to the normative foundations of the welfare state. The bestowal of social rights, i.e. above all economic safeguards for the individual in case of need through no fault of one's own, is gauged primarily according to the idea of affording every member of a society the measure of social recognition that makes him or her a full citizen. If we further consider that such recognition also comprises the citizen's incorporation in the process of social cooperation, the resulting conclusion is that programmes of minimal economic safeguarding do not suffice; rather, state welfare is then subject to the requirement that every individual be given the chance to participate in an elementary manner in the cooperative context of society by making his or her own contribution. It is only then, such would be the conclusion, that every individual is in a position to grasp his or her self as a full member of a society.

In the following I sketch the outlines of a theory of justice starting with the social and moral fact that social recognition is necessary. Before developing the properly normative core of such a theory of justice, I first set out the social-theoretical premises that form the presupposition for my outline. Two steps must be taken to obtain an appropriate point of departure for a recognition-theoretical conception of justice. In a first step it must be shown, following on from a series of recent investigations (Tzvetan Todorov, Avishai Margalit, Michael Ignatieff, Barrington Moore), that the experience of social injustice is always measured in terms of the withholding of some recognition held to be legitimate. To this extent the distinction between economic disadvantage and cultural deprivation is phenomenologically secondary in character and refers more to differences in the respects to which subjects can experience social disrespect or humiliation. To be able to make the intuition thus adumbrated fruitful for an intended theory of society, it must be shown in a second step that the establishment of the liberal capitalist social order is to be described as a process of differentiation by three spheres of recognition. Accordingly, we can reckon with different types of morally substantive struggles or conflicts in contemporary societies, with the differences between them depending respectively on whether the dispute is about the 'just' application of the recognition principle of love, of equality of rights, or of doing justice to achievements. As a direct consequence of

these considerations it naturally results that the opposition of 'distribution struggles' and 'recognition conflicts' is of little help, since it gives the impression that demands for economic redistribution could be understood independently of all experience of social disrespect. To me, however, it seems much more plausible to interpret distribution conflicts as the specific kind of struggle for recognition in which dispute is about the appropriate evaluation of individuals' or groups' social contributions. But right through to this conclusion I have not yet made use of a single argument in my justification that might possess a somehow normative character. Rather, with a purely descriptive intention I have limited myself to setting out the normative infrastructure of capitalist constitutional states in the way that allows the whole extent of a struggle for recognition to come into view.

Objections to the recognition-theoretical programme are frequently grounded not only on social-theoretical considerations but also on normative ones. Nancy Fraser, who has developed a fundamental critique of the recognition paradigm in recent years, also justifies her division between 'redistribution' and 'recognition' with fundamental reservations about tracing all justice-theoretical issues back to the principle of recognition (1997). Her central argument in this respect is that only the combination of economic and cultural justice can guarantee that form of 'participatory equality', which is to be understood as the morally supreme principle of liberal societies. She additionally links the development of such a conception of justice with a critique of recognition theory, which she reproaches for being too closely bound to an ethical idea of individual self-realization. A merely social-theoretical approach seems to have no ready answer at all to the complex questions that arise with this normative twist in argumentation: although the whole project of a differentiated terminology of recognition is, of course, borne by a certain moral intuition, this has as such still remained completely unarticulated. In the interests of better surveyability, I initially put the problems at issue in a systematic sequence, in order then to discuss them step-by-step in the course of my considerations. The turn to the normative becomes necessary as soon as we are no longer discussing how present-day social struggles are to be appropriately analysed theoretically, but turn to the question of their moral evaluation. It is obvious that we cannot approve of every political uprising as such, nor hold every demand for recognition to be morally legitimate or defensible. Rather, in general we judge the objectives of such struggles to be positive only when they point in the direction of a societal development that we can grasp as coming closer to our notions of a good or just society. Naturally, in principle, other criteria can also play a decisive role here; criteria related more with the aims of societal efficiency or stability, but these too then only reflect value decisions that have been made at a higher level about the normative meaning and purpose of a societal order. To this extent every evaluation of a state of social conflict relies on exhibiting those normative principles in which societal morality or political ethics are anchored, and by which these allow themselves to be guided subterraneously. From this preliminary consideration details now result of the tasks that today matter in developing a recognition-theoretical concept of justice. First of all, explication is required of those principles we respectively hold to be the normative epitome of what comprises the idea of a just and good society. Here debate will amount to the question as to how the principle of participatory equality is related to the normative notions contained, in moral respects, by the concept of 'recognition' (1). When we have clarified these differences, the next question ought to be how we think we are able to justify our various conceptions of a good or just societal order. In this context the problem brought up by Nancy Fraser – of whether such a justification makes recourse to an ethical idea of the good life requisite, or whether it is able to get by without any anchoring of such a kind – becomes acute (2). Finally, the question of how the differently grasped guiding principles are respectively to be applied to societal reality, such that they can be drawn upon in morally judging a state of social conflict, will crystallize as the last problem. My conjecture is that the full measure of the differences between the different approaches will first be completely

revealed at this point (3). Naturally, a sufficiently differentiated treatment of the three named problem areas would call for considerably more space than is available to me here in this article. Hence, I will have to limit myself to key points in setting out the central differences, in the hope that this will allow at least the outlines of a recognition-theoretical concept of justice to emerge.

1.

In my previous works I have, for the most part, made use of the normative idea of recognition only in a merely descriptive sense. In doing this I was constantly concerned with defending the thesis that the normative expectation which subjects have of society is directed towards social recognition of their abilities on the part of variously generalized others. The implications of this moral-sociological finding can be further developed in two directions, the first of which concerns the moral socialization of subjects, the second the moral integration of society. As far as the subject-theoretical side is concerned, we have good reasons for assuming that individual identity formation generally takes place through stages of internalization of socially standardized recognition reactions: The individual learns to grasp his or her self as both a full and a particular member of the social community by being gradually assured of the specific abilities and needs constituting his or her personality through the approving patterns of reaction by generalized interaction partners.¹ To this extent every human subject is dependent, in an elementary way, on a context of social forms of interaction that are regulated by normative principles of mutual recognition; and the absence of such recognition relations will be followed by experience of disrespect or humiliation that cannot be without damaging consequences for the single individual's identity formation. In the opposing direction, that of an appropriate concept of society, this close meshing of recognition and socialization now results in our being able to imagine social integration only as a process of inclusion through regulated forms of recognition. In the view of its members, societies represent legitimate order structures only to the degree that they are in a position to guarantee reliable relations of mutual recognition at various levels. To this extent, the normative integration of societies takes place only by way of institutionalizing principles of recognition that regulate in a comprehensible way the forms of mutual recognition through which its members become involved in the societal context of life.²

If we allow ourselves to be guided by these social-theoretical premises, the consequence that results for me is that a political ethics or societal morality must be tailored to the quality of societally guaranteed recognition relations. The justice or wellbeing of a society is measured according to the degree of its ability to secure conditions of mutual recognition in which personal identity formation, and hence individual self-realization, can proceed sufficiently well. Naturally, we cannot imagine such a turn to the normative as a mere inference from objective functional requirements to the ideals of societal coexistence; rather, the demands of social integration can only be understood as referring to the normative principles of a political ethics because, and to the extent that, they are reflected in the social expectation attitudes of socialized subjects themselves. But if this precondition is met, for which I am convinced many indications speak, then such a transition seems to me to be justified: In choosing the basic principles according to which we want to orient our political ethics we are then guided not simply by empirically given interests, but only by such relatively stable expectation attitudes as we can understand to be the subjective precipitation of socially integrative imperatives. Perhaps it is not completely wrong to speak here of 'quasi-transcendental interests' of the human species;³ and it might perhaps even be justified to talk at this particular point of an 'emancipatory interest' directed to the dismantling of social asymmetries and exclusions.

It has now also already become manifest that the content of such expectations of social recognition can alter with change in the structure of societies. Only in terms of their form do they represent an anthropological invariant, whereas their specific direction and orientation is due to the respectively established type of a society's social integration. This is not the appropriate place also to defend the far-reaching thesis that change in the normative structure of societies is itself again to be traced back to the impetus provided by a struggle for recognition. On the whole my idea is indeed that regarding societal development we should be able to speak of moral progress at least to the extent that the demand for social recognition always possesses a validity overhang which ensures the mobilization of reasons and arguments that are difficult to reject, and hence in the long term brings about an increase in the quality of social integration. For the purpose of my justification, however, all that is necessary at this point is the claim that in content terms the fundamental interest in social recognition is always formed by the normative principles that lay down the elementary structures of mutual recognition within a given societal formation. From this the conclusion now follows that we should today orient a political ethics or societal morality towards the three principles of recognition that regulate in our societies which legitimate expectations of recognition by other members of society can exist. Hence it is the three principles of love, equality and merit that collectively determine what ought currently to be understood by the idea of social justice. However, before I further develop the basic features of this plural conception of justice, it should first be clarified in what relation it stands to the idea that it is fair distribution and social recognition, which today collectively ground a principle of social justice.

At first glance, Fraser too seems to prefer a concept of social justice bearing the traits of a pluralism of different principles or aspects. For her central idea at the normative level is, after all, that only the elimination of economic inequality and cultural degradation are together able to contribute to the establishment of a just society. However, taking a second glance, it rapidly becomes clear that this is to be a matter not of an actual pluralism of principles, but merely of the idea of two different fields of application for one and the same basic principle: Economic redistribution and cultural recognition are measures owing their normative justification to the fact that they represent the two means of asserting the one aim of 'participatory equality'. It is this aim that plays the role of a supreme basic principle in Nancy Fraser's approach, whereas the determination of two types of injustice just comprises the result of its application to our societies' institutional conditions. Having made clear the differences in architectonics linked with this, the first question to arise is how the normative intuitions of the two approaches relate to one another. On the one side there seems to be the notion that subjects are entitled to the same degree of chances to participate in societal life; on the other side, however, is the idea that subjects deserve in equal measure the degree of social recognition that permits them successful identity formation. In one respect these two intuitions strongly resemble one another, since, indeed, the concept of recognition also links the possibility of identity formation with the precondition of participation in social interactions and hence affords participation a high status: Only the subject that has learned to be 'able to appear in public without shame' (Smith, 1976: 869–70), through the reactions of recognition in the social environment, is capable of unfurling his or her own personality's potential in an unforced manner and of thus developing a personal identity. But the agreement found here, which is initially due only to the vagueness of the concept of 'societal participation', should by no means gloss over the more profound differences. Even though the idea of unforced participation in public life plays a prominent role in the case of both intuitions, with Nancy Fraser it serves above all to explain what it means today to speak of social equality; for me, however, it serves to explain the fact that successful identity formation possesses a societal 'public' side.

Perhaps it is best initially to clarify this marked difference in only an indirect manner. It is true that Nancy Fraser and I jointly start with the idea that in the conditions of modern

societies every conception of justice must possess an egalitarian feature from the start, in the sense that it considers all members of society to have equal rights among one another and hence affords each of them the same autonomy. But the difference between our approaches essentially consists of the fact that with Fraser the starting point of individual autonomy is immediately transgressed in the direction of societal participation, whereas from individual autonomy I initially infer the aim of an identity formation that is as intact as possible and then bring into play conditions of mutual recognition as necessary preconditions for such identity formation. To this extent, the two normative conceptions are underlain by different answers to the question 'in relation to what should we speak of the equality of all citizens?' To express it in the terminology of an ethics of goods, Nancy Fraser determines the why or wherefore of equality by referring to the good of participation; I, however, comprehend that wherefore as the good of personal identity formation, though of course I see its realization as depending on conditions of mutual recognition. Starting with these differences in the defined aim of equality, an obvious second step would now be also to look at the differences which open up between our approaches regarding the sources or resources of equality. For then it would have to become manifest why I, in contrast to Nancy Fraser, consider it right today to start with a plural conception of social justice. But before I can move on to the issue thus alluded to, the problem must first be dealt with of how we are respectively able to justify our different starting positions. This is the point at which Nancy Fraser puts forward vehement objections to the attempt to bind the idea of social justice back to a conception of the good life.

2.

In what has been said up to now I have already hinted in an indirect way at how I think of the normative justification for the idea that the quality of social recognition relations should form the point of reference in a conception of social justice. In doing this, for modern societies, I start with the premise that what social equality should be about is enabling the formation of personal identity for all members of society. For me this formulation is synonymous with the statement that it is the enablement of individual self-realization that comprises the actual goal of equal treatment of all subjects in our societies. The question now is how to get from such a (liberal) starting point to the normative conclusion that it is the quality of social recognition conditions which should represent the core of a political ethics or societal morality. My idea here, as already outlined, is that we should generalize our knowledge about the social preconditions for personal identity formation in a conception having the character of a theory of egalitarian moral practice. In such a conception, we express those conditions which we consider, to the best of our knowledge, to be indispensable to give every individual an equal chance of realizing his or her personality. With the early Rawls assumptions of this (ethical) kind are bound up in his list of 'primary goods'; with Joseph Raz in his explication of the preconditions for human wellbeing; finally, with the Hegel of the *Philosophy of Right*, in his communications-theoretical determination of the conditions for the existence of the 'free will' (Rawls, 1973: ch. 2, §15; Raz, 1986: ch. IV; Hegel, 1991). All three authors bind the justification for their conception of social justice to an ethical theory that has the task of outlining which socially influenceable preconditions must be available to the single subject in realizing his or her autonomy. Furthermore, on the basis of such a link with ethical premises, these approaches are today often annexed to a tradition of 'teleological liberalism'. I perceive the advantage of such a conception in that it attempts to make explicit and to justify what for the most part coyly underlies more procedurally oriented versions of liberalism as a hidden premise: a normative idea of the purposes for the sake of which the establishment and assertion of social equality represents a political task that we hold to be sufficiently well justified ethically.

On the spectrum between these two alternatives Nancy Fraser's proposal assumes, in my view, an unclear intermediate position. On the one hand, she herself seems to want to bind the idea of social equality to a determination of purpose that she circumscribes with the concept of 'participation'. According to this, the success of achieving equality is to be measured according to the aim of putting all members of society in a position to partake in social participation without disadvantage. On the other hand, however, Nancy Fraser wants to understand this determination of purpose not as the result of a conception of the good life, but merely as an elucidation of the social implications of the idea of individual autonomy. Hence, she can take the field against recognition theory's ethical overloading without herself being forced to lay claim to an ethical element or elements. What is not clear about the strategy thus outlined is whether it should be grasped as proceduralist in the sense that the idea of 'participation' counts as a reference to precisely that public procedure which helps autonomous subjects in coordinating their individual freedoms in a fair way. Such a Habermasian conception would call for a significantly thinner, more formal concept of public life than Nancy Fraser seems to have in mind with her idea of participation: whereas this is obviously supposed to incorporate all dimensions of persons' public appearances, the democratic formation of will that Habermas intends with his concept of the 'people's sovereignty' embraces less than can be endearing to Nancy Fraser's normative intuitions (Habermas, 1996: ch. 3). If, however, the notion of social participation is supposed to be more comprehensive than the minimum that can be accommodated in the procedural concept of democratic formation of will, then the question arises more than ever of how it is to be filled out without the help of ethical considerations. For we learn about the aspects of public life that are of importance in realizing individual autonomy only from a conception of personal wellbeing, no matter how fragmentarily developed.

Because Nancy Fraser does not see this internal entwinement, there is something pervasively arbitrary about her idea of participatory equality. We do not know exactly why equally-entitled participation in public life is to presuppose only the elimination of economic inequality and cultural humiliation, but not also self-respect in relation to individual achievements or a strength of ego acquired through socialization. At the same level there is uncertainty as to why only the economy and culture come into view as dimensions potentially hindering participation in societal interaction, but not also the spheres of socialization or law. All these further questions impose themselves because Nancy Fraser introduces her concept of 'participation' without pausing to consider the functions it has to fulfil with regard to the social preconditions for individual autonomy. A careful analysis of the relation between the realization of autonomy and social forms of interaction alone could have preserved her from such underdetermination of her guiding normative concept. To become clear about the full extent of the dependency of normative theory on such a backdrop of identity or personality theory, which Nancy Fraser is disavowing, all that is required is a brief reminder of the moral-psychological pains that John Rawls goes to in introducing the primary good of 'self-respect' in his *Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1973: ch. 7, §67). As soon as we are supposed to develop a theory of justice, which also incorporates substantive principles from the starting point of an egalitarian idea of individual autonomy, we are dependent on theoretical bridging arguments with which either the prescribed aims or conditional relationships can be systematically justified. And if the corresponding solution just turns out to be the idea of societal participation, then generalized assumptions are necessary about the extent and forms of participation in social interactions that are expedient or beneficial to individual autonomy.

In contrast to the early Rawls, however, I am of the conviction that the collation of no matter how many findings of a theoretical kind cannot replace that step which must consist of generalizing our knowledge to an always anticipatory conception of the good life. Even though we draw up such a theory in the light of all the knowledge available to us, we cannot

hope ever to see this being fully covered by empirical findings or theoretical assumptions. To this extent, recognition theory, too, in so far as it is now understood as a teleological conception of social justice, only has the status of a hypothetically generalized blueprint of the good life. Using convergent reserves of knowledge this records which forms of mutual recognition subjects today require in order to be able to develop their identity in a manner as intact as possible.

3.

Having outlined with these considerations the normative status of recognition theory with regard to the question of justice, what remains open is the not inconsiderable task of determining the guiding principles of social justice. Also, a sketch at least is required of its approach to solving the question of how the corresponding principles can be brought to bear in judging social struggles. In contrast to Nancy Fraser, who understands both her principles of economic equality and of avoiding cultural humiliation as instrumental means to establishing participatory equality, I start by assuming a plurality of three equal-ranking principles of social justice. This tripartition results from the consideration that subjects in modern societies are reliant in their identity formation on three forms of social recognition, founded in the sphere-specific principles of love, of equal treatment in law and of social esteem. To begin with, I justify the idea of such a three-poled theory of justice, before then coming to discuss the question of its application to current conflict scenarios.

Until now I have sketched my considerations only up to the point at which it becomes clear why a societal morality should refer to the quality of social recognition relations. I see the decisive argument for this in the sufficiently justified thesis that the possibility of the single subject's realizing individual autonomy depends on the precondition of being able to develop an intact self-relationship by experiencing social recognition. It is the link with this ethical assumption that can import a temporal element into the design of a societal morality, to the extent that the structure of the presupposed conditions of recognition undergoes lasting change with the historical process: What subjects are respectively able to consider as dimensions of their personality for which they might legitimately expect social recognition is measured according to the normative mode of their involvement in society and hence according to the degree of differentiation of spheres of recognition. The corresponding societal morality can therefore also be understood as a form of normative articulation of those principles regulating the way in which subjects are to recognize one another mutually within a given societal formation.⁴ To this initially merely affirmative, or perhaps even conservative, task corresponds the idea that a theory of justice must today encompass three equally valuable principles, all of which can be understood as principles of recognition. In order to be actually able to make use of their individual autonomy, single subjects have just as much right, according to the kind of social relationship, to be recognized in their needs, in their legal equality, or finally in their contributions to society. As can be recognized from such a formulation, the content of what we call 'just' is here to be measured according to the respective kind of social relationship that subjects maintain with one another. If the concern is with a relationship shaped by an appeal to love, then the principle of need has priority, whereas in legally shaped relationships the principle of equality takes priority, and in cooperative relationships the principle of merit. Of course, in contrast to David Miller, who aspires to a comparable pluralism of three principles of justice (need, equality, desert) (1999), the tripartition I propose results neither from mere agreement with the empirical results of research into justice, nor from the social-ontological distinction between relationship patterns, but from contemplation of the historically produced conditions of identity formation. Because we live in a social order in which individuals owe the possibility of an intact identity to affective care,

legal equality and social esteem, it seems to me appropriate in the name of individual autonomy to make the three corresponding principles of recognition the normative core of a conception of social justice. A further difference to David Miller's approach concerns the fact that he wishes his three principles to be understood only as principles of distribution regulating, in a sphere-specific manner, how the respective socially esteemed goods should be distributed. Conversely, I seek to comprehend the three principles initially as forms of recognition with which specific attitudes and moral considerations are respectively to be linked; and it is only where consequences regarding the distribution of certain goods simultaneously result from these types of moral respect that I would also speak, in an indirect sense, of principles of distribution.

Despite all these differences, however, one must not forget the essential common features existing between the two approaches. Without recourse to teleological or ethical assumptions, David Miller also starts with the conviction that the modern idea of social justice should be divided into three facets, each of which identifies one of the respects to which individuals must be treated equally. Correspondingly, he distinguishes between the principles of need, equality and merit in the same way as I previously spoke of differentiating the three principles of recognition of love, legal equality and social esteem. In both cases it should not be surprising that the term 'equality' comes up in two places at the same time, for this touches on the distinction between two levels in the conception of justice. At a higher level it should hold that all subjects deserve to be recognized to the same degree, according to the kind of social relationship, in their needs, their legal autonomy, or their achievements; and at the subordinate level it must hold that the principle of legal autonomy implies the idea of mutual equal treatment and so possesses an egalitarian character in the strict sense.⁵ Thus, to put it paradoxically, depending on the sphere under consideration, the application of either the legal equality principle or of both the other, not strictly egalitarian, principles of recognition can be appealed to in the name of a higher-level equality.

But the decisive issue is now surely the problem of how such a recognition-theoretical conception of justice, beyond the merely affirmative task, can also take on a critical, indeed progressive, role. For what is at dispute between Nancy Fraser and myself is above all the extent to which the respective theory is of help in saying something normative about the direction of development that present social conflicts should, if possible, take. Until now I have only talked about the affirmative role which the conception of justice outlined must be able to exercise in so far as it attempts to maintain an awareness of the irreducible plurality of principles of justice in modernity. Here there are, as I have been seeking to make clear, three independent, sphere-specific principles of recognition that must be brought to bear as distinct standards of justice if the intersubjective conditions of personal integrity are to be protected for all subjects in the same measure. Of course, in invoking such a differentiation capacity, which, following Michael Walzer, might be called an 'Art of Separation' immanent in justice (1984: 315–30), nothing has yet been said about the critical role that a conception of justice of this kind must be able to take on when the moral evaluation of social struggles is to be discussed. In this second case the task concerned can no longer simply be that of making explicit the entire plurality of already existing, socially anchored principles of justice, but the much more difficult matter of attempting to develop normative criteria from the plural concept of justice with the help of which current developments can be criticized in the light of future possibilities. In doing this there is a risk of becoming embroiled in a short-sighted endorsement of actualities that takes the aims of currently influential social movements as its point of departure.⁶ Anyone who does not want to become embroiled in this way will be unable to avoid developing such criteria in combination with assertions about the overall moral progress of societies. For, as Maeve Cooke has recently shown once again with great clarity, the evaluation of current disputes requires a judgement of normative potentials that require certain

changes which not only promise short-term improvements, but allow a sustained rise in the moral level of social integration to be expected (2000: 193–227). To this extent the theory of justice, until now only roughly outlined, needs to be embedded in the comprehensive framework of a conception of progress that is in a position to identify a directed development in the moral constitution of societies. Only from this standpoint can it be shown, with a not merely relativistic justificatory claim, to what extent certain social demands deserve to be considered normatively justified.⁷

Now in these final pages not even a rough sketch of such a conception of progress can be presented. Up to now in my response I have repeatedly given scattered hints as to the necessity and, at the same time, the possibility of a conception of the directed development of social recognition conditions. But here I can do nothing more than use some key points to provide a summary, which should essentially have the function of putting the recognition-theoretical concept of justice in the position of being able to deliver normatively justified judgements about present-day social disputes.

Already at the point where I provided a survey of the recognition conditions of liberal capitalist societies, I had, of course, to implicitly introduce a series of assumptions about the moral direction of societal development. For only on the condition that the new order is a morally superior form of social integration can its internal principles then subsequently be considered the legitimate, justified starting point for drawing up a political ethics. As with all theorists of society that set out internally, i.e. start by assuming the legitimacy of the modern social order, whether Hegel, Marx or Durkheim, I too, therefore, had initially to assume the moral superiority of modernity by presupposing its normative constitution to be the result of a directed development in the past. In doing this I have only more or less in passing mentioned the criteria that permitted me to describe the differentiation of three distinct spheres of recognition as a moral progression. With the gradual formation of the three separate spheres, as it was put, the chance grows for all members of the new type of society to attain a higher degree of individuality, because they are able to learn more about their own personality through the different patterns of recognition. If these background convictions are now retrospectively made explicit, then two criteria result which, taken together, can justify the talk of progress in recognition conditions. On the one hand we are dealing with a process of individualization, i.e. with increasing the chances of legitimate articulation of personality portions; on the other hand with a process of social inclusion, i.e. with growing involvement of subjects in the circle of full members of society. It is easy to see how far these two criteria are internally linked with the social-theoretical starting premise of recognition theory in outlining two possibilities for increasing social recognition. If the social integration of societies takes place by establishing recognition conditions through which subjects receive social confirmation in aspects of their personality and hence become members of society, then the moral quality of this social integration can improve through an increase either in the 'recognized' personality portions or in the involvement of individuals – briefly, through individualization or through growing inclusion. From here it then seems justified to grasp the breakthrough to the modern liberal capitalist social order as a moral progression because the differentiation of the three recognitional spheres of love, legal equality and the principle of achievement is simultaneously accompanied by both an increase in social individualization possibilities and a growth in social inclusion. What is essential to this qualitative improvement is, above all, the fact that with the decoupling of legal recognition and social estimation the idea simultaneously emerges at the most basic level that from now on all subjects must receive the same chance of individual self-realization through equal participation in recognition conditions.

Having thus justified with a few key points why the moral infrastructure of modern, liberal capitalist societies can be considered the legitimate starting point for a political ethics, the question subsequently arises as to how moral progressions can be evaluated within such

societies. It is clear that a solution to this problem will only be able to be found within the framework of the tripolar model of justice that has emerged with the differentiation of three spheres of recognition as a normative reality; because that which from now on is to be called 'just' is measured, depending on the respective sphere, according to the idea either of responsiveness to need, legal equality or justice to achievements, the parameters of moral progress within the new social order will also only be able to be defined in relation to all three principles. What this might mean can be explained in a first step using the idea of a 'validity overhang', which I have already mentioned in the context of introducing the three spheres of recognition. Only following on from this can I then show, in a second step, that the critical task of a recognition-theoretical conception of justice need not be restricted to the advocacy appeal to that sphere-specific excess of validity, but can also encompass the innovative examination of the demarcation between the validity spheres. However, here too I must again be content with brief explanations.

Progress in social recognition conditions, I have previously said, takes place on the two dimensions of individualization and social inclusion: either new personality portions are disclosed to mutual recognition, so that the degree of socially confirmed individuality increases, or a greater number of persons is included in the already existing recognition conditions, so that the circle of mutually recognizing subjects grows. However, with the new, tripartite recognitional order that the modern society of capitalism allows to come about, it now becomes unclear, however, whether this (double) criterion of progress can still be applied at all. For the three spheres of recognition are respectively characterized by normative principles that internally supply their own measures of what can be considered 'just' or 'unjust'. In my view, the only thing that helps here is the idea already sketched that the three principles of recognition respectively possess a specific validity overhang, the normative significance of which is expressed in the fact that there is a constant struggle to apply and interpret them appropriately. Within each sphere it is always possible to launch a moral dialectic between the universal and the particular by calling upon the general principle of recognition (love, law, achievement) to appeal to a particular aspect (need, situation in life, contribution) that had not yet been adequately considered in the previously practised conditions of application. It is this validity overhang, as opposed to the actual state of their social interpretation, that the theory of justice sketched can link up with so as to be up to the task of critique. Against dominant practices of interpretation it asserts that there are particular, previously neglected, factual states, the moral consideration of which would require an extension of the respective sphere of recognition. To be sure, such a critique would only be able to gain a viewpoint allowing the distinction between grounded and ungrounded forms of particularization once it has translated the general criterion of progress previously outlined into the semantics of the respective sphere of recognition. What can here be considered a reasonable, legitimate demand will be shown in the possibility of being able to understand the consequences of its potential implementation as a gain in individuality or inclusion.

Even if these formulations should at a distance remind one of the Hegelian philosophy of history, they are nonetheless supposed only to identify the theoretical conditions in which the recognition-theoretical concept of justice can today take on a critical role. The identification of morally justified claims, which seems to be required for such a task, is possible only when those principles of justice that can be appealed to at all in raising legitimate demands are first named. In my model this corresponds to the idea that in our societies we are concerned with three fundamental principles of recognition, each possessing a specific, normative validity overhang permitting an appeal to differences or factual states that had previously remained unconsidered. To pick out from the multitude of such particularizations typically appealed to in social struggles for recognition those which are morally justified now requires, additionally, the application of a criterion of progress, no matter how explicitly formulated. For only such

demands as potentially contribute to extending social recognition conditions, because they point in the direction of an increase in the moral level of social integration, can in fact be considered normatively justified. The two standards I previously outlined of individualization and an increase in inclusion represent the criteria which can help in weighing this up.

Now, to indicate how, it would surely need to be made plausible to some degree that the criterion of progress named can be applied at all within the three spheres of recognition. For only in the sphere of modern law does it seem to some extent clear what it means to speak of progress in the application of the principle of equality (Habermas, 1996: ch. IX), whereas nothing comparable can be claimed for the recognition principles of 'love' and 'achievement'. As in many normative contexts, here too it initially helps to reformulate the positive criterion negatively and accordingly to take the idea of eliminating the corresponding hindrances as the point of departure.⁸ Thus a moral progression in the sphere of love might mean gradually eliminating those role clichés, stereotypes and cultural attributions that structurally stand in the way of the possibility of mutual adaptation to the needs of others. Correspondingly, for the recognition sphere of social esteem such a progression will mean radically questioning those cultural constructions which in industrial capitalism's past have catered for the distinction of only a small range of activities with the title 'gainful employment' (Kocka, 2000: 24). However, such a sectorially differentiated model of progress is now faced with a further difficulty, which I would like to come to speak about in conclusion because with this the full complexity of the task to be accomplished becomes clear.

The extent to which moral progress in the modern social order can also come about by way of new demarcations between the single spheres of recognition already became apparent in elucidating the fact that with the development of the welfare state the principle of equal legal treatment has advanced into the sphere of achievement-related estimation. For it is beyond question that it was in the interest of classes constantly threatened by economic impoverishment to detach part of the safeguarding of social status from the achievement principle and instead make it an imperative of legal recognition. In such cases of a shift in borders we can talk of moral progress when the social conditions of personal identity formation for the members of single groups or classes undergo lasting improvement through the partial conversion to a new principle. And it seems above all to be in processes of legislation, i.e. expansion tendencies of the principle of legal equal treatment, that the potential is inherent to intervene correctively in other spheres of recognition and to cater there for the assurance of minimal conditions of identity. So long as it proceeds from the sphere of law in the direction of the two other spheres of recognition, this fact suggests which moral logic underlies the shift in borders. Because the normative principle of modern law, understood as the principle of mutual respect among autonomous persons, as such does not have a conditional character, all those affected can appeal to this the moment they no longer see the conditions of individual autonomy being sufficiently preserved in other spheres. Examples of such processes of legislation initiated 'from below' are not only the already mentioned struggles to establish social rights but also today's ramified debates about legal guarantees of reciprocal equal treatment in marriage and the family. Here the central argument is that in view of the structural dominance of men in the private sphere the conditions for women's self-determination can only be safeguarded when they are guaranteed in the form of contractually secured rights and hence made an imperative of legal recognition.⁹

From these considerations it must be concluded that a recognition-theoretical concept of justice can take on a critical task not only where it is a matter of advocatory defence of moral progress in the respective spheres of recognition themselves. Rather, constant reflexive examination is required of the borders that have respectively become established between the various recognition principles' sovereign territories, since the suspicion can never be excluded that the given division of labour between the moral spheres compromises the chances of

individual identity formation. And it will not be unusual for such questioning to lead to the result that an extension of individual rights is necessary, since the conditions of respect and autonomy are not sufficiently provided for under the regime of the normative principles of 'love' or 'achievement'. However, here the critical spirit of such a concept of justice is capable of again coming into conflict with its own preservation function, since notwithstanding all the moral legitimation for border shifts there is always the necessity of upholding the separation of the spheres too – for in modern society, as we have seen, the conditions of individual self-realization are only socially secured when subjects are able to experience intersubjective recognition not only of their personal autonomy, but also of their specific needs and their particular capabilities.

Notes

Translation by Andrew Inkpin.

1. In the meantime I have further developed considerations of this kind – as were already found in Honneth (1996), especially chs 4 and 5. See also Honneth (2000).
2. Interesting references to such a concept of societal legitimation, which binds the moral acceptability of a social system of laws to the prerequisite of chances to experience social recognition, are found in Lawrence (1993). The idea of the 'social contract', as developed in Barrington Moore's book *Injustice. The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (1978), is, of course, to be understood in precisely this sense.
3. Here I am of course alluding to the corresponding concept in the early Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1972), which, in a modified version, I still consider worth defending. I find a comparable line of thought with Jonathan Lear in the idea that the human body represents 'a basic natural force' in *Love and its Place in Nature* (1990: ch. 7).
4. With this historical reformulation I hope, at least in part, to have taken account of Christopher Zurn's objections (2000).
5. On such a distinction between 'first-order justice' and 'second-order justice' which readily allows an ethics of care, say, to be appealed to at the second level in the name of universal justice (as impartiality), see Brian Barry's captivating deliberations (1995: chs 9 and 10).
6. This, of course, is the danger I see Nancy Fraser also facing with her normative political suggestions. To this extent the one-sidedness of her social diagnosis would also correspond to a one-sidedness at the level of applying her normative idea of justice.
7. Hints towards such a conception of moral progress, which works with the idea of the 'extension' of recognition relations, are already found in Honneth (1996: ch. 9).
8. On such a negativist procedure, see for example Margalit (1996). A discussion of this is provided by Allen (1998).
9. For arguments of this kind generally, see Okin (1989). Such a concept of rights is convincingly defended in Waldron (1993: 370–91).

References

- Allen, J. (1998) 'Decency and the Struggle for Recognition', *Social Theory and Practice* 24: 449–69.
- Barry, B. (1995) *Justice as Impartiality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cooke, M. (2000) 'Between "Objectivism" and "Contextualism": The Normative Foundations of Social Philosophy', *Critical Horizon* 1: 193–227.
- Fraser, N. (1997) *Justice Interruptus. Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Habermas, J. (1972) *Knowledge and Human Interests*. London: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1996) *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hegel, G. W. (1991) *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Honneth, A. (1996) *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Honneth, A. (2000) 'Objektbeziehungstheorie und postmoderne Identität. Über das vermeintliche Veralten der Psychoanalyse', *Psyche* 54: 1087–109.
- Kocka, J. (2000) 'Erwerbsarbeit ist nur ein historisches Konstrukt', *Frankfurter Rundschau* 9(5): 24.
- Lawrence, T. (1993) 'Characterizing the Evil of American Slavery and the Holocaust', in D. T. Goldberg and M. Krausz (eds) *Jewish Identity*, pp. 153–76. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Lear, J. (1990) *Love and its Place in Nature: a Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Margalit, A. (1996) *The Decent Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Miller, D. (1999) *Principles of Social Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Moore, B. (1978) *Injustice. The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*. London: Random House.
- Okin, S. M. (1989) *Justice, Gender and the Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rawls, J. (1973) *A Theory of Justice*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Raz, J. (1986) *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Smith, A. (1976) 'An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations', in R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner and W. B. Todd (eds) *Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, pp. 869–70. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Waldron, J. (1993) *Liberal Rights. Collected Papers 1981–1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walzer, M. (1984) 'Liberalism and the Art of Separation', *Political Theory* 12: 315–30.
- Zurn, C. (2000) 'Anthropology and Normativity: A Critique of Axel Honneth's "Formal Conception of Ethical Life"', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26: 115–24.

Biographical Note: Axel Honneth is Professor of Philosophy at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University and Director of the Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt am Main. His recent publications include: *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory* (MIT Press, 1993), *The Fragmented World of the Social. Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 1995), *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Polity Press, 1995) and *Suffering from Indeterminacy* (Van Gorcum, 2000).

Address: Institut für Sozialforschung, Senckenberganlage 26, D-60325, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. [email: honneth@em.uni-frankfurt.de]