

The
STRUGGLE
for
RECOGNITION

*The Moral
Grammar of Social
Conflicts*

AXEL HONNETH

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The Struggle for Recognition

The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts

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Translator's Note

Although most of the cases in which the original German terms defy easy translation are indicated within square brackets in the text, four cases deserve special attention here. In English, the word 'recognition' is ambiguous, referring either to 're-identification' or 'the granting of a certain status'. The former, epistemic sense translates the German '*Wiedererkennung*', which is distinguished from the practical sense with which Honneth is concerned here, expressed in the word '*Anerkennung*'. Throughout the present translation 'recognition' and 'to recognize' are used in this latter sense, familiar from such expressions as 'The PLO has agreed to recognize the state of Israel.' It is perhaps useful for understanding Honneth's claim that love, respect, and esteem are three types of recognition to note that, in German, to 'recognize' individuals or groups is to ascribe to them some *positive* status.

Honneth's general term for the failure to give someone due recognition is '*Mißachtung*', which is translated here as 'disrespect'. It should be noted that this concept refers not merely to a failure to show proper deference but rather to a broad class of cases, including humiliation, degradation, insult, disenfranchisement, and even physical abuse.

Whereas the terms 'ethical' and 'moral' are often used interchangeably in English, there are important differences between the German terms '*moraliscti*', '*ethisch*', and '*sittlich*'. The first of these is bound up with Kantian, universalistic approaches to the question of what is right and is rendered here as 'moral'. The other two terms both refer to conceptions of what is right or good that are based on the substantive customs, mores, or *ethos* of a particular tradition or community, or to practices that are motivated by such. They are both translated as 'ethical', although the

phrase 'customarily ethical' is sometimes used to indicate the more traditional connotation of '*sittlich*'. A related term, 'ethical life' [*Sittlichkeit*], denotes a concrete, integrated social arrangement in which norms and values are embodied in the basic attitudes and ways of life of members of the community.

Finally, in translating the discussion of Hegel, the pronoun 'it' has been used as the referent for 'the subject', not so much because '*das Subjekt*' is neuter in German, but rather to reflect the formal character of the concept for Hegel.

Translator's Introduction

Joel Anderson

As social struggles of the last few decades have made clear, justice demands more than the fair distribution of material goods. For even if conflicts over interests were justly adjudicated, a society would remain normatively deficient to the extent that its members are systematically denied the recognition they deserve. As Charles Taylor has recently emphasized, 'Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.'¹ As one scarcely needs to add, it is also a need that has all too often gone unmet. Regularly, members of marginalized and subaltern groups have been systematically denied recognition for the worth of their culture or way of life, the dignity of their status as persons, and the inviolability of their physical integrity. Most strikingly in the politics of identity, their struggles for recognition have come to dominate the political landscape. Consequently, if social theory is to provide an adequate account of actual fields of social conflict, it will have both to situate the motivation for these emancipatory struggles within the social world and to provide an account of what justifies them.

In this work, Axel Honneth sketches an approach to this dual task of explanation and justification that is both highly original and firmly rooted in the history of modern social theory. Rather than following the atomistic tradition of social philosophy going back to Hobbes and Machiavelli, however, Honneth situates his project within the tradition that emphasizes not the struggle for self-preservation but rather the struggle for the establishment of relations of mutual recognition, as a precondition for self-realization.² Like

Hegel, George Herbert Mead, and, more recently, communitarians and many feminists, Honneth stresses the importance of social relationships to the development and maintenance of a person's identity. On the basis of this nexus between social patterns of recognition and individual prerequisites for self-realization – and with constant reference to empirical findings of the social sciences – he develops both a developmental framework for interpreting social struggles and a normative account of the claims being raised in these struggles.

With regard to the former, explanatory task, his approach can be understood as a continuation of the Frankfurt School's attempt to locate the motivating insight for emancipatory critique and struggle within the domain of ordinary human experience, rather than in the revolutionary theory of intellectuals.³ As Honneth argued in *Critique of Power*, however, the Frankfurt School suffered from an exclusive focus on the domain of material production as the locus of transformative critique. In the present volume, he now proposes an alternative account, situating the critical perception of injustice more generally within individuals' negative experiences of having their broadly 'moral' expectations violated.

With regard to the normative task, the roots of his approach are to be found in the model of the struggle for recognition developed by Hegel during his early years in Jena (before the completion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807). Honneth takes from Hegel the idea that full human flourishing is dependent on the existence of well-established, 'ethical' relations – in particular, relations of love, law, and 'ethical life' [*Sittlichkeit*] – which can only be established through a conflict-ridden developmental process, specifically, through a struggle for recognition. In order to avoid the speculative, metaphysical character of Hegel's project, however, Honneth turns to Mead's

naturalistic pragmatism and to empirical work in psychology, sociology, and history in order to identify the intersubjective conditions for individual self-realization. In the course of analysing these conditions, Honneth develops his 'formal conception of ethical life', understood as a critical normative standard that is intended to avoid both the overly 'thick' character of neo-Aristotelian ethics and the overly 'thin' character of neo-Kantian moral theory.

Honneth's approach can be summarized, in a preliminary way, as follows. The possibility for sensing, interpreting, and realizing one's needs and desires as a fully autonomous and individuated person - in short, the very possibility of identity-formation - depends crucially on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. These three modes of relating practically to oneself can only be acquired and maintained intersubjectively, through being granted recognition by others whom one also recognizes. As a result, the conditions for self-realization turn out to be dependent on the establishment of relationships of mutual recognition. These relationships go beyond (a) close relations of love and friendship to include (b) legally institutionalized relations of universal respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, and (c) networks of solidarity and shared values within which the particular worth of individual members of a community can be acknowledged. These relationships are not ahistorically given but must be established and expanded through social struggles, which cannot be understood exclusively as conflicts over interests. The 'grammar' of such struggles is 'moral' in the sense that the feelings of outrage and indignation driving them are generated by the rejection of claims to recognition and thus imply normative judgements about the legitimacy of social arrangements. Thus the normative ideal of a just society is empirically confirmed by historical struggles for recognition.

Central to Honneth's 'social theory with normative content' is his account of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, along with the modes of recognition by which they are sustained, and this will be the focus here. With regard to each of these 'practical relations-to-self', three central issues emerge: the precise importance of each for the development of one's identity, the pattern of recognition on which it depends, and its historical development. Beyond this, the present introduction will provide a brief discussion of both Honneth's interpretation of social struggles as motivated by the experience of being denied these conditions for identity-formation - which he refers to as 'disrespect' [*Mifiachtung*] - and some of the distinctive features of Honneth's readings of Hegel and Mead, found in chapters 2-4.

It is perhaps useful, at the outset, to understand what self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem have in common. For Honneth, they represent three distinct species of 'practical relation-to-self'. These are neither purely beliefs about oneself nor emotional states, but involve a dynamic process in which individuals come to experience themselves as having a certain status, be it as a focus of concern, a responsible agent, or a valued contributor to shared projects. Following Hegel and Mead, Honneth emphasizes that coming to relate to oneself in these ways necessarily involves experiencing recognition from others. One's relationship to oneself, then, is not a matter of a solitary ego appraising itself, but an *intersubjective* process, in which one's attitude towards oneself emerges in one's encounter with an other's attitude toward oneself.⁴

Love and basic self-confidence

With regard to the concept of love, Honneth is primarily concerned with the way in which parent-child relationships – as well as adult relationships of love and friendship – facilitate the development and maintenance of the basic relation-to-self that Honneth terms ‘basic self-confidence’ [*Selbstvertrauen*: ‘trust in oneself’]. If all goes well in their first relationships to others, infants gradually acquire a fundamental faith in their environment and, concomitantly, a sense of trust in their own bodies as reliable sources of signals as to their own needs. On Honneth’s account, basic self-confidence has less to do with a high estimation of one’s abilities than with the underlying capacity to express needs and desires without fear of being abandoned as a result. Because of this fundamental character, it is usually only when extreme experiences of physical violation, such as rape or torture, shatter one’s ability to access one’s needs as one’s own and to express them without anxiety that it becomes clear how much depends on this relation-to-self.⁵

To explain the link between self-confidence and intersubjective relations of love and concern, Honneth draws on the object-relations theory of early childhood experience, particularly as developed in the work of Donald Winnicott. Against the Freudian emphasis on instinctual drives, object-relations theorists have argued that the development of children cannot be abstracted from the interactive relationships in which the process of maturation takes place. Initially, the child is dependent upon the responsiveness of primary care-givers (following Winnicott, Jessica Benjamin, and others, Honneth uses the term ‘mother’ to designate a role that can be fulfilled by persons other than the biological mother) and their ability to empathically intuit the needs of the inarticulate infant. Due to the newborn’s utter helplessness, an insufficient level of adaptation of the ‘mother’ to the infant’s needs early in life would represent a

serious problem for the infant, since the child can neither cope with nor make sense of failures of this 'environment' to intuit and satisfy his or her needs. Of course, the failure or 'de-adaptation' of care-givers is an unavoidable element of the individuation process by which infants learn to cope with gradual increases in the environment's insensitivity, that is, to recognize and assert their needs as their own instead of experiencing the absence of immediate gratification as threatening.

Following Winnicott, Honneth argues that this formative process must again be understood as intersubjective. Because 'good-enough' infant care demands a high degree of emotional and intuitive involvement, the individuation process has to be understood as a complex, agonistic process in which *both* parent and child extricate themselves from a state of 'symbiosis'. Despite the fact that the 'mother' is a fully individuated adult, it is only together that children and care-givers can negotiate the delicate and shifting balance between ego-dissolution and ego-demarcation. And it is this balance that provides the enduring, intersubjectively reproduced basis for relationships of love and friendship with peers as well as for a positive, embodied sense of what Erik Erikson calls 'basic trust'.⁶

Although Honneth is generally at pains to emphasize the historically contingent nature of human subjectivity,⁷ he argues that this notion of bodily integrity, together with the need for love and concern it entails, captures something important that cuts across differences of cultural and historical contexts. This is not to say that practices of child-rearing or love have gone unchanged but only that the capacity to trust one's own sense of what one needs or wants is a precondition for self-realization in any human community.

This is part of what separates love from the two other patterns of recognition Honneth considers essential to self-realization, for unlike the form of recognition that supports self-confidence, the ways in which both respect and esteem are accorded have undergone a significant historical transformation. Indeed, the very distinction between the two is a historical product, something that may help to explain why ‘respect’ and ‘esteem’ are still used interchangeably in some contexts (as in: ‘I respect her enormously’). In pre-modem contexts – roughly, until the bourgeois revolutions of the eighteenth century – one’s standing in society and one’s status as a moral and political agent were fused, typically, in the concept of ‘honour’. Rights and duties were rights and duties *of one’s status group or ‘estate’*, never of one’s status as a free legislator in either the local kingdom or the ‘kingdom of ends’ (Kant). In the modern period, however, the fundamental principles underlying the realm of law and rights came into conflict with the idea of according legal status on the basis of class privilege. In this way, the notion of one’s ‘status as a person’ was historically differentiated from the notion of ‘social standing’, giving rise to psychologically and analytically distinct modes of recognition, as well as to the corresponding notions of ‘self-respect’ [*Selbstachtung*] and ‘self-esteem’ [*Selbstschatzung*].⁸

Rights and self-respect

As Honneth understands it, self-respect has less to do with whether or not one has a good opinion of oneself than with one’s sense of possessing of the universal dignity of persons. There is a strong Kantian element here: what we owe to every person is the recognition of and respect for his or her status as an agent capable of acting on the basis of reasons, as the autonomous author of the political and

moral laws to which he or she is subject.⁹ To have self-respect, then, is to have a sense of oneself as a person, that is, as a ‘morally responsible’ agent or, more precisely, as someone capable of participating in the sort of public deliberation that Habermas terms ‘discursive will-formation’.

This relation-to-self is also mediated by patterns of interaction, those organized in terms of legal rights. To show why being accorded rights is crucial to self-respect, Honneth makes use of Joel Feinberg’s argument to the effect that ‘what is called “human dignity” may simply be the recognizable capacity to assert claims’.¹⁰ The object of respect (including self-respect) is an agent’s capacity to raise and defend claims discursively or, more generally, an agent’s status as responsible [an agent’s *Zurechnungsfähigkeit*].¹¹ But this capacity can only become a basis for ‘self-respect’ if it can be exercised. Indeed, in this context it is unclear what it could mean to have a capacity one cannot exercise. Hence, the importance of rights in connection with self-respect lies in the fact that rights ensure the real opportunity to exercise the universal capacities constitutive of personhood. This is not to say that a person without rights cannot have self-respect, only that the *fullestform* of self-respecting autonomous agency could only be realized when one is recognized as possessing the capacities of ‘legal persons’, that is, of morally responsible agents.

The specific content of these universal capacities, however, is something that shifts over time, along with shifts in the conception of the procedure by which political and moral issues are to be resolved: ‘The more demanding this procedure is seen to be, the more extensive the features will have to be that, taken together, constitute a subject’s moral responsibility’.¹² To understand this claim, it is important to keep in mind the distinction Honneth makes

between two historical processes: (a) an increase in the *percentage* of people who are treated as full-fledged citizens and (b) an increase in the actual *content* of what it means to be a full-fledged citizen (in particular, the emergence of both political and welfare rights, as supplements to basic liberties). In the first case, the historical development involves realizing the universality clearly implied in the notion of modern law, with its basis in post-conventional morality. In the second case, the historical development involves a shift in the conception of law itself, by taking into account what skills and opportunities persons must be equipped with if processes of political decision-making are to count as legitimate. One of the interesting implications of this is that, since participation in public deliberation presupposes certain capacities, neo-Kantian moral and political theory cannot be as purely proceduralist as is often suggested, for it must rely tacitly on a minimally substantive conception of justice in order to be able to determine the conditions under which participants in practical discourse can be said to have acquired the practical relations-to-self necessary for engaging fully in collective or personal self-determination.¹³

With regard to these historical processes, Honneth emphasizes that the social struggles for either type of expansion are oriented to ideas of universality and self-legislation that make it normatively illegitimate (though perhaps factually accurate) to view rights as the embodiment of class interests. It is precisely this universalistic core of modern law that has been overlooked by attempts since Hegel to appropriate the model of the struggle for recognition. As Honneth argues in chapter 7, despite their insights into the non-Hobbesian character of many social struggles, Marx, Sorel, and Sartre all failed to appreciate that the appeal to rights has, built into it, the idea that every subject of the law must also be its author.

Solidarity and self-esteem

Whereas self-respect is a matter of viewing oneself as entitled to the same status and treatment as every other person, self-esteem involves a sense of what it is that makes one special, unique, and (in Hegel's terms) 'particular'. This enabling sense of oneself as a unique and irreplaceable individual cannot, however, be based merely on a set of trivial or negative characteristics. What distinguishes one from others must be something *valuable*.¹⁴ Accordingly, to have the sense that one has nothing of value to offer is to lack any basis for developing a sense of one's own identity. In this way, individuality and self-esteem are linked.

With regard to these issues of individuality and particularity Honneth argues that Hegel's work, though ground-breaking, is marred by an unfortunate tendency to understand the relevant mode of recognition in terms of an overextended conception of romantic love. Because of this, Honneth focuses instead on Mead's discussion of personal identity. Mead claims that distinguishing oneself from others as an individual is a matter of what 'we do better than others'.¹⁵ The immediate difficulty with this, of course, is that not everyone can stand out above others. Mead tries to democratize this 'sense of superiority' by focusing on the division of labour in modern industrial societies, that is, by allowing individuals to find their functional roles in which to excel, not at the expense of others but precisely to the benefit of the whole.

In Honneth's view, however, Mead overlooks the fact that not every job automatically serves as a basis for one's 'sense of superiority' or self-esteem. Like the evaluation of the way in which the work is done, the esteem accorded to certain tasks hinges on a range of particular cultural factors. If, for example, homemaking is considered an insignificant

contribution to the common good, then homemakers will lack the evaluative resources in terms of which they can acquire a sense of personal accomplishment. In this sense, the social conditions for esteem are determined by the prevailing sense of what is to count as a worthwhile contribution to society. By situating esteem not in the division of labour but in the horizon of values of a particular culture,¹⁶ Honneth opens up the possibility of conceiving of the conditions for self-esteem as a field of contestation and cultural struggle for the recognition of previously denigrated contributors to the common good.

'Solidarity' is the term Honneth uses for the cultural climate in which the acquisition of self-esteem has become broadly possible. Although 'being in solidarity with someone' is sometimes equated with feelings of sympathy, Honneth's view is that one can properly speak of 'solidarity' only in cases where some shared concern, interest, or value is in play. What he is concerned with here is not so much the collective defence of interests or the political integration of individuals, but rather the presence of an open, pluralistic, evaluative framework within which social esteem is ascribed. He claims that a good society, a society in which individuals have a real opportunity for full self-realization, would be a society in which the common values would match the concerns of individuals in such a way that no member of the society would be denied the opportunity to earn esteem for his or her contribution to the common good: 'To the extent to which every member of a society is in a position to esteem himself or herself, one can speak of a state of societal solidarity.'¹⁷ Unlike the sphere of rights, solidarity carries with it a 'communitarian' moment of particularity: *which* particular values are endorsed by a community is a contingent matter, the result of social and cultural struggles that lack the universality that is distinctive of legal relations.

Honneth's position here may be usefully compared to the culturally oriented views of subaltern groups that have influenced recent debates over multiculturalism, feminism, and gay and lesbian identity. Like defenders of the politics of difference, he regards struggles for recognition in which the dimension of esteem is central as attempts to end social patterns of denigration in order to make possible new forms of distinctive identity. But for Honneth, esteem is accorded on the basis of an individual's contribution to a shared project; thus, the elimination of demeaning cultural images of, say, racial minorities does not provide esteem directly but rather establishes the conditions under which members of those groups can then build self-esteem by contributing to the community. To esteem a person simply for being a member of a group would be to slip back into pre-modem notions of estate-based honour discussed earlier, rather than acknowledging the 'individualized' character of modem esteem. Honneth insists that the point of reference for esteeming each individual is the evaluative framework accepted by the entire community and not just one subculture. It remains somewhat unclear exactly what determines the boundaries of the community in Honneth's account – what if one is esteemed only by other Jews or other lesbians? – but the central point is that, in pluralistic and mobile societies, it is difficult to maintain self-esteem in the face of systematic denigration from outside one's subculture.

Disrespect and the moral grammar of historical struggles

These intersubjective conditions for identity-formation provide the basis for Honneth's 'formal conception of ethical life', understood as a normative ideal of a society in which patterns of recognition would allow individuals to acquire the self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem necessary for the full development of their identities. This ideal is not merely a theoretical construct; it is implicit in the structure of recognition itself. As Hegel showed, recognition is worthless if it does not come from someone whom one views as deserving recognition. From this perspective, since the requirement of reciprocity is always already built into the demand for recognition, social struggles for the expansion of patterns of recognition are best understood as attempts to realize the normative potential implicit in social interaction.

Although the teleological language of 'potential' and a hypothetically anticipated 'final state' of this development may raise eyebrows, Honneth is careful to avoid suggesting a philosophy of history in the traditional sense of a necessary progression along a knowable, preordained path. He insists that history is made less at the level of structural evolution than at the level of individual experiences of suffering and disrespect. His point is that one misses the 'moral grammar' of these conflicts if one fails to see that the claims to recognition raised in them can only be met through greater inclusion, the logical extension of which is something like the state of society envisioned by the formal theory of ethical life. In this way, Honneth argues, normative theory and the internal logic of social struggles mutually illuminate each other.

The idea of social conflict having a 'moral' dimension is not, of course, entirely new. It is a central focus of much recent work in social history inspired by the ground-breaking studies of E. P. Thompson, and Honneth looks to that tradition - particularly to the work of Barrington Moore - for

empirical support for his position.¹⁸ Where he departs from this tradition, however, is in arguing that 'moral' motives for revolt and resistance - that is, those based on a tacit understanding of what one *deserves* - do not emerge only in the defence of traditional ways of life (as Thompson and Moore suggest) but also in situations where those ways of life have become intolerable.

Because key forms of exclusion, insult, and degradation can be seen as violating self-confidence, self-respect, or self-esteem, the negative emotional reactions generated by these experiences of disrespect provide a pretheoretical basis for social critique. Once it becomes clear that these experiences reflect not just the idiosyncratic misfortune of individuals but experiences shared by many others, the potential emerges for collective action aimed at actually expanding social patterns of recognition. Here, the symbolic resources of social movements play a crucial role in showing this disrespect to be typical of an entire group of people, thereby helping to establish the cultural conditions for resistance and revolt.

Hegel and Mead

As Honneth demonstrates, many of the ideas outlined above - in particular, the tripartite distinction among three relations of recognition as social prerequisites for identity-formation - are already found in the work of Hegel and Mead, and Honneth's interest in these thinkers lies largely in reconstructing a systematic social theory from their often fragmentary proposals. Beyond this, however, Honneth's discussions also represent significant contributions to the secondary literature on these authors.

The discussion of Hegel focuses on the elusive and little-discussed early texts from the years in Jena. His reading of

these texts not only uncovers the resources for reconstructing a ‘recognition-theoretic’ social theory but also identifies important tensions between the texts, tensions that help to explain why Hegel was never able to develop such a social theory himself. In the earliest Jena writings (discussed in chapter 2) and particularly in the *System of Ethical Life*, Hegel postulates a transition from ‘natural ethical life’ to ‘absolute ethical life’ in which the differentiation of society goes hand in hand with the development of human autonomy and individuality. Here, under the influence of classical theories of the *polis*, Hegel develops strong notions of both the normative potential of communicative relations and the primacy of the social. But he is unable to provide a sufficiently precise account of either the distinctions between forms of recognition or the stages of individual development. Honneth argues in chapter 3 that this more detailed account is precisely what Hegel’s later *Realphilosophie* provides. Unfortunately, however, this gain in analytical and psychological clarity also obscures some of the crucial insights found in the earlier writings, owing to Hegel’s increasing reliance on a ‘philosophy of consciousness’, that is, the metaphysical framework characteristic of subject-centred philosophy from Descartes to Husserl. In focusing on the struggle for recognition at the level of the formation of individual consciousness, Hegel makes social shifts in patterns of recognition mere stages in the overarching process of Spirit’s formation.¹⁹ In Honneth’s view, the more interesting earlier notion, according to which individual and societal development mutually constitute each other, never returns in Hegel’s oeuvre, and it is for this reason that Honneth does not discuss what is certainly the best-known of Hegel’s discussions of the struggle for recognition, namely, the master-slave dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In effect, Honneth concludes that the earlier and later Jena

writings *negate* each other, without Hegel ever being able to effect their *Aufhebung* [sublation].

In this connection, Mead represents a significant advance. For Honneth's purposes, what makes him interesting is that he provides an account of the tripartite interrelation between individual identity-formation and social patterns of interaction that is built on a non-speculative, postmetaphysical basis. In his discussion of Mead's intersubjectivist conception of the self, Honneth is in substantial agreement with the work of Hans Joas, Ernst Tugendhat, and Habermas.²⁰ Honneth develops his own criticism of Mead's narrow reliance on the division of labour as a basis for post-traditional solidarity (discussed above) as well as a careful reconstruction of the important distinction in Mead between two kinds of 'respect' (corresponding to Honneth's notions of 'respect' and 'esteem'). But what is more distinctive about Honneth's reading of Mead is his interpretation of the 'I' as a driving force of historical transformation. Something of the sort is needed to account for the expansion of identity-claims over time and for the emergence of new claims to recognition. Honneth sees Mead's notion of the 'I' as offering a way of explaining how innovation is possible in this domain. On his reading, then, the T is not merely the placeholder for the irretrievable subject of an individual's thought and action but also the pre-conscious source of innovation by which new claims to identity come to be asserted.²¹ On the basis of this, Honneth can then argue that historical transformations of social relations (in this case, individualization) are driven by the experiences and struggles of individuals and groups rather than functionalist dynamics.²²

Aside from suggesting new lines of scholarly research, Honneth's discussions of Hegel and Mead serve three further purposes. First, they provide the raw materials from

which Honneth constructs his own position, including the notion of struggles for recognition as a driving force in the development of social structures, the tripartite distinction among patterns of recognition and types of practical relation-to-self, and the ideal of full human flourishing as dependent on the existence of reciprocal relations of recognition. Second, these interpretations serve to forestall easy dismissals of either Hegelian or Meadian ideas on the basis of misassociations or distortions built into prevailing views on these thinkers. Finally, the discussions of Hegel and Mead – along with those of Marx, Sorel, and Sartre – serve to situate Honneth's own position within an often-overlooked tradition of social theory. By reconstructing and revising an alternative to the dominant tradition of modern social philosophy founded by Hobbes and Machiavelli, Honneth is able to undermine the apparent self-evidence of its underlying assumptions – in particular, assumptions about both the self-interested (what Honneth calls 'utilitarian') motives for social conflict and the atomistic character of the state of nature. He thereby opens up the theoretical space for conceiving struggles for recognition as attempts on the part of social actors to establish patterns of reciprocal recognition on which the very possibility of redeeming their claims to identity depends. On Honneth's understanding, that possibility is at the heart of social justice in the fullest sense.²³

Preface

Without the persistent pressure and keen interest of Jurgen Habermas, the first half of this book, which was submitted as a *Habilitation* to the Department of Philosophy of the University of Frankfurt, would not have reached completion within the necessary time period. I wish to thank him here for six years of cooperation, the significance of which for my own process of intellectual formation he will surely underestimate. As always, my friend Hans Joas has closely followed the development of my ideas from their inception. He will, I hope, know the importance that his advice and criticism has long had for my work. I have received important suggestions on several parts of the manuscript from Peter Dews, Alessandro Ferrara, Hinrich Fink-Eitel, Gunter Frankenberg, Christoph Menke, Andreas Wildt, and Lutz Wingert. I owe them all my deepest gratitude, even though not all their ideas have made their way into the book. I wish also to thank Waltraud Pfeiffer and Dirk Mende for technical help with the completion of the manuscript. Finally, I consider myself to have been most fortunate in having had Joel Anderson as translator of the English edition. He has the rare ability of understanding the intentions of the author sometimes better than the author himself. I am grateful to him for all his commitment.

A. H.

Frankfurt am Main

Introduction

In the present volume, I attempt to develop, on the basis of Hegel's model of a 'struggle for recognition', the foundations for a social theory with normative content. The intention to undertake this project arose in connection with the conclusions I reached in *The Critique of Power*: any attempt to integrate the social-theoretical insights of Foucault's historical work within the framework of a theory of communicative action has to rely on a concept of morally motivated struggle. And there is no better source of inspiration for developing such a concept than Hegel's early, 'Jena' writings, with their notion of a comprehensive 'struggle for recognition'.¹

The systematic reconstruction of the Hegelian line of argumentation, which constitutes the first third of the book, leads to a distinction between three forms of recognition, each of which contains a potential motivation for social conflict. This review of the young Hegel's theoretical model also makes clear, however, that the validity of his thoughts hinges, in part, on Idealist assumptions about reason that can no longer be maintained under conditions of postmetaphysical thinking.

The second, theoretical part of the book thus starts from the attempt to develop an empirical version of the Hegelian idea by drawing on the social psychology of G. H. Mead. In this way, an intersubjectivist concept of the person emerges, in which the possibility of an undistorted relation to oneself proves to be dependent on three forms of recognition: love, rights, and esteem. In order to remove the merely historical character of this hypothesis, I attempt to justify, in the empirically supported reconstruction found in the subsequent two chapters, the distinction between the

various forms of relations of recognition on the basis of the relevant phenomena. As the results of this investigation show, there are - corresponding to the three forms of recognition - three forms of experiences of disrespect, each of which can generate motives that contribute, in turn, to the emergence of social conflicts.²

As a consequence of this second step of the investigation, the idea of a critical social theory begins to take shape, according to which processes of societal change are to be explained with reference to the normative claims that are structurally inherent in relations of mutual recognition. In the final part of the book, I go on to explore, in three directions, the perspectives opened up by this basic idea. First, the historical thread is taken up again, in order to examine where, since Hegel, comparable approaches are to be found. From that point, insights into the historical significance of experiences of disrespect become possible, insights which can be generalized to such an extent that the moral logic of social conflicts becomes evident. Because such a model can only be developed into a critical framework of interpretation for processes of historical development once its normative point of reference has been clarified, I conclude by sketching a conception of ethical life, developed in terms of a theory of recognition, that might accomplish this task. Admittedly, these various suggestions cannot claim to represent anything more than a first attempt to clarify what is involved in the conception under consideration. They are meant to indicate the theoretical directions in which I will have to work further, should my considerations prove tenable.

Although current works of feminist political philosophy often lead in a direction that intersects with the aims of a theory of recognition,³ I have had to postpone the idea of a critical encounter with this discussion. It would not only have burst the bounds of my framework of argumentation, it

would also have taken me well beyond my current level of expertise. Furthermore, in developing my own proposal for interpreting the young Hegel's theory of recognition, I have also unfortunately been unable to take into consideration the work most recently published on this subject.⁴ My impression, however, is that they concentrate on phenomena that would be of only secondary interest to me.