

Axel Honneth

I. The Rift of the Social (Translation of Axel Honneth's 'Ce que social veut dire', page 9-22).

What Social Means

The Rift of the Social

Introduction to the French Edition

Reaching an advanced stage in one's intellectual development, every author knows necessarily the moment where he begins questioning the ways from where the theoretical seed of his conceptions have been emerged. Admittedly, in this kind of individual feedback through one's own experience, he is constantly exposed to the risk of self-stylization and self – blinding, as he is missing the complementary perspective of an interlocutor who is able to pointing him out what influence might have been forgotten or not desired or combat mostly to have an imaginary continuity in its own development. It is not excluded either that in absence of the kind of corrective, our self- esteem hasn't got much role to make us think about any borrowed concept for a personal discovery. In the following pages, despite these reservations, I am trying to evaluate my personal development in last two decades. First, because my French publisher and friend, Eric Vigne, asked me to give an overview of the problems that are dealt with to the readers of these two volumes. Secondly, out of such a kind of public justification towards my intellectual development, however I also associate the hope that an anticipated meeting with a critical public would oblige me furtively to do anything to avoid those illusions that were mentioned higher. Whatever

shall be the outcome, I am already doubly indebted to Eric Vigne: one part, for taking the risk of publishing two volumes made up of dispersed articles in his prestigious collection, on the other hand, for having me writing this introduction in which I begin – under the attentive wing of readers – to give an account of my personal development.

Most of the articles gathered together in these two volumes are from the period which followed the publication of my book *The Struggle for Recognition*¹. Therefore they make an illustration of the theoretical way that I have been following during the last twenty years to correct, deepen, and broaden my original approach. Then the first volume (*The Rift of the Social*) brings together only the contribution in which I am trying to clarify my ideas for the constitutive character of the social „struggle” for „recognition” through the confrontation with classical or contemporary authors. The second part (*The Pathology of Reason*) contains essentially those articles which aim at the application of the theory of recognition in large domain of diagnostic of injustice and social pathologies. Although of these two aspects of my theoretical evolution have not been developed independently from each other, on the contrary, they should always have been straddled and mutually fertilized, therefore I will mention them here separately. Nevertheless, I will not escape any critical confrontations with other approaches, and inversely I will make an effort to deepen my theoretical reflection without referring to philosophical resources. But I hope that this inconvenience will be compensated by the advantage of offering a better readability all together. My presentation should allow additionally to show how the two aims meet evenly, and feed each other at some of these interactions.

The Rift of the Social (page 11-16). (*Social Division, Social Teardown, The Fragmented world of the Social*)

¹ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, trad. by Pierre Rusch, Paris, Edition Cerf, 2000 (new edition Gallimard, Folio essays, 2013) (The original German edition is from 1992)

Based on the texts of the young Hegel, I had come to the conclusion in *The Struggle for Recognition* that the dominant social theories have made a serious mistake not distinguishing the permanent aspect of the struggles by members of society who want to get respect and dignity of their partners. Beside concentrating exclusively on the process of successful integration, they have been some attempts of making out a set of theories of saying „conflicts” reducing their attention on the game of confrontation in which everyone is looking for his own interest or their own statutory benefit not giving any place to the moral dimension of an effort to be valued in front of the other members of society². As early as my preparatory works on Hegel, however, I was not satisfied by a simple opposition between a model of social conflict based on interest and a model based on recognition giving appropriate answers to urgent challenges of society. My interest in the social ontology of Sartre for long time had confronted me with a sort of singular theory³ that admits the basic dependance of the individual relative to intersubjective recognition but far away from any draft of possible communitarian integration. In fact quite the opposite the starting point of departure is rather alienation or irreversible reification – the marks of this negativist concept of recognition can be found in the ambivalent concept of „subjectivation” that is also used by the Lacanian psychoanalysts or Althusser’s marxism⁴. From this particular set of theory of recognition, who have been keeping me busy since, that negativist concept of recognition, understood as well as the negativist conclusion originated from the

² Cf. In particular Barrington Moore, *Injustice, The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, White Plains, N.Y. , M.E.Sharp, 1978 (Trad.fr. : *Les Origines sociales de la dictature et de la démocratie*, Paris, Maspéro, 1969) ; Edward P.Thompson, *Plebejische Kultur und moralische Ökonomie. Aufsätze zur englischen Sozialgeschichte des 18 und 19. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt am Main, Ullstein, 1980 (in French, see : « *l’Economie morale de la foule dans l’Angleterre du XVIII.siècle* » in *The war of the wheat in XVIII.siècle*, Paris, Edition Passion, 1988).

³ See also for Sartre my article: „*Erkennen und Anerkennen. Zu Sartres Theorie der Intersubjektivität*”, Frankfurt am Main, 2003, p.71-105.

⁴ All together of this problematics, cf. *Think of Recognition. Between critical theory and contemporain French Philosophy*, under the dir.Mirian Bankovsky and Alice le Goff, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2012.

Rousseau-an heritage of „amour – propre”⁵, I have come to the point to distinguish three different variations in explaining the origin of social conflicts and struggles. On the one hand there are all those approaches who do not accept as mobile of those confrontations as the search of individual or collective „interests” in the maximalization of calculable gains. On the other hand there are those theories which relate these conflicts to the dependance of the subjects (in an epistemologic or normative sense) regarding social recognition. This latter category can be subdivided into two groups, where the first one in the struggle for recognition is characterized as the driving force in the gradual enlargement of the community, while the second one is on the contrary considered as the source of irreversible subjection to the other. The two variations of the model of social conflict based on recognition⁶ and their respective reciprocal relation is the locus of analyses. They share the premise that the subject in order to get her or his self-awareness or to play a role in society, she or he needs to be recognized that can be understood in a way as the general judgment of the other members of the society for the pertinence of her or his cognitive or practical accomplishment. The reason is because in every society there is some general uncertainty or disagreement about the criterion that it is suitable to be mobilized in his own judgment or to be adapted to the concrete situation; the search for recognition necessarily implies in itself a sort of conflict what I would call, following Hegel, „the struggle for recognition”. The two variants still agree on the reality of this kind of conflict, basically insolvable between members of the society either as an individual, or as a group. However, the difference with utilitarian approach, - while it brings the conflict between individuals and groups as a not conciliable interest, the theory of recognition explains the struggles by the (individual or

⁵ Cf. Axel Honneth, *Untiefen der Anerkennung. Das sozialphilosophische Erbe Jean – Jacques Rousseaus* », in *WestEnd. Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 9. year (2002), n.1 /2, p.47-64.

⁶ It might be not useless of reminding that the semantic field of the term « Anerkennung » does not include the sense of « gratitude » that is attached to the French « reconnaissance », that flourish mainly in the phrases like « expression of recognition », « evidence of recognition », etc. These will not designate anything else than the signs by which I manifest that I recognize (take into account, appreciate, value) the existence of the other. Cf. also p.23, note 2 of the author. (N.d.T.)

collective) efforts in order to influence or modify the criterion of social esteem. The actions of every parts appear in their light as worthy of recognition. Every other aspects of this second model depend on the manner we understand these intersubjective efforts that we appreciate their ability to be temporally satisfied within the society; it is here based on these issues that the two sub – groups are divided, that for convenience, I would refer to here as „German” and „French” variants of the theory of recognition.

The German branch of the philosophical intersubjectivity has his founder father in Hegel, in whom, Fichte had opened the way with his concept of “reciprocal call”. This is the aim of the four chapter of the volume of “The Rift of the Social”, to provide a reconstruction of the different steps of the argumentation, to highlight the nature, the extension, and the chances of success in the quest for recognition by this approach. On the other hand, the French branch finds his origin at Rousseau, who always had been engaged to show the intersubjective dependence (‘amour – propre’) as a highly ambivalent phenomenon to the extent that esteem has been received to make us capable to act as an individual; while it exposes us to be misjudged by the other⁷. The first five articles of the second part (Contemporary Confrontations) deal with the consequences that stem from this position on the description of social conflicts. Ideally, I outline the relation between the two parts of the book as a permanent back and forth movement between a positive model and a more skeptical one about recognition. Nevertheless, they are not without any transitions and their value will largely depend on the moral content and their social dynamic in “the struggle for recognition”. The last article of this volume in this respect constitutes an exception: based on the influential work of David Miller⁸ (‘the Principle of Social Justice’), establishing the appropriate measures of existing links of recognition to be considered in the normative justification of the

⁷ Ibid

⁸ David Miller, *Principles of Social Justice*, Cambridge, Mass.,1999.

principle of justice. In this way, the reflections developed here represent a transition to the themes dealt with in the second volume, at the center of which there will be the question of the consequences that can be drawn from the model of recognition previously obtained, as well as for the analysis of justice, as for the diagnostic of social pathologies.

It might be surprising that the reconstruction of the “Hegelian or German” variation of the theory of recognition begins here by an article given to the Kantian philosophy of history. This kind of outset in this matter seems to me yet justified, as we can see already at Kant in his different attempts to explain the idea for any possible progress during history, based on the notion of a permanent struggle for the social consideration that might constitute a plausible cause of moral progress accomplished in the past. Based distinctly on the Rousseau-an idea of “amour – propre”, he admits in the corresponding passages that it is the desire of glory and the individual distinction which could have been the motives for humans to deploy their efforts, in the past era, worthy of esteem to improve our faculty of knowledge indeed our faculty of morals⁹. However, Kant developed his historical philosophical speculations only in the aim of reaching a hypothetical idea of historical progress, which should push us further to redouble our efforts in the way of moral improvement: what is left out is nevertheless the notion of “amour propre” with a negative connotation and “vanity”, first time entering the German intellectual territory at least in a half positive way (less positive way). In addition, the idea for social esteem is already associated with the theme of progress, in a way that Hegel, could have started his own philosophy of history the other way round. It is uncertain that Fichte when he had developed the concept of reciprocal “call”, knew that Kant had taken the Rousseau-an motives in his own way. It is rather based on independent reflection which was destined to have a great influence. Subjects

⁹ Cf. for this subject see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, Princeton, N.J., 1980, II. part (Fr.trad.: *Kant et la Philosophie de l’histoire*, Paris, Méridien Klincksieck, 1989).

must be called to mind by a second person in order to make them fully aware of their own freedom (through this call) addressed to their frank and spontaneous reaction. This idea of Fichte has almost all, but only almost all what will shape the concept of reciprocal recognition at Hegel: the attitude of the second person's recognition, in such a way it is expressed in his "call", brings the first to discover, like in a mirror, what role he plays in the "normative status" of a free subject authorized to be expressed as his own master. But the person aimed in interaction cannot perceive the call as a duty of freedom if by himself he does not admit to the other person the normative status of a free subject. The person who does the call, not without missing the attributes of this latter giving the characteristic value of an expression of recognition. To this extent, according to Fichte, it is a 'transcendental' necessity that constitutes a reciprocal event, compelling the two persons to be limited simultaneously one the other, guaranteeing mutually the required liberty.

Fichte in his famous work on natural right already introduces this reciprocal form of recognition as the social mechanism by which it is possible to explain the creation of formal rights. I will show in the following article that Hegel will go much further. From the introduction of the motives of recognition in the chapter for "desire" in the *Spirit of Phenomenology*, mutual recognition will be the fundamental pattern of all forms of self – restrictions in intersubjective relations, and it will be not limited to the domain of "rights". Mutual recognition applied by Hegel in a much broader sense than by Fichte, is to be found in his work of the *Philosophy of Right*. I will attempt to show here that the mature Hegel identifies three spheres in modern society where recognition manifests itself (in the family, in civil society, and in the State). Every part is characterized by one particular class of norm of actions, in respect of which the member of society learn to limit their own liberty by giving subjects the status of free people, with equal right to theirs. Although I am working out a differentiated

approach¹⁰, there is still a missing line to free the model of conflict founded on the demand of recognition: it is the idea of a struggle that is being developed inside of the different spheres, because of the basic norms that hold fundamentally a kind of additional validity, giving space to innovative interpretations. The Hegelian model of conflict is different in his construction of ideas from the Kantian model, where “l’amour propre” and the “thirst of honor” is the determinant factor, while at Hegel it is the need of belonging and social integration. This difference will also modify the direction that takes the entire historical process under the effect of perpetual conflict between men. Whereas Kant in his hypothesis, supposes that the satisfaction of “amour propre” can push individuals to be self – distinguished by the sophistication of theoretical and practical knowledge without the substance of moral reason itself should thereby be enriched. Hegel indeed gets back from his inquiry for recognition to the moral concept as it practiced during the different corresponding stage of history. For him those subjects who are struggling for recognition, seek to assert an aspect - until now neglected - of freedom, the kind that history in itself all together following a progressive line of realization of liberty, at each stage transforming the criteria of morality in practice. To get a clearer view of the different approaches we need to outline of the two diverging determinations of the struggle for recognition or the conflict, that characterizes societies in a general manner. They are presented here as the struggle of groups or individuals who tend to fix the interpretation of the principles of the institutionalized recognition that is determined at each historical stage to whom shall be granted the normative status of a free and equal individual rights in society. To the extent when this struggle succeeds, resulting either in expanding the circles of recognized persons as “free”, either in the generalization of the principles of

¹⁰ Cf. See also in my work of ‘Les pathologies de la liberté. Une réactualisation de la Philosophie du Droit de Hegel’, trad. Franck Fiesbach, Paris, la Découverte, 2008, in English: *The Pathology of Individual Freedom, Hegel’s Social Theory*, translated from the German by Ladislaus Löb, Princeton University Press

recognition themselves, we can say that is permanently oriented towards the attainment of freedom and towards a greater social integration.

It is interesting to note that the “French” approach of the social conflict shares the premise with this Hegelian position that self-consciousness or (subjective) personal ability to act depend on prior recognition of the individual given by others. In the French tradition should it be under the influence of Alexandre Kojève¹¹ with reference to Hegel, through the Rousseau-an concept of “amour propre” or other resource, there is a general consensus that individuals need to be confirmed or to have an evidence of recognition by the other or by the “generalized other” in order to establish any rapport with themselves. If it was not the case, individuals were capable to achieve their self – awareness or their ability to act simply by their own strength, in a kind of way as an actor calculating his acts in a monological way in function of his own preference. What is common in the French branch with Hegel that a form of recognition socially mediated is always required to forge a conscious subjectivity of itself and the capacity to act. But here there is no more agreement with the Hegelian line, because the French branch presupposes nevertheless that the struggle triggered by the desire of recognition cannot lead to a higher level of integration or of freedom, but only restores the same dependence under different conditions. This is rather a negative approach of the term recognition. The “French” line then finds its inspiration in the tension between the social philosophy of Sartre and the contemporary post -phenomenological thinkers. Sartre in his work of the “Being and Nothingness” does not really succeed in giving a normative direction to the analyzed struggles, likewise the social philosophy marked by the French structuralism gets entangled in a sound dilemma to give any fundamental role for the conflicts of recognition; yet not arriving to extract any criteria of

¹¹ Alexandre Kojève, Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l’Esprit, Paris, Gallimard, 1947, in English : Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Lecture of Hegel, Lectures on the Phenomenology of Hegel. ed.by Allan Blomm, tran.by James H. Nichols, JR., Cornell University Press, 1969

evaluation of the examined process. Two lines of thought have their origin in the same negativism of recognition: it might be due to the fact that the Hegelian model had not been pursued till the stage of final reconciliation, founded for the essential possibility that parties engaged in the conflict agree on the principle of recognition in a more general sense for a certain time. Every institutionalized form of esteem and of recognition entail a trace of subjection, “non-recognition”, ignorance. It is perhaps not without any solid idea that any form of recognition holds some part of non – recognition, and this might be the key element in the French theory. It already appears in the famous chapter for the “Look”, in ‘Being and Nothingness’¹², or as it comes back at Lacan or at Althusser in the concept of subordination and plays an important role in the sociology of Bourdieu who cannot not find any normative orientation to distinguish the struggles. Nevertheless behind all non – recognition’s concept we should turn back for any orientation to the originator of the concept at Rousseau: there is never an explicit concept of subjectivity, according to that we could find the “real” core of the form of social recognition, if it succeeded, it can never be expressed or updated: it is like a shift between the normative concept of recognition for the benefit of the epistemological sense, like the subject were not any more granted with a particular form of individual freedom but the goal was to get to know the characters explicitly which bestows them with their individual quality. In this way all recognition must fail because it does not allow to get to know the subjects appropriately, or more, it always compels ultimately to non – recognition. The difference between the normative and the epistemic signification, whereas in the Hegelian tradition this concept is supposed to emblemize a proto – moral or a direct moral action, by which two subjects (individual or collective) mutually agree on the normative status, which will be the foundation of their expectation from one to the other. Yet in the French branch it is rather a cognitive act, where the subjects are supposed to be

¹² Jean – Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, Paris, Gallimard, , 1943, III.part, I.ch.,IV.

identified by their fundamental characteristics and only after that will they reach or acquire the rank of subjects endowed with certain identity within society. In the normative form of recognition, the subjects have more freedom than before, while in the case of epistemological sense, recognition depends on the contrary as a result of characteristics given to the subjects by an exact way of identification. Nevertheless, it is destined to fail to the extent that we are not capable to know in an objective way of what consists the “true” subjectivity of one person.