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Review of *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. By Axel Honneth.
(Cambridge UK: Polity, 2007).

Published in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 48/4 (December 2008).

In this collection of essays, Axel Honneth extends his theory of recognition to engage a wide range of issues within various domains of practical philosophy. The title indicates his attempt to ground a critical social theory on an account of the negative experiences of humiliation and disrespect that give rise to demands for recognition. One could say that Honneth is reorienting Frankfurt-School Critical Theory away from Habermas's focus on "undistorted communication" and toward the goal of "undistorted recognition." Honneth's central claim, first developed in *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995), is that there is an internal connection between individual identity-formation and social recognition that makes human beings particularly vulnerable to various forms of disrespect. Drawing on Hegel, he distinguished three forms of social recognition: the emotional concern and support found in intimate relationships of love and friendship, the equal respect accorded to rights-bearing individuals, and the social esteem granted to individuals based on their abilities and achievements. Thus, there are three types of recognition--love, respect, and esteem--and three corresponding forms of disrespect: physical or psychological abuse, denial of rights or exclusion, and denigration or insult.

The present collection is structured around Honneth's aim to reorient social, moral, and political philosophy around the concept of recognition, with each branch addressed in its own section.

The core idea for Part I, on social philosophy, is found in Chapter 3, “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect.” Honneth links his interest in the moral experiences of disrespect to the original goals of Critical Theory in the tradition of Left Hegelians from Marx and Lukacs to the early Frankfurt School, whose methodology is distinguished by the aim of bringing theory and practice together by grounding the critical standpoint in pre-theoretical experiences of social injustice. The basic idea is that Critical Theory must establish a foothold in social reality; it must be able to identify an emancipatory interest as an element of transcendence already present within the immanent. Honneth claims this idea was abandoned in the later work of Horkheimer and Adorno and not adequately theorized in Habermas’s theory of communicative action. Honneth returns to this objective by focusing on the moral experiences of subjects whose identity claims are violated.

The first essay in Part I, “Pathologies of the Social,” reconstructs the development of modern social philosophy from Rousseau’s critique of civilization, through Hegel and Marx, up to Arendt and Habermas. According to Honneth, what prevents social philosophy from being merely ungrounded social criticism or simply a sub-discipline of political philosophy is the task of diagnosing “social pathologies,” that is, those social conditions that hinder the good life or interfere with the aim of “undistorted self-realization” (p. 35). Honneth maintains that the only way for social philosophy to continue this task in a way that is not merely historically and culturally contingent, after Nietzsche and Foucault have unmasked its universalist pretensions, is through a “weak, formal anthropology.” Since Honneth’s theory of recognition is supposed to supply this, the essay prepares the ground for a turn to recognition by discussing social pathologies that distort identity-formation and self-realization.

Honneth continues the theme of diagnosing social pathologies in Chapter 2, “The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society.” In re-evaluating the legacy of earlier Frankfurt School theorists, he tries to recover what he can while also being sensitive to the way texts such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are in danger of “becoming stranger to us” with time. Honneth persuasively shows how that text relies on a “disclosive” critique that attempts to reveal the pathological character of society through provoking a new way of seeing social reality. He argues that Horkheimer and Adorno’s historical narrative going back to the dawn of civilization is better interpreted not as wild speculation or a patently false empirical account, but as a type of “rhetorical condensation” that, combined with other forms of exaggeration, is designed to provoke us to see our familiar social world as pathological. (Those interested in Honneth’s further attempts to re-evaluate earlier critical theorists while reviving the task of diagnosing social pathologies can see his *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (2008)).

In Part II, on moral philosophy, the essays range from discussion of Habermas, Derrida, and Levinas to contemporary moral psychology, and deal with challenges to the modern family, intimate relationships, and personal autonomy. The core of the moral theory of recognition is in Chapter 6, “Between Aristotle and Kant,” in which he elaborates the moral point of view in terms of three forms of reciprocal recognition. He incorporates insights from the feminist ethics of care, Kantian moral theory, and communitarianism into a morality of recognition that covers the personal integrity we acquire through the moral attitudes of care, equal respect, and esteem. A question that arises here is whether Honneth can consistently maintain that the three moral attitudes cannot be ranked, while also insisting that equal rights to autonomy place a “normative

restriction” on all moral decisions (p. 141). The latter claim seems to introduce a form of priority ranking.

Most of the other essays in the section on moral philosophy highlight a series of tensions between equal respect and love, or between justice and care. Chapter 5, “The Other of Justice,” challenges Habermas’s Kantian discourse theory of morality with Derrida’s Levinasian account of an irresolvable tension between the principle of equal treatment and the principle of unilateral and asymmetrical care for the particular other. Chapter 7, “Between Justice and Affection,” deals with tensions within the modern family between questions of justice and affective bonds. Honneth develops a contrast between a Kantian “legal model” and a Hegelian “affective model” that helps clarify the situation modern families face as they have to negotiate these tensions in each particular case. Chapter 8, “Love and Morality,” attempts to extend the idea of moral duty beyond Kantian duties of equal respect to include the particularistic duties generated by affective bonds of love.

A key virtue of Honneth’s approach to the questions in this section is that his tripartite account of recognition allows him to embrace the complexity of modern moral relations and to bring a variety of considerations into play without making a one-sided appeal to any single aspect of recognition. Although he focuses heavily on care and esteem in this collection, it is because they have long been overshadowed by the dominant focus on equal respect and rights. The point is not simply to displace the latter entirely with the former, but to decenter the latter so that each of the three aspects appears as prominently as it should. “The Other of Justice” is the German title of this collection, which can refer both to Honneth’s attempt to provide an account of social pathologies that goes beyond normative theories of justice and to his attempt to go

beyond moral theories that focus on rights and equal respect by giving prominent place to love and esteem.

The third aspect of recognition--social esteem--comes to the fore in Part III, "Problems in Political Philosophy." Honneth takes up themes from the liberal-communitarian debate and further develops a view of freedom as self-realization. The final essay, "Post-traditional Communities," articulates a normative account of the intersubjective relations of social esteem within modern society: each member of society is able to fully value his or her own achievements and abilities only to the extent that they are valued by others in society.

This idea is developed in terms of the social preconditions for political democracy in Chapter 11, "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation," through an engagement with John Dewey. Honneth maintains that not only is self-realization dependent upon cooperative relations with others within a just division of labor, but so is political democracy. In Chapter 12, "Negative Freedom and Cultural Belonging," he goes beyond the account of the *social* preconditions for individual self-realization, which focuses on a cooperative division of labor, to investigate the *cultural* preconditions for self-realization. He brings out the tension in Isaiah Berlin's work between negative freedom as unobstructed choice and positive freedom in terms of a right to cultural belonging. In Berlin's account of the freedom of cultural membership, Honneth identifies both liberal arguments for cultural belonging as a condition for the exercise of negative freedom, and communitarian arguments about the need for cultural survival. Honneth's attention to cultural preconditions for positive freedom as self-realization is consistent with his recent exploration of cultural membership as a potential fourth sphere of recognition in modern society in his exchange with Nancy Fraser in *Redistribution or Recognition?* (2003).

I have not discussed every essay in this rich collection, which also includes a very early essay (1981) attempting to reorient Critical Theory toward empirically identifying social experiences of injustice, as well as excellent recent essays on human rights and on reconstituting a conception of personal autonomy in light of linguistic and psychoanalytic critiques of the subject. The book serves as an excellent entrée into Honneth's work for those unfamiliar with his prior work, and will certainly be of interest to anyone concerned with the wide range of issues in practical philosophy that are fruitfully illuminated by Honneth's theory of recognition.