

Introduction: A Recognition-Theoretical Research Programme for the Social Sciences

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Anticipations of recognition, and the demands and struggles that may follow when the recognition is refused, are an abiding feature of the social world. But it is only in the past couple of decades that they have become an explicit focus of philosophical and scientific inquiry.¹ Reflecting the rising visibility of struggles for recognition in the public sphere of late modern societies, two publications, both appearing in 1992, got the current academic discussion around recognition going: Charles Taylor's essay 'The Politics of Recognition' and Axel Honneth's book *Kampf um Anerkennung (The Struggle for Recognition)* (Taylor 1992, Honneth 1992). While the main aim of Taylor's essay was to defend a version of liberal pluralism that was not hamstrung by a defective conception of the neutrality of the state, it suggested a thesis about the political recognition of cultures that was taken up, often highly critically, in much of the subsequent literature on recognition in political theory (Smith 2010a). Taylor's apparent claim that states ought to recognize and give material support to cultures as a whole, even in cases where that recognition abrogated certain individual rights, was widely seen as an inadequate basis not just of multiculturalism (in the sense Taylor sought to endorse), but of the rights to recognition of individual members of cultural minorities (Habermas 1993, Cooke 1997, Benhabib 2002). This in turn triggered extensive discussion about the precise nature and legitimacy of claims for the political recognition of cultural groups, indeed of group *identities* in general (Jones 2006, Seymour 2010). Alongside this debate, dissatisfaction came to be expressed, especially (but not exclusively) from theorists aligned with Marxist currents of thought, with this preoccupation with identity

politics, which is how the politics of recognition was generally understood (Barry 2001, Fraser 1997). Not only was culture just one aspect of identity, these critics pointed out, but identity was only one aspect of politics: struggles over the distribution of resources were just as important, from a moral, political, and social point of view, as struggles over the recognition of identity. Moreover, as Nancy Fraser argued, progressive social movements such as the women's movement combine these two forms of politics, though it was important not to confuse their goals (Fraser 2000, 2003). A number of studies of new social movements have been inspired by Fraser's account (Hobson 2003).

Fraser insists on distinguishing the norms and goals of redistributive social conflicts from those involving struggles for recognition partly because she believes that the account of the latter provided by Honneth in *The Struggle for Recognition* is fatally flawed by its failure to do so. Honneth's approach allegedly has a 'culturalist' bias and ignores the material, class dimension of politics (Fraser 2003). Fraser and Honneth have exchanged their views on this matter and their debate has been the focus of much of the recent literature on recognition (Fraser and Honneth 2003, Thompson 2006, Petherbridge 2011, Schmidt am Busch and Zurn 2010). But it is clear in retrospect that struggles for recognition, as depicted in Honneth's 1992 study and subsequent writings, also have a material, class dimension, and should not be conflated with identity politics, or even the 'politics of recognition' as discussed by Taylor. According to Honneth's account, struggles for recognition permeate throughout society and are as likely to concern the value of particular kinds of work as much as freedom of religious expression, the right to marry as much as the accommodation of ethnic or national minorities, the categorization of activity as crime as much as the affirmation of the value of a particular group. In other words, there is nothing 'cultural' as opposed to 'material' about struggles for recognition, and no unwarranted prioritisation of identity politics over class politics.

As Honneth and others have explained on several occasions, the theory of recognition offers itself as a framework for conducting critical social theory in the Frankfurt School tradition in a way suited to the contemporary world (Honneth 2007, 2009, Deranty 2009, Anderson 2011). It shares the ambition of previous contributions to this tradition of providing insight into the sources of social conflict, social suffering, and social pathology characteristic of the times, insight that might also reveal sources of social emancipation. But it also seeks to correct weaknesses in previous formulations of the foundations of critical social theory, and in particular Habermas's formulation of them (Habermas 1987). It can thus usefully be interpreted as a new 'paradigm' for critical social theory, one that encompasses commitments to some fundamental positions in epistemology, ontology, moral theory, and action theory (Zurn 2010), as well as a 'philosophical anthropology' that compares favourably with earlier 'productivist' and linguistic models (Smith and Deranty 2011). Alternatively, recognition theory might be taken as a 'research programme' in something like Lakatos's sense, insofar as it provides a proven framework for undertaking social research with the broad theoretical ambitions and practical orientation of the Frankfurt School. The central aim of our book is to lend plausibility to this idea.

The remainder of this introduction serves as a summary of our argument. After introducing the idea of a research Programme in the social sciences (section 1), we move on to reconstruct the 'core' elements of recognition theory conceived as such a Programme (section 2). We then examine the main issues dealt with in the three parts of the book as if they called for 'auxiliary hypotheses' of the core. In part one the central issue concerns the philosophical function of the concept of recognition (section 3), and apparently rival ways of interpreting it. The chapters contained in parts two and three address specific developments in recognition

theory that ‘protect’ its core while modifying it to accord with the social phenomena under investigation (sections 4 and 5).

1. The Idea of a Research Programme in the Social Sciences

As is well-known, Lakatos devised the idea of a scientific research Programme to correct the distorted picture of science projected by Popper’s falsificationism and Kuhn’s account of paradigms (Lakatos 1974). Whereas the former neglected the structural or holistic character of the scientific enterprise, the importance of overall coherence in developing and testing theories and the inevitable occurrence of anomalies, the latter failed to account for the sense of direction that guides scientific research, of it moving forwards, backwards, or standing still. So rather than conceive of science as anarchically organised conjectures and refutations, in the manner of Popper, or self-contained, self-answerable paradigms, in the manner of Kuhn, Lakatos proposed a model of holistically ordered but rationally evaluable research Programmes. A research Programme, in Lakatos’s sense, is made up of a ‘hard core’ of assumptions and an associated ‘protective belt’ of auxiliary hypotheses that can be generated from the core. Once arrived at, the hard core of the Programme is fixed, even in face of anomalies and counter-examples: only in this way can the Programme generate sufficient substantial research. The main task of research is rather to generate a set of auxiliary hypotheses out of the hard core assumptions that can then be subject to independent testing. A Programme that yields novel, successful predictions, while maintaining the integrity of its core (anomalies notwithstanding), has a progressive character and can be said to be rationally superior to one which, over time, degenerates into ad hoc modifications of its core assumptions without leading to any new discoveries.

In many people's view, including our own, Lakatos's idea of a research Programme provides a compelling way of thinking about progress in the natural sciences, one that is not distorted by excessive rationalism or relativism. But does it also provide a plausible model for research in the social sciences? Lakatos himself was sceptical about this, indeed he questioned the scientific status of much social research on the basis of it lacking the characteristic features of progressive research Programmes, in particular the yielding of new successful predictions. But the relatively weak predictive power of the social sciences is surely just as well explained by the nature and complexity of their subject matter as by the quality of their research Programmes. The understanding of social conflict, for example, requires a grasp of the meanings the conflict has for those involved in it, and so some engagement with the subject-matter, by contrast to the radical abstraction (adoption of the 'viewpoint from nowhere') required in the natural sciences (Nagel 1986). Furthermore, the final goal of social research, unlike research in the natural sciences, is typically not well served by the development of theories with high predictive power. For whereas the practical purchase of the natural sciences lies in actions that secure greater control over an environment (as signalled by successful predictions), the social sciences find their fulfilment in the removal of obstacles to moral goals such as freedom, justice, and self-realization. The social transformations that social theories are practically oriented towards, and which would provide their ultimate vindication, are thus of a different order of intelligibility to the transformations of nature that vindicate the natural sciences.

We should therefore not think of the idea of a research Programme in the social sciences in quite the same way as in the natural sciences. The subject matter of the social sciences includes meanings to be understood, and its practical justification lies first and foremost in its capacity to advance human freedom. It would be inappropriate, in this context, to invoke

predictive power as the main criterion of success for such a research Programme.

Nonetheless, theories that aim at improved social understanding and progressive social transformation can still be assessed in terms of the integrity of their core assumptions and their capacity to generate a protective belt of insightful auxiliary hypotheses in the manner suggested by Lakatos.

2. The Core of the Recognition-Theoretical Programme

So what are the core assumptions of the recognition-theoretic research programme? It seems to us that they can usefully be summarised as (1) an observational claim about the nature of social conflicts, (2) a claim about the explanatory framework required to make sense of this observation, and (3) a claim about the prescriptions for action yielded by (1) and (2) (the relation of theory to practice). Of course we do not mean to suggest that these are the only core elements of the theory, or that the core could not be fruitfully specified in another manner.² But we do believe that they provide a useful point of departure for understanding the character of recognition theory as a research programme for the social sciences in something like Lakatos's sense.

(1) First, recognition theory is premised on the observation that, in at least many cases, social conflicts emerge in response to feelings of disrespect, contempt, or humiliation suffered by the members of some group. The motivation for engaging in social struggle often comes from a sense of being looked down upon, of not being shown the basic respect that others receive, of being treated like a 'second-class citizen', of having to make do with less for no good reason, and similar experiences. This seems to hold not just of many contemporary social conflicts – around racial discrimination, gender inequality, the rights of minorities, ethno-national aspirations, and so on – but of epoch-defining historical conflicts too: anti-colonial

struggles in the mid-twentieth century, for example, and before that the class conflicts surrounding industrialisation (Fanon 1963, Thompson 1963). In all such cases, the conflicts seem driven by the intolerable burden borne by some part of the population of the disrespect or contempt shown to them by others, often in a generalised form embodied in prevailing laws, customs and social institutions. Many social conflicts thus seem to involve struggles aimed at the overcoming of some perceived source of humiliation, contempt or disrespect. Put positively, they seem to be motivated by a demand for due or proper *recognition*.

(2) If the above observation is correct, then clearly recognition matters a lot to human beings. What accounts for this pervasive need for recognition, and the depth of the suffering that lack of recognition or misrecognition can cause? The answer proposed by recognition theory, and this is the second of its core assumptions, is that nothing less than the psychic integrity of the self is at stake. Generally speaking, human beings need the affirmation of others if they are to see themselves as worthy of affirmation. One sees oneself as worthy of affirmation when one relates to one's feelings, emotions and physical needs, for instance, as one's *own* and worthy of expression and fulfilment. Self-respect and self-esteem are also vital aspects of the positive relation to self one must have in order to lead one's own life well. Psychic integrity depends on these practical self-relations being at least minimally in place. But human beings are not born with these self-relations, they learn them through successful processes of socialization and social interaction. More precisely, they are acquired through the internalization of the affirmative attitudes (love, respect and esteem) of others. This dependence on the recognition of others for the positive self-relations that enable individuals to lead their own lives well explains the vulnerability of each individual to crushing experiences of misrecognition (such as humiliation and disrespect). They are so crushing because the stakes could hardly be higher.

(3) This second core assumption explains not just the harm of misrecognition, but also what is *morally* wrong with it. The general purpose of moral norms, for the recognition-theorist, is to provide protection from the harms of disrespect and humiliation to which human beings are constitutively vulnerable. The moral norms of modern societies ideally extend this protection equally to everyone – that, at least, is the basic legitimating principle of the norms. Put positively, this means that modern morality has its basis in its claim to provide the social infrastructure, in terms of recognition relationships, that enables all individuals, no matter what their particular identity or place in society, to lead their own lives well. The meaning of morality is thus bound up with its social, institutional expression. This has important consequences for the practical orientation of recognition theory. On the one hand, it implies that *all* the basic institutions of modern society are answerable to some moral norm, or principle of recognition, they more or less explicitly claim to embody. On the other, it implies that the meaning of the norms to which moral criticism appeals cannot be entirely separated from their historical institutional expression. The former point implies that there are no spheres of society that are not suited to ethical deliberation, no kinds of social interaction that are immune from morally forceful criticism on account of being ‘norm-free’ or given by nature. The latter point implies that ethical deliberation about what to do about social conflicts should draw on norms that are internal or ‘immanent’ to the conflicts themselves, and the self-understanding of those involved, rather than norms that are external to, or have no anchor in, the actual social reality. A commitment to this kind of approach for thinking about the remedies for social conflicts arising from misrecognition is also at the core of the recognition Programme.

With this core in place, recognition theory can claim to provide insights into the nature, causes and remedy of social conflicts that are not available to other research Programmes in the social sciences. It can claim to have resources for penetrating to the *social origins* of moral and political discontent, which the dominant naturalistic and rationalistic research Programmes, sociobiology and rational choice theory respectively, lack on account of their atomistic assumptions. By taking the self-interest or capacity for self-assertion of discrete individuals as their point of departure, these approaches are liable to misconstrue struggles for recognition as struggles for self-preservation, and so to misunderstand the dynamics or ‘grammar’ of their unfolding and resolution.

Even other non-atomistic Programmes for social research can be seen to fall short in this respect. In particular, recognition theory can claim to address shortcomings in Habermas’s formulation of the foundations of critical social theory. As we noted, the first of recognition theory’s three core assumptions locates the source of social struggle in the agents themselves, in the actual experiences that shape their agency, and so better reflects the agents’ self-understanding than Habermas’s approach (with its explanatory focus on structural transformations in the public sphere, the lifeworld, and the social ‘systems’). By tying morality so closely to the existential vulnerability of each individual to the recognition of others, their dependence on others for the practical-self relations necessary for a good life, the second core assumption of recognition theory makes it clear why morality matters and what the individual’s stake in it is. By contrast, Habermas’s strategy of deriving moral norms from the conditions of communicative interaction makes it difficult to understand the motivation for following these norms, and it places too much emphasis on the cognitive (at the expense of the affective) content of moral experience. The third core assumption of recognition theory also addresses a widely perceived weakness of Habermas’s theory: its modelling of the

market economy as a 'norm-free' sub-system, one with its own laws of reproduction, which exempt it from ethical and moral scrutiny and reflection. The capitalist market is very much the proper object of recognition-theoretic critical reflection, so long as that reflection draws on norms that are immanent to the practice itself, and not merely utopian ideals that have no anchor in social reality.

Seen this way, the core assumptions of recognition theory compare favourably with those of its main rival. And although we do not have space to argue it here, these advantages can be taken as signs of a rational progression, enabling critical social science to penetrate deeper and with greater insight into the social realm.³ That is not to say that the core of recognition theory is not without its own anomalies, to use Lakatos's terms. While there is plenty of empirical evidence, and strong philosophical reasons, supporting the core, there are also significant considerations counting against it. Let us mention three that seem especially important to us. First, the precise philosophical function of the concept of recognition, as it has been inherited from Hegel, needs clarification. What philosophical work does the Hegelian concept of recognition do and how is it related to critical social inquiry? Second, if a social conflict involves struggle *against* misrecognition, does that necessarily make it a struggle *for* positive recognition? The relationship between misrecognition as a source of conflict and recognition as a remedy for it thus also needs elaboration. Third, the assumption that the practical stance of recognition-theory is tied to norms that are already in place in the practices criticised seems problematic. What about cases where the existing recognition order needs to be challenged more radically, or where the very existence of a socially effective recognition order is questionable (say, in international contexts)? If recognition theory is to prove itself as a fruitful research Programme, it needs to develop a 'protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses', in Lakatos's terms, to deal with these issues.

In the remainder of this introduction we shall outline how the following chapters of the book suggest ways of doing this.

3. The Philosophical Function of the Concept of Recognition

The first two chapters examine the philosophical foundations of recognition theory, and in particular the ways in which the theory attempts to integrate and renew aspects of Hegel's thought. Broadly speaking, contemporary philosophers attribute one of two types of fundamental insight to Hegel. The first, which emphasizes Hegel's link to Kant, has to do with the *authority* possessed by concepts, judgements, beliefs, norms, practices and institutions (Pippin 1989, Brandom 2009). Rejecting the sceptical view that there really is no such authority (that objectivity is merely subjectivity in disguise), and metaphysical views that attribute this authority to independently existing facts (how things are 'in themselves', in nature or God), Hegel showed that it is the social practice of giving and taking reasons that provides the ground of authority or objectivity in general. Hegel's key insight, read this way, concerns the philosophical problem of how objective thought, or thought that has command over us in virtue of having an 'object', is possible at all. It is possible because our placement in a social space of reason-giving and taking situates us as rational agents who are responsible *to each other*. In mutually recognizing each other as rational agents, we are thus able to constitute a space of *reasons* – as distinct from a chain of causes and effects, or a series of natural events – which secures the objective and authoritative basis of thought. 'Mind' or *Geist* is thus not ultimately accountable to anything outside it; it is not responsible to or dependent on nature, tradition, God, or other imagined sources of authority. Self-consciousness of this independence from non-human sources of authority, together with the social and historical basis of the authority thought actually has, is the key insight delivered by

Hegel's 'Absolute Idealism' (Pippin 1989). This Idealist ('non-metaphysical', 'conceptualist') theory of meaning and knowledge has received a remarkable revival in recent years, and is seen by many as Hegel's enduring contribution to philosophy, on a par with empiricism, rationalism, and Kant's transcendental idealism.

The second of Hegel's key insights has less to do with semantics and epistemology than with philosophical anthropology, or inquiry into the nature of the human being, and refers primarily to concerns shared by the young Hegelians and later by the existential phenomenologists. The problem here, in a nutshell, is to arrive at a conception of the human that encompasses both its *self-defining* and *situated* character: its constitution through norms or standards it sets for itself, but that also give form to its material and social incarnation (Taylor 1975). The trick is to avoid the errors of freedom-negating naturalism on the one hand, and situation-negating voluntarism on the other. Hegel's *expressivist* anthropology has been seen to pull this off, by conceiving self-definition as something that comes in *degrees* depending on the scope that is available *historically* for the fulfilment of human needs and the expression of human capacities. To say that self-definition comes in degrees, in the expressivist sense, means first that it is subject to a process of *formation* with various levels of maturity. It must thus be understood, in its mature state, as a contingently reached historical achievement. Second, it means that there are distinct, differentiated *spheres* of human action and interaction that do not enable or give expression to self-definition to the same degree or in the same way (Honneth 2011). It was Hegel's key contribution, on this reading, to arrive at a conception of freedom (self-definition) that gives expression to natural human capacities (rather than standing over them) while developing historically through a process of social differentiation and pluralisation (assuming multiple meanings in different spheres of action and interaction). This expressivist conception of freedom, which rose to

prominence in its contemporary form as early as the 1970s, has also been hugely influential, especially amongst ‘communitarian’ political theorists seeking to break out of the atomistic paradigm that has dominated their discipline since Hobbes, but also amongst critical social theorists seeking to revive the project of the Frankfurt School.⁴

As the chapters by Terry Pinkard and Jean-Philippe Deranty make clear, *both* of these insights attributable to Hegel can be considered as providing a philosophical basis for a recognition-theoretic approach to social thought. Taking up and defending the first of these insights, Pinkard argues that an understanding of the ‘meanings’ that make up the modern form of life requires an appropriate theory of concepts, one that is capable in particular of explaining the modern concept of agency. Just as the meaning of any concept depends on the work it is able to do in a normatively structured social space, rather than some fixed and independently given fact to which it is applicable, so one is made an agent by being recognized as such by others, recognized as having the authority of those who are accountable to each other through the giving and taking of reasons – which is to say, by having a certain *status*. The rub here, Pinkard argues, is that this also makes the conditions of success and failure by way of agency an essentially social matter, a matter of one’s standing as an agent, as that is revealed concretely and materially in the recognition-relations. Pinkard contrasts this approach, which is based on ‘logical’ or conceptual analysis, with Honneth’s theory of recognition, which he takes to be grounded in empirical hypotheses regarding the psychological (factual) conditions of self-realization, and thus of successful agency. Not only are these hypotheses subject to reasonable doubt, Pinkard contends, and command no more consensus than philosophical theories, but they lead to conceptual confusion when posited as starting points for practical (moral and political) reasoning. Rather than residing in some empirically determinable condition of self-realization, these starting points should be

considered as norms that are actualized in various ways in modern societies, ways that affect the authority they can rationally be taken to have for individual modern agents.

This raises important issues about the kind of validity recognition theory claims to have, the evidence supporting it, its suitability for guiding empirical research, and its relation to the social sciences generally, that are taken up in more detail in Deranty's contribution. Deranty argues that far from being an insuperable burden on recognition theory, its commitment to a substantive philosophical anthropology that draws on and feeds back into the various human sciences is just what recommends it as a framework for conducting critical social research today. By building on Hegel's expressivist insights, as they are vindicated empirically, Deranty argues, recognition theory can perform the *hermeneutic* tasks of interpreting the 'meanings' of the modern life form – which is the main task Pinkard ascribes to it – while avoiding some of the dangers of the conceptualist approach, such as a tendency to excessive philosophical abstraction and even tautology in its understanding of the justification of norms. But even more important, in Deranty's view, is the danger of conservatism that arises once recognition theory loses touch with those experiences of injustice and struggles for emancipation that also characterise the modern world. Such conflicts not only provide a reminder that the meanings of the basic moral and social norms of modernity are contested, but they can also point forward to new possibilities for self-realization or 'self-definition' free from domination. According to Deranty, this gives recognition theory as it has been developed by Honneth – that is to say, as a way of continuing the project of the Frankfurt School – a radical dimension lacking in the approach based on the conceptualist or 'non-metaphysical' reading of Hegel. It should be said, though, that Pinkard also claims to be reactivating the critical spirit of Adorno, and on this as well as other matters of dispute

between these two ways of taking Hegelian recognition as a basis for social and political inquiry, readers are invited to make their own judgment.

4. Responding to Misrecognition: Marriage, Work, Crime and Religion

While the chapters in part one engage in a debate about the philosophical shape of recognition theory understood as a framework for social research, the chapters that make up part two of the book deal with particular social phenomena that recognition theory can help us to understand and evaluate. If the premises of the recognition-theoretic programme are broadly true, then zones of conflict can be expected to arise around the principles of recognition that serve to regulate or normatively guide interaction in the different social spheres. Such conflicts will typically be precipitated by institutionalised patterns of misrecognition in those spheres, and will receive their moral animus from some apprehension (however justified) of a moral deficit in the prevailing relations of recognition. The institution of marriage, the organization of work, the categorisation of crime, and laws relating to the expression of religious belief, are key areas in which such patterns of conflict over recognition can be expected. The actuality of these patterns of misrecognition, and the proper resolution of the conflicts they generate, are thus crucial issues for a recognition-theoretic Programme of social research, and are examined in the chapters by Christopher Zurn, Nicholas Smith, Madjid Yar, and Jonathan Seglow respectively.

A shared point of concern amongst these contributors is the need for caution when thinking about the appropriate response to institutionalised patterns of misrecognition, be they in the context of love relationships, work, public expressions of religious identity, and elsewhere. Although positive social recognition may be the right way of dealing with misrecognition, it will not always be so, and some other means of securing the emancipatory move out of

misrecognition may be necessary. This is the case, Zurn argues, for sexual minorities struggling against the misrecognition embodied in exclusively heterosexual marriage codes. Rather than responding to this form of misrecognition by way of positive legal recognition of gay and lesbian marriages, it would be more appropriate, Zurn proposes, to question the recognition that marriage itself gives institutional expression to, and in particular its rigid ‘coupling’ or combining of distinct functions and norms (related to childrearing, sexual practices, legal and economic benefits, gender-roles, religious identity, and so on). The *aggregated* form of recognition that marriage provides is itself the source of the social problem, Zurn argues, and the solution is not more of it, or wider access to it, but (at least in some cases) removal of the need for recognition in that combined or aggregated form. This would be emancipation not by recognition, but ‘derecognition’, as Zurn terms it.

Something similar can be said of work. Drawing on a now well-established Programme of recognition-theoretic research into the sphere of work, Smith notes that recognition at or for work is not always an unambiguous good, and not always an emancipatory remedy for misrecognition. For example, measures for increasing individual responsibility at work, which at first sight seem progressive, often have the opposite effect of dominating individuals, as they internalize expectations of responsibility for outcomes over which they have no control. Strategies aimed at giving recognition for outstanding individual performance, which can be well-intended and mark a ‘gain in recognition’ in making success dependent on merit rather than privilege, can have a corroding effect on other areas of recognition. For example, they can damage the self-esteem of those whose contribution lies in long-standing, committed, but not easily visible service; and by introducing a culture of individual competition, they can undermine the integrity of a professional ethos, and indeed the quality of work the members of a profession are able to do, especially in areas such as the

caring professions, where excellence of performance in the relevant sense (good caring) is so hard, if not impossible, to publicly or transparently measure. Such ‘paradoxes of recognition’ abound in the contemporary world of work, not least in the form of ideologies of recognition, which as Honneth has remarked promise new possibilities for autonomy and self-realization in work without providing the material conditions for delivering them.

The concept of recognition which features in recognition theory was first formulated by Hegel to apprehend the precise ethical significance of crime and the moral psychology of an idealized criminal (Honneth 1995). It would thus be no exaggeration to say that recognition theory in its early nineteenth-century conception was a theory of crime and criminality. But does the theory of recognition provide a suitable framework for social research into crime today? The answer suggested by Yar in his contribution is a qualified yes. First, it provides an analytical framework for understanding crime as ‘social harm’ that compares favourably with other approaches. Second, it can clarify normative intuitions about what is wrong both with crime itself and illegitimate acts of criminalization (of legal categorization of an act as criminal). And third, it can support plausible hypotheses, backed up both intuitively and by recent empirical research, about the *causes* of crime and criminality – typically in experiences of misrecognition or non-recognition that trigger more or less displaced struggles for recognition. On the other hand – and this is the qualification – this form of explanation can degenerate into dogmatism, if experiences of misrecognition or non-recognition are attributed to a subject without independent verification, and it also risks ignoring or paying insufficient attention to other relevant causal factors.

As Seglow argues in his contribution, epistemological flaws in recognition theory, or shortcomings in the methods at its disposal for establishing the truth or falsity of attributions

of experiences of recognition or misrecognition, also threaten to undermine the recognition-theoretic approach to legal exemptions (exemptions from otherwise universally applicable laws). The advantages of the recognition-theoretic approach are considerable, Seglow suggests, especially in contexts of religious diversity, where claims for exemption on the basis of religious identity are common. But the insight on which the recognition approach turns – that exemptions are necessary to secure the self-respect (or self-esteem) of some religious citizens – is difficult to demonstrate empirically, and may exaggerate the contribution made by this particular form of recognition to the individual’s self-respect. The challenge for recognition theory is therefore to show how the granting or withholding of exemption helps secure the self-respect of those involved in a way that avoids these difficulties.

5. Challenging the Recognition Order in the State and Beyond

The focus of the chapters in part three of the book shifts to more overtly political conflicts that involve struggles for recognition by citizens of ethnically diverse states, by citizens moving between states, and by states themselves amongst other states.

We noted above that at the core of the recognition-theoretic programme was a claim about the relation of theory to practice. If we assume that the task of critical social theory, perhaps even social theory in general, is to provide an orientation for emancipatory social action, or for social transformation of a progressive character, then we can assess the validity of rival social theories in terms of the kind of orientation for social action and transformation they make possible. Although such testing is difficult to do prospectively—who knows what the future will bring?—one can reasonably attempt to reconstruct the interpretive frameworks that were more or less explicitly drawn upon in transformations that are now recognised as

being just or proper. In other words, one might be able to show in retrospect that a given framework for action was a condition for social progress, and that the framework so to speak proved itself, or at least its superiority to rival frameworks, in that capacity. This argumentative strategy is adopted by Shane O'Neill to assess the claim of recognition theory to provide an appropriate framework for understanding ethno-national conflict. He argues that one particular recent instance of progressive social transformation, the peace process in Northern Ireland, owed its success (in part) to recognition-theoretic presuppositions about the nature of democracy, that this success would have been less likely if a liberal-individualist framework had have been in place. More generally, he argues that the recognition model of democracy is more able to frame just and peaceful resolutions of ethno-national conflicts than alternative models, and in this decisive respect shows its theoretical superiority to them.

One of the key advantages of the recognition model of democracy, in O'Neill's view, is its ability to highlight the interplay between communities within a state and communities between states. In the case of the Northern Ireland peace process, the transition to mutual recognition ('mutual esteem') between the previously warring loyalist and nationalist communities was bound up with recent steps towards mutual recognition between the British and Irish States. But to what extent can recognition theory provide a general framework for understanding relationships between states, and between states and members of different societies and national communities?

This question is dealt with in the remaining essays in the volume. David Owen argues that so long as recognition theory, like many other social and political theories, remains committed to the coincidence of 'state' and 'society', it is incapable of grasping the significance of transnational migration, or migration from one nation to another, in the contemporary world.

But once commitment to the assumption of a ‘state-society nexus’ is dropped, Owen’s argument continues, recognition theory is well-placed to throw light on key normative issues raised by emigration. This is because the way we ought to think about issues such as dual nationality and voting rights for resident non-citizens can be explained at least in part by contexts of recognition that extend beyond the boundaries of particular societies. That is to say, entitlements to dual nationality and non-citizen voting rights can be grounded in principles of recognition. At the same time, and echoing a point made in previous chapters, these principles do not preclude strategic or instrumental considerations, ‘reasons of state’ or ‘statecraft’, coming into play. The suitability of recognition theory for analyzing immigration, in both its functional and normative dimensions, is also taken up by Ruth Cox. In Cox’s view, just as the categories and priorities of immigration give vivid expression to the recognition order of particular societies, so the actions undertaken by immigrants and refugees to secure immigrant status tell us much about what it means to struggle for recognition and challenge recognition orders in the contemporary world.

Our final chapter, by Volker Heins, also examines the idea of struggles for recognition in a global context. He maintains that while recognition theory rightly identifies collective feelings of humiliation and disrespect as ‘raw materials’ for potentially emancipatory social conflicts, its plausibility as an explanatory and normative theory depends on it also providing an account of the contingent social factors that transform such feelings into a politically significant force, including the construction of narratives that lend meaning to initially diffuse feelings of misrecognition. Heins thus recommends a reformulation of recognition theory along more hermeneutic or ‘culturalist’ lines, an approach that also promises to deliver a more plausible framework for understanding conflict between states, so Heins argues, than Honneth’s theory has so far managed to accomplish. Heins’s proposal, alongside Honneth’s

recent reflections on the relevance of recognition theory for understanding international relations (Honneth, 2010), suggests that this stands to be a particularly fruitful area for further recognition-theoretical research.

Endnotes

¹ Not counting the classic reflections on recognition in Rousseau, Fichte and Hegel which have done much to inspire current philosophical debates. For interesting discussions of the history of the philosophy of recognition focusing on these figures, see Schmidt am Busch and Zurn 2010 and Williams 1997. Honneth attempts to retrieve a neglected tradition of recognition theory stretching from Hegel to Sartre in Honneth 1992.

² Other useful summaries include Anderson 2011, Lazzari and Caillé 2007, and Zurn 2010.

³ Our claim can thus be compared to that made by MacIntyre about Thomism in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (MacIntyre 1990). MacIntyre argued that Thomism could be reconstructed as a progressive research programme relative to the Enlightenment encyclopaedist project on the one hand, and Nietzschean relativism on the other. Without endorsing the details of MacIntyre's argument, we believe that the case in favour of recognition theory could take a similar form.

⁴ The term 'expressivism' has been used to describe both the 'epistemic-semantic' reading of Hegel (favoured by Pippin and Brandom) and the anthropological-existential reading (favoured by Taylor and Honneth), generating some confusion about its meaning. For an attempt at sorting out some of this confusion, see Smith 2010b.

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