Symposium on Axel Honneth and Recognition

Anthropology, Social Theory, and Politics: Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition

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This article presents and discusses Axel Honneth's theory of recognition as a specific constellation, i.e. as a theoretical endeavour spanning over and interrelating positions in the fields of anthropology, social theory, and politics. As essential components in this constellation I discern an anthropology of recognition, a social philosophy of different forms of recognition, a morality of recognition, a theory of democratic ethical life as a social ideal, and a notion of political democracy as an ambitious reflexive form of social cooperation. A tentative attempt is also made to elucidate the motivational history that underlies and animates Honneth's theoretical endeavour and accounts for its specific 'spirit'.

I. Constellations

It need hardly be said that the three themes mentioned in the title of this article tend to go together; if the focus is on one of them, the other two – implicitly or explicitly – are seldom far away. Thus it might be argued that every social or political theory presupposes or rests upon a certain image of man, just as it might be argued that every image of man provides the frame and sets limits for connecting theories of society and politics. In other words, one can ask for the anthropological presuppositions of political statements just as much as for the political consequences of anthropological theses; and one can ask for the anthropological premises of social theories, just as much as for the sociological determination of anthropological conceptions. However, rather than trying to demonstrate necessary connections in one direction or the other – in the sense that a certain image of man implies a particular social theory and a certain political orientation, or that a certain political stance is simply projected back into a particular image of man – I prefer to talk of different possible *constellations* in the sense of a (more or less) coherent whole with regard to anthropology, social theory, and politics. A constellation is simply

the way that the three themes interrelate within a specific theoretical endeavour, making up a (more or less) coherent whole.

In the following I attempt to present and discuss Axel Honneth's theory of recognition as a specific constellation in the above-mentioned sense.[1] This theory can be considered a work in progress, or a constellation slowly taking shape over the years, spanning approximately two decades and forming step-by-step a more solid foundation, but also being carried on in new directions. At the beginning, Honneth moved quite close to the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, but also with certain critical accents. In the meantime, as concerns the continuation of the tradition of Critical Theory today, the theory of recognition has increasingly taken the form of a rival constellation.

II. Philosophical Anthropology and the Theme of Recognition

First let us remind ourselves of the anthropological strain that has been present in Honneth's writings from the start, and also how the theme of recognition first makes its appearance there and slowly emerges as the central concept and motive in his theoretical endeavour.

In 1980 Honneth published, together with Hans Joas, a work entitled *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur.* Coming from a neo-Marxist standpoint their ambition was to re-establish a connection with the German tradition of philosophical anthropology in order to defend 'a meaningful notion of historical progress' (1988, p. 11). This move corresponded to the sense of difficulty in a conception of progress anchored in technological mastery over nature, and to a re-awakened interest in the question of nature itself, including human nature or man as a natural being. Rather than being seen as a foundational discipline, philosophical anthropology was understood as the 'self-reflection of the social and cultural sciences on their biological foundations and on the normative content of their bodies of knowledge, considered in relation to determinate historical and political problems' (1988, p. 9). To pose the anthropological question then is to ask for 'the unchanging preconditions of human changeableness' (1988, p. 7), i.e. to ask for what is constant in what looks like constant change. This was quite a controversial move at the time because of the reputation of German philosophical anthropology within neo-Marxist circles for being essentially ahistorical, conservative, if not, with reference especially to Arnold Gehlen, proto-fascist.[2]

Without going into details, it can be said that Honneth and Joas try in their book to establish a theoretical framework within which 'historical materialism can be grounded in the anthropological reconstruction of the specifically human capacities for action' (1988, p. 26). In this connection they stressed the intersubjective character as well as the situatedness of human

action, an orientation which is well expressed in the notion of a *practical intersubjectivity* (as the title of Joas's book on George Herbert Mead reads from the same year). At the same time they criticized Habermas for rigorously separating from each other, in his reconstruction of historical materialism, narrative historiography and reconstructive developmental logic, and thereby being theoretically rather badly equipped for dealing with 'the collective experiencing of, and the co-operative opposition to, injustice arising out of the nature of the social system' (1988, p. 166). I can also mention here an early article by Honneth from 1981, which he himself refers to on several occasions as being crucial for his intellectual development: 'Moralbewußtsein und soziale Klassenherrschaft. Einige Schwierigkeiten in der Analyse normativer Handlungspotentiale.' Here he introduces as a key concept the 'consciousness of injustice' (*Unrechtsbewußtsein*) (cf. 1995d, p. 209). This concept, mainly inspired by studies in political and social history by Barrington Moore and George Rudé, refers to the historically situated experiences of injury and injustice. These kinds of experience often find expression in verbally rather unarticulated reactions of protest and struggle, but which indirectly articulate what might be called an unwritten social morality. By way of these experiences of and reactions to injustice, one can locate within social reality a pretheoretical point of reference for normative critique. In this connection Honneth, I think for the first time, talks about inequalities in the 'distribution of chances for social recognition' and about 'struggles for recognition' (1995d, p. 218).

Still, the theme of recognition is not a central focus in Honneth's book *Kritik der Macht* from 1985.[3] In connection with a critical discussion of Habermas, however, Honneth talks about the need to understand societal rationalization *also* as a continuous process of morally motivated conflicts and struggles between social classes, or as a 'struggle between the classes for social recognition', with a 'situation of mutual recognition' (1991, p. 271) as its ideal end. This finally led him back to the model of a struggle for recognition found in Hegel's writings from the Jena period (1801–1806) before the publication of *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. In an Afterword from 1988 to the second German edition of *Kritik der Macht* Honneth formulates the task as that of 'making Hegel's idea of a "struggle for recognition" systematically fruitful for a social theory' (1991, p. xviii).

In this way the first steps had been taken towards an anthropology and social philosophy of recognition. This move comprises a position that is in agreement with the communication theoretical turn of Critical Theory but parts company with Habermas on how to develop that new direction. What is at stake for Honneth, and I now quote from an inaugural lecture from 1993, is to 'justify in all its consequences the claim that the expectation of social recognition belongs to the structure of communicative action', which would 'require solving the difficult problem of replacing Habermas's universal

pragmatics with an anthropological conception that can explain the normative presuppositions of social interaction' (1994, p. 263).

III. Personal Identity and Recognition

This raises at least two basic questions for an anthropology of recognition: Why does recognition matter so much to human beings? How can we explain their seemingly enduring readiness to engage in struggles for recognition? The first question is dealt with in this section, the second in the following section.

An answer to the first question is found in the book *Kampf um Anerkennung* from 1992. Without a three-dimensional recognition – related to primary relationships (love and friendship), legal relations (rights), and communities of value (solidarity) – a *personal identity* cannot be developed, something which in its turn is a precondition for *human self-realization*. The kind of personal identity under discussion is a moral-practical identity that comprises a process of identity formation which has as its goal autonomy and individuality, or what Honneth refers to as a threefold *positive relation-to-self*, involving a basic self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (cf. 1995a, ch. 5). This notion of personal identity comes, I think, close to what Andreas Wildt writes in a systematic work on Fichte and Hegel: 'The question of my practical identity is in the last instance a question about which form of life I find meaningful, i.e. in which I can approve of myself' (1982, p. 262). To refuse an individual recognition means to reject certain identity claims in the form of claims to recognition. Such a rejection either renders the development of a personal identity impossible or breaks down an already established identity. Honneth talks in this connection of 'the constitutional dependence of humans on the experience of recognition', and of 'the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition' (1995a, pp. 136, 163). Without the recognition of *love and friendship*, i.e. emotional support, no basic self-confidence; without the recognition of *rights*, i.e. cognitive respect, no self-respect; and without the recognition of *solidarity*, i.e. social esteem, no self-esteem. The adequate reaction to the experience of a complete lack of recognition from others is probably the despairing expression: 'I am nothing', in the sense of 'I have no personal identity – there is nothing that is me'. Under somewhat more favourable circumstances the spontaneous reaction to disrespect might equally be strong feelings of harm, anger, and eventually struggle for recognition. I think most people have experiences of how painful even minor forms of disrespect can be, and how devastating such experiences can be for our relation-to-self. Recognition matters so much to us because our personal identity is dependent on it; without at least a minimum of recognition the question 'Who am I?' has no answer.

However, some tricky problems emerge here. For example, is the necessary self-esteem dependent on esteem from *all* members of society, or just from the members of that particular group or subculture to which one belongs? No doubt Honneth's model implies the former alternative, at least as the terminal point for the developmental potential contained in this form of recognition. However, it seems too strong a thesis to make this a precondition for a positive relation-to-self in terms of self-esteem. There seems also to be a risk that *only* those struggles which in a developmental perspective point forward towards widening relations of recognition will catch the interest and be of relevance to the critical theorist, i.e. that historical as well as ongoing struggles will be looked upon with a highly selective eye.[4] It can further be asked whether not a certain amount of self-esteem, already acquired within particular communities, is necessary in order to give an individual the inner psychical strength actively to engage in struggles for widened forms of recognition. Finally, the question can be raised whether we should not complement the notion of struggles for recognition with a notion of *struggles for difference*: for the recognition of differences and for the overcoming of discriminating differences. That would, so it seems, endow the critical theorist with a broader conceptual apparatus for dealing with the many-faceted morally motivated struggles going on in contemporary society.[5]

IV. An Anthropology of Transcendence

Not only has Honneth's answer to the second question been from the beginning more tentative, it is also apparently presently undergoing a shift. The claim to recognition is said to be rooted in man as an 'enduring motive which is continually capable of being activated' (1995c, p. xxiv), i.e. a reaction to disrespect, in the form of feelings of shame, harm, conflict, and struggle, is a basic trait of man invariant to culture. The task is to account for 'the motivational driving force that is supposed at all times and places', or for 'a motivational impetus which underpins an enduring readiness for conflict' (ibid.). The question then is not, as in the tradition of German philosophical anthropology and especially in Gehlen, how the necessity of a social – normative and institutional – order can be derived from human nature (cf. Rehberg, 1985, p. 78), but rather how the enduring readiness to transcend existing institutions, to put into question and disrupt the established social order, can be explained with reference to human nature. What is at stake here is an anthropology of morally motivated conflict and struggle.

Some hints were given already in *Kampf um Anerkennung*, where George Herbert Mead's conception of the 'I' were to account for the inner dynamic of the movement of recognition. The 'I', as a counterpart to the more socially conformist 'me', was interpreted as 'a reservoir of psychical energies that

supply every subject with a plurality of untapped possibilities for identity-formation', and in terms of 'the sudden experience of a surge of inner impulses', of which 'it is never immediately clear whether they stem from pre-social drives, the creative imagination, or the moral sensibility of one's own self' (1995a, p. 81).

In other contexts, Honneth has sought a tentative answer by turning to psychoanalytic theory: Cornelius Castoriadis's hypothesis of 'an enduring unconscious, which again and again confronts us with fantasies of an unattainable reconciliation', and to Object Relations theory (especially Donald W. Winnicott), which analyses 'the relation between unconscious fantasies and social recognition' (1995c, p. xxv; cf. 1995e), or how the so-called capacity to be alone, developed in early stages in life in interplay with others (especially the 'mother'), enables the individual to establish a creative contact with his unconscious impulses of action. These impulses in their turn are interpreted as the unconscious longing, which takes the form of fantasies of omnipotence, for a resurrection of the original state of symbiosis between the infant and the 'mother'.

In still another context Honneth argues for the need to develop a *weak* or *formal* anthropology that accounts for the preconditions of a good life without privileging any particular form of life, and which can function as a yardstick for diagnosing 'social pathologies' (cf. 2000b, pp. 67 ff.). Returning to our previous context, to reconstruct different forms of recognition as preconditions for personal identity and individual self-realization might involve no more than a weak or formal anthropology, but to ground the never-ceasing claim to personal identity and the enduring readiness for conflict and struggle seems to me to require a *stronger* and far more *substantial* anthropology.

However, in a recent article, under the impact of research on infants carried out especially by Daniel Stern, Honneth seems to have retreated from the theory of an original state of symbiosis between the infant and the 'mother', a state which is later dramatically disrupted, leaving a trauma behind that in the form of fantasies of omnipotence accompanies the adult all through life, but also serves as a permanent reservoir of psychical energy for struggles for recognition. Instead, Honneth now seems to accept the idea of an early developed core self and prefers to talk about only episodic experiences of a fusion with the beloved object, i.e. the 'mother'. However, these episodes give rise to lifelong expectations of a bodily-psychical feeling of safety and security that make it difficult later in life to accept the broken intersubjectivity constitutive of adulthood, and which account for the tendency found by most people from time to time to fall back behind established ego-demarcations, for example in religious or mass psychological experiences of melting together with God, the world or other humans. The 'memory' of such fusion experiences in the infant stage is also the source of what might be called a component of 'anti-sociality' (2001, p. 798) in man that accounts for or makes

up the motivational driving force for negating the existence of independent others, i.e. transcending existing relations of intersubjectivity. This argument leaves only a minimal space for a pre-social nature in man, i.e. very little predates in man the processes of social recognition. Honneth talks of the episodic fusion experiences early in life, to which there remains a perpetual temptation to fall back upon in adult life, as the 'zero point' (2001, p. 801) of intersubjectivity. Everything we are, as far as concerns our identity and personality structure, beside this moment of basic anti-sociality, we owe to social processes of recognition. Early episodic fusion experiences are thus made to account for the seemingly invariant trait in man to react to disrespect with the whole repertoire from feelings of shame to open revolt. Through forms of disrespect the Other drastically manifests its independence, and the struggle for recognition can thus be seen as the activation of an enduring readiness for fusion, taking the form of a reaction to asymmetrical relations of recognition. In this way Honneth lately seems to have moved in the direction of a theory that can do with a rather weak and in comparison less substantial anthropology.[6]

V. A Morality of Recognition

Another new direction that Honneth's theory of recognition has taken in later years is towards laying bare and focusing upon the potential inner tensions between the different kinds of obligations that arise from the different forms of recognition. To recognize another human being means to be aware of and accept that I have certain obligations towards him. In this sense one can talk of a *morality of recognition*: 'morality is the quintessence of attitudes we are mutually obligated to adopt in order to secure jointly the conditions of our personal integrity' (1997, p. 28).[7] However, and in contrast with basic Kantian premisses, 'it is not duty and inclination that normally confront one another, but rather various obligations, which without exception possess moral character because they lend expression to a different relation of recognition in each case' (1997, p. 33). We have different rights and obligations towards our fellow human beings depending on what kind of social relation is involved and what form of recognition is at stake. An ethics of *care* as well as an ethics of *justice* and *communitarian* models all have a legitimate place within moral theory. We are equally obliged to care emotionally in relation to our closest, to treat each and everyone with equal respect, and to demonstrate solidarity with the one's with which we share a concrete community and common horizon of values. Between the different forms of recognition and their respective obligations, together making up the moral point of view, however, there exists no 'harmonious relation', but rather a 'relation of constant tension' (1997, p. 32). In another connection

Honneth speaks of an 'unsolvable, but productive tension' in the moral realm, of solidarity or reciprocal sympathy (e.g. between team-mates or close colleagues) and care or one-sided aid (e.g. in the relation between parents and children) as both being 'necessary counterpoles' (2000c, p. 170) to the principle of justice or the obligation of equal treatment. There are different sources for moral orientation and each must be given its due; furthermore, no hierarchical order can be established between them. What social relation and thus which kind of obligation that in a concrete situation is to be preferred and ought to be given priority can only be decided through 'individual deliberation' (2000d, p. 190).[8]

Especially between the obligation to care emotionally and the obligation of universal equal treatment, there exists a constant latent tension. For example, the members of a family must recognize each other both as legal persons, whose moral integrity has to be respected, and as unique individuals, which as such must be treated with love and care. For every family, then, the task is posed to establish and maintain a right balance between the principle of justice and emotional bonds (cf. 2000e, p. 215). And there are real collisions of duties because our moral obligations don't have a common source but originate in or spring from different social relationships. A solution in principle to these latent conflicts is not to be found. However, social relationships which intrude on each and everyone's right to universal equal treatment must be rejected. For the rest, we have to decide by way of individual deliberation which obligation in a concrete case is to be granted priority. In a longer perspective the moral task, so it seems, must be to establish and maintain a *modus vivendi* in which all our moral obligations are given their due.

VI. A Comparison with Gehlen and Habermas

In order to provide a perspective on Honneth's morality of recognition, I will cast a glance back at the debate between Arnold Gehlen and Jürgen Habermas over ethics or moral theory, occasioned by the publication of the former's *Moral und Hypermoral* in 1969.

In his book, Gehlen advocates what he calls a *pluralistic ethic*. There can be no ethic as a unified whole, i.e. a coherent moral theory developed from a single source. Instead, Gehlen insists on our ethical conduct having different and mutually independent sources. To be more precise, he mentions four what he calls 'social regulations' (*Sozialregulationen*), i.e. a kind of more or less instinctive disposition or motivating force for ethical conduct. Thus ethical conduct for Gehlen has a biological foundation. The four social regulations that he mentions are (1) an ethos of reciprocity (e.g. if I do you a favour, you owe me a favour, etc.), (2) physiologically rooted ways of conduct (e.g. the

protective care that we tend to feel for everything that is small), (3) a family ethic which can be enlarged into humanitarianism (i.e. the love of all human beings), and (4) an institutional ethic (especially a state ethic). Now given this plurality of sources for ethical conduct, the basic ethical problem that each and everyone confronts and must find a solution to becomes to establish a *modus vivendi* in his or her life between these different social regulations, because each one must be given its due. For example, if for a time you have neglected your family or closest because of your work, you are obliged to make up for that by paying special attention to their needs, and if your best friend one day asks you for a favour, you must sometimes give that request priority over both the obligations you have in relation to your family and the duties of your work. This is a situation in which, I think, everyone recognizes him- or herself, and thus it can be said that everyone daily practises a kind of pluralistic ethic. Under such premises, character traits such as a sense of tact, readiness for compromise, a sense of proportion, the ability to acknowledge mistakes and respond to them become important. A state of peaceful co-existence between our different ethical impulses and dispositions and the different obligations anchored in them is what must be established and maintained. When the balance is upset, according to Gehlen, unreconcilable and unresolvable moral conflicts appear.

Habermas, in his critique of Gehlen from 1970, on the other hand, emphasizes the *unity of moral consciousness*. He sketches a development in the direction of a universalization and internalization of systems of values and norms: these are becoming more abstract in the sense of having an ever wider range of validity, and in the sense of an increased independence from external control. This process involves a development from an ethos of reciprocity, via a family ethic, via a state ethic, to a humanitarianism or an ethics of humanity. On the one hand, very abstract norms are developing that regulate our behaviour towards *all* human beings, on the other hand these norms are anchored in an intersubjective structure. 'The ethos of reciprocity, that so to say is inherent in the fundamental symmetries of possible situations of speech, is . . . the sole source of ethics, and in no way a biological source' (1987, pp. 117–18). By way of the development of moral consciousness, the ethos of reciprocity is finally realized in the form of a universalistic morality. The basic ethical problem for Habermas becomes how to establish and guarantee under sociocultural conditions mutual consideration and respect between human beings. With the degree of individuation man's vulnerability also increases, because he increasingly becomes dependent on fragile and easily disrupted processes of communication, of reaching understanding and agreement. For Habermas the undesirable alternative to this development is 'a return to the ethos of powerful and non-transparent institutions' (1987, p. 119).

Returning to Honneth's morality of recognition, his position in my opinion

amounts to what might be called a *pluralistic morality* rather than a theory of the unity of moral consciousness. It thus amounts to a kind of moral theory that, in this sense, seems to be closer to Gehlen's position than to Habermas's in the related controversy between the two. An important difference is of course that Honneth doesn't trace back the origin of the different moral motivations and obligations to man's biological constitution, to more or less instinctive impulses and dispositions, but rather to the different ways we relate to other human beings, i.e. the kind of social relationship involved. However, for Honneth as well as for Gehlen, everyone confronts the task of finding a way to establish and maintain a balance between the different obligations that at times collide with each other. In the case of such a collision we have to make a deliberate decision as to which obligation to grant priority in the given concrete situation. The *normal moral-problem situation* that we confront in our everyday life then isn't 'the coherent application of a moral principle, but the conflict-laden integration of different moral points of view' (2000d, p. 171).

VII. Democracy and Recognition

An important aim for Honneth from the very beginning of his writings has been to safeguard a notion of *work* that does not already at a conceptual level cover up the *moral experiences* related to the labour process, i.e. a notion that is sensitive to the experience of doing valuable work and being appreciated as positively contributing to a common good, as well as the experience of not being appreciated for doing so (e.g. in unpaid housework). In the fully developed three-dimensional theory of recognition one of the components is, as we have seen, the solidarity arising from the symmetrical social esteem between autonomous and individualized persons sharing a common horizon of values. The key notion here is that of a *post-traditional democratic ethical life*, where each and everyone is recognized not only as legally autonomous, but also as contributing in a positive way to the political community to which they all belong. The relations between the subjects are symmetrical in the sense that each one has the chance to and actually experiences himself as valuable from the perspective of the whole community. Obviously the daily occupational work that we perform and the experiences that we have in that connection today still play an important role for our self-esteem, although it is certainly not the whole of the matter.

Continuing this line of argumentation, and moving into the field of political philosophy, Honneth has tried to lay bare the *social preconditions* for a democratic formation of will. Going beyond a political liberalism that tends to restrict democratic participation to a periodically recurring voting process, but also taking issue with both the republican (Hannah Arendt) and the

proceduralistic (Jürgen Habermas) versions of radical democratic theory, Honneth tries to do justice to the insistence on reflexive procedures on the one hand and the demands for political community on the other, for democratic deliberation as well as community ends. The crucial question then becomes how we can expect to find motivation and an interest in each citizen to become politically active, to engage in public affairs. Honneth's answer, which draws mainly on John Dewey (but also on Émile Durkheim), reads: Only through a just organization of the division of labour which makes everyone acquainted with and used to solving common problems through cooperation. 'For citizens to have motives and interests to participate in public opinion and will formation, they have to have made democratic procedures as such a normative element of their daily habits' (1998, p. 779). Through being recognized as participating and having a part in a huge societal cooperative undertaking, each one can develop that self-esteem, which instead of arousing feelings of uselessness, harm, anger, and revolt, nourishes the feeling of having a common interest and goal. This amounts to a notion of democracy as not only a political ideal, but first and foremost a *social ideal*: 'democracy as a reflexive form of community cooperation' (1998, p. 765); i.e. a democratic formation of will is the answer to the question of how to solve common societal problems, and a vital public sphere lives off the experiences made already on the level of social cooperation based on a just organizing of the division of labour. The crucial questions to ask then become: What in the future will count as a cooperative contribution to the community to which we belong? What kind of division of labour can be imagined and realized which gives every adult member of society the feeling of participating in a joint project? Which common horizon of values can form the basis for and secure the feeling for each and everyone of being socially esteemed?

VIII. Motivational Histories

Thus far Honneth's theory of recognition has been reconstructed as a specific constellation with regard to the interconnections between philosophical anthropology, social theory, and political orientation. However, what holds a particular constellation together? Or, somewhat loosely formulated: What is the 'spirit' of a certain constellation and from where does it come? I would like to argue that such a 'spirit' to a certain extent has a pretheoretical origin and impetus.

Dieter Henrich (1996) has introduced the concept of 'motivational history' (*Motivationsgeschichte*) in an attempt to characterize the generation of German philosophers to which he himself belongs, i.e. a generation born in the 1920s, which grew up during the Nazi regime and the Second World War, and, for the most part, started their studies after 1945. A motivational history,

Henrich argues, is what gives a certain generation their unity of profile. It grows out of common experiences, giving rise to a common attitude to and outlook on the world, to related ambitions and life projects. It determines what is within reach for a particular generation and what is not; it connects individual life histories with the history of a nation. Those from the generation of the 1920s that turned to philosophy after the war, according to Henrich, did so out of the need to understand what had happened to them in their youth, and with the ambition to regenerate the credibility of German philosophy. And they did this out of a universalistic attitude and through the kind of synthetical thinking that has characterized the German philosophical tradition since Kant.

I would like to adapt Henrich's concept for my own purposes. A specific motivational history, then, is what ultimately holds together a certain constellation of anthropology, social theory, and politics. A particular constellation becomes understandable in the last instance through the motivational history that accounts for its specific 'spirit'. The theoretical strength of a particular constellation of course depends on laborious and detailed argumentative work over a long period of time, but its broad lines, its basic theoretical options, its choice of basic concepts, its flavour of optimism or pessimism, i.e. its 'spirit', depends on a much broader experience than pure theory. There is certainly no straight and compelling way leading from a motivational history to a particular constellation, but given a particular constellation I think it is highly worthwhile and illuminating to ask for the motivational history underlying it.

Henrich, in his related article, not only tries to elaborate the unity of profile of his own generation, but also raises some doubts about the prospects of the following generation, i.e. the post-war generation, producing important philosophy. In fact Henrich questions whether that generation really has had the deep and often painful life-experiences from which a specific motivational history can arise, and in particular he lets it be seen that he is quite annoyed over the popularity of the sports shoe with this generation, which for him becomes a symbol for being only in light touch with reality, which in its turn isn't very fertile ground for serious philosophy.

Honneth (2000f) has responded to Henrich's partly very polemical theses by pointing to some of the formative experiences of his own generation. He mentions the painful questioning of the parental generation and their life histories, the hopes and the disappointments related to the prospects for the realization of new-won forms of freedom, the experience from the school years of class differences, and that a community of values cannot be taken for granted, and the encounter with the culturally other in its many forms and the felt necessity to open up for this other.[9]

Not the least from the last two mentioned challenges, the step, so it seems, is not far to focusing on problems of mutual recognition, on experiences of

disrespect and struggles for recognition, and in general on conditions for the development and maintenance of a personal identity.

I won't speculate any further here, as in the end one arrives not only at generational experiences but also at very personal life-experiences. But I think that from Honneth's own hints one can catch a glimpse of a motivational history having as its theoretical counterpart a particular constellation including an anthropology of recognition, a social philosophy of different forms of recognition, a morality of recognition, a theory of democratic ethical life as a social ideal, and a notion of political democracy as an ambitious reflexive form of social cooperation.

NOTES

1 Cf. Honneth: '[T]he idea of making the struggle for recognition into the prescientific point of reference for critical social theory requires not only reflections in social theory and a diagnosis of the present era, but also a concept of the person that is capable of explaining how the claim upon the recognition of one's own identity is anchored within the particular subject' (1995c, p. xxiii).

2 With the exception of being proto-fascist, the critique in many ways resembled the way that Parsonian structural functionalism was looked upon from the perspective of the American New Left. In the case of Habermas, during the 1970s he was rather moving away from his initial deep roots in the tradition of German philosophical anthropology.

3 In fact, the concept of 'recognition' is not to be found in the index to the book.

4 This objection has a certain analogy to one that Honneth and Joas once gave voice to in relation to Habermas's reconstruction of historical materialism: in looking for evidence for a developmental logic, will the critical theorist not run danger of losing sight of the historical struggles for recognition in their 'experiential breadth and evenimential density' (1988, p. 165), i.e. proceed highly selectively?

5 In addition to my own reflections, I'm here drawing on discussions and criticisms found in Forst (1996, pp. 413 ff.), Fuchs (1999, pp. 317 ff.), and Raffnsøe-Møller (2000, pp. 174 ff.).

6 In a previous article, Honneth draws attention to Hans Loewald's theory of the social genesis of the basic psychical instances: the 'ego', the 'super-ego', and the 'id' (cf. 2000g, pp. 1101 ff.). In early interactive processes the basic drive energies become organized into different intrapsychical instances, constituting an inner room of communication, where the 'id' as the more weakly integrated and less organized instance remains somewhat of an archaic remnant.

7 For an expanded and revised version of this text, see Honneth (2000d).

8 The translation in (1997) here reads 'individual responsibility' (p. 33).

9 I'm here drawing also on remarks by Honneth at the seminar in Jyväskylä (29–30 November 2001).

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