Honneth's Project of Normative Reconstruction: An Analysis and Critique

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the theory behind Axel Honneth's attempt to identify an empirical reference point in social reality to justify a critical social theory that inherits the Frankfurt School's left-Hegelian tradition. I argue that Honneth is mistaken to express the degree of distance he interprets between Kantian and Hegelian moral theory, that Kantian transcendental philosophy can be dissociated from Kant's transcendental idealism, and when it is separated in this way, it can complement the recognition based social theory developed by Honneth. I examine the post-metaphysical pragmatic turn Honneth develops from the work of Habermas that enables Hegelian ethical theory to function as a critical social theory. Properly understood Kantian constructivism and transcendental critique are resources for this tradition. To defend this view, I present a novel account of Kantian constructivism.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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To my readers, I have endeavored to anticipate in advance the realization of meaning this text might give you, and the questions it prompts. Please forgive where I fail to connect with you. I only wish I could step out of the page to connect in dialogue.

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Introduction

In the course of developing his critical theory of society Axel Honneth has contrasted his approach with that of Kantianism that he describes as "decoupled from an analysis of society" (Honneth, 2014, p.1). Specifically, he critiques the project of transcendental philosophy, especially as it is pursued in its modern form (Honneth, 2021), as well as Kantian moral constructivism (Honneth, 2014, p.5), and Kantian proceduralism (Honneth, 2014, pp.55-56). This thesis argues, by contrast, that there ought to be an intellectual reconciliation between Kantian constructivism and Hegelian normative reconstruction if these two views are interpreted in a certain way, and that Kantianism need not be in 'denial of the social' (Honneth, 2014, pp.1-11; Honneth, 2021, p.582).

Underlying this argument is an interpretative understanding of the relationship between Kant's and Hegel's respective critical projects that shapes the plan of the thesis. The plan is as follows: I first examine Honneth's approach to continuing the legacy of Frankfurt School critical social theory in his attempt to "reconstruct the recognition order of modern capitalist societies" (Honneth, 2003, p.249) (§1). I identify the methodological commitments of his theory and key problems they imply (§2). The thesis then moves on to the main challenge that, in my view, Honneth faces when he naturalizes the Hegelian project: namely, 'how are we to think of objectivity and moral progress?' (§3). The following section draws on the recent work of Thomas Nagel to develop a theory of moral progress that is supportive of Honneth's project (§4). I then describe a particular interpretation of Kantian constructivism that I think both helps to understand Kant more accurately, but also enables reconciliation with Honneth's project (§5). I address how Kantianism can be clarified for an interpretation of Kantian critique that is separable from Kant's transcendental idealism (§6), which enables a reconciliation of Kantian critique with Hegelian social theory,

specifically when the 'constraints' that underly social interaction are considered in terms of reflective equilibrium, mutual recognition, and self-determination (§7) (*ibid*.). Lastly, I conclude that transcendental critique, thought of as a critically constructivist second-personal account of deontic morality, is necessary for any critical theory of self- or 'we-determination', and that Honneth's interpretation that all social integration depends on forms of mutual recognition requires providing a proleptic account of mutual recognition. (§8).

§1 Honneth's "Reactualization" of Critical Theory

Honneth's oeuvre is a development of a critical analysis of society in the left-Hegelian tradition of the Frankfurt School for a "reactualization of Critical Theory" (Honneth, 2003, p.237). In his own words, this means conceiving of social critique in terms of "an innerworldly instance of transcendence" (*ibid*. p.239), or "a dialectic of immanence and transcendence" (*ibid*. p.238). The force of the word "immanent" is that the standpoint required for critique is taken from within social practice.[1] Transcendence, by contrast, is the overcoming of the problematic within a given social order. But how is a critical view of a social order to be found within that same social order; how can immanent analysis of a society enable emancipatory transcendence from it without paradox, without implying a pulling oneself up by the bootstraps?

Honneth identifies this position in the legacy of Frankfurt School critical theory with the theoretical and self-critical evolution of revolutionary Marxism, where the task has

[1] cf. Stahl (2022)

continued to be that of identifying a revolutionary social subject or its functional equivalent. In Marxian theory the revolutionary subject is regarded as the proletariat, understood as an exploited class whose labor practices contain within them the normative structures that could establish a new social order. Specifically, Frankfurt School critical theory conceives of a praxis philosophy that enables emancipatory changes to the social order from analysis of the rationalizing potential in coordinated social practices. Dialectical progress for society is conceived of in terms of social practices that coordinate instrumental action through labor. It is assumed that norms for moral progress can be identified in the same social dialectic that is at work in producing the commodity economy, but can enable critique of the normative patterns of a commodity economy that are not guided by reasonable moral constraint.

Honneth's analysis seeks to identify this inner dialectical logic of critical social theory. He grounds a theory of society in the thesis that "social integration works through forms of mutual recognition" (Honneth, 2003, p.258). The same patterns of recognition at work when subjects develop their personal identity are assumed to require a "social guarantee" so subjects can perceive the normative quality and legitimacy of their society (*ibid*.). Norms of mutual recognition represent for Honneth a way of conceiving of a praxis-based philosophy that can be critical of institutionalized social practices. Justice is conceived of in terms of how institutionalized social practices 'guarantee' or protect the norms of recognition that are the core of both personal identity and subjects' sense of reason.

This means Honneth is continuing in a tradition beginning with Kant that takes practical reason as conceptually basic. Through Hegel the Kantian conception of the primacy of practical reason is developed so that it can view social life as being pervasively normative. This idea is key for understanding any neo-Hegelian views of practical reason, including

Honneth's. Practical reason is not simply reason that is oriented to the ends of action, as can be represented by rational choice theory, or cognitive-instrumental conceptions of reason, but is grounded in a conception of the social world as normatively constituted. This means that ethics and politics, for example, are not simply cognitive-instrumental practices that represent achievements of individuals attempting to socially organize in rational ways; they are social institutions that express the substance of who individuals are and how they co-exist. Whether this is accepted or not means judging whether, to what degree, and how society is constructed around normative concepts. It is not a simple question, but it is also not limited to work developed from left-Hegelianism. It is core to sociology and ethnographic studies, and implicated, for example, in the later work of Wittgenstein. It is also core to French post-structuralism, the work of Foucault in particular.

Methodologically, critical theory pursues the social 'detranscendentalization' of reason, where reason is not to be conceived in abstract and idealized theoretical terms but as socially embodied in local practices (Honneth, 1995, p.68). A social order that oppresses reason is assumed to incite discontent that implies rational demands for institutional realization of organizational principles that are already at work locally. Immanent analysis of society is assumed to be able to identify normatively emancipatory organizational principles in local practices despite the institutionalization of more globally recognizable norms. Honneth's project has been to develop a model for continuing this conception of critical theory today by overcoming the aporias identified in previous iterations. His solution is consistently presented as a reconstruction of Hegelian themes, and most explicitly as reconstruction of a conceptual model identified in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1991 [1821]). According to this model, Honneth interprets all social integration as dependent on successful forms of mutual recognition. This ambitious view of mutual recognition is central

to understanding Honneth's critical theory and will be explored and explained further in this thesis. But first I will describe how Honneth develops his position from Habermas's reading of Hegel (I); how he deepens the theory of Habermas (II); and how he incorporates the work of Foucault (III).

I

Honneth's output has been prolific, but several works stand out in the development of his position. His first well-known work published in English, *The Critique of Power – Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory* (1991), uses a Hegelian system of critical analysis to diagnose and overcome conventionally recognized aporias found in the early Frankfurt School work of Horkheimer and Adorno. He then interprets Habermas, and Foucault in such a way that their work can be seen as a historical-dialectical development of the early Frankfurt School project. Each thinker is interpreted against the requirement for a moral ground upon which we can develop a critical social theory. Honneth ends this early book with a view for the development of critical theory that largely incorporates the early work of Habermas, combined with critical insight from Foucault in the form of a genealogical metacritique. The view developed from critique of both Habermas's and Foucault's work is what defines Honneth's unique interpretation of Hegel for a critical theory of society.

Habermas's work stands out as the primary model for how Honneth plans to reconceive the left-Hegelian possibility for transcendence given an immanent analysis of society. Honneth develops the Habermasian analysis of communicative action, noting its emancipatory potential when placed within a rational reconstruction of Hegel's ethical theory. Practical reason, as viewed through Hegel, is considered in terms of the normative constitution of the social world. With Habermas the norms constitutive of the social world

are considered pragmatically as norms of communicative action. This means that the intersubjective availability of social norms upon which we can assume we are experiencing and forming judgments on the same independent reality are not just constitutive of social experience; they are regulative too in a way that supports critical participation. Habermas's view is that social norms are not only assumed to inform our practices, they also are presupposed in such a way to normatively constrain and guide our practices of action as well as how we account for such action. This means that action is socially grounded so that it is always pragmatically available for communicative mediation.

Habermas develops a communicative pragmatic reconstruction of the metaphysics associated with the tradition of German Idealism that is also developed by the Frankfurt School. Theory from Kant and Hegel is reinterpreted by rejecting associations with the metaphysical philosophy of self-consciousness, now being given reconsideration in terms of a pragmatic intersubjective model of communication. The work of the Frankfurt School, which already can be interpreted as having reconstructed German Idealist philosophy with a praxis philosophy that substitutes labor for self-consciousness, is also reconstructed as a "praxis philosophy renewed by phenomenology and anthropology" (Habermas, 1985, p.317). This leads Habermas to a theory of communicative action that conceives of a lifeworld in which human subjects are embedded, specifically, as agents who inter-subjectively coordinate action through mutual understanding. The immanent norms of communicative action are therefore patterns of social practice that in principle can always be understood in terms of communicative reason. Reason is solely understood by how it works in practice (pragmatically), for purposes of understanding, where first-, second-, and third-person points of view are made productive in ways that can be reconstructed communicatively.

Unlike a lifeworld conceived merely in terms of instrumental rationality, as the purposive-rational organization of means, communicative rationality (communicative reason) conceives the norms of everyday action to express principles of purposive-rational organization, normative organization, and aesthetic organization. So human action implies validity claims for epistemic truth, normative right, and aesthetic sincerity and authenticity (truthfulness) oriented by mutual understanding. The very hypothesis of validity claims being prelinguistically built into agential [inter]action allows for their reproduction at a reflective level, where discursive argument can then be permitted to mediate all action of would-be speakers in intersubjective relationships. The attraction for thinking of norms of agential [inter]action in this way is that all patterns of [inter]action can be considered critically, to address truth, rightness, and truthfulness for agents who simultaneously inhabit objective, social, and subjective 'worlds' (Habermas, 1986, p.x).

Honneth considers that out of all the conceived developments of left-Hegelian critical theory, only Habermas's view is able to reinterpret the emancipatory potential that was, in Marxist theory attributed to a revolutionary subject and practices of labor. In Habermas's theory this potential is now assigned to a linguistically mediated model of social action. Yet he finds Habermas to be ambivalent about whether potential for the transcendence of norms of social practice is found explicitly in social interaction or in normative presuppositions interpreted in the structure of language. There is a way of synthesizing these views (see §8), but Honneth wants to identify the grounds where normative expectations can be attributed, to identify precisely where transcending potential resides. He feels that Habermas leaves open whether the normative element comes through using language, or whether language just mediates the normative expectations of social interactions. He also discerns ambivalence where "Habermas uses the

concept of ‘recognition’ both for granting social status and for supporting language-based validity claims – without ever sufficiently distinguishing between the two” (Honneth, 2003, p.247).

Honneth’s proposal is that Hegel’s ethical theory can be interpreted via the post-metaphysical pragmatic turn of Habermas’s theory, where reason, conceived by Hegel as *Spirit*, is now considered as the reasoning of communicative interaction in the socio-anthropological interpretation of intersubjective practices. Given interpretations of Hegel, and the tradition from which Hegel’s concept of recognition emerges, Honneth favors the view that recognition identifies a “core of expectations” that all agents embody in social interaction (Honneth, 2003, p.247). This accommodates the view that the concept of recognition is to be understood with the idea of interactive summons. It means that recognition can be conceived in pre-linguistic form, in terms of physical gestures or expressive mimesis that ‘summon’ a response.

Notably in this view the concept of recognition does not refer to a psychologized understanding of subjects as having essential ‘recognition needs’. Recognition is considered as a conceptual medium that helps us think about how individuals rely on status that emerges from mutual approval. This means Honneth is able to differentiate mutual recognition from that which Habermas conceives as required for communicative practices. Mutual recognition can be attributed to interactions that are prior to the reflective recognition of communicatively mediated moral norms.

Honneth’s point is to be able to identify Hegelian principles of mutual recognition in practices understood through communicative action, given we assume all complex human interactions are, or can be, communicatively mediated. Fundamentally though, his proposal is that all social interactions can carry normative expectations that make communication

possible. But as ambitious as this sounds, what draws our attention to the normative expectations of particular social interactions is social suffering and discontent that are accompanied by claims that society is doing something unjust. Honneth wants to identify the "normative core" that "is a matter of the disappointment or violation of normative expectations of society considered justified by those concerned" (Honneth, 2003, p.129).

Rather than consider norms of communicative action through a rational reconstruction that uncovers validity claims for truth, right, truthfulness, Honneth looks for 'validity claims' that are expressive of expectations for mutual recognition. Ethical norms implicit in communicative action are embodied by pre-linguistic expectations of mutual recognition. Honneth's chief concern, unlike Habermas, is not in the breakdown of social interaction as it can be reconstructed in terms of speech action. Honneth is concerned with the breakdown of expectations of mutual recognition constitutive of social identity that must be presupposed if speech action is to be possible in the first place. Social problems are not merely addressed by endeavors to come to a shared understanding mediated by speech, they are also addressed in terms of the conventionally recognized capacities and rights for speech action where speakers operate in an inferred medium of social status and identity that requires grounding in mutual acceptance. Ultimately, Honneth's primary claim is that we can find the normative source for critical theory with the concept of mutual recognition; we can develop ideas of emancipatory potential with communicatively mediated 'struggle for recognition' where struggle becomes apparent through feelings of humiliation and disrespect.

II

What then leads Honneth to agree with Habermas that reason is more than merely instrumental, yet to deepen the conceptualization of Habermas's identification of formal validity claims implicit in communicative action? Habermas is key for Honneth insofar as he resurrects the Hegelian model of social dialectic and downplays the mature systematic philosophy of Hegel associated with Hegelian metaphysics. The idea of struggle for recognition evolves from how Habermas developed critical theory in reaction to the views of the early Frankfurt School, particularly the work of Adorno. What is important is the idea of a communicatively mediated lifeworld and its role in the constitution of subjectivity, which directly contrasts the view Adorno gives of Hegel in early Frankfurt School theory (Adorno, 1971; Honneth, 1995, pp.92-120). Adorno's social analysis concludes that reason, conceived purely as instrumental reason, leads to a totalizing and reifying objectification not just of nature but of human subjectivity (Adorno, 1971). Habermas's communicative-pragmatic approach to a Hegelian dialectic of reason allows him to loosely maintain Adorno's analysis of reification but to view it instead as a "historically oriented hermeneutic of the repressed" rather than a universal historical structure (Honneth, 1995, p.98).

Adorno had interpreted Hegelian absolute spirit as the history of human self-consciousness "conceived as the process of the unfolding and establishment of a totalitarian reason" (Honneth, 1995, p.97). Habermas, in contrast, draws from Hegel's early Jena period where a philosophy of intersubjectivity contrasts ideas of an isolated self-consciousness attributed by Adorno to Hegel's mature systematic philosophy. This means that Habermas can escape the idea of reason leading to a levelling or reification to such an extent where humans have become fully victimized under the very same forces of rationality used by them to dominate nature. Instead, Habermas conceives of reason more broadly and as

having an emancipatory potential, where violations of the reasonable can be remedied through communicative endeavors oriented to reach shared understanding.

A dialectic of enlightenment (or reason) can now be considered not merely as a materialist process of the socialization of an 'outer' nature, such as conceived by Adorno, but as an ethical socialization of a communicatively mediated 'inner' nature, or second-nature. Habermas thereby creates a model of critical theory that effectively replaces Adorno's use of the concepts of 'reason' and 'nature' with supplementary concepts understood in terms of 'violence' and 'communication' (Honneth, 1995, p.104). The emancipatory capacity of critical theory is reinvigorated with a communicative conception of reconciliation that addresses psychic suffering in terms of violence and its solution in terms of resolution through communicative action. The dialectic of enlightenment is reconceptualized as a dialectic of communicative rationality.

For Honneth the struggle for recognition is the inherently motivating practical concern of individuals to address their psychic suffering with recourse to the idea of reason suggested by being reasonable.[2] Reasonableness is conceived from basic norms of social practices that are recognized and justified by presupposed mutual approval, by agents with status that only emerges on the basis of such presupposed mutual approval. It is only because of fundamental norms of social interaction that individuals can recognize each other in terms of their social identity and status. When moral norms are violated the arbitrating normative source that both constitutes and regulates social interaction is conceived by Honneth with the mutual recognition that must be presupposed if there are to be other ethical social norms at all. All conventional ethical norms have pragmatic

[2] I differentiate reasonability from rationality similarly to Rawls, so that I can convey something being rational yet unreasonable (cf. Rawls, 2000, p.164), and I interpret Honneth as conceiving of reason in this wide sense.

foundations in basic norms of mutual recognition that we can infer as presupposed generalizable fundamentals. Honneth identifies these as norms that constitute basic self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, which through social analysis he identifies as produced in social experiences of love, respect, and solidarity. These are required foundations for the core institutions of modern democratic liberal societies.[3]

Honneth is thus able to conceive of a broad conception of violence provided by a sense of the violation of the fundamental ethical norms of reason understood as the implied mutuality that is expected in all reasonable [inter]actions. The task of critical social analysis is to normatively reconstruct the implied expectations in specific instances of expressed violation that results in feelings of humiliation and disrespect. This can be done without assuming that in every case the validity claims of truth, rightness, and truthfulness can be known such as to serve emancipation from normative violations.

This means that Honneth's references to humiliation and disrespect as indicative of violations must hold a specific meaning. That which is subject to disrespect are the fundamental norms of reason, and humiliation is taken to imply an individual's psychic awareness as an emotional awareness of violations of what is reasonable. This is important to understand, as it is very easy to conceive of humiliation and disrespect alternatively in terms of narcissistic injury. A narcissistic injury is the kind of injury of pride that is sometimes seen in two-year-olds going through the stage of development that does not yet recognize need for mutuality of power with others; they narcissistically act as if they should have all the power over social behaviors. Honneth's ideal of autonomy reflects the ideal that

[3] This view echoes the phenomenological conclusions of Knud Løgstrup who identifies ethical fundamentals in the concept of trust, and a view developed by Danielle Petherbridge who conceives of both Habermas's and Honneth's theories of recognition as reliant on mutual relations of trust. (cf. Løgstrup, 2020; Stern, 2019; Petherbridge, 2021).

power is to be distributed reasonably. The very question of the distribution of power is an added motivation for Honneth not to assume that validity claims can be associated with truth, rightness, and truthfulness, as these concepts themselves may be infected by imbalances of power in any given social context.[4]

III

Thus, implicit in Honneth's pre-linguistic development of Habermas's pragmatic theory of communicative reason is his interpretation of Foucault's analysis of power. Honneth finds that Foucault interpretatively traces social domination to an instrumental-strategic interaction between subjects but fails to give a "reflexive grounding" for his critical claims (Honneth, 1991, p.xvii). He feels that he can develop Foucault's insights about power that extend beyond a simple interpretative analytic model of social domination by providing normative grounding in the normative agreements implied by the theory of recognition.[5]

The development of Foucault's work incorporating genealogical method adds a final touch to Honneth's theory of normative reconstruction, but it also supports his deepening of Habermas's theory of communicative reason. Honneth's concern is that in certain circumstances of local normative violation counter-norms expressing prevailing notions of truth, rightness, and truthfulness may constitute social systems such that it will not be easy to create a space from which social reality can be criticized. What differentiates the post-structuralist approach to a critique of reason from Habermas's development of Frankfurt School critical theory is how it conceptually connects with the early Frankfurt School

[4] cf. Fricker (1999) for the argument that "{i}f the different "we"s within a form of life stand to one another in relations of advantage and disadvantage, power and powerlessness, then this inequality is likely to be reiterated in interpretive practice" (p. 207). For a similar argument cf. Saar, 2019, p. 147.
[5] 'Interpretative analytics' is the conceptual term Dreyfus and Rabinow give to Foucault's metatheory. (cf. Dreyfus, Rabinow, 1982).

rejection of traditional theory. Post-structuralists are concerned with a conception of reason that is not idealized and can be considered historically. This enables a rational critique of rationality which Foucault, in particular, attempts to address through genealogical historical analysis. It means, in contrast to what is implied in Habermas's approach, reason has a history. As Thomas McCarthy says, "{f}or Foucault, 'reason is self-created,' which means that humans develop forms or conceptions of rationality as part of a larger project of evolving an understanding of themselves given specific historical conditions" (McCarthy, 1994, p.146)

Honneth's bracketing of Habermasian validity claims of truth, rightness, and truthfulness, whilst considering the presupposed norms of institutionally expressed mutual recognition means that he is concerned with the norms that make current practices of rationality possible. A genealogical metacritique allows Honneth, like Foucault, to consider the historicity of reason and to address why normative violations can transcend capacities for formal expression in particular locally conventional ways.[6] It allows him to explore why conventional forms of expression might themselves contravene more fundamental norms of mutual recognition of the kind that must be presupposed if individuals are to have basic self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem.

It is important that the normative source Honneth has identified in terms of individuals' connection to the sense of what is reasonable through experience of psychic suffering is not disconnected from forms of expression available to them in language. Foucault's studies can be understood as the historical constitution of different fields of

[6] There is a large body of research into family psychopathology that to my knowledge Honneth has not researched, which indicates how 'symptoms' appear to express violations of basic self-confidence, respect, esteem, and trust that cannot be expressed in formal, accepted, conventional forms of rational speech or action (cf. Murray Bowen – thebowencenter.org).

experience – e.g. sexuality, delinquency, madness[7]. Honneth interprets that genealogical meta-critique can take up a form of quasi-transcendental analysis (cf. §6) that asks what the conditions of possibility are for certain historical practices, identifying various and changing historical *a priori* as the principles of those practices.[8] The analysis is not meant to suggest that we can discover ontological conditions of possibility for our present practices. It is merely meant as a way of finding perspective on the present through historical analysis, which in Foucault's case locates the ground and source of knowledge, meaning, and value as historically constituted through discursive games of truth, practices of power, and technologies of the self. The value of a genealogical metacritique for Honneth is to endeavor to hermeneutically challenge the meaning of our current moral concepts.

Bernard Williams describes genealogy as explanatory "because it represents as functional a concept, reason, motivation, or other aspect of human thought and behavior, where that item was not previously seen as functional" (Williams, 2002, p.33). Adrian Moore adds, "The point of a genealogical story is typically to give us a better understanding of some aspect of our lives whose existence we already acknowledge" (Moore, 2005, p.143). When we use moral concepts or conceive of moral principles there is a genealogical sense, in Foucault's sense, that this is the result of discursive games of truth, practices of power, and technologies of the self, even though we will not be able to describe these constitutive processes until we begin analysis with some historical distance. Distance provides a way of describing a functional development towards our present of discursive games of truth,

[7] cf. Foucault (1965 [1961])); (1963); (1975); (1976); (1984a); (1984b); (2018).

[8] cf. 'Foucault's Theory of Society: A Systems-Theoretic Dissolution of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*' (Honneth, 1991), and 'Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of "Critique" in the Frankfurt School' (Honneth, 2009b).

practices of power, and technologies of the self, as "{i}t is only from the vantage point of the present ontological order that the semantic relationships of another epoch can be described" (Oksala, 2010, p.76).

In the case of Foucault's analysis, what is striking about historical social practices is how alien they are to current social practices in overt ways yet make historical sense when given a deeper interpretative analytic study. Ongoing analysis of social spheres that have some historical distance from our own ought then to ground our own practices in a genealogical conception of history. In Honneth's view this alone will serve to create a space for subversive motivation. When current social practices are felt to be violating fundamental ethical norms of reason, yet the violation escapes accounting within the conventions of an accepted social recognition order, genealogical historical analysis can help provide a sense of what could be happening. Critique of our own times is given by considering perversions of reason socially accepted throughout history. McCarthy explains the use of genealogy for this sort of social critique, where "the purpose of genealogy is to make us aware of the dangers of the subliminal process of socialization that we have learned, but may want to 'unlearn' as a result of genealogical analysis" (McCarthy, 1994, p.164). Where Habermasian theory implies grounding critique on the rational achievement of our pragmatic and communicative problem-solving, the Foucauldian counterbalance enables us to become aware of systemic or structural problems that are hidden by our conventions. Characterization of systemic problems linked to how we problem-solve may mean we want to reconfigure how we approach problem-solving.[9]

[9] For example, the recent reflexive critique of the way racism has been problematized in the United States, where "rational solutions" targeted at rectifying racist practices have themselves perpetuated racialization problems, implicates 'problems of racism we didn't know we had'. For examples of 'rational solutions' to problems hiding deeper systemic problems. cf. Darwall (2024)

With this high-level view of Honneth's 'reactualization' of Frankfurt School critical theory in place, I want to now investigate some of the claims and tensions Honneth creates with moral theory outside the Frankfurt School, as well as ways in which moral theory associated with a larger critical tradition can support his work. What should be clear is that Honneth has reconstructed Frankfurt School critical theory with Habermas's theory of action mediated by communicative reason, providing a Hegelian understanding of ethical norms as expressive of expectations for mutual recognition. And he has incorporated historicist insights from French poststructuralism to consider how our current forms of reasoning may be self-deceptive. As Honneth says, "…in such a model the process of social integration is conceived as a process that assumes the form of a struggle among social actors for the recognition of their identity until all groups and individuals possess the equal chance to participate in the organization of their common life" (Honneth, 1991, p.xvii). He means this in a very wide sense, where social participation is not simply a matter of capacity to vote, but where we can conceive of social-realization in terms of creative self-realization, where both aim at increased autonomy.

§2 Methodological Presuppositions of Normative Reconstruction

The central issue in critical theory is what has been described above as the requirement to identify a revolutionary subject or its functional equivalent so that critique can bring theory and practice together to overcome of established forms of domination. The innovations of the Frankfurt School have been to conceive of this emancipatory potential in ways that do not rely on a proletariat. The iterations away from the paradigm of labor and production added a further innovation given that it could be discerned how forms of rational practice,

with rationality interpreted in merely instrumental terms, could be oppressive of a wider conception of rationality or reason. The Frankfurt School fear of instrumental, or positivistically conceived, rationality remains today, as action models that conceive of rationality merely in instrumental terms, make humans feature as objects for strategic rational manipulation just as much as traditional objects manipulated in labor for economic production.

Honneth's unique proposal for a critical theory of society is made clear in *The Critique of Power* (1991). After publishing several works deepening his approach to critical theory,[10] Honneth presents a precise defense of his approach in *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (2003), co-authored with Nancy Fraser. A debate with Fraser leads to an essay entitled 'The Point of Recognition: A Rejoinder to a Rejoinder' in which Honneth presents a rapid overview of the tradition from which his view emerges. He presents how critical theory can support transcendence of a given social order by identifying resources already at work in that social order. Key for Honneth are feelings of humiliation and disrespect, which he believes are tied to misrecognition such that a theory of struggle for mutual recognition can provide insight that will support normative change in forms of social organization.

Several years later again, Honneth presents a theory of justice in *Freedom's Right* (2014 [2011]), an explicit attempt at reconstruction of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1991 [1821]). This book presents, in mature form, the model that Honneth has been developing since his early work and introduces at a high level four principles that express Frankfurt School critical theory reconceived in terms of a Hegelian ethical framework. Together, the

[10] cf. Honneth 1992; 1995; 1997.

overview given at the end of *Redistribution or Recognition* and four methodological premises given at the very beginning of *Freedom's Right* present a picture of Honneth's model for critical theory that makes clear his commitments, which now must be explored. His reply to Fraser indicates how his model must present clarifications to avoid being given a pejorative reading but the four premises in *Freedom's Right* indicate the core of Honneth's model. Together the high-level view these works offer of Honneth's position indicates how we can examine defending his views and which of his claims require further critical evaluation.

The criticism from Fraser of Honneth's theory can be summarized in the claim that although recognition must play an important role in the critical theory of society, particularly when faced with social struggles over status and economic inequality, it cannot be the only focus of critical concern. Fraser offers what she describes as a perspectival-dualist framework that considers recognition alongside distribution, which she considers in terms of the theories of distributive justice associated with Ronald Dworkin and John Rawls. She considers recognition as key to addressing status subordination just as she considers distributive justice as key to economic subordination, and she claims there is an unbridgeable chasm between these two types of conflict.

Honneth replies suggesting that Fraser's dualist analysis conceives of recognition struggles too superficially as identity struggles, and that likewise her idea of distribution struggles superficializes a deeper understanding of social struggle. His criticism is that Fraser "projects principles of justice based on distribution theory onto social reality, as if this type of moral consideration would self-evidently play a motivating role" (Honneth, 2003, p.151). His argument is that redistribution measures based on uncritical theoretical models of distribution struggle simply leads to bargaining solutions that do not fully consider social

conflicts that can be understood with a deeper conception of the struggle for recognition. Honneth's concern that in many cases principles of justice based on distribution theory are merely projected onto social reality suggests some theorists are doing what Rawls' political liberalism is at pains to avoid, where only through analysis of "the basic structure of society" can we find what "allows the anticipation of points of departure for normative improvements" (Honneth, 2003, p.254; Rawls, 1996, ch.2). Honneth's commitment to moral monism means that distribution conflicts must be tied to normative expectations and 'struggle for recognition'. He follows Rawls in seeking a weak idea of the good to provide a conception of justice its aim but, unlike Rawls, seeks it in the intersubjective character of social relations considered in terms of a theory of mutual recognition (Honneth, 2003, p.259).

Honneth suggests that Fraser fails to grasp his concept of struggle for recognition because she fails to identify the real field upon which they can debate. His proposal is that he clarify the tradition from which his view emerges, and why he sees it as a realistic option for an effective critical theory of society. Aside from the significant problem of how best to conceive of the current social order for the development of a theory of justice, Honneth's specific criticism of Fraser's analysis is twofold: she fails to understand what is meant by transcendence given the left-Hegelian concept of a dialectic of immanence and transcendence; and she takes what Honneth considers as a "purely deontological approach" to conceive of emancipatory justice, something he finds difficult to reconcile whilst we can account for "historical processes of normative progress" (Honneth, 2003, p.238). Honneth interprets Fraser as attempting to derive a concept of 'participatory parity' deontologically from the concept of a person. This contrasts with his own idea that modern democratic societies have historically progressed to a form of recognitional order that commits to an

equality principle (Honneth, 2003, p.260). In Honneth's view, Fraser omits grounding her deontological approach in an analysis of society.

Honneth identifies the second problem as a question of the normative grounds for a critical theory of society. Honneth's solution, of course, (cf.§1) is developed from the left-Hegelian tradition to that finds normative grounds from within the ongoing historically conceived practices that make up social reality.[11] Honneth's synthesis of a post-metaphysical, pragmatist, reconstruction of Hegel's ethical theory using Habermas's theory of communicative action together with Foucault's use of genealogy for purposes of subversive social critique lead to his own neo-Hegelian view of critical theory. The model that expresses this synthesis is then expressed by four premises developed in *Freedom's Right* as principles of his methodology. I describe them as principles of:

1. Fundamental Ethical Norms
2. Immanent Analysis
3. Normative Reconstruction
4. Critical Theory

The principle of fundamental ethical norms assumes that the social practices we experience in a society are fundamentally determined by shared universal values and ideals. At various levels of depth all our social practices embody conceptions of shared goods and these shared goods find conceptual expression as ethical norms. Honneth explains, "{s}uch ethical norms not only determine 'from above', in the form of 'ultimate values' (Parsons),

[11] Notably, to this extent Honneth's approach to develop a conception of justice is in common with Rawls'.

which social measures or developments are conceivable, but they also determine 'from below', in the form of more or less institutionalized objectives, the guidelines that each individual's life path should follow" (Honneth, 2014, p.3). Unlike the 'purely deontological' approach attributed to Fraser, in Parsons, Honneth finds a way to develop criteria of moral progress from analysis of social integration which he conceives as arising through mutual recognition (Honneth, 2003, p.260).

Honneth appeals to the action-theoretical model of society developed by Parsons as he considers it to stand in the same tradition of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Weber. Importantly, on Parsons' view all social subsystems are ethically imbued, meaning that there are no social subsystems that perform according to steering mechanisms that cannot be ethically grounded. This is important for Honneth as he is developing his theory in contrast to the later work of Habermas, where some social subsystems are considered as uncoupled from an ethical grounding, now being steered purely by money or mechanisms of power, dissociated from communicative action. Conceiving of all social subsystems as ethically grounded means that they all hold potential to be steered by communicative action and the fundamental norms of mutual recognition. Honneth considers it a weakness of Habermas's later theory that he conceives of steering practices that are categorically uncoupled from the intersubjective sphere of communicative action.

The principle of immanent analysis makes the claim that moral theory, such as a theory of justice, should look at the conditions of social reproduction in any given society as the normative source for considerations of the values or ideals that can be expressed as normative claims. Honneth wants to emphasize this premise to distinguish his Hegelian view from a view he strongly associates with Kantianism. Honneth understands the Hegelian view to hold that values are embedded in ethical life, so that moral concepts can only be derived

from the internally understood meaning of previously established social practices. This is distinguished from a conception of moral concepts that formally transcends social practices as if from a "neutral perspective", or that draws on an "independent standard" found within moral concepts (Honneth, 2014, p.5).

Honneth describes the view that is dissociated from ethical life as 'Kantian'. He considers Kantian constructivism to be paradigmatic, where although moral principles are an expression of a value orientation, they are not considered as features of an ethical and social reality. Honneth considers Rawls' theory of justice and Habermas' theory of law to be constructivist in this way. But these are all contestable claims. He views their theories as needing additional social justification after "presenting a free-standing, constructive justification of norms of justice prior to immanent analysis" (*ibid*.). In his opinion, such constructivism relies on an assumption of "congruence between practical reason and existing social relations" which requires justification with the normative ideals of modern societies, even though this is what we find developed in Rawls' theory with the idea of wide reflective equilibrium (*ibid*.). The advantage of Honneth's approach to immanent analysis is held to be that a separate justification of congruence is not required. And despite their differences, Honneth also claims both approaches rely on "an element of historical-teleological thinking" (*ibid*.). This too is contestable, as historical teleology implies that society is to be understood in some sense of progression towards a historical end (telos).

Finally, there is a deeper methodological issue faced by both theoretical approaches. Honneth notes this by uncoupling the conception of social analysis from a critical method. If social analysis is simply the empirical analysis of social science, then there is no reason to assume that we are not presupposing a social reality from the point of view of a third personal perspective. The challenge that faced Hegel and that now faces Honneth is to build

a level of reflexive critique into the methodology of social analysis. Honneth describes the Hegelian approach (and thus his) as normative reconstruction. This means reconstructing specifically only those social practices, routines and institutions that are considered indispensable for social reproduction. Then, given that the goals of social reproduction are only understandable in terms of accepted values, the methodology of analysis needs to categorize and model an extended range of social practices in terms of impact on the stabilization of these accepted values.

The task is to conceive of social analysis so that it produces results that preserve the range of legitimately socially accepted values and ideals of the society under analysis. On the one hand, Honneth is interested in social analysis for highlighting the dominant social values that have been secured for the realization of the liberal values of modernity. But he is also interested in social analysis following a method that is not simply a reductive exercise that searches for broad themes and principles. Social analysis needs to be broad enough to present a wide understanding of society yet reflexive enough so that we see ourselves in it, that it is specifically 'our' society.

This leads to the third premise, the principle of normative reconstruction: this is a requirement of the methodological procedure of normative reconstruction that it not simply 'apply' normative principles to an analysis of social reality. Honneth conceives of the methodological task of a critical social analysis to focus on the structural conditions of social practices in a way that describes what Hegel termed 'ethical life' (*Sittlichkeit*). It must be a social analysis that has enough depth to consider increasingly local systems of action, with enough breadth to capture how such systems of action are overlapping and reinforcing as they cohesively make up the structure of a society's ethical life. It must systematically bring certain structural features of social practices as systems of action into the foreground, while

bracketing other social practices, repeating a shifting of emphasis to develop understanding of the breadth and depth of the ethical structure in society.

But following Hegel, whilst wanting to consider diverse ethical values, Honneth is only interested in practices that contribute to the realization of universal values and ideals of modern societies. This means rejecting certain values and ideals as particularistic in a pejorative sense, where they can be identified as hindering, or not contributing to the realization of values and ideals associated with modernity. The immediate worry with this view echoes the concerns made of Hegel's apparent conservativism. Analysis of 'ethical life' could be interpreted as merely affirming the existing order. Importantly, Honneth's task is critical. He is seeking through normative reconstruction the kind of depth into locality, and breadth across social spheres to discern the tensions that can be found between values and ideals. The goal is to critically transform social practices under a guiding ideal of freedom as autonomy, where practices are also evaluated in terms of paths of development towards autonomy that have not yet been fully explored.

Lastly, the fourth and final premise is his principle of critical theory. It stipulates that social analysis, conceived as normative reconstruction, must always seek to establish room for criticizing social reality. The purpose of specifically critical social analysis is to shift emphasis of local in contrast with more globally conceived values, and to contrast values across social spheres, to consider how society might engender a gradual experimental progression towards increased autonomy for its members. The purpose, Honneth emphasizes, is that "we do not merely confront given institutional practices with external criteria; rather, the same standards according to which these institutions and practices are

picked out of the chaos of social reality are used to criticize insufficient, still imperfect embodiments of universally accepted values" (*ibid*. p.9).[12]

The clearest way to see how conceptual problems emerge for Honneth comes from the way he adheres to an incorporation of Hegelian theory that involves either dubious Hegelian concepts or dubious interpretations of Hegelian claims. The two most obvious points of contention given the high-level overview we have made of Honneth's method are found within his principle of immanent analysis. The first is apparent incorporation of Hegel's idea that history is teleological. Honneth's remarks that an immanent procedure of critique requires thinking about history in a teleological way need to be more closely analyzed. My concern is that a teleological view of history implies an uncritical dogmatism about progression of human culture. Yet we must maintain a concept of historical progress despite rejection of teleology, as the concept of moral progress is required to conceive of critical theory resulting in emancipatory praxis. This is what will be explored in §§3 & 4.

The second conspicuous contention is that immanent analysis is to be strictly distinguished from "conventional 'Kantian' theories" associated with Kantian constructivism (Honneth, 2014, p.5). Not only does this claim suggest that Rawls' theory of justice and Habermas's theory of law 'construct' normative principles from procedures that are dissociated from existing institutional social structures, it puts in question the kind of Kantian moral theory we see developed by thinkers such as Onora O'Neill, John Skorupski, T. M. Scanlon, and many others (*ibid*.). Honneth's remarks in various publications, not only against Kantianism but against liberal theories in contrast to communitarian[13], indicate that

[12] Honneth's principle of critical theory resembles Williams' "*critical theory principle*, that the acceptance of a justification does not count if the acceptance itself is produced by the coercive power which is supposedly being justified…" (Williams, 2005, p.6). Honneth's sense of 'external criteria' is meant to capture the sense of heteronomous 'coercive power'.

[13] cf. 'The Limits of Liberalism: On the Political-Ethical discussion concerning Communitarianism' (1991b)

he takes his interpretation of Hegel in a direction that sees a strict distinction to be made between Kantian formal and transcendentally motivated theories with those theories that take cues from philosophical social analysis. Whether there ought to be as strict a distinction between Kantian and Hegelian theoretical procedures will be explored in §§5 & 6.

Of other problems that can be raised as concerns in Honneth's theory, many of them connect with the problems of historical teleology and the conception of immanence[14], as what is really being questioned is the normative source of the values that can be expressed as normative claims. As we have seen, Honneth rests the weight of all normative claims on the conception that [inter]action presupposes fundamental normative expectations of mutual recognition that imply capacities for moral progress.

§3 Naturalization of Hegelian Spirit

The critical evaluation of social practices requires a clear idea of what distinguishes correct moral judgement from incorrect. Moral objectivity ensures that the justification of correct judgment on practical matters is more than an issue of social convention. In this thesis I will develop my argument on the assumption that there is moral objectivity and I interpret Honneth as endorsing this claim too (Honneth, 2002a; 2002b). By assuming the truth of realism for the domain, I will argue that moral progress is objective and can be conceived so that, individually or collectively, it is possible that we can get better at making correct moral judgments. The argument requires a defense that shows it is not merely

[14] cf. Pippin (2008): Pippin raises a number of concerns about Honneth's adoption of Hegel's theory of recognition, but it is beyond the scope of this essay to compare their respective interpretations of Hegel.

dogmatism, positivism, or conceived based on idealistic and outdated metaphysics. I will interpret Honneth's views such that he, too, rationally justifies a novel understanding of moral realism in a way that shows that such a view supports the idea of moral progress.

However, I will also argue that a specific issue arises in the interpretation of Honneth's views when he attempts to link the idea of moral progress to a teleological view of history. I argue that this is an unnecessary assumption that does nothing to support Honneth's critical project. This tension in Honneth's commitments emerges indirectly through his reconstruction of Hegel's critical system which gives him some reason to link moral progress with teleologically conceived history. This problem also emerges in his reconstruction of Kant's analysis of historical progress. I argue that he draws the wrong inferences from Kant's work, though Honneth's intuitions about moral progress are correct. There is a better strategy for making the case for moral progress that would serve the aims of Honneth's larger project, in the recent work of Thomas Nagel (2023) (§4). This is a view of moral progress that does not rely on moral teleology but on critical moral evaluation committed to moral realism. I will now set out the difference between these two approaches.

Honneth (2014) introduces the issue of historical-teleological thinking when he describes how a theory of justice can employ a normative point of reference through immanent analysis of society. Given we are only able to critically assess society from within, even a broad principle of justice such as 'render everyone their due' must be both derived and understood in terms of previously established social practices. Honneth wants to use social analysis to prove that some "prevailing values are normatively superior to historically antecedent social ideals" (Honneth, 2014, p.5). But as it is not immediately clear to what extent we can claim moral progress over the course of history, he needs to reconcile two

assumptions. The first is that the idea of progress depends, in my view, on a prior commitment to moral realism. The second is that Honneth must recognize that we face certain historical-analytical limitations. There is a risk that progress does not occur in reality; it might merely be projected on history in order to make sense of history.

Honneth admits that immanent social analysis "ultimately entails an element of historical-teleological thinking" (Honneth, 2014, p.5). He claims such thinking is inevitable, but it is not clear what he means either by an 'element' of historical-teleological thinking, or 'inevitable'. Elsewhere, he remarks that "...the critical model of the Frankfurt School presupposes, if not precisely a philosophy of history, then a concept of the directed development of human rationality" (Honneth, 2009, p.51). These claims are not saying the same thing. We can have a philosophy of history without a concept of the directed development of human rationality; we might consider the events of history as radically contingent. More importantly, we can have a concept of the directed development of human rationality (progress) without thinking about progress through a historical-teleological framework. For instance, we might judge previous social practices in terms of current social practices and determine that we have progressed or advanced in key areas that are currently important to us. We need not infer from this that we are on a path of progress towards an ultimate end (telos). We need not commit the chain fallacy, concluding that 'there is an end to all chains' from the determination that 'all chains have an end' (Thomas, 2006, p.6). We may find that across history there are many instances of ends reached through rational progression without concluding that history as such must be progressing towards an end.

The question for Honneth is whether his approach must be committed to an implicit theory of historical-teleological thinking, or whether it could adopt a different

conceptualization of moral progress. This is important to address because Honneth connects the critical potential of his social theory to the idea of establishing normative point of reference through immanent social analysis. Social analysis is the medium through which he believes he can establish critical ground for judging social practices using a concept of temporal progress. Honneth characterizes this analysis as normative reconstruction, a rational reconstruction of the norms that constitute social practices to serve reflexive social critique. If social progress is understood with a historical-teleological model that views society as a unit essentially motivated towards an end (telos), then Honneth would be able to establish critical grounds in terms of understanding society's teleology. But what reasons are there to either view society as a whole in this way, or social practices as machinations towards a teleological end? In contrast, if social progress is merely understood critically, where the progress of current practices is determined against the weaknesses of previous practices with appeal to the values of a current framework of judgment, the 'current framework of judgment' is the critical ground or point of reference. On my view, the critical model appears more intuitive as it does not rely on teleological ideals and need not conceive of social practices as unified in an identity of a social 'whole'.

Honneth's teleological view is most clearly articulated in his essay 'The Irreducibility of Progress: Kant's Account of the Relationship Between Morality and History' (Honneth, 2009). Honneth appeals to the philosophical theory of Hegel to reconstruct concepts for his own critical theory of society. In the case of teleology, he draws upon Kant, despite identifying historical-teleological thinking in the theories of both Kant and Hegel. Honneth can avoid reconstructing Hegel's difficult work in the *Logic* (2015) if a critical theory of society can make do with a pragmatically interpreted implied metaphysics from *Philosophy of Right* (1991). He is also wary of the association between Hegel's critical project with the

objective teleology of *Spirit*. Kant's philosophy of history also offers a way of understanding historical-teleological thinking but is not as strongly committed to a teleological interpretation of nature as in Aristotelean teleological biology. It is Honneth's interpretation of Kant that leads him to conceive of a "concept of the directed development of human rationality" (Honneth, 2009, p.51). By drawing on Kant's work, Honneth believes he can situate practical reason historically without assuming the conclusion, drawn by Hegel, that there is an objective teleology immanent in any historical process. The question is, does this commit Honneth to the concept of teleology at all? Can we not conceive of a directed development of human rationality without the idealizations of societal telos? My goal in this section is to show that Honneth's aims can be defended from a set of more minimal assumptions. It is true that the idea of progress requires a commitment to realism. But it does not require a commitment to any immanent teleology of reason.

Honneth claims that Kant's idea of the teleology of history is restrained from reaching the point of Hegel's ontological teleological claims because of commitment to a hermeneutic thought "that the chaotic multiplicity of history must appear as a directed process of progress only to those individuals who must historically situate themselves in their present context in the interests of political and moral improvement" (Honneth, 2009, p.11). This suggests that 'directed development of human rationality' means a teleology that is not ontological, in the sense of Aristotle's metaphysical biology, but is hermeneutically 'constructed' by those who give themselves a moral and political self-understanding. This seems to me a contentious assumption. Honneth adds:

> All those who actively side with the moral achievements of the Enlightenment are thus forced to see the history preceding them as a conflict-ridden learning process,

> which, as heirs of this process, they have to continue in their own time. (Honneth, 2009, p.18).

This passage suggests that we must understand ourselves as moral agents that are, necessarily, part of a socio-historical and moral learning process. Yet, why must such a 'learning process' imply an historical telos, even within a hermeneutic framing?

The problem, it seems to me, could be expressed as a dilemma: is social practice right (or just) because it contributes to the final ends (telos) of human society? Or does social practice contribute to the final end of human society because it is done for the right reasons? Honneth seems to commit himself to the latter position. The right reasons, in Honneth's analysis, are understood as achievements in a moral learning process that has developed through at least the modern history of human society. Is he proposing teleology in at least the minimal sense of interpreting modern history as teleological up to this point in time? This is also contentious. Must we understand a progressive moral learning process as a thread throughout human history leading up to this point? From whose perspective can such a judgment like this be made?

A further problem emerges where power is implicated in the authority required to form the critical grounds for conceptualizing conflict and disagreement. To what extent is it true that history is written by the winners? Bernard Williams cautioned against the writing of "Whiggish" history where the triumph of a certain Enlightenment worldview is interpreted as its winning arguments in history in a way that drove its adoption (Williams, 2006, pp.180-199; 2005; McCarthy, 1994, p.146)[15]. The concern is that history is not so

[15] Williams reacts specifically to the Whiggism in the liberal tradition that can be associated with Kant. McCarthy notes, "Kant's conception of the history of reason in the first Critique is Whiggish, that is, the history would show Kant's own philosophy as the truth of all that came before, and as the only valid conception of reason" (McCarthy, 1994, p.146). Moral cognitivism supported by contextualism offers an alternative to the Whiggish view of history to explain moral error: see Thomas, 2006, pp.254-257; Timmons, 1999, pp. 76-93.

much a “conflict-ridden learning process” but a conflict-ridden war of assertion and domination, where those who achieve dominance get to write out the teleology of history that leads progressively to the establishment of their own power and authority. The worry, when the ‘authority of reason’ is alluded to, is that it is merely the ‘reasoning’ of the victors. This was described by Kant as the “terroristic conception of human history” (Kant, 1970, p.179). The concern is not overlooked by Honneth who makes use of its problematization for justifying his interpretation of some of Kant’s theoretical ideas about the teleology of history. But my concern is that Honneth overlooks his potential role as a moralizing historical ‘victor’ openly committing to attempt to reconstruct an image of society that convinces us to see ourselves ideally framed in it.

Honneth analytically distinguishes four distinct themes within Kant’s idea of historical progress. Two of them are described by Honneth as system-conforming, the other two as system-busting, where the latter term denotes “unorthodox… versions of historical progress” (Honneth, 2009, p.3). The motivation for identifying distinct approaches by Kant to conceive of history teleologically is to consider if there is a way to distance Kant’s views on history from his transcendental philosophy. Honneth identifies four frameworks:

1. A Theoretical/Cognitive Interest Explanatory Framework: Motivated by the theoretical interest of our reason in giving unity to the law-governed world of appearances and continuous with the principles that express our practical self-determination, reflective judgment requires the regulative principle of purposiveness. The hypothesis of progress emerges from human nature interpreted heuristically, critically, and reflectively constructed according to the regulative principle of historical telos.

2. A Practical Interest Explanatory Framework: Motivated by the practical interest of reason, the counterfactual of "a purpose-directed effectiveness of nature in human history" is heuristically constructed. Kant's argument is that history conceived as the development of practical reason is necessary as a condition of possibility for realization of the moral law.

3. A Hermeneutic Explicative Framework: Motivated by interests in countering the "terroristic" conception of history, Kant develops the argument to demonstrate that anyone who has the self-understanding of contributing something to society/culture necessarily must commit themselves to the concept of history considered in terms of possible progress. Implied from the normative standards of present circumstances in terms of which a subject presents themselves as morally contributing, is the concept of an inferior past, and a potentially superior future.

4. A Reflexively Situating Framework: Motivated by engagement with the world, a subject confirms their situatedness in the world. When that engagement is one of practical reason (implying moral motivation) a subject implicitly commits themselves to understanding the course of human history as a practical-moral process of progress.

Honneth wants to find a systematic meaning to Kantian philosophy of history in the last two frameworks, which he describes as system-busting, or unorthodox. The four approaches indicate a concept of teleology as a necessary concept of reflective judgment. Honneth

accepts this for the first two frameworks. The second two frameworks are based on the increased situating of reason in the world – initially the situating of theoretical/cognitive interest with hermeneutic self-understanding of engagement in the world, and next the situating of practical interest with practical engagement in the world. This suggests the last two frameworks can be bracketed to create distance from the Kantian idea of implicit transcendental regulative principles of reason. But the detranscendentalization that Honneth is looking for in the latter frameworks, in favor of situated and pragmatically understood interests of reason, is a needless attempt to establish distance from Kant's transcendental philosophy.

Kant's proposal is that a regulative ideal is needed to guide our inquiry into social or historical processes so that we can make them intelligible. It is an approach of critical modelling, where a regulative idea (or set of regulative ideas), heuristic, or model serves to make an observable content intelligible. The observed content will then inform the aptness of the critical model just as the model makes sense of the content. (This involves what Kant takes to be a virtuous circularity.) There is interpretative interdependence within any meaningful structure, where the parts and the whole are understood in terms of each other. But in the case of the historical agency of human self-understanding we are 'situated' within history (in a historical world).

Teleology is introduced by Kant as a regulative idea. He believes that the only way to conceive of meaningful regularities in history is within a teleological schema. But once more, this seems to me a controversial claim. Must we make sense of history this way? Honneth's terminology gives away his motivations in rejecting the first two of Kant's models. He interprets them (rightly) as heuristically constructed models. Given his other work, (cf. Honneth, 2014) where he laments on the formal abstractions of Kantian constructivism in

favor of situated Hegelian social analysis, we can see what is in play. Kantian constructivism, tied to Kant's transcendental philosophy, concerns Honneth as something that is decoupled from social analysis or an empirical/pragmatic anthropology. If he were shown that this is a mistaken interpretation of Kant, much more of Kant's transcendental philosophy becomes available for reconstruction in critical social theory, even if the doctrine of transcendental idealism is rejected. That being said, Kantian teleology is, in my view, an indefensible view.

What is overlooked in Honneth's preferred Kantian frameworks, which I have called the 'hermeneutic explicative framework' and the 'reflexively situating framework', is that they describe rational interests that need not be reduced to a regulative idea of teleology. We can be motivated to counter the 'terroristic' conception of history and to seek moral progress without requiring self-understanding as part of a historical-teleological moral learning process. We can also be motivated by current events in the world to engage with the world for practical reasons, without implicitly committing to understanding the course of human history as a practical-moral process of progress. In my view, Honneth does not require Kantian regulative teleological ideas to form the grounds for a critical moral theory.

As in any critical theory the issue of foundationalism looms, where any justifying foundations seem themselves to call out for justification. The appeal to establishing critical grounds in a teleological concept of history reconstructs the wrong part of Kant's philosophy; it misses the point of his critical constructivism. What Honneth requires is a theoretical conception of grounds for critique that does not fall into the regress of justification implied by a global foundationalism. This cannot be established with a teleological conception of history, especially when that history is tied to the judgment of the agent who interprets history. Honneth thus requires an alternative theory of moral progress other than that of a presupposed moral teleology.

In my view, if Honneth were to abandon the teleological conception of history, there does not appear to be any reason why he cannot think of social critique in terms of critical judgment framed for purposes of local progress. There is no immediately discernible reason why he requires the global progress implied in a teleological concept of history to form the grounds of social critique. It is neither desirable nor needed for a critical theory of society. At this point, it remains to be shown how Honneth can establish critical grounds with a conception of moral progress, but he need not refer to reliance on a historical-teleological concept, despite what can be made of predecessors' theories doing so in the Frankfurt School. That is the task I will undertake in the next section.

§4 Moral Progress as 'Normative Paradigm Change' and 'Revisionary Normative Critique'

Whereas Honneth approaches moral progress from the tradition of the Frankfurt School's attempt to justify the methodology of a critical theory of society, Thomas Nagel (2023) approaches the issue simply in terms of how moral progress can be conceived alongside a commitment to moral realism. On my reading, the two approaches can be aligned. I think this is informative for understanding which indispensable elements must be present in any philosophical analysis of moral progress. But Nagel's work, I propose, clarifies how to think about Honneth's work. Nagel conceives of the problem of moral progress initially in terms of practical moral deliberation. The issue is to what extent we can rely on the moral judgments we take as given, or intuitive, when faced with situational concerns about the right course of conduct.

Nagel suggests that the development of (non-moral) knowledge has brought us to a point in epistemology where we reflectively deliberate using both the first-personal

"internal" point of view and third-personal "external" points of view. The latter are established by conceiving ourselves as products of our biology, psychology, society, and history. He suggests that we deliberate by seeking reflective equilibrium, in the same sense John Rawls meant of the term (Rawls, 1971). We critically rationalize our moral thoughts by testing general principles against considered judgments about particular cases, then adjusting both until they give a sense of fit that also gives a sense of seeing the situation aright. This means neither the automatic moral judgments we associate with intuition nor any of our moral, social, psychological, biological, or historical principles are unrevisable. In the interests of seeing the situation aright, in the moral realist sense that there is a way of seeing the situation correctly, we critically incorporate third-personal principled knowledge about ourselves with our first-personal agential perspective. Two things are at work here: first, a critique of one's first-personal standpoint through incorporation of a third-personal standpoint in a process seeking reflective equilibrium; and, second, the move from narrow to wide reflective equilibrium that seeks to satisfy conditions of rationality as required by moral realism.

Nagel's description of the process of seeking reflective equilibrium in moral deliberation is not dissimilar to what Honneth means by his method of normative reconstruction for critical deliberation about social issues. Both methods address the fact that agents deliberate from a first-personal standpoint, but with recourse to a third-person standpoint that consists of descriptive knowledge about what makes us who we are. Honneth, specifically, at the level of society, is interested in the social institutions to which we belong in the sense that we conduct our lives through them. If we can understand the norms at work in such social institutions, normative reconstruction will be able to present

principles expressive of our institutional normative constitution, from a third-personal standpoint, that we can use in critically reflective deliberation.

On my interpretation, Honneth's innovation is to add to the repertoire of principles used in seeking reflective equilibrium with our considered judgments about particular cases for deliberation. Just as factors pertaining to our psychological propensities or our biological quirks might inform our situational moral 'intuitions,' through Honneth's work we can now consider our institutional normative constitution. These factors are not the result of the critical process expressed by seeking reflective equilibrium. We describe our institutional normative constitution in an analysis of the norms at work in social practices. This third-person perspective is then brought to play in the process moving from narrow to wide reflective equilibrium.

A point that Nagel emphasizes ought, in my view, to be emphasized in Honneth's project too, is that the 'external' point of view, the impartial, detached, objectivating point of view, cannot be decoupled from either our first-personal point of view, or our moral intuitions. The moral ground of practical deliberation is always from the first-personal agential point of view; it cannot be radically dissolved by 'external' objectivating points of view. There is no 'god's-eye view from nowhere', even though a detached, impartial point of view can be a view from nowhere in particular. The idea is that an impartial point of view can remain a first-personal perspectival view whilst establishing maximal objectivity, taking a viewpoint that is no perspective in particular.

Reflective equilibrium, therefore, is always implied in moral critique. It expresses the critical import of objective considerations to constrain first-personal subjective moral motivations, which constructs judgments that can govern precisely because they get authority from objective constraints. Importantly though, the moral realist considers this

more than a 'balancing act' of moral principles and judgments. They consider, as Honneth does, that even if our moral intuitions are a matter of historical constitution, there is a certain sense that the historical constitution behind the modern moral dispositions supported by certain social institutions has morally progressed as a historical learning process to consider ideas of the general good for society.

The seeking of reflective equilibrium thus indicates a challenge of objectivity (or what Nagel calls the "external challenge" (Nagel, 2023, p.15)). The process represents the question whether the external, third personal view of our moral responses (or institutional commitments, in Honneth's case) convincingly weakens the authority of some of our first-personal commitments more than others. Nagel specifies concern that the history of the debate about moral objectivity has tended to result in "two quite different reflective equilibria" (Nagel, 2023, p.17). He describes these as either favoring deontological views in moral theory that emphasize moral intuition or consequentialism that emphasizes revisionism. As he argues that we cannot distinguish correctness of moral deliberation in terms of either theory, he suggests approaching the idea of moral progress from a different angle. If we are confronted with plural options for moral deliberation, might we instead consider that the critical (revisionary) position itself might count as moral progress? Although Honneth does not indicate motivation for his own theory in this way, we can see here Nagel arrives at a way of thinking about moral progress in terms of critical revision that I think draws him very close to Honneth's theory. This becomes especially clear when we think of Honneth's normative reconstruction as 'critical social science'.

On a first pass, Nagel is drawn directly into considerations of how to link critical revisionary progress with science (not social science, but natural science). This leads to a helpful analogy which leads us to conceive of the critical progress which links moral

epistemological development as analogous to the progressive development of scientific theory. But the analogy fails. Scientific development can be understood in terms of a dialectic of sublation where, as Nagel says, we conceive of a later scientific theory as "not simply refuting, but subsuming and replacing an earlier one, in a way that preserves and explains many of its results while revising others" (Nagel, 2023, p.18). As moral theories are not simply different descriptions of an 'external' causally conceived world, but are of normatively conceived forms of life, the scientific dialectic cannot work; moral theory appeals to pluralistic normative grounds, not monistic causal grounds. This effectively highlights what distinguishes human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) from theories of natural science.

To accommodate this point, Nagel proposes to conceive of the possibility of normative progress in two ways that are either dependent on:

1. *Normative paradigm change*: where there will be cases where reasons come to be recognized in response to the presentation of new choices by new non-normative facts that effectively change the nature of the moral domain; or,

2. *Revisionary normative critique*: where there will be cases where reasons come to be recognized as a result of moral reflection that revises or extends existing moral attitudes within a moral domain (internal to a normative paradigm).

Importantly, the case of revisionary normative critique can be explained as internal, within the constraints of a normative paradigm. It can conceive of progressive development as a dialectic of sublation (following the model of natural science), even though such a process

cannot be determined outside the horizons of such a normative paradigm. Moral attitudes found within a normative paradigm are assumed as historically local whereby forms of normative recognition are limited within a horizon of shared practices. The idea of a normative paradigm, in other words, adds a theoretical constraint that protects our realization of moral pluralism. Yet, within conceived moral paradigms, we can think of progress in a simpler deliberative form.

To express these ideas, Nagel gives an example of moral progress in terms of property rights. Revisionary normative critique is proposed, "as an evaluative comparison between alternative conceptions of the same moral domain" (Nagel, 2023, p.18). The example rejects the radical (and unattractive) idea that private property ownership might be abolished, where paradigm change would be represented in terms of a normative shift to favor common ownership, with a (preferable) revisionary idea of basing property rights not on individual liberty but on the collective good. Nagel admits he is convinced by Hume's account of property as a social convention that is sustained on consequentialist grounds, so property cannot be a basic moral right in any way that transcends convention. He thus conceives of property in terms of the good it serves:

> [I]t provides security of possession, succession, and exchange, permitting capital accumulation, economic planning, and cooperation over the long term… {also serving} other ends such as distributive justice (Nagel, 2023, p.19).

Within a normative paradigm that is based on a principle of private property rights, importantly, the dialectic that aims at sublation can be brought into play. Reform of the morality of property can be conceived as protection of individual liberty in a way that it is subsumed in an expanded conception of property that is based on the collective good. This

is conceived in a way that protects the value of individual liberty. As this would be a reform that maintains the protection of the value of individual liberty, with collectively valuable property conventions that are not conceived as either the foundation of individual rights or determinate of their content, it presents a clear example of moral progress.

What is noteworthy in Nagel's example is that it reintegrates a conception of the dialectic of sublation associated with scientific theory and with Hegel's dialectic. Revisionary moral progress is conceived in terms of a dialectic of sublation that is conditional upon the framework of a moral domain or paradigm. The normative paradigm is itself determined by the presentation of choices made possible by the total set of non-normative facts constitutive of the social world. When the set of non-normative social facts changes, the presentation of possible moral choices available to us changes, thereby changing the horizons of our normative paradigm (a weak sense of normative change). Social critique enables a strong sense of normative change, shown in Nagel's example as revisionary critique seeking sublation within a normative paradigm or domain.

Nagel defends seeing the benefits of both the consequentialist method of conceiving of a collective good as well as conceiving of individual rights in terms of inviolability. But there is a sense where once again the first-person agential standpoint presented in terms of inviolable rights and moral respect guaranteed to everyone serves as the grounds for a critical moral epistemology. Nagel expresses it as the "moral minimum" of any theory of morality (Nagel, 2023, p.21). Honneth too can be understood as starting from the 'moral minimum' which we might think of as the principle of inviolability expressed in terms of moral respect, or mutual recognition of respect. Honneth too is interested in the right way to think about moral progress as an advancement of understanding or knowledge, not simply as advancement in moral behavior. Both he and Nagel are interested in moral

realism, where progress can be conceived of as acquiring knowledge, or specifically, by rejecting false beliefs after coming to know truths or reasons (through revisionary normative critique) or arriving at truths or reasons explaining situations that could not have possibly arisen before (indicating normative paradigm change).

Both Nagel and Honneth thus imply a Protagorean moral realism in contrast to a Platonist moral realism. Platonist views consider truth or reasons as metaphysically separate from the natural world or the people in it, so that moral truth can be timeless, and reasons can be external to the subjective motivational aspects of human agency. Moral progress, given a Platonist conception of moral realism, is simply to discover what has been true all along. A Protagorean conception of moral realism, in contrast, conceives of morality as an aspect of practical reason in the sense that it is about agents having reasons for or against practical action. Reasons are not external, waiting to be discovered, but internal in the sense that they are intrinsically motivating, and facts about reasons are irreducible normative truths about the normative nature of human agency. This still means that Protagorean moral realism accommodates there being normative truths that are not dependent on our believing them. What we have reason to do must be in accordance with certain normative truths, and failure to act according to such reasons allows us to conceive of irrationality.

On the Protagorean moral realist view the normative domain is a domain of reasons which can be accessed by reflection on the norms that underwrite our social practices and the systematic ways we interact with each other. Moral progress on such a view can be identified with a reasoned justified change in moral outlook. Given that reasons are a part of the normative domain they sometimes can exist before being recognized. This can be explained by the adoption of new social practices, for which the normative implications and consequences for moral disposition are not yet fully understood. It accounts for the

possibility of moral progress by revisionary normative critique. But sometimes reasons are simply limited by the circumstances of a particular point in history, facts internal to a normative paradigm, and what considerations are available or accessible to persons operating in that normative paradigm. Nevertheless, cutting across both views, the question concerning the possibility of moral progress is always whether there is a change in moral outlook that we have reason to adopt.

Nagel comments, "that a certain policy or practice would be an improvement may be understandable on reflection only by those who have already passed through certain prior stages of moral thought and practice" (Nagel, 2023, p.29). He is describing moral progress as normative paradigm change in terms of 'path dependence'. The issue we face when deciding how we can understand moral progress is that it is not easy to tell whether moral progress is a matter of local progress or progress in the sense of path dependence and normative paradigm change. How are we to know if we are discovering a moral truth because we are finally reasoning correctly about a situation or whether the reasons have only recently become accessible due to changes in the normative makeup of our society? There is a historical dialectic in play that makes recourse to investigation of Hegel appealing. This is likely what Honneth has sensed and what motivates his critical theory as normative reconstruction. On the one hand local revisionary normative critique develops our social practices in terms of reasoning correctly. But on the other hand, local advancement of practices in terms of reasoning correctly can enable paradigm change, where we can encounter circumstances that were not available to us before. There is a sense that history as path-dependent development and normative paradigm change is the conditional ground for advancement in local deliberation, and vice versa; they can be sensed to mediate each other.

Honneth describes this process in terms of a collective moral learning process, but it is much more than that. It is a moral learning process that is critically mediated by local normative critique. This is not overlooked by Honneth; it is why he rationally reconstructs his model from the phenomenological dialectic of Hegel. The difficulty is that we can only get a sense of this process when we: (1) see cases where great injustice is overthrown, and then consequently how rapidly people endorse new just ways of seeing the world, signifying paradigm change, or; (2) view this process locally and can be attuned to gradual change enabled by local revisionary normative critique.

The issue faced in historical analysis of the complex normative systems that underwrite our social practices is to challenge ourselves to properly reflect on what we can legitimately say about moral progress. Nagel is likely correct to attribute justification of moral progress to two separate realizations that have come about due to normative paradigm changes in the history of humankind. The first is that a certain accessibility to reasons was only made possible by development of the human capacity to recognize the freedom and happiness of individuals. These values, he suspects, allow us to justify a certain conception of moral progress. But this does not imply that such values are a telos of humankind. It is more plausible that such values came about as a contingent feature of our historical development as a species, as a matter of path-dependence, as ancient as they appear to be.

The second paradigm constitutive value that Nagel identifies, importantly, is one that appears peculiar to the modern era. It is recognition of the right to freedom of expression. Nagel believes, "{i}t was not accessible, and therefore not applicable, in pre-modern times because the reasons behind it are intelligible only to those who understand from inside the conception of political legitimacy on which they depend" (Nagel, 2023,

p.40). Such insights indicate our being normatively tied to a modern paradigm as well as path dependence. Nagel describes the modern realization as having:

> [A]rrived at a modern understanding of the conditions of political legitimacy and the autonomy of the individual in relation to the state, in order to be able to engage in the reasoning that allows one to see what it entails with regard to freedom of expression. (Nagel, 2023, p.41).

I believe he is correct, and that he is expressing a wider thought, shared by Honneth, that the modern era is in some sense discontinuous with what came before, providing new conditions of existence for uniquely modern social norms. This is not to commit to a Whiggish history that determines the past by ideological commitments to ideas of the present. But it is insights like this that motivates Honneth to ringfence the modern era of democratic-liberal social history for the focus of normative reconstruction. From within a modern normative paradigm, he can then consider what normative principles might be reconstructed from social institutional analysis indicating how modern rational agents have been conditioned to conceive of themselves, and what capacity for progressive change this implies.

Moral progress, in normative paradigmatic terms, then, can be conceived as the discovery of objective reasons to adopt new moral principles. In the modern era, as Nagel shows, we can identify conditionally necessary principles such as that of individual right to freedom of expression. The deliberative route to moral progress, however, whether we can identify paradigm change or merely identify reasons through local revisionary normative critique, lies fundamentally in normative critique. Normative critique must pay close attention to more than simply the rational agency that is the principle of critique; it requires that we consider how rational agency is institutionally embedded with a conceptual sense of

where the authority of governance can be found. This thought is what drives Honneth's relentless claims against merely formal conceptions of rational agency (Honneth, 2014). With Honneth, (mirroring Nagel), moral progress is expressed as discovery of objective reasons to adopt new moral principles, but it is explained and justified by historical critique that notes the possibility of both normative paradigm change and a requirement for ongoing local revisionary normative critique. Honneth's work, specifically, is not just an explanation of moral/social critique and moral progress; it is an attempt to deliberatively participate in it.

I suggest that the correct way to view Honneth's approach to critical social theory is to view it as a critical moral theory. This view can be made transparent after consideration of the critical moral theory of Nagel, his analysis of moral progress, his commitments to Protagorean moral realism, and reflective equilibrium as a method of contextual critical deliberation. Moral deliberation occurs through reflection on norms that underwrite social practices. This is reflection on the domain of reasons. Sometimes deliberation is revisionary normative critique which discovers reasons that can exist before being recognized. At other times deliberation results in reasons being recognized due to paradigm change, where there are new non-normative facts that effectively change the nature of the moral domain and the choices available to agents in deliberation. Moral progress is discerned with the process of critical deliberation and a commitment to moral realism. It is not to be conceived in terms of a teleology of history. Honneth explores the idea of historical teleology through the work of Kant, but these considerations of Kant ought to be rejected. Teleological theory is not needed to support Honneth's approach to a critical theory of society through normative reconstruction of the domain of reasons which anchor our social institutions. Critical deliberation alone, as modelled by reflective equilibrium, suffices; we critically rationalize

our moral thoughts by testing general principles against considered judgments about particular cases, then adjusting both until they give a sense of fit that characterizes seeing the situation aright. Critique is anchored in the domain of reasons which evolves because the norms that constitute our complex moral understanding are themselves constituted by the social practices that embody our forms of life.

§5 Constructive Critique

It has now been argued that Honneth's project should incorporate a concept of moral progress in history without conceiving history as teleological. Nagel's conception of moral progress is non-teleological and supports a critical theory committed to moral realism. Honneth's principle of normative reconstruction that was explained in §2, which expresses the idea that critical theory should not simply 'apply' normative principles to an analysis of social reality, can now be conceived in terms of the process that seeks reflective equilibrium.[16] I interpret this as the view that normative reconstruction is a method of contextual critical deliberation. The shift of emphasis that Honneth describes when deliberating through the social analysis of normative reconstruction – "shifts between the foreground and the background, between the significant and the negligible" – indicates his emphasis on different contexts of enquiry. Contexts are embedded in larger contexts as social analysis seeks width and depth where individuals can conceive of their first-personal

[16] cf. Thomas (2015) for defense of Rawlsian reflective equilibrium against Williams' critique of the 'political moralist'. Thomas develops an analogy between Rawls and Hegel, and puts Rawls in the contextualist and pragmatic traditions.

perspectives in coherence with third-personal, objective views.[17] The 'congruence' Honneth speaks of when he describes Kantian constructivist approaches, which is a necessary additional methodological component to the constructive procedure, is reflected in his own theory as a part of normative reconstruction's immanent analysis. The seeking of congruence is the seeking of reflective equilibrium between first-personal and third-personal points of view.[18] This implies that Hegelian normative reconstruction can be re-interpreted as Kantian constructivism embedded in wide reflective equilibrium. The components of each methodology could conceivably be the same. But this does not seem correct if we take seriously Honneth's claims that Kantian constructivist methods conceive of normative principles not derived from existing institutional structures. The next stage of this enquiry then ought to be an analysis of what is meant by Kantian constructivism.

In ethical theory Kantian constructivism is conventionally described as theory about moral value that is pitched against moral realism, as its contradictory. This convention is unhelpful as it makes opaque what can be meant by both a constructivism based on Kantian philosophy, as well as moral realism. There is a tendentious version of moral realism that is either made to act as a straw man for irrealist arguments or as a representationalist model about human values existing extrinsically to human practices, sometimes associated with Platonism, and often cited as dogmatic rationalism.[19] Dogmatic rationalism would, in this case, explain our epistemic access to Platonic principles. A more viable form of moral realism is Protagorean, one that considers values and norms to be tied to human practices

[17] For an analysis of immanent critique as contextual critical deliberation between generalizable principles and particular moral experiences, cf. Stahl (2022).
[18] In other words, we seek reflective equilibrium between local and more global perspectives.
[19] Honneth distinguishes two versions of moral realism that are either framed in a pragmatic model that ties the rational demands of reality to our goal-directed activities, or a representationalist model that ties access to the rational content of the world to passive reception that is within theoretical framing. I associate the latter model with Platonism and the former with Protagorean realism (cf. Honneth, 2002, pp.254-258).

and which therefore argues that there need be no special faculty of moral intuition to understand how an epistemology can be tied to these values and norms. A second-property pragmatic moral realism, or moral cognitivism fits this profile.[20]

Constructivism, associated with Kant's philosophy, has come to mean many things too. To moral realists who are not persuaded by aspects or interpretations of Kant's moral philosophy, constructivism has standardly come to mean that values or norms are constructed. This is what puts constructivism in opposition to even viable forms of moral realism. It strongly associates constructivism with irrealism and non-cognitivism. But there is a more nuanced way to understand Kantian moral philosophy too, both whilst maintaining Kant's transcendental idealism and when rejecting transcendental idealism whilst maintaining Kantian critical philosophy. This permits constructivist theories that can be realist in at least some sense, as well as cognitivist. The question about constructivism really depends on what is meant as the object of construction; what is being constructed?

Onora O'Neill develops Kantian constructivism in a modern form and takes a wide view of what is meant by 'construction'. She notes that "Kant repeatedly likens the task of reasoning to the task of constructing a building…", and that:

> Kant takes it that the standards and norms of human reasoning must be built or constructed from the meagre resources and capacities that are actually available to human beings, which he describes in some passages as 'just enough for the most pressing needs for the beginnings of existence (IUH 9:19-20) (O'Neill, 2015, p.3).

Does this mean that the standards and norms of human reasoning are not real, or not factual? And does not being real and not being factual amount to the same thing?

[20] See: Thomas (2006)

John Skorupski rejects Kantian transcendental idealism and holds that there is a fundamental distinction between factual and normative claims that can give us a position of cognitive irrealism. What Skorupski means by this is developed from the claim that "norms are truths about reason relations that are not truths about anything else" (Skorupski, 2010, p.429). He interprets the claim to imply that reason relations must therefore neither be "fictions nor putative reals, but objective (non-mind-dependent), actual irreals (*ibid*.). Cognitive irrealism expresses the view that normative propositions do not have a factual content, when facts are considered as positivist reals in a domain that can be separated as "independent of human presupposition and involvement" (Thomas, 2006, p.45).

However, I interpret Skorupski's view in such a way that when he describes norms as truths about reason relations, he is describing what second-property moral cognitivists describe as 'real'.[21] A second-property moral cognitivism describes moral properties as "real in so far as they are indispensable to the explanations we offer of moral phenomena, but not real in the sense that they are grounded in the universe 'as it is in itself' without relation to the interests and concerns of human beings" (Thomas, 2006, p.2). This, I interpret, means that moral properties can be considered as 'real' second-properties. The Platonic realism rejected by second-property realism, that is tied to a representationalist model about human values existing extrinsically to human practices, is the same as the "global realism" rejected by Skorupski (2010). They also both commit to a view that there are true normative propositions. They dispute what is meant by the concept of 'fact', upon which the concept of 'real' turns. For Skorupski, importantly, the upshot of normative propositions making no

[21] There is a serious philosophical issue to be worked out whether to take Skorupski's position of cognitive irrealism, or Thomas's position of second-property realism. I am interested in the elements of Skorupski's theory that are compatible with second-property realism.

'factual' assertions is that they can be known *a priori*, which creates the possibility of both self-determination and self-audit.

Second-property moral cognitivism can thus be loosely associated with Skorupski's cognitivist irrealism, as it too can claim that normative propositions can be known *a priori*, supporting conceptions of reflexive self-determination.[22] Given O'Neill's wide understanding of Kantian constructivism, self-determination can be thought of as self-construction. This is because self-determination, if we are to be autonomous, includes constructive self-audit, a way of coming to know the principles of our moral actions that can function as normative or guiding principles.

Skorupski explains Kantian constructivism in a more nuanced way than O'Neill. He notes Kant's references to construction, clarifying what is constructed in terms of transcendental idealism, where the spatio-temporal causal field is considered constructed by the transcendental subject. He then indicates how in Kant's moral philosophy the matter of construction is less clear. It is certainly clear in Kant's texts that the moral law is not constructed or created by anyone, especially if we note the distinction between the 'author of a law' and a 'lawgiver' (legislator), who is simply the author of obligation in accordance with a law. Skorupski sees that "{w}hat we give ourselves is not the normative content of the law, or even its 'practical necessity', but its standing as a *moral law*" (Skorupski, 2010, p.485). This recognition of 'standing' is a recognition of its validity and how moral law applies to us. From these views Skorupski can present two senses of 'construction' in Kant's moral philosophy. "We can say that our sensuous nature 'constructs' our experience of the

[22] I am asserting an association between views for the sake of this thesis that requires working out in detail to decide precisely how Skorupski's cognitive irrealism and second-property realism can support the same normative conclusions about reason relations, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. This is beyond the scope of this thesis.

moral law as law – as imperatival, binding…" (Skorupski, 2010, p.468). And when this account of moral experience is detranscendentalized, thus, when it becomes a phenomenology, we can investigate "what objects spontaneously arouse respect" (*ibid*.). It is in this sense that Hegel's phenomenology, and Honneth's reconstruction of it, are investigations into the constructions of reason in history and culture.

The second sense of moral construction that Skorupski identifies in Kant is what is more conventionally associated with moral constructivism. This is that construction refers to the Categorical Imperative procedure, where moral principles are 'constructed' by testing whether a maxim or practical principle can be universally willed. It is here Skorupski mentions the factor, we can assume, that leads people to want to distance themselves from constructivism. There is a misleading suggestion in using the metaphor of 'construction' that its construction is what makes a moral principle true, that the moral content is a product of the procedure, rather than the mere recognition of it as moral content. Skorupski explains that "the procedure is epistemic not constitutive: a way of clarifying to ourselves a content which obtains anyway" (Skorupski, 2010, p.486). This is important. The principles of normative governance are not constructed procedurally; what is constructed is "a way of recognizing, or better, throwing into relief, their epistemic basis and content" (*ibid.*). What is constructed is the recognitive experience of practical norms as specifically moral laws, and the associated idea of moral obligation, not the norms themselves. The mechanism of the constructive procedure is negative in form, designed to rule content out, which is how principles of normative governance are thrown into relief. The procedural test rules nothing in, and the content for the constructive procedure needs to come from somewhere prior to the test.

This important clarification of Kantian constructivism connects O'Neill's claim about construction as a task of reasoning with Skorupski's discernment of the construction of a recognitive experience. Deliberative, or procedural, critical reasoning is the method of construction of a recognitive experience that is typically used in Kantian philosophy to develop the recognition of norms that govern our thinking. We are not authors of these norms, but at most authors of the concept of moral obligation in accordance with norms, as a matter of deliberative and recognitive achievement. We can think of this form of constructivism as deliberative constructivism or critical constructivism which holds a normative view as a way of thinking about and acting within a world (the world of nature and culture, as second-nature, considered as a social world of second-property reason relations). This means that moral constructivism expresses recognition of our self-determining activity, an activity that has both normative and factual aspects that are not neatly distinguishable. The two senses of constructivism Skorupski identifies, from a Kantian moral standpoint, can then be considered as two ways of viewing recognition of our self-determining activity. On the one hand the phenomenological analysis of history is the attempt to grasp self-determining activity in a substantive way, as a reconstruction of the constructions of reason in history. On the other hand, there is a formal Kantian approach to self-determination that attempts to put in motion self-determination as a deliberative procedure of reasoning, with the aim of constructing a philosophical recognitive experience. The two approaches are complementary aspects of the same process.

These views also have significant implications for how we view Kant's Categorical Imperative. Broadly, we can take Kant's intention to be that the Categorical Imperative is the epistemic principle for the recognition of our moral obligations in self-determination. We can leave to one side whether Kant was successful in giving substance to this principle.

However, we can take the two views, the substantive phenomenological view of the history of self-determination and the formal procedural view of self-determination as a method, as both being guided by the principle of the Categorical Imperative when it comes to recognition of moral standing. In phenomenological analysis of the history of self-determination the Categorical Imperative will be manifested as the principle behind what objects spontaneously arouse moral respect (as a matter of recognition). And in a formal critical procedure to construct a recognitive experience, the Categorical Imperative will be the principle that serves to give us recognition of our moral obligations, to what we owe respect (as a recognitional commitment) given our current self-awareness of shared practical norms.

This view of the Categorical Imperative dovetails with the work of Honneth when he reconstructs Hegel's phenomenological view of culture to extract the recognitional aspects of morality. Yet it also indicates that what Honneth means by 'Kantian constructivism' is unreasonably pejorative, as he distances his Hegelian reconstruction, which is effectively a critical theory of historical practices of self-determination, as a rejection of Kantian constructivism. The way to view both the Kantian and Hegelian approaches of reflective critique on self-determination is in terms of the critical construction of the experience of moral recognition (cf. Skorupski, 2010, ch.20). The Hegelian approach endeavors rationally to reconstruct the way self-determining beings have, in fact, constructed the experience of moral recognition as determined by a socio-historical analysis. The Kantian approach endeavors to methodologically construct experiences of moral recognition using a Categorical Imperative deliberative procedure on the basis of practical norms that we are already committed to, for purposes of practical reasoning and self-determination.

Phillip Stratton-Lake provides an interpretation of Kant that is similar, proposing that "the moral law plays a transcendental and criterial role" (Stratton-Lake, 2000, p.111). He explains that the transcendental role explains the possibility of obligation, that is, how it is possible that we can experience some acts, given certain situations, as practically necessary. The moral law does not constitute a normative reason why we are duty-bound to act (the moral law is not meant so that we can add duty, or obligation to reasons for action – i.e., in the sense of "you must act because it is your duty"). The formal principle that expresses the moral law is simply meant to indicate the conditions behind any action that are sensed as being morally required.

The criterial role simply tells us whether our action falls under a maxim (a subjective principle) which is permissible. It does not tell us what we have to do, or why we ought to act, given particular sets of circumstances. The Categorical Imperative test is meant simply to provide reasons "to believe that our verdictive moral judgments are correct" (*ibid*.). It provides a criterion from which to assess our moral judgments, specifically to give us reason to believe that these judgments are correct and that we ought to act in certain ways. Giving ourselves reasons for believing that we ought to act in certain ways stands beside and in addition to reasons why we ought to act. I take the Categorical Imperative's transcendental and criterial role to also play a critical role. The Categorical Imperative procedure is critically reflexive deliberation about the conditions of our moral obligations that develops account-giving reasons for believing that we ought to act in certain ways.

Together, Skorupski's view of the Categorical Imperative procedure is a way of epistemically clarifying to ourselves a content which obtains anyway, and Stratton-Lake's view is that this clarification embodies a role indicating the moral worth of actions, interpreting our moral interests. The procedure interprets why some actions are obligatory

and why we have reasons to believe why we ought to act in certain ways, through constructive recognition of our moral interests. The correct way of understanding Kantian constructivism indicates Honneth's method of normative reconstruction is also a derivative of constructivism. I believe both methods are procedural, deliberative, and concerned to understand the moral sources of our obligations in a way that creates a recognitive context where we can 'construct' reasons for believing that we ought to act in certain ways. As Stratton-Lake says, "{i}n its criterial role, the moral law gives us epistemic reasons of a certain sort…" (Stratton-Lake, 2000, p.5). This contrasts with a more common (yet mistaken) reading of Kant that interprets the Categorical Imperative procedure as giving us practical reasons.

Stratton-Lake's theoretical view of the Categorical Imperative helps clarify what is meant by Kantian constructivism, and provides clues about how constructivism is commonly understood in different ways. Stratton-Lake interprets the constructivist project as an attempt to find a middle way that neither falls to subjectivism (and relativism) or moral realism when it is conceived in terms associated with dogmatic rationalism. He sees its principal aim to conceive of objectivity in ethics (moral cognitivism) without resorting to objectivity of the externalist sort that we see represented by positivism and associated with Platonism. The motivating idea for value objectivity is that moral principles are expressive of reasonable ways to act and that we can deliberate procedurally about what is reasonable. Although constructivists differ concerning their preferred procedure, they share the idea that what is reasonable to believe about why we ought to act in certain ways can be determined by constructive procedure. So far, this aligns with Honneth's theorization about normative reconstruction through social analysis of the principles that express why we believe we ought to act in certain ways.

Care must be taken by constructivists when they say that moral principles are determined by carrying out a deliberative procedure. This could be interpreted as saying that the procedure determines a moral principle being correct or applicable because (in the causal sense) it is the outcome of the procedure. Or, we may interpret the correctness of a moral principle as *evidenced* by the moral procedure.[23] Stratton-Lake considers the constructivist doctrines that reduce the correctness of moral principles to the causal process of following a relevant procedure to be 'reductive constructivism' (Stratton-Lake, 2000, p.113). A preferable way of understanding constructivism is to reject this view and consider that "the constructive procedure is not understood as telling us what it is for us to be required to act in certain ways, but as telling us why we should act in those ways" (*ibid.* p.114).

But even this can take two forms if we consider constructive procedure as giving us a practical 'reason to act' (justificatory constructivism) or as giving us an epistemic 'reason to believe' that we ought to act in certain ways (criterial constructivism). Stratton-Lake believes that if Kant is to be understood as a moral constructivist he is to be understood in one of these two ways. Either, as a justificatory constructivist, we "see the Categorical Imperative as a procedure which provides us with normative moral reasons why we ought to act in accordance with certain more specific moral principles" – such as principles of fidelity, beneficence, self-improvement, or other principles expressive of virtues (*ibid.* p.115). Or, as a criterial constructivist "the Categorical Imperative test will be thought of as a procedure by means of which we can check our verdictive moral judgments" (*ibid*.). This simply means that "if the principle which the action falls under can be willed as a universal

[23] Philip Pettit notes the distinction in uses of 'because' when considering Euthyphro questions. We can distinguish the causal - strictly, causally programmatic - sense of 'because' from the evidential. An eraser bends because (causal) it is elastic, yet it is elastic, because (evidential) it bends. (Pettit, 2002, p.45).

law without contradiction, then that gives us reason to believe that our judgment that we ought to do that act is correct" (*ibid*.). The same goes for believing that our judgment is correct that we should not do an act if its principle cannot be willed as universal law.

Stratton-Lake's 'criterial constructivism' is what I think of as critical constructivism. Its aim is to check the moral judgements we make given our participation in ethical life as reflective moral agents. It is compatible with moral realism, given we understand moral realism as implying that moral values come from dispositions and a certain form of upbringing, or moral learning tied to social practices, and that lack of such a disposition means that seeing certain acts as right or wrong may be undetectable. The constructivist procedure is intended to be merely formal and not require reference to particular moral properties or conventions. But it is also not intended to be a form of deliberation about how to act, simply about whether how we already judge how to act is something that we can believe to be correct. Honneth's normative reconstruction, in my opinion, is a derivative of Kantian constructivism in precisely this way. Normative reconstruction is also 'criterial', or 'critical' constructivism. It checks through deliberative procedures of social analysis whether we can believe in our verdictive moral judgments by giving us 'reasons to believe' in them, giving us an epistemic way of clarifying to ourselves a content that obtains anyway.

These arguments are intended to suggest the correct way to understand Kantian constructivism by way of how we understand Kant's project in practical philosophy. Yet they also indicate a view of Kantian constructivism that is entirely compatible with Honneth's method of normative reconstruction. Honneth demands immanent analysis understood in the left-Hegelian tradition, where the possibility for transcendence can be found from within analysis of the social and ethical conditions that constitute a social order, or our form

of life.[24] Kantian constructivism, understood as a method of critical construction is intended as a way of practically deliberating based on one's self-understanding, whilst embedded in a form of life.

Honneth rejects Kantian constructivism as if it were able to establish a form of critique by conceiving of normative principles that transcend immanence as such. I believe this is what Honneth understands by the notion of the transcendental, as if transcendental principles are external principles or reasons that can be justified as categorical in a sense where they are not conditional on a particular social order or forms of life. The next stage of the argument here then ought to show why this is the wrong way to think about transcendental principles. What we are looking for is a way to understand transcendental principles as objective in a way where they are still conditional in terms of particular forms of life, particular structures of social order. There are two subjects that require investigation. The first consists of an analysis of Honneth's claims that Kantian constructivism is a denial of the social. The second is an analysis of how the concepts of mutual recognition and reflective equilibrium can be made to work in a simplified theory of self-determination that incorporates transcendental principles for critical praxis.

§6 Alleged "denial of the social"

There is a sense of the concept of critique presented in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that implies providing a complete account of reason as a coherent system of concepts and principles. However, there is also another sense implicit in the text where

[24] cf. Jaeggi (2018)

critique is the reflexive criticism of reason by reason itself (Rawls, 2000, pp.256-257). The second sense is important, indicating that reason can be misapplied or suffer from fallacy. The first conception, however, leads one thread of Kant's project to develop a doctrine of transcendental idealism grounded in a transcendental subjectivity. This transcendental idealism is driven by inquiry into the *a priori* conditions of human sensibility and proposes that the essential form of a transcendental subjectivity is what determines necessary structures in our experienced world. On this interpretation, alongside his doctrine, Kant also describes a method – transcendental argument – which seeks the necessary conditions of any given experience. Transcendental argument begins with an obvious premise about our experience (or knowledge), and then reasons to a conclusion that is a substantive but unobvious presupposition and necessary condition of this premise. Given that certain features of our experience are necessary the argument concludes that the conditions that ground those features are also necessary.

For a number of reasons, Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism can seem unappealing. It is often considered especially problematic because it requires working out the form of a transcendental subjectivity that is meant as the ground and necessary condition of the possibility of all experience and objectivity.[25] Ross Harrison notes that Kant's method can survive the rejection of the doctrine of transcendental idealism (Harrison, 1982, pp.211-24). This is important as it means we can speak of transcendental presuppositions as necessary conditions for experience in a way that they are merely conditional necessities. It means that we can view the world in terms of contingent truths but then determine conditionally necessary principles as constraints which are applicable to

[25] Transcendental Idealism is given various interpretations, including the 'two-world view' and the 'two-aspect view'. Allison is famously associated with the latter, but even he feels it is not the most helpful way to frame the issue. I find the 'two-world view' especially problematic. (cf. Allison, 2006).

those truths (Thomas, 2006, p.57). It permits a critique of reason in the second sense as we can determine conditional necessities that are based on contingencies; we can determine what must be the case based on conditionally transcendental presuppositions.

Honneth's method of normative reconstruction in many ways appears to be a method that seeks to establish transcendental presuppositions. Indeed, Honneth admits that his "moral-psychological reflections in fact seek a quasi-transcendental justification of critique in the structure of social reality" (Honneth, 2003, p.245). By 'quasi-transcendental' Honneth appears to mean 'conditionally transcendental'. So, if the structure of social reality has largely contingently evolved through history, his identifications of principles of mutual recognition would be determinations to establish conditional necessities given the structure of social reality that currently exists. The conception of moral or social progress that Honneth's theory must rely on, that he describes as teleological, but which would be better described as path-dependency that is conditional on contingent paradigms, allows us to see why he is interested in "quasi-transcendental critique". Given the structure of a historical paradigm, within that paradigm necessary schemas of reason can be determined. The paradigm, as an epistemological framework of a social order, such as a contemporary democratic-liberal society, indicates conditions that we can accept having arrived at contingently. But within the context of that paradigm, or framework, we can conceptualize transcendentally necessary relations that must hold as presuppositions of that particular framework.

The ethical conditions of a social order appear to be a social achievement; we understand them as the result of social progress. Charles Taylor considers social goods in terms of 'achievements' of this sort when he analyzes what distinguishes common from convergent social goods (Taylor, 1989, pp.159-182). There are either mediately common

goods or immediately common goods. Common goods have value to *us*, in contrast to merely having value simply to me and you, where 'me' and 'you' are conceived in an atomistic, monological way. Mediately common goods are goods that can have value to you or me alone, but when we are an us, that value is transformed. Taylor gives examples of jokes and listening to Mozart for mediately common goods, as jokes are funnier in company, as is the enjoyment of listening to Mozart (Taylor, 1989, p.168). An immediately common good is valuable in the sense that it is only good because it is shared. Taylor gives the example of friendship as an example of an immediately common good; friendship is only valuable because it is shared (*ibid*.).

Convergent goods, in contrast, are collectively provided goods, but their value can be enjoyed alone, as a you or me; they do not require that we be an 'us'.[26] Then, in his analysis of politically republican regimes, a social paradigm, Taylor claims that immediately common goods are essential to them. There is a bond required between citizens in republics that resembles friendship. Such goods are something that Taylor describes as 'we-identities' that can be contrasted against merely convergent 'I-identities'. In terms of a republic, Taylor describes we-identity in a way that is helpful for us to understand what Honneth is conceptualizing with mutual recognition, where "…the bond of solidarity with my compatriots in a functioning republic is based on a sense of shared fate, where the sharing is itself of value" (Taylor, 1989, p.170).

Honneth's conception of a struggle for recognition thus can be conceived as the inherent motivation to identify the bonds of solidarity with others that comes from a sense of shared fate. But importantly, within contexts of shared social practices, any bonds that

[26] Taylor gives the example of welfare economics for convergent goods: "we enjoy security from various dangers, through our system of national defense, our police forces, our fire departments, and the like" (Taylor, 1989, p.169).

can be conceived as we-identity, based on mutual recognition, can also be conceived as conditionally transcendental. This implies the concept of struggle for recognition is itself a transcendental presupposition, as Honneth presupposes struggle for recognition to be a necessary practical condition of possibility for all forms of institutionalized interaction.

Honneth, however, consistently rejects attempts to link his analysis in normative reconstruction with transcendental philosophy. He makes claims throughout his work that appear as an attempt to distance the Hegelian method of philosophical critique from its Kantian transcendental predecessor. This can be seen in the rejection of the "dominance of Kantianism" at the very start of *Freedom's Right* (Honneth, 2014, p.2). It can be seen as driving the interpretative historical dialectic of the concept of freedom that Honneth presents in Part I of *Freedom's Right*, where Kantian 'reflexive freedom' is presented as unable to find realization without institutional expansion of the concept of freedom in a substantive Hegelian manner (Honneth, 2014, pp.15-67). These thoughts on freedom that reject Kantianism are also reiterated later in the essay 'On the poverty of our freedom' (Honneth, 2023, pp.19-34). And there is a rejection of Kantianism again, alluding to the need for departure from Kantian constructivism and the method of "impartial testing procedure", in the essay 'The normativity of ethical life' (Honneth, 2023, pp.35-45). It echoes the claims given in *Freedom's Right* that reject Kantian constructivism when Honneth explains the premise of immanent analysis for pursuing the method of normative reconstruction. Taking all considerations of his views against Kantianism together, Honneth appears to incorporate three broad claims: that the method of transcendental argument cannot be separated from the doctrine of transcendental idealism; that Kantian constructivism must be understood as a rejection of a socially mediated concept of moral realism; and that Kantian proceduralism,

or method, falls to the same inferred critique taken from comments Hegel famously gives in *Philosophy of Right*. We can address each of these, last to first.

Hegel's notorious claim against 'Kantianism' is as follows:

> As essential as it is to highlight the pure unconditioned self-determination of the will as the root of duty, as is done in knowledge of the will, first achieved in Kantian philosophy, which reached the fixed ground and point of departure of that knowledge through the thought of the will's infinite autonomy (cf. §133), it is equally the case that seizing on the mere moral standpoint, which does not become the concept of ethical life (Sittlichkeit), reduces this achievement into an empty formalism and moral science to a blather about duty for duty's sake. On the basis of this standpoint no immanent doctrine of duties (immanente Pflichtenlehre) is possible; one can of course bring in stuff from without and thereby reach particular duties, but from that determination of duty, as the lack of contradiction, the formal correspondence with itself… there can be no transition to the determination of particular duties… (Hegel, 1991 [1821], §135)

This quote has frequently been read as an attack claiming Kantian moral theory to be an 'empty formalism'. But this is a misinterpretation of the quote. The parts of the quote that must be read carefully are here put in italics and paraphrased: As *essential as it is to highlight the pure unconditioned self-determination of the will as the root of duty*, …it is equally the case that *seizing on the mere moral standpoint, which does not become the concept of ethical life*, reduces this achievement into an empty formalism and moral science to a blather about duty for duty's sake.

Two points are made here. The first is that it is necessary to understand that the root of duty is the pure unconditioned self-determination of the will. Hegel is not suggesting that Kant is mistaken to identify a free, self-determining will as central to the concept of duty. The second point is what is frequently missed when this quote is conventionally repeated. This is the point that *if* the moral standpoint, which consists of a conception of duty, does

not become the concept of ethical life, then it will be an empty concept (again, emphasis in italics). How, then, does the moral standpoint become the concept of ethical life? One answer is implied in the next sentence: 'stuff' could be brought in from without, in order to reach particular duties. But the stronger answer is found by reading the rest of Hegel's text in §135, noting where he refers to 'content'. Hegel's criticism is expressed in the statement: "But if duty is to be willed merely as a duty and not because of its content, it is a formal identity which necessarily excludes every content and determination" (Hegel, 1991 [1821], §135). Hegel continues:

> For the proposition 'Consider whether your maxim can be asserted as a universal principle' would be all very well if we already had determinate principles concerning how to act. In other words, if we demand of a principle that it should also be able to serve as the determinant of a universal legislation, this presupposes that it already has a content; and if this content were present, it would be easy to apply the principle. (Hegel, 1991 [1821], §135 Addition (H))

What Hegel is proposing is that for Kantian formal practical philosophy to be anything other than an empty formalism, it requires a moral content ('stuff' meaning content), in which case it serves to (re)construct the determinations of duty.

Ken Westphal identifies these nuances in Hegel's arguments and draws the conclusion that "Hegel makes common cause with Kant", noting that "{i}t is deeply unfortunate that this has been so widely overlooked" (Westphal, 2005, p.340). Westphal argues that analysis of Kant shows that he is aware that the pure principles of duty need to be applied to experience to be able to conceive of a complete system of a doctrine of ethics, so that they can be schematized in a way that makes them available for practical use (Westphal, 2005, p.339). What is required for a complete doctrine of ethics is that Kant's

metaphysics of ethics is grounded in a practically conceived philosophical anthropology that draws out features that express human nature, human agency, and particular circumstances of action. Westphal notes that:

> [T]he closest Kant came to providing the relevant philosophical anthropology in any systematic form are his lectures, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Perspective*, which is not quite the same undertaking (*ibid*.).[27]

Hegel's project, then, can be conceived as resolving the issues in Kant's practical philosophy by providing a doctrine of duties. Clearly, on this view, Hegel's project is Kantian.

With this interpretation of Hegel's ethical project, the procedure known to represent Kantian constructivism, the Categorical Imperative procedure, can also be understood in renewed light. The critique that can be drawn out of comments Honneth makes in *Freedom's Right* against Kantian constructivism supports the claim that "we should follow Hegel in abstaining from presenting a free-standing, constructive justification of norms of justice prior to immanent analysis" (Honneth, 2014, p.5). But Hegel's quote says clearly that moral content can be brought into the method for the determination of duty "from without" (Hegel, Philosophy of Right, §135). Hegel acknowledges that the determination of duty requires the Categorical Imperative test, as a test against contradiction, together with moral content. Contrary to how we are interpreting Honneth's view, we must not understand Kantian constructivism to be a rejection of a socially mediated concept of moral realism. Kantian constructivism, if it is to be meaningful at all, must rely on a moral content,

[27] Nancy Sherman indicates other of Kant's texts that note 'features of human nature' in her analysis of Kant's discussion of emotions and their relation to virtue - The Doctrine of Virtue (1797); Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone (1793); Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View (1798). See Sherman, 1997, p.126; and Kant (1991; 2006; 2018).

and this content must come from a philosophical anthropology, which is how we can conceive of the content determined by a socially mediated concept of moral realism.

Finally, I suggest that we interpret Honneth's view as claiming that the method of transcendental argument cannot be separated from the doctrine of transcendental idealism. It is associated with his rejection of Kantianism, but can be best seen from the claims that Honneth makes in his arguments against the second-personal theory of Stephen Darwall.

Honneth picks up on Darwall's interests in analysis of moral obligation that have evolved from a reconstruction and development of Fichte's conception of mutual recognition of summons.[28] Darwall developed a theory of moral obligation that presents the idea that moral agents take a 'second-personal standpoint' such that morality is conceived as equal accountability. What drives the argument is the idea that second-personal reason is a reason that, as Darwall puts it, "depends on presupposed authority and accountability relations between persons and, therefore, on the possibility of the reason's being addressed person-to-person" (Darwall, 2006, p.8; 2020, p.592). The result of conceiving of reasons in this way means that interactions that have a moral component and constrained by moral obligations, requires taking a second-person standpoint that accepts the equal second-personal competence and authority of both the addresser and addressee of an interaction. When an individual makes a putatively valid claim, or a demand on another, they regard the other as accountable to them for complying with that claim. The issue is about asserting claims or demands in a way that implies rights.

[28] Fichte's idea will be studied further in §8.

For example, if I exclaim, “hey, get off my foot!” I will be addressing you from the second-personal standpoint. I will be making a claim that you ought to stop standing on my foot, that the reason you have to stop standing on my foot is the same reason I have for not standing on someone’s foot, that you have the competence to understand this, and an accountability shared with me to the (second-personal) reason for getting off my foot. In my claim is an implicit reference to a right that we both recognize, which is the right to not be stood on by other people without good reason. We can see in this theory that there is a reference which is similar to the idea of common goods articulated by Charles Taylor.

Second-personal reasons are common goods. They are not convergent goods, as they are not reasons for me that can happen to be reasons for you too. They are reasons that I have and that you have in common. As Taylor would say there is a “common understanding of the *right*” (Taylor, 1989, p.172). Reasons appealed to in moral claims, when formally conceived, have value for we-identities conceived of as ‘us’ in a way that is dialogical and can be construed as sharing an immediately common good. We might also say that second-personal reasons indicate a bond of solidarity based on a sense of shared fate. In the example, we might say the ‘shared fate’ is simply that of being human and having feet that cause us pain when stood on by others.

Honneth interprets Darwall claiming that “the objections that Hegel brought to bear against the transcendentalism of Fichte’s doctrine of recognition also apply to Darwall’s idea of an “I-you” relation” (Honneth, 2021, p.582). He argues that Darwall’s “project ultimately fails due to its denial of the social, and thus conflictual, character of the moral norms governing participants within the I-you relation” (Honneth, 2021, p.581). Honneth also makes claims against Darwall that indicate how he is making the same criticism against modern reiterations of transcendental philosophy that he has made before.

Honneth claims that Darwall shares the transcendental project with Habermas and Apel. In response, Darwall admits that his theory of second-personal reasons ought to be interpreted as having a transcendental presuppositional character, and that he shares this commitment with both Apel and Habermas, even though his is not as ambitious as their projects. Both Apel and Habermas make transcendental presuppositional claims about discourse in general, suggesting that discourse is itself, in Taylor's terms, an immediately common good. Darwall clarifies that he "make{s} no claims about discourse in general, but only about discourse that already involves the (second-personal) deontic concepts of authority, accountability, legitimate claim, right, obligation, and so forth" (Darwall, 2021, p.593). It could be that all discourse implicitly commits to these concepts, which is something that can be read in the theories of Apel and Habermas. Darwall's position is intended to hold whether this is the case or not.

The way Darwall defends his theory against Honneth's claims is an argument for why transcendental theories do not deny the social. Formal transcendental theories, as with formal deliberative procedures that characterize determinations of duty, are not a denial of social content but are in fact dependent on it. The distinction to be made between formal and substantive theories is simply that the formal can draw out procedural elements of substantive content. Darwall makes a terminological point to clarify the distinction. He notes that "morality" can function as a count noun and a noncount noun.[29] We can speak of the (count) morality of a group in the sense that groups have 'moralities' realized in the world through social conventions and norms, and we can speak of a group having (noncount) morality in the sense that philosophers often speak of morality, where 'morality'

[29] Count nouns are nouns that can be counted from one to infinity. Noncount nouns cannot be counted or pluralized and exist as masses or abstract qualities.

is meant abstractly as a set of normative standards to which actual social groups conform in one substantive way or another. Darwall explains that 'moral community' can be understood in the same way, in a substantive count sense and a formal noncount sense. Darwall admits, following Honneth's arguments in favor of substantial analysis that moral community in the noncount sense is abstract, that it is not to be thought of as existing in the same way as actual moral communities. However, he claims: "moral community in the noncount sense is an inescapable presupposition of normative moral thought" (Darwall, 2021, p.594).

The outcome of this argument suggests that transcendental presuppositions can be determined as the formal necessary conditions of any identifiable class. But why is this important? Darwall argues that "transcendental presuppositions of the very possibility of normative deontic thought (the address of second personal reasons) are required" if we are to be able to deliver genuinely deontic moral conclusions (*ibid*.). Without such presuppositions actual social convention, just like any positive, nonnormative fact, will lack any power to determine normative conclusions (what we ought to think, or do).

As self-determining beings, if we are to have a normative hold on one another, where we can have a sense of moral obligation and rights, we must hold to commitments in principle that are understood as commitments that we all hold in common. In order to understand the nature of such commitments we investigate our social conventions in order to transcendentally deduce the presuppositions that we all hold in common, as common goods which characterize our we-identity. Importantly, this means that a philosophical anthropology of our social practices in context is equally relevant to the requirement to understand the normative transcendental principles to which we are committed as we participate on the basis of we-identity. Darwall concludes that "without a grounding in a

second-personal moral philosophical framework, recognitional social theory lacks the basic presuppositions necessary to ground genuine deontic normativity"; and that "without recognitional social theory, a second-personal moral philosophy will lack resources necessary for nonideal theory" (Darwall, 2021, p.595). This implies that the principles Honneth is seeking that clarify what has been achieved through the struggle for mutual recognition are themselves transcendental presuppositions, what Honneth describes as quasi-transcendental justification of critique in the structure of social reality.

In these arguments provided by Darwall we can see that that the method of transcendental argument can be separated from the doctrine of transcendental idealism. We do not require to work out the details of a formal transcendental subject in order to ground the necessary structures in our experienced world. Yet we can still, and must still, work out conditionally transcendental presuppositions if we are to determine the principles to which we are committed sharing we-identity, where such principles express the values we share as immediately common goods. This view also fits the project of Habermas so far as he alludes to making a post-metaphysical turn. It ought to fit Honneth's project in the same way, and we might deduce as much in the fact that Honneth chooses to reconstruct Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* whilst bracketing the *Logic*. We can take the view that Habermas's post-metaphysical turn is not taken because a logic of reason like Hegel's logic of Spirit cannot be worked out, but that it is not necessary if we are to critically deliberate about normative practices. We can conceive the pursuit of metaphysical and post-metaphysical Hegelianism, that works out a practical anthropology, as compatible pursuits. If Hegel's practical philosophy is considered a historicization of Kant's transcendental idealism, and Honneth is pursuing Hegel's reconstructive method of human social history,

then the correct way to understand both Kantian and Hegelian critical theory is as the development of the method of transcendental critique.

§7 Reflective Equilibrium, Mutual Recognition and Self-Determination

That Kant's transcendental method can be sustained, despite rejection of the doctrine of transcendental idealism, means that we need to think differently about the principles that express necessary *a priori* conditions of possibility. Coupled with an empirical moral psychology of human agency instead of a transcendental psychology, we ought to consider the *a priori* as relative to deliberated theoretical paradigms. A relativized *a priori* of this kind is a conditional necessity, based on contingency (Thomas, 2006, p.57, p.93). In §4, I proposed that third-person points of view were objectivating and impartial points of view. These express principles that can be instances of the relativized a priori. They remain perspectival whilst being abstractive, to take 'no perspective in particular'. They are abstractions towards impartiality rather than outright idealizations based on an ideal conception of rational agency (Thomas, 2006, p.94). Perspectival neutrality is sought by agents that have a moral interest in taking a point of view that could be taken by any other rational agent. This moral interest acts as a procedural constraint over agents' deliberations. The procedural constraint grounds the rationality of agent's third-personal deliberations. Importantly, it grounds moral rationality in the "cognitive architecture" of agents' practical deliberation, where agents act according to these principles whether they explicitly adopt them in decisions guiding their practical action or not (*ibid*.).

From the arguments in §5, we can understand these impartial abstractions that guide practical action through critical constructions that come from the pragmatic

constraints of critical deliberation directed at self- or moral-audit. By moral audit it is meant that the epistemic moral constructions showing why we can believe our moral judgments to be correct can serve critically when we seek to put our moral commitments in reflective equilibrium. Stratton-Lake has shown constructive procedures are not aimed at determining 'reasons to act', but 'reasons to believe' that we ought to act in certain ways (and ought to adopt certain principles). Construction of reasons to believe that we ought to act in certain ways provides an epistemic account of our objective practical reasons that hold anyway. It clarifies the correct moral content we must commit to when we seek self-audit through reflective equilibrium. So when an agent seeks to express and justify reasons for an [inter]action, the deliberative constraint that makes their reasons accountable to others is a constraint of impartiality. This enables agents to establish a critical framing over their motivated reasons where they ensure they are reasons that could be justified to others, via moral self-justification.

There is a theoretical position that is at odds with the impartialist view, other than the one that attempts to idealize rationality in an idealized structural account of rational agency (based on, or inspired by, Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism). John McDowell's clash with Bernard Williams over internal and external reasons brings the position to light. McDowell also argued for moral cognitivism (as we are doing here), agreeing that there are objective moral reasons for action. He conceives of there being an *a priori* truth about the role reasons play in deliberation. He conceives of a virtuous agent acting for the right reasons because they have been 'brought up' correctly, but reasons are considered objective in a unique external sense. Only if such reasons are an *a priori* part of an agent's motivational set, where agents can come to realize these reasons that they have

as a matter of external fact, by deliberating about ideals of the good or the virtuous agent, can they come to act in the morally right way.

This view idealizes not the structure of rational agency but the content of the good, typically as the content expressed in the actions of an ideal agent of moral psychology (a *Phronimos*). The proposal that we infer from McDowell is that we should all come to have the motivational set, or moral psychology, of the ideal moral agent. This seems moralistic rather than simply moral, and less about acting by normative constraints for justification than it is about acting under moral indoctrination through shared moral ideology. Rather than a moral learning process that seeks to develop capabilities for agency in rational deliberation through self-auditing critique, indoctrination implies moral conditioning of patients to react in programmed ways to practical situations.

A moral theory committed to internal reasons, which always display relativity to an agent's motivational set, means we can find impartiality by pragmatic constraint, through development of the third-person perspective (§4). This avoids idealization of moral agency in terms of its formal structure, as in transcendental idealism which seeks to uncover the ontology of rational subjectivity. It also avoids idealization of moral agency in terms of moral content, where moral reasons just are the reasons of an ideal practical agent (a *Phronimos*). Idealization of moral content implies agents' reasons are external such that they are only internally linked to the motivational set of the ideal agent.

At the level of a social theory linking justice to the norms of particular institutional structures in society we need to avoid these idealizing possibilities for theorization too. We need to avoid idealization of the formal structure of particular social institutions just as we need to avoid idealization of the moral content. The correct reading of Honneth's approach ought to be that he reconstructs the norms of social institutions into principled form being

subject to the same sort of procedural constraints that lead to impartiality, with no suggestion of *idealized* externality. The 'externality' that is required for moral realism, objectivity, must be found without idealization of these sorts. It must be able to tie reasons to the cognitive architecture of agents' practical deliberation to "get all human beings into the scope of all reasons" (Skorupski, 2010, p.255). It must be able to explain reasons as applying to people who are unable to see their reason-giving force without the development of moral capacities in critical deliberation. This is an important point to consider when we look more closely at Honneth's development of Hegel's ideas about mutual recognition.

An example of Hegel's characterization of mutual recognition that is adopted by Honneth comes from the *Encyclopedia*: "that the individual proves 'worthy' of it 'if he behaves towards others in a generally valid manner, recognizing them as what he would like to be regarded as himself'" (Honneth, 2001, p.51). 'Validity' here implies moral validity and justification, where an agent [inter]acts justifiably by deliberative identification of aspects in others based on the desire that others deliberatively identify these aspects in reciprocation. We can entertain that they each have tokens of the same type of disposition because they have been 'properly brought up', but importantly, being 'properly brought up' (moral learning) implies the development of critical capacity for reflective moral audit. In Kantian terms, the Categorical Imperative is developed through reflection on the form a necessary principle would take that could express the universal authority of reason. In compatible Hegelian terms, the principle of mutual recognition is developed through reflection and internal critique of norms of (inter)action to draw from them the basic principles of rational authority and accountability.

Interpretation of Hegel's development of the importance of mutual recognition is controversial, and it is more common to interpret Hegel's theory of recognition from the *Phenomenology*. I take the view, from Robert Pippin, that Hegel's emphasis on recognition did not abandon an earlier, more intersubjective theory from his Jena period, for a later, more monastic or monological theory.[30] I also take Westphal's view of Hegel's *Phenomenology* that it is an analytical development of internal critiques addressing philosophical positions Hegel identified and showing how they are internally inconsistent.[31] On this reading, the idea of mutual recognition that is commonly lifted from the *Phenomenology* in the section on the 'Lord and Bondsman' is actually not Hegel's development of an argument for mutual recognition. At this point Hegel merely asserts mutual recognition as a thesis, which has led recent interlocutors to interpret that in this section Hegel is actually criticizing Fichte (Westphal, 2003; Clarke, 2009). Hegel is taking Fichte's thesis of mutual recognition that is coupled with a thesis that individual self-consciousness is completely self-sufficient, and showing through internal critique how the latter thesis is false (Westphal, 2003, p.61). Hegel's development of his own ideas about mutual recognition is not seen until near the end of the *Phenomenology*. The problem of mutual recognition manifests again in the section of the 'Unhappy Consciousness', but a resolved conception of mutual recognition is not fully developed until 'Evil and Forgiveness' at the end of Hegel's thinking about 'Conscience' (*PhdG*, ch. VIC §c) (Westphal, 2003, p.62).

Westphal explains:

> At this juncture, two moral judges finally recognize that they are equally fallible and equally competent to judge particular matters, and that they require each other's

[30] Versions of such a claim can be found in Habermas (1973), Theunissen (1982), Hösle (1987a), Honneth (1996). See: Pippin (2008)
[31] See: Westphal (2003)

> assessment in order to scrutinize and thereby to assess and to justify their own judgment on any particular matter (PhdG 9:359-62/M405-9; Westphal, 1989a. 183; 2003). This result introduces the theme of mature judgment into the content of the Phenomenology. (Westphal, 2003, p.62)

By 'mature judgment,' Westphal means a critically reflective judgment which he describes as constructive self- and mutual criticism that in turn leads to the development of a disposition expressing cardinal intellectual virtues. Maturity is regarded as a dispositional achievement that recognizes the value of constructive self- and mutual criticism. Westphal explains that the qualities of having the disposition of mature judgment "are revealed by how much more realistic a picture they provide our actual cognitive predicament…" (Westphal, 2003, p.48).

Alan Thomas and Bernard Williams also address this idea of 'higher order dispositions' which bring with them distinctive associated patterns of motivation. Thomas is specifically concerned with the minimal sense of mature rational disposition that has a regulative status over particular motivations (Thomas, 2006, p.92). He notes the distinction between having desire to advance reasons to others without reasonable rejection from a more ethically developed idea of mature rational disposition to be found in the work of Williams. In 'Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame,' Williams develops the account that mature rational disposition involves a reflective proleptic appeal in moral criticism to "the desire to be respected by people whom, in turn, one respects" (Williams, 1995, p.41).

With some support, Williams' idea interlocks with the views of Honneth and the dispositional idea of mutual recognition. This can be understood by appreciating how moral obligations are linked to reasons for action, as is noted by Williams in the following passage:

> Blame rests, in part, on a fiction; the idea that ethical reasons, in particular the special kind of ethical reasons that are obligations, must, really, be available to the blamed agent. ... He ought to have done it, as moral blame uses that phrase, implies there was reason for him to have done it, and this certainly intends more than the thought that we had a reason to want him to do it. It hopes to say, rather, that he had a reason to do it. But this may well be untrue: it was not in fact a reason for him, or at least not enough of a reason. Under this fiction, a continuous attempt is made to recruit people into a deliberative community that shares ethical reasons ... But the device can do this only because it is understood not as a device, but as connected with justification and with reasons that the agent might have had; and it can be understood in this way only because, much of the time, it is indeed connected with those things. (Williams, 1995, p.16)

The idea of recruiting people into a deliberative community is the idea of social agents developing their social disposition to recognize themselves as part of a particular we-identity. Honneth's idea of the struggle for recognition is the struggle to get all people to be reasonable in the sense of all people being under the scope of all reasons. But as people do, in fact, have different values and ideals, different things matter to different sorts of people. An individual's way of seeing facts in situations as reason-giving requires that those facts hold for them a reason-giving force: "If we say that Tom has no reason to thank Mary, the thought that moves us is that a fact cannot be a reason for an agent to ϕ if it cannot be recognized as such by him" (Skorupski, 2007, p.88; ϕ indicating a verb of action). Williams thus can argue that there is no scope for blame towards people who do not share rational dispositions in the sense of being members of the same deliberative community, sharing the same second-personal ethical reasons, or we-identity. So at first glance, Williams' view is at odds with Honneth.

Does this leave us with an extreme variant of moral relativism? Williams' conception of a specifically proleptic theory of blame connects membership in a deliberative community sharing ethical reasons with the desire to be respected by people whom, in turn, one respects. In thinking this way, he effectively preempts the method Honneth pursues to

consider how we might envisage securing mutual recognition so that society can be bonded because of reasons that enable the best possible autonomy, considered as a common good. The issue is in conceiving how people develop responsiveness to second-personal moral reasons, as such responsiveness is the measure of moral responsibility. This responsiveness is developed, not by monological reasoning, in isolation, but in a dialogical manner, where "I come to appreciate reasons that I wouldn't have come to see on my own by listening to what people I respect think" (Skorupski, 2007, p.101). This expresses mature judgement, in the sense Westphal interprets Hegel. Honneth's social analysis, specifically develops this view through diagnosis of the social spheres of the family, market, and democratic public sphere, where it is not just feelings of respect that are a normative source for the development of practical reasons, but also feelings of love, and self-esteem (Honneth, 2014). Each of the socially induced feelings of love, respect, and esteem engages individuals in the domain of reason whereby they proleptically interact as agents responsive to reasons as such.

The issue is whether the idea of prolepsis serves merely as a critique of the morality system, as it does with Williams, where agents desire to be respected by people whom, in turn, one respects merely for prudential reasons. The point developed by Hegel, and expressed by Westphal as mutual recognition of the need for mature judgment solves this issue. Reflective proleptic appeal in moral criticism indicates that mature ethical dispositions are those that commit to being a part of a moral community. In Williams' analysis this community integrates in we-identity by the desire of members to be respected by people whom, in turn, one respects. But, unlike Williams, we can entertain that integration in we-identity is done for more than prudential reasons. Like Hegel's two moral judges, socialized agents in reflection are capable of mutually recognizing morality "as a psychological

authority rooted in the cognitive architecture of their practical deliberation" (Thomas, 2006, p.94).

This leads, in Skorupski's analysis, to individuals coming to appreciate reasons that they wouldn't have come to see on their own, and links together with Westphal's interpretation of the disposition of mature judgement. In Honneth's analysis this too is the case, but in addition to grounding we-identity in wanting to be respected by those who are respected, there is wanting to be loved by those who are loved and esteemed by those who are esteemed.

In effect, this means that internal reasons need not be conceived as convergent goods, reasons that simply happen to be good for me as they are good for you, but can be conceived as common goods, good for us, as we are of a mature, reason-guided disposition to share motivations in common. Objective reasons are available to agents who interact in shared contexts because of the cognitive architecture they must share if they interactively reflect on those contexts. This idea answers the threat of relativity suggested by Williams' idea that there is no core set of reasons on which all agents are, *a priori*, guaranteed to converge. A proleptic account of mature rational disposition indicates that the intentions of agents are aligned by way of their self-determination according to shared principles. They find these principles through sharing values and coming to appreciate this with mutual recognition grounded interactively in shared practical contexts.

But how are we to conceive of a proleptic account of self-determination? The idea with prolepsis with the acceptance of reasons based on wanting to be respected by those that are respected is that individuals are anticipating in advance being the kind of person for which those reasons are meaningful and motivational, because they are meaningful and motivational for those who are respected. Then, as self-determining beings, these reasons

are taken as reasons for practical deliberation. An idea at work in a proleptic account of self-determination is thus that when self-determining with reasons that are reasons for those I respect, I will not come to find that I later lose respect for them after acting from those reasons. Reflective equilibrium is in play again here. The reasons upon which an individual acts are not merely those that can be described as first-personal reasons. They also bring into play the third-personal perspective, which allows an individual to take a third-personal view of themselves as agents, interacting with other respected, loved, esteemed, agents in a shared world. The reasons generated from the third-personal perspective can include principles based on constructive procedures such as the Categorical Imperative procedure, as well as reasons that are reasons for individuals who are respected. These reasons come into consideration when self-determining through practical deliberation.

It is important to understand how self-determination through practical deliberation works. Understanding self-determination is the key to understanding the motivations for critical theory, as in critical theory the idea is that reflexive critique will play an important role in allowing us to self-govern as a matter of self-determination so that we can act in more reasonable ways, both for ourselves, and together in social organization with each other. Unfortunately, my sense is that self-determination is frequently referenced in critical theory, as is self-governance, as they are key concepts to the idea of autonomy, but often little further explanation is given for what happens in self-determination as a matter of agential practice. This is what I need to account for now and in a way that indicates how the practice of self-determination is proleptic, where it anticipates in advance what will later prove to be the case. Anticipating in advance what will later prove to be the case can appear as a circular bootstrapping explanation, but it is not. It is proposed on a temporal

understanding of practical agency. I will argue that prolepsis is integral to the concept of practical self-determination.

If we were to ask what the aim of self-determination is and agree to take the viewpoint, broadly speaking, of the tradition that starts with Kant, proceeds through Hegel and ends up with Honneth, we would say that it is to self-govern through practical deliberation. This means that we can deliberate about what we do in such a way that we are able to govern our own conduct. If we were to extrapolate this idea to the level of collective social organization, we can give credence to the idea that when practically deliberating together we are able to govern our social conduct and put in place institutions that represent this. Honneth thinks of social organization with the term 'collective will-formation', where we can conceive of the idea of our 'struggle for recognition', as the struggle to be reasonable together so that we may self-determine as a collective will (Honneth, 2014, p.330). We will consider self-determination here at the individual level before considering it at the collective level.

The core idea for self-determination as self-governance can be conceived in how reflective equilibrium is used for practical deliberation to govern personal conduct. We can consider the result of the pursuit of reflective equilibrium as determining a decision that guides how we act. This means that when reasons for acting are all considered, the reflective equilibrium that results between first-personal reasons based on thoughts and desires motivated by a context or situation, and third-personal reasons that are maximally impartial, thus objective, provide reasons for action, so that decision can be made to ϕ. In deciding to act, third-personal considerations function as principled self-imposed constraints on conduct which is motivated by first-personal thoughts and desires.

The proleptic aspect of deciding to act is expressed so far as when a decision to act is made, an agent is making proleptic assumptions about their future conduct. Agents make assumptions about their future by making decisions under the guidance of constraints. Deciding to ϕ, as an example of intended action, means committing to behavior that will be a realization of knowledge which that agent has of ϕ-ing, or presuppositions about ϕ-ing (cf. Soteriou, 2013). For example, we can think of ϕ-ing as 'visiting an art gallery'. If I know, or even presuppose, what 'visiting an art gallery' means, what it involves, then the decision to visit an art gallery is the decision about constraining my future behavior in such a way that I can realize myself in action as 'visiting an art gallery' in this way. Until I do visit an art gallery, my decision will not have been realized. When it is realized, I will recognize myself as having self-determined through self-governance by imposing constraints on my behavior so that I made sure to act by 'visiting an art gallery'. Self-determination is proleptic in this way. Prolepsis allows agents to conceive of themselves across time as beings who realize themselves through self-imposed constraints based on principles and reasons in reflective equilibrium, where decisions realize knowledge.

How, then, can proleptic self-determination be conceived in terms of the desire to be respected by people whom, in turn, one respects? If we consider the desire to be respected by people as first personal, then reflective deliberation that results in equilibrium between this desire and one's third-personal principles about conduct will result in decisions about how to act. If an agent starts this process of practical deliberation with knowledge or presuppositions about what it is to be respected by people whom one respects, then the ongoing desire for this, together with the committed decision to realize the desire, through self-disciplined action can determine its realization – which is that of being respected by people whom one respects.

We can see how transcendental principles determined by the Categorical Imperative are used in proleptic self-determination. The Categorical Imperative procedure enables us to believe that principles expressive of the norms of our conduct are correct, that is, objective. These principles are transcendental presuppositions of acts if those acts are to be morally obligatory (Herman, 1981). On the one hand, we can envisage an agent behaving morally simply by having been brought up correctly, where they think and act as described by a naive view of moral dispositions, where moral dispositions might be described as 'conditioned'. In some cases, people have been conditioned to see the facts in such a way that they have motiving force to do the right thing. On the other hand, a less naive view of dispositions sees that humans are self-determining. They can self-govern as a way to adapt their conventionally conditioned moral dispositions so that they can develop their 'own' (autonomous) moral dispositions through practical self-audit and self-critique. Presuppositional transcendental principles of classes of action are criterial, as Stratton-Lake suggests, but they are also critical, as they can be used in practice, when used as constraints to aid practical realization of intentions.

What can we make of this process at the social level? Let us imagine self-determining in a small group, which can be extrapolated in principle to a large group. We want to believe that the same process of self-determination to realize intentions or decisions based on knowledge can be replicated in a small group of self-determining agents. In a slightly idealized scenario, the small group will maintain an individual requirement to be self-determining, where their choices and decisions have enabled them to successfully self-realize by constraining their behavior in the right ways – they have mature judgement.

Each will then come together to self-determine as a group in a way that does not affect their own self-determination negatively. This is where an idea of freedom comes into

play. Rather than merely protect their negative freedom to each continue self-determining without interference, the group decides to test the intention to self-determine as a collective in agreement, to realize goods that they could not come to realize individually. Upon success, a positive conception of freedom is effectively realized, and understood as increased autonomy. The group goal, reflected in the attitude of each individual, now becomes to continue making group decisions to achieve goods that are of a higher order than goods that can be achieved alone, common goods grounded in we-identity such as personal relationships, the market economy, and a democratic political sphere (Honneth, 2014). But this realization must also respect egoistic goods that individuals want to be able to achieve alone, thus maintaining a constraint of negative freedom, implying individual rights for securities.[32] The group thus proceeds, and puts in place institutional forms of systems of action based on reasonable constraint for the realization of both convergent and common goods. As this point, we have a simple model of what Honneth's society would look like if it worked well.

We might ask now how the model goes wrong in reality, but unfortunately this is a demanding question to answer. A better question is to ask what is meant by self- and we-determination going wrong? One answer will say that elements of irrationality or unreasonableness have entered the social system. The task of a critical theory is to help the social system 'self-determine' in a way that secures better reasonability. Honneth, specifically, has identified the task of critical social theory to address failings in reason in terms of the struggle for recognition, which is how he presents the social struggle for us all to be more reasonable in the way we self-determine together.

[32] cf. Liberal Republicanism (based on a Roman republicanism) – Pettit (2012); Thomas (2016)

What is interesting about this simple social model given the idea of proleptic self-determination is that it indicates once again why the idea of social progress is important to Honneth, as well as the idea of teleology. I do not want to reintroduce any idea of history as being teleological, but there is certainly an idea with self-determination that agents are hermeneutically setting their own ends, or telos. At the level of a working social model that consists of self-determining agents working together in collective will-formation to achieve more goods than they could achieve merely individually, there may even be an idea that a social agent is 'self-determining' by setting its own telos. But this is a mistake. There is no such thing as a social agent, as if an individual agent writ large. Furthermore, there is no such thing as a purely intentional human being. I have described self-determination as acting practically on the basis of decisions or intentions. But much of the time, realistically, humans act by habit, not by intention, even if previous intentions have helped form these dispositional habits.

Unfortunately, with history, just as at the level of individuals, life-course is largely dispositional habit with a sporadic critical intervention of intentional praxis for purposes of self-determination.[33] History is not purely intentional, thus is not teleological. But aspects of history are perhaps teleological. Within any given path-dependent paradigm there is a hermeneutic teleology towards mature judgment to the degree that we commit to increased self-determination.[34]

[33] cf. Jaeggi (2019) where this view is described in terms of 'forms of life' (clusters of social practices) that are integrated through ethical self-understanding and succeed or fail in responding to social challenges by revising that self-understanding.

[34] cf. Stahl (2024) for an argument supporting social critique through 'we-determination' as anticipation of possible future states of affairs where there is more reasonable social organization. Where Stahl describes a "future, idealized state of affairs" (*ibid.* p.90), I would argue we can seek pragmatic 'we-realization' through prolepsis.

§8 Social Integration through Proleptic Mutual Recognition

The final section of this thesis argues that Honneth's interpretation that all social integration depends on forms of mutual recognition requires providing a proleptic account of mutual recognition. A number of points have now been suggested that clarify Honneth's project in critical social theory. Briefly, it has been argued, Honneth's project as a reactualization of Frankfurt School critical theory is best understood as a critical synthesis of ideas from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* with ideas from Habermas's work that led to *Knowledge and Human Interests*, with additional insight from Foucault's late work in genealogical critique. The 'post-metaphysical pragmatic turn' is adopted from Habermas to conceive of the instrumentality of reason in terms of social action rather than in 'consciousness', where language use fixes the executions of instrumental action in a generalized objective form. This view allows communicative action to be transcendentally presupposed for any sufficiently complex or socially integrative action given the idea that such action is determined by being programmed and coordinated based on shared- and self-understanding.

Social or moral progress is also best viewed as naturalized in this post-metaphysical pragmatic form, and Honneth's references to historical teleology ought to be viewed as mistaken and unnecessary for his theory. Nagel's view of social and moral progress suits Honneth's critical theory much better and introduces the idea of reflective equilibrium to help us conceive of the congruence Honneth's theory requires when he shifts emphasis of analysis between different spheres of action. Most importantly, for a critical theory that is to avoid becoming an uncritical, conservative social analysis, local spheres of action require an emphasis where the first-personal perspective is required to be the moral minimum of

any theory of morality. Indeed, against the concern that feelings and thoughts from the first-personal perspective are structurally dissociative, where conventional terms of communication cannot capture an individual's feelings of humiliation, disrespect, blame, a genealogical metacritique can help us understand that discursive games of truth, practices of power, and technologies of the self may be contributing to the problem. The moral minimum is thus an ongoing concern for a critical social theory.

Honneth identifies the normative sources for normative governance in principles of mutual recognition. It has been argued here that his view that these principles are "quasi-transcendental" really means that they are conditionally transcendental. Arguments in support of Kantian theory have led to a picture that suggests (we interpret) that Honneth's discomfort with Kantian theory is linked to misunderstandings of Kant's moral philosophy, and particularly those Kantian models described as Kantian constructivism. I have argued that constructivism and Honneth's method of normative reconstruction are entirely compatible, and that the former is not a 'denial of the social' but depends on it. I have linked Honneth's position, given the requirement of the moral minimum, to the moral theory that claims "there are only internal reasons for action" (Williams, 1995, p.35). I believe this helps clarify further how Honneth's theory sides with interpretations of Kant that distance themselves from more specifically rationalist interpretations that do not emphasize the critical potential of Kantian theory. Finally, I have described a simple model of self-determination that I argue is proleptic, implying that self-conscious agents must take a view of themselves as temporally extended agents, not just in the sense that they have

different motivations at different times, but that making decisions to be realized in future action is how agents govern their decision-making.[35]

I want to finish this thesis by considering how mutual recognition is proleptic in a way that supports Honneth's belief that recognition identifies a "core of expectations" that all agents embody in social interaction (Honneth, 2003, p.247). I also want to argue a reconciliation for the two views that Honneth finds as evidence of ambivalence in Habermas, where it is not clear whether the potential for transcendence of norms of social practice is found explicitly in social interaction or in the normative presuppositions that are interpreted in the structure of human language. Darwall suggests that transcendental theories and recognitional social theories need not be orthogonal to each other (Darwall, 2021, p.564). I will argue that if recognitional social theories are to be critical theories, they *require* support from transcendental theory.

The form of mutual recognition that interests Honneth is what Skorupski notes is "the form of recognition whose withdrawal is at stake in blame" (Skorupski, 2010, p.374). "It is recognition of the other as a responsible moral agent, i.e. one who possesses the subjectivity and moral insight of a moral agent, and can be relied on, and if necessary called on, to act on it" (*ibid.*). This is a developed form of mutual recognition.

Skorupski identifies a first basic sort of recognition as 'summons'. This term of recognition is associated with Fichte, but it appears more basic than Fichte's notion. 'Summons' is a primitive recognition, where a "being may be able to 'call on' or 'summon' others" where, "I recognize it as, like me, a being with concerns it can call on me to respond to" (*ibid.*). Skorupski notes that this is the kind of primitively recognitive relationship we can

[35] Soteriou summarizes this view, although he doesn't describe it as proleptic: "when one decides to ϕ, a constraint one imposes on oneself is to treat 'I will ϕ' as a premise in one's practical reasoning – to assume the truth of 'I will ϕ'" (Soteriou, 2013, p.310)

have with animals (though we have it with people too), in the case of where animals issue an appeal to a person as communication that cannot be an object of mutual linguistic development. The 'call' or 'summons' is a call for recognition and Skorupski notes that "one can't help feeling that to turn it down requires some 'explanation' or at least a show of feeling" (*ibid.*).

A stronger form of recognition is 'demand'. This is more clearly linked to Fichte's ideas about mutual recognition. Demand comes in the form of recognition of a command and recognition of the other as a right-holder. It indicates a form of recognition as a way of structuring social role relations. In the 'demand' relationship there is a transcendental presupposition held between agents that defines the nature of their agency to each other: "{t}o demand is to recognize the other as capable of responding to a demand, thus as capable of recognizing the demand as a reason to act" (Skorupski, 2010, p.374). Abstractly, the recognitional 'demand' is a summoning of agency or subjectivity in the sense developed by Fichte. Though it is not yet a fully moral attitude, as noted by James Clarke:

> For although Fichte's conception of free activity as a capacity to set ends and to will to realize them may suggest Kant's notion of 'humanity' (*Menschheit*), Fichte explicitly states that the concept of right – which denotes the relationship of mutual recognition – has 'nothing to do with the moral law', being 'deduced without it' (Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right*, p. 50)" (Clarke, 2009, p.371).

Clarke describes Fichte's claims that when considering merely from within a domain of right, coercion, with the implicit threat or implementation of physical force, is what gives right its sanction. We thus can envisage a social system of mutual recognition where agents restrict their own freedom through the concept of the possibility of the freedom of others (Clarke, 2009). This is merely a prudential respect for others based on self-interest.

Moral recognition, in contrast, reflects recognition of agents from a second-personal standpoint in terms of the idea of second-personal reasoning – this is reasoning that "depends on presupposed authority and accountability relations between persons and, therefore, on the possibility of the reason's being addressed person-to-person" (Darwall, 2006, p.8). Importantly, moral recognition implies recognition as summons, and as demand, but where authority is secured not by coercion, but by mutual recognition of second-personal reasons.

But what happens when there is an act of moral violation? The idea of blame suggests that blameworthy agents are in violation of what we ought to mutually recognize as reasonable. Blame suggests that an individual has reason for action that they have failed to see. Humiliation, and disrespect, when given a similar moral sense, can then be tied to the concept of blame. Moral humiliation and disrespect are feelings that can be associated with not being recognized at the level required by moral recognition, and therefore indicate blameworthy actions (or inaction) on the part of others. Such feelings, as Honneth identifies, can be the normative source of motivation for addressing and potentially changing the social order.

A difficulty emerges when we consider what we might say to someone who acts in a way that we consider morally blameworthy, because we might feel morally humiliated, or disrespected by an instance of their [in]action, yet they appear to lack having a sense of sharing our reasons for action. This has been described above as a case of others not being a part of our deliberative community, our moral community, or our we-identity. If we consider mutual recognition merely in terms of demand, not at the level of moral recognition, we might say that it is in their interests to act better lest they receive a coercive thumping. But this means giving a reason of the wrong sort. Reasons in moral recognition

are second-personal, whereas in demand recognition that isn't grounded in moral recognition, reasons can at best be instrumental and prudential (guided by self-interest).

The proleptic theory of blame indicates a solution to this problem and together with a simple model of self-determination shows that agents can intentionally constrain themselves to realize knowledge they have of acts in their own future actions. So, given the desire to be respected, loved, or esteemed, by those who are, in turn, respected, loved, or esteemed, reasons for action can be considered through a proleptic mechanism. If I cannot see a reason for acting in some way in my motivational set, I can at least see a reason for acting to maintain the respect, love, or esteem, of those I respect, love, or esteem, and therefore intentionally act on reasons that are their considered reasons. Reasons can be proleptic when they are supposed for the sake of realization through an intentional action that secures the correct anticipated responses. For example, when I first met Japanese businessmen and I noticed that they bow when handing over their business cards, and hold these cards in two hands, studying the exchanged card in detail before continuing conversation – did I have reason to act this way too? The proleptic account of reasons shows how I can conceive that I did, if it was part of my motivational set to be respected by these businessmen whom I respected. Of course, this account can point to practical reason as being merely prudential (Williams' idea). But support from the Hegelian idea of mature judgment indicates that dispositional development to share concerns in contexts of [inter]action realizes a deep desire that we must all share, to be in the ethical. This not only means that we have the desire to justify ourselves to others, but that we believe we all fall under a schema of universal reasons.[36]

[36] cf. Skorupski, 2010, ch.10.8 - Cognitive internalism and the range of practical reasons.

The question now is whether mutual recognition can be proleptic when it is supposed for the sake of realization through intentional actions that secure the correct anticipated responses. And of course, we see that it is. In any assumption of a summons, whether as primitive summons, demand, or moral expectation, mutual recognition can be supposed. Then when it is presupposed for action, it will figure in the constraints of behavior that lead to realization in action of knowledge that in fact confirms the presupposition. In the same example, let's suggest that both the Japanese businessmen and I were supposing that we wanted to bond in mutual recognition where we converge on shared understanding of reasons in we-identity. We both have a strong desire to be in the ethical. I act with intention presupposing mutual recognition, just as they act with intention presupposing mutual recognition, and the realization of our actions, despite our language difficulties, is the shared realization of our mutual recognition as an 'us', with we-identity.[37] Supporting the premises for Honneth's theory, this shows that mutual recognition can identify a core of expectations that all agents embody in social interaction when they interact towards shared understanding with self-determined intention.

Can this view now support the argument that if recognitional social theories are to be critical theories, they require support from transcendental theory? Let us look at the views in Habermas that I have suggested can be reconciled (§1). The premise of Honneth's position is "the hypothesis that all social integration depends on reliable forms of mutual recognition, whose insufficiencies and deficits are always tied to feelings of misrecognition – which in turn, can be regarded as the engine of social change" (Honneth, 2003, p.245). The question Honneth poses Habermas's theory is whether the transcending potential is in

[37] A great example of this based on a primitive form of summons with mimesis, is the father & son scene in the film Jaws, by Steven Spielberg.

social interactions themselves, or only when social interactions are mediated by language, because of the normative potential of communication. The solution, given understanding of explicitly moral recognition, in contrast to mere summons, or demand recognition, is that self-determination is required to be understood as mutually recognized self-determination for the establishment of moral we-identity, as 'we-determination'. Social interactions thus need to be communicatively mediated in a way that supports mutual self-determination if emancipatory potential for social change is to be found.

There is a further implication of this view which is reflected in Darwall's analysis of transcendental theories in relation to recognitional social theories. What is made clear in transcendental theories are the principles that must be presupposed as conditions of possibility in a specified class, framework, or paradigm. In moral philosophy, the explicitly Kantian method, rejecting or leaving to one side the doctrine of transcendental idealism (transcendental subjectivity), aims to reflect on our practical commitments in a way that draws into relief the universal aspects of our practical commitments as explicitly moral commitments. This method is what is used by a number of philosophers to develop theories through self-audit that conceive of political justice (Rawls), autonomous moral identity (Korsgaard), the authority of reason (O'Neill), the concept of validity in speech acts (Habermas), our second-personal commitments to reasons (Darwall).

Honneth follows a derivative method of securing transcendental principles by replacing constructivist self-audit with a reconstructive social-audit that evaluates the principles of mutual recognition that are necessary presuppositions of institutionalized social practices. But another step is required for analysis, or audit, to serve a role in critical praxis. Objective principles secured through audit are used as constraints for our practical deliberations in either self- or we-determination that is intentional (that acts on the basis of

decision-making). The presuppositions of social practices that we value operate as knowledge when deciding to act, whereby we constrain our behavior by principles in order to practically realize what we take as theoretical knowledge in our actions. The power of critical theory is to identify transcendental presuppositions of practices that we value so that these presuppositions, as theoretical knowledge, can act as a constraining force over behavior as self- and we-determination seeks to realize knowledge in action. Transcendental theory is core to critical theory, whether transcendental principles are identified through self-audit or social analysis.

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