Jean-Philippe Deranty

Beyond Communciation. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy. Critical and Social Theory. A Critical Horizons Book Series (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), x + 500 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-17577-8 (hbk). €173.00.

Axel Honneth, the director of the famous Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, and nowadays also a professor of philosophy at Columbia University, is still best known for his book *Struggle for Recognition* from 1992, read in the Anglophone world as a contribution to post-Rawlsian debates on normative political philosophy. Jean-Philippe Deranty's ambitious study on Honneth's social philosophy starts with the observation that such reception of Honneth's work has been regrettably narrow in two ways. First of all, excessive focus on *Struggle for Recognition* has meant that Honneth's other writings, which provide crucial motivations and developments of the themes presented in that book, are not taken into account, leading to misunderstandings of some its central ambitions. Secondly, as the reception has been very focused on purely normative political questions, Honneth's broader understandings of the tasks of critical social philosophy and philosophical anthropology have been ignored. In Deranty's view, then, a broader picture is needed.

Deranty's book aims at providing such a broader picture of Honneth's project – and succeeds admirably. The book is a highly recommendable companion both to *Struggle for Recognition* and for Honneth's later work, such as the recently translated *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition* and *Freedom's Right*. Deranty's book remains the most thorough study of Honneth's work.

Axel Honneth's intellectual trajectory is patiently mapped in the first six chapters of Deranty's book (while the latter six chapters are devoted to a systematical study of Honneth's theory). *Struggle for Recognition* on its own gives the impression that Honneth starts from Hegel and then uses other theorists (such as Mead or Winnicott) to flesh out the Hegelian insights in a naturalized, less metaphysical form. But given the selectivity and creativity of Honneth's Hegel-reading in *Struggle*, the readers may be left to wonder how and why these choices and selections were initially made. Deranty shows how the turn to Hegel was in fact a significant departure from Honneth's key references until then – until 1992 Hegel was simply rejected by Honneth as a metaphysical thinker with a strong philosophy of history, with bad influence on Marx and Critical Theory.

In Deranty's view, Honneth can be seen as creatively isolating a model from Hegel, which is not readily salient in Hegel's texts, but which for Honneth provides a solution to pre-existing theoretical needs. Honneth's turn to Hegel was an attempt to answer questions and concerns that have originated in different

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sources: in the young Marx, in the ambitions of the Critical Theory of Adorno and Horkheimer, and in Habermas's early work. Honneth shares with these the ultimate aim of critical analysis of contemporary society with emancipatory intent, but holds that none of these has successfully pursued that aim.

Deranty stresses how Honneth in each case identifies "a fork in the road" in the intellectual development of these theorists: they were onto something important, but took a wrong turn, and left a more promising path untaken – a path that Honneth's own work then continues. Deranty then goes on to use the same move against Honneth, who in his view has posed the rights questions and formulated promising views, but has ended up narrowing down the concerns in a way that leaves some of the promise unfulfilled.

Marx was right to stress the need for a critical theory of society, which can articulate goals for social action understood as emancipation from domination, and which can account for its link with the social life whose reflection it is. A theory is needed both to explain capitalist society and to illuminate the possibility of emancipation. The good Marx stresses the role of class struggle, and the bad Marx turns to functionalist account of structures of capitalism, the "logic of capital," or philosophy of history, threatening to make social movements or agents mere characters in a world-historical play – passive material for systemic forces. Marx's view of class struggle is also outdated. Marx took the human species to be a collective subject, which had nature as its object: subject-object model was stressed in the model of social labour, instead of intersubjectivity which Honneth following Habermas stresses. Young Marx had had good insights into intersubjectivity following Feuerbach's ideas concerning altruism. Deranty points out critically that while early Honneth also stressed the aspect of sensuality in Feuerbach and young Marx, he later loses that from sight in stressing intersubjectivity too narrowly – one of Honneth's wrong turns.

The same "fork in the road" development concerns Adorno and Horkheimer. Their initial aim of critical theory is worth preserving, as are some ideas about the nature of social struggle. But roughly along the lines of Habermas's criticism, Adorno and Horkheimer are rejected as providing an undifferentiated view of capitalist societies, as a seamless domination by administration and capitalism. Adorno and Horkheimer stress the connection between domination of nature and domination of others, whereas Honneth and Habermas stress the distinctiveness of intersubjectivity and social domination. Here Deranty asks whether domination of nature is after all connected to the social domination – perhaps Honneth ends up losing sight of the former.

Perhaps the most intricate debate concerns Honneth's relation to Habermas's intersubjective and communicative turn. Habermas makes distinctions which

might be useful as analytical tools but reifies them as autonomous institutional spheres. Honneth does not accept the strict dualism between lifeworld and systems or the independence of systems: institutions result from cultural struggles within relations of power. Habermas also has an overly linguistic, disembodied conception of human agents while Honneth thinks we need to stress lived experiences of alienation and injustice. The procedural conception of lifeworldly normativity is also problematic, as is Habermas's understanding of the "rationalization of the lifeworld" beyond the backs of human experiences. But in Habermas's earlier work, Honneth finds a "latent model" which relies on individuals' experiences of suffering. From there, Honneth develops his own view of struggles for recognition. Concerning this, Deranty points out that Habermas might have a richer account of interaction than Honneth's merely interpersonal one.

These influences, discussed in the first three chapters of the book, provide crucial background to Honneth's project. Honneth has also used the theories from German Philosophical Anthropology, especially Gehlen, for the purpose of a neo-Marxist critical theory. This provides further support to the aspects of sensualism and altruism found from Feuerbach. Chapter Four of Deranty's book deals with that.

Chapter Five then reaches the *Struggle for Recognition*, and the reading of Hegel in that book. In this chapter Deranty demonstrates how Honneth uses young Hegel to provide solutions to the concerns of young Marx, Adorno and Horkheimer and early Habermas. What Hegel's Jena writings offer for Honneth is a model of social integration with a normative core, and one stressing the centrality of struggle, without Marxian narrow interest in social labour or functionalist understanding concerning systems. Further, Hegel's model captures the desirable feature of individuation through socialization, as the struggle for recognition is a both community- and subjectivity-building process.

Chapter Six of Deranty's book discusses Mead's social philosophy, and shows its importance in different phases of Honneth's career. The rest of the book discusses then in detail Honneth's theory of recognition as new critical social theory. Chapter Seven discusses the three spheres of recognition and clarifies among other things in a very illuminating way the concept of "practical self-relation" (self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth) that is central to Honneth's model. Chapters Eight to Eleven then systematically discuss this model from the viewpoint of different disciplines: social, political, critical, and moral theory. Chapter Eight discusses Honneth's theory as answering the questions and program of critical theory, Chapter Nine as the questions of social theory (such as questions of agency and structure, and social integration), Chapter Ten discusses it as answering the questions of moral theory

(questions of what agents ought to do), and Chapter Eleven as answering various questions of political theory (for example, the relation to the liberalism-communitarianism –debate, the critique of political economy, and identity politics). The relevance of the recognition theory to issues of philosophical anthropology and social psychology are not discussed separately here as they were already discussed in Chapters Four and Six rather extensively.

Chapter Twelve concerns Honneth's writings after *The Struggle for Recognition*, and Chapter Thirteen ("Recognition or Interaction?") finally sums up Deranty's own criticisms of Honneth. These concern Honneth's rejection of substantive account of multi-layered *interaction* of embodied socialized agents with material and social and institutional world, in favour of narrower focus on *intersubjective* and *interpersonal* relations of recognition. Deranty wishes to stress those underdeveloped aspects in Honneth's writings which would stress the embodied interaction with material world (e.g. work), and with the institutional world. This would mean a more decisive break with the Habermasian paradigm of communicative action and discourse ethics, and would take critical theory more decisively "beyond communication". On the whole, the book both makes a significant contribution to our understanding of Honneth's social philosophy and defends successfully an independent although closely related view of the tasks and promises of critical social theory.

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