

Chapter 5. Work as a Sphere of Norms, Paradoxes and Ideologies of Recognition

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1. The Recognition Frame

One of the key functions of social theory is to provide a ‘framework’ for undertaking empirical social research (Taylor, 1967). It does this by equipping the researcher with a vocabulary for describing social phenomena, together with a related set of assumptions about how to go about explaining them. Amongst these assumptions will be views about the fundamental goals and purposes that human beings strive to realise through their actions. These goals and purposes might be consciously and deliberately aimed at by individuals or groups, or they might operate behind their backs, as it were, through some sub- or supra- personal mechanism: the reproductive strategy of a gene, the striving for satisfaction of an instinct, a system’s tendency towards equilibrium, and so forth. To give an example, research into the rise of teenage pregnancies will typically be ‘framed’ by a set of assumptions about the salient motivations capable of explaining the behaviour, such as conformity to increasingly sexualised self-images, or the perception of economic benefit. To give another example, researchers investigating changing levels and types of incarceration typically have to rely on assumptions about the overarching purposes served by these practices – such as the exercise of power over life, or the maximisation of utility under conditions of heightened risk – and to that extent are dependent on a theoretical framework. Of course there can be social research that just gathers data or documents

observations. But wherever it aspires to interpretive insight or explanatory power, social research relies on a theoretical framework, including assumptions about the ends and purposes served by human action, which are indirectly put to the test in each interpretation and explanation offered up within the framework.

Social researchers currently draw on many kinds of theory to frame their research. Nevertheless, for a long time the predominant framing theories of social research have been either borrowed directly from the natural sciences, or developed in imitation of them. The widespread uptake of an evolutionary psychological framework continues the long-standing influence of sociobiology as a social research program, and the pervasiveness of rational choice theory, especially in political science, can convincingly be attributed to its claim to establish a physics of human society (Murphy 1995). One of the key assumptions of these and kindred 'naturalistic' theories is that the ends and purposes served by human action, including social action, are continuous (if not at bottom identical) with those to be found in the rest of the natural world. Consequently the grounds of social conflict are to be sought in the same ends and purposes that are responsible for patterns of conflict that can be observed throughout nature. Given what we know about nature from the modern natural sciences, social conflict can then be presumed to have its ground or prototype in the struggle for *self-preservation* by way of securing competitive advantage. There may be debate within these frameworks about the relative strength of the forces of self-preservation at play (and whether the object of self-preservation should be regarded as the individual, the group, the species, the gene, and so forth), but the basic model of conflict as determined by the end of self-preservation and maximisation of competitive advantage is taken for granted.

This model of conflict is by no means exclusive to naturalistic social theories such as sociobiology and rational choice theory: it also finds its way into the so-called ‘critical’ theories of society. While the definition of ‘critical theory’ is a complex matter, at least part of what makes a social theory ‘critical’ is the centrality of a concept of domination. Critical social theories typically conceptualise the conflicts and pathologies that characterise the modern age – what should be the agenda-setting items for social research – as effects or symptoms of relations of domination. Rather than claiming to be value free in regard to their subject-matter, like naturalistic theories, critical theories are explicitly committed to a goal of emancipation, or release from the forms of domination they analyze. This goal is typically conceived as the authentic realisation of a distinctive human capacity – such as autonomy, self-creation or democratic will-formation – which is distinct from and irreducible to self-preservation secured through competitive advantage. The latter may well be ends of *systems* of action that have emerged in the modern world, as Habermas’s version of critical theory postulates, but to the extent that they *suppress* morally oriented action, or action that gives expression to the distinctive human capacity for autonomy and democratic will-formation, they give rise to ‘zones of conflict’ and pathologies such as anomie and alienation (Habermas 1987). Within such systems, of which markets and state bureaucracies are taken to be paradigmatic, instrumental reason plays a decisive role: instrumentally rational action is necessary not just to flourish within the system but to survive within it. The capitalist economy, as well as an array of modern social institutions aimed at the control of life, are then targeted for critique as supra-personal agents of the domination of instrumental reason.

Recognition theory belongs to the class of critical theories insofar as it is oriented towards a goal of emancipation (Honneth 2007a). The ultimate point of social research framed by the theory of recognition is to remove obstacles to autonomous self-realisation. But unlike other critical theories, and certainly in contrast to naturalistic social theories such as sociobiology and rational choice theory, it does not approach social conflicts as fundamentally a matter of struggles for self-preservation or maximisation of competitive advantage. While recognition theorists do not deny that such struggles take place, and that much action is aimed at realising those goals, they suspect that traditional social theories have exaggerated their significance, and that social research framed by those theories misses more salient sources of conflict and social pathology. Their most egregious defect is that they lack all sensitivity to a crucial dimension of social reproduction and historical change: namely, the *recognition* relations that must be in place to secure a healthy self-identity. *All* societies must have such relations in place if successful socialisation and social integration is to be possible within them. But in modern societies, where norms of autonomy play a crucial functional role (their members have to be capable of a certain degree of autonomy if they are to survive and flourish), recognition becomes an especially potent source of conflict, disturbance, and when things go well, social progress. Relations of recognition are thus a causal variable relevant for explaining specifically *social* change (such relations do not exist in the non-human world), one which is potentially more determinate and satisfactory from a social-scientific point of view than the drive for self-preservation and the pursuit of advantage in the competition for resources.

The idea that it is the establishment of proper relationships of recognition, rather than self-preservation and self-interest, that provides the most salient axis of variation in spheres of social action, has the potential to transform the shape of inquiry into those spheres. The more the presumption that action in a given sphere is aimed at utility-maximisation under the rule of instrumental reason is entrenched, the more radically it stands to be transformed by the recognition-theoretic frame. And there is probably no sphere of action in which the applicability of the figure of *homo oeconomicus* is more widely taken for granted than the sphere of work. On the one hand, research framed by naturalistic theories typically regards work as a sphere dominated by the end of optimising output-input ratios (for example, at the micro-level, by workers putting in as little effort as possible for the highest rewards, by their ‘natural’ and ‘rational’ tendency to ‘shirk’; or at the macro-level, by market forces securing maximum efficiency of production). On the other hand, research into work framed by critical theories – to the extent that it is still done nowadays – generally conceptualises work as a site of the struggle for power, the struggle between classes for control over the means of production. Under the premises of recognition theory, however, work is a sphere of social action in which both individuating and socially integrative norms of recognition, norms that serve at once to individualize and socialize, are somehow at play. Research undertaken within this theoretical frame thus anticipates the emergence of conflicts within the social division of labour that have a more complex moral ‘grammar’ than the logic of bargaining over competing interests or brute self-assertion (Honneth 1995a). Recognition theory thus offers the prospect of a phenomenologically more nuanced critique of the sphere of work – one that is more attuned to the structure of moral disappointment and sense of grievance within it – as

well as a more complex conception of what emancipation might mean in relation to work.

2. Work and the Dialectics of Social Recognition

If we look back at the evolution of recognition theory in Honneth's writings, it is clear that, for Honneth himself, the superiority of its 'framing' of work relative to rival theories has been a decisive consideration in its favour (Smith 2009, Deranty 2009).

In an early article on the normative foundations of critical theory (originally published in 1981), Honneth invoked the pre-theoretical, pre-discursive anticipation of an autonomous work-situation to expose the limits of Habermas's linguistic approach to norms and instrumentalist approach to work (Honneth 1995b). Ten years later, in one of his first and most concise statements of the foundations of recognition theory ('The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', Honneth's inaugural lecture at the Free University in Berlin presented in 1993) the critical perspective opened up by recognition theory on gender inequality in the division of labour was used to illustrate the worthiness of its claim to take the tradition of critical theory forward (Honneth 2007a). An interpretation of the history of the workers' movement as motivated by experiences of disrespect and contempt, rather than a utilitarian desire for more material resources, is central to the argument of *The Struggle for Recognition* – still the most important general formulation of recognition theory though it also first appeared in the early 90s (Honneth 1995a). And in Honneth's exchange with Nancy Fraser, the inherently recognitive aspects of work and the social division of labour are used to defend a 'recognition monism' from the objection that it is a form of 'culturalism' that has nothing to say about the maldistributions of contemporary capitalism (Fraser and Honneth 2003).

The recognition-theoretic framing of work sketched by Honneth in the 1990s has been taken up and elaborated by several of Honneth's colleagues at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and elsewhere. There is now a quite substantial body of empirical social research which refines and puts to the test the hypotheses about work issuing from the theory of recognition (Holtgrewe, Voswinkel and Wagner 2000, Voswinkel 2001, Honneth 2002, Voswinkel and Korzekwa 2005). One of the key claims put forward by recognition theory in this regard is that in modern societies, social contribution or achievement (in German: *Leistung*) by way of participation in the social division of labour is a crucial source of social esteem, the internalization of which provides the basis of one of the three practical self-relations – self-esteem – which is a condition of autonomous self-realisation. The principle of achievement (in the specific sense conveyed by the German expression *Leistungsprinzip*) thus becomes a pillar in the 'recognition order' of modern societies, and struggles for recognition increasingly take the form of contestations of the meaning of that principle. However, partly as a result of the studies conducted at the Institute for Social Research, it has become clear that the principle of achievement, at it has mutated in the past decades, can no longer be unproblematically or unambiguously contrasted with the *self-preserving, advantage-maximising* orientations of social action – though as we have just seen, it was precisely this contrast that provided the point of departure for the recognition-theoretic project. The evidence now suggests that recognition, especially in the form of social esteem for achievement, but also autonomous self-realisation more generally, can *itself* become the object of instrumental reasoning, can be *co-opted* into the system of instrumentally rational

action, the limited perspective of which the basic recognition concepts and theoretical assumptions were meant to correct.

In their more recent work, Honneth and his colleagues have sought to respond to this development. That is to say, they have sought to identify and make sense of social phenomena in which recognition appears to be at odds with itself, or appears to turn against itself – what we could call the ‘dialectical’ or self-negating structure of social recognition. This requires making intelligible the fact that relationships of recognition can oppress as well as emancipate, can block or distort self-realisation as well as enable it, can be the cause of social pathologies as well as the remedy. While it has long been a routine objection against recognition theory amongst its more hostile critics that recognition is inherently oppressive, destructive of the self, and a source of pathological social conformity – or at best a worthy but naive dream of prelapsarian innocence and social harmony (Honneth, Butler, Geuss, Lear and Jay 2008) – what is interesting about these internal efforts at theoretical self-correction amongst recognition-theorists is that they are driven primarily by empirical and practical considerations; by changes in the social world and corresponding shifts in the possibilities for socially effective critique. Furthermore, it is above all changes in the world of work and the social division of labour that have forced such a reconsideration of the framework recognition theory provides for social research.

My focus in the remainder of this chapter will be the conceptual innovations that Honneth and his colleagues have introduced into recognition theory in order to track the dialectics of social recognition (its negative as well as positive character, and the internal relations between the positive and negative) in the sphere of work. First, in

section 3, I will look briefly at the fundamental norms that, on the recognition-theoretic view, go towards constituting the social division of labour in modern societies. I will also consider the critical perspective on contemporary work that opens up on the basis of these norms. At this level of analysis, norms of recognition have both a descriptive meaning (as representations of social reality) and a prescriptive one (as standards for social criticism). This lends them a peculiar – one might say ‘dialectical’ – ontological status which requires further clarification. Furthermore, in the contemporary world of work, as well as providing standards for criticism, norms of recognition also seem to figure as the *object* of critique – as something to be struggled not *for* but *against*, on the basis of causing (rather than relieving) social suffering, which would make them count as agents of social pathology rather than antidotes to it. In section 4, I turn to the notion of a *paradox* of recognition that Honneth and others have sketched to make sense of this kind of phenomenon. Although this is the most consequential conceptual innovation for dealing with the negativity of recognition, or moral ambivalence in regard to it, another is the notion of recognition as an *ideology*. The relevance of this concept for social research into work framed by recognition theory is briefly discussed in the final section.

3. Esteem, Respect, and Work

Recognition theory has a distinctive take on the question of the core norms that are responsible both for the reproduction of the sphere of work and the conflicts that typically arise there in modern societies.¹ It does not deny that participation in the system of the production and exchange of goods and services in a modern economy is regulated by norms of instrumental reason: for most people, the instrumental value of work, the value that it has as a means to an end (the wage), provides the main reason

to do it; and some degree of success in performance at work, as measured by a standard of instrumental rationality (efficiency), is the main way of keeping it. Nor does the recognition-theoretical approach deny the persistence of norms of expression in work: many people aspire to find fulfilment through their careers and find empty, meaningless work intolerable, whatever instrumental value it may have. However, the fundamental norms of work only come into view, according to the recognition framework, when their function in the establishment of practical self-relations is taken into account. For it is in the successful acquittal of this function that the subjects of modern society gain reassurance about the legitimacy of the basic institutions that regulate their interaction. Allegiance to the basic social institutions, some minimal measure of which is required for them to function properly, depends on them actually fulfilling the norms that legitimate them. And in modern societies, according to recognition theory, these norms have to do above all with the intersubjective conditions of autonomous agency, and so norms of recognition.

Honneth's first explicit formulations of a recognition-theoretic approach to work focussed on the social esteem that is received for contributions to the social division of labour. Work is not just action that is necessary for the production of useful goods and services: it is also the primary social means by which individuals develop their talents and abilities. For those who are in paid employment, the wage provides social recognition of their contribution, though non-remunerative forms of recognition are also important. Gainful employment is thus, in its own way, proof of social esteem, and provides the individual with a basis for self-esteem that the unemployed lack. An abundance of empirical research now backs up the recognition-theoretic hypothesis that the practical self-relation of self-esteem is damaged by the lack of social esteem

suffered through unemployment (indeed, under-employment).² From the recognition-theoretic perspective, it is exclusion from the sources of social esteem that explains the specific injustice of unemployment. But unemployment is by no means the only wrong of this sort. In addition, there are all those contributions and achievements that make up the so-called ‘informal economy’ of domestic labour, child-rearing and care-work, which also lack the social esteem that comes automatically, as it were, with paid work. Social criticism of the division of labour framed by recognition theory has the social invisibility of this kind of contribution particularly in view, though it is unclear what mechanisms would be best suited to correct it (Roessler, 2007). The third esteem-related issue, in addition to the exclusion of the unemployed and the weak social recognition of domestic labour, child-rearing and care-work, concerns the differential recognition that is given to work within the formal economy, not least as manifest in salaries. The focus here is on the cultural assumptions that go towards determining the scale of a contribution or achievement. In modern democratic societies, the norm that is generally expected to serve this function is the principle of *merit*: the greater the contribution or achievement, the better the reward. But the actual distribution of rewards by no means always reflects this. As far as occupations are concerned, the evidence suggests, for example, that the main variable in determining the amount of social recognition given for the performance of a task can be the cultural estimation of the group associated with task, rather than the performance itself. Work tasks associated with women, for example, have been shown to be less well remunerated than those associated with men.³ Such misrecognition of the contribution made by the workers who perform those tasks, in the form of lower social esteem than they deserve, is another injustice that can be highlighted by recognition theory.

Once income is taken as an expression of esteem, and the normative core of esteem is taken to be the principle of merit, far-reaching issues of redistribution present themselves. Even if some income inequality is justifiable (indeed demanded) on the basis of differential achievement, how can the massive economic inequalities that characterise the contemporary world of work possibly be justified in terms of merit? Can we not reasonably expect such extreme inequality to have a detrimental effect on the self-esteem of those whose work is, relatively speaking, so lowly valued?⁴ And might it not also be the case that a struggle for recognition, in the form of the pursuit of social esteem, will push income inequality ever higher so long as the main measure of esteem is salary level, which has no natural limit?⁵ While these are important issues, they have not been systematically taken up by Honneth himself. There is a negative and a positive reason for this. The negative reason is that interpretations of the principle of achievement in modern societies, Honneth believes, are doomed to a certain arbitrariness. Claims regarding the real worth of a particular social service, or the degree of achievement represented by the prosecution of specific tasks, tend to reflect the interests of the groups or professions involved, rather than a common horizon of values that all can endorse. Lacking a shared conception of the good that the division of social labour is aimed at, or gives expression to, such claims fall short of the justification required for morally well-grounded, socially effective criticism (Honneth, 2010). The positive reason is that, as Honneth puts it in a reply to Beate Roessler, the thrust of his theory ‘is not [...]founded on a normative concept of achievement and merit, but on a conception of legal recognition’ (Honneth 2007c, p. 360). In other words, it is now the equal *respect* that persons are due as subjects of

social rights that provides the key to recognition-theoretic criticism of patterns of misrecognition in the contemporary world of work.

The idea that inclusion in the division of labour, and access to the benefits that follow from it, is a right that ought to be enjoyed equally by everyone in a free society, on account of it being a social condition of autonomous self-realisation, receives various formulations in Honneth's writings from *The Struggle for Recognition* onwards. In the earlier formulations, the emphasis is on legally secured equality of opportunity. The justice or fairness of the sphere of labour, on this account, depends not so much on appropriate reward for achievements, as on the equal opportunity individuals have to acquire socially useful skills in the first place: skills that at once match (at least to some extent) the individual's abilities and enable the person to pursue their autonomously chosen career. The match between ability, skill and career will in many cases be only partial, Honneth concedes, because the specialisation and rationalisation of tasks in a modern economy entails that much of the work that needs to be done lacks a meaningful content; that is to say, the kind of content that has an intrinsically fulfilling character, or that involves autonomous self-expression. In any case, Honneth seems to think that the need for meaningful work is a 'free-standing ethical consideration' that lacks rational foundation (Honneth 2007c, p. 360). But in more recent formulations, Honneth has attempted to broaden the scope of critique recognition theory opens up on the division of labour while tightening its normative ground. He has done this by appealing to the norms of recognition implicit in the 'exchange of services', which can in turn provide some basis for rational criticism not just of inequalities of opportunity in relation to work – though that remains important – but of the content or quality of the work made available (Honneth 2010, p. 230).

The thrust of the argument is that the modern labour market is a social institution powered (and legitimated) by a moral ideal: reciprocal benefit arising from the free interaction of autonomous persons. This requires the agents of interaction to be capable of autonomy and to be recognised as such. In order for that to be the case, each person must be rewarded with a decent wage for the work that they do (one that can sustain a reasonably autonomous life), and the work itself should be of a certain quality, one that is commensurate with it being chosen and performed by an autonomous person, and that is therefore worthy of the respect of other persons.

According to this formulation, then, the key to well-grounded criticism of the patterns of misrecognition that afflict the sphere of work lies in interpreting them as breaches of mutual respect in the exchange of services. This is because the norm of mutual respect and its derivatives provides the ethical basis of the modern market economy that delivers these services. To say that it provides the ethical basis of the market is to say that it helps ‘constitute’ it, because without such a basis, the system would lack legitimacy and the allegiance of its participants. Misrecognition understood as breaches of mutual respect is thus the object of rational criticism, well-grounded in the sense that the existence of the system presupposes the applicability of the norm. On the other hand, however, Honneth also maintains that the norms of mutual recognition themselves ‘only exist in the peculiar form of counterfactual presuppositions and ideals’ (Honneth 2010, p. 236-7). It is not clear what to make of this point. If the ‘counterfactuality’ of the norms consists in them not being actual, in them not actually applying to the practice, then they surely cannot be ‘constitutive’ of it. The ‘ethical basis’ would then seem to be merely fictional. That would not necessarily make criticism of the breaches of mutual respect in the sphere of labour

invalid, but it would bring into question the *exclusive* validity of such criticism, since there would then be no case for ruling out the applicability of other relevant norms (such as the good of meaningful or fully autonomous work). Alternatively, the claim could be that the norms of mutual recognition have a more than fictional, but less than factual, form of existence: perhaps something akin to a regulative ideal as conceived by Kant (Kant, 1929). The idea here would be that the social exchange of services proceeds *as if* norms of mutual recognition were in place; even though, in much of the actual practice, they aren't. Just as scientific enquiry, on Kant's conception, is a practice that is and has to be regulated by principles and ideals (such as unity and comprehensiveness) that can never be actually realised, so the practice of exchanging services, it could be argued, only gets going on the presumption that the participants reciprocally recognize each other as autonomous persons, even if they do not actually do so. Following Kant's lead, we could ascribe this to the 'dialectical' character of the norms of recognition, so long as we only take them to regulate, and not strictly speaking constitute, the sphere of work.⁶

4. Paradoxes of Recognition in Work

If there is an unresolved paradox in the idea that the norm of mutual recognition provides the ethical basis of the sphere of labour in modern societies, the basis without which this sphere would not exist in its contemporary form, even though the norm itself only exists counterfactually (contrary to the facts), an explicitly elaborated notion of paradoxical development has come to assume increasing importance in recognition-theoretic diagnoses of the times. According to the original recognition model, social conflicts and pathologies were diagnosed as effects of insufficient or inadequate recognition: insufficient in not providing due acknowledgement of a need,

right or contribution; inadequate in lacking reciprocity, in failing to reflect the fundamental equality of those involved. Criteria needed to be introduced in order to distinguish progressive or emancipatory social struggles from morally unjustified or backward-looking ones, and to this end Honneth formulated two criteria of social progress: individual self-realisation across ever-expanding dimensions of personality, and greater social inclusion (Honneth 2003). This seemed a reasonable way of representing the moral achievements that had been institutionalised through the mechanisms of the welfare state (universal education, health insurance, anti-discrimination laws and so forth). However, this refinement of the theory, undertaken for the sake of normative clarification, seemed to clash with the picture emerging from empirical studies of ‘neo-liberal’, ‘post-Fordist’ capitalism that had been replacing its ‘welfarist’, ‘Fordist’ incarnation since the mid-1970s.⁷ These studies suggested that the criteria that had been identified as marking social progress had somehow mutated into agents of new kinds of social pathology; that norms of recognition that had once seemed to promise freedom were now delivering new types of oppression. The point of the concept of paradoxes of recognition is to make sense of such phenomena.

The main example Honneth gives of how a paradoxical reversal of recognition stands behind new *social pathologies* concerns the way in which individual self-realisation through work figures in post-Fordist organizations (Honneth 2004). Broadly speaking, post-Fordist organizations are characterised by a ‘flatter’ hierarchical structure, by a division of labour into teams that are responsible for the completion of discrete fixed-term projects, and by a ‘team-work’ ethos that encourages individuals to take the initiative and to invest themselves subjectively in their work. From a normative point

of view, this kind of arrangement seems to compare favourably with working conditions characterised by rigid organizational hierarchies, an entrenched division of intellectual and manual labour, detailed task descriptions fixed in advance from above, and so on, which seemed to leave little room for individual autonomy or authentic self-expression. And this normative appeal (its appeal *qua* norm), according to recognition theory, goes some way to explaining the transition from one type of organization to the other: it satisfied demands for broader possibilities for individual self-expression than were previously available (and in this sense could even be said to issue from a struggle for recognition). But the very satisfaction of this demand, in the context of work organizations and business enterprises, had a number of negative consequences. Employees now found themselves having to assume responsibility for things beyond their control; subjective identification with the project or the organization became an expectation, even a requirement, of the job; claims for compensation for effort and sacrifice suffered a corresponding dent to their legitimacy (if you realize yourself in your work, isn't that its own reward?). Management strategies designed to make personal identification with work easier simultaneously made it more difficult to challenge the conditions of work: immersed in a culture of 'subjectivised work' (Baethge 1991), it is hard not to see one's dissatisfaction with work as a sign of one's personal deficiencies, as a reflection of one's own failure. But continuously staged self-presentation as a successful 'entreployee' or 'entrepreneur of one's labour power' (Pongratz and Voss 2003), as a flexible subject always alert to value-adding opportunities at work and ready creatively to make the most of them, eventually takes its toll. Besides helping to justify a return to the high levels of precarious and exploited labour that characterised earlier phases of capitalism, 'the ideal of self-realization's inversion into an external compulsion' (Honneth 2004, p.

475) that typifies the new post-Fordist regime of work is psychologically very damaging in the long-run. The relentless pressure of successful self-presentation, staged moreover to put the true self on show, leaves us stressed, anxious, and prone to depression. Something that was originally intended as a means of enhancing individual self-esteem, and of increasing the range of opportunities for individual fulfilment, thus leads paradoxically to pathologies of low self-esteem and inner emptiness. The wide extent of such pathologies in advanced capitalist societies (Ehrenberg 2010; Wilkinson and Pickett 2010) would seem to corroborate Honneth's recognition-theoretic diagnosis.

Paradoxes of recognition manifest themselves not just as the conversion of health into illness, but as I indicated above, of emancipation into *oppression*. It is an important consideration, from a recognition-theoretic point of view, that the increased scope for individual self-realisation promised in post-Fordist organisations provided a favourable evaluative contrast with previous regimes of work. This 'gain in recognition' helps to explain the transition. But of course the new organizational structures and management techniques of post-Fordist firms would not have been adopted if they were not also believed to be instrumental in increasing profitability. They would hardly have been taken up so enthusiastically if they did not bring financial benefits; in particular increased market shares and short-term profits to shareholders. And this capacity of capitalism to 'economize' gains in recognition – to capitalise on them economically, or in more Marxian imagery, to feed vampire-like on them and thereby drain them of normative life – has been used to account for the dominant paradoxes of recognition witnessed today (Hartmann and Honneth 2006, p. 46). In addition to the transformation of the ethic of individual self-realisation into

something approaching its opposite ('entreployeeship', or perpetual self-reinvention for the sake of keeping the job or maintaining a career), other examples include the mutation of the principle of autonomy into a mechanism for holding individuals responsible for all aspects of their fate, including those they have little or no control over (thereby also vitiating the responsibility others have for decisions that affect them), and the transformation of the achievement principle from a criterion for distributing rewards on the basis of merit to a means for securing competitive advantage in markets. While the achievement principle signified a gain in recognition to the extent that it enabled the worth of an individual's contribution to be measured on the basis of its merit rather than the individual's social position (class, gender, or race), it could nevertheless be mobilized for the sake of improving economic performance, or performance as measured by market success, so long as market success stood as a proxy for the extent of one's achievement. It could do this to the point, which some observers maintain we have reached today, where achievement and market success become identical – where the *only* criterion of achievement, the only achievement worthy of *recognition*, is success as measured by profitability or advantage over competitors in a market (Hartmann and Honneth 2006, p. 54; Wagner 2011). In this way the achievement principle loses its original 'emancipatory content', correctly understood as a gain in recognition, and turns paradoxically into its opposite: an agent of oppression.

But while the extent to which achievement in work is now measured in terms of market success should not be underestimated, empirical research framed by recognition theory suggests that *multiple* forms of recognition persist in contemporary organizations. Furthermore, paradoxes of recognition are generated by the

contradictory logics of these forms of recognition, and not just by their reduction to the logic of the market. The question of *how* recognition is given in organizations, and *for what*, has been explored in depth by researchers at the Institute for Social Research, and amongst their key discoveries is a sharpening differentiation between two modes of recognition: recognition in the form of *appreciation*, and recognition in the form of *admiration* (Voswinkel 2001, 2011). The ‘for what?’ of recognition as appreciation, that for which recognition is deserved, is, broadly speaking, *service*: it is the recognition owed to those workers who have put much of their lives into the job, perhaps their whole careers; who have stuck with it through thick and thin; who have shown loyalty and commitment over an extended period of time. The ‘how?’ of appreciation is symbolised most purely in the jubilee celebration, but appreciation also has more utilitarian manifestations in benefits such as long service leave, social welfare provisions, job security and so forth. The ‘for what?’ of recognition as admiration, by contrast, is exceptional individual performance. To count as exceptional, the performance must typically meet formalised – ideally numerical – standards (‘Key Performance Indicators’ such as productivity, profit margins, share prices, place in a league table, and so forth). Recognition as admiration is given for the *result* and it is owed to those who deliver results. The period of time spent in the organization, or the amount of effort or sacrifice put into the work, hardly matters as far as work that is worthy of admiration goes. One doesn’t get admiration, as distinct from appreciation, for sweat and tears. The ‘how?’ of recognition as admiration is also different. Receipt of cash bonuses or fast-track promotion, rather than medals or days off, is how you know you are admired for your work.

Put this way, it comes as no surprise to learn that admiration as distinct from appreciation has taken over as the dominant form of recognition in work organizations. This has far-reaching consequences the understanding of which presents a challenging task for recognition theory as social research. For one thing, all sorts of new paradoxes of recognition become possible. Recognition as appreciation, for example, requires recognizers with *authority*, authority that comes from being proved over time, that is made substantive by accumulated historical knowledge. But the conditions for such authority are undermined by the flattening of organization hierarchies, on the one hand, and recognition as admiration on the other, even though both originally represented gains in recognition insofar as they equalized opportunity or opened up new possibilities for self-realisation (Kocyba 2009). More straightforwardly, appreciation requires the existence of something that is at least as enduring as the thing appreciated, either other long-serving people who can remember the unrecorded effort and sacrifice of years ago, or some other stock of institutional memory. But the rate of organization change is now so rapid (not least because it has become an indicator of admiration-worthy management) that an institution's link with its past required for meaningful appreciation is lost (Sennett 1998; Hartmann and Honneth 2006). The decline of recognition as appreciation also threatens to recoil paradoxically on recognition as admiration. If organizations do not provide the conditions in which service is appreciated, social bonds of loyalty and commitment will be weakened, which in turn has to affect the extent to which work that is worthy of admiration can get done. Also important here is the fact that much of the work for which appreciation is the appropriate mode of recognition is informal: it is often done spontaneously out of good will, perhaps on the side and out of view, and does not appear explicitly in a formal job description. The bonds of gratitude established by such interactions are vital to the health of the working group, since they enable the individual members of the group to cooperate. Recognition as appreciation can be understood

as a kind of generalised gratitude that reflects a generalised reciprocity of contribution within the organization (Voswinkel 2005). By obscuring the very existence of such relationships, the rise of recognition as admiration paradoxically undermines the conditions of its own existence.

Admiration and appreciation are two types of recognition that come from ‘above’: they operate, so to speak, on the vertical plane. But Voswinkel’s point about generalised gratitude as a bonding force within an organization suggests that recognition is important on the horizontal plane too; that is to say, between workers themselves. This dimension of recognition, which has to do with the conditions of cooperation and thus of the actual activity of working (rather than acknowledgement of contribution to an organization as a whole), is the subject of recent research by investigators using Honneth’s theoretical framework (Kocyba 2011), and it has been analysed by others in ways that can complement the recognition-theoretic approach.⁸ One of the key issues that comes to the fore once recognition relations are viewed side-on, so to speak, is the fragility of the social bonds that are both established and presupposed by working activity, and their vulnerability to distortion by clumsy managerial techniques. It is typical of working activity that its nature and meaning is understood only by those that do it. This shared knowledge, which includes the capacity to judge the intrinsic worth or ‘beauty’ of a job well done, lends dignity to the work and is a source of solidarity. But in order to be recognizable from *above*, the activity must be represented in a certain way, typically one that admits of measurement. A measurable performance is one that can be seen and evaluated by anybody; it has maximal visibility. The rendering visible and measurable of a task is from one point of view a condition of the proper recognition of excellence in its performance. But it can also have deeply damaging consequences, of which the following are just a few. First, by undermining the local

knowledge of the peer group, and hence its authority, it can weaken the sense of dignity that the working activity provides, and the solidarity amongst peers that goes with it. Second, by incentivizing activity that accords with the *representation* of the task from an ‘objective’ point of view, rather than the spontaneous deliverances of the ‘engaged’ point of view, it leads to bad work, and hence personal dissatisfaction. Third, because *all* work involves *some* elements that remain hidden and unmeasured, it can be demoralizing just to be evaluated on the visible, measurable aspects. Fourth, some jobs are less amenable to quantified evaluation than others because they do not involve the performance of discrete, self-contained tasks. Service work, in particular, is hard to assess this way. And fifth, there are tasks whose excellence seems to *consist* in them being invisible and not recognizable by anyone outside the work situation itself. This could be said, for example, of excellence in ‘emotional labour’ and, again, in nursing (Molinier 2011).

5. Ideological Recognition

The *evaluation of performance*, which in the past two decades has come to dominate most people’s working lives – if not the rest of them – thus seems to be replete with paradoxes of recognition. But it may be that more than paradoxes of recognition are at stake here. In section three, we saw that some kinds of achievement were valued higher than others not because of any intrinsic merit, but because of their association with a privileged or dominant group (in particular, the social contribution of tasks associated with women tends to be undervalued). We have now just seen that within organizations, and not just society at large, certain kinds of task are more amenable to positive performance evaluation, and the ‘admiration-recognition’ it brings, than others. And again, it was the service and care sectors, also associated with women, that got the worst of it. A pattern seems to be emerging. It looks like recognition

might be working against equality, especially gender equality, in a more sinister way than the notion of a paradox of recognition was able to capture.

According to Hartmann and Honneth's formulation, paradoxes of recognition occur when the realization of an intention to increase autonomy by way of a more inclusive or expansive recognition order has the opposite effect: namely, more domination.⁹ But might there be forms of recognition which, from the start as it were, serve to dominate? Are there intrinsically oppressive forms of recognition? Even if the positive self-relations that recognition secures makes people happier, or more content with themselves and the social roles they play, might it not be at the cost of their real freedom, which they unwittingly forfeit through their conformity to the dominant recognition order? Would recognition then be little more than an instrument of voluntary servitude – an *ideology*, in the classic Marxian sense – which by providing an anodyne to the powerless, merely perpetuates established relations of power?

In Honneth's view, recognition *can* function as an ideology, but only under very specific circumstances (Honneth 2007b). In order for ideological recognition to be really *recognition*, Honneth points out, it must be apprehended by those who receive it as attaching to some positively valued feature of themselves. After all, recognition, in the sense deployed in recognition theory, always involves an attitude of affirmation, and affirmation can only be given to positive attributes. It makes no sense to struggle for the recognition of something that one takes to be worthless or to have negative value. So the self-conception yielded by ideological recognition must have a positive character to the recognized agents themselves; they must be able to relate to themselves positively (and not, say, as a second-class citizen or inferior human type)

by means of it. Moreover, Honneth notes that the self-conception emerging from mutations in a recognition order must seem like advances to those affected by them (rather than regressions to a less autonomous condition). They have to be credible as gains in recognition. But the gains in *recognition* established by ideological recognition must also be of a kind that can motivate behaviour that suits the purposes of *ideologies*: behaviour that reproduces and indeed accentuates asymmetrical distributions of power. Typically, some *extra* motivation is required to induce such behaviour, to make the individual conform ever more closely with their externally imposed social role, and it is exactly this that the ‘gain in recognition’ attached to the behaviour can provide.

Although this conception of recognition as ideology is quite narrowly circumscribed – and consciously excludes more extravagant conceptions of ideology that once populated critical social theory – Honneth believes it might still be a useful tool for framing social research. And there is one area in particular that Honneth takes the concept to be apt for: the sphere of work organized along post-Fordist lines. The recognition given to ‘entreployees’ – the workers who become entrepreneurs of their own labour power discussed above – ‘shows all the signs of being a pure “ideological” form of recognition’ (Honneth 2007b, p. 343). In adopting the self-conception of the entreployee, workers are able to relate to themselves as autonomous creators of value, ready to take risks with their jobs and career, and to take responsibility for their actions. The self-conception encouraged by this form of social recognition can thus support their self-esteem and self-respect. Furthermore, it can reasonably be taken as a ‘gain in recognition’ relative to the previous recognition order, since it makes the kind of achievement formerly recognized only in the self-

made entrepreneur as attributable to the wage-earner as well. At the same time, its *ideological* function in lubricating the cogs of the capitalist machine is evident in the motivation it provides to accept ever-increasing and unpredictable work-loads, to assume personal responsibility for failed projects, to bear the brunt of economic reversals, and so forth. But it is just such ‘material’ consequences of this ideological form of recognition, Honneth points out, that expose its *deficiency* as a form of recognition. If it were a properly justified form of recognition, it would not just hold out the *promise* of increased autonomy and authentic self-realisation: the institutional context of the recognition would actually be able to deliver them. The aspiration for more autonomy and personal fulfilment at work, legitimate in itself and indeed a gain in recognition at the interpretive level, must be realisable – the material conditions for realising these aspirations institutionally must already be in place – if the act of recognition implicit in designating someone as an ‘entrepreneur’ of their labour is to be properly justified. Failing this, the recognition is not just merely symbolic, but strictly speaking ideological, in exacerbating the vulnerability of the individual to the system of capitalist – and as we have seen masculinist – system of power (Honneth 2007b, p. 347).

It would thus invite conceptual confusion to consider ideological forms of recognition as distinct from paradoxes of recognition on account of their intrinsic bent towards domination. As forms of recognition, both paradoxes of recognition and ideologies of recognition dominate, as it were, accidentally. We saw that in the case of paradoxes, this can arise from the self-negating character of distinct norms of recognition: appreciation and admiration, for example, can each be emancipating in their own way, but taken together issue in self-destructive contradictions. Just as important are the

contradictions that arise when recognition becomes the servant of capital accumulation. The *instrumentalisation* of recognition, both by employers for the sake of increasing profits, and by employees for the sake of personal gain (or mere survival), nullifies its normative character. Such nullification, to use the Hegelian jargon, is an important feature of the dialectical structure of social recognition in the sphere of contemporary work. But the concept of ideological recognition brings out another feature of this dialectic, which is more reminiscent of Kant's use of the term. This is the thought that recognition can be subject to a *logic of illusion*. It is surely one of the great challenges facing recognition theory as social research to identify, explain, and perhaps even liberate us from the illusions of recognition that permeate the contemporary sphere of work.¹⁰

Endnotes

¹ For a more detailed account of the normative model of work elaborated within recognition theory, and how it contrasts with the instrumental and expressive models briefly alluded to below, see Smith 2011.

² See, for example, the evidence cited in Lane, 2000, especially p. 165-166.

³ In a recent landmark case considered by the Australian workplace relations tribunal Fair Work Australia, it was concluded that employees in the non-governmental social and community service sector (SACS) were underpaid, and that the under-valuation of their work was due to it being associated with women. The ruling, issued on May 16th 2011, states that 'for employees in the SACS industry there is not equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal or comparable value by comparison with workers in state and local government employment. We consider gender has been important in creating the gap

between pay in the SACS industry and pay in comparable state and local government employment. And, in order to give effect to the equal remuneration provisions, the proper approach is to attempt to identify the extent to which gender has inhibited wages growth in the SACS industry and to mould a remedy which addresses that situation' (Fair Work Australia, Full-Board, 2011, section 291).

⁴ The case for a causal relation between rising levels of economic inequality and lower levels of self-esteem (as indicated by levels of anxiety, depression, insecurity and so on) is presented in Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010. Wilkinson and Pickett argue further that it is not just the self-esteem of those who are economically worse off that is negatively affected, but the social basis of self-esteem generally.

⁵ For a defence of this suggestion as it can be reconstructed from Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, see Schmidt am Busch 2011.

⁶ Of course the notion of counterfactual idealization Honneth has recourse to here has a more recent ancestry: Habermas's formal pragmatics. But it is not clear how Habermas's resolution of the paradoxical appearance of counterfactual social norms is suited to Honneth's purposes, especially in view of Honneth's own efforts to distance his recognition model of critique from the one Habermas derives from his theory of language. For further discussion of this matter see Kocyba, 2011.

⁷ In the discussion that follows the terms 'neo-liberal' and 'post-Fordist' are interchangeable.

⁸ The work of Christophe Dejours and his colleagues – well-known in France but still to have a major impact on English-language research – is particularly significant in this regard. Unfortunately there is no space to give Dejours' research program the consideration it deserves here. For discussion of Dejours' program in relation to Honneth's, see Deranty 2011, Renault 2007, and Smith and Deranty (forthcoming). Dejours surveys the main elements of his approach in his contribution to Smith and Deranty 2011.

⁹ ‘A contradiction is paradoxical when, precisely through the attempt to realise such a [normative] intention, the probability of realising it is increased’ (Hartmann and Honneth 2006, p. 47).

¹⁰ Acknowledgements – ARC, OSP, IfSR etc.

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