Identity or Status? Struggles over "Recognition" in Fraser, Honneth, and Taylor

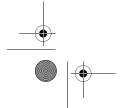## Christopher F. Zurn

I. Introduction

How are we to understand the changing forms of political struggle evinced in western constitutional democracies, in particular the rise of demands for social and political recognition of distinctive group identities? What exactly is the nature of the harm or injustice such movements are contesting? Do such identity-based struggles promote overall social justice within a society or might they detract from egalitarian and universalist ideals by tending towards new forms of sectarianism? And how should a social theory oriented by an emancipatory intent comprehend and evaluate these new social movements for recognition, without ignoring more traditional problems of economic inequality that remain with us?
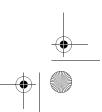
Prominent theories of recognition have usually started from the intersubject-ivist insight that individual identity is formed only in and through social relations of recognition.[1] They posit a healthy and intact sense of self as a crucial ingredient of the good for individuals. Critical theorists of recognition then attempt to identify obstacles to attaining a healthy sense of self in extant social relations of recognition, and call for their overcoming in the name of each person's legitimate claim to an equal opportunity for realizing an undistorted identity. Finally, most recognition theorists also attempt to connect their analytic and normative theories with actual developments in contemporary social movements, often through clarifying and advocating certain strategies for practical action.

In many ways Nancy Fraser's work has appeared to follow this model for developing a critical theory of recognition. One important distinction, however, concerns her insistence on the crucial importance of struggles against injustices anchored in the political economy of society, especially her account of the myriad ways in which such problems of maldistribution are not reducible to, nor analyz-able within the framework of, the intersubjective conditions of recognition.[2] Her influential claim that there are persistent tensions and tradeoffs between a politics oriented to cultural change and one oriented to economic change has spurred recognition theorists to rethink the practical limits of identity politics.[3]

Her most recent work has also brought to the fore a more subtle difference in her approach: the attempt to rethink recognition outside of an account of individ-ual identity-formation. The idea is to develop an account of groups struggling for
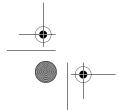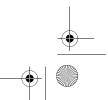
recognition from the external perspective of an objective, social-scientific observer, who attends only to those distinctions between groups that are the result of institutionalized social relations of subordination, whether economic, political, or cultural. Calling this a "status" model of recognition politics, Fraser claims that it provides a better basis for a *critical* theory of struggles against denigration than competing "identity" models of recognition. Only by forswearing recourse to the prevailing identity model can theorists make normatively important distinctions between warranted and unwarranted claims for recognition. Furthermore, according to Fraser, only such a status model can be properly integrated with a theory of just economic distribution, so that one coherent framework of social justice can accommodate and reconcile claims for just social relations of distribution *and* recognition.

Fraser's general model does indeed represent an important advance over competing models of identity politics. However, it is not entirely clear how many of its advantages are the result of the status model, and how many are attributable to other theoretical components. My underlying hypothesis is that no adequate critical theory of recognition can be so objectivistic that it ignores the internal connections between struggles for expanded social relations of recognition and the development of individual identity. I develop some arguments in support of this hypothesis in this paper by showing that most of the clear advantages contained in Fraser's critical social theory are not due to the adoption of a status-based model of recognition. In particular, after reconstructing the crucial changes that Fraser has made most recently in her theory of recognition (II), I turn to her specific claims for the advantages of a status-based model of recognition in comparison with the competing identity-based models put forward in the work of Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor (III). Throughout, I pay special attention to the ways in which Fraser attempts to depart from the problems she detects in identity politics, to whether these problems are actually evident in competing identity-based theories of recognition, and to the potential losses faced by a theory that forswears access to the connection between social struggles for expanded recognition and the structures of individual identity development. I conclude that, while Fraser is right to insist on a theory of recognition politics that can be integrated with a distinct theory of redistributive politics, she is wrong to claim that a critical theory of social justice requires a status model of recognition.

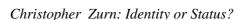## II. Fraser's New Status Model of Recognition

In two recent essays Fraser has reformulated her critical theory of recognition in order to respond to problems she perceives in both her own and in other theorists' accounts of the dynamics and prospects of identity politics, as evinced in the new social movements of the last 30 years or so.[4] Rather than recount her entire theory, I focus here on five crucial changes she makes in the theory in these two
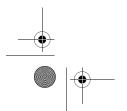
articles. This will then enable a critical evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses – and their specific theoretical sources – in comparison with competing theories in the next section.

1. No Specific Remedy Recommendations

The first striking change is the absence of any particular socio-theoretic claims concerning intrinsic dilemmas or tensions, arising from inherently distinct group differentiation dynamics, between redistribution and recognition struggles. In fact, Fraser now foresees many different tendencies for group differentiation or dedifferentiation within recognition struggles. But this entails that she can no longer put forward theoretically tidy recommendations about how, *in general*, any collectivity facing harms of both maldistribution and misrecognition can best finesse the unavoidable remedy dilemmas they face. Hence Fraser now apparently considers practical questions about what kinds of strategies to adopt to be too particularistic and specific to be soluble within the scope of political theory: "The approach proposed here sees claims for the recognition of difference pragmatically and contextually – as remedial responses to specific pre-existing injustices. . . . For the pragmatist, accordingly, everything depends on what precisely currently misrecognized people need in order to be able to participate as peers in social life."[5]

2. No Requirement of Identity Deconstruction

The second change is entailed by the first: Fraser no longer recommends a general deconstructive strategy towards extant group-differentiating traits and symbolic markers.[6] Rather, a multiplicity of possible approaches to identity-constitutive categories and status-marking ascriptions is recommended, with the choice between them to be made on pragmatic grounds. This change also neutralizes a possible objection to the old model: namely, that of a lurking illiberalism in the requirement that persons disconnect their sense of self from dichotomous and hierarchical identity categories. Fraser is much more sensitive to problems of intra-group illiberalism than she was before, now regularly highlighting the ways in which patriarchal intra-group structures and demands for a purified identity can enforce a kind of conformism for those who might prefer a more fluid, complex, and destabilized relation to ascriptive identity categories. But abandoning the blanket recommendation for a deconstructive attitude towards one's identity also relieves the complementary illiberalism of requiring individuals to take a detached, ironic stance towards their identities. So her position is now deliberately agnostic about the worth of different approaches toward, for instance, sexuality and sexual identity, seeking in principle neither to "deconstruct the homo-hetero dichotomy so as to destabilize all fixed sexual identities," nor to assert sexual identity as the key to subjectivity.[7]
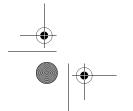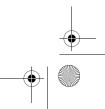
3. A Sociological, not Psychological or Cultural, Model of Group Identity

The third major change is that the status model of recognition now comes fully to
the fore as a sociological rather than psychological or cultural model. The status
model treats recognition from the external perspective of a sociological observer
rather than the internal perspective of individuals engaged in intersubjective rela-
tions of recognition and identity-formation. Thus, although it does not deny the
multiplicity of kinds of social affinity groups, collectivities, associations, coali-
tions, and so on found in complex societies, it focuses only on those groups which
owe their existence as a group to being placed in a subordinate social position
because of entrenched patterns of cultural value. According to the status model,
misrecognition arises not merely from cultural and symbolic slights, but only
from those anchored in social structures that systematically deny the members of
denigrated groups equal opportunities for participation in social life. Thus, legiti-
mate recognition struggles are now seen as those aimed at changing institutional-
ized patterns of cultural value that subordinate certain persons and groups in such
a way that they are denied the opportunity to participate in social life on an equal
basis. The core change here, as I see it, is that misrecognition proper occurs not in
a purely cultural realm of symbolic patterns of stigmatizing or demeaning evalua-
tion, as implied by Fraser's earlier analyses, but rather in cultural value patterns
that are *institutionally anchored* and *systematically subordinating*.

For example, while we can clearly identify a set of cultural values and symbolic
meanings that differentiate Italian-Americans as a group in contemporary America,
and these values may be demeaning and stigmatizing, it is (perhaps) no longer
the case that these cultural and symbolic stereotypes are anchored in asymmetric
social structures that systematically deny parity of social participation to Italian-
Americans; in this respect, Italian-Americans no longer constitute a status group. In
short, on the status model, there can be no misrecognition through culture alone, as
was possible on Fraser's earlier analysis. Misrecognition occurs only through
institutionally-anchored, status-denying patterns of cultural value. Thus, her now
frequent dismissal of the identity model of recognition as conceiving of cultural
harms as "free-floating" is also appropriate vis-à-vis her previous position.[8]

It is also worth noting that although this model finds its inspiration in Weber's
tripartite distinction between class, status, and party, it is not in fact the same as
his account of status.[9] For Weber, status is essentially a matter of honor, and
honor is essentially a matter of differential judgments of worth. To put it another
way, there can be no status apart from judgments that those who have honor are
worth more others; there is no possibility of egalitarian status relations. Further-
more, since the social order of status relations is fundamentally about the distribu-
tion of power between groups, status groups are conceived of as essentially
seeking collective power over other groups. Finally, because Weber takes status
groups to be formed around members' felt perception that they share markers of
honor, he claims that status groups form enclosed communities that enforce their

borders against other groups and require intra-group conformity to a shared way of life.[10]

Fraser shares with Weber the view that status groupings are essentially about the distribution of power in society, and thus she should likewise be committed to the view that status groups disappear as such once the differential relations of power between them have been equalized. But, in contrast to Weber, Fraser's model does not require that the members of a status group share any sense or feeling of belonging together, that they undertake collective action on the basis of that shared feeling of solidarity, or that they establish and maintain themselves as a group through differential judgments of comparative worth or honor vis-à-vis outsiders. What is left of Weber's model with respect to power is only the requirement that members of status groups are in fact unequally placed in social institutions, whether or not they notice this and whether or not they perceive themselves as a group at all. In short, Fraser has expunged all internalist elements from Weber's account of status groups.

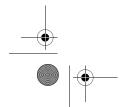### 4. Normative Standard of Parity of Participation

The fourth major development in Fraser's position is her ongoing specification and clarification of the general justificatory framework of justice she believes a normative social theory requires. This revolves around a capacious norm of justice – parity of participation – that can be sensitively applied to issues of justice concerning both maldistribution and misrecognition. From her 1997 Tanner Lectures on, she has worked to come up with a normative framework within which both redistribution and recognition claims can be accommodated, without reducing one kind of claim to the other. Her 2001 essay puts forth the most precise formulation yet:
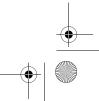
> The normative core of my conception is the notion of *parity of participation*. According to this norm, justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers. For participatory parity to be possible, I claim, at least two conditions must be satisfied. First, the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participants' independence and voice. . . . The second condition requires that institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem.[11]

The elaboration of this norm now enables Fraser to say exactly what is wrong with different forms of injustice, and to clearly analyze the deficiencies of certain social arrangements.[12]

5. Deontology

The final major change is that Fraser now explicitly aligns her position with the deontological tradition of political theory, and against communitarian, teleological,

and perfectionist forms of justification. Some of her reasons for this alignment are the standard ones: the putative ability to make universally binding normative claims across various worldviews and ways of life; remaining theoretically agnostic with respect to competing conceptions of the good; being compatible with the priority of the right over the good; and so on. One reason, however, is distinctive to Fraser's framework: namely, a desire to avoid the "philosophical schizophrenia" entailed by considering the distribution of rights and resources to be a matter of deontological justice, and the recognition of identity to be a matter of qualitative ethical evaluation. Rather than agree with either traditional theories of justice that recognition is a non-universalizable issue of the good, or with communitarian theorists of recognition that universalist theories of justice are too abstract and formal to deal with harms to identity, Fraser aims to integrate both kinds of concern under one capacious, deontological framework of justice.
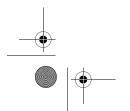
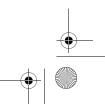### III. The Putative Advantages of the Status Model

In her most recent articles, Fraser has claimed (at least) four main advantages of the status model of recognition in comparison with identity models: the status model of recognition (1) doesn't displace or distort consideration of economic inequities, (2) is deontological not ethical, (3) doesn't promote a reified group identity with pressures to conform to a false authenticity, and (4) focuses on objective social relations without relying on psychological facts, and so can critically evaluate recognition claims. In each case, I will consider these putative improvements by comparing Fraser's status model with the models of recognition put forward by Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor, the only two theorists she mentions as propounding identity models of recognition.[13] I conclude that we need not employ a status model to retain most of the advantages Fraser associates with it.

1. Recognition and Distribution

Since at least 1995, Fraser has been explicitly concerned to develop a theory of justice that is bifocal, one that: adequately encompasses the politics of both distribution and recognition, does not reduce either type of politics to the other, systematically investigates the interrelations between misrecognition and maldistribution, and gives fruitful normative guidance for political action.[14] Fraser's current status model certainly continues this bifocal theory construction. The central question here is whether this advantage is unique to the status model of recognition, or whether it is only contingently related to it.

   If Honneth and Taylor are taken as the paradigmatic identity theorists, then the status model has a clear advantage over their models in its insistence that issues of political economy not be ignored or reduced to recognition. Considering Taylor first, his theory of recognition has consistently ignored issues of political economy, class, and distributive justice.[15] Fraser is certainly right to take this
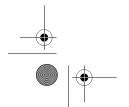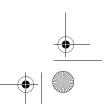
kind of identity theory of recognition to task for displacing distribution by being "silent on the subject of economic inequality."[16] And the problem, as she rightly points out, is not just that issues of distributive justice get ignored, but that the displacement distorts the analysis of recognition struggles as well. For sometimes economic injustices generate their own demeaning stereotypes as a way for society to justify to itself the economic marginalization of certain groups. Thus, single mothers in the United States – who lack affordable child care, are unable to attend job training programs because of so-called "welfare-to-work" full-time employment requirements, and are consigned to the reserve labor army subject to "structural unemployment" – are stigmatized as freeloading welfare queens, suffering a misrecognition injustice actually generated as a byproduct of society's economic arrangements. Alternatively, certain cultural-symbolic transformations lamented by identity-based difference theorists – such as cultural homogenization – are largely driven by economic imperatives, such as the profitability of large-scale commodity production and the increasing pressures of transnational competition leading to ever larger conglomerates. In either case, an identity theory of recognition wholly blind to political economy will generate an inadequate account of misrecognition itself.

Honneth's theory of recognition, unlike Taylor's, does not simply ignore distributive inequalities. Rather, it seeks to reduce them to aspects of damaged structures of social recognition by means of "a proposal to understand conflicts of distribution, in a meaningful and adequate way, as struggles for recognition."[17] Honneth's idea here, in brief, is that we should conceive of extant distributive patterns as the result of struggles for recognition waged by groups over the degree of social esteem to be accorded to various productive activities. Honneth thus clearly embraces an analysis that reduces political-economic patterns to cultural patterns of recognition:

> The rules organizing the distribution of material goods derive from the degree of social esteem enjoyed by social groups, in accordance with institutionalized hierarchies of value, or a normative order. . . . Conflicts over distribution, as long as they are not merely concerned with just the application of institutionalized rules, are always symbolic struggles over the legitimacy of the sociocultural dispositive that determines the value of activities, attributes and contributions.[18]

Fraser argues against this that individuals can suffer distributive injustices that are not rooted in cultural patterns of evaluation, but are rather caused solely by the autonomous market logic of a capitalist economy. Thus, for example, in the case of a "skilled white male industrial worker who becomes unemployed due to a factory closing resulting from a speculative corporate merger . . . the injustice of maldistribution has little to do with misrecognition."[19] Although Fraser doesn't mention such examples, the irreducibility of distribution to recognition is also evident when economic imperatives drive cultural changes. This occurs, for
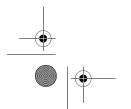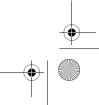
instance, when market logic demands corporate recognition of individuals in despised groups, often to the consternation of those fighting against the expansion of relations of recognition. Thus, companies might extend domestic partnership benefits to gays and lesbians, despite reactionary cultural protests, in order to be competitive in a tight labor market. Examples like these, which could be multiplied, show that Fraser is correct that a sufficiently differentiated account of struggles for social justice should analytically separate struggles according to the causal roots of the injustices, and that maldistribution may follow a different dynamic than misrecognition. It would be a mistake, further, to reduce distribution to recognition, since then political activity would pointlessly struggle against symbolic structures when it should seek to fairly structure society's political economy. Perhaps the best that can be said for Honneth's attempt to relate distribution and recognition is that it provides an integrative framework for normative analysis, even though its socio-theoretic analysis of causal relations is impoverished by a culturalist reduction of class to status.[20]

To summarize, I take Fraser's bifocal theory of economic and cultural injustices to have decisive advantages over Taylor's and Honneth's approaches: it does not displace maldistribution by focusing exclusively on misrecognition; it is open to the complex interconnections between economic and cultural injustices; and it doesn't attempt an unfeasible one-dimensional social theory that reduces solely to economic or cultural factors. I don't think it adequately incorporates legal and political institutions, but it is an improvement over Taylor's and Honneth's models.[21]

However, I don't see how the *status* model of recognition is essentially wedded to this bifocal approach, any more than the *identity* model of recognition is incapable of accommodating it. One can think that economically-defined class is essentially different than either identity-defined or status-defined groups, and that maldistribution has essentially different causal roots than misrecognition based either in harms to one's identity or in status subordination. In fact, if Fraser is now repudiating the more identitarian model of recognition in her 1995, 1997, and 1998 essays – as I believe – then there is all the more reason to think that the identity model stands or falls on other merits, since it is equally capable of properly integrating distribution and recognition. Different strategies are possible here for combining components into an overall theory of social justice. One could simply add a theory of misrecognition based on distortions in the intersubjective conditions of identity formation to analyses of other forms of injustice, such as maldistribution, political exclusion, legal discrimination, environmental degradation, and so on. This strategy would, by focusing only on types of injustices, forsake the benefits of an integrated social theory of generative causes, but it may better portray the diversity of contemporary problems. Alternatively, one could start from a comprehensive sociological theory of spheres of social life and then attempt to assign different forms of identity-based recognition to their relevant spheres, and different forms of distribution to their relevant spheres. Other
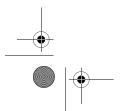
strategies are conceivable as well. But there seems to be no a priori reasons that an identity model of recognition is doomed either to ignore maldistribution or to develop a monocausal social theory. Fraser's current overall critical social theory is better than Taylor's and Honneth's on this point, but not becaue it either employs a status model of recognition or eschews an identity model.

2. *Deontology not Ethics*

Fraser also claims that the status model of recognition has the advantage over competing models of bringing claims for the recognition of persons under the aegis of a deontological, justice-based normative theory. This would provide at least four theoretical benefits. First, if recognition is a matter of justice and not of ethics, then a broad critical social theory can integrate claims for a fair distribution of rights, resources, and opportunities – traditionally thought to be issues of justice – with claims for an equitable recognition of difference – traditionally thought to be a matter of self-realization and so subject only to ethical evaluation. This would avoid "succumbing to philosophical schizophrenia."[22] Second, the status model could take advantage of the universally binding character of claims to justice, as opposed to the provincialism of ethical claims. Since "norms of justice are thought to be universally binding" and "hold independently of actors' commitments to specific values,"[23] the normative force of claims for expanded recognition would not directly depend on "a specific substantive horizon of value."[24] This would entail, thirdly, that many claims for recognition could be justified without recourse to the messy business of comparing and ethically evaluating competing forms of self-realization. It could avoid hermeneutic problems of ross-cultural comparison, pluralistic problems of incompatible worldviews, contextualist problems of changing and apparently contingent hierarchies of value, and so on. Fraser does acknowledge that, at some point, the strategy of avoiding ethical evaluation may not be sufficient, but she argues that avoiding a "premature" turn to ethics will allow us, on many issues, "to adjudicate recognition claims definitively – in ways that are binding on all."[25] Finally, since it inherits the priority of the right over the good from the justice framework, the status model would apparently endorse certain deontic recognition claims as trumping claims concerning both how best to live one's life and how best to maintain collective identities and comprehensive worldviews. Unfortunately, Fraser has not yet developed an account of the relative priority of the now large class of potentially competing justice claims.[26] We don't yet have a sense of how we are to analyze and adjudicate competing claims to whatever legal and political rights, material resources, and culturally-patterned social institutions may be necessary for parity of participation.

In comparing this approach to the normative framework adopted by the "identity" theorists of recognition, I think that Fraser's has clear advantages. It is certainly an improvement over Taylor's attempt to develop a non-procedural
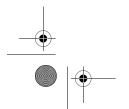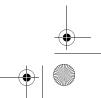
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liberalism on the basis of a specific substantive account of the good life.[27] As she rightly argues, if we understand the harms of misrecognition as centering on impeding a person's capacity for realizing a good life, then we seem to assume some background framework establishing more or less worthy ways of realizing the good. Conceived of in ethical terms, recognition violations cannot be judged apart from some determinate set of substantive evaluations concerning what forms of life are worth living and which are not. In fact, the forms of liberalism that Taylor endorses, those that "are not procedural models of liberalism, but are grounded very much on judgments about what makes a good life,"[28] intrinsically cannot abstract from substantive ethical evaluation, and so remain fundamentally wedded to a determinate set of comprehensive doctrines. But this move forestalls hopes for non-sectarian agreements across divergent conceptions of the good life, precisely when we are faced with increasing cultural pluralization and diversification, as well as larger, more complex political groupings which must solve coordination problems across ethical differences.

Turning to Honneth's normative framework, I think that although Fraser misreads his theoretical intentions, her general argument about the theory's deficiencies is still correct. Honneth's framework is based on the contention that a "formal conception of ethical life" can function as the normative standpoint from which to judge progressive and pathological forms of social organization. In brief, this "formal conception of ethical life" is intended to delineate "the entirety of intersubjective conditions that can be shown to serve as necessary preconditions for individual self-realization."[29] The idea is to articulate the social conditions of reciprocal recognition required for any form of healthy self-realization by spelling out the three forms of relation-to-self: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Such a formal conception of adequate social conditions for the good life is intended to be sufficiently abstract and formal to be universalizable. Thus, contra Fraser's characterization of it, Honneth's project does at least *intend* to provide a non-sectarian normative theory that can justify normative claims binding on all persons, irrespective of their substantive conceptions of the good life. Nevertheless, as I have argued elsewhere, Honneth's project does in fact presuppose a delimited range of acceptable forms of the good, precisely because it attempts to focus on a perfectionist model of self-realization, to the exclusion of comprehensive doctrines that, for example, do not embrace the ideal of individual worldly fulfillment.[30] Thus, Fraser is right to claim that his identity-based model of recognition succumbs to the limited scope of ethical evaluation, precisely because it is rooted in an internalist account of the connection between individual identity development and groups struggling for recognition, rather than an objectivist, socio-theoretic account of status differentials.
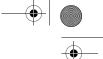
In sum, there does seem to be an intrinsic connection between the status model and the deontological framework of justice such that the status model promises significant normative advantages over identity models of recognition. Whether that promise is fulfilled depends, however, on two further conditions. First, its
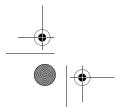
feasibility as a strategy of justifying recognition claims depends on the actual cases at issue and whether they really can be adjudicated in a non-sectarian way in the context of increasing value pluralism. I am not as confident as she is that, for instance, issues about sex-segregated public schools, or duties to future generations concerning the environment, or even what a just distribution of resources is, can be decided wholly independently of assumptions about particular ideals of the good life.[31] Since an objectionable status subordination that counts as a misrecognition for Fraser is one structured by demeaning cultural symbols and values, in fact it seems rather unlikely that debates over misrecognition can be adjudicated independently of thick hermeneutic judgments, judgments ineliminably tied up with context-specific horizons of value. Secondly, her justice framework would greatly benefit from more analytic clarity and specificity, particularly with respect to the relative priority of competing justice claims. Corresponding to the advantage of overcoming "philosophical schizophrenia" through an integrative framework of justice may be the disadvantage of simply ignoring the most controversial issues at a philosophical level of undifferentiated generality.

3. Against the Jargon of Group Authenticity

Absolutely central to Fraser's rejection of the identity model of recognition are her concerns about the kinds of group reification, pressures toward conformity, and false invocations of homogeneous group authenticity that identity politics sometimes falls into. These worries should be familiar from the now extensive literature on recent social movements and struggles for the recognition of differences across and among groups based on ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, nationality, etc.

The mistakes and simplifications of some forms of identity politics – and some forms of theory construction about recognition – that Fraser is worried about here all result, I believe, from an *authenticity* model of group-formation and identification. Fraser recapitulates these errors of the politics of authentic group identity: groups are taken to be all-encompassing, internally undifferentiated collectivities holistically closed off one another; identity-constitutive characteristics are reified as cutting reality at the joints, rather than as reflecting contingent historical practices of human distinction and discrimination; groups are taken to have an authentic character which all members should seek to emulate and foster, thus encouraging intra-group conformity and illiberal pressures on "inauthentic" members; the internal politics of active group self-definition is hidden behind the cover of an appeal to the pre-existing "genuine" group identity; inter-group separatism and conflict is encouraged since the definition of authentic identity is constructed through invidious comparisons with other groups; and, finally, politics aims at the recognition and protection of groups themselves as distinctive, rather than at the protection of the equal opportunity of individuals to be recognized independently of subordinating cultural values. This particular conglomeration of

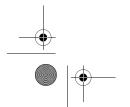530   *Constellations Volume 10, Number 4, 2003*

ideas about group identity has its heritage in German Romanticism and nineteenth-century nationalist movements, their jargons of authenticity having been imported into recent debates about identity politics. If Fraser is right that the identity model of recognition is inseparable from these features of the authenticity framework, then she is right, I think, to consign the identity model to the scrap heap.

Taking Taylor's specific arguments for group recognition first, he does in fact argue for the institutionalization of certain immunities for cultural minorities, as groups, in order to ensure their survival against the homogenizing tendencies of democratic politics in large nation-states. Thus, he argues that although there must be legal guarantees for an inviolable and invariant core of individual rights, this schedule of rights need not be as extensive as some forms of liberalism assume. Rather, according to Taylor a good polity should not be inhospitable to overriding some individual entitlements and rights of lesser importance when that is required to ensure a collective goal such as a group's cultural survival. Furthermore, this claim is grounded on the assertion of individuals' need for access to the social conditions necessary for the realization of a healthy identity, including an intact and flourishing culture involving a distinctive structure of strong evaluations and conceptions of the good. So he does argue for a politics that recognizes and protects certain cultural groups – for instance Canadian francophones – as groups.

It hardly seems correct, however, to accuse Taylor's model of recognition of reifying group identities as involving rigid boundaries between essentially distinct natural kinds of people, or of hiding the ongoing construction, evolution, and critical assessment of collective identities, or of promoting group self-identification through invidious comparisons with others, or of conceiving of groups as basically holistically enclosed within clear, rigid borders. His explicit espousal of a hermeneutic model of the fusion of horizons through cross-cultural comparison, by which a culture's own standards of evaluation are inevitably transformed, certainly vitiates such charges. Furthermore, he himself did much of the work, early on in debates about recognition, of highlighting the dangers and oversimplifications of reified and homogeneous ideals of authentic group identity.[32]

There is the remaining question of whether or not Taylor's conception of recognition struggles cedes too much individuality to the demands of particular – specifically religious and ethnic – forms of collective identity; that is, whether he does not sufficiently acknowledge the conformist and possibly repressive pressures asserted over individuals in the name of one overriding identity-based characteristic.[33] I think Fraser is right to be suspicious of the tension between inter-group social demands for the recognition of group specificity and intra-group demands for individuals to behave as authentic group members, and to be wary of Taylor's resolution of this tension. However, when we turn to Honneth, it is no longer clear that this deficit of Taylor's authenticity model of recognition is intrinsic to any and every identity-based model.[34]
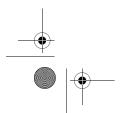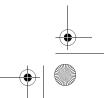
Considering that Honneth insists on a tripartite distinction between forms of relation-to-self and their requisite recognition relations, I don't see how his model could be accused of reifying group identities, or of always demanding recognition of cultural specificity and difference. For the scope of the relevant groups demanding recognition depends on what kinds of recognition they are seeking and what kinds of misrecognition they are combating: just insofar as persons are humans do they demand the social conditions necessary for the development of basic self-confidence and so insist on an environment free of physical degradation; just because they are fellow legal consociates do citizens struggle against the denial of those equal rights and opportunities necessary for the development of self-respect; and just because persons require a shared community of value within which to develop self-esteem do individuals demand a social environment free of identity-specific denigration. In short, struggles for recognition may seek "group-differentiated" remedies at the level of humanity, citizenship, or community of value – Honneth's theory does not entail any simple identity politics.

Honneth, rightly, to my mind, locates such a gross misreading of his project in its overly-hasty assimilation to Taylor's constricted conception of recognition struggles: "There is a noticeable inclination in the debates concerned with a 'politics of recognition' to reduce the social recognition of persons to the single aspect of the cultural recognition or acceptance of their differing forms of life.... I seem to detect a crucial misunderstanding here."[35] This foreshortening simply avoids other kinds of recognition struggles, such as those for an environment free from violence and for the expansion of currently provincial allocations of basic rights and opportunities for citizens. If however, as Honneth claims, there are different kinds of recognition struggles, with distinct normative logics and specific internal dynamics of group-formation adequate for supporting effective social movements, then the authenticity model of identity politics alone cannot capture the breadth and diversity of recognition politics. Aside from reducing all recognition struggles to an authenticity model, then, there is little reason to believe that an identity-based model of recognition tends inevitably towards inter-group separatism, intra-group conformism, hierarchical intolerance, or shielding of processes of group self-definition behind a false screen of naturalized authenticity. Finally, it is not the case that Honneth's theory of recognition always, or even frequently, demands that only groups' specificity and difference should be acknowledged and celebrated.[36]

In short, only by forcefully misreading any *identity* model of recognition as an impoverished and jingoistic *authenticity* model of group valorization can Fraser easily tout the advantages of her preferred status model of recognition. Ironically, Weber's original status model is a more genuine authenticity model of group recognition: there groups are conceived of as seeking power through the maintenance of differential and hierarchical honor relations vis-à-vis other groups, while enforcing a conformist "style of life" among group members as the price of the perquisites of power.
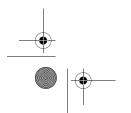
4. A Truly Critical Theory of Recognition

A fourth advantage claimed by Fraser is that since the status model focuses on objective social relations rather than subjective mental states, it can advance a fully *critical* theory of recognition. Rather than identifying misrecognition with a harm to a person's sense of identity, the status model focuses only on those demeaning cultural value patterns that are institutionally anchored and lead to social subordination from the perspective of participational parity. Thus, the theory does not need to account for all instances of cultural devaluation of a person or group, or even those that are socially pervasive, but only to those that lead to status subordination.

The anti-psychologism of the status model ostensibly represents an improvement over the identity model at three levels: theoretical, practical, and evaluative. Theoretically, the status model is supposed to refer only to publicly accessible, and thus objectively verifiable, social structures, rather than to evanescent and opaque subjective mental states. Practically, status violations would appear to have more salience in contemporary politics than harms to one's sense of self. Modifying the old playground retort, we might say that social subordination may break my bones, but being thought ill of will never hurt me.

Finally, Fraser claims that the status model has the normative advantages associated with a truly critical social theory because its evaluation of misrecognition is based on an objective assessment of extant social relations, while competing identity models are intrinsically tied to social actors' felt states of psychic injury. For Fraser, a truly critical theory of recognition should have principled resources for distinguishing worthy from unworthy recognition claims, and for sensitively diagnosing misrecognition even in the absence of a social group claiming to be so affected. Thus, for example, a critical theory should be able to dismiss, on principled grounds, claims for expanded recognition put forth by racist hate groups. It should also be able to demonstrate that cultural stereotypes of feminine sexuality may subordinate women through legal definitions of rape – even when these definitions are not generally detected as harmful by women. In other words, a critical theory of recognition must be able to deal with what we could call the problems of the malevolent claimant and of false consciousness.

Because sufficiently adjudicating these diverse claims involves considerations of social scientific methodology, contemporary political culture, and political-theoretic normativity, I can only indicate lines of thinking here in lieu of a more thorough discussion. In brief, the status model appears to have only *prima facie* advantages over identity models with respect to the theoretical objectivity and everyday traction of status subordination claims. Theoretically, it is neither the case that external assessments of social subordination are fully objective, nor that identity models rely entirely on evaluations of subjective mental states to warrant recognition claims. Practically, furthermore, it is not obviously the case that contemporary political culture always understands status subordination as a serious
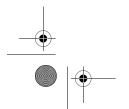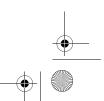
harm, while it does increasingly seem to recognize impediments to developing a healthy identity as a serious form of harm. Finally, while Fraser's status model can effectively show why claims for recognition put forward by malevolent groups such as racial supremacists should be rejected, it turns out that competing identity-based models, because of their richer perfectionist ideals of individual development, can also reject such claimants as unworthy of expanded social recognition. The real strength, then, of the status model as a critical theory comes in its ability to handle instances of unjust subordination due to misrecognition that are nevertheless not noticed by some or all of its victims – that is, to handle the problem of false consciousness. The status model gains its strength here by simply avoiding reference to the psychological states of victims of subordination, and so avoids traditional problems associated with theoretical reliance on potentially distorted or manipulated ideas held by social actors. In other words, unlike identity-based models of recognition, which internally tie their socio-theoretic claims to the dynamics of individual psychological development, the status model takes up a viewpoint external to identity development and so can assess recognition harms independently of subjects' beliefs and desires.

IV. Conclusions

I have argued that many of the advantages that Fraser's critical social theory possesses over Honneth's and Taylor's theories are attributable to theoretical elements independent of the objectivistic status model of recognition. In particular, there are clear gains provided by a bifocal theory that attends to social injustices rooted in both political-economic structures and cultural-symbolic patterns of evaluation, while refusing to reduce either type to the other. However, there seems to be no reason that one could not integrate concerns about distribution equally with a status-based or an identity-based model of recognition. Likewise, Fraser's insistence on warding off the reifying, homogenizing, and oppressive dangers of an authenticity model of group identity is important for recognition struggles, but I don't see how authenticity is necessarily implied by the adoption of an identity-based theory of recognition. On the other hand, there are important differences between the two types of theory when it comes to methodological considerations of theory construction and to the practical traction misrecognition claims may expect to have in contemporary culture. I have suggested, however, that neither of these differences gives either type of theory clear analytic or practical advantages, Fraser's claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

Where the status theory does possess clear advantages over Honneth's and Taylor's – namely, in its objective assessment of subordination without reference to psychically-felt harms, and in its reliance on deontological assessments of recognition struggles – it is notable that the advantages are attributable to a basic method of avoidance. By simply sidestepping any account of how in fact social misrecognition can lead to deformations of individual identity-formation, the
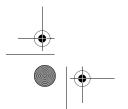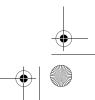
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status theory can avoid complex problems of assessing degrees of actual harm to individuals in terms of their relation-to-self, and of evaluating the legitimacy of group claims to expanded recognition in terms of ethically substantial shared horizons of value and conceptions of healthy self-realization. But can this method of avoidance be sustained? I think not. On the one hand, there is a serious risk of foreclosing from theoretical view precisely what theories of recognition were designed to bring into view in the first place: the way in which, even within institutionalized social relations where relevant rules and norms have been structured to overcome unjust subordination, there are still harms felt by individuals and carried by denigrating cultural-symbolic patterns of evaluation. In short, one may suffer recognition harms even within formally egalitarian structures. But then the status model will have bought the benefits of its anti-psychologism at the price of its diagnostic acumen. On the other hand, as I argued above, the reliance on deontological assessments of status subordination may not take us very far at all in adjudicating concrete disputes. We will probably have to turn to the difficult business of ethical debate and substantial judgment – even within a contemporary context of increasing value pluralism and cultural diversity – in order to fully and openly adjudicate conflicts over whether particular mechanisms i fact carry unjust misrecognition and how to remedy them if so. Here, then, the method of avoidance may have simply taken us down an unproductive byway away from and back to the route begun with identity-based theories. Fraser's critical social theory does represent an important advance over existing theoretical attempts to "grasp the struggles and wishes of the age in thought," but not because it relies on a status model of recognition.

NOTES

1. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition*," ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

2. Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Postsocialist' Age" and "Introduction," *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997); "Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler," *Social Text* 15, nos. 3 and 4 (1997); "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, ed. Grethe B. Peterson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998).

3. I argue against Fraser's well-known claim that there is an chronic dilemma between struggles for recognition and those for redistribution in "Group Balkanization or Societal Homogenization: Is There a Dilemma between Recognition and Distribution Struggles?" (forthcoming). Notably, Fraser no longer maintains that there is a single or persistent dilemma between recognition and redistribution struggles, even as she has continued to insightfully highlight particular practical
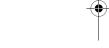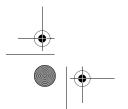
tensions that can arise from specific constellations of political goals, policy strategies, and social contexts.

4. Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review* (II) 3 (2000) and "Recognition without Ethics?" *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, nos. 2–3 (2001).

5. Fraser, "Recognition without Ethics?," 31.

6. There is also no reference in Fraser's 2000 or 2001 articles to the need for a fundamental restructuring of prevailing capitalist market structures. This absence, however, is surely due not to a change in Fraser's substantive position, but to the topical focus on recognition and identity politics in the two pieces.

7. Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition?," 24. Jon Mandle stressed the potential illiberalism of Fraser's earlier embrace of a deconstructive approach to identity in his comments on my "Group Balkanization or Societal Homogenization" at the Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association, December 2001. I'm thankful to him for the insights and discussion.

8. See, for instance, Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition": "On the status model, moreover, misrecognition is not relayed through free-floating cultural representations or discourses. It is perpetrated, as we have seen, through institutionalized patterns – in other words, through the workings of social institutions that regulate interaction according to parity-impeding cultural norms" (114). In contrast, Fraser's earlier formulations were ambiguous concerning how institutionally anchored denigrating cultural patterns had to be: misrecognition "injustice is rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication. Examples include cultural domination (being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and/or hostile to one's own); nonrecognition (being rendered invisible by means of authoritative representational, communicative, and interpretive practices of one's culture); and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions)," "From Redistribution to Recognition?" 14.

9. Max Weber, "Class, Status, Party," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946). I rely on here on the same excerpt from *Economy and Society* that Fraser refers to.

10. See, e.g., his explanation of the mechanism for maintaining status stratification, ibid., 187–88: "In content, status honor is normally expressed by the fact that above all else a specific *style of life* can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle. Linked with this expectation are restrictions on 'social' intercourse. . . . As soon as there is not a mere individual and socially irrelevant imitation of another style of life, but an agreed-upon communal action of this closing character, the 'status' development is under way." For Weber, this status development reaches further in ethnic segregation, and culminates in caste relations: "ethnic coexistences condition a mutual repulsion and disdain but allow each ethnic community to consider its own honor as the highest one; the caste structure brings about a social subordination and an acknowledgment of 'more honor' in favor of the privileged caste and status groups" (188).

11. Fraser, "Recognition without Ethics?," 29.

12. Unfortunately, because her reformulated position employs a more abstract account of class and status, it seems it can no longer provide the kind of guidance for political strategizing that it once did. Perhaps there is a tradeoff here between ideal political theory – which can sharply outline the justice deficiencies of extant social relations – and a pragmatic realization of the resistance of social reality to sociological generalizations. At any rate, the increased philosophical clarity concerning the normative standards of her theory is to be welcomed.

13. In "Rethinking Recognition," where the most detailed comparative evaluative analysis of the status and identity models is developed, Fraser does not even mention by name any theorists who supposedly hold the position she attacks as "both theoretically deficient and politically problematic" (113). In "Recognition without Ethics?," she repeatedly attributes the mistakes of the identity model only to Honneth and Taylor, while categorizing the other major theorists referred to – Ronald Dworkin, Will Kymlicka, John Rawls, and Amartya Sen – as distributive theorists of justice who have a bit of room for issues of status and recognition in their theories.

14. Fraser, "Recognition or Redistribution? A Critical Reading of Iris Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference*," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1996).
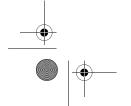
15. As far as I can tell, there is no mention of the distribution of goods and resources in Taylor's "The Politics of Recognition," though there is mention of the "distribution" of individual rights and their legal protection under liberal constitutionalism. Of the six commentators in the Gutmann's volume, only Anthony Appiah and Jürgen Habermas even mention class struggles, and only in passing at that.

16. Fraser, "Rethinking Recognition," 110.

17. Honneth, "Recognition or Redistribution? Changing Perspectives on the Moral Order of Society," *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, nos. 2–3 (2001): 44. See also "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today." *Political Theory* 26, no. 6 (2000), where he addresses the theoretical connection between the social bases of self-esteem and the division of labor in democratic societies, in order to develop a recognition-based justification for a fair division of labor (and assumedly for a fair distribution of goods and resources as well).

18. Honneth, "Recognition or Redistribution?," 54.

19. Fraser, "Recognition without Ethics?," 29.

20. This is not the place to pursue a critical analysis of Honneth's recent efforts to develop a normative theory that interrelates the world of work, distributive arrangements, social relations of recognition, and a democratic division of labor, for instance in "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation." Suffice it to say that it may be possible, at a sufficient level of abstraction, to insulate his normative framework from deficiencies in his social theory. When sufficiently abstract, however, that insulation is bought at the cost of losing the critical insight necessary for practical action. I take up these issues in "Recognition, Redistribution, and Democracy: Dilemmas of Honneth's Integrative Theory" (forthcoming).

21. Honneth's generalized account of patterns of esteem, coupled with attention to the legal-political anchoring of economic structures, might be taken to show that the status model, rather than correcting the identity model's insufficient account of political-economic factors, can in fact itself be seen as overly vague. For, at a sufficiently abstract level of analysis, Honneth is correct: patterns of economic distribution *are* the result "institutionalized patterns of cultural value" – namely, the legal and political institutions that guarantee private property, establish corporations, set tax policies, carry out redistributive policies, create administrative regulations, and so on. Insofar as the ostensibly autonomous logic of market relations is only made possible by being anchored in a stable, rule-based structure of positive law, and insofar as law is enacted through political institutions that attempt to transform values into institutions, patterns of material inequality will, at some remove, be the causal result of patterns of differential cultural values. Bu, these are not the same value patterns as those concerning the "degree of social esteem enjoyed by social groups" that Honneth claims in the quote above. Thus, a Honneth-inspired critique of the vagueness of the status model would be wrong to claim that the institutionalized patterns of cultural value underlying material distributions concern the recognition relations among groups. In other words, Honneth is wrong to claim that an identity theory of recognition can account for both class relations and patterns of material distribution. But his model does obliquely show how Fraser has still not adequately conceived of the relationships between recognition, distribution, and legal and political structures.

22. Fraser, "Recognition without Ethics?," 25.

23. Ibid., 22.

24. Ibid., 25.

25. Ibid., 37.

26. Fraser mentions only that "unlike the identity model, then, the status model is *compatible* with the priority of the right over the good" (ibid., 25, emphasis added). Assumedly, however, the inference is warranted that at least some recognition claims – as claims to remedy *unjust* subordination – would have priority over even very compelling claims for the good or for the social conditions necessary for realizing them.

27. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" and "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

28. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 61.
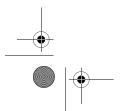
29. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, 173.

30. Zurn, "Anthropology and Normativity: A Critique of Axel Honneth's 'Formal Conception of Ethical Life'," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 26, no. 1 (2002).

31. Fraser "Recognition without Ethics?," 34–37.

32. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1991).

33. Anthony Appiah nicely formulates this worry: "Demanding respect for people as blacks and as gays requires that there are some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires. There will be proper ways of being black and gay, there will be expectations to be met, demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another." "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction" in *Multiculturalism*, ed. Gutmann, 162–63.

34. Another indication that the combination of an identity-based model of recognition with a defense of group-differentiated rights is not inherently destined to prioritize the community over the individual is the work of Will Kymlicka. For he has consistently argued for group-differentiated rights to an intact culture by means of a fully liberal ideal of basic goods necessary for any individual's capacity to pursue whatever vision of the good life he or she chooses. In other words, one can be fully aware of the dangers of intra-group pressures while still advocating the need for group recognition. See his *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

35. Honneth, "Recognition or Redistribution?," 52.

36. In "Recognition without Ethics?," Fraser claims without evident support that "both Taylor and Honneth hold this view" (41, n15), namely, that "everyone always needs their distinctiveness recognized" (31). Not only is this facially false concerning Honneth's view, it ignores the long argument that Taylor advances at the end of his essay to the effect that we owe all cultures only a rebuttable presumption of worth. For Taylor this is only a preliminary presumption that their difference and specificity ought to be celebrated, not an ultimate, categorical obligation that we owe all groups. The rebuttability of the claim, furthermore, is entailed by the possibility that we may well, in the end and after a long hermeneutic process of reaching an informed interpretive understanding, judge certain kinds of difference to be *unworthy* of recognition. See Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 63–73.

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