let these conflicts be played out by the actors themselves. A proper theory of justice must go beyond this – it must be able to guide political practice and to point forward, towards the right and away from the wrong, regardless of the beliefs held true in society, by dominant groups or by others. This, however, Honneth's approach cannot do, fueled as it is by feelings of disrespect as experienced by subjects themselves, and failing as it does to discriminate between warranted and unwarranted experiences.

3. Final Remarks

In conclusion, while Honneth might be right that the injustice suffered by Fraser's skilled white worker *can be understood* in terms of recognition, it is not clear that his purely recognition-theoretical approach can adequately answer how such claims *should be evaluated*. Granted – and this weakens my argument – I have presupposed what were to be shown: that economy cannot be reduced to culture alone; that not everything is interpretations of culturally shaped interests; that there are truths and falsities that go beyond mere culture. Or, referring to the examples above, that it might be that Nozickian libertarians or van Parijs' free-riding surfers are wrong. Plain and simple. Not wrong within the interpretative schema that is our culture, but wrong regardless of what they themselves, or people in general, consider right or wrong.

For the claim that Honneth fails to assess our subjective experiences theoretically, or pre-politically, is meaningful only on the assumption that such assessments are possible. This in turn requires that there is a deeper point of departure available, one that is morally prior to subjects' experiences and valid regardless of culture. That, however, I have not argued for. Acknowledging the incompleteness of my argument, I therefore offer these remarks only as an attempt to shed further light on what I consider to be the main shortcomings of Honneth's approach and of its theoretical presuppositions.

Marcus Ohlström
Linnaeus University, Sweden
marcus.ohlstrom@lnu.se

On the Motivational Bases of Social Struggle. Honneth versus Fraser
Marco Solinas

Axel Honneth has furnished a penetrating critique of the dichotomy between redistributive or economic conflicts and conflicts over social and cultural identity that has recently been re-endorsed by Nancy Fraser. I think it may be helpful to re-examine this particular issue here precisely because it allows us to shed some light on two closely interconnected questions. The first one, formulated in negative terms, concerns the renewed attempt to overcome certain fundamental assumptions of the classical Marxist tradition. The second, expressed in positive terms, is concerned with clarifying the principal theoretical commitments of an ambitious socio-philosophical approach that

attempts to interpret the basic motivational factors behind all social struggles exclusively in terms of human convictions and aspirations that are eminently moral in character. First, in section 1, I discuss the negative side of the question, in order to show how this critique of the dualistic "Marxist approach" favoured by Fraser basically revives earlier criticisms that have been directed against the Marxist schema of "basis" and "super-structure." In section 2, I indicate how the abandonment of this schema, in contrast to the sort of criticisms raised by members of the first generation of Critical Theory, is based on a version of Habermas's normative-theoretical approach (one that goes beyond the admittedly crucial distinction between "life world" and "system"), but Honneth also suggests, albeit cautiously, the need to reconsider Gramsci's position in this regard, a position that seems to me to represent a more balanced approach to the problem. In section 3, I show how Honneth has radicalized his theoretical model of intersubjective recognition by claiming that the moral response to the experience of disrespect provides the basic motivation for all forms of social struggle, so that that the role of material inter-ests, and of the economic sphere more generally, is now effectively absorbed within the recognition model. In section 4, I attempt to show that this analytical perspective leads to an exaggerated emphasis upon the moral sphere in relation to the ethico-political and the politico-economic sphere, and that this imbalance impairs the heuristic fruitful-ness of the recognition paradigm itself. I believe that this tendency can be countered through a more balanced approach that draws on the insights and contributions of the Gramscian perspective, including his thematization of struggles for hegemony. This approach would allow us, without falling back into a dualist position, to broaden the complex spectrum within which we can clearly analyse both the phenomenology of the experience of disrespect and the struggles for recognition that emerge from this experi-ence. Finally, in section 5, I summarize the conclusion of the argument.

1. Reflections on Superstructure

In negative terms, Honneth's principal criticism of the "Marxist tradition" defended by Frazer springs from the "conviction that Marx makes some serious mistakes in his analysis of capitalist society. The central objection here concerns his unmistakable propensity to dismiss the moral power of the equality and achievement principles as cultural superstructure [*als kulturellen Überbau*], although they provided the newly emerging market society with its legitimating framework in the first place."[21] These principles play a decisive role in determining how "labor" is valued and understood: "Between the new status hierarchy – the gradation of social esteem according to the values of industrial capitalism – and the unequal distribution of material resources there is, to this extent, more than a merely external relation of "superstructure" and "basis" [*mehr als das bloß äusserliche Verhältnis von "Überbau" und "Basis"*], of "ideol-ogy" and objective reality."[22] Honneth thus goes further than merely criticizing the

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[21] Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition. A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London: Verso, 2003, p. 150. Unless otherwise indicated, all other page references in the text refer to this text.

[22] Ibid., p. 141.

schema that posits the superstructure as a reflection of "the basis," something that had already been undertaken by the earliest exponents of Critical Theory. For the task is to change the whole perspective from which the Marxist schema should be addressed: the question is no longer that of explaining the absence of revolutionary class consciousness, or of testing the historical effectiveness of political ideologies. Once the underlying Marxist philosophy of history has been abandoned, we can clearly recognize the "tendency to see the proletariat alone as the stand-in for all social discontent" as "the fatal mistake Marxist theory made over and over again."[23] The crucial question now is to show that the critique – like the justification and in fact, at least in part, the very constitution – of the capitalist criteria of value that define the terms of redistributive conflicts rests on principles of a "moral" kind. What is at issue now is thus no longer simply the thesis (now almost obsolete anyway) that the superstructure is merely the "reflection" of the economic basis, but the separation itself between the sphere of economics and that of culture (between the "material" level and the "cultural" or "symbolic" level). Here therefore Honneth moves both against Marx and against, or rather beyond, Habermas. And he has continued to work in this same direction throughout the last few years, by insisting on the normative elements that he believes are immanent to the economic sphere.[24]

2. The Roots of Normativity

Still speaking negatively, the second essential component in his critique of Fraser and the Marxist tradition concerns the basic socio-anthropological model underlying this approach. In this regard, Honneth emphasizes how the tradition of critical social theory – influenced by the idea that a single "unified interest" could be ascribed to the working class, and that there was therefore absolutely no need for "a separate explanation" of the moral expectations of society that (individual and collective) subjects entertain – privileged an essentially utilitarian anthropological model that simultaneously precluded the possibility of developing an analysis of those moral factors that ultimately sustain the redistributive conflicts themselves.[25] From this point of view, an articulated theory of recognition "should serve to make visible a deep layer of morally motivated conflicts that the tradition of critical social theory has not infrequently misrecognized, owing to its fixation on the concept of interest."[26] For this fixation explains "why the attempt has never really been undertaken within the tradition of critical social theory to come to a preliminary conceptual understanding [*sich konzeptuell* [...] *vorzuverständigen*] of the normative sources of social discontent. With the great exception of Jürgen Habermas – alongside whom Antonio Gramsci should perhaps be placed – for various reasons a certain tendency to anti-normativism has prevailed, which essentially prohibited subjects from being endowed with normative expectations vis-à-vis society."[27] In this respect

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[23] Ibid., p. 124.
[24] See in particular, A. Honneth, "Arbeit und Anerkennung. Versuch einer Neubestimmung," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 56 (2008) 3, pp. 327-341.
[25] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 127.
[26] Ibid., p. 136; see also p. 134.
[27] Ibid., pp. 128-29.

Honneth thus distances himself from the earlier generation of critical theorists, and follows Habermas in insisting on the necessity of adopting an explicitly normative perspective for analyzing social reality and the suffering and discontent that afflicts it. He also appeals, albeit rather cautiously, to Antonio Gramsci in this connection. I believe that this appeal is entirely legitimate in one respect. For Gramsci's writings reveal an unequivocal tendency to acknowledge and appreciate the ethical and moral dimension that is inherent in social struggle. And he addresses this dimension within a theoretical framework that, while clearly Marxist in character, is by no means economistic in a reductive sense, and expressly questions the schema of base and superstructure in a number of respects. Nonetheless, when we consider Honneth's critical observations regarding the role of material interests in generating social conflicts and struggles, and, more generally, the radicalized version of his theoretical model that we shall explicitly discuss below, I believe that the Gramscian approach has a distinct advantage here. For it is more successful in combining the two dimensions, that of moral norms and that of material interests, that produce and sustain social (and political) struggles, without thereby falling back into a basically dualistic perspective.

3. Radicalizing the Theoretical Model of Recognition

In positive terms, the abandonment of the schema of base and superstructure, along with the repudiation of the socio-anthropological model associated with it, leads directly to the attempt to interpret all forms of injustice, whether in the context of redistributive issues or that of questions regarding social and cultural identity, within the unified framework of a theory of recognition. As far as the more strictly economic level is concerned, this means that we are in a position "to offer evidence for the strong thesis that even distributional injustices must be understood as the institutional expression of social disrespect [*von sozialer Missachtung*] – or, better said, of unjustified relations of recognition."[28] The task of demonstrating this thesis is unfolded as follows: "Since the central institutions of even capitalist societies require rational legitimation through generalizable principles of reciprocal recognition, their reproduction remains dependent on a basis of moral consensus." And this implies that what "motivates individuals or social groups to call the prevailing social order in question and to engage in practical resistance is the *moral* conviction that, with respect to their own situations or particularities, the recognition principles considered legitimate are incorrectly or inadequately applied." It follows from this that "a moral experience that can be meaningfully described as one of 'disrespect' [*Missachtung*] must be regarded as the motivational basis of all social conflicts [als *die institutionelle Basis aller sozialen Kämpfe*]."[29] And this thesis amounts to the claim that "the experience of social injustice always corresponds to the withholding of what is taken to be legitimate recognition."[30] Thus redistributive conflicts, like "all" other social conflicts, would also belong to the sphere of struggles for recognition in general.

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[28] Ibid., p. 114.
[29] Ibid., p. 157.
[30] Ibid., p. 170.

I believe that this line of argument clearly reveals how the attack on the economistic and utilitarian model once defended by the Marxist tradition has been radicalized through the elaboration of a normative framework that tends to leave little room for thematizing the interrelations between moral expectations and material interests. Yet in Honneth's book *The Struggle for Recognition*, it seems to me, the question of the difference between struggles connected with power, goods, and interests of a material kind on the one hand, and the intersubjective conditions of identity formation on the other, was addressed more cautiously. As Honneth writes: the "model of conflict, based on a theory of recognition, should not try to replace [*eben nicht ersetzen*] the first, utilitarian model but only extend it [*sondern allein ergänzen wollen*]."[31] The programmatic thesis, articulated here, that "recognition-theoretic models of conflict have the duty not only to extend but possibly to correct" the utilitarian model,[32] seems to me to preserve the constitutive possibility of questioning, in addition to the moral sphere of recognition, that of the power relations and material interests that also serve to shape the motivational factors behind social conflicts and struggles. In other words, this suggested a theoretical horizon that did offer a distinct alternative to the previous model, and avoided the danger of a certain excessively unilateral approach by integrating, substantially correcting, but not completely replacing that model. I think Honneth's caution in this respect is entirely justified. For however much we investigate the differentiated structure of the moral concepts of recognition and disrespect, I do not believe it is possible to subordinate the sphere of material interests entirely to this normative framework, effectively treating these interests as derivative or merely surrogate expressions of such concepts. In the sometimes rather heated debate with Fraser, on the other hand, the traditional "fixation" with the instrumental category of "interest" seems to have been almost entirely replaced with theoretical speculations regarding the normative concept of "recognition." It is precisely this imbalance in the argument that could, I believe, be redressed if we gave due consideration to Gramsci's contribution to the problem.

4. The Ethico-Political Dimension and the Question of Hegemony

If we reduce the motivational bases of all social struggles solely to the moral dimension of disrespect, the more specifically ethico-political and politico-economic aspect of such experiences ends up assuming second place. Yet if disrespect is to provide the motivation for engaging in a given social struggle, it must be interpreted in a particular vocabulary that, as Honneth himself stresses in *The Struggle for Recognition*, allows for "translation" into social and political terms that can at least guarantee its universal application to a given social group. It is this operation that permits individuals to share and rethink their own experience so that it can effectively provide the emotional incentive and force for a given social movement, whether actual or emergent.[33] Yet it seems to me that this act of translation plays a more significant role than is really

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[31] Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992, p. 265; [*The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, translated by J. Anderson, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, p. 165].
[32] Ibid., p. 166.
[33] Ibid., pp. 259 ff.

acknowledged in Honneth's analyses, and this becomes particularly clear as soon as we consider cases where it fails to occur: when, for example, the experience of disrespect is confined to the realm of purely personal resentment, or is turned directly against the subject himself. Or we may think of those "depressive" reactions in which subjects who can be considered a target of institutionalized disrespect become socially isolated and withdraw entirely into their own suffering or discomfort.[34] This type of reaction can be traced back to that broad range of emotional processes that I would describe as "regressive." Rather than developing a positive kind of reaction that can be translated into some form of social struggle, subjects such as this passively accept the disrespect they have received, often interpreting and justifying this with arguments and considerations that neutralize the emancipatory potential of the experience, and thus remaining effectively crushed by their own suffering. I believe that the analysis of such cases, which are certainly not that exceptional, should play a significant role in the context of a renewed critical theory that specifically undertakes to identify and evaluate the emancipatory potential within the experience of social suffering. Similarly, it seems to me that this negative and regressive aspect of the issue also tends to be obscured and neglected under the influence of a reinterpreted Hegelian model of the struggle for recognition, the basic teleological orientation of which requires the almost uninterrupted and progressive development in the moral and ethical level of western societies.

But the crucial question to which I would like to draw attention here is this. Once we have acknowledged the central importance of this process of "translation," and thus of the "political" character that is intrinsic to the moral reactions of individual subjects – in other words of the fact that "feelings of social injustice are always shaped by public discourses"[35] – we must also proceed, at the same time, to develop a more radical political interpretation of the phenomenology of moral experience that Honneth has presented. My own view is that Gramsci's investigation of the ethico-political dimension of social struggle and his related attempt to conceptualize the struggle for hegemony must be counted amongst the most significant conceptual resources for pursuing just such an approach. I believe that a renewed engagement with this perspective could help to shed considerable light upon the various hegemonic devices and approaches that combine to define the syntax and semantics of a language that is capable of neutralizing the emancipatory potential of social suffering, and thus in a position to perpetuate the dominant consensus, in spite of the suffering experienced by the subjects involved (and I believe that it is the element of suffering here that distinguishes this question from that regarding the role of mere "ideologies"[36]). But once we reintroduce the question of ethico-political hegemony into the foundations of the phenomenology of the moral experience of disrespect, the more strictly economic

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[34] I have attempted to explore the consequences of such cases in relation to issue of recognition in more detail elsewhere. See M. Solinas, "Vite svuotate. Per una critica dell'impatto psicosociale del capitalismo contemporaneo," *Costruzioni Psicoanalitiche*, 10 (2010) 20, pp. 71-81 and Id., "Die Melancholie, der Geist des Kapitalismus und die Depression," *Freie Assoziation*, 13 (2010) 4, pp. 119-152.

[35] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition*, p. 250.

[36] See A. Honneth, "Anerkennung als Ideologie," *Westend. Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1 (2004), pp. 51-69.

dimension of material interests simultaneously reacquires a decisive role in the paradigmatic struggle for recognition. At the very moment when the feelings and moral expectations of moral subjects reveal their "political" nature, as the progressive or regressive character of the reactions in question clearly reveals, it becomes imperative to reconsider the political-economic forces and relations that determine the outcome of the struggle for hegemony amongst different social groups. In other words, the exercise of hegemonic power represents a fundamental condition for the emergence or the neutralization of the motivations that are required to provoke social struggles for recognition. And once we bear in mind, as Gramsci writes, that "if hegemony is ethico-political, it cannot fail to be economic as well,"[37] it is clearly necessary to proceed not only from the ethico-political to the economic level, but also in the opposite direction, tracing the path that leads from the economic to the ethico-political level, and from here, to the level of morality.

5. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, I believe that we can only endorse Honneth's renewed and vigorous attempt to overcome the economism and radical anti-normativism of the more orthodox Marxist tradition by re-emphasizing an absolutely crucial dimension of all social struggles – including those connected with the economic sphere (conflicts over redistribution) – as this emerges from the phenomenology of the moral experience of disrespect. At the same time, however, I think it is also necessary to move towards a more decisive political understanding of this experience: when we posit "disrespect" as the "motivational basis of all social struggles," we must also always acknowledge the crucial role played by the ethico-political context within which such experience takes concrete shape. In fact, it is the struggles for hegemony that determine how far the moral feelings and perceptions of the subjects involved can or cannot be translated into ethical, social, and political terms, and thus provide the semantic and conceptual conditions that are required if a given moral experience is to furnish an effective motivational stimulus for any particular social struggle. This broader perspective, it seems to me, would serve to redress the rather unilateral emphasis upon the cultural sphere of recognition in relation to the economic sphere of material interest. Without simply falling back into the trap of dualism, and thus overemphasizing one or other of the two poles involved, Gramsci's approach to the issue of hegemony allows us to consider the reciprocal relations between the economic and the cultural sphere in a unified manner, and thus to reconstruct a dynamic relationship between the level of morality and the level of material interests that, in this regard, exhibits a circular, or we could also say dialectical, movement.

(*Translated from Italian by Nicholas Walker*)

Marco Solinas
Università di Firenze
marco.solinas.serra@gmail.com

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[37] A. Gramsci, "Noterelle sul Machiavelli," Q, 13 (XXX), 18, 12ª.